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INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS  
Tél. : 01- 48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01- 48 24 64 66

[www.fikp.org](http://www.fikp.org)  
E-mail: [bulletin@fikp.org](mailto:bulletin@fikp.org)

- **BAGDAD: L'ACCORD SUR LE PÉTROLE KURDE FORTEMENT COMPROMIS**
- **KURDISTAN D'IRAK: LE GOUVERNEMENT KURDE S'OPPOSE FERMEMENT À L'ENTRÉE DE MILICES CHIITES À KIRKOUK**
- **L'ÉTAT ISLAMIQUE S'EN PREND AU PATRIMOINE CULTUREL**
- **KOBANÎ: LIBÉRATION DE TOUS LES VILLAGES DU CANTON**
- **TURQUIE: ÖCALAN APPELLE LE PKK À DÉSARMER**
- **CULTURE: MORT DE YACHAR KEMAL**

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### **BAGDAD: L'ACCORD SUR LE PÉTROLE KURDE FORTEMENT COMPROMIS**

**A** lors qu'un accord de plus sur le pétrole avait été signé entre Bagdad et Erbil en décembre dernier, accord qui devait prendre effet au début de l'année, il semble aujourd'hui menacé tant pour des raisons de suspicions politiques que par la difficulté ou l'incapacité des deux parties à en respecter, financièrement et économiquement, les termes.

L'accord stipule en effet que le Kurdistan doit envoyer 300.000 barils par jour de Kirkouk et 250.000 du reste de la région kurde à la SOMO (State

Organization for Marketing of Oil), la société qui est à la fois en charge de l'exportation, de la commercialisation et de la distribution du pétrole et des produits raffinés en Irak. En contrepartie, la Région du Kurdistan doit recevoir enfin ses 17% du budget irakien, lequel, pour 2015, devrait être d'un montant de 103 milliards de dollars.

Mais le 1er février, une délégation du GRK s'est rendue à Bagdad avec l'intention de renégocier les termes de l'accord, indiquant que 550.000 barils par jour était un montant trop lourd pour Erbil, car les Kurdes doivent aussi céder leur pétrole à des sociétés auprès

desquelles ils se sont lourdement endettés.

Les contreparties demandées par les Kurdes – le versement de 17% du budget irakien, l'entretien et la solde des Peshmergas – ne sont toujours pas respectées concrètement, même en violation de l'accord. Certaines voix, au sein du GRK, soupçonnent Nouri Maliki, l'ancien Premier Ministre maintenant vice-président d'Irak, mais toujours irréductible ennemi des Kurdes, de mettre des obstacles au versement effectif des sommes dues par Bagdad aux Kurdes. Sur son site, le GRK affirme que Bagdad n'a, de toute façon, pas le

fonds suffisants pour respecter sa part de l'accord: «Il est apparu clairement, lors de la réunion, qu'en raison de la crise financière et du manque de liquidités, le gouvernement irakien ne peut donner au GRK la part du budget qui lui revient.»

Le 16 janvier, le Premier ministre Nêçirvan Barzani a déclaré à l'agence Reuters que l'accord de décembre pourrait être rompu si le gouvernement central ne reprenait pas les paiements dus sur son budget: «Selon l'accord, si les deux parties ne parviennent pas à respecter les articles, l'accord prendra fin. Nous avons exporté le montant requis de pétrole, mais le problème est que Bagdad n'a pas d'argent à envoyer à la Région du Kurdistan.»

Les deux parties souffrent d'une grave pénurie de ressources financières, en raison de la guerre qui a ralenti l'exploitation, des chutes du prix du baril et, pour le Kurdistan, du poids économique que font peser plus d'un million et demi de réfugiés, venus d'Irak ou de Syrie.

«Il est évident que nous avons signé un accord avec un pays en faillite», a ajouté Nêçirvan Barzani. «Nous avons respecté totalement l'accord, mais son application doit être remplie par les deux parties.»

Le Premier Ministre a révélé que Bagdad proposait maintenant d'envoyer aux Kurdes 300 millions de dollars, «ce qui est moins de la moitié de ce que nous avons convenu auparavant.»

Malgré l'incapacité de Bagdad à respecter ses engagements, le Premier Ministre kurde a cependant indiqué le 16 février que son gouvernement ne stopperait pas les envois de pétrole, revenant sur la menace de couper les exportations, qu'il avait émise le 29 janvier, avant que sa délégation ne se rende à Bagdad. Mais il a proposé que la vérification du volume global de ces exporta-

tions ne se fassent plus que tous les trois mois

«Nous leur avons dit de vérifier le montant de pétrole que nous leur enverrons tous les trois mois. Si nos livraisons sont en dessous du volume prévu, ils pourront couper notre budget au début du quatrième mois.»

Nêçirvan Barzani a ensuite donné des précisions sur la crise financière que traverse l'Irak surtout en raison de la chute des prix du pétrole qui ont baissé de 60 % en sept mois: en 2014, le budget national a perdu 50 milliards de dollars, alors que 95% de ses ressources dépendent de ce secteur. Quant au Kurdistan, il est lui aussi touché par cette baisse et aurait besoin de 10 milliards de dollars pour surmonter sa crise financière.

Mais si le Premier Ministre a tenu d'abord un langage conciliant, d'autres voix, notamment parmi les députés et les ministres kurdes à Bagdad, ont souhaité ou menacé de rompre l'accord voire même de se retirer du gouvernement. Et les propos qu'a tenus, quelques jours plus tard, le 22 février, le Premier Ministre irakien sur les chaînes irakiennes, n'ont guère conforté le camp des modérés à la table des négociations.

Hayder Al-Abadi a en effet déclaré que le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan devait «prendre la responsabilité» de payer ses propres fonctionnaires au lieu de recevoir l'argent du gouvernement central: «Je ne suis pas contre l'envoi du traitement des fonctionnaires, mais il y a un problème que chacun doit savoir, et c'est qu'il y a des employés du GRK qui n'ont pas été engagés par le gouvernement irakien mais sont plutôt employés par la Région du Kurdistan.»

Cela n'a évidemment pas incité les Kurdes à continuer sur le ton de la compréhension et de la bonne volonté et cette fois, le président

Massoud Barzani a à son tour envisagé, lors d'une conférence de presse, de cesser les envois de pétrole si la part kurde du budget ne parvenait pas enfin à Erbil.

Quant au Premier Ministre kurde, deux jours après la déclaration de son homologue irakien, il a de nouveau donné une conférence de presse, où il a répété que son gouvernement «ferait de son mieux» pour résoudre la question du budget, mais que sa patience n'était pas infinie.

«Nous souhaitons un accord avec Bagdad et nous voulons que le peuple du Kurdistan, les États-Unis et les autres pays sachent que nous avons fait de notre mieux envers Bagdad. Mais il faut aussi que ceci soit clair: nous ne pouvons tolérer plus longtemps cette situation [...] Malheureusement, Bagdad agit comme une compagnie pétrolière envers une partie du pays plus que comme un État.»

«Bagdad nous a dit que nous avons exporté plus de pétrole qu'il était prévu dans l'accord, ce qui est vrai, mais nous avons dit à Abadi lors de notre première réunion, que nous avons reçu des avances de fonds pour les salaires de nos gens [les fonctionnaires] de la part de sociétés, en échange de notre pétrole. Nous leur avons dit que même si nous exportons un million de barils par jour, nous ne pouvons leur donner que 550 000 en raison de ce que nous devons aux sociétés pétrolières.»

Ainsi, si l'on veut résumer le dialogue de sourds qui dure depuis plus d'un mois, Bagdad reproche aux Kurdes de céder leur pétrole à des sociétés étrangères afin que ces mêmes Kurdes paient leurs fonctionnaires privés d'un traitement que Bagdad leur refuse depuis un an, et pour cette raison continue de geler l'envoi du budget kurde; ce qui oblige Erbil à s'endetter plus encore auprès des sociétés.

## KIRKOUK: LE GOUVERNEMENT KURDE S'OPPOSE FERMEMENT À L'ENTRÉE DES MILICES CHIITES

**L**e gouvernement irakien a adopté un projet de loi, le 3 février, qui ouvre la voie à la légalisation du statut des groupes paramilitaires chiites disparates et des forces sunnites tribales, qui seraient regroupés sous le commandement d'une Garde nationale. La loi suscite de vives oppositions de la part des Kurdes qui refusent catégoriquement l'entrée de ces milices, en principe destinées à chasser l'État islamique, dans les territoires kurdes contrôlés par les Peshmergas et leurs autres forces.

Aussi les députés kurdes au parlement d'Irak tentent-ils de faire passer, dans cette loi, la garantie que ces unités paramilitaires n'ont en aucun cas vocation à entrer au Kurdistan d'Irak, et surtout pas dans les régions kurdes réclamées depuis longtemps par Erbil, comme Kirkouk ou Khanaqin, où les forces du GRK se sont déployées en juin 2014, après la fuite de l'armée irakienne. Ce projet de loi devait faire l'objet d'une première lecture au parlement de Bagdad le 10 février. Mais l'opposition qu'il rencontre a retardé ce premier vote.

Dans un entretien accordé au journal arabe basé à Londres Al-Hayat, le président du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani a rejeté l'hypothèse d'un retour dans les régions kurdes de l'armée irakienne ou de l'arrivée des milices chiites, appelées «Mobilisation populaire»: «Nous n'avons pas besoin de la Mobilisation populaire et nous ne permettrons à aucune force d'entrer à Kirkouk.»

Cela dit, dans les faits, les nécessités du terrain militaire ont déjà amené des unités chiites à Kirkouk depuis l'attaque du 29 janvier,

quand l'EI a tenté de pénétrer dans la ville et que des combattants de la Mobilisation populaire l'ont repoussé aux côtés des Peshmergas. Ce n'est pas la seule fois où Peshmergas et miliciens chiites ont coopéré dans des régions où ils étaient déployés ensemble, comme à Amerli, une ville chiite turkmène qui a subi un long siège de Daesh l'été dernier, ou à Jalawla, zone mixte.

Le 7 février, en visite à Kirkouk, Hadi-Al-Ameri, le commandant des brigades Badr, un groupe chiite ouvertement pro-iranien a, à l'issue d'une rencontre avec le gouverneur kurde Najmaddin Karim, souhaité une coopération plus étroite avec les Peshmergas

«Kirkouk a une haute importance, et a des ressources en gaz et en pétrole, ainsi que des centrales électriques. Nous devons agir pour mettre fin à la menace posée par Daesh, au moyen d'une grande coopération avec les forces Peshmergas et le gouverneur, et cela requiert une action rapide.» (Al-Monitor).

En prévention des menées chiites ou iraniennes en direction de Kirkouk, le président Barzani a ordonné que les Peshmergas empêchent les milices irakiennes Al-Hashid as-Shaabi (Forces volontaires irakiennes), environ 7000 combattants, d'entrer à Kirkouk, ce qui a déclenché la colère de Hadi Al-Amiri, qui se serait plaint auprès de Qassem Soleimani, le commandant iranien des forces Al-Qods, omniprésent sur le front irakien depuis juin 2014. (Source Rudaw). Cette milice a été mise en place par l'ayatollah Ali al-Sistani en 2014 pour protéger les lieux saints shiites des destructions de Daesh. Mais au fur et à mesure de sa reconquête des

régions sunnites prises par Daesh, notamment dans la Diyala, elle est accusée de représailles aveugles contre des civils. Des officiers irakiens se plaignent par ailleurs de voir les forces paramilitaires mieux équipées et armées, que leurs propres troupes.

Massoud Barzani s'est lui-même rendu à Kirkouk, sur la ligne de front de ses Peshmergas, le 18 février, et a tenu un discours des plus fermes concernant l'avenir de la cité et des régions kurdes «disputées», en affirmant notamment que «Kirkouk est au Kurdistan et ne tombera plus jamais aux mains de l'ennemi.» Comme jamais l'EI n'a conquis Kirkouk, il est aisé d'en déduire que cet «ennemi» n'était pas uniquement les groupes djihadistes dans l'esprit du président, qui a renchéri: «Kirkouk est aussi important pour l'ennemi qu'il l'est pour nous. Il est important pour eux en termes de moral et de politique – s'ils parvenaient à prendre Kirkouk. Mais ils doivent savoir que soit nous mourrons tous, soit Kirkouk ne tombera jamais aux mains de l'ennemi. Nous garderons Kirkouk, même si nous devons retirer des forces dans d'autres régions.»

Après avoir loué le courage et le rôle des Peshmergas dans cette lutte, il s'est adressé ensuite directement à l'EI, qui venait tout juste de diffuser des images de Peshmergas capturés lors de l'attaque du 29 janvier, exhibés dans une parade sinistre, au milieu d'une foule en joie, en tenue orange et dans des cages évoquant le sort du pilote jordanien brûlé vif dans la même cage et dans la même tenue.

Massoud Barzani a averti les Daesh que si ces Peshmergas

étaient tués, «ceux qui commettraient ce crime comme ceux qui l'applaudiraient le paieront cher » et visiblement ulcéré par le soutien populaire que cette humiliation a rencontré dans certaines localités arabes sunnites, le président kurde a critiqué leur inaction devant l'État islamique et stigmatisé leur ambiguïté dans cette guerre: «Nous ne voulons pas entrer en guerre avec le monde arabe, mais qui et où sont ces Arabes qui s'opposent à l'EI ? S'il en existe, nous les remercierons et les laisserons [nous] aider, mais avec des actions, pas des paroles. Mais nous ne pourrions fermer les yeux s'ils abritent l'EI qui continuerait de nous attaquer de leurs régions. Si vous êtes avec l'EI, parfait, mais si vous êtes contre, eh bien montrez-vous et envoyez votre peuple combattre l'EI comme font les Peshmergas. Jouez votre rôle ! »

Enfin, revenant sur la question des milices chiïtes désireuses de s'immiscer dans la défense de Kirkouk, Massoud Barzani a répondu qu'il était du ressort des Peshmergas seuls de décider s'ils avaient besoin d'aide et de choisir qui devait les aider.

« Notre principe est celui-ci: nous n'épargnons aucun effort pour combattre l'EI partout où nous le pouvons et nous remercions qui-

conque fait de même. Si nous avons besoin d'aide, nous devons être les seuls à en décider. Jusqu'à ce que nous prenions une telle décision, aucune autre force n'est admise à Kirkouk. »

Sur la question de savoir si cette interdiction concerne tout aussi bien la milice de Hadi al-Amri, que l'armée irakienne, Massoud Barzani a rejeté tout aussi catégoriquement l'idée de laisser revenir la 12<sup>ème</sup> division qui était déployée à Kirkouk avant sa fuite devant l'EI en juin 2014

« On parle de faire revenir la 12<sup>ème</sup> division à Kirkouk, mais cela n'arrivera pas. La 12<sup>ème</sup> division ne remettra jamais le pied à Kirkouk. Le passé ne doit pas se répéter. La réalité d'aujourd'hui est le fruit d'un sang précieux et nous ne tolérerons aucun changement à ces frontières. Chacun doit garder cela en tête. Les Peshmergas ont payé de leurs vies et de leur sang et par conséquent, personne ne doit envisager de venir ici pour prendre des décisions ou diriger. Je ne dis pas que nous nous imposons ici. Je répète que la population de Kirkouk est la seule qui doit décider de son avenir. La décision et la volonté de cette population doivent être respectées. »

Ce qui n'a pas empêché le prési-

dent Barzani de revenir sur l'identité kurde de la ville et de son appartenance au Kurdistan

« Certains disent que nous avons occupé Kirkouk. C'est faux. Les Peshmergas ont toujours été à Kirkouk. Kirkouk est une ville du Kurdistan et son identité kurde n'est pas un sujet de débat. Nous défendons Kirkouk, nous ne l'occupons pas. »

Pour Masrour Barzani, à la tête des services de Renseignements kurdes, le surarmement de ces milices, à la fois par les Américains, obstinés à ne livrer des armes qu'à Bagdad et jamais directement aux Kurdes, et à la fois par l'Iran, même si c'est un paradoxe, désavantage considérablement les Peshmergas qui ne sont, eux, pas payés par l'Irak et voient en plus leur solde gelée depuis un an. Mais si Washington, Bagdad et Téhéran y voient peut-être une façon de freiner le retour de Kirkouk au sein du Kurdistan, mettre sur pied des groupes paramilitaires aussi puissants est un risque fort de replonger l'Irak dans une guerre civile désastreuse entre chiïtes et sunnites, et d'accélérer spectaculairement la désintégration de l'Irak: exactement ce que ces trois capitales voudraient à tout prix empêcher et c'est cet 'à tout prix' qui peut mener cette politique droit dans le mur.

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## L'ÉTAT ISLAMIQUE S'EN PREND AU PATRIMOINE CULTUREL

**A**lors que l'État islamique perd du terrain, des hommes et de l'argent en raison des frappes aériennes, de l'offensive des Peshmergas et des YPG, et de la baisse des cours du pétrole, sa désintégration interne ne se traduit pas par un assouplissement de la politique de terreur mais s'accroît, au contraire, dans une série d'actes atroces ou dramatique-

ment destructeurs, filmés avec complaisance et diffusés dans les réseaux sociaux comme un défi à la Coalition et aux «traîtres» de l'islam.

Ainsi, le supplice infligé à un pilote jordanien, capturé après que son avion se soit écrasé lors d'une frappe aérienne en Syrie, en décembre dernier a horrifié l'opinion mondiale et plongé la Jordanie tout particulièrement

en état de choc. Daesh a en effet diffusé une vidéo montrant le pilote, en tenue orange, enfermé dans une cage, aspergé d'un liquide inflammable et brûlé vif.

Ces faits se seraient produits le 3 janvier, alors que le lieutenant Muath Al-Kaseasbesh a continué de faire l'objet d'une tractation tout le mois, visant à libérer, en échange, une djihadiste irakienne, arrêtée, jugée et déjà

condamnée à mort pour sa participation à un attentat suicide qui avait coûté la vie à 60 personnes, en 2005. Le dernier ultimatum de Daesh avait été lancé 'en janvier dernier, et lu par l'otage japonais Kenji Goto, avant son exécution: «Si Sajida al-Rishawi n'est pas à la frontière turque le 29 janvier à l'heure du coucher de soleil à Mossoul le pilote jordanien sera exécuté ». La Jordanie avait accepté l'échange contre la libération du pilote mais avait demandé une preuve de sa vie. La réponse a été, le 29 janvier, la diffusion de la vidéo.

En représailles, Sajida al-Rishawi et un autre prisonnier d'al-Qaeda, Ziyad Karboli, ont été presque immédiatement exécutés par pendaison par les autorités jordaniennes. Sajida-Rishawi était la sœur du bras droit de Zarkawki l'ancien leader de la branche irakienne d'al-Qaïda, et appartenait à un clan irakien sunnite extrêmement influent. Tous les groupes djihadistes réclamaient la libération de leur «sœur emprisonnée», devenue une figure symbolique de leur lutte, qu'ils soient d'Al-Qaïda ou de Daesh. Même si, en principe et peut-être surtout à cause de cela, Al-Qaïda et Daesh sont des groupes rivaux dans la prépondérance à la tête du Djihad: obtenir la libération de Sajida al-Rishawi aurait renforcé la position de Daesh au sein des mouvances du Djihad. On ignore pourquoi ils ont choisi d'assassiner de la sorte le pilote, et de diffuser les images seulement lorsque la Jordanie a exigé des preuves de vie. On pouvait difficilement imaginer que dans une telle tractation, Amman eût pu décider d'un échange en toute confiance, sans s'assurer de la vie de son otage.

Le pilote appartenait lui aussi à une puissante tribu jordanienne, très liée avec la famille royale.

Revenant précipitamment des États-Unis, le roi Abdallah a prononcé une allocution à la télévision jordanienne, qualifiant cet acte de «lâche», venant d'un groupe étranger à l'Islam, et promettant une riposte impitoyable à Daesh: «La vengeance sera aussi grande que la calamité qui a frappé la Jordanie.» Mais au-delà de la décision symbolique et spectaculaire du roi Abdallah, lui-même pilote, de participer en personne aux frappes aériennes, et du maintien de son pays dans la Coalition, les représailles de la Jordanie ne pourront se limiter qu'à une recrudescence des peines de mort à l'encontre des djihadistes.

Les Kurdes de tous bords ont condamné cette exécution barbare et le PYD a inscrit le pilote à la liste de ses propres «martyrs» puisque c'est en bombardant Daesh à Kobanî qu'il a été capturé. Mais une autre exécution a, dans le même temps, secoué profondément le Kurdistan: le 25 janvier, un des 30 peshmergas capturés par Daesh à Mossoul a été publiquement décapité par un membre de Daesh, lui-même Kurde, qui a été identifié sur la vidéo comme faisant partie d'une fratrie de trois djihadistes, habitant auparavant à Bardarash (province de Duhok) la ville-même d'où était originaire le Peshmergas tué, Hujam Khidr Surçi. Deux des frères, Musa et Yunis Askandar, ont été tués au combat. Et c'est donc le dernier survivant, Muafaq, qui a assassiné Hujam Khidr, qu'il connaissait très bien avant la guerre, d'après le frère de la victime.

Hujam Surchi laisse une veuve et 12 enfants, dont deux infirmes et, comme tous les Peshmergas au front, n'avait pas touché sa solde depuis un an. Son meurtre a ému profondément les Kurdes et un appel aux dons a été lancé pour collecter des fonds afin de

soutenir financièrement sa famille. Le Premier Ministre Nêçirvan Barzani s'est aussi engagé à envoyer en Allemagne les enfants handicapés pour qu'ils reçoivent des soins adéquats.

Le 14 février, Daesh a de nouveau diffusé une vidéo filmant une «parade» exhibant dans les rues d'une localité non loin de Kirkuk, 17 Peshmergas prisonniers, en tenue orange et enfermés dans les mêmes cages que le pilote jordanien. Le groupe affirme par ailleurs avoir décapité 21 prisonniers kurdes, sans que cela ait pu être confirmé.

Mais la barbarie de Daesh tente aussi de laisser sa marque sur des domaines plus «culturels», et le 26 février, une autre vidéo a montré des militants en action dans le musée de Mossoul, brisant et détruisant des statues dans les salles des antiquités assyriennes, notamment un des grands taureaux ailés à face humaine, les fameux «Lamassu» ou «Shêdu», gardiens des entrées palatiales et des portes de remparts de Khorsabad, comme le décrivait Hérodote.

Là encore, ce vandalisme médiatique a suscité une grande émotion, rappelant la destruction, en mars 2001, par les Talibans, des Bouddhas monumentaux de Bamian, en Afghanistan.

Les spécialistes et conservateurs des Antiquités orientales ont très vite estimé qu'il ne pouvait s'agir à 90% que de copies, l'essentiel des objets de Mossoul ayant été depuis 2003, transportés par les Américains de Mossoul à Bagdad. Par ailleurs bon nombre de ces antiquités orientales ont enrichi depuis le 19ème siècle les grands musées occidentaux, comme le musée de Pergame à Berlin, ou celui du Louvre à Paris, avec notamment la reconstitution de la cour du

palais de Khorsabad (un seul des deux taureaux ailés étant cependant authentique, l'autre ayant coulé dans le naufrage du bateau qui l'amenait de Mossoul à la France, en 1855 et dort depuis au fond du Tigre, au sud de l'Irak).

Interrogée par le Figaro, Élisabeth Fontan, ancien conservateur en charge des collections assyriennes au Louvre, souligne que le plus grand danger ne pèse pas sur des objets qui ne sont que des copies, voire même sur des originaux qui sont plutôt destinés à un trafic clandestin, (de toute façon leur célébrité les rendra immédiatement identifiables sur le marché). Mais des sites assyriens comme celui de Ninive et son palais dont « de nombreux bas-reliefs n'ont jamais été retirés » n'est plus surveillé ni fouillé depuis longtemps et a été souvent en proie au pillage. Maintenant le Daesh menace de les détruire après les salles du musée et leur disparition serait, par contre, une perte irrémédiable pour l'archéologie.

En plus des sites assyriens de Ninive, Kalhu, Dur Sharrukin-Khorsabad ou Assur, un autre site est aussi menacé par Daesh : il s'agit de la ville de Hatra, fondée au II ou IIIe siècle avant JC par la dynastie grecque des Séleucides, et qui passa ensuite dans la sphère d'influence des Parthes, puis des Romains, avant d'être prise et saccagée par les Sassanides. C'était une des plus prestigieuses villes arabes pré-islamiques, au même titre que Palmyre. Vouée au dieu Soleil Shamash, ses ruines circulaires de 2 km ne sont qu'à 110 km de Mossoul au sud de la province de Ninive, dans le district de Al-Hadhra, et ont été aussi la proie des pilliers.

S'exprimant sur le vandalisme du musée de la ville, le blogueur anonyme « Mosul Eye » précise

lui aussi que 90% des statues dans ces salles sont des copies. Plus intéressant, il affirme que le grand taureau Lamassu (qu'il dit être authentique) a été en fait détruit durant l'été dernier et que les films diffusés datent de juillet-août 2014. Mais d'autres objets manquent dans les salles et l'on ignore ce qu'ils sont devenus, détruits ou vendus. Des pièces auraient été ainsi convoyées secrètement via la Turquie, le Kurdistan et Bagdad, par un réseau de trafiquants.

Quant aux manuscrits anciens, arabes, syriaques ou latins qui ont aussi été confisqués par Daesh, prélevés dans les églises, monastères ou dans la bibliothèque de Mossoul, il semble, comme prévu, plus promis à un juteux trafic qu'à un autodafé.

Les hommes filmés en train de casser les statues se sont adressés aux « Musulmans » et ont désigné ces objets comme des « idoles et des dieux adorés à la place d'Allah par des peuples qui ont vécu il y a des siècles. Ceux que l'on appelait les Assyriens et les Akkadiens, et d'autres, se tournaient vers les dieux pour la guerre, l'agriculture et la pluie, et leur offraient des sacrifices. Notre prophète a ordonné d'enlever toutes ces statues, comme l'ont fait leurs fidèles quand ils ont conquis les autres nations. »

Si le vandalisme est une constante dans le fanatisme religieux et politique, au cours de toute l'histoire de l'humanité, le supplice du bûcher, si courant en Occident, de l'époque romaine jusqu'aux Temps modernes, ne fut jamais un mode d'exécution très fréquent en Islam, même s'il se produisit quelquefois, plus fréquemment en Afrique du nord (peut-être par imitation des royaumes chrétiens hispaniques) et surtout à l'encontre de juifs,

de chrétiens ou d'apostats. Mais l'État islamique a, dans une fatwa, daté du 2 janvier 2015 et distribué dans les rues de Raqqa, en Syrie, justifié le recours à cette forme d'exécution. Le site du MEMRI en a traduit et publié des extraits

« **Question :** Qu'est-ce qui a été décrété sur le fait de brûler vif un infidèle jusqu'à ce qu'il meure ?

**Réponse :** Les écoles [de pensée islamiques suivant] Hanafi et Shafi'i soutiennent que ce procédé est totalement permis. Elles ont interprété la parole du Prophète « Seul Allah torturera par le feu » comme [un appel à] l'humilité. [Le savant de l'islam] Al-Muhallab déclare : « Cette injonction n'est pas [une réelle] interdiction, mais plutôt un moyen de [prôner] l'humilité. »

[Le savant Shafi'i] Ibn Hajar, puisse Allah avoir pitié de lui, dit : « [Cette injonction] indique qu'il est permis de brûler vif, comme l'ont fait les Compagnons. Le Prophète a rendu aveugles deux hommes d'Arina [qu'il considérait comme des apostats et des criminels] au moyen d'un fer rouge. Khalid bin Al-Walid [l'un des Compagnons du Prophète] a également brûlé vifs des apostats. »

Certains savants soutiennent que brûler vif est interdit en principe, mais admis quand il s'agit de représailles, comme le Prophète l'a fait avec les deux hommes d'Arina. Il les a rendus aveugles avec un fer rouge en représailles [“mumathala”, Loi du Talion, principe jurisprudentiel de la Charia], comme mentionné dans un authentique [hadith]. Et c'est là la principale preuve. »

Cet argument de la loi du Talion s'appuie sur le fait que le pilote, en allant bombardier des combat-



tants du Daesh, se rendait coupable à la fois d'apostasie, puisque le Calife Al-Baghdadi est censé être le commandeur des Croyants» et de rébellion armée contre les soldats de l'islam. Le fait d'être brûlé vif serait ainsi «l'équivalent» d'une mort sous les bombes.

Qu'il s'agisse de supplices barbares commis sur des êtres humains ou de la destruction des vestiges d'une des plus anciennes et des plus prestigieuses cultures du monde, l'État islamique semble ainsi

riposter à la contre-offensive kurde et aux bombardements de la Coalition par des actes d'horreur surmédiatisée, sans que l'on sache s'il s'agit d'une stratégie de la terreur visant à décourager ou freiner ces contre-offensives, ou bien une tentative pour éclipser, auprès de l'opinion internationale, ainsi que de ses membres actifs ou sympathisants, leurs revers stratégiques.

Il peut s'agir plus simplement d'une spirale plus folle que froidement concertée, emportant dans une violence désordonnée

un groupe qui a besoin, pour maintenir son élan, d'une dynamique permanente dans la sur-enchère des défis aux puissances occidentales et aux États musulmans «traîtres» et des couvertures médiatiques sensationnelles. Mais il ne faut jamais négliger l'aspect religieux de Daesh, et son idéologie eschatologique, qui vise à accélérer la fin des temps dans une purification dévastatrice du monde entier, dont les meilleurs des fidèles, les plus radicaux des djihadistes, en somme, seraient promis à la miséricorde divine.

## TURQUIE : ÖCALAN APPELLE LE PKK À DÉSARMER

**L**e 17 février, le Groupe de communautés du Kurdistan, (Koma Civakên Kurdistan, KCK), l'organisation politique du PKK, a demandé des avancées concrètes dans le processus de paix entre le PKK et la Turquie, processus que le mouvement estimait être dans une phase «très critique et dangereuse» et même «près de sa fin.»

Mais dix jours plus tard, le leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, appelait, de sa prison d'Imralı, sa guerrilla à rendre les armes, dans ce qu'il a qualifié de «décision historique».

L'appel a été lu en direct sur les télévisions par Sirri Sureyya Onder, député HDP au Parlement turc, aux côtés du vice-premier ministre Yalçın Akdoğan. Dans cet appel, Sirri Önder annonce qu'Abdullah Öcalan demande au PKK de se réunir dans un congrès extraordinaire au printemps, afin de «prendre la décision historique et stratégique de déposer les armes.»

Mais cette annonce de «désarmement» est contestée par d'autres personnalités du HDP, dont le co-

président Selahattin Demirtaş, qui assure que le PKK est prêt à rendre les armes **seulement si** le processus entre enfin dans une phase de négociation active.

Quant à Cemil Bayik, à la tête du KCK, il insiste sur la nécessité d'un congrès mais qui réunirait tous les partis du Kurdistan (cette fameuse conférence générale des Kurdes annoncée depuis des années et qui a toujours été reportée, en raison de la méfiance des partis et surtout des tensions PDK-PKK). Cemil Bayik souhaite aussi publiquement la formation de forces kurdes unifiées (tout en s'opposant à l'indépendance du Kurdistan d'Irak, ce qui semble assez compliqué à envisager).

Quoi qu'il en soit, les 10 articles ou demandes qu'Abdullah Öcalan considère comme essentiels à la résolution de la question kurde en Turquie (et à l'adieu aux armes du PKK) sont les suivants

- Le contenu d'une politique démocratique doit être débattue.
- Les dimensions nationales et locales d'une résolution démocratique doivent être débattues.
- Des garanties légales et démocratiques d'une citoyenneté libre.

- Des directives concernant les relations entre la politique démocratique, l'État et la société et l'institutionnalisation de ces dernières.

- Les dimensions socio-économiques du processus de résolution

- Une nouvelle structure sécuritaire à laquelle le processus mènera

- Des garanties légales concernant les questions des femmes, de la culture et de l'écologie

- Le développement des mécanismes d'égalité au regard de la définition et de la notion d'identité

- Définir la république démocratique, la patrie commune et le peuple selon les critères démocratiques

- Une nouvelle constitution qui aidera à assimiler toutes ces étapes.

Comme on le voit, ces demandes sont plus l'émanation de vagues principes généraux plutôt que les points de départ concret de véritables négociations, hormis le dernier point, qui réclame une nouvelle constitution, mais sans en préciser détailler les articles ou les amendements à introduire..

En tout cas, le gouvernement turc, le président Erdoğan et le Premier Ministre Ahmet Davutoğlu, se sont empressés de saluer la déclaration, en ne parlant que du désarmement

«préliminaire» à ces négociations. Mais pour la suite des événements, la présidence turque reste toute aussi vague, en parlant de «processus démocratique», d'«unité nationale» et de «projet de fraternité».

Un des atouts de cette déclaration est, pour Erdogan, l'espoir que le désarmement du PKK ait lieu avant les législatives de juin prochain. Le président turc a aussi critiqué les propos de Sebahattin

Demirtas sur sa propre interprétation (plus nuancée, concernant le désarmement) des dix articles et les prises de position «contradictoires» des différentes voix au sein du HDP, comme au sein du PKK.

## KOBANÎ: LIBÉRATION DE TOUS LES VILLAGES DU CANTON

**A**près la libération de la ville de Kobanî en janvier dernier, les YPG, avaient à reconquérir l'ensemble du canton et ses 400 villages conquis par les Daesh. Mais la retraite de l'EI sous le feu conjugué des frappes aériennes de la Coalition et de l'opération Volcan de l'Euphrate, regroupant les forces conjointes des YPG et celle des trois groupes armés de l'ASL basées à Alep s'est avéré presque aussi rapide que leur avancée foudroyante à l'automne, qui avait submergé tout le canton de Kobanî.

Alors que le 1er février, l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) donnait les chiffres de 17 villages repris par les YPG à Daesh, à la fin du mois, c'est presque la totalité des villages perdus qui a été repris, les forces kurdes et arabes rencontrant peu de résistance, comme l'a déclaré à l'AFP Rami Abdurahman (OSDH): «Dès que les YPG entrent dans un village, l'EI retire ses combattants.» En à peine plus d'une semaine, plus d'un tiers des villages avaient été ainsi réinvestis et les forces kurdes et arabes parvenaient ainsi aux abords de la province de Raqqa, avec pour objectif affiché la reconquête de Tell Abyad, ville qui avait été le théâtre d'une défaite sévère des YPG quand ils avaient tenté auparavant d'en chasser les Daesh, en janvier 2014. Le 20 janvier, l'OSDH annonçait aux agences de presse que 19 villages de la province de Raqqa étaient tombés aux mains des Kurdes, alors que la Coalition poursuivait ses frappes aériennes. Les YPG ne se trouvaient plus alors à 25 km de Raqqa.

Mais le 23, c'est en direction d'une autre ville, Tell Hamis, dans la province de Hassaké, que se sont lancés les YPG. C'est alors qu'en représailles ou pour faire diversion, les combattants djihadistes ont attaqué des villages assyriens autour de Tell Tamr, à 20 km de Hassaké et enlevés autour de 200 ou 220 chrétiens, tous civils, dont de nombreuses femmes et des vieillards. Cette attaque soudaine a déclenché un exode de chrétiens vers la ville de Qamishlo (environ 150 familles) ou celle de Hassaké (80 familles) toutes deux sous contrôle mixte des YPG et du régime syrien, d'après l'Assyrian Human Rights Network, ainsi que d'Arabes bédouins fuyant aussi l'État islamique.

Le porte-parole des YPG, Rêdûr Xelîl a donné les chiffres d'une centaine d'Assyriens massacrés par l'État islamique à Tell Temir

«Après avoir subi de lourdes pertes à Tell Hemis les militants de l'EI ont fait route sur Tell Temir, et y commis un massacre contre le peuple assyrien, tuant plus de cent civils assyriens et en enlevant des dizaines d'autres.»

Les YPG ont alors formé une ligne de défense autour d'autres localités susceptibles d'être attaquées par les Daesh.

«Cette attaque est un coup dur contre les Kurdes, les Arabes et les Assyriens. Une femme assyrienne a résisté aux djihadistes de l'EI et a tué quatre d'entre eux quand ils ont attaqué le village de Hirmiz à Tell Temir. Cette femme a été capturée et décapitée par les gangs. Des

accrochages ont encore lieu à Tell Temir.»

Ce qui s'apparente plus à un raid de chasseurs d'esclaves (ou d'otages dans le meilleur des cas) n'a pas empêché les Kurdes de reprendre presque la totalité de la ville de Tell Hamis, hormis sa zone ouest, le 27 février, dans un assaut qui, selon l'OSDH a coûté la vie à 175 djihadistes. D'après le porte-parole des YPG, le commandant Rêdûr Xelîl, Tell Hamis abritait le plus grand quartier général de l'EI dans la région de Djézireh.

Les relations de la Turquie avec le PYD syrien, d'un autre côté, semblent, par ricochet avec l'appel d'Öcalan à déposer les armes, s'orienter aussi vers une certaine détente, puisque les troupes turques sont entrées en Syrie quelques jours avant l'annonce d'Öcalan, dans le canton de Kobanî, pour relever les soldats qui gardent le tombeau de Süleyman Shah, l'ancêtre de la dynastie ottomane, Le mausolée est dans une enclave appartenant toujours à la Turquie, en vertu du traité d'Ankara signé avec la France en 1921, quand elle avait mandat sur la Syrie, traité qui fixe la frontière syro-turque dans ses grandes lignes. L'article 9 prévoit que:

«Le tombeau de Suleiman Chah, le grand-père du Sultan Osman, fondateur de la dynastie ottomane (tombeau connu sous le nom de Turc Mézari), situé à Djaber-Kallesi restera, avec ses dépendances, la propriété de la Turquie, qui pourra y maintenir des gardiens et y hisser le drapeau turc.»

Il faut noter que les historiens de

l'islam considèrent comme plus que douteuse la présence des restes de Süleyman Shah dans le mausolée. On a parfois émis l'hypothèse que le mausolée abrite en fait la dépouille du fondateur de la dynastie des Seldjoukides de Roum, Süleyman ibn Kutulmush, mais il n'abrite probablement ni l'un ni l'autre. Les données biographiques de Süleyman et de son fils Ertugrul, lui-même père d'Osman, le fondateur du sultanat ottoman, sont par ailleurs largement légendaires.

Le mausolée: se trouve au bord de l'Euphrate, où Suleyman Shah se serait noyé, à 35 km de la ville de Kobanî, qu'ils ont dû pour cela traverser. Il s'agissait pour la Turquie d'évacuer 40 hommes, dont 20 appartenant à une troupe d'élite, qui n'avaient pu être relevés depuis 11 mois.

Les YPG ont très vite diffusé la

nouvelle de l'opération, assurant qu'ils avaient assisté dans leur périple les véhicules blindés et les soldats venant soulager enfin de leur longue garde les sentinelles. Le déroulé de ce sauvetage et la coopération YPG-Turquie auraient été planifiés et discutés avec le commandement militaire de Kobanî. Le convoi a traversé la ville le 21 février à 21 h et a fait route en suivant un itinéraire préparé par les YPG.

Mais la présidence turque et son gouvernement ont nié toute participation des YPG. Le porte-parole de Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ibrahim Kalin, s'est fait l'écho des propos d'Ahmet Davutoğlu, lequel assure que tout s'est passé en accord avec le gouvernement syrien, après une «note diplomatique» émise par la Turquie, et que la Coalition en était informée. Par contre, selon lui, aucun contact, coordination et

coopération avec les YPG n'ont eu lieu, au contraire de l'Armée syrienne de libération, mise au courant par Ankara.

Mais à 21 heures, en temps de guerre, il y avait évidemment assez de témoins parmi les Kurdes, que ce soit les combattants, les civils ou les journalistes pour voir passer un convoi militaire turc dans Kobanî et le rapporter aux agences de presse. À ces objections, Kalin a répliqué que, dans la situation actuelle de la Syrie, il était «difficile de déterminer à qui le territoire, çà et là appartenait». En ce cas, les soldats turcs ont dû se donner bien du mal pour ne pas remarquer les drapeaux du PYD et les portraits d'Öcalan qui pavoisent la ville et toutes les portions du «canton» que les combattants kurdes ont reprises à l'État islamique.

## CULTURE:

### MORT DE YACHAR KEMAL

**L'**écrivain Yachar Kemal est mort le 28 février dans un hôpital d'Istanbul, à l'âge de 92 ans, «des suites de complications survenues après une infection pulmonaire et d'arythmie cardiaque», selon l'agence Anatolie, citant les médecins.

Écrivain de langue turque, mais d'origine kurde, et engagé dans cette cause, Yachar Kemal était à la fois un des plus célèbres auteurs de la littérature turque et son doyen. Il a plusieurs fois été pressenti pour recevoir le prix Nobel, qui échet finalement à un plus jeune compatriote, Orhan Pamuk.

Né en 1923 ou 1926, dans le village de Hemite, à Kadirli, province d'Osmaniye, en Cilicie, Kemal Sadık Gökçeli est issu d'une famille dont les racines se trouvent plus au nord, près du

lac de Van, dans le village d'Ernis, où sa famille résidait avant de fuir l'occupation russe durant la Première Guerre mondiale. Il a vécu les premières années de sa vie dans le milieu de la paysannerie pauvre d'Anatolie. Tout jeune, il perd un œil accidentellement et à 5 ans, assiste à l'assassinat de son père, scène traumatique qui afflige son élocution jusqu'à l'âge de 12 ans. Il étudie d'abord à l'école du village voisin, puis à Kadirli, hébergé par d'autres membres de sa famille. C'est à Adana enfin qu'il fait ses études secondaires, tout en travaillant dans une filature de coton. À la fin de ses études secondaires, il exerce divers métiers, travaillant aussi bien dans des fermes que dans une bibliothèque, ou bien dans l'enseignement. C'est au début des années 1940 qu'il côtoie des artistes et écrivains de gauche comme Pertev Naili Boratav,

spécialiste du folklore turc, le peintre Abidin Dino, ou Arif Dino, peintre et poète et est emprisonné pour la première fois, pour des raisons politiques, alors qu'il a à peine vingt ans.

Sa première publication, en 1943, s'intitule *Ağtılar* ou «Élégies», une compilation de plaintes populaires. Il part à Istanbul après son service militaire et travaille comme inspecteur du gaz pour une compagnie française. En 1948, il retourne dans sa région natale, où il exerce notamment l'emploi d'écrivain public pour les illettrés de Kadirli. Mais il est de nouveau arrêté en 1950 pour «propagande communiste» et incarcéré un an. Après sa libération, il retourne à Istanbul et travaille au journal *Cumhuriyet* comme grand reporter, jusqu'en 1963. C'est là qu'il prend le nom de plume de Yachar Kemal, et publie son pre-

mier recueil de nouvelles en 1952, *Sarı Sıcak* ou «Chaleur jaune» et Mehmed le Mince en 1955, son premier roman, qui connut rapidement un grand succès et a été traduit en une quarantaine de langues, le premier volume d'une quadrilogie racontant les aventures d'un Robin des bois turc, jeune paysan révolté contre la tyrannie d'un agha et prenant alors le chemin des montagnes pour devenir un brigand légendaire. Le personnage de Mèmed fut peut-être inspiré par l'oncle de l'auteur, «bandit» fameux qui mourut à 25 ans, mais le thème des petits seigneurs et aghas d'Anatolie et l'oppression de la paysannerie est récurrent dans toute son œuvre, même si dans une trilogie, «Les Seigneurs de l'Aktchasaz», il porte aussi un regard ironique et sensible envers la classe des beys, chevaleresques et anachroniques, s'entretuant dans une vendetta au profit d'une classe de nouveaux riches qui se montreront encore plus impitoyables envers leurs serfs. Mais sa trilogie «Au-delà de la montagne», comme celle de «Salman le solitaire» et bien d'autres romans, reviennent sur le monde des affamés, des villageois et des révoltés avec leurs

opresseurs, leurs rêves et aussi leurs vendettas, campant un univers pétri de beauté et de cruauté, écartelé entre tragédie et poésie, qui rappelle l'Albanie légendaire d'Ismail Kadaré.

Écrivain populaire, Yachar Kemal fut aussi un homme engagé. En 1962, il adhère au Parti des Ouvriers de Turquie (TIP) où il exerça des fonctions comme membre du conseil d'administration et membre du conseil exécutif central. Il fut de nombreuses fois attaqué en justice pour ses activités et ses écrits politiques. En 1967, il avait également co-fondé un hebdomadaire politique et participa à la création de l'Union syndicale des écrivains de Turquie en 1973, dont il fut le premier président, en 1974-75.

En 1995, après un article sur la sale guerre du Kurdistan, publié dans le journal allemand *Der Spiegel*, il fut jugé par la Haute cour de Sûreté d'Istanbul, mais acquitté. Mais la même année, il fut condamné à un an et 8 mois de prison pour un article sur l'oppression des Kurdes en Turquie, publié dans *Index on Censorship*, sentence finalement annulée.

Il est emprisonné en 1971 puis relâché sous la pression internationale. Mais dix ans plus tard il s'exile deux ans en Suède, après le coup d'État militaire.

En 1995, ses prises de positions contre la guerre au Kurdistan de Turquie lui vaut une condamnation avec sursis et il prend aussi la défense d'Orhan Pamuk, attaqué en justice et menacé de mort après ses déclarations sur le génocide arménien.

S'il n'obtint jamais le prix Nobel, Yachar a reçu de nombreuses récompenses et distinctions à l'étranger, particulièrement en France où il reçut en 1979 le prix du meilleur livre étranger pour *L'Herbe qui ne meurt pas* et le prix mondial Cino Del Duca en 1982 pour l'ensemble de son œuvre. La France le fit aussi Commandeur de la Légion d'honneur en 1984 et Grand Officier en 2011 et dix ans avant que le titre de Docteur honoris causa lui fut décerné par plusieurs universités grandes turques, il avait déjà obtenu cette distinction par l'université de Strasbourg, en 1991. Son dernier prix littéraire fut le prix Bjørnson de l'Académie norvégienne de littérature et de liberté d'expression, le 9 novembre 2013.

# Injustice française envers les Kurdes

Par Kendal Nezan, Président de l'Institut kurde de Paris

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L'Institut kurde de Paris, qui depuis trente-deux ans porte dans le débat public en France et en Europe la voix de ce peuple sans Etat, victime des pires injustices du XXème siècle, qui informe et documente journalistes, chercheurs, étudiants, associations et parlementaires sur le monde kurde, est condamné à disparaître ou à s'ex-patrier en raison du désengagement des pouvoirs publics.

Créé en février 1983 avec le soutien du gouvernement et du président Mitterrand pour gérer l'afflux considérable des réfugiés kurdes généré notamment par la guerre Iran-Irak et le coup d'Etat militaire en Turquie et faire connaître à l'opinion publique la culture, l'histoire et la situation politique du peuple kurde, cet institut est rapidement devenu une référence en Europe et au-delà à tous ceux qui s'intéressaient à la question kurde.

Ses colloques et conférences, ses actions de défense des droits de l'homme, ses appels internationaux en faveur d'un règlement pacifique de la question kurde ont été honorés du soutien d'une vingtaine de Prix Nobel, d'éminentes figures comme E. Kennedy, B. Kreisky, N. Mandela, Danielle Mitterrand, A. Sakharov, ainsi que de nombreux ministres et parlementaires des pays européens et des Etats-Unis.

Plusieurs pays, dont la France, ont mis à sa disposition des bourses qui ont permis de former plusieurs centaines d'étudiants kurdes. Devenus avocats, médecins, ingénieurs, diplomates, ministres, universitaires, ils jouent un rôle important dans la construction d'une société démocratique au Kurdistan et aussi dans l'intégration républicaine des Kurdes en France.

Ce rayonnement international donna un supplément d'âme, une image humaniste, à une diplomatie

française lourdement engagée aux côtés de la terrible dictature de Saddam Hussein en guerre contre l'Iran des ayatollahs et contre sa population kurde. Cette image fut parachevée lors de l'exode massif de près de deux millions de Kurdes irakiens qui suivit la Guerre du Golfe quand la France fit adopter par le Conseil de Sécurité une résolution créant une zone d'exclusion aérienne au nord de l'Irak pour permettre le retour sur leurs terres de ces réfugiés. Cette zone évolua vers le Kurdistan autonome actuel où notre pays jouit d'un exceptionnel capital de sympathie.

Organisme laïc indépendant et non partisan, ouvert à tous les Kurdes, l'Institut kurde fut longtemps considéré comme une ambassade officieuse facilitant le dialogue entre les leaders kurdes et les autorités françaises, un relais entre la France et le Kurdistan.

En 1993, le gouvernement de Pierre Bérégovoy lui accorda le statut de fondation reconnue d'utilité publique en raison de sa contribution à l'intégration républicaine des Kurdes en France, notamment des Kurdes irakiens accueillis à l'occasion du bicentenaire de la Révolution française.

Ces rescapés des gazages de l'armée irakienne venant des villages reculés et conservateurs longeant la frontière turque paraissaient difficiles à intégrer. Or grâce à un encadrement assuré par l'Institut kurde et à l'extraordinaire hospitalité des Auvergnats, ce millier de réfugiés furent parfaitement intégrés. Leurs enfants ont fait des études. Certains sont devenus avocats, enseignants, pharmaciens d'autres, artisans pâtisseries, policiers. L'un d'eux occupe actuellement au siège du FMI un poste d'économiste.

Ce cas d'école, qui fait l'objet de thèses de doctorat, montre qu'en dépit des origines sociales et culturelles variées, l'intégration n'est pas tâche impossible si l'on s'en donne les moyens.

A cet égard, le rôle des associations oeuvrant pour l'intégration si peu évoqué dans les débats actuels peut être décisif, notamment pour les familles et les exclus du système scolaire. Le gouvernement de Lionel Jospin, conscient de ce rôle, avait mis en place un dispositif du renforcement du secteur associatif avec des conventions triennales. Dans ce cadre, et après un audit financier et d'activités approfondi, il avait accordé à l'Institut kurde, un financement public de près de 600 000 euros par an.

Ce financement, réduit année après année à partir de 2002, fut totalement supprimé sous la présidence de Nicolas Sarkozy sous prétexte qu'il appartenait désormais au gouvernement du Kurdistan de financer l'Institut. La même logique devrait conduire à demander aux pays arabes, autrement plus riches que le modeste Kurdistan, de financer l'Institut du Monde arabe. L'argument est d'autant plus absurde que l'Institut kurde qui entretient la plus importante bibliothèque d'Europe est un centre de ressources unique et un lieu de mémoire pour les quelques 250 000 Kurdes de France, citoyens intégrés et payant leurs impôts qui ont droit à l'accès à leur culture d'origine. La valorisation de celle-ci est même un facteur majeur d'une bonne intégration.

Privé de subvention, l'Institut kurde a pu survivre grâce au soutien du gouvernement du Kurdistan. Or celui-ci est depuis plus d'un an privé par Bagdad de sa dotation financière. Submergé par le poids écrasant de 1,7 millions de déplacés et réfugiés irakiens et syriens, engagé sur plus de 1 000 km de frontière dans une guerre très coûteuse, le Kurdistan traverse une crise financière grave et il peine à payer salaires et soldes avec des mois de retard. La coalition internationale qui sur le papier rassemble une soixantaine de pays et qui sur le terrain compte sur le courage des Kurdes pour vaincre les djihadistes de « l'Etat Islamique » (Daech) leur mesure

chichement son aide militaire et humanitaire et ne leur accorde aucune assistance financière.

Autant dire qu'avec une telle stratégie minimaliste, la victoire sur le Daech, qui contrôle encore la moitié du territoire syrien et le tiers de l'Irak n'est pas plus proche que la chute du régime de Damas annoncée depuis 2011.

On aurait pu espérer qu'à défaut de venir en aide aux Kurdes dans l'épreuve, le gouvernement français ferait preuve de solidarité en assurant sur son sol la pérennité de l'Institut kurde. Il n'en est malheureusement rien. Des démarches que nous avons entreprises depuis deux ans auprès de l'Élysée et de Matignon pour le rétablissement de nos subventions n'ont pas abouti. L'argument invoqué: les contraintes budgétaires. A géométrie variable, celles-ci n'empêchent pas le gouvernement de continuer de subventionner des écoles et des centres culturels d'autres communautés, d'accorder un financement de 12,8 millions d'euros à l'Institut du Monde arabe. Et c'est tant mieux. Mais il affirme avoir du mal à trouver 4% de cette somme pour l'unique institution en France des 40 millions de Kurdes du Proche-Orient.

Naguère être de gauche signifiait partager, défendre les plus démunis, les plus fragiles, les plus modestes, privilégier la culture et le tissu associatif qui crée du lien social, qui donne de l'espoir, voire un idéal de vie.

La gestion comptable court-termiste semble depuis avoir pris le dessus sur toute vision politique avec des conséquences lourdes pour notre vie collective. Le monde associatif est sinistré. Les associations d'intégration disparaissent et avec elles des dizaines de milliers d'emplois. Les réseaux islamistes richement dotés investissent le terrain socio-culturel délaissé.

Face à la position injuste et absurde du gouvernement français envers les Kurdes, en ultime recours nous appelons à nos concitoyens français qui tout au long de ces trois décennies ont, dans des moments difficiles, fait preuve d'une magnifique solidarité avec le peuple kurde. ■

AFP

# Irak: à Erbil, on ne vient plus en vacances mais pour fuir les jihadistes

Par Jean Marc MOJON | AFP – dim. 1 février 2015

**"BIENVENUE À ERBIL, capitale 2014 du tourisme arabe". Les panneaux publicitaires sont restés en place mais les visiteurs ont déserté depuis juin la capitale du Kurdistan irakien qui reçoit à la place des milliers de déplacés ayant fui l'offensive des jihadistes de l'EI.**

L'année 2014 devait être celle de le décollage du tourisme dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien au nord de Bagdad, prisée pour son calme sécuritaire, ses paysages montagneux et autres sites archéologiques millénaires.

L'assaut fulgurant lancé au début de l'été par les combattants de l'EI, qui se sont emparés de pans entiers du territoire irakien, en a décidé autrement.

"Je ne peux même pas parler d'un déclin chiffrable, mais plutôt d'un effondrement total" de la fréquentation touristique, explique Hearash Ahmad Karem, responsable de l'association des hôteliers et restaurateurs du Kurdistan irakien.

Le secteur était pourtant en pleine expansion: en 2013, il avait représenté un milliard de dollars et près de trois millions de visiteurs étaient venus à Erbil.

Les quatre millions attendus en 2014 n'ont pour la plupart jamais mis les pieds dans la ville, inquiétés par les combats se déroulant tout proche et l'engagement des combattants kurdes peshmergas dans la bataille.

"Après le 10 juin (...) le tourisme a été anéanti", explique M. Karem, faisant état de la fermeture d'au moins 72 hôtels au cours des six derniers mois.

Un nombre équivalent a dû fermer ses chambres, ne conservant que l'activité restauration, ajoute-t-il alors que la plupart des projets en cours, de la construction d'un zoo en passant par la rénovation de citadelle d'Erbil classée au patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco, ont été mis en suspens.

## - QUELQUE 900.000 DÉPLACÉS -

"Au lieu d'avoir des touristes, nous avons des déplacés", constate aujourd'hui M. Karem en référence aux 900.000 Irakiens qui ont quitté les régions en proie aux violences pour se réfugier dans les trois provinces du Kurdistan.

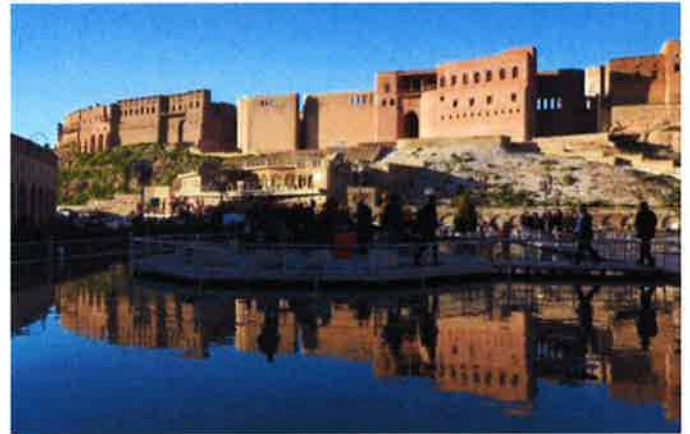
De longue date, les Irakiens affluaient des quatre coins du pays vers le Kurdistan célèbre pour ses sommets enneigés et ses cascades spectaculaires. Mais plutôt que les violences, c'est la chaleur de l'été qu'ils fuyaient en venant passer leurs vacances dans les montagnes kurdes.

Erbil était aussi devenue une destination prisée des touristes occidentaux en mal d'aventures. La région avait acquis la réputation d'un lieu sûr, contrastant avec le reste de l'Irak ravagé par les violences confessionnelles.

Aucun visa n'y est requis pour la plupart des ressortissants occidentaux et le Kurdistan disposait d'une économie et d'institutions solides.

"Tout était prêt, nous avons dépensé énormément pour préparer l'accueil" des touristes, explique Nadir Rwsy, membre de l'Office du tourisme.

La région pétrolière, qui avait misé sur ce secteur pour devenir le second pilier de son économie, a vu en quelques mois ses revenus diminuer avec la chute



La citadelle d'Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien, Photo par Safin Hamed/AFP dim. 1 févr. 2015

des prix du pétrole et ses dépenses militaires exploser.

## - ERBIL ÉPARGNÉE PAR LES VIOLENCES -

La désertion de la ville par les touristes touche de nombreux professionnels comme Burwa Mohamed Aziz, vendeur de souvenirs au pied de la citadelle.

Ce garçon de 22 ans se désole en exhibant une paire de 'klashs', l'espadrille traditionnelle qui faisait fureur chez les touristes étrangers. "Avant, ça se vendait comme des petits pains, mais aujourd'hui les seuls Occidentaux qu'on voit ici habitent Erbil et ils savent comment négocier."

Baxtiar Sadiq Ahmed lui aussi regrette ces touristes, souvent de retraités européens désireux de fuir le tourisme de masse, pour qui il avait mis en place des circuits haut de gamme axés sur les richesses culturelles de la région.

Ces formules permettaient d'explorer "l'héritage juif, la présence arménienne, l'histoire des Assyriens ou encore le temple de Lalish, centre spirituel de la minorité yazidie", énumère-t-il.

Dans son agence de voyage du centre-ville d'Erbil "tout allait pour le mieux, les affaires commençaient à décoller", raconte-t-il. Et finalement, au lieu des huit groupes attendus l'année passée, il n'en a reçu que deux "avant le début de la crise".

Le Kurdistan est resté un lieu sûr durant cette période, assure-t-il. Pourtant assureurs et tours opérateurs sont sur leurs gardes. "Il va falloir que je me rende en Europe (...) pour les rassurer. Je suis même prêt à payer pour qu'ils viennent ici et se rendent compte par eux-mêmes", avance-t-il. ♦

24 heures

2 février 2015

## Découverte d'un nouveau charnier de l'Etat islamique

Irak Au moins 25 personnes de la minorité Yézidie ont été retrouvées par les forces kurdes dans le nord-ouest de l'Irak.

2 février 2015

www.24heures.ch

Des combattants kurdes ont découvert les restes des corps de 25 Yézidis, tués par des djihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI), dans un charnier situé dans le nord-ouest de l'Irak, ont indiqué lundi 2 février 2015 des responsables.

«Les forces peshmergas ont découvert (dimanche) un charnier contenant les restes de quelque 25 personnes -- hommes, enfants et femmes -- de la minorité Yézidie, qui ont été

tués» par l'EI, a déclaré Myasser Haji Saleh, un responsable local dans le secteur de Sinjar.

La minorité Yézidie, considérée comme hérétique par l'EI, a été particulièrement visée par les exactions du groupe extrémiste, qui a conquis l'an dernier des pans entiers du territoire irakien.

### EXACTIONS DE DAECH

Le groupe a notamment conquis un temps les alentours du mont Sinjar (nord), fief des Yézidis, où ses combattants ont exécuté des hommes et enlevé des centaines, sinon des milliers, de femmes, vendues comme épouses aux djihadistes ou réduites à l'état d'esclave



sexuelle, selon Amnesty International.

L'EI multiplie les exactions dans les régions sous son contrôle en Irak comme en Syrie voisine, où le groupe djihadiste, est impliqué dans la guerre depuis 2013.

Les défenseurs des droits de l'Homme et l'ONU ont accusé cette organisation ultraradicale de nettoyage ethnique et de crimes contre l'Humanité. (ELB/afp/Newsnet) ♦

Le cri de Vian Dakhil, députée irakienne

# "LE MONDE DOIT EMPÊCHER UN GÉNOCIDE DES YÉZIDIS"

Unique députée yézidie au Parlement irakien, Vian Dakhil lutte pour sauver son peuple, première cible des atrocités de Daech.



La députée irakienne yézidie, Vian Dakhil, publiquement ces atrocités"

Propos recueillis par Alfred de Montesquiou à Erbil, Kurdistan irakien, 03 février 2015  
www.parismatch.com

Les djihadistes considèrent la minorité religieuse yézidie comme des païens dont l'islam autoriserait le massacre. Pourchassés dans les zones du Kurdistan tombées aux mains du califat autoproclamé, de nombreux Yézidis ont été mis en esclavage, notamment les femmes, vendues comme esclaves sexuelles sur les marchés à bestiaux de l'Etat Islamique. Pour la seule députée yézidie au Parlement irakien, Vian Dakhil, la communauté internationale doit réagir avant qu'il ne soit trop tard.

**Paris Match :** Vous avez alerté le monde sur les souffrances du peuple Yézidi dès les exactions de l'E.I. en août dernier. Avez-vous eu le sentiment d'avoir été entendue ?

**Vian Dakhil :** Pas assez, voire pas du tout. La situation continue d'empirer, notamment à cause de l'hiver. 500 000 Yezidis, sur les 650 000 que compte le pays, vivent actuellement sous des tentes, dans des camps de réfugiés boueux. Et les atrocités continuent dans les zones contrôlées par Daech. Les femmes, parfois des fillettes de 9 ans à peine, sont vendues pour être violées. J'estime qu'elles sont au moins 3000 à être actuellement esclaves. Et il y a autant de petits garçons de moins de 10 ans qui ont été kidnappés. Ils ont été convertis de force par Daech et se font endoctriner pour devenir des combattants ou des kamikazes pour les attentats suicide. "Les imams sunnites n'ont pris aucune position pour condamner

**P.M.:** Quels soutiens espérez vous, notamment de la part de la communauté internationale ?

**V.D.:** Il y a plusieurs niveaux d'aide qui sont nécessaires. D'abord, aider le peuple Kurde - dont nous faisons partie - en améliorant l'équipement militaire de l'armée du Kurdistan pour qu'elle puisse enfin repousser l'E.I. Ensuite, il y a l'aide financière, pour améliorer les conditions de vie dans les camps de réfugiés. Voire, comme je le fais moi-même, pour racheter des femmes prisonnières. Et enfin, il y a le soutien moral des musulmans pour condamner ces horreurs perpétrées sous couvert de la religion. Les plus hautes autorités chiïtes ont émis une fatwa pour condamner sans appel le fait de tuer ou de réduire en esclavage les Yézidis. Mais les imams sunnites n'ont pris aucune position pour condamner publiquement ces atrocités...

**P.M.:** Votre nom circule pour le prix Nobel de la Paix. Qu'en attendriez-vous ?

**V.D.:** Soyons clairs, le Nobel ne m'importerait pas du tout d'un point de vue personnel. Mais ce serait une bonne chose pour tous les Kurdes qui souffrent en Irak et en Syrie. J'ai tellement peur qu'on oublie le supplice des Yézidis ; que ce soit une de ces causes dont tout le monde parle pendant quelques semaines avant que l'actualité ne passe à autre chose. Or il faut savoir que c'est un véritable génocide que vise Daech. Il y a déjà des milliers de morts, sans qu'on puisse vraiment les dénombrer. Pas plus tard qu'hier, par exemple, les Peshmergas (kurdes) ont repris le village de Senouni. Ils ont découvert une fosse commune avec quarante corps, principalement des femmes et des enfants yézidis ! ■

## Kurd Oil Producers Resort to \$30 Sales as Export Income Stalled

February 5, 2015 / by Mikael Holter  
<http://www.bloomberg.com>

**(Bloomberg) – Foreign oil producers in Iraqi Kurdistan are resorting to selling crude at about \$30 a barrel in the domestic market as the government hangs on to companies' export earnings amid weaker world prices and a costly battle with Islamic State.**

"The government's announcement was that there would be payments coming," said Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani, executive chairman of Norwegian producer DNO ASA, said in an interview in Oslo. "That payment I think got disrupted because of lower prices and the resolution of the budget issues." That's forcing DNO to increase sales to the local market.

"The companies cannot go on forever investing," Mossavar-Rahmani said. "Local sales are an opportunity for us to get oxygen as we wait for those larger issues to come together."

DNO, Genel Plc and Gulf Keystone Petroleum Ltd. received an initial \$75 million from the Kurdistan Regional Government for their exports last year that was to be followed by a second payment. However, prices that have slumped by half in the past six months are squeezing income for the govern-

ment at the same time as it's battling Islamic extremists in northern Iraq.

"The biggest setback has been the crash of oil prices internationally because it limits the amount of revenue that can be shared," the chairman said. "Had it not been for the oil crash, I think the situation would have been quite different. This squeezes everybody, governments and the companies."

### SHIPPING CRUDE

Producers built up production and fed rising exports from Kurdistan through a pipeline to Turkey through 2014 as the local government started shipping crude to international markets in defiance of Iraq's central authorities. While Baghdad and the KRG struck a deal on exports in December, it's still unclear when producers in Kurdistan will be paid, according to DNO.

"I don't try to predict what they can do and when they can do it," Mossavar-Rahmani said in the interview.

DNO, after a \$253 million loss in the fourth quarter on charges linked to lower oil prices, says it plans to boost local Iraqi sales in the first quarter. Still, export volumes will keep rising, Mossavar-Rahmani said, declining to estimate what share from the Tawke field in Kurdistan will be sold locally.

The company, and its partner Genel, currently export 100,000 barrels a day from Tawke and are set to reach their target of increasing capacity at the field to 200,000 barrels early this year, according to Oslo-based DNO.

Producers need revenues to invest in fields such as Tawke to increase, let alone maintain, output, Mossavar-Rahmani said. "Every field has a natural decline in production," he said. "Unless you keep investing, that's what's going to happen."

The Kurdish government and producers will split revenue from local sales evenly, a higher share for companies than their contracts would indicate, Mossavar-Rahmani said. The price for local sales of Tawke crude of a little more than \$30 a barrel compares with about \$55 a barrel for benchmark Brent crude. ●

# Pride in victory outweighs Kobani's grief



Devastation in the Syrian town of Kobani, a result of the Islamic State siege. "We don't care about money or buildings, only victory," a resident said. "We were not broken by ISIS."

## KOBANI, SYRIA

### Residents repel ISIS and now hope to carve out a Kurdish homeland

BY TIM ARANGO

Lasheen Abdulla steered her white minivan through the streets of her hometown, past the charred husks of car bombs, the shattered storefronts, the unexploded mortar shells. Across the gray of destruction were streaks of color: the purple sheets hung to hide the Kurdish snipers who, for months, defended this city from the extremists of the Islamic State.

She pointed to the spots where her city's martyrs fell — five over there, near the bullet-pocked wall of a girl's school, six at a heap of rubble that used to be an open-air vegetable market. In recent days, the ruins have yielded corpses of Kurdish fighters, their heads severed. Even children's dolls were found decapitated, a symbol, Ms. Abdulla said, of the cruelty of their enemy.

"When you see your hometown destroyed like this, you feel destroyed from within," said Ms. Abdulla, 43, who

remained in Kobani for the entire siege. She has washed many bodies of Kurdish fighters for burial, and said she had three in the house where she has been staying.

The devastation of this city, wrought by the Islamic State siege and the American-led air campaign that ultimately expelled the militants, is so thorough that it manages to feel unreal, like a movie set.

Even so, now that the city has been liberated, pride in victory outweighs grief over the losses for the Kurds who live here. As the battle unfolded, with its outcome uncertain, Kobani had taken on mythic status: — Kurds called it their Stalingrad — as a place from which the Kurds hope to carve a homeland from the turmoil of the Middle East.

"All I can feel now is happiness because of this victory," said Anwar Jarmesh, 33, who lost two brothers in the fighting. He had escaped to Turkey at the height of the conflict, but returned to make his own contribution: washing bodies of fighters. "We don't care about money or buildings, only victory. We were not broken by ISIS."

The battle for Kobani, a border outpost that abuts Turkey, began in September. Almost by accident the city, of little obvious strategic value to the

American-led coalition, took on outsized importance as the signature test of President Obama's strategy for defeating the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL: American airpower combined with local forces on the ground.

More than 700 airstrikes from the American-led coalition pounded this city over nearly five months — more than in any other place in Syria or Iraq, where the Islamic State controls a vast territory that straddles the border between the two countries.

American officials said Kobani became important to them only because it became important to the Islamic State, which rushed reinforcements to the city — providing a steady stream of targets for coalition fighter pilots — and used the battle as a recruiting pitch for foreign jihadis.

In a statement released on Friday, the Islamic State acknowledged its retreat from Kobani, saying it was "because of the bombardment and because some of the brothers were killed."

The message continued, "they flattened the land with their rockets, so we were forced to retreat. Then those rats advanced."

Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday that the Islamic State had "said all along that Kobani was a real



symbolic and strategic objective. They said so themselves; they defined it as such. So pushing them out of there is a big deal.”

Nearly 400 Kurdish fighters died in Kobani, but the Islamic State took more losses, more than 1,000 fighters, many of them jihadis from abroad.

The body of one of those fighters arrived at the city's border gate with Turkey on Friday afternoon, in a brown coffin on the back of a white truck.

A Kurdish man lifted the lid of the coffin and unzipped the body bag to show a bearded man dressed in camouflage. A Kurdish officer said the dead man was a Turk who had been living in Germany, and the body was being delivered to his family, which lives in Konya, a conservative Turkish city.

“He came here to behead our people,” the Kurdish officer, Ismet Hassan, said to reporters as photographers and fighters snapped pictures of the body.

At a traffic circle here, a Kurdish fighter stood and looked around, as gunfire and shelling from combat in nearby villages could be heard.

“Barbarians,” said the man, Zagros Mohammed, who used to be a house painter in a quiet village outside Kobani, as he pointed to a hospital destroyed by an Islamic State car bomb.

Still, he said, “regardless of all of this, we are victorious and they are on the run.”

Despite the destruction and the dangers of unexploded bombs and booby-trapped buildings, there were small signs that Kobani was awakening. Down the street and around the corner from the traffic circle, a handful of children played in a doorway. Their aunt, Fayhaa Hamza, was watching them and said she and the children had returned a few weeks ago, and she wanted to thank Mr. Obama for helping to liberate her city.

“ISIS has been attacking Syrians everywhere and it was only the Kurds who could defeat them,” she said.

A constellation of Kurdish forces, backed by American airpower, defended Kobani. Many of them were local Syrian Kurds, but some were Turkish Kurds with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., who have waged an insurgency against the Turkish state for decades. Iraqi Kurdish forces, known as pesh merga, were also dispatched here, and on Friday a truck full of Iraqis drove through the main streets. Kurds also came from Europe, including Sweden and Germany, to fight in Kobani.

Even some Syrian Arabs, with the moderate Free Syrian Army, which rose in 2011 after a peaceful uprising against President Bashar al-Assad turned violent, joined the fight.

The scenes of destruction in Kobani provide a haunting panorama of what may lie ahead, as the war against the Islamic State unfolds in other places, especially in Iraq. There, in cities like Mosul and Falluja, where the Islamic State is entrenched, a campaign to oust them will likely be more difficult, and perhaps

more destructive.

Acknowledging this, Rear Adm. John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, said of the victory in Kobani: “Nobody's doing touchdown dances here. This is going to be long and hard.”

From the start, the battle for Kobani put the Turks in an awkward position. The Syrian Kurdish group that was the dominant fighting force is an offshoot of the P.K.K., an avowed enemy of Turkey. As the battle raged at its doorstep, Turkey refused entreaties from the United States and other Western allies to intervene directly against the Islamic State.

Turkey did take in nearly 200,000 people fleeing the fighting in Kobani, and even as the city was being liberated, the refugee crisis was taking on a sense of permanence. In recent days, Turkey



BULENT KILIC/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**A Kurd in Kobani. The town gained mythic status — Kurds called it their Stalingrad.**

opened its largest refugee camp, in Suruc, a border town near Kobani.

Local Turkish authorities on Friday enticed a group of journalists to tour the new camp, by promising them that afterward they would facilitate entry to Kobani for the afternoon.

So far, there are about 4,000 Kobani refugees in the camp, and will soon swell to 35,000, highlighting the reality that despite the liberation of the city it could be a long time before its citizens can return.

Regardless of how long it takes to repopulate Kobani, the Kurds say they will never again accept dominion by outsiders — neither the Arabs of Syria, who treated them as second-class citizens, nor the Turks, who ruled them during the days of the Ottoman Empire. There are already plans to open a school in Kobani, where lessons will be taught in the Kurdish language, something that had long been prohibited.

Standing just inside the gate that separates Kobani from Turkey, Mohammed Jarada, a fighter guarding the post, savored the recent victory and shrugged off the costs.

“This means that the Kurds exist,” he said. “We exist.”

*Karam Shoumali contributed reporting from Kobani, and Eric Schmitt from Washington.*

International New York Times

FEBRUARY 1, 2015

## Kurds struck by surprise assault from Islamic State

BAGHDAD

### Bold attack on Kirkuk kills senior leader and prompts U.N. evacuation

BY KAREEM FAHIM

Exploiting a foggy night as cover, Islamic State militants launched a surprise attack on Kurdish positions on the outskirts of the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk early on Friday, killing a senior Kurdish commander and at least five of his men, security officials in the city said.

The assault was one of the most aggressive undertaken against Kirkuk in recent weeks by the Islamic State, the Sunni extremist group that controls a large area of Iraq and Syria.

Families fled their homes as the fighting intensified, and at one point, the militants stormed an abandoned hotel in the Kirkuk city center. After calling in emergency reinforcements from Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish fighters, backed by airstrikes, killed dozens of militants and eventually repelled the attack, officials said.

Even so, the foray by the Islamic State fighters underscored the group's strength and audacity, as well as its determination to capture Kirkuk, an oil-rich city that is seen as vitally important by Kurdish leaders.

The United Nations said on Friday that it was withdrawing its foreign staff from Kirkuk and sending it north to Erbil because of the “rapid deterioration in security,” according to The Associated Press.

Security officials said the militants had used armored vehicles and deployed car bombs as they attacked positions of Kurdish militia fighters, known as pesh merga, from the east and south of the city early Friday. A pesh merga commander, Brig. Gen. Shirko Fatih, who led the First Brigade, was killed along with five of his soldiers, the officials said.

Later in the day, militants from the group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, attacked the abandoned hotel inside the city with a car bomb. A security official in Kirkuk said three Islamic State fighters had infiltrated the hotel, reaching its roof. Kurdish troops and local police officers stormed the hotel, killing the militants, the A.P. reported.

# Turkey's eroding democracy

Fethullah Gulen

**SAYLORSBURG, PA.** It is deeply disappointing to see what has become of Turkey in the last few years. Not long ago, it was the envy of Muslim-majority countries: a viable candidate for the European Union on its path to becoming a functioning democracy that upholds universal human rights, gender equality, the rule of law and the rights of Kurdish and non-Muslim citizens. This historic opportunity now appears to have been squandered as Turkey's ruling party, known as the A.K.P., reverses that progress and clamps down on civil society, media, the judiciary and free enterprise.

Turkey's current leaders seem to claim an absolute mandate by virtue of winning elections. But victory doesn't grant them permission to ignore the Constitution or suppress dissent, especially when election victories are built on crony capitalism and media subservience. The A.K.P.'s leaders now depict every democratic criticism of them as an attack on the state. By viewing every critical voice as an enemy — or worse, a traitor — they are leading the country toward totalitarianism.

The latest victims of the clampdown are the staff, executives and editors of independent media organizations who were detained and are now facing charges made possible by recent changes to the laws and the court system. The director of one of the most popular TV channels, arrested in December, is still behind bars. Public officials investigating corruption charges have also been purged and jailed for simply doing their jobs. An independent judiciary, a functioning civil society and media are checks and balances against government transgressions. Such harassment sends the message that whoever stands in the way of the ruling party's agenda will be targeted by slander, sanctions and even trumped-up charges.

Turkey's rulers have not only alienated the West, they are also now losing credibility in the Middle East. Turkey's ability to assert positive influence in the region depends not only on its economy but also on the health of its own democracy.

The core tenets of a functioning democracy — the rule of law, respect for individual freedoms — are also the most basic of Islamic values bestowed upon us by God. No political or religious leader has the authority to take them away. It is disheartening to see religious scholars provide theological justification for the

ruling party's oppression and corruption or simply stay silent. Those who use the language and symbols of religious observance but violate the core principles of their religion do not deserve such loyalty from religious scholars.

Speaking against oppression is a democratic right, a civic duty and for believers, a religious obligation. The Quran makes clear that people should not remain silent in the face of injustice: "O you who believe! Be upholders and standard-bearers of justice, bearing witness to the truth for God's sake, even though it be against your own selves, or parents or kindred."

For the past 50 years, I have been fortunate to take part in a civil society

movement, sometimes referred to as Hizmet, whose participants and supporters include millions of Turkish citizens. These citizens have committed themselves to interfaith dialogue, community service, relief efforts and making life-changing education accessible. They have established more than 1,000 modern secular schools, tutoring centers, colleges, hospitals and relief organizations in over 150 countries. They are teachers, journalists, businessmen and ordinary citizens.

The rhetoric used by the ruling party repeatedly to crack down on Hizmet

**By viewing every critical voice as an enemy, the government is leading the country toward totalitarianism.**

participants is nothing but a pretext to justify their own authoritarianism. Hizmet participants have never formed a political party nor have they pursued political ambitions. Their participation in the movement is driven by intrinsic rewards, not extrinsic ones.

I have spent over 50 years preaching and teaching the values of peace, mutual respect and altruism. I've advocated for education, community service and interfaith dialogue. I have always believed in seeking happiness in the happiness of others and the virtue of seeking God's pleasure in helping His people. Whatever influence is attributed to me, I have used it as a means to promote educational and social projects that help nurture virtuous individuals. I have no interest in political power.

Many Hizmet participants, including me, once supported the ruling party's agenda, including the 2005 opening of accession negotiations with the European Union. Our support then was based on principle, as is our criticism

today. It is our right and duty to speak out about government policies that have a deep impact on society. Unfortunately, our democratic expression against public corruption and authoritarianism has made us victims of a witch-hunt; both the Hizmet movement and I are being targeted with hate speech, media smear campaigns and legal harassment.

Like all segments of Turkish society, Hizmet participants have a presence in government organizations and in the private sector. These citizens cannot be denied their constitutional rights or be subjected to discrimination for their sympathy to Hizmet's ideals, as long as they abide by the laws of the country, the rules of their institutions and basic ethical principles. Profiling any segment of society and viewing them as a threat is a sign of intolerance.

We are not the only victims of the A.K.P.'s crackdown. Peaceful environmental protesters, Kurds, Alevis, non-Muslim citizens and some Sunni Muslim groups not aligned with the ruling party have suffered, too. Without checks and balances, no individual or group is safe from the ruling party's wrath. Regardless of their religious observance, citizens can and should unite around universal human rights and freedoms, and democratically oppose those who violate them.

Turkey has now reached a point where democracy and human rights have almost been shelved. I hope and pray that those in power reverse their current domineering path. In the past the Turkish people have rejected elected leaders who strayed from a democratic path. I hope they will exercise their legal and democratic rights again to reclaim the future of their country.

**FETHULLAH GULEN** is an Islamic scholar, preacher and social advocate.

# La défaite en trompe-l'œil de l'EI à Kobané

La ville syrienne porte les stigmates des combats acharnés contre les djihadistes

## REPORTAGE

KOBANÉ (SYRIE) - envoyé spécial

Pendant quatre mois, Mahmoud Hassan a suivi, réfugié en Turquie, l'avancée de l'Etat islamique (EI) dans Kobané. Il a su que les djihadistes combattaient dans sa rue il y a deux mois. Que sa maison était encore debout il y a deux semaines. Le corps d'un djihadiste gisait dans sa cour, face à dix carcasses de voitures. Mahmoud Hassan - fonctionnaire du régime syrien, il refuse de donner son véritable nom - a demandé à un voisin de brûler le corps avant de revenir chez lui après la libération de la ville la semaine dernière. Le cadavre s'est momifié dans l'essence. L'homme dresse un poing presque intact, raidi vers le ciel.

Aujourd'hui, debout sur son perron, les pieds dans un tapis de douilles, Mahmoud Hassan aimerait savoir pourquoi cet homme est venu mourir ici. « Il n'y a pas de pétrole, il n'y a rien que Daech [acronyme arabe de l'EI] puisse désirer à Kobané », dit-il.

Ce combat a coûté cher à l'EI : un millier d'hommes, selon un décompte, approximatif mais crédible, de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, parmi lesquels des djihadistes expérimentés et de nombreuses recrues étrangères. Mais la capacité de résistance que le groupe a montrée, sous les objectifs des caméras du monde entier, est saisissante. On peut se demander au terme de cette bataille si la perte de Kobané, objectif secondaire pour l'EI, est réellement une défaite, tant elle illustre la difficulté de lutter contre les djihadistes.

Il aura fallu pour les chasser quatre mois de combats et plus de 700 bombardements aériens, qui

ont réduit la ville à presque rien - le « premier ministre » de Kobané, Anwar Muslim, envisage de la reconstruire ailleurs, s'il trouve les fonds. « Même quand les Américains les bombardaient, ils ne sortaient pas des maisons. Il fallait qu'on aille les abatte sous les décombres », dit Asmat Cheikh Hassan, « ministre de la défense » du canton kurde.

Lorsque les officiers de l'EI ont lancé l'attaque sur Kobané, à la mi-septembre, ils avaient peut-être imaginé une proie facile. Le plus exposé des trois « cantons » kurdes du nord du pays. Une base depuis laquelle les « unités de protection du peuple » kurdes (YPG) lançaient des raids depuis 2013, avec les forces de l'Armée syrienne libre, sur les portions de route que tient l'EI entre son fief de Rakka et Alep.

Canons de char contre kalachnikovs, les djihadistes ont d'abord progressé sans grande difficulté à travers les campagnes. En ville, ils ont ensuite bénéficié de la supériorité de leurs armes, prenant en quatre jours le « quartier de sécurité » des YPG, puis marchant jusqu'à la principale voie de ravitaillement de la ville, près du poste-frontière de Mursitpinar, entre la Syrie et la Turquie.

Malgré les armes larguées par les Etats-Unis, dès le 20 octobre, pour les forces kurdes et celles de

**« Leur première force, c'est leur idéologie. Ils venaient ici pour mourir »**

ZAGROS DJIAN  
officier du PKK



Le corps d'un djihadiste de l'Etat islamique gît dans une rue de Kobané, le 30 janvier. LAURENCE GEAI/SIPA POUR « LE MONDE »

l'ensemble de la coalition syrienne venues d'Alep ; malgré l'arrivée, le 1<sup>er</sup> novembre, de 150 peshmergas du Kurdistan irakien, équipés d'armes lourdes, l'EI a progressé. Pilonné par les avions de la coalition internationale menée par les Etats-Unis, il a tenu son terrain et a relancé des offensives au sud-ouest et à l'est. Il a envoyé des renforts en ville entre les phases de bombardement. Il a lancé voiture piégée après voiture piégée contre les tranchées kurdes, masquant leur progression par des feux de pneus. Des YPG paraient, vendredi, dans Kobané sur l'une de ces bombes mobiles : un camion plaqué de métal, à la tête soudée en double biseau.

L'EI a ouvert de nouveaux fronts en bombardant par tanks, canons et mortiers, puis lâchant d'importantes forces, notamment des djihadistes étrangers peu expérimentés, selon Asmat Cheikh Hassan, qui fait visiter, l'œil éteint, la place de la Liberté écrasée par les bombes, dans le centre-ville.

### « Ils savent faire peur »

« Leur première force, c'est leur idéologie. Ils venaient ici pour mourir », dit Zagros Djian (un pseudonyme), 39 ans, qui pèse son compliment. Djian est un officier du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), organisation mère des YPG, d'inspiration marxiste et experte en raideur idéologique. Il dit avoir passé vingt-cinq ans basé dans les monts Qandil, dans le nord de

l'Irak, à combattre l'armée turque. « Leur propagande est intensive : tout le monde sait qu'ils vont brûler, mutiler leurs ennemis. Ils savent faire peur. »

L'officier affirme que de nombreux djihadistes portaient des grenades à la ceinture, « pour se faire exploser parmi nous ». Une tactique indigne, dit-il. Le PKK a pourtant commis lui aussi des attentats-suicides en Turquie. En octobre 2010, un groupe affilié à l'organisation revendiquait encore une attaque qui avait fait trente-deux morts dans le centre d'Istanbul.

Selon les autorités kurdes de Kobané, la plupart des djihadistes étaient des étrangers venus de toute l'Europe, notamment de France, du Golfe et du Maghreb, du Caucase, d'Asie centrale, regroupés en unités partiellement nationales. Les YPG citent volontiers les Tchétchènes pour leur capacité de combat et leur nombre.

La plupart des Tchétchènes actifs en Syrie, affiliés à l'émirat du Caucase, sont fidèles à Al-Qaïda et à sa filiale syrienne, le Front Al-Nosra. Mais des groupes se sont constitués au sein de l'EI. « Sur les talkies-walkies, les djihadistes parlaient d'un camp d'entraînement tchétchène à l'est de Kobané, dit Asmat Cheikh Hassan. Ils étaient concentrés dans le centre-ville, à l'est de "l'aire de sécurité". Ils sont très bien entraînés : d'excellents combattants. » ■

LOUIS IMBERT

# Des officiers turcs dans les rangs djihadistes

**Membre de l'Otan et alliée des Etats-Unis, la Turquie soutient pourtant l'Etat islamique. Par hostilité envers les Kurdes, qui rêvent d'indépendance.**

**L**A présence de milliers d'islamistes armés aux frontières de son pays n'inquiète guère le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ces partisans de l'Etat islamique et de son calife Ibrahim mènent une guerre qui lui convient parfaitement : ils veulent chasser Bachar – son ennemi depuis 2011 – de Damas, et ils occupent déjà environ 20 % du territoire syrien, plus un gros tiers de l'Irak. Mais Erdogan apprécie davantage encore leurs combats contre les milices kurdes, qui rêvent de créer un Etat indépendant à quelques kilomètres de sa chère Turquie. Et fournissent ainsi un mauvais exemple aux 12 à 15 millions de Turcs d'origine kurde qui revendiquent un statut d'autonomie, voire plus...

Précision nécessaire, la Turquie a rejoint – par obligation ? – la coalition internationale, dirigée par les Etats-Unis, avec pour mission d'en finir avec l'Etat islamique. Mais Erdogan n'en a cure, de cet objectif lointain, et sans doute enrage-t-il de voir des avions américains, canadiens ou français pilonner chaque

jour ou presque les positions djihadistes en Irak ou en Syrie. Un soutien militaire et politique décisif aux ambitions des Kurdes, ses ennemis intimes.

Comment s'étonner dès lors que, depuis plus de deux ans, les autorités turques aient ouvert leurs frontières à tous les adversaires de Bachar ? Personne ne leur a reproché de fournir une aide aux rebelles dits modérés de l'Armée syrienne libre, dont les effectifs sont de plus en plus réduits. En revanche, à Washington, Paris ou Londres, on n'a guère apprécié que des volontaires européens et autres – souvent jeunes – aient pu profiter de cette « hospitalité » pour rejoindre les combattants djihadistes en Syrie ou en Irak. Même constat pour les blessés, soignés dans les hôpitaux turcs avant de repartir au combat, ou pour les convois d'armes et les trafics divers qui approvisionnent les forces de l'Etat islamique.

Erdogan a fait mieux : il a refusé aux avions de la coalition l'accès de la gigantesque base turque d'Inçirlik. Concédées à l'Otan, utilisées par les Améri-

cains lors de leurs interventions au Proche ou au Moyen-Orient, et hébergeant en permanence des militaires US, ses installations modernes, à quelque 100 kilomètres de la Syrie, auraient permis une multiplication des raids sur leurs objectifs.

## Coopération barbouzarde

Mais, si Erdogan se garde d'apporter son concours au combat de ses « alliés », il laisse se développer, en revanche, une curieuse coopération. Les liens entre l'Etat islamique et les services turcs de renseignement – le MIT – se sont diversifiés, au fil des ans, au nom de la lutte contre le « terrorisme kurde », formule chère à Erdogan. Des officiers du MIT ont infiltré les camps de réfugiés syriens installés en Turquie. Et d'autres agents sont allés exercer leurs talents, et risquer leur vie, mêlés aux combattants de l'Etat islamique.

Leur présence a été détectée par certains services alliés, mais il n'est pas trop question d'en faire état. Une pudeur très politique qui ne convainc pas un expert du Quai d'Orsay, lequel reconnaît que « l'on n'ose guère parler de ce double jeu d'Erdogan, alors que personne n' imagine que cette coopération clandestine puisse se pratiquer à son corps défendant ». Les naïfs, peut-être ?

Claude Angeli

## Etat de sévices

**O**N connaît Daech par le sang versé. Egorgeurs, coupeurs de mains, violeurs de femmes, voleurs d'enfants, ses troupes crucifient les opposants et exterminent les minorités. Mais Daech est aussi une gigantesque machine économique. Une start-up criminelle née derrière les barbelés américains du camp de prisonniers de Bucca (Irak), avant de lancer une OPA victorieuse sur l'internationale islamiste. En deux ans, écrasant ses concurrents et ringardisant Al-Qaïda, Daech est devenu une véritable multinationale. Un Etat voyou qui règne sur 10 millions de sunnites syriens et irakiens, dans un territoire prison grand comme la moitié de la France.

Car les illuminés d'Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, calife Ibrahim autoproclamé, ne se contentent pas de brandir le sabre contre les infidèles. Aux populations conquises de force, Daech souhaite offrir l'illusion d'un émirat rêvé.

### Fond des âges

Dans leurs villes, les barbares salarient des ingénieurs, des médecins, des techniciens. Ils

assurent la distribution d'eau, d'électricité, veillent au bon fonctionnement du téléphone, revendent à vil prix le blé, le maïs, le coton dérobés par récoltes entières. En Syrie et en Irak, le drapeau noir flotte sur plus de 20 banques, qui n'ont jamais cessé leurs transactions internationales. Autant de puits de pétrole sont aux mains des terroristes sunnites. Leurs camions-citernes encombrant les routes, empruntant les réseaux de contrebande mis en place sous Saddam Hussein pour contourner l'embargo. L'or noir de Daech est bradé partout. Bandits irakiens, mafieux syriens, trafiquants kurdes, le brut voyage sans encombre en

Jordanie ou en Turquie. Après quelques kilomètres de route et trois barrages complices, qui peut encore dire d'où il provient ?

Jérôme Fritel et Stéphan Vileneuve se sont courageusement rendus au plus près du « califat ». Ils ont enquêté à Bagdad et le long de ses « frontières » pour raconter comment Daech tente ainsi de se vendre, en alternative crédible aux Etats corrompus de la région. A Maktab Khalid, dans le nord-ouest de l'Irak, où djihadistes islamistes

et peshmergas kurdes se font face, des milliers de personnes traversent chaque jour cette ligne de front devenue frontière illégale. Daech seul décide de qui a le droit d'entrer et de sortir.

Des familles entières vont faire leurs courses à Kirkouk, ville kurde, avant de retourner librement au pays du drapeau noir. Devant la caméra, les gens ont peur de parler. La foule est gangrenée par les mouchards. Et la critique ne pardonne pas. Même ce trafiquant d'armes syrien évoque les barbus avec prudence. Il a fourni du matériel à des Tchétchènes embrigadés. « Ils étaient riches. Ils payaient cash et d'avance. » Les craignait-il ? Il soupire : « A la moindre erreur, on risquait la décapitation. Pas de négociation possible. »

« L'Etat islamique restera ! » hurlent les terroristes à chaque nouvelle conquête. Par ce cri, ils

affirment que, même vaincu militairement, l'esprit du califat demeurera sur ces terres. Et les accuser de renvoyer leur peuple au Moyen Age est pour eux un régal. Age d'or de l'islam, cette période n'est pas vécue comme obscure mais revendiquée comme bénie.

Sorj Chalandon

● « Daech, naissance d'un Etat terroriste », le 10/2 à 20 h 50, en ouverture d'une soirée spéciale sur Arte.

# Syrie. Kobané libéré, les Kurdes s'unifient

Ankara craint une poussée nationaliste au sein de la population kurde du Moyen-Orient, après que Kobané a été repris des mains de l'Etat islamique.

d'Irak contre les Kurdes irakiens. Aujourd'hui pourtant, les Kurdes irakiens sont les plus proches alliés d'Ankara dans la région et de solides partenaires commerciaux, même si cette amitié a été mise à rude épreuve par le refus des Turcs de lutter franchement contre l'Etat islamique. Le même scénario serait-il sur le point de se jouer en Syrie ?

**Bomber le torse.** "La Turquie n'a pas pu stopper les Kurdes en Irak, elle a tout aussi peu de chances d'y parvenir en Syrie, analyse le diplomate occidental déjà cité. A défaut d'unir leurs chefs, la stratégie turque aura uni les Kurdes." Ankara conserve toutefois sa capacité de nuisance à leur égard. De fait, les Kurdes de Syrie sont de plus en plus dépendants de l'aide turque. Et, contrairement à la très montagneuse frontière turco-irakienne où est établi le PKK, la région frontalière entre la Turquie et les régions kurdes du nord de la Syrie est totalement plate – ce qui facilite grandement de potentielles interventions militaires.

Pourtant, Erdogan a beau bomber le torse, cette éventualité reste la moins probable. Car, outre le tollé qu'il susciterait dans la communauté internationale, ce choix serait lourd de conséquences sur la scène intérieure turque. Erdogan et son gouvernement négocient depuis deux ans la paix avec Öcalan, et le cessez-le-feu déclaré en mars 2013 a pour l'essentiel été respecté. Aucune des deux parties ne peut se permettre de relancer la guerre. Le PKK est trop occupé par l'Etat islamique, et l'AKP par les législatives du 7 juin prochain, qu'il entend bien remporter pour la quatrième fois consécutive. "Avec Kobané, les Kurdes de Turquie et de Syrie ont vu leur sort inextricablement lié, analyse Arzu Yilmaz, chercheuse à l'université d'Ankara. A leurs yeux, quand on attaque les Kurdes de Syrie, c'est à eux aussi qu'on s'en prend."

—Amberin Zaman  
Publié le 28 janvier

Un mécontentement partagé du côté américain. Washington n'a guère apprécié le refus d'Ankara de laisser les avions de la coalition utiliser la base d'Incirlik, dans le sud de la Turquie, pour leurs missions de combat contre l'Etat islamique.

**200 000 réfugiés.** Si la Turquie avait soutenu les Kurdes dès le départ, "l'idée qu'Ankara est du côté de l'Etat islamique ne serait pas aussi répandue aujourd'hui", lâche un diplomate occidental. Car, pour le PKK, la Turquie arme et entraîne les djihadistes, façon pour elle de combattre par procuration les Kurdes de Syrie.

Mais Ankara nie toute collusion avec les djihadistes contre les Kurdes de Syrie, rappelant qu'elle a accueilli plus de 200 000 réfugiés de Kobané. Un gros millier de combattants des YPG blessés sont soignés dans des hôpitaux turcs, ajoutent des responsables turcs. Il n'en reste pas moins qu'Ankara aurait certainement préféré que la situation s'enlise plutôt qu'aucun des deux camps ne l'emporte.

Erdogan n'a laissé aucun doute sur son hostilité à tout accord en Syrie qui instaurerait dans le nord du pays quoi que ce soit qui ressemble à l'Etat de facto des Kurdes d'Irak. Une position qu'il a réaffirmée le 26 janvier devant la presse : "De quoi parle-t-on ? Du nord de l'Irak ? Maintenant, [ils voudraient] une Syrie du Nord. Nous ne pouvons pas l'accepter... De telles entités seront sources de graves problèmes à l'avenir."

Des propos qui rappellent fortement les ultimatums qu'avait lancés Ankara dans les années 1990 quand les Kurdes d'Irak avaient formé leur gouvernement régional. A l'époque, la Turquie avait cherché à monter les Kurdes irakiens contre le PKK, et les Turkmènes

Pour la première fois, Washington collabore ouvertement avec le PKK, alors même que le mouvement kurde reste sur la liste des organisations terroristes du ministère américain des Affaires étrangères. Les frappes aériennes incessantes de la coalition menée par les Etats-Unis contre des cibles de l'Etat islamique à Kobané et dans sa région ont joué un rôle décisif et fait pencher la balance en faveur des Kurdes.

Le président turc, Erdogan, n'a pas caché le déplaisir que lui causait la tournure prise par les événements. S'exprimant devant des journalistes le 26 janvier, il a ainsi laissé entendre qu'il avait demandé au président américain, Obama, de ne pas intervenir aux côtés des Kurdes. "Je lui ai dit : 'N'allez pas parachuter ces bombes [entendre par là des armes et d'autres aides matérielles] aux forces kurdes. Ce serait une erreur de votre part.' Malheureusement, malgré cette conversation, ils ont parachuté tout le nécessaire depuis trois avions de transport C-130, et la moitié de tout cela a fini entre les mains de combattants de l'Etat islamique."

—Al-Monitor (extraits)  
Washington

**K**obané est libéré ! Prochaine libération, Öcalan !" [le leader du PKK emprisonné en Turquie], ont scandé des milliers de Kurdes à travers la Turquie, l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie, alors que cette ville à la frontière turco-syrienne venait d'être débarassée des combattants de l'Etat islamique après 133 jours de guerre sanglante. Une victoire durement gagnée, et qui apparaît ici comme un tournant historique dans la longue lutte que mènent depuis des décennies les Kurdes pour défendre leurs droits. Pour certains observateurs, les premiers vainqueurs en sont, pour l'heure, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et son chef Abdullah Öcalan ; du côté des vaincus, il faudrait, à l'Etat islamique, ajouter la Turquie.

Le PKK et son pendant syrien des Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG) sont de fait les fers de lance du combat contre les djihadistes en Irak et en Syrie.



# Kurds dream of independence as they defend perilous border

**VALLEY OF THE CROWS,**  
northern Iraq, February 4, 2015 (Reuters)  
By Samia Nakhoul and Isabel Coles /  
english.alarabiya.net/

The black banner of the Islamic State, fixed to a shack within sight of this frontline, is evidence of the existential threat menacing the Kurds from across the 1,000-km long frontier.

Kurdish Peshmerga fighters are digging trenches and building defense berms in Wadi al-Ghorab (Valley Of The Crows), less than 2 km away from the IS-held Sultan Abdullah village, which demarcates the new border of their autonomous region.

The Kurds have enjoyed de facto self rule since the first Gulf War in 1991. They are now closer than ever to achieving their dream of full independence. Yet they are menaced by the deadly ambitions of the Islamic caliphate across the frontline.

Not far from Wadi al-Ghorab, mostly Sunni Arab Iraqi fighters were undergoing military training to help fight to regain Mosul, one of Iraq's largest cities, and other Sunni towns that were overrun by Islamic State last June before it surged menacingly towards Erbil, the heart of Kurdish power.

The jihadi movement declared its cross-border caliphate last year after seizing territory in eastern Syria and west and northern Iraq. It now directly threatens the Iraqi Kurdish entity across lines that lie 45 km (30 miles) from Erbil, the bustling capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

To the southeast, Kurdish forces battled IS insurgents and last week recaptured an oil field near the city of Kirkuk, which Kurds seized last summer and proclaimed as their own.

"To have ISIS ... we can't sleep well," said Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan. "It means every night having a nightmare."

## TWO WORLDS

Najat Ali Saleh, a Peshmerga commander, said not a week passes when IS doesn't try to wage a new offensive or attack to regain lost villages.

"They are stronger than us," said Saleh near the Wadi al-Ghorab frontline. "We need heavy weapons to fight them. They have heavier weapons. We need artillery, mortars, armored cars and Humvees. Right now we have Kalashnikovs and machine guns."

Across this new frontier, Sunni residents interviewed in Mosul, just 80 km from Erbil, tell of another world under Islamic State's



Kurdish Peshmerga fighters stand guard on the outskirts of Mosul January 26, 2015.  
Credit: REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

rule.

They recount tales of beheadings, executions, flogging and stoning to death in public squares. Punishments are meted out to Sunni Muslims seen by IS as not adhering to their nihilistic brand of Islam. Smoking cigarettes, watching movies or even world cup football games are all deemed un-Islamic. Music and all forms of arts are forbidden.

IS insurgents have taken over the schools, segregating girls from boys, even in nurseries, and changed the curriculum to implant their vision of Islam in young minds. They have set up military camps to train and recruit boys to replace fighters they have lost on the battlefield, residents say.

On the KRG-run side of the frontier, Kurdistan has witnessed not just political independence but hitherto unknown economic prosperity over the past decade, as hotels and construction projects mushroomed. The boom froze last year when Baghdad stopped paying the Kurds' share of the national budget as punishment for the region's move to export oil on its own terms.

## BROKEN COUNTRY

For Kurds, the rise of IS has reinforced their belief that Iraq is a broken state, that they are better off in their own entity and that all other sects should emulate them.

From ordinary Kurds to top officials it is impossible to find anyone who believes in Iraq as one united country. All those interviewed want partition or at least federation.

The ties that bind Kurds with Arab Iraq are few and fraying.

Most Kurds born in the autonomous region, created after the Kurdish uprising that followed the 1991 Gulf War, don't speak Arabic. Signposts along roads, on shops, military bases and government buildings are all in Kurdish, the official language of Kurdistan.

Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said Iraq, which has been ravaged by sectarian warfare since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein, does not exist as a unified country.

"There is no loyalty to a country called Iraq," he told Reuters in an interview.

"It really is important to find a formula for how to live together within the boundaries of what is called Iraq. Unless a formula is found, there will be more bloodshed and the country will remain a destabilizing factor in the region."

Pointing to Shi'ite-Sunni sectarian strife across Iraq, all Kurdish factions agree that a unified country ruled from Baghdad is a dream of the past and that power must be devolved to give each of the main sects, Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds their autonomous regions.

## PARTITION ONLY SOLUTION?

But any such vision is unlikely to materialize unless they get rid of the Islamic State first, they say.

"The only solution (to stop the bloodshed) is to partition Iraq, everybody will be →

⇒ relieved. What are the benefits of keeping Iraq united with people killing each other every day?" said Sirwan Barzani, a prominent businessman but now a Peshmerga commander, and also a nephew of President Barzani.

Speaking at the Black Tiger Camp, Barzani, dressed in combat uniform, added: "At least if we can't have independence, let's have three federal entities – Kurdish, Shi'ite and Sunni."

The sense of Iraqi national identity has evaporated since the 2003 invasion which handed power to the Shi'ites, ending decades-old Sunni rule with the toppling of Saddam, triggering sectarian wars and leading to the rise of radical Sunni groups, including al Qaeda, which spawned Islamic State.

Qubad Talabani, Deputy Prime Minister of KRG, said the reality is that a whole generation of Iraqis has grown up in a highly sectarian environment in the last decade. "We have Shi'ites promoting and defending Shi'ite policies; Sunnis rallying around Sunni identity and Kurds doing the same."

"Iraqi unity as we knew it is over, so what political system could be devised to salvage the country? We have a model here in Kurdistan - maybe our exact model is not applicable to Sunnistan but some sort of autonomy is," he said at his office in Erbil.

He said Sunnis living in scattered areas could have autonomy within their governorates even if they don't have a contiguous region. "So long as Baghdad remains the center of all decision making people will fight over it. There's no leader today in the country that can talk on behalf of all Iraqis," he added.

#### NO LOYALTY

Less than a generation ago tens of thousands of Kurds in northern Iraq were victims of attempted genocide: aerial bombardment, mass executions, chemical gas attacks and

massive displacement by Saddam's forces. More than 4,500 Kurdish villages were destroyed and around 1 million Kurds displaced.

The al-Anfal Campaign, known to Kurds as the Kurdish Genocide waged by Saddam from 1986-89, is still engrained in the Kurdish psyche. It is hard to meet anyone who hasn't been marked by al-Anfal, which culminated with a nerve gas attack in 1988 on Halabja in which up to 5,000 Kurds were killed.

"I don't feel any sense of belonging to Iraq," said Ihsan Sheikh Almozuril, 46, who works in a money exchange shop.

"Our loyalty is first and foremost to Kurdistan. Even when Iraq plays a football match against another country we support the opponent.

Sarkaft Ahmed, 18, who works in a shop selling household appliances and speaks no Arabic said: "We want to separate from them. Arabs are the enemy. They are treacherous and they kill."

Ali Tahsin, 37, and whose mother is Arab and father is Kurd, said: "Right now no Iraqi feels as though they are Iraqi – it's not just in Kurdistan. We are living in a country where there is no value for human life."

On the ground, the war in Syria and IS's push into Iraq from 2013, have burst open the boundaries in the Middle East - fixed after the 1916 Sykes-Picot accord, which carved up not just Iraq but the Levant between Britain and France based on interests.

These frontiers ignored the complex ethnic, tribal and religious differences that dominated Middle Eastern politics. And they left the Kurdish people, estimated now at 30 million and mostly Sunni by religion, to live as minority communities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria as well as in the diaspora.

#### RIPPLE EFFECT

Ever since the KRG carved out a de facto

independent enclave in northern Iraq, its neighbors in Turkey, Syria and Iran have fretted at the nightmarish prospect of a pan-Kurd state which might incite their own Kurdish minorities to secede.

While neighbors dread Kurdish secession that might break up their states, the reality on the ground is that the Kurds have given birth to a nation – at least in Iraq. Three enclaves in neighboring north-east Syria are practically under Kurdish control, although menaced by IS.

Kurdish officials said Kurds were fighting Islamic State for areas that rightfully belonged to the Kurdish region but that they would avoid using Peshmerga fighters to drive IS from Sunni areas – much less to spearhead the recapture of Sunni Mosul.

They insist that fight will have to be led by Iraqi army units, mostly Sunnis.

But any recapture of Mosul seems distant. PM Barzani and others emphasized that the timetable for such an offensive would depend on the rebuilding of the Iraqi army, which collapsed as IS conquered Mosul and raced across northern Iraq.

Atheel al-Nujeifi, the former regional governor who fled Mosul when IS pushed in, said the coalition's response has been very slow and late. He said Mosul residents were too frightened to revolt unless supported by a force from outside.

"We think that if there were forces close to Mosul or on the outskirts, the city will mobilize (against IS) very quickly," said Nujeifi, whose properties and Arab thoroughbred horses were looted by Islamic State, and whose Rolex watch was the one seen on the wrist of IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi when he appeared at a mosque in Mosul last year to declare his caliphate.

■ ■ ■

## 1,000 Peshmerga Fighters Killed by ISIS Since June: Kurdish Official

February 4, 2015  
english.al-akhbar.com

Nearly 1,000 Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters have been killed battling the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) jihadist group since June, a senior security official said on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a monitoring group reported that ISIS has killed 50 people in Syria since the beginning of the year.

Jabbar Yawar, the secretary general of the ministry responsible for the peshmerga, told

a news conference that 999 Kurdish fighters were killed and 4,569 wounded between June 10 and February 3.

Previous casualty figures released on December 10 put the toll at 727 killed and 3,564 wounded.

Large swathes of land in Iraq have become ISIS strongholds as the extremist group, which declared a "caliphate" in the territory it seized in Iraq and Syria, drove Iraq's army — the recipient of \$25 billion in US training and funding since the 2003 invasion — to collapse in June.

Several federal army divisions collapsed in the early days of the assault, clearing the way

for the Kurds to take control of a swathe of disputed territory they have long wanted to incorporate into their autonomous region over Baghdad's objections.

But after driving south towards Baghdad, ISIS turned its attention to the Kurds, pushing them back towards regional capital Erbil in a move that helped spark US-led airstrikes against the jihadists.

The Kurds have now regained most of the ground they lost, but commanders complain they remain ill-equipped compared with ISIS militants, who plundered Iraqi arms depots when they overran Mosul in June.

Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani told Reuters in an interview on Thursday that the US-led coalition against ISIS was inadequate and said US policy would at best contain the resilient and carefully structured group.

The conflict is redrawing some of the de facto internal boundaries of Iraq in favor

of broader Kurdish control in the north.

On Sunday, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) said in a statement that fighting and other violence in Iraq killed at least 1,375 people including 790 civilians in January.

UNAMI added that the worst affected city was the capital, Baghdad, with 256 civilians killed and 758 wounded. Moreover, at least 2,240 civilians and soldiers were wounded during the same period.

According to UNAMI figures, last year was the deadliest in Iraq since 2006-2007, with a total of 12,282 people killed and 23,126 wounded.

50 killed in Syria in 2015

Meanwhile, a monitoring group said Wednesday that ISIS has killed 50 people so far this year in Syria, people the jihadist group accused of insulting God, spying or being enemy fighters, including a Jordanian pilot it burned alive.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the hardline group killed them mainly through beheadings and shootings.

An ISIS video showing the burning to death of pilot Maaz al-Kassasbeh, released on Tuesday, sent shockwaves through Jordan. ISIS also published footage last month purporting to show the killing of two Japanese

captives.

The group has executed thousands in Iraq and Syria, targeting, in particular, ethnic and religious minorities.

Other militant groups in Syria have also executed people in 2015, the Britain-based Observatory said. Al-Qaeda's Syria wing al-Nusra Front killed six while around 20 others were put to death by other insurgent groups, the pro-opposition Observatory said.

Four of those killed were women.

The Observatory reported in November that ISIS had killed 1,432 captives since declaring a caliphate in June. ●

(AFP, Reuters, Al-Akhar)



February 19, 2015

# Washington's Fear of Kurdistan



By DAVID ROMANO  
19 february 2015 - rudaw.net

In last week's column, I criticized the United State's apparent willingness to heavily arm just about anyone except the Kurds – Shiite militias (via the Iraqi Army), Syrian Sunni rebels of questionable allegiance, a NATO "ally" that regularly peddles conspiracy theories about the Americans, and very repressive regimes in general. Washington shies away from providing more to the Kurds because it fears strengthening the push for an independent Kurdish state.

This happens despite the fact that the Kurds appear to be a much more dependable ally of the Americans. From 2003 to 2011, not a single Coalition soldier died in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish movements from other parts of Kurdistan likewise have never targeted Americans, even when Washington was arming the repressive regimes they rebelled against. This week it might therefore prove useful to discuss what the American policymakers fear from the prospect of Kurdish independence.

First and foremost, we should remember that America is a "stability seeking power." The country that created and benefits the most from the post-World War Two international order remains very leery of any changes to the order's most fundamental underlying prin-

ciple – the inviolability of current borders. If a Kurdish state emerged in any part of Kurdistan – peacefully or via armed conflict – leaders in the West fear that state would harbor irredentist aspirations to liberate the rest of Kurdistan. Once the genie of border revisions has been released in even a part of Kurdistan, no one is sure they could get it back in its lamp. This seems particularly true if the nascent Kurdish state does well for itself while ethnic kin in neighboring states remain oppressed minorities. The demonstration effect will give Kurdish rebels all across Kurdistan something tangible to aspire to, much the way Iraqi Kurdish autonomy is already doing.

American diplomats and policy makers also spend a lot more time speaking to the diplomats and policy makers of other existing states than leaders of "sub-state groups." They get socialized to their points of view. So when a Turkish ambassador or Iraqi minister asks them to refrain from "destabilizing their government by supporting the Kurds," they tend to listen readily. The argument has a naturally compelling logic, especially for a country that suffered through its own very bloody war of attempted secession not so long ago. In the case of completely delegitimized, "rogue states," Washington prefers to support governments in exile such as the Syrian National Council than secessionist movements seeking to redraw boundaries and challenge the whole system.

In the case of Iraq, supporting

the Kurds' ability to secede carries an added embarrassment for Washington: An admission that the state they spent so much blood and money rebuilding after 2003 is a failure. If Kurdistan seceded, what remained of Iraq would include a much larger Shiite majority and a correspondingly greater chance of close, enduring alignment with Iran rather than the United States. The Arab world would no doubt accuse Washington of having planned the creation of "another Israel" in their midst all along.

In the case of the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Syria, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) long association with Marxist-Leninism and now anarchist "anti-statism" helps alienate American elites, no matter how well the PKK and its sister parties fight the Islamic State. Turkey also draws a lot more water in the region – with its huge economy, population and geo-strategic position – than any Kurdish group. Even as Washington's relations with Ankara sink to historic lows, it is still not enough to cause a reappraisal of whom to listen to and whom to back. Only a very severe falling out with Turkey might prove sufficient to move the Americans to look for new allies against Ankara's wishes.

All these obstacles to a "special relationship" between America and the Kurds should be weighed against the alternatives and potential benefits of backing the Kurds, however. Your humble columnist does not think leaders in Washington have displayed the imagination or courage to look sin-

cerely at their real choices in the region, as opposed to a false dichotomy of a Kurdish Pandora's Box versus an idealized, stable Middle East full of eager, dependable friends. American fears of independent Kurdistans also seem to prevent the Americans from acquiescing to the kind of extensive autonomy the Kurds, given their history, need in order to feel secure within present state boundaries. The resultant message from Washington seems to be "help us with our interests, but stop causing trouble for the sake of your own interests."

That message needs to be changed, especially if Washington wants a more effective local fighting force against the Islamic State. ■■

*David Romano has been a Rudaw columnist since 2010. He is the Thomas G. Strong Professor of Middle East Politics at Missouri State University and author of The Kurdish Nationalist Movement (2006, Cambridge University Press) and co-editor (with Mehmet Gurses) of Conflict, Democratization and the Kurds in the Middle East (2014, Palgrave Macmillan).*

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Rudaw.*



# Massoud Barzani à Paris pour plaider la cause des Kurdes

Le chef du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) était mardi 10 février à Paris où il a rencontré le président français, qui avait déjà reçu dimanche 8 février des représentants kurdes de Syrie.

Agnès Rotivel  
10/2/2015 - www.la-croix.com

Mardi 10 février, c'est au tour de Massoud Barzani, le chef du parti démocratique du Kurdistan, d'être reçu par François Hollande. Ce responsable de l'une des deux principales composantes politiques du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, région quasi autonome de l'Irak, succède ainsi aux représentants du principal parti kurde de Syrie, le PYD (Parti de l'Union démocratique) dirigé par Saleh Muslim, qui avaient eux aussi monté les marches de l'Élysée, dimanche 8 février.

Massoud Barzani, 69 ans, est le fils de Mustapha Barzani, chef historique du mouvement national kurde en Irak. Il est né à Mahabad, en Iran, à l'époque de l'éphémère République de Mahabad, alors que son père y occupait le poste de général en chef.

## UN LEADER INCONTOURNABLE

À la tête du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, il s'est imposé comme un des leaders incontournables de la région. Son territoire dispose désormais d'une quasi-autonomie par rapport à la capitale Bagdad depuis 1991.

L'irruption de Daech dans la province frontalière du Kurdistan, à Mossoul et dans la pro-



Le mardi 10 février sur le perron de l'Élysée. / Photo Présidence de la République.

vince de Ninive l'été dernier, a obligé les Peshmergas (combattants) kurdes à intervenir militairement pour repousser les combattants islamistes en épaulant une armée irakienne incapable de relever le défi.

Massoud Barzani y a gagné d'obtenir de fait la souveraineté sur des territoires longtemps disputés avec Bagdad comme Kirkouk et ses riches gisements pétroliers.

Les Peshmergas en première ligne  
Ses combattants, soutenus par la coalition

internationale conduite par les États-Unis, ont repris ces derniers jours un cinquième du territoire aux djihadistes dans le nord de l'Irak, près de la ville stratégique de Mossoul, selon des informations publiées par l'armée américaine.

## LE MYTHE DE DAECH VAINCU

S'exprimant samedi 7 février, à Munich à la conférence sur la sécurité, Massoud Barzani a déclaré que « même si Daech n'a pas encore été éradiqué, les Peshmergas kurdes ont réussi à vaincre le mythe de Daech ».

Il est sûr que Massoud Barzani a l'intention de demander des compensations le moment venu. Absent récemment d'une réunion de la coalition internationale à Londres où il n'avait pas été invité, il a regretté que « le peuple du Kurdistan se sacrifie et que le crédit aille à d'autres ».

Dans un entretien à Al Hayat, quotidien arabe publié à Londres, publié samedi 7 février, il a lancé un avertissement au premier ministre irakien, Haïdar al-Abadi. Pour que le Kurdistan demeure au sein de l'Irak, le pays doit adopter « un autre système de gouvernance », a-t-il déclaré. « Les frontières du Proche-Orient sont en train d'être redessinées par les armes et dans le sang, Haïdar al-Abadi a entre ses mains la dernière chance de sauver l'unité de l'Irak. » □

# Une princesse kurde défend un Kurdistan indépendant

Alors que les combattants kurdes regagnent du terrain face aux djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak, la princesse Sinenkham Bedirkhan milite pour une renaissance du Kurdistan.

par Camille Sarret-François-Xavier Freland  
tv5monde.com - 12 fév 2015

À un milieu du chaos irakien, les combattants kurdes résistent à l'expansion de l'État islamique (EI) et parviennent même à reprendre du terrain. Appuyées par des frappes aériennes de la coalition internationale emmenée par les États-Unis, ils ont déjoué l'opération des djihadistes qui cherchaient à s'emparer de la ville de Kirkouk. Ils ont aussi repris le contrôle d'un champ pétrolier et libéré près d'une dizaine de villages dans le sud-ouest de la province de Kirkouk. Des succès mili-



La princesse kurde, Sinenkham Bedirkhan, chez elle à Erbil, en Irak.

itaires qui font espérer aux Kurdes d'Irak une indépendance pleine et entière. Pour la princesse Sinenkham Bedirkhan, « c'est maintenant ou jamais » qu'il faut faire re-naître le Kurdistan.

La princesse Sinenkham Bedirkhan est la dernière descendante des princes kurdes Badrakhan en ligne directe. Elle habite une maison à deux étages dans le quartier chrétien d'Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, qui ressemble plus à un musée qu'à un domicile. Y sont entassés une multitude de photos, d'objets, de textes, qui racontent l'histoire du Kurdistan qui se confond avec celle de sa famille qui a longtemps régné sur la presqu'île de Botan, à proximité de l'extrême nord-est du Kurdistan irakien, avant d'en être dépossédée par les Turcs. Elle fait visiter le « château » familial à l'envoyé spécial de TV5MONDE. ■

# Les héros kurdes de Kobané reçus par François Hollande



Le dimanche 8 février à l'Élysée. / Photo Présidence de la République.

par FRANCE 24 Avec Reuters et AFP  
10 février 2015 - france24.com

**F**rançois Hollande a reçu, pour la première fois, des représentants de la principale organisation des Kurdes syriens, le PYD, dont la branche armée a vaincu les jihadistes de l'EI à Kobané. Ils demandent un soutien accru de la France.

Le président Hollande a reçu, dimanche 8 février, une délégation du principal parti kurde de Syrie, qui contrôle depuis 2011 les zones kurdes du nord syrien. Lors de cette rencontre, qualifiée d'historique par les Kurdes, la co-présidente du parti de l'Union démocratique (PYD), Asiya Abdallah, et Nassrin Abdalla, commandante de la branche féminine des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG, branche armée du PYD), ont demandé une aide logistique de la France pour contrer les jihadistes de l'organisation de l'État islamique (EI).

"C'est une rencontre historique et c'est peut-être une première étape vers quelque chose de positif", a déclaré Asiya Abdallah, lundi soir. "La rencontre s'est bien passée mais maintenant on attend des gestes concrets, des actes de la part de la France. Pour vaincre Daech [acronyme arabe de l'EI, NDLR], qui dispose d'armes sophis-

tiquées, nous avons besoin d'armes", a-t-elle affirmé. "François Hollande a salué la victoire de Kobané, on lui a dit qu'on était prêts à combattre de manière plus forte encore et qu'on souhaitait qu'il y ait un bureau entre la France et les kurdes qui permette de coordonner ces actions", a rapporté la co-présidente du YPG.

## LE PYD, "ORGANISATION TERRORISTE" AU MÊME TITRE QUE LE PKK ?

Cette rencontre intervient après les contacts directs survenus en octobre entre le parti kurde et des responsables américains à Paris, présentés comme sans précédent par Washington. Par ailleurs, le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, doit rencontrer François Hollande, mardi soir à Paris.

À l'Élysée, la rencontre organisée dimanche avec le PYD est qualifiée de "réunion plutôt de nature d'information privée" et l'on insiste sur les "très bonnes relations avec les Kurdes" sans donner davantage de précisions sur l'aide qui leur est apportée.

Le parti kurde syrien est considéré par la Turquie comme une "organisation terroriste" au même titre que le mouvement frère du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) qui mène depuis 1984 la

guérilla sur le sol turc. Le PKK figure également sur la liste des organisations terroristes de l'Union européenne, sans que le PYD, ni sa branche armée le YPG, ne soient mentionnés.

## LA "VICTOIRE" KURDE À KOBANÉ

La visite du PYD à Paris fait suite à son avancée sur le terrain face à l'EI en Syrie. Le mouvement est sorti renforcé de la bataille de Kobané, ville syrienne kurde à la frontière turque. Sa branche armée, appuyée par les frappes aériennes de la coalition emmenée par les États-Unis, a infligé l'une des plus importantes défaites à l'EI en reprenant le contrôle de la ville le 26 janvier.

Après leur victoire à Kobané, les combattants du YPG s'emploient désormais à sécuriser les zones alentour. "La campagne de libération des environs de Kobané a déjà commencé, cette campagne continue avec succès, et nous avons à ce jour libéré 140 villages", a souligné la co-présidente du PYD. "Ce qui est stratégique pour nous c'est d'avoir un corridor, notamment entre les deux cantons de Kobané et de Cezire, mais entre les deux il y a les forces de Daech, c'est pour cela qu'on a besoin d'aide." ♦

## Pour le Kurdistan irakien, Bagdad ne respecte pas l'accord sur le pétrole



Erbil (Irak), 16 février 2015 (AFP)

**LE PREMIER ministre du Kurdistan irakien a accusé lundi le gouvernement fédéral de Bagdad de ne pas verser à la région autonome sa part de revenus pétroliers, en dépit des stipulations de l'accord signé en décembre.**

En vertu de cet accord, qui aurait dû prendre effet en début d'année, le Kurdistan doit mettre à disposition du gouvernement fédéral 250.000 barils par jour, tandis que 300.000 barils par jour doivent être transférés de la province contestée de Kirkouk.

Ce pétrole doit être transporté par le réseau d'oléoducs kurdes, mais sous le contrôle de la compagnie pétrolière fédérale.

En contrepartie, Bagdad doit débloquer la part dévolue au gouvernement régional kurde dans le budget national, gelée depuis plus d'un an en raison du différend pétrolier qui empoisonne les relations entre Bagdad et Erbil.

Selon Nechirvan Barzani, chef du gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien, la région autonome devait recevoir "1.200 milliards de dinars (environ 1 milliard de dollars) de Bagdad" chaque mois, en contrepartie de ces 550.000 barils par jour versés à Bagdad qui est chargé de les exporter.

D'après M. Barzani, l'accord de décembre "n'a pas de sens actuellement". "Bagdad n'a pas d'argent à donner... On a passé un accord avec un Etat qui est fauché", a-t-il indiqué lors d'une conférence de presse à Erbil.

Qoubad Talabani, l'adjoint de M. Barzani, a indiqué que le gouvernement irakien entendait envoyer une partie du budget de janvier mais que cette somme "ne répond pas aux attentes" de la région autonome.

M. Barzani s'exprimait quelques heures après avoir mené une délégation kurde à Bagdad pour s'entretenir avec le Premier ministre Haider al-Abadi. "Nous avons invité M. Abadi à venir au Kurdistan et il a promis de venir", a-t-il indiqué.

Un communiqué du bureau du Premier ministre irakien a précisé que les discussions de lundi ont porté sur des "questions en cours" entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan, et sur la façon de les résoudre "dans le cadre de la Constitution".

"L'Irak fait actuellement face à de nombreux défis, dont la chute des prix du pétrole et son impact sur le budget (fédéral)", a souligné le Premier ministre dans ce communiqué.

Le pétrole brut a perdu plus de la moitié de sa valeur depuis le mois de juin. L'Irak, engagé dans une guerre coûteuse contre les jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI), qui occupent une bonne part du pays depuis l'an dernier, dépend presque entièrement des revenus de son or noir.

Le Kurdistan irakien, région riche en pétrole, a lui besoin de liquidités pour payer ses fonctionnaires et financer sa lutte contre l'EI dans le nord du pays. ●

# Will 'Kurdish Spring' redraw Middle East map?

**A critic looks at "Kurdish Spring: A New Map for the Middle East," a new book by David Phillips that could become a main reference on the Kurdish struggle.**



**Author Cengiz Çandar**  
February 5, 2015  
[www.al-monitor.com](http://www.al-monitor.com)

It was almost three years ago that Barham Salih, then prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), on seeing me for the first time after an unusually long interval, shouted from the distance, even before we greeted each other: "The Kurdish moment has arrived!"

His jubilant mood reflected the sentiments shared by most of the Kurds around the region. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring upheavals that started in North Africa, rapidly moved to the Levant and took a violent turn in Syria, the insurgent organization of the Kurds of Turkey had begun to issue calls to begin a "Kurdish Spring" by the year 2011. The KRG's self-confidence was boosted by international oil magnates rushing in to explore and produce Kurdistan hydrocarbons, bringing with them not only the technological inputs but also the much-needed legitimacy for the quasi-independent Kurdish entity.

The Syrian Kurds had started to exercise self-rule in the three cantons, though lacking territorial continuity along the long Turkish-Syrian frontier. The one around the largest Syrian Kurdish town, Qamishli, was also at the proximity of the KRG, the other around Kobani at the midpoint of the 911-kilometer (566-mile) Turkish-Syrian border and the third around Afrin, which was also right across the Turkish border, a half-hour drive from the largest city of Syria, Aleppo, where nearly a half-million Kurds lived.

Since then, a new phenomenon was added to the map of the Middle East in the name of the Islamic State (IS), which declared itself a caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on June 29. Controlling large tracts of land in eastern Syria and the western and northwestern parts of Iraq, IS has become the neighbor of the KRG, having the longest frontier, nearly 1,000 kilometers (621 miles), which is judged as the line of confrontation. IS emerged as the main threat to Kurdish self-rule in Syria. The siege of Kobani compelled US President Barack Obama's administration to respond, forming an anti-IS coalition and pounding IS positions with US-led coalition aircraft. Kobani was hailed as the "Stalingrad of the Kurds," adding an epic dimension to Kurdish nation-building that was accelerated on the ashes of the Arab Spring, which is no longer blossoming.

The resistance of Kobani that ended with the withdrawal of IS has become the pride of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the leading Kurdish party of the resistance. It was considered the Syrian affiliate of Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which was banned and listed as a terrorist organization by the US State Department and the European Union since the latter half of the 1990s to appease Turkey, a NATO ally that has become a disappointment for not joining the West's policies against IS.

The Kurds, ranging from Barzani's KRG to its main competitor, Turkey's villain, Abdullah Ocalan's PKK and its Syrian affiliate, PYD, presented themselves as the most valiant and reliable resistance forces for the Western world's anti-IS drive

The paradox is that Turkey is engaging the PKK by talking directly with its leader, Ocalan, who is serving a life sentence on Turkey's prison island, Imrali. Turkey's strongman, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has seemingly lost any residue of sympathy in Washington and in most of the EU capitals, has his closest ally in the Middle East as Massoud Barzani, the president of the KRG.

Since the inauguration of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and with the removal of President Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt in February 2011, the talk that dominated was whether we would be witnessing the end of the Sykes-Picot order in the region with a new map.

The Arab Spring ultimately produced the human tragedy and carnage in Syria and began to be called "Arab Winter" by some Western pundits. If there is any reference to a new map for the Middle East, it is drawn by IS with unrecognized and illegitimate boundaries.

However, it is still far from certain what history is shaping for the Kurds' destiny and how a new map might be drawn in the Middle East.

There could be no better timing for a book with the title "Kurdish Spring: A New Map for the Middle East." A 264-page, very reader-friendly book from Transaction Publishers, it was published on Dec. 22, 2014. It has a foreword by Bernard Kouchner, the former French minister of foreign affairs who has a very good reputation in the region, greater than his ministerial title, as the co-founder of *Médécins Sans Frontières* (Doctors Without Borders),

Not surprisingly, the author is David Phillips, a Columbia University professor, a former State Department official known for his close relationship with the late US envoy Richard Holbrooke. Kouchner describes him as "The Activist Professor" and defines him in the following lines:

"Political science keeps events at bay and touches upon them with caution. David L. Phillips loves to embrace them. If you get lost in the day-to-day confusion of events, read his book and you will be able to distinguish what is important from the mundane. ... Phillips knows how to project the real world into stale lecture rooms. To commentators and diplomats alike, he is a reality detector, and for us all, a lightning rod in times of confusion."

In Phillips' own words: "The Kurdish Spring' draws on my experience as a practitioner and scholar of Kurdish issues for over twenty-five years. I have been engaged in various capacities, working with the US Congress, as a US official, at think tanks, institutes, and universities. Based on my experience, Kurds are one of America's best and most reliable friends in the Middle East. ...

"The Kurds are at a historic crossroads. This book tells their story. There are many scholars knowledgeable about Kurdish issues and the Middle East. However, few have been involved in Kurdish issues for as long as I have. Few have my experience working with Kurds across party lines and in different countries. Few have been engaged as both a scholar, activist and as an official. These pages describe the tragic history of betrayal and abuse experienced by the Kurds. They also tell a hopeful story of progress, with Kurds poised to realize their rights and national aspirations."

While reading, I came across some minor errors — such as the exact date of the PKK's declaration of its first cease-fire. There could be some people who might disagree with the analysis of the author on certain issues pertinent to the history of the Kurds and the Kurdish struggle. Nonetheless, nothing prevents the book from being the most concise account on the history of the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran since David McDowall's seminal book "A Modern History of the Kurds" (I.B. Tauris, 1996).

It is an updated, a very fresh information arsenal on the Kurdish issue and Kurdish history. There is no doubt that it will take its rightful place on the bookshelves of everyone around the world concerned with the issues of the Middle East, despite that its content is less scholarly but more of a "Kurdish issue for Beginners" or "Overall Kurdish History 101" for the English-reading public.

It can be seen as a wake-up call for the US administration from a pro-Kurdish independence pundit implying that it is high time for the United States to assist Kurdish efforts for the eventual independent state of the Kurds in the region, so that the map of the Middle East could change.

It is good for Phillips' book that he did not elaborate further. The future of the Middle East is so uncertain that even many Kurds would love to consider what is happening or what still may occur as the "Kurdish Spring," but it is still far from certain what is in store for them.

We should consider "The Kurdish Spring: A New Map for the Middle East" to be one of the main reference sources that will ably serve all those concerned with the Middle East and the Kurdish issues. ♦

*Cengiz Candar is a columnist for Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse. A journalist since 1976, he is the author of seven books in the Turkish language, mainly on Middle East issues, including the best-seller Mesopotamia Express: A Journey in History.*

## The war against Islamic State

# It will be a long haul

The fight against Islamic State is making some progress, but the jihadists are hardly on the back foot

Feb 7th 2015 | RIYADH  
www.economist.com

**THE repertoire** of new horrors keeps expanding. On February 3rd the jihadists of Islamic State (IS) released a video showing the immolation of Flight Lieutenant Moaz al-Kasasbeh, a Jordanian pilot captured after he ejected from his F-16 jet, over Syria in December. The sickening footage appears calculated to attract potential IS recruits; scare and provoke its enemies into actions that would feed IS's propaganda; and create cleavages between the leaders and populations of countries who have joined in coalition against it.

Sure enough, within a few hours Jordan responded by hanging two convicted terrorists, including one whose freedom IS had demanded in exchange for Lieutenant Kasasbeh. But in other respects IS may have miscalculated. Jordan, which along with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had stopped flying sorties against IS after the pilot's capture, vowed a "severe" response. The Jordanian people, many of whom had just days earlier been protesting the monarch's decision to join the coalition against IS, now seem united in outrage and demands for revenge. Even jihadist groups have expressed outrage at the killing.

Despite the ghoulish propaganda, the coalition can claim to be making slow progress. It is six months since Barack Obama gathered 60-odd countries into a coalition to "degrade and ultimately destroy" IS. Since the first air strike in Iraq on August 8th, the campaign has extended into Syria and widened to include arming and training allies such as Syrian and Iraqi Kurds, and Iraqi government forces.

America's Central Command claims that about 6,000 IS fighters have been killed, including up to half the group's "top commanders". Some reckon it has 30,000 fighters in fray. At the end of January Kurdish fighters in Kobane, a Syrian town on the border with Turkey, said that they had expelled IS after four months of grim fighting with help from coalition bombers.

More than 1,000 IS fighters are thought to have been killed in that battle. Syrian Kurds have also extended their control into sur-



rounding villages previously held by IS. Rebels in provinces to the west of Kobane say their front lines with IS have been quiet, suggesting that the jihadists are struggling to fight on multiple fronts.

The biggest setback appears to have been to the aura of invincibility that IS acquired last year when its advance through Iraq and Syria seemed unstoppable. Although IS still controls an area of Syria and Iraq about the size and population of Jordan, it has been unable to expand into areas of Iraq where Shias or Kurds are a majority. Threatening Baghdad or Erbil now appears beyond IS's capacity.

IS sees no distinction between Iraq and Syria, as the coalition does. As the group gets squeezed in Iraq, it is likely to expand into Syria where there is little the coalition could do but increase the number of air strikes. The population of potentially-friendly Sunnis is far greater than in Iraq and the atrocities of Bashar Assad's regime continue to stir Sunni resentment. Outside the Kurdish areas there are no local forces to partner with. Until the coalition can resolve its conflicting interests in Syria, above all how it intends to get rid of the Assad regime, IS will at most be contained.

Foreign fighters appear to be flowing in to replenish losses as fast as ever, reckons Rami Jarrah, a Syrian journalist who lives on Turkey's border with Syria. In January the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, a London-based think-tank, suggested there were at least 20,000 foreign jihadists, surpassing the number that flocked to defeat

the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

On the ground the battlefield remains fluid. In November Iraqi government forces, with help from coalition air power, retook Baiji, the site of Iraq's biggest oil refinery, in a major reverse for IS. A month later they had lost it again. Though IS appeared to have consolidated its grip on the mainly Sunni province of Anbar, some Shia militias, invited in perhaps surprisingly by local Sunni tribal leaders, have made advances. In late January, Iraqi government and Shia forces pushed IS out of its remaining stronghold in Diyala province, north-east of Baghdad.

Further north the jihadists are also on the retreat. American commanders say that air strikes combined with a ground offensive by Iraqi Kurdish forces have pushed back IS from their positions west of Mosul, Iraq's second-biggest city, which fell to jihadists last June. IS supply routes from its territory in Syria are being cut. Talk of an early summer assault on Mosul has also resumed. That seems premature. Efforts to rebuild the Iraqi army are unlikely to bear fruit so quickly. And the city could not be taken without a heavy toll in civilian lives.

The coalition is also having some success in hitting IS in its wallet. By destroying oil installations, the air strikes have denied IS its main source of cash. Oil receipts may have dropped by two-thirds to \$750,000-\$1.3m a day from \$2-3m in June. Banks in areas under IS control may have run out of cash. IS is killing rather than ransoming hostages, having raised at least \$20m in 2014. "The key thing is these sources of financing aren't renewable," says Matthew Levitt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think-tank. "While IS is a rich terror group, it is a poor state." People in Raqqa, IS's Syrian headquarters, say salaries are still being paid, but services—crucial to IS's claim to rule—are drying up.

These setbacks may help explain the group's turn to ever more ghoulish acts to bolster morale and keep up the flow of new recruits. That suggests an opportunity, says Mr Levitt. Stories are emerging of IS fighters who are killed or jailed by the group when they try to leave it, but they are not widely circulated. "We need [videos of] foreign fighters who have returned saying: 'I went but was cleaning toilets;...' I went and wanted to leave and they killed my two brothers'," says Mr Levitt. A long war needs not just guns and planes but also a comprehensive strategy and the patient waging of a battle of ideas. ■

# ISIS video unites Arabs on all sides in revulsion

AMMAN, JORDAN

## Jordanian pilot's burning brings denunciations and vows of revenge

BY ROD NORDLAND  
AND ANNE BARNARD

There was one thing that many of the Middle East's fractious clerics, competing ethnic groups and warring sects could agree upon Wednesday: a shared sense of revulsion at the Islamic State's latest excess, its video showing a Jordanian pilot being burned alive inside a cage.

In Syria, the government denounced the group, which has been fighting it for months; but so did fighters from Al Qaeda who oppose both the government and the Islamic State.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian government for once were in accord on something, the barbarity of the militant group for the way it killed the Jordanian, First Lt. Moaz al-Kasabeh. Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the head of Cairo's thousand-year-old institute Al Azhar and a leading Sunni scholar, was so angered that he called for the Islamic State's extremists to be "killed, or crucified, or their hands and legs cut off."

In a way that regular beheadings of hostages had not, the immolation of Lieutenant Kasabeh united the Arab world in an explosion of anger and disgust at the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, or to most Arabs as Daesh, a word derived from its Arabic acronym.

The sense of anti-Daesh unity made for strange scenes throughout the region. King Abdullah II of Jordan, caught by surprise in Washington when the video was released on Tuesday, returned home not to anger at his absence, but to a hero's welcome. Crowds lined his route from the airport to cheer Jordan's decision to promptly retaliate by executing two convicted terrorists, both with connections to the Islamic State, only hours earlier.

The convicted terrorists, a would-be suicide bomber, Sajida al-Rishawi, and a former top lieutenant of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Ziad al-Karbouli, were executed Wednesday at dawn, less than 12 hours after the Islamic State video was released.

Never known as a charismatic leader,

King Abdullah received rave reviews at home for his tough talk in Washington, where in a meeting with congressional leaders he said his retribution would remind people of the Clint Eastwood movie "Unforgiven."

While the Islamic State video, with its vows to kill other fighter pilots bombing Islamic State positions, was clearly aimed at trying to scare Jordan out of the American-led coalition fighting ISIS, it seems to have had the opposite effect among many Jordanians. Jordan is one of a half-dozen Arab countries actively participating in the coalition, and Jordan's government spokesman said the kingdom would now step up its involvement.

"I guess in a way we lost a pilot, but at the same time I think the government gained a collective support for fighting them, in Jordan and from all around too," said Adnan Abu Odeh, a former head of Jordan's intelligence service. "Daesh have made a big error. When you are weakened as they have been, you try to make your supporters think you are strong by being more monstrous, but this time they went too far."

In Syria, where a chaotic four-year insurgency provided an incubator for the Islamic State, both those supporting President Bashar al-Assad and those opposing him condemned the act.

Iran, the Syrian government's most important ally and no friend of Jordan, called the pilot's killing "inhumane and un-Islamic." Al Manar, the channel of another ally of the Syrian government, the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, called it "the most gruesome" of many atrocities by Islamic State.

Qatar, which opposes Mr. Assad, likewise condemned the killing as "contravening the tolerant principles" of Islam. Turkey, blamed by many in the region as allowing foreign fighters to cross its borders into Syria, where some join the Islamic State, also weighed in. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called it an act of "savagery" that had no place in Islam, adding, "I curse and damn the burning of the Jordanian pilot."

In Cairo, Sheikh Tayeb denounced the Islamic State as a "diabolical" terrorist group, and he cited Quranic verses to show that Islam forbids the burning or mutilation of enemies at war.

"This vile terrorist act," he said in a statement issued by Al Azhar, "requires punishment as cited by the Quran for oppressors and spoilers on earth who fight God and his prophet, that they be killed, or crucified, or their hands and legs cut off."

Al Azhar, a seat of Islamic learning, considers itself a beacon of moderation and tolerance for the Sunni Muslim world, and the statement offered no explanation for the incongruity of Sheikh Tayeb's advocating some of the same medieval punishments typically employed by extremists.

Mainstream Arab leaders reacted to the burning alive in a categorically different way to the long string of hostage beheadings that preceded it. Partly that



may have been because, according to many commentators Wednesday, burning someone alive is prohibited in Islam, as a punishment that belongs to God alone, applied in hell. Beheadings, on the other hand, have a long Islamic history.

Others, while condemning the Islamic State, sought to draw attention to the Syrian government's barrel bombings of cities, which, according to Human Rights Watch and other organizations tracking the conflict, kill far more civilians than Islamic State, however attention-grabbing the militant group's methods.

Khaled Khoja, the president of the main Syrian exile opposition group, linked the pilot's participation in the struggle against the Islamic State directly to the Syrian opposition's struggle against Mr. Assad.

"Moaz's blood has mingled with the soil of our beloved Syria, and whose remains mingled with those of hundreds of thousands of Syrians killed by Assad's barrel bombs and the terrorist group ISIS," Mr. Khoja said in a statement. "While I strongly condemn this barbaric act, which symbolizes pure evil that the terrorist group represents, and the deepest of depravity to which they are prepared to sink, I call upon the peoples and governments of the world to stand by the Syrian people and end their suffering caused by the Assad regime and ISIS alike."

"ISIS's despicable conduct shouldn't make us lose sight of the largest killer of civilians in Syria: Assad's barrel bombs," he said in an email. "The world has been reluctant to address them out of a misguided sense that nothing should be done that might constrain the fight against ISIS, but barrel bombs have little if any military significance. They are so inaccurate that the Syrian Air Force doesn't dare drop them near the front line for fear of hitting its own troops.

"It will be hard to win the hearts and minds of the Syrian people by arguing that they should stand up to ISIS's atrocities while ignoring the government's."

International New York Times

FEBRUARY 5, 2015

# ISIS is losing, but what happens next?

**Kenneth M. Pollack**

**WASHINGTON** In Iraq, the good news always seems to come mixed with bad.

The good news right now is largely on the military front. Iraqi, Kurdish and American forces appear to be turning the tide against the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL. American air operations have inflicted heavy losses on the group — killing its fighters, destroying its equipment, disrupting its command and impeding its movements.

As a result, the Islamic State is more and more on the defensive. It has not made any significant conquests since the summer. During the past month, it mounted a major offensive in western Anbar Province but achieved only modest gains.

American military officials in Iraq tell me they are confident that a smaller, revamped Iraqi Army will be ready to begin big operations to retake Iraq from the Islamic State in the next four to eight months. Kurdish and Iraqi forces have largely secured Baghdad and its environs, made gains in the cities of Baiji and Samarra, cut off the road by which the Islamic State was supporting

its garrison in Mosul from its base in Syria, and are encroaching on Mosul itself. In six to 18 months, the Islamic State may be driven out of Iraq altogether.

That would seem to be a good thing — a stunning reversal from just six months ago, when the Islamic State swept across northern Iraq like a juggernaut.

The problem is that political progress in Iraq has not kept pace with the military campaign. In fact, political reconciliation between the Sunni and Shiite communities is at a standstill. A military victory under these circumstances could turn into a “catastrophic success.”

Iraq’s Sunni and Shiite communities are captive to the mistrust from the 2006-8 civil war, inflamed by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki’s violent treatment of the Sunnis from 2010 to 2014 and the subsequent Sunni embrace of the Islamic State.

The government’s security forces, both army and police, are overwhelmingly Shiite. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has done a heroic job replacing many Shiite loyalists and political hacks at the top of the military chain of command with more competent officers, including many Sunnis. But the enlisted ranks and junior officers remain disproportionately Shiite.

On top of that, many of Iraq’s recent conquests were won by Iranian-backed Shiite militias. The government does not like to admit it, but these Shiite militias often lead Iraqi attacks and form the backbone of their defenses.

In these circumstances, offensive operations into the Sunni heartland — Anbar, Nineveh and Salah al-Din Provinces — could be disastrous.

The Sunni populace is terrified by reports of Shiite troops and militiamen conducting brutal ethnic-cleansing operations. Without a new power-sharing agreement, promises that they will not be mistreated, and a program for reconstruction, the

**To achieve real peace in Iraq, the U.S. must insist that Shiites and Sunnis share power.**

Sunnis may well see Iraqi government forces (and even the Kurds) not as liberators, but as a conquering Shiite army.

If that is the case, they will defend the Islamic State and, even if it is defeated, resist the Shiite forces. Military victory would not end the slow-burning Iraqi civil war, but inflame it.

Unfortunately, there is little prospect that the Iraqis will reach a reconciliation to avert the danger of catastrophic success on their own.

Mr. Abadi is a good man in a difficult position. He understands the importance of political reconciliation, but he is badly constrained in his ability to deliver.

Many of the most important Shiite leaders oppose reconciliation because they distrust the Sunnis. Others will block anything Mr. Abadi does so that they can undermine him and take his place. Mr. Abadi is further constrained by Iran, which seems interested in reconciliation, but only on its own terms.

For its part, the Sunni leadership is fragmented as a result of Mr. Maliki’s campaign against it. Many Shiite leaders shrug off calls for compromise with the Sunnis by claiming that they have no strong, legitimate Sunni partner to bargain with. Yet the government isn’t doing enough to help unify them. Despite Baghdad’s claims to the contrary, there has been little outreach to the Sunni tribes.

The Iraqis are not going to solve these problems by themselves. Someone is going to have to help them. That someone can only be the United States.

The United States still retains credibility with Iraqis because we pulled off the same feat in 2008, pacifying Iraq militarily and setting it on a path to-

ward political stability (if only after our disastrous mistakes, which pushed Iraq into civil war in the first place). We are the only country that can do the job, and we need to do it, or Iraq will unravel again and President Obama’s judicious decision to recommit to Iraq will be for naught.

The White House should designate a high-level representative to take on the challenge, like the United States ambassador to Iraq, Stuart E. Jones, or another diplomat with Iraq experience, like Brett H. McGurk, now the envoy to the global coalition fighting the Islamic State.

This representative should serve as a mediator, bringing Sunnis and Shiites together to hammer out a new power-sharing arrangement and establish the mechanics of the reconquest of the Sunni lands. However, because of the fragmentation of the Sunni leadership, the American representative will probably have to act as its surrogate in negotiations. This is effectively what Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker did in Baghdad in 2007-8.

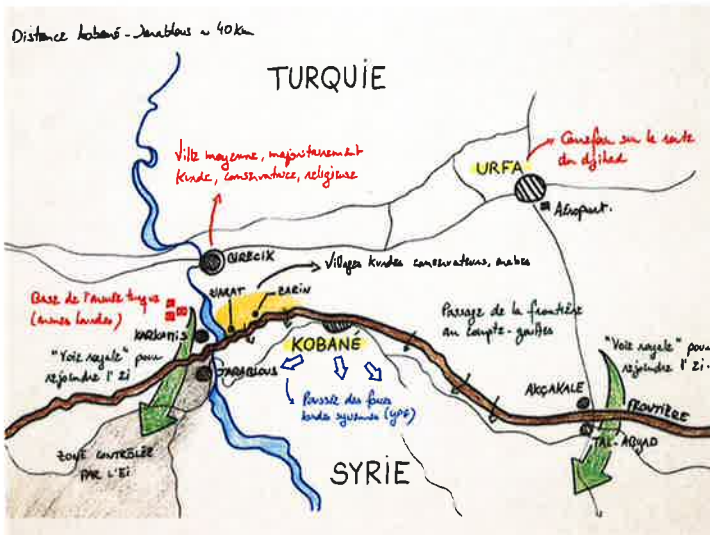
Finally, the American representative will most likely need some additional leverage to secure a deal. If Washington were willing to offer additional military training, hardware and support forces, as well as diplomatic, technical, financial and targeted economic assistance, it could persuade Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites to accept less from one another in expectation of getting more from the United States.

Mr. Obama’s willingness to recommit to Iraq has already yielded important results, but the military victories that have been achieved could backfire if military progress is not coupled with political reconciliation. Doing so will be hard, but hardly impossible. It is essential if we are to turn the battlefield gains against the Islamic State into lasting political achievements.

*KENNETH M. POLLACK, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, is the author, most recently, of “Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy.”*

# En Turquie, le chemin du djihad passe par Urfa

Turcs, Kurdes et djihadistes se livrent à une guerre discrète dans la ville frontalière, théâtre de tous les trafics



La grande place de la ville d'Urfa accueille de nombreux réfugiés chaque jour.

www.lemonde.fr

Texte : Louis Imbert

Photos : Laurence Geai pour "Le Monde"

12 février 2015

Le 4 janvier, Hayat Boumeddiene est passée par Sanliurfa, dite "Urfa", chef-lieu de région dans le ventre mou de la Turquie, à la frontière syrienne, au bord du Kurdistan. C'était cinq jours avant que son compagnon, Amedy Coulibaly, ne soit tué à Paris dans la prise d'otages sanglante du magasin Hyper Cacher de la porte de Vincennes. Selon le quotidien turc progouvernemental Yeni Safak, la veille de cet attentat, le 8 janvier, elle traversait la frontière. A 50 km au sud d'Urfa, à travers des champs de blé, de coton et de pierraille, elle disparaissait dans le territoire tenu par les djihadistes de l'Etat islamique (EI).

Ce passage a été lent : il est possible de le faire en une journée. Etait-ce parce que la jeune femme, enceinte de quatre à cinq mois, selon une source proche de l'enquête française, savait que les autorités turques la recherchaient, sur signalement de la France ? Ou bien par manque de

préparation, de lien avec les agents de l'EI qui guident les volontaires étrangers des faubourgs d'Urfa vers la terre du djihad ?

Depuis l'émergence de l'EI, en 2013, Sanliurfa ("Urfa la glorieuse", littéralement), 800 000 habitants, est devenue un carrefour majeur sur la route de la guerre syrienne. Cette ville conservatrice, dévote (elle est réputée avoir vu naître Abraham et le prophète Job), peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes et d'Arabes sunnites, s'est muée au fil des progrès de l'EI en une base arrière du conflit. Elle est le lieu d'une guerre discrète, complexe, entre les autorités turques, les djihadistes et les miliciens du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste interdit en Turquie), qui affrontent l'EI de l'autre côté de la frontière, dans les campagnes de Kobané.

Un exemple : en octobre, Abou Issa, commandant syrien de la Liwa Thuwar Al-Rakka, qui combattait à Kobané aux côtés des Kurdes, a été enlevé en plein centre-ville d'Urfa. Selon ses proches, l'attaque avait été menée par la mafia turque locale, avec l'aide de son chauffeur. A la

ville frontière d'Akçakale, où Abou Issa devait être livré à des membres de l'Etat islamique contre 500 000 dollars, ravisseurs et commanditaires se sont affrontés. L'armée turque est intervenue. Abou Issa s'en est tiré avec une balle dans l'estomac.

"Il y a deux guerres contre l'EI en ce moment. L'une en Syrie et l'autre ici", dit Redvan Yavuz, coprésident du Parti démocratique du peuple (HDP, filiale politique du PKK) dans la région d'Urfa. "Urfa est une capitale pour l'EI, mais les autorités turques disent qu'elles n'en savent rien. Que font-elles ? Elles attendent que les djihadistes fassent leur travail en Syrie [en luttant contre le PKK, que le président turc Erdogan a estimé par le passé aussi nocif que l'EI] ou bien elles en ont peur."

Dans sa lutte contre le régime syrien, la Turquie a longtemps été accusée d'avoir favorisé l'émergence des groupes radicaux, dont l'EI. Sa frontière, poreuse, constamment traversée par les réfugiés de Syrie (480 000 pour la seule région d'Urfa), est devenue une nasse dont il est difficile d'évaluer à quel point les autorités turques la contrôlent. L'EI y fait passer ses hommes, ses armes. Il y vend son pétrole en contrebande.

Après la libération, en septembre, de 46 otages turcs capturés

par l'EI au consulat de Turquie à Mossoul, en Irak, et à la suite d'intenses pressions diplomatiques occidentales, la Turquie a resserré ses filets à l'automne. Quelque 5 000 policiers et 10 000 soldats ont été dépêchés en renfort dans la région, selon les autorités locales, soit une augmentation des effectifs de 50 %.

Cet effort se fait discrètement, et la Turquie se garde bien de déclarer une guerre ouverte aux djihadistes aux côtés de la coalition internationale menée par les Etats-Unis, qui les bombarde en Irak et en Syrie. Car le pays est vulnérable, plus qu'aucun autre, à des attentats de l'EI sur son sol. Un récent rapport des services de police turcs, qui a fuité en janvier, mettait en garde contre des "cellules dormantes" de l'EI, qui comprendraient près de 3 000 personnes directement liées au groupe. A la mi-janvier, le ministre des affaires étrangères, Mevlüt Cavusoglu, évoquait les craintes de son gouvernement face à l'éventuel retour de 700 citoyens turcs qui combattraient dans les rangs de l'EI.

Ainsi, le 6 janvier, une femme identifiée par la presse russe comme Diana Ramazova, originaire du Daguestan, en Russie, a perpétré un attentat suicide à Istanbul, dans un commissariat non loin de la Mosquée bleue, tuant un policier. Venue de Syrie par la région de Gaziantep, ↵

↪ selon la presse turque, elle était la veuve présumée d'un djihadiste de l'EI, un Norvégien d'origine tchétchène, mort en Syrie.

"Nous avons arrêté 145 djihadistes venus de Syrie dans la région depuis un an, affirme le gouverneur d'Urfa, Izzetin Küçük. Mais nous avons 900 kilomètres de frontière commune. Là-bas, il n'y a pas d'autorité ! Il y a le régime syrien, les Kurdes et, au sud d'Urfa, l'Etat islamique. Je peux contrôler la frontière de notre côté, pas du leur."

La ville que M. Küçük est chargé de défendre est peu riant. Ses artères épaisses de poussière, perpétuellement en travaux, semblent avaler un centre-ville ancien perché sur sa butte, où les réfugiés syriens traînent en quête de travail. On vit ici d'agriculture et de l'industrie textile. On commerçait auparavant avec la Syrie, suivant un axe devenu la colonne vertébrale de l'Etat islamique. A 50 km, le poste frontière de Tal-Abyad, contesté jusqu'au mois de juin, est aujourd'hui fermement tenu par l'EI. A 200 km au sud, la ville de Rakka, fief de l'organisation. Puis, suivant partiellement le cours de l'Euphrate, la ville de Deir ez-Zor, au cœur de la région pétrolière gouvernée par l'EI, et la province irakienne d'Anbar, que les djihadistes contrôlent partiellement. Plus loin, c'est Bagdad.

Des Arabes sunnites originaires de ces provinces forment une large part des réfugiés d'Urfa. Parmi eux, qui saura distinguer un membre de l'EI d'un civil ? "Nous acceptons tout le monde. Mais ces gens-là, nous ne les connaissons pas, nous ne savons pas ce qu'ils font", note Ibrahim Kaymaz, vice-président à Urfa du Parti pour la justice et le développement (AKP, islam-conservateur) du président

Erdogan, qui tient la mairie et la région.

Pour compliquer les choses, un civil haïssant cordialement l'Etat islamique peut aussi en être un allié fidèle. C'est le cas d'Abou Shahadi (un nom d'emprunt), 28 ans, père d'un enfant, fumeur invétéré, qui officie comme passeur dans la région de Jaraboulous, à 100 km au sud-est d'Urfa. C'est là le deuxième point d'entrée de l'EI dans la région, qui contrôle les principales villes syriennes à l'ouest, jusqu'aux faubourgs d'Alep.

Pour Abou Shahadi, l'EI, "ce sont des criminels". Sa maison est située à 300 mètres de la frontière. Comme la plupart de ses voisins, il faisait, avant la guerre, de la contrebande de cigarettes. Depuis l'été 2013, il s'est adapté à la demande : il fait passer des combattants. Des Arabes pour la plupart, originaires de Tunisie, d'Arabie saoudite, mais aussi des Européens et deux Français. Une cinquantaine au total, qui paient entre 200 et 1 000 dollars, selon l'épaisseur de leurs poches.

Pendant un an, Abou Shahadi a travaillé pour Jabat Al-Nosra, la branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda. Il versait régulièrement une trentaine d'euros à un militaire turc pour sa discrétion. Lorsque l'EI a pris le contrôle de sa ville, il a changé d'employeur et s'est fait plus discret. "Depuis le début des bombardements [de la coalition internationale menée par les Etats-Unis contre l'EI en Syrie et en Irak, en septembre], c'est devenu plus difficile. La police cherche les combattants étrangers."

Le jeune homme attend ses ordres d'une connaissance au bureau de l'EI, chargée des médias à Jaraboulous. Ce contact lui donne un nom, l'heure d'atterrissage d'un avion à l'aéroport



Urfa, de nuit. Dans la vieille ville, deux combattants kurdes ont été blessés aux jambes en défendant Kobané contre l'EI.

d'Urfa ou à celui, voisin, de Gaziantep. Abou Shahadi emmène le client à la frontière sans trop causer, dans la journée si possible. Sinon, il le fait dormir dans une cache de l'EI en ville, plutôt que dans un hôtel.

De l'autre côté du fleuve Euphrate, d'autres yeux que ceux de l'armée turque essaient de suivre les mouvements d'Abou Shahadi et de ses clients. Des volontaires kurdes ont planté des tentes, discrètement, à deux kilomètres d'un village que la frontière coupe en deux, Ziarat (40 votants aux dernières élections, côté turc). Le responsable local du HDP, Youssouf Yeshiltepe, à qui les volontaires font leur rapport, raconte de drôles d'histoires. Celle du minibus chargé de quinze barbus, passé par Ziarat en novembre en direction d'Urfa, et revenu deux jours plus tard, chargé des mêmes, et de quoi d'autre ? Celle des deux djihadistes "costauds comme des boxeurs" qui se sont battus dans un champ, une nuit de décembre, avec un paysan de Zérin, village voisin. Des concitoyens sont venus lui porter secours, armés de fusils. Puis, des combattants sans uniformes de la branche syrienne du PKK (les Unités de protection du peuple, YPG), ont sorti les étrangers de ce mauvais pas. Ils leur ont promis de les aider à franchir la frontière et à rejoindre l'EI. "On n'en a plus entendu parler", rigole Youssouf Yeshiltepe.

Selon lui, une trentaine de djihadistes ont ainsi été arrêtés cette année par les volontaires kurdes des environs, et remis pour la plupart à la police turque. C'était, dit-il, du menu fretin : des hommes isolés, qui n'avaient pu se brancher sur les filières de l'EI et improvisaient leur passage.

"Ici, notre parti [le PKK] est

faible. C'est une région traditionnelle : les tribus sont puissantes", se lamente ce responsable d'une organisation laïque d'inspiration marxiste, qui tient le Kurdistan turc à l'est d'Urfa. Là-bas, l'EI aurait grand peine à prendre pied. Mais dans ces campagnes, il a le champ libre et recrute : Youssouf Yeshiltepe soupçonne une trentaine de jeunes de Bireçik, la ville voisine, d'avoir rejoint les rangs de l'EI.

"Les Kurdes votent pour les notables, affiliés à l'AKP, dit-il. Les villageois vivent dans leur coin et ne nous disent rien, la plupart du temps. De ce côté de l'Euphrate, il y a des villages arabes, qui s'arrangent avec l'EI. Et de l'autre côté, vers Jaraboulous, il n'y a plus de Kurdes."

L'armée turque dispose d'une base en face de Jaraboulous, à une vingtaine de kilomètres de la frontière. Ses guérites jalonnent les villages frontaliers. Mais pour le gouverneur Küçük, même dans ces régions à haut risque, il est impossible de boucler entièrement la frontière. "L'essentiel des trafics de l'EI est fait par de petites mains", dit-il. Ce sont quelques armes, de la drogue, un camion de pétrole... "Les villages de la frontière vivent d'échanges du même genre. Si nous fermons totalement les routes de Jaraboulous et d'Akçakale, ils mourront de faim !"

Abou Shahadi, le passeur, ne dit pas autre chose. "Certains de ceux que j'emène en Syrie, ce sont des malades, des fous", qui, dit-il, feront long feu dans les rangs de l'EI. "Mais si je leur dis 'je ne prends pas celui-là', ils ne m'appelleront plus. Je perdrai mon travail, et il n'y en a pas d'autre." ■



Passeur de djihadistes, Abou Shahadi aurait aidé une cinquantaine de combattants à entrer en Syrie. Avant il faisait de la contrebande de cigarettes.





## Un millier de kurdes irakiens tués en combattant l'EI depuis juin

Erbil (Irak), 4 février 2015 (AFP)

UN MILLIER de combattants kurdes irakiens ont été tués dans les affrontements avec le groupe Etat islamique depuis juin 2014, date du début de l'offensive jihadiste en Irak, a indiqué mercredi un responsable de la sécurité kurde.

Jabbar Yawar, le secrétaire général du ministère en charge des peshmer-

gas (combattants kurdes), a ajouté que 4.569 de ces combattants avaient en outre été blessés entre le 10 juin et le 3 février.

Un précédent bilan faisait état le 10 décembre de 727 morts et 3.564 blessés.

L'EI a lancé en juin 2014 une offensive qui lui a permis de prendre le contrôle de larges pans de territoire en Irak, principalement dans les régions sunnites, face à la déroute des forces armées. Après avoir mené son offensive vers le sud en direction de Bagdad, l'attention de l'EI s'est tournée vers le Kurdistan.

Les combattants irakiens ont alors voulu stopper l'avancée des jihadistes, soit en défendant seuls les villes soit en se ralliant aux forces armées irakiennes, avec le soutien crucial des frappes de la coalition internationale menée par les Etats-Unis. ●



12 février 2015

## Les femmes kurdes marchent pour Öcalan

12/02/2015  
www.dna.fr

Environ 80 femmes kurdes et une vingtaine d'hommes ont traversé le secteur à l'occasion de leur marche de Berne à Strasbourg. Ils réclament la libération d'Abdullah Öcalan, leader du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Ils – mais surtout elles, qui organisaient la marche – sont partis le 4 février de Berne, la capitale suisse, avec leurs drapeaux kurdes, les portraits de leur leader et cette phrase au dos de leurs gilets : « Ji Ocalan're

azadi », « Libérez Öcalan ». Abdullah Öcalan, dirigeant du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), emprisonné depuis 1999 en Turquie pour activités terroristes. Son parti figure lui aussi dans la liste internationale des organisations terroristes.

Cette nuit, les marcheurs ont dormi à Erstein, chez d'autres sympathisants du PKK, avant de reprendre la route pour Strasbourg vers 8h30, escortés par les gendarmes. Direction le Conseil de l'Europe, où ils retrouveront demain deux autres cortèges partis respectivement de Francfort et du Luxembourg.



« En plus de sa libération, nous revendiquons l'autonomie démocratique », explique Nursel, la trentaine, une des rares militantes présentes à parler le français. Pas l'État indépendant réclamé par les Kurdes de Turquie, d'Iran, de Syrie et d'Irak depuis un siècle ? « En tant que socialistes révolutionnaires, nous sommes contre l'État-nation, centre de tous les monopoles

», rectifie Nursel dans la parfaite vulgate PKK.

Les marcheuses et leurs compagnons célèbrent aussi un événement qui a mis la cause kurde sous les feux de la rampe : la prise de Kobané, ville martyre de Syrie, après une bataille acharnée contre l'État islamique où s'est illustrée l'YPJ, force d'autodéfense féminine kurde. ■



14 février 2015

## Strasbourg : Des milliers de Kurdes manifestent pour la libération d'Öcalan

14 février 2015 par AFP

Entre 6.000 et 7.000 Kurdes selon la police, plus de 30.000 selon les organisateurs, défilaient samedi à Strasbourg (est de la France) pour exiger la libération de leur chef historique Abdullah Öcalan, détenu en Turquie depuis 1999.

Les manifestants devaient ensuite se retrouver dans l'après-midi pour un grand meeting politique en plein air, pour le rassemblement annuel d'un collectif d'associations de Kurdes de France et des pays voisins.

Comme chaque année depuis une première marche des Kurdes à Strasbourg en 2000, de nombreux manifestants étaient venus de pays voisins comme l'Allemagne, la Suisse ou la Belgique. Et comme chaque année, certains

étaient venus à pied de Berne, du Luxembourg et de Francfort (ouest de l'Allemagne).

«On demande la libération de M. Öcalan, un statut politique pour le Kurdistan et le retrait du PKK (le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) de la liste des organisations terroristes de l'Union européenne», a déclaré à l'AFP Hélène Erin, porte-parole des organisateurs de la manifestation.

Vendredi, une pétition géante pour la libération de M. Öcalan, ayant récolté «plus de 10 millions de signatures» à travers le monde en deux ans, selon Mme Erin, a été officiellement remise à des représentants du Conseil de l'Europe à Strasbourg.

Le défilé avait également pour but d'afficher la solidarité des Kurdes d'Europe avec les Kurdes qui se battent contre l'Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie



et en Irak, a-t-elle souligné.

«Depuis la résistance de Kobané et dans le Sinjar, le regard sur les Kurdes a changé», a-t-elle estimé. «Autrefois quand je demandais des rendez-vous avec des personnalités politiques c'était très difficile. Or maintenant ce sont les politiques qui demandent à nous recevoir».

Le président français François Hollande a notamment reçu dimanche dernier pour la première fois des représentants du PYD, la principale organisation des Kurdes de Syrie qui a vaincu les jihadistes de l'EI à Kobané, avant de recevoir mardi le président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak, Massoud Barzani. ●



# Kurdish Push in Iraq, Syria Prompts Sunni Fears

Jamie Dettmer  
February 09, 2015 1:48 PM  
www.voanews.com

The Iraqi Kurds' offensive against Islamic militants in mainly Arab areas outside their autonomous region in northern Iraq is being applauded by Western powers relieved at jihadist setbacks. But analysts worry that the advances hold serious risks of undermining U.S. strategy to coax Sunni Arab tribes to join the battle against the Islamic State.

They say the seeds of future cycles of sub-national conflicts are being sown by current hostilities and roiling of sectarian and ethnic fault lines.

Few analysts and locals believe the sectarian map across the region can be returned to how it was before the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad triggered wider fighting among religious communities. That provided the opening for al-Qaida and rival Islamic State, also known as ISIS, to exploit the violence for their own purposes.

From Iraq through Syria and on to Lebanon, sectarian divisions have been widened.

Leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have reassured Arab neighbors that they have no intention of seeking to liberate the northern Iraq city of Mosul, now in the hands of the Islamic State. But the so-called disputed territories of Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Diyala governorates, with their significant Kurdish populations and history, are another matter. Kurds see the KRG as a reduced version of Southern Kurdistan.

Kurdish officials are already talking about eventually being able to establish a multi-confessional state going beyond the formal borders of the KRG.

They say the welcome they have received from Christian, Turkmen and Yazidi minorities show their fight back against Islamic militants, whose so-called caliphate straddles Syria and Iraq, is appreciated. Even among those minorities in the Nineveh plains, however, there are groups radicalized by what they suffered at the hands of jihadists who are now promoting the idea of their own statelet. Others remain wedded to the idea of a unified Iraq.

Local Arab tribes are even more suspicious of the Kurds. They worry the Peshmerga



*A Kurdish flag is seen next to Peshmerga fighters taking position with their weapons on the frontline against the Islamic State, on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq, Jan. 26, 2015.*

fighters will turn their offensive against Islamic militants into a land grab, retaking territories they have long maintained were stolen from them during the rule of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. He pursued an aggressive Arabization policy involving confiscation and eviction of Kurds, Christians and Turkmen.

In a recent news conference in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the minister for provincial affairs, Ahmed al-Jabouri, accused Kurdish fighters of "denying the return of Arab residents in localities where IS has been expelled."

According to Denise Natali, an analyst with the Institute for National Strategic Studies, "U.S.-led efforts to counter the Islamic State with Kurdish Peshmerga partners is having a backlash on Sunni Arab communities."

She added that "relying on Iraqi Kurds to act as coalition boots on the ground may help eliminate some IS safe havens, but is fueling Kurdish land grabs."

The jihadists were able to recruit local Sunni Arabs in northern and western Iraq to their cause because of widespread feelings of disenfranchisement and anger towards a Shi'ite Muslim-dominated central government in Baghdad.

The Kurdish offensive isn't helping to assuage a deep-set sense of alienation, nor is the role being played by Iraq's Iran-aligned Shi'ite militias, who have been accused of retaliating against Sunni Arabs and engineering their evictions from villages. In Kirkuk, the city Kurds see as their lost Jerusalem, Shi'ite militiamen have even clashed with Peshmerga fighters.

Sectarianism has riven also the opposition in Syria to President Assad.

The Sunni-dominated Western-backed Free Syrian Army brigades — as well as Islamist militias — have long fumed at the refusal of Syrian Kurds in northeast Syria to throw in their lot with them and to forgo their focus on setting up an autonomous Kurdish state of their own. Their non-aggression pact with Damascus following the withdrawal of government forces from the northeast early in the civil war prompted fury in Syrian rebel ranks.

The recent involvement of some FSA units in the defense of the Kurdish border town of Kobani has done little to build bridges between the FSA and the PYD, the dominant Kurdish party in northeast Syria.

"We don't trust them, they have not been with us in the fight against Assad," said an Aleppo-based FSA commander, Abdul Rahman.

Both Assad, a member of the minority Alawi offshoot of Shi'ite Islam, whose members dominate the government in Damascus, and Islamic State, have purposefully set out to pit religious and ethnic groups against each other, according to Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, co-authors of a new book, "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror."

Islamic State deliberately fuels sectarianism just like the Assad regime, attacking its enemy sects to "prompt their counter-reaction [and overreaction], in order to drive Sunnis into ISIS's protective arms," they said.

The group then couches its fight in "sectarian-existential grammar," they said.

That aggressive sectarianism is also spreading into Lebanon, risking re-igniting a civil war the country is still struggling to recover from

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February 9, 2015

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## Peshmerga Ministry Criticises Baghdad For Insufficient Military Support

Coalition countries to send more weapons to Kurdish forces

Basnews | Shwan Barzinji 09.02.2015 - ERBIL

**Secretary General of Peshmerga Ministry Jabar Yawar says that the coalition will send more weapons to Kurdish Peshmerga forces.**

"As part of the military support of the US-led coalition, they will send more weapons to Peshmerga," Yawar told BasNews on Monday.

He continued, "Coalition countries continue to send ammunition, weapons and military aid to the Kurdistan Region. Some new German weapons have been received and we have asked them for some specific heavy weapons, that are expected to be delivered to the Kurdistan

Region soon.

"Coalition countries also train the Peshmerga and support Kurdish forces by shelling Islamic State (IS) bases."

"A team of military experts from the coalition will visit the Kurdistan Region," said Yawar.

He criticised the Baghdad government for insufficient military support, saying that although they have sent weapons and ammunitions to the Peshmerga twice, it was not enough.

He concluded by pointing out that the MILAN anti-tank systems that have proved so effective against IS armoured vehicles were donated by members of the coalition. ●

RUDAW

February 9, 2015

## Allies pledge more arms to the Kurds at Munich conference

rudaw.net - february 11, 2015

**M**UNICH, Germany—The Western powers, particularly Germany have promised to supply more arms to the Kurdish forces in the coming days, said Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani on Sunday.

"Our meeting with Angela Merkel was very productive and she is very concerned with the situation in Kurdistan," Barzani told Rudaw. "She also told me that they have decided to send m

The Kurdish president who attended the Munich Security Conference with other world leaders said that he had met with the



*Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani (R) with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.*

German Defense Minister and her European counterparts on the sidelines of the conference.

Germany has been one of Kurdistan Region's staunch allies in the war against the Islamic State (ISIS). German Defense Minister

Ursula von der Leyen has visited Erbil twice in the past few months.

Barzani said that he also met with a number of US senators who had pledged to pursue more arms to the Kurds with the US government.

"What is important is that they all have a lot of respect for the bravery and dedication of our Peshmerga forces," said Barzani.

Barzani also met with Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi for the first time in Munich where they discussed the war against ISIS and future plans for Mosul.

"I met with Abadi and we discussed many issues among them the situation in Mosul and we agreed to have more cooperation between us from now on," said Barzani.

The Peshmerga forces have pushed back ISIS on many fronts and are currently positioned 25 kilometers outside Mosul, but Kurdish leaders believe the Iraqi government and local Sunnis are responsible for the city's final liberation. ■

RUDAW

February 11, 2015

## Italy adds military muscle for ISIS fight

rudaw.net - February 11, 2015

**ERBIL, Kurdistan** - Italy's top defense official has promised his country will provide arms, ammunition and advanced weaponry to the Kurdistan Region in

its ongoing fight against the Islamic State..

Defense chief Luigi Binelli Manetelli made the announcement, which also included Kurdistan's first-ever military helicopter, in Erbil on Wednesday before visiting

Peshmerga camps where more than 50 Italian trainers have been stationed. Manetelli is also expected to meet KRG Peshmerga minister, Mustafa Said Qdir.

Italy, a member of the US-led coalition against ISIS, has also decided to send another 300 military trainers to Kurdistan along with more than 100 machine guns and an undisclosed amount of anti-tank missiles.

The promised helicopter will reportedly be used for logistical and medical support on the frontlines ■



*Italian defense chief has promised to provide Kurdistan's first-ever military helicopter*

# A Shiite militia drives back the Islamic State, but divides much of Iraq

## CAMP ASHRAF, IRAQ

BY KAREEM FAHIM

At their victory rally, the Shiite militiamen used poetry, song and swagger to sweeten their celebration of an ugly battle.

More than a hundred fighters from the militia, the Badr Organization, had been killed in the farms and villages of Diyala Province in recent fighting against the Sunni extremists of the Islamic State. During the battle, thousands of residents had been forced from their homes — including Sunni families who accused Shiite paramilitary groups like Badr of forced displacement and summary executions.

But the militias had pushed the Islamic State back from key areas in a crucial battle. So on Monday, the Badr Organization convened in a mosque at Camp Ashraf, its base in Diyala, to celebrate its “liberation” of the province — and to serve notice that it was the vanguard force battling the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Speaking at the rally, to an audience that included giddy fighters barely past their teens, the head of the Badr Organization, Hadi al-Ameri, boasted of the towns his men and allied militias had set free. “These were big operations that others must learn lessons from,” he said.

But even as Mr. Ameri was fishing for broad support and recognition, his group stands among the most divisive in Iraq, accused of atrocities against Sunnis and known for its close ties to Iran. The new government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, which has promised to rule inclusively, has been under pressure to distance itself from retaliatory attacks against Sunnis by both Shiite and Kurdish militiamen.

At the same time, Mr. Ameri’s boast rings true: His militia has been among the most effective fighting forces against the Islamic State, gaining ground even as the Iraqi Army has faltered in many places despite support from American airstrikes and trainers.

Now, the Badr Organization’s leaders have asserted that their fighters and other allied militias — organized under the banner of “popular mobilization” forces — are ready to advance to neighboring provinces and other Iraqi cities menaced by the Islamic State: a shadow army to Iraq’s official security forces, flush with its own success.

At their celebration on Monday, the militia’s leaders were feeling expansive. Tribal sheikhs had been invited to Camp Ashraf from around the country, some milling around a small photo exhibit of the Diyala battles. Journalists had been asked to join as well, to listen to speeches



AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Shiite fighters of the Badr Organization celebrating in Diyala Province on Feb. 2 after defeating Islamic State militants. The militia is accused of atrocities against Sunnis.

and to tour the liberated villages.

A group of young fighters in fatigues gathered in a circle, singing religious hymns, and broke to join the mob that formed around Mr. Ameri, the guest of honor.

Standing in front of a backdrop that said “Diyala Wins. Iraq Wins,” Mr. Ameri lightly admonished supporters who chanted his name, telling them to praise Iraq instead. He reached out to Sunnis, pledging that Diyala would be a “safe area,” and responded to the accusations of atrocities by his fighters, warning that there would be consequences for abuses, including kidnappings and killings, though he did not explicitly acknowledge that they had happened.

“We are determined to complete our mission,” Mr. Ameri added, listing other Iraqi provinces that his fighters would liberate soon. “God willing, we will defeat Daesh in Iraq,” he said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State.

His fighters seemed to be spoiling for the coming battle. Haidar Aidan, 25, described eight days of grueling work in the village of Mansouriya, dodging snipers and defusing explosive devices. Twenty-five other Badr fighters, he said, had been killed there.

Families had been displaced, but Mr. Aidan seemed confident that they would be able to return soon, echoing the assurances of his superiors. Now that Mr. Ameri had declared the province free of Islamic State militants, “we will go find other places to liberate,” he said.

Ali Jassim Kadham, another fighter, also said it was important to return Sunni families to their homes. But his talk of reconciliation faded as he spoke about Sunni tribes who he asserted were allied with the Islamic State.

Collaborators were worse than the terrorists, he said, warning, “Their punishment will be more severe than Daesh’s.”

Fears of retaliation by the militias in Diyala grew last month after residents of the Sunni-majority village of Barwanah accused Shiite militiamen of executing 72 people. Mr. Ameri and other Badr officials have denied that their fighters were responsible, even as they have promised to clamp down on abuses.

A local Badr leader in Diyala, Harath al-Rubai, said he had been in Barwanah on the day the executions occurred, checking the identity cards of refugees from other villages.

He said he had heard about the killings only the next day. “I don’t know how and when they were killed,” he added. The government has promised a full investigation into the allegations.

Erin Evers, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, said it was dangerous for the government to outsource military operations to Badr and other militias in Diyala, a mixed province home to Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds and Turkmen.

“It’s a place where anywhere you light a match, it’s guaranteed to start a fire,” she said. She said her organization had received reports that the militias, with the cooperation of some Iraqi security forces, had been “disappearing” people in the province for at least the last year and a half.

Salah al-Jabouri, a Parliament member from Diyala, said there had been attempts by “bad people” in the militias to alter the province’s demographic balance by not allowing Sunnis to return to their homes. “Violations against Sunni society in Diyala will weaken the strength of the popular mobilization and

make Daesh stronger," he said.

But there were few signs of tension as Badr militiamen, accompanied by Iraqi security forces, led journalists on a tour of the province in a heavily armed convoy on Monday. A militia anthem blared from speakers on a truck toward the head of the convoy, catchy but dark, a warning to Badr's enemies: "Fight them!" men sang. "Kill them!"

The fighters proudly showed off the Sudour irrigation dam, which the Sunni extremists had taken over, causing wa-

ter shortages in the region. The water was flowing again, and a bridge over the dam that was damaged had been temporarily repaired, allowing passage over the waterway.

The Badr Organization's signs were freshly planted along the roads of Muqdadia District, in a show of authority.

Things appeared to be slowly returning to normal even in villages like Al Aqoud, where a battle between the militias and militants had left stores burned

and some homes in rubble.

One shopkeeper, Hafiz Hussein, said that some of the residents, especially Sunni neighbors, were frightened by the Shiite militias and had fled. He said he hoped they would return.

For many who had stayed, the militias had brought only relief. "Daesh was like hell," he said.

Falih Hassan contributed reporting.

International New York Times FEBRUARY 5, 2015

# How Iraq subsidizes Islamic State

Aki Peritz

The Islamic State generates all sorts of funds to power its terrorist empire — by smuggling oil, imposing taxes from the locals, plundering archaeological treasures and ransoming hostages. But there's one major source of revenue that often goes unmentioned: funds earmarked for Iraqi civil servants.

At least five million people are employed by the Iraqi government, and it is reasonable to assume that a significant portion of Iraq's \$102 billion budget for 2015 will be committed to the salaries and pensions of these civil servants. And tens of thousands of government workers still collect salaries from Baghdad even though they live and work in cities controlled by the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL. These include doctors, teachers, nurses, pharmacists and the whole spectrum of municipal workers.

Despite the de facto partition of the country, a majority of these Iraqi government employees report for work just as they did before. According to the London-based Arabic newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat, workers from the electrical and water departments in the Islamic State-controlled city of Falluja go about their regular jobs unmolested by their new rulers.

And government employees still need to be paid. For example, Baghdad provides about \$130 million every month to pay all its workers in Mosul, according to the head of the Nineveh provincial council's finance committee, who was forced to flee when the Islamic State took over. We can estimate that the Iraqi treasury has paid over \$1 billion to these workers since the city fell last June.

The official financial system has been down since the jihadist militia seized control of the banks, so department emissaries are sent into Iraqi or Kurdish territory. They collect the salary money and return to disburse it.

Money still flows from Baghdad

This regular shuttle for trusted individuals has become

to pay civil servants in territory controlled by jihadists.

routine in some places, even on the front lines. Referring to such practices, one Iraqi officer controlling a military checkpoint outside of

Falluja recently noted, "There is a kind of strange coexistence between ISIS and the government authorities."

Evidently, the Islamic State generates significant income by skimming off the top of this cash trafficking. According to one researcher's estimate, the Islamic State confiscates up to 50 percent of the civil servants' salaries. Naturally, the organization monitors the distributions: In a neighborhood of Mosul, for example, a jihadist guard is assigned to wait for the trusted individual to return with the money. His job is to appropriate any unclaimed cash "for those who did not show up."

Why does Baghdad persist with this system? After all, most of the Shiite or other non-Sunni government workers in Islamic State-held territory have either been murdered or forced to flee, leaving behind Sunni employees, some of whom may in fact have sympathies with the militants.

There is a humanitarian justification, since these salaries help people survive the winter, but Iraq also claims that it needs to show it has not forsaken its civil servants. But this argument falls flat, considering that Kurdish employees have gone without pay for a year because of oil disputes that for a time led Baghdad to freeze funding to the Kurdistan Regional Government.

There might also be a deeper cultural explanation embedded in the Iraqi state. Despite the turmoil over the last generation, the Baath Party socialist mentality that a government job is a protected job for life is still deeply ingrained in Iraqi society. To cut all its workers off is anathema to this ethos. Bureaucratic inertia is a powerful force.

Baghdad is nevertheless spending a fair portion of its budget to keep afloat a rickety system that benefits its most fearsome enemy. Besides providing the Islamic State with cash, this policy also

enables hospitals in occupied areas to remain open (if starved of medical supplies), even though they now primarily serve the jihadist fighters.

There are a number of steps Baghdad could take to choke off these funds. To cut off these thousands of civilians immediately would cause great hardship, especially now when fuel for heating is in short supply. But one action the Iraqi government can take is to place these salaries in an escrow account, to be paid out when the employee permanently flees Islamic State territory.

Another measure would be to oblige each individual to collect his or her income personally from the Iraqi government. This would play havoc with the Islamic State's revenue streams. Another tactic would be to persuade the Sunni tribes to demand ISIS reduce its cut, causing dissent within Islamic State territory.

All of these policies risk causing grave hardship among mostly innocent people caught in an already terrible situation. The real solution, of course, is to wrest those towns and cities from Islamic State control.

Smothering the Islamic State's financial resources is one of the ways this group can be degraded and ultimately destroyed. The jihadist organization is already contending with lower oil prices, and there is only so much money the group can extort from struggling local people. This makes it even more important to stop the river of money flowing from Baghdad to its Islamic State-controlled civil service. It's a politically unsustainable situation that must be stopped in one way or another.

AKI PERITZ is a former C.I.A. counterterrorism analyst and the co-author of "Find, Fix, Finish: Inside the Counterterrorism Campaigns that Killed bin Laden and Devastated Al Qaeda."



## Analysis: Why Kurds Are Losing Patience With the U.S.



By Richard Engel  
February 11, 2015  
www.nbcnews.com

**ERBIL-Hewler, Kurdistan region 'Iraq',— Just a few dozen soldiers with automatic rifles and an old Humvee guard the Kurdish front line against ISIS.**

This Kurdish outpost near the Mosul Dam is attacked several times a day, every day. So far, ISIS has sent twenty car bombs to try to destroy it. The Kurds are hanging on, barely, and are increasingly frustrated. They want to know why the U.S. — their ally — isn't helping more or supplying the guns and ammunition they seek.

But Washington isn't ignoring the Kurds out of spite. It's dragging its feet out of concern that those weapons would not just be used against ISIS and would eventually, serve another cause: Kurdish independence.

Fight ISIS or fight to keep Iraq together?

To hear President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry describe it, the war on ISIS sounds straightforward. The vicious terrorist group has spread through Syria and Iraq and is slowly killing both nations.

ISIS has often been described as a cancer. The U.S. air campaign is designed to destroy the cancer and heal the nations it infected. But ISIS has insinuated itself along old, unresolved fault lines in Iraq. And nowhere is this plainer to see than in Kurdistan — or northern Iraq, as the government in Baghdad calls it.

The U.S. military has a special alliance with Iraq's Kurds. Unlike the Arabs — both Sunni and Shiite — the Kurds have never raised arms against U.S. troops. In fact, even before the U.S. invasion in 2003, the Kurds have been unabashedly pro-American.

Erbil — the Kurdish capital — is unique in being an Iraqi city where you can see

American flags hanging behind the cash registers at shops and restaurants. The Kurds believe that a strong relationship with the U.S. is key to achieving their ultimate goal of independence.

Kurds, who make up about 17 percent of Iraq's population, are members of an ethnic group often referred to as "the largest stateless nation." Their historical homeland is divided between Syria, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Kurds spent the past century demanding, fighting and dying for the right to a free and independent homeland. Now, at last, that dream seems within reach.

During the U.S. war in Iraq, the Kurds were constructive partners in a fragile three-way government with their Sunni and Shiite neighbors. But the Americans have gone and ISIS has ended the illusion of Iraqi unity, leaving the Kurds free to declare their lands as their own.

As ISIS fighters marched through one Iraqi city after another last summer, Iraq's army withdrew in advance of their arrival. While Iraqi forces ran away, the Kurdish forces — known as Peshmerga — grabbed the city of Kirkuk and its vast oil fields.

It was a hugely important moment. Now that they have the city, they have no intention of giving it back to the central government in Baghdad, which they see as corrupt and sectarian.

The Kurds believe Kirkuk's oil will make the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq an economically viable, even wealthy, state. Control of Kirkuk is the key to nationhood that Kurds have always sought.

There is a formal referendum coming on the fate of Iraqi Kurdistan. Before ISIS came along, Kurds might have seen the benefit of keeping their uneasy alliance with the Iraqi state. They needed the money that the central government was sending north and the Iraqi army, with its superior, American-provided weapons was a better guarantee of safety in a volatile region than the lightly-armed Peshmerga. All that has changed



Richard Engel on Peshmerga Front Line in Northern Iraq

now. And the referendum, originally scheduled to take place last year, is almost guaranteed to show that Iraqi Kurds are ready to break away.

All of this puts two key elements of the U.S. policy in the region on a collision course.

"The United States not only has to worry about the Islamic State, but it also needs to worry about the future unity of Iraq," says Anthony Cordesman, a Middle East specialist at Washington's Center for Strategic Studies.

"This is a little bit of a combination of a juggling contest and a tightrope walk," Cordesman continued. "If you make a mistake, essentially you can trigger a new form of civil conflict."

### MORE ARMS

Politicians in Washington, desperate for good news from the war against ISIS, often heap praise on the Kurds, who, with the help of U.S. advisers and close air support from the U.S. military, have managed to take back large areas that were lost to the extremists in June.

But, in an exclusive interview, the man who runs the Kurdish region's security council told NBC News that neither airstrikes nor praise from Washington are enough to win the war. →

→ “Praising is good. We also see ourselves as trusted allies of the United States and the free world,” Masrour Barzani, Chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council, said. “But fighting needs more than just praising. It needs guns, it needs weapons.”

Speaking on NBC’s “Meet the Press” on Sunday, Kerry said he fully understood Barzani’s “impatience” but added: “The fact is that the Iraqi Army itself needs to be retrained and stood up.”

However, the Kurds and the Iraqi Army want different things for Iraq. There is little doubt that arming the Kurds will hasten the day when the Kurds declare themselves independent. Kurdish leaders are increasingly comfortable speaking of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq as their goal.

Independence, Barzani said, “[is] a God given right of the Kurdish people to be equal not less than any other nation on the face of the Earth.”

**‘LONG WAR’**

The more Kurds speak of an independent future, the less comfortable U.S. officials will likely be to send them weapons. But failing to adequately arm the Kurds would not only be a betrayal, but it could slow — or even reverse — the progress they have already made against ISIS.

“It looks like this is going to be a long war,” Barzani told NBC News. “Peshmerga armies are doing their best, fighting ISIS with whatever they have in their possession which is not much really. It’s a very difficult war.”

The solution the administration has

found is to split the difference, arming the Kurds just enough to fight ISIS but not with heavier weapons that could later be used in an internal war with Baghdad. The Kurds are frustrated. And so, they say, are the Americans that were sent to help them.

“Basically, they’re doing their best,” Barzani says about the American advisers. “I think many of them are just as frustrated as we are.”

Balancing competing interests and goals seems like sound policy. But what seems sound on a power-point presentation in Washington does not seem reasonable to men who are fighting on the front lines. The Kurds have lost 1,000 Peshmerga in the fight against ISIS and absorbed an unprecedented wave of refugees. The patience of one of our closest allies is wearing thin. ○

The Economist February 14th 2015

**Turkey and its Kurds**

**Dreams of self-rule**

**The dance of Kurds seeking autonomy with a government wanting support**

Feb 14th 2015 | CIZRE AND SURUC  
www.economist.com

ON A recent evening in Cizre, an old Kurdish settlement skirted by the Tigris river in south-east Turkey, a family grieves. Muhammad, their 20-year-old son, died fighting jihadists of Islamic State (IS) across the border in the Syrian town of Kobane shortly after Kurdish forces declared victory on January 26th. “Cizre gave 17 martyrs for Kobane,” says Mullah Qassem, an imam who has come to pay condolences. Pan-Kurdish sentiments have been sharpened by the battle against IS, in turn stirring the long-standing rebelliousness of Cizre, where a legendary Kurdish emir, Bedr Han, rose up against the Ottomans in the early 19th century. “Cizre is ours, Kobane is ours, we must fight for both,” says Muhammad’s mother, Selma.

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) started fighting for Kurdish self-rule in 1984. Scores were killed in Cizre in 1992 when Turkish forces opened fire on civilians who celebrated the Kurdish new year in defiance of orders to stay home. Muhammad was imprisoned for a year for throwing stones at a police vehicle. “He was only 14, he then vowed to join the PKK,” Selma recalls.

The Justice and Development (AK) party has made unprecedented overtures to the Kurds, easing bans on the language and talking to the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan. A two-year ceasefire is holding. A deal giving the Kurds more rights is on the table as part of a package that AK hopes would see the pro-Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (HDP) back a new constitution, including an executive presidency, after Turkey’s June 7th election.

Yet many Kurds believe the state is behind the violence that has recently gripped Cizre. At least six people have died, four of them children. One 12-year-old was shot, allegedly by security forces, on January 14th. One police officer has been arrested so far.

The unrest began in October when Turkey refused to let Kurdish fighters open a corridor to Kobane. It escalated into street battles between PKK supporters and Huda-Par, an Islamist Kurdish party, whose precursor, Hizbullah (unrelated to the eponymous Lebanese militia), was used by the Turkish state to fight the PKK in the 1990s. The PKK insists that Huda-Par has links to IS and that Turkey backs both. Huda-par and Turkey deny these claims.

In Cudi, a gritty part of Cizre, men and women huddle round wood-burning stoves as they keep nightly vigil at “checkpoints” to keep Huda-par and Turkish forces out. Earthen mounds serves as barricades. PKK banners and portraits of Ocalan are strung above the streets. “The state cannot come here, we are in charge,” boasts Sami, a 16-year-old. Like thousands of Kurds he ekes out a living harvesting crops in western Turkey. “I began going to the fields in my mother’s tummy,” he says. Unemployment in Cizre runs at 70%, against a national average of 10%, says Leyla Imret, the 27-year-old HDP mayor.

She insists the HDP will win the minimum 10% of the national vote needed to win parliamentary seats in June’s election. The party used to field independents to circumvent the 10% rule. But this time it plans to run as a party despite polls



Where Kobane’s martyrs now lie

suggesting it may not clear the hurdle.

In the regional capital, Diyarbakir, many Kurds don’t want to be part of the Turkish parliament anyway. “We should form our own parliament uniting all the Kurdish parties,” argues Sitki Zilan, of Azadi, an Islam-tinged group. Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, a businessman, blames the government. “Their Kobane policy has deepened separatist impulses. If the HDP is not represented in parliament, tensions could spiral out of control,” he warns.

Farther west, in Suruc, which stands opposite Kobane, some 200,000 Syrian Kurds who fled the war prefer to stay in rough camps run by the HDP-run municipality rather than a shiny refugee complex built by the government. “We feel free and at home here,” said Nejaha, a war widow. A section for “martyrs of Kobane” has been added to the local cemetery, where this correspondent counted 66 fresh graves. But Muhammad was buried in Kobane. “No need to bring him back. It’s all Kurdistan,” says his mother. ■

# Hollande-PYD meeting challenges Erdogan

**French President Francois Hollande, by hosting at Elysee Palace two Kurdish female leaders from Kobani, sends a strong message to Ankara.**



**Fehim Taştekin**  
February 12, 2015  
www.al-monitor.com

French President Francois Hollande has initiated a diplomatic move strongly challenging President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who considers the Syrian Kurds' People's Protection Units (YPG) in the self-styled Rojava canton to be a terror organization and who is seriously disturbed by the US military assistance to the Kurds in their fight against the Islamic State (IS). On Feb. 8 at the Elysee Palace, Hollande hosted Asya Abdullah, the co-chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD); Nesrin Abdullah, the commander of the YPJ (YPG's women units); and Khaled Issa, the PYD representative in France. The meeting was held at the personal and official invitation of Hollande. Aysa Abdullah attended the meeting in her traditional Kurdish costume and Nesrin Abdullah in her combat uniform. Accounts differ, but the two Kurdish women reportedly flew from Erbil to Paris in a private plane sent by France or on a scheduled flight with all expenses paid.

Even more significant was the dissemination of photographs of the meeting that put on record recognition of the Kurdish identity, Kurdish political entity and Kurdish defense forces by French leaders through the website of the Elysee Palace.

One of the major intended targets of this message by Hollande is undoubtedly Ankara. PYD representatives told Al-Monitor that the message is mostly aimed at Turkey. The visit has thus become the most momentous indicator of the legitimacy Rojava is gaining in the international arena. PYD Co-Chair Salih Muslim previously held meetings with Western officials, but they were not as notable or symbolic.

## GUNS FROM THE WEST, CORRIDOR FROM TURKEY

PYD officials told Al-Monitor that the Kurdish representatives recounted the situation in Rojava and asked for advanced weapons to fully eliminate the IS threat. Kurds are mostly seeking anti-tank weapons of the type Germany supplied to the Kurdistan Regional Government. Hollande said support for the Kurds in their anti-IS struggle will continue. Issa said of the Elysee meeting: "We explained that we are proposing our Rojava model for all of Syria. We emphasized that international support against the IS threat must continue."

Zuhat Kobani, the PYD foreign relations official, also spoke to Al-Monitor about the visit: "The visit was made at the official invitation of the French president. All facilities were provided for the delegation to come to Paris. Our representatives told Hollande that the Kobani victory is not a success only for the Kurds but for all of Syria. They told him, 'We are also fighting against those who attacked Charlie Hebdo. Our resistance is your resistance. We must move this struggle forward. The YPG and the PYD are your friendly forces.'

"They discussed how to jointly fight IS. International assistance is badly needed for the reconstruction of Kobani, which was destroyed in the war. We want Turkey to open a corridor to Kobani. This corridor is vital to bring in supplies for reconstruction and international teams that will come to work on those projects in Kobani. We asked for his help to realize our requests. The French president was positive and stressed that our support will continue. France wants to lead the war against IS and is seeking ways to cooperate with Rojava actors in that framework."



*French President Francois Hollande receives Kurdish leaders Asya Abdullah and Nesrin Abdullah at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Feb. 8, 2015.*

When asked whether there was discussion on expanding the anti-IS war to outside of Rojava or whether the Kurds will participate in the struggle against the Damascus regime, Kobani replied: "We explained our views on Syria. Our resistance is the resistance of all freedom-seeking Syrian groups. Our goal is to democratize all of Syria. We want a decentralized Syria. We have proven ourselves militarily and politically. We put together a democratic governance model incorporating all political, ethnic and religious groups. We want this system to prevail in all of Syria. It is not possible to put this system in place under the current dictatorship."

## WAR WILL EXPAND, BUT HOW?

My next question was: If it is impossible to move forward with the current regime, would this mean that Rojava forces would adopt an offensive posture, abandoning their defensive policy of trying to keep the war away from their territory?

Kobani answered: "We will go into alliance with free Syrian forces that share our objective. We haven't given up our legitimate self-defense, but if forces like Burkan el-Firat [Euphrates Volcano] attached to the Free Syrian Army [FSA] are attacked, we will play our role and help them. If regime forces again attack like they did at Hasakah, we will respond. We already have had several clashes with regime forces at Aleppo."

When reminded that the FSA had lost its effectiveness in the field, and that in addition to IS, organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra, the Army of Islam and Ahrar al-Sham were becoming prominent, Kobani said: "We are talking of cooperation with forces that accept the model we created. The organizations you listed are actually fraternal brothers of IS. Partnership with them is not possible. We had made an agreement with them when Serekaniye was attacked but they immediately exploited this agreement and tried to dominate the region. This is when the YPG expelled them. Our experience shows there can be no agreement with those groups. We are now trying to implement an agreement at Afrin similar to our alliance with Burkan el-Firat."

## NEXT, WASHINGTON VISIT

Kobani said the YPG and YPJ will be having other meetings in Europe and that an expanded PYD delegation, including Asya Abdullah, is planning to visit Washington. The United States had earlier denied a visa to Muslim, reportedly because some of his statements had disturbed Washington. But PYD sources said the United States has already issued a visa to PYD Europe representative Sinem Muhammed, and they are now expecting visas for the other members of the delegation.





European countries are closely following the model that is now operational at Rojava. Former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and Gregor Gysi, a leader of the German party The Left, visited the Jazeera canton in November 2014. Around the same time, a delegation of the European Parliament also visited the area. There is definitely a growing interest in Rojava after the defeat of IS at Kobani.

#### WISHED ERDOGAN HAD DONE IT BEFORE HOLLANDE

In contrast with the spectacular interest France showed the Rojava actors, the Turkish government stuck to its policy of discrediting the Kobani resistance. The negative language used by Erdogan, who branded the PYD as a terror organization and equated it with IS, is now reflected in official statements from other Turkish bodies, led by the Turkish armed forces.

Zuhat Kobani, referring to Turkey's supportive position of IS against the Kurdish resistance while there is growing European support for the Kurds, said: "The reception accorded to our delegation in their traditional costumes and military uniform at the Elysee Palace was an open message of the acceptance of the PYD, YPG and YPJ. We wish that Erdogan had done this before Hollande and had received the Kurds. As a neighbor, that is what we expected from Turkey. We hope

Turkey will learn a lesson now."

The photos from the Elysee Palace were yet more signs of how deep Turkey's regional isolation has become. Ankara was in harmony with France when cracks appeared in Turkey's relations with the United States about Syria after 2013. A few hours after US President Barack Obama listened to Erdogan's objections, US military planes delivered weapons to Kobani and the bombing campaign against IS began as the unmistakable harbinger of the new Middle East policy of Washington "despite Ankara." Hollande's gesture to the Kurds will expedite the process of the legitimization of the Kurds. There are no signs that Erdogan and his team are going to reverse their policy of trying to eliminate the Rojava actors. Only recently, the Turkish Foreign Ministry reaffirmed its position that the PYD is a terrorist organization. ♦

*Fehim Taştekin is a columnist and chief editor of foreign news at the Turkish newspaper Radikal, based in Istanbul. He is the host of a fortnightly program called "Dogu Divani" on IMC TV. He is an analyst specializing in Turkish foreign policy and Caucasus, Middle East and EU affairs. He was founding editor of Agency Caucasus.*

## The Kurdistan Region of Iraq Needs an Estimated US\$1.4 billion this Year to Stabilize the Economy

<http://www.worldbank.org>

**ERBIL, February 12, 2015** – The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is facing an economic and humanitarian crisis as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees (starting in early 2012) and more recently the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in 2014. According to a newly completed KRG – World Bank report, economic growth contracted 5 percentage points in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and poverty rate more than double increasing from 3.5 percent to 8.1 percent.

The report, Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS Crisis, provides national and regional policy makers with a technical assessment of the impact and stabilization costs needed for 2015, associated with the influx of refugees and IDPs. The stabilization cost for 2015 is estimated at US\$1.4 billion in additional spending above and beyond the KRG budget. This estimate could get much higher depending on how long the crisis persists. While the KRG has been responsive to addressing the needs of the displaced population up till now, more resources are needed to avert this humanitarian crisis and address the needs of the displaced population in the medium and long-term. Impact refers to the immediate economic

and fiscal effects on the KRG economy and budget, while stabilization cost refers to the additional spending that would be needed to restore the welfare of residents of the KRI.

"The international community remains deeply concerned by the circumstances facing the refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," said Robert Bou Jaoude, World Bank Special Representative for Iraq. "We hope that this assessment will support the KRG's dialogue with its national and international counterparts and that a swift resolution to this problem will be identified."

The study highlights how prices and unemployment have increased, and refugees and IDPs entering the labor market are pushing wages down. A surge in violence led to supply side shocks. The ISIS crisis has had a significant effect on trade of goods and services. Transportation routes were disrupted. Foreign direct investment flows have declined and operations of foreign enterprises have been adversely affected. Disruption of public investment projects have had a negative impact on the economy.

"As a result of the Syrian conflict and the ISIS crisis, KRI's population increased by 28 percent placing strains on the local economy, host community, and access to

public services. We accepted and treated them as our own by providing access to all public services in our region," said Dr. Ali Sindi, KRG Minister of Planning. "While our government has allocated significant resources through the Immediate Response Plan to accommodate the needs of the displaced population, it cannot address this big scale humanitarian crisis on its own. Greater support from the national and international partners will be needed to rise above this humanitarian crisis and meet the needs of the displaced."

The report is an outcome of close collaboration between a wide spectrum of World Bank experts and regional government institutions and international partners. "A national and international response is needed in the immediate future and in the medium-term there is a need for structural reforms," said Sibel Kulaksiz, World Bank Senior Economist and Project Leader. "The authorities have already recognized the need for economic reforms and the diversification of the economy. Indeed, one of the main pillars of the KRG Vision is the development of a diversified economy driven by the private sector." ●

AFP

## les Kurdes ont repris du terrain à l'EI près de Mossoul (armée américaine)

Washington, 9 février 2015 (AFP)

**LES COMBATTANTS KURDES soutenus par la coalition internationale conduite par les Etats-Unis qui lutte contre le groupe Etat islamique ont repris du terrain aux jihadistes dans le nord de l'Irak, près de la ville stratégique de Mossoul, a affirmé lundi l'armée américaine.**

Mossoul est considérée comme une ville cruciale pour une éventuelle contre-offensive des soldats irakiens et des combattants kurdes, les peshmergas, visant à repousser les jihadistes de l'EI qui contrôlent de vastes pans de territoires en Irak et en Syrie.

"Les forces de sécurité de la région kurde se sont emparées de trois postes avancés sur la rive gauche du Tigre au nord de Mossoul, dans des zones qui

étaient auparavant contrôlées par Daech", acronyme arabe pour l'EI, a précisé dans un communiqué le commandement américain interarmées qui dirige les raids contre l'EI (CJTJF-OIR).

L'assaut kurde a été soutenu par quatre raids "précis et efficaces" de la coalition entre vendredi et dimanche, a-t-il ajouté. Des conseillers militaires de la coalition ont aussi fourni aux Kurdes "une aide en matière de renseignements".

"Les peshmergas contrôlent maintenant les positions qu'ils ont reprises et sont prêts à reprendre encore du terrain à Daech dans les environs de Mossoul", note le commandement interarmées.

Les forces irakiennes vont mener dans "les semaines à venir" une offensive terrestre contre les jihadistes de l'EI avec l'appui de la coalition, a annoncé dimanche le coordinateur américain de la coalition contre l'EI, le général à la retraite John Allen, lors d'un déplacement à Amman.

A la date de dimanche, la coalition avait mené 2.341 raids en Irak et en Syrie depuis le 8 août, dont une très large majorité (1.890) opérée par des avions américains, selon le Pentagone. ●

AFP

## Turquie: la menace Gülen plus grave que celle du PKK, selon Erdogan

Ankara, 10 février 2015 (AFP)

**LE MOUVEMENT de l'imam Fethullah Gülen constitue une menace plus grave pour la sécurité de la Turquie que les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a estimé le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan cité mardi par les médias.**

"Aujourd'hui, sur le plan international, même l'organisation terroriste PKK n'a pas provoqué autant de dégâts pour la Turquie que la +structure parallèle+" de Gülen, a indiqué M. Erdogan à des journalistes qui l'accompagnent en visite officielle en Colombie.

En autres griefs, le chef de l'Etat a reproché à son ex-allié Gülen d'avoir consti-

tué un réseau de "relations sales" avec la communauté internationale dans le seul but de calomnier le gouvernement islamo-conservateur à la barre de la Turquie depuis 2002.

Constitué d'une galaxie d'écoles, ONG, médias ou entreprises, le mouvement de l'imam Gülen, qui vit aux Etats-Unis depuis 1999, a soutenu à bout de bras le régime de M. Erdogan contre l'armée et l'élite laïque du pays.

Mais l'homme fort du pays lui a déclaré la guerre totale il y a an à la faveur d'un scandale de corruption sans précédent qui a éclaboussé tout son entourage.

M. Erdogan reproche à M. Gülen d'avoir fabriqué de toutes pièces ces accusations pour lui nuire et d'avoir bâti un "Etat parallèle" destiné à le renverser. Il a répliqué en ordonnant des purges massives et des enquêtes contre tous les proches de l'organisation guléniste.

Le PKK constitue depuis des décennies l'ennemi numéro un des autorités turques. Cette rébellion a fait quelque 40.000 tués depuis 1984 dans le pays.

Depuis l'automne 2012, le gouvernement de M. Erdogan a engagé des pourparlers de paix avec le chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, qui n'ont pour l'heure pas abouti. ●

i24

15 février 2015

## Syrie: les forces kurdes ont repris 163 villages autour de Kobané

www.i24news.tv (avec AFP)  
15 Février 2015

**Des pilotes revenus de Syrie racontent les offensives de la coalition contre les djihadistes de l'EI**

Les forces armées kurdes, appuyées par les raids aériens de la coalition sous commandement américain, ont repris au cours des trois dernières semaines le contrôle de 163 villages autour de la ville syrienne de Kobané. L'information émane samedi de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

Selon cette source, les peshmergas kurdes ont repris le contrôle de nombreuses localités depuis leur victoire fin janvier pour le contrôle de Kobané, ville située à la frontière avec la Turquie.

Leur avancée a toutefois été ralentie par de nouveaux heurts à l'ouest et au sud-ouest de Kobané où le groupe Etat islamique (EI) a concentré des combattants.

La libération de Kobané est intervenue le 26 janvier dernier grâce au soutien des peshmergas kurdes venus d'Irak ainsi qu'aux bombardements quasiment quotidiens des pays alliés.

Les Kurdes ont également pu compter sur la participation d'autres rebelles syriens qui se sont joints aux combats dans cette zone stratégique, précise encore l'OSDH. Ces rebelles appartenaient à la brigade Chams al Chamal, à la brigade des révolutionnaires de Rakka et à des groupes opposés à l'EI venus du nord de la Syrie.

**"Faire Winchester"**

Les pilotes américains appellent cela "faire Winchester": larguer toutes ses bombes en une mission. Ce n'était pas rare à Kobané en Syrie, ont raconté à l'AFP les pilotes de bombardiers B-1B engagés contre le groupe de l'Etat islamique.

Les bombardements intenses, inédits depuis l'offensive américaine en Irak en 2003, ont aidé les forces kurdes à reprendre la ville frontalière avec la Turquie, que les djihadistes étaient presque parvenus à con-



*Kobané après sa reconquête par les Kurdes sur le groupe Etat islamique le 30 janvier 2015 BULENT KILIC / AFP*

trôler en octobre.

"Quand on partait pour Kobané, on pouvait être quasiment certain de larguer une bombe", a expliqué le capitaine Todd Saks, un officier d'armement de B-1B de 31 ans, interrogé depuis la base aérienne de Dyess (Texas) après son retour de six mois de mission au-dessus de l'Irak et de la Syrie.

"Personnellement j'ai fait Winchester trois fois", renchérit le major Brandon Miller, un pilote de 38 ans à qui cela n'était jamais arrivé lors de ses missions précédentes.

Lors des déploiements au-dessus de l'Afghanistan, l'escadron de Saks et Miller, le 9ème escadron de bombardiers, larguait en moyenne 15 à 20 bombes en six mois. Mais à Kobané, les avions ont largué plus de 2.000 bombes, et touché plus de 1.700 cibles. ■

# En Turquie, Erdogan veut un Parlement aux ordres

Le président turc espère obtenir une majorité des deux tiers aux législatives de juin pour modifier la Constitution

ISTANBUL - correspondante

**A** quatre mois d'une échéance électorale cruciale, les islamo-conservateurs du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) sont sur la brèche. Les législatives du 7 juin constituent un temps fort pour le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui les perçoit comme un moyen de consolider encore son pouvoir.

Si l'AKP obtient la majorité requise au Parlement, soit 367 députés sur 550 (contre 320 actuellement), il lui sera possible d'amender la Constitution dans le sens d'un renforcement des prérogatives du chef de l'Etat. Ce dernier place la barre très haut : « Le 7 juin, il nous faut 400 députés pour passer au système présidentiel et faire émerger la nouvelle Turquie », a-t-il déclaré, le 6 février.

Mardi 10 février, soit la date butoir donnée aux hauts fonctionnaires pour démissionner et se porter candidats, des centaines de personnes se sont déclarées. A tel point que le premier ministre, Ahmet Davutoglu, s'est interrogé : « Mais qui va diriger l'Etat si tous démissionnent ? » Quatre conseillers du premier ministre ainsi que son médecin personnel, Celil Göcer, sont candidats. Deux anciens ministres et députés de l'AKP – Muammer Güler, ex-ministre de l'intérieur, et Zafer Çağlayan, ex-ministre de l'économie –, sortis blanchis in extremis d'un récent scandale de corruption, briguent chacun un nouveau mandat.

Hakan Fidan, le chef des services de renseignements turcs (MIT), a été l'un des premiers à se lancer dans la bataille en démissionnant de son poste le 7 février. Sa candidature a semblé plonger M. Erdogan dans l'embarras. « J'avais nommé à la direction du MIT une personne extrêmement fiable, quelqu'un que je considère comme

ma boîte à secrets (...), lui trouver un remplaçant est décisif quand on sait tout ce que nous avons souffert dans la lutte contre la structure parallèle », a-t-il expliqué aux journalistes de *Hürriyet* dans l'avion qui le menait à Bogota (Colombie), dans le cadre d'une tournée sud-américaine commencée lundi 10 février. La périphrase est le qualificatif en usage pour désigner la confrérie de son ancien allié, le prédicateur Fethullah Gülen, accusé d'avoir comploté pour le renverser.

Nommé il y a cinq ans à la tête des services, Hakan Fidan, 47 ans, fait partie du premier cercle des fidèles du président. Réputé d'une loyauté sans failles envers son patron, il a mené les pourparlers de paix avec Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste, interdit) emprisonné depuis 1999 dans l'ilot-prison d'Imrali. Le dévouement et la discrétion de M. Fidan sont fort

**« Le 7 juin, il nous faut 400 députés pour faire émerger la nouvelle Turquie »**

**RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN**  
président de la Turquie

appréciés dans la lutte contre le guide de la Confrérie Gülen, « plus dangereux que le PKK », a estimé M. Erdogan qui vient de lui faire retirer son passeport.

**La partie n'est pas gagnée**

Il est aussi l'artisan de la politique controversée d'aide aux djihadistes du Front Al-Nosra et de l'Etat islamique en Syrie. Ses services ont connu quelques déboires, notamment lorsque le 19 jan-

vier 2014, des gendarmes turcs ont intercepté dans la région d'Adana, non loin de la frontière syrienne, des camions chargés d'armes destinées aux rebelles syriens sous escorte du MIT. Depuis, l'affaire a été étouffée.

A l'heure où les affaires – scandale de corruption, reprise en main de l'appareil judiciaire, harcèlement des journalistes, fragilité de l'économie – érodent la popularité des islamo-conservateurs au pouvoir depuis 2002, les législatives auront valeur de test pour le président Erdogan. La partie est loin d'être gagnée à en croire un sondage récent de l'institut d'enquêtes Gezici Arastirma, selon lequel l'AKP obtiendrait moins que le score (54 %) réalisé lors du scrutin de 2011.

Mettant en garde contre la polarisation croissante des forces politiques, le vice-premier ministre Bülent Arinc dit craindre que le pays ne devienne « ingouvernable ». « Avant, nous étions aimés, même nos opposants nous respectaient, maintenant, je vois de la haine dans leurs regards », a-t-il déploré sur la chaîne de télévision CNN Turk. « Nous devrions nous adoucir plutôt que de crier », a suggéré ce vieux briscard de l'AKP, tellement indisposé par les sonorités vocales qu'il a récemment enjoint les femmes à s'abstenir de rire trop fort en public.

Comment redresser la barre ? Le parti, qui ne tolère que trois mandats consécutifs selon son règlement interne, va miser sur l'apparition de nouvelles têtes. Parmi les candidatures attendues, celle de la fille cadette du président, Sümeyye Erdogan, 30 ans, conseillère particulière de son père jusqu'à l'élection de celui-ci à la présidentielle d'août 2014. L'AKP, qui compte le plus grand nombre de députées (44 sur 77), ambitionne d'en avoir 60 après le 7 juin. ■

MARIE JÉGO

Le Monde

13 FÉVRIER 2015

# Les négociations sur le nucléaire iranien piétinent

Téhéran et Washington s'accusent mutuellement de manquer de volonté politique pour parvenir à un accord

**A**lors que les négociations sur le programme nucléaire iranien sont entrées dans une phase critique à l'approche de la date butoir du 31 mars pour parvenir à un accord politique, aucun compromis n'est en vue. Au contraire, le ton monte entre l'Iran et les Etats-Unis, les deux pays qui pilotent ces pourparlers, menés dans le cadre du « P5 + 1 », regroupant les cinq membres du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, plus l'Allemagne.

Le président iranien, Hassan Rohani, a prononcé un discours combatif, mercredi 11 février, à Téhéran, à l'occasion du traditionnel défilé militaire célébrant l'anniversaire de la révolution islamique de 1979. Il a dénoncé les sanctions « injustes, inhumaines et illégales » imposées à l'Iran et a souligné que tout accord devrait préserver « la grandeur et le progrès de la nation ».

**Hassan Rohani a dénoncé les sanctions « injustes, inhumaines et illégales » imposées à l'Iran**

La formule vise à rappeler que l'Iran n'envisage pas de consentir à d'importantes réductions de ses capacités nucléaires, réclamées par les Occidentaux, en échange d'une levée progressive des sanctions internationales en vigueur depuis 2006. Entre les lignes, le président iranien réitère sa demande d'une levée totale et immédiate des sanctions en cas d'accord, ce qui constitue l'un des principaux points de contentieux avec les Occidentaux.

## L'heure des choix

Présent au défilé, le ministre des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif, qui dirige les négociations nucléaires, a abondé dans le même sens et accusé les grandes puissances d'être à l'origine des blocages. « Si elles en ont la volonté, nous pouvons conclure un accord dès aujourd'hui, a-t-il affirmé. Sinon, les négociations n'aboutiront pas, même dans dix ans. »

Ces interventions semblaient avant tout destinées à répondre aux propos tenus, lundi 9 février, par le président américain, Barack Obama, en pleine épreuve de force avec le nouveau Congrès à dominante républicaine, qui menace de voter de nouvelles sanctions contre l'Iran. Alors que les pourparlers ont déjà été prorogés à deux reprises depuis la signature d'un accord intérimaire, en novembre 2013, initialement conçu pour durer un an, M. Obama a prévenu que l'heure des choix était venue. « Je ne vois pas l'utilité d'une nouvelle prolongation » au-delà du 31 mars, a-t-il affirmé. « Les



**Le Guide suprême iranien, Ali Khamenei, a dit préférer un échec des négociations sur le programme nucléaire à un « mauvais accord », dimanche 8 février, à Téhéran. AP**

problèmes ne sont plus techniques, a insisté M. Obama. Les problèmes sont maintenant de savoir si l'Iran a la volonté politique et le désir de conclure un accord. »

Depuis le temps que durent ces discussions, dont les prémices remontent à 2003, tous les paramètres sont connus. « On a regardé dans tous les coins et les scénarios ont tous été passés au crible », insiste une source diplomatique. Or, malgré la multiplication des rencontres depuis le début de l'année entre les délégations à Paris, Istanbul, Zurich et Munich, c'est le « statu quo », estime un proche du dossier. « Les Iraniens, dit-il, demandent des concessions considérables sur les sanctions en échange de gestes symboliques sur leur capacité d'enrichissement d'uranium. » Une référence aux 20 000 centrifugeuses iraniennes, dont près de la moitié sont en activité, et qui peuvent servir à fabriquer de l'uranium de qualité militaire pour une bombe atomique.

Les Occidentaux ont toujours affirmé que l'Iran n'a pas besoin d'un parc aussi élevé, car le combustible pour son unique centrale civile, à Bouchehr, est fourni par la Russie. Les Iraniens, de leur côté, soulignent qu'ils doivent développer leurs infrastructures pour acquérir, à terme, une indé-

pendance énergétique.

Les pistes d'un compromis sont néanmoins évoquées depuis plusieurs semaines. Selon des diplomates américains, cités de façon anonyme, début février, par l'agence Associated Press, l'Iran pourrait, peu ou prou, conserver son nombre de centrifugeuses, en échange d'une réduction significative de son stock d'uranium déjà enrichi, qui serait exporté en Russie et transformé de telle sorte qu'il ne puisse être utilisé rapidement à des fins militaires. De plus, la configuration des centrifugeuses existantes serait modifiée pour les rendre moins performantes.

L'opération vise à obtenir des garanties sur le « breakout », à savoir le temps nécessaire aux Iraniens pour assembler une arme nucléaire. Pour le moment, ce délai est d'environ trois mois, selon les Occidentaux. Ils veulent qu'il soit « au moins supérieur à un an », d'après un proche du dossier.

D'autres paramètres, tels que la durée de l'accord, un régime d'inspections renforcées et la transparence sur les activités passées du programme nucléaire, sont à prendre en compte pour assembler ce puzzle d'une complexité inouïe. Le sprint final est enclenché. ■

YVES-MICHEL RIOIS

## LES DATES

### 24 NOVEMBRE 2013

L'Iran et les pays du « P5 + 1 » signent à Genève un accord intérimaire d'un an. L'Iran accepte de geler son programme nucléaire, en échange d'une levée partielle des sanctions.

### 19 JUILLET 2014

Les pourparlers sont prolongés jusqu'au 24 novembre, au terme d'une semaine de négociations tendues à Vienne.

### 24 NOVEMBRE 2014

Le calendrier est repoussé de sept mois. L'objectif est désormais de parvenir à un accord politique sur les questions à résoudre d'ici au 31 mars 2015, puis de finaliser les détails dans des annexes techniques avant le 30 juin.

# Barzani: The region's new borders will be drawn in blood

**Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani speaks about the current conflict with the Islamic State, relations with Baghdad and his predictions on what's next.**



Author Ghassan Charbel / Al-Hayat  
Translator Tyler Huffman  
February 15, 2015  
www.al-monitor.com



*President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Massoud Barzani is also the commander-in-chief of the peshmerga. Because he considers the war with the Islamic State (IS) an existential battle, Barzani spends most of his time on the front line, meeting with leaders of various units and making surprise visits to stations. In the operations room near the long border with the area IS controls, Barzani met with Al-Hayat. We asked him to tell the story of this war, which he acknowledges is tougher than the previous confrontation with Saddam Hussein's army. Here is the first part of the interview:*

**Al-Hayat:** On June 13, 2014, you cut short a trip abroad and returned to Erbil. How did you find the Kurdistan Region three days after IS had entered Mosul?

**Barzani:** I found the Kurdistan Region in a new and sensitive situation. The region now had a 1,050-kilometer [652-mile] border with a new neighbor, IS. Unfortunately, when IS entered Mosul the army of [former Prime Minister Nouri] al-Maliki collapsed. In the span of 24 hours, IS reached the outskirts of Baghdad and headed east to near the Iranian border. It's a new and dangerous situation.

When IS targeted the Kurdistan Region, taking advantage of the weapons they plundered from the Iraqi and Syrian armies, they made some breakthroughs and progress. We adopted a two-stage strategy: first resisting IS attacks, and second going on the offensive against them. In less than two weeks we were able to contain IS attacks and stop the group. We then transitioned to the attack stage, and the first thing we did was recover the Mosul Dam, which constitutes a strategic goal. Subsequently there was a succession of battles and victories, bringing us to where we are now. I can say that the peshmerga forces managed to break the "thorn" of IS and achieve great victories.

**Al-Hayat:** How many victims were there from the peshmerga?

**Barzani:** About 800 martyrs, including 300 commissioned and non-commissioned officers. This is in addition to 4,000 wounded.

**Al-Hayat:** Were a large number of senior leaders martyred?

**Barzani:** Our leaders are at the front of the forces. Two major generals and 10 brigadier generals were martyred, in addition to colonels, lieutenant colonels, staff sergeants and others.

**Al-Hayat:** How do you feel when you hear that a major general, brigadier general or lieutenant has been killed?

**Barzani:** These are the dearest to my heart. In a number of instances, I had met with one in the morning and then learned of his martyrdom that evening. I know a large number of them. Some of them are themselves the son or grandson of a martyr. Even a drop of blood spilt is painful.

**Al-Hayat:** What have been the most important battles fought by the peshmerga so far?

**Barzani:** The battle to recover the Mosul Dam, the battle of Makhmour, the battle for the Rabia border crossing, the battle to liberate Zammar, the battle to liberate Mount Sinjar, the battle south of the Mosul Dam, the bat-

tle of the Kasak Junction between Mosul and Tel Afar, the battle to liberate Jalawla and Saadia, and the battle of Tel Warad southwest of Kirkuk. These were intense battles.

**Al-Hayat:** Did the peshmerga fight by itself?

**Barzani:** Yes, but with air support from the coalition forces. The airstrikes were effective and very precise.

**Al-Hayat:** How much has this war cost financially?

**Barzani:** The war is very expensive, exceeding the capacity of the [Kurdistan] Regional Government (KRG). But the Kurdish people did their duty and bear the burden of the crime committed by Maliki when he cut off the KRG's budget. [The people] are bearing the burden of this malicious plot, and both the wealthy and the poor have taken the initiative to provide support, each according to his or her ability. Some wealthy individuals took it upon themselves to provide food for military units at their own expense.

**Al-Hayat:** How many peshmerga members are involved in the confrontation with IS?

**Barzani:** The border with [the region controlled by] IS stretches 1,050 kilometers [652 miles] from Sinjar to Khanaqin. The forces involved in the fighting from our side number about 70,000. This is a long border, and thus sometimes there are unannounced operations, especially given the absence of quick and advanced capabilities to transport troops.

**Al-Hayat:** Did those who provided weapons have an impact on the course of the battles?

**Barzani:** I must thank all the countries that have provided assistance. Indeed, US air support was significant. French President [Francois] Hollande called [me] immediately and expressed France's readiness [to provide support]. The German chancellor contacted [us], as did Britain's prime minister and foreign ministers from a large number of countries.

I must point out that there has been air support from the French, British, Canadians, Dutch and Belgians. The French provided excellent machine guns. The Germans provided MILAN missiles, as well as another less anti-armor type. German arms contributed to thwarting a number of car bomb attacks. The MILAN missiles have proven to be very effective. We also received assistance in the form of ammunition manufactured in Eastern Europe. Many states supported us, such as Canada, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia and Albania. Indeed there has been support, and the most prominent was the French machine guns, the German missiles and other less sophisticated missiles.

**Al-Hayat:** Did you receive heavy weapons?

**Barzani:** We have yet to receive heavy weapons, which would allow us to resolve the entire battle. The peshmerga forces are confident, and if they had received the weapons they needed they wouldn't have ➔

➔ hesitated. IS has not resisted any large-scale attack by the peshmerga, but the group has resorted to surprise operations, car bombs and suicide attacks. Seventy percent of our losses were the result of car bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

**AI-Hayat: Is IS skilled in these forms of attack?**

**Barzani:** Yes.

**AI-Hayat: Where did they get this experience?**

**Barzani:** They have experts from various countries of the world. They have attracted retired officers from the former Soviet Union army from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Chechnya, as well as Tartars. They have members from Pakistan, in addition to a large number of officers from the Iraqi army. There are officers from Arab armies who joined IS. They have experts on using sniper rifles as well.

**AI-Hayat: What is IS' strong point?**

**Barzani:** Car bombs driven by suicide bombers, IEDs and snipers. They are also proficient in the use of artillery due to the presence of professional officers in the group.

**AI-Hayat: A rush of those eager to "go to paradise"?**

**Barzani:** This is how they think and behave. IS has a so-called "caliphate army" comprising foreign immigrants, and they fight with viciousness. I think the majority of them are from Chechnya, as well as other [places]. The bodies they leave [in the wake of battles] show the presence of multiple nationalities [among their ranks]. I also saw bodies of Africans. Their members are from Asia, Europe and Africa. They have another fighting entity comprising those who were members of al-Qaeda. After [IS] took control of various areas, those who wanted to protect themselves from IS' evils joined the group.

**AI-Hayat: How many people are estimated to be fighting under the IS flag?**

**Barzani:** About 50,000 in Iraq and Syria combined.

**AI-Hayat: Is this a large army?**

**Barzani:** Of course.

**AI-Hayat: What about their military arsenal?**

**Barzani:** They have looted weapons from the Iraqi and Syrian armies. They seized the strategic storehouses in Beiji, and it could take them two years to complete the transfer of their contents. They also obtained Syrian army weapons in Raqqa and elsewhere. IS captured about 1,700 armored US-made Humvees, which are resistant to gunfire from Kalashnikovs and PKC [machine guns]. These are armored vehicles that protect occupants. But they are not in a state of retreat.

**AI-Hayat: Was the Iraqi Kurdistan Region facing an existential threat?**

**Barzani:** Certainly. It was a very serious threat.

**AI-Hayat: Iran was the first to send you ammunition. Who did you meet with from the Iranian side?**

**Barzani:** I received the foreign minister and a delegation from the Iranian parliament.

**AI-Hayat: Was Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force, the first person you received?**

**Barzani:** He confirmed Iran's readiness to provide support, which arrived via two planes at Erbil.

**AI-Hayat: Is [Iran] continuing to send ammunition?**

**Barzani:** From time to time.

**AI-Hayat: What other parties have supported you? The Americans?**

**Barzani:** Yes. Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry and Commander of United States Central Command Gen. Lloyd Austin contacted me. They expressed US readiness to provide air support, which they did and it had a big impact.

**AI-Hayat: Has the air support caused you human casualties, or did it allow you to avoid losing the battle?**

**Barzani:** There is no doubt that, without the air support, the battle would have been more difficult and the losses greater.

**AI-Hayat: If the peshmerga forces stopped in their current positions, would you considered yourselves to have won the war?**

**Barzani:** We do not place limits on where we strike IS. If we can strike them in any location, we will do so. They are criminals and monsters who have committed unforgivable crimes. Our troops have now reached the

borders of the Kurdistan Region. The next steps depend on the readiness of the Iraqi army and residents of these regions to cooperate with us — and we are ready. For our forces to advance from their current positions requires study and thought.

**AI-Hayat: Has Russia provided you any assistance?**

**Barzani:** I think they have just sent a plane of humanitarian aid. I met with [Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikhail] Bogdanov about a week ago and he expressed his sympathy and willingness to cooperate, but he didn't offer anything specific.

**AI-Hayat: There is talk about complications in the Russian arms deal with Baghdad.**

**Barzani:** Yes, because of Western sanctions on Russia.

**AI-Hayat: If I asked you, "What is IS," how would you respond?**

**Barzani:** IS is an extremist organization that brings together religious and nationalist fanaticism. It is a combination of extremist jihadist thought and the chauvinism of some Arabs. The coming together of these two elements produced this organization, with its backwards, violent and dangerous ideology and its cruel and offensive practices. Here I'm talking about the essence of IS. As for penetrating the organization, or using or impacting its practices, these are other issues.

**AI-Hayat: Could the [Kurdistan] Region coexist with a permanent IS presence on its borders?**

**Barzani:** This would be very difficult, even impossible. No one could coexist with these people, who can be considered monsters. This is not to mention that they don't even believe in the idea of coexisting with others.

**AI-Hayat: What is the role of the Baathists in IS' mission?**

**Barzani:** In the beginning, those who stood against the political process in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein [supported] IS. Now, I think that IS is dominant in Sunni areas and the role of Baathists and their ilk has receded.

**AI-Hayat: Are there a large number of former Iraqi officers in IS?**

**Barzani:** Yes, a very large number. They are currently in charge of leading IS military units.

**AI-Hayat: Is this the reason that IS is able to enter into simultaneous battles in regions separated by hundreds of kilometers?**

**Barzani:** IS is strong and dangerous. It has limitless fanaticism, experience, money and violence. It also has a number of people who are willing to commit suicide. It is a great honor for the Kurds that IS has been militarily shattered at their hands.

**AI-Hayat: Can you say it has been shattered?**

**Barzani:** I can almost say "yes." It is about to shatter.

**AI-Hayat: What is the level of coordination between you and the Iraqi army?**

**Barzani:** Now, after Haider al-Abadi became prime minister, there is more room for coordination. And this exists currently.

**AI-Hayat: Do Iraqi warplanes support the peshmerga?**

**Barzani:** In fact, [support] is still weak, but there is coordination between us. We know the situation of the Iraqi army, and if it improves the coordination will produce good results. We are ready to cooperate.

**AI-Hayat: There are those who say that the war against IS will take years.**

**Barzani:** This is difficult to predict. Also, confronting IS is not limited to the military part. The confrontation should take place on several fronts: militarily, economically, socially, politically and ideologically. Moreover, IS is not only present in Iraq, it also has a presence in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Lebanon. IS has almost taken the place of al-Qaeda.

**AI-Hayat: How does IS attract youths from Mosul, for example?**

**Barzani:** I think there are several factors. They deceive the youth and promise them paradise and virgins. Then there are also the effects of the sectarian conflict, which pushes some youths to consider IS as a source of strength and a savior. There are a lot of [Arab] chauvinists who feel empowered by IS against the Kurds and are under the delusion that the organization has dominated the Kurds and is forcing them to return to the mountains, thereby ending the issue of Article 140 [of the Iraqi Constitution] that talks about a mechanism for resolving the problem of the "disputed areas," as they are commonly called. Perhaps in Syria, Egypt and Libya there are other factors relating to the political situation and the composition of ➔

➔ these countries.

**Al-Hayat: Do you have prisoners from IS?**

**Barzani:** Yes.

**Al-Hayat: Did you obtain information about the organization from them?**

**Barzani:** Of course. Some cooperate, while others won't utter a word.

**Al-Hayat: Some are cooperating?**

**Barzani:** Yes, some are providing good information.

**Al-Hayat: Have you uncovered sleeper cells in Kurdistan?**

**Barzani:** I can't say that IS does not exist at all, but it is certain that the existing cells are small and limited. Establishing fixed and permanent bases is very difficult. There may be some infiltration, but this has become more difficult with the changing fronts. There are certainly sleeper cells in Kirkuk, which was the site of forced Arabization operations. Unfortunately, there are those who initially rejoiced at IS' victories, forgetting that they came to the Kurdistan Region as guests and enjoy security and services.

**Al-Hayat: Do you rely on a Kurdish consensus on the fight against IS?**

**Barzani:** Yes, there is a consensus on this matter. There is an unprecedented national unity. Kurds are united against this danger.

**Al-Hayat: Is the fight against IS harder than the fight against Saddam Hussein's forces?**

**Barzani:** Yes, it is. We are now an organized force confronting unorganized groups. Also, the battle [against IS] involves different methods. We held courses for young engineering specialists in order to be able to confront car bombings and mines. We have made clear progress in this context. I repeat: IS is not a "legend" that is unbeatable. The peshmerga have struck down this image, which was prevalent.

#### POST SYKES-PICOT

**Al-Hayat: We frequently hear that the Sykes-Picot borders are a thing of the past. What is your opinion?**

**Barzani:** The fact is the Sykes-Picot borders were always artificial.

**Al-Hayat: The Baathists were saying this, too.**

**Barzani:** Each side speaks based on its rationale and interests. But these borders are truly artificial and not natural. Any forced division cannot last indefinitely. The new borders in the region are those drawn in blood, rather than the Sykes-Picot borders.

**Al-Hayat: Do you mean there is no going back to the former Iraq?**

**Barzani:** A new Iraq must be formulated. The former Iraq failed. Kurdistan has transformed into a safe haven for other components of society, including Christians, Turkmens and Arabs who reject the policies of IS and its cohorts. If a referendum were held, perhaps some residents living outside of the [Kurdistan] Region would request to be part of it. The Kurdistan Region today is hosting 1.5 million displaced Iraqis. This is in addition to 250,000 displaced Syrians.

**Al-Hayat: How would you describe relations between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq?**

**Barzani:** Unfortunately [they are not good]. We wish that they were good, and if we could help improve them we would not hesitate. If you want the truth, relations between the Shiite and Sunni components are bad.

**Al-Hayat: What does the US want from Iraq?**

**Barzani:** I wish I had an answer to this question, and I hope to find the person who has the answer.

**Al-Hayat: What does Iran want?**

**Barzani:** Iran wants to have the greatest influence in Iraq, and I think that's what is happening now.

**Al-Hayat: What does Turkey want?**

**Barzani:** Turkey also wants to have influence in Iraq. Yet Iran has acted more accurately and faster.

**Al-Hayat: Have any Arab countries provided you with assistance?**

**Barzani:** Yes, some have, and I would like to thank these countries. I won't specify names, because perhaps they don't want that.

**Al-Hayat: Was what happened in Mosul truly a surprise?**

**Barzani:** Sometime before IS entered Mosul, we received information that extremists were establishing bases in al-Khudr, a region southwest of Mosul near the Syrian border. I sent messages to Maliki via Ammar al-Hakim, [current Deputy Prime Minister] Rowsch Shaways, and the US ambassador at the time, Stephen Beecroft. I told them: "Tell [Maliki] that he is preoccupied with Anbar and uninterested in Mosul, which has become an open arena." I suggested that we carry out a joint operation to prevent extremists from gaining control of Mosul and its environs.

**Al-Hayat: When was this**

**Barzani:** In December 2013, seven months before Mosul fell into the hands of IS. Maliki was unconcerned. I contacted him by telephone, I think in early 2014, and said: "My brother, the situation is very dangerous in Mosul, let's carry out a joint operation. I can't send the peshmerga alone, because this would raise sensitivities between the Kurds and the Arabs. Also, the government forces are present in the area. There is the second division of the Iraqi army, as well as a division from the federal police and others. We are prepared to bear the largest burden, but let's carry out a joint operation." He responded: "My brother, look after the [Kurdistan] Region and don't worry about anything outside it. The situation is under control."

I have heard that Maliki denies these contacts. The [involved] people are alive, you can ask them.

**Al-Hayat: And what happened next?**

**Barzani:** IS expanded. The truth is the organization hadn't even dreamed of gaining control of Mosul, and didn't expect this. Our information indicated that [IS] had contacted guards at Badush Prison [Barzani points to a location on the map 10 kilometers (6 miles) west of Mosul]. They wanted to liberate IS prisoners being held there, and [planned] to engage in fighting with an army base [to distract them] to implement this mission. In the past, skirmishes had occurred ... and Maliki sent the commander of ground forces and the deputy chief of staff for operations, given that they were two prominent officers.

IS launched bombs in the direction of al-Ghazlani military base as a distraction for the operation to liberate prisoners. The two officers sent by Maliki fled and were joined by the commander of the division. This state of fragmentation spread like wildfire and the division dispersed. There was a quasi-alliance in Mosul between the opposition forces and those disgruntled with Maliki's policies, in addition to sleeper cells and the remnants of the Baath Party. The army disintegrated and left the city entirely, so the [IS] operation expanded.

**Al-Hayat: Are you certain that IS wasn't expecting Mosul to fall into its hands?**

**Barzani:** They never imagined this would happen. This is a significant and terrible issue. The army did not resist. Senior officers took refuge at peshmerga checkpoints. We saved them and sent them to Baghdad at their request. There are areas [outside the Kurdistan Region] that we protected, such as south Kirkuk and regions near the Mosul Dam. Some criticized the fact that our forces entered these regions. It's strange — would they have preferred we left them to IS?

There is something strange here. After the fall of Mosul, Maliki and those around him began talking about us being involved in a conspiracy to overthrow Mosul. These lies reached the point of claiming that there was a joint operations room between the peshmerga and IS. [They used] this sea of lies and slander to cover for [their own] scandal. After the city fell they said to us: "Send your forces to the city." We said: "[This request] is too late, I can't contribute to provoking Arab-Kurdish fighting." Had Maliki listened to us at the appropriate time, everything we see now wouldn't have happened. Following what happened, the Kurdish parties met together. We said we would monitor the situation and defend our borders if they were subject [to attack]. Thankfully the situation later changed — there was a new government and an opportunity for coordination.

**Al-Hayat: Why did IS do this?**

**Barzani:** I believe [IS] is being paid to carry out two agendas. First, to curb the Kurdish issue, after it reached a very advanced stage in terms of the issues of a referendum and independence. I want to say that neither IS nor any greater [force] can break the will of the Kurdish people. The process will continue. The second agenda involves Arab chauvinists who tried to strengthen themselves via IS and supported the group on the basis that this would settle the fate of the so-called "disputed areas." But they miscalculated. They didn't expect that US and European support would come so quickly, and they didn't properly estimate the peshmerga and Kurdish ➔

➔ people's ability to remain steadfast.

**Al-Hayat:** When the Kurdish parties said "we are defending our areas," do they mean the "disputed areas" as well?

**Barzani:** We did not allow IS to take control of some areas such as Kirkuk, Tuz Khormato, Zammarr and Sinjar at the time.

**Al-Hayat:** What is the size of the area defended by the peshmerga toda

**Barzani:** More than 60,000 square kilometers [41,631 square miles].

**Al-Hayat:** This is a large area?

**Barzani:** And a rich one as well [laughing].

**Al-Hayat:** Has a role for Izzat al-Duri [a former deputy of Saddam Hussein] appeared in this war?

**Barzani:** In the beginning, the Baathists cooperated with IS in the same way they dealt with other Sunni organizations opposed to the political process. Now, IS completely controls the areas it occupies and I don't think others play any role. IS does not believe in allies or partners. IS wants allegiance [from others].

**Al-Hayat:** Does this mean that the goal of striking the Kurds was a fundamental part of IS' program?

**Barzani:** Yes. The attack targeting the Kurds is large and dangerous.

**Al-Hayat:** Isn't it strange that you have yet to meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi?

**Barzani:** The fact is I am very preoccupied with the situation in Kurdistan, the war and the fronts. I haven't had a chance to visit Baghdad, and [Abadi] is very preoccupied as well. I was hoping there would be a meeting, whether in Baghdad or in Erbil. I hope this happens in the future.

**Al-Hayat:** How did you feel when you saw what happened to the Yazidis? Do you imagine the Kurds could face a similar fate?

**Barzani:** I felt sorry, anger and determination when I saw the scenes. Yazidis are [ethnically] Kurds, only their religion is different. I had not ruled out that IS would kill Kurds, but I never thought that any group — regardless of how brutal and criminal it may be — would enslave women. I never expected this, and this had created a fissure that can never be mended between those who committed these crimes and the Kurds. We will not forgive them and we will not be silent about their crimes.

**Al-Hayat:** Were [these crimes] committed at the hands of militants coming from abroad?

**Barzani:** This was the work of militants from abroad, but local militants at least played the role of guides. They fled from the scene of the crime, but we know who they are. We will carry out random acts of revenge. The accused will appear before the courts, where all conditions of justice are provided. It is impossible for us to forgive anyone who participated in enslaving women and rapes.

**Al-Hayat:** Were [these accounts of] rape real?

**Barzani:** Yes, even worse [than reports].

**Al-Hayat:** And the enslavement of women?

**Barzani:** Yes. Can you imagine that in this day and age, militants enter a village, kill the men, take the women and rape them, and then announce their enslavement. This is terrible. In war, you kill and are killed. You detain and are detained. Let me be frank, we [the Kurds] have been subjected in the past to the Anfal campaigns, chemical weapons and mass graves. All of these crimes were less severe than the issue of enslaving and raping women.

**Al-Hayat:** How did you feel when you learned of this?

**Barzani:** My heart almost exploded.

**Al-Hayat:** What did you decide to do?

**Barzani:** I decided to go to war with IS to the end, and without leniency. The proof is that I met you today on the front line and not in Erbil. It is a battle for destiny. They wanted to eliminate the Kurds.

**Al-Hayat:** Are there Iranian experts in Kurdistan?

**Barzani:** No. We have a number of Western experts and trainers, and officers to coordinate with the air forces.

**Al-Hayat:** What is the most important battle waged by the peshmerga?

**Barzani:** From a moral perspective, the battle of Mount Sinjar. From a military perspective, the battle of al-Kasak.

**Al-Hayat:** Was the battle at al-Kasak difficult?

**Barzani:** Very. IS put up fierce resistance in this area, which lies at the midway point on the road between Mosul and Tel Afar. The peshmerga regained control of this area after fierce battles on three axes: one to the west of the Tigris River, one to the east of the river and the Hassan Jallad axis. The battle ended with cutting the road between Mosul and Tel Afar and liberating the region south of the Mosul Dam to the Tigris. IS used many car bombs and suicide attacks.

**Al-Hayat:** What is the estimated size of the regions liberated by the peshmerga in this war?

**Barzani:** I can't provide you with a very precise figure, but it's about 17,000 square kilometers [10,563 square miles].

**Al-Hayat:** How can you get out of this war?

**Barzani:** By breaking IS' back in the war militarily, politically, economically and ideologically. Look at Afghanistan — large, powerful and advanced armies have been fighting there for 14 years. There is also what happened in Algeria. I don't think [the war against IS] will end quickly, but I can say that IS' open control of fronts will not last long. Yet when it comes to completely eliminating IS, I cannot speculate on this topic.

**Al-Hayat:** If you were given a suitable military force, could you resolve the battle against IS?

**Barzani:** Militarily, if we received advanced heavy weaponry we would resolve the battle militarily very quickly.

**Al-Hayat:** Where can you obtain these weapons?

**Barzani:** From [the Iraqi federal government], via [the federal government], or directly. If the Kurds are expected to play a decisive role in the battle against IS, we must have appropriate weapons.

**Al-Hayat:** What are these weapons?

**Barzani:** Tanks and combat helicopters. Sometimes helicopters are more effective than combat planes in these types of wars. Tanks are also essential, along with armored transport vehicles for soldiers.

**Al-Hayat:** It's unlikely that Baghdad would agree to hand over these types of weapons, especially after you said that borders are drawn in blood.

**Barzani:** Let me clarify the subject of the borders. Let's be realistic, new borders are drawn in blood — sometimes between states and sometimes within states. These are borders for groups, roles, fears, guarantees and aspirations. The crises experienced by most countries are crises of components and identities. Look at what's happening in Yemen and in Syria. Other states are experiencing tribal and regional problems, such as Libya. The equations that have lasted for decades and emerged from World War I have been violently shaken.

I'll return to the question. If the Iraqi government does not agree to provide such weapons, we'll cross the bridge when we come to it. Right now Iraq is lacking capabilities. If the capabilities are provided, then what we agreed upon should be implemented — i.e., the peshmerga gets a share of the military equipment received by Baghdad. We won't accept a repeat of what happened with Maliki, who confiscated our share of weapons and equipment. We won't be silent about this from now on. We must get our share. If Iraq receives 300 tanks, we must take our share of them.

**Al-Hayat:** And if Iraq receives combat helicopters?

**Barzani:** Yes, as long as the peshmerga is part of the Iraqi defense system, it should not be excluded. ♦



# Islamic State spans new territories, raising prospect of wider war on terror

WASHINGTON

## Expansion of the group raises the prospect of a new global war on terror

BY ERIC SCHMITT  
AND DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

The Islamic State is expanding beyond its base in Syria and Iraq to establish militant affiliates in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt and Libya, American intelligence officials assert, raising the prospect of a new global war on terror.

Intelligence officials estimate that the group's fighters number 20,000 to 31,500 in Syria and Iraq. There are less formal pledges of support from "probably at least a couple hundred extremists" in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen, according to an American counterterrorism official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential information about the group.

Lt. Gen. Vincent R. Stewart, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in an assessment this month that the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, was "beginning to assemble a growing international footprint." Nicholas Rasmussen, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, echoed General Stewart's analysis in testimony before Congress last week.

But it is unclear how effective these affiliates are, or to what extent this is an opportunistic rebranding by some jihadist upstarts hoping to draft new members by playing off the notoriety of the Islamic State.

Critics fear such assessments will once again enmesh the United States in a protracted, hydra-headed conflict as President Obama appeals to Congress for new war powers to fight the Islamic State. "I'm loath to write another blank check justifying the use of American troops just about anywhere," said Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee.

The sudden proliferation of Islamic State affiliates and loyalist fighters motivated the White House's push to give Mr. Obama and his successor new authority to pursue the group wherever its followers emerge — just as he and President George W. Bush hunted Qaeda franchises outside the group's headquarters, first in Afghanistan and then in Pakistan, for the past decade.

"We don't want anybody in ISIL to be left with the impression that if they move

to some neighboring country, that they will be essentially in a safe haven and not within the range of United States capability," Josh Earnest, the White House press secretary, said on Wednesday.

The Islamic State began attracting pledges of allegiance from groups and individual fighters after it declared the formation of a caliphate, or religious state, in June 2014. Counterterrorism analysts say it is using Al Qaeda's franchise structure to expand its geographic reach, but without Al Qaeda's rigorous, multiyear application process. This could allow its franchises to grow faster, easier and farther.

"Factions which were at one time part of Al Qaeda and its affiliates, as well as groups loyal to it or in some ways working in tandem with it, have moved on to what they see as more of a winning group," said Steven Stalinsky, executive director of the Middle East Media Research Institute in Washington, which monitors Arabic-language news media and websites.

The Islamic State's attraction, even in the West, was proved when Amedy Coulibaly, one of the gunmen in the Paris terrorist attacks last month, declared allegiance to the group.

In Afghanistan last week, an American drone strike killed a former Taliban commander, Mullah Abdul Rauf

### Factions affiliated with or loyal to Al Qaeda "have moved on to what they see as more of a winning group."

Khadim, who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and had recently begun recruiting fighters. But that pledge seemed to indicate less a major expansion of the Islamic State than a deepening of internal divisions in the Taliban.

There is no indication that the Islamic State controls territory in Afghanistan, but it has signaled its interest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and has reportedly sent envoys there to recruit.

Similarly, until recently, leaders of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, in Yemen, used nonconfrontational language to mask simmering disagreements with the Islamic State and its head, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. But tensions peaked in November, when a faction of Qaeda fighters there swore loyalty to Mr. Baghdadi.

Any authorization to use American military force against the Islamic State could arguably also cover interventions in Egypt and Libya, where active militant organizations have pledged allegiance to the group and have received its public acknowledgment as "provinces"

of the putative caliphate.

Although there is little or no public evidence that the Islamic State's leaders in Syria and Iraq have practical control over its North African provinces, its influence is already apparent in their operations and is destabilizing the countries around them. A publication released by the central group last week included a photograph of fighters in Libya with its affiliate there parading 20 Egyptian Christian captives in the Islamic State's trademark orange jumpsuits, indicating at least a degree of communication.

In Egypt, the Sinai-based extremist group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis sent emissaries to the Islamic State in Syria last year to seek financial support, weapons and tactical advice, as well as the publicity and recruiting advantages that might come with the Islamic State name, according to Western officials briefed on classified intelligence reports.

Ansar Beit al-Maqdis began adopting the Islamic State's signature punishment, beheadings, even before a formal merger. After becoming the Sinai Province of the Islamic State in November, the group's online videos and statements claiming responsibility for attacks began to take on more of the sophistication and gore associated with its new parent group.

Unlike the Islamic State fighters in Syria and Iraq, the Sinai Province has so far focused on hitting the security forces of the military-backed Egyptian government, largely avoiding attacks on

Westerners, members of Egypt's Christian minority or other purely civilian targets.

But despite the government's escalating crackdown in Egypt, the militants appear to have grown bolder and more advanced since linking themselves to the Islamic State.

On the night of Jan. 29, for example, the Sinai Province claimed responsibility for a series of coordinated bombings that targeted security forces across the region, killing 24 soldiers, six police officers and 14 civilians, according to the Egyptian state news media.

In neighboring Libya, at least three distinct groups have declared their affiliation with the Islamic State, one in each of the country's component regions: Barqa in the east, Fezzan in the desert south, and Tripolitania in the west, around the capital.

With fighting among other regional and ideological militias having already plunged the country into chaos, the Islamic State affiliates pose a new obstacle to Western attempts to negoti-

ate a truce or a unity government.

Western officials, especially in southern Europe, fear that the three Libyan "provinces" could evolve into bases for Islamic State fighters traveling across the Mediterranean, into Egypt or elsewhere in North Africa.

Eastern Libya has already become a training ground for jihadists going to Syria or Iraq and a haven for Egyptian fighters staging attacks in the neighboring desert.

Ambassador Deborah K. Jones, the American envoy to Libya, posed a question on Twitter in a plea for unity this month: "Can a divided #Libya withstand #ISIL/Daesh?" she wrote, using the English and Arabic shorthand for

the Islamic State.

The Islamic State's self-proclaimed provinces have compounded Libya's instability by introducing the prospect of Islamist-against-Islamist violence between those who support and those who oppose the group. But Tripolitania has leapt to the fore as the province that most clearly threatens Westerners and Western interests.

Last month, fighters under the group's banner claimed responsibility for a brazen attack on a luxury hotel in the capital, Tripoli, that is a hub for visiting Westerners and leaders of the Islamist-backed provisional government.

At least eight were killed, including David Berry, an American security con-

tractor who had served as a Marine. Two of the Islamic State fighters died in a battle against government forces, a sign of the Islamist-versus-Islamist volatility the group had injected into the Libyan chaos.

"It is a real conflict," said Frederic Wehrey, a senior policy analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who recently visited Libya.

"The Islamic State guys are trying to carve out territory" apart from the broader Islamist coalition and are "challenging them on their own turf," he said, while other extremists are "peeling off, gravitating to the Islamic State and becoming bolder."

International New York Times FEBRUARY 12, 2015

# Turkey treads a positive path

**M. Hakan Yavuz**  
**Mujeeb R. Khan**

For decades, Turkey was a dutiful ally that mostly followed America's lead. But since the Justice and Development Party's re-election in 2007, it has asserted a more independent foreign policy in the Middle East, which often puts it at odds with Washington.

There have been sharp disagreements over the 2013 coup in Egypt, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the need for intervention in Syria. Turkey's critics have called into question its reliability as a NATO ally, including in the fight against the radical Wahhabi group known as the Islamic State.

But much of this concern is misguided. The ongoing crises in the Middle East have only underscored Turkey's pivotal geostrategic position: It's no surprise that Pope Francis, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain have visited Ankara in the past few months. And Turkey's detractors, partly because they do not understand the sources of its new assertiveness, fail to see that its transformation actually serves America's long-term interests.

Turkey's new foreign policy is often credited to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was prime minister from 2003 to 2014. But its roots lie in the political and economic reforms of Prime Minister Turgut Ozal during the 1980s, which accelerated the country's democratization and the rise of the Muslim middle class in the Anatolian countryside.

After the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a small, secular and authoritarian establishment tore the country away from its magnificent Islamic heritage. By the late 20th century, however, many Turks were looking back on the unity and leadership provided by the Ottoman Empire with nostalgia. Today, they no longer simply accept the

West's problematic policies in the region, such as its support for the coup that brought Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power in Egypt.

**Ankara's more assertive foreign policy actually serves American interests.**

When the United States government refuses to help impose a no-flight-zone in Syria or to enforce

its own red lines on chemical weapons, Turkish officials are reminded of previous instances when the West seemed indifferent to onslaughts against Muslim populations in Bosnia and Chechnya to which many Turkish citizens trace back their ancestry. Such perceptions were underscored in recent months, as Washington attempted to pressure Turkey into entering full-blown combat against the Islamic State while ignoring the greater bloodletting caused by the Assad regime against Sunni civilians, with whom many Sunnis in Turkey identify.

Critics of the Turkish government also argue that it is becoming intolerant of domestic dissent and promoting an ethno-sectarian agenda in the Middle East. The Justice and Development Party, known as the A.K.P., has been rightly condemned for its harsh response to the 2013 Gezi Park protests and for weakening democratic institutions. Yet Turkey remains far more democratic than its neighbors. Its elections are free and fair, and it does not eliminate its political opponents or persecute its ethnic and religious minorities.

Turkey is also trying to move the region away from the cycle of despotism, conflict and outside intervention that has plagued it since the end of the Ottoman era. After President Bashar al-Assad's first visit to Turkey in 2004, the A.K.P. leadership embraced the young president's promises of reform and relations with Syria improved. It was only after Mr. Assad ignored the Turkish government's appeals for reform and carried out mass killings of Syrian civilians that Ankara demanded his removal.

Mr. Erdogan's party followed its election in 2002 by strengthening ties with Israel, signaling that Turkey would treat Israel as a legitimate partner in its attempt to broker comprehensive peace in the region. But after hundreds of Palestinian civilians died in the Gaza War of 2008-9 and Israeli forces raided the Mavi Marmara, an unarmed Turkish vessel, in 2010, Turkey decided it would no longer indulge the belligerent fantasies of Israel's ruling Likud party.

The A.K.P. has also done more than any other Turkish leadership to end the Kurdish conflict. Turkey hosts 1.6 million Syrian refugees, including 200,000 Kurds, Christians and Yazidis fleeing the Islamic State. Ankara has provided military aid to the Kurdish pesh merga fighting Sunni radicals in Syria, and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq has become one of Turkey's closest strategic and economic partners.

The United States has long allowed client states like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel to pursue shortsighted goals in the Middle East. This has only brought despotism and strife. Washington's failure to fully support the democratic government of Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt contributed to its collapse, and so to the instability and violence that have occurred there since. And it was President Obama's cynical abandonment of the Syrian opposition during the first two years of the uprising against Mr. Assad that set the stage for the advent of the Islamic State.

To avoid any more such calamities, policy makers in Washington, and other Western capitals, should abandon their counterproductive approach: They should embrace Turkey's growing, and positive, engagement in the Middle East.

M. HAKAN YAVUZ is a professor of political science at the University of Utah and the author of "Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey." MUJEEB R. KHAN is a doctoral candidate in political science at the University of California, Berkeley.

**AFP** Syrie: 35 jihadistes tués dans des combats avec des Kurdes

Beyrouth, 15 février 2015 (AFP)

**AU MOINS 35 jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) ont été tués dimanche dans différents combats avec des Kurdes syriens aux alentours de Kobané, a rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).**

Les heurts ont eu lieu dans trois endroits différents autour de cette ville symbole, à la frontière syro-turque, reprise entièrement à l'EI fin janvier après quatre mois de combats sanglants.

Au moins 22 jihadistes sont morts dans des affrontements à la lisière des provinces syriennes d'Alep et de Raqqa, dont le chef-lieu est la "capitale" du califat installé par l'EI à cheval sur la Syrie et l'Irak voisin.

C'est la première fois depuis des mois que des miliciens des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG, kurdes syriens) vont se battre à la frontière de la province de Raqqa. Ils y ont saisi la colline stratégique de Tal Bagdaq, mais quatre d'entre eux y ont perdu la vie, selon l'OSDH.

Les autres jihadistes ont péri dans des combats à l'ouest et au sud de Kobané, reprise entièrement le 26 janvier par les Kurdes, appuyés par les rebelles

syriens et les avions de la coalition internationale antijihadistes menée par les Etats-Unis.

Depuis, les YPG ont étendu leur emprise autour de la ville, ne rencontrant qu'une faible résistance des jihadistes.

Selon l'OSDH, les combats autour de Tal Bagdaq sont les plus féroces dans la région depuis la libération de Kobané, et les avions de la coalition ont mené des frappes dans la zone dimanche. L'ONG, basée en Grande-Bretagne et qui bénéficie d'un vaste réseau de sources à travers la Syrie, ne pouvait fournir de bilan de ces raids dans l'immédiat.

Selon un communiqué militaire américain, la coalition a mené trois frappes autour de Kobané entre samedi 08H00 (locales) et dimanche 08H00, détruisant un bâtiment et deux véhicules appartenant à l'EI.

Le conflit en Syrie, commencé en mars 2011 par une révolte pacifique contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad réprimée dans le sang, s'est transformée en une guerre civile complexe, dont l'EI a profité pour s'emparer de pans entiers du pays. En quatre ans, plus de 210.000 personnes sont mortes et plus de 10 millions ont dû fuir leurs foyers. ●

**Liberation** 19 février 2015

# Une milice attire des «cowboys» contre l'EI

Par AFP, 19 février 2015

Piercing brillant sous la lèvre et tenue de camouflage, ce combattant américain ne passe pas inaperçu dans la ville chrétienne d'Al-Qosh, dans le nord de l'Irak. Composée d'une centaine d'hommes, la milice Dwekh Nawsha a été formée dans le but de défendre les chrétiens d'Irak des persécutions de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI).

Brett, 28 ans, incarne un mouvement émergent d'Occidentaux qui abandonnent tout pour venir défendre les Assyriens, l'une des plus anciennes communautés chrétiennes du monde. Un tatouage de mitrailleuse sur le bras gauche et de Jésus dans une couronne d'épines sur le droit, il se décrit lui-même en plaisantant comme un «croisé». «Le terroriste des uns est le combattant de la liberté des autres», explique Brett. «Ici, nous nous battons pour que les gens puissent vivre en paix, sans persécution, pour que les cloches de l'église continuent de sonner.»

Aucun djihadiste n'a mis les pieds à Al-Qosh mais la population a fui début août, quand l'EI s'est emparé de plusieurs villages environnants. Comme des dizaines de milliers de chrétiens du nord de l'Irak, les habitants de cette ville ont alors rejoint dans un exode

massif la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

## Expérimentés de la guerre

Brett explique que l'un de ses objectifs est la création d'une «légion étrangère» en Irak. Grâce à ses talents de recruteur, il a convaincu cinq autres volontaires d'Amérique du Nord et du Royaume-Uni de le suivre. Ils ont tous, selon lui, une expérience dans l'armée ou avec des sociétés militaires privées. Et il prétend avoir 20 candidats de plus en attente.

La première recrue de Brett est Louis Park, qui a quitté les Marines en décembre. «Je ne me suis pas bien habitué à la vie en temps de paix», explique ce Texan, en chiquant du tabac. «Je voulais revenir.»

Après avoir servi en Afghanistan, Louis a été diagnostiqué avec des troubles de stress post-traumatique (PTSD) «et quelques autres trucs» qui l'ont empêché de retourner au combat avec l'armée américaine.

Dès octobre, il a commencé à mettre de l'argent de côté pour pouvoir partir en Irak se battre contre l'EI. Selon Louis, c'est surtout un moyen de défendre son propre pays, les Etats-Unis, même si la milice Dwekh Nawsha n'est pas souvent envoyée au front. «Je suis terriblement patriotique», explique-t-il. «Si mon gouverne-



Brett (d), un volontaire américain engagé au sein de la milice chrétienne Dwekh Nawsha, le 5 février 2015 à Al-Qosh

ment ne veut pas combattre (l'EI), je le ferai.»

Andrew, un quinquagénaire canadien grognon, a rejoint Dwekh Nawsha parce qu'il a entendu parler d'«abattoirs» où l'EI découperait des gens pour alimenter un trafic d'organes. Ces rumeurs n'ont jamais été prouvées mais largement diffusées par des organisations évangéliques et anti-musulmanes, en particulier en Amérique du Nord.

## «Un rôle à jouer»

Quant à Brett, c'est un verset de la Bible qui l'a poussé à revenir en Irak. Selon lui, la résurgence de la nation Assyrienne est le signe que l'Apocalypse est en marche.

«Nous avons un rôle à jouer» dans l'avènement de la fin des temps, explique-t-il. Dwekh Nawsha signifie d'ailleurs «Futur martyr» dans le dialecte araméen local.

La milice attire aussi les déçus d'autres groupes armés, comme ceux qui s'étaient initialement

enrôlés auprès des combattants kurdes. Scott, un vétéran qui a servi dans l'armée américaine pendant sept ans, explique qu'il souhaitait rejoindre les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), jusqu'à ce qu'il découvre qu'ils étaient «un tas de foutus gauchistes».

D'autres étrangers de Dwekh Nawsha affirment qu'ils ont été rebutés par ce qu'ils considèrent comme la fibre socialiste des kurdes des YPG, dont la résistance dans la ville syrienne Kobané face aux djihadistes de l'EI a séduit de nombreux volontaires.

Jordan Matson, un vétéran originaire du Wisconsin qui est devenu une petite célébrité parmi les combattants étrangers des YPG, rétorque que certains volontaires ont «perdu leur sang froid» face à l'intensité des combats dans Kobané. «La plupart de ces cowboys d'internet ont fini par réaliser que ce n'est pas un déploiement militaire normal», assure Jordan. ♦



## Contre Daech? Les Kurdes

Bernard-Henri Lévy

18 févr. 2015

<http://laregledujeu.org>

Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan d'Irak. Sortir d'Erbil et, par la route du Sud, prendre la direction de Mossoul.

Et là, dans un paysage de collines verdoyantes mais nues, la ligne de front où les peshmergas du général Barzani font face aux combattants de Daech.

«Nous manquons de tout, me dit le jeune général, debout au milieu de ses hommes dans le dernier fortin de pierres sèches en surplomb de la vallée du Tigre. Nos soldats sont braves. Ils sont expérimentés. Ce sont, souvent, de vieux peshmergas qui, face à cette nouvelle guerre, ont repris du service...»

La moyenne d'âge, sur les remparts de terre où les hommes sont postés tous les trois mètres, doit être, en effet, supérieure à 40 ans. Et certains, comme «Mike», le juif kurde qui, au bivouac, évoquera la présence millénaire de sa famille sur cette terre, ont plus de 60 ans.

«Nos hommes sont braves, oui, continue le général. Mais ils n'ont rien. Ni armes de longue portée, ni lunettes à vision nocturne, ni matériel de déminage. Regardez ce Milan, par exemple, que nous a livré l'Allemagne...»

Je vois, posé sur le remblai, le tube du missile filoguidé qui a déjà, me dit-il, repoussé deux assauts.

«J'en ai deux comme cela dans mon secteur. Et les sept autres commandants qui, avec moi, couvrent les 1 000 kilomètres du front n'en ont pas davantage.»

Il s'interrompt pour donner un ordre à un septuagénaire, rescapé des massacres au gaz de Saddam Hussein il y a vingt ans, et resté l'un des meilleurs tireurs de la compagnie. Puis reprend.

«L'ennemi, face à nous, est surarmé. Il s'est emparé des arsenaux abandonnés par l'armée irakienne, l'été dernier, dans sa déroute à Mossoul. Mais nous n'avons, nous, pour l'essentiel, que des armes individuelles et des Douchka. Que fait l'Occident? Qu'attendent nos amis? Nous nous battons pour eux et eux nous livrent au compte-gouttes.»

Ce discours, combien de fois ne l'ai-je pas entendu?

Ce «notre combat est votre combat – en défendant notre pays nous défendons aussi le vôtre» n'est-il pas un classique de toutes les guerres de résistance et de libération que j'ai couvertes depuis quarante ans?

Sans doute.

Sauf qu'il y a, ici, une différence – ou plutôt deux.

D'abord, c'est plus vrai que ce ne le fut jamais. C'est littéralement, concrètement, techniquement vrai. Les commanditaires de l'exécution de l'équipe de Charlie, ceux du massacre de Bruxelles et de l'Hyper Cacher, les inspireurs de la double fusillade de Copenhague, les égorgés de Coptes en Libye, c'est ici qu'on les affronte, ici qu'on les contie et ici que l'on pourrait, si l'on en avait les moyens, commencer de les défaire.

Et puis, surtout, on a là des alliés avec lesquels – et c'est si rare! – on partage non seulement des buts de guerre, mais des valeurs. Laïcité... Respect des femmes... Pluralisme politique et religieux... Chrétiens et yazidis se battant au coude-à-coude avec leurs camarades musulmans... Une minorité d'Arabes dont certains ne craignent pas de se dire incroyants... Je repense à ces Afghans armés pour contrer l'Union soviétique et devenus talibans. A ces dictateurs africains dont on équipe les forces armées pour cause de Boko Haram. Je me revois



Bernard-Henri Lévy au Kurdistan. Bernard-Henri Lévy au Kurdistan.

plaider pour les chebabs de Benghazi tout en imaginant bien qu'ils pourraient, un jour, faire mauvais usage de leurs équipements. N'est-ce pas la première fois, dans cette région, que nous appelent au secours des hommes dont nous savons que la vision du monde, le projet de société, l'art de la guerre sont, en tous points, proches des nôtres? N'est-ce pas le premier cas, depuis très longtemps, où nos intérêts militaires coïncident avec la défense de nos idéaux?

L'Occident temporise pour, comme de coutume, ne pas ajouter la guerre à la guerre.

L'Otan tient à distance ses amis kurdes, de peur de déplaire à l'allié turc.

L'administration américaine a la hantise de voir ces peshmergas, venus à bout de Daech, se retourner contre Bagdad et achever de démembrer l'Irak.

Mauvais calculs.

Géopolitique à la Norpois, le diplomate aux idées courtes de Proust.

Je crois, pour ma part, qu'il n'y a pas de meilleur choix que d'aider les Kurdes à nous aider à vaincre la barbarie sans pareille des coupeurs de tête de l'Etat islamique. Des armes, donc, oui. Une alliance sans réserves ni arrière-pensées. Peut-être même cette grande «conférence d'Erbil» dont j'ai, le lendemain de mon passage sur le front, proposé l'idée au Premier ministre et où seraient mises sur la table toutes les questions posées à la sécurité collective de la région et du monde par la montée en puissance des nouveaux barbares.

Le Kurdistan est le bouclier.

Mais c'est aussi l'épée.

Voire l'aimant auquel peuvent et doivent s'agrèger toutes les forces concernées par l'avancée de l'Etat islamique.

Là est le cœur de la contre-offensive.

Là est le vrai cerveau d'un monde sans imagination ni vision face à ce terrifiant défi.

Les Kurdes sont les seuls à avoir non seulement la détermination, mais la claire évaluation de la menace.

Non seulement le courage, mais la capacité à définir une stratégie et pour peu, encore une fois, qu'ils en reçoivent les moyens à la mettre en application.

Il faut, de cette situation, tirer sans tarder les conclusions.

la Croix

lundi 16 février 2015

# Fort de ses succès militaires, le PKK rêve à un avenir politique

► Les militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) se sont engagés aux côtés des peshmergas kurdes irakiens et de la coalition internationale contre Daech. ► Ils espèrent que cela leur vaudra d'être retirés de la liste des organisations terroristes de l'Union européenne et des États-Unis.

**MONTS QANDIL (Irak)**  
De notre envoyée spéciale

Le flanc irakien des monts Qandil scintille de mille feux alors qu'un cortège funèbre s'aventure sur ses routes sinueuses. Arborant le drapeau bleu et jaune à l'effigie de son fondateur Abdullah Öcalan, le convoi du PKK (Parti des travailleurs kurdes) transporte le corps du « chahid » Armandj, un camarade tombé à Kirkouk sous un tir de mortier de Daech (État islamique).

Hébergée depuis trente ans sur ces hauteurs à cheval entre l'Irak, l'Iran et la Turquie, la guérilla marxiste du PKK est née en 1979 dans l'espoir d'obtenir la reconnaissance des droits politiques des Kurdes de Turquie. Une branche iranienne, le PJAK, et une branche syrienne, le PYD, sont ensuite apparues pour promouvoir l'idéologie d'Öcalan auprès des populations kurdes de ces pays, étendant l'influence du PKK hors de Turquie. En 1984, ce combat s'est transformé en guerre larvée contre le gouvernement turc, un conflit qui a fait près de 40 000 morts.

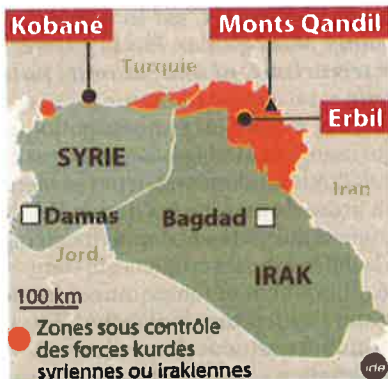
Mais aujourd'hui, le PKK et sa branche armée (HPG), composée essentiellement de Kurdes turcs, apparaissent de nouveau comme fréquentables aux yeux de la communauté internationale. Depuis août dernier, ils sont engagés aux côtés des peshmergas kurdes irakiens et de la coalition internationale contre Daech.

Les HPG sont notamment acclamés pour avoir arrêté l'avancée l'été dernier des djihadistes sur la capitale kurde irakienne Erbil. La branche syrienne a quant à elle joué un rôle central dans la libération



Ces combattants du PKK se trouvent à la frontière entre l'Irak et la Turquie. Ils ont perdu une centaine des leurs dans la lutte contre Daech.

tion de Kobané, à la frontière turque. Cet engagement contre Daech a coûté la vie à près de cent combattants, comme l'a rappelé Murat Karayilan, le chef des HPG.



organisations terroristes de l'Union européenne et des États-Unis. Une contradiction que souligne Cemil Bayik, numéro deux du PKK. « Nous sommes dans le camp des droits de l'homme et de la démocratie. Nous souhaitons donc être jugés à l'aune de notre

Pourtant, ce prix du sang tarde à faire évoluer l'image de ce groupe dans la région.

Tandis que les Kurdes irakiens sont en route vers une autonomie politique croissante, le PKK reste inscrit sur la liste des

engagement contre Daech et ce qu'il représente. » Une contradiction que l'Occident a de plus en plus de mal à justifier, d'autant que le PKK participe à des pourparlers de paix avec la Turquie depuis mars 2013.

Le PKK justifie son engagement contre Daech comme le prolongement de son combat pour l'« autonomie démocratique ». Ce concept, inventé par Abdullah Öcalan, vise à instaurer une démocratie respectueuse du droit des Kurdes à l'autodétermination dans les quatre pays où ils vivent (Iran, Irak, Turquie, Syrie).

L'objectif est d'obtenir pour les régions kurdes une autonomie politique et administrative dans un cadre fédéral et démocratique. De fait, la région kurde syrienne est déjà administrée par un conseil révolutionnaire « élu » où le PYD - branche syrienne du PKK - est prépondérant. « Nous souhaitons construire une Syrie sur la base du système établi au Rojava (Kurdistan syrien), puisque ni le régime syrien ni Daech ne peuvent servir de modèles pour établir une démocratie », explique Cemil Bayik. En Turquie, nous construisons un front démocratique autour du parti pro-kurde HDP pour faire obstacle au fascisme de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir, lors des élections législatives de juin 2015. »

Ce discours veut séduire les Occidentaux. « Le PKK a le vent en poupe, c'est indiscutable, analyse Ahmed Meera, rédacteur en chef de la publication kurde, Lvin Magazine. Son combat contre Daech et son discours prodémocratie ne pourront que favoriser un changement d'appréciation de la part de la communauté internationale qui, par ailleurs, est de plus en plus critique vis-à-vis de la Turquie. »

Néanmoins, le pari du PKK de transformer ses victoires militaires en victoire politique n'est pas gagné. Beaucoup s'inquiètent de son influence croissante dans la région. L'intervention du PKK au nord de l'Irak dans les monts Sinjar, à travers la formation de milices yézidiennes et la création d'un conseil révolutionnaire sur le modèle de Rojava, n'a pas été appréciée du président kurde Massoud Barzani. Il s'est empressé d'envoyer ses peshmergas irakiens à Kobané, où le PKK était jusqu'alors en position de force.

Ankara de son côté, tente de décrédibiliser le discours kurde en Turquie alors que le PKK l'accuse de soutenir Daech contre les Kurdes syriens. « Il ne faut pas surestimer les capacités politiques du PKK, conclut Ahmed Meera. L'expérience dans le Rojava fonctionne car il s'agit d'un contexte de guerre. Le PKK est une guérilla : enlevez-lui la guerre et elle est perdue. Il lui faudra bien plus que descendre de ses montagnes pour s'inscrire durablement dans la vie politique des Kurdes. »

AGNÈS RICHIERI

## REPÈRES LA GALAXIE KURDE

- **Les Kurdes de Turquie** : représentés par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), mouvement marxiste-léniniste, anti-impérialiste et communiste. Sa branche militaire est le HPG.
- **Les Kurdes de Syrie** : il existe une myriade de petits partis kurdes, mais le principal est le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD). Sa branche armée, YPG (Unités de protection du peuple) s'est illustrée lors de la libération de Kobané, aux côtés des Kurdes du HPG.

- **Les Kurdes d'Irak** : deux partis principaux et concurrents, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani et l'Union démocratique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Jalal Talabani. Ce dernier est issu d'une scission du PDK survenue en 1975. Chacun entretient des combattants, les peshmergas.
- **Les Kurdes d'Iran** : représentés au sein du Parti démocratique kurde d'Iran (PKKI), le Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan (Pejak) et le Comité des révolutionnaires du Kurdistan iranien (Komala).



www.ekurd.net

## KURDISTAN REGION NEWS IN BRIEF

### IRAQ TO RECEIVE F-16S FROM US: ABADI

February 2, 2015

**Baghdad:** Iraq expects to receive a delivery of F-16s in a few months time, Iraqi Defense Minister Khalid Obeidi announced during a news conference in Baghdad. "Iraqi's [military] has an arranged plan for battle. Retaking Mosul and repulsing IS will come soon," Obeidi said. Obeidi has faith in Iraq's military and ability to defeat Islamic State IS militants who seized large swathes of land in the country in 2014, including Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul. Iraqi and Kurdish security forces are reportedly planning and preparing for a takeover of Mosul sometime this summer. "Good progress can be seen within Iraq's air force in recent years after receiving many updated weapons," Obeidi added. In November, US officials delivered the F-16s to Tuscon, Arizona instead of Balad Air Base north of Baghdad due to security concerns relating to ISIS' presence in the area. [nrttv.com](http://nrttv.com) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### MASSOUD BARZANI OVERSEES MEETING OF THE MAIN KURDISH PARTIES TO DISCUSS HOW TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF KRG

February 2, 2015

**Erbil:** A senior source in Erbil revealed on Monday, that the five main Kurdish political parties participating in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have started an expanded meeting under the supervision of Kurdistan's president, Massoud Barzani to discuss how to support KRG and the success of its program agreed upon among the involved parties. The source said that "the main objective of the meeting, which is held in KRG ministers council building, is collaboration among the five parties; Democratic Party of Kurdistan KDP, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan PUK, Change (Gorran) Movement, the Islamic Union and the Islamic Group, with KRG as a part in it, and must work to make it successful. The source said that a number of government ministers participated in the meeting, which was held in the presence of Roze Nuri Shaways, Azad Barwari, Fazil Mirani, Mahmoud Mohamed from KDP, Adnan Mufti, Arslan Baez, Omar Fatah from PUK, Jalal Jawhar, Omar al-Sayed, Rebaz Mohammed and Mustafa Sayed Qader from Change movement, Muhammad Faraj, Khalil Ibrahim and Mustafa Abdullah from the Islamic Union, Baber Ali and Mohammad Hakim from the Islamic Group...[shafaq.com](http://shafaq.com) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### KIRKUK GOVERNOR BLAMES DELAY IN ANNEXING PROVINCE TO KURDISTAN REGION

February 4, 2015

**Kirkuk:** The governor of the Iraqi northern province of Kirkuk, Najmaldin Karim, blamed the vague situation of the province and inactions to annex the province to Kurdistan Region in the north. Also a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), he said no action has been taken for the province in the past 10 years and said due to the Islamic State (IS) insurgency on the province the Arab and Turkmen's outlook has changed and they want the province to have an independent self-ruling system. He went on to say that the province cannot be ruled in this way any longer and "we and all Kurds want the province to be annexed to Kurdistan Region and this is the demands of all people in the province." The governor believes a different situation should exist in the province and if the province cannot be annexed to the northern Kurdish region then an independent ruling system should be established for four years and then people would decide whether they want to be a part of the region or not. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem." Kurds see it as the rightful and perfect capital of an autonomous Kurdistan state. [kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### KURDISTAN'S SHARE OF THE IRAQI BUDGET: 15 TRILLION IRAQI DINARS

February 4, 2015

**Erbil:** The Kurdistan Region's share of Iraq's 119.5 trillion dinar budget for this year amounts to 14.8 trillion dinars, based on the 17 percent share to which Erbil is constitutionally entitled. Following the approval of the budget bill by the Iraqi parliament on Thursday, the Defense Ministry in Baghdad must send salaries, weapons, and military equipment to the Peshmerga forces. This will be based on the size of the Kurdistan Region's population, not the 17 percent share. Masoud Haydar, a member of the Iraqi parliament's Finance Committee, said that the Peshmerga should receive 1.2 trillion dinars. The amount was agreed by Erbil and Baghdad, but it is not included in the budget bill. In addition, Kurdistan has also secured one trillion dinars from the sovereign budget. Haydar said that Erbil is also entitled to a share of every oil barrel sold. "In the Petro-Dollars clause, \$1 dollar for each sold barrel of oil will go to the province that produced the oil, except for Basra, which will get \$1.5 for each barrel. This clause applies to the Kurdistan Region," he said...[rudaw.net](http://rudaw.net)

### SOME KURDISH-LIKE AUTONOMY APPLICABLE FOR IRAQ: QUBAD TALABANI

February 6, 2015

**Erbil:** Kurdistan's Deputy PM Qubad Talabani there is no longer a unified Iraq and the autonomy in Kurdistan region can be model for Iraq on the whole. Qubad Talabani, also son to Iraqi former President Jalal Talabani, told Reuters that the reality is that a whole generation of Iraqis has grown up in a highly sectarian environment in the last decade. "We have Shi'ites promoting and defending Shi'ite policies; Sunnis rallying around Sunni identity and Kurds doing the same." "Iraqi unity as we knew it is over, so what political system could be devised to salvage the country? We have a model here in Kurdistan - maybe our exact model is not applicable to Sunnistan but some sort of autonomy is," he said at his office in Erbil. He said Sunnis living in scattered areas could have autonomy within their governorates even if they don't have a contiguous region. "So long as Baghdad remains the center of all decision making people will fight over it. There's no leader today in the country that can talk on behalf of all Iraqis," he added. [kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### KURDISTAN PM NECHIRVAN BARZANI: IRAQ NO LONGER A UNIFIED STATE

February 6, 2015

**Erbil:** The Prime Minister of Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani said Iraq, which has been ravaged by sectarian warfare since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein, does not exist as a unified country. "There is no loyalty to a country called Iraq," he told Reuters in an interview. "It really is important to find a formula for how to live together within the boundaries of what is called Iraq. Unless a formula is found, there will be more bloodshed and the country will remain a destabilizing factor in the region." Pointing to sectarian strife across Iraq, all Kurdish factions agree that a unified country ruled from Baghdad is a dream of the past and that power must be devolved to give each of the main sects, Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds their autonomous regions. [kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### UK DEFENCE REPORT CALLS FOR KURDISH PESHMERGA ARMY UNIFICATION

February 8, 2015

**London:** A report published by the UK Parliament UK Defence select committee on Thursday recommends that the UK should support the unification of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and reports on concerns about corruption within the Peshmerga forces. The critical report focused on the British military contribution to fight against the Islamic State (IS), emphasizes that the role of UK military in Iraq is small compared to other countries such as Germany. Therefore, the UK Defence select committee urges the UK to do more in Iraq. One of the report's conclusions is that although the Peshmerga's are an impressive fighting force, "it faces a number of organizational challenges besides a lack of sophisticated weaponry"...[basnews.com](http://basnews.com)

### MORE VILLAGES LIBERATED IN KOBANI

February 9, 2015

**Kobani:** YPG Press Centre reported in a written statement that the operation to liberate Kobani of Syrian Kurdistan is continuing and that YPG/YPJ fighters liberated many more villages and strategic points in east, west →

⇒ and south Kobani Sunday night. The statement said that the Islamic State group IS militants in east Kobani were inflicted major blows in an extensive operation as a result of which the villages of Mîlê, Bîr Omerê and Xanikê were cleansed of IS jihadists. 11 IS militants were ascertained killed while corpses of 6 among them and a bomb-laden vehicle was seized by Defense Units. In west Kobani, YPG/YPJ forces who have made a remarkable progress carried out an operation targeting the villages of Ciblê and Çariqlî where operations and clashes are going on, the Press Centre said. The Press Centre reported that Defense Units carried out another simultaneous operation in south west of Kobani, after which the villages of Qoçlê, Nayif and Bestekê were liberated. One fighter of the Defense Units was martyred and one other was wounded in the operation. Also clearing a large area in south Kobani, YPG/YPJ fighters liberated the villages of Qilomerg, Zinarê, Itweran and Qela Zîrik. [firatnews.com](#) | [E Kurd.net](#)

## BARZANI AND ABADI AGREE ON OPERATION TO FREE MOSUL, SAYS ZEBARI

February 9, 2015

In a meeting held in Munich, Germany, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Abadi agreed to a joint operation to fight Islamic State (IS) militants in Mosul. On Sunday, Iraqi Finance Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, one of the Baghdad government delegates in Munich, told Basnews, "Iraqi delegates took part in the Munich Security Conference (MSC) and held meetings with senior officials from many countries." "In Berlin, we held a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, which was positive," he said. He continued, "We held many meetings in Munich. One of them was with President Barzani and the Kurdistan delegates. In the meeting, we discussed the role of Peshmerga forces in fighting terror, the budget and cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil." "In the meeting, Barzani and Abadi agreed that Baghdad and Erbil must cooperate to combat IS insurgents and liberate Mosul as soon as possible," added Zebari...[basnews.com](#)

## U.S. VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN AND KURDISTAN PRESIDENT BARZANI DISCUSS BATTLE AGAINST IS

February 9, 2015

**Munich:** U.S. Vice President Joe Biden met with Iraq's Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani on Sunday in Munich and discussed the region and Iraq's battle against the jihadist group of the Islamic State (IS). According to a readout of the meeting from the White House, Biden spoke with Barzani about "regional developments, cooperation between Erbil and Baghdad, and the ongoing fight against [IS]" and Barzani expressed his appreciation for the U.S. support and assistance. The two leaders also discussed "additional U.S. and coalition assistance" for Kurdish Peshmerga forces during the intensification of operations against IS. Barzani took part in a Munich conference on security and Biden was in the city, taking part in a NATO conference regarding the ongoing tensions in Ukraine. [kurdpress.ir](#) | [E Kurd.net](#)

## KURDISTAN REGION EXPORTS 450000 OIL BPD: DEPUTY

February 9, 2015

**Baghdad:** A member of the Iraqi parliament has stated that document prove the autonomous Kurdistan Region is exporting 450000 barrels of crude oil per day. Also vice president of parliament's finance commission, Hareth al-Harethi told Dijeh Channel that according to documents achieved by Baghdad from Turkey the region is drilling and exporting 450000 barrels of oil every day. According to a December 2014 deal between the region and the central government in Baghdad, Erbil should export 250000 barrels of oil from the region and 300000 barrels from oil wells in northern province of Kirkuk that is completely controlled by the Kurdish forces of Peshmerga after the IS insurgency began in Iraq. The official went on to say that issue is to be discussed in an upcoming meeting between delegations from the two governments. [kurdpress.ir](#) | [E Kurd.net](#)

## US SENATOR: "WE NEED TO ARM THE KURDS"

February 9, 2015

**Washington:** Sen. Ted Cruz, a potential presidential candidate in 2016, isn't ruling out sending American ground troops to fight Islamic State militants.

The Texas Republican tells ABC's "This Week" that "if need be, we should go that step. But it should be driven by the mission." Cruz says Iraqi Kurds have a good fighting force but need to receive arms more effectively from the United States, rather than through the central government in Baghdad. Cruz, who was attending an international security conference in Munich, wants to use Kurdish fighters — known as the peshmerga — as the ground forces in combination with U.S.-led airstrikes. He says those fighters are effective and ready. "We need to arm the Kurds now because they are our boots on the ground," he told CNN's "State of the Union." **AP**

## KERRY, MASROUR BARZANI DISPUTE OVER US STRATEGY AGAINST IS

February 9, 2015

The U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry denied claims by Iraq's Kurdistan Security chief Masrour Barzani that Pentagon lacks a clear and specific strategy to fight against the militants of the Islamic State (IS) and said Iraqis are not ready to defeat the group. Barzani told NBD TV that the U.S. does not have a clear strategy to fight against the jihadist militants. He went on to say that the situation would lead to the death of more people. Kerry blamed Barzani's remarks and said a powerful ground force is needed to defeat the jihadist group, adding that the force should be Iraqi not an American or European force. He went on to say that the Iraqi army is not ready and needs training. Kerry added that he understands Masrour Barzani's impatience, Peshmerga forces have been brave in fight against the IS and we give them weapons and ammunition and our allies have helped Kurds in this regard. [kurdpress.ir](#) | [E Kurd.net](#)

## 22,000 BODYGUARDS PROTECT OFFICIALS IN KURDISTAN REGION: DEPUTY

February 11, 2015

**Slemani:** There are some 22,000 bodyguards in Iraq's Kurdistan Region and protect the region's governmental officials as well as political leaders. A member of Gorran (Change Movement), Bisetoon Fayegh told the independent Levin Press that the bodyguards protect governmental and party officials and receive salary from Kurdistan Region's interior ministry. He went on to say the he has achieved the statistics by himself indirectly, adding that the number of bodyguards puts a heavy burden on the region's weakening economy. He further lashed out at dedicating a large number of bodyguards for the people who have no official post. It is worth mentioning that a member of interior commission of the Region's Parliament stated last year that there are 19 separate forces inside Peshmerga and each one is under the control of a separate party and line. [kurdpress.ir](#) | [E Kurd.net](#)

## ISLAMIC STATE DIGGING MASSIVE TRENCH ON KURDISTAN BORDER

February 13, 2015

**Kirkuk:** Frontline commanders have reported that Islamic State group IS is digging a 500-km-long trench from Shingal (Sinjar) to Kirkuk to defend against Peshmerga attacks. Attempts by IS to construct the security trench have been stymied by coalition airstrikes and Peshmerga attacks on the areas where the militants are using bulldozers to dig. Several weeks ago, Peshmerga forces captured many ISIS-held areas on the western Tigris front, including Wanke town and surrounding villages. [rudaw.net](#) | [E Kurd.net](#)

## STREET CLASHES, 3 WOUNDED AS PESHMERGA REPULSE ISLAMIC STATE OFFENSIVE IN SINJAR

February 13, 2015

**Shingal:** Three Peshmerga were wounded in Shingal (Sinjar) Thursday, where Kurdish forces repulsed an Islamic State attack on Kurdish-controlled positions in the war-ravaged city. General Hashim Sitayi from the 8th Peshmerga division told Rudaw the attack involved intense street clashes in the city. "The clashes went on for several hours, till late in the evening," Sitayi said, adding that coalition warplanes were involved in some of the fighting. He could not provide details of ISIS casualties because of the poor visibility at night. Kurdish forces in December last year recaptured most areas around Shingal, including Mount Shingal, where thousands of Yazidis had taken refuge after an IS offensive last summer. Parts of the city are in Peshmerga control but roadside mines and explosives planted by the militants have hampered advances. Meanwhile Kurdish ⇒

⇒ security forces seized three tons of TNT in the border town of Rabiaa and arrested several suspects, according to Qasim Smo, a Kurdish security official in Shingal, about 30 kilometers away. [rudaw.net](http://rudaw.net) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

## US HAS SENT 60 MILITARY CARGOS TO KURDISTAN

February 14, 2015

**Washington:** The U.S. has stated that it has sent 60 military cargos to Kurdistan Region in the north of Iraq since the outbreak of the Islamic State (IS) war against the region, Kuwait News Agency reported. U.S. Department of State Spokeswoman Jen Psaki stated Washington has sent 60 military cargos to the Kurdish administration since the IS insurgency onto the region in September last year, adding that most of the aids include heavy weapons and have been sent to the region through Germany. She further said all the military cargos, including 15000 grenades, 40 bullets, 18000 machine guns and 45000 shells, and have been sent to the region under Baghdad's supervision. [kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir)

## KURDISTAN REGION IS TO DECLARE INDEPENDENCE: AYAD ALLAWI

February 15, 2015

**Baghdad:** Iraqi Vice President and former PM Ayad Allawi said the Kurdistan Region in Iraq's north to declare its independence from Iraq and establish an independent state, al-Ma'alomeh news agency reported. Allawi's office said in a statement that the region would declare its independence soon or later, adding that the situation is not suitable for such a move. The statement, however, went on to say that if the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish government in Erbil reach accord on oil and its venues then there would be no place for the expected decision. The militants of the Islamic State (IS) are not removed though bombing, the best way, however, is to overcome the extremists group in ideological ways. Stressing on Iraq's unity and integrity to fight the group, Allawi said clashes are continuing between Iraqi forces and the IS jihadists and the northern second-biggest city of Mosul is still under the control of the group. [kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

## PESHMERGA READY TO TRADE HOSTAGES WITH ISLAMIC STATE: OFFICIAL

February 15, 2015

**Erbil:** Recent Islamic State group IS video of caged Kurdish Peshmerga being paraded through a militant-held village has ramped up efforts of the KRG to negotiate prisoner exchanges. Kurdish parliamentarian Dler Mawati, who serves as deputy chief of the Committee of Peshmerga Martyrs and Genocide Sacrifices Affairs, said an estimated 50 Peshmerga have been captured by ISIS with a larger number taken prisoner by Kurdish forces. Malawati said the KRG is ready to free those Peshmerga in IS captivity by exchanging hostages with the militants. "We intensified our attempts to free the hostages when IS showed the Peshmerga in caged procession on the streets of Hawija. We now have two options: either to pay money to free our hostages or by exchanging IS hostages," he said. Mawati added that the KRG is ready to even exchange by IS captives taken in Kobani. [rudaw.net](http://rudaw.net) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

## MASROUR BARZANI : KURDS NOT SEEKING TO CONTROL ARAB REGIONS

February 16, 2015

**Erbil:** Chief of Kurdistan Region Intelligence Agency Masrouf Barzani said the Kurdish forces of Peshmerga would attack Arab regions of Iraq in their fight against the militants of the Islamic State (IS). Speaking with CNN, Barzani, son to the region's President Massoud Barzani, said the Peshmerga forces have retaken the control of 500 square kilometers from the jihadists and are at war the militants from Shingal to Kirkuk, about 1000 kilometers. Although the legend of the group's invulnerability has ended but the group is still very strong as it has 40000 forces in Iraq and Syria and is backed by some Sunni tribes. "Now it is the Iraqi army's turn to fight against the IS. The Kurds should not and cannot enter Arab-dominated regions like Tel Afar. We don't like to make a politically sensitive situation for Sunni Arabs," he said, adding that the situation is dire in the regions liberated by the Kurdish forces and people are starving...[kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir)

## SUNNI LEADERS TO GATHER IN KURDISTAN TO ADOPT UNITED ANTI-ISIS STANCE

February 16, 2015

**Erbil:** Leaders representing Iraq's Sunni factions are set to gather in Erbil for a second time to adopt a unified stance against the radical Sunni group fighting under the banner of the Islamic State (ISIS), a Kurdish Islamic party official said Monday. "The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) will support any effort that is aimed at saving Iraq from the current crisis," the KIU's Muhammad Rauf told Rudaw. "The main problem Sunnis face in Iraq is lack of a recognized Sunni authority which everyone could follow," he added. Mosul's exiled governor Osama Nujaifi, a Sunni, has pushed Sunni tribal leaders in Nineveh province, where Mosul is the capital, to distance themselves from ISIS. Last month, Nujaifi said Sunni volunteers have registered "in their hundreds" to take up arms against ISIS. Rauf said even the Kurdish Islamic parties that are defined as Sunnis have been invited to the congress in Erbil, along with religious and political leaders of the Sunni communities in Iraq...[rudaw.net](http://rudaw.net)

## PESHMERGA FROWN ON FOREIGN VOLUNTEERS

February 16, 2015

**Erbil:** Peshmerga leaders have been turning away foreign volunteers eager to fight against the Islamic State, explaining the Kurdish military needs weapons, not manpower. Citing reasons ranging from safety to diplomatic relations, Peshmerga officials say the practice of putting foreigners on the frontline is just not done. For one thing, as Ministry of Peshmerga spokesman Helgurd Hekmat explained, it's illegal. "The Peshmerga is a professional fighting force," Hekmat said, adding that Kurdish law expressly forbids admission of foreigners to the iconic fighting force whose name means "those who face death." Still, Hekmat said he routinely turns away wide-eyed Westerners drawn to put their lives on the line in the name of fighting ISIS, and adventure. "Just last week an American man arrived wanting to volunteer. I couldn't help him. Yes, they are volunteers, but we have to guarantee their lives and we can't do that," he said...[rudaw.net](http://rudaw.net)

## WASHINGTON AND BERLIN REFUSE TO GRANT VISA TO IRAQ'S VP MALIKI

February 17, 2015

**Baghdad:** The Saudi newspaper "Al-Sharq al-Awsat" revealed that the United States has rejected a request made by the current Vice President and former Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki to give him a visa for the purposes of treatment. The newspaper, citing sources said from London, "Maliki had made the same request to Germany before, but it was also refused." In turn, a senior official in the US State Department declined to comment and said, "As a general rule, we cannot comment on visa applications." [shafaaq.com](http://shafaaq.com)

## ISLAMIC STATE DECLARES NEW PROVINCE INCLUDING PARTS OF THE KURDISTAN REGION

February 18, 2015

A new declaration from Islamic State (IS) released 18th February, has announced the formation of a new province, or 'Wilaya' which includes parts of the Kurdistan Region. Social media accounts linked to IS published a document announcing the new Jazira Province in northern Iraq. The document claims that Jazira Province includes Sinjar, Tal Abga, Mhallabia, Talaafar, Zoomar and Ba'aj. It is the first time that IS has claimed Kurdistan Region territory for the so-called Caliphate. After taking control of parts of Syria, IS announced the establishment of provinces such as Al Barakah, Al-Khayr, Raqqah, Homs and Halab. In June 2014, after the extremist group moved into Iraq, it declared new provinces; Al Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salahadin and Nineveh. It also claims other provinces in Lebanon and Libya but has no practical control in defined areas of the territories. The declaration of Islamic State's new Province in Northern Iraq. [basnews.com](http://basnews.com) ♦



# Iraq's Kakais: 'We want to protect our culture'

Iraq's Kakai religious minority is taking up arms against ISIL.

Mohammed A Salih ,  
Wladimir van Wilgenburg 11 February 2015  
www.aljazeera.com

**K**IRKUK.— In the middle of the vast green plains of southern Kirkuk, Farhad Nezar, and a group of mostly young men, roam around the dirty village streets carrying light and medium machine guns.

The force that Nezar leads is unique because it's exclusively made up of the followers of a minority religious group known as Kakai. It is formed to defend the non-Muslim minority against a possible attack by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The Kakai faith, also known as Yarsanism, is a syncretistic mystical faith that is believed to have originated in Kurdish dominated parts of western Iran in the 14th century. Its followers speak a dialect of Kurdish known as Gorani and are scattered across northern Iraq, Iran and many live in exile in Europe and North America.

The Kakai Battalion, as Nezar's force is known, was established in January and has around 680 fighters in its ranks. It is answerable to Iraqi Kurdistan's Ministry of Peshmerga.

The brutality that ISIL demonstrated in dealing with religious minorities in Iraq and Syria prompted the Kakais to opt for forming their own protection force.

Last June, Iraqi army forces abandoned their positions in Kirkuk when ISIL fighters ran over the neighbouring areas of Nineveh and Salahuddin provinces. And the Kurdish Peshmerga failed to protect the Yazidi and Christian-dominated areas in Nineveh plains, leading to a large-scale massacre and brutalisation of the Yazidi community in August.

"We as Kakais feel very threatened," said Nezar, who like almost every other Kakai man here sports a big moustache that covers his mouth. "If they [ISIL] get their hands on us, they will attempt a genocide of our people."

On a pleasant recent sunny afternoon, Nezar and his men walk rather cheerfully to the main road to check out the situation on the front line which is a couple of kilometres away.

They stand next to a sign that identifies the village as Kobane. Inspired by the stiff resistance that the Kurdish forces put up against ISIL in the northern Syrian town of Kobane, the locals here decided to go for the namesake.

ISIL's black banner can be spotted on a hill in the distance.

"Don't gather here all of you. They might fire mortar rockets at us," Nezar, a former major in the Iraqi army and commander of the Kakai Battalion tells his fighters.

The Kakai religion shares elements with Islam and other Mesopotamian religions.

The followers of the faith hold Imam Ali – a holy figure among Muslims particularly the Shia – in high esteem. That has led some to believe

that Kakais give Imam Ali a divine status.

Kakais believe in reincarnation, a notion that is also shared in certain ways by the followers of the Yazidi faith.

The Iraqi Kobane and its surrounding areas, populated mostly by Kakais, have been largely quiet compared to most other parts of the front line between Kurdish-ruled areas and ISIL that runs over 1,000km.

The most recent battle here took place on January 10, but ISIL fighters could not penetrate through Peshmerga lines.

Kakais are a small community and there is no exact figure of their numbers. Sherzad Kakai, a notable person in the community, estimates there are around 75,000 Kakais in Iraq.

The group has been marginalised and subjected to persecution for much of the contemporary history of Iraq.

Ever since the Kurdish Peshmerga forces extended their control to this part of Kirkuk after Iraqi forces deserted their positions in the face of ISIL's assault, the Kakais say they have reasserted themselves.

The village of Kobane itself once used to be almost completely Kakai.

But like many other parts of Kirkuk, it was subjected to a campaign of demographic gerrymandering by Saddam Hussein's government in mid-1970s and beyond.

During the campaign, known as Arabisation, hundreds of Arab tribesmen were settled in this area by the government. As a result, many Kakais lost their lands.

Kobane, formerly known as Arab Koi, is now actually a predominantly Arab village with over 50 Arab households and around 30 Kakai families.

The fear of being uprooted from their areas has galvanised the Kakais into action.

Of the seven Kakai villages in this corner of Kirkuk province, one named Abu Mohammed is under ISIL control. "Some Kakai villages in Gwer, Hamdaniya and in Kirkuk are controlled



A Kakeyi Kurd. Photo credit: Karlos Zurutuza/IPS



Kakai fighters walk towards the main road in the village of Kobane, in the southern part of Kirkuk province to check out ISIL positions a couple of kilometres away [Mohammed A Salih/Al Jazeera]

by Daesh [ISIL]," Liza Kakai, a Kurdish Kakai activist said. "Just like the Yezidis, we are afraid of extremists after the arrival of Daesh [ISIL] in Mosul."

In August, ISIL destroyed some holy shrines in Kakai villages near Hamdaniya area, west of Mosul city, ISIL's major stronghold in Iraq. ISIL now controls six Kakai villages in western Nineveh.

A unit of the Kakai Battalion is based in the Kakai villages in Nineveh province for now.

The religious minority has been a target of ISIL's extremist predecessors in Iraq as well. Dozens of Kakais have died in suicide attacks and assassinations since 2003.

"We want to protect our culture," says Sherzad Nezar, a Kakai man from a nearby village of Shalyar. "We want strong international support."

There are some holy religious sites in southern Kirkuk, around Daquq district, that Kakais fear will be destroyed if ISIL gets its hands on them.

The vast majority of the residents of Kobane and neighbouring villages have decided to stay behind despite the precarious and uncertain conditions.

Hayaz Hamid, 22, used to spend most of his time working on the family farm. Now, for many of the villagers here it's risky to cultivate their land as they are within reach of ISIL fire.

Hamid has now taken up arms like the majority of young men in this area.

He says he is emotionally attached to the land and fellow members of his vulnerable community.

"We just can't accept other people to occupy our villages and land," Hamid says with his AK-47 gun hung from his shoulder. "We consider it a sacred and necessary duty to defend our areas."

Meanwhile, like many parts of the country, communal tensions have heightened here since ISIL attacks began.

Nezar, the Kakai commander, says the local Arabs have not volunteered to take up arms to defend the area.

But some Arab villagers here say if push comes to shove, they will defend their homes.

"Life is normal here so far," says Hamid Taha, an Arab resident of Kobane who is a farmer and a shopkeeper. "We will join them [the Kakais] if ISIL will attack." ■

## Kurdish officials: Peshmerga to exchange prisoners with ISIL



February 15, 2015 by Ahmed Hussein, [www.iraqinews.com](http://www.iraqinews.com)

Baghdad (IraqiNews.com) – Recent ISIL video of caged Peshmerga being paraded through a militant-held village has ramped up efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government to negotiate prisoner exchanges. Kurdish parliamentarian Dler Mawati, who serves as deputy chief of the Committee of Peshmerga Martyrs and Genocide Sacrifices Affairs, said an estimated 50 Peshmerga have been captured by ISIL with a larger number taken prisoner by Kurdish forces.

Malawati said the Kurdistan Regional Government is ready to free those

Peshmerga in ISIL captivity by exchanging hostages with the militants.

“We intensified our attempts to free the hostages when ISIL showed the Peshmerga in caged procession on the streets of Hawijja. We now have two options: either to pay money to free our hostages or by exchanging ISIL hostages,” he said.

Mawati added that the Kurdistan Regional Government is ready to even exchange by ISIL captives taken in Kobane. ●

# The Kurdish paradox



NURAY MERT  
February/16/2015  
[hurriyetdailynews.com](http://hurriyetdailynews.com)

After a series of meetings between the government and the main Kurdish party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the pair has announced that they will prepare a “joint text” for the so-called “Kurdish resolution process.” Under different circumstances, it would be very good news, but because of the fact that Turkey is in an election process, it is rather confusing. I am among those who support the peace process unconditionally and avoid making a fuss about Kurds' need to deal with the governing party.

Nevertheless, from the beginning two years ago, the peace process has been overshadowed by skepticism about a possible deal between the Kurds and the governing party. It was thought that Kurds might have agreed with the ruling party on the presidential system in exchange for Kurdish rights. Such a thought was protested by the Kurdish party, which said it has never considered separating peace from the democratization processes.

However, since then the debate has continued, especially revolving around some events like the Gezi protests, when many leftist democrats questioned why the Kurds did not participate in the protests wholeheartedly. I have never been among the critics, not because I believed that the “peace deals” could not be separated from the democratization process as Kurds claim, but I thought the opposite in the name of political realism.

In theory, the best way to peace with Kurds should have been within the framework of general democratization, but in fact, Turkey is in the reverse process of de-democratization. Under those circumstances, I thought it was better to at least not risk negotiations with the ruling party.

Now things are getting even more complex, since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling party have determined the political target of the coming election as winning an absolute majority to replace the existing system with a “Turkish-style presidential system.”

As for the Kurdish party, it is supposed to campaign against the ruling party's undemocratic ways and get more votes from democrats and leftists to cross the 10 percent election threshold. The same Kurdish party is supposed to avoid risking its relations with the governing party in the name of the peace process or negotiations. Kurds are clearly in a difficult position, but it is more than that; it is “mission impossible,” which may end up endangering both the Kurdish peace process and Kurds' political credibility and their political/moral alliance with leftist democrats in Turkey.

In fact, the decision by the HDP to run in the elections as “a party” for the first time, rather than running as independents candidates, is being debated widely, even by democratic supporters of Kurdish rights. It has been argued that the Kurdish party is running a big risk, since in the event that it fails to overcome the 10 percent threshold, it will give the ruling party an overwhelming majority and, there-

fore, free hand in parliament to change the constitution and the political system. The idea of risk could work for HDP if those who are scared of such a prospect decide to vote for the HDP to halt the ongoing authoritarian tendency. However, it is obvious that even if the Kurdish party manages to transcend the threshold, the subject of “the big deal” will not change; the ruling party will expect the Kurdish party to compromise on its biggest aim, namely, accepting the native version of the presidential system in exchange for more rights for Kurds.

The other option for Kurds is to confront the ruling party, but it will lead to the end of negotiations. Finally, the paradox of Kurdish politics is not only about the elections but it will be even more pressing after the election under any circumstances. If Kurds fail to enter parliament, they will either play into the hands of the ruling party and expect Erdoğan and his party to be benevolent to Kurds, or Kurds will choose to launch civil disobedience and unrest; such a policy would lead to political chaos in Turkey. In the event that the HDP manages to get into the parliament, they will face the dilemma of compromising with the presidential system project or risking negotiations.

Finally, there is the problem of transparency; the HDP is asking for democratic support but is unable to discuss its politics, since the negotiations that it is currently engaged in are all secret and rather enigmatic. Both parties took the decision of secrecy so as not to endanger the peace process. It means that the HDP is in the odd position of seeking democratic support for secret decisions. In short, the Kurdish paradox seems to be very complicated and difficult to sort out.

■ ■ ■

# Kurds reject proposed rival force in Kirkuk

The law to establish the National Guard forces in Iraq raised the ire of Kurds in northern Iraq who would rather remain in full control of their areas.



**Mohammed A. Salih**  
February 12, 2015  
www.al-monitor.com

**E**RBIL, Iraq — A law to found a paramilitary National Guard force in Iraq to assist in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) has put Kurds at loggerheads with other communities in northern Iraq.

Kurds strongly reject the formation of any rival armed units in the parts of northern Iraq that are known as disputed territories to which Kurdish, Sunni Arab, Turkmen and Shiite Arab populations lay claims. Most of the disputed territories are now under the control of Kurdish peshmerga forces.

Members of the other communities want to play a role in the security arrangements of those areas and hope that the National Guard will become a vehicle for their return to the security scene in disputed territories.

But fearful that the birth of other armed groups can weaken their control over those areas amid a difficult war with IS and give rise to chaotic outcomes, the Kurds have resisted the idea of other competing forces in the disputed territories.

Shakhawan Abdullah, a Kurdish member of the Iraqi parliament, told Al-Monitor that the law has to make it clear that the National Guard will not be established in Kurdish-controlled areas. "The National Guard law should stipulate clearly that the peshmerga is in charge in the disputed territories and that's it," said Abdullah, a Kirkuk deputy in the Iraqi parliament's security and defense committee.

Iraq's Cabinet passed a draft law on Feb. 3 that paves the way for legalizing the status of disparate Shiite armed groups and organizing tribal Sunni forces under the umbrella of a National Guard force.

**T**he National Guard draft law was scheduled for a first reading by Iraqi members of parliament during a meeting on Feb. 10. But deep disagreements regarding certain items of the bill led the speaker to delay discussions indefinitely.

Grappling with a resilient and formidable foe in the form of IS, the Iraqi government is desperate to use the National Guard as a key element to turn the tide against the jihadist group. There appears to be nationwide support for the creation of the National Guard as far as fighting IS is concerned in the areas that the group controls in northern and central Iraq.

While Kurds also support the idea of the National Guard to fight IS in other parts of the country, they do not want those fighters in areas they run such as the Kurdistan Region and the disputed parts of Kirkuk, Ninevah, Salahuddin and Khanaqin provinces under their control.

In particular, the oil-rich province of Kirkuk has been at the center of the controversy surrounding the National Guard.

In an interview published Feb. 8 in the London-based pan-Arab daily, Al Hayat, Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani said, "We are not in need of the Popular Mobilization [forces] and will not allow any forces to enter Kirkuk."

Popular Mobilization refers to the armed Shiite groups formed after the collapse of several divisions of the Iraqi army when IS attacked Mosul and other main areas in northern and central Iraq.

After the Iraqi army forces were routed by IS militants last June, the army's 12th Division abandoned its bases in Kirkuk. Kurdish peshmerga forces moved swiftly and set up shop in the areas of the province where Kurdish populations reside, including the city of Kirkuk and the rich oil fields in its environs.

Sunni Arabs form the vast majority of the Arab population in the ethnically and sectarian-diverse Kirkuk province and other disputed territories. The southern parts of Kirkuk province, around the districts of Hawija and

Rashad, host the majority of Sunni Arabs in the province and are currently controlled by IS forces.

But Sunni Arab leaders who are not residing in IS-controlled territories demand the formation of a Sunni force as part of the National Guard.

"Sunni Arab tribes want to be part of the forces defending Kirkuk alongside the peshmerga," Ismael Hadidi, the chief of the Sunni Arab Hadidi tribe, told Al-Monitor. "Daesh [IS] poses a huge threat to us all."

**H**adidi, who also served as Kirkuk's deputy governor for a number of years after the US-led invasion in 2003, said that the structure of the National Guard forces and their command structure must be clearly defined. He added that in the event that the National Guard forces are established in Kirkuk, there should be "coordination and a joint command" between them and the peshmerga forces.

Another draft law aimed at relatively easing the restrictions placed on the return of the former members of Saddam Hussein's outlawed Baath Party to public life is expected to be discussed alongside the National Guard bill. The Sunni Arabs want a board that was in charge of identifying and disqualifying Baathists from engaging in public life to be dismantled as they accuse it of practically launching a witch-hunt campaign against Sunni Arabs.

"There are many professional and patriotic officers from the former Iraqi army [under Saddam Hussein] who we can draw on their capabilities," Hadidi said.

While the majority of Kurdish members of the Iraqi parliament and Kurdish politicians in Kirkuk appear to be against the formation of National Guard units in Kirkuk, there is already some measure of cooperation between the Shiite Popular Mobilization units.

IS launched a multi-pronged assault on Kirkuk city on Jan. 29, but after two days of intense fighting, Kurdish forces pushed back IS militants, preventing them from reaching the city. Following those attacks, scores of Shiite armed elements reportedly set up shop south of Kirkuk city with the stated aim of assisting the peshmerga forces in defending the city. There were some Popular Mobilization forces in Kirkuk even before Jan. 29.

There appears to be a rift in the stance of the two dominant Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in terms of their approach to the Shiite armed groups.

**W**hereas the KDP, led by Barzani, is adamant in rejecting the presence of Shiite armed groups in areas under Kurdish control, the PUK, led by former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, appears to have a lukewarm position. Peshmerga forces affiliated with the PUK have cooperated with the Shiite armed groups in liberating areas such as Amerli in Salahuddin province and Jalawla in Diyala province.

Abdullah, the Kurdish member of parliament, says that the Shiite groups have violated their earlier agreements with Kurds to leave the Kurdish-controlled areas after Amerli was recaptured from IS in September and Jalawla in November last year.

In a visit to Kirkuk on Feb. 7, Hadi al-Ameri, the head of the Badr Brigades, an Iranian-backed Shiite armed group, hinted at possible plans for cooperation between the Popular Mobilization units and the peshmerga forces.

"Kirkuk is of high importance and has oil and gas resources as well as power stations," Ameri said following a meeting with Kirkuk Gov. Najmaddin Karim. "We have to act toward ending the threat posed by Daesh [IS] through high coordination with the peshmerga forces and the governor, and this requires swift action." ♦

*Mohammed A. Salih is a journalist based in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan. He has written about Kurdish and Iraqi affairs for local and international media.*

# Rojava, l'Etat insoumis

Face au califat, un mini-État kurde et démocratique se fédère



Bruno Deniel-Laurent  
19 février 2015  
www.causeur.fr

L'un des aspects les plus fascinants des guerres civiles réside peut-être dans leur génie à susciter l'apparition d'États de facto dont les actes fondateurs sont sculptés dans la frénésie des combats. Deux étranges entités politiques sont ainsi en train de naître sous nos yeux en Syrie, prospérant sur les décombres d'un régime baassiste qui ne maîtrise guère plus que la moitié de son territoire : proclamé le 29 juin 2014, l'État islamique impose désormais l'autorité « califale » d'Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi sur une superficie égale à celle du Royaume-Uni, partageant des frontières communes avec la Turquie, la Jordanie, l'Arabie saoudite et le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak ; et au même moment, dans l'extrême nord de la Syrie, trois cantons kurdes disjoints se sont fédérés pour créer le territoire « auto-administré » du Rojava, dont la charte fondatrice, publiée le 21 janvier 2014, semble comme sortie de l'imagination d'un socialiste-révolutionnaire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Au-delà de l'antagonisme fondamental qui oppose ces deux entités ennemies, l'une et l'autre se pensent comme des modèles de gouvernance au Proche-Orient et se rejoignent sur un même refus de la conception occidentale de l'État-nation : tandis que les combattants de Daesh – acronyme arabe de l'État islamique – clament leur volonté de restaurer une forme califale de pouvoir tout en pulvérisant les frontières héritées des accords franco-britanniques de 1916, les dirigeants du Rojava n'aspirent pas tant à créer un État, fût-il kurde, qu'une « confédération démocratique des peuples kurde, arabe, assyrien, chaldéen, turkmène, arménien, tchéchène ». Ainsi, ce n'est pas une Constitution qui fonde l'« auto-administration démocratique » du Rojava, mais un contrat social appuyé sur un idéal multiethnique, inclusif et « laïque », tandis que l'État islamique s'appuie quant à lui sur une conception intraitable et guerrière de la charia, vue comme un réseau de canaux divinement prédisposés pour l'équilibre d'une société musulmane pleinement victorieuse. Aucun doute : la Syrie est devenue, pour le meilleur ou pour le pire, le laboratoire des nouvelles utopies proche-orientales.

En ce mois de novembre 2014, je traîne mes guêtres, justement, dans le canton syrien du Cizîrê, le plus vaste des trois territoires qui forment le Rojava. Si des milliers de Français, de Belges ou de Scandinaves sont venus grossir les rangs des moudjahidine de l'État islamique, ici, il n'y a pas foule : les Européens présents au Kurdistan de Syrie se comptent ainsi sur les doigts d'une seule main, ce que l'on me fera remarquer dès mon arrivée. La vice-premier ministre, Elizabeth Gawriya, me posera ainsi cette colle : « Pourquoi mille Français se sont-ils engagés dans une milice qui coupe nos enfants en morceaux tandis que pas un seul n'est venu défendre le Rojava ? » ; elle s'étonnera aussi que la France – « pays chrétien » – n'aide pas le Rojava alors qu'il est le premier pays du monde à avoir fait de l'araméen – la langue du Christ – l'une de ses langues officielles, à côté du kurde et de l'arabe... Plus tard, un officier nous apprendra que les daeshistes sont équipés de missiles Milan de fabrication française ; puis un membre du Parlement s'emportera



contre François Hollande, accusé d'être le « meilleur allié de la Turquie » ; enfin, Nazira Gawriya, la coprésidente – syrienne orthodoxe – du Conseil législatif du Cizîrê, formulera une requête primordiale : « Que la France arrête d'accorder des visas d'entrée aux chrétiens d'Orient ! » On l'aura compris : aller en tant que Français à la rencontre des officiels du Rojava – surtout s'ils sont chrétiens –, c'est prendre le risque d'être accueilli par une soupe à la grimace, qui, heureusement, se mue généralement en franche hospitalité.

Le Rojava – littéralement, Kurdistan « de l'Ouest » – est né d'un compromis historique entre les Kurdes du parti PYD et le régime de Bachar el-Assad : ne pouvant se battre sur tous les fronts à la fois, ce dernier a en effet choisi de laisser les militants du PYD former en 2012 des assemblées populaires dans trois cantons disjoints – Efrîn, Kobané et Cizîrê – qui, ensemble, couvrent un territoire désormais aussi étendu que le Liban. Territoire éclaté mais aussi enserré entre deux puissances qui ont juré sa perte : le gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc, au nord, rêve évidemment d'écraser dans l'œuf cette entité politique dominée par les idées « confédéralistes démocratiques » d'Abdullah Öcalan, leader omnipotent des Kurdes de Turquie. Mais c'est l'État islamique qui exerce sur le Rojava la pression la plus brutale : en septembre 2014, les combattants de Daesh se sont ainsi lancés dans une guerre-éclair contre le canton de Kobané, provoquant l'exode de centaines de milliers de civils vers la Turquie, où ils s'entassent désormais dans des camps de fortune. Bataille épique, mais aussi fondatrice : il n'est pas besoin d'avoir lu Carl Schmitt pour comprendre que la figure de l'ennemi total permet de fonder des solidarités opératives. En ce sens, l'existence de Daesh et la menace existentielle qu'il fait peser sur les peuples du Kurdistan syrien sont peut-être une chance historique : l'acte de naissance du creuset multiethnique du Rojava restera à jamais lié au souvenir d'une guerre totale rassemblant sous un même drapeau Kurdes, Arabes, chrétiens, mais aussi hommes et femmes, les médiatiques Unités féminines de protection (YPJ) totalisant quelque 30 % des troupes combattantes dans la ville assiégée de Kobané ou sur la ligne de front du Cizîrê.

Il est évidemment plus intéressant d'évoquer la réalité de l'État islamique avec celles et ceux qui se défendent quotidiennement contre ses assauts que de subir les assommants clichés véhiculés en France, oscillant entre l'hystérie va-t-en-guerre d'une certaine droite et l'euphémisation anti-amalgamiste d'une certaine gauche. Ainsi, à l'encontre de tous ceux qui parlent en France de « pseudo-État islamique » ou d'État « prétendument islamique », les Kurdes savent que le califat d'al-Baghdadi possède tous les attributs régaliens : une administration efficiente, deux Premiers ministres (l'un pour l'Irak, l'autre pour la Syrie), des ministères organisés, des structures provinciales décentralisées, des agences de presse, des services de renseignement et un gigantesque budget alimenté par les raffineries artisanales, les trafics frontaliers, les confiscations et le pillage →

⇒ des sites archéologiques. L'État islamique a la vocation d'être un foyer : sa propagande martèle sans cesse que le premier devoir des vrais musulmans – « Arabes et non-Arabes, Blancs et Noirs, Orientaux et Occidentaux » – est de quitter les nations impies d'Europe et de se livrer à l'hijra (émigration) vers les terres « califales ». Ceux qui en France s'inquiètent du « grand remplacement » devraient s'en réjouir !

Les Kurdes – qui sont sunnites pour la plupart – et les Arabes du Rojava savent aussi qu'il serait absurde ou mensonger de nier le caractère « islamique » de cet État de facto, car c'est un rêve grandiose, puissamment ancré dans la mémoire sunnite, que renouvelle l'État islamique d'al-Baghdadi : celui du califat abbasside de Bagdad, détruit par les invasions mongoles du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et auquel succédera l'avatar califal ottoman, qui sera formellement aboli en 1924 par Mustafa Kemal. Ainsi, contrairement à la « rue occidentale » qui ne voit dans l'État islamique qu'un ramassis de fous ou de barbares – tandis qu'une partie de la « rue musulmane » le suspecte d'être une création des services occidentaux et israéliens... –, le rêve califal d'al-Baghdadi est perçu par de nombreux musulmans comme un processus historico-religieux d'une inégalable beauté, prompt à susciter de virils et d'idéalistes engagements, depuis la Tunisie jusqu'aux Philippines en passant par Lunel et Berlin. S'inscrivant dans le sillage de l'intransigeante école de jurisprudence hanbalite et se référant constamment aux écrits d'Ibn Taymiyya (un théologien d'origine kurde du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle), les combattants de Daesh sont, qu'on le veuille ou non, l'un des visages de l'islam contemporain, et pas le moins belligène, puisque leur conception de l'apostasie, particulièrement extensive, n'est pas de nature à nous rassurer : sont en effet considérés comme apostats, donc passibles de mort, les musulmans non sunnites dans leur ensemble – ce qui fait beaucoup de monde dans la région : chiites duodécimains, ismaéliens, alaouites, alévis, druzes –, mais aussi la plupart des confréries soufies, ainsi que les sunnites collaborant avec les États arabes jugés apostats. Même les Frères musulmans ou les islamistes palestiniens du Hamas, coupables selon Daesh de s'être compromis dans les joutes électorales, sont accusés d'être des idolâtres... On le voit : si le monde est contre l'État islamique – la coalition arabo-occidentale regroupe vingt-deux pays dont dix pays musulmans –, c'est aussi parce que l'État islamique a déclaré la guerre au monde entier. Mais, contrairement à Al-Qaïda, qui avait choisi de frapper – et de quelle manière extraordinaire ! – « l'ennemi lointain », l'État islamique privilégie pour l'instant « l'ennemi proche ».

Le 20 novembre dernier, j'arpentais ainsi les ruines de la ville Lsyrienne de Tel Maarouf, centre religieux de la confrérie soufie des naqshbandi et haut lieu de pèlerinage du canton du Cizîrê. En février 2014, une brigade internationale de miliciens de l'État islamique – parmi lesquels des Français – a nuitamment pénétré dans la ville, n'y restant que vingt-quatre heures, le temps de dynamiter les deux mosquées, dévaster l'école primaire et profaner la tombe de Sheikh Khaznawi. Les miliciens ont quitté Tel Maarouf sans coup férir, emportant avec eux les fruits de leurs pillages et quinze villageois parmi lesquels des jeunes filles et des bambins, celles-là promises aux viols et ceux-ci à la réassignation identitaire. Dans les décombres des mosquées, les daeshistes ont aussi dispersé des exemplaires piégés du Coran, espérant ainsi défigurer encore quelques Kurdes après leur départ. Tel Maarouf est désormais une ville morte, abandonnée aux chats qui se faufilent entre des matelas éventrés, des jouets d'enfants, des livres souillés. Voilà ce qu'il en coûte aux sunnites syriens de ne pas entrer dans le moule étroit du salafisme révolutionnaire.

Les chrétiens de la région, on s'en doute, n'ont pas été les derniers à s'associer à la construction de l'« auto-administration » du Rojava. Ils sont, ne l'oublions jamais, les rescapés du génocide assyro-arménien de 1915 au cours duquel un million de chrétiens ont été exterminés, avec la complicité de supplétifs kurdes, par les Jeunes-Turcs, ce très « progressiste » mouvement fondé, comme par

hasard, un siècle jour pour jour après la prise de la Bastille. Puis les chrétiens du Rojava savent ce qui les attend en cas de victoire des « djihadistes » : en 2012, les miliciens de Jabhat al-Nosra et du groupe turco-caucasien Ghuraba al-Sham sont ainsi entrés à Ras el-Aïn, l'une des principales villes du Cizîrê, et n'en ont été chassés qu'un an plus tard, après avoir vandalisé les églises et crevé les yeux des icônes mariales. Au projet d'homogénéisation radicale de l'État islamique répond donc la volonté polyphonique du Rojava, inscrite dans le marbre de sa charte fondatrice : chaque ministère est tricéphale et doit inclure au moins une femme et un(e) représentant(e) d'une des trois grandes communautés, c'est-à-dire, dans les faits, un/une Kurde, un/une Arabe, un/une chrétien(ne). Des règles similaires sont appliquées dans les différentes instances politiques qui reposent sur les comités communaux, les initiatives populaires et le bénévolat. Et le plus incroyable est peut-être que, dans ce contexte de pénurie et de guerre totale, les administrations du Rojava trouvent aussi le temps de travailler sur des questions que certains pourraient juger secondaires : Amina Omar, la ministre de la condition féminine, œuvre ainsi à la création de refuges pour les femmes battues, arguant qu'il faut déployer la même énergie contre ceux qui sont violents qu'ils soient de l'extérieur ou de l'intérieur. Et, pendant ce temps, Luqman Akhmi, ministre de l'écologie, de l'archéologie et du tourisme (sic), travaille à préserver les sites antiques d'Urkesh et d'Halaf, une démarche qui contraste fort avec les agissements des fonctionnaires de l'État islamique. Lesquels, dégoûtés par les œuvres façonnées sous l'ère antéislamique de la jâhiliyya, oscillent entre les pillages lucratifs et les destructions méthodiques. Enfin, dans les rues de Qamişlo ou dans les casernements de la ligne de front, la jeunesse du Rojava se livre à une activité désormais criminalisée à l'intérieur de l'État islamique : elle danse.

Pour l'heure, sous-équipées et seulement aidées par le soutien aérien de la coalition arabo-occidentale, les troupes combattantes du Rojava continuent de subir le siège de Kobané et tiennent fermement la ligne de front du Cizîrê, intervenant aussi en Irak afin de protéger les Yézidis, une population kurde mithraïste vivant dans la région des monts Sinjar. Largement ignorés par les États, boudés par les visiteurs, menacés de toutes parts, les peuples du Rojava n'en gardent pas moins la virile assurance de la légitimité que confère l'ancienneté. Ce sont de vieux peuples : contre la prétention hégémonique de l'État islamique, les chrétiens de Kobané et du Cizîrê n'oublient pas qu'ils sont les enfants du patriarcat d'Antioche, dont l'institution remonte aux apôtres Pierre et Paul ; les Kurdes, peuple indo-européen, se savent quant à eux les héritiers des royaumes mèdes, tandis que le calendrier yézidi entre dans sa 6765<sup>e</sup> année. Aussi, l'on comprendra que ces populations, dont les mythes fondateurs s'enracinent dans une mémoire autrement plus ancienne que l'hégire, restent un peu dubitatives face aux leçons de vie administrées par des « djihadistes twitter » shootés aux amphétamines – dont certains sont par ailleurs des transfuges des milices baasistes irakiennes ou d'anciens alcooliques venus des Flandres ou d'Indre-et-Loire... Les daeshistes ont beau cultiver un zèle surhumain à trancher des gorges récalcitrantes ou profaner des corps adolescents, pour les peuples du Rojava, les vertus de la révolution califale n'apparaissent pas encore dans leur pleine lumière. [/access]

\*Photo : Bruno Deniel-Laurent.

Bruno Deniel-Laurent

collabore régulièrement à la Revue des Deux Mondes, Marianne, Grand Seigneur et est co-fondateur de feu la rue littéraire Cancer !.

★ ★ ★

## Irak : les Kurdes repoussent une attaque de l'EI au sud d'Erbil

18 fév 2015 (AFP)  
lorientlejour.com

**Erbil (Irak),** — Les combattants kurdes (peshmergas) ont repoussé une attaque majeure de l'organisation Etat islamique au sud-ouest d'Erbil, capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, ont indiqué mercredi des responsables.

"L'attaque qui a été lancée mardi à 20h00 (17h00 GMT) a été

déjouée. Elle a duré quatre heures et nous avons tué 34 membres de l'EI", a affirmé à l'AFP Sirwane Barzani, le commandant local des peshmergas.

Selon M. Barzani, quelque 300 jihadistes ont attaqué deux villages entre les localités de Gweir et Makhmour, situées dans une zone à 40 km au sud-ouest d'Erbil. "Daech (acronyme arabe de l'EI) n'a pas pu utiliser des véhicules militaires ou des voitures piégées

en raison des tranchées creusées par les peshmergas sur les lignes de front", a expliqué M. Barzani, neveu de Massoud Barzani, président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak.

M. Barzani a affirmé que les peshmergas avaient reçu l'appui aérien de la coalition internationale anti-jihadistes conduite par les Etats-Unis, qui depuis août 2014 a mené des centaines de frappes contre l'EI. "Les affronte-

ments sont maintenant terminés, nous récupérons leurs corps (ceux des jihadistes, ndlr)", a déclaré Najat Ali, commandant adjoint des peshmergas sur le front de Makhmour.

Gweir et Makhmour ont été il y a six mois parmi les premières cibles des frappes aériennes américaines contre les jihadistes. La région est régulièrement l'objet d'offensives de l'EI. Les jihadistes y avaient déjà mené le mois dernier une attaque surprise, traversant les eaux du Zab en bateau et s'emparant de la zone kurde de Gwer avant d'en être repoussés. Vingt-six membres des forces de sécurité kurdes avaient été tués. ■

## IRAK. Jusqu'à 10.000 femmes vendues par l'Etat islamique

**Un rapport d'un groupe de défenseurs des droits explique que le trafic de femmes a "explosé" ces dernières années. Leur destin ? Etre violées, forcées à se prostituer ou tuées.**

19 février 2015  
tempsreel.nouvelobs.com

**J**usqu'à 10.000 femmes et filles en Irak ont été enlevées ou victimes de la traite pour l'esclavage sexuel, la prostitution ou la rançon, selon un rapport du Minority Rights Group International and the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights rapporté par Reuters.

Quelque 14.000 femmes ont été tuées depuis l'invasion américaine de 2003, et beaucoup de femmes et filles ont été violées dans ce laps de temps. Les auteurs du rapport expliquent que le trafic en Irak a "explosé" ces dernières années et que l'Etat islamique est devenu un acteur majeur dans l'achat et la vente de filles.

Les déplacements massifs ont créé un environnement favorable pour les trafiquants. Les femmes déplacées, comme celles qui ont fui des violences domestiques ou des mariages forcés, sont particulièrement vulnérables. Certains trafiquants recherchent des fugueuses dans des lieux publics, comme le marché par exemple, selon le rapport. D'autres les trouvent en prison en établissant des cautions pour les femmes et en les forçant à rembourser leur dette en se prostituant.

**«L'EI a introduit et légitimé la pratique de l'esclavage sexuel à une échelle sans précédent», écrivent les auteurs du rapport.»**

Ces femmes sont envoyées à Bagdad ou dans les villes du nord de l'Irak ou en Syrie, en Jordanie ou aux Emirats arabes unis. Une fille yézidie a expliqué avoir été emmenée en Syrie avec 350 autres filles où elles ont été exposées et vendues dans la rue "comme des poulets sur un marché".

Une méthode commune consiste à nouer un mariage temporaire avec une victime, puis divorcer une fois arrivés à destination. Sur place, l'homme force sa compagne à se prostituer, avant de retourner en Irak pour répéter le processus.

**DE 200 À 500 DOLLARS LA NUIT AVEC UNE VIERGE**

En dehors de l'Irak, les femmes sont vendues jusqu'à 20.000 dollars. En Irak, une nuit avec une femme vierge coûte entre

200 et 500 dollars. Dans certains cas, les filles ont été forcées de subir une chirurgie de reconstruction de l'hymen afin d'être vendues une nouvelle fois comme vierges.

L'EI a capturé au moins 3.000 femmes et filles en Irak en 2014 seulement, dont la majorité vient de la minorité yézidie.

Les femmes capturées qui sont parvenues à parler aux défenseurs des droits disent que les combattants de l'EI violent leurs victimes quotidiennement. Toute fille qui essaye de se suicider ou de s'échapper est torturée avec des câbles électriques. Certaines en viennent à espérer que des frappes aériennes s'abattent sur leur emplacement pour mettre fin à leurs souffrances.

Le rapport met aussi en avant des cas terrifiants. Par exemple, un soldat a violé une enfant de 4 ans avant de la battre à mort avec une brique. Une fille de 5 ans a été violée en réunion avant d'être étranglée avec un lacet.

Le Minority Rights Group a demandé aux gouvernements irakiens et kurdes de redoubler leurs efforts pour obtenir la libération des femmes kidnappées, mais aussi de renforcer les lois contre les violences sexuelles et d'enquêter sur les crimes commis. ●

# Un jeune kurde exécuté en Iran malgré la mobilisation internationale

Texte par FRANCE 24  
20 février 2015

**R**ecconnu coupable d'actions armées contre les Gardiens de la révolution, le jeune kurde iranien Saman Naseem a été exécuté jeudi 19 février en Iran, selon la FIDH. L'Iran est resté sourd aux appels internationaux à la clémence. La menace de son exécution était imminente. Le jeune Kurde iranien Saman Naseem, 22 ans, reconnu coupable en avril 2013 d'actions armées contre les Gardiens de la révolution, l'armée d'élite du régime iranien, n'a pas été amnistié. Il a été exécuté jeudi 19 février dans la matinée, selon la FIDH qui a obtenu ces informations vendredi.



D'après l'ONG, la famille de Saman Naseem, à qui il a été demandé de garder le silence sur l'affaire, a été contactée par les autorités iraniennes jeudi après-midi pour venir chercher les effets personnels du jeune homme, comme cela est d'usage après une exécution.

### MINEUR À L'ÉPOQUE DES FAITS

L'Iran est resté sourd aux appels internationaux, notamment celui de la France, deman-

dant à Téhéran de respecter ses engagements dans le domaine des droits de l'Homme. En effet, l'Iran est signataire de la convention de l'ONU sur les droits de l'enfant, qui interdit les condamnations à mort pour les mineurs.

"Saman Naseem était mineur au moment des faits qui lui sont reprochés. Son droit fondamental à un procès juste et équitable n'a pas été respecté. La France appelle les autorités iraniennes à respecter leurs engagements internationaux dans le domaine des droits de l'Homme, notamment la convention des Nations unies relative aux droits de l'enfant", avait déclaré le ministère des Affaires étrangères dans un communiqué émis jeudi.

En français, en anglais, en japonais, en turc... les messages s'étaient multipliés sur Twitter depuis les quatre coins de la planète pour demander à l'Iran de ne pas exécuter Saman Naseem. Certains internautes n'hésitant pas à s'adresser directement au Guide suprême iranien, qui possède un compte twitter décliné en plusieurs langues, alors même que le réseau social est interdit en Iran. ■

# le Pentagone annonce une offensive prochaine sur Mossoul

Par Roland Gauron  
20/02/2015  
www.lefigaro.fr/

L'armée irakienne et les combattants kurdes, forts de 20.000 à 25.000 hommes, se prépareraient à reprendre au printemps la deuxième ville du pays, tenue par l'État islamique.

L'opération doit débuter avant le Ramadan. C'est du moins ce qu'affirme un responsable du Pentagone. Celui-ci a dévoilé jeudi devant plusieurs journalistes américains les préparatifs en cours afin de reprendre Mossoul. «Nous visons toujours le créneau avril-mai», déclare sous couvert d'anonymat le responsable du Centcom, le commandement militaire américain. Mais il reste «toujours beaucoup de choses à finaliser», tempère-t-il. La deuxième ville irakienne était tombée aux mains de l'État islamique en juin dernier. Début février, les peshmergas kurdes ont repris un terrain précieux face à l'ennemi. Et la reconquête de Mossoul est considérée comme cruciale avant l'éventuelle

contre-offensive des forces irakienne et kurdes.

«L'État islamique perd chaque jour du terrain», estime le responsable américain. D'après lui, les frappes de la coalition provoquent d'énormes pertes dans les rangs djihadistes, à tel point que le groupe n'est plus en capacité de

### «C'est leur plan. Ils y croient fortement.»

Un responsable du Centcom, le commandement militaire américain.

former suffisamment de combattants pour remplacer ceux tombés sur le champ de bataille. À titre de comparaison, détaille-t-il, Daech a enregistré deux fois plus de pertes, en l'espace de sept à huit mois, que les États-Unis en ont connu en 14 ans, lors des interventions en Irak et en Afghanistan. Près de 6700 soldats américains sont tombés sur ces deux théâtres d'opération. «Aucune organisation au monde ne peut endurer autant de pertes sans que ses objectifs à long terme

ne soient irrémédiablement impactés», explique l'intéressé. Daech, dans une position défensive, serait uniquement capable de micro-offensives.

### CINQ BRIGADES IRAKIENNES, TROIS KURDES

Mossoul serait actuellement tenue par 1000 à 2000 djihadistes. Et, à en croire le responsable du Pentagone, les forces irakiennes et kurdes sont pour leur part prêtes à aligner entre 20.000 et 25.000 hommes. La majeure partie de ces troupes seront fournies par l'armée irakienne. «Cinq brigades vont passer par nos camps d'entraînement avant que ne commence l'opération sur Mossoul», précise encore le militaire américain. Également mis à contribution, trois brigades de peshmergas auront pour mission de bloquer les accès nord de la ville et de l'isoler des combattants de Daech positionnées plus à l'ouest. Une milice, mêlant d'anciens policiers de Mossoul à des forces tribales, devra pour sa part assurer l'ordre une fois la ville

conquise. Enfin, des hommes spécialisés dans l'antiterrorisme prendront part à l'assaut.

Un tel niveau de détails laisse néanmoins perplexe. Le Pentagone n'a pas pour habitude de divulguer autant d'informations sur une opération en cours de préparation. Interrogé sur ce point, le responsable américain a expliqué que ces chiffres illustraient le degré d'implication de l'armée irakienne et l'importance de l'opération à venir. «Il y a beaucoup d'éléments à rassembler et nous voulons nous assurer que les conditions seront réunies, ajoute-t-il. Mais c'est leur plan. Ils y croient fortement.» La participation de contrôleurs avancés américains, chargés de guider les bombardements pendant l'offensive, n'a pas encore été tranchée par Barack Obama. Et le responsable du Pentagone n'a pas fermé la porte à un éventuel report de l'opération, si les forces irakiennes n'étaient pas prêtes au printemps.

Des hommes de l'organisation Etat islamique paradedans les rues de Mossoul, en Irak, le 23 juin.



# To curb Iraqi arms, C.I.A. paid cash

Purchases in '05 and '06 took chemical weapons off market, officials say

BY C. J. CHIVERS  
AND ERIC SCHMITT

The Central Intelligence Agency, working with American troops during the occupation of Iraq, repeatedly purchased nerve-agent rockets from a secretive Iraqi seller, part of a previously undisclosed effort to ensure that old chemical weapons remaining in Iraq did not fall into the hands of terrorists or militant groups, according to current and former American officials.

The extraordinary arms purchase plan, known as Operation Avarice, began in 2005 and continued into 2006, and the American military deemed it a nonproliferation success. It led to the United States' acquiring and destroying at least 400 Borak rockets, one of the internationally condemned chemical weapons that Saddam Hussein's Baathist government manufactured in the 1980s but that were not accounted for by United Nations inspections mandated after the 1991 Persian Gulf war.

The effort was run out of the C.I.A. station in Baghdad in collaboration with the Army's 203rd Military Intelligence Battalion and teams of chemical-defense and explosive ordnance disposal troops, officials and veterans of the units said. Many rockets were in poor condition, and some were empty or held a nonlethal liquid, the officials said. But others contained the nerve agent sarin, which analysis showed to be purer than the intelligence community had expected given the age of the stock.

A New York Times investigation published in October found that the military had recovered thousands of old chemical warheads and shells in Iraq and that Americans and Iraqis had been wounded by them, but the government kept much of this information secret, from the public and troops alike.

These munitions were remnants of an Iraqi special weapons program that was abandoned long before the 2003 invasion, and they turned up sporadically

**In Operation Avarice, at least 400 Borak rockets, some containing the nerve agent sarin, were destroyed.**

during the American occupation in buried caches, as part of improvised bombs or on black markets.

The potency of sarin samples from the purchases, as well as tightly held assessments about risks the munitions posed, buttresses veterans' claims that during the war the military did not share important intelligence about battlefield perils with those at risk or maintain an adequate medical system for treating victims of chemical exposure.

The purchases were made from a sole Iraqi source who was eager to sell his stock, officials said. The amount of money that the United States paid for the rockets is not publicly known, and neither are the affiliations of the seller.

Most of the officials and veterans who spoke about the program did so anonymously because, they said, the details remained classified. The C.I.A. declined to comment. The Pentagon, citing continuing secrecy about the effort, did not answer written questions and acknowledged its role only obliquely.

"Without speaking to any specific programs, it is fair to say that together with our coalition partners in Iraq, the U.S. military worked diligently to find and remove weapons that could be used against our troops and the Iraqi people," Rear Adm. John Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, said in a written statement.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Richard P. Zahner, the top American military intelligence officer in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, said he did not know of any other intelligence program as successful in reducing the chemical weapons that remained in Iraq after the American-led invasion.

Through the C.I.A.'s purchases, General Zahner said, hundreds of weapons with potential use for terrorists were taken off the market. "This was a timely and effective initiative by our national intelligence partners that negated the use of these unique munitions," he said.

Not long after Operation Avarice had secured its 400th rocket, in 2006, American troops were exposed several times to other chemical weapons. Many of these veterans said that they had not been warned by their units about the risks posed by the chemical weapons and that their medical care and follow-up were substandard, in part because military doctors seemed unaware that chemical munitions remained in Iraq.

In some cases, victims of exposure said, officers forbade them to discuss what had occurred. The Pentagon now says hundreds of other veterans reported on health-screening forms that they believed they too had been exposed.

The Borak warheads, which are roughly 40 inches long and attach to a motor compatible with the common Grad multiple rocket launcher system, were domestically produced. But no clear picture ever emerged of how many Iraq manufactured or how many it fired during the Iran-Iraq war.

In confidential declarations in the 1990s to the United Nations, Iraq gave shifting production numbers, up to 18,500. It also claimed to have destroyed its remaining stock before international inspectors arrived after the Gulf war.

One veteran familiar with the program said warheads were tested by putting them in "an old cast-iron bathtub" and drilling through their metal exteriors to extract the liquid sarin within.

The analysis of sarin samples from 2005 found that the purity level reached 13 percent — higher than expected given the relatively low quality and instability of Iraq's sarin production in the 1980s, officials said. Samples from Boraks recovered in 2004 had contained concentrations no higher than 4 percent.

The new data became grounds for concern. "Borak rockets will be more hazardous than previously assessed," one internal report noted. It added a warning: The use of a Borak in an improvised bomb "could effectively disperse the sarin nerve agent."

The Americans believed the weapons came from near Amara, a city not far from Iran. It was not clear, however, whether rockets had been retrieved from a former forward firing point used by Iraq's military during the Iran-Iraq war, or from one of the ammunition depots around the city. Neither the C.I.A. nor the soldiers persuaded the man to reveal his source of supply, the officials said. "They were pushing to see where did it originate from, was there a mother lode?" General Zahner said.

Eventually, a veteran familiar with the purchases said, "the guy was getting a little cocky." At least once he scammed his handlers, selling rockets filled with something other than sarin.

Then in 2006, the veteran said, the Iraqi drove a truckload of warheads to Baghdad and "called the intel guys to tell them he was going to turn them over to the insurgents unless they picked them up." Not long after that, he said, the relationship appeared to dry up.

*Mark Mazzetti and John Ismay contributed reporting.*



# Iraqi-Kurdish oil deal is slipping away

**Collapse of revenue-sharing deal with Baghdad could have dire financial consequences for Kurdish Regional Government.**

Mohammed A Salih / 19 Feb 2015

www.aljazeera.com

**E**rbil - A deal on oil exports and revenue sharing between Iraq's government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) appears to be in tatters as both sides signal their reluctance to uphold it prompting the Kurdistan government to seek alternative ways of monetising its oil.

At the currently lower oil prices, any severing of the deal can, at least in the short run, affect both sides' war efforts against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and further fragment Iraq, analysts say.

The deal, signed last December, essentially amounted to a cash for oil exchange: The Kurds committed to handing over 550,000 barrels of oil per day from areas under their control to Iraq's national oil marketing entity known as SOMO.

In return, the federal government in Baghdad agreed to pay Kurds 17 percent of Iraq's national budget. That meant, after deducting certain expenses for common national purposes, the KRG would get around \$1bn per month from Iraq's budget, estimated at about \$105bn.

In late January, the deal was incorporated into Iraq's national budget law for 2015.

On Monday, KRG's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani threatened to withhold oil exports without getting KRG's share. "If they don't send the budget, we won't send oil," Barzani said.

But according to several sources speaking to Al Jazeera, the KRG has not been able to fulfil the target level of 550,000 barrels per day. Although Kurdish officials say this was due to technical difficulties, critics argue otherwise.

"There is enough production capacity within Kurdistan whether from the originally KRG-controlled fields as well as the Kirkuk fields," said Luay al-Khateeb, the executive director of the London-based Iraq Energy Institute who has also advised the Iraqi parliament on energy policy.

"But Kurdish authorities are very interested to keep enough margin of production for export to pay the IOCs [international oil companies] investing in the north [in Kurdistan] as well as allocating enough production to meet local consumption and this has reduced the share agreed with Baghdad."

The Kurdish government has grappled with a deep financial crisis since the beginning of 2014 when the then Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki cut its share of the national budget.

To provide the salaries of employees in its vast civil service, the KRG increased independent oil sales that it had already started through Turkey. It also borrowed around \$3bn from international firms operating in Kurdistan particularly those in the energy sector, said Dilshad Shaban, a



*It is not clear if the KRG would include Kirkuk's oil in its exports in the event that the deal with Baghdad collapses [Al Jazeera]*

member of the energy committee at Iraqi Kurdistan's parliament.

Of the nearly 500,000 barrels it produces per day, the KRG has withheld at least an average of 150,000 barrels per day from SOMO in a bid to pay those international firms, multiple Kurdish sources said. Around 150,000 additional barrels are used for domestic consumption.

Kurdish officials also said that since the beginning of February, the KRG has only pumped around 150,000 barrels per day from Kirkuk fields which has been under Kurdish control since ISIL's emergence last June.

The budget law mandates that the KRG provide 250,000 barrels of oil on a daily basis from the three provinces under its jurisdiction, and 300,000 barrels from oil fields in Kirkuk province that is now under the Kurds' de-facto control.

But it does not clearly address the issue of a time frame for calculation purposes.

Barzani recently said due to fluctuations in output caused by technical difficulties, the Iraqi government should not measure his government's commitment to the deal by calculating the amount of oil the KRG provides on a daily basis.

The Iraqi government, Barzani suggested, should rather take an average of KRG's oil deliveries within a three-month period and expressed optimism the Kurds can meet the target that way.

On Thursday, Barzani met with Turkish president and prime minister in Ankara to discuss energy matters. The Kurdish prime minister's visit to Ankara and his previous statements that the central government in Baghdad is "bankrupt" are seen as signs that KRG might resume its independent oil sales through a pipeline it has built with the help of Turkey in recent years.

"The prime minister's visit to Turkey is aimed at talks about independent oil sales so that the Kurdistan Region can overcome the financial crisis," said MP Shaban, who is also a member of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party. "If Baghdad does not commit to the agreement, then KRG will opt for independent oil sales."

It is not clear yet if the KRG would go as far as including Kirkuk's oil in its exports in the event that the deal with Baghdad collapses and the Kurds embark on extensive independent oil sales.

Many expect the Kurdish government will have a hard time in the coming months to make ends meet as its coffers are almost empty.

The government has often come under criticism for not carrying out reforms to diversify and better regulate its economy and the current situation might further compound the situation.

The KRG is already behind schedule in paying its civil servants and while March is approaching, it has not yet fully paid its employees for December.

"It's a triple whammy crisis [for KRG]," said Shwan Zulal, managing director of Kurdistan focused consultancy Carduchi firm. "You have Baghdad not paying you, oil prices crashing and you have a war with ISIL. It's difficult even if it had a plan, or if it had contingency funds, or had economic robustness, [then] the KRG would have probably withstood it much better."

Some analysts and officials who spoke to Al Jazeera suggested that one reason why Baghdad has not been willing to fulfil its side of the agreement might be that Kurdish contribution to the Iraqi budget is significantly below what it is entitled to receive.

While Kurdish officials admit that "KRG is committed to the agreement with Baghdad and wants it to work", some, however, accuse Baghdad of double standards in distributing the national budget.

**The prime minister's visit to Turkey is aimed at talks about independent oil sales so that the Kurdistan Region can overcome the financial crisis. If Baghdad does not commit to the agreement, then the KRG will opt for independent oil sales.**

*Shaban, MP and member of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party*

The Baghdad government, say Kurdish officials, has withheld KRG's funds for most of the past year, but it has paid civil servants in the rest of the country.

"Why does Baghdad pay other provinces even those under ISIL's control but it refuses to pay KRG's budget?" asked Shaban, the Kurdish MP.

But even as the distrust between Baghdad and the KRG has deepened, some believe the deal is not beyond redemption yet.

Both sides say they need to cooperate in the fight against ISIL and oil should not hamper that.

Aziz Alwan, a member of the Iraqi parliament, believes the federal government should accept the idea to calculate the KRG oil output in three-month blocks and not on a daily basis.

"There is a weakness in commitment to the deal but not a total collapse yet," said Alwan, also a member of the Iraqi National Alliance of which Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi is a member as well. "There is still some good will left and attempts will be made to resolve the matter." ♦

# Kurdish Institute of Paris Threatened with Closure

The director of the Kurdish Institute in Paris has pleaded for public support

Basnews — 20 february 2015 — PARIS

**The director of the Kurdish Institute in Paris, Kendal Nezan, has pleaded for public support, after the French and Kurdish governments withdrew funding.**

In a letter to French newspaper Le Monde, the French-Kurdish nuclear physicist has appealed to the public for solidarity and support. The institute is home to one of the largest Kurdish libraries in the world.

The survival of the institute is threatened after both the French and Kurdish governments ended their financial support.

The Kurdish Institute was established in February 1983 with the support of the French government and former President François Mitterand. Funding was reduced year after year under the presidency of Nicolas



The Kurdish Institute in French Capital Paris

Sarkozy, who argued that the government of Kurdistan should be funding the Institute.

However the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is facing an economic and humanitarian crisis due to the refugee situation and the war against Islamic State. The KRG needs an estimated \$1.4 billion this year to stabilize its economy, the World Bank has said in a recent report.

Nezan believes the French government should continue to support the Institute, since it annually gives €12.8 million to the Institute for the Arab World.

"This is an unfair and absurd position of the French government against the Kurds. As a last resort we call on French citizens, who throughout these three decades, in difficult times, have showed a magnificent solidarity with the Kurdish people," he wrote. ●

# US opening air base near Erbil, Kurdish official says

rudaw.net - February 11, 2015

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – The United States is opening an air base in the Kurdistan Region, and planes based there will carry out surveillance missions but not bombing raids, a Kurdish official said. Helgurd Hekmat, spokesman for the Kurdish Peshmerga forces fighting on the ground against ISIS, said that US military planes and personnel would be deployed at the new base, which was still under construction. "The base is close to Erbil," he told Turkey's Anadolu Agency, without giving more details. "The aircraft will carry out surveillance," he added, "but those on bombing missions will not take off from the new base."

Hekmat said the base – once ready – would be used by all countries that are part of the US-led coalition arrayed against insurgents fighting under the Islamic State (ISIS) banner.

US warplanes have been pounding ISIS positions in Iraq since early August, with some Western and Arab states more recently taking part.

In a news briefing in Washington on Tuesday, Pentagon Spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby denied that the US had any military bases in Erbil.

"We don't have a military base in Erbil. There are some Combat Search and Rescue assets that we have up in Erbil, should they be needed, and we're grateful for the space that they're able to occupy up there," he said.

The United States sent a number of



The US stationed several Black Hawk helicopters in Erbil this month. AFP photo.

Black Hawk helicopters to Erbil this month, enabling quicker rescue missions, after insurgents killed a downed Jordanian pilot by burning him alive.

The deployment reportedly happened after the United Arab Emirates refused to fly missions over Iraq unless there was a quick rescue operation in place to rescue other downed pilots.

The New York Times reported that the Black Hawks were sent to Erbil over objections by Baghdad, which sees any strengthening of

the Kurds as a possible step toward the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) declaring independence for Iraq's estimated 5 million Kurds.

But Kirby said that every US move across Iraq – including Kurdistan – was coordinated with Iraqi officials: "We coordinate and consult with them before we make any major decisions inside their country. It is their country." ■

# Fight for Kirkuk Goes Beyond the Islamic State

**Analysis /** February 18, 2015  
www.stratfor.com

**SUMMARY**

The Islamic State is not the only concern for Kurdish leaders in Kirkuk province. The Shiite-dominated Iraqi government and its backers in Iran will prevent the Kurds from consolidating control over the oil-rich province. They will do so by operating through Shiite militias that have been battling alongside the peshmerga against the Islamic State and playing off the personal ambitions of the Kirkuk governor. Such territorial competition and potential violence could help the Islamic State, destabilizing the province and the efforts against the militant group.

Analysis

Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani arrived in the city of Kirkuk on Feb. 17 to show a united peshmerga front against the Islamic State. However, upon his arrival in Kirkuk, Barzani declared that only the Kurdish peshmerga will be allowed in the province, and that Kirkuk belongs to Kurdistan. His declaration was directed squarely at the Shiite militias that, after successfully beating back Islamic State positions in Diyala province, have been creeping north along the border with the Kurdistan region toward Islamic State positions in Kirkuk province. The Islamic State is positioned in the northern and western portion of Kirkuk province, while Shiite militias are encroaching into southern Kirkuk.

After Barzani ordered the peshmerga to prevent Shiite militiamen from the Iraqi Volunteer Forces from entering the province, Qais Khazali, the leader of one of Iraq's most active Shiite militias, Asaib Ahl al Haq, said that his men would enter Kirkuk if the province's residents requested it and that it was not Barzani's place to decide who enters since Kirkuk belongs to Iraq and not the Kurds. Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Regional Government has redeployed Oil Protection Forces from nearby blocks to reinforce security at the Kirkuk oil domes to prevent further encroachment by Shiite militias.



The governor of the Iraqi province of Kirkuk, Najmaddin Karim (R), attends a meeting with Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani (C) on Feb. 17 in the oil hub of Kirkuk. (MARWAN IBRAHIM/AFP/Getty Images)

**THE VALUE OF KIRKUK**

The battle over Kirkuk was entirely expected. Barzani ordered Kurdish peshmerga to seize the Kirkuk oil fields and establish control over both the city and province after the Iraqi army fled during the Islamic State siege in July 2014. At that time, Stratfor cautioned that the Kurdish gains would not be permanent, because jihadists, Tehran and Baghdad would engage in an elaborate game of "keep away" to prevent the Kurdistan Regional Government from consolidating control over the Kirkuk prize.

Though the threat of Islamic State-induced cooperation between the Kurds and Baghdad, including an agreement on how to share control and revenue over northern exports, this relationship is barely working. The Kurdistan Regional Government maintains the right to

**ISLAMIC STATE POSITIONS RELATIVE TO THE KRG**



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► unilaterally export oil from the north, while Baghdad retains the power of the purse to withhold budget allocations to the cash-strapped Kurds. A number of international oil companies awaiting payments — not to mention an overwhelming number of civil servants (including peshmerga forces battling the Islamic State) awaiting their salaries — have put significant pressure on Arbil as the dispute with Baghdad persists.

Baghdad is also feeling the crunch from \$50-per-barrel oil as it wages an expensive war against the Islamic State. Moreover, it needs the cooperation of Kurdish forces to dislodge Islamic State fighters from urban strongholds like Mosul, with support from the United States. But Arbil and Baghdad are still in a largely asymmetric relationship. As long as Baghdad can maintain ambiguity over the legality of unilateral Kurdistan Regional Government oil sales, the Kurds will remain in a tenuous financial position and unable to capitalize on their own infrastructure and energy assets to divorce themselves from Baghdad.

Regardless of whether Baghdad needs peshmerga assistance, the Kurds have their own reasons for establishing a security buffer and extricating the Islamic State from the north. Moreover, the price of U.S. backing for the Kurds will entail peshmerga cooperation against the Islamic State threat and a commitment to work with Baghdad as Washington tries to preserve the authority of the central government and the territorial integrity of Iraq.

#### BAGHDAD'S OPTIONS

The Shiite-run government in Baghdad has several tools other than its financial clout to undermine the Kurdish position in Kirkuk. Shiite militias have been highly effective against the Islamic State and will be a necessary component of offensives. The Islamic State threat provides a useful pretext for Shiite militias to move into disputed territories like Kirkuk, where they can then try to reshape the demographics of the province by giving abandoned Kurdish property to cooperative Arabs as people start returning to areas where the Islamic State has been flushed out. Growing local Arab resistance to Kurdish rule, along with the ethnic and sectarian violence that ensues as Shiite militias target Sunni communities in these territories, will continue to challenge

Arbil's authority in the Sunni-Kurdish borderland.

Baghdad can also exploit the personal ambitions of local officials, including the eminently pliable governor of Kirkuk, Najmaddin Karim. Karim understands that he presides over an oil-rich land, and he does not want to see those riches go exclusively to Arbil. Instead, he has quietly bargained for autonomy for Kirkuk — an idea that Baghdad and Tehran have entertained and even encouraged in their private talks with the governor. Karim also works closely with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by the Talabani clan, and has used the party's rivalry with Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party to his advantage in carving out a more independent role for Kirkuk. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan has a strong presence in Kirkuk province and its members have openly questioned Barzani's move to take over out of concerns that Kurdish occupation of the province could invite more problems.

Karim and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan may in fact be willing to defy Barzani's order to keep Shiite militias out of Kirkuk. Stratfor received information that in recent days, Karim held a closed-door meeting with Hadi al-Amiri, the leader of Iraq's oldest and most politically integrated Shiite militia, the Badr Organization. The details of the meeting have not been disclosed, but there are hints that both Karim and Hero Talabani, who is married to Patriotic Union of Kurdistan leader Jalal Talabani and wields considerable influence over the party, are both in negotiations to allow Shiite militias into Kirkuk. We can assume Barzani had a stern message for Karim and Talabani upon learning about this meeting, but his Kurdish rivals could still openly flout his order.

The battle over Kirkuk will intensify as Shiite militias inevitably encroach on the Kurdistan Regional Government's claimed sphere of influence. This competition could result in violent clashes between peshmerga and Shiite militias, an outcome that the Islamic State would welcome as it tries to hold its position in the north. The Islamic State remains a priority threat for both Baghdad and Arbil, but that threat alone will not be enough to allow for a sustainable compromise on energy exports, much less to neutralize the territorial competition over Kirkuk

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## Kurdish Official: Deployment of Shiite Militia in Kirkuk is "Dangerous"

**Deployment of Shiite militia group in Kirkuk banned by President Barzani, says KDP official**

Basnews | Hoshmand Sadiq - Kirkuk  
16 feb. 2015 - basnews.com/

**M**ember of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) political bureau Sa'di Ahmed Pira warns that the threatened deployment of the Hashdi al-Sha'bi Shiite militia to the Kirkuk Province will destabilise the area further.

"Hashdi al-Sha'bi is for the provinces in which it is organized, and they should only be deployed there," said Pira to BasNews.

"In the constitution of Iraq, Hashdi al-Sha'bi is a force that combats terrorist groups like Iraqi army."

"After the Iraqi army left Kirkuk last year, the Peshmerga have protected the province and will continue to do so," he said.

"Hashdi al-Sha'bi is supported by the federal government. If the militia's deployment to the province is for a military operation against Islamic State (IS) insurgents, it is normal. However, if they are being deployed to remain in the province for the long term, then it causes dangerous uncertainty," added Pira.



Shiite Militia groups getting ready to enter Kirkuk

He suggested a joint force consist of Kurds, Turkmen, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arabs, declaring that forces from outside Kirkuk, other than the Peshmerga, will not be tolerated.

Previously, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) official in Kirkuk Mohammed Kamal told BasNews, "The Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani banned the deployment of Hashdi al-Sha'bi to Kirkuk."

Iraqi local media reported that Shiite Badr militia Brigadier Hadi Amri revealed that Hashdi al-Sha'bi will enter Kirkuk soon. ●

A Djalaoûla,  
le 8 février.

MATT CETTI-ROBERTS



# En Irak, le recul de l'EI laisse face à face Kurdes et chiites

Les milices chiites soutenues par l'Iran n'entendent pas laisser aux seuls Kurdes les régions désertées par l'Etat central irakien et reprises aux djihadistes



## REPORTAGE

ALLAN KAVAL

DJALAOÛLA (IRAK) - envoyé spécial

**L**es eaux boueuses de la Diyala disparaissent lentement dans une brume où se dessine la silhouette d'un antique pont ferroviaire, vestige du temps où Djalaoûla était encore un coin reculé de l'Empire colonial britannique. En août 2014, les djihadistes de l'Etat islamique (EI) ont fait sauter l'ouvrage d'art alors que le secteur était sous leur contrôle. Puis ils ont été repoussés, en novembre, par une alliance de circonstance passée entre les peshmergas kurdes et les groupes armés chiites irakiens soutenus par un détachement des forces iraniennes. La frontière de la République islamique ne se trouve qu'à 40 kilomètres à l'est, et Djalaoûla est ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler une zone grise, une ville fantôme entièrement vidée de

sa population, éventrée par les bombes, désoyée par les pillards, où aucun gouvernement n'exerce plus son autorité.

### « DJALAOÛLA, C'EST TERMINÉ ! »

Depuis juin 2014 et la conquête de Mossoul par les djihadistes de l'EI, l'Etat irakien a disparu du nord du pays. Si les Kurdes ont gagné du terrain dans les régions qu'ils disputaient autrefois à la souveraineté de Bagdad, d'autres groupes ont émergé du vide laissé par l'armée irakienne devant l'avancée djihadiste. Répondant à une fatwa de l'ayatollah Sistani, la plus haute autorité religieuse chiite d'Irak, des dizaines de milliers de volontaires ont pris les armes, rapidement encadrés par les milices confessionnelles réapparues en Irak depuis 2003, certaines étant directement liées aux gardiens de la révolution iraniens, même si ces volontaires sont, dans leur ensemble, reconnus par Bagdad comme une force légale réunie sous le vocable de « mobilisation populaire ».

Bien qu'ils aient été rapprochés par cet ennemi commun, Kurdes et groupes armés chiites

ne font pas toujours de bons voisins. Dans le nord, ces derniers ont investi plusieurs localités de peuplement chiite qui voisinent le territoire kurde, mais aussi Djalaoûla, ville majoritairement sunnite dont les habitants ont été chassés par les combats et restent maintenus à distance par l'épouvante que leur inspirent les miliciens qui s'y sont installés. En vertu d'un accord passé récemment entre Kurdes et chiites, quelques réfugiés sunnites autorisés par l'Union patriotique du

Kurdistan (UPK), l'entité politico-militaire kurde dominante dans la région, peuvent venir récupérer en camion ou en pick-up ceux de leurs biens qui ont échappé aux pillages. Pour les effrayer, des coups de feu se font entendre de temps à autre en provenance des bâtiments où les milices ont pris leurs quartiers. Les portes métalliques des maisons vides leur répondent en écho, claquant au souffle d'un vent de poussière qui apporte avec lui des odeurs de pourriture.

« Les miliciens sont venus ici pour se venger, explique anonymement le responsable local des Asayiches, les services de sécurités kurdes. Maintenant, ils veulent empêcher les sunnites de revenir. » Ceux qui sont présents au centre de Djalaoûla appartiennent au groupe Saraya Al-Khorasani, une milice formée initialement en Irak pour participer au conflit syrien en soutien au régime de Bachar Al-Assad. Joint au téléphone par *Le Monde*, ils ont manifesté leur refus catégorique de recevoir tout représentant de la presse française.

### TRIOMPHALISME MIS EN CAUSE

Dans le souk ravagé, jonché d'ordures, de gravats, de jouets chinois en mauvais plastique et de mannequins démembrés, d'anciens habitants ont formé un groupe d'autodéfense. Placés sous la protection de services kurdes, ils n'envisagent plus de rentrer chez eux, mais simplement d'occuper l'espace en attendant d'avoir pu sauver ce qu'ils peuvent de leurs échoppes dévastées. « Djalaoûla, c'est terminé ! », lâche, désabusé, un membre des Asayiches derrière son foulard noir orné d'une tête de mort.

Les désolations de Djaloula préfigurent ce que pourrait être l'après-EI dans ces zones de front devenues frontalières, désertées par leurs populations et où des alliés de circonstance coexistent, d'accords temporaires en arrangements locaux, troublés de loin en loin par des accrochages ponctuels. Si Djaloula n'est pas un foyer de population chiite, d'autres localités, où les milices sont mieux implantées localement, jalonnent la route qui mène de la frontière iranienne à Kirkouk.

Ville-frontière au sous-sol riche en hydrocarbures, partagée entre Kurdes, Arabes, Turkmènes chiites et Turkmènes sunnites, Kirkouk marque la limite entre le Kurdistan et l'Irak arabe. Les forces kurdes qui y étaient déjà solidement implantées en ont pris le contrôle en juin 2014, profitant du retrait total de l'armée irakienne dans le nord du pays et réalisant ainsi l'un de leurs objectifs historiques. Mais le triomphalisme qui s'en était suivi est aujourd'hui largement mis en cause par le renforcement des forces chiites dans ses environs.

Dans les localités de Tuz Khurmatu, Dakouk et Taza situés au sud de Kirkouk, aux marges du territoire kurde, une multitude de groupes armés ont pris position. Formés sur la base de l'engagement de Turkmènes chiites locaux, organisés par des cadres venus du sud de l'Irak et encadrés par des officiers iraniens, ils sont dominés par l'organisation Badr, un groupe formé par la République islamique pour combattre le régime de Saddam Hussein lors de la guerre Iran-Irak et toujours lié organiquement aux pasdarans, et notamment au tout-puissant Ghassem Soleimani, le chef de la force Al-Qods, bras armé de la politique régionale iranienne.

« Personne ne peut mener cette guerre seul et les peshmergas ne peuvent pas protéger Kirkouk sans nous », tranche Haji Remzi, un officier de la brigade Badr qui commande le front

## DJALAOULA EST UNE VILLE FANTÔME, ÉVENTRÉE PAR LES BOMBES, DÉSOSÉE PAR LES PILLARDS, OÙ AUCUN GOUVERNEMENT N'EXERCE PLUS SON AUTORITÉ

de Taza que se partagent miliciens chiites et peshmergas. Dans son QG – décoré d'un double portrait de l'imam Khomeini et de l'actuel Guide suprême de la République islamique d'Iran, l'ayatollah Khamenei, flanqué de deux religieux venus du sud de l'Irak arborant turban blanc et treillis de combat et d'un homme discret dont la barbe finement taillée, le modeste costume beige et le keffieh rappellent l'apparence des dignitaires du régime iranien –, il évacue toute éventualité d'un contrôle exclusivement kurde de Kirkouk à l'avenir. Sur un mur de la pièce, un écran géant relié à une puissante caméra gyroskopique placée en un endroit stratégique de la ligne de front retransmet en direct l'image d'un bâtiment gris au-dessus duquel flotte la bannière de l'EI.

### EMBARRAS

Côté kurde, c'est l'embarras qui domine. « Nous nous battons depuis trop longtemps pour Kirkouk pour qu'elle nous échappe à nouveau », semble regretter un haut responsable des services de renseignement de l'UPK, dominant dans la ville. Le parti kurde se trouve

cependant dans une situation délicate. Allié historique de l'Iran, dépendant pour partie de son soutien, il ne peut s'opposer frontalement aux forces chiites qui ont pris pied dans sa chasse gardée. Bien que certains de ses responsables aillent jusqu'à se déclarer prêts à livrer bataille aux milices chiites si elles ne se retirent pas une fois éloignée la menace de l'EI, la position la mieux partagée parmi ses cadres consiste à saluer le rôle de Téhéran et de ses alliés irakiens dans la guerre contre les djihadistes, remettant à plus tard un accord politique portant sur le contrôle des régions disputées.

La situation de guerre n'empêche cependant pas l'Iran d'assurer l'avenir de son influence dans la région. Les dernières attaques de l'EI sur Kirkouk ont ainsi donné lieu à un déploiement renforcé des miliciens chiites dans les environs de la ville.

En traitant directement avec les barons locaux de l'UPK comme le gouverneur de Kirkouk, Najmaldin Karim, l'Iran, vieille puissance impériale, construit progressivement dans sa nouvelle zone d'influence une clientèle dépendante, tentant de contraindre les deux parties à une forme de coexistence militaire et politique, quitte à renforcer les divisions kurdes. De passage dans la ville le 17 février, une semaine après la visite d'Hadi Al-Amiri (le chef de l'organisation Badr), Massoud Barzani, le président du Kurdistan irakien, affilié au Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et rival historique de l'UPK, avait déclaré qu'aucun groupe armé autre que les peshmergas ne serait jamais admis à Kirkouk.

Quelques jours auparavant, Haji Remzi révélait pourtant le déploiement opéré en accord avec les autorités locales de ses hommes, autour des mosquées et quartiers chiites de la ville avant de lâcher en guise d'avertissement : « Les Kurdes doivent comprendre qu'ils doivent compter avec nous à présent. » ■

FRANCE  
24 21 février 2015

# Daesh chercherait à à revendre les corps de soldats kurdes

www.20minutes.fr  
20 Minutes avec AFP  
21.02.2015

**Daesh est prêt à tout. Et les nouvelles révélations à paraître dimanche dans la Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung (FAS), le confirment une nouvelle fois.**

«Entre 10.000 et 20.000 dollars»

Selon le journal allemand, qui cite des «sources sécuritaires», l'organisation Etat islamique chercherait ainsi à revendre aux forces kurdes les corps de leurs soldats tombés au combat, qu'elle monnaierait «entre 10.000 et 20.000 dollars».

Il est toutefois «peu vraisemblable» que

l'Etat islamique se livre directement au trafic d'organes, l'organisation ne possédant pas les infrastructures ou les compétences médicales, techniques et logistiques nécessaires, écrit la FAS.

### Une activité de contrebande à la peine

A l'origine de cette nouvelle pratique: une quête de nouveau financement alors que l'organisation est durement touchée par les offensives de la coalition internationale. Ses bombardements dans le nord de l'Irak et en Syrie, pour appuyer les soldats kurdes, ont détruit de nombreuses infrastructures, explique l'édition dominicale du quotidien Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ).

Ces destructions entravent largement les activités de contrebande de pétrole ou

d'antiquités pillées par le groupe djihadiste, désormais privé d'une partie de ses revenus et contraint de trouver de nouvelles rentrées d'argent, poursuit la FAS.

Daesh a aussi réduit jusqu'à deux tiers les soldes de ses combattants et selon les estimations des experts, l'EI ne retirerait que «10 à 20 dollars» par baril de pétrole vendu, écrit encore la FAS.

Par ailleurs, mi-février, le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU avait adopté à l'unanimité une résolution visant à asphyxier les groupes djihadistes comme Daesh ou le Front al-Nosra, branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda, qui tirent des millions de dollars du pétrole, du trafic d'antiquités et de rançons.

Le texte rappelle notamment aux Etats l'obligation de s'abstenir de toute transaction pétrolière directe ou indirecte avec l'EI et de geler ses avoirs financiers. Le Conseil leur demande également de signaler à l'ONU leurs saisies de pétrole brut ou raffiné venu de zones tenues par les djihadistes en Syrie et en Irak.



www.ekurd.net

## KURDISTAN REGION NEWS IN BRIEF

### CHANGE: WE ARE CONCERNED FROM REPEATING MALIKI'S POLICIES SCENARIO TOWARD KURDISTAN REGION

February 18, 2015

**Baghdad:** The Head of Change (Gorran) bloc in the Iraqi Parliament, Hoshiyar Abdullah said, in a statement that "his bloc is annoyed from the lack commitment by PM, al-Abadi to implement the agreement between Kurdistan and the center, which resulted in passing in the budget in 2015, explaining that the federal government should have launched dues and salaries of the staff of Kurdistan since the beginning of the new year under the agreement and the law. Abdullah expressed the fear and concern that al-Abadi may repeat the scenario of the previous government headed by Nuri al-Maliki in delaying the dues exchange "but in a quieter way," calling to urge the government to abide by the application of the budget law and the agreement between the center and the region. He said that the policy of delaying to pay Kurdistan Region's salaries is rejected by all segments of the Iraqi people "because it reminds us of al-Maliki's policies." [shafaq.com](http://shafaq.com) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### TEACHERS PROTEST IN SLEMANI AND HALBJA FOR DELAY IN RECEIVING SALARIES

February 21, 2015

**Sleman/Halabja:** Teachers in Slêmanî (Sulaimaniyah) city and in Halabja city in Kurdistan Region have demonstrated on Saturday in protest at the delay in the payment of their salaries, local media reported. Teachers haven't received their monthly salaries from December 2014. The delay in the distribution of employee's salaries in the Kurdish region led to the staff to strike consistently during the past months. Since December 2013, Baghdad has suspended salary payments towards to Kurdistan due to the ongoing disagreement between Iraq's federal government and Kurdistan government on the issue of oil exportation. Baghdad is unable to honour the Kurdistan Region's budget for January and February, due to the ongoing financial crisis. [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### REBWAR TALABANI: THERE IS NO AGREE- MENT WITH AMERI TO ENTER KIRKUK EXCEPT BARZANI-ABADI AGREEMENT

February 21, 2015

**Kirkuk:** The provincial council of Kirkuk said that there is no agreement with the head of the Shiite Badr Organization, Hadi al-Amiri to make the popular crowd troops enter to Kirkuk province, and begin liberation operations to the southern regions of the province in coordination of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. The deputy head of the council, Ribawar Talabani said, that "there is no agreement until now between the local administration in Kirkuk and head of Badr Organization, Hadi al-Amiri to enter the popular crowd forces to Kirkuk and start liberating areas operations." He added, "What remains is a general agreement between Kurdistan President, Massoud Barzani and Iraqi PM, Haider al-Abadi in Munich that there would be common liberation operations of land from the presence of ISIS, but there was no agreement at the time on the areas that will witness the joint operations. Massoud Barzani said on Tuesday during his visit to Kirkuk province that Peshmerga is ready to cooperate with any power stand against ISIS organization. President Barzani pointed out that "we have to work with the Arabs and Turkmen in fighting ISIS, but we want others to take their fighting against the terrorist organization," and expressed "his readiness to cooperate with any power that stands against IS". [shafaq.com](http://shafaq.com) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### MASSOUD BARZANI ORDERS KURDISH PESHMERGA TO BATTLE ANY FORCES ENTERING KIRKUK

February 22, 2015

**Erbil:** Iraq's Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani has ordered battling any forces that is intending to enter into Kirkuk province, official said. Peshmerga ministry press Chief Halgurt Hikmat denied reports that volunteer forces have entered Kirkuk and revealed that Barzani has ordered responding to any forces that is intending to enter into the province, now under the Kurdish forces of Peshmerga, al-Mada Press reported. Hikmat went on to say that whatever volunteer forces' entrance into Kirkuk is considered preparing to attack Hwajja or any other goals since the regions around Kirkuk are under Peshmerga control as the Kurdish forces have sacrificed to protect the regions. [kurdpress.ir](http://kurdpress.ir) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### PUK MP: KIRKUK GOVERNOR AND SHIITE BADR LEADER AGREED ON A PLAN TO RESTORE SECURITY IN LIBERATED AREAS

February 22, 2015

**Baghdad:** Kirkuk governor and the secretary general of the Shiite Badr Organization agreed on a plan to restore security deployment and secure the stability of all the liberated areas from Islamic State group (IS) in Kirkuk. The MP for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Leila Barznji told the National Iraqi News that Kirkuk governor, Najimalddin Kareem and Secretary-General of the Badr Organization, Hadi al-Amiri agreed to a plan to achieve security and stability in all the liberated areas and villages in Kirkuk after the expulsion of the elements of IS, "pointing out that "the plan based on the re-deployment of the security forces of the army and police in all the villages and districts, including Riyadh and Hawija and other liberated areas to secure the return of displaced families and ensure access of services and return to normal life there..." [ninanews.com](http://ninanews.com) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### IRAQI KURDISH PESHMERGA FORCES BOMBARD ISLAMIC STATE BASES IN SYRIAN KURDISTAN

February 22, 2015

**Sinjar:** Peshmerga forces in the Kurdistan region have begun shelling Islamic State-held villages in neighboring Syrian Kurdistan region (northern Syria also known as Rojava). Qasin Shasho, the Shingal (Sinjar) security administrator told Rudaw the purpose behind this attack is to retake Kurdish villages held by IS in the area. Shasho said Peshmerga artillery has shelled IS bases in Syrian Kurdistan and ground forces have advanced from the Kurdistan region of Iraq. "As a result of the Peshmerga advance the villages of Tarbik and Tal-Mushrif were liberated in southern Kurdistan," said Shasho, referring to communities inside Iraqi Kurdistan. Brigadier Hashim Sitai, a Peshmerga commander in Shingal, told Rudaw: "With the help of the Peshmerga more than 500 YPG fighters managed to cross into Rojava to fight IS." The YPG, or People's Protection Units, is an armed group composed of Syrian Kurds fighting IS. [rudaw.net](http://rudaw.net) | [Ekurd.net](http://Ekurd.net)

### NECHIRVAN BARZANI, IRAQ'S KURDISH MPS AND OFFICIALS MEETING STARTS TO DISCUSS FINANCIAL CRISIS

February 22, 2015

**Erbil:** A meeting between Kurdistan PM Nechirvan Barzani with Iraq's Kurdish MPs, ministers and Kurdish officials of the Kurdistan Alliance is taking place to discuss developments in the relationship with Iraq's federal government in the light of the recent results of the meetings of the Kurdish delegation to Baghdad, media reported. The source said that the meeting, which was attended by Kurdish members in the Finance and energy Committees and being held in the Council of Ministers building of the regional government in Erbil to discuss the position of the developments in the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad in light of recent talks between the Kurdish negotiator in Baghdad, headed by Nechirvan Barzani. He added that it is likely the meeting would focus on ways to tackle the financial crisis in the region, after the Kurdish delegation was confirmed that the federal government is unable to abide by the agreement, which took place between the two parties on the issue of export quantities of the region's oil and Kirkuk oil for the Iraqi government through the Kurdish-Turkish pipeline and depriving the region from financial dues of the Iraqi →

⇒ public budget...shafaaq.com | Ekurd.net

## SHIITE CLERICS GIVE \$ 1.4 MILLION TO KURDISH YAZIDI FIGHTERS

February 23, 2015

**Sinjar:** A Kurdish Yazidi Commander has confirmed that Baghdad sent IQD 1.6 billion to Kurdish Yazidi forces through Iraqi Shiite clerics. The Iraqi federal government has been regularly sending money through Shiite clerics to Yazidi fighters. There are over 1,000 volunteers, supervised and led by Qassim Shasho. The total amount sent so far is IQD 1.6 billion [almost \$ 1.4 million]. Commander Qassim Shasho, said, "Yes, it is true that we have regularly received subsidies from the Baghdad government through Shiite clerics. The money covers the costs of transportation, food and living of our fighters." "We get less financial support from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and we haven't received any military aid such as weapons and ammunition that has been given to the Peshmerga," he said. [basnews.com](#)

## KURDISTAN BORROWS \$500 MILLION FROM TURKEY: INTERFAX ENERGY

February 23, 2015

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has sought to reduce its reliance on Baghdad by borrowing \$500 million from Turkey to pay civil servants' salaries. Kurdish relations with Iraq's federal government have been strained by the KRG's demand to receive 17% of Baghdad's budget and the right to export its own hydrocarbons. Kurdistan has plans to develop its gas reserves for export to the European market, and has agreed to supply Turkey with 4 billion cubic metres per year from 2017, rising to 10 bcm/y by 2020. [interfaxenergy.com](#)

## 60 ISLAMIC STATE MILITANTS BODIES LEFT BEHIND IN MAKHMOUR DEFEAT

February 23, 2015

**Makhmour:** Islamic State group (IS) militants have attacked Kurdish Peshmerga frontlines twice in the last three days in the heights of Sultan Abdulla and on the Makhmour front. In each case the militants were defeated, and repulsed in such a way they reportedly left behind 60 dead bodies for the first time. IS suffered heavy casualties from the Peshmerga defense and coalition warplanes. Many bodies were abandoned in the village of Talarim, northwest of Mekhmor, and 20km from Mosul. Peshmerga commanders said the warplanes arrived in the area very quickly and effectively hit the targets. Once the airstrikes started, the ISIS guns were silenced in about 90 minutes. [rudaw.net](#) | [Ekurd.net](#)

## MASSOUD BARZANI AND NAWSHIRWAN MUSTAFA DISCUSS FILES LINKED TO ERBIL

February 23, 2015

**Erbil:** A senior source revealed in Erbil on Monday, that Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani received in Biermam resort, the leader of Change (Gorran) Movement, Nawshirwan Mustafa to discuss the latest developments on Kurdish and Iraqi arenas. The source said that a meeting gathering the two sides before noon today took place to discuss the Kurdish and Iraqi situation and the latest developments on the political and economic levels and ways to reach a common vision to unify positions about a range of issues that have emerged in recent times, especially regarding the signs of the emergence of problems concerning the implementation of the agreement signed by Kurdistan government with the federal government on the general Iraqi budget and the share of the region and the oil export pipeline through the Turkish- Kurdish pipeline. A press conference expeted after the meeting...[shafaaq.com](#) | [Ekurd.net](#)

## ARAB OFFICIAL: US, KURDS STRATEGIC AGREEMENT ON PESHMERGA

February 24, 2015

A member of the Iraq northern province of Anbar's council said the U.S. and Kurdish forces of Peshmerga have made a strategic agreement in fight against the militants of the Islamic State (IS) that is controlling a large part of the state as well as neighboring Syria. Rafea al-Isawi told al-Tejah TV that

the accord would help the Kurdish forces is wake of any threat against Peshmerga. He, however, blamed the U.S. for failing to support and help the province that is largely under the control of the radical jihadists. Isawi went on to say that clashes between security forces, civilian and nomad volunteers against the jihadists are continuing in the province, adding that aids would be sent to people in besieged Iraqi town of al-Baghdad, in Salahaddin province. The official further hailed Iraqi religious authorities' guide supporting Anbar province in fighting against the jihadists. [kurdpress.ir](#)

## IRAQI FINANCE MINISTER ZEBARI: IRAQ HAS WASTED \$18 BLN SINCE 2013

February 25, 2015

**Baghdad:** Iraq's Finance Minister Hoshiyar Zebari acknowledged that Iraq has wasted \$18 billion USD from the Iraq Development Fund in 2013 as a result of mismanagement. Speaking to the Financial Times, Zebari stated, "It's gone. We no longer have that cushion. All of that was spent because of poor governance and poor financial management." Iraq is suffering economically with a war against Islamic State militants and record-low global oil prices, along with mismanagement issues. "We need an overall reshuffling and restructuring of the economy," Zebari said. Up to 90 percent of the country's national budget is said to be directly tied to oil revenues and with prices well below the average \$100 per barrel of the last several years, Iraq is enacting a set of necessary changes. New taxes on SIM cards, tobacco, alcohol, cars, and internet are expected to bring in \$13 billion but the country still faces a \$21 billion budget shortfall...[nrtv.com](#)

## IRAQI GOVERNMENT ALLOCATES \$60 MILLION TO SHIITE MILITIAS

February 25, 2015

**Baghdad:** The government has earmarked \$60 million to Shiite militias known as popular mobilization force. The Iraqi Council of Ministers approved in its meeting on Tuesday, the draft of the popular crowd forces at an estimated cost of \$ 60 million. The Statement of the Council, said that it has agreed to the implementation of building capacity of the popular crowd included in the investment budget on exception of the Implementing of government regulation contracts and instructions for implementation of the budget for 2015 project. [shafaaq.com](#) | [Ekurd.net](#)

## KIRKUK DOESN'T NEED SHIITE MILITIA SUPPORT: GOVERNOR

February 27, 2015

**Kirkuk:** During an interview with Kurdsat TV, the governor of Kirkuk province, Najmaddin Karim, denied presence of Shiite militants in Kirkuk city. Karim also confirmed that there is no need for deploying Shiite militants in the city as Kirkuk is protected by the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and they are able to defeat attacks by Islamic State group (IS) militant. The Shiite militants have committed crimes against humanity in Diyala, Tikrit, Jalawla and Daqooq areas. Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani has ordered the ministries of Peshmerga and interior to prevent Iraq's al-Hashid al-Shaabi Shiite militia from entering Kirkuk and othe Kurdish areas to counter Islamic State group (IS) militants. [millettnews.com](#) | [Ekurd.net](#)

## PRO-ISLAMIC STATE CLERIC: NO EXCHANGE OF PESHMERGA HOSTAGES

February 27, 2015

**Erbil:** A pro-Islamic State group (IS) imam has rejected prisoner swaps of captured Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, calling the any possible hostage exchange a "lie of the media," a Rudaw reporter in Mosul has learned. "Whoever flees the frontlines, will be immediately executed," said Abu Asad al-Ansari, the IS cleric in his sermon for Friday prayers at Mohammad Rasul Alla mosque in Mosul. "Over the last few days, rumors are being published concerning negotiations for exchanging Peshmerga hostages with ours in the hands of the Peshmerga, but these rumors are untrue," said al-Ansari. Speaking to roughly 250 people at the mosque amid tight security, he continued: "Whoever fights for Allah must reach prosperity or receive the reward of martyrdom. We must not comply with the enemy at all." He also had fierce words for those who have joined Mosul Governor Asil Nujaiifi to fight the Islamic State to recapture Mosul. "Nujaiifi is leading the infidels and traitors of the Islamic State, but the fate for all of them is fire," he said. [rudaw.net](#) | [Ekurd.net](#) ♦



**Kurdistan**

# Ever closer to independence

**Iraq's Kurds are independent in all but name. They must play their cards cleverly if they are to break away completely**

Feb 21st 2015 | ERBIL AND MAKHMOUR | [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)



**THEY** are questions that no politician can avoid in what the international lexicon calls the Kurdish Region of Iraq. Is Kurdistan going to be independent? And, if so, when? Virtually all Iraq's 6m Kurds would give an emphatic yes to the first question. But most would wobble and waffle on the second. Nor do they know exactly where the borders of the new state would run.

Many nations have declared independence in the past century: after Africa was decolonised; as the Soviet Union splintered; and often after civil wars (witness the countries that once made up Yugoslavia). And the Kurds have several advantages: a well-defined identity and language (close to Persian); a lack of religious strife (most adhere non-fanatically to Sunni Islam).

For the birth of an independent Kurdistan, the omens have never been so propitious. "We have waited long enough," says Sirwan Barzani, a grandson of Mustafa Barzani (1903-79), the Kurds' legendary leader whose descendants are in the vanguard of today's fledgling state. "It has been a hundred years since we were divided between the four devils," he says, referring to the regional carve-up of Kurdish lands after the first world war between the rump of Ottoman Turkey, Iran, Syria (then run by France) and Mesopotamia (run by Britain, and soon to become Iraq). "We will be independent within two years."

Last June the jihadists of Islamic State (IS)

raced across the Syrian desert and captured Mosul, Iraq's second city, barely an hour's drive from the Kurds' capital, Erbil. IS declared that it had effaced the colonial-era Sykes-Picot border between Iraq and Syria to create a new caliphate. But in seeking to break the states of the Arab world, IS may be helping the birth of a Kurdish one. The president of the Kurdish region, Masoud Barzani, a son of Mustafa, declared that independence was around the corner. For Iraq, he argued, had ceased to exist. "The time has come to decide our fate, and we should not wait for other people to decide it for us," he declared. Masrour Barzani, the president's most powerful son, who runs the security council and the pervasive intelligence service, is also thought keen to hasten towards independence.

"The situation after Mosul is completely different," agrees Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister (and the president's nephew). "You can't go back to the same structure, the same system, because Iraq is now a failed state. There is no Iraqi nation. But independence won't be offered to us, we'll have to take it." If the Kurds are diplomatically skilful, it could be achieved, he reckons, "in five or six years, maybe."

Yet he is acutely conscious that a stable, independent Kurdistan can emerge only with the co-operation of its neighbours, especially Turkey, and with the agreement of the government of Iraq, such as it is. "The first country to talk to is Baghdad itself," he says. "We have to convince them."

His canny predecessor as the Kurds' prime minister, Barham Salih, is looking forward to a time when IS has been pushed back. Baghdad must be "the anchor" of a new structure that would give the Kurds independence, he says. "The minute Mosul is liberated we'll need to sit down and sort everything out." The disputed borders between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq have been redrawn in the Kurds' favour since the Iraqi army fled before the jihadists, letting the Kurds fill the vacuum (see map). Other leading Kurds vary over tactics and timing. But all think Kurdistan should, and can, become independent in the end.

The Kurds' immediate priority is to fend off IS. When nearby Mosul fell overnight on June 9th-10th, a frisson of horror rippled across Kurdistan. The jihadists, rolling southward towards Baghdad, were soon up against a border with Kurdistan that stretches for more than 1,000km (621 miles), coming almost within artillery range of Erbil. In August and September they took the Sinjar mountain area, home to 200,000-plus terrified members of the esoteric non-Muslim Yazidi sect, and made assaults along the border with the Kurds.

The Kurdish forces, known as the Peshmerga ("those ready to die"), fought indifferently. They had not been seriously tested in battle for two decades, their equipment is out of date, and they are anyway better suited to guerrilla warfare. "It was a shock," admits a former Kurdish minister. "Our morale was badly hurt." Only speedy action by the American-led coalition, which bombed IS forces relentlessly, kept the jihadists at bay.

Even so, IS is still a menace, recently surprising the Peshmerga with a series of attacks along the front line near Gwer (half an hour's drive from Erbil) and Makhmour. The Kurds, who secured the area thanks in large part to American and allied bombing, admit to at least 24 dead; the true figure may be far higher. More than 800 Peshmerga have been killed and 3,600 wounded since IS took Mosul—a heavy toll for a fledgling state.

The plain between Gwer and Makhmour is spookily desolate, save for the odd herd of goats and sheep. Arabs have been driven out of the villages they once inhabited. The town of Makhmour, retaken from IS by the Kurds, is devoid of life. Shops are shut, cars are few, walls are pockmarked with bullet holes. At the ubiquitous checkpoints surrounding the town, no one has bothered to paint over graffiti that still say, "Welcome to the Islamic State" and "Long Live al-Baghdadi", IS's "caliph".

**HOLDING THE LINE**

The Kurds have had notable successes. ➤

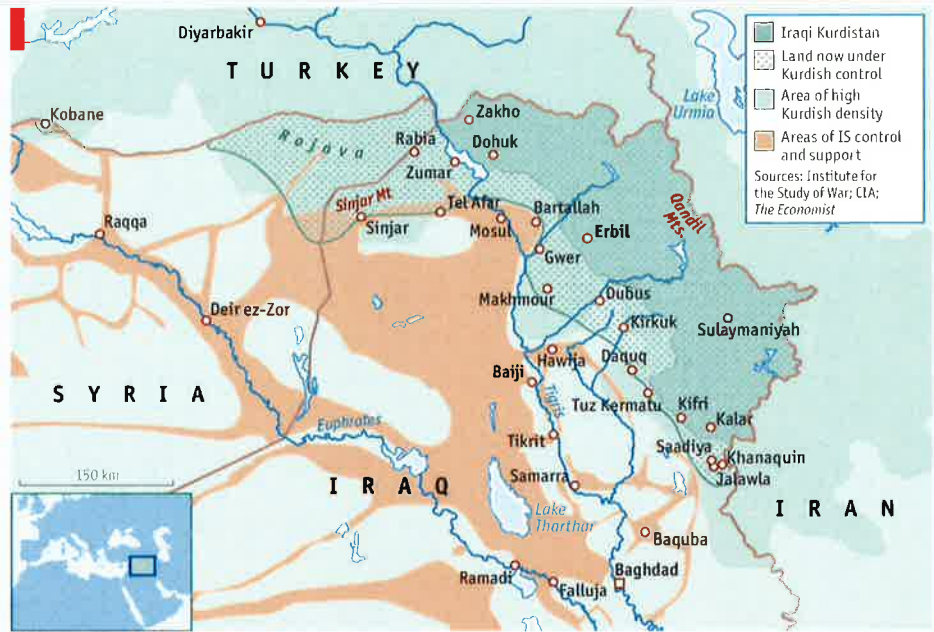
➤ In the mountainous Sinjar area in the north-west, they have retaken the town of Zumar and the border town of Rabia, and have recaptured most of Sinjar city. IS may lose control of the road westward from Mosul to its Syrian headquarters at Raqqa, which is a lifeline for the jihadists. In the south-east, close to the border with Iran, the Peshmerga have consolidated around Jalawla and Saadiya, which they recaptured from IS in the autumn. And they have tightened their grip on Kirkuk city and the northern half of Kirkuk province (Tamim to the Arabs), which they seized in the summer after the Iraqi security forces fled.

But few independent observers think Mosul will be recaptured soon. Unless the Iraqi government of Haider al-Abadi, a Shia, can persuade Iraq's alienated Sunni Arabs that they will be given a fairer deal, it will fail to motivate a retrained national army to retake the city. Despite reports that IS is losing popularity in the city as supplies and services begin to dry up and its brutality palls, the Sunni majority in the city is unlikely to welcome as liberators the Shia militias, still the basis of Mr Abadi's armed forces, which they consider to be just as murderous as IS.

As for the Kurds, they say they will back up Iraqi forces seeking to retake Mosul but will not be the spearhead. Their aim is defensive: to secure their borders with the rest of Iraq, especially those they have expanded since the summer, but not to help Baghdad restore the status quo ante.

The Iraqi Kurds also want to bolster their cousins in what they call Rojava, a Kurdish-populated north-eastern salient of Syria. Rojava is under the sway of a party with links to the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has recently been patching up long-standing differences with Iraq-based Kurdish parties. And they are keen to help Kurds farther west in Kobane, on Syria's northern border with Turkey, from which IS has recently been ejected. A rapprochement between Iraq's Kurds and the PKK, together with the current ceasefire between the PKK and Turkey, has improved Kurdish fortunes elsewhere (see article), though tension between the Kurdish rivals persists in parts of Rojava and in the Sinjar area.

The Kurds' most pressing military needs, apart from Western air support against IS, are training and equipment, especially anti-tank weapons and artillery. France and Britain have sent advisers. Germany has provided some MILAN anti-tank guided missiles and has promised hundreds more. The Americans have promised 25 Humvee armoured vehicles. But, as a Western official puts it, "Our job is to prop up the Kurds but also to stop them from becoming independent," while urging the Baghdad government to put Iraq together again. Arming the Kurds too well might egg them on, once IS is defeated, to attack Iraqi forces in a bid to secede for good.



Hence all new arms to the Kurds must go via Baghdad, since Western governments accept that Iraq's government still has sovereignty over the Kurdish region. "It's ridiculous," says Nechirvan Barzani. But even a modest roundabout supply is a lot better than nothing.

In another respect, however, the Kurds should get their own way—over oil, which could enable economic independence. For ten years the regional government in Erbil has argued bitterly with the authorities in Baghdad over how to share the revenue from oil and what laws should apply to old wells and new ones. A year ago the Baghdad authorities stopped sending Erbil its 17% share of the national budget, a portion roughly commensurate with the Kurds' share of the total population, which had been agreed to long ago.

But in December, thanks in part to Baghdad's dire need for Erbil's military help against IS, a deal was struck that lets the Kurds export oil from their own territory through a new pipeline connecting to an old one to Turkey, as long as they send the revenue from 250,000 barrels a day back to Baghdad. The Kurds hope to be producing 800,000 barrels a day by the end of this year, and 1m by 2017. They should profit handsomely—though they complain that the government in Baghdad has been slow to honour the deal, as falling oil prices play havoc with its budget.

**PUT THAT IN YOUR PIPELINE**

The Baghdad government seems also to have accepted that the Kurds can sell their oil on the open market via the Turkish terminal at Ceyhan, on the Mediterranean. For years its oil ministry had refused to let them do so. At first Baghdad tried to sue oil traders who sold Kurdish oil this way, but at least 40 tankers have now taken on the stuff at Ceyhan and have sold it on, a lot of it via the Israeli port of Ashqelon. (The Israelis have

long regarded an independent Kurdistan as a useful potential ally.) Moreover, since the Peshmerga expanded the Kurds' zone of control deeper into Kirkuk province to the south after the Iraqi army fled from IS, they are now upgrading a pipeline to pump Kirkuk's abundant oil northward to join the flow to Turkey.

But Iraqi Kurdistan's economy is still a rentier one, based almost solely on oil. It sorely needs to diversify. Banking, commercial law and basic services such as the post are all rudimentary. Corruption is rife. The two families that dominate the two main political parties, the Barzanis and the Talabanis, dominate business, too. Sirwan Barzani owns Korek, the main cell phone company. The prime minister owns Rudaw, the main television channel.

Nonetheless, the Kurdish economy is incomparably livelier than that of the area controlled by Baghdad, let alone Mosul. The Kurds welcome foreigners. Above all, it is far safer than the rest of Iraq—though a suicide-bomber blew himself up, killing five other people, opposite the Erbil governor's office in November, and there are worries that several hundred Kurds have gone to Mosul and may return as jihadists.

Moreover, despite corruption, nepotism and feudal habits, Iraqi Kurdistan enjoys a level of democracy that should be envied in most of the Arab world. The two main parties—the Barzanis' Democratic Party and the Talabanis' Patriotic Union—currently rule in coalition, but remain rivals for power and influence. A third party, Gorran, meaning "Change", which recently emerged from the Talabanis' party, promises to increase choice, though it has now joined the ruling coalition, somewhat blunting its purpose. Two Islamist parties have been brought into government too, further emasculating the opposition.

In 2005 Kurds were asked in a



➤ referendum to opine on two statements: "I want Kurdistan to stay as part of Iraq," and "I want Kurdistan to be independent." Nearly 99% voted for the second. It is hard to believe the verdict would differ today.

#### WILL THE NEIGHBOURS BE NICE?

If the landlocked Iraqi Kurds are to win statehood by peaceful means, plainly they must reach an accommodation with their neighbours. Their biggest new hope on this score is the transformation of their once-scratchy relations with Turkey. Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister, emphasises friendship with Turkey and Masoud Barzani, the president, gets on well with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president. Annual bilateral trade now exceeds \$8 billion and 100,000 Turks are reckoned to be working in Iraqi Kurdistan. They built the snazzy new airport in Erbil, where Americans and Europeans, among others, can enter without a visa. Turkey is easily the region's leading investor. "It's amazing," says Mr Salih. "Who would have thought it five years ago?"

But of course things could still go wrong. Mr Salih also notes that Turkey has "golden handcuffs" over Kurdish oil exports. "We must not exchange one dependency for another," he says. "We need three pipelines." The Kurds must square the governments in Iran and Baghdad as well as in Turkey if they are to fulfil their dream. He and other Kurdish leaders still doubt whether Turkey would let them break entirely free. Hence some of them talk of confederation with Baghdad, perhaps as a way-station to independence.

Syria and Iran, the Iraqi Kurds' other neighbours, are less predictable. But their co-operation, though it would be useful, is less vital. Whatever kind of country emerges from the wreckage of Syria is unlikely to let the Kurds of Rojava, in the north-east, break off or join up with Iraqi Kurdistan. But they are not bidding for that. They, too, want autonomy. When peace eventually returns to Syria, Rojava could perhaps be part of a Syrian federation.

As for Iran under its ayatollahs, it has perfectly good relations with Iraq's Kurds, warmed by discreet diplomacy and brisk cross-border trade. At the same time the ayatollahs still suppress the PKK's currently quiescent sister-movement, known by its Kurdish initials, PJAK, which has a haven in the mountain borderland of north-eastern Iraq. Like its Syrian counterpart, PJAK tends to echo whatever the PKK says, so it too now demands only autonomy.

Iraqi Kurdistan exists, in whatever form, in dangerous and shifting surroundings. But that has been the case since 1991, when it first got extreme autonomy, thanks to the no-fly zone imposed by America and its allies. Since then, it has steadily entrenched itself as the rest of Iraq has fallen apart, especially after IS grabbed a chunk of it. Never before has Turkey been so friendly to Iraq's Kurds. Never before has the government in Baghdad needed the co-operation of the Kurds in Erbil so badly. Now, surely, is the Kurdish moment. ■



February 21, 2015

## 7,000 ARAB SHIITE FIGHTERS NEAR IRAQ'S KIRKUK, READY TO ENTER THE CITY ON AMIRI ORDER

February 21, 2015 — [www.ekurd.net](http://www.ekurd.net)

**KIRKUK,—** With the arrival of Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashdi Shabi) in northern Iraq's Kirkuk region, purportedly to join Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the fight against the Islamic State group (IS), the question of how these shifting alliances will play out remains.

According to the head of the Popular Mobilization Forces, Hadi al-Amiri, there are now approximately 7,000 of the Arab Shiite fighters near the city of Kirkuk, and they are ready to enter the city on his order.

On the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) side, President Massoud Barzani said during a meeting in Kirkuk Tuesday, "We do not need Hashdi Shabi, and if we were in need, we would tell them."

Kirkuk is in Kurdistan and "will never fall to the enemy again," Kurdish President Massoud Barzani vowed, declaring that Iraq's Kurds would die defending the city from the Islamic State (IS).

"Kirkuk is as important to the enemy as it is to us," Barzani said after visiting some of the highest-ranking Kurdish military leaders, frontline commanders and the Kirkuk governor on Tuesday.

Barzani had given previous orders to Kurdish Peshmerga leaders not to allow the Popular Mobilization Forces into the city.

According to Stratfor the governor of Kirkuk, Najmaddin Karim and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan PUK may in fact be willing to defy Barzani's order to keep Shiite militias out of Kirkuk. Stratfor received information that in recent days, Karim held a closed-door meeting with Hadi al-Amiri, the leader of Iraq's oldest and most politically integrated Shiite militia, the Badr Organization. The details of the meeting have not been disclosed, but there are hints that both Karim and Hero Talabani, who is married to PUK leader Jalal Talabani and wields considerable influence over the party, are both in negotiations to allow Shiite militias into Kirkuk.

While Peshmerga forces and the Popular Mobilization Forces now face a shared enemy in the form of IS, it is unknown how long this fragile alliance could hold, particularly if Iranian-backed Shiite militias increase their presence in the area.



*Iraqi Shiite fighters on the outskirts of the city of Tikrit, February 18, 2015. Photo: Reuters*

The oil-rich province of Kirkuk is one of the most disputed areas by the Kurdistan regional government and the Iraqi government in Baghdad.

The Kurds are seeking to integrate Kirkuk province into the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region clamming it to be historically a Kurdish city, the population is a mix of majority Kurds and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem." Kurds see it as the rightful and perfect capital of an autonomous Kurdistan state.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution is related to the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk city and other disputed areas through having back its Kurdish inhabitants and repatriating the Arabs relocated in the city during the former regime's time to their original provinces in central and southern Iraq.

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.

Kirkuk fell to the full control of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces after the IS June insurgency in Iraq and the withdrawal of Iraqi army from the province and some other northern region of the state, including second-biggest city of Mosul. ◆

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# Kurdistan's right to secede Set the Kurds free

The case for a new state in northern Iraq

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www.economist.com



**THE Kurds**, at least 25m-strong, are one of the world's most numerous peoples without a state. Other small nations in their region have a home alongside the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks: the Jews created (or, in their book, recreated) Israel after the second world war; Armenia and Georgia re-emerged as independent as the Soviet Union fell apart.

The Kurds have twice come close to fulfilling their dream, once after the first world war and the Ottoman empire's collapse, when they were promised a state by the treaty of Sèvres, and again after the second world war, when for ten brief months the Kurdish republic of Mahabad rose up in what is now north-western Iran. Today the Kurdish Region of Iraq, home to at least 6m people, is independent in all but name (see article). It is that benighted country's only fully functioning part. Since 1991, when the West began to protect it from Saddam Hussein, it has thrived. In due course, it deserves its place in the community of independent nations.

The principle, promoted by America's President Woodrow Wilson a century ago, is that nations should have the "unmolested opportunity of autonomous development". A country should be able to gain independence if it can stand on its own feet, has democratic credentials and respects its own minorities. To qualify, Iraq's Kurds should confirm (again) in a

vote that they want their own homeland. As well as being economically and democratically viable, the new state must be militarily defensible and disavow any intention to create a Greater Kurdistan by biting chunks off Turkey, Iran and Syria. It needs its neighbours' endorsement. And it must settle terms with Iraq's government, including where to draw its boundary.

## MARRIAGE MISGUIDANCE

A sustainable economy is within the Kurds' grasp. They are exporting increasing amounts of oil, and Iraq's central government in Baghdad has at last agreed a formula that will let them keep the lion's share of the profits. Soon they hope to produce 800,000 barrels a day, worth \$17 billion a year at today's prices.

Democracy is established, though still rough-edged. Iraqi Kurdistan has regular elections, a boisterous parliament, an array of political parties and a raucous media. Certainly its courts are weak, its leaders' habits feudal, its journalists sometimes harassed and its human-rights record far from spotless. But it is more democratic than most of the region—and far safer than the rest of Iraq, even though the fanatics of Islamic State press against its long border. Suicide-bombings and atrocities of the sort committed by sectarian militias in Baghdad and elsewhere in Arab Iraq are mercifully rare.

The regional politics are trickier. Turkey and Iran have long been opposed to an independent Kurdistan carved out of Iraq, lest their own Kurds try to follow suit, if Iraqi Kurdistan becomes a magnet for neighbouring Kurdish rebel movements.

Yet even here there has been progress for the Kurdish cause. Syria, which is unlikely soon to recreate a centralised state, is hardly in a position to object to secession for Iraq's Kurds. Iran has forged a pragmatic relationship with them. Relations between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey, the most concerned of its neighbours, have warmed remarkably. For now, the Kurds of south-east Turkey, far more numerous than those in Iraq, seem genuinely to have forsaken their desire for a separate state, seeking autonomy instead. Moreover, most of Turkey's Kurds, assimilated in Istanbul and elsewhere, do not want secession. Hence Turkey might accept an independent Kurdistan across its south-eastern border.

The longer-term prospects are also good. Other countries based on an ethnic group—Albania, for instance—have resisted the temptation to incorporate the territory of their brethren in neighbouring states. Landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan will need access to markets for its oil, making it all the more vital that it is on decent terms with its neighbours, especially Turkey. Western countries should make plain that an independent Kurdistan will get no help if it stirs up secessionist Kurds across its border.

As for Iraq's Arabs, the longer they fail to govern their bit of the country the less right they have to stop the Kurds governing theirs. Secession sets a precedent in the Middle East. Even so, the Iraqi Kurds know they must work with the powers in Baghdad and go through a difficult negotiation over oil. Since the fall of Mosul (where Islamic State holds sway), Kurdistan has crept towards de facto independence, with its capital in Erbil. While Islamic State's maniacs are howling at the gates of Baghdad, a divorce cannot take place. But in due course separation would give the Kurds international protection from any violent Iraqi Arab attempt to reassert control. The Kurds want a country of their own. They have earned it. ■

# La Syrie, source du chaos régional

Alors que les forces de Bachar al-Assad, aidées par le Hezbollah et Téhéran, piétinent devant Alep, l'Etat islamique se bat sur tous les fronts, inquiétant même l'Arabie Saoudite.



Par **JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN**

**A** présent, la guerre est partout. Elle est à Alep, où le régime syrien a lancé une grande offensive pour tenter d'en briser le siège. Elle est au Kurdistan d'Irak où les peshmergas viennent de repousser une attaque majeure de l'Etat islamique (EI) au sud d'Erbil. Elle est à Bagdad où se prépare une grande offensive de l'armée irakienne pour tenter de reprendre les territoires conquis par les jihadistes. Elle est dans les airs au rythme des bombardements aériens de la coalition mise sur pied par Washington. Elle est sur le versant syrien du plateau du Golan où le Hezbollah et les forces loyalistes, assistés par des officiers iraniens et des chiïtes afghans, avancent à la lisière des positions tenues par Israël. Mais la guerre menace aussi le Liban, avec la présence de cellules de l'Etat islamique dans les grandes villes de Tripoli et Saïda. Elle est crainte aussi à Riyad, qui se dépêche d'ériger une formidable muraille de 950 km à sa frontière avec l'Irak; à Amman, où l'abomi-

nable exécution par le feu d'un pilote jordanien n'empêche pas les idées les plus radicales de prospérer dans certaines villes comme Maan. Près de quatre ans après les premières manifestations pacifiques dans la ville de Deraa (sud-est du pays) contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad, qui furent réprimées dans le sang et provoquèrent la rébellion, la crise syrienne a muté en un conflit généralisé qui menace l'existence des frontières au Proche-Orient et même la pérennité de certains Etats.

## DÉCRYPTAGE

### POURQUOI LA BATAILLE D'ALEP EST-ELLE SI CRUCIALE ?

Pour le régime, reconquérir cette grande ville, qui fut la capitale économique du pays, est absolument vital s'il veut faire valoir qu'il est en passe de gagner la guerre et qu'il domine désormais l'essentiel de la Syrie utile. Le contrôle de la ville, déchirée en deux depuis juillet 2012 et où 400 000 personnes environ vivent dans les seuls quartiers rebelles, lui permettra aussi de couper l'une des principales voies d'approvisionnement en armes de l'insur-

# 200 000

C'est le nombre de morts syriens depuis le début du conflit, en mars 2011, quand plusieurs villes s'étaient soulevées contre le régime, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme.

«Il est très probable que l'offensive [contre Alep] soit en train d'échouer en raison de l'incapacité du régime à faire venir des renforts.»

**Rami Abdel Rahmane**  
directeur de l'OSDH

rection. Mais rien n'indique que les troupes loyalistes sont en mesure de remporter la bataille. Pour le moment, elles piétinent. Elles manquent visiblement de renforts. En fait, la communauté alaouite (à peine 10% de la population) apparaît désormais saignée par les quatre années de guerre et peine à fournir l'essentiel des officiers et des hommes, comme elle le faisait auparavant. «Rares sont les familles de cette communauté qui n'ont pas perdu un fils, voire deux», souligne un expert.

### LE RÉGIME PROGRESSE-T-IL SUR LES AUTRES FRONTS ?

La faiblesse criante de cette armée syrienne, ce sont ses effectifs. En fait, elle ne peut guère engager d'offensive de grande ampleur sans dégarnir Damas où la rébellion, essentiellement islamiste, conserve faubourgs et banlieues, comme celle de Douma. C'est pourquoi le régime fait autant appel à des milices pour tenir villes et régions. Mais celles-ci ne constituent pas pour autant une armée. D'où l'appel aux forces étrangères. C'est ce qu'un éditorialiste libanais proche du Hezbollah appelle l'«axe de la résistance», qui réunit Damas, Téhéran et le Hezbollah. Cet axe a permis à Bachar al-Assad de marquer des points, notamment dans la région du Qalamoun (près de la frontière libanaise). Et, parallèlement à l'offensive sur Alep, de progresser sur le front sud, ce qui permettra de dégager Damas et au Hezbollah d'avancer sur le versant syrien du Golan où il entend allonger la zone de confrontation avec Israël, qui part du Liban.

### QUEL RÔLE LE HEZBOLLAH ET L'IRAN JOUENT-ILS EN SYRIE ?

Un rôle fondamental. Sur les 15 000 combattants que compte la for-

mation chiïte libanaise (sans compter les réservistes), les experts israéliens, qui observent le parti de Dieu à la loupe, estiment qu'entre 5 000 et 6 000 sont actuellement engagés en Syrie et que plus de 600 d'entre eux ont déjà été tués au combat. Pour la première fois, avec une franchise totalement insoupçonnée, Damas a reconnu le rôle primordial du Hezbollah et des officiers iraniens dans l'offensive sur le front sud. Pour cette opération, préparée depuis plusieurs mois et lancée contre le Front al-Nusra, jamais le Hezbollah n'avait engagé des forces aussi nombreuses, si bien que les troupes syriennes apparaissent à présent comme supplétives.

Quant à l'Iran, elle ne fait pas non plus mystère de son engagement en Syrie (et en Irak), comme le montrent les visites répétées du général Qassem Soleimani, le chef de la Force Al-Qods des Gardiens de la révolution (chargée des opérations extérieures) à Damas, à Beyrouth mais aussi à Bagdad et dans le Kurdistan d'Irak. Dans la presse iranienne, on a pu voir l'officier sur le front aux côtés de combattants kurdes irakiens et de militaires irakiens. Dernièrement, un diplomate iranien nous confiait que «sans l'appui de Téhéran, la Syrie se serait effondrée». L'implication iranienne n'est pas sans conséquence sur la souveraineté du pays : des écoles iraniennes ont ouvert à Damas et, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la Syrie, l'Achoura, la grande fête religieuse chiïte, y a été célébrée.

#### L'ÉTAT ISLAMIQUE PERD-IL DU TERRAIN ?

L'EI se bat sur de multiples fronts. Et les défaites, certaines cuisantes comme à Kobané, dans le Kurdistan d'Irak, sont

souvent compensées par des progrès ailleurs. La ville de Al-Baghdadi, que les jihadistes assiégeaient depuis des mois, est ainsi tombée le 12 février entre leurs mains et leurs mortiers menacent à présent la base aérienne toute proche de Aïn al-Assad, où 320 Marines américains entraînent la 7<sup>e</sup> division irakienne. Globalement, l'organisation de Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi ne progresse plus en Irak et a renoncé à conquérir Bagdad, qu'elle avait commencé à encercler – la grande crainte du gouvernement irakien, l'été dernier –, de même que les territoires où les chiïtes sont majoritaires.

Mais elle n'a pas renoncé à s'emparer des régions mixtes (sunnites-chiïtes ou arabes-kurdes). Une grande offensive de l'armée irakienne, soutenue par des conseillers américains, iraniens et même français, est prévue en mars contre l'EI mais le chercheur Pierre-Jean Luizard, spécialiste de l'Irak, est sceptique sur ses chances de réussite : «Etant donné l'état de l'armée irakienne aujourd'hui, elle ne peut reprendre que des terres mixtes kurdes ou chiïtes. Elle ne peut qu'échouer en zone purement arabe sunnite.» «Quand on connaît le sort de certaines villes reprises à l'Etat islamique, on peut comprendre qu'il y ait une résistance locale forte», insiste-t-il, citant «des villages passés au fil de l'épée par les milices chiïtes dans la province de Diyala». En Syrie, l'EI se bat à la fois contre le régime d'Assad, l'organisation jihadiste rivale du Front al-Nusra et toutes les autres composantes de la rébellion. A ce jour, c'est toujours l'organisation d'Al-Baghdadi qui contrôle le seul chef-lieu de province conquis par l'insurrection, Raqqa, dont elle a fait sa capitale

administrative.

#### LES FRAPPES DE LA COALITION SONT-ELLES EFFICACES ?

Les avions de la coalition bombardent les jihadistes depuis le 8 août en Irak et le 23 septembre en Syrie. Selon Barack Obama, plus de 2000 frappes aériennes ont été menées. Si elles ont permis aux Kurdes de tenir Kobané et de freiner l'avancée de l'EI, elles n'ont pas été suffisantes pour entamer une véritable reconquête territoriale. D'où la volonté du président américain de mener une guerre plus intensive sans pour autant envoyer des troupes mener une offensive terrestre en Irak, où l'armée américaine a déjà perdu près de 4500 soldats entre 2003 et 2011 – déjà, quelque 1830 militaires assistent les forces irakiennes sur le terrain. A présent, la bataille fait rage aussi au Congrès, où démocrates et républicains auront du mal à trouver un consensus sur la meilleure façon de contrer les jihadistes.

Les uns et les autres ont pourtant de quoi s'inquiéter : la campagne de bombardements n'a nullement endigué le flux de volontaires. «La tendance est claire et inquiétante. Le nombre de combattants étrangers se rendant en Syrie est sans précédent», soulignait dernièrement à Washington Nicholas Rasmussen, directeur du Centre de lutte contre le terrorisme, devant la Chambre des représentants. Il a estimé à «plus de 20 000» le nombre de volontaires étrangers en provenance de plus de 90 pays à avoir rallié l'EI en Syrie. «Au moins 3 400 d'entre eux viennent de pays occidentaux, dont 150 Américains qui y sont partis ou ont tenté de le faire.»

## Irak : Paris renforce (doucement) l'opération

LePoint.fr - De notre envoyé spécial à Bagdad, Jean Guisnel - 24 févr. 2015

Malgré l'envoi de maigres renforts en Irak, la France ne souhaite pas participer à l'offensive qui se prépare contre Daesh pour la reconquête de Mossoul.

La situation de l'Irak est au-delà de la catastrophe. Les trois composantes formant le pays (chiïtes, sunnites et Kurdes) sont aujourd'hui complètement divisées et écartelées entre des objectifs antagonistes. La minorité sunnite qui tenait le pays sous Saddam Hussein est aujourd'hui exclue du pouvoir par les chiïtes majoritaires, tandis que les Kurdes jouent leur propre jeu.

L'offensive des djihadistes de l'organisation Etat islamique l'été dernier, spectaculairement couronnée par la prise de la deuxième ville du pays, Mossoul, a illustré l'improbable faillite de l'Etat irakien : les quatre divisions qui défendaient la région se sont débâchées, officiers en



Le 23 février 2015, le groupe aéronaval (GAN), constitué autour du porte-avions Charles de Gaulle, est officiellement engagé dans l'opération Chammal en Irak, pour lutter contre le groupe terroriste Daesh

pourrait représenter l'équipement complet de deux ou trois divisions mécanisées, pour l'essentiel offert par les États-Unis.

#### La visite du CEMA

La grande question de l'heure, pour les dirigeants irakiens, consiste à préparer la reconquête de Mossoul. Lors d'une récente visite à Bagdad et à Irbil, le chef d'état-major des armées françaises, le général Pierre de Villiers - que nous avons accompagné à cette occasion -, a pu préciser à ses interlocuteurs les conditions dans lesquelles la France aiderait cette stratégie. Elle consiste essentiellement à renforcer l'opération Chammal en ajoutant une centaine d'hommes à ceux qui se trouvent déjà sur place en nombre équivalent, notamment à Irbil, au Kurdistan.

Appartenant pour une large part au commandement des opérations spéciales, les Français d'Irbil forment actuellement deux détachements d'instruction opérationnelle (DIO) mis en place auprès des peshmergas (...)



« Sous les verrous, j'ai rencontré ceux que j'appelle les grands hommes et les grandes femmes d'Iran : des opposants bahais, des partisans des moudjahidins, des réformateurs, bref tout ce que le pays compte de gens qui se battent pour leurs idées »

## Faezeh Rafsandjani : « En Iran, les libertés ont encore reculé »

Pour cette représentante de la contestation interne au régime, le président iranien a cependant fait des avancées dans le domaine économique.



Propos recueillis à Téhéran par  
Georges Malbrunot  
gmalbrunot@lefigaro.fr

**F**aezeh Rafsandjani est la fille d'Hachemi Rafsandjani, l'un des fondateurs de la République islamique d'Iran en 1979. Cette jeune femme est pourtant l'une des figures de proue de la contestation interne au régime de Téhéran. Emprisonnée en 2012, Mme Rafsandjani s'exprime rarement devant la presse étrangère. Pour *Le Figaro*, elle a accepté de nous livrer son regard sur la situation politique en Iran et les délicates négociations qui ont lieu actuellement à Genève sur le programme nucléaire de son pays.

**Le FIGARO.** - Quel est l'état d'esprit des Iraniens, un an et demi après l'élection du président Hassan Rohani ?

**Faezeh RAFSANDJANI.** - La population attendait beaucoup d'Hassan Rohani. Aujourd'hui, les Iraniens ne sont pas complètement déçus, mais ils ont moins d'espoirs qu'il réponde à leurs demandes. Pourtant, le président Rohani affiche un programme de nature à faire avancer les choses, notamment en économie, où il a obtenu des résultats. L'inflation par exemple est retombée à 15 % contre 40 % auparavant. Le problème, ce sont les ultrac-conservateurs qui lui mettent des bâtons dans les roues. Leur but est clair : ils ne veulent pas qu'il réussisse. Ainsi les Iraniens seront-ils encore plus déçus, et c'est comme cela qu'ils pensent remporter les prochaines élections législatives de l'an prochain. N'oubliez jamais que le président de la République en Iran ne dispose pas du vrai pouvoir. Celui-ci est entre les mains du guide suprême (l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, NDLR), qui est soutenu par les ultrac-conservateurs.

Après un net recul sous la présidence de son prédécesseur Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, les libertés individuelles ou la liberté de la presse ont-elles regagné du terrain ?

Là encore, la situation s'est dégradée depuis l'élection de M. Rohani. Juste après son élection en juin 2013, le régime a libéré certains prisonniers politiques et des journalistes. Mais maintenant, nous voyons que des journaux sont fermés, des journalistes et des opposants politiques sont mis sous les verrous. Le pouvoir agit dans l'illégalité, quand il ordonne, par exemple, à l'ensemble des journalistes de ne pas parler de Mohammad Khatami (l'ancien président réformateur, NDLR). Or, ce dernier n'a jamais voulu changer le régime. Ce recul des libertés est dû à l'obstruction du Majlis (le Parlement dominé par les conservateurs, NDLR). Quand, à Ispahan, de l'acide est jeté au visage de plusieurs femmes, personne ensuite n'a été arrêté, ce n'est vraiment pas un bon signe. Mais attention : n'allez pas conclure que malgré toutes ces déceptions, nous soyons proches d'une chute du régime. Certes, nous faisons face à beaucoup de problèmes, mais il n'y a pas de demande pour une nouvelle révolution. Même en 2009, la plupart des manifestants ne réclamaient qu'un changement à l'intérieur du régime.

Malgré votre appartenance au régime, vous-même avez été mise en prison pendant six mois en 2012 ?

Comme beaucoup d'autres prisonniers, j'ai été détenue sous l'accusation de propagande contre le régime. Placée dans la section politique de la prison d'Evine, j'ai été traitée comme les autres captifs, même si je suis la fille de l'un des fondateurs de la République islamique. Mais les premiers jours de ma détention, certains prisonniers ont protesté. Les responsables du centre pénitentiaire sont alors venus me dire que c'était à cause de moi, qu'avant

mon arrivée, il n'y avait pas de problèmes. Ils m'ont punie en me plaçant pendant cinq jours à l'isolement total. Étant détenus avec la fille Rafsandjani, les autres prisonniers avaient de l'espoir que leur sort s'améliore. Et les matons, eux, attendaient que je les calme, puisque je faisais partie, disaient-ils, du pouvoir. Malgré toutes ces difficultés, je ne regrette pas cette expérience, j'en ai même retiré de nombreux points positifs. Sous les verrous, j'ai rencontré ceux que j'appelle les grands hommes et les grandes femmes d'Iran : des opposants bahaïs, des partisans des moudjahidins, des réformateurs, bref tout ce que le pays compte de gens qui se battent pour leurs idées.

**Croyez-vous à un accord sur le nucléaire entre l'Iran et les Occidentaux ?**

Là aussi, l'espoir s'est amenuisé. Des extrémistes mettent des obstacles à un accord que ce soit chez nous, les ultraconservateurs, ou aux États-Unis, certains membres du Congrès. Barack Obama parle bien en général à propos des négociations, mais il utilise parfois des formules du genre « toutes les options sont sur la table » pour évoquer d'éventuelles frappes militaires, ce qui renforce chez

nous les ennemis d'un tel accord. De son côté, Rohani fait tout pour arriver à un accord en respectant les lignes rouges fixées par le guide. Mais plus le temps passe, plus les gens éprouvent une certaine déception.

**Vous faites partie de ceux qui poussent Hassan Rohani à organiser un référendum sur le nucléaire. A-t-il les moyens d'affronter ainsi le guide suprême ?**

Le référendum est prévu par la Constitution. Puisque tout le monde prétend parler au nom du peuple, laissons donc le peuple s'exprimer sur une question aussi fondamentale. En brandissant cette menace, le président Rohani a simplement voulu dire qu'il manquait de pouvoir. En face, les conservateurs ne devraient pas penser que cette initiative vise à affaiblir leur pouvoir. Le référendum est la seule solution pour sortir de l'impasse, comme le prévoit, encore une fois, notre Constitution. Jusqu'à maintenant, l'autre partie du pouvoir (*sous-entendu le guide, qu'elle ne nomme pas par prudence, NDLR*) ne l'a pas accepté, mais j'espère que cela changera. C'est une question juridique, pas politique. En agissant de la sorte, Hassan Rohani reste bien dans la légalité. ■



23 FÉVRIER 2015

# L'EI exhibe des peshmergas dans des cages

**Le groupe extrémiste a diffusé une vidéo dans laquelle il exhibe dans des cages des hommes présentés comme des combattants kurdes. L'EI y profère des menaces à leur encontre.**



une cinquantaine de kilomètres de Kirkouk.

arme automatique ou un revolver.

Le film montre chacun des 21 otages, en tenue orange et la tête basse. Ils sont emmenés vers des cages sur une place entourée de murs de béton, et devant lesquelles se tiennent des combattants cagoulés de l'EI portant un pistolet.

**ATTAQUE TERRORISTE**

Les images sont entrecoupées de celles de l'exécution du pilote jordanien et de celle des 21 otages coptes tués en Libye, le 15 février. Un commandant des peshmergas à Kirkouk, le général Hiyowa Rach, a affirmé que les peshmergas otages ont été capturés le 31 janvier «lorsque les combattants kurdes avaient repoussé une attaque terroriste de l'EI visant Kirkouk».

**OTAGES AGENOUILLÉS**

Un homme barbu portant un turban blanc adresse alors un message aux peshmergas, les appelant à cesser leur combat contre l'EI. «Sinon votre sort sera comme ceux-là, soit dans des cages ou sous terre», prévient-il.

L'EI contrôle depuis juin 2014 de larges territoires dans le nord et l'ouest de l'Irak. Il a mené une offensive contre Kirkouk fin janvier pour tenter de capturer cette ville pétrolière où se trouvent les peshmergas depuis le retrait des troupes irakiennes un mois auparavant.

Par la suite, ces derniers, toujours dans les cages, sont exhibés sur des camionnettes dans une rue au milieu de dizaines d'habitants et d'hommes armés. Enfin, la vidéo montre les otages agenouillés avec derrière eux un homme cagoulé portant une

aucune exécution.

Les 21 hommes sont présentés comme étant seize peshmergas, deux officiers de l'armée irakienne et trois policiers de Kirkouk, ville située à 240 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad. Cette vidéo ne précise ni le lieu ni la date des événements filmés.

Des sources kurdes ont toutefois affirmé à l'AFP que les scènes ont été tournées il y a une semaine. Elles auraient été filmées sur le marché principal du district de Hawija, tenu par l'EI, à

www.20min.ch  
23 févr. 2015

La mise en scène de ce document diffusé dimanche rappelle celle du pilote jordanien brûlé vif dans une cage, selon une vidéo diffusée par le groupe EI le 3 février. La vidéo de dimanche, reprise par le centre américain de surveillance des sites islamistes, ne montre



# Isis funding coming from Gulf States 'protection money' - senior Kurdish President's chief-of-staff

Despite recent setbacks Isis remains formidably well-funded says Kurdish President's chief-of-staff



By Mark Piggott  
February 22, 2015  
www.ibtimes.co.uk

Gulf states are continuing to provide Islamic State (Isis) with huge levels of funding, partly in the hope this will dissuade the group from launching attacks in their countries, it has been claimed. The group remains well-equipped and has hundreds of thousands of fighters.

Fuad Hussein, Kurdish President Massoud Barzani's chief of staff, has told the Independent on Sunday that removing the organisation from cities like Mosul would require huge amounts of weapons and troops, as well as an improbable partnership involving local Sunnis as well as the Baghdadi government.

Hussein was remarkably frank about how difficult it is to beat Isis in combat. "So far we are only defeating them in various places in Kurdistan by giving our blood. We have had 1,011 Peshmerga killed and about 5,000 wounded."

Hussein's gloomy assessment comes after a number of recent reports which appeared to show Isis are on the retreat after being beaten out of Kobani, local tribes disgusted by their brutality turning against them and fighters are deserting the organisation.

Isis militants There are suggestions the Iraqi army may try to drive Isis out of Mosul(Reuters)

Both the Iraqi government and US have begun to talk openly of attempting to wrest back Iraq's second-most populous city from Isis.

Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi told the BBC last week that "We are now planning an offensive on Mosul in the coming few months. We have to prepare for it carefully because the only choice we have in Mosul [is to win]. We have to win in Mosul to keep [Isis] out."

However, Hussein believes re-taking Mosul would be fraught with



Isis execution of Peshmerga forcesThe latest Isis video shows the 21 Kurdish Peshmerga who were recently executed (Islamic State)

risks.

"The Iraqi army has two divisions to protect Baghdad, but is it possible for the Iraqi government to release them? How will they get to Mosul? If they have to come through Tikrit and Baiji, they will have to fight hard along the way even before they get to Mosul."

In yet another attempt to horrify the world, intimidate its enemies and attract more militants, Isis released a video showing 21 Kurdish Peshmerga imprisoned in cages before they were reportedly being murdered – either by beheading or burning alive like Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh.

Young men – and women – still flock to join Islamic State, and revenue from oil, extortion and Gulf supporters continues to flood in. According to Iraqi Kurdish politician Dr Mahmoud Othman, such donations aren't simply gestures of goodwill – they are also a form of protection money.

Isis "gets money from the Arab countries because they are afraid of it", says Dr Othman. "Gulf countries give money to Da'esh (Isis) so that it promises not to carry out operations on their territory." ●

## IRAQ'S ABADI SAYS KURDISTAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD PAY ITS OWN EMPLOYEES

ekurd.net — February 22, 2015

**SPEAKING** to Iraqi television broadcasters in Baghdad on Saturday night, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) should bear the responsibility of paying its civil employees not hired through the central government.

"I am not against sending the civil servants' salary, but there is a matter everyone should know, the case is, there are some employees of the KRG who have not been hired by the Iraqi Government but rather, are employed by Kurdistan Region," Abadi stated.

Iraqi and Kurdish leaders have been locked in a dispute over the KRG's budget and payment of civil servants' salaries which have repeatedly been delayed since the beginning of 2014.

KRG employees, including Peshmerga on the frontlines fighting against Islamic State militants, report having gone months at a time without receiving salaries.

Abadi's speech comes after talks with KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in Baghdad on February 16 where he said Iraq's central govern-

ment does not have enough money to send the KRG its 17 percent share of the national budget.

Following the meeting, KRG President Masoud Barzani stated during a press conference that the KRG is abiding by the terms of the oil deal struck by officials in December and will cease exports to Baghdad if the budget is not received.

Under the terms of the oil revenue sharing accord, the KRG is to send 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) to the Iraqi government to be exported by the State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO) in return for 17 percent of the total national budget.

The KRG is then allowed to export 300,000 bpd to Turkey via pipeline from the Kirkuk oilfields. ♦

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# Kurdish Peshmerga call for heavy weaponry to take their fight to Isis

Fighters deride western fears that sending them weapons could give real impetus to frequent talk of sovereignty at the expense of Iraq

Martin Chulov in Duhok  
23 February 2015  
www.theguardian.com

**From his perch behind sandbags on a last approach towards Mosul, Captain Ibrahim of the Kurdish Peshmerga lives and breathes his enemy.**

Down the hill, around a mile across an open plain, Islamic State (Isis) gunmen hide in a partly-ruined village. At least a half dozen times a day, they drive a flatbed truck from a hiding spot and send a large mortar arcing towards the Kurds.

"They're good," Ibrahim said with a wince, seconds after a shell thumped into the dirt just outside his outpost. "They're very good. The Iraqis have taught them well."

In between the Kurds and their enemy, two dead gunmen lie in no-man's land. "They tried to attack us last night," he said. The scent of death wafts on the breeze. "They are Chechens. Terrorists from everywhere are being hosted in those villages, and there's only us to stop them."

Beyond the village, at what the Kurds call Kiske junction, is the Isis heartland, a 12-mile stretch of farms and villages that spreads towards Mosul and then beyond into Anbar province and west into Syria.

One leg of the spring offensive touted by Washington to push the gunmen from Iraq's second biggest city will likely start from here, but those doing the bulk of the fighting now are far from convinced that they should also be the ones to go further.

What to do about Mosul looms as a seminal moment both in Kurdish history and in more recent faltering steps towards nation building - a fact that Kurdish leaders are adamant that its allies should acknowledge upfront.

"We are not naive," said the chancellor of the Kurdish region security council, Masrour Barzani, from his position an hour or so away from the front lines. "We are very careful not to take any Arab lands. We are not going to go into Mosul alone. We are not agents."

"We asked the UK for some of their weaponry from Afghanistan," said Barzani. "We were prepared to buy it, but instead we find it being sold elsewhere and denied to us."

Britain has sent the Peshmerga 40 heavy machine guns and ammunition, but has denied other requests, insisting privately that will channel its deliveries through Iraq's central government.

Kurdish leaders seethe at the decisive weaponry sent to Baghdad in recent months, much of which is being used to replace six divisions worth of trucks and tanks that were abandoned when the Iraqi army fled the north of the coun-



*Kurdish border police take down an Isis flag after taking control of Yangija village in September last year. Photograph: Erin Trieb/Erin Trieb/Corbis*

try in June.

Isis promptly looted more than 200 armoured troop carriers, more than 1,000 humvees and several dozen US battlefield tanks, and have used them ever since to menace Iraq's army and the Peshmerga.

Iraq's western partners fear that sending weapons to the Kurds could give real impetus to frequent talk of sovereignty at the expense of Iraq - the current borders of which they remain committed to, even as the post-Ottoman boundaries of the modern Middle East continue to wither.

Such a view is derided in Irbil and across much of the north. "We're fighting a war for a country that we are not a part of, and that we have no future in," said Falah Fikri, a businessman in Irbil. "We are in this state because the Iraqi army collapsed, and we are told to believe in them?"

In six months of fighting against Isis, Kurdish leaders have already faced a series of reckonings: what to do about the contested city of Kirkuk, which they now control after the Iraqi army abandoned it in June; how to defend their seat of government, Irbil, which was nearly stormed by the jihadis two months later; and what the collapse of Iraq meant for their ambitions to etch a sovereign state from its ruins.

As US war planners tout plans for 25,000 men - 12 Iraqi brigades, three of them Peshmerga - to launch a final battle in April, Iraq's Kurds are trying to set their own rules of engagement.

Kurdish border police take down an Isis flag after taking control of Yangija village in September last year

The Peshmerga have lost more than 1,000 members since August, with more than 4,500 others injured. The battle ahead will certainly

add to that. Since early February, Kurdish forces have recaptured roughly 400 square miles of land seized by Isis, including the Mosul dam, which supplies water to most of Iraq. "And what do you get for all of that?" asked Barzani. "We have redrawn the Kurdish borders with our own blood."

Kurdish advances have been secured by a US-led air campaign, which was particularly effective around the Mosul dam. From the giant waterway, built during the Saddam years, to the front lines, hundreds of concrete homes lie in ruins. Many have clearly been hit by air strikes, but others were dynamited as Isis retreated. Large yellow diggers gouge trenches from green fields, which will act as defensive positions if the jihadis try to reclaim their losses.

Much of the front line fighting appears to be a throw back to bygone eras of warfare. The Peshmerga have enough Kalashnikovs and ammunition, but their pleas for heavy battle-

**“ We asked the UK for weaponry from Afghanistan. We were prepared to buy it, but it is sold elsewhere and denied to us ”**

*Kurdish leader Masrour Barzani*

field weapons that could help them make more gains have been rejected by the US, Britain and other European allies.

Barzani bristles at the notion that the Peshmerga may use any new weapons to conquer Mosul, or lands closer to Kirkuk that are more central to the Kurds' ancestral claims.

"The east bank of Mosul is part of Kurdistan, but we are not claiming that," he said. "We will go as far as we are welcomed into all those areas that are part of the greater Kurdistan. Anything above the Tigris river, we have taken it, but we are not aspiring to a greater Kurdistan. We are talking about Iraqi Kurdistan. We have to convince the countries that we live with that it is in the interests of everybody. We have to convince Baghdad through an understanding.

"Kurdish Iraq has for too long been a taboo that we can not even talk about. For Iraq [the Kurdish north] is just an economic base. But we don't need Kurdistan for its economic value. This land is ancestral.

"Waiting for the local forces to fight Isis is going to give them the option to grow, reorganise, recruit and be a constant threat to the region and the rest of the world. To defeat Isis requires a lot more engagement, to send troops and to give the right equipment to the ➤

► forces who are defeating them, and that is the Kurds. There is no excuse not to arm the Kurds. No justification.”

As bullets ping past the Kiske junction outpost, Ibrahim points to the skies. The roar of a jet comes into earshot. “I called them a while ago,” he said. “They need to deal with that mortar. We don’t have any trouble getting them to help, but we would rather do it ourselves.

“We are operating in areas where we cannot trust the people. It is very hostile. The villages

don’t like us, even though we are helping them,” he said. “I’ll give you an example. When we arrived here we found a boy with a phone. He was telling [Isis] our positions. I told my commanders and they said to let him go.

“A few weeks later, we went back to that village and were giving them food. That same boy was at the front of the line. We told the locals and they started throwing shoes at him. Maybe now they know we’re on their side, but we can never believe it.”

Another Peshmerga unsheathed an Italian supplied rocket, part of a small cache sent by Rome several days earlier. “This is what we need, he said. “But it won’t get us to Mosul.”

Sipping a coffee in his dugout, Ibrahim said: “You know, we’re puzzled being out here with such a lack of support. Why is this happening? We like freedom. We are just like you. We want what you have.” □

# Iran executes young Kurd Saman Naseem arrested as minor: media

February 20, 2015, by Editorial Staff in Kurdistan  
Saman Naseem on death row in Iran [www.ekurd.net](http://www.ekurd.net)

**URMIYE, Iranian Kurdistan,**— The young Iranian Kurdish man who has been at the center of an international campaign to urge Iranian authorities to spare his life was executed Thursday, according to local media in Iranian Kurdistan.

Saman Naseem, 22, who was arrested as a minor, was executed in Urmiye (Orumyiah) prison in the capital of Iran’s West Azerbaijan Province, the reports say.

Naseem’s family was reportedly threatened by Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence to remain silent after the execution order had been carried out.

Saman’s family have been told to collect his body on Saturday, according to several independent sources. Despite the international appeals to halt the execution, Naseem was hanged on Thursday.

Iran Human Rights (IHR) reported earlier that Saman’s family were contacted by the authorities on Friday to meet at the prison to collect Saman’s belongings on Saturday. According to several independent sources, Saman’s family have been asked earlier today to collect Saman’s body on Saturday February 21. It is still unclear whether Saman was executed Thursday or Friday.

While Naseem’s lawyer has confirmed the execution of the Kurdish political prisoner despite all the calls by human rights organizations, worrying wait continues for three other Kurdish prisoners on death row.

In the meantime, two Kurdish brothers Ali Afshari and Habibullah Afshari have also been executed Friday. The Afshari family has been informed on Friday that the bodies of the two brothers could be reclaimed on Friday.

Naseem had been charged with “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth” in April 2013, following his arrest in 2011 at the age of 17.

The charges were connected to Naseem’s suspected membership in the armed opposition group Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) and his alleged participation in an armed battle with Iran’s Revolutionary Guards.

Rights groups and activists made repeated calls for Iran to cancel Naseem’s execution in recent days on the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Iran is a signatory.

Amnesty International warned Thursday of a potential secret execution, with the organization’s deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, saying, “The lack of news about Saman Naseem’s fate or whereabouts with prison officers denying his family any information is cruel and inhuman.”

In a letter released by Amnesty International last week, Naseem described torture “so severe that it left me unable to walk,” and activists have said his original confession had been made under duress.

UN experts on Wednesday joined a chorus of calls for Tehran to halt plans to execute a young Iranian Kurdish man.

Five others were set to be executed along with Naseem, including four Kurds and one Azeri prisoner.



An older photo of Saman Naseem, 22, is scheduled to be executed Thursday February 19, after being found guilty of membership of the rebel Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) and involvement in armed confrontations with the Revolutionary Guards. Photo: Iranian Media



Two Kurdish brothers Ali Afshari and Habibullah Afshari have also been executed in Urmiye prison in Iranian Kurdistan. Photo: sm

The PJAK, or the (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê) (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan), is a militant Kurdish nationalist group based on the border areas between Iraq’s Kurdistan region and Iran’s Kurdish region, that has been carrying out attacks Iranian forces in the Kurdistan Province of Iran (Eastern Kurdistan) and other Kurdish-inhabited areas.

PJAK, the most active Kurdish group in Iranian Kurdistan, is a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (Koma Civaken Kurdistan or KCK), which is an alliance of Kurdish groups and divisions led by an elected Executive Council.

Since 2004 the PJAK took up arms to establish a semi-autonomous Kurdish regional entities or Kurdish federal states in Iran, similar to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. The PJAK has about 3,000 armed militiamen, half the members of PJAK are women.

Estimate to over 12 million Kurds live in Iran. ♦

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24 FEBRUARY 2015

Nikolai BOBKIN  
Strategic-Culture.org

# US Plans to Separate Kurdistan from Iraq

The Middle East faces the vicious circle of US-incited changes of regimes and the established borders of Arab states. Perhaps Americans are guided by the view expressed four decades ago by former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir: «Except for Egypt and Israel, which are the true states, the rest of the Middle East - it's just tribes waving their flags». The plundered Libya has ceased to be a unified state, Yemen is divided, and the integrity of Syria and Iraq is threatened. The Islamic State, a new product of US diplomacy, has emerged to control the territory larger than Great Britain. It is preparing an invasion of Lebanon and Jordan. Its further plans include establishing control over Mecca and Medina. The organization has become a much bigger threat than any another terrorist group.

At present a 25-thousand strong joint contingent of Iraqi army and Kurdish armed formations is preparing to free Mosul from the Islamic States militants. An operation to liberate the second largest Iraqi city with the population of two million is not just an anti-terrorist action - it's

an operation of large-scale in a full-fledged war. And it's not about achieving a military victory only. Iraq defends its very national statehood. The US Afghanistan experience provides a warning. Mojahedin got US arms to fight the USSR. Now they have become the Taliban. After 13 years of US and NATO occupation the civil war is not over, the Taliban is on the way to seize power. It is all being repeated in Iraq. Few believe that the US will win.

The US-planned military operation with the mission to defeat the Islamic State has three phases:

- to deliver air strikes against the Taliban positions;
- to provide training to Iraqi government forces and Kurdish self-defense units, and, perhaps, some Sunni tribes.
- to eliminate Islamic States forces in Syria – the final objective of the campaign.

According to the Pentagon, it will take three years to implement the plans. Somebody else will have to accomplish the mission as Obama is leaving in 2016. Before his tenure is over he can lay a mine under the Iraq's statehood. That's what his Iraqi Kurdistan policy is aimed at.

There is no united front against the Islamic State. The forces confronting the group include the US-built coalition, government forces in Syria and Iraq, as well Kurds formations in these two countries. Kurds realize well that under no circumstances will jihadists accept the idea of Kurdistan's independence or its autonomy within the borders of the state they want to create. Being formally an autonomous entity in the north of Iraq, the Kurdish independent state has been in existence for many years, practically since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Under George Bush Jr., the United States became a guarantor of Iraq's territorial integrity within the borders that existed at the time. Back then Washington was not interested in the partition of the country. President Obama views things differently. With him in power the US withdrew from Iraq to deviate pretty soon from its commitments as an ally. Washington is concerned over the growing rapprochement



- Border proposed by the Kurdish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919
- Border defined by the Treaty of Sèvres, 1920
- Border proposed by the Kurdish delegation at the first United Nations conference, San Francisco, 1945

- TOWARDS KURDISH SELF-RULE**
- Iraqi Kurdistan
  - Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (1946-1947)
  - "Red Kurdistan" in Azerbaijan (1923-1929)

Kurdish-inhabited areas

Sources: Kurdish Institute of Paris, Michael Mehrdad R.S.C Izady, University of Columbia, New York, 1998

between the Shia leadership of Iraq and the government of Iran, a Shia state. This prospect frightens it more than the emergence of terrorist monster, such as the Islamic State, on Iraqi soil. Again, it makes a mistake by thinking that the «Kurdish project» it sponsors will undermine the position of Iran. Perhaps, to the contrary, by playing the Kurdish card the US President strengthens Iran. If Kurdistan becomes independent, the Shia Muslims will enjoy vast support to increase the Iran's influence inside the country. Political opponents keep on asking Obama why he has wasted the opportunities produced by the victory over Saddam Hussein to make the efforts requiring huge funds and great casualties go down the drain. Has it all been in vain? The US plans to make Kurdistan secede are not supported by neighbors. The Arab world believes that the Obama's Kurdish policy leads to the appearance of the «second Israel» in the Middle East. The Arabian Peninsula monarchs are afraid that the peshmerga (Kurdish self-defense armed formations) will do away with the Islamic State threat and then turn the arms provided by Washington against Baghdad. Such development of events will result in the partition of Iraq. The fears are grounded. The US scenario of anti-Islamic State campaign does not envision the support of Iraq as a whole state. Fragmentary aid is to be rendered to three groups inside the country: pro-government Shia forces, Kurdish armed formations and Sunni tribes. The US cooperates separately with each of these forces trying to make them politically subjugated. At that the amount of military aid is well balanced and calculated. The strategy by itself lays down the basis for future internecine feuds.

It's not without reason Saudi Arabia is going to erect a 1000-km long wall at the Iraqi border to prevent the spread of chaos from Iraq to the Arabian Peninsula. Saudis have no wish to participate in the war against the Islamic State. The wall is rather a publicity stunt than a fortification to prevent aggression. 20 Arab states met in Riyadh a few days ago to discuss the issue of providing military aid to Baghdad. Saudi Arabia stands against the US-style partition of Iraq and it opposes the idea of independent Kurdish state. Riyadh believes that the recognition of Iraqi Kurdistan will split the governing coalition in Baghdad tipping the balance in favor of Shia Muslims close to Iran. In this case, the Islamic State will turn into one of two evils along with the pro-Iranian Iraq.

The emergence of Iraqi Kurdistan, being to large extent dependent of US comprehensive aid, is not acceptable to Turkey. The Turkey's relationship with Washington has marked a low ebb recently. It has never been worse. The Kurdish issue is a burning national problem for this



country. Turkey refuses to help Kurds in Iraq and Syria. It is ready to veto the unification of Kurds and flatly refuses the idea of establishing a Kurdish state. Some time ago Syrian Kurds announced the creation of their own administration in Western Kurdistan (a de facto Kurds-populated autonomous region in northern and north-eastern Syria). In 2012 16 Kurdish political parties united under the umbrella of the Kurdish National Council to take the northern part of Syria under their control. The powerful Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union (the PYD) joined with the Kurdish National Council to form the Kurdish Supreme Committee. The Union has teeth and keeps up close ties with the Kurdistan Workers Party, a Kurdish rebel group operating in Turkey. Ankara wants its stance be taken into account as Washington builds its relationship with Kurds. Turkey calls for thorough assessment of possible repercussions resulting from possible partition of Iraq.

Criticizing Obama for foreign policy failures at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Jebb Bush, former Florida governor and the prospective 2016 presidential race runner on Republican ticket, warned that «everywhere you look, you see the world slipping out of control» in a speech that appeared to be a next step in a carefully choreographed roll-out of a 2016 presidential bid. Criticizing Obama's foreign policy is an issue on the agenda. The United States has always been rather inconsistent in its Kurds policy. Washington supports the Iraqi Kurds while fighting the Islamic State, but it turns its back on Syrian Kurds. Washington uses Iranian Kurds to undermine the Iranian regime and Turkish Kurds to blackmail Ankara. For instance, the US threatens to transfer the US Air Force base in Incirlik to Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. □



24 February 2015

## Baghdad continues to hold back Kurdish budget, situation intolerable Barzani warns

rudaw.net — 24/2/2015

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region**— In a meeting with members of the press on Monday Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said that Erbil would do its best to resolve its budget dispute with Baghdad but that patience is also running out.

“We want to be in agreement with Baghdad and we want the people of Kurdistan, the US and other countries to know that we have done our best with Baghdad,” said PM Barzani. “But it also must be clear that we can no longer tolerate this situation.”

Barzani who recently met with his Iraqi counterpart Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad over the

Kurdish share of Iraq's budget, said: “Unfortunately Baghdad is acting like an oil company towards a part of the country not like a state,”

Barzani said that Abadi had told him in Baghdad that his hands were tied by the Shiite alliance.

A meeting between a Kurdish delegation led by PM Barzani with Abadi and other Iraqi ministers earlier this month ended in impasse.

“Baghdad is telling us that we have exported more oil than it is in the agreement and that is true,” said Barzani. “But we had told Abadi in our first meeting that we had received cash advances for our people's salaries from companies in return for oil.”

Erbil and Baghdad signed an



Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani

agreement last year whereby Erbil would contribute to the federal budget by selling 550,000 barrels of oil for Baghdad daily.

“We had told Baghdad back then that even if we export one billion barrels a day we could only give them 550,000 barrels because we owed the companies money, “ that need to be paid back.

Baghdad cut off Kurdistan Region's share of the federal budget January last year and this has placed severe strain on the Kurdish government that is at war with the Islamic State (ISIS) and received 1.4 million refugees from the rest of Iraq.

The Kurdish prime minister said that on his visit to Turkey last week he borrowed \$500 million to help pay government salaries.

Barzani said that the Kurds are willing to run another round of negotiations with Baghdad to resolve the disputes and that he has tasked Roj Nuri Shaways— Abadi's deputy—and Kurdish MPs in Baghdad to talk with Abadi and members of the Shiite alliance. ■

# L'armée turque pénètre en Syrie pour évacuer un mausolée ottoman

Par **L'EXPRESS.fr** avec **AFP**,  
22 février 2015

Situé en territoire syrien, le tombeau de Souleïmane Shah, ancêtre de la dynastie ottomane est aujourd'hui dans une zone aux mains de Daech. Le contingent de 40 soldats turcs et les reliques du dignitaire ont été rapatriés en Turquie.

La Turquie a mené une vaste mais brève opération militaire en Syrie, dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, afin d'évacuer un mausolée et les 40 soldats turcs qui le gardaient.

Le tombeau de Souleïmane Shah, l'ancêtre de la dynastie ottomane, est situé dans une zone tenue aujourd'hui par le groupe Etat islamique (EI), à une quarantaine de kilomètres de la frontière turque. Le contingent turc qui gardait le mausolée était assiégé par l'EI et avait été pris dans des échanges de tirs entre djihadistes et combattants kurdes. Les services de sécurité turcs craignaient en outre un assaut de cibles turques par l'EI.

## Les troupes turques et les reliques rapatriées

Cette opération a été décidée en raison de la détérioration de la situation autour de la minuscule enclave turque de quelques centaines de mètres carrés où gît Souleïmane Shah, le grand-père d'Osman Ier, fondateur au début du XIVe siècle de l'Empire ottoman. Il est mort dans le désert syrien au XIIIe siècle, alors qu'il fuyait devant l'avancée mongole.

L'opération "a été lancée à 21h locales avec le passage de 572 soldats par le poste-frontière de Mursitpinar" (en face de Kobané), a annoncé ce dimanche le Premier ministre turc Ahmet Davutoglu, lors d'un point de presse à l'état-major des armées.



Des chars turcs traversent le 21 février 2015 la ville syrienne de Kobané



Une quarantaine de chars sont entrés en Syrie, a précisé le Premier ministre turc. Un soldat turc a été tué lors de l'opération.

Toutes les troupes turques et le contingent gardant la tombe sont rentrés tôt dimanche. "Les reliques du dignitaire ont été temporairement rappatriées en Turquie (près de Sanliurfa) pour être inhumés ultérieurement en Syrie", a indiqué Ahmet Davutoglu et tout ce qui reste du mausolée a été détruit.

## Considéré comme un territoire turc depuis 1921

L'emplacement du tombeau est considéré comme un territoire turc depuis la signature d'un traité entre la France, qui occupait alors ce territoire, et la Turquie en 1921. En 1973, la sépulture a été transférée plus au nord, en raison de la construction d'un barrage, mais la propriété turque du mausolée est restée inchangée.

L'opposition turque a vivement critiqué "un retrait présenté comme une victoire mili-



Le nouveau site du mausolée de Souleyman Shah vu du côté turc de la frontière, dimanche 22. (Photo Ilyas Akengin. AFP)

taire par le gouvernement" islamo-conservateur turc. "Pour la première fois de l'Histoire de la République turque, nous perdons nos terres sans combattre, c'est inacceptable", a martelé Gürsel Tekin, secrétaire général du parti républicain du peuple (CHP). □

# Incursion turque en Syrie pour sauver un mausolée ottoman

courrierinternational.com  
23 février 2015

L'armée turque est intervenue en Syrie, sur le seul bout de territoire qui appartient à Ankara et qui se trouve à l'extérieur des frontières de la Turquie. Il s'agissait en effet de sauver le mausolée de Suleyman Shah (grand-père du fondateur de la dynastie ottomane) et les militaires qui le gardaient, écrit le quotidien turc Hürriyet. Ce mausolée, considéré comme territoire turc

depuis 1921, se trouve dans une zone à risque à proximité des lieux d'affrontements entre l'organisation Etat islamique et les Kurdes.

Hürriyet a d'ailleurs littéralement titré en une "Passage du Shah par Kobané". Et le quotidien d'expliquer que cette opération a été déclenchée après que les militaires turcs se sont assurés que les parties liées à la fois à l'organisation Etat islamique et au PYD (parti kurde syrien, proche du PKK) les laisseraient faire. Le tombeau a été provisoire-



La une du quotidien turc Hürriyet le 23 février 2015

ment réinstallé en territoire syrien, à proximité de Kobané, explique Hürriyet, "en attendant que la situation se normalise". ♦

# QUI SONT LES YÉZIDIS?



**Christophe Lamfalussy et Johanna de Tessières (photos), Envoyés spéciaux en Irak**

25 février 2015 à <http://www.lalibre.be>

L'ÉTÉ DERNIER, jusqu'à 40 000 Yézidis se sont réfugiés sur le mont Sinjar, qui culmine à 1 462 m au-dessus de la plaine de Ninive en Irak. Certains sont morts de soif et de faim, d'autres ont survécu. Mais jamais Daech n'est parvenu à conquérir ce mont mythique qui, selon la croyance yézidie, fut le port d'attache de l'arche de Noé.

Au cours de la première guerre mondiale déjà, l'armée ottomane avait buté contre cette montagne insolite où des dizaines de milliers de chrétiens arméniens et syriaques s'étaient réfugiés. Sommés par les Ottomans de rendre leurs armes, les Yézidis du Sinjar déchirèrent la proposition de reddition et renvoyèrent les émissaires complètement nus dans leur camp.

## D'ORIGINE KURDE

Qui sont donc ces Yézidis revenus subitement dans l'actualité ?

Cette population d'origine kurde affirme aujourd'hui vivre la pire épreuve de son histoire, la 74e persécution, et ne compte que 800 000 personnes dans le monde, dont 600 000 jusqu'il y a peu en Irak.

"Le sort des Yézidis est inconnu, nous dit



Salim Ginos Hamoka, un homme de 82 ans assis près du sanctuaire de Lalesh. Je crains que quelque chose de pire arrive. J'ai vécu à Bassorah et à Bagdad comme ouvrier dans la construction. A l'époque, les gens ne distinguaient pas un Yézidi d'un autre citoyen irakien."

Structurée en castes, la communauté yézidie vit traditionnellement repliée sur elle-même. Les mariages interreligieux sont interdits, de même qu'entre castes. Elle n'accepte pas les convertis. Mais elle s'ouvre progressivement à la modernité grâce aux jeunes générations.

## LE CULTE DE L'ANGE PAON

C'est surtout sa religion qui lui vaut d'être

persécutée, depuis des siècles, par les musulmans sunnites. Ceux-ci considèrent les Yézidis comme "des adorateurs du diable" parce qu'ils vénèrent sept anges, dont l'un d'eux, le plus puissant, l'Ange Paon Taous Malek, serait la réincarnation du diable.

Les Yézidis démentent cette interprétation qui a la dent dure chez les experts de confession sunnite. Ils ajoutent que ces anges se réincarnent parmi les hommes, les "khas", notamment sous la forme des anciens chefs de clans yézidis.

Des saints et des prophètes d'autres religions - comme Jésus de la religion chrétienne et Hassan Al-Basri, un proche des compagnons du prophète Mahomet - sont aussi considérés comme des "khas", des réincarnations des anges, mais c'est l'Ange Paon qui, selon les Yézidis, gouverne le monde, explique Christine Allison, spécialiste à l'université d'Exeter en Grande-Bretagne. L'Ange Paon n'est pas le Dieu en lequel les Yézidis croient, mais l'émanation bienveillante de lui.

## AU LEVER ET AU COUCHER DU SOLEIL

Inspirée par le soufisme et le zoroastrisme de la Perse antique, le yézidisme est une religion synchrétique qui existait avant l'islam et le christianisme. Elle attache beaucoup d'importance à la pureté et à la nature. "Nous respectons le soleil, la lune, le ciel", explique Ziyad Shammo, qui a lui-même rang de "cheikh" dans la communauté yézidie.

Trois castes existent : les murids, les cheikhs et les (é)mirs. Plus on monte dans la hiérarchie, plus ceux-ci sont dépositaires des secrets de la religion.

De tout cela découle une série de règles qui peuvent paraître exotiques aux yeux des étrangers. Ainsi les anciens ne s'habillent pas en bleu pour ne pas se confondre avec le ciel. Il est inconvenant de cracher pour ne pas souiller la terre. Certains ne mangent pas de salades car, en kurde, il se traduit par "khas".

De tradition orale, le yézidisme ne dispose que depuis récemment d'ouvrages théologiques. Il n'y a pas de liturgie. Chaque fidèle prie de façon plutôt individuelle, principalement au lever et au coucher du soleil.

## COMBIEN SONT-ILS ?

La plupart des Yézidis vivent dans la plaine de Ninive en Irak. Leur nombre reste vague en raison des émigrations successives dues aux persécutions. Les estimations varient de 250 000 à 600 000 personnes en Irak, selon les sources.

Ils habitent dans deux régions en particulier : la région du Sinjar, où Daech et les peshmergas kurdes se font face actuellement, et le

Sheikhan, "le pays des cheikhs", une région agricole au nord-est de Mossoul.

On trouve aussi des Yézidis en Turquie, en Arménie, en Géorgie, en Syrie et en Allemagne où ils seraient près de 35 000. Ils seraient près de 800 000 en Irak et dans le monde, selon le site yeziditruth.org.

## LALESH EST LE SANCTUAIRE DE LEUR RELIGION MILLÉNAIRE

Pour entrer dans le périmètre immédiat du sanctuaire des Yézidis à Lalesh, au nord d'Erbil dans le Kurdistan irakien, il faut ôter chaussures et chaussettes et marcher, en plein hiver, sur des pierres glaciales.

Puis les fidèles déambulent dans un dédale de petits temples, de couloirs aux murs noirs et de grottes.

A intervalles réguliers, ils apposent leurs lèvres aux endroits où les sept anges, réincarnés notamment dans d'anciens chefs de clans Yézidis, se seraient tenus.

Des torches à l'huile laissent des traînées noires sur les murs. Un serpent sur un mur symbolise celui qui, en se glissant dedans, aurait réussi à colmater un trou dans l'arche de Noé. Jamais les fidèles ne posent le pied sur le seuil d'une porte car celui-ci, pensent-ils, a été foulé par les prophètes.

## UN NŒUD, UN VŒU

Dans le temple du cheikh Adi, un savant soufi du XIIe siècle devenu la principale figure de la foi yézidie, des tissus pendent le long des colonnes. Chaque fidèle doit faire un vœu en nouant l'un des bouts, puis dénouer un autre bout pour délivrer son prédécesseur de la charge de ses intentions. Ainsi se forme une chaîne de solidarité.



Au fond du temple, un escalier mène à plusieurs grottes. Dans la première, des escaliers creusés dans la roche mènent à une source d'eau pure où les Yézidis viennent se laver le visage.

Dans la seconde, les Yézidis peuvent lancer un tissu sur une saillie dans la roche. Ils ont droit à trois essais. S'ils réussissent à stabiliser le tissu sur la saillie, leur vœu est exaucé. ➔

➤ Plus loin, des amphores stockent l'huile d'olive récoltée dans la vallée et qui sert de combustible aux torches. Enfin, il y a la tombe du cheikh Adi, recouverte d'un épais drap noir, devant laquelle les croyants s'inclinent et tournent autour.

#### UN SANCTUAIRE INTACT

Situé dans une vallée au nord d'Erbil, dans la province de Ninive, Lalesh a miraculeuse-

ment échappé à l'offensive de Daech. Le groupe extrémiste a détruit de nombreux temples Yézidis mais n'a jamais réussi à atteindre Lalesh, protégé par la milice yézidie et les peshmergas kurdes.

Le hameau date d'au moins 2 000 ans avant Jésus-Christ. Il est le lieu saint de cette religion préislamique, vieille de 6 765 ans (selon les Yézidis) qui trouve ses racines dans la Perse antique et le soufisme. Chaque fidèle est

tenu d'y faire un pèlerinage par an.

Lalesh, qui signifie "le levain", est aux yeux des Yézidis le centre du monde car le Kurdistan irakien est une terre bénie des dieux, avec peu d'activité sismique, rarement des inondations, quatre saisons bien marquées et est un point de contact entre l'Europe, l'Asie et le golfe Arabo-Persique.

◆◆◆

Le Monde 19 février 2015

## Etats-Unis et Turquie signent un accord pour former et équiper les rebelles

Le Monde.fr avec AFP | 19 février 2015

Les Etats-Unis et la Turquie ont signé, jeudi 19 février, à Ankara, un accord, scellé il y a deux jours, pour former et équiper des opposants syriens modérés en Turquie, ont annoncé des responsables américains et turcs. Les signataires sont le sous-secrétaire au ministère des affaires

étrangères turc, Feridun Sinirlioglu, et l'ambassadeur des Etats-Unis à Ankara, John Bass.

L'annonce met un terme à des mois de négociations difficiles entre les alliés au sein de l'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord sur la formation de rebelles syriens et sur quel ennemi il faudrait se concentrer.

LE PROGRAMME POURRAIT

#### DÉBUTER EN MARS

La Turquie, très critique vis-à-vis du président syrien, Bachar Al-Assad, souhaite que des factions de rebelles modérés soient entraînés pour combattre tant le régime de Damas que les insurgés du groupe djihadiste Etat islamique (EI), qui contrôlent de larges zones de territoires en Irak et en Syrie, jusqu'à la frontière

turque. Washington, dont la force aérienne mène des attaques ciblées contre les positions de l'EI en Syrie, veut former les rebelles dans le cadre de sa lutte contre le groupe EI.

Le gouvernement américain espère que le programme pourra débuter d'ici à la fin de mars, de manière à ce que les premiers combattants rebelles formés puissent être opérationnels d'ici à la fin de l'année, selon le Pentagone. L'objectif du programme est d'entraîner plus de cinq mille combattants syriens dès la première année. ■

FIGARO VOX  
Débats, opinions, controverses

26 février 2015

## Pourquoi des Occidentaux partent combattre l'État islamique

Par Anne-Laure Debaecker  
26/02/2015 - lefigaro.fr

FIGARO VOX/ENTRETIEN - Tim Locks, un quadragénaire britannique, vient de tout plaquer pour aller grossir les rangs des Occidentaux qui s'engagent auprès de milices kurdes et chrétiennes pour combattre l'État islamique. Thibault de Montbrial décrypte ce phénomène nouveau.

Des dizaines d'occidentaux ont rejoint des milices kurdes, les Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), ou chrétiennes qui ont pris les armes contre l'État islamique pour défendre des villages. Ce phénomène vous étonne-t-il?

Ce n'est pas particulièrement étonnant: il était inévitable qu'à force de voir des massacres commis quotidiennement sur des minorités kurdes ou chrétiennes par les islamistes, des initiatives individuelles soient prises ici et là dans les pays occidentaux pour aller aider ceux qui sont



Des volontaires américains, vétérans d'Irak, ont rejoint des milices kurdes pour combattre l'État islamique. Crédits photo: Emilien URBANO MYOP POUR LE FIGARO

persécutés. C'est dans l'ordre naturel des choses.

Pensez-vous qu'il va s'accroître?

Il est trop tôt pour le dire mais cela n'est pas exclu. On manque encore de vision globale sur les identités et parcours des intéressés, c'est un phénomène qui en est à ses débuts.

Certains parlent de «symétrie» ou encore «d'effet miroir» entre ces occidentaux qui partent combattre l'État islamique et ceux qui vont, eux, dans l'au-

tre camp rejoindre les djihadistes. Ce parallèle vous paraît-il juste?

Je ne trouve pas. Je pense qu'il y a d'un côté des gens qui sont sincèrement choqués par les massacres commis envers les minorités de ces régions et qui veulent aller aider. Et de l'autre les djihadistes, c'est à dire des gens qui partent au nom d'une idéologie islamique qui est politique, conquérante et guerrière, pour rejoindre des gens dont ils ne peuvent ignorer qu'ils com-

mettent des massacres contre des minorités, compte tenu de tous les éléments de propagande auxquels ils ont eu accès sur internet. Donc d'un côté il y a les massacreurs, et de l'autre les massacrés. La démarche ressemble donc plus à la volonté de participer à une forme de légitime défense des massacrés, chrétiens ou kurdes.

Ne risquent-ils pas néanmoins de perturber les vrais militaires sur place?

Pour le moment, il n'y a pas sur place de militaires occidentaux sur le terrain. S'ils rejoignent des groupes constitués en milice, cela renvoie à la question d'une coordination éventuelle entre les chrétiens, les kurdes et la coalition qui mène les raids aériens contre l'Etat islamique.

Le premier occidental kurde est mort mardi lors d'une offensive contre l'État islamique. Ces hommes peuvent-ils être devenir des «héros» utiles pour mobiliser l'opinion?

Cela dépend d'encre beaucoup de facteurs mais je ne suis pas sûr que, dans leur ensemble, les opinions publiques occidentales soient prêtes à ce jour à associer des initiatives individuelles de cette nature à de l'héroïsme. □





Début février, dans le Kurdistan syrien, instruction et entraînement militaire de la milice de protection féminine populaire YPG.

EMILIE URBANOWSKI/MYOP POUR LE FIGARO

# Syrie : les Kurdes en embuscade



**Samuel Forey**

envoyé spécial dans le Kurdistan syrien

@SamForey

**I**l y a quelques cahutes de terre et de parpaings, au loin, dans la plaine. Que s'y passe-t-il ? Difficile de le savoir. Mais il faut y aller. C'est l'objectif d'une petite unité de quinze combattants YPG - les « Unités de protection du peuple », cette milice kurde qui s'est battue, entre autres, à Kobané. Les YPG constituent le principal groupe armé du Kurdistan syrien, de facto autonome depuis l'été 2012. Parmi les multiples factions de la guerre civile syrienne, c'est l'une des plus nombreuses et des mieux organisées.

Pour parvenir aux cahutes, il faut franchir un petit kilomètre de terrain à découvert. Le vent vient de l'est, balaie la plaine. Elle semble plate à l'infini. C'est la Djézireh, une région au nord-est de la Syrie qui s'enfonce comme un coin entre la Turquie et l'Irak. Les champs commencent déjà à se couvrir d'un vert tendre. C'est le grenier à blé du pays ; c'était la Mésopotamie.

L'unité avance dans les sillons. Elle est guidée par Bachir, un jeune chef de 24 ans, muscles épais et paroles brèves. Les gars progressent, à petits pas, courbés, le doigt tout près de la détente de leurs kalachnikovs hors d'âge. À 500 mètres des maisons, Bachir fait un signe. Les combattants mettent un genou à terre, épaulent leurs armes, couvrent toutes les directions.

Pas un bruit dans la plaine.

Bachir sépare le groupe en deux. Six côté gauche, six côté droit. Deux ailes se forment. Le talkie de Ba-

chir grésille sans cesse. Il confirme les positions, ralentit ceux qui avancent trop vite. On n'attaque pas les djihadistes comme ça. Les Kurdes, en deux ans et demi de guerre civile, ont affiné leurs tactiques. Il ne s'agit plus de guerre de partisans, en montagne, contre une armée régulière. Maintenant, c'est guérilla contre guérilla, dans les plaines, dans les villes. L'ennemi change au gré des alliances et des retournements. Moins organisé, il peut rester redoutable, qu'il s'agisse des groupes djihadistes, de l'Armée syrienne libre, voire de l'armée du régime ou de ses milices - bien que les Kurdes soient dans une paix froide avec l'État syrien. La guerre civile syrienne est difficile à lire. Les alliés d'hier sont souvent les ennemis de demain. Dans ce chaos, seul les djihadistes de l'État islamique arrivent à faire l'unanimité contre eux.

Les YPG se rapprochent des cabanes et du danger. Bachir a gardé le porteur de l'unique lance-roquettes auprès de lui. Il fait avancer une mitrailleuse lourde pour couvrir la route, déporte le porteur du lance-roquettes à droite, à gauche, pour faire avancer ses ailes à gauche, à droite. Les deux groupes s'épaulent l'un l'autre. On ne progresse pas sans avoir assuré ses appuis.

C'est l'aile droite qui arrive la première. À l'approche du dénouement, les combattants avancent trop vite, sans se couvrir. Bachir n'arrive plus à les tenir. Alors tant pis, il envoie tout le monde.

Les petites masures sont conquises sans résistance. Et pour cause : elles n'étaient protégées que par quelques poules, chèvres et dindons. Les combattants saluent poliment les trois paysannes qui occupent la seule maison.

Aucun coup de feu n'a été tiré, aucune roquette n'a été lancée. On rentre à la base.

Les YPG se sont installés dans une école primaire



adossée à un village. Il n'y a plus assez d'enfants pour faire cours. À ce jour, plus de 3,8 millions de Syriens ont fui leur pays. La Djézireh, pourtant relativement épargnée par les combats, est elle aussi victime de cet exode. « On est arrivés ici il y a deux mois. Au départ, on était une demi-douzaine. Puis des volontaires nous ont rejoints. On est 18 aujourd'hui », explique Rudi, fin, athlétique, légèrement barbu, compagnon d'armes de Bachir.

### Véritable petit camp d'entraînement.

À eux deux, ils ont monté un véritable petit camp d'entraînement. Ils s'inspirent de quatre ans d'expérience dans les YPG, des batailles auxquelles ils ont participé. Ils ont aménagé leur propre parcours du combattant : saut d'obstacles, ramping sous les barbelés, bientôt une mare de boue. C'est rudimentaire. Ils font avec les moyens du bord. « Je m'inspire aussi de ce que je vois à la télé. Je regarde tous les documentaires de National Geographic sur la guerre », dit Bachir.

Le matin même, l'attaque des cahutes avait fait l'objet d'un cours théorique. Dans une salle de classe, Bachir avait expliqué à grands coups de craie sur un tableau noir les différentes tactiques de déploiement, l'importance de l'appui-feu, le rôle de chacun. Devant lui, des élèves en treillis, avec pour cartables des kalachnikovs, écoutaient, parfaitement alignés. Ils se levaient pour prendre la parole. Un rêve de professeur.

Mais Bachir estime l'exercice réussi seulement à « 80 % ». Ils font le bilan après la fausse bataille. Chacun prend la parole. Pour l'un des combattants, « c'est difficile de se coordonner, on est trop éloignés les uns des autres. » Bachir répond : « C'est à cause des attaques suicides. Les djihadistes visent les groupes. C'est pour ça qu'il faut se disperser. » Il enchaîne : « Il faut vraiment suivre les ordres de votre chef de groupe. La plupart des soldats deviennent martyrs parce qu'ils n'écoutent pas ou prennent de mauvaises initiatives. Votre chef, il est chef pour une heure ou deux, pas président à vie ! » Utile à rappeler dans un pays où la dynastie Assad est au pouvoir depuis 1970.

L'entraînement continue. Au maniement des armes, le jeune chef crie : « Visez vers le ciel ! Vers Allah ! » Frisson dans les rangs, sourires gênés. Bachir est hilare, fier de sa provocation. L'entraînement est autant une affaire de reconditionnement physique que mental. Il faut diffuser l'idéologie des nouveaux maîtres du Kurdistan syrien, sous le contrôle du PYD depuis l'été 2012. Le Parti de l'union démocratique est la branche syrienne du PKK, fondé par Abdullah Öcalan. Les portraits du leader indépendantiste kurde ont remplacé ceux de Bachar ou Hafez el-Assad. Il trône dans le bureau du directeur, aujourd'hui occupé par Bachir, où, le soir, il fume cigarette sur cigarette en compagnie d'Ahmed, un civil, jeune, visage fin, petites lunettes, l'archétype du commissaire politique. Ahmed s'assure du bon enseignement des nouvelles doctrines.

Le PKK et ses partis affiliés ont officiellement abandonné le marxisme-léninisme - et les revendications indépendantistes - au profit d'une idéologie anarcho-libertaire - qui se contente de velléités autonomistes.

Dans la base YPG, les « cours de politique » prennent autant de place que le sport. Pour un responsable du PYD, « il s'agit de changer les mentalités corrompues par le régime syrien. On enseigne la philosophie de notre leader Apo ». Apo, « Oncle » en kurde, le surnom d'Abdullah Öcalan.

C'est une nouvelle vie qui commence, sous les drapeaux YPG, frappés de l'étoile rouge. C'est un engagement à vie. Quand on rentre, on prend un nom de guerre.

C'est le cas de Rachid. Il y a toujours, dans un petit groupe de combattants, le géant, celui qui dépasse tout le monde d'une tête. Le fort tranquille, à qui on fait porter les camarades blessés. Rachid a 25 ans. Il est arrivé il y a un mois et demi. Il a demandé à un check-point où était la base YPG la plus proche. Il a été envoyé dans la petite école de Bachir. « Ils ont longuement parlé avec moi. J'ai dit que j'étais prêt, que je voulais prendre le relais de mon oncle. »

### « Il y a eu une quinzaine de martyrs ce jour-là »

L'oncle de Rachid était dans les YPG, basé du côté de Hassakeh, au sud de la Djézireh. Il y a deux mois, un homme se présente à l'entrée pour faire réparer sa voiture. Le garde se méfie, ne veut pas le laisser entrer, mais l'autre ne veut pas partir. Soudain, derrière la base, une voiture explose. Tout le monde sort. Le garde comprend que c'est un piège. Il crie à tout le monde de rentrer, mais c'est trop tard, l'homme à l'entrée fait exploser sa voiture soi-disant en panne. « Il y a eu une quinzaine de martyrs ce jour-là, dont mon oncle. J'ai voulu continuer son chemin. Je suis venu ici de ma propre initiative. Et j'ai repris son nom, Rachid. »

Le neveu est issu d'une mère kurde et d'un père arabe. « Des deux côtés de ma famille, je suis soutenu », dit-il. En plus de lui, ils sont cinq autres Arabes à avoir rejoint cette petite unité. Ils partagent tous le même rejet de l'État islamique - et la même urgence de protéger leur terre. Fait exceptionnel, Rachid a une femme et trois enfants, alors que l'engagement dans les YPG interdit, en théorie, le mariage et la propriété privée.

Mais Rachid était volontaire et le Kurdistan syrien manque de combattants. Le porte-parole des YPG affirme qu'ils sont 35 000, hommes et femmes. C'était il y a un an et demi et, depuis, plus aucun responsable n'a avancé de chiffre précis. Les autorités kurdes syriennes ont jugé la situation suffisamment grave pour mettre en place un service militaire obligatoire. Mais auprès de la population, ça passe mal. Les pratiques rappellent trop celles de l'ancien régime de Bachar el-Assad. Il faut monter patte blanche aux check-points, ou on est enrôlé de force. Le responsable d'un parti d'opposition affirme que de nombreux jeunes hommes quittent le pays pour fuir le service.

En plus du service, le PYD parsème la Djézireh de bases YPG comme celles que commande Bachir. Il y en a près de chaque ville, grande ou petite. Une école, une ancienne caserne, des installations pétrolières, prennent les couleurs jaune, rouge, vert du Kurdistan. Homme ou femme, il suffit de se présenter pour être recruté. L'un d'entre eux vient d'arriver, justement. Mohammed, un Kurde - il n'a pas encore changé de prénom. Il affirme qu'il a 18 ans - il en fait moins. Il ne sait pas lire. Il ne travaille pas. « Les martyrs qui sont morts ne sont pas meilleurs que moi. Je veux protéger ma terre, mon honneur. Je veux tuer des djihadistes. » L'un de ces milliers de jeunes Syriens qui n'ont pour perspective que la guerre. Bachir met la main sur son épaule : « On va le tester pendant un mois. Ensuite, on verra. » Il vient de gagner une nouvelle recrue. ■

La plupart des soldats deviennent martyrs parce qu'ils n'écoutent pas ou prennent de mauvaises initiatives. Votre chef, il est chef pour une heure ou deux, pas président à vie!

BACHIR, UN JEUNE CHEF YPG DE 24 ANS

# After Isis: Kurds and Arabs return to old lives and new tensions

In Iraqi areas recaptured by peshmerga from Islamic State neighbours are turning on each other as population movement redraws the map

Fazel Hawramy in Zumar  
24 February 2015  
www.theguardian.com

When Shvan, who is a Kurd, returned home to Zumar in north-west Iraq and saw his property had been reduced to rubble, he found an empty house belonging to an Arab and moved his family in.

Now, life is gradually returning to the town, which was seized by Islamic State in August 2014 then captured by Kurdish forces with coalition air cover in October. A schoolgirl with a satchel on her back walks home past shattered buildings while men sell meat and vegetables by the roadside. There are plans to restore water and electricity.

But it will prove harder to repair relations between Kurds and Arabs in what was a mixed town. Zumar shows how the demography of northern Iraq is changing in the aftermath of the Isis incursion and Kurdish and Shia counterattacks, turning neighbour against neighbour and redrawing the map.

Zumar is located in the disputed territories to which both the Kurds and the Iraqi government in Baghdad lay claim. Before Isis came, the town was under the control of Iraqi federal authorities. Now the Kurds are in charge, and they have no intention of letting go.

Shopfronts and garden walls have been daubed with graffiti since the militants left that reads: "Reserved for Kurds", "Kurdish House", "Kamal Kurdish" and "Mohammad Kurdish".

Only Kurdish residents are returning to the bombed-out town and, like Shvan, those whose homes were destroyed are taking the houses of Arabs they accuse of helping Isis overrun it. Shvan said the house he now lives in belonged to an Arab who joined the militants and went with them to their self-proclaimed caliphate when he was forced to flee.

When the Kurdish peshmerga forces advanced on Zumar in mid-October, the entire Arab population of the town left for areas under Isis control, including Mosul.

"Whether the Arabs should come back or not is up to Kurdish authorities, but I personally don't want them to return," said Kurdish resident Mohammad Abdulrahman. "There is no trust between us any more. They took our belongings, plundered our homes and destroyed them."

Kamal Majid's telephone number is written on the facades of two houses in



A peshmerga fighter in Zumar, north-west Iraq. Photograph: Reuters

Zumar. He said his two sisters, both married to Arabs, had lived there, and he tagged them because he worried they would be looted by fellow Kurds.

Majid, who is married to an Arab woman himself, said he hoped Arabs who had not sided with Isis would come back and be compensated to avoid further problems with Kurds in the town. "While there were some problems in the past between Arabs and Kurds, they lived together in relative harmony," he said.

Elsewhere in Iraq, entire towns and villages are being abandoned by their Sunni Arab residents as Shia militias retake them from Isis. When the US assistant secretary of state for human rights, Tom Malinowski, visited Iraq earlier this month, he highlighted the issue of revenge attacks by the Shia militia and Kurdish peshmerga forces and told the authorities these attacks were unacceptable.

In a recent report, Human Rights Watch condemned the abuses by Shia militia for-

« Daesh doesn't represent us; they are criminals. God bless the peshmerga, they treat us with respect »

cing Sunni Arabs to abandon their towns and villages and leading to huge demographic changes in Diyala and Salahaddin provinces. "Iraqi civilians are being hammered by Isis, and then by pro-government militias in areas they seize from Isis. With the government responding to those they deem terrorists with arbitrary arrests and executions, residents have nowhere to turn for protection," the report said.

When Kurdish forces captured Zumar and its surrounding area from Isis in October, they flattened some villages they accused of cooperating with the militants, and turned others into ghost towns. Villages where the residents did not assist Isis appear to have been left untouched.

While thousands of Kurds fled Zumar as Isis approached, many Arab residents stayed, some because they sympathised with the Sunni Islamist militants, but others simply because they were not a target, or had nowhere else to go.

Sunni Arab Salem Ahmed, who served in the Iraqi army, was one of those who left. He fled his home village of Abuni, outside Zumar, as Isis – known locally as Daesh – made its advance, and returned with the other residents after peshmerga forces took Zumar and its surrounding settlements in October and early November.

"Daesh doesn't represent us; they are criminals," said Ahmed, surrounded by his mother and several children while a group of peshmerga removed about a dozen IEDs left by the militants in an outhouse. "God bless the peshmerga, they treat us with respect."

West of Zumar is Sinjar, where Isis massacred thousands of Yazidis and enslaved about 5,000 girls and women. Mass graves are being discovered by members of the minority who are returning to the area after Kurdish forces drove out Isis in December.

Angered by these gruesome discoveries, some Yazidi militiamen are taking revenge on Arab neighbours they accuse of collaborating with Isis. Late last month, a group of Yazidi militiamen entered two Sunni Arab villages near the Syrian border and massacred more than 20 people, with 17 still unaccounted for.

When a Yazidi militia attacked the Sunni Arab residents of Sibaya, near the Syrian border, Salah Mohammad, a farmer, asked one of the Yazidi men why they were attacking his village. The militiaman replied: "You started it."

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# How Turkish Troops Entered Syria with ISIS and Kurdish Assistance

By: Elie Hanna  
February 23, 2015  
<http://english.al-akhbar.com>

Turkish troops entered Syria, as part of a well-planned operation, to relocate the remains of Suleiman Shah. The "seamless" operation relied on alliances and understandings forged by Ankara with the Kurdish force in the region and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Today, Turkey chose a new location to bury the grandfather of the Ottoman empire's founder Osman I, thus playing a more active part in the operations taking place in north Syria, particularly in matters regarding the Kurds and the Syrian Army.

Turkey seems to be the only state to have accomplished such strong relations with Syrian opposition factions. Over the past few years, Qatar and Saudi Arabia witnessed a number of setbacks with groups they were supporting in Syria, while Ankara has maintained improving and varied relations with different opposition factions. This success was crowned on Sunday with an operation "without clashes," carried out on Syrian territories that are controlled by Turkey's supposed enemies: the Kurdish units and ISIS.

Away from its "direct" relationship with groups such as the Syrian Turkmen Brigades, Turkey has exerted a great influence over most major factions (such as al-Shamia Front), in north Syria. It may even be the only major power to have entered into tacit agreements with ISIS. The besieged mausoleum complex of Suleiman Shah "al-Sharqi"—as referred to by ISIS—did not witness the same fate as other tombs and graves, where citizens and leaders were buried, in regions infiltrated by the "soldiers of al-Baghdadi."

Turkey today is implementing a new

strategy in north Syria. It is the country that viewed the Ain al-Arab battle as a win-win situation, as it sponsored breaking the backbone of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) (which had launched a "self-management" project), through the massive ISIS invasion of the village of Ain al-Arab and its countryside in September 2014. Ankara then used the presence of the fundamentalist organization near its borders to justify interferences in Syria, and allowed Iraqi peshmerga fighters to step in and support Syria's Kurds after the Baghdad-Erbil agreement, which coincided with the start of the US coalition's strikes.

Turkish military vehicles arrived in Syria on Sunday through the Murshid Binar border crossing (in Ain al-Arab), and peacefully entered locations manned by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), to reach the "besieged" tomb of Suleiman Shah, thus completing a several-hour long operation without firing a single bullet. Ankara, which is seemingly at ease in north Syria, placed the village of Esmesi (west of Ain al-Arab) "under the control of the army," and raised the Turkish flag above it, making it the new location of the tomb. Ankara is regarding the new location, about 200 meters away from its borders, as part of Turkish territories. It is now guarded by the PYD, an affiliate of Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK) in Syria, which means that the Turkish presence in the Kurdish-Syrian region has become a key launching point in the north. This achievement also gives Ankara an "armed wing" in the Kobani Canton. Accordingly, Syrian-Kurds must think twice, from now on, before adopting policies that contradict Turkish interests.

As the critical battle between the Syrian Army and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups continues in Aleppo's northern countryside,

**his achievement also gives Ankara an "armed wing" in the Kobani Canton. Accordingly, Syrian-Kurds must think twice, from now on, before adopting policies that contradict Turkish interests.**



*Turkish Army vehicles and tanks move near the Syrian border in Suruc on February 23, 2015 as almost 600 Turkish troops pushed deep into Syria in an unprecedented incursion on February 22, relocating a historic tomb and evacuating the soldiers guarding the monument AFP/Ilyas Akengin*

Turkey confirmed its "official" presence in nearby operations — as its tanks and soldiers advanced about 30 kilometers deep into Aleppo's countryside — as well as farther away in the region extending from the city of Aleppo to the borders, through thousands of armed men. However, Ankara had previously informed Syria of its operation, indicating Turkish unwillingness to risk a war between the two countries.

The YPG confirmed that several of its members, "designated by the leadership," met with Turkish officials for four days before the operation, helping to set up its plan and determine their own role in it.

For its part, Turkey confirmed that it had contacted its allies, the peshmerga in Kobani. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu indicated that "39 tanks, 57 armored vehicles, 100 other military vehicles and 572 soldiers" were involved in the operation. He added that "another military force [meanwhile] headed to the village of Esmesi to prepare it for receiving the remains within the next few days, after they were temporarily moved to Turkey." Davutoglu also indicated that the decision to launch this operation — dubbed "Shah Euphrates" — "was made in Ankara according to legal regulations, without requesting permission or authorization."

## PLANNING THE OPERATION

Turkey's allies paved the way for the Turkish operation prior to its implementation. On Saturday, the Euphrates Volcano Operations Room (which includes Shams al-Shamal (Sun of the North), Jabhat al-Akrad (Kurdish Front) and Raqqa Revolutionaries factions) declared the Qara Quzak bridge and the Qara Quzak region, as well as the Sitrine junction and the Sitrine silos, a military zone. A few days back, these factions had seized three villages — Nasro, Kharous and Ja'da — in the southern countryside of Ain al-Arab, after clashes with ISIS insurgents. They thus reached the surroundings of the Qara Quzak bridge, closer to the tomb of Sultan Suleiman Shah.

Meanwhile, the YPG declared these same regions conflict zones, confirming that there was no direct ISIS presence in regions separating the Kurdish units from the tomb of Suleiman Shah. The YPG media center further reported that "those designated by the Kobani leadership met with Turkish officials for four days and discussed the plan of the Suleiman Shah tomb campaign." In a statement, the center explained that "our units transported Turkish soldiers in their vehicles to the tomb of Suleiman Shah on the previously set path. Our

men were entrenched in their locations, and successfully completed their tasks in order to lead Turkish Army forces [to the mausoleum]."

**A "PREVIOUS REHEARSAL"**

Last month, renowned Turkish reporter Metehan Demir, former editor-in-chief of Hurriyet newspaper in Ankara, wrote that "ISIS has been providing water and food to the [Turkish] soldiers who have been trapped in the tomb," as supplies from Turkey were late. Therefore, official Turkish concerns regarding a military response from ISIS seem untrue, as Ankara had delivered supplies to its soldiers in the tomb back in April 2014 and replaced them. Al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper then cited opposition leader in Aleppo's countryside Munzir Salal, as saying that "coordination between the Turkish government and ISIS is not new." Salal confirmed that "three months ago, it [ISIS] secured the entrance of

Turkish forces to replace the soldiers guarding the tomb [of Suleiman Shah], provided that the Turks would supply arms and take down the Turkish flag raised on the tomb."

In the same context, YPG spokesman Redor Khalil stressed that "ISIS facilitated the protection of the Turkish troops after they crossed Kurdish regions." The Aleppo Media Center had confirmed that ISIS insurgents accompanied Turkish Army troops near the tomb of Suleiman Shah in the countryside of Manbij as they returned to Turkey. "[ISIS] militants accompanied the troops to secure them, which led to believing that the organization had seized them," the center reported.

**DAMASCUS CONDEMNS INCURSION AS BLATANT AGGRESSION**

For its part, Damascus declared that Turkey "committed a blatant aggression on Syrian territory." In a

**The YPG media center further reported that "those designated by the Kobani leadership met with Turkish officials for four days and discussed the plan of the Suleiman Shah tomb campaign."**

statement, the Syrian Foreign Ministry said that "although the Turkish Foreign Ministry had conveyed to the Syrian Consulate in Istanbul, on the eve of the aggression, its wishes to move the tomb of Suleiman Shah elsewhere, it did not wait for Syrian approval as required, according to the treaty signed in 1921 by Turkey and the French occupation at the time." On Sunday night, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu explained that "we had informed the Syrian Consulate in a diplomatic memorandum that we were evacuating the location [of the tomb], but this land is ours and we shall return to it. We also told them we were moving the tomb to the village of Esmesi, and therefore, no lands shall be abandoned..."

**TOMB OF SULEIMAN SHAH: FROM MARJ DABIQ TO ESMESI**

The mausoleum complex of Suleiman Shah, grandfather of the Ottoman empire's founder Osman I,

is perched on the banks of the Euphrates river, near Manbij in Aleppo's countryside. When Selim I first conquered Syria in the battle of Marj Dabiq (in Aleppo) in August 1516, he built a mausoleum worthy of the grandfather of the Ottomans, and the pilgrims called it the "Turkish sanctuary." In 1968, the Tabqa Dam was constructed in al-Tabqa region (currently al-Thawra or The Revolution), and water from the dam's lake flooded the shrine, as well as parts of the Qal'at Ja'bar monument. It was then decided to move the tomb to a high hill, north of Qara Quzak. According to Article 9 of the Treaty of Ankara, which was signed in 1921 by Turkey and France during the French mandate of Syria, it was agreed that the tomb of Suleiman Shah would remain under the Turkish sovereignty, and would be guarded by Turkish soldiers, with a Turkish flag raised above it.



**[T]his land is ours and we shall return to it. We also told them we were moving the tomb to the village of Esmesi, and therefore, no lands shall be abandoned." — Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu**



February 23, 2015

**New ISIS video shows Kurdish Peshmerga soldiers in cages in Iraq**



By Yousuf Basil and Holly Yan, CNN edition.cnn.com — February 23, 2015

(CNN)ISIS has released a new propaganda video showing what appears to be Kurdish Peshmerga fighters paraded down Iraqi streets in cages.

The video features a man saying the Peshmerga soldiers were captured by ISIS.

CNN cannot independently verify the authenticity of the video. But it shows at least 21 men in orange outfits hauled in the cages atop the beds of pickup trucks.

A man with a microphone bearing the ISIS logo

interviews some of the captives, who say they are Peshmerga soldiers. Most of those interviewed say they are from Kirkuk. The prisoners, under duress, call on their fellow Peshmerga soldiers to give up their fight against ISIS.

The video also features superimposed bios for each prisoner. One captive is described as an officer for the Iraqi army.

The heavily edited footage also includes flashing clips of the recent beheadings of Christian Egyptians in Libya.

It's not clear what happened to those in the video. The last scene shows them alive.

But a man in the video gives an ominous warning.

"We say to the Peshmerga: Leave your jobs, or your fate will be like these, either the cage, or under the ground," he says in Kurdish.

The Peshmerga are armed forces protecting Kurdistan, a semiautonomous region in northern Iraq. The fighters opposed Saddam Hussein's regime and supported the United States in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In recent months, the Peshmerga have been battling ISIS as the terror group tries to establish a radical Islamic state across parts of Iraq and Syria. ●



Kurdistan Regional Government  
February 24, 2012

## PM Barzani: We are fully committed to the agreement with Baghdad

24 FEB 2015 | KRG Cabinet  
<http://cabinet.gov.krd>

**Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, (gov.krd)** - Kurdistan Region Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani told the press that Kurdistan Regional Government is committed to the agreement reached between Erbil and Baghdad last December on oil export and Kurdistan Region's share in the 2015 federal budget.

In a meeting held yesterday with representatives of media outlets in Kurdistan Region, Prime Minister Barzani highlighted the technical and political problems and obstacles which stood as impediments to the implementation of the budget law.

Prime Minister Barzani stated that the KRG will exert all its efforts to overcome the problems and obstacles that hamper the implementation of the agreement, adding that the Kurdistan Region's priority is to resolve the outstanding issues with the federal government and the implementation of 2015 budget law. This is in the interest of the Kurdistan Region and the rest of Iraq.

Prime Minister Barzani said, however, if the Iraqi government was not to honour the agreement, the Kurdistan Region will have no other options but to look elsewhere for solutions. He reaffirmed that the Kurdistan Region has so far honoured its obligations towards Baghdad.

Regarding the Kurdistan Region's oil policy, the Prime Minister stressed that it is in line with Iraqi federal constitution and that the



Kurdistan Region will use all its constitutional rights regarding the oil sector and will not waive its constitutional rights.

He told the press that Baghdad is important for the Kurdistan Region not only in oil field but also in trade, security, military and economic cooperation as well as many other areas, and for this, he is ready to visit Baghdad to find longterm solutions for all the issues.

The meeting with the press was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister, Qubad Talabani, KRG Minister of Natural Resources, Dr Ashti Hawrami, Minister of Culture, Khalid Doski, Minister of Planning, Ali Sindi and the Minister of Finance and Economy, Rebaz Muhammad.

Deputy Prime Minister Talabani highlighted KRG plans on how to address the problems that have emerged as the result of the financial crisis and the war against the Islamic State terrorist organisation, also known as ISIS, in addition to the large numbers of refugees and displaced people who fled ISIS violent repression and took refuge in the Kurdistan Region. He said that the government is confident that the plans to combat these problems will succeed.

The KRG Minister of Natural Resources, Dr Ashti Hawrami briefed the press about the technical aspects of the agreement with the Federal Government of Iraq, reiterating that as stipulated in the agreement, oil is being exported to the Turkish Ceyhan port on a daily basis. ●



24 February 2015

## Peshmerga-YPG drive out ISIS from

rudaw.net — 24/2/2015

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – Peshmerga forces and the People's Protection Units (YPG) drove out Islamic State (ISIS) militants from areas near the Syrian border in a joint operation on Sunday, a Kurdish military chief said.

Jamal Eminki, chief of staff of the Peshmerga forces, told Rudaw that the Peshmerga and YPG launched a major offensive against ISIS positions at Khanasur, capturing six villages from the group and extinguishing an ISIS threat to Mount Shingal forever.

"Khanasur is located at the end of Mount Shingal and from there

ISIS used to attack the Peshmerga and YPG," said Eminki. "But following a plan, the Peshmerga and YPG managed to drive the militants away and reach the border."

The Kurdish military official said that the joint Kurdish forces bombarded the militants with heavy artillery as they moved forward, while "coalition fighter jets also joined the operation."

Eminki added that the Kurdish forces had crossed the border into YPG-controlled Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), where they also liberated two villages from ISIS control.

"The ISIS threat to Mount Shingal is gone forever and their routes to the area are cut off completely," he said.



*Peshmerga and YPG fighters in solidarity outside Kobane. Rudaw photo.*

Meanwhile, Kurdish forces in Rojava said Monday that the YPG and Peshmerga are closing in on the city of Gire Spi (Tel Abyad), around 70 kilometers east of Kobane.

Muslih Zebari, the commander of the Peshmerga forces in Kobane, told Rudaw that all vil-

lages and areas between Kobane and Gire Spi have been retaken by the Peshmerga and YPG forces, and that the Kurds are within three kilometers of the town.

Over the weekend, the Kurdish forces recaptured the Lavarj cement factory on their way to Gire Spi. ■

# Barzani: Those Who Help IS Will Suffer the Same Fate as the Insurgents

US to deliver extra support to Peshmerga

basnews.com — ERBIL — 22 February 2015

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani warns that those who help and support Islamic State (IS) can expect to face the same fate as the insurgents.

On Saturday, Barzani welcomed US Senator Jack Reed, ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He was accompanied by US Ambassador to Iraq Stuart Jones, US Consul General Joseph Pennington and other US military and political officials.

Reed praised the leadership of Barzani and acknowledged the bravery and sacrifices of the Peshmerga. He promised that Washington would continue to aid the Peshmerga with air support, training and the provision of arms.

He added that the people of the US have deep appreciation for the sacrifices made by the people of Kurdistan in combating IS militants and their generosity in providing refuge to the many internally displaced people from other parts of Iraq.

Reed agreed that more military support is needed for the Iraqi

Kurdish forces and the US will work to provide it. He emphasised that fostering closer ties between Erbil and Washington was a priority.

In response Barzani thanked the people of the US and the Washington administration for supporting the Peshmerga and the Kurdistan Region. He explained the situation on the frontlines and stated that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and people of Kurdistan are doing as much as they can to help refugees and displaced people.

He explained that the KRG and the international coalition cannot bare the responsibility of fighting IS alone; other countries must also step up their efforts in defending against the global threat posed by the organisation.

Barzani claims that destroying jihadists through military operations only is not the complete solution; IS must also be tackled politically, economically and ideologically.

He gave details about areas liberated by the Peshmerga alongside those who have been standing against the extremists. Those who support IS can expect to meet the same fate, Barzani cautioned.

The meeting concluded by addressing the ongoing cooperation between the Peshmerga and the international coalition, and preparations for an operation to liberate Iraq's second city, Mosul.



# PESHMERGA HOLDING BACK ISIS, BUT DENIES SUNNI ARABS RETURN HOME TO KURDISH IRAQ

by Frances Martel / 26 Feb 2015  
<http://www.breitbart.com>

**While the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Iraq have managed to hold back the Islamic State (ISIS) from key areas, including the stronghold of Erbil, Sunni Arabs displaced by ISIS attacks are protesting that the Kurdish army is not allowing them to return home following the pushback.**

Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Iraq have been pivotal in stemming the spread of the Islamic State terrorist group, itself a Sunni Arab outfit, since the group began its unprecedented expansion last summer. While the Kurds have successfully protected Erbil and fought to protect Kurdish Yazidi populations near Mount Sinjar, Al Monitor reports that the Kurds have yet to attempt breaching some territorial lines near the city of Kirkuk, a move that would serve to protect the area's Arab Sunni population.

Al Monitor notes that the Kurds have resisted an attempt to move the Islamic State further south of Kirkuk. When asked, Peshmerga Capt. Rebwar Mala Ali responded, "Why should we shed Kurdish blood for Hawija when we know the Iraqi government will claim it back once the IS threat is gone?"

Kurdish officials have made no mystery of their hopes that liberating swathes of Iraq and

Syria from the Islamic State may lead to a conclusive creation of a Kurdish state. Their reluctance to act in Sunni Arab areas is not just a product of the fear of having their soldiers killed to help the Arab Shiite government in Baghdad, however; Sunni Arabs are the only acceptable population for the Islamic State in its territories, leading to fears that any Sunni Arab attempting to travel into Kurdish territory may be operating undercover for the Islamic State.

Human Rights Watch issued a report this week condemning Kurdish officials for restricting the freedom of movement of Sunni Arab civilians, claiming that "Kurdish forces for months barred Arabs displaced by fighting from returning to their homes in portions of Ninewa and Erbil provinces, while permitting Kurds to return to those areas and even to move into homes of Arabs who fled." HRW also claims that Kurdish forces have destroyed dozens of Arab homes in territories they have reclaimed. They also released a video featuring interviews and images of areas discussed in the report:

HRW nonetheless notes that Kurdish authorities eased restrictions on travel in January after the NGO issued their concerns for the rights of those affected. Kurdish Peshmerga leaders relayed to Human Rights Watch their concern that "many Arabs had assisted the ISIS advance and might again collaborate with the armed group."

Complicating the situation is the history behind the Arab Sunni presence in many of the areas affected by Kurdish victories against the Islamic State. As Haaretz reports, many Kurds contend that Arab populations in areas near Kirkuk are illegitimate, artificially created by relocation initiatives during Saddam Hussein's tenure. "Saddam brought Iraqis here to try and turn Kirkuk into an Arab city," one Kurdish military leader tells Haaretz. "This was to change the population. But no one will take this city from us; this area—all of it—is Kurdish, Kirkuk is Kurdish."

Reports earlier this month indicated that violence has increased in the newly liberated northern areas of Nineveh, near Mount Sinjar, where thousands of Yazidis—a religious sect composed of ethnic Kurds—were forced, upon the arrival of the Islamic State, to hide. Thousands more died on that mountain before the Peshmerga could rid the area of the Islamic State. Now, Yazidis returning to the area are allegedly engaging in revenge murders of Sunni Arabs who remained in the territory and, due to their ethnic and religious background, were spared by the Islamic State.

Those who escaped the ISIS siege of Sinjar told reporters and Kurdish soldiers that most of the violence against Yazidis did not come from foreign Islamic State invaders, but Arab Sunnis who lived in peace with Yazidis before ISIS's arrival. "It wasn't even IS who did most of the killing," said one Yazidi refugee at the time. "It was our Sunni Arab neighbors. ... We looked after these people's children, and as soon as ISIS appeared, they immediately turned against us." ●

# At Kurdish front-line outpost, skepticism abounds about assault on Mosul

By Mitchell Prothero  
 McClatchy Foreign Staff February 22, 2015  
 www.mcclatchydc.com

**O**UTSIDE SULTAN ABDULLAH, Iraq — Major Deliar Shouki, the commander of a string of Kurdish fire bases less than 20 miles from Mosul, admitted he was skeptical when he'd heard the news last week that a U.S. official had told Pentagon reporters that 25,000 Iraqi troops would attack the Islamic State-held city perhaps as soon as April.

"There really is no Iraqi army, so I don't know where they get the idea that they can train 25,000 soldiers in two months to fight house to house in Mosul," he said on Friday as he gave a visiting journalist a tour of his men's positions on the outskirts of the tiny hamlet of Sultan Abdullah, which lies about midway between Mosul and the Kurdish capital of Irbil.

Only a few hundred yards of open ground separates his troops from the Islamic State positions, with Shouki's men dug in deeply on the tops of hills and the Islamic State fighters occupying the tiny village below. Nearly every night, the area is the scene World War I-style battles as the extremists attempt to storm the Kurdish trenches, only to be thrown back, with heavy casualties.

"It just seems to me like the Iraqi [Arabs] lack a certain morale to be soldiers, and I don't want to directly accuse them of anything, but every time they fight Daash, they lose ground and equipment that ends up being used against us," he said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State. "It's very suspicious and I don't think they want to fight them."

**B**oth Shouki and the American-made armored vehicle he uses to shuttle ammunition and evacuate the wounded from his front line area are examples of how the Kurdish peshmerga adapted after the Islamic State stormed into Mosul and took over much of northern and central Iraq last summer.

Shouki isn't exactly a major, it's what his men call him. In fact, though, he'd retired from the peshmerga after years of fighting Saddam Hussein; when he volunteered to return as the Islamic State threatened, he was given command of one of the most bitterly contested sections of northern Iraq.

And his command vehicle once carried U.S. troops before being given to the Iraqi army when the Americans left in 2011. It was captured by the Islamic State in June when the Iraqi Army abandoned its equipment and fled before the extremists' advance. The peshmerga captured it in battle a few months ago and immediately put it to use.



*The Kurdish Peshmerga base on the outskirts of the tiny contested hamlet of Sultan Abdullah, about 35 miles from the Kurdish capital of Irbil, comes under constant attack from Islamic State militants less than 1000 yards away.*  
**MITCHELL PROTHERO** — McClatchy

"We need more armored vehicles and heavier weapons," Shouki explained. "We fight to defend Kurdistan and the coalition air strikes have been very helpful but we need [American] special forces 'boots on the ground' to help guide them in and heavier weapons if we are to drive them out of Iraq."

"Americans need to understand we are fighting them here for you because if they stay in Mosul and take Irbil, they'll come to New York and Washington eventually," he added.

Over a hot lunch of chicken and eggplant brought to the base by a local family as a thank you to the troops, the commanders of this section of the front line dismissed the notion that any major operation led by the central government in Baghdad to recapture Mosul is imminent.

"The Arabs can't take Tikrit and Bayji," laughed one, referring to two much smaller cities held by the Islamic State. "There is no Iraqi army, just Shiite militias."

**A**nother dignitary, dressed in traditional Kurdish garb and heavily armed who declined to give his name but described his occupation as an "arms dealer for Kurdistan," said the only capable fighting forces that the Iraqi Arabs can field are the Iranian-trained, -led and -equipped militias, which he said, to much agreement in the room, aren't interested in Sunni Arab Mosul, for both sectarian and strategic reasons.

"Shiite militias and Kurds are going into Sunni Arab Mosul?" he asked. "We Kurds will fight to protect our homeland but Mosul is not, it's the Arabs' home. And the Shiite only care about protecting Baghdad and their areas in the south from the Sunnis of Anbar," the Iraqi province to the west of Baghdad that has largely fallen to the Islamic State.

Adding to these concerns are the role of Shiite militias in the area south of the city of Kirkuk, which is now in Kurdish hands. The peshmerga lines and the Shiite militias' operations intersect there, and tensions between the two forces occasionally flare into fighting, even though both are battling the the Islamic State. So far the incidents have been minor,

but there are concerns they could become a major source of conflict, especially after recent statements by Shiite militia leaders that they would force the Kurds to allow them to deploy around oil-rich Kirkuk, a city the Kurds have vowed not to return to Arab control.

Shouki said it's possible the Kurds would cooperate in an assault on Mosul, but there were in his opinion many conditions that would need to be met: the government in Baghdad would have to assemble an army, give the Kurds significant amounts of weapons, and pay some of the nearly \$6 billion it owes the Kurdish regional government.

In addition, he said, Kurdish cooperation is likely to depend on the United States agreeing to put combat air controllers on the ground to ensure the accuracy of air strikes, something the Pentagon has said might be possible, but that would place U.S. troops in danger.

"We are the only ones fighting and dying," he said.

That sacrifice is obvious at one of the tiny hillside fire bases overlooking Sultan Abdullah. The Kurds' bunkers there were deep for protection from the better-equipped Islamic State artillery, and sand bags covered a series of trenches that were surrounded by barbed wire.

**T**he Kurds are better armed now than they were last summer, thanks to donations of gear from the United States and Germany and British logistical help that brought in large amounts of ammunition from former Soviet stockpiles. But the peshmerga still lack the heavy artillery and armored vehicles the Islamic State has.

Pointing at his command vehicle, Shouki noted that the Iraqi army abandoned about 2,000 similar vehicles last June; his men have one, plus about dozen American-made Humvees mounted with heavy machine guns.

Still, his men are able to hold off the Islamic State's frontal assaults on their positions, thanks to the German anti-tank weapons they've been given — the Milan ➤



➔ guided anti-tank missile and the Panzerfaust anti-tank rocket system.

The men described a battle last Wednesday night, where under the cover of fog, Islamic State fighters – estimated in the hundreds – pushed to within 25 yards of these trenches, sparking a five-hour close quarters gunfight that left the peshmerga unsupported by coalition air power.

“They told us we were on our own because both sides were too close to bomb,” said one peshmerga fighter as he stared down the barrel of his PKM medium machine gun through a slit in the sandbags at the Islamic State lines just a few hundred meters away.

He described the pitched battle that followed. “Normally it’s harder to throw grenades

up than down but in this case it was the opposite,” he said. “All the Daash guys had to do was get their grenades over our sandbags and that was it. But they were so close, we had to hold our grenades live for a few seconds so they would go off before they rolled past the Daash guys.”

He pointed to dark shapes throughout the field. “You can still see a lot of their bodies, I don’t know how many but nobody can go out there to get them.”

Shouki said in that fight they recovered 38 Islamic State fighter bodies, many snared on the barbed wire just outside the trenches, while his men lost one killed and six wounded, all from grenades. He claims the Islamic State death toll was likely much higher; once

the Islamic State fighters retreated, coalition air power was able to go to work.

“Daash is a lot less powerful now because of the planes,” he said. “They can still attack but we see them growing weaker because they can’t reinforce or retreat without getting hit. But we also get their best fighters attacking here because it is important, mostly foreign fighters with good training and discipline.”

The same position was hit again Saturday, according to a text message from Shouki. This time, he said, 53 extremists were killed and about a dozen of his own men were wounded, but the bunkers and trenches held.

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REUTERS

## Islamic State snatches 220 from Christian villages: Syria monitoring group

February 26, 2015 / BEIRUT / REUTERS

**ISLAMIC STATE militants have abducted at least 220 people from Assyrian Christian villages in northeastern Syria during a three-day offensive, a monitoring group that tracks violence in Syria said on Thursday.**

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the abductions took place when Islamic State captured 10 villages inhabited by the ancient Christian minority near Hasaka, a city mainly held by the Kurds, in the past three days.

Islamic State has ruthlessly targeted members of religious minorities, as well as fellow Sunni Muslims who refuse to swear allegiance to the ‘caliphate’ it has declared in parts of Syria and Iraq.

A video released last week showed its members beheading 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya. Last August it killed or enslaved hundreds of Iraq’s Yazidis, whom it considers devil worshippers.

The militants have previously used kidnappings to trade captives for their own captured fighters but it was not clear if they planned to use the same tactic with the Assyrians, whose abduction they have not yet claimed.

The United States on Wednesday condemned the attacks on Assyrian Christian villages, which it said included the burning of homes and churches and abduction of women, children and the elderly.

Hundreds of Christians have now fled to the two main cities in Hasaka province, according to the Syriac National Council, a Syrian Christian group.

### LAND BRIDGE

The region is strategically important to Islamic State as one of the bridges between land it controls in Syria and Iraq. In recent weeks it has lost ground in northeast Syria after being pushed out of the Kurdish town of Kobani in January by Kurdish forces backed by U.S.-led airstrikes.

These same strikes, however, have been unable to stop its advance into smaller villages.

Heavy fighting continued through Wednesday night between Syrian Kurdish militants and Islamic State, Kurdish officials and the human rights observatory said.

“ISIS now controls 10 Christian villages,” observatory head Rami Abdulrahman said by phone, using an acronym for Islamic State. “They have taken the people they kidnapped away from the villages and into their territory,” he said.

Two Kurdish officials said around 90 people had been abducted. One of the officials, Nasir Haj Mahmoud, from the YPG militia in northeastern Syria, said they were taken to Shedadeh village, which is Islamic State territory. “Some Assyrian villages are still under Islamic State control,” he said.

Mahmoud said YPG had cut a main road linking Tel Hamis with al-Houl, a town just a few miles (kilometres) from the Iraqi border, and prevented attempts by Islamic State to reopen it. “The YPG are still in control,” he said.



*Kurdish YPG fighters stand in front of a church in the Assyrian village of Tel Jumaa, north of Tel Tamr town, February 25, 2015. Photo: Reuters*

He said dozens had died overnight in clashes, which underline the emergence of well-organised Syrian Kurdish militia as the main partner for the U.S.-led alliance against Islamic State in Syria.

### SOUTHERN PUSH

Islamic State fighters also launched an attack on rival insurgents east of Damascus, the group said on social media on Thursday, a rare skirmish near the southern capital from the militant organisation, which is strongest in the northeast.

An official Twitter account for Islamic State said its fighters ambushed members of the Free Syrian Army, an alliance of western-backed rebels, on Wednesday in the Eastern Ghouta area.

It said the FSA suffered casualties, and Islamic State fighters seized tanks and ammunition in what it called a strategic location close to the government stronghold of central Damascus. The Observatory confirmed the attack but said it had targeted rival jihadist brigades.

Mainstream rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad’s forces in Syria’s civil war have mostly been eclipsed by jihadists, complicating a U.S. plan to train and equip Syrian opposition forces to fight Islamic State.

Units from Islamic State are staging increasing attacks in the south, mostly in the Qalamoun Mountain range that runs north-south to Damascus and also borders Lebanon.

The Lebanese army deployed along that border on Thursday near the village of Ras Baalbek and fired artillery at jihadists who move between Syria and Lebanon, a Lebanese security source said. ●

International New York Times FEBRUARY 23, 2015

# Battle to regain key Iraqi city will test Obama administration's strategy

WASHINGTON

## Obama administration struggles to gauge odds of retaking key Iraqi city

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON  
AND ERIC SCHMITT

American intelligence agencies and the Pentagon are struggling to determine how difficult it will be to retake Mosul, the Islamic State's de facto capital in Iraq, as planning intensifies for a battle that is becoming a major test of the Obama administration's strategy to stop the spread of the terrorist group in the Middle East.

The assessment will be pivotal in driving important policy and military decisions that President Obama will need to make in the coming weeks, including whether the Pentagon will need to deploy teams of American ground forces to call in allied airstrikes and advise Iraqi troops on the battlefield on the challenges of urban warfare.

Reclaiming Mosul, which has a population of more than one million people and is Iraq's second-largest city, will require 20,000 to 25,000 Iraqi and Kurdish forces to clear it block by block, with many of the streets and buildings likely to be rigged with explosives, American officials said. The battle is planned for as early as April.

The city is being held by 1,000 to 2,000 Islamic State militants, according to United States military estimates. It sits astride one of the major infiltration routes that the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has used to ferry troops and supplies into northern Iraq from Syria.

American intelligence agencies say they do not yet know whether Islamic State fighters will dig in and defend Mosul to the death or whether, fearing encirclement, most fighters will slip out of the city for other Iraqi towns or cross the border into Syria, leaving behind a smaller force and booby-trapping buildings with bombs to tie down and bloody thousands of Iraqi troops.

"We are looking at all the things that are out there, i.e., what is the final enemy disposition in Mosul?" said a United States Central Command official who briefed reporters at the Pentagon on Thursday. The briefing drew sharp criticism from Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss future operations, continued, "All those things will have to be considered in the final analysis, and then, ultimately, they will go to the president with those things,



ARI JALAL/REUTERS

Kurdish pesh merga forces resting on the outskirts of Mosul, Iraq, last month. Reclaiming the city will require up to 25,000 Iraqi and Kurdish troops, United States officials said.

and he will make that decision." Central Command oversees American military operations in the Middle East, and officials there are helping Iraqis in the war planning.

The plan to retake Mosul, which the Islamic State has controlled since June, faces an array of challenges. The strategy is to draw on five of the most experienced Iraqi Army brigades, about 10,000 troops in all, put them through several weeks of special training and then use them in conjunction with Kurdish pesh merga units and other forces to mount the main assault. But both American and Iraqi commanders have raised doubts about the readiness of Iraq's ground forces, which have struggled to recapture smaller towns that pose far less of a challenge than Mosul.

Since American air power will be critical to helping the Iraqi and Kurdish forces advance, the main question Mr. Obama will have to answer is whether the challenges posed in retaking Mosul mean that teams of American joint terminal attack controllers, or JTACs, need to be on the ground so that the airstrikes can be delivered precisely.

These teams, if deployed, would most likely need to be protected by Special Operations forces. There would also need to be additional quick-reaction forces held in reserve for emergencies, as well as medical personnel and helicopters in case the Americans came under heavy fire, former commanders said.

Although Mr. Obama has sent Marines and Special Forces to train Iraqi and Kurdish troops and advise them at the brigade level, he has not approved

their use on the battlefield to call in airstrikes or advise Iraqi forces in combat. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said he would ask the president for such authorization if needed.

In preparation for the assault on Mosul, the United States and its allies are trying to weaken the Islamic State by cutting its supply lines. Kurdish forces, backed by American-led air power, have recently positioned themselves near an important crossroads at Kiske, 25 miles west of Mosul. "The isolation of Mosul is going on now," said the official at Central Command.

In addition, American officials took the unusual step on Thursday of announcing the timing of the battle and the number of Iraqi and Kurdish forces to be deployed. Openly discussing future military operations is normally off-limits to avoid aiding the enemy, but American officials said it was done this time to try to weaken the resolve of the Islamic State fighters and to spur Mosul's residents to rise up against the occupiers and help the Iraqi ground forces.

That strategy angered Mr. McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who, with Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, sent a blistering letter to Mr. Obama on Friday denouncing the briefing for reporters. "Never in our memory can we recall an instance in which our military has knowingly briefed our own war plans to our enemies," Mr. McCain and Mr. Graham wrote.

A defense official said Friday that the White House and Ashton B. Carter, the

new defense secretary, "had no advance knowledge" of the briefing. Mr. Carter, speaking to reporters on Friday en route to Afghanistan, gave no date for the assault on Mosul. "Even if I knew exactly when that was going to be, I wouldn't tell you," he said.

American officials said it was possible that announcing the battle for Mosul ahead of time could prompt many of the Islamic State fighters to slip away and make the retaking of the city less of a fight — perhaps to the point that it might not be necessary to have Americans call in airstrikes and advise Iraqi troops on the battlefield. But the officials acknowledged that they did not know how the militants would respond.

Some experts who recently visited Iraq, however, said that the Islamic State's actions in the towns of Kobani in Syria and Baghdadi in Iraq's Anbar Province did not suggest that the fighters would flee. They said the Islamic State would not only try to hold parts of Mosul but would also launch diversionary attacks against the Iraqi forces elsewhere.

"They are going to fight back hard," said Kenneth M. Pollack, a former C.I.A. analyst now at the Brookings Institution. "They are not only going to try to hold Mosul but will try to relieve the

pressure by launching counteroffensives elsewhere."

Michael Knights, an expert on Iraq at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said the Islamic State's strength was in the western half of Mosul, which has important government buildings and is predominantly Arab. There are more Kurds in eastern Mosul. "My gut is that they continue doing an economy-of-force effort, screening and lively raiding, on the east bank until the Kurds get serious and push forward," Mr. Knights said. "Then they fall back to the west and blow the bridges."

"They'll fight like devils for west Mosul, making the entire place into a huge harassment minefield full of unexploded car bombs, roadside I.E.D.s and masses of fake I.E.D.s," he added.

The battle, he said, could be a slugfest, reminiscent of the epic 2004 battle for Falluja in the Iraq war, unless local residents or neighboring tribes took matters into their own hands, or the Americans and Iraqis had an effective covert program to undermine the Islamic State's defenses from within.

Another challenge will come if the city is retaken. While Mosul is overwhelmingly Sunni, the Iraqi attacking force is

### To prepare for the Mosul assault, the United States and its allies are trying to cut the Islamic State's supply lines.

likely to be overwhelming Shiite, which may create friction with the local population. The Sunni Arab population could be alienated if their neighborhoods were held by Shiite-dominated units or pesh merga forces.

The plan calls for introducing a stabilizing force that would be composed of former Mosul police officers and Sunni tribal fighters. But it is unclear how synchronized this effort will be.

"It may well be the Iraqi forces are ready to assault Mosul in a couple of months," said one European military officer who had been briefed on some of the battle planning. "But what comes next, who holds the ground taken, that could be just as difficult."

*Michael S. Schmidt contributed reporting from Kabul, Afghanistan.*

International New York Times TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2015

# U.S. and Iran seek to outline accord

GENEVA

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON

Iranian and American officials ended a round of high-level nuclear talks here on Monday with a proposal under consideration that would strictly limit for at least 10 years Iran's ability to produce nuclear material, but might ease restrictions on Tehran in the final years of a deal.

A senior American official traveling with Secretary of State John Kerry and Energy Secretary Ernest J. Moniz said the United States would insist that Iran's nuclear program be constrained for "at least a double-digit number of years" from being able to produce enough material for a nuclear bomb should it decide to "break out" of the accord.

The United States has insisted that Iran's breakout capacity be constrained from producing enough nuclear material to produce a bomb in a year for as long as possible.

Iranian officials have said they want an agreement that would allow their country to ramp up the number of centrifuges as soon as possible.

One way to bridge the difference would be to impose the limits in phases. Strict constraints on the number of cent-

rifuges that Iran could operate might be maintained for the first 10 years of a potential 15-year agreement and then relaxed in the last 5 years. Such an approach would allow the Iranians to say the tough constraints would last for only 10 years, and the Americans could say they had a 15-year agreement.

The official, who could not be identified under the Obama administration's protocol for briefing reporters, was deliberately vague on how long the year-long limit on breakout time would need to be preserved beyond the first 10 years of an agreement, suggesting that the United States was looking for Iran to make concessions in return for a shorter second phase.

The official said American and Iranian officials had made progress during the negotiations here, which for the first time, included Mr. Moniz and Ali Akbar Salehi, the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, who joined Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister.

The negotiations, which began on Sunday night in a luxury hotel near Lake Geneva, sought to make progress toward an agreement before a March deadline for finalizing an outline of an agreement to limit Tehran's nuclear program. The two sides plan to meet again next Mon-

day.

"We have made some progress," a senior administration official told reporters. "We still have a long way to go."

The March deadline has become an important milestone since the White House is eager to show that progress is being made to dissuade Congress from moving to impose new sanctions on Iran.

It is unclear what form a March agreement might take, if it is reached. Would it be a signed document that the

United States, its allies and Iran would make public? Or would it be a confidential record of the status of the talks on which Congress might be briefed but that would not be published?

This latest round of talks is the first time that the countries' top nuclear officials have participated, a reflection of the complexity of the potential agreement, which seeks to constrain Iran's nuclear program in return for suspending and eventually removing economic sanctions.

The presence of Mr. Salehi, who received a Ph.D. in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Mr. Moniz, who once led the physics department there, could ease progress, though there were no indications that an agreement was imminent. Hossein Fereydoon, President Hassan Rouhani's brother, was also a member of the Iranian delegation here.

"These meetings are steps in a long and tough process," the State Department said in a statement.

Asked at the start of Monday's meeting how the negotiations were proceeding, Mr. Zarif said simply, "It is going."

# ISIS steps up abductions of Christians in Syria

ISTANBUL

BY ANNE BARNARD

Continuing its assaults on a string of Assyrian Christian villages in northeastern Syria, the Islamic State militant group has seized scores more residents over the past two days, bringing the number of captives to as many as several hundred, Assyrian organizations inside and outside Syria said on Thursday.

The number of captives reported by different Assyrian groups has varied because, in the chaos of fighting, many families are fleeing and it has taken time to verify by name those captured.

The Syriac Military Council, a militia formed in recent years to protect Assyrian villages in the traditionally diverse area of Hasaka, in northeastern Syria, said in a statement that more than 350 civilians from 12 villages had been abducted.

George Stifo, a leader of the United States branch of the Assyrian Democratic Organization, part of the Syrian opposition, provided the names of 96 captives, which included several children. The Assyrian International News Agency, a website tracking community news, reported that 150 were missing.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an antigovernment monitoring group with a network of contacts in Syria, said on Thursday that 220 were missing.

Assyrian organizations and the observatory reported that negotiations were taking place for the release of the prisoners in exchange for Islamic State fighters held by Christian and Kurdish militias, with local Arab tribal leaders acting as mediators.

The Assyrian news agency said that the tribal leaders were pushing the Islamic State to release civilian Assyrians and that the group had agreed in principle "to release those Assyrians who



offered no resistance, but flatly rejected releasing those who fought back."

In a video posted to YouTube, a resident of the village of Abu Tineh in the Tal Tamer district described what he said had been his dramatic flight as fighters from the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, approached the village after midnight.

"We took a small boat to go to the other side of the river," he said. "We took the children and women, then the youths." He said he knew of scores of people in nearby villages, including eight women, who had been captured. "We don't know what happened next," he said.

Video also surfaced on Thursday appearing to be an official Islamic State production made in Iraq's Nineveh Province, which is also traditionally home to many Assyrian Christians. The video appeared to show black-clad men using sledgehammers and drills to destroy ancient artifacts, including some dating from the ancient Assyrian Empire from which many Assyrian Christians claim to be descended.

*Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Beirut, Lebanon.*

"Time is passing," Mr. Kerry chimed in. "We are working."

But some Western observers have also raised concerns that Mr. Salehi, who also served as foreign minister in Iran's previous hard-line government, might seek to protect the country's nuclear activities from being subjected to stringent limits and restrict Mr. Zarif's room for maneuver.

In July, for example, Mr. Salehi argued that Iran needed to have industri-

## The talks have also included the American energy secretary and the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

al-scale ability to enrich uranium by 2021, when a contract under which Russia supplies fuel for Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr is to expire.

When the negotiations were extended in November, American officials outlined a two-step process for making progress. The first step, they said, would be to work out an agreement outlining the main provisions of an accord by the end of March. The final step would be to complete the entire accord, including its technical annexes, by the end of June.

Both sides have said they are not interested in extending the negotiating deadlines further.

Adding to the pressure to show progress, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel is scheduled to address the United States Congress in early March to present his criticism of the potential accord. On Sunday, Mr. Netanyahu said the emerging deal would be "dangerous for Israel." He added that it was "astonishing" that the talks were continuing since Iran had yet to answer longstanding questions that the International Atomic Energy Agency had posed about Tehran's suspected earlier work on nuclear designs.



February 23, 2015

## ISIS offers to hand over Kurdish fighters bodies in exchange for \$20,000 for each

February 23, 2015, by Abdelhak Mamoun — [www.iraqinews.com](http://www.iraqinews.com)

On Sunday, a German newspaper stated that the ISIS organization offered to hand over the bodies of Kurdish fighters killed in the fights against it in exchange for 10 to 20 thousand dollars for each

body, indicating that this confirms that the organization is facing financial problems.

The German newspaper 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung' wrote in a report followed by IraqiNews, "ISIS has been suffering from financial problems, and it offered to hand over the bodies of Kurdish fighters killed in the fights against it in exchange for money."

The newspaper quoted some security sources, who refused to give out their name, as saying, "The organization seeks to deliver the bodies of those were killed in battles against it to the Kurdish forces, in exchange for sums ranging between 10 and 20 thousand dollars for each body."

The newspaper said that it is unlikely for ISIS to be able to take advantage of these bodies by selling their organs, because it lacks the medical technology and expertise that will allow it to do so.



## Irak: les Kurdes bloquent le retour d'Arabes dans des régions disputées

Bagdad, 26 février 2015 (AFP)

**LES FORCES ARMÉES kurdes ont empêché des habitants arabes déplacés par les violences de retourner dans des régions d'Irak que le Kurdistan autonome dispute aux autorités fédérales, a affirmé jeudi Human Rights Watch dans un rapport.**

L'ONG, basée à New York, met en garde le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan contre l'imposition d'une "punition collective à des communautés arabes entières" pour les violences commises par les jihadistes du groupe extrémiste Etat islamique (EI).

"Bloquer les habitants arabes et refuser d'autoriser leur retour chez eux semble bien au-delà d'une réponse sécuritaire raisonnable", juge ainsi Letta Tayler, experte de HRW.

Selon le rapport, les forces kurdes empêchent depuis plusieurs mois les habitants arabes déplacés par l'offensive lancée l'an dernier par l'EI de rentrer chez eux dans des zones disputées.

En revanche les Kurdes ont pu retourner dans ces mêmes régions et dans certains cas ont été autorisés à s'installer dans des foyers appartenant à des résidents arabes déplacés, souligne l'ONG.

HRW dit avoir répertorié des "actes vraisemblablement discriminatoires" dans les provinces de Ninive et Erbil (capitale du Kurdistan) lors de visites en décembre et janvier.

Lorsque le groupe EI a lancé son offensive fulgurante dans les régions sunnites du nord de l'Irak en juin 2014, les forces kurdes ont occupé le vide laissé par les forces de sécurité fédérales ayant fui devant l'avancée des jihadistes.

Elles ont ainsi pris le contrôle de zones contestées de longue date et revendiquées par le gouvernement central à Bagdad et le Kurdistan autonome (nord), élargissant d'environ 40% la région sous contrôle kurde.

Les jihadistes s'étaient emparé de plusieurs de ces zones multi-ethniques et multi-confessionnelles en août, mais les forces kurdes, aidées par les raids aériens de la coalition internationale, ont repris du terrain.

Selon HRW, certains responsables kurdes ont défendu les mesures discriminatoires en arguant que les habitants arabes sunnites de la région avaient soutenu l'offensive des jihadistes et collaboraient toujours avec le groupe EI.

HRW a affirmé que certaines restrictions imposées aux Arabes sunnites avaient été allégées en janvier, mais souligné que les autorités kurdes devaient faire plus. ●



28 février 2015

# Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du PKK, appelle son mouvement à déposer les armes

www.france24.com/

28 févr. 2015 - Avec AFP

**Le leader du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, emprisonné en Turquie, a relancé samedi le processus de paix avec Ankara en appelant son mouvement à prendre la décision "historique" de déposer les armes.**

Le chef historique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, emprisonné depuis 1999 en Turquie, a appelé, samedi 28 février, les dirigeants de son mouvement à prendre la décision "historique" de déposer les armes dans le cadre du processus de paix entamé avec Ankara.

Une démarche qui a ravivé de façon spectaculaire, à trois mois des élections législatives du 7 juin, l'espoir que soit mis fin à la rébellion séparatiste kurde qui ensanglante la Turquie depuis 1984.

Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a qualifié cet appel de "très, très important" mais s'est montré prudent. "J'espère qu'ils respecteront cette déclaration et qu'ils prendront les mesures nécessaires, a-t-il déclaré. Mais je me dois d'insister sur le fait que ceux qui déposent les armes sont des membres d'une organisation terroriste".

### "REEMPLACER LE COMBAT ARMÉ PAR LA POLITIQUE"

Dans un message lu devant la presse par le député du Parti démocratique du peuple (HDP, pro-kurde) Sirri Sureyya Önder, samedi au cours d'une conférence de presse commune inédite avec le vice-Premier ministre Yalçın Akdoğan, Abdullah Öcalan a appelé son mouvement à organiser au printemps un congrès sur son désarmement. "Nous nous rapprochons d'un règlement de ce conflit vieux de trente ans sous la forme d'une paix définitive, et notre objectif premier est de parvenir à une solution démocratique", a estimé le chef rebelle.

"J'appelle le PKK à organiser un congrès extraordinaire au printemps pour prendre une décision stratégique et historique de désarmement", a-t-il poursuivi, "c'est un appel historique à remplacer le combat armé par la politique". Les deux parties sont "plus proches de la paix que jamais", a commenté devant la presse Sirri Sureyya Önder.

"Nous avons franchi une étape importante et historique dans le processus de paix", a renchéri Yalçın Akdoğan, premier représentant d'un gouvernement turc à assister à la lecture d'un message du chef du PKK, encore largement considéré en Turquie comme un "terroriste".



Sirri Süreyya Önder en train de lire l'appel d'Öcalan à Istanbul, le 28 février. REUTERS/Turkish Prime Minister's Press Office/Handout via Reuter

L'annonce de samedi intervient après la visite rendue par une délégation d'élus du HDP aux chefs militaires du PKK dans leur base du mont Kandil, dans le nord de l'Irak, puis à Abdullah Öcalan dans son île-prison d'Imrali, en mer de Marmara, non loin d'Istanbul.

### LES PONTS ENTRE LES DEUX PARTIES N'ONT JAMAIS ÉTÉ COUPÉS

Après un premier échec en 2010, le gouvernement islamo-conservateur, au pouvoir depuis 2002, a réactivé à l'automne 2012 les discussions avec le PKK pour tenter de mettre un terme à un conflit ayant fait en trente ans quelque 40 000 morts. Il avait cette fois directement engagé le dialogue avec Abdullah Öcalan, qui purge une peine de prison à vie.

En octobre 2014, elles ont failli capoter lorsque des milliers de jeunes Kurdes sont descendus dans les rues des villes de Turquie afin de dénoncer le refus du gouvernement turc d'intervenir pour soutenir les miliciens kurdes qui défendaient la cité syrienne de Kobané, assiégée par les djihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) avant d'être reprise.

Malgré ces fortes tensions, les ponts entre les deux parties n'ont jamais été coupés et le gouvernement a fait pression en vue d'une solution avant les législatives du 7 juin. ◆



© Delil Souleiman, AFP | Des combattants kurdes dans un quartier de la ville de Tall Hamis, le 26 février.

Ils s'emparent d'un nouveau fief

## Les Kurdes infligent une nouvelle défaite à l'EI en Syrie

www.parismatch.com - C.R. avec AFP - 28 février 2015

**L**es combattants kurdes ont infligé vendredi une sévère défaite aux jihadistes du groupe État islamique (EI) en s'emparant d'une de leurs places fortes dans la province de Hassaké, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, selon une ONG.

Un nouveau revers de l'Etat islamique face aux Kurdes. "Les jihadistes

se sont retirés sans grande résistance après que les forces kurdes épaulées par des combattants arabes de Jeich Sanadi (Armée des héros) sont rentrés à Tall Hamis", qui se trouve à un trentaine de km de Qamichli, a fait savoir vendredi l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Les Kurdes occupent désormais une bande de territoire reliant Tall Hamis à la frontière avec l'Irak, pays où l'EI est bien implanté, ce qui gêne les jihadistes dans leurs mouvements dans ce secteur.

L'Union démocratique kurde (PYD), principal parti kurde de Syrie, a affirmé dans un communiqué que sa branche armée, les Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), avait libéré Tall Hamis et les localités environnantes à la demande des villageois (arabes) qui voulaient se débarrasser de ces terroristes".

Cette victoire à Tall Hamis, aux mains de l'EI depuis plus d'un an, intervient après sept jours de combats avec le groupe jihadiste durant lesquels les YPG se sont emparés d'une centaine de villages et hameaux de la région. Depuis le début des combats dans le secteur, au moins 175 jihadistes ont été tués dans les accrochages et les bombardements de la coalition internationale dirigée par Washington.

### 30 COMBATTANTS KURDES TUÉS

Dans l'autre camp, 30 combattants kurdes et des rebelles ont été tués, dont un Australien, le premier Occidental à mourir en combattant avec les unités kurdes en Syrie. Selon le Pentagone, la coalition a mené plusieurs raids jeudi dans la province de Hassaké, dont trois près de Tall Hamis. Les jihadistes ont enlevé cette semaine 220 chrétiens assyriens au sud-ouest de Qamichli, dans une autre partie de la province de Hassaké, selon l'OSDH.

Quelque 5.000 chrétiens assyriens ont ensuite fui ce secteur, se réfugiant à Qamichli et Hassaké, deux villes tenues par les forces kurdes et gouvernementales. Jean Tolo, un responsable assyrien à Qamichli, a affirmé que le rythme des arrivées des déplacés s'était ralenti vendredi, après un grand afflux en début de semaine.

"Nous offrons aux déplacés de la nourriture et tout ce dont ils ont besoin. Des médecins travaillent gratuitement pour faire face à tout cas urgent", a-t-il expliqué, précisant que 200 familles avaient trouvé refuge à Qamichli et 900 autres à Hassaké. Les Assyriens, une communauté parmi les plus anciennes converties au christianisme, sont environ 30.000 en Syrie, soit 2,5% des 1,2 million de chrétiens du pays, et ils vivent en majorité dans la province de Hassaké. ■

## Un pétrolier du Kurdistan irakien livre du brut à Israël

28 Février 2015  
www.i24news.tv

**L**e pétrolier United Kalavrta était bloqué depuis plusieurs mois au Texas, suite à une plainte déposée par Bagdad

Un pétrolier du Kurdistan irakien, bloqué au Texas depuis l'été dernier après une contestation judiciaire émise par Bagdad, est revenu en Méditerranée et a livré cette semaine une partie de sa cargaison en Israël, selon des sources rapportées par le Jerusalem Post.

Le pétrolier United Kalavrta, transportant près d'un million de barils de pétrole nord-irakien, d'une valeur de 100 millions de dollars, était ancré au large du port Galveston Bay (Texas), suite à un imbroglio juridique.



Une cour américaine avait ordonné la saisie du pétrole nord-irakien, jugeant illégale la vente du pétrole sans l'accord du gouvernement irakien central, suite à une plainte du gouvernement de Bagdad.

Le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan avait protesté, rétorquant que les ventes indépendantes étaient autorisées, conformément à la constitution irakienne.

Le navire avait finalement quitté le Texas

fin janvier, après que Bagdad et le gouvernement kurde ont trouvé un accord temporaire sur les ventes de pétrole.

Le pétrolier a ainsi été vu se dirigeant vers le port israélien d'Ashkelon.

Plusieurs pétroliers qui ont transporté du brut venant du Kurdistan irakien depuis le port de Ceyhan en Turquie en Méditerranée, ont déchargé une partie de leur cargaison dans plusieurs ports israéliens, selon différentes sources maritimes et industrielles..

Les Kurdes ont pourtant refusé, dans le passé, de vendre du pétrole à Israël, qui n'est pas reconnu par la grande majorité des pays arabes, et notamment l'Irak.

Une source du gouvernement kurde a affirmé au Jerusalem Post que l'intégralité du pétrole que le navire transportait avait été livré à ses clients.

Une grande partie du brut vendu avait été payé à l'avance l'année dernière, car les Kurdes avaient besoin de fonds après la réduction du budget de la région par le gouvernement central de Bagdad, a ajouté la source. ♦

# HDP and AKP government issue joint statement

**The HDP Imrali delegation and representatives of the AKP government have held a joint press conference on the process of resolution.**

February 28, 2015 — Istanbul - Anf  
<http://en.firatajans.com>

The HDP Imrali delegation and representatives of the AKP government have held a joint press conference on the process of resolution.

The HDP Imrali delegation, that a few days ago met KCK executives in Kandil, comprising deputies Pervin Buldan, İdris Baluken and Sirri Süreyya Önder today met Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan and Interior Minister Ekan Ala. Following the meeting a joint press conference was held.

A statement was read out by Sirri Süreyya Önder.

**'The problem concerns the transformation of the state'**

The statement was as follows:

"We are on the verge of an historic decision process. Since the beginning of the process the problem has concerned the transformation of the state. The existing dominant state mentality has always seen this question solely as a means of maintaining power, which has led to it being the victim of violence. Unless strong ties are established with peace and universal democracy we cannot expect rights, justice and equality from the state and society. The process will develop with the recognition of all the communities that have been ostracised throughout the history of the republic."

**'The process has reached a serious stage'**

"The great responsibility for this question put on our shoulders by history is one that does not just concern our own society, but affects the whole region and even the world. While the century-old equilibrium in the region is being overwhelmed and violence spirals, it is important that perceptions and approaches are developed on the basis of universal human values. There is a need for a dynamic approach given conditions in the region. In the light of this the occasionally faltering process of dialogue has now reached a formal, responsible and serious stage."

Önder explained Kurdish People's Leader Abdullah Öcalan's view on

the stage reached in the process thus:

**Öcalan calls on PKK to hold congress**

"While taking the 30-year period of conflict to a lasting peace our principal aim has been to reach a democratic resolution. I call on the PKK to hold an extraordinary congress in the spring months to take a strategic and historic decision to abandon the armed struggle based on a minimum consensus of principles. This invitation is a historic declaration of the intention to replace the armed struggle with democratic politics.

These are the headings which will constitute the backbone of both our real democracy and our great peace:

**1 - Democratic politics, its definition and content**

**2 - Democratic resolution and the recognition of the national and local dimensions of resolution**

**3 - Legal and democratic guarantees of free citizenship**

**4 - Headings regarding the relationship of democratic politics to state and society and the institutionalisation of this**

**5 - The socio-economic dimensions of the resolution process**

**6 - Treating the relationship between democracy and security in the process in a way that will protect public order and freedoms**

**7 - Legal solutions and guarantees for problems of women, culture and ecology**

**8 - Development of a pluralistic understanding of the concept of identity, its definition and recognition**

**9 - The recognition of a democratic republic, common homeland and people with democratic criteria, within a pluralist democratic system with legal and constitutional guarantees.**

**10 - A new constitution for the purpose of internalising all this democratic transformation."**

**Call for support**

Önder said the following at the conclusion of his speech: "There is no doubt that in order for these historic developments to become reality there must be no conflict. We, as the HDP, call on all democratic circles and those who are in favour of peace to support these democratic negotiations and the stage of resolution. We salute all those forces that are working hard for peace, which is now closer than ever."

**Akdoğan: we consider this to be an important statement**

Akdoğan said: "We know that in the process of resolution we will achieve an outcome through sincerity, bravery and decisiveness. We consider this statement highlighting democratic politics as a method and the move towards the giving up of arms and the complete ending of actions to be significant. With arms out of the equation democratic development will gain momentum. Ideas and policies with public support gain value in democracies. We are determined to reach an ultimate solution with the blessing and support of our people. We see a new constitution as an important opportunity to resolve many long-standing and chronic problems." □



# Kurdish Fighters Seize Key Islamic State Stronghold in Syria

[www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com)

February 27, 2015

Kurdish fighters say they have "liberated" a northeastern Syrian town that has been a key stronghold of Islamic State militants.

A spokesperson for the People's Protection Units, or YPG, confirmed to VOA that the Kurdish fighters had seized the city of Tal Hamis, in Hassakeh province.

"This victory is a huge blow for IS terrorists because they orchestrated their attacks against Qamishli and other Kurdish cities in Syria and Sinjar region in Iraq from this city," he told VOA's

Kurdish service. "In this operation a significant number of local Arab forces also helped them because people came to realize that there is no future under this terrorist organization."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 175 Islamic State militants were killed by Kurdish fighters and air strikes by the U.S. led coalition in recent days.

Meanwhile, VOA's Kurdish service reports that at least nine people were killed when Islamic State militants carried out a bombing of a church in Ghibsh village, near Tal Tamr. At least four people were abducted.

Earlier this week, Islamic State militants

attacked 11 Assyrian Christian villages in the Tal Tamr area, where they reportedly took 220 people prisoner. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights Director Rami Abdurrahman told VOA they have now been moved to the Abd al-Asiz mountains, where they are still in captivity.

The U.S. State Department this week called for the immediate release of the kidnapped Assyrian Christians.

"ISIL's latest targeting of a religious minority is only further testament to its brutal and inhumane treatment of all those who disagree with its divisive goals and toxic beliefs," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said, using an acronym for the group. "ISIL continues to exact its evil upon innocents of all faiths, and the majority of its victims have been Muslims."

The Islamic State group has targeted religious minorities with kidnappings and killings during its spread across northern Iraq and Syria.

# Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan calls on followers to lay down arms

'We view this statement as important to accelerate the work on disarmament,' Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdogan said.

By Ayla Jean Yackley / Reuters  
 ISTANBUL  
 February 28, 2015

Jailed Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan called on his followers to take a "historic" decision to lay down their arms, according to a statement on Saturday, a crucial step in Turkey's drive to end a 30-year insurgency by Kurdish rebels.

Turkey's president, Tayyip Erdogan, welcomed the call but cautioned the rebels had failed to deliver on previous pledges.

Sirri Sureyya Onder, a lawmaker from parliament's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), read a statement from Ocalan that urged the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to attend a congress on disarmament in the spring months.

"I invite the PKK to attend an extraordinary congress in the spring months in order to make the strategic and historic decision to abandon the armed struggle," Onder said, quoting Ocalan, with whom an HDP delegation met this week.

Onder spoke live on television alongside Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdogan, who said the move towards disarmament showed "an important phase in the resolution process has been reached," after the two sides met briefly in Istanbul.

"We view this statement as important to accelerate the work on disarmament ... and for democratic politics to come to the forefront," Akdogan said.

The statement also attributed to Ocalan 10 measures that Kurds want to ensure peace, including a new constitution which Erdogan is also seeking — to imbue his office with more executive powers and to replace a charter drawn up by technocrats after a 1980 military coup.

Erdogan has risked a nationalist backlash to pursue an end to the insurgency that has claimed more than 40,000 lives, mostly Kurdish, since 1984, launching jailhouse talks with Ocalan — once derided as a "baby killer" — in late 2012.

"Of course calls are good, but what is most important is implementation. How much will implementation will be reflec-



Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdogan (C), accompanied by Interior Minister Efkan Ala (3rd L) meets with pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) lawmakers Sirri Sureyya Onder (3rd R), Pervin Buldan (2nd R) and Idris Baluken (R) in Istanbul February 28, 2015. Jailed Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan called on his followers to take a "historic" decision to lay down their arms, according to a statement on Saturday, a crucial step in Turkey's drive to end a 30-year insurgency by Kurdish rebels.

Credit: Reuters/Turkish Prime Minister's Press Office/Handout via Reuters

ted in the field ahead of an election?" Erdogan said at a news conference.

"I hope (they) will stand behind these statements."

## ELECTION

Facing a parliamentary election in June, the government has said it expected Ocalan to declare an end to the PKK's armed struggle for greater autonomy and cultural rights for Turkey's estimated 15 million Kurds.

The PKK's units have joined other Kurds to battle Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Kurdish victories, especially in the Syrian town of Kobani, have raised worries in Ankara about an emboldened PKK at the bargaining table.

Less than two weeks ago, the PKK warned the government negotiations could break down unless it took concrete steps to further the peace process.

"With today's events a critical point has been reached in Turkey's democratization, the expansion of freedoms and for lasting peace," said HDP chairman

Selahattin Demirtas, whose deputies have shuttled from Ocalan's island prison near Istanbul to Qandil mountain in northern Iraq, where the PKK is based.

The disarmament congress would be held after consensus on the measures outlined in the statement is reached, he said. It was not clear who would attend the conference or whether PKK forces outside of Turkey would be expected to lay down arms.

Turkey, the United States and the European Union list the PKK as a terror organization. The militants declared a ceasefire in Turkey in 2013, but violence still sporadically erupts. □



Robert Einhorn

**WASHINGTON** When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel addresses a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, he can be expected to argue that any nuclear deal with Iran should eliminate its capability to produce nuclear weapons, not just aim to prevent Iran from producing them. But such an accord is neither achievable nor necessary to safeguard the security of the United States and its friends in the Middle East.

To Mr. Netanyahu, eliminating Iran's nuclear weapons capability means banning uranium enrichment, a dual-capable technology that can produce both fuel for civil nuclear reactors and weapons-grade uranium for nuclear bombs. Allowing even a limited enrichment program, in his view, would make Iran a "threshold" nuclear weapon state — able to break out of an agreement and produce nuclear weapons at a time of its choosing.

Banning enrichment and dismantling Iran's existing enrichment facilities would indeed be the best negotiated outcome. But such an agreement is not attainable.

Iran's leaders have convinced the Iranian people that a ban on enrichment would deprive them of an inalienable right to pursue civil nuclear power as they see fit and impede their scientific advancement. Iranians across the political spectrum would prefer to forgo an agreement and muddle through under existing sanctions rather than accept what they would regard as a national humiliation.

Moreover, in a fundamental sense, it is too late to eliminate an Iranian enrichment capability. Iran already has the knowledge of how to produce and operate centrifuges. Even if somehow Tehran could be coerced into dismantling its current enrichment program, it would retain the ability to reconstitute it at a future time.

Fortunately, even if an agreement cannot eliminate Iran's capability to enrich uranium to weapons grade, it can prevent Iran from exercising that capability. It can do so by deterring Iran's leaders from making the decision to break out of the agreement and produce nuclear weapons. To deter such a decision, a deal should meet three requirements.

First, it should have rigorous monitoring measures to convince Iran that

**A package of serious constraints can allow uranium enrichment without a quick path to developing the bomb.**

any attempt to violate and break out of the agreement at either declared or covert sites would be detected very quickly. This would require intrusive verification provisions that go beyond the measures con-

# How to stop an Iranian nuclear breakout

tained in the International Atomic Energy Agency's additional protocol, including frequent access to centrifuge production facilities, detailed reporting of nuclear-related procurement and robust inspection procedures.

Second, the accord should ensure that the time Iranians would need to produce one bomb's-worth of weapons-grade uranium would be long enough to enable the United States and others to intervene decisively to stop them. The Obama administration is seeking to increase this "breakout time" from the current two-to-three months to at least one year, which is more than enough time to exhaust diplomatic efforts and economic pressures before turning, if necessary, to military force.

Getting to one year would depend on a package of interrelated constraints, including on the number and type of operating centrifuges and the amount of enriched uranium Iran would be allowed to retain. There is nothing magic about any particular number of centrifuges. The lower the amount of enriched uranium, the higher can be the number of centrifuges without shortening breakout time, and vice versa.

With the Iranians reportedly willing to ship most of their enriched uranium stocks to Russia, the so-called P5+1 — the United States, France, Germany, Russia, China and Britain — may be closing in on a package that would achieve the desired one-year breakout time. Negotiators may have taken a step closer last weekend in Geneva by making headway on the agreement's duration, apparently discussing a duration of perhaps 15 years, with some restrictions on Iran gradually relaxed in the final years of the agreement.

Third, it is necessary to convince Iran's leaders not only that breakout would take a long time and would be detected promptly, but also that they would face a harsh international response that would prevent their breakout from succeeding. To supplement any agreement, the Obama administration should collaborate with its international partners and the Congress on contingency plans — including both economic and military options — to ensure that the threat of a decisive response to a breakout attempt is credible.

Members of Congress and other interested parties, both at home and abroad, will judge for themselves whether any agreement eventually reached provides a sufficient deterrent

against a future Iranian decision to pursue nuclear weapons. In forming these judgments, it is important to compare the eventual deal not with an ideal but unattainable agreement but with the alternatives to a negotiated solution.

One alternative is to try to ratchet up sanctions dramatically in the hope of pressuring Iran to make concessions it has been unwilling to make. But it may be very difficult to persuade states that have supported sanctions at considerable cost to themselves to adopt much tougher measures, especially if Iran is successful in portraying itself as not to blame for the negotiating impasse. And even if the United States could persuade others to adopt stronger sanctions, it is questionable whether they would produce the desired Iranian flexibility, given Iran's ability so far to withstand punishing sanctions and the repeated assertions by the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that Iran can make do economically without an agreement.

Another alternative is military force. A military attack could set back Iran's nuclear program. But such a setback would probably only be temporary, and the use of force could trigger an Iranian decision to go for nuclear weapons as soon as possible, a decision the American intelligence community believes has so far been deferred. Moreover, the use of force could end I.A.E.A. monitoring, the best source of information about Iran's nuclear program, and lead to the unraveling of international sanctions that would be needed to keep pressure on Iran in a post-attack environment.

Those like Mr. Netanyahu who have opposed any agreement except on terms that cannot be realized should not engage in wishful thinking about the likelihood of such alternative approaches succeeding. They should be clear-eyed in comparing these alternatives with the kind of agreement that can be realized. Of course, if Iran is not prepared to accept a reasonable deal, the United States would have little choice but to turn to nondiplomatic approaches. But before it does, Washington should make every effort to negotiate a sound agreement which, while not eliminating Iran's capability to produce nuclear weapons, can effectively deter Iran's leaders from exercising that capability.

**ROBERT EINHORN** is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He served on the U.S. delegation to the Iran nuclear negotiations from 2009 to 2013.