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### **TURKEY: A KURDISH LANGUAGE STATE TV CHANNEL IS LAUNCHED**

**J**anuary 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 saw the launching of the first Kurdish language channel by the public Turkish TV service, (TRT). This channel, TRT-6, broadcasts 24 hours a day programmes with the Turkish sub-titles that were originally obligatory for the few hours of Kurdish language broadcasts allowed on the Turkish channels. Under pressure from the European Union, the laws banning the TV and radio broadcasts in Kurdish were

permanently repealed in 2003. However this did not lead to the growth of a real policy of freeing and supporting audiovisual programmes in minority languages in Turkey. With the municipal elections impending, many see this as a political gesture by the AKP to win the votes of a substantial part of the Kurdish electorate so as to swing a number of town councils, at present held by the pro-Kurdish DTP party, over to the governing AKP party. In any case, the Prime Minister's recorded

message, broadcast at the opening of the channel, in which he pronounced a few words in Kurdish ("*TRT 6 bi xêr be*" — wishing good luck to the channel) shows the unambiguous involvement of the authorities in this politico-media scoop. This was immediately attacked by the nationalist parties and by the DTP — the former seeing it as an attack on the Republic's linguistic unity, the latter as a mere electoral manoeuvre without any real intention of

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making headway on the Kurdish question. Thus the DTP members of parliament and councillors point to the ban that is still in force on the use of Kurdish in any administrative context, as well as the ban on the use of the letters Q, X and W. Because of its status of a of an official State Channel, TRT is suspected of serving as the government's "spokesperson", in the way that the Denmark based RojTV channel, widely viewed in Turkish Kurdistan, is already accused of speaking for the PKK.

The channel's Director, Sinan Ilhan, rebuts this accusation, as do other intellectuals and performing artists taking part in this enterprise, who consider it a stage towards the recognition of a more or less official status for the Kurdish language as well as opening the possibility of later

opening private Kurdish channels. Thus the Kurdish television has been welcomed by Kurdish intellectuals like Umit Firat and Altan Tan, who have stated that Turkey is, in this way, putting an end to its denial of the Kurdish people's existence.

After broadcasting Recep Tayyip Erdogan's message, one by the Turkish President Abdullah Gul also expressed best wishes to TRT6. Three Minister attended the inauguration in person: junior Ministers Mehmet Simsek and Mehmet Aydin and the Minister of Culture Ertigrul Gunay and a number of AKP members of Parliament were present in the studios. There was no DTP representative present.

Broadly speaking, the first programmes were considered of good quality, TRT visibly provided the necessary means.

There were cultural broadcasts of music and literature or dealing with social questions, as well as documentaries. Some performers who are very popular with the Kurds of Turkey, Rojin and Nilufer Akbal organised live variety shows with guests on the set, whether singers or not, and questions from the audience. Although hitherto Kurdish children's programmes were banned, TRT6 is now broadcasting cartoons in this language, which along with Turkish and international films, dubbed into Kurdish, thus giving it the status of a "family channel". For the moment the language chosen is the Kurmanji dialect, but Sinan Ilhan has announced his intention later to broaden out into the Zazaki and Sorani dialects. Apart from RojTV, most of the Iraqi and Iranian Kurdish channels are at the moment broadcasting in Sorani.

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## IRAQ: TENSION BETWEEN IRBIL AND BAGHDAD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

**T**ensions between the Kurdish region and the central government in Baghdad have not eased as the date for local elections draws closer. These are due in 14 Iraqi districts, i.e. excluding Kirkuk and the Kurdish Region. Baghdad is accusing the Kurds of having secessionist aims while Irbil regards unfavourably the attempts of Prime Minister l-Maliki at concentrating power in his own hands. This the Kurds interpret as a return to the past, towards the former authoritarian and nationalist regimes from which Iraq has already suffered. In a very critical open letter addressed to Nuri al-Maliki, President Barzani observes: "*unfortunately there are, in Arab circles, some short-sighted*

*chauvinists and extremists*". Without specifically naming them, Massud Barzani attributes to them the deterioration of relations between Arabs and Kurds and the awakening of "*harmful hostilities by reopening wounds of the past*".

One of the most criticised actions is the creation in the provinces of tribal militia backed by the central government that are not answerable to the local authorities. This the supporters of federalism in Iraq see as a sign of a takeover of decentralised regional policies and an attempt to set up personal power. The Prime Minister's supporters, however, deny any drift towards dictatorship, attributing these accusations to electoral manoeuvres and stressing Nuri

al-Maliki's determination to set up a State of Law that would put an end to sectarian conflict.

The Kurds are not the only ones to criticise the Prime Minister's new and more authoritarian policy. Other Iraqi voices are being heard taking up the accusations of a dictatorial drift, even within his own parliamentary block, the United Iraqi Alliance, as well, naturally, amongst the Sunni Arabs, generally disinclined to admit the new political supremacy of their Shiite compatriots. "*For the last few months Maliki has been acting in a unilateral fashion on many decisive issues*", accuses Abdul Karim al-Sanary, leader of the Sunni Arab Iraqi Concord Front. A rumour has even gone round of an attempt to oust al-Maliki from his

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position as Prime Minister before the end of his term in office (2010 theoretically) by a challenge in parliament. This rumour, which was finally squashed by a denial from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI — another Shiite party), had earlier been suggested as a possible Parliamentary riposte to the government by a Kurdish M.P. Mahmud Othman in an interview given on the Ridaw web site: *“The Kurds have allies: Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) is even more dissatisfied by Maliki than us and the Iraqi Islamic Party also disagrees with him. If these factions unite to discuss certain subjects they could achieve something”*. However, in Mahmud Othman’s opinion this is not the moment for such an extreme solution: *“but this depends on the government’s behaviour. If the differences are resolved the discontent will not reach such a point. Otherwise it could be possible”*.

The source of the conflict between Nuri al-Maliki and the Kurdish government, according to this M.P. lies in the mistakes and inefficiency of the Iraqi and Kurdish administrations as well as of persisting Arab nationalist ideology: *“The conflicts are of political, legal and administrative character. The legal and administrative conflicts come from the fact that the federal system is new to Iraq. Neither the Iraqi government nor ourselves have had any previous experience of this system. So much so that we both make mistakes. As far as the political and ideological aspects are concerned, there are probably two further problems to be considered: the first is that the Iraqi government does not believe in federalism. Have you ever heard Nuri al-Maliki say “federal Iraq”? Only the Kurds use the term. Maliki says that the constitution needs amending, the authority of the central government consolidated and that of the*

*Kurdistan Region reduced and the Peshmergas must withdraw to the blue line (the area that was under Kurdish control before 19 March 2003). He says that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is not empowered to sign oil contracts off its own bat. All these points show a rejection of federalism. Constitutionally, the KRG does have such prerogatives. The second problem is that there is an Arab chauvinist ideology that believes that the Constitution was drawn up when the Iraqi government was weak and the country unstable and that that is how Kurdistan acquired such benefits. It considers that little by little the balance must be restored by weakening the Regions authorities and consolidating the central government”*.

In 14 January the Los Angeles Times published an interview with President Barzani both in summary as well as the full recording. This aroused sharp reactions from many Arab papers and political groups that once again accused the Kurdish President of threatening independence if he did not get what he wanted. In this interview, Massud Barzani recounted the past relations the Kurds had had with Nuri al-Maliki when he was in exile and the support the Shiite leader had received from the Kurds such as in 2007, when the Kurdish government had opposed an attempt to overthrow the Prime Minister. *“It was in April 2007, when we felt that there were a serious attempts to force him out of office. We felt this and also what was behind it all, which was not at all well intentioned. There were some ill-intentioned people with their own agenda that boded no good for Iraq in general or the Kurds in particular. Around the end of April, on the 26 and 27, a meeting took place of several Iraqi groups, under the auspices of foreign secret services*

*from several of neighbouring countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Emirates. I think there were six of them in all. They organised this meeting with several Iraqi groups whose principal idea was to undermine the situation. We were alarmed at this, which is why we fully supported al-Maliki’s stand — we felt that all this was directed against Iraq’s interests. It was a very direct and baleful intervention in Iraq’s internal affairs through the secret services of those countries. We were alarmed at this and we openly supported the Prime Minister because we felt that all this was aimed against the Iraqi people, against the Kurdish people and against Iraq. This led us to a coalition of four parties, later extended to five (a consultative committee including Barzani, the members of the Iraqi Presidential Council and Prime Minister al-Maliki)”*.

As well as Kirkuk, disagreements continue covering the management of the hydrocarbon resources that Baghdad would like to control, particularly regarding the signing of contracts with foreign companies. In addition there is the marginalisation, in the view of the Kurds, of their units within the Iraqi Army, accompanied by an attempt by the head of the government to use the armed forces like a private militia. *“In normal circumstances, it is quite natural to transfer and move different officers and units to different parts of the country. Evidently, when one considers the situation in Iraq it is easy to see that the situation is not normal. For the moment the situation is quite abnormal. In quite recent periods we have observed an attitude of deliberately marginalising Kurdish participation in the Army. So we seem to be seeing a unilateral attempt to create an Army that is answerable*

to a single individual, which is even more alarming. First and foremost, the Army should not be involved in politics. Moreover the Army should not be used to settle internal conflicts between this group and the next. I think that, at present, there are 16 divisions in the Iraqi Arm. Normally the generals of the divisions should be appointed and approved by Parliament. However, I defy anyone to find a single divisional general whose appointment was made or approved by Parliament. They were all approved by personal decisions — decrees — and this is surely something intolerable. This is not the Army ... that we hoped to create".

This Kurdish suspicion is strengthened by the deployment of Iraqi troops in Kurdish populated regions that the Irbil government claims, particularly Kirkuk and Khanaqin. The Kurdish Peshmergas, initially deployed in these areas to ensure security at the request of the US and Iraq, report "abnormal" troop movements since the summer. Thus the Iraqi Army's 12<sup>th</sup> Division was given the duty of forming a military belt round Kirkuk which, by being thus stationed close to the Kurdistan Region borders had the result of restricting traffic between Kirkuk and the two major towns of Irbil and Suleimaniah whereas previously, when Kirkuk-Irbil-Suleimaniah controls were carried out by Peshmergas, traffic flowed freely between the three regions. Thus the Kurdish newspaper Aso published the remarks of an Iraqi officer, speaking off the record, "the Iraqi Defence is trying to set up rigorous check points on the roads entering and leaving Kirkuk to control the city's borders". The same officer indicated that, in future, the Iraqi Army hoped to be deployed in the Eastern districts of Kirkuk like Laylan, Qadir-karam, Takyay-Jabari, Shwan and Bani-Maqam as well

as the North side, at Dubiz and Pire.

"The movements of these divisions are not normal, they are part of an pre-planned agenda", accused Mustafa Shawrash, commander of the PUK Peshmergas. "This is why the Kurdish leaders watch it with suspicion". Mustafa Shawrash stated that the Peshmergas had sent several messages to the Iraqi troops to urge them to leave. A commission had then been formed of representatives of the Kurdish Region, the American forces and the 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army, but it had not yet been able to meet. For the moment the 12 Division is not advancing but it is not retreating either and the Peshmergas are standing firm. This division is composed of 70% Arabs, 20% Kurds and 10% Turcomen, making a total of 9,000 men. According to Sharwash, the general commanding it, an Arab from Hilla, is a former leading member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, who had previously fought the Kurds at the head of the same division. He was imprisoned for four months by the Americans before resuming his duties. On the other hand, the Kurdish officers appointed to this division had been transferred from Kirkuk to other Iraqi towns like Tikrit and replaced by Arabs or Turcomen.

Thus Kirkuk remains the major issue that crystallises all the country's ethnic tensions. Thus US Vice President Joe Biden's visit to this city was subjected to considerable attention by Iraqi observers. However, the American leader's speech got no further than vague generalities with his appeals for "cooperation" between the country's religious and ethnic groups after meeting several local leaders, talking about "compromise" and

"concessions needed" for Iraq to settle its internal conflicts. When he was still in opposition, however, Senator Joe Biden had been the author of a plan, approved by the US Senate in September 2007, to divide Iraq into three major semi-autonomous regions: Kurdish, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab. This plan had been rejected by the White House, however, and Turkey, for its part, continues to issue warnings against too hasty decisions regarding the status of Kirkuk, evoking the inter-ethnic violence to which this would lead.

Be that as it may, even if the elections in that town have been postponed, several murders of political activists and leaders have taken place, mainly in Kirkuk as well as in Khanaqin, which fully involved in its election campaign. On 4 January, in Kirkuk Anwar Moheddin Rassul, a member of the Communist Party of Kurdistan, was killed by armed "persons unknown" who fired at him. The murder took place near his home and his body showed signs of blows. This is not the first assassination that has hit this party, since in 18 December last, Nabla Hussein al-Shaly, a member of the same Party's Women's League, had also been assassinated in her home by "persons unknown". Two days later, another Kurdish politician, Subhi Hassan, a member of the Jalal Talabani's PUK, was shot down in his car with his bodyguard, after being chased by another vehicle. On 8 January, it was the turn of Abdelrazzak Mohsen Ulwi, 14 years of age, to be shot down as he was strolling through the al-Saadi Market. This victim was the younger brother of Nossair Ulai, who runs the al-Saadiya section of the Kurdistan. Two brothers had already received several death threats.

## ERGENEKON: FRESH ARRESTS AND A FIFTH SUSPICIOUS DEATH

**O**n 7 January, a fresh wave of arrests connected with the Ergenekon case shook Turkey. The confessions obtained again reveal several planned assassinations aimed at the Alevi and Armenian communities, the Prime Minister and members of the Supreme Court of Appeals, all with the aim of plunging the country into a state of chaos and insecurity favourable for an Army *coup d'état*.

Launched in six Turkish towns at once, this dragnet was able to arrest over thirty people. These included seven retired generals, a former colonel, Levent Göktaş; Ibrahim Sahin, former Chief of Police for special operations; a writer, Yalçın Küçük, the former President of YÖK; Kemal Gürüz and some journalists. Two days later, on 9 January, a drawing found in Ibrahim Sahin's house enabled the investigators to discover a secret arsenal in an old warehouse with firearms, ammunition, and rocket launchers. In a forest near Ankara, they also found an arms cache, still thanks to a map found in a suspect's home, they found an arms cache containing: 30 hand grenades, three flame-throwers, a quantity of explosives and ammunition of different kinds. Arms were also seized in lieutenant colonel Mustafa Dönmez's home in Istanbul: some Kalashnikov's, bullets, some shotguns, binoculars, bayonets, and 22 hand grenades. Mustafa Dönmez, however, succeeded in escaping and is now being sought as a suspect.

The Public Prosecutors report that phone tapping operations by the police found evidence that those

charged planned to assassinate Ali Balkiz and Kazim Genç, two Alevi leaders, and the President of the Armenian community of Sivas, Minas Durmaz Güler. In Sivas, two hand grenades were found at the home of the principal suspect of the plot to assassinate Minas Durmaz Güler, a certain Oguz Bulut, President of the Sivas Idealists Club, an association closely linked to the ultra-nationalist MHP, although the latter is now trying to distance itself from the Club.

Other sources close to the investigators describe the former Mayor of Istanbul, Bedrettin Dalan, at present on the run in the USA, as the head of the Ergenekon network's financial section. As for Generals Kemal Yavuz and Tuncer Kiliç, they are said to have provided the network's military training. Another Brigadier General, Levent Ersöz, was arrested on 15 January as a suspect while he was returning Turkey illegally. He was coming from Russia to undergo treatment for prostate trouble. However, on 18 January he was sent to hospital for heart trouble. According to his daughter, Fulya Ersöz, he is said to be undergoing intensive care and being kept unconscious by the medical team. Levent Ersöz, who retired in 2003, had been appointed to Sirnak Province at a time when the gendarmerie was conducting such a reign of terror that the region was nicknamed "*The Temple of Fear*" or "*The Republic of Sirnak*" to stress the absolute independence of the Armed Forces and the paramilitaries in this part of Turkish Kurdistan. Levent Ersöz is also suspected of being behind a large number of disappearances and assassinations by "*persons unknown*".

On 19 January, a former commander of the Diyarbakir JITEM (the gendarmerie's secret service — that has no official or legal existence) was found dead in his Ankara home. The autopsy will have to determine whether it is a case of suicide. In any case, this is the fifth "*mysterious*" death since the start of the case. Abdelkrim Kirca is the fifth JITEM officer to die in suspicious circumstances. General Ismet Yediyildiz, also suspected of belonging to this organisation died in a road accident. Major Cem Ersever was found dead in his house, apparently assassinated, as were the Gendarmerie Majors Ismail Selen and Hulusi Sayin.

Colonel Abdülkerim Kirca was accused of having ordered many "*extra-judicial executions*" by an informer, an ex-PKK man who had been turned round, Abdülkadir Aygan. He had already been accused, together with another officer, Mahmut Yıldırım, of kidnapping and murdering eight men. However, following disagreements over jurisdiction, his case had been transferred from the Diyarbakir 7th Corps Army Court to the judicial disputes Court in Ankara. Accused of founding an illegal armed organisation, of torture and of three murders, Abdülkerim Kirca faced a life sentence. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, the President of the Turkish Republic of the time, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, had decorated him with the State Honour medal.

Nevertheless, the colonel was recently the subject of a press campaign publishing the accusations of the families of people who had "*disappeared*".

He was accused of being behind hundreds of “unresolved murders” in the 1990s. Indeed, the number of these “extra-legal executions” had increased in a spectacular manner during the period when he was on duty in the region as commander of the JITEM. Thus, after his suicide, the General Staff denounced the press for relaying then testimony of “so-called informers”. General Ilker Basbug, Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces General Staff attended his funerals accompanied by a great number of officers from all four of the armed forces. The Minister of the Interior, Besir Atalay, was there at the side of the deceased wife and his daughters, who published the General Staff’s written accusations of the press: *“We see here a real example that shows how people who have served the nation loyally give up their lives because of a negative atmosphere spread by some circles of Evil. This irresponsibility deeply shakes our noble nation, as well as the Kirca family. For the moment there is nothing we can do except to hope that common sense will prevail. Our only consolation is the solidarity of which his brothers at arms have shown. They are heroes and their behaviour full of dignity. If we have some hope for the future*

*it will be because of this worthy behaviour”.*

However, an examination of Abdulkadir Kirca’s military record in the light of recent evidence published in the press reveal some areas much less “worthy”, involving the JITEM’s scheming and abuse of power. Major Kirca took on his duties after his predecessor, Cem Ersever had left the Army, in 1993, possible because of the death of another gendarmerie commander, Esref Bitlis, killed in an unexplained air crash. Cem Ersever had recognised that he had been responsible for JITEM’s operations in the “South East”, that is in the Kurdish region. He was assassinated on 4 November of the same year, together with his wife and his assistant. All the documentation in his possession regarding JITEM disappeared.

Abdulkadir Aygan, a former PKK member who had been turned round and become an informer, stated that he had seen Kirca kill three people with his own hands at Silopi: Necati Aydin, Mehmet Aydin and Ramazan Keskin, all three members of the Diyarbakir branch of a medical workers union. They are said to have

been shot down on the Silopi-Diyarbakir road.

Kirca’s name also turns up in the famous Susurluk scandal. Kutlu Savas, the author of a report commissioned by the Prime Minister, refers to Kirca as the “planner and executor” of the bulk of the abuses of power committed by the shadowy networks operating inside the Army. The Susurluk scandal burst when a police chief and a wanted criminal and mafia leader were killed, in the same car together, in a road accident in 1996. It was one of the scandals that confirmed the existence of a “deep State” working underground. Another passenger, a Member of Parliament, was linked to the “Village Guardians” militia, armed by the State as auxiliaries against the PKK. According to Kutlu Savas, the JITEM was controlled by the Army security of East and South East Anatolia: *“Even if the general in command of the Gendarmerie refuses to admit it, the JITEM’s existence cannot be denied. It is possible that the JITEM has since been dismantled and set aside up to a point, by dispersing its personnel and archives to different places. Many officers, however, who have worked for JITEM are still alive”.*

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## IRAN:

### NO WEAKENING OF THE REPRESSION OF KURDS

**T**he hanging and sentencing to death of minors is continuing in Iran. Hamid Zarei was also executed at Sanandaj for a crime he had committed when he was 17 years old.

As for Zeinab Jalalian, 27 years, living at Maku, in Iranian Kurdistan, she was sentenced to death for alleged membership of a political party. According to

Zeinab’s family, the Iranian Security Services arrested her at Kermanshah and transferred her to the Intelligence section of the Guardians of the Revolution’s Army (Pasdarans) in the same town, eight months ago. Kept in isolation, no information about her was given nor any visits allowed. In her trial, which only lasted a few minutes, the Revolutionary Court accused her of being an “enemy of God” (*muharib* — a crime punishable

by death) and of membership of a Kurdish political party (often PJAK in these cases). The defendant, who has always denied the charges, was consequently sentenced to death. In the last few years, 12 other Kurdish activists, accused (rightly or wrongly) of membership of banned parties have been sentenced to death and are awaiting execution.

Moreover, another Kurdish



activist, this time at Mahabad, has died in detention, in suspicious circumstances, a few days after his arrest by the authorities. Hashim Ramazani, originally from a village in the Bokan region but living in Mahabad, was arrested for "security reasons" and transferred to an office of the Urmia secret services (Itlaat). Four days later his family was summoned by this office to collect his body. The authorities stated that Hashim had committed suicide but refused to let the body be sent to Teheran for an autopsy. They also forced the family to sign a promise to keep the whole matter secret. Even his burial took place at night with plain-clothes police in attendance.

Another Kurdish activist, Jebraïl Khosravi, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by the Sanandaj court for membership of an illegal political party, unspecified. As for Kamal Sharifi, a political activist and journalist at Saqiz, he was sentenced to 30 years for membership of a dissident Kurdish organisation. He also ran an Internet site that covered Kurdish news in Iran.

On 18 January, two students, Rahim Mohammadi and Mohammad Sadeghi as well as another youth of 18 were arrested at Ravansar (Kermanshah Province) and their families and friends have had no news since. No one knows what they are accused of. At Mahabad another Kurdish student, Amir Masbah Ghazi was arrested by the security forces at the end of 2008 and is still imprisoned at the Urmia secret service detention centre. A student at the private university of Mahabad, he is known for his activity as a social and

intellectual activist. He is also a member of the Mahabad Literature Association, the activities of which are only concerned with Kurdish culture and literature. Amir Masbah Ghazi had already been arrested and harassed by the Iranian authorities three years ago. Finally, the Third Court of that town's Revolutionary Court sentenced a Hamadan student to 6 months jail. He was accused of having insulted the regime in power and of having founded several illegal associations.

The abuses by the authorities can sometimes cover a whole village. Thus the inhabitants of the Azeri-Kurdish village of Khorkhora, in the Salmas district, have collectively filed a complaint against the Guardians of the Revolution's Army (Pasdarans) for tortures and acts of violence.

On 17 January, at eight o'clock in the morning, some Pasdaran officers carried out an attack on the home of Sayyid Taher Mohammadi, 38 years of age, and arrested him after severely beating him up. He was taken to an unknown destination and there has been no news of him since. The week before, 6 other residents of that village, aged between 24 and 47 had been arrested in the same way. Still detained by the Pasdaran, they are not allowed any visitors.

According to the inhabitants of Khorkhora, this is not the first time that they have been subjected to attacks by the Pasdarans. In June 2008, the Guardians of the Revolution had carried out an identical raid and arrested the two sons of a municipal councillor. Vali Hamidi reported that he had been beaten and tortured before being able to escape and hide in

the village. As a reprisal, the Pasdaran took it out on other households whose members they threatened and beat. Finally they took away Vali Hamdi's father together with his other son, Amir. Vali Hamdi still lives secretly in the village. Despite the complaint filed by the villages, the authorities have refused to act, denying that the Pasdarans were behind these actions.

Finally the fortnightly Sanandaj paper, Rojhelat, which is published in Kurdish and Persian, had its banning order (passed in November 2008) confirmed on appeal. Directed by Mohammad Ali Tofighi, the paper preached reforming ideas and for a peaceful approach to the country's Kurdish question. According to its director, *"The Iranian officials continue to silence the forces of the press, instead of giving priority to dialogue and negotiation. This political approach cannot lead to anything other than the spread of violence"*.

Another Kurdish journalist, Mohammad Sadegh Kabodvand, who is at present serving a 10-year sentence in prison, has been awarded the Hellman/Hammett prize by Human Rights Watch. This prize is intended for writers imprisoned for their opinions, their opposition to established regimes or for expressing themselves on forbidden subjects. A special "emergency" prize is also awarded to authors who have had to flee for their safety and need rapid medical treatment because of the tortures or violence to which they have been subjected while in prison. This is Mohammad Sadegh Kabodvand's case, as his state of health requires urgent medical treatment as Sarah Leah Wilson (responsible for the Middle East and North Africa Department of

HRW) points out: “His experience bears painful witness to the difficult situation that are being faced today by journalists, dissidents or peaceful opponents of all kinds”.

Mr. Kabodvand is an eminent defender of Human Rights in Iran, as well as being a journalist. In 2005, he founded a movement to defend the rights of Kurds in his country, the Human Rights Organisation in Kurdistan (HROK). This group includes 200 local reporters throughout the Kurdistan region that conduct enquiries collecting testimony daily on events that are taking place there. These articles and news were published in the review Payam-e Mardom (The People’s Message — at present banned) of which Mr. Kabodvand was the Director and editor.

Through his journalistic and

social activities Mohammad Sadegh Kabodvand hoped to encourage a network that, in civil society, would help Kurdish and activist youth. He is the author of three books: Nimeh-ye Digar (The other half), a treatise on women’s rights; Barzakh-e Democracy, or The struggle for Democracy; and Jonbesh-e Ejtimaai, the Social Movements.

The Iranian secret services arrested Mr. Kabodvand on 1 July 2007 and searched his house. He was taken to Evin Prison N° 209, controlled by the secret service and intended for political prisoners. Without any charges being officially made against him, this journalist remained six months in solitary confinement. In May 2008 he was sentenced by the Revolutionary Court to 10 years imprisonment for “intrigues against national security by

founding the Human Rights Organisation of Kurdistan and for propaganda against the regime by spreading information, for opposing Islamic laws, particularly against stonings and public executions and by expressing himself on behalf of political prisoners”. In October 2008, the 54<sup>th</sup> Chamber of the Teheran Court of Appeal confirmed the sentence.

On 17 December last, according to his lawyers, Mr. Kabodvand suffered a heart attack. He is at present suffering from high blood pressure, kidney infection and prostate problems. However the authorities refuse to let him leave the prison medical centre to be seen by specialists. Human Rights Watch has thus appealed to the Iranian authorities to allow the detainee to undergo suitable medical treatment and to end his solitary confinement.

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### SYRIA:

## INTELLECTUALS ARE ARRESTED AND CONSCRIPTED KURDS DIE IN SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES ...

**S**everal arrests and acts of intimidation against Kurds have taken place in Syria, principally aimed at intellectuals or political activists. Thus on 6 January, Mustafa Juma, President of the Azadi Party, was arrested and tried by the Syrian secret services in Aleppo. According to his party, he was transferred to Damascus, where he is still detained by the Army Intelligence. Mustafa Juma is 62 years of age, born at Koban, and is the father of 12 children. The “Palestine” section of the secret service, which is detaining him, as an especially sinister reputation in Syria, and the conditions of detention and torturing of prisoners there are considered the most severe.

Furthermore, another Kurdish party, Yekiti (Unity) has denounced a number of suspicious “suicides” of young Kurds doing their national Service. Thus, on 10 January last, Berkhwedan Xalid Hemmo, from the town of Koban, died while doing his Army service at Hassake. On 13 January 2009, the family of Mohammad Bakkar Sheikh Daada was informed by the authorities that their son, who was also doing his national Service in the Army, had committed suicide. This is strongly contested by the young man’s relatives, who point out his strong personality and stress that, six months before being called up, he had been arrested for activities on behalf of the Kurdish cause. On 27 December

2008, Ibrahim Rouf’au Charwish, of Afrin, died in Damascus during his national Service. Here too, the family was informed of their son’s “suicide”. On 21 December 2008, Siwar Tammo, from the town of Durbassia, died “in the same circumstances”, in Aleppo. Yekiti states that other cases exist and that young Kurds who are due to do their military services are beginning to worry. Thus the party calls on the country and the European Union and the USA to investigate, as well as NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to continue to defend human rights in Syria.

Alongside these “suicides”, real or alleged, arbitrary arrests are

continuing. On 18 January, Imran as-Said was once again arrested for his participation in the Movement for a Kurdish Future in Syria, and then released. He had suffered the same misadventure last August and had just been released on 24 December. On 18 January he was sentenced to eighteen months jail for activity in "a secret organisation". On 3 January, Shado Rachid Ali, born in 1973 at Afrin was arrested by the

secret services at Qamishio and has not yet been brought to trial. On 17 January Fawaz Kano, born in 1966, who works for an international NGO (FAW) was arrested by the secret police together with Zaki Ismael Khalil, born in 1977, who works in the Hassake hospital laboratory. They were "illegally" teaching the Kurdish language in Syria

In general, Yekiti thinks that Israel's recent attacks on Gaza

will contribute to worsening the persecution of Kurds in Syria. In fact, since 1967, the Arab nationalists — whether of the Baath Party or other movements — have always branded Kurdish activists, (except for the PKK who, for a long time, enjoyed the support of Damascus) in Syria as in Iraq as "allies of Israel" aiming to divide the "Arab nation" on behalf of "Zionists and of the USA".

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### IRBIL:

#### MOVES TOWARDS TRIPARTITE COOPERATION AGAINST THE PKK

**O**n 11 January, the President of the Regional Government of Kurdistan, Massud Barzani, received the Turkish Assistant Foreign Minister, Murat Özcelik. The two men met in Irbil and discussed the presence of PKK forces in the Qandil Mountains. While the Kurdish government remained fairly vague about the tenor of the discussions, Hoshyar Zebari, the Iraqi Foreign Minister finally announced the setting up of a "tripartite" command centre in Irbil, covering the US, Turkish and Iraqi forces. While visiting Ankara, Hoshyar Zebari declared, during a Press Conference with

the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan, following this meeting: "We have agreed with the Minister (Ali Babacan) to set up a joint command centre at Irbil". The Iraqi Minister also indicated that the USA would be included in this. The decision to create this tripartite force is the result of a trilateral commission formed last November in Baghdad, assembling Iraqi, Turkish and American leaders, so as to fight the PKK. Also present at this meeting were two representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government, including the Minister of the Interior, Karim Sindjari. According to the Turks,

the centre will open very soon and will provide intelligence on military operations planned by the PKK. Hoshyar Zebari reported "a new climate of cooperation and understanding" between Turkey, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. Ali Babacan, for his part, noted a "very positive change in Irbil's attitude on the question. The choice of Irbil for this command centre, as well as the journey of Murat Ozcelik to the Kurdish regional capital are signs showing a change in Turkish policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan as well as US insistence on stabilising relations on the Northern borders of Iraq.

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Le drapeau kurde est officiellement autonome depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003. Le drapeau et l'armée, ici sur la route de l'aéroport d'Erbil, capitale régionale, sont les premiers symboles d'une indépendance en devenir.

# Vers un Etat kurde au Moyen-Orient ?

## PREMIÈRE PARTIE : IRAK ET SYRIE

Les Kurdes sont trente millions à vivre sur un territoire à cheval sur l'Irak, la Syrie, la Turquie et l'Iran. Leur rêve politique renaît, de former un jour un pays uni et indépendant. Nos reporters ont exploré ce «grand Kurdistan» et dévoilent quelles seraient, s'il venait à exister un jour, ses ressources, ses forces et ses faiblesses.

TEXTE DE OLIVIER PIOT - PHOTOS DE JULIEN GOLDSTEIN

LE MOIS PROCHAIN : TURQUIE ET IRAN



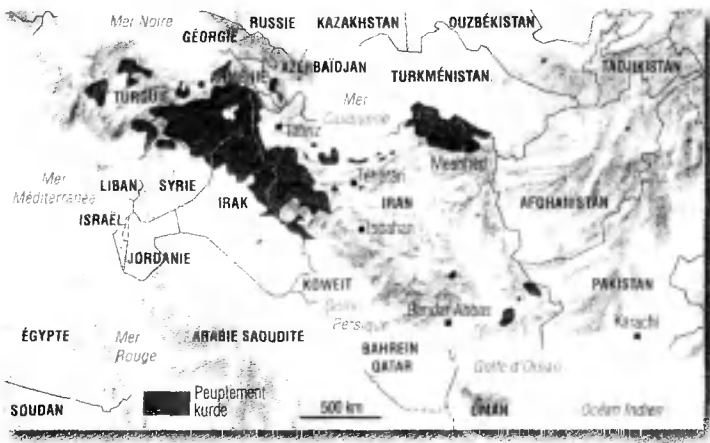
Julien Goldstein, photographe, et Olivier Piot, rédacteur, collaborent régulièrement à GEO. Depuis deux ans, ils travaillent notamment sur les relations entre la Turquie et ses voisins.

### Une nation, quatre pays

**GÉOGRAPHIE** La superficie du grand Kurdistan (carte) est estimée à 500 000 km<sup>2</sup>. La région est traversée par les massifs du Taurus et du Zagros, où prennent naissance le Tigre et l'Euphrate, les deux fleuves qui l'irriguent.  
**DRAPEAU** Il fut dévoilé lors de la conférence de Paris, en 1920, qui prévoyait la création d'un Etat kurde. Interdit en Turquie, il est le drapeau officiel du Kurdistan irakien.  
**POPULATION** Pas de recensement officiel. Les sources convergent vers le chiffre de 30 millions sur le territoire dit du grand Kurdistan.  
**LANGUES** Issu de la branche iranienne des langues indo-européennes, le kurde utilise des alphabets différents (latin, cyrillique, arabe, persan) et connaît plusieurs variantes :

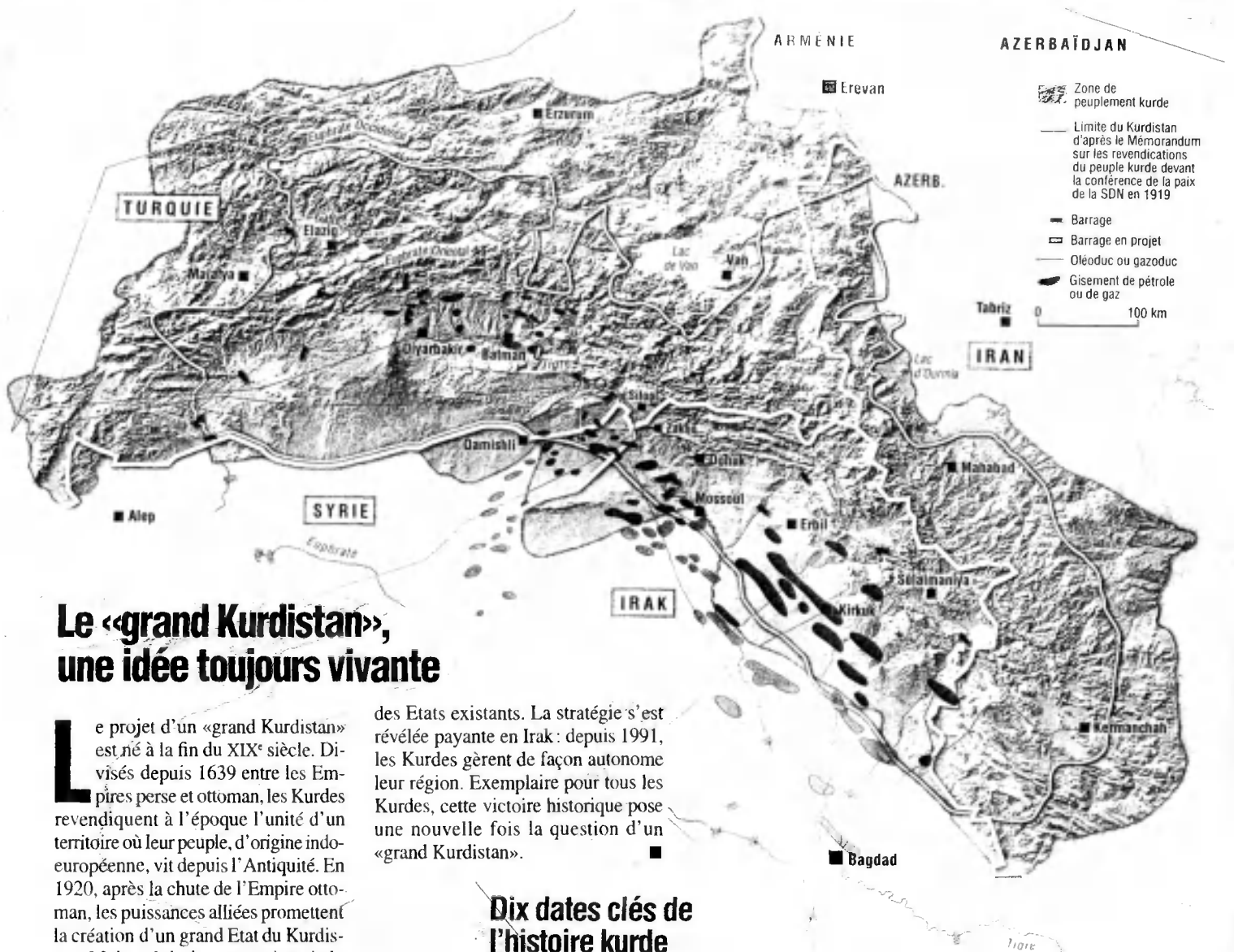
le sorani (Irak, Iran), le kurmandji (Turquie, Syrie, Irak, Caucase) ou le zaza (Turquie).  
**DIASPORA** Environ 3 millions de personnes dans le monde, surtout en Europe (600 000 en Allemagne et 130 000 en France), dans le Caucase et en Asie centrale.

Près de 85 % de cette diaspora est originaire de Turquie.  
**RELIGION** Les Kurdes, descendants des Mèdes, ont été islamisés à partir du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Sunnites à 80 %, ils comptent aussi des chiites, des Alévites et des Yézidites. Il existe des minorités chrétienne et juive.



Il existe d'autres zones de peuplement kurde : dans le nord-est iranien, dans le Caucase, au Proche-Orient et en Turquie occidentale. Istanbul est la première ville kurde au monde.

Cartes : Léonie Schlessler. Sources : Institut kurde de Paris, inkurd.com, université de Laval (Québec)



## Le «grand Kurdistan», une idée toujours vivante

Le projet d'un «grand Kurdistan» est né à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Divisés depuis 1639 entre les Empires perse et ottoman, les Kurdes revendiquent à l'époque l'unité d'un territoire où leur peuple, d'origine indo-européenne, vit depuis l'Antiquité. En 1920, après la chute de l'Empire ottoman, les puissances alliées promettent la création d'un grand Etat du Kurdistan. Mais celui-ci ne verra jamais le jour. En 1923, le peuple kurde est placé sous l'autorité de quatre pays: la Turquie, l'Iran, la Syrie et l'Irak.

Quatre-vingt-cinq ans plus tard, le Kurdistan (littéralement «pays des Kurdes») reste un territoire mythique, sans frontières reconnues, et les Kurdes une nation sans Etat. Niés dans leur identité, les quelque trente millions de Kurdes du Moyen-Orient n'ont pourtant cessé de lutter pour faire reconnaître leurs droits culturels et politiques, face à des Etats centralisateurs et répressifs. Mais les divisions linguistiques et religieuses les ont conduits à lutter en ordre dispersé. Par ailleurs, les zones kurdes sont riches en pétrole et en eau, ce qui renforce les enjeux du combat.

A l'exception de l'éphémère République kurde de Mahamad (1946), en Iran, le rêve d'un grand Kurdistan s'est peu à peu émoussé. Seul le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a ramené en Turquie, dans les années 1980, la flamme d'un «grand Kurdistan libre et démocratique». Ailleurs, les partis politiques kurdes ont tous opté pour un objectif plus modeste: l'autonomie de chaque minorité kurde dans le cadre

des Etats existants. La stratégie s'est révélée payante en Irak: depuis 1991, les Kurdes gèrent de façon autonome leur région. Exemple pour tous les Kurdes, cette victoire historique pose une nouvelle fois la question d'un «grand Kurdistan».

### Dix dates clés de l'histoire kurde

**VII<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. Fondation de l'Empire mède.** Les Kurdes s'en disent les descendants.

**1171-1250 Les Ayyubides.** Le prince Saladin (ci-contre) fonde cette dynastie kurde, qui règne sur une grande partie du Moyen-Orient.



Bridgeman - Giraudon

**1639 Premier partage.** Le Kurdistan est divisé entre les Empires perse et ottoman.

**1920 Traité de Sèvres.** Signé entre les Alliés et l'Empire ottoman, il prévoit la création d'un Etat kurde dans l'est de l'Anatolie.

**1923 Traité de Lausanne.** Il revient sur la promesse faite en 1920. Le Kurdistan est partagé entre la Turquie, l'Iran, la Syrie (protectorat français) et l'Irak (protectorat britannique).

**1946 République kurde de Mahabad (Iran).** Soutenue par l'URSS, elle est proclamée en janvier et écrasée par l'armée iranienne onze mois plus tard.

**1961 Révolte kurde en Irak.**

Elle est dirigée par le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), créé en 1946 par Mustafa Barzani (photo ci-dessous).



**1984 Début de la guérilla du PKK en Turquie.**

**1991 Première guerre du Golfe.** Sous la protection des Nations unies, les Kurdes administrent la région nord de l'Irak.

**1999 Arrestation d'Abdullah Öcalan,** président du PKK.

**2003 Seconde guerre du Golfe.** Chute de Saddam Hussein. Bagdad reconnaît l'autonomie du Kurdistan irakien.

# En IRAK, avec un embryon d'Etat, les Kurdes montrent la voie de l'indépendance

**S**ilopi, une modeste bourgade turque collée à la frontière avec l'Irak. Comme sa voisine irakienne, Zakho, la ville s'éveille chaque jour au vrombissement rauque des files ininterrompues de camions qui se croisent ici. Moldaves, Roumains et surtout Turcs, des milliers de chauffeurs franchissent chaque jour la frontière au volant de leur trente tonnes. Carrelages, tuyauteries, armatures métalliques... Depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003, le tronçon Silopi-Zakho inaugure la grande route des matériaux en tout genre qui alimentent la chaudière économique du nord de l'Irak, la région la plus sûre et la plus prospère d'un pays encore troublé par la guerre.

Passé l'ultime ligne de partage territorial, aucun drapeau marqué de l'aigle irakien, pas un seul uniforme couleur sable de l'armée de Bagdad. Sur la grande arcade qui coiffe la frontière, des bannières tricolores frappées d'un soleil cernent une inscription : «Welcome to Iraqi Kurdistan Region» («Bienvenue dans la région du Kurdistan d'Irak»), le nom officiel de cette région autonome de l'Etat fédéral irakien.

## «Il a fallu supporter les bombardements chimiques»

Contrôle des identités. Un soldat kurde nous offre le thé. Derrière lui, deux portraits suspendus : ceux de Mustafa Barzani, chef historique de la lutte des Kurdes d'Irak et de son fils, Massoud Barzani, leader du PDK (Parti démocratique du Kurdistan) et actuel président du gouvernement régional autonome. En nous tendant nos papiers, le militaire nous avertit : «Vous êtes ►  
► bien en Irak, mais ici, au nord, ce sont les Kurdes qui gouvernent.»

Tous les soldats postés ici portent le treillis vert olive des peshmergas, ces fantassins de la guérilla kurde dont



En Irak, les Kurdes ont désormais leur président, leur législation, leur armée. Massoud Barzani, leader du PDK (Parti démocratique du Kurdistan) et président du gouvernement autonome, s'adresse ici aux 111 députés qui siègent au parlement Erbil, la capitale régionale.

l'histoire est aussi vieille que celle de l'Irak. Entamée sous le protectorat britannique (1920-1930), leur lutte n'a abdiqué devant aucun des régimes qui se sont succédé depuis à Bagdad. Behram, la cinquantaine, évoque des bribes de l'histoire torturée de son peuple. «Avant d'être maîtres chez nous, il nous a fallu supporter la répression, l'exode, les bombardements chimiques et la destruction de milliers de villages, sans oublier les deux guerres du Golfe.» En 1991, Saddam Hussein battu, la partie nord du Kurdistan s'organise, soutenue par les Nations unies qui interdisent à l'armée irakienne de franchir le 36<sup>e</sup> parallèle. Douze ans plus tard, le dictateur tombe : Bagdad finit par reconnaître officiellement l'autonomie des Kurdes qui vivent sur un cinquième du territoire irakien.

## Deux décennies de répression sous Saddam Husseïn n'ont pas éteint la volonté d'autonomie

## En 2005, les Irakiens ont élu un Kurde pour président

Quatre cents kilomètres au sud de Zakho : Erbil (un million d'habitants) s'étale dans une plaine quasi désertique, écrasée par la chaleur de mai à septembre. Dès les premiers faubourgs, la cité historique des Kurdes d'Irak impose son statut de capitale politique. Partout, les peshmergas patrouillent. Sur chaque avenue, les bannières du Kurdistan et celles, rouges, du PDK, se partagent les hauteurs des bâtiments officiels. Présidence, parlement régional, ministères, école de police... Créées en 1992, ces institutions ont ►

► été paralysées par la guerre fratricide (1994-1998) qui opposa le PDK à l'UPK (Union patriotique du Kurdistan), l'autre grand parti kurde. Mais aujourd'hui, un embryon d'Etat kurde est en ordre de marche : cent onze députés siègent dix mois sur douze, la région aligne une armée de deux cent mille hommes et, en à peine quatre ans, ce petit bout de territoire a su s'imposer sur la scène internationale. Massoud Barzani parcourt le monde, reçu en chef d'Etat par le président américain et la chancelière allemande. Et Jalal Talabani, l'autre leader kurde, occupe depuis 2005 la présidence de l'Irak.

Mardi 10 mars 2008, les séances reprennent au Parlement d'Erbil, qui vote des lois pour la région et lève ses propres taxes douanières. Aux portes de l'hémicycle, dans un balai incessant de tailleurs et de costumes-cravates, un homme tranche par son allure. Saïd Kaka, 80 ans, semble tout droit sorti du maquis. «J'ai commencé la lutte en 1961, au côté de Mustafa Barzani.

Aujourd'hui, je suis fier de voir les Kurdes se diriger enfin eux-mêmes.» Le Parlement est-il une première étape vers la création d'un grand Etat kurde au Moyen-Orient? Surpris par la question, Saïd sourit. Long moment de silence. «Nous n'avons pas encore fini ici, en Irak», finit par lâcher le vieil homme. Autre silence, nouveau sourire... «Vous savez, les Arabes ont vingt-cinq Etats, alors si les Kurdes arrivent ici à en avoir un, ce ne sera pas si mal.»

Nouvelle génération, autre style. Dans son ensemble gris perle impeccable, Rozhan Dizayee fait partie des jeunes cadres du PDK. Députée depuis 2005, cette avocate de 36 ans va droit au but: «Il vaut mieux une région avec un pouvoir fort qu'un grand territoire avec un pouvoir faible. Soyons réalistes: tous les pays voisins nous sont hostiles. Nous devons composer avec eux et les Kurdes des autres pays doivent le comprendre.» Un scepticisme qui a de profondes racines en Irak. Les leaders du gouvernement d'Erbil, en effet, n'ont jamais vrai-



A Sulaimaniya, les tanks et les canons de défense antiaérienne de l'armée de Saddam Hussein rouillent devant l'ancien bâtiment de la sécurité, de sinistre mémoire pour les Kurdes. Sous le régime du dictateur (1979-2003), la répression a fait plus de 180 000 morts dans la région.

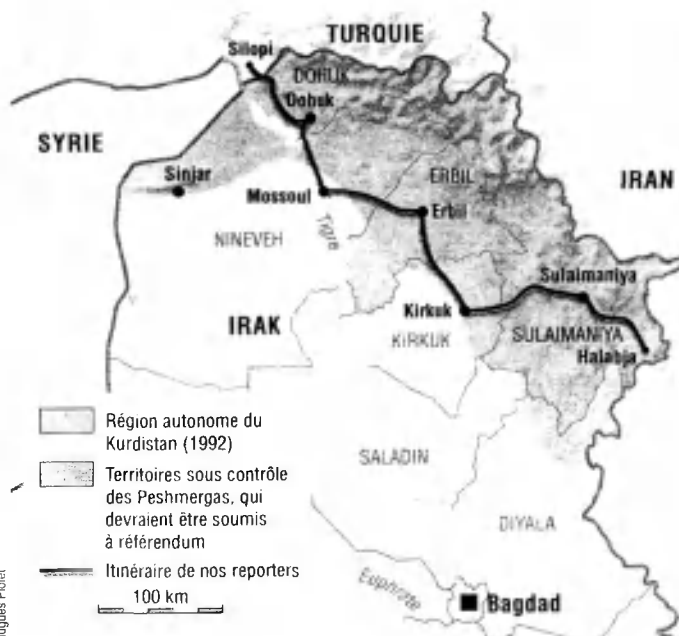
ment adhérent au projet d'un grand Kurdistan, longtemps défendu par le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), qui poursuit la guérilla pour l'autonomie des Kurdes de Turquie. Conduite depuis 1946 par le PDK, la rébellion kurde avait, d'emblée, pris la forme d'une lutte classique d'indépendance, se cantonnant aux frontières de l'Irak.

### Des lotissements poussent comme des champignons

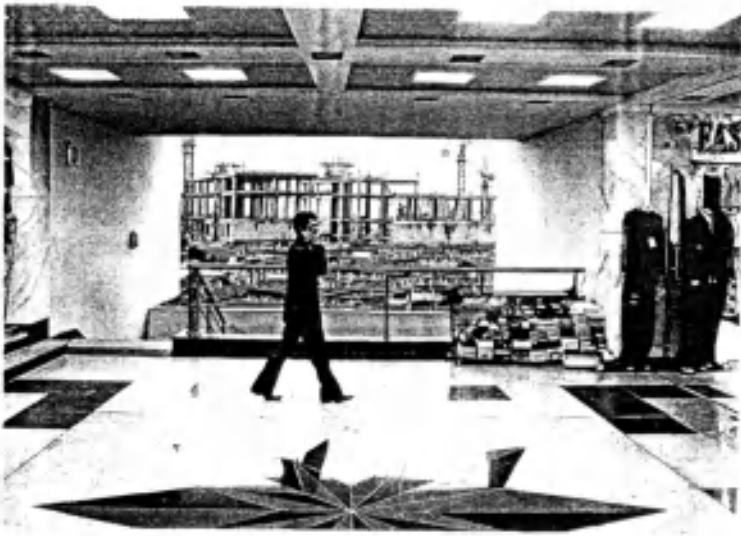
Cet héritage nationaliste se double à présent d'une arrogance économique. Après la chute de Saddam Hussein et la fin de l'embargo sur l'Irak, les grandes familles kurdes ont rapatrié leurs capitaux placés à l'étranger. Rassurés par la stabilité de la région, les investisseurs étrangers ont suivi. Depuis 2004, plus de mille entreprises étrangères se sont implantées à Erbil, indique le Kurdistan Investment Board, rattaché au Premier ministre de la région. Cessions de terrains publics, privatisation de domaines agricoles, signatures de partenariats commerciaux dans l'énergie et les travaux publics, vote d'une loi protégeant des investissements privés... Les autorités kurdes ont engagé une course contre la montre. Tout se passe à Erbil, comme si la réussite économique devait obliger l'Irak et le monde à ne jamais remettre en question l'autonomie kurde.

La physionomie de la ville est aujourd'hui marquée par cette frénésie. En périphérie, les lotissements résidentiels poussent comme des oasis artificielles: Italian Village, Royal Village, Naz City, ces vastes complexes de pavil-

## Leur région constitue un îlot de prospérité dans un pays en guerre



Nos journalistes ont sillonné les trois provinces qui composent la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, et la zone de peuplement kurde (environ cinq millions de personnes), qui s'étend au-delà.



A Erbil, le centre commercial Nasdak illustre la frénésie immobilière qui s'est emparée de cette région, la plus sûre et la plus prospère d'Irak.



A Halabja, ce monument, inachevé, est dédié aux victimes du bombardement chimique par l'aviation de Saddam Hussein, qui fit 5 000 morts en 1988.

lons privés singent le mode de vie et l'architecture occidentaux. Près de l'aéroport, l'English Village exhibe quatre cent vingt villas de type haussmannien : un ensemble de quarante-cinq hectares pour deux mille cinq cents résidents, avec école, centre commercial et réseaux privés d'eau et d'électricité. Un havre de paix, en somme, pour des privilégiés forcément proches du pouvoir local. Le centre-ville aussi est atteint ►

## Les partisans armés du grand Kurdistan se réfugient dans les montagnes



La section féminine de l'armée de libération du peuple, venue de Turquie, s'est retranchée dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak. Elle appartient à la branche militaire du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), dont le leader (photo), Abdullah Öcalan, est emprisonné depuis 1999.

► par ce vertige de la construction. Au pied de la vieille citadelle, un énorme centre commercial a été bâti en quelques mois. Baptisé du nom éloquent de Nasdak, le complexe, avec marbre blanc et escalators, a pris pour slogan : «Here, we're building the future» («Ici, nous construisons l'avenir»).

### Kirkuk, ville stratégique, échappe à l'autorité kurde

Mais de quel avenir s'agit-il ? Installé depuis quatre ans à Erbil, Victor, homme d'affaires franco-britannique, reste dubitatif : «La zone est la plus sûre d'Irak, c'est bon pour les affaires. Mais le pouvoir kurde local va trop vite. En empruntant massivement pour financer le développement de la région, il anticipe sur des revenus qu'il espère tirer un jour des deux grandes ressources de la région (l'eau et le pétrole).» La critique est rejetée d'un revers de main par Tahsin Qadir Ali. Fin connaisseur des méandres du réseau hydraulique irakien, le ministre régional de l'eau manie les kilowatts et les mètres cubes par seconde avec un bel optimisme. «Songez qu'avec le Tigre et bien d'autres fleuves, les neuf dixièmes de l'eau qui coulent en Irak passent par notre région !» La réalité est plus... aride : aucune des trois provinces qui composent le Kurdistan irakien (Erbil, Dohuk et Sulaimaniya) n'est autonome en électricité, dont une grande partie est acheminée de Mossoul. Bagdad contrôle cette ville (qui est le plus grand réservoir d'eau d'Irak) et refuse aux Kurdes la construction de barrages sur les grands fleuves de la région.

Même constat pour l'or noir. En marge du Kurdistan, la ville de Kirkuk est un foyer de tensions exacerbées par la présence de gisements et de raffine- ►



► ries de pétrole. Après dix-sept ans de négociations conflictuelles, et bien qu'elle soit en majorité peuplée par des Kurdes, cette cité pionnière du pétrole irakien échappe toujours à l'autorité du gouvernement d'Erbil. Quadrillée jour et nuit par des militaires américains, irakiens, kurdes, assyriens et même turkmènes, elle attend toujours l'organisation d'un référendum sur son rattachement au Kurdistan, sans cesse reporté. Pour le reste, les deux partis kurdes (PDK et UPK) sont contraints au marchandage avec Bagdad. Certes, en vertu de la Constitution irakienne de 2004, l'Irak doit céder 17 % des revenus pétroliers nationaux à la région kurde, mais le texte interdit aux Kurdes d'exploiter les gisements situés sur leur territoire.

## Ils n'ont pas le droit d'exploiter le pétrole que renferme leur sous-sol



La Constitution de 2004 interdit aux Kurdes d'exploiter les gisements sur leur territoire. A Kirkuk (photo), comme ailleurs, c'est l'Etat irakien qui détient les puits.

Résultat, Erbil cède en catimini des concessions à des compagnies étrangères, prenant le risque de pourrir les relations entre les deux capitales...

On imagine l'importance qu'auraient de telles ressources dans le contexte d'un grand Kurdistan. Fédérant le sud-est de la Turquie, l'ouest de l'Iran, l'est de la Syrie et le nord-est de l'Irak, un tel Etat contrôlerait l'essentiel de l'eau et une partie des réserves pétrolières de la zone. «C'est vrai que notre victoire en Irak pose à nouveau la question du grand Kurdistan. Mais le revendiquer serait une déclaration de guerre aux Etats voisins et un suicide pour notre autonomie», assure Mala Bakhtyar, un

des leaders de l'UPK. Choisi pour son «réalisme», le compromis vanté par Erbil –renoncer à l'indépendance en échange d'une grande autonomie– a pourtant un prix. Il lie en effet le sort des Kurdes à la tutelle américaine, qui joue sur l'équilibre entre les trois grandes communautés : les Kurdes, et les Arabes sunnites et chiïtes, majoritaires. Si les Etats-Unis quittaient l'Irak, les Kurdes pourraient perdre au change. Quant aux voisins (Turquie, Syrie, Iran), la volonté de les ménager a conduit le gouvernement régional de Barzani à fermer les yeux sur le sort réservé aux minorités kurdes de ces pays. En 2007 et 2008, les dirigeants kurdes irakiens ont

même été jusqu'à se désolidariser publiquement de leurs «frères» du PKK.

Plus concrètement, la logique fédérale acceptée par le gouvernement régional kurde a des conséquences sur les Kurdes eux-mêmes. Amputée des deux principales richesses (l'eau et le pétrole), la région compense en ouvrant son marché aux produits syriens ou iraniens (des tomates aux matériaux de construction) et aux investissements turcs (immobilier). En quelques années, la flambée des prix, des loyers et du chômage (autour de 40 %) ont fait d'Erbil la ville des laissés-pour-compte. Au nord de l'agglomération, le quartier de Safin abrite des réfugiés de Mossoul, ainsi que des familles chassées du centre-ville par la flambée des loyers. Des maisons de briques et de parpaings, certaines sans toit... Sur un terrain vague, deux enfants jouent dans la carcasse éventrée d'une machine à laver. Délaisé par les autorités, le quartier doit son électricité (deux heures par jour) à l'ingéniosité de ses habitants. Branchés sur l'unique poteau d'alimentation, des kilomètres de fils électriques relient murs et terrasses. «Ici, tu viens avec tes briques, tu les montes et tu te débrouilles», déplore un père de famille.

Le long de la grande artère qui conduit vers Mahmur, au sud, des centaines de manœuvres viennent, dès l'aube, se vendre à la tâche. Quand un responsable de chantier passe, les travailleurs s'agglutinent autour de sa voiture et les enchères commencent. Le salaire mensuel minimum est officiellement de cinq cent mille dinars (344 euros) mais les plus désespérés acceptent quinze mille dinars pour une journée de dix heures. «Je ne sais pas combien de temps je vais pouvoir refuser ces salaires de misère», lâche Azid. Chaque nuit, cet instituteur de 45 ans parcourt deux cents kilomètres en bus pour aller travailler sur les chantiers d'Erbil et arrondir ses fins de mois. En évoquant les tensions avec la Turquie et la présence, dans les montagnes du nord, des camps retranchés du PKK, Aziz réagit. «J'ai l'impression que leur lutte nous affaiblit car elle sert de prétexte à la Turquie pour nous menacer. Mais quand je vois la misère dans laquelle nous sommes, je me dis que les Kurdes devraient lutter ensemble, une fois pour toutes.» ■

Olivier Piot ►

# En SYRIE, les Kurdes vivent sur un territoire fertile, mais sont privés de droits

**L**e village est perdu dans les collines qui dominent la ville d'Afrin, au nord-ouest de la Syrie. Nous taïrons son nom pour protéger nos interlocuteurs. De sa terrasse, Ardan observe au loin les milliers de silhouettes torturées d'oliviers qui accaparent chaque parcelle de terrain. «Ces arbres sont comme nous, les Kurdes, attachés à cette terre depuis des siècles.» Plus au nord, à une trentaine de kilomètres, la frontière turque : «J'ai de la famille là-bas, poursuit Ardan, mais il faut un visa. Le passage n'est libre que trois jours dans l'année, pendant le Ramadan.» Agé de soixante-deux ans, cet ancien instituteur est né dans cette région prospère où vivent un tiers des deux millions de Kurdes syriens. C'est ici, à Afrin, qu'il a rencontré, au milieu des années 1980, deux exilés de Turquie membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). Depuis, Ardan lit les journaux et regarde tous les jours les télévisions kurdes, diffusées de l'étranger par satellite. «C'est bien, ce que les Kurdes ont obtenu en Irak, explique-t-il. Nous rêvons tous de suivre leur exemple. Mais en Syrie, nous n'y arriverons jamais. L'Etat est trop répressif.»

## «Tous nos partis politiques sont clandestins»

Un coup de téléphone, une adresse griffonnée sur un bout de carton... Deux jours plus tard, nous sommes quasi clandestinement reçus par une amie d'Ardan à Alep, la deuxième ville du pays. Les familles kurdes sont ici concen-

► trées dans un unique quartier : Cheikh Massoud. Assise dans le séjour de son modeste appartement, Rojda, la quarantaine, mère de cinq enfants, fulmine contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad,



Près d'Ain Diwar, au nord-est de la Syrie, le Tigre forme une frontière naturelle avec la Turquie et l'Irak. Majoritaires dans cette région qui est le grenier à blé du pays, les Kurdes ont été privés de leurs terres, cédées aux Arabes.

le président syrien. «C'est une véritable dictature ! Depuis l'indépendance de la Syrie (1946), les Kurdes n'ont aucun droit dans ce pays ! Pas d'emploi dans la fonction publique, aucun journal dans notre langue, même les noms sur nos tombes sont écrits en arabe ! Et

## Ils habitent ici depuis des générations, mais sont traités en apatrides



Son livret militaire date de 1951. Mais depuis le recensement de 1962, Jivan est considéré comme «non-enregistré» aux yeux de l'Etat civil syrien. Comme lui et sa famille, près de 400 000 Kurdes ont ainsi été privés de nationalité.

tous nos partis politiques sont clandestins. C'est pire qu'en Turquie. Là-bas, au moins, les Kurdes ont des députés.» Découragé par le chômage record qui frappe la communauté de ce quartier (d'après les habitants, près de 50 %), le mari de Rojda est parti travailler en Grèce. Il revient une fois par an. Quant à la fille aînée de la famille, elle s'est engagée à 17 ans dans le maquis du PKK, au nord de l'Irak. C'était en 1996. Depuis, Rojda ne l'a jamais revue.

## En 1962, on instaura la fameuse «ceinture arabe»

A la sortie d'Alep, la grande route file au nord avant de s'incliner plein est, le long de la frontière turque. Pendant des siècles, sous la domination de l'Empire ottoman (1516-1918) comme sous le Protectorat français (1920-1944), cette bande de territoire qui s'étire d'Afrin à Qamishli fut exclusivement habitée

par des Kurdes. Mais la présence de l'Euphrate (les eaux de ce fleuve sont stratégiques pour la Syrie) et la proximité du Kurdistan turc (au nord) et irakien (à l'est) ont conduit Damas à dompter cette région. En 1962, les autorités syriennes mirent en place la fameuse «ceinture arabe» : en quelques années, ►

► des milliers d'Arabes venus d'autres provinces de Syrie se virent distribuer des terres, confisquées aux Kurdes du nord, dont beaucoup ont été expulsés de force vers Alep et Damas. Al Bab, Minbej, Abu Qalqal... les noms arabisés des villes et villages portent la marque de cette politique d'émiettement du Kurdistan syrien.

Passé l'Euphrate, la province de la Djézirey s'évase en suivant le cours du fleuve. Au nord, ces terres plates et arides forment une pointe qui s'engouffre entre la Turquie et l'Irak, jusqu'aux rives du Tigre. Dans ce triangle grand comme le Liban où vivent aujourd'hui 800 000 Kurdes, la ville de Qamishli (170 000 habitants) a la réputation d'être le foyer de la résistance kurde. En 2004, un match de football entre une équipe locale et un club arabe a dégénéré à la suite de provocations de nationalistes syriens. Les émeutes ont fait plusieurs dizaines de morts parmi les Kurdes. «Damas ne supporte pas que des Kurdes aient arraché l'autonomie à moins de cent kilomètres d'ici, en Irak, commente Bayiz, la cinquantaine, écrivain et responsable d'un des douze partis kurdes clandestins de Syrie.»

### La région kurde est le grenier à blé de la Syrie

Mais les troubles qui opposent périodiquement la communauté aux forces de l'ordre ont des causes plus profondes. «Avant, Qamishli était une

Prohibés par la loi syrienne, les cours de langue kurde s'organisent clandestinement. Le tableau, simple bout de tissu scotché au mur, peut vite disparaître à la première alerte.



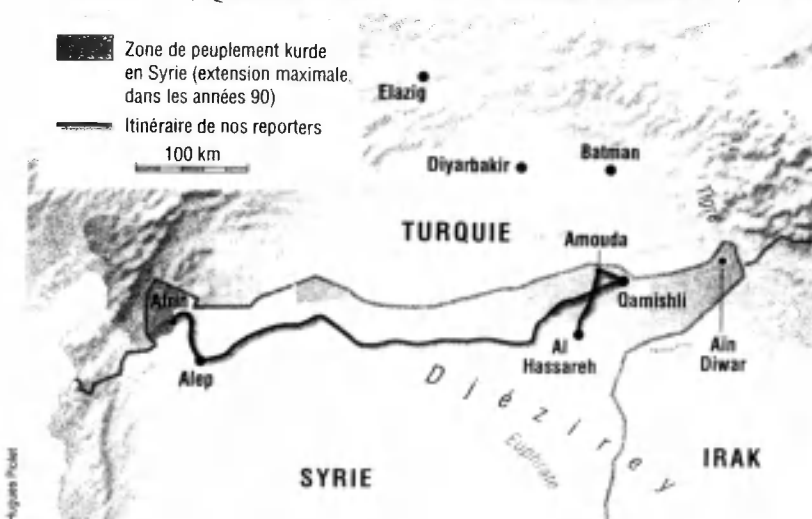
ville caserne et les Kurdes vivaient surtout dans les villages voisins, raconte un commerçant. Avec la confiscation des terres données aux Arabes, la plupart sont venus vivre en ville.» Grenier à blé de la Syrie, la région n'a laissé ►

► aux Kurdes que les activités du petit commerce. Pire, pour beaucoup d'entre eux, la politique de «ceinture arabe» s'est traduite par la destitution pure et simple de leurs droits civiques. En 1962, Damas organisa un recensement dans la province. Près de cent vingt mille Kurdes furent déclarés «non enregistrés» ou «étrangers». Transmis d'une génération à l'autre, ce statut d'apatride touche aujourd'hui près de quatre cent mille Kurdes dans le pays. En brandissant son livret militaire daté de 1951, Jiwan s'emporte : «Je suis né en Syrie, mes enfants aussi, mais en nous refusant la nationalité, on a fait

de nous des moins que rien. Personne dans ma famille ne peut quitter le pays, posséder sa propre maison, ouvrir un commerce, aller à l'école publique ou se faire soigner dans un hôpital.»

Bayiz nous reçoit cette fois chez lui, à l'extérieur de la ville. Une chambre monacale, décorée de nombreux livres et de quelques photos. Des pages noircies de notes traînent sur son bureau. Plusieurs responsables politiques kurdes devaient nous rejoindre. «Ils ont eu peur de vous parler, précise notre hôte. C'est la terreur qui paralyse les Kurdes de Syrie. D'Afrin à ici, nous sommes trop peu nombreux et surtout trop éloignés les uns des autres pour nous unir. C'est sans doute la raison pour laquelle il n'y a jamais eu de guérilla kurde dans ce pays.» Et ces liens tissés depuis quarante ans avec les partis kurdes des deux grands pays voisins ? «Ça nous a aidé, enchaîne Bayiz. Le PKK a beaucoup fait ici. Mais il recrute pour sa propre cause, de plus en plus orientée vers l'autonomie du Kurdistan turc. Quant aux Irakiens, ils sont trop occupés à gérer leurs affaires. Aujourd'hui, notre salut ne peut venir que de l'Europe ou des Etats-Unis.» Un salut qui, pour l'heure, n'est pas synonyme d'autonomie mais simplement d'une reconnaissance des droits élémentaires de la communauté. ■

Olivier Piot



Deux millions de Kurdes vivaient en Syrie. Depuis 1962, le pouvoir favorise l'implantation de colons arabes afin d'«arabiser» le Kurdistan syrien.



## TURQUIE: 670 REBELLES KURDES ABATTUS EN 2008, SELON UN BILAN DE L'ARMÉE

ANKARA, 1 jan 2009 (AFP) –

L'ARMÉE TURQUE a tué 670 rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) en 2008 au cours d'accrochages en Turquie et d'opérations militaires effectuées dans le nord de l'Irak où le PKK dispose de bases arrière, a annoncé jeudi l'état-major turc sur son site internet.

Deux-cent-dix-huit "terroristes", dénomination officielle des rebelles, ont été capturés vivants et 174 autres se sont rendus aux forces de l'ordre, souligne l'armée turque.

Environ 200 kg d'explosifs appartenant au PKK ont par ailleurs été saisis par

les forces de sécurité à travers la Turquie, ajoute l'état-major.

L'armée ne donne pas de bilan pour le nombre de militaires tués, mais ceux-ci sont estimés à plusieurs dizaines pour l'année 2008.

Le PKK est un mouvement séparatiste basé principalement dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, et dans le nord de l'Irak. Il mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre Ankara, qui a fait environ 44.000 morts, pour une majeure partie des rebelles.

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

**24heures**

1 janvier 2009

## la télévision d'état turque lance une chaîne entièrement en kurde

ANKARA, (AFP) - Une chaîne de la Radio-télévision d'Etat turque (TRT) devait commencer jeudi soir à émettre entièrement en kurde, une première en Turquie qui espère intégrer l'Union européenne (UE) et où l'usage de cette langue était autrefois interdit.

La TRT-6, la sixième chaîne généraliste de la télévision publique, diffusera des films, des documentaires, des séries et des émissions musicales 24 heures sur 24.

Une cérémonie officielle était prévue dans la soirée dans un grand studio d'Ankara pour marquer le lancement de cette chaîne. Depuis plus d'une semaine, des émissions test ont déjà été réalisées.

L'"objectif principal est de refléter la diversité culturelle de la Turquie", a annoncé la chaîne, répondant ainsi à une exigence de longue date de l'UE en faveur de la communauté kurde de Turquie qui compte environ 12 millions de personnes sur 71 millions d'habitants.

Pour augmenter ses chances d'adhérer un jour à

l'Union, la Turquie a levé en 2002 les restrictions pesant sur l'usage du kurde dans le paysage audiovisuel turc.

La nouvelle chaîne est dirigée par un diplomate et commencera par émettre en kurmanci, dialecte kurde majoritaire en Turquie.

Selon les autorités turques, cette nouvelle chaîne

pourrait contribuer à contrer l'influence de Roj-TV, la chaîne pro-PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, interdit) qui émet du Danemark malgré les protestations d'Ankara, et qui est reçue dans le sud-est turc, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, grâce aux antennes paraboliques.

Cependant les milieux politiques kurdes ont accueilli cette chaîne publique avec prudence dénonçant une manœuvre du gouvernement à trois mois d'élections municipales que le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) au pouvoir veut absolument remporter dans les régions kurdes.

De retour d'un voyage en Syrie et Jordanie où il a évoqué les opérations meurtrières d'Israël dans la bande de Gaza, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, chef de l'AKP, a souhaité, en kurde, devant les journalistes, "bonne chance" à la chaîne, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Le PKK mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée autonome contre les forces d'Ankara. Les combats ont fait 44.000 morts.



## IRAK: UN MEMBRE DU PC KURDE ASSASSINÉ À KIRKOUK (POLICE)

KIRKOUK (Irak), 4 jan 2009 (AFP)

UN MEMBRE du parti communiste kurde irakien a été assassiné samedi soir par des inconnus à son domicile de Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, ont indiqué dimanche à l'AFP la police et son parti.

"Des inconnus ont tué un de nos membres dans sa maison à Kirkouk samedi soir", a déclaré Abdelrahmane Fares du bureau politique du Parti communiste kurde irakien.

"C'était un militant actif, il travaillait comme fonctionnaire à la mairie de Kirkouk", à 255 km au nord de Bagdad, a ajouté M. Fares.

Le lieutenant-colonel Baistoune Mohammed Qoussabi, de la police de Kirkouk, a précisé à l'AFP que l'homme, Anouar Mohiddine Rassoul, avait été tué d'une balle dans la tête.

Le 18 décembre, Nahrla Hussein, militante pour la défense des droits de l'Homme et leader de la branche féminine de ce parti, avait été retrouvée

morte, la tête tranchée, à son domicile de Kirkouk.

Aux élections législatives de 2005, le Parti communiste kurde faisait partie de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président irakien Jalal Talabani, première force politique au Parlement kurde irakien.

Ces meurtres interviennent en pleine campagne électorale pour les élections provinciales du 31 janvier.

14 des 18 provinces irakiennes doivent participer au vote, mais pas la province de Kirkouk qui votera plus tard.

Très riche en pétrole, la province compte quelque 900.000 habitants et plusieurs communautés qui se disputent le pouvoir: des Kurdes, en nombre croissant, des Turcomans, qui se considèrent comme ses habitants historiques, des Assyro-chaldéens (chrétiens) ou des Arabes, souvent arrivés à l'occasion de la politique d'arabisation forcée pratiquée par Saddam Hussein.

## Iraqi Kurd leader blames Arabs for growing rift

REUTERS

January 2, 2009 By Shamal Agrawi

ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) – The president of Iraqi Kurdistan urged Arabs to give minority Kurds their political due on Thursday in a strongly worded letter highlighting growing ethnic strains in Iraq's federal state.

"Unfortunately there are short-sighted chauvinists and extremists in some Arab circles, some inside the federal government," Masoud Barzani, president of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq, wrote in the open letter.

Without naming names, Barzani condemned those who he said had destabilized ties between Kurds, who make up about a fifth of Iraq's 28-million population, and majority Arabs "by provoking harmful ethnic feuds and inflaming the wounds of the past."

Discord between Baghdad and Arbil, the autonomous Kurdish capital, has increased over the division of oil wealth, the proper role of Kurdish security forces and control of northern towns, especially the oil-rich, ethnically mixed city of Kirkuk.

Tensions have grown in recent months as Kurds and Arabs jockey for influence ahead of provincial elections this month.

After Saddam Hussein's ouster in the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Kurds made themselves partners in the fledgling Shi'ite-led government, winning newfound influence in Baghdad.

But with Shi'ite Arab Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's own position growing stronger and a Sunni Arab insurgency fading, Kurds now see their clout in Baghdad under threat.



### 'BALANCED PARTNERSHIP'

Barzani has complained in the past that Maliki, who envisions a strong central state, has sidelined Kurds. In his letter, he stressed the "voluntary" nature of the Kurds' union with Baghdad and called for a "truly balanced partnership."

He referred to Kurdish suffering under Saddam, including the slaughter of villagers and gassing of civilians.

The frictions raise questions about Iraq's future as Washington prepares to withdraw its 140,000 troops by 2011 and unseasoned Iraqi forces take charge of defending a fragile calm.

Kurd-Arab feuds have already hobbled hopes for swift passage of an oil law wanted to rebuild Iraq's shattered economy.

Conflict nearly broke out last year between Kurdish and Iraqi forces over control of Khanaqin, a town along the "green line" dividing Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq.

In the upcoming provincial elections, no vote will be held in Kirkuk or the Kurdish provinces, but Kurds could lose influence in places such as the ethnically mixed, volatile city of Mosul, where many Sunni Arabs stayed away from earlier polls.

With tensions simmering late last year, Kurds and Arabs set up a special committee to deal with disputes.

"Arab solidarity with Kurds, in Iraq or in the region, is the best way to continue a peaceful coexistence," Barzani said.

TODAYS ZAMAN

January 2, 2009

## Can 'TRT Şeş li ser xêrê be' secure Diyarbakır for Erdoğan?

By EMRE USLU & ÖNDER AYTAÇ\*

For the Kurds of Turkey, 2009 came with a surprise: a state-owned Kurdish TRT TV channel. The biggest surprise of all is Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's congratulatory message to the new channel in Kurdish, saying, "TRT şeş li ser xêrê be" (May TRT six be beneficial).

One should admit that no matter what his purpose is for speaking Kurdish, Mr. Erdoğan's statement in Kurdish is a milestone for Turkey's Kurdish policies. Although Erdoğan declared in 2005 that the Turkish state had made some mistakes regarding Kurds but recently abandoned his progressive position, with this message in Kurdish, he came back to where he was in 2005 and showed that Erdoğan is willing to compromise between the state and Kurds.

Kurdish opposition groups, however, think the Kurdish TV channel has two aims. For the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Erdoğan, it is a part of Erdoğan's election campaign to win some Kurdish votes. For the military and the state bureaucracy, it is a new way of establishing a "cultural guard" system, referring to the village guard system, against the growing influence Kurdish broadcasting on some private TV channels. The counterargument to Kurdish intellectuals who do not like the Kurdish TRT channel is that they do not like having a state-owned Kurdish TV station because they will not be able to criticize the state on the basis of oppression of Kurdish culture and language.

Those Kurdish intellectuals should admit that even if it is for the purpose of winning an election in Diyarbakır, it is a big step for Turkey. On the other hand, Turkish criticism toward Kurds who do not like Kurdish TRT



indicates that the state does support Kurdish TV with sincerity, but has the aim of counteracting Kurdish broadcasts by private channels in the region.

When it comes to the issue of how the Kurdish TV channel will impact people's preferences in the upcoming local elections, it is not the launch of a Kurdish TV channel per se that will affect people's opinions toward the AKP, but the intensity of the debate around the idea of a Kurdish TV channel will have a major impact on how people will vote.

Debates around Kurdish TRT have three sub-categories. First, Kurdish opposition groups, on the one hand, by underlining the Kurdish struggle and their contribution to the struggle brought the state to the point of launching a Kurdish TV channel to try to benefit from the new TV channel. On the other hand, in order to keep their privileged positions in shaping Kurdish culture, they argue that the Kurdish TRT channel will be another tool for the state to assimilate Kurds by diminishing the intensity

of Kurdish cultural symbols through the new Kurdish TV channel.

The second debate is to question whether the state-owned Kurdish TV channel will freely use banned letters such as X, W and Q in its Kurdish broadcasting. In fact it is one of the issues that Kurdish TRT will face because public prosecutors continuously file lawsuits against Kurdish activist who use X, W and Q in their writings in Kurdish.

The third debate around Kurdish TRT will concentrate on how Turkish nationalists will respond to the Kurdish TV station. If it is not properly managed, Turkish nationalist reaction to the state-owned Kurdish TV channel will bring a miserable failure to the AKP in central Anatolian cities where Turkish nationalism is deeply rooted.

The direction of the debate around Kurdish TV will be mainly determined by the substance of Kurdish broadcasting on Kurdish TRT. If programs on Kurdish TRT aim to contribute to Kurdish culture, Kurdish life and the Kurdish language, then the AKP and the state will certainly be the beneficiaries of the new channel. Otherwise Kurdish TRT will be another failed AKP policy to find a medium to satisfy Kurds. In that case, of course, it would be a farfetched dream for the AKP to win in Diyarbakır.

\*Dr. Emre Uslu is an analyst working with Washington-based think tank the Jamestown Foundation. Önder Aytaç is an associate professor at Gazi University's department of communications and works with the Security Studies Institute in Ankara.

REUTERS

## Turkey's Kurdish TV channel opens to mixed reviews

January 2, 2009 DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, (Reuters)

- Turkey has launched its first 24-hour Kurdish-language TV station in what the government called a democratic new era for minority Kurds.

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan extended best wishes in once-banned Kurdish, but some Kurdish politicians criticised the New Year launch of state-run TRT 6 as a ploy to woo voters ahead of March local elections.

Some viewers were concerned that programming would become state propaganda, underscoring scepticism in a region scarred by decades of violence and poverty.

Turkey, which aspires to join the European Union, has been under pressure to expand cultural and political rights of its estimated 12 million Kurds, a sixth of the population.

Kurdish was banned following a 1980 military coup until 1991. Under pressure from the EU, TRT began broadcasting documentaries and news in Kurdish in 2004, but only for about 30 minutes each week. TRT 6 will be broadcast for 24 hours a day.

In a separate move, the head of Turkey's higher education authority told CNN Turk on Friday it planned to open Kurdish language and literature departments in Istanbul University and Ankara University in 2010.

Analysts have said solving the Kurdish problem required political reforms to drain support for the PKK separatist group. The army has stepped up operations against PKK rebels in Iraq.

"The launch of TRT 6 is important for the development of the Kurdish language. I remember when even listening to Kurdish music was a crime," said Ahmet Cihan, a 29-year-old shopkeeper in Diyarbakir, the largest city in the Kurdish southeast.

Officials said the station will air news, films, soaps and talk shows, as well as video clips by Kurdish artists.

"If the aim of the channel is propaganda then the government will lose, but if it pursues an independent policy then people will watch it. If it is not impartial Kurds would feel deceived," said Cemil Genc, a 32-year-old self-employed man.

Erdogan, whose ruling AK Party is hoping to make strong inroads in the Kurdish southeast in March local elections, said the channel will help Kurds feel more included in Turkey.

"This is a step which will strengthen our democracy," Erdogan said in a pre-recorded message in which he uttered: "TRT ses bi xer be" (Best wishes to



Demonstrators, holding Turkish flags, shout slogans as they attend a protest against a state run television channel in Kurdish language in front of the Turkish Radio Television Corporation in Ankara December 31, 2008. Turkey will launch its first 24 hour state run television channel in Kurdish language on January 1, 2009. The banner (C) reads, "Kurdish is betrayal for Kurds". REUTERS/Umit Bektas (TURKEY)

TRT 6) in Kurdish.

Selahattin Demirtas, an MP for the Democratic Society Party (DTP), the largest Kurdish party, said the channel had political aims. The DTP and AKP have traded bitter words as polls near.

"Even the singers invited to the opening ceremony were chosen because they are DTP opponents," Demirtas said.

Despite some progress, the use of the Kurdish language is still banned in parliament and in political campaigning.

According to media reports, DTP lawmakers are working on a draft law to allow the use of q, w and x -- letters used in Kurdish but not in Turkish -- in official correspondence, a move which would incur the wrath of nationalists

REUTERS

## Election friction flares in Iraq's violent north

January 4, 2009 By Khalid al-Ansary-

**BAGHDAD (Reuters)** Tensions are mounting between Sunni Arabs and Kurds in the Iraqi city of Mosul, where political violence is increasing ahead of provincial elections.

The United Nations this week condemned attacks on candidates competing in the January 31 provincial council vote in Mosul and the surrounding province of Nineveh.

Predictions that violence could flare ahead of the polls are already bearing out. On Wednesday, gunmen walked into a cafe in central Mosul and killed Mowafiq al-Hamdani, a member of the Sunni Arab "Iraq for Us" party list.

He was the second candidate to be shot dead in a month.

In Nineveh, minority Kurds stand to lose the control they won when many of the area's Sunni Arabs stayed home during the last provincial elections in 2005.

An ethnic feud between Kurds and Arabs in the north has worsened in recent months, even as sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in other parts of Iraq has eased.

Disputes have simmered across an ethnically mixed swathe along the "green line" that separates the autonomous Kurdish region from the rest of the country. In Kirkuk, a divided city Kurds want as their capital, the election has been postponed.

In Mosul, a mainly Arab Sunni bloc, al-Hadba, which takes its name from an askew mosque minaret, says it has been targeted in a crackdown orchestrated by Kurdish officials ahead of the vote. The United Nations says the group has

been hit by raids.

"They can't compete in a democratic atmosphere, so they try to resort to horror to eliminate others and impose their power in these areas," said Atheel al-Nujaifi, a Sunni Arab engineer and businessman who heads al-Hadba.

He said Kurdish parties were trying to move Kurds en masse into local towns ahead of the vote, to tilt the election result.

Kurdish politicians deny cracking down on al-Hadba and accuse the group of stoking ethnic divisions that date back to the regime of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Arab who repressed Kurds and moved Arabs into disputed Kurdish towns.

"We are not harassing anyone," said Khisro Goran, Nineveh's Kurdish deputy governor. He called al-Hadba an "enemy of the Kurds, who carry the ... aggressive thoughts of the past regime (of Saddam Hussein) against us."

In a strongly worded New Year's statement, the leader of the autonomous Kurdish region, Masoud Barzani, criticized "short-sighted chauvinists and extremists in some Arab circles."

The January 31 election comes at a fragile point in Iraq's history, as U.S. troops come under an Iraqi mandate for the first time and Iraq's ability to resolve feuds will be tested.

The vote will apportion 440 seats on local councils that in turn name powerful regional governors.

"Campaign violence in Iraq must not be allowed to intimidate candidates or interfere with the right of every Iraqi to exercise their vote on 31 January," Staffan de Mistura, special U.N. representative in Iraq, said late on Thursday.

## Kurdish broadcast on state TV

By MÜMTAZ'ERTÜRKÖNE

TRT 6 started its broadcasts on the first day of the new year. TRT Şeş, or the Kurdish TRT channel, will be airing programs in Kurdish 24 hours a day.

The test broadcasts the channel aired in December gave an idea of what TRT 6 would be like. The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation's (TRT) management has given serious thought to and put serious work into this task, mobilizing all the resources of this established state organization. The Kurdish channel of the TRT -- or more correctly, the Turkish Republic -- is not a channel devised for show. Last Thursday evening, i.e., the first day of the new year, a reception was held for the opening of TRT 6 at the TRT's Arı studio in Ankara. Three government ministers and many deputies from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) attended the event. State Minister Mehmet Şimşek, State Minister Mehmet Aydın and Culture Minister Ertuğrul Günay delivered speeches. It is obvious that top state officials backed this initiative undertaken by the state.

### From ban on Kurdish songs to concerts in Kurdish on state TV

A speech by Günay contained self-criticism over past practices. He talked about the mistakes made on the part of the government. Among the errors he made reference to were people who had been prosecuted on charges of singing Kurdish songs. Ahmet Kaya, who died in a foreign country, was one such personality. In the past, speaking Kurdish was banned. The military rule established after the military coup of Sept. 12, 1980 passed a bill just before the resumption of democratic rule banning the use of Kurdish in all arenas. At that time, great sorrows were suffered.

At the reception, I found myself chatting with a Kurdish deputy. He was talking about how important the Kurdish channel was. I couldn't agree more with his words. "If this channel had been launched 10 years ago, who knows how many people would be alive today," he said, referring to the underlying reasons for outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorism.

The first program on TRT 6 was a concert by female Kurdish singer Rojin. Rojin's songs, which can be defined as Kurdish pop music, were impressive. Then, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan joined with a televised speech that was dubbed in Kurdish and accompanied by Turkish subtitles. The prime minister stressed the bond of citizenship. He stressed the risk of racism. "We don't need to be afraid of our diversity," he warned. He ended his speech saying, "TRT şeş bi xer be" (May TRT six be beneficial).

Those who have closely followed developments during the last 25 years in Turkey with respect to the Kurdish issue know very well what TRT 6 signifies and what a revolutionary step it is. The move from a country



where Kurdish speech and songs were banned to a country where the official state TV network launches broadcasts in Kurdish on a 24-hour-a-day basis should be regarded as important progress.

I remember a comic from a paper published in the late 1980s; the comic was ridiculing the atmosphere of that time. A man wearing a suit and a tie speaks to a raggedly dressed man who is assumed to be a Kurd: "What do you do?" He says this in Turkish but with a dialect used in the Southeast. In the second frame, he talks to himself: "As you see, we all talk in Kurdish, but why do these Kurds want more?" A modern version of this comic was experienced upon the above-mentioned words in Kurdish by the prime minister. Almost all papers failed to write it correctly in Kurdish. Consulting experts on the Kurdish language, the Radikal newspaper listed the errors newspapers made in reporting it. In short, papers performed poorly in Kurdish.

### The Kurdish language issue and the Kurdish issue

The Kurdish issue is a complicated one. The latest report by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), titled "A Roadmap for the Solution of the Kurdish Issue: Recommendations to the Government from the Region," defines it as "an issue that has ethnic, cultural, legal, political, economic and psychological dimensions." This definition is a well designed and correctly made one, but we need to distinguish between cause and effect. The Kurdish issue is an ethnic issue. And this ethnic issue is largely a linguistic issue. There are legal, political and psychological issues nurturing this linguistic issue. The "nation-state" on which the Turkish Republic relies has been derived from a narrow and superficially made definition of a nation. All differences outside of this narrow conception of a nation are automatically rejected. The Kurdish language takes the lead

in the list of unaccepted differences. The main axis on which the Kurdish issue travels is the banning of the Kurdish language. There is a long list of areas where the use of Kurdish is not allowed: Kurdish names (names of people and geographical locations), Kurdish education and training, Kurdology institutes, communication in Kurdish between state officials and citizens, etc. When you prohibit what is natural, people seek to get back what they have lost and show their reaction to the implementers of the ban. Thus, bans on the Kurdish language evolve into a political issue. There is always a linguistic issue observable as an ostensible factor in an array of problems, including violence. In a nutshell, the Kurdish issue is largely a Kurdish language issue. Because this Kurdish language issue is the result of bans imposed by the state and discrimination implemented by the state, it is a problem neither of Kurds nor of Turks. The Kurdish issue is the problem of the state. When the state lifts the bans it has imposed, this issue will be solved.

The TESEV report lists possible solutions to the problems revolving around the Kurdish language issue as follows:

- \* With legal amendments, the Kurdish language should be accepted as a second language in schools;
- \* The linguistic bans on organizations and freedom of expression should be lifted;
- \* Names of geographical locations should be restored to their original Kurdish names;
- \* Religious sermons in the region should be allowed to be given in Kurdish;
- \* Health organizations in the region should employ personnel who know Kurdish;
- \* Educational institutions should employ Kurdish-speaking personnel;
- \* State theaters should stage plays in Kurdish; and
- \* Universities should be allowed to establish Kurdology institutes that will study Kurdish language and literature.

These demands voiced by TESEV are vitally important. This is because all of them are the actual demands of people living in the Kurdish region.

TRT 6 is an extremely advanced step by the state to satisfy these demands. This Kurdish TV channel should be regarded as a driving force that will bring an immediate solution to diverse aspects of the Kurdish language issue. Let me demonstrate this point with two examples. Among the bans introduced by the Supreme Election Board (YSK) concerning the municipal elections of March 29 is a prohibition on use of languages other than Turkish, such as Kurdish. This ban is

meaningless when a state-owned channel is airing programs in Kurdish. Not a single person can be prosecuted for violating this ban during the election campaign.

One of the major issues related to the Kurdish language is that several letters should be added to the alphabet we are currently using. The letters x, q and w should be added to the Latin script adopted by law for the Turkish language. Adding these letters to the list of 28 letters annexed to Article 1 of the Law on the Adoption and Implementation of

the Turkish Alphabet, dated Nov. 1, 1928, would not go against the spirit of the law, but we don't even need to amend the law. These letters are already on our keyboards. The interior minister could issue a circular to civil registrars, instructing them to include these letters in records if requested. Shouldn't the fact that a state channel is already using these letters put an end to these meaningless debates? The existence of TRT 6 is powerful enough to solve these problems on its own. Broadcasts by TRT 6 use these three letters in

the subtitles.

TRT 6 is an expression of the respect the Turkish Republic pays its citizens whose mother language is Kurdish. This respect removes the majority of narrow-minded interpretations of laws and bans on the Kurdish language. For this reason, it represents a very advanced state in the solution of the Kurdish issue.

It seems Turkey has made significant progress in the Kurdish issue by introducing broadcasting in Kurdish on state TV.



January 05, 2009

## RELIGIOUS KURDS BECOME KEY VOTE IN TURKEY

**Despite its secular roots, a major Kurdish political party is fighting to regain conservative Kurdish votes from the ruling party.**

**By Yigal Schleifer | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor**

**DIYARBAKIR, TURKEY** In an office on the outskirts of this city in Tur

key's predominantly Kurdish southeast, a group of gray-bearded men – all retired clerics – gather for a nightly meeting.

The conversation quickly turns to politics. Local elections will be held throughout Turkey in March, and religiously conservative Kurds like these men have become an important constituency in the southeast.

In recent years, Kurds have gravitated toward Turkey's Ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Though not explicitly pro-Kurdish, the party, founded by veterans of the country's political Islam movement, has worked hard to woo Kurdish voters with its conservative credentials.

But these men say they are throwing their weight behind the Democratic Society Party (DTP), a pro-Kurdish party with socialist roots. Despite its secular origins, the DTP has been trying to reclaim Kurdish votes lost to the AKP by tailoring its language and symbols to religiously conservative Kurdish voters.

"What we have seen in the last year is that the DTP is trying to eliminate the image of the party as an overtly secularist and nationalist movement and reach out to conservative Kurds," says Ihsan Dagi, a professor at Middle East Technical University in Ankara and an expert on Turkish politics. "The AKP's success has forced the DTP to come to terms with the religiously conservative nature of the Kurdish people."

The DTP – currently facing closure proceedings in Turkey's highest court, where it's accused of separatist activities – certainly has a lot to worry about. Once the leading political force in the southeast, the DTP now finds itself locked in a bitter fight for votes with the AKP. In 2007's parliamentary elections, for example, the AKP managed to collect 56 percent of the

southeast's votes. Even in Diyarbakir, considered a DTP stronghold, the AKP took 41 percent of votes, up from only 16 percent in the previous general elections in 2002.

"We are closer to the people in this region, absolutely," says Ahmet Ocal, the AKP's Diyarbakir district chairman, during an interview in his office.

The DTP's strong suit has long been its clear pro-Kurdish stance. On the other hand, the party's secular and Marxist roots have often left it at odds with segments of Kurdish society – among the most traditional and conservative in Turkey – something the AKP has been able to capitalize on.

"We've had some problem with religion in the past because of the DTP's Marxist origins. We were once more ideological, but we are becoming more a people's party, one that is respectful of everyone's views," says Bengi Yildiz, a DTP member of parliament from Batman, a city in the southeast.

The DTP is still far from being a religious party. But from the use of religious invocations at certain party events to its tacit embrace of the retired imams group, it does seem to be moving away from its doctrinaire past.

In Batman, for example, the manager of the DTP's local branch is a headscarved woman named Muslime Akgul. "I feel very comfortable in the party," she says, a stylish white headscarf with a dark, wavy pattern wrapped tightly around her face.

"When I go out and talk to people about our party, I tell them that there's a home for religious people in our party," says Ms. Akgul, adding that most of the women in her city's branch wear the headscarf.

Simsiroddin Ekinci, former general secretary of the Diyarbakir branch of Mazlum-Der, an Islamic human rights group, says he believes the DTP is succeeding in changing its image. "The DTP is now

bringing religious views and the Kurdish issue together," he says.

Although the AKP has made inroads in the southeast by promising increased rights for the Kurds while playing up its Islamic credentials, recent missteps made by Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan have also given the DTP an opening.

In a November speech he made in the southeastern city of Hakkari, Mr. Erdogan told the audience: "We have said, 'One nation, one flag, one motherland, and one state.' Those who oppose this should leave." Erdogan's words, which echoed the rhetoric long used by Turkish nationalists, were met with fierce criticism in the southeast.

"The AKP had been gaining strength here, but now it seems to have lost its way on the democracy issue," Mr. Ekinci says. "If the AKP doesn't change its strategy on the Kurdish issue, which is not very clear right now, the DTP will take the elections here."

Still, in the streets and bazaars of Diyarbakir, skepticism of the DTP's new image remains.

"We don't believe them. It's only for elections," says Abdulhakim Begin, who works in a small shop near Diyarbakir's main mosque selling Korans and prayer rugs. "Their ideas are Marxist and Marxism is against religion. They can't represent religious people."

But Bakir Karadeniz, a member of the retired imams group, says his religious beliefs compel him to vote against the ruling party in the upcoming local elections.

"The AKP are not good Muslims, and they are not good democrats. They are using religion, and they are lying to us," he says. "The question is not if the DTP is socialist. The most important thing is to support our rights."



## KURDS IN IRAQ: INDEPENDENCE OR AUTONOMY?

By Marvam Abbasi

This paper discusses the dilemma faced by the Kurds in Iraq: press for independence or sustain autonomy. In the wake of World War I, the Kurds lost their prospect for independence. Years later, Saddam Hussein's atrocities against the Kurds amounted to the de facto state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Despite considerable progress, polarized debates over the reconstruction of Iraq post 2003 have generated concerns over the probable emergence of an independent Kurdistan. Nevertheless, the Kurdish leaders have insisted upon autonomy within a federal Iraq, noting that independence has little or no international or regional support. They believe autonomy serves their nationalist aspirations further in preserving regional self-governance.

The toppling of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime in 2003 sparked a renewed debate about the future of the Kurds in Iraq and the viability of an independent state of Kurdistan. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the early part of the twentieth century had laid the seeds for Kurdish statehood. The Treaty of Sevres, in 1920, allowed for the formation and validation of a fully independent Kurdistan but this was soon quashed by the imperial powers.

The Kurds rightly believe that they have long served as pawns in a vicious game of de-colonization and imperialism. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France promised the Kurds their own, independent state as outlined in the Treaty of Sevres. However, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish republic, summarily declared the treaty void. The Kurds then found themselves living as minorities, spread throughout the newly created states of Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. However, Kurdish nationalist aspirations for an independent state or, at the very least, regional autonomy, have remained fiercely alive.

The Kurds in Iraq have enjoyed de facto independence since 1991. This is mainly due to the non-intervention of the US when President Bush Sr. encouraged an uprising against the Ba'athist regime and promised to support their revolt. The Kurds in the north and the Shi'a Arabs in the south rose to overthrow the Ba'athist regime. The United States was caught in a dilemma of whether or not to actively assist in the revolt. It chose not to for two reasons: the American administration feared that if the Shi'a Arabs succeeded in the south, they would turn Iraq to an Iranian-style theocratic state; and secondly, if the Kurds succeeded in the north, Iraq might break up with the Kurds seeking an independent state. To date, the US remains concerned about both possibilities.

The gassing of the Kurds by Saddam's troops in 1988 and the subsequent invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 led to the creation of a UN sponsored "safe haven". The US and the UK provided troops and weapons systems to enforce a no-fly-zone, in 1991. Kurdistan was gradually transformed into a quasi-independent entity "politically and administratively, [and with] separate political institutions (parliament, regional government and political parties), infrastructure, security arrangements and economic development all have contributed to this process" (Salih 2006).

An autonomous Kurdistan within Iraq is a precarious entity. Having almost full control over its natural resources and a relatively large share of Iraq's oil revenues, Kurdistan displays the characteristics of a de facto state within a state. With its own constitution and parliament, flag and militia, its own border and official stamp with which to mark visitor's passports (Carnes, "Qubad" 2007), Kurdistan has created the impression that it is truly a sovereign entity. Indeed, it even has its own Washington representation.

Kurdish leadership and power are not exclusive to Kurdistan, as

there are also many Kurdish representatives in the national government in Baghdad. The current, elected, Iraqi President, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, are Kurds. In addition, Kurds occupy six other cabinet posts, as well as other positions within various national institutions and organizations. They have been involved, since 2003, in the reconstruction of Iraq, while also maintaining self-governance over their own affairs. While administrative and political authorities and institutions have been badly fractured in the Arab region of Iraq, Kurdistan has managed to preserve its institutions and police forces and retained economic stability. This is, in part, due to a considerable amount of foreign aid and the above mentioned efforts by the UN, the US and Britain.

Kurdistan is, currently, the most secure and stable region within Iraq and Kurdish identity is present in everyday life. Until recently, the Kurdish flag alone was flying on governmental buildings and Kurdish logos remain visible on the security forces. Kurdish is also the common language throughout the area. According to Gareth Stansfield, in their unambiguous efforts to break "linguistically" from the rest of Iraq, "English is now being promoted as the second language in Kurdish schools and colleges" (2006: 7). The younger generation does not speak Arabic, and the older generation cautiously observes the new Iraq and looks optimistically toward possible independence.

Many Kurds viewed the invasion of Iraq, in 2003, as a logical step toward independence. But the question of an independent Kurdish state remains open, even though it is clear that a very large number of Kurds desire statehood. In an unofficial referendum compiled in 2005, an overwhelming majority of Kurds voted for an independent Kurdistan. Yet, independence will not be easily attained. Kurdistan's not-so-friendly neighbours, and its geopolitical position, are impediments to achieving complete independence. Under such conditions, autonomy within the Iraqi state may be a better, more viable alternative to independence. However, arguing for autonomy does not negate the significance of the Kurdish quest for statehood later.

### IRAQI CONSTITUTION

The dismantling of Saddam's Ba'athist regime created new opportunities for the marginalized ethno-sectarian communities in Iraq to demand inclusion in the state rebuilding process. The Shi'a Arabs, being approximately 60 percent of the population, seized this opportunity for political gain and leadership. They felt their long, deliberate exclusion from partaking in the governing of the country automatically justified their empowerment in Baghdad. The Sunni Arabs, who comprise almost 20 percent of Iraq, became increasingly concerned at being sidelined and not included in the new distribution of power. They resented the new arrangements of demotion in light of their holding power since the formation of Iraq. The Kurds, however, were content with governing their autonomous region in the north, and wished to continue with self-rule.

The culmination of the constitutional process in 2005 called for federalism with the devolution of power to regional provinces. The constitution was, in essence, a Kurdish-Shi'a transaction based on power sharing. Despite a seeming victory for the Kurds, some are skeptical, as they point out there is no reference made to Kurdistan's boundaries in the constitution (Fatah 2006). Further, approximately 40 percent of disputed Kurdish territories are outside the KRG's jurisdiction, and are unrecognized as parts of the Kurdish

region (ibid.). Nevertheless, under the new Iraqi constitution, the Kurds have retained influence over the future of Kurdistan as well as the reconstruction of Iraq.

During the negotiations to draft the Iraqi constitution a Sunni member of the committee, Kamal Hamdun, while rejecting federalism for the state of Iraq, said, "...we accept the Kurdish region as it was before the war" (qtd. in Ahmed 2007: 171). Notwithstanding, federalism is enshrined in the constitution ratified in December, 2005, as is the formal recognition of autonomy for Kurdistan. In addition, Kurdish and Arabic are recognized as the two official languages. On the subject of Kurdistan's independence however, the Shi'a and Sunnis strongly opposed it. Thus, Kurdistan remains an autonomous region within a federal Iraq, with no changes made regarding self-governance and rule.

#### **KURDISH PERSPECTIVES: PRAGMATISTS AND SEPARATISTS**

Some Kurds feel the constitution offers little hope for an independent state of Kurdistan in the future. They view "the idea of federalism as diluted to a very simple form of federation", which is not helpful to them. They maintain the federation does not recognize the ethnic, historic and geographical reality of a Kurdish homeland" (Fatah). An overwhelming number of Kurds participated in the January 2005 elections in hopes that would lead to "establishing Kurdish independence and separating their region from Iraq" (Spinner 2005: A18). Others were just happy to be part of "the dialogue" and were unconcerned with central government influence over the Kurdish region (ibid.). Still other Kurds criticized their political leaders for settling for "a federalist system of government that would make the Kurdish region a state within Iraq" (ibid.). Clearly, there is no one single solution to content everyone.

With respect to attitudes to independence within the Kurdish population, there are two groups: pragmatists and separatists. The pragmatists would prefer an independent Kurdistan, but realize that it is not currently viable. They are prepared to settle for regional autonomy, and believe that Kurdistan should co-exist within a federal Iraq, but with equitable sharing of power among all ethnic and religious groups. Among the pragmatists is the Kurdish leadership, who believe the Kurds would benefit from sharing power in Baghdad, and would be in a stronger position, than if they were independent, to bargain for Kurdish nationalist demands. Their claim for autonomy means self-governance, which wards off potential attacks from neighbouring countries (Lawrence 2008: 312). Above all, by remaining a part of Iraq, the Kurds remain participants in the rebuilding of the state.

The separatists claim that without independence there can be no guarantee against future repression by the central government. They recall the infamous Anfal campaign, when Saddam deployed chemical weapons against the civilian Kurds. They "associate Iraq with poison gas and mass executions" (Galbraith 2003). To the separatists an independent Kurdish state is the only way to safeguard vital Kurdish national interests. The elections of January 2005 generated resentment in Kurds who accused their political leaders of making concessions and advocating a system of federalism that merely allows Kurdistan to exist as province within Iraq (Spinner).

Kurdish leaders are firm in their belief that independence is not feasible at present. In part, this is because they do not want to be perceived as being the destroyers of the Iraqi nation. Filad Merani, a prominent leader within the Kurdistan Regional Government, concedes that, independence "is a goal [they] have to struggle for – but when the time comes" (Spinner). He further notes, "[they] know it's important for [them] to be part of Iraq strategically. [They] know if there is no peace and security, it's going to affect [them]" (ibid.).

The separatists argue that since WWI, the assimilation policies of the surrounding host countries toward their Kurdish populations have mainly been attempts to quell any ethno-nationalistic quests for independence. They insist that with enforced assimilation in those countries, and the possibility of similar policies in promulgated in Iraq, the Kurd's distinct identity may be on the path to

extinction (Gunter 2004: 106). Their feeble chance of independence, the separatists believe, is only possible in the further escalation of civil war and the failure of Iraq's central government (Stockman). It is at that point that the Kurds would most likely press for independence (ibid.).

#### **INDEPENDENCE**

Ethnic and religious minorities within a state often are faced with two possibilities: expulsion or assimilation (Kellas 1998). In such circumstances, the dominant power exerts hegemony over citizen's affairs with the aim of building a nation-state (ibid.). Some Kurds fear that without an independent state, they are susceptible to future repressions if they remain as minorities within Iraq. Complete sovereignty, they maintain, diminishes future probabilities of ethnic cleansing and reprisals against them, as they "associate Iraq with poison gas and mass executions" (Galbraith 2003).

Although these fears are certainly justified, others maintain that independence for the Kurds could bring about other, serious, political and economic repercussions. Moreover, attacks from neighbouring states may ensue. Turkey, with its perpetually restless Kurdish minority population, has threatened invasion in the event of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. Iran and Syria, too, have also expressed their opposition to independence. They fear this event could encourage their own Kurdish populations to demand autonomy, if not outright separation. The Kurds' key ally, the United States, is also not supportive of establishing a sovereign state of Kurdistan. It supports only a unified Iraq and fears the destabilizing effect independence might have on the entire region.

Another major factor is that the US does not wish to anger Turkey. Political logic suggests that the US would take side with a major NATO ally in any dispute over the future of the Kurds. If it had to choose between supporting Turkey or the Kurds in any conflict, it would choose Turkey "every time" (Phillips 2005: 36). Therefore, it is highly improbable the US would lend support to the Kurdish aspirations for statehood. In fact, Washington has emphasized, repeatedly, that it would not favour one Iraqi group over another and has further stated that the three groups collectively should work toward a unified state (Stockman 2007).

In the period leading up to the invasion, the Kurds assured the Bush administration that they would not press for independence. It was stated that the Kurds wished only to preserve their self-governance over the Kurdistan region (Galbraith 2003). Although desiring independence, the Kurdish leadership has not recanted on their promise. The leadership has consistently pressed for autonomy within a federal Iraq while collaborating in the reconstruction of the state.

The Kurdish leadership acknowledges the desirability of creating a sovereign state, but also realizes that the process is not feasible. In his inauguration speech as the first President of Iraqi Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani stated, "I promise to safeguard the accomplishments of Kurdistan and to carry out my duties faithfully." He further added, "I will do my best to strengthen national unity and brotherhood between Kurds and Arabs" (qtd. in Ahmed 2007: 162). Later, the Kurds in Iraq fiercely criticized Talabani for imparting, "The establishment of a Kurdish state is an impossible dream...the Kurds will have much greater stability within a united Iraq rather than as part of a fragmented country" (Aslan 2007). The title of Azad Aslan's article, "Dear Mr. President, Kurdish state, not a dream, it's inevitable," encapsulates the longing of the Kurds for independence.

According to Talabani, "...there are merits to a stable situation in Baghdad...if Iraq were to be a stable, relatively democratic society, then that would be a help to Kurdistan" (qtd. in Carnes, "Qubad" 2007). Moreover, the KRG would not risk the profitable economic relationship it has established with Baghdad, nor imperil the benefits in return for independence (ibid.). The price of independence is too high and the Kurdish leaders are not willing to compromise their autonomy just yet. In an attempt to display their solidar-

ity with the rest of Iraq, the KRG has decided to fly the new national flag, along with that of Kurdistan, in the Kurdish region ("Kurds Display New Iraqi Flag" 2008).

James Fearon notes, "Nations are not born but are made, partly in response to international incentives and major power politics" (2004: 394). The regional states are not happy at the prospects of sharing borders with an independent Kurdistan. International support for the creation of newly independent states is also limited, as can be seen in the case of Kosovo, in February 2008. Furthermore, any future Kurdish independence denotes the presence of the US military base in Kurdistan indefinitely, which would threaten its sovereignty, as it would be a potential target, being allied with the US. As well, the US military base would not please Iran and Syria, as they would fear US attacks from Kurdistan. The US would be perceived as occupiers, which might give impetus to terrorist organizations to further their missions in resisting occupation.

However, the presence of the US military has not deterred Turkish and Iranian forces from crossing into the Iraqi northern region on the grounds to target Kurdish rebels. During the no-fly-zone years, Turkey periodically launched military strikes inside the Kurdish region with the full knowledge of the American administration. As well, on the pretext of targeting the Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Turkey's air strikes inside Iraq have resulted in the killing of a number of Iraqi Kurdish civilians (Human Rights Watch Report 1998). On several occasions, the Clinton administration had defended Turkey's raids inside the American protected 'safe haven' and stated, "Turkey's an ally and we have no reason to question the need for an incursion across the border" (ibid.). In contrast, the US administration strongly denounced Iran's air strikes against an Iranian political organization, Mojahedines, harboured in southern Iraq (ibid.). The US administration threatened taking "whatever action necessary to prevent both Iraqi and Iranian entry into the no-fly-zone" (ibid.). Turkey's incursions have not abated. Ankara has repeatedly uttered military threats in the event of an independent Kurdistan. Although the US might be able to deter such future attacks, political strategy would prevent it from siding with the Kurds against Turkey.

## AUTONOMY

Ted Gurr maintains "...threats to divide a country should be managed by the devolution of state power and that communal fighting about access to the state's power and resources should be restrained by recognizing group rights and sharing power" (2000: 52). Gurr recommends autonomy as a solution to ending conflict, as it does not lead to secession and independence (ibid.). Although, satisfactory outcomes for all parties are rare, most ethno-nationalist movements are reconciled to results that amount to less than independence. This is mainly due to their weaker status at the negotiations. Conflicts for complete independence, Gurr adds, often lead to "autonomy, negotiated or de facto autonomy within the state" (57). If autonomy is a solution to resolving conflicts, why do some states ignore this process? Gurr maintains the answer invariably lies in the central governments' grip on power. There are very few ethno-nationalist movements fighting for absolute independence. The fighters in Chechnya and East Timor may be seen as an exception, however (ibid.).

The multi-layered definition of autonomy is generally accepted as "a useful concept and means by which to address competing claims for political and minority rights" (Yildiz 2007: 197). A minority group within an encompassing state is granted autonomy depending on the state's cultural, economic and political infrastructure. Autonomy does not grant the nation within a sovereign state international recognition, or allow it to possess powers "such as in the areas of defence or foreign affairs" (ibid. 198). However, at times autonomy may include developing independent diplomatic, economic and political relationships with other countries.

Ernest Gellner states that "...the power and prestige of a nation depends on its annual rate of growth and its economic clout, and [not], on how much of the map it manages to paint with its own

colour (1997: 107-8). Currently Kurdistan is dependent upon the central government for its budget. Under the Iraqi constitution, the KRG receives 17 percent of the national budget (Carnes, "Expert" 2007). The KRG budget for the 2007 fiscal year reached almost \$4.7 billion. This is approximately 95 percent of the region's annual budget, of which 64 percent is allotted to private sector salaries (Carnes, "Qubad" 2007). As yet there are no international investors or foreign banking in the region (Gunter 2008). Since 2003, the KRG has joined with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in calling for autonomy within a federal Iraq. Both organizations realize that Kurdistan is in a much stronger position to grow and prosper within an equally thriving economy in Iraq as a whole. The KRG recognizes that absent international support, demanding separation and independence will not be beneficial.

In a statement issued by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on January 21, 2006, the leadership concedes that the progress and security of Kurdistan's future are possible only through "the development of a democratic and federal Iraq." The statement emphasizes the importance of the Iraqi Constitution, the "[establishment] of a genuine federal and democratic Iraq," and calls for the "[restoration of] Kirkuk...to the embrace of the Kurdistan region" (KRG Unification Agreement 2006). The Kurds want real domination over their own territory and titular control over any armed forces from Baghdad that are within Kurdish lands. The president of the KRG, Masoud Barzani, has gone so far as to remark, "What we really need to work on in the parliament of Kurdistan is that the region of Kurdistan should have its own special constitution and laws. There is absolutely no need to have a link that whatever is done in Baghdad should be done here too" (qtd. in Eland, Newman, et al. 2005: 2).

## RELATIONS WITH TURKEY AND IRAN

Since the formation of a quasi-independent Kurdistan, Ankara has been a major trading partner. As well, in the period since the invasion the construction of the new airport in Irbil was made possible with the aid of Turkey and Britain ("Does Independence Beckon" 2007). Ankara's agreement for the operation of Petrol and General Energy Oil and Gas in the Kurdish region was on "government to government relations," thus, tacitly acknowledging the probability of a "future entity with a sovereign government, if not as a state" (Olson 2004: 116).

The de facto northern region has also maintained good economic and political relations with Tehran. According to statements from Kurdish authorities, the value of economic trade between Kurdistan and Tehran has been approximately \$800 million annually (Rafaat 2007: 83). The presence of Iranian consulates in Irbil (the capital of Kurdistan) and Sulaymanyeh, and the official representation of the KRG in Tehran, illustrates the recognition, if not legitimization, of Kurdistan by Tehran (ibid.). However, Iranian Kurdish movements opposed to the government in Tehran have established bases in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 1991, the KRG has made strenuous efforts to prevent the armed groups from operating in Iraq. It recognizes that good relations with its neighbours are imperative in achieving political strength and economic prosperity. Without the continued economic relations with its neighbours, Kurdistan would risk the development and prosperity it has gained since 1991.

## UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL: THEIR REACTION

Graham Fuller argues, "the international system characteristically does not welcome the break-up of existing states and the resulting turmoil and violence" (1993: 109). Furthermore, legitimacy of new states often is acknowledged by the presence of the separatist group in the United Nations, if not as members, at least as observers. The Kurds do not have representatives in the United Nations, even though other stateless nations such as Palestine have observers. The UN Security Council's unwillingness to

recognize Kurdistan as an independent state is, to a degree, due to some members of the Council facing challenges from their own separatist groups at home. This may be seen in the cases of the Chechens within Russia and the Tibetans and Muslim minorities in China. Moreover, the United States will not willingly oppose Turkey, a NATO ally, in support of the Kurdish cause for independence.

## CONCLUSIONS

Any long-term plans for Kurdistan in Iraq must consider a strategic national vision, as well as regional ideal. For the reasons discussed herein, an independent state of Kurdistan is not viable at present and not congruent with the interests of the US and other international actors. Furthermore, Kurdistan's neighbours, particularly those with restive Kurdish populations, would not agree to a re-drawing of boundaries that could lead to destabilizing their own nations. As well, there is international concern that the creation of an independent Kurdistan would give impetus to other separatist groups around the globe.

Some believe the Kurds have acquired something better than membership in the United Nations. Quil Lawrence in his book, *Invisible Nation* (2008), states the Kurds have acquired a status better than de jure independence (2008). They enjoy de facto sovereignty without causing their concerned neighbours – Turkey and Iran – reason to invade or interfere with their autonomy and self-governance (ibid.).

They established and gained more rights in the new Iraqi constitution, particularly having been granted self-rule in Kurdistan. These rights include the ability to maintain autonomy in the three provinces they ruled, the preservation of an army along their border with Turkey, Iran and Syria, and power to establish economic, political and diplomatic relations with other states. Although they strongly desire independence, they have, at least in the short term, chosen autonomy. International recognition has allowed the Kurds to enjoy diplomatic relations with other nations and to further ventures in international trade and investment. Whatever the future holds for Kurdistan, present circumstances grace them with recognition of their distinct ethnic identity and culture.

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**Le Monde**  
7 janvier 2009

# Les Etats-Unis inaugurent à Bagdad leur ambassade, la plus vaste du monde

Symbole de la « profonde amitié » entre les deux pays, elle est cernée par des kilomètres de hautes murailles, et s'étend sur 42 hectares

Vingt-sept bâtiments fortifiés, 619 appartements équipés pour tenir un siège, un bon millier de bureaux, plusieurs piscines, courts de tennis, supermarchés, cinémas, salons de coiffure, divers restaurants spécialisés, un hélicad, une centrale électrique, une station d'épuration, une autre pour la purification des eaux, un système ultramoderne d'air conditionné et filtré, assez sophistiqué pour prévenir toute attaque chimique ou biologique, etc. Près de quatre années après sa mise à l'étude à Washington, la plus vaste et la plus chère ambassade du monde, d'un coût de 736 millions de dollars (près de 525 millions d'euros), a été inaugurée en grande pompe, lundi 5 janvier, à Bagdad.

Entièrement cernée par des kilomètres de hautes murailles antibombe, surélevées en plusieurs endroits de miradors équipés de mitrailleuses, à l'intérieur même de la fameuse « zone verte » elle-même ultrafortifiée où se sont installés, au cœur de la ville, tous les corps constitués irakiens, du Parlement jusqu'au siège du gouvernement en passant par les grands ministères, la superficie de la nouvelle ambassade américaine seule est de 42 hectares, quasiment aussi étendue que celle du



Le numéro deux du département d'Etat, John Negroponte (à droite), et l'ambassadeur Ryan Crocker écoutent l'allocution du président irakien, Jalal Talabani, lors de l'inauguration de l'ambassade américaine, lundi. EPA

Vatican, qui en compte quarante-quatre.

Qualifiée d'« extravagante », voire d'« impossible à gérer » par de nombreux critiques aux Etats-Unis, qui soulignent que le budget annuel du complexe devrait dépasser 1,2 milliard de dollars, la nouvelle forteresse « est le signe que les Etats-Unis entendent rester engagés en Irak », a déclaré l'ambassadeur Ryan Crocker, nommé par le président George Bush en 2006 et en instance de départ.

« D'ici, a ajouté John Negroponte, le numéro deux du département d'Etat qui avait fait le voyage pour l'occasion, nous poursuivons la tradition d'amitié, de coopération et de soutien commencée en 2003 par de nombreux Américains. »

## L'administration déménage

En l'absence du chef du gouvernement Nouri Al-Maliki, reçu pra-

tiquement à la même heure à Téhéran par le Guide de la révolution iranienne, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, qui a mis son hôte irakien en garde contre « la propension américaine à trahir ses promesses », c'est le président de la République, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, qui représentait le pouvoir irakien à l'inauguration. « La construction de ce site n'aurait pas été possible sans la courageuse décision du président Bush de libérer l'Irak », a dit le chef de l'Etat. « Ce bâtiment, a ajouté le vieux politicien qui dirige l'un des deux grands partis politiques kurdes et qui fut élu en 2005 par l'Assemblée des représentants, est le symbole de la profonde amitié entre les peuples de l'Amérique et de l'Irak. » Symbole imparfait puisque, pour des « raisons de sécurité », c'est une entreprise du Koweït, avec plus d'un millier de travailleurs asiatiques importés, qui ont édifié l'entièreté du complexe ces dernières années.

Il n'empêche. Comme l'a souligné l'ambassadeur Crocker, l'ouverture officielle de la nouvelle ambassade, lundi au bord du fleuve Tigre, « ouvre un nouveau chapitre dans les relations » entre les deux pays. L'Amérique, qui occupait le Palais de la République, construit au début des années 1950 par l'ancien roi d'Irak Fayçal II, depuis l'invasion du pays en avril 2003, est désormais dans ses murs à Bagdad. C'est l'administration Maliki qui devrait à présent s'installer au palais dont Saddam Hussein, après l'avoir agrandi, avait fait sa résidence officielle. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

## IRAK LE GOUVERNEMENT A REPRIS LE CONTRÔLE DE LA « ZONE VERTE »

Des soldats américains passés théoriquement sous autorité irakienne, jeudi 1<sup>er</sup> janvier, se photographient à Bagdad devant un monument. Inaugurée en 1989, cette arche faite d'épées croisées au-dessus d'une large avenue constituait un hommage à Saad Ibn Aba Ouagas, vainqueur de la bataille de Qadissiya contre les Perses. Erigé après la guerre contre l'Iran, il avait pour objectif d'établir un parallèle avec le président Saddam Hussein. Pendant la cérémonie de passation de pouvoir, jeudi, le gouvernement irakien a également repris le contrôle de la « zone verte », le quartier ultra-sécurisé situé dans le centre de Bagdad.





## BOMBARDEMENTS TURCS ET IRANIENS SUR LE KURDISTAN IRAKIEN

**MONTS QANDIL (Irak), 5 jan 2009 (AFP) -**

L'AVIATION TURQUE et l'artillerie iranienne ont bombardé lundi des positions des séparatistes kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak, a indiqué à l'AFP le responsable des relations extérieures du groupe.

"L'aviation turque et l'artillerie iranienne ont bombardé nos positions entre 19H00 et 20H00 (16H00 et 17H00 GMT). Les Turcs ont frappé Akouwan, et les Iraniens ont bombardé Maradou", deux localités du Kurdistan irakien, a déclaré Ahmed Denis, le responsable des relations extérieures du PKK.

"Nous n'avons pas d'informations sur des victimes", a précisé M. Denis.

Le responsable du PKK a critiqué la position du gouvernement irakien à Bagdad. "Comment peuvent-ils laisser un autre pays bombarder leur propre pays ?" a-t-il demandé.

Le 28 décembre, des avions de chasse turcs avaient bombardé des positions du PKK au Kurdistan irakien, à la frontière entre l'Irak, l'Iran et la Turquie. Et les 16 et 17 décembre, l'armée turque avait bombardé des cibles du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak.

Les sites visés se trouvaient dans les montagnes de Qandil, une place-forte des rebelles kurdes de Turquie.

L'armée turque effectue régulièrement des raids aériens contre des bases du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak avec l'aide de renseignements fournis par les Etats-

Unis, alliés de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, a lancé en 1984 une campagne armée pour obtenir l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, une région peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait 44.000 morts.

Selon Ankara, quelque 2.000 rebelles du PKK sont retranchés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, y disposent de la liberté de mouvement et s'y approvisionnent en armes et en munitions avec lesquelles ils lancent des attaques en territoire turc.

Le 25 décembre, trois soldats turcs avaient été tués et neuf autres blessés, dont quatre grièvement, dans une attaque de rebelles kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Des rebelles du PKK avaient attaqué à l'arme automatique un minibus de l'armée dans la petite ville de Cizre, proche des frontières avec l'Irak et la Syrie.

La Turquie a souvent accusé les Kurdes d'Irak, qui gèrent la région dans le cadre d'une autonomie, de tolérer et même d'aider les activités du PKK.

Le 24 décembre à Ankara, le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki et son homologue turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avaient exprimé leur volonté de lutter contre les séparatistes du PKK retranchés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

"Nous ne devons pas permettre que les organisations terroristes, en particulier le PKK (interdit), affaiblissent nos relations", avait indiqué M. Maliki.



## TURQUIE : Le renouveau de la langue kurde

**JEUDI 08 JANVIER 2009 Par ASSIA SHIHAB**

**Longtemps interdite en Turquie, la langue kurde vient de bénéficier d'un geste de la part du gouvernement qui a lancé, le 1er janvier, une chaîne de télévision publique destinée aux 12 millions de Kurdes vivant dans le pays.**

Longtemps interdites en Turquie, les trois dialectes kurdes devraient bénéficier d'un petit coup de pouce de la part du gouvernement qui, au nom de la diversité culturelle, a lancé, le 1er janvier dernier, une nouvelle chaîne de télévision publique destinée aux 12 millions de Kurdes qui peuplent le pays.

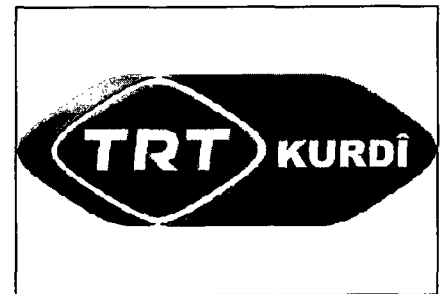
Si le projet a provoqué l'ire des nationalistes et des Kurdes les plus radicaux, qui dénoncent une manœuvre électorale du gouvernement, il devrait, en revanche, s'attirer les faveurs de l'Union européenne (UE).

La langue kurde a été interdite après le coup d'Etat militaire de 1980. Les pressions de l'UE aidant, elle retrouve peu à peu sa place dans la

sphère publique. Dans le studio où travaille le réalisateur Omer Avci, on produit des doublages en kurde pour la chaîne TRT6 qui diffuse, entre autres, des films étrangers. "Pendant des années, nous les Kurdes, on ne pouvait pas parler notre langue, seulement à la maison ou entre nous, affirme Omer. C'est nouveau de pouvoir suivre des programmes en kurde à la télévision. Les gens ont encore du mal à y croire..." Des productions hollywoodiennes en kurde

Ici, en plus des doublages, on réalise, toujours pour la nouvelle chaîne, toute sorte de documentaires sur la culture kurde. Une culture commune à 12 millions de personnes jusque là très peu représentées dans les médias turcs.

"On essaie d'apporter des réponses et des éclaircissements, explique Ahmet Sel, producteur et journaliste. Les gens ne sont pas suffisamment informés sur les questions de santé, sociales et économiques. Dans le domaine culturel aussi, on fait des choses qui n'ont pas été faites jusqu'à aujourd'hui."



Dans le même temps, la langue kurde n'a pas d'existence légale, elle n'est pas enseignée à l'école et son utilisation reste strictement encadrée. Dans le Centre culturel kurde d'Istanbul, la création de la chaîne est accueillie avec prudence. Beaucoup y voient une manœuvre politique du gouvernement. Lequel a assuré que TRT6 était une première étape avant l'établissement de chaînes privées. En attendant, les téléspectateurs peuvent profiter pour la première fois de productions hollywoodiennes dans leur langue.



## UN JOURNALISTE TURC RISQUE LA PRISON POUR DIVULGATION DE SECRETS MILITAIRES

**ISTANBUL, 6 jan 2009 (AFP)**

UN PROCUREUR TURC a requis de trois à cinq ans de prison contre le directeur de la rédaction d'un quotidien libéral pour avoir publié des informations militaires confidentielles mettant en cause le rôle de l'armée dans une attaque de rebelles kurdes, a affirmé mardi ce journal.

L'acte d'accusation rédigé par un procureur stambouliote après une plainte de l'état-major reproche à Adnan Demir d'avoir "dévoilé des informations de

nature confidentielle et de diffusion interdite par les autorités compétentes", a déclaré à l'AFP Markar Esayan, rédacteur en chef du journal Taraf.

Le procès doit selon l'agence de presse Anatolie débiter dans les prochains jours.

Dix-sept soldats ont péri en octobre dans l'assaut lancé par des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) soutenus depuis l'Irak par des tirs d'armes lourdes contre une caserne proche de la frontière irakienne, dans la

province de Hakkari.

Taraf a publié après cette attaque une série d'articles affirmant que l'armée avait connaissance un mois avant l'assaut des déplacements d'un groupe de 80 rebelles à travers les montagnes du nord de l'Irak en direction de la frontière turque.

Le quotidien a également fait état d'un rapport prévenant cinq jours avant l'assaut que les rebelles transportaient des pièces d'artillerie anti-aérienne et de renseignements fournis par les Etats-Unis dans les heures précédant l'opération montrant les rebelles installant leurs armes et minant les alentours.

L'armée a mené une enquête interne concluant à l'absence de faute des forces de sécurité.

L'attaque du 3 octobre avait suscité l'indignation de la population turque et encouragé les autorités à lancer une opération contre les bases du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak.

Considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'UE et les Etats-Unis, le PKK mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait quelque 44.000 morts.

**Humanité**

9 janvier 2009

## La Turquie à l'heure des audaces

**Ankara . Réhabilitation de Nazim Hikmet, télévision d'État en kurde, levée du tabou sur le massacre des Arméniens : le pays révisé ses dogmes pour s'ouvrir à l'Europe.**

Cent sept ans après sa naissance, que l'on célébrait mercredi, quarante-cinq ans après sa mort en exil à Moscou, le grand poète Nazim Hikmet s'est vu restituer lundi la nationalité turque. Il en avait été déchu en 1951 pour communisme. Un crime qui, jusque dans les années 1980, celles du dernier coup d'État militaire, est resté puni en Turquie de prison, de tortures et de bannissement, quand ce n'était pas de mort. C'est le porte-parole du gouvernement, Cemil Çiçek, qui en a fait l'annonce solennelle à l'issue du Conseil des ministres, précisant que « les délits qui avaient poussé les autorités à le déchoir à l'époque ne sont plus considérés comme un crime aujourd'hui ». Il a ajouté que le gouvernement ne s'opposerait plus au rapatriement du corps du poète qui avait tant souffert de l'exil, ce « dur métier », et dit son rêve de reposer un jour sous un platane dans le sol de sa patrie.

### Ouverture et dialogue

Aboutissement de longues années de luttes de sa famille, de ses amis, des communistes et progressistes turcs, cette décision va dans le sens d'autres pas importants faits ces derniers mois par le gouvernement turc dans un sens d'ouverture et de dialogue.

Le précédent date de moins d'une semaine avec le lancement d'une chaîne de télévision publique entièrement diffusée en langue kurde. Une langue pendant longtemps interdite d'antenne et dont l'usage en public valut à de nombreux kurdes - y compris des député(e)s et des maires - de longues années d'emprisonnement et la persécution pour tous ceux qui militaient pour sa reconnaissance. Pour donner plus de poids à l'événement, le président Gül et le premier ministre Erdogan ont tous deux prononcé quelques phrases en kurde à TRT6 - le nom de la nouvelle chaîne. Ils ont été aussitôt la cible des attaques des nationalistes de droite et de gau-

che, le plus virulent étant le chef de l'opposition sociale démocrate, Denis Baykal. Il a reproché au parti au pouvoir, l'AKP, et à ses dirigeants, de « brader l'unité nationale ».

### arrimer la Turquie à l'Union européenne

Les nationalistes - et parmi eux nombre de militaires - voient d'un mauvais oeil les efforts faits ces derniers mois par l'AKP (le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir), qui s'est donné pour premier objectif d'arrimer la Turquie à l'Union européenne, pour satisfaire aux exigences présentées par la Commission européenne dans le cadre des négociations d'adhésion. Ils ont sévèrement critiqué l'ouverture des négociations entre Chypriotes turcs et grecs sur la réunification de l'île et les nouvelles facilités de communication accordées aux habitants des deux parties séparées depuis 1974.

Ils ont été rendus furieux par le voyage en Arménie, l'été der-

nier, du président Abdullah Gül. Un tournant historique confirmé depuis par d'autres faits qui montrent que, désormais, la question du génocide arménien n'est plus un tabou, même s'il reste imprudent de prononcer le mot. Ainsi, une pétition lancée à la mi-décembre par plusieurs intellectuels turcs qui proposent de « demander pardon aux frères et soeurs arméniens » dont ils disent « partager les sentiments et les peines » ne parle pas de génocide mais de « catastrophe dont ont été victimes en 1915 les Arméniens de l'Empire Ottoman ». Là encore, la levée de boucliers a été considérable et le président Gül, qui a refusé de critiquer l'initiative au nom de la « liberté d'expression », s'est vu accuser de n'être pas un vrai Turc et d'avoir... une grand-mère arménienne !

**Françoise Germain-Robin**

AFP

## LE PRÉSIDENT DU KURDISTAN IRAKIEN RENCONTRE DES ÉMISSAIRES TURCS SUR LE PKK

**BAGDAD, 11 jan 2009 (AFP)**

LE PRÉSIDENT de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a rencontré des émissaires turcs après une série de bombardements récents par l'aviation turque des positions des séparatistes kurdes du PKK sur ce territoire, a annoncé dimanche son bureau.

M. Barzani et le ministre adjoint des Affaires étrangères turc Murat Ozelik se sont vus samedi à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan, pour discuter de la coopération contre les bases arrières des séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), indique le bureau du président kurde dans un communiqué.

"Cette visite a permis de jeter les bases d'un futur dialogue concernant les problèmes entre la région kurde et la Turquie et de travailler à résoudre ces problèmes et (apaiser) les tensions", a déclaré à des journalistes Safin Dizayi, responsable des questions internationales au sein de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK, parti kurde nationaliste).

Les négociateurs turcs devraient à nouveau se rendre au Kurdistan dans l'avenir, a-t-il ajouté sans donner de détails.

Les deux parties ont également abordé la situation générale de l'Irak, près de six ans après l'invasion américaine, selon le communiqué.

La rencontre de samedi intervient après une rencontre, le 24 décembre à Ankara, du Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki avec le président turc Abdullah Gül. Les deux hommes avaient discuté de la manière d'aborder le problème des rebelles du PKK terrés dans le nord de l'Irak.

Ankara cherche à établir des relations diplomatiques et une coopération économique avec Bagdad.

Le PKK, considéré comme un groupe terroriste par Ankara et la plus grande partie de la communauté internationale, a pris les armes en 1984 pour revendiquer l'indépendance du sud-est de la Turquie, à majorité kurde. Le conflit a fait depuis 44.000 morts.

La chasse turque pilonne les repaires des rebelles kurdes en Irak depuis une attaque du PKK contre un poste-frontière turc, le 3 octobre, qui s'était soldée par la mort de 17 soldats.

Le dernier bombardement turc connu remonte au 5 janvier.

AP Associated Press

## Member of Iraq president PUK party killed in Kirkuk

6 January 2009 The Associated Press

IRAQI POLICE say gunmen have killed a member of President Jalal Talabani's political party in a drive-by shooting in the northern city of Kirkuk.

Police Brigadier Ahmed Hawandi said the official killed Monday was a member of Talabani's Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Hawandi says the gunmen chased a car carrying Subhi Hassan and two others after it passed through a checkpoint before firing at it. He says Hassan and his bodyguard were killed, and a third unidentified person was wounded.

Kirkuk city is historically a Kurdish city and it lies just south border of the Kurdistan autonomous region, the population is a mix of majority Kurds

and minority of Arabs, Christians and Turkmen. lies 250 km northeast of Baghdad. Kurds have a strong cultural and emotional attachment to Kirkuk, which they call "the Kurdish Jerusalem."

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

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

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

TODAYS ZAMAN

January 05, 2009

## Kurdish to be offered as elective course at universities

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH WIRES

In a step to support government efforts to meet a demand long sought by the country's Kurdish population, the Higher Education Board (YÖK) has announced that Kurdish will be made an elective course at universities.

"Education in Kurdish is offered through language centers and institutes. As soon as we meet the need for instructors to give Kurdish classes, we will offer this language as an elective course at universities," said Halis Ayhan, president of YÖK's education committee. "We want to realize this plan in the name of science, not in the name of lifting a ban. Any student studying at any university department should be allowed to take Kurdish as an elective course and develop his knowledge of this language."

Ayhan's remarks came only one week after YÖK head Yusuf Ziya Özcan announced plans to open Kurdish language and literature departments at Istanbul University and Ankara University. Özcan also said that his board might later consider opening Kurdish institutes.

Ayhan and Özcan's statements serve as support for the launch of the country's first 24-hour television channel broadcasting in the once-banned Kurdish language. The public use of Kurdish was prohibited following the 1980 military coup until 1991.

Ayhan said Kurdish classes should have been offered earlier at universities. "We should have acted before the launch of the Kurdish channel. Such a plan should have been preceded by education. However, YÖK is too late.

The day we make Kurdish an elective course at universities, we will eliminate a great flaw," he noted. Ayhan also said it was a "shame" not to offer Kurdish courses at universities in a country where Kurdish is widely spoken on the street.

**Ban on phone calls in Kurdish to be lifted**

Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Şahin has acted to lift a ban on phone conversations in Kurdish in Turkey's prisons. Kurdish inmates are not allowed to talk on the phone in their mother tongue, which poses an obstacle for prisoners and their relatives who don't know Turkish. Şahin recently gave his team instructions to draft the required changes. If the Council of State approves the changes, inmates will be able to communicate freely with their families and relatives in their language of choice.

TODAYS ZAMAN

January 07, 2009

## RTÜK to extend broadcasting time of private stations in Kurdish

ASLIHAN AYDIN

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) is planning to extend the period of time private television and radio stations are allowed to broadcast in Kurdish.

In a step to support government efforts to meet a demand long sought by the country's Kurdish population, the RTÜK will grant more time to private TV and radio stations to air broadcasts in Kurdish. Private TV stations currently have the right to broadcast programs in Kurdish provided that they do not exceed four hours a week, and radio stations have the same right provided that they do not exceed five hours a week. Private TV and radio stations which

broadcast in Kurdish include Gün TV, Söz TV and Medya FM.

The RTÜK's decision to extend the broadcasting time allowed to private TV and radio stations for Kurdish programming came only days after the launch of the country's first 24-hour television channel broadcasting in Kurdish. The public use of Kurdish was prohibited following the 1980 military coup until 1991.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan yesterday praised the new Kurdish channel, terming it "a very important initiative to strengthen ties between the public and the state."

"It is a great flaw that Turkey was so late in launching a channel that would fully broadcast in

Kurdish. We have a broad understanding of democracy. Everybody has the right to express themselves within democracy. The new Kurdish channel is a very good example of this fact," he said.

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli was, however, critical of the new channel. He said the existence of the Kurdish channel could not be regarded as a development independent of the strategy of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to become a political body and Turkey's efforts to become a full member of the European Union since 2002.



January 8, 2009

INTERNATIONAL  
Herald Tribune

# This time, Iraqi politics go public

## Candidates now allowed to use their names for campaigning

By Timothy Williams  
and Suadad al-Salhy

**BAGHDAD:** It was a cool winter morning in Baghdad on Monday, just a few kilometers from the Shiite mosque where a suicide bomber had killed or wounded 112 people the day before. But Abdul Kareem, 50, a real estate developer and independent Shiite candidate, was on the street hustling for votes anyway, passing out campaign cards and gluing his posters to walls.

"If you think I'm a good man, campaign for me," Kareem told an elderly man, handing him a stack of laminated cards.

The nation's provincial elections on Jan. 31 are the first in which the government has deemed it safe enough for the names, instead of simply the political affiliations, of office seekers to appear on the ballot.

It is also the first time that large numbers of candidates like Kareem have decided for themselves that Iraq is sufficiently safe to campaign publicly and put their oversize pictures on posters and banners around the city. It sometimes seems that every little part of blast wall in Baghdad is covered with them.

The elections are part of a series of votes scheduled in Iraq this year, including parliamentary elections and a referendum on the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

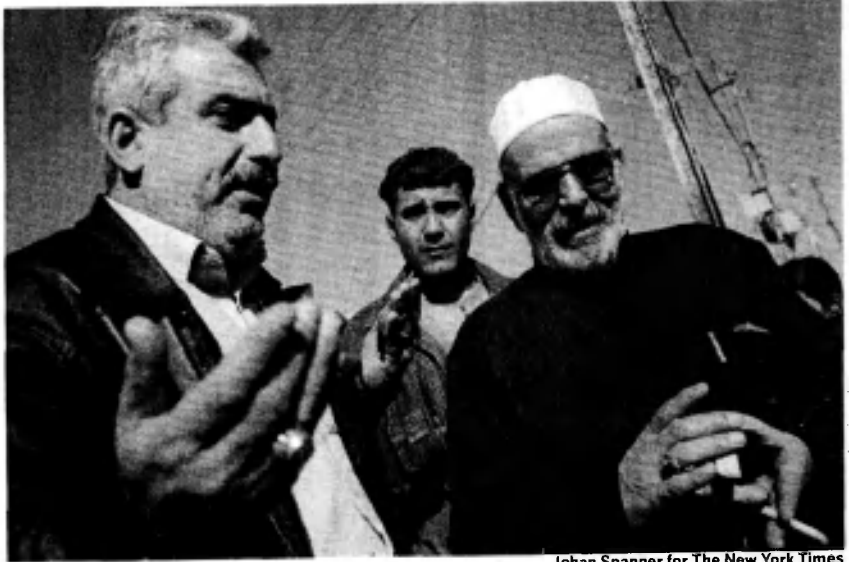
Taken together, they are expected to shape the political future of Iraq as it emerges from an extended period of sectarian violence and continues to wrestle with basic questions like whether it will be a single nation or several.

The provincial election also takes place against the backdrop of a wave of departing foreign troops, most significantly from Britain and the United States. The United States has agreed to pull its combat troops, now numbering about 145,000, from cities by June 30, and to withdraw entirely from Iraq by the end of 2011.

The balloting for the provincial councils is expected to correct underrepresentation in local governments among Sunni Arabs, particularly in areas where there has been heavy insurgent and sectarian violence, including Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala and Nineveh provinces. Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the 2005 provincial elections.

There is widespread fear, however, that the vote may set off a new round of clashes. At least one candidate has been assassinated by political rivals and a number of opposition candidates have been arrested, several of whom are being investigated for terrorism-related charges in Diyala.

The election will be delayed in restive Kirkuk Province, where about 40 percent of Iraq's oil reserves lie, and in the three provinces of Kurdistan, a semiautonomous region.



Johan Spanner for The New York Times

Abdul Kareem, left, stumping for votes this week in Baghdad. Many candidates in the Jan. 31 provincial elections have decided Iraq is safe enough to campaign publicly.

Further complicating the vote are the estimated 5.1 million Iraqis who remain displaced, according to the International Organization for Migration. Only about half of the refugees — those still living within Iraq's borders — are eligible to vote.

The provincial elections could prove to be a referendum on the religious parties that have dominated Iraqi politics in recent years, including Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's Islamic Dawa Party.

"There is widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of the governing religious parties, but Maliki is clearly trying to mitigate this by playing the nationalist and centrist card," said Reidar Visser, a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs in Oslo, who runs [www.historiae.org](http://www.historiae.org), a Web site focused on Iraqi affairs.

While Maliki is not running, his Dawa Party has organized a group of political organizations into a coalition called "State of Law," which is playing down Dawa's Shiite roots and emphasizing improved security, nationalism and economic development.

During interviews across Iraq during the past two weeks, voters said they associated the nation's sectarian violence with the rise of religious parties. Provincial governments had done little, they said, to provide basic services like electricity. Now, four years after a raised purple index finger became a symbol of Iraqi democracy, the hope that a single vote could restore peace and order has been replaced by a fatalism common in far older democracies.

"I won't participate in the election, because those whom we elected last

time failed us," said Iman Karkaz, a 50-year-old academic from the war-torn city of Falluja. "Most of the parties used religion and Islam as a cover and then created sectarianism and riot in our society."

The government has sought to limit the influence of religion for the provincial elections by prohibiting appeals for candidates in mosques and other places of worship and by barring political signs with pictures of religious figures — strategies that religious parties employed in previous elections with great success.

Two of the nation's most influential Shiite clerics, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the reclusive 78-year-old cleric revered by many of Iraq's 15 million Shiites, and Moktada al-Sadr, 35, whose armed supporters have clashed with U.S. and Iraqi forces in the past, have said that they plan to stay largely neutral during the elections.

Instead of attaching his name to a slate of candidates as in previous elections, Sadr, whose standing is far weaker than it had been during the 2005 elections, said he may only endorse specific candidates this time.

"We didn't want to lose the trust of the people by politicizing the provincial councils," said Salah al-Obeidi, a spokesman for Sadr.

It may be too late. Karrar Ali, a 28-year-old laborer from Maysan Province in heavily Shiite southern Iraq, which continues to be Sadr's base of support, said he planned to vote only for candidates running on secular platforms.

"I won't elect any of the religious lists," he said. "The lists that think art is forbidden, that sports are forbidden

and that freedom of expression is forbidden won't be elected by me because it ties me up with the chains I've always been with, and I want to be free now from those chains."

There are other signs that voters have grown tired of politics as it has been practiced in Iraq.

In a government poll of 3,000 eligible Iraqi voters in November, nearly one-third said they supported the idea of a single-party state, and a 46 percent plurality said the existing provincial councils had done a poor job. Still, 75 percent of respondents said they were optimistic about Iraq's future, and 69 percent said they intended to vote.

But while religious parties may not fare as well as they have in past elections, analysts said their access to money, their grip on local and national seats and their ability to form political coalitions would virtually guarantee them a large following in the provincial contests.

And some voters say that Iraq needs Islam to help bind it together.

"We're an Islamic country that will never accept a person who distributes immoral alcohol and urges our sons to be effeminate," said Kareem al-Muhammadawi, a 57-year-old taxi driver from Maysan Province.

The government, which has budgeted

\$225 million for the election, has made a major push to match the 63 percent turnout of the 2005 local elections — which were held on the same day as balloting for the National Assembly.

And in an effort to avoid fraud, 46,000 nonpartisan election observers and thousands of other monitors will be allowed inside polling stations.

Anwar J. Ali, Riyadh Mohammed, Atheer Kakan and Campbell Robertson contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of *The New York Times* from Basra, Karbala, Kirkuk, Maysan Province, Falluja, Mosul and Diyala Province.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune January 9, 2009

## After arrests, top general meets Turkish leaders

From news reports

**ANKARA:** The military chief of Turkey met with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul on Thursday as tensions rose following an investigation into an alleged plot to depose the government.

News of the meetings, just a day after the Turkish police detained about 40 people including three retired generals and active military officers for their suspected links to a rightist group, added to financial woes in Turkey, which has been wracked by the global financial crisis. The stock market fell 5 percent.

In a terse statement, the military said the talks between the commander of the armed forces, General Ilker Basbug, and the two leaders had centered on the detentions Wednesday.

The military, which has unseated four governments in the last 50 years and views itself as the guarantor of the secular order in Turkey, denies any link to the group, known as Ergenekon.

But the case, in which 86 people including retired army officers, politicians and lawyers, are on trial, has shattered taboos by opening the military to judicial investigation.

"The Chief of General Staff has presented his views on yesterday's developments to the prime minister and the president," the military said without elaborating.

The prime minister's office said Basbug had requested the meeting at Erdogan's private residence, which lasted more than an hour.

"Prime minister Erdogan held a meeting with Chief of General Staff Basbug today," the statement said. "The latest developments were assessed in the meeting."

Critics of the governing Justice and Development Party say Erdogan's government is using the case as revenge for

court moves by the secular establishment last year to outlaw the party for anti-secular activities. The party denies any link.

"There are no political motives," Cemil Cicek, the deputy prime minister, said Thursday.

Erdogan's government has diminished some powers of the military in line with demands from the European Union to reduce its influence in politics. It denies wanting to erode secularism, citing reforms it has made to try to gain membership in the EU.

The country's top business group, Tusiad, called for calm after Turkish shares fell sharply, following global moves and pushed down by concerns that political tensions were mounting between the government and the secularist establishment.

"Cases like Ergenekon, which is followed closely by people, should be carried out in accordance with the common

sense within the context of a democratic society and the rule of law," it said, urging "all political sides" to refrain from statements that would cast a shadow on the impartiality of the judiciary.

The defendants in the case, all critics of the government, are accused of planning assassinations and bombings to sow chaos and force the military to step in.

Some analysts say the Ergenekon case is part of a proxy war played out in the courts between the Justice and Development Party, which has its roots in political Islam, and secularists.

The Turkish judiciary, considered secularist, also met in an emergency meeting. Hasan Gerceker, head of the Turkish appeals court, said it called on everyone to respect the law.

The defendants are accused of being members of a "terrorist organization" and trying to destabilize Turkey with a string of attacks before a coup, which itself was never carried out. (Reuters, AP)

## EU voices support for Ergenekon investigation

SELÇUK GÜLTAŞLI

European Parliament Rapporteur on Turkey Ria Oomen-Ruijten has voiced support for an ongoing investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine network of groups and individuals accused of plotting to overthrow the government. In an interview with Today's Zaman yesterday she said she was satisfied that the process has started and encouraged Turkish authorities to further investigate to see how bits and pieces of this network have influenced the whole state.

"I hope the defendants will face an honest process and that procedures will follow the rule of law."

Close to 40 individuals were detained on Wednesday in simultaneous police operations staged in six cities as part of the Ergenekon investigation. The detentions, however, drew the ire of main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal, who convened a press conference to criticize the operation as an attempt to steer Turkey in a new direction from its historical path.

When asked about the attitude of CHP leader Baykal, she said she disagrees with him, adding, "If there are organizations in any country working in silence against the state, you at least need to investigate those who want to disturb the functioning of democracy and take them to court."

Oomen-Ruijten, a Dutch Christian Democrat member of the European Parliament, in her report last year made strong calls to the government to unearth the Ergenekon network. In her 2009 report, which has not yet been approved, she reiterates her calls.

Oomen-Ruijten's report on Turkey, which is expected to be debated again at the Foreign Affairs Committee on Jan. 19, has referred to Ergenekon as follows: "[The European Parliament] welcomes the beginning of the trial against those accused of being members of the Ergenekon criminal organization, encourages the authorities to continue investigations and to fully uncover the organization's networks which reach into the state structures, is concerned about reports regarding the treatment of defendants in this case and urges the Turkish authorities to provide them with a fair trial and to adhere strictly to the principles of the rule of law."

EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee Vice Chairman Maria Eleni Koppa said everyone should have full faith in the Turkish judiciary and leave the Ergenekon investigation to Turkish prosecutors and judges without any outside intervention.

Commenting on Wednesday's detentions, Baykal said: "The situation we are faced with shows that we are looking at a political case and not a legal trial. In this case, we don't see the application of the law but rather a political settling of accounts for which law is being used."

Koppa, in response, stated that it would



not be correct to intervene politically in the Ergenekon investigation. "Though the CHP is our sister party, we do not share the same ideas with Mr. Baykal on the Ergenekon affair. We want this issue to be enlightened fully. We believe the Ergenekon case is a very serious one for Turkish democracy. The investigation should go until the very end," she added.

Joost Lagendijk, co-chairman of the committee, said the deepening and widening of the investigation is in itself good. "It is necessary to get to the bottom of this case, but it should be done in a proper way, within the law and with respect to the rights of the defendants. So, my position has two pillars: The first is to do everything to unearth the Ergenekon network, and the second is to be respectful of the law and the rights of those in custody while doing so. They should know what they stand accused of," Lagendijk stated.

Regarding Baykal's harsh reaction to the latest detentions, he said it is difficult to understand Baykal's position. "He defends those in custody without having the proper information and even before the 2,500-page indictment was made public. Baykal's reaction is very unusual," he noted, emphasizing that Baykal's comparison of the AK Party with (Argentine dictator Juan) Peron does not sound good. "Baykal should be careful when it comes to the case."

Lagendijk added that the European Parliament is supportive of the case as long as the law is respected. "Many people were thinking that there was a class in Turkey which was immune and untouchable; now this belief is falling apart. No one in the European Parliament would be against the investigation," he said.

Graham Watson, the leader of the Liberals in the European Parliament, who commented on the Ergenekon operation, called on everyone to be respectful of the court's

decision. "The most important thing is the continuation of the judicial process which we can rely on. It is only through the judicial process, which should be allowed to take place, that people can judge who is guilty and who is innocent. The judicial process should be fully respected," Watson said.

European Parliament Socialist Group Vice Chairman Hannes Swoboda said he is very happy about Turkey's move to rid itself of the network. "I am very happy that this chance has been taken. As far as I can see from here, it is being done objectively and respects the rule of law. One should not miss the chance to rid the body of disease before it affects the entire body. This is therefore a very good message."

He also called on CHP leader Baykal, who claims that the Ergenekon case is politically motivated, to be consistent. Baykal had spoken about the virtues of not intervening in the judiciary several months ago. "It is not sensible to talk about government intervention now. I hope this case is not misused and, again, as far as I can see, it is not being misused by either the police or the judiciary. In any case, one should let the judiciary do its work and refrain from intervening in the judicial process. It is not up to Baykal or any other politician to claim that these moves are politically motivated. Let the judiciary do its job." Unlike the European Parliament, the European Commission is keeping a low profile vis-à-vis the Ergenekon case. Asked about the new wave of arrests, commission officials reiterated their previous position on the case; namely, "The commission is following this case very closely. We expect the case to be pursued in accordance with international best practice in police investigations and judicial procedures."

Los Angeles Times January 11, 2009

## 'The new Iraq is based upon the principle of consensus'

*A transcript of The Times' interview with Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani.*

By Ned Parker Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

In Sunday's paper, The Times interviewed Kurdistan region's President Massoud Barzani about the growing rift between the Kurds and Prime Minister Nouri Maliki. Below is a transcript of most of the interview.

Barzani, whose late father led multiple revolts against Baghdad in the 20th century, discusses the Kurds' differences with Maliki and his own conviction that the prime minister is drifting toward authoritarian rule. Barzani reviews in details his differences with Maliki over the the Iraqi army's current direction and a pending oil and gas law. Other topics discussed include disputed territories like Kirkuk, and a recent confrontation between Maliki's body guards and Kurdish security forces at the Iraqi parliament, that ended with Maliki's guards calling in an Iraqi army unit to seize control of the parliament building. The interview was conducted Saturday at Barzani's offices in Salahuddin, outside Irbil.

Barzani is asked about his expectations for Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's coming visit to Kurdistan.

**Barzani:** "I think it will be his fourth visit to the region as PM. Although the time has not been set for the visit, but of course when he does come, there are five specific issues and the issues which have been set forth that will be discussed, and they will be the key topics to be discussed with him.

"The first one will be the file of the security and the military. The second one would be partnership in government — in other words our partnership in government. The third one is the economical one, which covers oil and gas as well. The other file would be the disputed regions. And finally the foreign affairs or foreign politics."

Barzani is asked about disagreements between Maliki and his partners in the government, including the Kurds. Have those disputes centered about concerns that the Prime Minister is trying to rule by himself and is there any progress in resolving these questions.

**Barzani:** "What I mentioned earlier. One of the issues that will be discussed and one of the key files is partnership in administration. Which is based on the rule by consensus among the key groups as well as commitment to the constitutional principles and what has been laid out in the constitution. Indeed, it is a big issue in Iraq."

Barzani is asked to describe the prime minister's policies.

**Barzani:** "We certainly have expressed our views very openly and clearly and we also have expressed our views in official correspondence with the prime minister. We have expressed that we have reservations on certain issues and they have also been made public. What we have geared, what we have aimed, is to resolve these issues through direct contact, and obviously adhering to the constitution that has laid the groundwork for such issues."

Barzani is asked about comments he made in November on the Al Hurra satellite television channel that the Iraqi government ignores the Kurdish role whenever possible in every area and that the government wants to return to a one-party system and a totalitarian authority. He is asked to elaborate on what he meant.

**Barzani:** "It was earlier in November when I was interviewed by al Hurra. After that interview I visited Baghdad actually ... I stayed there for a couple of weeks. We had meetings and we presented our views and certain notes that I had mentioned earlier and the committees [that] were formed were as a result of those notes, as a result of the concerns that we had expressed openly and sometimes in private, so these committees were agreed. We had a chain of meetings — of key groups al Dawa, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, KDP [Kurdistan Democratic Party], PUK [Patriotic Union of Kurdistan] and Islamic Party of Iraq as key components or political groups, or government to government, or KRG with federal government.

"So these committees were formed in order to handle these issues, in order to resolve these pending issues which are detrimental. This is what we are proceeding with right now... The formation of the new Iraq is based upon the principle of consensus. These key groups must adhere to the constitution, to the roadmap that has been laid, as well as the principle of consensus because no single party has won elections and has come to power by absolute majority. This is through consensus and we all have to adhere. If one particular group diverts or moves away from this line and principle of consensus, obviously it creates such problems which have been [seen] more recently. We would fully support issues to be handled and to be resolved through the constitution and dialogue. This is how we've proceeded and this is what we are doing right now."

Barzani is asked if any of these new committees have made progress.



**Massoud Barzani, leader of the semi autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq's north, discusses Prime Minister Nouri Maliki and more in his office in Salahuddin.**

**Barzani:** "There has been some progress within certain committees, but maybe not that significant or tangible due to the fact that there were full concentration by all parties on the security agreement or SOFA. Everybody was concerned with that. As of now the committees have begun their work in earnest."

Barzani is asked if there has been any progress on the oil law.

**Barzani:** "As far as we are concerned, there is a foregone conclusion on how the oil law should be drafted, but unfortunately it seems that Baghdad is dragging its feet and not wanting an amicable solution to it. In real essence, the problems or blame are being laid at the doorsteps of the Kurds at a time when the state has no oil policy and the ministry is a failed ministry with a failed policy. And at the same time, they do not want to see any development in this field in Kurdistan as well and [are] blaming the Kurds for the failures in Baghdad. And quite contrary to that the problem is not with the Kurdistan region.

"Over the past three years, there has been a budget of eight billion dollars allocated for the [rehabilitation] of the oil industry sector in order to increase the production level, and when you look at it the production it has perhaps even decreased, rather than increased. That's what the Iraqi public has to be told. What was the reason and why [was] this budget that was allocated was not properly spent and what actually has happened to that budget and why has the oil production not met the required production level.

Barzani is asked why the money hasn't been spent properly.

**Barzani:**"This is what we ought to know as well, to know the reason for it, the Iraqi public need to know about it."

Barzani is asked if the reason is corruption in the oil ministry.

**Barzani:**"I can't prejudge that. I cannot say. It's a very important issue, that the Iraqi people need to be aware of and they need to be informed."

Barzani is asked if he feels that elements within the government or parties are trying to blame the Kurds about the oil law to distract the Iraqi public from larger political issues.

**Barzani:**"Until very recently, yes indeed, it was the case to blame the Kurds for any mishaps or lack of developments, whether it was [in] the prime ministry or any particular ministry where they face obstacles or problems. And they were trying to blame the Kurds for any lack of developments, which was not the case, although things have moved on a little bit now. It has improved but until very recently that [was] the case having the Kurds as a scapegoat for every misfortune."

[Asked about the negotiations on the oil law, Barzani speaks about an agreement to start shipping Kurdish oil through the Iraqi oil pipeline to Turkey, following a visit by Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Shahrastani to Kurdistan in November]

"We have all agreed in principle in the constitution that oil and gas belongs to all Iraqi people and should be distributed equally and this 100,000 barrels can be part of this greater Iraqi oil production level in order to be distributed as per agreements we have reached."

Barzani is asked about his previous comments that Kurds have been marginalized in the Iraqi army

**Barzani:**"The very beginning after the new developments in post 2003, when there were efforts to reform and rebuild the Iraqi army, it seems that people were hesitant to join the army – neither the Sunnis nor the Shiite Arabs were joining the Iraqi army. The very first steps were taken by the Kurdish side. The very first three divisions were actually formed by Kurdish units and elements. Thereafter other people gradually joined in and volunteered to join the army. Like oil and other resources, the military is for all Iraqi people and there has to be a balance of all elements of Iraqi society to participate in the army. And of course the military should and must have its own regulations and [foundations] that it has been set up on.

"Under normal circumstances, it is very natural to move around officers and units of various types and elements to various parts of the country. Of course, looking at the situation in Iraq, it is not a normal situation. It is an abnormal situation at the moment. And in more recent times, we have witnessed there has been a deliberate attitude to marginalize and to oppose the Kurdish participation [in the army]. And there seems to be a unilateral move in order to create an army that would be more responsible to an individual, which is more alarming. First and foremost, the military should not be engaged in politics. Furthermore the military should not be engaged in settling internal disputes of this group and that group."

"I believe there are 16 divisions right now in the Iraqi army. Normally the heads of divisions have to be nominated and for the parliament to approve the nomination. But I challenge [to find] any single division head of the army that has been nominated and approved by the parliament. They have been approved on personal will [decrees], and of course this is something which is not tolerated. This is not an army ... we were hoping to create.

"We have been very flexible and we have tolerated this because we feel that we should discuss these matters and give this [newly formed] committee a chance in order to review the situation and come up with some kind of solutions [that can] be implemented. This is why we did not want to make a big deal out of it, until a final solution has been put forward and discussed and agreed [upon]. We hope that this would lead to a balanced participation in this important military. Either that [solution] has to be implemented... or [it] would be unacceptable to go in [a] direction that would be extremely difficult for us to tolerate. This is not a problem for us only as Kurds, but I believe this is a problem for all Iraqis."

Barzani is asked about cases of the army being used for politics or to resolve internal disputes between Iraqi groups

**Barzani:**"One of the examples is the issue of Khanaqin. And it was on the agenda to follow the same line in other areas [of sending Iraqi troops against peshmerga forces]. Once we realized that this was the case, obviously the program was foiled.

"Very recently there was a dispute between the bodyguards of the prime minister and the security of the parliament, when the prime minister was visiting the parliament. Immediately, the military was called, the military surrounded the parliament, and actually occupied the parliament. That's another example. This is quite a major event. What else can [we] expect?"

Barzani is asked about in which other provinces had there been plans before the Khanaqin confrontation to send Iraqi troops to evict Kurdish forces.

**Barzani:**"Kirkuk, Mosul [provinces] as far as southern areas were concerned I'm not too sure, too aware."

Barzani is asked how Kurds in the military have been marginalized.

**Barzani:**"They have been either transferred to other units out of the region or they have been sent back to the ministry of defense".

Barzani is asked about whether Maliki is the individual he is referring to as the person who is trying to direct the Iraqi army alone.

**Barzani:**"The prime minister has been the [commander in chief] of the armed forces. That doesn't mean the [commander in chief] of the armed forces has the authority to do whatever he likes. The office of the [commander in chief] of the armed forces is doing things all by itself and not coordinating or working with the ministry of defense or the chief of staff nor with other various departments of the armed forces.

"And of course, why should we blame the situation only on one person, of course other institutions are to be blamed, such as the presidency council, the parliament itself and the council of ministers. How can they tolerate this? I think they should have a say in this matter as well."

Barzani is asked about allegations made by Maliki at a November 20 press conference that Kurdish forces had been involved in illegal arrests and tortures?

**Barzani:**"First I think it was a big mistake for him to make such a statement and unfortunately he had gone against the grain of this solid traditional relationship that we had with him and his group in the past. Perhaps there are two reasons for that kind of attitude. First perhaps he may well have been misinformed by groups or individuals who were actually trying to create some kind of animosity. The second reason may well have been to attract and to gain some support of some chauvinistic elements and individuals. But adopting that position he did not calculate ... who exactly he would be losing."

Barzani is asked if the two have spoken since Maliki's press conference.

**Barzani:**"We have expressed our official view in the response. The letter. After that letter that was sent out to him, I have not met with him nor spoken to him. I had visited Baghdad for a couple of hours when President Bush was visiting Baghdad, but it was not for a meeting with the prime minister."

Barzani is asked about times when he backed Maliki when others wanted to force the prime minister from office.

**Barzani:**"You are right. It was in April 2007. When we felt there was a serious effort to remove him from his seat. We felt what was behind it, was not well intended. It was people of sinister intention with a sinister agenda, It was not for the benefit of Iraq in general and neither for the Kurds in particular. Toward the end of April 2007, the 26th or 27th of April, there was a gathering of various Iraqi groups under the auspices of various intelligence groups of regional countries, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi, Turkey and the Emirates. I think there were six countries in total, who had organized this gathering of certain Iraqi groups and the whole idea was to undermine the situation, and we were alarmed by this. This is why we fully supported [Maliki's] position because we felt this was first and foremost against Iraq. It was a very direct and sinister intervention in Iraqi affairs through intelligence apparatuses of these countries. We felt alarmed by it and this is why we moved on it and we supported obviously the PM. We felt it was against the Iraqi people, against Iraq and against the Kurdish people. That led to this four-party coalition, which was later extended to five [a consultative body grouping Barzani, the Iraqi presidency council and Maliki]."

Barzani is asked about a plot to topple Maliki last spring during his military campaign in Basra, and if he rallied to Maliki's side then as well.

**Barzani:**"When he embarked on this operation, I phoned him ... I told him I

fully support you in every way and if need be I can dispatch military units to help you with this operation. Indeed, we were serious in our intervention and sincerity."

Again Barzani is asked there was an effort to unseat Maliki by some groups during the Basra military campaign.

**Barzani:**"Indeed that was the case. There were intentions to unseat him, but the way to remove him and the [motives] behind the removal were not well intended. Still I am not for any such measures to unseat him, or to even remove any single government official or police officer from his position through the sinister efforts of regional intelligence apparatuses. I don't support that."

Barzani is asked if he feels Maliki has forgotten what the Kurds have done for him and the way the Kurds have been a good partner for Iraq.

**Barzani:**"Unfortunately, he seems to have forgotten it. Not only recently but even the relations we had in the 1980s and what we had offered him then. We had very close contact and provided support for his group, the Dawa party."

Barzani is asked why Maliki has forgotten the past.

**Barzani:**"We want to know. It is also a surprise for us. In Arabic there is a saying that absolute authority could lead to an individual losing insight or bearing. In other words, his character would be lost in absolute authority."

Barzani is asked if he is saying this is what has happened to Maliki.

**Barzani:**Unfortunately, we are disappointed. This is the reality. It is a very sad reality. We are disappointed. My expectations were that even in my absence somebody like Maliki would be defending the rights of the Kurds in any gathering or platforms. I never expected that he would be opposing the rights of the Kurdish people nor he would be opposing the existence of peshmerga units or peshmergas or Kurds within the Iraqi army and he would be marginalizing them. Unfortunately, this is what is happening and we are disappointed by that. To elaborate on the earlier [point], one gets lost in absolute authority. You become too authoritarian, you lose yourself."

Barzani is asked to describe his last conversation with Maliki.

**Barzani:**"On a personal level he is a good close friend of mine. And in fact, when I get to see him, I tell him far more face to face rather than what I say publicly. So I'm very open and very frank with him. In the media, I try to consider his situation and not to be so rigid."

Barzani is asked to describe their recent conversations.

**Barzani:**"Just to conclude on that, we have this dispute. It is very clear. We have identified the areas. These committees have been formed upon agreement of all parties concerned and we are waiting for the outcome of their work. We don't want to exacerbate the situation further. We certainly want to concentrate on the work of the committees. Hopefully they will come out with some agreements which will be amicable, pragmatic and practical."

Barzani is asked whether there is a solution for Kirkuk through the UN beyond the referendum called for in the Iraqi constitution's article 140. The UN has advocated alternative ideas, including Iraqi political factions coming to a consensus on what areas might be annexed to Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Barzani:**"The reason we had agreed as the Kurdistan region to remain within the state of Iraq is so long as Iraq is in possession of such a constitution and so long as they adhere to this constitution. The disputed areas are far more important than has been given credit. It is historical issue for us and if you look at the more recent history of the Kurdish confrontations or movements against successive and various Iraqi regimes [they] were all over these disputed areas. There were aggressions against the Kurds and unfortunately there has been a lot of unfortunate and unkind treatment of the Kurds historically on this issue. Article 140 is a constitutional article and it has given a roadmap for a solution to the issue."

"We cannot afford to lose time and to come back to new proposals every day. The constitution is very clear. The constitution was voted by 80 percent or more of the Iraqi population. The constitution is a package. One cannot be selective in taking a part of it out ... Therefore it should be comprehensive. There has to be efforts to fully implement the constitution. Those who oppose any article of the constitution should have opposed voting for it in the referendum [on the constitution in 2005]. Now that it has been voted for, therefore, it has to be respected. And

you cannot be selective and you cannot allow individuals or groups to take a part of it out and to stand against it and to support other parts of the constitution... No alternative to article 140 would be acceptable."

Barzani is asked does this mean he thinks there has to be a referendum on the disputed territories.

**Barzani:**"Normalization, census and referendum. Whatever the people decide then it should be respected."

Barzani is asked about a recent comment by Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih that there were attempts to take political and social problems in Baghdad to provoke an Arab-Kurdish conflict.

**Barzani:**"As far as full-scale and all-out Arab-Kurdish conflict, this is impossible because we will not tolerate and we will not accept such a conflict between the two communities, the two people. Throughout our history, we have not had any animosity or any move against the Arabs as a people, and we will never do that, and the Arab people in its entirety, the majority of it have been sympathetic to us and in support of us, the dispute is with the political forces."

"But if an individual or the head of a tribe or clan tries to enter such a conflict and turn the conflict into a Kurdish-Arab conflict then he will be confronted by all people and I think he will be the loser. If he tries to drag the entire Arab population to this, I think he will fail. It has not crossed our minds to settle problems through violence. We strongly believe in the constitution, we believe in dialogue, if somebody or individual groups consider using force, then of course, we have the capabilities to stand against it..."

"In the last few years almost 2,000 Kurds have been killed in Mosul. ... We have not responded in the same manner and we have not reacted in any act of vengeance, but of course everything will have its limits."

Barzani is asked if he thinks Maliki can really change his behavior, via the committees set up to broker compromise.

**Barzani:**"I think we have discussed a lot about the prime minister so we want to go on."

Barzani is asked about a meeting in December of major political leaders in northern Iraq that some media reports described as a meeting to plot Maliki's ouster. The gathering included Barzani, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and vice presidents Tariq Hashimi and Adel Abdul Mehdi.

**Barzani:**"In fact, the gathering was purely social because of the feast [the Muslim holiday Eid al Adha] that had taken place, so we gathered there. Issues of all aspects, in general issues were discussed. On the issue that you mentioned, under no circumstances, this was discussed replacing him... There was no discussion about replacing him. Discussions were only in general terms about reconciliation and political reforms that should take place and to also activate the committees that have been set up."

Barzani is asked again whether there have been any discussions at all among senior Iraqi leaders about replacing Maliki.

**Barzani:**"There hasn't been any discussion on his removal at all in the meeting in Dokan [Sulaymaniya]... That was the last meeting [of Iraq's senior political leaders] in Dokan."

Barzani is asked whether Iraqi Kurdistan will always remain part of Iraq.

**Barzani:**"So long as Iraq is in possession of such a constitution and adheres to such a constitution, Kurdistan will be part of Iraq."

Barzani is asked what the Kurds would do then if Iraq does not remain loyal to the constitution.

**Barzani:**"That's the bridge we will have to cross when we come [to] it. Even in the preamble of the constitution, it says very clearly adherence to this constitution is a precondition to preserving the unity of Iraq. For sure, we will not accept an Iraq ruled by dictatorship."

Barzani is asked if he is optimistic about the country's future and challenges facing the country in the coming years.

**Barzani:**"In our position, one always has to be optimistic. Terrorism, and secular disputes and confrontations and of course rule of the state, the culture of democracy has to be promoted and deeply rooted."

Los Angeles Times January 11, 2009

## KURDISH LEADER SEES AUTHORITARIAN DRIFT IN IRAQ

*Massoud Barzani, head of the Kurdish semiautonomous region, says moves by Prime Minister Nouri Maliki threaten the nation's unity and have raised concerns among the Kurdish minority.*

By Ned Parker

**R**eporting from Salahuddin, Iraq —The president of Iraq's Kurdish region charged Saturday that Prime Minister Nouri Maliki was drifting toward authoritarian rule, in the latest sign of the dangerous rift that has emerged between the Iraqi leader and his partners in the country's ruling coalition.

"One gets lost in absolute authority," said Massoud Barzani, the leader of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq's north. "You become too authoritarian, you lose yourself."

In an interview at his palatial office here, Barzani accused Maliki of working to purge Kurds from the Iraqi security forces. And citing concerns about changes to the constitution, he refused to rule out the possibility that Kurdistan could declare independence from Iraq.

"For sure, we will not accept an Iraq ruled by dictatorship," he said, sitting in a room with a view of the snow-topped Zagros mountains.

The Kurds, who are scattered across several Middle Eastern nations, have long fought to establish their own state. Iraq's Kurdistan is the closest that the ethnic minority has come to achieving its nationalist dreams. But now, 18 years after the Kurds achieved de facto independence, the population once again is worried that Iraq's Arabs could turn on them.

Barzani said he hopes that an upcoming visit by Maliki to Kurdistan and a series of working groups set up in November would go a long way toward resolving the problems.

His comments in the hour-long interview with the Los Angeles Times veered from direct attacks on the prime minister's record to the conciliatory. He denied rumors that efforts were underway by parties in the government to replace Maliki.

Barzani, dressed in an olive military shirt, baggy traditional pantaloons, sash and cummerbund, and a headdress, appeared to grapple with his turbulent relations with Maliki. He described how he had intervened to block an attempt to overthrow Maliki in spring 2007 and how he had offered crucial support last year when an embattled Maliki ordered his forces into the southern city of Basra.

A veteran of the guerrilla struggle against Saddam Hussein's regime, Barzani demanded a reason for what he felt was the prime minister's desertion of the Kurds.



"We want to know. It is also a surprise for us. In Arabic there is a saying that absolute authority could lead to an individual losing insight or [his] bearing. In other words, his character would be lost in absolute authority," he said.

Barzani said he was stunned by Maliki's behavior. The prime minister, whose Islamic Dawa Party joined the Kurds in fighting Hussein from the mountains of northern Iraq in the 1980s, has courted Arab nationalists hostile to the Kurds and called for the strengthening of the central government, which the Kurds fear could rob them of their autonomy.

"I never expected that he would be opposing the rights of the Kurdish people, or he would be opposing the existence of . . . *peshmerga* or Kurds within the Iraqi army and he would be marginalizing them," he said. "Unfortunately, this is what is happening and we are disappointed by that."

Recent events have proved alarming for the Kurds, particularly an effort in the summer by Sunni and Shiite Arab lawmakers to get a jump on the Kurds with their own solution regarding the disputed northern oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which Kurds want to incorporate into their region.

Since then, Kurds say, they have watched Maliki transfer Kurdish units out of provinces such as Nineveh, where veterans of the Kurd-

ish *peshmerga* forces that fought Hussein have dominated the Iraqi army. Maliki has also called for the constitution to be revised, which the Kurds consider a direct threat to their powers in northern Iraq.

The tensions have evoked a feeling of betrayal among Kurds.

"The personal aspect derives from the relationship that the Kurds had with the Shiite Islamist parties during the time of exile," said Iraq expert Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group.

The developments have already provoked a war of words between Maliki and Barzani.

In November, Barzani said the central government was increasingly sliding toward one-party rule, but steered clear of direct insults against the prime minister.

Soon after, Maliki criticized the Kurds for signing their own contracts with foreign oil companies. He also suggested that Kurdish forces were arresting and torturing Arabs in disputed regions.

On Saturday, Barzani discussed the quarrel over the long-stalled national oil law, which is supposed to govern relations among provinces on oil revenue and contract signing. Barzani faulted the central government for not agreeing to a compromise that would have allowed regions to sign oil contracts with foreign companies. The Kurds have not waited for a law to proceed with such con-

tracts.

"Unfortunately, it seems that Baghdad is dragging its feet and not wanting an amicable solution to it. In real essence, the problems or blame are being laid at the doorsteps of the Kurds at a time when the state has no oil policy and the ministry is a failed ministry with a failed policy," Barzani said.

He warned that if the prime minister continued to try to make changes to the constitu-

tion and alter the spirit of post-Hussein Iraq, the Kurds might consider declaring independence.

"That's the bridge we will have to cross when we come [to] it," he said. "Even in the preamble of the constitution, it says very clearly [that] adherence to this constitution is a precondition to preserving the unity of Iraq."

Members of Maliki's Dawa party said Sat-

urday that Barzani should be careful with his words.

"Massoud Barzani is a significant leader, and he should realize the great responsibility in issuing [statements], since it can change many equations," Dawa member Ali Alaaq said. "A well-placed statement can do a lot of good, while the contrary can cause a great deal of damage."



HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH  
January 9, 2009

## Iran: End Repression in Kurdish Areas

**(New York, January 9, 2009)** - The government of Iran should amend or abolish broadly worded national security laws used to stifle peaceful dissent in the country's Kurdish areas and end arbitrary arrests of Kurdish critics and dissidents, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 42-page report, "Iran: Freedom of Expression and Association in the Kurdish Regions," documents how Iranian authorities use security laws, press laws, and other legislation to arrest and prosecute Iranian Kurds solely for trying to exercise their right to freedom of expression and association. The use of these laws to suppress basic rights, while not new, has greatly intensified since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power in August 2005.

"Iranian authorities show little tolerance of political dissent anywhere in the country, but they are particularly hostile to dissent in minority areas where there has been any history of separatist activities," said Joe Stork, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division.

Kurds account for 4.5 million of the 69 million people in Iran, and live mainly in the country's northwest regions. Political movements there have frequently campaigned for greater regional autonomy. The main Iranian Kurdish parties with a long history of activism deny that they engage in armed activity and the government has not accused these groups of any such activity since the early 1990s.

"No one would contest a government's right to suppress violence," Stork said. "But this is not the case here. What is going on in the Kurdish areas of Iran is the routine suppression of legitimate peaceful opposition."

The new report documents how the government has closed Persian- and Kurdish-language newspapers and journals, banned books, and punished publishers, journalists, and writers for opposing and criticizing government policies. Authorities also suppress legitimate activities of nongovernmental organizations by denying registration permits or charging individuals working with such organizations with spurious security offenses.

One victim of the government's repression is Farazad Kamangar, a superintendent of high schools in the city of Kamayaran and an activist with the Organization for the Defense of Human Rights in Kurdistan. He has been in detention since his arrest in July 2006. The new report reproduces a letter Kamangar smuggled out of prison describing how officials subjected him to torture during interrogation.

On February 25, 2008, Branch 30 of Iran's Revolutionary Court sentenced him to death on charges of "endangering national security." Prosecutors charged that he was a member of the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), but provided no evidence to support the allegation. In July, the Supreme Court upheld the sentence. Kamangar's lawyer has appealed to the head of the judiciary to intervene, the only remaining option for challenging the sentence.



## Turkish police discovers new weapons cache

January 12, 2009 By Associated Press

**ANKARA, Turkey** — Turkish police today discovered a new weapons cache in a broadening investigation into an alleged secularist plot to bring down the Islamic-rooted government, state media said.

Police discovered large amount of explosives, weapons and ammunition buried close to an abandoned house near Ankara. Turkish television broadcast live images of the weapons discovered. It was the second such finding, which state television said was based on maps seized during a raid.

Authorities were not available for comment.

Police discovered another weapons cache in Ankara on Friday and confiscated dozens of hand grenades at a lieutenant colonel's home last week. The officer turned himself in, and was jailed Monday for possessing the grenades.

A Turkish court formally arrested 16 more suspects, including military and police officials as well as intellectuals, over the weekend, bringing the total of people suspected in the case to more than 100.

The government claims the crackdown will shed light on a network of renegade agents within the state. But critics say it is designed to silence the government's opponents.

Omer Faruk Eminagaoglu, the head of a group representing judges and prosecutors, said Monday that police were tapping the phones of potential suspects without judicial permission under orders from the government and seeking consent of the judiciary later.

Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin denied wrongdoing Monday.



Weapons, dug up from a hidden cache during an investigation into an alleged coup plot, are displayed at the local police headquarters in Istanbul, Turkey, Sunday, Jan. 11, 2009.





**institute for war & peace reporting**

**January 13, 2009**

## **Mixed Fortunes of Yazidis in New Iraq**

**They've better opportunities than they did under Saddam, but have become the target of insurgents.**

**By Qassim Khidhir in Sinjar (ICR No. 280, 12-Jan-09)**

THE ANCIENT town of Sinjar may be on Mosul's doorstep, but the road connection to Iraq's third-largest city is so treacherous that it has to get its supplies from Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan, more than four hours' drive away.

"Mosul has cut its connection with us. If we go there, the insurgents will kill us," said Eido Shingali, a resident of Sinjar, driving along the road to Dohuk. "This route takes longer but it is safe."

Giant truck bombs flattened two villages in Sinjar district in August 2007, killing more than 300 people in the bloodiest attack of its kind in Iraq since 2003.

The victims were mostly Yazidis. As Kurds who follow a pre-Islamic faith, they are doubly distinct from their Sunni Arab neighbours.

"Insurgents attack everywhere in Iraq but in our case, we believe they do so because of our ethnicity and religion," said Jalal Khalo Zandini, an employee of the mayor's office in Sinjar, who lost two relatives in the 2007 bombings.

Many Yazidi villages erected sand barriers after the attacks. Entry and exit to these villages is now controlled at a single gate, where identity cards can be checked and vehicles searched.

Sinjar district borders Syria and is now heavily guarded by Iraqi army and police units, whose ranks include many Kurds of Yazidi and non-Yazidi origin.

The leaders of Iraqi Kurdistan argue that Sinjar is a historically Kurdish territory and ought to be given the option of joining it in a referendum.

However, Sunni and Shia Arab parties in the Iraqi government oppose Kurdish efforts to expand the semi-autonomous region under their control in the north.

Kurdish forces operating outside that region are also viewed with suspicion by politicians in Baghdad.

Yezidi Kurds make up the majority of Sinjar district's 340,000 people. The region is also home to long-established communities of Sunni and Shia Arabs and Christians.

Taking a walk through Sinjar's old town is like travelling thousands of years back through time: there are several Yazidi temples; a gate apparently dating to the Roman Empire; an ancient Islamic minaret; and a shrine believed to contain the remains of Zainub, the infant daughter of Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

Dakhil Qassim Hassoun, the mayor of Sinjar, says there is no conflict between the district's ethnic and religious groups.

"They have been living with each other for thousands of years," said Hassoun, the first Yazidi to be elected mayor of an Iraqi town. "There are no kidnappings, assassinations or gunfights here."

The only risk, he says, comes from suicide attacks.

Areas bordering Sinjar district are plagued by unrest. Talafar to the east has seen fighting between Sunni Arabs who support the Shia-led government in Baghdad and those who do not. Its Sunnis and Shias have fought each other, while rivalries between local tribes have erupted into violence.

Local political posts remain vacant with potential candidates deterred by the threat of assassination. Rabyha district, to the east of Sinjar, lost its mayor four years ago. The mayor of Bahaj district, to the south, was killed in 2006.

Mosul, just over an hour from Sinjar, remains tense, with regular clashes between US-backed Iraqi troops and militants allied to al-Qaeda.

The border with Syria lies southwest of Sinjar. The US has accused Syria of tolerating the traffic of weapons and fighters into Iraq - a charge Damascus denies.

Hassoun says security along the border has improved since the deployment of troops on both sides and the construction of a US military base nearby.

Young Yazidi men are increasingly finding work as border guards and as employees of the police and Iraqi Kurdish militia forces, known as peshmerga.

They are also taking up jobs in restaurants and hotels in the Kurdistan region.

Most of the Yazidis in Sinjar remain extremely poor. Wheat and barley crops are their main source of income.

Northern Iraq boasts the biggest Yazidi community, though followers of the ancient faith can be across Turkey, Syria, Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Russia.

The Yazidis of Sinjar speak Kurdish in the same Kermanji dialect as the one used by Kurds in Syria and parts of Turkey.

The war has brought mixed fortunes for the Yazidis.

On the one hand, they are happy to have better opportunities than they did in the days of Saddam Hussein.

"Under the former Iraqi government, we used to be cleaners and manual workers at best," said Jalal Khalo Zandini of the Sinjar mayor's office.

"Now many Yazidis work as government employees, the mayor of Sinjar is a Yazidi and two of the Iraqi president's advisers are Yazidis."

On the other hand, Yazidis say the Iraqi conflict has exposed them to insurgents' attacks.

A day after IWPR visited the district, it received a phone call from Eido Shingali, one of the Yazidis interviewed along the road to Dohuk.

He described how a car bomb had just exploded in the town centre, injuring several of his relatives.

*Qassim Khidhir is an IWPR-trained reporter in Iraq.*

## En Turquie, la langue majoritaire des Kurdes a désormais sa chaîne télévisée publique

Depuis deux semaines, des programmes en langue kurmandji sont diffusés par une nouvelle chaîne de télévision publique turque.

« *C'est une révolution!* » Yavuz Binbay, 51 ans, fondateur d'une association de soutien scolaire et d'aide psychologique basée à Diyarbakir, la principale ville kurde de l'est de la Turquie, salue le lancement, le 1<sup>er</sup> janvier, de la TRT6, la toute nouvelle chaîne publique turque en langue kurde. Emprisonné entre 1980 et 1986 dans la prison de cette ville, à l'époque véritable « laboratoire » de la torture, cet activiste est d'habitude peu amène envers l'État turc. Mais cette fois, il se félicite d'une « grande avancée qui marque la reconnaissance d'une langue qualifiée durant des années par l'État d'« inconnue ». Même insuffisant, c'est un pas positif qu'il faut encourager. »

Le lancement de cette chaîne de télévision est hautement symbolique dans ce pays qui, durant des décennies, a nié l'existence des langues kurdes et de leurs locuteurs, qui seraient plus de 12 millions en Turquie. Certes, depuis 2004, certaines chaînes privées peuvent émettre en kurde et la télévision publique lui réservait 45 minutes de programmes quotidiens. Mais avec TRT6, une nouvelle étape est franchie. Elle diffuse des séries télévisées turques et étrangères, des émissions culturelles, des films hollywoodiens et des bulletins d'information, tous présentés ou doublés en kurmandji. La chaîne a été inaugurée, dans cette langue, par le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan en personne. Une première fortement criti-

La chaîne diffuse des séries télévisées turques et étrangères, des émissions culturelles, des films et de l'information.

quée par les nationalistes turcs.

Deux semaines après ce lancement, le responsable de la chaîne, Sinan Ilhan, sans donner de chiffres d'audience, s'est dit très satisfait des débuts de cette télévision

« familiale, regardée à la fois en Turquie et à l'étranger ». Son but, officieux, est de réduire l'influence de Roj TV, diffusée à partir du Danemark et présentée par Ankara comme le porte-voix du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui mène depuis

trois décennies une véritable guerre contre la Turquie. « Je ne suis pas certain que cet objectif puisse être atteint », estime Naci Sapan du journal *Olay*, basé à Diyarbakir. « Les adeptes de Roj TV regarderont certainement la TRT6 par curiosité, mais sans plus. »

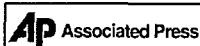
Au sein de la classe politique kurde, cette nouvelle chaîne de télévision a été accueillie avec une grande perplexité, surtout du côté du Parti de la société démocratique (DTP) menacé de dissolution en raison de ses liens supposés avec le PKK. Parmi les voix les plus critiques, se trouve celle de Leyla Zana, figure emblématique du mouvement, condamnée à la prison, en 1991, pour avoir parlé kurde au sein du Parlement à Ankara, et libérée depuis. « L'État a créé cette chaîne pour les Kurdes assimilés, pas pour nous. Nous n'en avons pas besoin », a-t-elle affirmé.

Moins radical mais néanmoins critique, Muharrem Erbey, président du bureau à Diyarbakir de l'association des droits de l'homme IHD, juge le « pas positif mais insuffisant dans un pays où il est encore interdit de porter des prénoms kurdes et où une mère, venue voir son fils en prison, ne

peut lui parler kurde ». « Le kurde doit être autorisé dans les services publics, dans les hôpitaux et les écoles », ajoute-t-il en dénonçant une manœuvre électoraliste du gouvernement, à trois mois d'élections municipales. « Cette chaîne est un instrument de propagande. L'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement, au pouvoir) redoute de perdre la région, alors il agit. Cela va bien sûr influencer les électeurs. Sur le fond, l'intention est donc mauvaise. »

« Peu importe », estime de son côté Naci Sapan. « Si seulement il y avait des élections tous les six mois et avec elles de nouvelles avancées pour les Kurdes ! » Le gouvernement, en tout cas, a déjà annoncé une nouvelle mesure : l'ouverture, peut-être dès 2009, de départements de kurde dans deux universités du pays.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER  
(à Istanbul)



## En Irak, Joe Biden promet un retrait "responsable"

13 janvier 2009 Robert Reid

**ARRIVE LA VILLE** En Irak, le vice-président élu des Etats-Unis Joe Biden a rencontré mardi le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki. Il lui assuré que la future administration américaine voulait un retrait des troupes responsable, pour ne pas compromettre les progrès en matière de sécurité, d'après un porte-parole du gouvernement irakien.

Lire la suite l'article

"Il a dit qu'Obama est déterminé à se retirer mais qu'il veut que ce soit un retrait responsable. Obama ne veut pas gâcher les gains en matière de sécurité qui ont été obtenus", a rapporté Ali al-Dabbagh, interrogé par l'Associated Press.

Le président-élu Barack Obama a promis durant la campagne de retirer toutes les forces de combat américaines d'Irak dans les 16 mois suivant sa prise de fonctions et concentrer les efforts sur l'Afghanistan pour lutter contre la résurgence des violences des talibans et combattants liés à Al-Qaïda.

Mais depuis la présidentielle de novembre, les Etats-Unis ont signé un nouvel accord de sécurité avec le gouvernement irakien permettant un retrait des plus de 140.000 soldats américains d'ici 2012, même si des membres du haut commandement américain craignent que les forces irakiennes ne soient pas prêtes d'ici-là à protéger seules la stabilité du pays.

D'après Ali al-Dabbagh, Joe Biden a promis que la nouvelle administration respecteraient les calendriers fixés par l'accord.

Joe Biden et le sénateur de Caroline du Sud Lindsey Graham sont arrivés à Bagdad lundi après des visites en Afghanistan et au Pakistan. Mais le vice-président élu n'a pas fait aucune déclaration publique sur ses entretiens dans la capitale irakienne, laissant aux responsables irakiens le compte-rendu de ces rencontres.

Après Bagdad, Joe Biden s'est rendu à Kirkouk, ville pétrolière du nord de l'Irak, revendiquée par les arabes, les kurdes et les turkmènes. Il a rencontré les membres du conseil provincial local, où sont représentés tous les groupes ethniques.

"La question de Kirkouk est importante pour l'administration américaine. J'espère que les problèmes de Kirkouk seront résolus à l'avenir. Je suis très heureux de rencontrer tous les groupes qui vivent à Kirkouk", a-t-il déclaré à la presse avant cette rencontre.

Le parlement irakien a décidé de reporter les élections provinciales dans la région de Kirkouk faute d'un accord sur le partage du pouvoir entre les différents groupes ethniques.

Le mois dernier, un attentat-suicide a fait au moins 55 morts dans un restaurant proche de Kirkouk où des responsables kurdes et des chefs tribaux arabes tentaient de résoudre leurs différends. AP



## Irak : Biden en visite à Kirkouk

13 janvier 2009 AFP

**LE VICE-PRESIDENT** élu américain Joe Biden, en visite en Irak à une semaine de sa prise de fonction, s'est rendu aujourd'hui à Kirkouk, ville symbole des divisions communautaires en Irak.

Après avoir rencontré dans la matinée le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki à Bagdad, le sénateur de l'Etat du Delaware est arrivé à l'aéroport de Kirkouk où il a rencontré le gouverneur Abdel Rahmane et son adjoint Rakan Al-Joubouri, ainsi que les représentants des différentes communautés de Kirkouk, rapporte un journaliste de l'AFP.

"La résolution des problèmes de Kirkouk est une préoccupation majeure pour le gouvernement américain en Irak. La nouvelle administration est très inquiète par rapport au conflit à Kirkouk et j'appelle tous les partis politiques en Irak à trouver un consensus qui résoudra ce conflit", a déclaré Joe Biden, dans des propos traduits de l'anglais à l'arabe.

Kirkouk, à 255 km au nord de Bagdad, est un concentré des défis et problèmes irakiens. Riche en pétrole, la province de quelque 900.000 habitants compte plusieurs communautés qui se disputent le pouvoir: des Kurdes, qui souhaitent

son rattachement au Kurdistan irakien, des Turcomans, qui se considèrent comme ses habitants historiques, des Assyro-chaldéens (chrétiens) ou des Arabes, souvent arrivés à l'occasion de la politique d'arabisation forcée de Saddam Hussein. Ce matin, MM. Biden et Maliki ont parlé "des progrès en matière de sécurité et de politique (...), ainsi que du renforcement de l'armée irakienne qui reprendra les rênes après le retrait des troupes étrangères d'Irak", selon un communiqué du Premier ministre irakien.

Arrivé lundi en provenance de Kaboul après une courte escale au Koweït, le sénateur du Delaware pour encore quelques jours effectue une tournée en tant que président sortant de la commission des Affaires étrangères du Sénat.

Il avait rencontré lundi le président irakien Jalal Talabani et le chef de la diplomatie irakienne Hoshiyar Zebari.

"Il a conscience que la nouvelle administration (de Barack Obama, ndlr) fera face à une nouvelle réalité. Il nous a encouragés à continuer nos efforts" et mis l'accent sur le processus de "réconciliation" après des années de violences confessionnelles, avait indiqué à l'AFP M. Zebari après la rencontre.



13 janvier 2009

## DES MILITANTS KURDES CONDAMNÉS À PARIS

**Le tribunal correctionnel de Paris a condamné mardi onze hommes proches des Jeunesses apoïstes, une organisation de jeunesse affiliée au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), à des peines allant de trois mois avec sursis à cinq ans fermes pour une série de jets de cocktails Molotov contre des bars et des lieux culturels turcs à Bordeaux en 2007.**

Ils étaient poursuivis notamment pour "destruction de biens immobiliers par l'effet d'une substance explosive", "association de malfaiteurs en relation avec une entreprise terroriste" et "financement du terrorisme". Le parquet de Paris avait ouvert une enquête préliminaire à la suite de jets de

cocktails Molotov contre des bars et des lieux culturels turcs à Toulouse et Bordeaux en mars 2007 puis à Marignane en avril, à Port-de-Bouc et à Marseille en mai.

Le tribunal a assorti les condamnations de sept des prévenus d'interdiction de territoire français (ITF) pour des durées allant de trois à dix ans, décerné deux mandats de dépôt à la barre et un mandat d'arrêt à l'encontre d'un prévenu absent qui écope de cinq ans d'emprisonnement ferme.

L'enquête confiée à deux juges antiterroristes n'a pas permis d'identifier les auteurs de tous ces faits. Les onze prévenus sont notamment jugés pour trois attaques commises le 5 mars 2007 contre le "Football café" à Bordeaux, le 17 mars contre une association culturelle bordelaise et le 24 avril

2007 contre un bar turc de Bordeaux, "Chez Musa".

Cette décision du tribunal intervient alors qu'une perquisition a eu lieu mardi à la Maison du peuple kurde, dans le centre-ville de Marseille. Cinq personnes ont été interpellées et placées en garde à vue dans le cadre d'une commission rogatoire d'un juge antiterroriste parisien. Elles sont soupçonnées d'extorsions de fonds contre plusieurs membres de la communauté kurde des Bouches-du-Rhône.

Considéré comme une organisation terroriste par l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, le PKK a pris les armes en 1984 pour l'instauration d'un Etat kurde indépendant regroupant certaines régions de la Turquie, de l'Irak, de la Syrie et de l'Iran. AP

## Marseille : soupçons de racket pour alimenter le PKK

### Sept Kurdes arrêtés hier par la police judiciaire

La Maison du peuple kurde, l'association où se retrouve une large partie de la communauté marseillaise de cette région, cache-t-elle une entreprise de racket au profit du PKK? L'orga-

nisation, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, qui se bat pour l'indépendance de cette région coincée entre l'Iran, l'Irak, la Syrie et la Turquie, est aussi considérée comme terroriste par l'Union européenne. Hier matin, des hommes de la Sous-direction antiterroriste (Sdat) et de la Brigade criminelle de la police judiciaire marseillaise ont interpellé sept personnes, dans les locaux de l'association, boulevard Longchamp (Marseille 1er), mais également à proximité du Marché du Soleil et dans le quartier des Chartreux (4<sup>e</sup> arrondissement).

Parmi les suspects arrêtés figure la présidente de la Maison du peuple kurde. Hier, sur place, une centaine de militants se sont très rapi-



**La présidente de la Maison du peuple kurde (ci dessus) faisait partie des sept personnes interpellées.**

dement rassemblés sur le boulevard Longchamp, où la colère le disputait à l'incompréhension. Devant

les fonctionnaires de police qui barraient l'entrée de la Maison du peuple kurde, Baris Kosen, l'un des manifestants criait son indignation: "Nous sommes 40 millions dans le monde. Personne ne peut croire que nous sommes un peuple terroriste. On ne peut pas accepter ces arrestations." "Nous sommes tous effectivement très surpris, renchérisait Joël Dutto, conseiller communautaire (PC) et fin connaisseur de la question kurde. Tout cela laisse supposer que la Maison du peuple kurde est un repaire de terroristes. Ce n'est pas possible."

Selon nos informations, l'enquête pour extorsion de fonds serait partie de la plainte d'un ressortissant kurde, lassé de devoir verser des sommes d'argent en faveur du PKK. Toutes les personnes en garde à vue devraient être rapidement transférées à Paris, dans les locaux de la Sdat. Dans ce type de dossiers, les auditions peuvent durer jusqu'à 96 heures.

**20 minutes.**

15 JANVIER 2009

## Les Kurdes dans la rue contre les arrestations

UN MILLIER de personnes selon la police, 1 500 selon les organisateurs, ont manifesté hier à Marseille contre des interpellations dans les milieux kurdes. « Stop aux pressions de l'Etat français sur les Kurdes », pouvait-on lire sur une banderole. Quelques incidents ont éclaté lorsque des manifestants s'en sont pris à une ambulance des marins-pompiers de Marseille, blessant légèrement deux pompiers en leur donnant des coups de poing, a-t-on appris auprès des pompiers. Huit personnes, présentées comme militants du Parti des travailleurs kurdes

(PKK), ont été interpellées mardi et sont soupçonnées de tentatives d'intimidation accompagnées dans certains cas de violences contre des membres de la communauté kurde à Marseille, aux fins d'extorsions de fonds. La plainte de deux commerçants qui affirment avoir été « torturés » dans les locaux de la Maison du peuple kurde serait à l'origine de l'enquête. Les suspects ont été transférés en garde à vue à la sous-direction antiterroriste de la police à Paris.

## BARZANI : L'IRAK NE DOIT PAS CONSIDÉRER LES KURDES COMME DES ENNEMIS

AFP

ERBIL (Irak), 19 jan 2009 (AFP) -

LE PRESIDENT de la région autonome kurde Massoud Barzani a affirmé lundi son engagement à maintenir un Irak unifié, tout en avertissant qu'il n'y aura pas de paix dans le pays si les Kurdes sont vus comme des ennemis.

"Nous n'appelons à la sécession d'aucune partie de l'Irak, nous voulons l'unité et l'intégrité de l'Irak mais par des moyens démocratiques. Il n'y aura pas de stabilité si les Kurdes sont considérés comme des ennemis", a-t-il dit lors



d'une réunion avec des chefs de tribus arabes dans la province septentrionale de Ninive.

La tension avec les Kurdes a pris de l'ampleur ces derniers temps avec le désir du Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki d'aller vers un Etat plus centralisé. Les Kurdes sont exaspérés par la décision de M. Maliki de constituer des "Comités de soutien" tribaux qui visent selon eux à les empêcher d'agrandir leur région autonome.

"Nous soutenons tout acte visant à lutter contre le terrorisme mais les buts des +Comités de soutien+ sont tout autre. Dans le cadre de la mise en place de ces comités, il a été fait appel à des criminels impliqués dans Anfal. C'est une trahison et une action malfaisante. Je vous le dis aujourd'hui, nous nous opposerons à eux", a-t-il souligné.

Il faisait allusion à la "campagne d'Anfal" lancée il y a 20 ans par Saddam Hussein contre la rébellion kurde. Plusieurs dizaines de milliers de Kurdes avaient été tués et des villages rasés.

Les Kurdes considèrent comme illégaux ces comités de soutien, et en novembre le Conseil présidentiel dirigé par le Kurde Jalal Talabani avait demandé à M. Maliki de suspendre leur activité. Le Premier ministre assure en revanche que ces groupes jouent un rôle vital de soutien aux forces de sécurité irakiennes.

Le Monde  
20 janvier 2009

# Paris et Londres veulent accroître les sanctions européennes contre l'Iran

La France estime qu'il faut aider l'équipe Obama à mener une politique d'ouverture à l'Iran « avec un plus gros bâton ». Le sujet divise les Européens

Aider le président américain Barack Obama à traiter avec l'Iran en position de force ? C'est la motivation d'un groupe de pays européens, France et Royaume-Uni en tête, qui ont multiplié les démarches, ces dernières semaines, pour tenter de parvenir à de nouvelles sanctions de l'Union européenne (UE) contre la République islamique. L'Italie et, de façon plus nuancée, l'Allemagne, les ont rejoints. Mais les discussions entre Européens n'ont pas abouti à ce stade car les Vingt-Sept sont divisés.

L'Iran est aux prises avec la communauté internationale en raison de la poursuite de son programme d'enrichissement d'uranium, soupçonné d'avoir pour but la fabrication de l'arme nucléaire.

Les partisans de sanctions accrues estiment qu'il faut que l'UE se dote des moyens d'accompagner l'équipe Obama dans ce qui se profile comme une nouvelle stratégie américaine d'ouverture en direction de l'Iran (*engagement*) avec un « plus grand bâton », c'est-à-dire des pressions économiques accrues, indique-t-on de source diplomatique occidentale.

La France a été sur ce plan particulièrement active, notamment lors de sa présidence du Conseil européen, dans la continuité de ce

que Nicolas Sarkozy avait décidé en 2007. Paris et Londres ont plaidé auprès des partenaires européens en faveur de nouvelles mesures, visant notamment le secteur énergétique de l'Iran et les activités bancaires du pays.

Il s'agirait d'empêcher l'Iran de se procurer certains équipements et technologies pour son industrie pétrolière, qui fournit une grande partie des revenus du pays. L'Iran connaît d'importants problèmes d'investissements et de modernisation de son infrastructure énergétique, rendus plus aigus encore par la chute des prix mondiaux du brut.

Ayant pour l'heure échoué dans leur tentative faute de consensus européen, les responsables français et britanniques semblent se concentrer sur un autre objectif : faire interdire sur le territoire de l'UE les activités des banques iraniennes Saderat et Mellat. Ces institutions sont déjà frap-

## CHRONOLOGIE

**Juin 2008** : l'Union européenne, agissant en dehors du cadre des sanctions de l'ONU contre Téhéran, interdit la banque iranienne Melli d'activités sur son territoire.

**12 novembre** : le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, déclare à l'institut Brookings de Washington que « la pression doit être augmentée sur l'Iran ».

**16 janvier 2009** : Nicolas Sarkozy qualifie l'année 2009 de « décisive pour l'Iran », ajoutant que « le temps est désormais compté ».

pées de sanctions unilatérales américaines, la première en raison de son soutien à des « organisations terroristes », la seconde parce qu'elle aide le secteur nucléaire iranien.

Un autre axe de travail consiste à rallonger la liste des entités iraniennes déjà visées par des mesures européennes autonomes, afin de traquer les sociétés qui servent de « faux nez » aux activités de l'Iran dans sa stratégie de contournement des sanctions internationales.

Depuis des années, les Etats-Unis et Israël incitent les Européens à resserrer l'étau économique et financier sur l'Iran, pour contraindre son régime à satisfaire les demandes du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU. On anticipe, à Paris et à Londres, que l'administration Obama poursuivra sur cette voie tout en ouvrant, sans doute, de nouveaux canaux de discussions avec l'Iran.

L'effort des Français et des Britanniques se heurte aux réticences de plusieurs pays européens soucieux de protéger leurs intérêts économiques. C'est le cas de l'Autriche, dont la firme OMV a conclu en 2007 un accord avec l'Iran dans le domaine pétrolier, et du Luxembourg, qui pense à son secteur bancaire. En Allemagne, pays dont de nombreuses PME sont actives en Iran, de forts trairiellements politiques existent entre la chancelière Angela Merkel (favorable à de nouvelles sanctions) et son ministre des affaires étrangères, Frank-Walter Stein-

meier (qui y est opposé). La Suède a fait valoir que le processus des sanctions serait plus légitime s'il restait dans le cadre du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, qui a voté trois résolutions de ce type depuis 2006. L'Espagne, la Grèce et Chypre veulent mettre l'accent sur le dialogue avec Téhéran.

Le flou entourant les intentions de l'équipe Obama ainsi que la perspective de l'élection présidentielle iranienne en juin pèsent

## Les Européens s'inquiètent de leur marginalisation sur le dossier nucléaire iranien

sur le débat. « L'augmentation des sanctions ne ferait-elle pas le jeu des radicaux iraniens ? », s'interrogent certains. « Les Français poussent très fort, commente une source européenne, mais on ne voit

pas très bien comment on peut faire alors que les Américains n'ont pas encore bougé. »

Les Européens s'inquiètent de leur marginalisation sur le dossier nucléaire iranien, où ils ont joué depuis 2003 un rôle de premier plan. Les responsables français ont incité M. Obama à ne pas casser le canevas des efforts diplomatiques menés jusqu'à présent, estimant dangereux que Washington renonce à certaines exigences.

Alors que l'UE est sur une position d'attente, Paris, Londres et Rome ont discrètement décidé, en décembre 2008, d'aller de l'avant. En conseillant fortement aux banques, aux assurances, aux compagnies de navigation et à toute firme liée au secteur énergétique de se passer de transactions ou de contrats avec l'Iran. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

## Kurds report Iraqi army moving north, into Kurdish territories

United Press International

ERBIL, Iraq, Jan. 22, 2009 (UPI) —

The Iraqi army is allegedly on the verge of deploying to Kurdish territories with the aim of controlling the disputed city of Kirkuk, Kurdish reports say.

Kurdish media outlets report the 12th Division of the Iraqi army issued a request to the Ministry of Defense for greater movement in the Kurdish territories. Sources to the Kurdish newspaper Aso said military officials are hoping to establish checkpoints in Kirkuk to control movement in and out of the city.

Iraq holds provincial elections Jan. 31 in 14 of its 18 provinces. The vote in the three Kurdish provinces and Kirkuk is delayed amid territorial disputes.

Military commanders with the Kurdish Peshmerga force complained of the allegations, saying they are wary of such troop activity on the part of Baghdad, the Kurdish Globe reported.

"The movement of the division is not normal and it is a planned agenda; therefore, the Kurdish leadership looks suspiciously at that movement," said Peshmerga leader Mustafa Chawrash.

Conflict between Kurdish and Iraqi forces reached a boiling point in August as Iraqi troops tried to enter the disputed city of Khanaqin in the Iraqi province of Diyala. Both forces stood down, however, leaving control of the city to local officials.

TURQUIE VISITE DU PREMIER MINISTRE ERDOGAN À BRUXELLES

# Ankara cherche à sortir de l'ornière les négociations d'adhésion à l'UE

BRUXELLES

BUREAU EUROPÉEN

Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a bouclé, mardi 20 janvier, une visite de trois jours à Bruxelles destinée à revigorer le processus d'adhésion de son pays à l'Union européenne (UE) et d'éviter l'enlisement de négociations déjà très laborieuses.

Lancés fin 2005, les pourparlers traînent en longueur, et la défiance n'a cessé de croître entre les deux parties. A ce jour, seuls dix chapitres sur trente-cinq ont été ouverts ; un seul a été refermé. Les Européens s'interrogent sur le rythme des réformes menées par le gouvernement islamiste modéré dans la perspective, lointaine, de son intégration européenne. En face, M. Erdogan soupçonne certains dirigeants européens, dont le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, et les chrétiens-démocrates allemands, de tout faire pour retarder le processus.

M. Erdogan n'était pas venu à Bruxelles depuis 2004. Dans la capitale européenne, certains se demandaient s'il n'avait pas « perdu la foi » après une année, à Ankara, riche en tensions avec les camps laïc et nationaliste. L'adhésion demeure « la priorité

numéro un » du gouvernement, s'est employé à expliquer le dirigeant turc. En prélude à la visite, Ankara a d'ailleurs tenté d'envoyer différents signaux pour convaincre les Vingt-Sept de sa bonne volonté. Pour la première fois, un canal en kurde a été mis en place par la télévision publique. Un négociateur en chef, l'ex-député Egemen Bagis, a été nommé pour accélérer le rapprochement avec l'Union.

A Bruxelles, M. Erdogan a également mis en avant les avantages que l'UE pourrait retirer d'une adhésion de la Turquie. Sur le terrain diplomatique, Ankara se targue de jouer un rôle de méditation de premier plan au Proche-Orient, en tant qu'allié d'Israël, et interlocuteur du Hamas. En 2008, les efforts de la diplomatie turque ont facilité l'émergence d'un dialogue indirect entre la Syrie et l'Etat juif. Un

entregent que même Nicolas Sarkozy – toujours farouchement opposé à l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'UE – a salué en fin de présidence française.

Le premier ministre turc a, par ailleurs, insisté sur l'importance de son pays en matière d'approvisionnement énergétique. Il a menacé de revoir sa position au sujet du gazoduc Nabucco (censé relier en 2012 les champs de la Caspienne à l'Europe via la Turquie) afin d'obtenir l'ouverture du chapitre sur l'énergie. Chypre s'y refuse en raison d'un contentieux avec Ankara sur l'exploration pétrolière en mer Egée. Or le projet Nabucco figure plus que jamais parmi les priorités de l'UE, dans le contexte de la « guerre du gaz » entre la Russie et l'Ukraine. « Nous nous sommes entendus sur la nécessité de ce gazoduc », a assuré, lundi, José Manuel

Barroso. Le président de la Commission européenne a laissé entendre qu'il n'apprécie pas le chantage turc : « Nous ne devrions pas lier la question de la sécurité énergétique avec un élément particulier dont nous discutons dans le cadre des négociations d'adhésion. »

L'accélération des négociations d'adhésion est cependant très incertaine. Comme ses prédécesseurs, la présidence tchèque de l'Union ne devrait pas être en mesure d'ouvrir plus de deux ou trois chapitres supplémentaires d'ici à juin. La France continue de refuser l'ouverture de cinq chapitres qui présupposent, selon elle, une adhésion à l'Union, comme l'euro, les institutions ou le budget.

En raison de la non-reconnaissance de Chypre, huit chapitres économiques sont de surcroît bloqués. D'ici à fin 2009, l'UE exige, avant d'envisager d'aller de l'avant, que la Turquie étende les accords d'union douanière à l'ensemble de ses membres, dont Chypre. Mais rien ne devrait évoluer tant que les pourparlers sur la réunification de l'île, dont l'armée turque occupe la partie nord depuis 1974, n'ont pas abouti. Relancées pendant l'été sous l'égide de l'ONU, ces discussions piétinent elles aussi. ■

PHILIPPÉ RICARD



# Irak L'angoisse des généraux



Barack Obama  
a promis de  
retirer toutes les

« troupes de combat »  
d'ici à mai 2010.

L'armée américaine  
met en avant  
les « dangers »  
de ce plan et voudrait  
en ralentir l'exécution

PATRICE CLAUDE  
BAGDAD, ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

**C**e vendredi 16 janvier, vers 16 heures, Hashem Al-Husseini rentre chez lui. Sur la route de Babylone, un véhicule se porte à la hauteur du sien. Une vitre se baisse, un fusil d'assaut se met à cracher une pluie de balles. L'homme est tué sur le coup. Al-Husseini était candidat, sur la liste du premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, aux élections régionales prévues le 31 janvier. C'est ce genre d'attaques, quotidiennes dans ce pays « où la démocratie s'enracine », comme disait récemment George W. Bush, que craignent les commandants de l'armée américaine qui conseillent à Barack Obama de ne pas trop presser le désengagement militaire d'Irak.

L'assassinat d'Hashem Al-Husseini, comme celui, deux jours plus tard à Mossoul, d'Hassan Al-Luheibi, numéro deux d'un grand parti sunnite, sera sans doute vite oublié. « Mais imaginez, s'angoisse un analyste à l'ambassade américaine à Bagdad, ce qui se produirait si quelqu'un réussit

à tuer Maliki lui-même, ou le grand ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, la conscience spirituelle des chiïtes ? » Emeutes, vengeance, guerre civile peut-être. Le scénario a déjà été joué une fois, en 2006. Le dynamitage, par l'Al-Qaida locale, du mausolée chiïte de Samarra avait déclenché un carnage interconfessionnel qui a duré deux ans et a coûté des milliers de vies.

Alors bien sûr, l'Irak dont hérite Obama aujourd'hui a changé. La guerre civile entre majorité chiïte et minorité sunnite s'est achevée début 2008 par la retentissante défaite de cette dernière, d'où venaient Saddam Hussein et consorts. Les Arabes sunnites ont largement cessé de soutenir les djihadistes. Les tribus se sont révoltées contre les barbares d'Al-Qaida. Elles ont fourni 100 000 miliciens aux « comités du réveil », soutenus et salariés par les Américains avant de passer, fin 2008, sous juridiction irakienne.

En conséquence, grâce aussi à la stratégie anti-insurrectionnelle mise en place par le généralissime David H. Petraeus, la violence a diminué d'environ

80 % en un an. « Il y avait 180 attaques et attentats par jour contre les forces, constatait récemment un officier supérieur irakien, il n'y en a plus qu'une dizaine. » Essentiellement concentrées dans le centre-nord du pays, autour de Mossoul et de la province de Diyala. Mais également à Bagdad, où l'on enregistre encore d'un à trois attentats chaque jour.

« La guerre n'est pas terminée », répète, dans chacune de ses interventions, le général Raymond Odierno, qui a pris la suite de Petraeus à Bagdad. En 2008, selon les organisations indépendantes, le nombre de tués irakiens a diminué de moitié. Ce qui a fait encore de « 7 000 à 8 000 victimes ». Bref, et c'est le nouveau mantra des officiers supérieurs américains : « Les progrès sont fragiles et réversibles. » C'est ce message d'extrême prudence, rédigé et développé par Petraeus et Odierno, que Robert Gates, le



Des policiers irakiens sur les lieux d'un attentat en plein cœur de Bagdad, le 15 janvier. ATEF HASSAN/REUTERS

secrétaire à la défense reconduit par Obama – comme il l'avait promis – précisément pour « *mettre un terme à la guerre d'Irak* », a transmis à la mi-décembre à son nouveau « *commander in chief* ».

Aux termes du nouveau « *statut des forces* » (SOFA) conclu entre Bagdad et l'administration Bush quelques jours plus tôt, la totalité du contingent américain, soit environ 141 000 soldats, devra avoir quitté l'Irak d'ici au 31 décembre 2011, à l'exception d'un certain nombre – « *à négocier ultérieurement* » – de « *conseillers militaires* » destinés à poursuivre la formation de l'armée irakienne. Barack Obama, qui a été consulté lors des négociations sur le SOFA, n'a pas émis de réserves publiques au sujet de cette échéance.

En revanche, et notamment parce qu'il veut doubler dans les deux ans le contingent présent en Afghanistan (31 000 hommes aujourd'hui), le nouveau président américain a fait savoir ces derniers jours, par l'intermédiaire de ses conseillers, qu'il entendait bien tenir sa promesse de retirer d'Irak « *la totalité des troupes de combat* »

Les forces irakiennes se montreront-elles assez patriotiques pour oublier leurs attachements ethniques, tribaux ou religieux ? C'est la grande angoisse des généraux américains

dans les seize mois suivant son élection, c'est-à-dire fin mai 2010. Le Pentagone, sous la houlette de Robert Gates et de l'amiral Mike Mullen, qui dirige l'état-major, a obtempéré et devait présenter au nouveau président, « *dès le lendemain de son inauguration* », un plan de retrait « *conforme à ses vœux* ». Les itinéraires de retrait, par la Jordanie et la Turquie surtout, « *ont été identifiés* », disent-ils. Mais les deux hommes, sans doute accompagnés à la Maison Blanche, des généraux Odierno et Petraeus, présen-

teront aussi à Obama, « *d'autres options* » tenant compte de leurs propres réserves liées « *aux dangers et aux risques* » identifiés par eux-mêmes en Irak.

Selon les termes du SOFA, « *toutes les troupes de combat* » américaines, soit environ 55 000 des 141 000 soldats du contingent actuel, devront avoir été retirées des villes et zones urbaines irakiennes à la fin juin 2009. L'une des idées, maladroitement avancée publiquement par Odierno, au grand dam du premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, pour contourner cet accord et conserver, notamment à Bagdad, Bassora et Mossoul, des forces « *en nombre suffisant pour parer au pire* » serait de changer l'appellation de certaines de ces troupes.

Ainsi, les « *forces de combat* », les « *20 à 30 000* » combattants que Petraeus et Odierno voudraient conserver à portée de main, ce qui ralentirait automatiquement le rythme des retraits souhaité par Obama, deviendraient « *conseillers et soutiens techniques* » à l'armée irakienne. A suppo-

ser que Maliki accepte ce tour de passe-passe sémantique, pour la sécurité d'un Etat en reconstruction, mais affaibli par l'effondrement des prix du pétrole, son unique ressource, la question demeure : Barack Obama y consentirait-il ? Il y a peu de chances.

**P**our convaincre son nouveau patron, le haut commandement militaire américain, discrètement soutenu, il faut le dire, par plusieurs conseillers importants de Maliki, mettent essentiellement en avant trois « *gros facteurs de risque immédiats* ».

D'abord, les élections. En Irak, où ce type d'exercice démocratique est tout récent puisqu'il a commencé en 2005, les consultations peuvent toujours être l'occasion de règlements de comptes et de flambées de violence déclenchées par telle ou telle section mécontente du corps national. Par les milices plus ou moins en sommeil. Ou par les groupes d'insurgés, « *qaidistes* » inclus, qui n'ont pas tous désarmé, loin s'en faut. Or, il y a au moins trois consultations prévues en 2009 : les élections provinciales le 31 janvier, un référendum le 31 juillet sur les conditions du retrait américain (le SOFA), enfin les législatives qui doivent en principe avoir lieu en décembre.

Ajoutons qu'il n'est pas impossible que la question de Kirkouk, la poudrière pétrolière du nord, qui fait l'objet d'un conflit grandissant entre les Arabes, les Turkmènes et les Kurdes qui veulent inclure la région dans leur zone autonome, doive également être réglée par les urnes. Un rapport doit être rendu par les Nations unies en mars. En attendant, pour la troisième fois en trois ans, la consultation populaire prévue à Kirkouk est reportée. A Mossoul, la grande ville voisine, sans doute la plus ethniquement mélangée du pays, où les attentats et les opérations américaines se poursuivent au quotidien, les différents partis arabes ont demandé, en prévision des élections, « *une protection renforcée contre les activistes kurdes* » qui voudraient, disent-ils, « *tricher et intimider les électeurs* » pour garder le pouvoir dans une ville où ils sont minoritaires.

Les élections provinciales, qui auront lieu moins de deux semaines après la prise de fonctions d'Obama, promettent d'être agitées. En principe, 15 millions d'Irakiens sont appelés à élire, dans 14 provinces sur 18 – Kirkouk et les trois provinces de la région kurde autonome voteront plus tard –, des assemblées et des autorités locales aux pouvoirs largement augmentés par une nouvelle loi votée en 2008.

Mais le scrutin de janvier 2005 avait été boycotté par près de 90 % de la mino-

rité arabe sunnite, qui soutenait alors l'insurrection. L'espoir, cette fois-ci, est d'avoir une participation plus large, donc des institutions plus représentatives et plus puissantes qui iront à l'encontre, il faut aussi le souligner, des efforts centralisateurs de Nouri Al-Maliki. Pour la première fois, des chefs de tribu et des activistes sunnites, souvent armés jusqu'aux dents, vont participer. Comment réagiront ces hommes peu habitués à l'exercice du vote s'ils perdent, le scrutin ou la face, dans des conditions discutables ? Mystère.

**O**r, et c'est le deuxième « *danger* » identifié par le général Odierno, les forces de sécurité irakiennes, qui comptent autour de 560 000 policiers disséminés dans divers services (protection des édifices publics, garde des oléoducs, circulation, commandos de l'intérieur, forces antiémeute, gendarmerie, etc.) et 260 000 soldats, ont certes fait la preuve, ces derniers mois, d'une efficacité grandissante, mais les officiers américains se plaignent encore souvent de leur « *manque de ferveur et de discipline* ». Sans compter qu'ils n'ont pas encore tous les équipements nécessaires au maintien de l'ordre.

Peu de transports de troupes, pas d'avions ni d'hélicoptères en commande ; en cas de besoin urgent, dans ce vaste pays, les forces locales pourraient-elles être acheminées à temps ? Sur le terrain, se montreront-elles assez patriotiques pour oublier leurs attachements ethniques, tribaux ou religieux ? Telle est l'angoisse des généraux. Mais comme on le répète dans l'entourage de Barack Obama, « *avec ce genre de raisonnement, on ne partira jamais...* » ■



Le Monde  
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Enquête Les conflits qui attendent Barack Obama

# Ambiguïtés iraniennes



La République islamique est à la fois isolée et incontournable. Irak, Pakistan, Afghanistan, partout, Iraniens et Américains se retrouvent nez à nez. Sont-ils « condamnés à s'entendre par pragmatisme », comme le suggère un diplomate occidental ?

MARIE-CLAUDE DECAMPS  
TÉHÉRAN, ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

**L**a peinture s'écaille sur les murs de l'ancienne ambassade américaine à Téhéran, ce « nid d'espions », comme l'appelaient les étudiants islamiques qui s'en sont emparés en novembre 1979, mais on distingue encore le slogan « *L'Amérique est impuissante* » derrière une statue de la Liberté agonisante. A quelques rues de là, un immeuble affiche sur toute sa hauteur une bannière étoilée flambant neuve : les étoiles sont des têtes de morts, les rayures, des trajectoires d'obus. Entre ces deux « créations artistiques » : trente ans de révolution iranienne, trente ans d'antiaméricanisme.

L'un ne va pas sans l'autre, tant la République islamique s'est fondée sur l'« indépendance nationale » face au régime du chah inféodé à Washington. Un ressort nationaliste fortement teinté d'anticolonialisme qui trouve une de ses sources dans la « faute originelle » du coup d'Etat



Un portrait de Barack Obama est déchiré, mardi 20 janvier, à Téhéran, lors d'une manifestation d'Iraniens opposés à l'intervention de l'armée israélienne à Gaza. VAHID SALEMI/AP

de la CIA contre le premier ministre Mohammad Mossadegh, en 1953. Et qui a fonctionné à chaque fois, de la guerre Iran-Irak (1980-1988), appuyée par Américains et Occidentaux contre Téhéran, jusqu'à l'infinie guérilla diplomatique sur le dossier nucléaire iranien. Trois séries de sanctions contre Téhéran du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies n'ont pu dénouer la crise : l'Iran affirme son « droit » à enrichir de l'uranium dans le cadre d'un programme de recherches civil ; Washington et ses alliés soupçonnent des applications militaires et veulent y mettre un terme.

Bill Clinton et George Bush se sont cassés les dents sur le dossier du nucléaire iranien. Entre-temps, le ton est monté, l'Iran s'est vu classé dans « l'axe du Mal » américain et régulièrement l'option d'aller bombarder les centres nucléaires iraniens refait surface. De son côté, le « messianique » et fondamentaliste président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, dénonce « l'appui inconditionnel » de Washington à un Israël qu'il voudrait voir « rayé de la

carte ». Entre-temps aussi, la situation au Moyen-Orient a évolué.

L'Iran est « isolé », mais il est aussi devenu incontournable : en Irak, où les chiïtes ont pris la main ; au Liban, où le Hezbollah, parrainé par Téhéran, a remporté une victoire sur les Israéliens en 2006 ; sur la question palestinienne, où M. Ahmadinejad, le persan chiïte, cherche à se positionner en « leader de la rue arabe », face à des pays arabes modérés gênés par leurs alliances américaines. Au Pakistan, en Afghanistan, partout, Iraniens et Américains se retrouvent nez à nez. « Condamnés à s'entendre par pragmatisme », comme l'expliquait un diplomate occidental ? Face à l'inextricable dilemme iranien, Barack Obama, le nouveau président américain, l'a dit, il cherchera une « autre approche », évoquant une sorte de « dialogue dans la fermeté », sans autres détails.

Qu'en est-il en Iran ? M. Ahmadinejad, qui – geste inhabituel – a envoyé un message de félicitations à M. Obama, a fait savoir : « Si le changement annoncé est réel et la nouvelle approche basée sur le respect,

nous l'accueillerons et prendrons les mesures appropriées. »

Devant un feu de cheminée dans un salon à l'élégance que l'on pourrait qualifier d'« anglaise », si le mot n'avait des connotations « coloniales », de son ministère, le vice-ministre des affaires étrangères et ex-ambassadeur à Paris, Ali Ahani, nous a expliqué ce que pourraient être, vues d'Iran, les bases d'une détente avec les Etats-Unis.

Obama, disait-il, doit rompre avec la « détestable politique agressive de Bush ». Conseillant un certain « réalisme » au président américain, il l'exhortait à changer sur deux points fondamentaux, véritables épines plantées depuis des années dans l'orgueil national et la préoccupation du régime pour sa sécurité. D'abord reconnaître, enfin, la République islamique pour ce qu'elle est, une République pérenne qui peut aider à la stabilité de la région – « Nous avons essuyé trente ans d'embargo, de sanctions, de menaces et nous sommes toujours là. » Ensuite, admettre que de nouvelles puissances, dont l'Iran, « sont apparues sur la scène internationale » : « Nous sommes entourés de pays en crise, mais nous sommes un partenaire à ne pas négliger car nous avons notre poids dans la région, dans

le monde et dans le monde islamique », rappelait M. Ahani.

Et il ajoutait : « Les Américains sont toujours sur la même analyse. Les données ont changé mais ils n'ont toujours pas changé de partenaires. Regardez Gaza et la crise entre l'Egypte, l'Arabie saoudite et leurs opinions publiques. Vous croyez que les Américains pourront toujours compter sur ces pays à l'ave-

nir ? » Téhéran serait-il prêt à un geste sur le nucléaire ? « Une suspension, préalable à tout dialogue, de l'enrichissement d'uranium est hors de question, assurait M. Ahani. Nous avons suspendu sous la présidence Khatami, on a aussi aidé dans la lutte contre les talibans en Afghanistan. Et comment a-t-on été remercié ? En étant placé dans "l'axe du Mal". »

Un dialogue ? Beaucoup l'espèrent. En attendant, Téhéran veut montrer qu'il l'abordera en force : à quelques heures de l'investiture de Barack Obama, les services iraniens annonçaient l'arrestation de quatre personnes impliquées, selon eux, dans un complot de la CIA pour fomenter une « révolution de velours en Iran ».

« En réalité les autorités auraient préféré une victoire de McCain. Ce Barack Obama qui parle d'ouverture ça les met mal à l'aise, explique l'essayiste et économiste Saeed Leylaz. Une petite frange de fondamentalistes, plus radicaux encore que le pré-

sident, ont peur que si Obama les accule par trop d'ouverture à ouvrir eux aussi le régime, tout leur échappe des mains. J'appelle ça, le syndrome Gorbatchev. Une perestroïka iranienne les épouvante... » D'où, dans les journaux conservateurs, qui se servent fort à propos de l'émotion engendrée par les morts de Gaza, un regain de critiques contre les Etats-Unis. « Qui commandera à la Maison Blanche, interrogeait un éditorial récent. Obama, le Pentagone ou les sionistes ? »

« Franchement, notre ressentiment contre l'Amérique est tel que je le crois inscrit dans nos gènes », confie, dans un petit sourire poli Shariat Madari, directeur du groupe de presse conservateur Keyhan et homme parmi les plus influents du régime. D'un geste, il désigne dans sa bibliothèque les 10 volumes reliés tirés des papiers du « nid d'espions » américain en 1979. « A Keyhan, dit-il, on n'est pas positif sur Obama depuis le début. Nos diplomates et M. Ahmadinejad le sont un peu plus. Mais que peut un président américain ? Bien peu. Et sur quelle base s'accorder ? Quand il y a un voleur, la justice exige-t-elle de la victime qu'elle se prête à un compromis ? »

Chez les réformateurs, en pleine effervescence à l'approche du scrutin présidentiel de juin, le ton est plus positif. « Nous, les réformateurs, nous sommes toujours bien entendus avec les démocrates américains, mais si Ahmadinejad reste en place, rien ne bougera », commente Saïd Adjarian, désabusé. Pourtant ce politicien difficile à faire taire, victime d'une tentative d'assassinat qui l'a laissé handicapé, est un concentré d'optimisme. « Il nous restera, dit-il en riant, le "rêve américain". Ici, on critique les excès commis à Guantanamo et la politique américaine, mais nos jeunes diplômés sans emploi admirent les Etats-Unis où le travail est une valeur reconnue. »

Presque sous la fresque de la bannière étoilée « revisitée », au centre de Téhéran, une vieille femme accroupie vend des tee-shirts sur le trottoir. Dessus, une simple inscription : « USA ». Sur les grandes artères, vendeurs de donuts (beignets) noyés de chocolat comme à New York, et fast-foods de hamburgers alternent. Et tel dignitaire qui vous reçoit pour pourfendre la politique de Bush boit sans sourciller son Coca-Cola ou touille dans sa tasse de café son « coffee mate » (substitut de lait) à l'américaine.

Au hit-parade des diplômés, le MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) écrase Cambridge ou la Sorbonne, et « abroad » (à l'étranger) est synonyme d'Amérique. Trois millions d'Iraniens y vivent, surtout à Los Angeles (baptisée ici

Téhér-Angeles). Chaque soir, des millions d'Iraniens se connectent sur Internet où regardent par satellite les programmes en farsi émis depuis la Californie. « L'Amérique est là, embedded dans notre culture derrière le bouton de la télévision ! », déplorait un universitaire iranien conservateur.

L'ayatollah Khomeiny avait beau dire au début de la révolution que « l'Amérique est un serpent blessé », trente ans après, son venin se diffuse toujours. Près de la place Jaleh où les soldats du chah tirèrent sur la foule, haut lieu de vénération des premiers martyrs, un magasin vend les roller skates les plus performants. Dans les librairies il n'est pas rare de voir des affiches de Marlon Brando, Al Pacino ou James Dean. Et même dans ce saint des saints qu'est l'immense mausolée où repose l'ayatollah Khomeiny, une boutique destinée aux pèlerins propose, noyés dans des articles anodins, poupées Barbie, cassettes vidéo de Spiderman, Hulk et autres Mad Max.

« Le rock américain, c'est ma vie, disait Dariouch, chanteur d'un groupe de rock alternatif au chômage (le bassiste a émigré en Grande-Bretagne et le guitariste en Italie). Mais on dit tant de choses sur les Etats-Unis. Je ne suis pas prêt à brader l'indépendance de mon pays pour autant. Haine et fascination, l'Amérique nous rend schizophrènes. »

Au terme d'une conversation très docte sur l'évolution de la révolution, l'hodjatoleslam Ansari, un réformateur plutôt « ouvert », s'interrompra soudain pour constater : « Vous savez, ce slogan d'Obama, "Yes, we can", ça aussi les Américains nous l'ont pris ! L'ayatollah Khomeiny détestait le mot "impossible". Et chaque fois qu'on lui disait, c'est impossible de renverser le chah, il répondait agacé : "Si, nous pouvons..." » ■

« Haine et fascination, l'Amérique nous rend schizophrènes »

Dariouch, chanteur d'un groupe de rock

# Timetable for Iraq too slow for Obama

## He tells U.S. generals to speed up pace for withdrawal of troops

By Elisabeth Bumiller and Thom Shanker

**WASHINGTON:** President-elect Barack Obama has signaled to top military commanders that he is not satisfied with their timetable for a reduction of American troops in Iraq and has asked for options to accelerate the withdrawal, a top Pentagon official said Wednesday.

The request is an early sign of potential differences between Obama and military commanders over the pace of the drawdown in Iraq. It suggests that the incoming president has reservations about a withdrawal plan outlined to him last month, which military officials have said would stop short of the rapid drawdown he promised during his election campaign.

Obama met on Jan. 8 in Washington with his national security team, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Pentagon official declined to offer details on what new options military planners were preparing.

A drawdown in Iraq is seen as a prerequisite to any significant American military buildup in Afghanistan, where Obama appears ready to add up to 30,000 American troops over the next two years, a near doubling of the current U.S. force there of about 31,000.

The broad outlines of a military plan for Iraq that was presented to Obama in December envisioned withdrawing two brigades from Iraq, or about 7,000 to 8,000 troops, over the next six months.

U.S. military officials have declined to be more specific about that plan, by General David Petraeus and General Ray Odierno, the top American commanders responsible for Iraq. But they have made clear that the plan did not set forth as fast a withdrawal as

Obama pledged during the election campaign, when he repeatedly promised to have all combat troops out of Iraq by May 2010, or 16 months from his first day in office.

Officials with Obama's transition team say he remains committed to that goal, although he has also said he will listen to the recommendations of his commanders.

"We have had briefings from the Bush administration, including Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen, about current plans for Iraq and Afghanistan, and we appreciate the information that has been shared," said Brooke Anderson, the national security spokeswoman for the Obama transition. Anderson said that as president Obama would meet with his commanders "to make a determination to how we move forward to safely redeploy our combat brigades in 16 months."

Military officials say they have been anticipating a request for speedier options from Obama on his first day in office, but they have also expressed uneasiness about a quick withdrawal in Iraq and are unclear at this point about Obama's overall strategy in Afghanistan.

"It is more than a question of how fast and how low; it includes calculating how much risk you are willing to take in Iraq," one senior military officer said of the discussions over a withdrawal. The official spoke on the condition that he not be named because of the sensitivity of discussing war planning before the new president takes office.

The military plan was drawn up to meet the recent status-of-forces agreement between the United States and the Iraqi government. That agreement calls for both shorter and longer timetables than Obama's campaign pledge: All U.S. combat troops are to be out of Iraqi cities by June and all American forces are to be out of Iraq entirely by the end of 2011. That agreement, however, can be renegotiated.

Even as Obama prepares for the drawdown in Iraq, some influential Democrats and national security experts have begun voicing concern about his willingness to send up to 30,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan, where the United States has been at war for more than seven years.

They say that Obama has yet to make clear his overall goals beyond calling for more forces, money and diplomacy in an increasingly violent, ungovernable country that the military says presents even more problems than Iraq.

"Additional troops in Afghanistan may be putting a Band-Aid on a fatal wound," said Kenneth Pollack, director of research at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

Moreover, there are limits on how fast Afghan force levels can rise, in particular the need to build housing and other support structures for troops under the proposed increase.

"Right now, there's just no more room at the inn," said one U.S. Army logistics planner.

A significant construction program is under way, but the landlocked location of Afghanistan, and its primitive infrastructure, make it many times costlier to support each soldier there than in Iraq.

Although Mullen has said he would like the bulk of the Afghan increase to be in place by June, other officers in charge of logistics say that simply may not be possible if the goal is to deploy most of a potential increase of 30,000.

Transition officials also said this week that the president-elect will be keeping another holdover from the Bush administration on his national security team, Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, who will keep his job coordinating Iraq and Afghanistan policy on the National Security Council.

But unlike his role in the Bush administration, where, as assistant to the president for Iraq and Afghanistan, he reported directly to President George W. Bush, Lute will report to Obama through his national security adviser, General James Jones.

Lute's appointment to a job that was essentially Bush's war czar was criticized two years ago by Democrats who said the job should have been handled by Stephen Hadley, Bush's national security adviser. They said the appointment of Lute signaled that the White House had lost control of the war effort.

But Obama transition officials said that Jones's decision to keep Lute — who he has worked with in the past on Iraq-related issues — reflects his belief that there should be some continuity in military policy, even if the new administration is pursuing different tactics and strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that Jones plans to take an active role in Afghanistan and Iraq issues.

Lute has recently completed a review of Afghanistan policy for Bush, and one Obama transition official said that there were elements of that policy review that the incoming administration might seek to keep.

# Kirkuk: A Test for the International Community

By Ahmed Ali and Michael Knights

On January 31, most Iraqis will go to the polls and express their political preferences in provincial elections, but four of Iraq's provinces -- the three governorates within the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and Kirkuk province -- will not hold elections. Kirkuk's noninclusion is a symbol of its unresolved status, and its elections are on hold until the Council of Representatives in Baghdad passes a special election law. There is little impetus, however, for the different ethnic factions to compromise on such a law unless the international community strongly supports the process.

## Background

Both Iraqi Kurds and Turkmen claim Kirkuk as their historic capital, but the ethnic balance of the governorate was extensively altered under the former regime through the expulsion of Kurds, the influx of Arabs, and the forced recategorization of Turkmen as Arabs. Since April 2003, tens of thousands of Kurds have returned to Kirkuk, and the January 2005 provincial elections gave the Kurdish coalition (Kirkuk's Brotherhood list) a majority of seats on Kirkuk's provincial council. Arab members of the council boycotted the council's meetings for thirteen months until an agreement was signed on December 2, 2007. This agreement stipulated a power-sharing arrangement, dividing government jobs based on a 32-32-32-4 percentage split among Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and Christians, respectively; consensus decisionmaking in the provincial council; the release of unindicted Arabs jailed in northern Iraq; and the departure of KRG Asayesh (security personnel) from Kirkuk. Due to the competing agendas of local actors, as well as regional and national conditions, the agreement was not implemented.

## Obstacles to Conflict Resolution in Kirkuk

Local governance. Not only is the 32-32-32-4 split for government employees not occurring in practice, a disproportionate number of Kurds are also in management positions. According to Kirkuk's provincial council, government workers are 56 percent Arab, 23 percent Turkmen, and 19 percent Kurdish, while 54 percent of government managers are Kurdish, 26 percent Turkmen, and 19 percent Arab. Furthermore, local security forces are predominately Kurdish. Another local concern, the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the Saddam era, is complicated by the destruction of many of the original villages and urban neighborhoods from which Kurdish IDPs originated. In addition is the practical issue of who should be allowed to vote in the forthcoming elections.

Regional, national, and KRG politics. Politicians tend to use instability in Kirkuk as a way of burnishing their nationalist and/or ethnic credentials and to reap electoral gains. Kurdish leaders and citizens find it difficult to compromise on Kirkuk's absorption into the KRG. Indeed, the fate of disputed areas is an issue that maintains Kurdish unity and diverts political energy away from a domestic political reform process in the KRG. At a more practical level, physical and administrative control of Kirkuk is perhaps the sole bargaining chip the KRG holds in its struggle to draw predominantly Kurdish areas into the KRG, as well as to gain the right to directly benefit from the region's oil production. Arab and Turkmen leaders, including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, likewise use Kirkuk as a means of displaying their ethnic or nationalist credentials. Al-Maliki's recent extension of mostly tribal "Support Councils" to Kirkuk was meant to exploit Arab and Turkmen fears of Kurdish control to boost his party's support base.

## Resolution Mechanisms

To resolve the issue of Kirkuk and other disputed territories, both sets of issues must be tackled in a separate but integrated manner. At present, Baghdad and the KRG are deadlocked on broader issues, leaving local governance problems in a vacuum. Furthermore, although Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution called for a census and a

referendum on Kirkuk's administrative status to be held by December 31, 2007 (subsequently postponed to June 2008), nothing has transpired. The September 2008 provincial elections law sought to reenergize the process by stipulating that a committee of seven Council of Representatives legislators -- two Kurds, two Arabs, two Turkmen, and one Christian -- will work with a range of advisors (including the UN) to develop a consensus mechanism for sharing Kirkuk's governance. The committee will also "[identify] the trespasses on the public properties in Kirkuk before and after April 9, 2003," in advance of legal steps to reverse any violations of land rights under the Iraqi Property Claims Commission. Finally, the committee will "[review and scrutinize] all data and records related to the demographic situation, including the registry of voters, and submit binding recommendations to the Independent High Electoral Commission."

The committee is expected to incorporate these findings into a draft Kirkuk election law (with a mandate for one set of provincial elections only) that will be sent to the Baghdad parliament for approval by March 31, 2009. If the special committee fails to provide recommendations by then, the Iraqi cabinet must present a draft Kirkuk election law to parliament. The committee has been formed, but has yet to commence its activities. The members of the committee offer differing reasons for the delay, ranging from lack of security to the intention of some parties to maintain the status quo (for example, Kurdish control of the city). Based on the failure of the Article 140 effort to meet its objectives, mediation from outside the Iraqi system will probably be required to keep this latest committee on track.

## The Need for International Support

The September 2008 provincial election law passed partly due to the proactive role of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), which is scheduled to open two offices in Kirkuk in 2009 as a result of UN Special Representative Staffan de Mistura's December 2008 visit. A high-profile UNAMI role will help alleviate fears by Iraq's neighbors of Kurdish annexation of Kirkuk, and the UN could help keep the Kirkuk special committee on track and on schedule. On January 13, Vice President-elect Joseph Biden told reporters in Kirkuk that "solving the main issues of Kirkuk is a major issue for the United States government." If so, the Obama administration should send an early and clear message of support for UNAMI, making it plain to Baghdad and the KRG that the United States expects the Kirkuk committee to make active use of UN support. It is possible, for instance, that UN technical support would enable more rapid, effective, and transparent resolution of property claims and voter registration disputes.

There is also a strong case for an international effort to provide targeted economic aid to Kirkuk province. Many seemingly intractable political issues in Kirkuk have practical solutions: for instance, international investment and support for de-mining efforts could assist the minority of Kurdish IDPs who wish to return to their places of origin, even if their villages were destroyed. Initially, even a few examples of such "model villages" would show the Kurdish population that the international community was working on their behalf, making UNAMI's recommendations more palatable. For the balance of Kurdish IDPs, there is a pressing need for international support for development of urban housing and public services. This could allow Kurds to return without necessitating the removal of Arabs. Likewise, an investment-led improvement in private-sector employment opportunities in Kirkuk would make gradual rebalancing of government jobs possible without raising unemployment. Training programs are needed to bring sufficient Kurds into the workplace to begin to implement the 32-32-32-4 formula envisaged in the December 2, 2007, agreement.

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## The acid wells of Ergenekon

By Bejan MATUR

Turkey is signaling that it is becoming a country that is finally questioning its dark side and is finding the courage to clean out its underground vaults. The television screens show bulldozers with shovels digging into the dirt to unearth the crimes deep down below.

The bones and weapons shown on sketches summarize the last 25 years of Turkey. Perhaps these crime sketches date more back to the 1990s. Just as there are live broadcasts of excavations conducted to find groups of people killed, hogtied and buried together today in Turkey, light anti-tank weapons, bones and bombs are being brought to the daylight from these underground repositories.

In many places around the country, bulldozers are digging into the earth to discover crimes buried deep in the ground. We need these to be metaphorical tools of courage, to be a real attempt toward the settling of old accounts. This is because this settling will bring about confrontation, which will, in turn, yield to purification. All of us are in dire need of the closure that this will bring.

Indeed, even if we pretend that what happened in the past did not happen at all, there will always be that crime lying two meters beneath the earth, near our villas or near the roads that we stroll along, or near the lakes where we have our picnics. Living with crime and with so much dirt, can we expect this to create goodness in Turkey or peace in the people of Turkey?

Life will always bring its own justice to the scene, even when things seem most unfair. There is always equilibrium. While the crime buried deep underground has darkened many souls, can we still create democracy? Imagine what contacts İbrahim Şahin might have established, or with what order he might have meddled with to prevent the weapons that he buried in Gölbaşı from being unearthed. Thinking about this alone may explain why goodness has not manifested itself in our lives. Countries are like people. This is also the case in psychiatry. In order to treat a person, you first have to get access to the subconscious, or the dark recesses of the inner mind, a collection of the past, something which many prefer to forget. When those dark vaults are cleaned, when they start to make sense and their impact is understood, the spiritual integrity of that person can be made whole. Turkey must undergo serious rehabilitation. It must do this in order to regain its spiritual integrity. Today, we see signs that it is developing the courage to confront the crimes that have been building within its borders. We hope that this purification continues without being overshadowed by political rows.

On the other hand, this cleansing must also be performed on the other side of the Euphrates. If the Ergenekon investigation crosses over to



the other side of the Euphrates, this will bring real improvement.

The argument that this investigation must include the Southeast, which is the real area of the crime, has up to now been voiced by several hesitant politicians in weak statements and by several confessors who later have tended to backpedal from their statements. The mystifying murders in the Southeast are a challenging focus which even media organizations have been inclined to steer away from. What gives permanence to this challenge is the fact that the region is still marred by violence. Yes, the problem is grave. Yes, many deaths seen during the last 25 years in the region might be associated with other deaths. Let us hope that the awareness that the mysterious murders of the Southeast are under the scope of the Ergenekon investigation will create similar courage for further investigation of the case. It is obvious that Ergenekon was first organized in the West, but its core members grew strong in the Southeast. A keen eye carefully monitoring Ergenekon's murderers can trace them also in the Southeast. We knew that there were connections between the cases of unexplained murders, shadowy networks, criminal organizations within the state and the drug trade. But none of us would know that one day we would see a sketch which shows us that these connections have come so close to our lives. Yes, this is the case: Those crime sketches, which may seem abstract, are actually so real and alive. When several suspects confessed that they had killed thousands of people; when the mother of another said her son had killed many; and when Abdülkadir Aygan, who killed Musa Anter, said his corpse had been thrown into a well, these sounded like the introductory forays into Turkey's confrontation with its dark past. Nowadays, we are being led on deeper forays by Tunçay Güney. He talks about acid wells and inexplicable murders.

Will Turkey show the courage to bend down and look into these deep wells and deal with

these nauseatingly deep crimes? This is the question we must ask.

What must be done in the Southeast requires much more care and an extended effort. Even the traces of these crimes in the Southeast have been destroyed. The acid wells which Güney referred to in his statements, but later denied, tell us many things, even if it is mere metaphor. The level to which the Southeast incidents descend makes trailing them even more difficult. The Nazi furnaces and gas chambers, often advertised as the worst tools of crimes against humanity, were chosen because they would leave no trace of the crime committed. Those furnaces would destroy not only people, but also humanity itself. Argentina used a similar technique for leaving no trace, referred to as "Argentinean-type death" in history, in which about 30,000 murdered people were thrown into the ocean from the air. But today, Argentina is a peaceful country because it has confronted these deaths.

When will we confront our acid wells? How will we eliminate the fear of the people of the Southeast, who fear even the utterance of the word "well"? When he was asked how the acid for these wells had been provided, Güney said, "Since acid is also used for drugs, it was not hard to find." Should we repeat the claim that some law enforcement officers take an active role in the drug trade? He added that retired Gen. Veli Küçük easily arranged the provision of acid from chemical plants in İzmit and Düzce, where many mysterious murders were possibly committed.

Even if the acid wells, which are an obvious endpoint for the mysterious murders, are not true, they tell us a true story. As Turkey confronts its dark past, we may find traces in Ümraniye, Gölbaşı and at the Atatürk Forestry Farm. But it will be too hard to find the traces of the crimes committed in the Southeast because deep crimes were committed there, which were designed to destroy everything just like gas chambers, death furnaces and dumping people into the ocean. The target of these crimes was not to end the lives of those murdered. There were other values that this destructiveness targeted.

Even today, the fear that the mentioning of the names of JİTEM and Levent Ersöz creates in Şırnak also applies to the wells of the state-owned Turkish Pipeline Corporation (BOTAŞ). Of course, it does not make any difference whether the victims of mysterious murders were really thrown into the BOTAŞ's acid wells. But if these mysterious murders are not questioned seriously and with courage, who can say that they didn't actually take place?

***Bejan Matur is an award-winning poet and writer specializing in Kurdish issues.***

# Police capture fugitive Ergenekon general in Ankara

SEDAT GÜNEÇ/MELİK DUVAKLI

A former senior general who has been on the run since July last year attempting to avoid arrest as part of the ongoing investigation into Ergenekon, a clandestine terrorist organization charged with attempting to create chaos and undermine stability in order to trigger a coup, was captured yesterday in a hospital in Ankara.

Retired Brig. Gen. Levent Ersöz was believed to have escaped to Moscow last year, shortly ahead of a wave of detentions in the Ergenekon investigation in July. The fugitive arrived at Ankara's Balgat 100 Yıl Hospital yesterday, accompanied by his nephew, a military officer serving at the Kırşehir Brigadier Command. Ankara police counterterrorism teams, having determined that Ersöz was checking into the hospital for prostate surgery using the alias Mehmet Gülcü, captured and detained him at the hospital at 8:30 a.m. Ersöz's nephew and a noncommissioned officer accompanying him to the hospital were also detained by the police. Since last year Ersöz has grown a beard and started wearing eyeglasses.

Ersöz was taken to the Ankara Police Department for interrogation.

Police have established that Ersöz entered Turkey more than a month ago accompanied by an army colonel. He visited the same hospital at least twice in December.

Commenting on Ersöz's capture, State Minister Hayati Yazıcı said: "Nobody can run from the law. This is a state of law."

The retired general served as the head of the Gendarmerie Force's Intelligence Department. He is known to have had close ties with Gendarmerie Force Commander Gen. Şener Eruygur, who was also arrested as an Ergenekon suspect.

Police officers disguised as doctors captured the retired general, police sources said. Ersöz was attempting to obtain a doctor's report to be able to stand trial without being held in custody, reports indicated.

"Ersöz was referred here by the A Clinic in Ümitköy. The police officers came to the hospital in plain clothes. Then they detained Ersöz. There were two other individuals with Ersöz. They found a large number of identity cards from different institutions. He checked in under the name Mehmet Gülcü. He was taken from the hospital 40 minutes after his detention," Talat Aydın, the medical superintendent at the hospital, told reporters.

Speaking to the press after the detention, Ümitköy A Clinic Medical Center Superintendent Bülent Yetim said Ersöz had visited the clinic



An ID card which was arranged in the name of Mehmet Ramazan Gülcü was found on Retired Gen. Levent Ersöz.

and been diagnosed with prostate enlargement and was scheduled for surgery with the 100 Yıl Hospital, where Yetim, a guest doctor at the clinic, is employed on a permanent basis. Yetim said none of the hospital staff suspected anything out of the ordinary with their patient; however, police sources said officials were not ruling out possible collaboration as a number of doctors who have retired from the Gülhane Military Medical Academy (GATA) are employed at the 100 Yıl Hospital.

Police sources said intelligence information indicated that Ersöz was planning to escape to Cyprus following the completion of his treatment in the hospital.

Meanwhile, yesterday police also located the whereabouts of Mehmet Orhan Gülcü, the owner of the identity card being used by Ersöz at the time of his capture, and interrogated him. Police sources said Gülcü was a retired worker residing in Burdur.

It was also discovered that Ersöz' brother-in-law recently sent a package to Ersöz at a house he had recently purchased in Ankara. However, when PTT officials noticed that the package was addressed to Ersöz, a fugitive at the time, they contacted the police, who examined the contents. The package included an industrial insecticide and a syringe along with a note explaining that the insecticide could be used to make a

lethal poison. "Wishing you a good time using it," the note ended.

Background on Ersöz

Ersöz is regarded as one of the key figures in the Ergenekon investigation. He is known as one of the leaders of JİTEM, an illegal gendarmerie intelligence department the existence of which has been officially denied for decades. He is also remembered as the commander in charge of the prison island of İmralı, where outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan is serving a life sentence, at the time when an alleged meeting between military officials and Öcalan took place on the island.

According to accounts from various witnesses, Ersöz led a military operation against the Kurdish terrorist organization KAWA shortly after the Sept. 12, 1980 coup in Turkey. KAWA, which was destroyed after the operation, in which suspected Ergenekon leader Gen. Veli Küçük also participated, was considered the only viable rival to the PKK for Kurdish public opinion.

The same team of Ersöz, Küçük and Col. Atilla Uğur are remembered in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish Southeast, the region of most alleged JİTEM operations, for having terrorized the region. Ersöz is remembered for referring to the southeastern border town of Şırnak as "the temple of fear" and "the republic of Şırnak" during the time he served in that city between 1995 and 1996. In the late '80s, '90s and early 2000s, when the trio and the clandestine and illegal structure they set up in the region were dominant, hundreds of people went missing. Former JİTEM members who turned informants as well as family members of those who disappeared have also claimed that people from Silopi who went missing during the time when Ersöz was the Şırnak provincial gendarmerie corps commander were victims of JİTEM executions. Ergenekon informant Tuncay Güney also recently claimed that a number of people had been summarily executed by JİTEM, adding that the bodies were burned with acid and buried in wells located near facilities owned by the state-owned Turkish Pipeline Corporation (BOTAŞ) in Silopi. Last month the Silopi Prosecutor's Office authorized investigators to locate and excavate these wells. An investigation is currently under way.

According to an account written in a book by Col. Erdal Sarızeybek, Ersöz and his team used gendarmerie facilities to listen in on and record the phone conversations of the prime minister, the chief of general staff and other high-level state administrators.



January 14, 2009

## Kurds welcome Biden in Kirkuk

**KIRKUK / Aswat al-Iraq:** A Kurdish member of the Kirkuk provincial council welcomed the U.S. Vice President-elect Joe Biden's visit to the disputed province, reiterating support of the visitor's suggestion to divide Iraq into three independent countries.

Ahmed al-Askari, a member of the Kurdish bloc in the Kirkuk provincial council, told Aswat al-Iraq news agency that Biden's visit indicates that "the new U.S. administration is interested in solving Iraqis' problems in general, mainly Kirkuk."

He reiterated Kurds' welcome to Biden's suggestion to divide Iraq, asserting that it paves the way to solving all Iraqis problems.

On Monday (Jan. 12) afternoon, Biden arrived on a surprise visit to Iraq and met with Talabani and his deputy, Adel Abdelmahdi.

Biden voted for the 2003 invasion of Iraq but later became a critic of the war and the way in which President George W. Bush was executing it.

He is best known in Iraq as the author of a 2006 plan to divide the country into self-governing Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish enclaves - an idea that offended many Iraqi politicians and was quietly put on the back burner as violence ebbed.

However, Arabs in the oil-rich province, have a different viewpoint.

"The Arab bloc considers carrying out article 23 of the provincial elections law that puts special mechanisms into effect for local elections in Kirkuk as an important part in solving the Kirkuk cause," Mohamed Kahlil al-Juburi, told Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

He considered article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, which was formed to solve the disputed areas, as a dead article.

Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution calls to normalize situations, hold a census, and then hold a referendum in the disputed areas. The Iraqi government failed to fulfill the steps on time, which should have come at the end of 2007.

Both Arbil and Baghdad last June agreed on UN input of offering technical support to solve the issue.

"Turkomans search for their interests when they hold talks with any U.S. or governmental delegation as they are part of Iraq," member of Turkomans List, Tahseen Kihya, said.

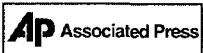
"We talked with the American officials on Biden's proposal and they underlined that this is above the authority level of the vice president," Kihya explained.

Kurds in the oil-rich Kirkuk city want to annex the governorate to the independent Kurdistan region while its Arab and Turkmen citizens want to keep it under the direct rule of the Baghdad central government.

A referendum on its status was to be held in line with article 140 of the constitution, but the implementation of the article and consequently the referendum has been postponed.

Kirkuk, 250 km (156 miles) north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, sits on the ruins of a 5,000-year-old settlement. Because of the strategic geographical location of the city, Kirkuk was the battle ground for three empires, Assyria, Babylonia and Media which controlled the city at various times.

Kirkuk is the center of the northern Iraqi petroleum industry. It is a historically and ethnically mixed city populated by Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs and Iraqi Turkmen. The population was estimated at 1,200,000 in 2008.



## Momentum builds for a self-ruled southern Iraq

January 16, 2009

By HAMZA HENDAWI and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press Writers

**NAJAF, Iraq (AP)** -- The country's biggest Shiite party is hoping for a big win in elections across the oil-rich south to jump-start its campaign for a self-ruled region - a move that would transform Iraq and, critics say, give Iran its biggest prize since the ouster of Saddam Hussein.

To reach that goal, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council needs to win control of Najaf - which it wants as a future capital of an autonomous southern Iraq - when voters across the country choose members of ruling provincial councils Jan. 31.

But the Supreme Council faces strong opposition from other Shiite groups, including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Dawa party and followers of anti-U.S. cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Those groups fear regional self-rule, modeled after the Kurdish autonomous area in the north, would weaken Iraq, open the door to expanded Iranian influence and threaten the existence of the Iraqi state.

Zoheir al-Hakim, a senior Supreme Council official in Najaf, predicted a comfortable win in this urban center of Shiite learning about 100 miles south of Baghdad.

"Creating a region in the south is our right by law and under the constitution," al-Hakim said. "Our loyal masses will take on anyone who tries to take this right away from us."

The council's campaign posters and banners outnumber the competition here in Najaf, dominating every available space in the heart of the city. The party has a hometown advantage - Najaf is home to the al-Hakims, a prominent family that has produced generations of top clerics and scholars and founders of the Supreme Council.

Even so, the large number of candidates - about 1,100 running for 28 seats - makes it difficult for any single party to take power alone.

Al-Hakim and other Supreme Council officials say they will take concrete steps toward creating a self-ruled region after the election but that the timing would depend on how well they do in the balloting.

To transform a province to self-rule, one-third of the members of a provincial council must call for a referendum that requires the support of a simple majority of the voters.

The law also provides a second, more cumbersome method involving collecting two sets of signatures of registered voters in support of self-rule. Once enough signatures are collected, the paperwork goes to the prime minister who has two weeks to forward the proposal to the election commission, which in turn must schedule a referendum within three months.

Under the constitution, self-ruled regions enjoy significant powers. They can write their own constitutions, amend federal laws that conflict with local ones, open representative offices abroad and assume responsibility for internal security.

The Supreme Council hopes to establish a self-ruled region encompassing all nine provinces south of Baghdad, but officials say they would settle for less if they don't win everywhere.

Nevertheless, Najaf is a must-win, largely because of its prestige among the world's Shiite Muslims.

The city includes the most venerated Shiite shrine: the tomb of Imam Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the founding saint of the Shiite faith. The shrine and the Shiite seminaries draw pilgrims and students from throughout the Shiite world.

It's also the home of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most powerful Shiite cleric and a close ally of the Supreme Council.

With the self-ruled Kurdish region already in a bitter quarrel with al-Maliki over the extent of one another's powers, critics say another autonomous region in the south could lead to the breakup of Iraq along religious lines and open the door to domination by Shiite-led Iran.

The Supreme Council was founded in Iran in 1982 by Iraqi Shiites who fled Saddam's rule. Its armed wing fought alongside the Iranians during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, and its leaders returned home after the fall of Saddam's Sunni-dominated regime.

The proposed region in southern Iraq poses a dilemma for the United States, which for years counted on the Supreme Council as a partner in Iraq despite its close ties to Iran. U.S. officials have also encouraged Iraqis to consider giving more power to their provinces to prevent the rise of a new strongman after Saddam's regime was toppled in the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Vice President-elect Joe Biden, then a Democratic senator, proposed in a 2006 article in The New York Times to set up Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni self-ruled regions to defuse sectarian violence sweeping the country then. The proposal gained traction when the U.S. Senate approved a nonbinding resolution endorsing the formula.

Al-Maliki, whom the U.S. has strongly supported, is a staunch opponent of decentralized government and has warned that the current constitution has weakened the power of the Iraqi state.

"We will be doomed without a strong state," al-Maliki warned last week.

In a sermon Friday in Baghdad, senior Supreme Council lawmaker Jalaluddin

al-Saghir sharply criticized al-Maliki over his views, accusing the government of overstepping its authority and failing to implement constitutional provisions of transferring power to local administrations.

In a Friday sermon at Najaf's twin city of Kufa, the chief spokesman for al-

Sadr's movement warned against what he said was a "serious project" to divide Iraq, arguing that a huge turnout in the Jan. 31 election could foil that plan.



January 23, 2009

## Kurdistan president: Kurds have no aspirations in Mosul

**ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq:** President of Iraq's Kurdistan region Massoud al-Barzani said that Kurds have no aspirations in Mosul city, adding that they seek peaceful coexistence in the multi-ethnic city. The remark was made during his meeting with tribal leaders in Ninewa on Monday evening, according to a statement published on the official web site of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). "We want Mosul to be a city of fraternity and peaceful coexistence. Rumors that they (Kurds) commit transgressions are false," the statement quoted Barzani as saying. The meeting was attended by the secretary of the political bureau of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Fadi Mirani; the head of the presidency office, Fouad Hussein; and several politicians. Mosul, the capital city of Ninewa, lies 405 km north of Baghdad. The original city of Mosul stands on the west bank of the Tigris River, opposite the ancient biblical city of Nineveh on the east bank, but the metropolitan area has now grown to encompass substantial areas on both banks, with five bridges linking the two sides. Despite having an amount of Kurdish population, it does not form part of the area controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). There are different communities in Mosul like Christians, Shiites and Kurds along with a Sunni majority. The fabric Muslin, long manufactured here, is named for this city. Another historically important product of the area is Mosul marble. The city is also a historic center for the Nestorian Christianity of the Assyrians, containing the tombs of several Old Testament prophets such as Jonah, Yunus in Arabic, and Nahum.



Mosul tribal leaders speak to Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani during their visit to Erbil on January 18



Kurdistan Region Presidency (KRP)  
January 21, 2009

## President Barzani stresses need for stronger relations between Arabs and Kurds in Mosul

[KRP.org](http://KRP.org)

**Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (KRP.org)** - Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani called for stronger relations between Kurds and Arabs and stressed the need for more tolerance. He made these remarks to a gathering of Arab tribal leaders from the Mosul province, who were invited to Erbil.

The President said that the Kurdistan Region will remain a sanctuary for all Iraqis fleeing violence and instability in other parts of Iraq. He noted that more than 25,000 displaced families from other parts of Iraq have found safety and refuge in the Kurdistan Region.

President Barzani also referred to the historical bonds of friendship between Kurds and Arabs in Mosul. "We don't have any ambitions in Mosul. Mosul is a place for all Iraq's ethnic and religious communities -- Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. Mosul is an example of peaceful co-existence and tolerance of all these communities," the President added.

In response to calls to form support councils in the Kurdistan Region and adjacent areas, the President said, "We support all attempts to fight terrorism but the goals of forming support councils are something else. Under the guise of setting up support councils, some criminals who were involved in the Anfal operations [ a genocidal campaign against the Kurds by the former regime in late 1980s] were asked to take part. This is treachery and a vicious act. Talk about establishing supporting councils in Kurdistan is prohibited and we consider it as treason against us"

The President added that if Arabs take part in forming support councils in adjacent areas to the Kurdistan Region, they will help to trigger a conflict. After the President's initial remarks, several tribal leaders participated in the meeting and raised some issues of public concern in Mosul. One of the participants asked President Barzani to ease travel restrictions for travellers from Mosul to the Kurdistan Region. He also asked for the release of detainees from Mosul who are held in the Region.

In response, President Barzani said that travel restrictions are applied to all travellers to the Region regardless of their ethnic or religious background. He said that these are purely security measures designed to protect people living in the Kurdistan Region. Despite this, the President promised to work to further ease restrictions for travellers to the Region.

As for releasing detainees from Mosul held in the Kurdistan Region, President Barzani said that any detainees not involved with terrorist activities will be released.



President Barzani rebuffed allegations that the Kurds have ambitions to take control of Mosul. "I urge you to be wary of allegations that the Kurds have ambitions for Mosul and are on the verge of controlling Mosul. These assertions could have dangerous consequences. Incitement to sedition and discord is a heinous crime. I cannot claim that no offences or violations have been committed by any party member or officials. But let me reassure you that our policy calls for co-existence, mutual respect and compassion. At the same time, we cannot take any action on general accusations. I want people to be specific in their accusations. We will of course hold any offenders accountable."

"Occasionally we hear voices that maliciously accuse the Kurds of improper behaviour towards the people of Mosul. They want to cleanse Mosul of every last Kurd. This is of course also unacceptable. Mosul belongs to Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Christians; it belongs to all communities, living in peace with one another."



**IRAQ'S ELECTIONS**

**A real choice for the people**

**BAQUBA- Hold your breath as a year of democracy begins**

**B**LAST walls that used to protect shop windows from car bombs in towns across Iraq are now covered in campaign posters, as candidates battle for votes ahead of test-case elections at the end of this month. These polls, for provincial councils, will measure the popularity of Iraq's main coalitions and point the way towards a general election due by the end of the year. The prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, seems determined to run for a second term. This month's local polls will be his first proper electoral test since he took the top job two-and-a-half years ago.

Pictures of a smiling Mr Maliki, arm outstretched, are promoting his Shia party and several other groups that make up his ruling State of Law coalition, even though he himself is not actually a candidate. The coming polls will decide who sits on the councils that run 14 out of Iraq's 18 provinces. People in the autonomous Kurdish region's three provinces will not vote this time; those in the disputed province of Kirkuk (known in Arabic as Tamim) will cast their vote at a later date, so far undecided.

Better security since the last election, in 2005, means that candidates will for the first time have their name on the ballot and, if they choose, their face on campaign posters. Previously, people voted just for party lists. This time, with 14,400-odd candidates running for 440 council seats, turnout should be much higher, particularly as many Sunni Arabs who boycotted past polls in protest against the American-led occupation now plan to vote. So Iraq's second largest sectarian group is likely to weaken the grip that the Shia majority and the Kurds have enjoyed since the invasion.

In the rural province of Diyala stretching along the Iranian border north-east of Baghdad, tea-houses buzz with the chatter of men exchanging views on candidates as they play cards or backgammon and smoke water-pipes, in contrast to past ballots when violence deterred many people from daring to show an interest in voting.

In the darkest days of 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq, the jihadist group that looks to Osama bin Laden for inspiration, named Diyala's provincial capital, Baquba, as the capital of its Islamist caliphate. It set up Islamist courts and prisons in the city; its masked gunmen controlled the streets.

But Omar Hassan, a 20-year-old law student, no longer worries about the jihadists, most of whom have been driven out of Baquba by American and Iraqi forces. Now he spends his spare time in tea-houses, playing dominoes and chatting about politics. "Some say, 'We must vote', while others say, 'We won't vote. What have the candi-



dates done for us?," says Omar. In the coming poll he will plump for his mother, Najat Khalaf Hussein, one of a growing band of women engaging in politics for the first time. Though a member of the Iraqi National Accord, a secular party led by Iyad Allawi, Iraq's first prime minister after the fall of Saddam Hussein, she expresses a rather religious view of politics, calling on divine intervention to fix such problems as patchy electricity and water supplies, high unemployment and war-damaged buildings. "Everything will become easy if God helps." She herself has had to pay for her posters on shop fronts, lamp posts and blast walls.

By contrast, candidates for the bigger parties, such as Mr Maliki's Dawa or its Shia rival, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, which is probably the country's biggest Shia outfit, or the Iraqi Islamic Party, the main old-established Sunni one, have lots of cash, enabling them to festoon towns and even villages in the depths of the countryside with banners and billboards. They are expected to win the lion's share of seats.

But the Constitutional Party, founded by Jawad al-Bolani, Iraq's powerful interior minister, a Shia, may also emerge as a force to be reckoned with. Campaigning on a secular platform, its posters hog prime spots in Baghdad and nearby districts with the words "Vote for Iraq's unity".

Candidates linked to the Sunni tribal *Sahwa* (Awakening), which helped the Americans pacify Anbar and other provinces, may also do well, challenging the dominance of the Islamic Party. Fans of a

firebrand Shia cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, who appeals to the poor, have no party to vote for, as his group was banned from the list on the ground that it maintains a militia. But voters will be able to tick the box of nominally non-aligned candidates backed by Mr Sadr's people. It will still be a big test of his popularity, especially in eastern Baghdad and areas of the south where his militias previously held sway. Mr Maliki is determined to cut Mr Sadr down to size.

**Will sect and tribe still call the shots?**

In past polls, Iraqis have tended to vote on sectarian or ethnic lines. Shia Arabs picked Shia parties, Sunni Arabs (if they voted at all) went for Sunni parties, Kurds for Kurdish parties, and so on. But more politicians and parties are trying this time to appeal across such lines, though it is still highly unlikely that, for example, a Sunni party will win many votes in a mainly Shia province such as Basra or that a Shia party would get many in Sunni Anbar, west of Baghdad. Corruption is a big issue: many Iraqis accuse the new establishment's politicians of enriching themselves while failing to provide basic services to the people.

Tribal loyalties are also bound often to influence voters more than candidates' individual merits, especially outside the cities. In the village of Saedah, a cluster of huts in a Sunni tribal area in eastern Diyala, only one candidate matters: Sheikh Mohammed Turki. "He is our sheikh and he is good for us," said Muhammad Tarik Mahmood, a jobless 24-year-old villager.

As election fever mounts, so do allegations of dirty tricks, such as handing out telephone cards and cash tucked into election pamphlets. Supporters often tear down rival posters or disfigure portraits. Violent incidents have already occurred. A candidate from Mr Maliki's party in Baghdad has been killed. Many fear that violence may rise as election day draws near.

Another tricky factor is security at polling stations, especially in mixed areas such as Diyala, whose northern border abuts Kurdistan. Representatives of Kurds and Arabs, both trading accusations of voter intimidation, are locked in talks with American army officers over how to keep the peace. On polling day, January 31st, the Iraqi police and army will take the lead.

If the poll is reasonably peaceful, transparent and fair, it will mark a hugely hopeful step towards the general election at the end of the year, when, with American troops on the way out, Iraqis should come close, at last, to ruling themselves.



## IRAK: MALIKI FAIT CAMPAGNE POUR UN ETAT FORT FACE AUX AMBITIONS KURDES

NAJAF (Irak), 21 jan 2009 (AFP) –

LE PREMIER ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki, dont la liste pourrait arriver en tête aux élections provinciales du 31 janvier, fait campagne pour un Etat fort en sachant que ce thème est largement porteur parmi les Arabes face aux ambitions territoriales des Kurdes.

"L'Irak a besoin de changer ses lois et sa Constitution afin qu'elles soient en mesure de défendre son unité", a déclaré mercredi le chef du gouvernement lors d'une réunion avec des chefs de tribus locales à Najaf.

"J'appelle les provinces à coopérer avec le gouvernement fédéral pour couper la route à ceux qui veulent nuire à l'Irak", a ajouté M. Maliki.

"L'existence d'un puissant Etat fédéral ne nuit pas aux provinces, au contraire, elles auront plus d'argent et plus de soutien du gouvernement central", a-t-il encore dit.

Le Premier ministre est conscient que cette idée fait mouche chez les arabes de confessions chiite et sunnite qui craignent les ambitions territoriales et les velléités indépendantistes des Kurdes irakiens. Mais il sait aussi qu'il est quasiment impossible de modifier la Constitution car cette dernière accorde de fait aux Kurdes un droit de veto.

Selon les résultats d'un sondage publié mercredi par un organisme gouvernemental, le Centre national des médias, les Arabes d'Irak sont très fortement opposés à l'idée de fédéralisme, inscrite dans la Constitution qui a été adoptée après l'invasion américaine en 2003.

Selon l'enquête menée auprès de 4.500 personnes, de toutes origines et confessions, dans les 18 provinces d'Irak, 72% de l'ensemble des Irakiens rejettent le fédéralisme. Ils estiment en effet qu'une plus grande autonomie des provinces risque d'entraîner un démantèlement du pays.

Mais, au Kurdistan, qui bénéficie d'une large autonomie depuis 1991, 78% la soutiennent, toujours selon ce sondage.

Les Irakiens, entourés de puissants voisins, craignent que ces derniers profitent d'une large autonomie pour élargir leur zone d'influence ou cherchent même à démanteler le pays, qui se relève difficilement de presque six ans de chaos. Ils ont également peur que l'autonomie entraîne de nouveaux conflits confessionnels.

Mercredi, M. Maliki a d'ailleurs réitéré son credo pour un Etat fort le jour même de l'annonce de l'échec d'une campagne en faveur de l'autonomie de la province de Bassorah (sud).

Les initiateurs d'une opération visant à obtenir l'autonomie de la province de Bassorah ont échoué à recueillir les signatures requises pour l'organisation d'un référendum populaire.

Si ce référendum avait été accepté par les électeurs, il aurait donné à cette province riche en pétrole les mêmes pouvoirs élargis que ceux accordés aux trois provinces du Kurdistan en matière de gouvernement, de gestion des finances et d'organisation des forces de sécurité.

Selon un sondage du Centre des médias --le seul disponible pour l'instant--, la liste de M. Maliki arriverait en tête aux élections provinciales au détriment de la liste du Conseil suprême islamique en Irak (CSII, chiite), qui contrôlait huit des 18 provinces du pays.

La "coalition pour l'Etat de droit", patronnée par M. Maliki, recueillerait 23% des suffrages, devançant la "liste nationale irakienne" (laïque) de l'ancien Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui (12,6%).

Le grand perdant serait le CSII d'Abdel Aziz Hakim, qui n'arriverait qu'en troisième position (11,4%).



## Turquie, Irak et USA s'entendent pour lutter contre le PKK

23 janvier, 2009

ANKARA (Reuters) Ankara, Bagdad et Washington vont créer un centre de commandement commun dans le nord de l'Irak où seront centralisés les renseignements nécessaires à la lutte contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), annonce le chef de la diplomatie irakienne.

Lire la suite l'article

La Turquie réclamait depuis longtemps le concours de l'Irak et des Etats-Unis contre les séparatistes du PKK retranchés dans le Nord irakien.

"Nous sommes convenus (...) de mettre en place un centre de commandement conjoint à Erbil", a déclaré Hochiar Zébari, s'adressant à la presse à Ankara en compagnie de son homologue turc, Ali Babacan. Les Etats-Unis y seront représentés, a-t-il ajouté.

Les attentats commis par le PKK ont durement affecté les relations entre Bagdad et Ankara, mais le ministre irakien a assuré qu'un "nouveau climat fait de compréhension et de coopération" prévalait désormais entre l'Irak, la Turquie et les autorités du Kurdistan irakien autonome.

La réduction des activités du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, a souligné Ali Babacan, est "un facteur essentiel" de la consolidation de ces relations.

Le centre en question devrait voir le jour dans les prochaines semaines, selon des diplomates turcs.

L'armée turque pilonne régulièrement les positions séparatistes dans le nord de l'Irak et a déployé plusieurs milliers d'hommes dans le secteur, il y a un an, pour tenter de mettre un terme à leurs incursions.



## IRAK: MALIKI ET BARZANI SE TRAITENT DE DICTATEUR ET DE SÉCESSIONNISTE

DOHOUK (Irak), 25 jan 2009 (AFP) –

LE PRESIDENT du Kurdistan autonome irakien Massoud Barzani et le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki se sont traités respectivement dimanche, mais sans se nommer directement, de dictateur et de sécessionniste en pleine campagne électorale.

"Nous savons qu'il y a une personne qui voudrait restituer la dictature en Irak en contrôlant l'armée et la police", a déclaré le leader kurde devant un rassemblement d'universitaires et de notables à Dohouk, une des principales villes du Kurdistan irakien.

"Si le changement de la Constitution vise à améliorer la situation, il n'y a aucun problème. Mais nous ne l'accepterons jamais si le but est d'imposer des restrictions aux intérêts des Kurdes", a ajouté M. Barzani en une allusion claire à Nouri al-Maliki qui fait campagne sur le thème d'un Etat fort et d'une réforme de la Constitution.

Parallèlement, le Premier ministre irakien, en meeting à Diwanayah (180 km au sud de Bagdad), a lancé: "je veux dire à ceux qui ont l'ambition de créer un petit Etat que l'attachement à la Constitution nous a permis d'unifier l'Irak", en référence aux Kurdes.

Les deux hommes se disputent régulièrement sur la question de Kirkouk, une province riche en pétrole où vivent Turcomans, Kurdes et Arabes.

Lundi, Massoud Barzani avait affirmé son engagement à maintenir un Irak unifié, tout en avertissant qu'il n'y aurait pas de paix dans le pays si les Kurdes étaient vus comme des ennemis.

Les tensions avec les Kurdes ont pris de l'ampleur ces derniers temps avec le désir de M. Maliki d'aller vers un Etat plus centralisé. Les Kurdes sont exaspérés par la décision de M. Maliki de constituer des "Comités de soutien" tribaux qui visent selon eux à les empêcher d'agrandir leur région autonome.

# Les Yézidis ne veulent pas être Irakiens

BORIS MABILLARD

## REPORTAGE -

Pour de nombreux chrétiens, ce sont des suppôts de Satan, pour les musulmans, d'abominables infidèles. Pour sauver leur peau, les Yézidis se réfugient dans le secret, cachent leurs coutumes et leurs traditions et tentent de nouer des alliances avec les Kurdes.

Les Yézidis forment une communauté religieuse forte d'environ huit cent mille adeptes qui vivent essentiellement dans le nord de l'Irak. Mais depuis que la guerre embrase l'Irak, un nombre significatif de Yézidis a choisi l'exil en Europe, au Canada et aux Etats-Unis. Le malheur des Yézidis, c'est de vivre coincé à cheval sur la ligne de démarcation entre deux territoires, coincé entre deux peuples, les Kurdes d'un côté, les Arabes de l'autre. Précisément, ils habitent les contreforts montagneux au nord de Mossoul et le Djebel Sindjar entre Mossoul et la frontière syrienne.

Deux zones qu'on qualifie de «territoires disputés.» De fait, les gouvernements de Bagdad et d'Erbil se les disputent âprement, avec des arguments symétriques et opposés. Les élections du 31 janvier prochain ont attisé les tensions et polarisé les positions. Pris au milieu d'une tourmente qui les dépasse, les Yézidis craignent d'être totalement engloutis.

### Persécutions

A une trentaine de kilomètres au nord de Mossoul, quelques dizaines de villages yézidis se répartissent sur un territoire qui, au regard de l'Irak, semble être un mouchoir de poche; Sheikhan en est le cœur, presque la capitale. A l'entrée, un poste de contrôle tenu par des miliciens locaux filtre l'accès. La crainte d'un attentat met tout le monde sur le qui-vive. Retranché dans sa maison, sous haute garde, le chef de la communauté, le Mir ou prince Tahsin Beg reçoit les délégués des partis politiques kurdes qui le courtisent: «Notre histoire est marquée par les persécutions, nous avons traversé septante-deux ferman, l'équivalent d'un génocide, ce qui se passe aujourd'hui rappelle les pires heures des persécutions ottomanes.

Les Arabes musulmans ont juré notre mort. A Mossoul, où nous vivions depuis des siècles, il ne reste plus aucun Yézidi. Il s'agit d'un nettoyage ethnique. Pour Mossoul c'est trop tard, nous n'y retournerons pas. Mais nous voulons rester dans les villages comme Sheikhan, où nous sommes majoritaires.»

Les relations entre Arabes et Yézidis n'ont pas toujours été aussi mauvaises qu'aujourd'hui. Mais, depuis un crime d'honneur sordide, le torchon brûle entre les deux communautés. En avril 2007, Doa, une adolescente yézidie est sauvagement lapidée par des membres de sa famille; les siens la soupçonnaient d'entretenir une relation avec un musulman. La scène est

filmée et, en quelques heures, elle se retrouve sur tous les portables: des images insoutenables qui montrent l'agonie de la jeune fille. Le scandale est immense, au-delà de l'horreur de ce crime, les images sont instrumentalisées. Pour les musulmans, il ne fait aucun doute que la jeune fille voulait se convertir à l'islam et qu'elle a été pour cette raison trucidée. Plusieurs imams lancent alors des fatwas appelant au génocide des Yézidis. Les poussa-au-crime voient vite leurs efforts couronnés.

Les Yézidis sont menacés, la tension monte et culmine dans le sang: vingt-trois Yézidis meurent carbonisés dans un bus; le 14 août 2007, trois explosions coordonnées tuent plus de trois cents personnes dans l'un des attentats les plus meurtriers de l'histoire du terrorisme. Vian Dakheel se désole de l'image qui colle aux Yézidis depuis le meurtre de Doa. Elle porte un regard très critique sur sa communauté: «Les rites religieux en tant que tels ne sont pas très nombreux, mais religion et coutumes s'entrelacent pour former un carcan rigide d'interdictions et de tabous qui régissent le mariage et la famille, et les rapports entre les castes.» Au-dessous du Mir et de Baba Cheikh, le chef spirituel, la société yézidie se divise en trois castes; en haut, les Cheikhs (une quarantaine de familles), puis les Pir, et enfin, les Mrid, les gens normaux. Il est impossible de se marier hors de sa caste, a fortiori tout à fait exclu de se marier avec quelqu'un d'une autre religion. La petite Doa l'a payé de sa vie et pour Vian, cela pourrait encore arriver: «Après ce drame, personne n'a fait son examen de conscience.» Vian appartient à l'une des familles de l'aristocratie yézidie, elle est Cheikh de haut lignage. Elle était fiancée à un jeune homme de la même caste qu'elle qui a été assassiné à Mossoul. Depuis, il ne reste aucun galant de son rang, Vian restera célibataire.

### Aucun intérêt stratégique

Coincées entre la frontière syrienne et la ville de Mossoul, les montagnes du Djebel Sindjar abritent près de la moitié des Yézidis d'Irak. Le massif forme une île au milieu des plaines arabes où règnent les groupes terroristes. Un peu coupé du monde, les villages du Sindjar ont préservé un mode de vie traditionnel. Mais, aujourd'hui, l'insécurité, l'absence d'équipement et les difficultés économiques rendent la vie insupportable. Au pied du Djebel, la ville de Sindjar vit dans le dénuement. Son maire, le premier maire yézidi dans l'histoire de la ville, explique: «L'agriculture dont dépend la vie des Yézidis se meurt à cause de la sécheresse qui dure depuis trois ans. En plus, Bagdad n'a jamais investi ici, ni les forces de la coalition, car nous ne représentons aucun intérêt stratégique. Nous ne sommes pas un groupe armé dont il faudrait acheter les faveurs. En somme, s'il n'y avait les Kurdes, nous serions totalement oubliés.»

Au milieu des montagnes, les villages en pisé s'étagent le long des pistes. La poussière grise a recouvert les feuilles des vergers. Karsi Koban est l'un des fiefs du clan des faqirs. Ce clan est connu pour les nombreux saints, faqirs, qui en sont issus. Les Yézidis leur attribuent des pouvoirs sacrés: celui de guérir, ou de deviner l'avenir, ou même l'invincibilité. Surtout, ils sont, parmi d'autres, les dépositaires de la tradition orale, sur laquelle se fonde la religion yézidie. Darwich Abdi montre fièrement sa kharka, vêtement saint que lui a donné son père. La coutume veut que chacun baise la manche du vêtement pour obtenir une bénédiction: «Je ne quitte que très rarement ma kharka, pour me laver, elle me confère mes pouvoirs, grâce à elle, je suis invincible. Grâce à elle, je peux résoudre les conflits au sein de la tribu.» De fait, chacun respecte le vêtement sacré et celui qui le porte. Une discussion éclate, son vêtement suffirait-il à le protéger contre les terroristes de Mossoul? Il croit que oui, mais chacun s'accorde à dire qu'il vaut mieux ne pas tenter la malchance: «Nous sommes pacifiques, notre religion nous interdit tout prosélytisme, personne ne peut devenir Yézidi, s'il n'est pas né Yézidi.»

### Des gages de sécurité

Sur un promontoire, à l'écart du village, se trouvent le temple et un cimetière attenant. Dans l'enceinte du lieu saint, autour aussi, quelques arbres tordus résistent au vent. Un homme vêtu de l'habit traditionnel, une tige blanche nouée sur le devant, effleure un tronc en signe de respect. Pour les Yézidis, les éléments et l'ensemble de la création doivent être honorés. Le linteau à gauche du portail d'entrée figure un serpent. Darwich Abdi s'assied face aux montagnes: «Le Sindjar ressemblait à un paradis, nos vallées nous donnaient l'abondance, et les figues de nos vergers étaient les meilleures du monde. Il s'est transformé en prison que nous ne pouvons quitter.»

Le docteur Dakheel S. Khudur, l'un des deux ministres yézidis du gouvernement kurde autonome d'Erbil, espère qu'une vie ensemble, avec les musulmans, reste possible: «Les musulmans radicaux ont juré notre mort, cette haine rend illusoire une cohabitation avec les Arabes sunnites. En revanche, les Kurdes, peut-être parce qu'ils sont en majorité plus modérés, nous ont donné des gages de sécurité. Nous sommes plus proches d'eux que des Arabes, nous parlons la même langue, nous avons la même origine. Notre survie passe par le Kurdistan autonome, auquel nous voulons que soient rattachés nos territoires. Le 31 janvier, nous donnerons un signal fort en faveur des partis kurdes que Bagdad ne pourra pas ignorer.»

**LE FIGARO** 27 janvier 2009

# Les risques d'un désengagement en Irak

## MOYEN-ORIENT

Pour parer à toute recrudescence des violences, après le départ des troupes américaines, des brigades pourraient stationner à proximité de l'Irak, ou certaines unités être maintenues, sous un autre nom.

POUR l'armée américaine en Irak, le compte à rebours a commencé. Barack Obama s'est engagé à retirer les troupes de combat des villes irakiennes d'ici à juin. Et selon l'accord de sécurité signé entre Bagdad et Washington, le départ des troupes doit être achevé avant la fin 2011. Persuadé que la lutte contre le terrorisme se joue à Kaboul et non pas à Bagdad, le nouveau président américain veut doubler le nombre d'hommes en Afghanistan, où la situation dégénère. Le premier ministre irakien, Maliki, approuve : il espère même que le rythme du retrait « s'accélère » et qu'il soit achevé « avant la date prévue ».

Quasiment irréversible, le départ des troupes américaines d'Irak comporte pourtant de gros risques. Initié par le général Petraeus, alors patron des militaires américains en Irak, la stratégie contre-insurrectionnelle du *surge* (sursaut), basé sur une augmentation des troupes et des négociations avec les insurgés, a obtenu un vrai succès. En deux ans, les violences ont diminué de 80 %. Les attentats se limitent aujourd'hui à Bagdad, à la région de Mossoul et à la province de Diyala. Bref, pour l'Irak, que l'on disait en 2007 au bord du chaos et du démembrement, c'est un calme inespéré...

Mais surtout trompeur, craignent certains. Car sur le fond, si le *surge* a offert une victoire tactique aux Américains, aucun des problèmes de l'Irak n'a été résolu. La crise couve toujours entre le Kurdistan et la Turquie. Au nord, le problème de Kirkouk n'a pas été résolu. Côté chiite, l'Armée du Mahdi de Moqtada Sadr a décrété une trêve, mais n'a pas disparu. Les mouvements djihadistes anti-américains font profil bas, mais n'ont pas renoncé à leurs ambitions. Côté sunnite, les insurgés attendent que le gouvernement consolide leur place au sein du pouvoir. Enfin, al-Qaïda a subi une défaite depuis que les insurgés sunnites se sont rebellés contre elle, mais n'est pas partie d'Irak.

### « Un retrait responsable »

Dans ce contexte jugé « fragile » et « réversible » à Washington, les experts et des officiers généraux redoutent qu'un désengagement trop rapide favorise un nouvel embrasement en redonnant espace et liberté aux milices. « Aujourd'hui la plupart des groupes armés respectent la trêve car ils veulent le départ des troupes américaines. Mais ils seront peut-être tentés, lorsqu'ils seront entre eux, de régler leurs affaires en famille », redoute un spécialiste.

L'année 2009 et sa cohorte d'élections – provinciales, parlementaires et un référendum sur le retrait des



Entraînées par l'armée américaine, les troupes irakiennes (ici à Mossoul en novembre) ont réalisé de grands progrès mais souffrent d'un manque d'équipement. *Alleruzzo/AP*

troupes – est à cet égard considérée comme charnière pour la jeune démocratie irakienne.

Le maintien de la stabilité dépendra beaucoup de l'efficacité des forces de sécurité irakiennes, 560 000 policiers et 260 000 soldats. Épaulées par les troupes américaines, elles ont réalisé de grands progrès, mais souffrent d'un manque d'équipement. Seront-elles capables de répondre, seules, à une recrudescence des violences ?

Les autorités militaires et politiques américaines sont conscientes du risque. En quittant son poste, l'ambassadeur américain en Irak, Ryan Crocker, a affirmé la semaine dernière qu'un « retrait précipité pourrait être très dangereux ». « La guerre n'est pas terminée » a prévenu de son côté le général Odierno, qui a remplacé David Petraeus à Bagdad.

Ce sont les raisons pour lesquelles Robert Gates, le secrétaire américain à la Défense, a appelé à un « retrait responsable » des troupes en Irak et préparé différents scénarios pour Obama. Parmi les options étudiées, le stationnement d'une ou deux brigades, prêtes à intervenir, à proximité de l'Irak, au Koweït, en Jordanie ou au Kurdistan. Certains envisageraient aussi de conserver une partie des troupes de combat – 55 000 hommes sur un total de 141 000 – en Irak en changeant leur nom, afin de ne pas violer l'accord qui prévoit leur départ. Restent deux autres solutions : une montée en puissance des forces spéciales ou le recours aux sociétés militaires privées, déjà très puissantes en Irak et qui ne sont pas concernées par le retrait...

ISABELLE LASSERRE

## La reconstruction frappée par la chute du cours du pétrole

■ Frappé de plein fouet par la chute des cours du pétrole, l'Irak est contraint de diminuer en 2009 de 20 % ses investissements, alors qu'il a besoin de 400 milliards de dollars pour rétablir ses infrastructures ravagées par dix-neuf années de guerre et d'embargo international. Le gouvernement a été contraint de réduire pour la seconde fois en quelques mois les dépenses

du budget 2009 en raison de la chute des cours du brut, dont l'exportation est la principale source de revenus du pays. Dans un pays qui se relève de cinq années de violence, le budget d'investissement a été réduit de 3 milliards de dollars, pour s'établir à un peu plus de 12 milliards, soit une baisse de 20 %.

(AFP)

Le Monde  
27 janvier 2009

# L'affaire Ergenekon continue de secouer la Turquie

La justice a lancé un nouveau coup de filet contre des policiers et des militaires soupçonnés d'avoir voulu déstabiliser l'Etat

Istanbul  
Correspondance

La nouvelle série d'arrestations lancée entre le 22 et le 25 janvier par la justice turque, la onzième depuis le début de l'affaire en 2007, a encore élargi la liste des suspects d'une quarantaine de noms. L'enquête sur le réseau Ergenekon, une nébuleuse nationaliste soupçonnée d'avoir tenté de renverser le gouvernement en organisant attentats et assassinats, n'en finit plus de s'étendre.

La dernière série d'arrestations visait essentiellement des policiers et des militaires. Dix-sept d'entre eux ont été mis en examen et écroués dimanche, à Istanbul. La plupart sont des officiers d'unités spéciales en poste dans les régions à majorité kurde de l'est de la Turquie. Tous seraient liés à Ibrahim Sahin, un ancien chef des opérations spéciales de la police, arrêté début janvier.

Des plans découverts dans sa maison ont permis aux enquêteurs d'exhumer une cache d'armes dans la banlieue d'Ankara. Ibrahim Sahin apparaissait déjà dans l'entourage d'Ali Agça, jeune militant ultranationaliste qui avait tenté d'assassiner le pape Jean Paul II en 1981. « Suivez les traces d'Ibrahim Sahin et vous aurez une chance de découvrir la source des actions illégales au sein de

*l'Etat turc depuis les années 1970 »,* note Can Dündar, auteur de plusieurs enquêtes sur « l'Etat profond » turc. « Si l'enquête est bien menée, la Turquie a la clef pour nettoyer des décennies de saletés », ajoute-t-il.

Le dirigeant du puissant syndicat des travailleurs de la métallurgie, titulaire de comptes bancaires bien garnis et de propriétés dans la République turque de Chypre, son fils (dirigeant d'une chaîne de télévision) et le directeur d'un institut de sondages ont également été inculpés durant le week-end.

« Si l'enquête est bien menée, la Turquie a la clef pour nettoyer des décennies de saletés »

Can Dündar  
journaliste turc

L'opposition kémaliste et les proches des personnes arrêtées continuent de dénoncer une « offensive antilaïque ». Ils accusent le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et la presse pro-gouvernementale de chercher à museler l'opposition. Une procédure judiciaire chaotique et des fuites suspectes dans la presse ont également semé le trouble. « C'est un changement de régime, comme à l'époque d'Hitler ou de Khomeini »,

s'emporte Deniz Baykal. Le président du CHP (Parti républicain du peuple), qui s'est proclamé « avocat d'Ergenekon », dénonce ce qu'il croit être des dérives fascisantes de la part du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), le mouvement islamo-conservateur au pouvoir depuis 2002.

Malgré les arrestations de plusieurs dizaines de sous-officiers, d'officiers et de quelques généraux à la retraite, l'armée turque réagit, quant à elle, avec plus de retenue. A aucun moment le chef de l'état-major, Ilker Basbug, ne s'est opposé frontalement à l'enquête menée par le procureur Zekeriya Öz. Le général et le premier ministre Erdogan se rencontrent tous les mercredis pour faire le point sur la situation du pays.

Journaliste spécialisé dans les questions militaires, Lale Sariibrahimoglu pense que le général Basbug a donné son feu vert aux vagues d'arrestations afin de se débarrasser des éléments les plus radicaux. Civils et militaires tenteraient de trouver un terrain d'entente. Depuis l'ouverture des négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne et l'amorce du processus de réforme du pouvoir militaire, les réseaux parallèles soupçonnés d'agir dans l'ombre de l'Etat depuis des années sont devenus encombrants, y compris pour l'état-major de l'armée. ■

Guillaume Perrier

LE FIGARO 27 janvier 2009

## Le pouvoir irakien mise sur les élections provinciales pour se renforcer

Ce premier scrutin, prévu samedi, établira le nouveau rapport de forces entre les différentes factions politiques dans un pays où la violence a reculé.

POUR la première fois depuis les élections législatives de jan-

vier 2005, 15 millions d'Irakiens voteront samedi pour élire leurs représentants dans 14 des 18 provinces du pays. Les régions kurdes du nord et la province contestée de Kirkouk ne sont pas concernées par ce scrutin. Son principal enjeu sera de mesurer les rapports de forces sur le ter-

rain, entre, d'une part, les communautés chiite et sunnite, mais également entre les différentes factions à l'intérieur de la communauté chiite, qui domine la scène politique depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003.

Deux partis s'affrontent chez les chiites : celui du premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, et le Conseil suprême islamique en Irak (CSII) de son rival, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim. La liste (« Coalition pour l'Etat de droit ») de Maliki est donnée vainqueur par les sondages. Le chef du gouvernement espère engranger les dividendes

politiques de l'amélioration de la sécurité à travers le pays et de la signature de l'accord stratégique avec les États-Unis, qui a renforcé son image de leader nationaliste auprès de ses compatriotes.

Pour Maliki, « ces élections sont un moyen d'élargir sa base politique », affirme un diplomate occidental à Bagdad. Le premier ministre cherche à faire approuver sa « stratégie d'indépendance dans la coopération », aussi bien à l'égard de ses tuteurs américains que de ses voisins iraniens, auxquels il tient désormais le langage suivant : « Vous arrêtez vos ingérences en matière de sécurité, et on

vous fait une place de choix dans la reconstruction et le développement de l'Irak. »

Son principal adversaire, le CSII, qui contrôle six provinces du sud du pays, devrait pâtir de la désaffection des partis religieux auprès d'Irakiens épuisés par des années de violence interconfessionnelle. Leur aspiration à un État central toujours fort pénalise également le CSII, partisan d'un large fédéralisme, une valeur

apparemment en baisse dans l'Irak d'aujourd'hui.

#### Moqtada Sadr en embuscade

Même s'il a décidé de ne pas présenter de candidats, le troisième larron chiite, Moqtada Sadr, n'a pas renoncé à troubler le jeu. Ses nombreux partisans des bastions déshérités de Bagdad ou de Bassora, au sud, pourront voter pour des faux nez sadristes, en la personne de candidats « indépen-

dants ». Sadr compte sur ces élections provinciales pour poursuivre sa stratégie de reconquête d'influence, après les revers que Maliki et son armée ont infligés à sa milice, à Bagdad et à Bassora, au printemps dernier. Depuis, le jeune trublion a décidé de scinder son mouvement en deux : une aile politico-religieuse, qui aura le leadership du mouvement, et une aile militaire épurée de ses éléments les plus extrémistes, qui

respecte le cessez-le-feu recon-

duit l'an dernier avec Maliki. Côté sunnite, on a tiré la leçon de l'abstention de 2005, qui avait offert le pouvoir aux chiites et aux Kurdes. Cette fois, la minorité sunnite (un quart des 27 millions d'Irakiens) participera au scrutin, d'une seule façon pour elle d'obtenir une plus grande participation aux décisions gouvernementales, même si elle est affaiblie par des divisions internes.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

LE FIGARO

28 janvier 2009

## Ankara se lance dans une opération « mains propres »

### TURQUIE

Les vagues d'arrestations se multiplient au sein d'Ergenekon, un réseau soupçonné de tentative de putsch.

Istanbul

PRESQUE plus un jour ne se passe en Turquie sans que les chaînes de télévision ne diffusent un bulletin spécial sur les derniers rebondissements de l'affaire Ergenekon, ce réseau accusé d'avoir planifié des actions violentes en vue de renverser le gouvernement islamo-conservateur.

Dimanche, la onzième vague d'arrestations a donné lieu à l'inculpation de dix policiers, membres d'une unité spéciale, et de sept militaires. Il y a trois semaines déjà, 33 autres personnes avaient été arrêtées, dont des généraux à la retraite et Ibrahim Sahin, un ancien chef de la police déjà condamné dans le scandale politico-mafieux de Susurluk, à la fin des années 1990. Sur la base d'un croquis trouvé à son domicile, une cache, découverte dans la fougère dans un bois proche d'Ankara, qui contenait des lance-roquettes, des mitrailleurs et des grenades a également contribué à relancer l'enquête. Selon les médias, ces

coups de filet auraient notamment permis de déjouer l'assassinat du représentant de la communauté arménienne de la ville de Sivas, en Anatolie.

Alors que 86 personnes – des officiers à la retraite, criminels, journalistes, avocats – sont déjà jugés pour appartenance au réseau putschiste présumé depuis le mois d'octobre, la multiplication des arrestations contribue à consolider les positions tant des détracteurs que des partisans de cette investigation. L'opposition nationaliste, le Parti républicain du peuple (CHP), a ainsi de nouveau accusé le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) au pouvoir d'en profiter pour régler ses comptes avec ses adversaires, accusant le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, de « manipulation » et de mener « une dictature péroniste ».

#### Mystérieux personnage

Pour tenter de faire retomber la pression politique, le président de la République, Abdullah Gül, a réuni la semaine dernière le gotha judiciaire, législatif et exécutif au palais de Cankaya. À l'issue du déjeuner, un communiqué présidentiel a insisté sur le nécessaire respect de « la suprématie de la loi », qui instaurera « un climat de confiance ». La conduite de l'enquête a en effet été critiquée à

plusieurs reprises : le premier acte d'accusation comporterait notamment des lacunes, les journalistes sont régulièrement prévenus à l'avance des perquisitions...

Et parfois, l'affaire Ergenekon prend une tournure rocambolesque. Comme avec l'interview de Tuncay Guney, un rabin turc exilé au Canada, qui a été diffusée sur la télévision publique mercredi dernier. Mi-suspect mi-témoin, ce mystérieux personnage, présenté comme un collaborateur du MIT, les services de renseignements turcs, a accusé de nombreuses personnalités de faire partie de la cellule terroriste.

Malgré tout, la majorité des Turcs, plus de 60 %, selon un sondage publié lundi par le quotidien libéral *Milliyet*, croit en l'existence d'Ergenekon, même si un quart des sondés estiment en même temps que la mise en cause de certaines

personnes vise à intimider l'opinion. Et pour tous ceux qui dénoncent depuis des années l'existence de ce que l'on appelle ici l'« État profond », une structure nichée au sein de l'État avec des ramifications mafieuses et accusée de dizaines d'assassinats depuis les années 1970, le démantèlement d'Ergenekon donne enfin le coup d'envoi à une opération « mains propres » en Turquie.

#### Feu vert de l'armée

« Un tel réseau criminel a des extensions horizontales et verticales, parce que sans soutien économique et militaire derrière, une organisation ne peut pas commettre de tels crimes », estime Ergin Cinmen, un des avocats de la famille de Hrant Dink, le journaliste d'origine arménienne abattu en 2007. Dans le procès de ses meurtriers présumés, la partie civile réclame d'ailleurs que son assassinat soit versé au dossier Ergenekon. Avec les dizaines d'interpellations effectuées ce mois-ci, la structure du réseau présumé se dessine plus nettement. De nombreux suspects étaient en poste dans les provinces du Sud-Est à majorité kurde, où le Jitem, une cellule clandestine de la gendarmerie, est accusé d'avoir perpétré des centaines de meurtres au plus fort de la guerre civile dans les années 1990.

Enfin, l'institution militaire ne s'est jusqu'à présent pas opposée publiquement aux arrestations d'officiers en activité, parfois très haut placés. Ces dernières n'ont pu se faire sans le feu vert de l'armée, estiment tous les spécialistes. Et le chef de l'état-major, le général Basbug, et le premier ministre, M. Erdogan, sont convenus de se rencontrer désormais une fois par semaine.

LAURE MARCHAND



## A MOSSOUL, LE MOT D'ORDRE DE LA CAMPAGNE: "DEHORS LES KURDES"

MOSSOUL (Irak), 28 jan 2009 (AFP) –

**FAVORI DES ELECTIONS** dans la province irakienne majoritairement sunnite de Ninive, Athil al-Nujeifi a un programme des plus sommaires: mettre fin à l'emprise kurde.

"Les Kurdes entretiennent la tension pour servir leurs propres intérêts. Et je veux y mettre fin", assène le leader de la liste Hadba, qui regroupe une quinzaine de partis et a le soutien des principales tribus de la région.

Près de six ans après l'invasion américaine, cette province --et sa capitale Mossoul-- est le symbole de l'incapacité des forces américaines et irakiennes à enrayer l'action d'Al-Qaïda et des groupes insurgés. Cette rémanence se cristallise sur la question kurde.

C'est en tout cas l'avis des candidats arabes qui rêvent de succéder à Duraid Kachmoula, gouverneur sortant et considéré par ses détracteurs comme la marionnette des Kurdes dans cette province majoritairement arabe et sunnite.

"En 2003, les Américains sont entrés dans Mossoul suivis par les Kurdes et depuis ces derniers n'ont qu'un but: maintenir l'instabilité. Leurs partis protègent ceux qui commettent des exactions", assure cet Irakien de 51 ans, connu pour posséder le plus important haras d'Irak avec ses 400 purs-sangs arabes.

Quand on lui demande d'être plus précis, il reconnaît toutefois "qu'entre Al-Qaïda, les insurgés et les Kurdes, on ne sait jamais très bien qui est responsable" des attentats quasi-quotidiens à Mossoul.

Dans les rues de la ville, la "question kurde" est sur toutes les lèvres.

"Je ne fais pas confiance aux peshmergas", les combattants kurdes, dit un étudiant irakien qui refuse de donner son nom par souci de sécurité. "Ils ne sont pas d'ici, se comportent mal. Il faudrait qu'ils soient remplacés par des soldats irakiens".

En fait, les peshmergas sont plutôt discrets mais la confusion vient du fait qu'aux côtés de deux brigades de l'armée irakienne venues d'Al-Anbar et de Bagdad, "il y a une brigade composée de soldats irakiens d'origine kurde qui dépendent du commandement militaire de Bagdad", rappelle Duraid Kachmoula.

Installé dans son fauteuil, sur la base américaine Mazer, au coeur de la capitale provinciale, le général Robert Brown, chargé des opérations dans le nord de l'Irak, était déjà à Mossoul en 2005 lors des précédentes élections.

"Les forces de sécurité sont bien équilibrées maintenant. Elles reflètent la société. Il n'y a pas que des Kurdes dans les forces déployées à Mossoul", dit-il.

Comme dans le reste du pays, les sunnites de Ninive, majoritaires, avaient boycotté l'élection de 2005. Résultat: 31 des 41 sièges du Conseil provincial étaient occupés par des candidats pro-Kurdes.

"Il y avait un réel manque de représentativité. Le gouvernement est perçu comme très pro-Kurde. Et il n'a vraiment pas fait ce que le peuple attendait de lui", estime le général Brown.

La "question kurde" à Mossoul cristallise plus largement un affrontement entre le gouvernement central du Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki et le président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani. Les deux hommes en sont arrivés cette semaine à se traiter, sans se nommer, de dictateur et de sécessionniste.

Le premier prône un Etat fort et appelle les Kurdes à respecter la Constitution alors que Massoud Barzani entend préserver la quasi-indépendance de sa région et ne cache pas ses ambitions territoriales notamment sur une grande partie de la province de Ninive.

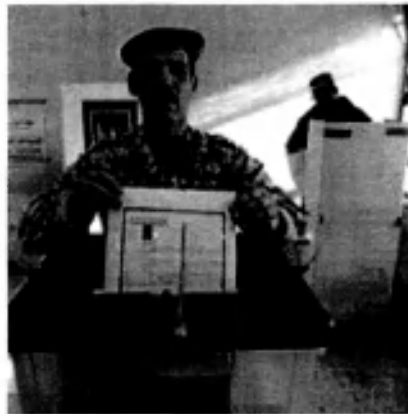


28 janvier 2009

## IRAK • Première étape des élections provinciales

**Les Irakiens sont invités à choisir leurs conseillers provinciaux dès le 28 janvier. Un scrutin test pour la démocratie et la capacité des autorités à assurer la sécurité. Les résultats seront un indicateur des équilibres politiques avant les législatives prévues fin 2009.**

Quelque 800 observateurs étrangers sont arrivés en Irak pour superviser les élections des conseils provinciaux. Plus de 15 millions de personnes sont inscrites sur les listes électorales. Le mercredi 28 janvier, 614 000 policiers, soldats, malades et prisonniers irakiens ont commencé à voter. Les autres électeurs se rendront aux urnes le samedi 31 janvier", rapporte Asharq Al-Awsat. Plus de 400 partis ou mouvements sont en lice, et 14 431 candidats se disputent les 440 sièges de conseillers provinciaux qui sont à pourvoir dans 14 des 18 provinces du pays. Selon le site Elaph, "on compte parmi les candidats 3 912 femmes pour lesquelles, selon la loi, 25 % des sièges seront attribués". La loi électorale, adoptée en septembre 2008 par le Parlement irakien et approuvée en novembre par le Conseil présidentiel, accorde également six sièges aux minorités, dont trois aux chrétiens – soit un à Bagdad, un à Ninive et un à Bassorah. Les Sabéens ont obtenu un siège à Bagdad, les Yazidis et les



Shabaks chacun un siège dans la province de Ninive.

Ce scrutin est le premier depuis celui du 30 janvier 2005 (premières élections libres et plurielles en Irak après la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein). Mais ce scrutin avait été boycotté par les principaux mouvements d'obédience sunnite, laissant le champ libre aux chiïtes et aux Kurdes. Ainsi ces élections provinciales sont marquées par le retour des sunnites. Les partis de la majorité chiïte, qui s'étaient présentés en coalition aux précédentes élections, se présentent cette fois-ci de manière indépendante. Le parti Daawa, du Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, compte sur l'amélioration générale de la sécurité

en Irak pour attirer les voix et se distancier du Conseil suprême islamique d'Irak (CSII), qui contrôle la plupart des provinces du sud du pays. Du côté des Kurdes, les élections seront organisées ultérieurement dans les provinces du Kurdistan irakien : Dohouk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah et Kirkouk. Cette dernière province pétrolière fait l'objet d'un grand débat au sujet de son rattachement à la région kurde et de la répartition des pouvoirs entre les communautés kurdes, arabes et turkmènes. Son statut devrait être déterminé suite à une consultation prévue en juillet prochain.

"Par ailleurs, ce vote intervient quelques semaines après la fin du mandat des Nations unies sur la présence des forces de la coalition en Irak. Depuis le 1er janvier, les Irakiens ont le contrôle de la sécurité dans le pays", rappelle le quotidien panarabe Asharq Al-Awsat, qui souligne l'énorme déploiement des forces armées irakiennes et américaines autour des bureaux de vote pour assurer le transport des urnes contenant les bulletins. "A la différence des précédentes élections, les questions sécuritaires n'ont pas été au centre de la campagne. La plupart des slogans insistent plutôt sur l'amélioration de la situation économique et des services publics", ajoute le journal. Selon la commission électorale, les résultats seront annoncés le 3 février.

Hoda Saliby



## Irak: procès de Tarek Aziz, "Ali le Chimique" et 14 partisans de Saddam

BAGDAD 28 jan 2009 (AFP) –

SEIZE ANCIENS dignitaires du régime de Saddam Hussein, dont l'ancien vice-Premier ministre Tarek Aziz et "Ali le Chimique", sont jugés depuis lundi en Irak pour des exactions contre les Kurdes Faily dans les années 1980, a indiqué mardi une source judiciaire.

"Le Haut tribunal pénal irakien, dirigé par le juge Raouf Rachid Abdel Rahmane, a commencé lundi la lecture de l'acte d'accusation contre 16 accusés, dont les plus importants sont Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique", Tarek Aziz, Watban Ibrahim Hassan (ex-ministre de l'Intérieur, ndlr) et le secrétaire particulier de Saddam, Abed Hamoud", selon une source au tribunal.

Les poursuites visent des exactions commises contre les Kurdes Faily, de confession chiite, a-t-on précisé de même source.

La majorité des Kurdes irakiens sont sunnites. Les Kurdes Faily vivent essentiellement dans la province de Diyala (est), près de la frontière avec l'Iran.

Les charges portent notamment sur "le déplacement des Kurdes Faily", "la confiscation de leurs biens mobiliers et immobiliers, leur utilisation comme cobayes pour le test d'armes chimiques et leur utilisation comme boucliers



Les trois hommes risquent la pendaison.

Unique chrétien du cercle étroit des puissants de la dictature de Saddam Hussein, Tarek Aziz, 72 ans, a exercé des fonctions de ministre des Affaires étrangères, de ministre de l'Information et de vice-Premier ministre du dictateur déchu.

humains sur le front lors de la guerre avec l'Iran" (1980-88), a ajouté la source judiciaire.

Cousin de l'ancien dictateur Saddam Hussein, "Ali le Chimique", 67 ans, surnommé ainsi parce qu'il avait ordonné l'utilisation d'armes chimiques lors du massacre des Kurdes dans les années 1980, a déjà été condamné à mort à deux reprises. La dernière condamnation remonte au 2 décembre, pour "crimes contre l'humanité et meurtres prémédités".

Avec Watban Ibrahim Hassan et Tarek Aziz, il est toujours en cours de jugement dans un autre procès, pour "crimes contre l'humanité", pour l'exécution en 1992 de 42 commerçants accusés d'avoir spéculé sur les prix des produits alimentaires, alors que l'Irak était soumis à des sanctions de l'ONU.

Herald <sup>INTERNATIONAL</sup> Tribune January 27, 2009

## EU lifts ban on Iranian group

### But Tehran asserts terror label applies

By Stephen Castle

**BRUSSELS:** In a decision that could worsen tension with Tehran, the European Union on Monday removed a prominent Iranian opposition group from its list of banned terrorist organizations.

The move ended a long legal battle by the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, which was placed on the EU list of proscribed organizations in 2002, and came at a sensitive moment in relations between Europe and the government of Iran.

The People's Mujahedeen said it would now focus its attention on persuading the United States to follow the European example and remove it from America's terrorist list.

The 27-nation bloc Monday sought to play down the political implications of its action, arguing that it was the result of decisions by the European Court of Justice, the EU's highest court, which had been asked to rule on the inclusion of the group on the list of terrorist organizations. Relations with Tehran already are strained because of its nuclear program.

Alexandr Vondra, deputy prime minister of the Czech Republic, which holds the EU presidency, said the bloc had no alternative but to abide by the interpretations of the European court that had

been asked to rule on whether the inclusion of the People's Mujahedeen on the list was legal. The court concluded that the EU had failed to properly explain why it froze the assets of the group.

"We complied with the judgment," Vondra said.

But Vondra added that the EU's action might be reviewed because of a French decision to challenge the findings of the European Court.

"Certainly we know that at least one country has appealed," Vondra said at a press conference. He said the People's Mujahedeen could be put back on the list "if there is new evidence relating to that problem."

Nevertheless the move marked the first time an organization has been removed from the list of groups banned by the EU and, as of Tuesday, the assets of the People's Mujahedeen of Iran will be unfrozen within the 27-nation bloc.

Shahin Gobadi, a spokesman for the group, said \$9 million had been frozen in France, the group's base in exile, and "tens of millions of dollars" more had been frozen in other EU countries.

He added that the group would now lobby in Washington for an end to its status as a terrorist organization.

"We believe there is no justification for the U.S. to maintain" the group on the terror list, Gobadi said.

The government in Tehran had made it clear that it opposed any change to the standing of an opposition group that advocates the overthrow of the Ira-

nian leadership. The People's Mujahedeen has also claimed responsibility for bombings that killed hundreds of people and government officials in the 1980s.

On Monday, the Foreign Ministry in Tehran said the hands of the People's Mujahedeen "are stained with the blood of thousands of Iranian and non-Iranian people."

It also said the group has never renounced violence and has resorted to terrorism. The ministry statement was read on state television Monday night, The Associated Press reported.

The EU decision came as Brussels awaited fresh moves from President Barack Obama, who is expected to consider direct negotiations with Iran to try to resolve the impasse over its nuclear ambitions.

In his inaugural address, Obama said his government would "extend a hand" to any foe willing to unclench its fist.

Maryam Rajavi, president-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, said in a statement that removing the organization was "a crushing defeat to Europe's policy of appeasement."

"The blacklisting of the Iranian Resistance contributed to the prolongation of the rule of religious fascism in Iran," she added in a statement. "The most important part of a changed policy in the U.S. by the new president toward Iran is to set aside appeasement of the mullahs and take the terror label off" the People's Mujahedeen.



# In Iraqi province, anger still raw

By Alissa J. Rubin

**BAQUBA, Iraq:** The election at the end of this month has brought a certain excitement to the gray days of January — at least in most places. Campaign posters with the candidates' gleaming faces and party names emblazoned in red or black Arabic calligraphy, seem to shout at you from nearly every blast wall and lamppost.

The littered, war-scarred road north of Baghdad is thick with posters of Iraq's Sunni vice president, a member of the Iraqi Islamic Party. Smiling beatifically and wearing a business suit, the white-haired vice president, Tareq al-Hashimi, exudes confidence. He stands in stark contrast to his neighbor on nearby placards: Iraq's stolid prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. Also in a business suit, his expression is serious, even somber.

On Saturday, Iraqis will turn out to vote in elections for provincial councils. The results will have an impact only in the individual provinces, but they are seen as a harbinger of the important national parliamentary elections a year from now. If signs are any measure, in most places there appears to be healthy competition.

As the road passes through small villages many other parties, Shiite and Sunni, secular and religious, take their turn. Their presence sends a message: it is safe enough for everyone to campaign here.

Not so in Diyala Province. Cross the border into the province and the election signs thin out, a signal of the anger still simmering beneath the surface.

Riven by sectarian violence that has lasted longer than in almost any other province in Iraq, Diyala is often described as a microcosm of the country: Shiites and Sunnis, Kurds and Arabs, farmers and professors. All live in lethally close proximity.

In Diyala, resentments fast become hatreds, murder is more readily resorted to than discussion, sectarian cleansing more than reconciliation. The violence has diminished of late, in the face of nearly continuous security operations, but the tensions remain.

"We have many closed neighborhoods in Baquba," said Saja Khadori, a member of the Diyala Provincial Council's security committee, referring to the provincial capital.

This is just one of the many problems in Diyala that make holding a fair election almost impossible. "We tried to postpone the voting because we are worried about the integrity of the election, but we failed," she said.

Khadori, who is running for re-election on the ticket of Maliki's State of Law party, and Ibrahim Bachilan, the Diyala Provincial Council chairman, a Kurd who is not running again, rattled off discouraging statistics.

"About 30 percent of the province is

## Threat of violence hangs over election

still under the influence of Al Qaeda," said Bachilan as he sat waiting for the weekday Provincial Council meeting to start. And in those villages and neighborhoods, Shiites and Kurds cannot campaign at all, he said.

Another problem, he said, is that 10 percent of the province's population has fled over the years. Most of those people have not returned. In some neighborhoods, Bachilan and provincial law enforcement officials said, intimidation is taking place before the elections.

In the Ghaton neighborhood of Baquba, the provincial capital, where Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia fought with Iraqi and U.S. soldiers in 2006 and 2007, three families who recently returned to reclaim their homes were murdered last week — strongly discouraging other refugees from returning anytime soon, a law enforcement official said.

Khadori and Bachilan said that some candidates are suspected of having ties to the Islamic State of Iraq, the most vicious wing of the insurgency, responsible for numerous kidnappings, beheadings and the expulsions of residents.

They also said it has ties to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

Since no candidates are wearing "Islamic State of Iraq" buttons as they campaign, their affiliation is hard to verify. However, a number of candidates from onetime Qaeda-held areas express sentiments that could easily be espoused by insurgents underscoring the shadowy line between insurgents and sympathizers. In some of these places candidates could not safely run if they did not have at least the tacit approval of still active Al Qaeda cells, said Khadori.

Sheik Abdul Rahman Jassam al-Mujalimi is a candidate with the Reform and Development party, also known as "The Solution" party, he says. A Sunni organization, it is strong in areas of Diyala once held by the Islamic State of Iraq, and Mujalimi's views, particularly of the Americans, are similar to that of many insurgent groups.

Mujalimi is a member of the Awakening Council in the area, one of the U.S.-backed groups that pushed out Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. He says they have mostly beaten the extremist insurgents and discounts reports that the Qaeda branch is still active there. "Most of those people now are trying to hide in the orchards or in some faraway villages," he said with a dismissive shrug.

He has little patience for the U.S. presence in Iraq, which, like the insurgents, he terms "the occupation." He has a warning for President Barack Obama: "I call on the new American president to think about withdrawal of forces seriously, because maybe there

will be a day when we will witness a revolution against their forces and there will be battles in the streets. So I advise him to withdraw his soldiers."

Despite the president's stated intention to withdraw most forces within 16 months, Mujalimi remains skeptical. "I doubt that they will withdraw," he said. "They said they would offer democracy and freedom, but where is democracy? Where is freedom? And they said they would build, but what have they built? They have brought only destruction."

His party seems to have local enemies. While he was talking to a reporter for The New York Times a bomb exploded outside the party headquarters a few blocks away. It had been planted under the car of the party's spokesman. He was unhurt, but two civilians were wounded.

Nonetheless his party is likely to garner at least three seats on the 29-member Provincial Council.

A few streets away, over a shop that sells cheap furniture, is the headquarters of the secular National Meeting party. Run on a shoestring, the party is a mix of professionals, former military officers and government workers. In the last election it ran as part of the Iraqiya Party, led by a former prime minister, Ayad Allawi, a secular figure.

"The previous election was built on the religious parties; it wasn't a fair election," said Salim Zaidi, the National Meeting's provincial standard bearer.

The secular parties cannot campaign in either closed Sunni or Shiite neighborhoods and also face problems raising money. Incumbent parties can give patronage jobs, award contracts and make use of government employee networks; religious parties have access to financing from followers who fill the coffers at mosques as well as from groups outside the country. Newer, secular parties have none of these advantages.

On the city's outskirts lie dilapidated subdivisions that look almost deserted. In one, Al Muradiya, the Sunni Tawafuk and Reform Party has unfurled a huge banner from a building that appears to be deserted. As we stop we see a man sitting outside a shuttered shop and another standing, watching us.

He looks at us cautiously. What does he think of the prime minister, a Shiite? "At the beginning no one liked him, but now when they see he is getting rid of sectarianism, he is more popular," said the man, Samir Zaidan.

What's the mood about the election here? A pickup truck carrying wood turned into the scrap-metal-strewn lot where we were standing. The driver was a man with a large beard wearing tribal disha dasha; next to him was a similarly bearded companion.

Zaidan looked back at us. "In this place 40 young men were killed," he said, looking at the receding pickup truck. "It was an Al Qaeda-held place."

It seemed like time to go.

## Police capture two Ergenekon death squads

### TODAY'S ZAMAN İSTANBUL

Two assassination teams of Ergenekon, a clandestine terrorist organization nested within state organs and charged with plotting to overthrow the government, were captured yesterday by the police in 14 provinces throughout the country in raids organized as part of an investigation into the group.

Twenty police officers and military officers were detained in yesterday's operations on charges of being members of two assassination teams led by İbrahim Şahin, a former senior police official who was the deputy head of the National Police Department's Special Operations Unit. Şahin was arrested on Jan. 7.

A wave of detentions on Jan. 7 in the Ergenekon investigation revealed that the group was planning to assassinate Alevi and Armenian community leaders, the prime minister and members of the Supreme Court of Appeals -- acts that would have dragged Turkey into chaos had they been carried out.

The many detentions of special operations officers were tied to statements from Şahin, reportedly made during his police testimony following his detention. In his initial testimony, Şahin said 7th Army Commander Gen. Bekir Kalyoncu, currently on active duty, had assigned him to set up a team of 300 officers to be employed in a new anti-terrorism department. Kalyoncu also promised that Şahin would be the undersecretary of the new unit. Şahin claimed he was working to set up this new structure. He said a document found in his home during the police search was a list of officers to be chosen

for the special force. The document was titled "S-1" and listed military officers and police Special Operations Unit members under the age of 30. Analysts believe most of those detained yesterday were individuals from the list.



Yesterday's raids were launched on a warrant issued by Ergenekon prosecutor Zekeriya Öz on property of individuals affiliated with a workers' union and the ART TV network. Authorities began their search of a house in Ankara's Bey-sukent district belonging to Mustafa Özbek, the head of metals sector workers' union Türk Metal, at 7:30 a.m. Özbek, Türk Metal Deputy Chairman Ferruh Kavlak and Türk Metal Secretary-General Muharrem Aslıyüce. Union officials Süleyman Erdiç and Pevrul Kavrat were also detained.

A group of Türk Metal Union members protested the detention of Özbek in front of the Ankara Police Department yesterday. Union members, holding signs, chanted: "We are wherever Özbek is. Don't be silent, you will be

next. We are Turkish, we are strong, we are Atatürkists."

Journalist Ünal İnanç and Türkmeneli Association President Savaş Avcı were detained in İstanbul. Researcher Erhan Göksel, owner of the Verso Research Company, was also detained yesterday.

Answering reporters' questions while being taken away by the police for a health check-up, Göksel said he was not a member of Ergenekon. Özbek also made a brief statement in front of the Ankara Police Department, claiming that the detentions and raids were "unlawful."

A police chief and a police officer were detained in Antalya and sent to İstanbul to testify as part of the investigation, sources said. One other person was detained in Bursa.

Other detentions took place in operations in Antalya, Elazığ, Hakkari, Hatay, İstanbul, Iğdır, Isparta, Kahramanmaraş, Siirt, Şırnak and Tokat. The police also searched the Şirinoğlu Social and Strategic Research Center in Ankara.

Commenting on his father's arrest, Özbek's son Haydar Özbek said: "We are living in a period when being a Turk in Turkey is a crime. I wouldn't be surprised if they arrest Nejat Uygur soon," he said, in an ambiguous comment about a veteran thespian.

### Other searches and detentions

Murat Çavdar, a police officer from the Special Operations Unit, was detained in Tokat. In Isparta, a high-ranking military officer was detained. Three special operations officers were detained in Kahramanmaraş. In Bursa, a military officer was detained.

At least 10 people were detained in İstanbul, although the police did not announce an exact figure.

A gardener who worked for Lt. Col. Mustafa Dönmez, detained in the Jan. 7 raids, was taken to the İstanbul Police Department yesterday to testify. Twelve rifle grenades and 12 booby traps were found.

Meanwhile, President Abdullah Gül yesterday reacted to news stories about a luncheon he gave for military and government representatives earlier this week. Some newspapers had claimed that the president, presidents of high courts and the prime minister had spoken about the Ergenekon investigation during the luncheon. "Would the judges, the president and the prime minister violate the law? Would they speak about an ongoing case?" he asked, speaking to journalists yesterday during a brief press conference at the Çankaya presidential palace.



Members of the Foundation for Social Rights and Values asked Ergenekon prosecutors to open some wells in the Southeast alleged to contain the acid-doused bodies of missing people.

## Kurdish president reiterates rejection to support councils

**NINEWA / Aswat al-Iraq:** President of Iraq's Kurdistan region Massoud Barzani on Thursday reiterated rejection to the formation of support councils.

In his speech during meeting Yazidi personalities in Shikhan district, north of Mosul, the president said "unfortunately some bodies, who fought with us against the former regime, want to form the support councils to won more votes, but we will not allow this in Kurdistan."

In response to calls to form support councils in the Kurdistan Region and adjacent areas, the President said, "We support all attempts to fight terrorism but the goals of forming support councils are something else."

President Barzani also referred to the historical bonds of friendship between Kurds and Arabs in Mosul. "We don't have any ambitions in Mosul. Mosul is a place for all Iraq's ethnic and religious communities — Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. Mosul is an example of peaceful co-existence and tolerance of all these communities," the President added.

Speaking about Yazidis, Barzani said "we have absolute trust that Yazidis are Kurds and they have the right to decide that."

The Yazidi faith is not a missionary religion. Its followers are concentrated in northern Iraq. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), there are about 800,000 Yazidis all over the world. 550,000 of them live in Iraq and concentrated in the district of Sinjar, where the temple Lalesh is considered the holiest shrine for Yazidis, the district of al-Shaykhan (50 km north of Mosul), the district of Bueshiqa (15 km east of Mosul) and some other areas and villages in the provinces of Ninewa and Duhok. Yazidis



are primarily ethnic Kurds and most live near Mosul, with smaller communities in Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Russia, Syria, and Turkey. The estimates of their population size vary, partially due to the Yazidi tradition of secrecy about their religious beliefs. Mosul, the capital city of Ninewa, lies 405 km north of Baghdad.

## Arabs, Kurds take their fight to polls

The vote this week to decide who will control Iraq's Nineveh province may inflame their historical enmity.

By Ned Parker and Usama Redha

Reporting from Mosul, Iraq — For decades, Arab soldiers and Kurdish guerrillas battled by gun, by mortar, by rocket. Now, elections are the latest weapon in the struggle for land and power in Iraq's north.

The ballot box has become a battleground in Nineveh province, a high-stakes combat zone where Kurds and Arabs will face off over the future shape of the country -- and confront each other over the past. The outcome could set the stage for another round of violence, which both sides insist that they do not want.

"In the last few years, almost 2,000 Kurds have been killed in Mosul," Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani told The Times this month. "We have not responded in the same manner and we have not reacted in any act of vengeance; but of course everything will have its limits."

The rival ethnicities are grappling with the legacy of Saddam Hussein's policy of displacing Kurds to create an Arab majority here. Whereas the Kurds believe they are correcting a historical wrong, Arabs see humiliation. They accuse the Kurds of harassment, arbitrary arrests and torture in the run-up to the election Saturday.



Safin Hamed, AFP/Getty Images

**IN IRBIL, IRAQ:** Kurdistan regional President Massoud Barzani, right, meets with tribal leaders from neighboring Nineveh province. Kurds were able to gain control of Nineveh in 2005 because Sunni Arabs boycotted the vote that year.

How the struggle plays out here, where Arabs clearly outnumber Kurds, will go a long way toward determining the outcome in other disputed territories, such as the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk, where no side has such an outright majority.

"If these problems are not solved, there will be some extremism here in [Nineveh], on the Kurdish side and Arab side," Deputy Gov. Kharso Goran warned, sitting in his riverside office in the provincial capital,

Mosul, flanked by the flags of Iraq, Kurdistan and his Kurdistan Democratic Party.

The Kurds have governed their own region, Kurdistan, since 1991 and have pushed to expand the area to include the northern and eastern belt around Mosul and the Sinjar region of western Nineveh. That has exacerbated Kurdish-Arab tensions, which U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker recently labeled one of the emerging challenges of the year.

"The people of these areas do not want to belong to Kurdistan," said Sheik Abdullah Humaidi Yawar, a senior leader in Hadba, a Sunni Arab nationalist movement. Yawar is considered the front-runner in the Nineveh election.

"They want to stay included in Nineveh," he said. "The Kurdish parties have proven to the people for the last five years that they are racist like the former regime."

The Sunni Arabs are playing catch-up after their boycott of U.S.-sponsored elections in 2005 handed the Kurds control of Nineveh. The Kurds used the last four years to cement their grip on the disputed areas in northern Nineveh bordering Kurdistan, with a sizable presence of Kurdish border guards, intelligence officers and Kurdish-dominated Iraqi army units.

The Kurds had hoped to formalize the new reality in a constitutionally mandated referendum, designated to settle the fate of similarly contested areas across Iraq, including Kirkuk. But the date for the referendum expired a year ago, and with it the Kurds' opportunity to quickly seize what they believe is rightfully theirs.

Now both Baghdad and local Arabs appear intent on beating back the Kurds, through a mix of intimidation, negotiation and show of force.

"When we have the ability to protect these areas, we will ask Kurdistan to leave them," said Yahya Abdul Majoud of the Iraqi Islamic Party, which is considered the less extreme Sunni faction in the north. "If they agree or not, it's not the Kurds' choice," he said, adding that the Iraqi army should replace Kurdish units in Nineveh in six months to a year.

Shiite Muslim Prime Minister Nouri Maliki has already put his weight behind Nineveh's Arabs. He has started trying to purge the two Iraqi army divisions in Nineveh of Kurdish officers, who have been accused of working for Kurdish ambitions, Kurdish officials say.

Since the summer, Nineveh's security command, which reports to Maliki, has twice threatened to forcibly evict Goran from his Kurdistan Democratic Party offices in east Mosul.

The Kurdish political parties are sure to not go quietly. They warn that an aggressive campaign to dislodge them from the disputed territories and marginalize them in Nineveh politics has the potential to spark serious confrontations. If Baghdad backs the hard-line Arab nationalists, Goran said, "there will be a problem between Kurdistan and the central government."

Goran has a visceral dislike of Hadba, which exemplifies the new nationalist wave. He accuses the movement of having ties to the militant group Al Qaeda in Iraq and Hussein's Baath Party. Hadba is headed by Atheel Najafi, scion of an old Mosul family, famed breeders of Arabian horses who once sold and raced horses with Hussein's sons Uday and Qusai.

Najafi and his colleagues regularly accuse Kurdish army units of torturing detainees and hint that the Kurdistan Democratic Party has plotted at least one assassination attempt against a Hadba candidate. Najafi vows to force Kurdish troops to withdraw from the disputed territories.

"When we have strong authority and power in Mosul, the Kurds will change their stance," Najafi said. He pledges to bar Kurdistan's two main parties from any leadership positions in Mosul.

Najafi describes the dispute as the latest mutation of an old conflict between the Kurdish parties and the central government.

"This struggle has existed dozens of years," Najafi told *The Times*.

A U.S. official has called Hadba's rhetoric "dangerous" and said Goran was alarmed with good reason. But the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, also accused the Kurds of harassing opponents.

"Some of it is stick, intimidation, threat, a little bit of good old-fashioned thuggery," the official said, referring to the Kurdish practices of detaining rivals.

Arabs in Zimar, a district west of Mosul, complain that the Kurdish authorities treat them as second-class citizens and have harassed candidates and threatened them over the vote. Abu Noor, a laborer, remembers when the Kurds entered Zimar after the U.S. invasion to help suppress a revolt.

Kurdish soldiers and U.S. troops knocked on his door one night and detained him and his brother. They told them that they would be held for one or two hours. After 22 days, Abu Noor was released, but his brother remained in jail, mainly in Kurdistan, for almost four years.

The daily routine in Zimar eats away at Abu Noor. As an Arab, he has a special badge to enter the district, to be allowed through checkpoints. But at night, he can't move because of a curfew imposed by the security forces. "I don't know why they do these

things," he said. "This is a psychological warfare."

He said his relationship with the Kurds has always been good. He grew up alongside them. His sister married a Kurd and moved with him to Kurdistan. He still visits them regularly, but he says the trip, with its four checkpoints, is an exercise in humiliation.

"They do a lot of things. The simplest thing they've done to me is call me a terrorist when they know I'm an Arab," he said, adding that he ignores the insults and waits for the family member or phone call that will allow him to pass.

"What can I do?" he said.

For their part, the Kurds, still scarred by Hussein's military campaigns, worry that the loss of control of northern Nineveh province will put them in danger. They are terrified by Hadba's rhetoric.

In the Shaikhan district in the northern Nineveh plains, Nurman Farhan Othman, 60, a Kurd and follower of the ancient Yazidi sect, sits cross-legged on a couch and considers a life defined by war. His father tapped him when he was 13 to fight against Baghdad. "Thirteen is the most active age for a young man," he said.

If the early days of war were heroic, eventually the rebellion against Baghdad cost him a great deal.

The hard times started in 1975, when Iran, which had been supplying weapons to the Kurds, struck a deal with Baghdad to stop arming them. The Iraqi army began to crush the Kurdish uprising, and its leaders ordered people to flee or surrender.

Othman remembers walking out from the mountains around the town of Rawanduz, where he had fought for months in the snow, pounding Iraqi army camps with artillery. He handed in his weapons and returned to his home district of Shaikhan, only to be expelled.

His exile ended in 1995, when the government allowed him to move back to Shaikhan. Othman's home and farm had been razed to build government housing for Arab families, but the state forbade Kurds from buying property. He says he lived in a rental without electricity or water, existing on limited food.

The U.S. invasion in 2003 allowed him to start rebuilding his life. Out from under the rule Hussein, Othman bought land, and two years ago he finished building a home, decorated with a map of Kurdistan.

He worries now that the bad times could return. He sees the rise of the Arab parties in Nineveh as shades of the past when Baghdad denied them their rights.

Once again, he said, "we fear that we will be betrayed."

# Iraqi women fight for a voice

By Sam Dagher

**BAGHDAD:** Amal Kibash, a candidate for the Baghdad provincial council, is running a bold and even feverish campaign by most standards.

With elections coming Saturday, Kibash never wastes a chance to reel in another voter. "You are going to vote for me, right?" she quizzed passers-by with a smile while strolling recently through her neighborhood of Sadr City, until May a battleground for Shiite militias. Giant posters of her veil-framed face were draped on several buildings, some of which still bore the marks of recent fighting.

In Basra, where until a year ago banners warned women that they would be shot if they wore too much makeup or ventured out of their homes without a veil, another female candidate, Ibtihal Abdul-Rahman, put up posters of herself last month. Encouraged by security improvements throughout the country, thousands of women are running for council seats in the provincial elections.

Of the estimated 14,400 candidates, close to 4,000 are women. Some female candidates have had their posters splattered with mud, defaced with beards or torn up, but most have been spared the violence that has claimed the lives of two male candidates and a coalition leader since the start of the year.

For many of these women, the elections offer a chance to inject some much-needed fresh air into councils that are currently plagued by deep corruption and dominated by men and big political parties that are often ultraconservative.

But even if they win, they face numerous hurdles, particularly the entrenched attitudes of most Iraqi men, who view women as either sex objects or child bearers who have no place in the rough-and-tumble world of politics.

"This is the mentality. We have to change it," said Safia Taleb al-Suhail, a member of Parliament "How can we change it? By fighting."

She is leading a group of female lawmakers who are lobbying to make sure that the same constitutional provision that mandates that 25 percent of all seats in Parliament go to women is applied to provincial councils as well. Currently, it is not.

Suhail, the daughter of a prominent Shiite tribal leader assassinated by Saddam Hussein's henchmen in Lebanon in 1994, returned to Iraq after the regime's fall for a chance to participate in shaping her country's political future.

While Iraq in the 1950s was the first Arab country to name a woman minister and adopt a progressive family law, the leadership aspirations of women were mostly quashed under Saddam's macho regime. The situation became further complicated for women after 2003, with the ascendance of religious parties.

Suhail and others were instrumental in lobbying Iraq's U.S. administrator at the time, L. Paul Bremer 3rd, to include the quota for women in the country's

## Thousand to run in Saturday vote



Two candidates running for office in Baghdad. Women leaders say elections offer a chance to inject fresh air into corrupt councils.

first transitional Constitution. It was preserved in the current Constitution because many felt that it was the only way to insure the participation of women in a male-dominated culture.

When it was published in October, the final version of the law regulating the provincial elections omitted the quota for women; it remains unclear whether that was deliberate or just an oversight. The electoral commission has ruled that the law as written is acceptable, saying that women are ensured of adequate representation by the requirement that a woman be chosen after every three men in any winning slate. Suhail responded that many of the candidate slates do not have enough women in them to meet that requirement, while other slates are made up of less than four candidates, all of whom are male.

Mahdiya Abed-Hassan al-Lami, a women's rights advocate and candidate in Baghdad running on the slate of a former prime minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, said that while she supports the quota system, it had been manipulated by the major political parties, both secular and religious, to marginalize women. Most of the women chosen for the large candidate slates are there for their family and tribal connections and loyalty to the sect or party, she said, rather than their qualifications.

"If women are simply followers, they cannot fulfill their roles properly," said Lami, who is a teacher and a devout Shiite. Her campaign has focused on reaching out to her network of women, particularly in some of the most destitute slums of Baghdad.

Kibash, another female candidate who is running on Jaafari's list, is currently a member of the Sadr City municipal council, but she and other women on the council are prevented by the men from sitting on the crucial and financially important services committee. She said the council is mired in corruption.

Despite the recent gains in security, some women continue to face threats, while others say the whole thing is a charade and not worth the effort.

Liza Hido sat on a municipal council but was forced to quit in 2006 after receiving threatening e-mails and text messages on her cellphone.

She is running again this year but, still concerned for her safety, she is keeping her campaigning discreet, putting up no posters and making no public appearances. Instead, she restricts herself to private gatherings.

Her friend, Bushra al-Obeidi, a law professor at Baghdad University, has rebuffed all efforts to convince her to become a candidate. She feels the odds are stacked against women, starting with laws she views as discriminatory toward women — one allows a rapist to largely escape punishment if he marries his victim. Obeidi also has little faith in the commitment to gender equality by the current political leadership, which is dominated by religious parties.

"I assure you they are against women, they are lying to us," she said.

Suhail, the lawmaker, admitted that Iraqi women have failed so far to break into the top levels of the political power structure, but says that this no reason to give up.



## Bomb kills 3 Iraqis near Kurd office

Tensions rise as Saturday's pivotal vote for provincial councils approaches.

January 25, 2009 By Kim Game! The Associated Press

**BAGHDAD** — A car bomb exploded near a Kurdish party's office Tuesday in Mosul, killing at least three Iraqi soldiers as tensions rose in volatile areas north of Baghdad ahead of pivotal elections.

Friction between Kurds and Sunni Arabs, as well as Sunnis and Shiites, has made northern Iraq a key battleground with just four days to go before the vote. Iraqis will choose ruling councils Saturday in most of the country's provinces.

The blast in Mosul, 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, occurred near the offices of the Kurdish Democratic Party, or KDP, which is headed by Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani.

Iraqi security forces became suspicious of the vehicle, which blew up as a team approached to inspect it, an army officer said. The officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to release the information, said two soldiers and a civilian were wounded.

Hisham al-Gourani, a KDP official in Mosul, said the explosion took place about 100 yards from the KDP office, but the Kurds suffered no casualties.

Nobody claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred against a back-

drop of heated rivalries between Kurds and mainly Sunni Arabs who are jockeying for power in Saturday's vote to be held in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces.

Sunnis have a slight majority in Ninevah province, which includes Mosul, but they boycotted the January 2005 vote, leaving the Kurds with a disproportionate share of power on the 41-seat council. Insurgents also remain active in the north, despite numerous U.S.-Iraqi military operations.

Iraq said it will seal its borders and restrict travel between Baghdad and other provinces starting Friday. It also will close the airports and impose a vehicle ban for unofficial traffic to prevent car bombs. Polling sites will be reinforced with additional protective barriers and voters will be searched, with specially trained female volunteers deployed to help search women.

U.S. troops will help ensure roads are clear of explosives and will conduct patrols with their Iraqi partners, commanders said. But they will largely stay on the sidelines in what will be a major test of the Iraqis' readiness to assume their own security as the American military begins to draw down its forces.

"We are in a complete support role leading up to the day of the elections," said Col. Pat White, commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division.

United Press International

## Turkey wary over status of Kirkuk

ANKARA, Turkey, Jan. 26 (UPI)

Turkey cautioned against moving too quickly on a referendum to settle the disputed status of the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, officials said.

Abbas al-Bayati, a Shiite Turkomen with the United Iraqi Alliance coalition, said Turkish President Abdullah Gul invited members from the ethnic community in Kirkuk to meet in Ankara to discuss the way forward on the disputed city, Turkey's daily newspaper Hurriyet reported Monday.

Iraq holds provincial elections in 14 of the 18 provinces Jan. 31. The vote is delayed in the three Kurdish provinces and Kirkuk because of territorial disputes.

Ethnic Kurds, Sunnis and Turkomen disagree over whether Kirkuk should be considered part of greater Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan. The vote in Kirkuk is postponed indefinitely.

"The meeting of the representatives of the Iraqi components is related with (Turkish) approval and willingness to discuss this sensitive issue at a roundtable," Bayati told Baghdad's al-Sabah newspaper.

Turkey has expressed reservations on moving too swiftly on Kirkuk's status, saying haste may result in clashes between the ethnic groups in the region.



Kurdistan Region Presidency (KRP)  
January 27, 2009

## Departing U.S. Ambassador on farewell visit to President Barzani

Salahaddin, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (KRP.org)-

United States Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker visited Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani today for a farewell meeting.

The Ambassador, who is on his last visit to the Region before he leaves his post as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, thanked President Barzani and the people of Kurdistan Region for the cooperation throughout his tenure in Iraq.

During the meeting, the Ambassador noted that Iraq has come a long way since he started his work as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. Ryan Crocker arrived in Baghdad in March 2007.

"There have been many developments in Iraq, especially in the Kurdistan Region which has seen increasing progress," the Ambassador remarked. The U.S. Ambassador also talked about the many sacrifices that the Kurdish people have made for the freedom that they enjoy now. "The [Iraqi] constitution and the strong relations between the Kurdistan Region and the United States will provide the guarantees for this freedom to be preserved and they will also guarantee that the adversities that the Kurdish people suffered in the past are not repeated," Ryan Crocker, who was accompanied by a delegation, added.

The Ambassador further added that they understand the concerns of the people of the Kurdistan Region, because, he said, they have suffered a lot in the past and they have the right to be concerned about potential threats.

For his part, President Barzani praised the U.S. Ambassador's role in Iraq and expressed his happiness with the relations that have developed between the Kurdistan Region and the United States of America. The President described Ambassador Crocker as a close personal friend and a friend of the people of the Kurdistan Region. He hoped that this friendship continues beyond his departure from Iraq.

President Barzani talked about the sacrifices of the people of the Region. "Although our sacrifices far outweigh what we have achieved, our people are pleased with the new Iraq and we will continue to work for the building of a federal, democratic Iraq. We will defend

the democratic process in Iraq and we will stand in the way of any efforts to return Iraq to



dictatorship," President Barzani added. He also reiterated the Kurdistan Region's commitment to the Iraqi Constitution.

As a symbol of friendship and appreciation for his role in Iraq, President Barzani awarded the Ambassador with a medal engraved with the emblem of the Kurdistan Region Presidency.

## Feyli Kurds case trial begins in Baghdad

The trial of the 16 defendants in the Feyli Kurds case began today, the president of Iraq's Higher Criminal Court (IHCC) said on Monday.

"The session was presided over by Judge Raouf Rasheed," Judge Aref Shahin told AAI news agency. Several International organizations estimated that nearly one million Iraqi Feyli Kurds were displaced by force between the years 1970 and 1990.

The defendants on this case are Sadoun Shakir, Tareq Aziz, Fadel Sulfeij al-Azzawi, Watban Ibrahim al-Hassan, Sabawi Ibrahim al-Hassan, Ahmed Hussein, Mazban Khedr Hadi, Ali Hassan al-Majeed, Saber al-Dori, Aziz Saleh al-Nawman, Abdelhamid Soliman, Saad Saleh Ahmed Sultan, Muhammad Khudeir al-Halboussi, Fadel Abbas al-Aamiri, Nu'man Ali al-Tikriti and Iyad Taha Shihab.

Feyli Kurds are a group of people of Iranian stock living in Baghdad and Diala province, around Khanaqin and Mandali. Feylis speak Feyli, a dialect of the Pahlawani. The roots of the Feylis go back to the Aryan immigrants of the first millennium BC, and more specifically, the Par-

thian/Pahlawi/Pahlawanid settlements of the 2nd century BD. Feyli Kurds are largely a Shi'a community living in Baghdad and the Diyala Province of Iraq around Khanaqin and Mandali ( a Kurdish areas outside the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region). They are an estimated 2-3 million Feylis living in Iraq.

They embraced Islam in the early stages of the Islamic conquest and colonization of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Iran, though archeological evidence from the Ilam province in Iran indicates that a significant proportion of Feylis were Nestorian Christians until the 18th Century. When the Safavid dynasty (1507-1721) held sway over Persia, Feyli Kurds switched to the Shiite Jaafari doctrine under Persian influence.

In modern times the Feylis have been subject to state persecutions. They are considered as a stateless people, with both Iran and Iraq claiming they are citizens of the other country. In mid-1970s, Iraq expelled around 40,000 Shiite Feyli Kurds who had lived for generations near Baghdad and Khanaqin, alleging that they were Iranian nationals.

## In Iraq's North, Ethnic Strife Flares as Vote Draws Closer

Arabs Hope to Curb Power Of Kurdish Government

By Ernesto Londoño Washington Post Foreign Service

**Q**ARAOOSH, Iraq -- Iraq's upcoming provincial elections have exacerbated tensions along the ethnically mixed frontier between the traditionally Arab parts of the country and its Kurdish autonomous region in the north.

As Election Day looms in Nineveh province, where the most dramatic power shift is expected, Sunni Arab politicians are vowing to curb the influence of the Kurdish regional government, which in recent years has sent millions of dollars and thousands of soldiers into villages south of the territory it formally controls.

The 2005 elections, which most Sunni Arabs boycotted, left Nineveh province solidly in the hands of Kurds, a minority in the predominantly Arab province. The Kurds currently hold 31 of the 37 seats on the provincial council, the equivalent of an American state legislature. In the vote set for Saturday, Arabs in Nineveh are widely expected to win a comfortable majority.

Taking the reins of Nineveh's government would allow Arabs to appoint a governor and use their political power to roll back Kurdish expansion, which is being bitterly contested in villages across the 300-mile swath of disputed territories, as well as in Baghdad and in Irbil, the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite Arab, and Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, have exchanged heated accusations in recent weeks, underscoring the intensity of a conflict that U.S. officials and Iraq experts have come to view as Iraq's most potentially destabilizing.

The power struggle has made battlegrounds of places such as Qaraqosh, Iraq's largest Chris-



A wall in Baghdad is plastered with posters for provincial elections, scheduled for Saturday. North of Baghdad in Nineveh, Arabs are expected to win a majority over Kurds.

(By Wathiq Khuzaie  
Getty Images)

tian town, which lies about 15 miles southeast of Nineveh's capital, Mosul. Sherbel Issou, Qaraqosh's senior priest, prides himself on having kept his flock largely unscathed by war. But in recent months, as the rhetoric has sharpened and campaign promises have begun sounding like calls for battle, residents of the disputed areas are feeling squeezed.

"We're the land in between," the chipper 65-year-old priest said. "When there's a battle, it's people like us who get caught up in the front lines. We provide security for the people

in this town. But we can't seal the town off to everybody."

Wedge between the devastated city of Mosul and the prosperous Kurdish autonomous region, Qaraqosh is home to roughly 40,000 Assyrian Christians, who have lived for the past five years in the shadow of the insurgency.

Largely invisible to the provincial and central governments, the town has had only one reliable, undisputed authority since 2003: the church. Shortly after the war began, the Kurdistan Democratic Party opened an office here. A

banner posted at the party's headquarters proclaimed, "Under the parliament and government of the Kurdistan region, the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Turkmens will enjoy their rights."

Soon afterward, as violence picked up in Nineveh, Sarkis Aghajan, the Kurdish region's finance minister, began funding a Christian militia that currently has 1,200 members in Qaraqosh and surrounding villages.

"I don't ask where the money comes from," Issou said, noting that he has never bothered to determine whether it comes from the Kurdish government's coffers. "I don't want to know. They pay the salaries for those guards to feed their families, so we bless them."

Shortly after the U.S.-led invasion, the Kurdish government began deploying soldiers of its militia, the pesh merga, to towns in Nineveh and other provinces that border the Kurdish region. In the years that followed, as the Iraqi army and police forces were disbanded and a burgeoning insurgency took control of vast stretches of the country, the presence of the Kurdish militia drew little criticism.

After the 2005 elections, non-Kurds in several villages in northern Iraq said the militia's soldiers had prevented them from voting. In Qaraqosh, residents awoke on Election Day thrilled by the prospect of casting votes.

"We waited from morning until noon," Issou said. But the ballots never came. Later, Issou said, town leaders discovered that ballot boxes earmarked for Qaraqosh had been taken to a neighboring town and stuffed with ballots marked for Kurdish candidates.

"So much for freedom and democracy," he said, laughing.

Nineveh has become Iraq's most restive province. As violence has ebbed across the country in recent months, the U.S. military has shifted troops and resources to Mosul, now among the country's most dangerous cities.

Governance of the province, by all accounts, has been disastrous. The sitting provincial council does not dispute that, but it blames the central government in Baghdad for withholding its budgeted funds and otherwise thwarting the authority of local leaders.

"We can't even appoint a policeman without getting approval from the ministries in Baghdad," complained Khosro Goran, Nineveh's deputy governor. "In Baghdad, there has been a lot of pressure on us because they

know this government belongs to the Kurdish parties, and they're always trying to link us to their problems with" the Kurdish regional government.

Much of Mosul remains in shambles. Millions of dollars that the central government sent to the province last year to fund reconstruction projects have vanished. Tens of thousands of residents have been displaced, including many Christian families who fled the city last fall amid a string of killings.

Kurdish leaders say Sunni insurgents were



By Gene Thorp — The Washington Post

behind the slayings. Some Arab politicians have blamed the Kurds, suggesting that the campaign was designed to undermine confidence in the central government's security forces.

Arab parties have accused Kurdish officials and their proxies of intimidating and detaining their candidates, and expressed concern that Kurdish soldiers will keep voters from polling sites Saturday in areas where Kurds are expected to do poorly. The Kurds reject those accusations and call their opponents political novices who have ties to the insurgency.

U.S. and Iraqi officials say they fear that the perception of unfair elections on the part of either side, or both, could trigger a fresh wave of violence. On Tuesday, a bomb detonated near an office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Mosul, killing three policemen. It was unclear whether the office was the intended target.

"It could get very nasty because the stakes are so high," said Joost Hiltermann, an Iraq expert at the nonpartisan International Crisis Group. "You're going to have allegations of fraud. Parties that lose are not going to accept that."

Even if the political stalemate doesn't turn violent, a protracted fight over disputed areas is likely to create breathing room for insurgent groups such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, which has clung onto Mosul.

"Nineveh is a place where all the fault lines of Iraq meet," a senior U.S. official in Baghdad said.

Abdullah Humedi Ajeel al-Yawer, a wealthy, influential tribal leader who is one of the founders of the largest opposition party, al-Hadba-a, says he is eager to keep the fight in the political arena. But in a province with only a short, troubled history of democracy and a mix of politically malleable armed forces, his faith in the power of the ballot box is limited.

Some of his candidates have been detained and their offices ransacked, he said. Hadba-a candidates say they have been forced to campaign in whispers in areas controlled by the pesh merga.

Humedi, 40, a towering man who travels with a small army of bodyguards, takes pride in his ability to quickly mobilize tribesmen, saying he can gather tens of thousands of men in a few hours.

"I personally work against violence," Humedi said recently, sipping espresso in the living room of his palatial fortress near the Syrian border. "I try to keep my people out of the violence. But to protect ourselves? We will do anything to protect ourselves and our democracy. All options are on the table."

Kurdish candidates call such rhetoric dangerous -- but not surprising from leaders they say have checkered pasts.

"Where were the political parties that are competing with us now?" Khalil Ismail, a Kurdish candidate in Qaraqosh asked defiantly. "Were they with the political process or with the terrorists?"

The fight for votes is complicated by the vast oil reserves in the disputed region and competing ancestral claims to them by Arabs and Kurds, who in recent decades have been pushed in and out of the area, often by force.

"The debate is quite legitimate," the senior U.S. official said. "And it's a debate that is likely to go on for years, even in a prosperous Iraq. The line has never really been drawn. It's going to be very difficult to determine the boundary in this dispute because the population has shifted so many times and so dramatically."

United Press International

## Kurdish lawmakers offer aid to Khanaqin

**KHANAQIN, Iraq, January 28, 2009 (UPI)**

Kurdish lawmakers met with residents in the northern cities of Iraq's Diyala province Wednesday to urge them to vote in the provincial elections Saturday.

Mala Bakhtiyar with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan visited supporters in the northern Diyala city of Khanaqin in an effort to increase voter turnout and promise aid to the region, the party's media branch reported.

"We have a long way ahead to build and construct the new Iraq; therefore we should work together to achieve



that goal," he said. "The citizens should elect those who they think are suitable and loyal to build and construct Iraq."

Tensions between the Iraqi military and the Kurdish Peshmerga force approached the point of conflict last summer in Khanaqin related to disputes over jurisdiction. Kurdish forces had claimed authority over certain areas of Diyala, though Iraqi government officials downplayed the significance of the row.



Kurdish officials denied any attempts to annex parts of northern Diyala, though Kurdish President Massoud Barzani noted in September that 99 percent of the Khanaqin population voted for Kurdish parties in 2005.

Bakhtiyar said parts of northern Diyala suffered from neglect and announced the Kurdistan Regional Government was setting aside \$500,000 each for the cities of Qarah Tappah, Jalawla, Qizil Rabat and Mandali.

**TODAYS ZAMAN**

January 28, 2009

## Former member describes JITEM's reign of terror

TODAY'S ZAMAN

A former member of a gendarmerie intelligence unit that does not exist on paper and whose existence has been consistently denied by officials spoke to the Taraf daily, giving spine chilling details about the brutality of the organization's reign of terror in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated Southeast.

Abdülkadir Aygan, a former member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and later a member of the illegal gendarmerie unit known as JITEM, told Taraf stories of murders of various individuals, giving details about the crimes committed by gendarmerie officers who worked for JITEM.

Aygan, who has been living in Stockholm for fear of his life since confessing, first came into the spotlight when an alleged former leader of JITEM, Maj. Abdülkerim Kirca, was found dead in his home last week. Kirca's death appeared to be a suicide.

Families of the victims of hundreds of unsolved murders accused Kirca of being behind most of the murders committed in Turkey's East and Southeast in the '90s. A surge in the number of unsolved deaths coincides with the term he served in the region.

Aygan claimed that he had witnessed Kirca, who received the State Merit of Honor from former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, kill three men with a gun in the southeastern city of Silopi. Aygan's descriptions were printed in various newspapers on the day of Kirca's suicide.

In the first section of a lengthy interview with Taraf's Neşe Düzel, Aygan described how he joined JITEM in 1990 as a PKK informant who had made use of Turkey's partial-amnesty regulations, known as the "law of repentance," in which terrorist organization members can get reduced punishment if they agree to cooperate. He said the person who recruited him was Col. Arif Doğan, currently in jail as a suspect in Ergenekon, a clandestine terrorist organization charged with plotting to overthrow the government. JITEM is thought to be an important branch of the larger Ergenekon network. Among Ergenekon suspects are a not insignificant number of army retirees and officers on active duty. Aygan worked for JITEM for nine years, starting in 1990. He said they were given their own guns, and they were hired as civil servants under Turkey's Public Servants Law No. 657 with paycheck docu-

ments, tax cuts, benefits and the right to a state pension.

Aygan described how JITEM worked: "They call their acts 'operations.' For example, you are suspicious of someone. Normally, security forces would file a criminal complaint on the basis of some evidence, and a court would decide if the person is guilty or not. That's not what JITEM is like. Those who had any relationship with the

years, unsolved murders peaked," Aygan said.

"All JITEM operations always ended in death. As an example, there was a young man rumored to be a PKK member. His family had immigrated to Diyarbakır from Lice. He lived in the Şehitlik neighborhood. That young man was taken to JITEM, questioned. Later, he was shot with a bullet in the head and left in an empty field. But later I



PKK were reported to JITEM, which did its job."

Aygan stated that, to JITEM, "doing its job" meant "taking a person illegally, taking them to JITEM headquarters, then questioning them there, then executing them, and then hiding, burning or burying their body. Depending on the importance of the person, sometimes the Gendarmerie Security Command would be notified, which in turn informed, or sometimes didn't inform, the OHAL Governor's Office." OHAL was martial law in the Southeast that was declared against terrorism and remained in place throughout the '90s.

The estimates on unsolved murders in the region from those years reach as high as 20,000. Aygan, who says that figure sounds exaggerated, gave an estimate for Diyarbakır province. "In the 10 years I served in Diyarbakır, I would say the number of executions by JITEM would be 600 or 700." In response to a question on whether he'd killed anyone as a JITEM member, Aygan replied, "I don't want to answer this question."

He said unsolved murders by JITEM began in 1993 and continued until 1996, when some of the JITEM and Ergenekon structure was partially exposed in a car accident in which a police chief and a mafia leader who was also a hit man for shady state-linked groups were killed together. "In those three

heard from Abdülkerim Kirca, that, it turned out, he wasn't killed by the bullet shot into his brain. He was only shocked. He walked to Batman and went to the hospital. He told about what he had been through, after which, the Batman team informed Kirca on the phone and explained the situation." Aygan said the young man was killed in the hospital later on.

Aygan said people were generally strangled with wires or electric cables. "Torture would last usually one or two nights. They weren't killed right away. They were even given some bread so they wouldn't die before being interrogated."

He recalled the details of another murder. "There was a university kid named Servet Aslan. He had a girlfriend from Mersin named Fatma. There were no allegations against her. She had nothing to do with it. Based on testimony from Serpil [Toprak], who was an informant like us, these two were taken from the center of Diyarbakır as they walked hand in hand. The kid had never joined the PKK. He had his girlfriend. They led a completely normal life. No PKK member would walk hand-in-hand with his girlfriend in the city center. They killed them both, even though he cried, saying he wasn't a PKK member. Both were questioned and tortured. Abdülkerim Kirca himself tortured that girl."

LE FIGARO  
29 janvier 2009

# L'Iran dicte ses conditions à Barack Obama pour renouer le dialogue avec l'Amérique



Répondant à « *la main tendue* » offerte lundi par Barack Obama, le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (ici mardi à Téhéran devant le Parlement), a demandé aux États-Unis de ne plus soutenir Israël. A. Kenare/AFP

## MOYEN-ORIENT

En campagne, Ahmadinejad exige des excuses des Américains pour leurs « crimes » contre Téhéran.

OFFICIELLEMENT, le ton de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad est sans concession : « *Ceux qui parlent de changement doivent présenter des excuses au peuple iranien et essayer de réparer (...) les crimes qu'ils ont commis contre la République islamique* », a affirmé hier le président iranien dans un discours tenu dans la ville de Kermanschah (ouest). Et d'énumérer une longue liste de griefs contre les États-Unis : de l'organisation du coup d'État contre le régime nationaliste de Mossadegh en 1953 à leur hostilité à la révolution de 1979, en passant par leur occupation de l'Irak depuis 2003.

Le président pose ses conditions avant tout rapprochement avec le « Grand Satan ». Durant sa campagne, Barack Obama avait proposé « *un dialogue sans condition* » avec l'Iran. Lundi, le président américain a renouvelé son offre « *de la main tendue, pour peu que vous acceptiez de desserrer le poing* ». Le lendemain,

Hillary Clinton, sa secrétaire d'État, a également tendu la perche en appelant l'Iran à « *manifeste sa volonté de dialogue sérieux* ». Un autre signal est toutefois venu de responsables militaires américains, qui ont hier fait savoir que leur marine avait découvert la semaine dernière des armes sur un navire qui se rendait d'Iran en Syrie. Le navire a été autorisé à poursuivre sa route.

La réaction d'Ahmadinejad sonne-t-elle le glas d'une normalisation ? « *Nous ne sommes qu'au début d'un long processus* », avertit un diplomate occidental à Téhéran. Depuis trente ans, les États-Unis et l'Iran n'ont plus de relations diplomatiques. Ces dernières années, les aspirations iraniennes à disposer de l'arme atomique à des fins militaires, comme l'en accuse l'Occident, ont encore alourdi le contentieux. Et, pour ne rien arranger, l'Iran est entré en campagne électorale. Un conseiller du président a confirmé hier qu'Ahmadinejad serait candidat à sa succession en juin prochain. « *Ses déclarations sont d'abord destinées à son propre camp, celui des durs qui ne veulent pas entendre parler d'un rapprochement avec les Américains* », estime un entrepreneur français.

Mais, sur ce dossier stratégique des relations avec Washington, Ahmadinejad n'a pas le dernier mot. In fine, c'est le guide de la révolution, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, qui décidera du cours de la politique iranienne.

## Le poids de la rhétorique

Or, cette question de la normalisation divise profondément les dirigeants à Téhéran. D'un côté, les durs redoutent qu'une telle ouverture signe l'arrêt de mort de la République islamique. De l'autre, les réalistes sont favorables à un dialogue avec les États-Unis, pour desserrer l'étau autour d'un régime frappé par des sanctions internationales.

Mais les uns et les autres sont dans l'embarras : ils ignorent quel contenu les Américains entendent donner aux discussions avec Téhéran. Celles-ci porteront-elles sur l'ensemble des litiges, ou les sujets seront-ils, au contraire, abordés séparément (l'Irak, l'Afghanistan, le Hezbollah, le nucléaire) ? Enfin, les Américains sont-ils prêts à offrir d'entrée de jeu les garanties de sécurité réclamées par l'Iran pour s'engager dans un processus de négociations ? Face

à toutes ces interrogations, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a choisi l'option maximaliste. « *Les Iraniens doivent pouvoir dire que ce sont leurs ennemis qui se sont finalement soumis à leurs demandes* », commente le diplomate européen. Les conditions posées par Ahmadinejad font peu de cas du soutien de la population à un rapprochement avec l'Amérique.

« *Nous-mêmes, Européens, ignorons quelles seront les carottes que les Américains offriront aux Iraniens* », reconnaît un autre expert du dossier. « *Nous avons le sentiment que les Américains vont être très prudents, qu'ils ne feront rien pour aider Ahmadinejad à être réélu en juin. Nous sommes convaincus que, si les Américains sont décidés à s'impliquer dans les négociations menées par les Européens sur le nucléaire iranien, des contacts secrets seront certainement organisés entre les deux ennemis* », conclut-il.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

TODAYS ZAMAN

January 29 2009

## Abant Platform to bring together Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals in Arbil

KERIM BALCI

The Abant Platform is planning to bring Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals together to discuss the future of Iraq, the Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq and the identity issues faced by Kurds all over the world in a meeting on Feb. 15 and 16 in Arbil titled "Searching for Peace and a Future Together."

The opening speech of the meeting will be given by the prime minister of the regional Kurdish administration, Nechirvan Barzani. The meeting is co-organized by the Abant Platform, a sub-organization of the Journalists and Writers Association, Arbil's Salahaddin University and the Mukriyani Institute. Arbil Gov. Nevzad Hadi Mawlood will also be among the speakers at the opening session of the meeting. The Abant Platform has organized international meetings in the past in capital cities such as Washington, Brussels, Paris, Moscow and Cairo aimed at finding solutions for the challenges of the modern world.

The platform took up Turkey's Kurdish issue in the town of Abant in the northwestern Turkish province of Bolu last year. Salih Yaylaci, the secretary-general of the Abant Platform, told Today's Zaman that the seeds of the Arbil Meeting had been sown during the 17th Abant Platform Meeting dealing with the Kurdish Issue. "The 17th Meeting was attended by northern Iraqi Kurds and, seeing the intellectual polyphony and free environment of discussion, they

approached us about a similar meeting in northern Iraq. So we are responding to an invitation," he said.

Speaking to Today's Zaman, Ali Bulaç said the meeting was an entirely civilian initiative with no political goals. "The Abant Platform has organized several similar meetings in the past and this time we are going to discuss the future of Iraq and of the Middle East with Iraqi Kurdish, Turkmen and Arab intellectuals," he said. Professor Mümtaz'er Türköne, an organizer of the event, had previously told the Zaman daily that the meeting was aimed at bringing the intellectual richness of Turkey to the region.

The two-day meeting will feature four sessions titled "Assessment of the Situation," "Common Cultural Values and the Future," "Mutual Dependence and Opportunities" and "Perspectives for the Future." In line with the Abant Platform tradition, each session will have three or four speakers presenting papers and about 50 participants commenting on these papers. Two of the sessions will be headed by Kurdish intellectuals, namely Dr. Shirzad al-Najjar, an international law professor at Salahaddin University and counselor for higher education in the cabinet of the regional administration, and Dr. Rashad Miran, from the College of Education of Scientific Humanities at Salahaddin University.

The Turkish chairpersons are Professor Mehmet Altan and Professor Eser Karakaş, both

long time participants at Abant Platform meetings. Among the Kurdish intellectuals who will present papers are figures such as Sami Shores, a former minister of culture for the regional government and a well-known Kurdish commentator on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Iraq service, Professor Halkawt Abdallah, an influential journalist and organizer of the Hope Project, Abdurrahman Siddiq, a former Iraqi minister of justice and chairman of the Strategic Research Committee of the Islamic Unity Party, and Karwan Aqrawi, writer and director of Iraq's Kurdistan TV.

The participants from Turkey will include Associate Professor İbrahim Kalın, chairman of the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) and a columnist of Today's Zaman, Bulaç, Turkey's foremost intellectual on Islamic issues and a columnist for Today's Zaman, Altan Tan, Cengiz Çandar, Bejan Matur and Galip Ensarioğlu, a local politician from Diyarbakır. A particularly interesting figure who will be speaking about cooperation in education between Turkey and the northern Iraqi regional administration will be Professor Salih Hoşoğlu. Hoşoğlu is the president of the Turkish Işık [Light] University established in Arbil. Işık University is often associated with the Gülen movement, together with the 11 Turkish schools established in northern Iraq.

ScrippsNews

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editorials and opinion

## Barnett: Obama must not sell out Kurdish Iraq

By THOMAS P.M. BARNETT, Knoxville News-Sentinel

My company, Enterra Solutions, has performed development work inside northern Iraq for close to two years, proving out an economic "connect-up" model we call Development-in-a-Box. That experience leads me to believe that the Kurds' success in nation building could ultimately be their undoing when it comes to President Obama's plan to rapidly withdraw our troops. First off, let me correct my mistake in identifying citizens of the Kurdistan Regional Government as "Kurds," because their leaders prefer the term Kurdistanis, a label they compare to Americans. Why? Kurds aren't the only people living in the KRG, they note, so let's make clear that citizenship isn't tied to ethnicity.

That logic alone tells you the KRG is worth defending.

Second, some history: America enforced a no-fly zone over northern Iraq soon after Desert Storm's conclusion. Unlike the rest of Iraq that remained under Saddam's iron grip, the Kurdistanis got a lengthy head start on nation building -- an opportunity they vigorously exploited.

That success, in tandem with the KRG's disciplined militia known as the peshmerga, accounts for the almost complete lack of U.S. military casualties there since the war. You know that neocon bit about Iraqis "welcoming us with flowers" and helping us overthrow Saddam? Well, it actually happened in Kurdistan. As a result, our military hasn't stationed -- or lost -- troops inside the KRG since Saddam fell.

So when we talk about U.S. nation building in Iraq, we must admit there was a "good" (Kurdistan) to go along with the "bad" (Shiite south) and the "ugly" (Sunni triangle).

Third, the KRG enjoys the financial support of one of the biggest expatriate populations in the world, with substantial numbers living in neighboring Syria, Turkey and Iran -- whose culture Kurdistan most resembles. In their

wisdom, KRG leaders make no claim for a "greater Kurdistan" or for secession from Iraq, even as they legitimately contest control over oil-rich Kirkuk.

Instead, they believe a secure and vibrant Kurdistan vastly improves Iraq's prospects for loose federalism. The neocons ridiculed then-Senator Joe Biden's promotion of Iraq's "soft partition," but the truth is that outcome was preordained, with the majority Shiia ruling the south and Baghdad, Sunni tribal councils once again governing their own, and the KRG in firm control of northern Iraq.

The U.S. military's surge strategy achieved success in pacifying southern Iraq primarily by acquiescing to that emergent reality and co-opting it.

But here's the rub: the Bush administration's meager efforts to create a regional security dialogue yielded little-to-no commitment to Iraq's stability from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey once U.S. troops leave. Plus, we'll leave behind three armies inside Iraq: the Sunni militias, the KRG's peshmerga, and the reconstituted Iraq army -- overwhelmingly controlled by Shiia.

Thus, as our troops draw down, the Obama administration will become essentially powerless to stop any future Shiite attempts to establish unitary control over the entirety of Iraq, meaning a resumed civil war is entirely possible. Moreover, if regional kingpins Iran (Shiite) and the House of Saud (Sunni) are intent in re-igniting a proxy war within Iraq's borders, Washington will be reduced to a bystander.

But there is one thing the Obama administration can do to shape this scary pathway for the better: leave behind enough ground troops inside Kurdistan to effectively take it off the table regarding future civil strife. If we don't, we're essentially punishing the Kurdistanis for their past and current success in not constituting a sinkhole for U.S. blood and treasure.

That's immoral.

Such "trip wire" deployments have been enormously successful in the past, including our military cooperation with South Korea since the Korean War and with Kuwait since the first Iraq War. It is a cheap and honorable commitment to make to the Kurdistanis, allowing them to continue serving as a model of economic advance and political stability to the rest of Iraq.

(Thomas P.M. Barnett is a visiting scholar at the University of Tennessee's Howard Baker Center and a contributor to the Knoxville News-Sentinel. Contact him at tom(at)thomaspmbarnett.com.)

**TIME**

January 28, 2009

## Iraq's Election Fuels Tension on Kurdish Fault Line

By Abigail Hauslohner / Khanaqin

Most discussion about the security dangers of U.S. withdrawal from Iraq tends to center on the threats of jihadist insurgents, friction between the Sunni Awakening militias and the Shi'ite-led government, and intra-Shi'ite power struggles. But U.S. commanders in Diyala province believe that mounting tensions between Baghdad and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in the north could produce one of the most dangerous flash points.

U.S. officers in Diyala have spent weeks mediating between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi military over security arrangements for next week's provincial elections. The national army had planned to set up security checkpoints in northern Diyala, just as they will do all over the country on polling day. But the Kurds were furious. While ethnically mixed Diyala is under the jurisdiction of Baghdad, the province's northern section is predominantly Kurdish and falls along the fuzzy but increasingly agitated fault line that separates the Kurdish north from the rest of Iraq. The Kurds complained that the Iraqi army might interfere with their votes and insisted on matching its deployment with Peshmerga forces. After a flurry of helicopter shuttles between Kurdistan and Diyala and well over 40 hours of stubborn negotiation, U.S. commanders last week brokered a deal that will see area security provided by a joint force of Iraqi-army and Peshmerga fighters, with U.S. troops present to make sure everyone stays calm. (See images of Iraq's northern border zone.)

"As long as coalition forces are between us, then we have nothing to be afraid of," said Mullah Bakhtiar, a powerful local Kurdish leader, during a meeting with Lieut. Colonel Mike Kasales, who commands U.S. troops in the area. And that's exactly what has American commanders worried about the situation that will result from U.S. moves to withdraw from Iraq. Similar election-day arrangements had to be brokered for contentious areas of ethnically mixed Nineveh, while the three provinces that fall in Iraqi Kurdistan and the fiercely contested province of Kirkuk, won't vote until later this year.

Election-day arrangements may have been agreed to, but U.S. commanders based along the Kurdish-Arab fault line warn that a failure to resolve the larger issue of where Kurdish autonomy begins and ends before a U.S. withdrawal could be a dangerous mistake.

"President Obama says, 'Hey, we want you guys to accelerate your exit out of there.' There's a lot of anxiety associated with that statement here in Diyala," says Colonel Burt Thompson, the top U.S. military commander in the province. "The Kurds like us because we bring that stability. The Iraqis like us because we bring that stability ... I would not be surprised if you had a U.N. peacekeeping force here, in this part of the world, along the 140 line [dividing Iraqi Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq] as this thing matures and develops, to keep two belligerents away from each other."

The current Kurdish-Arab tension over ownership of northern Iraq dates back to Saddam Hussein's policies during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, when his regime murdered tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds and forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands more, resettling the territory with Iraqi Arabs from further south. After the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. protected a Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, and after the 2003 invasion, the Peshmerga moved down to take control of parts of Diyala, Nineveh and oil-rich Kirkuk, all of which they claim as historically Kurdish. Iraq's new constitution promised that the future status of those areas would be settled in a referendum, after a census had been held. But the census and the referendum have yet to take place, and the government in Baghdad has begun pushing back against the Kurdistan Regional Government's claims on the disputed zones.

Next week's election is particularly contentious, since it will most likely dilute some of the power of Kurdish politicians in assemblies representing the disputed areas — Kurds are currently overrepresented relative to their share of the population, say U.S. officials, because Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the 2005 election. A more representative turnout will probably change the local balance of power, which could in turn affect the future negotiations over the status of these areas. That's why local Kurdish leaders are going to great lengths to get out the vote. A high-ranking Kurdish official in Diyala's Khanaqin district said thousands of voters would be bussed down from Suleymaniya province in Kurdistan to cast their votes in Khanaqin. "Their names are registered here. They just work in Suleymaniya," he said. It is unclear what mechanism would prevent those voters from voting again in Suleymaniya's election.

"[The Kurds] think this town belongs to the Kurdistan government," said an Iraqi

army officer who was present during the negotiations over election security in Khanaqin. "It was Bush, the father, who made a line [in 1991] where the Iraqi army was not allowed to cross. This town is south of the line. [Disputed polling sites in] Sheikh Baba and Jabara are south of the line too. They want to make the Kurdish government as big as they can."

Underneath the tension over election security, then, is the knottier problem of where to draw the boundaries of the Kurdistan Regional Government's authority. The Kurdish alliance is confident of winning votes in Khanaqin, which was under Peshmerga control until last August. "There are a lot of folks up there who really don't consider themselves being a part of Diyala province," said Thompson at a U.S. base outside Baquba. "You talk to folks, and they're like, 'Governor who? Governor Ra'ad? He never visits us. We don't get anything from Diyala province.' ... The Kurds provide for basic needs. If you've got good, clean water, predictable electricity, roads are being built, kids are going to school, and the quality of life is O.K., then guess where your loyalties and allegiances are going to be."

Neither side is expecting the election to alleviate the growing friction. From the doorstep of his modest farmhouse outside Khanaqin, Mudhar Mohammed Madloun can see a Peshmerga checkpoint on one hill and an Iraqi army checkpoint barely half a mile away. Similar pairings are scattered along Diyala's contentious fault line. "The Peshmerga checkpoint has been here since the fall [of Saddam]. The Iraqi army checkpoint has been here for a few months," said Madloun. "They are not both necessary."

At a meeting with U.S. officials two weeks ago, local Kurdish leaders expressed concern that the forces sent by Baghdad and the Kurdish government to provide election security may not depart after the votes are counted. "I'm worried the Iraqi army won't leave. Then the Peshmerga won't leave. Then we will have a militarized city," the Kurdish mayor of Khanaqin, who asked to remain unnamed, warned. "What if they fought?"

"[Then] we'll see who wins," joked Kasales. Everyone in the room laughed. But once U.S. forces are gone, the reality might not be so funny.

THE  
WALRUS

Jan/Feb 2009

## RATTLE AND HUM

# Hello, Baghdad! A Kurdish

## singer rocks Iraq

by Emily Paddon & Taylor Owen

ERBIL — It is the eighth day of our sponsored junket of “The Other Iraq” (a.k.a. Kurdistan), during which we have ridden the roller coasters at a new mountaintop theme park, been paraded through tony shopping malls, and met with the region’s political, media, and academic leaders. Dusk finds us in the Kurdish capital, exploring an 8,000-year-old citadel where Alexander the Great is said to have once clashed with the Persians, when our cellphone rings. “Would you like to come over for a European drinking party?” a familiar voice asks. It is Zakaria, the Kurdish rock star-cum-nation builder to whom we were introduced days ago. Our flight to Jordan departs at 3 a.m. from the modernized Erbil International Airport, but we can’t resist. “Bring your bags,” the voice commands.

No stranger to late-night escapes, Zakaria snuck out of his family home in a less prosperous Erbil at 4 a.m. fifteen or so years ago. Fleeing persecution under Saddam Hussein, the teenage piano prodigy made his way to Sweden, where he scraped by as a backup singer in local bands. Eventually, he started writing his own music, a blend of traditional Kurdish marching rhythms and pop genres that became anthemic to Kurds around the world.

He returned to the Kurdistan Region after the fall of Baghdad in 2003 with big plans to help rebuild his homeland. Many Iraqi Kurds, along with brothers in Turkey, Syria, and Iran, grew up dreaming of a sovereign state, but their nationalist ambitions have been somewhat tempered by Kurds’ rising fortune in post-Saddam Iraq. They now control much of Iraq’s oil (if you include the contested Kirkuk region) and are friendly toward the United States. Iraq’s president and foreign minister, both Kurds, ensure that Kurdish concerns are on the national agenda.

Zakaria, who arrived on the scene with plenty of investment capital, has been party to this progress. He swiftly rose to the upper echelons of the establishment, befriending the Barzanis, Kurdistan’s ruling family, and brought international visibility to the cause. It’s rumoured that when George W. Bush visited Iraq, he met with Zakaria, who has become the primary symbol of Kurdish nationalism. As one native explained, “Imagine if you were Irish, and Bono was the Pope.”

We are soon whisked off in a convoy of four white SUVs without licence plates to meet Zakaria at Naz City, a luxury complex he built with help from the Barzanis, on the edge of Erbil, to lure members of the wealthy and educated Kurdish diaspora back home. The development consists of seven high-rise apartment buildings, an underground garage with 1,100 parking spots, an outdoor gym, two tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a twenty-four-hour security system Zakaria claims to have designed himself.

A couple of guards usher our cars from the darkness of the countryside into the electrified compound through pastel peach-coloured gates. While Naz is said to be 80 percent full — housing seven ministers, 112 members of parliament, and fifty-six university professors — we don’t see a soul until we are greeted by Zakaria’s manager at the entrance to one of the high-rises.

He informs us that the evening’s festivities will take place in the building’s model penthouse. We are given a perfunctory buyer’s tour: master bedroom with mountain view, “children’s office,” and a cavernous living room with black pleather couches lining the walls. “Did you expect to see anything like this in Iraq?”



he asks hopefully. It is a question we’ve been asked continually during our time in Kurdistan, and, once again, we affirm that we did not.

Zakaria is late. We sit silently on one of the couches and stare at the steaming Kurdish barbecue prepared by his mother. When the star finally arrives, he offers us drinks from a bar stocked with Black Label, Champagne, and Chablis, and calls for his humidor. Cocky but cool, he tells us he is going to build a “medical city” adjacent to Naz, and similar compounds in the Kurdish cities of Sulemanian and Dohuk. He says he’s also financing large-scale construction projects in Baghdad. If the Kurds and Arabs are ever to get along, he explains, someone needs to start building bridges.

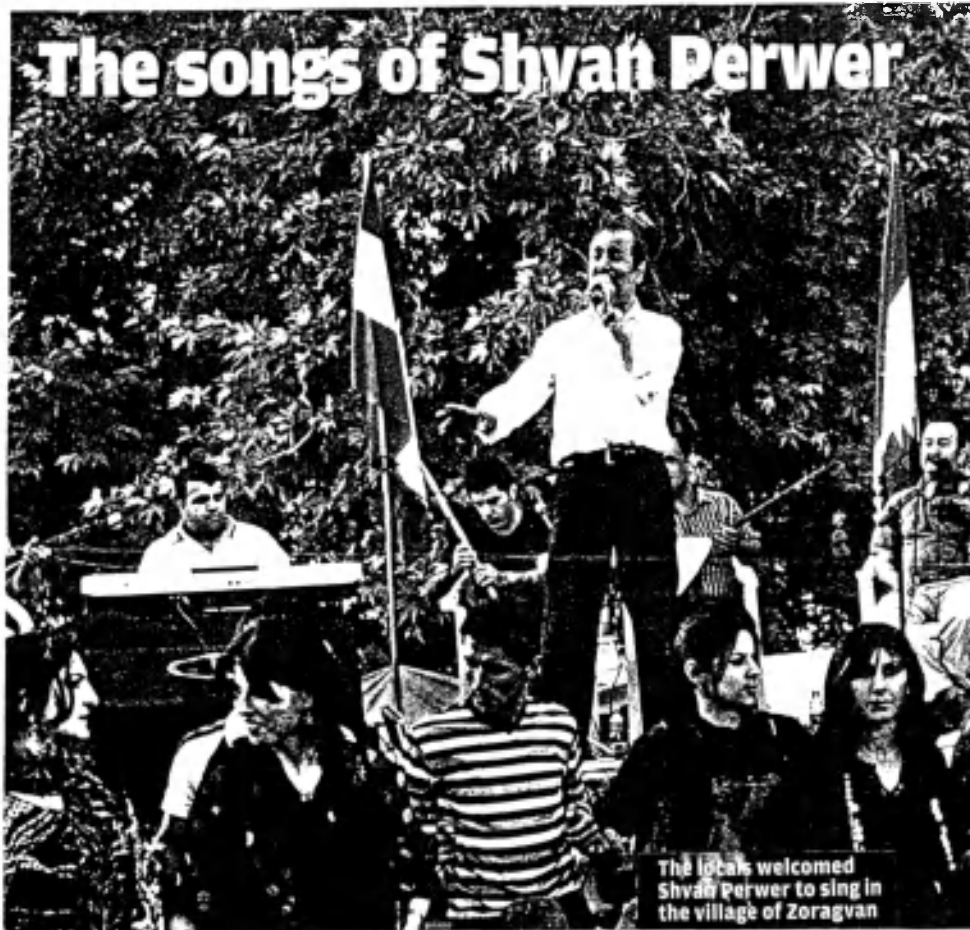
We lose track of him when he heads off to mingle to the tune of his last album with other guests who’ve been trickling in. There’s the head of security for Erbil, the president of the Kurdistan Student Union (a breeding ground for political fervour), and a high-ranking member of the Kurdish Democratic Party — not to mention the heavily armed, Peshmerga-trained bodyguards who have protected Zakaria night and day ever since Kurdish forces discovered a death list during a raid on an Islamic terrorist group; Zakaria was listed fourth.

Near midnight, the bodyguards gather and lock arms, circling the room in a traditional Kurdish dance. Zakaria, perched on the bar, Cohiba in mouth, bellows his own name. “Zakaria!” his men holler back. He raises his hands in triumph and cries out again. Unlike Zakaria, the guards haven’t been drinking, but they are nevertheless whipped into a frenzy, kicking higher and shouting louder. The call-and-response escalates until the din surely echoes through the compound.

As our departure time approaches, we are forced into the fray to make inquiries; we need a ride to the airport. But Zakaria wants his European drinking party to continue. He pulls a cellphone from the pocket of his Italian suit and spouts a stream of Kurdish before turning back to us. “Don’t look so worried,” he says with a sly smile. “I’m holding your plane.”



THE MIDDLE EAST JANUARY 2009



CHRIS KUTSCHERA reports from Iraqi Kurdistan.

HE HAS SUNG with his band in the some of the best halls around the world, in Australia, New Zealand, America, North Africa, and all over Europe, almost everywhere it seems, except in his native Turkey. But today he is singing in the open air, in the mountains of Kurdistan, at Zoragvan, near the village of Billeh, in the district of Barzan. Sitting on a small hill looking like a natural auditorium, hundreds of Kurdish villagers, men dressed

in their traditional *chalwar* (Kurdish trousers) and red turban, women and small girls in their colourful long dresses, applaud Shvan Perwer, probably the world's most famous Kurdish singer.

So why was Shvan Perwer singing at Zoragvan, a small hamlet which does not figure on any map and is situated at the end of a tiring two and a half hours' drive from Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan?

"The struggle of these people started

from these villages", says Shvan Perwer. "Barzan means a lot to us; it gave birth to many Kurdish heroes, Sheikh Abdes Salam Barzani, Sheikh Ahmed Barzani and general Barzani ... Sheikh Abdes Salam asked for freedom, for a nation. And each family gave a martyr. Many children have no father, and many women lost their husbands. They are so sad they don't want to marry again. They keep their martyred husband in their heart," he adds, recalling the tragic events of July 1983, when 8,000 Barzani males, aged between 14 and 70, were rounded up by Saddam Hussein's security forces and taken to the deserts of Southern Iraq, summarily executed and buried in the sand. "These village people and me, we belong to the same family," concludes Perwer.

Perwer was born in 1955 in a village between Diyarbekir and Urfa, in Kurdistan Turkey. His father, a farmer, had a beautiful voice and played the Kurdish flute. His mother and his uncles were also musical. In short, he was born into a family of musicians. After he left Turkey in 1976, he studied music in Germany and became a militant singer - at one time close to the PKK - and he has not been allowed to return to Turkey for the last 32 years. "But we will see freedom for all Kurdistan," claims Perwer. "It is not a fantasy, but a

reality. Twenty years ago, I wrote a song called *Dream Song* ... I met Sheikh Said and Seyid Reza, as well as other leaders of Kurdish uprisings in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and all of them said 'Yes, you will see a free Kurdistan.' Indeed, today, my dream has come true."

Kurdistan Iraq was free - partially free - in 1991, after the Kurdish uprising, when Perwer visited for the first time and gave a concert at Rowanduz, a city carved in the mountain. "I tried to give some hope to the Kurdish refugees coming back from Turkey and Iran ... At that time the Iraqi Kurds were in big trouble: they were oppressed by Saddam Hussein's regime who wanted to wreak genocide on the Kurds. It was so brutal. Remember the situation then. Everything - villages and cities - was destroyed. Now," observes Perwer, it is like paradise. There are schools universities, highways... And we have a regional republic (sic), a democratic parliament. All the Kurdish parties are working together in the parliament. Slowly we are going to see a social-democracy."

During his concert at Zoragvan, Perwer sang his well-known political songs and also his lyrical love songs. Soon the crowd came down from the hill and started dancing in front of the makeshift podium, men and women waving the Kurdish flag, which

**"All the Kurdish parties are working together in the parliament. Slowly we are going to see a social-democracy"**

was flown for the first time in 1946 when Qazi Mohammed established the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in Iran, the same flag that now flies all across Iraqi Kurdistan. It was a happy day the villagers of Barzan will never forget.

"This flag is the symbol of the Kurdish nation," noted Perwer, "all people have a symbol. Without a symbol there is no nation. We have fought long and hard to raise this flag in our sky. It is the symbol of the culture and the folklore of our nation."

Perwer left Zoragvan promising that his next big concert would be at Halabja - if possible on the 16 March - in memory of the day in 1988 the inhabitants of Halabja were bombed with chemicals. Slowly but surely the Kurds are reclaiming what was lost for so long. ■

## Israel and Turkey

# Bad new vibrations

ISTANBUL

**The special relationship between the Turkish and Jewish states is at risk**



**WIDESPREAD** outrage over Israel's assault on Gaza has sharply soured the tone of Turkey's people and government towards the Jewish state. The prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, castigated it for hammering the Palestinians. So far he has resisted a clamour in Turkey to loosen or even sever his country's close ties with Israel. But some advocates of the strategic friendship between the two countries fear it may be at risk.

Behind the scenes, Turkish policymakers, especially military ones, still cherish their ties with Israel. Speaking this week in Switzerland, Mr Erdogan seemed keen to draw a line under the row. He explained that he was incensed by the war in Gaza particularly because his tireless mediation had brought Israel and Syria close to a deal over the Golan Heights. He said he had also been trying to fix a deal with Hamas over a prisoner exchange, including freedom for a kidnapped Israeli corporal.

Similar rows have occurred before. In 2004 he annoyed Israel by calling it a terrorist state after it assassinated Hamas's founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, as he left a mosque in Gaza. Mr Erdogan then invited Khaled Meshaal, Hamas's present leader, to visit Turkey. But Israeli-Turkish relations were mended after prodding by the United States. Military co-operation went on. Israel has invariably chosen to turn a deaf ear to Turkey's occasionally fierce rhetoric for the sake of that strategic liaison. In a bid to soothe the anger of Jews and Israelis, Turkey's foreign minister, Ali Babacan, urged Hamas to decide "whether it wants to be an armed group or a political movement".

But this time Mr Erdogan had been a lot angrier. Israel, he railed, was "committing a crime against humanity...The world must not turn a blind eye to Israel's savagery...How can such a country, which totally ignores and does

not implement the UN Security Council's resolutions be let through the gates of the UN?"

An education ministry circular particularly annoyed Israel by telling Turkish schoolchildren to observe a minute's silence in solidarity with Palestinian children. In the event, the Israelis persuaded the Turks to cancel a proposed essay and drawing contest for schoolchildren to air their feelings of hatred towards Israel. Israeli officials were apparently poised to respond by proposing a programme in Israeli schools for discussing the genocide of Armenians by Turks in the first world war.

In any case, anti-Israeli anger on Turkey's streets rose during the assault on Gaza. In rallies across the country demonstrators chanted "Killer Israel! Nazi Israel! Turkish armies, march on Jerusalem!" Calls to boycott Israeli goods and scrap military co-operation grew louder.

Not for the first time, anti-Semitism reared its head. In the western city of Eskisehir, members of a nationalist group brandished placards that read, "Only dogs can enter: no Armenians or Jews!" An outcry from Turkey's 25,000-strong Jewish community, plus pressure from the foreign ministry, shamed a local prosecutor into launching a probe. Turkey's Jewish community issued a rare statement saying that "we Turkish Jews, an inseparable part of the Turkish Republic, feel deep sorrow for the comments appearing in recent days in certain media outlets that belittle and insult our religion and present us as targets."

### An ancient alliance

Turks deny accusations of anti-Semitism, noting that the Ottoman Sultans opened their doors over 500 years ago to Jews fleeing from Christian persecution in Spain. In 1948, Turkey was among the first countries to recognise Israel. Under a military co-operation deal in

1996, Israeli pilots have been training in Turkish skies. In 2007, bilateral trade rose to \$2.7 billion. Between 2006 and 2007, the number of Israelis visiting Turkey went up from 362,000 to 511,400—more than 7% of Israel's population. Turkey has also earned praise from the Americans for its recent mediation between Syria and Israel.

But anti-Semitism is often part of a general anti-Christian and anti-Western feeling. "Jew" and "Armenian" are both often used as slurs. Last year a Pew Global Attitudes Survey found that anti-Jewish sentiment in Turkey had risen: 76% said they had negative views towards Jews, whereas only 7% said they looked kindly on them.

Anti-Semitism was also blatant during a campaign against an Israeli financier, Sammy Ofer, who had planned to invest with a Turkish partner in rehabilitating Istanbul's historic Galata district and its port near the Golden Horn. The tender was cancelled amid widespread claims that the deal was crooked and that "Jewish capital" was trying to take over the country.

Radical Turkish Islamists have long tried to stir up anti-Semitism. Their long-standing jibe against the secular Kemal Ataturk, modern Turkey's founder, was that he was "really a Jew". In recent years assorted leftists and Kemalists have joined an anti-Jewish chorus that frequently accompanies hostility to America, which is often accused of plotting with Israel to set up an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq that will eventually take large chunks out of south-eastern Turkey.

Behind-the-scenes lobbying by Turkish, American and European Union diplomats may have persuaded Mr Erdogan to tone down his language. He recently told Turkey's parliament, "As a leader, I have said that anti-Semitism is a crime against humanity." But if anti-Israeli rhetoric in Turkey persists, the Israeli lobby in the United States could hit back by backing a congressional resolution to call the mass killings by Turks of some 1m Armenians "genocide". Hitherto, Israel's influential lobby in America has repeatedly helped block such a resolution, though Barack Obama and his vice-president, Joe Biden, have both referred to genocide in the past and have pledged to back the bill.

Secret talks between Turkey and Armenia to open diplomatic ties and reopen their borders are hotly opposed by some in the Armenian diaspora's lobby in America. American Jews have long felt queasy about defending Turkey over the massacre of Armenians. Hitherto, pragmatism has prevailed and they have sided with the Turks. But if Mr Erdogan keeps on lambasting Israel, they may change their mind.

# L'Irak prolonge son expérience démocratique

**LE FIGARO**

31 janvier - dimanche 1<sup>er</sup> février 2009

**MOYEN-ORIENT**

Les élections provinciales organisées aujourd'hui vont tester la viabilité d'un modèle unique dans le monde arabe.

DES ÉLECTIONS provinciales se tiennent aujourd'hui dans quatorze des dix-huit gouvernorats d'Irak. Ce scrutin, qui verra pour la première fois la participation de presque toutes les composantes politiques et ethniques de la société irakienne, constitue une étape clé dans la reconstruction institutionnelle du pays, naguère proche d'exploser dans plusieurs sanglantes guerres civiles, ethniques et confessionnelles.

La large participation prévue tranche avec celle des précédentes élections provinciales de janvier 2005, boycottées dans leur immense majorité par les Arabes sunnites et une partie des chiites. Le résultat de ce boycott avait été de donner l'essentiel des pouvoirs aux partis chiites rentrés d'exil, le Conseil

suprême islamique d'Irak (CSII) et le Dawa du premier ministre actuel, Nouri al-Maliki, ainsi qu'aux Kurdes, alliés objectifs propulsés à la tête du nouveau protectorat américain.

**Enjeu économique**

Les Arabes sunnites et les chiites du courant de Moqtada al-Sadr, contestant des élections tenues sous une occupation étrangère, s'étaient, eux-mêmes, exclus du jeu politique. Quatre ans plus tard, ces courants sont déterminés à participer à la compétition.

Les enjeux de ces élections dépassent le strict cadre provincial. La Constitution irakienne a été amendée fin 2005 sous l'influence de l'ambassadeur américain de l'époque, Zalmay Khalilzad. Pour convaincre les Arabes sunnites -ulcérés par la fin de leur domination historique- de participer aux nouvelles institutions, une plus grande autonomie financière et politique a été accordée aux provinces irakiennes. Chaque gouver-

norat se voit dorénavant attribuer, en fonction de son importance démographique, une part du budget fédéral, et sera maître d'une grande partie de son utilisation.

Ces élections ne se tiendront pas dans les trois provinces kurdes, Erbil, Souleimaniya et Dohuk, autonomes dans les faits, et auront lieu à une date ultérieure cette année. Ce décalage de calendrier marque une nouvelle étape de la discrète marche vers l'indépendance du Kurdistan irakien. Elles n'auront pas lieu non plus dans la province de Kirkouk, revendiquée par les Kurdes, faute d'accord sur le corps électoral.

Mais, dans le reste de l'Irak, plus de quatre cents partis sont en lice. Les quatre provinces où le scrutin s'annonce disputé sont celles de Ninive (capitale Mossoul) au Nord, al-Ambar (capitale Ramadi) à l'Ouest, Bassora au Sud, et Bagdad, la capitale, au Centre. Mossoul reste l'une des provinces les plus volatiles d'Irak. La branche

locale d'al-Qaida reste active dans cette région peuplée d'Arabes sunnites, de Kurdes, et de minorités turkmènes et chrétiennes. Le boycott du précédent scrutin par les sunnites avait permis aux Kurdes d'obtenir une écrasante majorité. Cela devrait changer dimanche.

Al-Ambar, presque entièrement peuplée d'Arabes sunnites, était en 2005 le bastion de l'insurrection antiméricaine, et à peine 1 % des électeurs avaient participé au scrutin. L'essor du Mouvement du réveil, milices sunnites qui s'étaient retournées contre les excès d'al-Qaida en Irak, a complètement changé la donne. Les nouvelles élections pourraient consacrer l'essor politique de ce mouvement, qui a perquis le succès du « sursaut » militaire américain contre l'insurrection sunnite.

**Paradoxe américain**

Bassora, gouvernorat majoritairement chiite, qui contrôle le seul débouché maritime de l'Irak et une bonne part de ses ressources

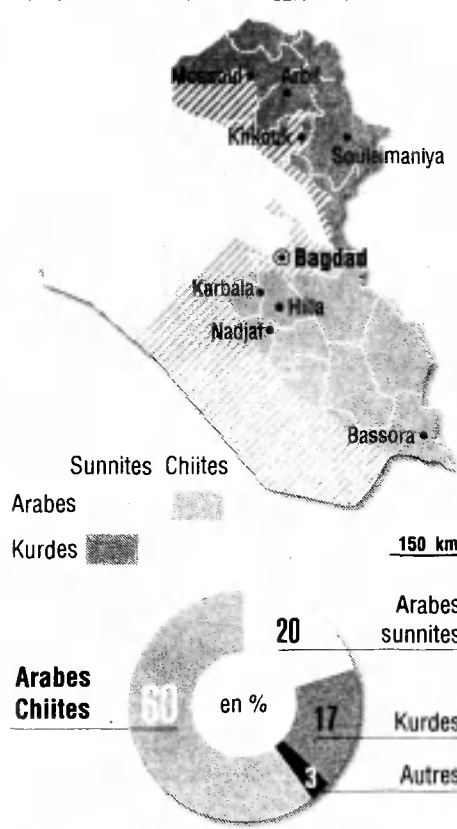
**Les enjeux multiples du scrutin provincial**

L'IRAK POLITIQUE



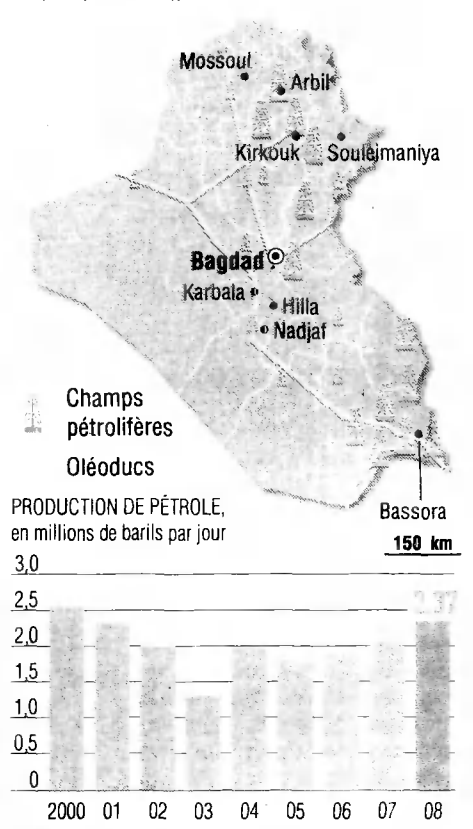
Source : AFP

LA RÉPARTITION ETHNICO-RELIGIEUSE



Source : Cartothèque de l'Université du Texas

LE PÉTROLE IRAKIEN



Sources : Idé et cartothèque de l'Université du Texas



pétrolières, sera disputé entre les partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr, le jeune clerc antiaméricain, et leurs rivaux chiïtes du parti Fadila (la Vertu). Bagdad enfin, champ de la guerre confessionnelle entre chiïtes et sunnites en 2006-2007, verra la domination des partis chiïtes du gouvernement, le CSII et

cahier de doléances numérique qui est aussi, insiste-t-elle, un « cahier de propositions ». Disponible sur le site Internet de campagne de la candidate aux primaires UMP pour l'Ile-de-France, il permet aux Franciliens de signaler, sur la carte de leur région, les points noirs de leur vie quotidienne : l'occupation américaine de l'Irak transports, économie, culture...

ront sans doute de voter en fonction de critères ethniques et religieux, ce scrutin constitue une étape clé dans la reconstruction institutionnelle de l'Irak, encore fragile, mais qui a fini par prendre une dimension nationale.

Par un curieux paradoxe, l'occupation américaine de l'Irak

aura permis, malgré les violences et les guerres qui ont menacé, jusqu'à ses bases, l'État irakien, le développement d'une expérience démocratique unique dans le monde arabe. Les nouvelles élections provinciales constituent un nouveau test pour sa viabilité.

ADRIEN JAULMES

**LE FIGARO** samedi 31 janvier - dimanche 1<sup>er</sup> février 2009

# Les tensions à Gaza ravivent l'antisémitisme en Turquie

## MOYEN-ORIENT

Le coup de colère d'Erdogan à Davos sur la situation au Proche-Orient a déçu la communauté juive turque qui attendait un message d'apaisement.

Istanbul

LES TURCS ont l'habitude des coups de sang de leur premier ministre. Dans l'ambiance feutrée de Davos, la colère de Recep Tayyip Erdogan a surpris. Jeudi soir, il a quitté avec fracas un débat sur la situation au Proche-Orient, vexé de ne pas obtenir la parole après un discours enflammé de Shimon Pérès, le président israé-

lien, justifiant la guerre à Gaza.

Cette passe d'armes verbale a valu au chef du gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc les félicitations du Hamas et des députés libanais. À son retour du Forum économique mondial, à l'aéroport d'Istanbul, il a également été accueilli comme le sauveur de « l'honneur turc » par quelques milliers de supporteurs. Hier matin, en Turquie, experts en relations internationales, diplomates et éditorialistes s'interrogeaient sur les répercussions de cette attitude sur l'alliance turco israélienne, déjà fortement chahutée ces dernières semaines. Mais aussi sur la crédibilité du rôle de médiateur d'Ankara sur la scène orientale.

## « Citoyens de seconde classe »

Comme du temps de la guerre contre le Liban en 2006, tout au long de l'offensive de Tshal, des manifestations rythmées par des slogans antisémites ont réuni des dizaines de milliers de personnes, à l'appel d'organisations islamistes ou d'extrême gauche. Des étoiles de David ont été brûlées devant les représentations diplomatiques. « Cette fois-ci, l'hostilité a dépassé le cadre habituel, c'était beaucoup plus agressif », ressent une intellectuelle juive, qui veut conserver l'anonymat.

Dès les premiers dérapages antisémites, la presse libérale a d'ailleurs tiré la sonnette d'alarme : des panneaux avec l'inscription « Les Juifs et les Arméniens ne peuvent pas rentrer, les chiens oui » ont été brandis, des affiches géantes ont été placardées sur les murs d'Istanbul avec le slogan « tu ne peux pas être l'enfant de Moïse » accompagnant la photo d'un chausson de bébé ensanglanté. La minute de silence en mémoire des enfants tués à Gaza observée par tous les écoliers turcs a également marqué les esprits. Confronté à de vives critiques, le ministère de l'Éducation a finalement annulé le concours de dessins et la composition sur Gaza qui avaient été programmés.

« Il n'y a cependant pas eu une seule agression physique, seules deux synagogues ont été graffitées et les autorités religieuses ont appelé au calme lors du prêche du ven-

dredi », tient à souligner Silvyo Ovadya. Mais le président de la communauté juive, habituellement enclin à relativiser les tensions, court d'un plateau télé à un autre pour dissiper les risques d'amalgame entre critiques antisyoniennes et antisémites, entre Juifs et Israéliens : « Les discours des hommes politiques ont encouragé la confusion. »

Cinq associations juives américaines ont envoyé une lettre ouverte à M. Erdogan pour lui faire part de leur préoccupation. À Istanbul, un immense drapeau palestinien flotte toujours dans la rue de la synagogue Neve Shalom, une des cibles des attentats d'al-Qaïda qui avaient fait 63 morts en 2003.

La récente mise au point du vice-premier ministre a donc été reçue avec soulagement. Cemil Çiçek a déclaré qu'il n'y avait « aucune différence entre les citoyens juifs et les autres » en Turquie. Mais parmi les diatribes anti-israéliennes quasi quotidiennes de M. Erdogan pendant le conflit, une remarque sur l'accueil des Juifs qui ont fui l'Inquisition au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle ne passe pas. « Nous sommes les descendants des Ottomans qui vous ont sauvés des Espagnols il y a cinq cents ans », a-t-il lancé. « Est-ce que je suis toujours considérée comme une invitée sur ces terres où je suis née et où j'ai grandi, où je remplis mes devoirs en tant que citoyenne, a réagi Leyla Navaro, psychologue, dans une tribune publiée dans le quotidien *Radiikal*. Ajoutant : « On me tient responsable de la guerre au Moyen-Orient parce qu'il est écrit "judaisme" dans la case religion de ma carte d'identité. » Au-delà d'une peur de l'antisémitisme, ses doutes, largement partagés par la communauté, questionnent la place allouée aux minorités non musulmanes dans la République turque. « Nous faisons notre service militaire, payons nos impôts comme n'importe quel Turc, nous ne voulons pas être perçus comme des citoyens de seconde classe », résume Izel Rozenal, caricaturiste de presse.

LAURE MARCHAND



« Vous avez la psychologie d'un coupable (...) Vous savez très bien tuer les gens », a lancé Recep Tayyip Erdogan à Shimon Pérès, jeudi lors d'un débat à Davos, avant de brutalement quitter le plateau. Michel Euler/AP

TURQUIE

# D'où vient l'extrême droite nationaliste ?

Un procès impliquant plus de quatre-vingts personnes, dont plusieurs généraux à la retraite, remet le réseau Ergenekon sur le devant de la scène. Retour sur un demi-siècle de combats souterrains.

BUGÜN  
Istanbul

**L**e réseau Ergenekon, dont on parle tant aujourd'hui en Turquie, n'est que le énième avatar d'un réseau souterrain qui s'adapte avec une certaine souplesse à différents contextes en nouant des alliances circonstanciées et en privilégiant certaines thématiques en fonction du moment. Etendant ses ramifications jusqu'au plus profond de l'Etat, raison pour laquelle on l'appelle chez nous "Etat profond", l'Ergenekon [nom du lieu mythique d'Asie centrale où serait née la nation turque] tire son origine des réseaux de type Gladio mis en place au début des années 1950 dans le cadre de la guerre froide. A la différence de ses équivalents européens, ce réseau n'a jamais été démantelé. Depuis lors, son seul objectif consiste, tout en encerclant et en contrôlant les institutions légales de l'Etat ainsi que les gouvernements élus, à susciter de la crainte auprès de la population afin de la soumettre et de pouvoir ainsi demeurer le véritable centre du pouvoir dans le pays.

Toutefois, les méthodes employées par ce réseau souterrain ont varié selon les époques. Ainsi, au cours des années 1970, l'affrontement gauche-droite et musulmans sunnites-alevis [chiites hétérodoxes anatoliens] a été l'élément déstabilisateur idéal et fut dès lors employé jusqu'au coup d'Etat du 12 septembre 1980. En organisant des attentats contre des intellectuels de gauche, des pogroms antialevis, comme celui de Marash, en 1978, qui a fait plus de 100 morts, et en orchestrant des provocations lors des célébrations du 1<sup>er</sup> mai 1977 place Taksim à Istanbul, qui conduisirent à la mort de plus de 34 personnes, le but était d'engendrer un chaos permettant de créer les conditions favorables à la réalisation d'un coup d'Etat militaire [la Turquie a connu des coups d'Etat militaires en 1960, 1971 et 1980]. Dès lors qu'à l'époque la cible toute désignée était la gauche, ce réseau utilisa des jeunes militants de l'extrême droite nationaliste turque

**■ Vers l'Est**  
*"Le réseau Ergenekon entend rompre avec l'Europe et les Etats-Unis dès lors que ce sont désormais les exigences démocratiques qui conditionnent l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne et même à l'OTAN", souligne Beril Dedeoglu dans Star. "Les personnalités animant ce réseau regardent vers l'Asie centrale, où l'élément turcophone est important, mais aussi vers la Russie, qui, avec un régime de plus en plus autoritaire et un discours antioccidental, constitue à leur sens un modèle."*

pour effectuer ces basses œuvres, tout en réussissant à amadouer l'opinion de droite nationaliste au nom de la peur du communisme.

**SE MAINTENIR EN PROVOQUANT UNE POLARISATION DE L'OPINION**

Dans les années 1990, ce réseau, connu alors sous le nom de Susurluk [du nom du lieu de l'accident de voiture qui, en novembre 1996, révéla à l'opinion turque l'étendue des liaisons dangereuses entre appareil d'Etat, classe politique et mafia d'extrême droite],

se concentre davantage sur la question sensible du moment, à savoir le terrorisme du PKK. La question kurde devient alors le domaine d'action privilégié de l'"Etat profond". Sous prétexte de lutter contre le PKK, cette structure occulte suscite l'affrontement turco-kurde afin de rendre le pays ingouvernable et de maintenir son pouvoir intact. En adéquation avec cette orientation, ce réseau instrumentalise d'anciens militants d'extrême droite ainsi que la mafia turque, alors en concurrence avec la pègre kurde. Le thème de l'"Etat unitaire en danger" face au séparatisme kurde est alors – et est encore – largement exploité pour s'attirer les faveurs de la population.

A partir des années 2000, tout en continuant d'instrumentaliser la question kurde, cet "Etat profond" va privilégier une nouvelle thématique : la montée de l'AKP et le danger de l'apparition d'une théocratie islamiste en Turquie. Dans ce contexte, "Ergenekon" n'est rien d'autre que le nom qu'a pris à partir des années 2000 cette structure assez souple qui s'est immiscée dans l'appareil d'Etat et qui depuis des décennies mène des actions illégales pour se maintenir au pouvoir. Dès lors que la phobie qu'il faut entretenir devient maintenant la "prise du pouvoir par les religieux", les alliances et l'identité des provocateurs et des criminels qui vont être utilisés pour les basses besognes doivent s'adapter à ce nouveau contexte. L'"Etat profond" utilise alors les partisans les plus fanatiques de la tendan-

ce "souverainiste" qui réunit en son sein des ultrakémalistes de gauche et de droite partisans

d'une indépendance totale de la Turquie et donc antieuropéens, anti-FMI..., et réussit à obtenir le soutien moral de la partie de l'opinion turque dont la fibre laïque est la plus sensible.

Ce "Gladio", cet "Etat profond" a donc réussi à se maintenir en instrumentalisant diverses problématiques au gré des tendances du moment, mais surtout en provoquant une polarisation de l'opinion et en réussissant ainsi chaque fois à obtenir les faveurs d'une partie contre une autre. Ce réseau a ainsi obtenu les faveurs de l'opinion conservatrice contre la gauche dans les années 1970, celles des nationalistes au cours des années 1990 au nom de la lutte contre le PKK, et enfin celles des milieux laïcistes au prétexte d'empêcher l'"instauration de la charia".

Lors du scandale de Susurluk (1996), révélant des liens très étroits entre Etat, classe politique et mafia d'extrême droite, la gauche avait organisé des meetings de protestation, qui furent boycottés par les partisans du parti conservateur islamiste Refah [ancêtre de l'AKP], au pouvoir dans le cadre d'une coalition avec un parti impliqué dans ce scandale. Aujourd'hui c'est l'inverse. En effet, alors que la tendance conservatrice, favorable à l'AKP au pouvoir, appuie le processus judiciaire engagé contre le réseau Ergenekon, les partisans du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, opposition) prennent fait et cause pour les membres de cette organisation. Tant et si bien que l'opinion turque ne parvient jamais à se dresser comme un seul homme, au-delà de ses orientations politiques, pour s'opposer aux réseaux criminels et à la négation de l'Etat de droit qu'incarne aujourd'hui Ergenekon. Or l'"Etat profond" sort toujours gagnant de ce genre de division.

**Gülray Gökürtük**