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IRAQ: THE HANGING OF "CHEMICAL ALI"

Ali al-Majid, nicknamed "Chemical Ali", a cousin of Saddam Hussein and the main organiser and enforcer of the Anfal campaign, was executed by hanging on the 25th of this month. This was the fourth death sentence passed on Ali al-Majid, all of which were for crimes committed against Iraqi Kurds or Shiites. Thus he was sentenced to death in June 2007 for having ordered the gas attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja on 16 March 1988, and then in

December 2008 for war crimes during the Shiite uprising that was drowned in blood in 1991. In March 2009, another court found him guilty of murdering dozens of Shiites in 1999 in Baghdad's Sadr City quarter.

As one of the principal public figures of the Baathist regime, considered to be Saddam Hussein's right hand man, he was a member of the Command Council of the Revolution, the highest organ of the Baghdad regime, and ordered several bru-

tal and bloody repressions throughout the country. In March 1987 he was given full powers to crush the Kurdish rebellion in the North of the country. Arrested in August 2003, he was one of the 52 most wanted people sought by the Coalition forces, whose pictures had been printed on a set of playing cards. Ali al-Majid was the King of Spades on this set.

While the majority of the Kurdish and Shiite population received with some satisfaction

the announcing of his execution, the Kurdistan Regional Government expressed its regret about the terms of the sentence itself, which does not include the crime of "genocide". This has been demanded all along by the Kurds, for the actions committed in the course of the *Anfal* campaign. Majid Hamad Amin Jamil, Kurdistan's Minister for Martyrs, stated: *"After having consulted several lawyers, we think that the individual sentences are fair enough but we have reservations about the charge of "crimes against humanity" since we consider that the gassing of Halabja, which killed over 5,000 people, was an act of genocide aimed at the Kurdish people. We have decided to appeal against this sentence"*.

The issue of recognising the genocidal nature of the *Anfal* campaign would also allow an increase in the compensation to its victims as well as bringing about greater international recognition of this dark page of Kurdish history. Thousands of people are still suffering from physical after-effects due to the chemical gasses, let alone the psychic consequences, as

The Kurdish jurist, Bakir Hama Sidiq, who himself had lost 23 members of his family during the 16 March 1988 attack on Halabja, explained in his plea during an appeal: *"It is important that the criminal charge of genocide be retained because there is no doubt that what happened at Halabja in 16 March 1988 was an act of genocide. This will help the victims to secure compensation. The government (of the day) claimed that Halabja was a military base, but in fact this action was a message to Iran, to show that the Iraqi leaders had no pity, even towards their own subjects. It was an act of genocide"*.

The Attorney General, Goran Adham, stated that he and his

team supported the sentence but that they were, nevertheless filing an appeal to secure a verdict of genocide, even though the recognition of *"crimes against humanity"* at Halabja could, according to the lawyers, still give the victims the possibility of filing civil suits to secure compensation for their sufferings: *"We are suing the foreign companies [that sold the chemical gases used as weapons] and the Central Government as well as the Kurdistan Regional Government before International Courts"*.

The Kurdistan Regional Government's spokesman, Kawa Mahmud, also expressed his government's support of the appeal against this sentence: *"We consider the verdict a just one but the failure to officially recognise this case as being one of genocide has aroused fears among our people. We are thus glad that the prosecution has filed this appeal"*.

The determination to appeal against the verdict does not, however, mean a postponement of the sentence. Goran Adham even said he was convinced that the execution would be carried out even before the court of appeal had made its ruling as the latter process would take several months; as indeed was the case.

Other sentences had disappointed the Prosecution. Both the former Defence Minister, Sultan Hashim al-Tai and the former Secret Service chief, Aziz al-Duri were sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment each, which the Public Prosecutors considered insufficient. Thus, Goran Adham also has appealed for stiffer sentences in their cases.

Hashim al-Tai was sentenced to death with Ali al-Majid in 2007 for crimes committed during the *Anfal* campaign. However, at

that time, the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and his Sunni Arab Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi, had refused to sign the sentence, to eventually sign it in February 2008.

However, some political observers consider that the determination to press on rapidly to carry out this execution is not without some electoral ends, with the approach General Elections in March 2010, especially as the debate about the banning of some candidates close to the old regime has revived anti-Baathist feelings, particularly in Shiite circles.

"The death sentence passed on Ali al-Majid in the Halabja case, could be used by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in his election campaign", wrote the analyst Haj Jelow Mari in the Iraqi daily Al-Mada. *"Maliki will thus be able to tell the street that it was he who that he was the one who had secured the execution of Saddam Hussein and that he would continue to take strict measures against Saddam's former assistants"*.

The execution finally took place a week after the sentence was passed. This time, unlike the execution of Saddam Hussein, no videos were shown of the hanging and only two still pictures were shown on Television, both showing the condemned man before his execution.

At Halabja there feelings were mixed between satisfaction and indifference to this execution, together with disappointment that the charge of genocide had not been accepted. The day of the execution a commemoration took place at the town cemetery, where thousands of victims of the 16 March were buried, including some unidentified ones in mass graves.

"I am not happy about this execution since it will not change anything for us", explained Yahya Nawzar, a Halabja schoolmaster. "He could even have been executed without the Halabja ver-

dict. What counted for us was the recognition of the genocide".

During the ceremony, in fact, banners were waved demanding this recognition. The town's

mayor, Khidr Karim Muhammad stated that he was optimistic about this question, thinking that the Supreme Court would end up by deciding in their favour.

SYRIA:

THE KURDS ARE IN AN INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION

Smugglers landed 123 refugees who said they were Kurds from Syria on the Corsican coast. Immediately transported by the French authorities to several administrative detention centres without being allowed to apply for asylum within the legal time limits, the refugees were finally released by the courts as the result of a heated controversy between the Minister of Immigration, Eric Besson, and the associations for the defence of refugees and the right of asylum, like the CIMADE or the *Forum des Réfugiés*.

In fact, the procedure for asylum seekers provides for the applicants to be placed in reception centres while applying for asylum — not in detention centres... The Minister of Immigration had then tried to argue that: "*it was impossible, in a few hours, to take, to the Southern end of Corsica, dozens of interpreters, lawyers, doctors of to find premises locally for detaining them that met all the legal standards*". However, the Freedom and Detention Judges of Marseille, Nimes and Rennes decided to free all the refugees, considering that they had not been informed of their rights and that they were not in detention — which implied that their detention had no legal context.

Eric Besson was thus obliged to retreat by cancelling the decree ordering their expulsion and by accepting that the refugees be housed "*in places of reception man-*

aged by the State in partnership with the Red Cross".

Quite apart from this purely French politico-legal controversy, the fate of these 123 Kurds has briefly put the fate of the Kurds in Syria, especially with regard to the "undocumented" Kurds — that is, those arbitrarily stripped of their Syrian nationality in the early 60s, who now number over 300,000.

Persecution of Kurds, whether stateless or not, is undiminished in Syria and the pressure on political movements and against Human Rights activists there is accentuating, though without being able to stifle their demands. Paradoxically enough, this can even lead them to formulating new political objectives, hitherto taboo in the allowable Syrian political area, possibly inspired by the Kurdish experiment in Iraq. Thus four members of the (banned) Yekiti party were arrested this month — not, in itself, an unusual occurrence — for having expressed the wish for political autonomy of the Kurdish regions in Syria.

This demand was openly formulated in December 2009 during the 6th Congress of the Yekiti party. The four men had argued in favour of autonomy as a solution to the Kurdish question in Syria, an idea that was being discussed inside the party, hitherto inclined to concentrate on the issues of Human Rights and on

the fate and liberties of the "undocumented" Kurds.

Following this, the four political leaders were arrested, although no direct link could be made between the position they took and their arrest. The four politicians arrested are: Hassan Ibrahim Saleh, born in 1947, Mohamed Mustafa, born in 1962, Maruf Mulla Ahmed, born 1952. All three are members of the Yekiti Political Committee and live in Qamishlo. The fourth, Anwar Nassi, a political activist, was born in 1962 at Amude.

All the Syrian Kurdish political parties and NGOs that defend human rights in Syria condemned their arrest.

Trials are also being held, for even more arbitrary reasons. Thus seven men, some of whom were members of a group of professional musicians, were arrested in October 2009 for having sung in Kurdish during a wedding party. The celebration was then broken up by the Syrian Security forces. The musicians and the brother of one of the best men were detained in a prison in Qamishlo. Some local NGOs have received testimony attesting to the torture being inflicted as a result of which one musician, Jamal Sadun had to be sent to hospital, where several physical lesions, particularly on the feet, were noted.

On 17 January, the Qamishlo Army Judge interrogated the

detainees about the charges against them, namely *"inciting sectarian conflict"*. The prisoners Jamal Sedum, Mihad Hussein, Jawar Munir Abdullah, Jiwan Munir Abdullah, Hossam Ibrahim, Zahid Yussef, all musicians, and Abdel Latif Malako Yaco, the owner of the restaurant where the wedding party took place, all pleaded not guilty. Despite the lack of any evidence the Judge did not annul the trial but merely postponed it till 17 March to give the lawyers time to prepare the defence.

On the same day, the same judge sentenced other detainees of opinion to prison. They were Khalil Ibrahim Ahmed, Mohamed Shekho Issa, Abdelsalam Sheikmus Issa and Rami Sheikmus al-Hassan, in detention since mid-March 2009. They had taken part in a commemoration of 16 March 1988, the day when the Kurdish town of Halabja was wiped out by the Iraqi Army's chemical bombs. They had already been sentenced to 6 months jail for having incited sectarian conflicts but their sentences had been reduced to 3 months each. They have all appealed.

Moreover, added to the political pressures, the Kurds in Qamishlo are suffering from serious economic difficulties aggravated by a drought for which the farmers, who make up the majority of the region's population, receive no government assistance. Many of them have left their home village for the capital, Damascus, or another of the larger cities, being unable to earn a living from their land. Smuggling with Iraq in cigarettes, household products and appliances, petrol or even sheep is also rife. Many villages in this Northern part of Syria look like semi-desert ghost towns.

The impoverishment of a whole

population has worrying repercussions, not only on its health but also on its access to treatment. The bulk of the families cannot afford to go to private clinics, which are extremely expensive, and so depend on public hospitals and dispensaries where treatment is poor.

The situation also affects education. The schoolteachers testify that a growing number of children are missing school, being pushed by their families to work. Moreover, schoolbooks and stationary are too expensive for needy families.

Yet the Jezirah has a rich agricultural soil, with abundant supply of watercourses. Traditionally they cultivate wheat, cotton, fruit and vegetables here — in fact 30% of Syria's agricultural products come from this region. In the opinion of experts, the drought has been aggravated by an inadequate policy of irrigation. According to government sources, backed by UN estimates, over a million people are said to be hit by this drought, 800,000 of whose conditions of survival are very shaky. According to UNO, between 40,000 and 60,000 families may have left their homes for a hand to mouth existence in the large towns.

Lat August, Syria had sounded the alarm, backed by humanitarian organisations, describing the situation as a "humanitarian catastrophe". UNO had initiated an appeal for aid in the form of food supplies to the tune of some \$53 million, for both the population and their livestock. However, in view of the tensions between Syria and its neighbours as well as its bad reputation internationally, it is taking a long time for the funds to be released. This was confirmed last October by a UN official stationed in Damascus, in an interview given to the

Financial Times. In addition to funds from UNO the countries making donations are, for the moment just Australia, Ireland, Saudi Arabia and Sweden. Further aid is expected from the United States and the European Union.

UNO's World Food Programme also expects aid to the tune of 22 million dollars for next July to cover the regions of Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh, The WFP official for Syria, Mohammad Hadi, explained that *"the majority of the population affected is facing extreme difficulty and has exhausted its resources for survival. The WFP has launched a new emergency operation to make up for the nutritional deficiencies of the most vulnerable part of the population, with special attention to the women and children under five years of age"*.

However, local officials estimate that this aid is insufficient compared with the needs of the population living in the disaster stricken areas. *"It is no exaggeration to say that people are dying of hunger here"*, states a Jezirah official of the Baath Party speaking off the record. According to him, the local authorities have warned the central government of the seriousness of the situation several times, but without effect, even though in June 2009 the government had distributed additional rations of flour, sugar, oil and other foodstuffs for the hardest hit families: *"the food distributions were insufficient because corruption is generalised and part of this food was stolen"*.

However the drought is not the only reason for the impoverishment of the Jezirah. Many people criticise the absence of any programmes for the development of industry or tourism in the region, which is, nevertheless rich in natural resources like gas or sulphur as well as archological remains that could attract tourists.

IRAN:

18 KURDS ARE WAITING FOR EXECUTION IN THE IRANIAN "DEATH ROWS"

Death sentences continue to be passed and Kurdish activists are amongst the groups hardest hit. In its latest report, Human Rights Watch highlights the breaches of Human Rights and freedom of expression directed at the Iranian Kurds, who are some 12 million strong — about 7% of the total Iranian population.

Thus Shirin Alan Hove, at the moment detained in Teheran's Evin Prison, was sentenced to death by the revolutionary court as a "moharab" (enemy of God). She had been arrested a year and a half earlier in the town of Maku, in Western Azerbaijan province where she lived.

Two other Kurdish detainees, Mohammad Amin Abdollah and Ghader Mohammadzadeh, originally from Mir-Abad (Bokan) were sentenced to death by the Urmiah Court. Mohammad Amin Abdollah, who is 25 years old, was originally sentenced to

20 years imprisonment before being re-tried and sentenced to be executed on the 16th of this month as a "threat to national security" and "actions against God". Ghader Mohammadzadeh, 32 years of age, was originally sentenced to 32 years jail but the same Urmiah court retried him and sentenced him to death. These second trials, aimed at increasing the sentence, are part of a practice that is becoming generalised. They recall the circumstances of Ehsan Fatahyan's execution on 11 November last. As with Ehsan Fatahyan and all the political detainees, the two condemned men had been tortured and subjected to great pressure during their interrogations.

Amnesty International has, moreover, appealed to Iran not to execute another Kurd, Habibollah Latifi, who was transferred this month from where he had been detained in Sanandaj to solitary confinement —the last stage before hanging.

Habibollah Latifi is charged with membership of PJAK, the armed wing of the Iranian branch of the PKK. Arrested in Sanandaj in October 2007, he was tried in camera without even his lawyer being present.

At the present time there are 18 Kurdish political prisoners awaiting execution in "death row".

Furthermore ten Kurdish activists from Sanandaj, Kermanshah and Urmiah were arrested on 14 January as they were paying tribute to a student, Ebrahim Lotfollahi, who died while being tortured exactly two years earlier in the premises of the Sanandaj Secret Service. These activists had gathered at the Nehesht Mohammadi cemetery in front of Ebrahim Lotfollahi's tomb for a minute's silence. It was then that they were brutally assaulted by the security forces and ten of them taken away. Their families have had no news of them since.

CULTURE:

METIN MIRZA IS STAGING A SECOND PLAY IN ISTANBUL

Metin Mirza, who had directed and acted in a Kurdish language play, *Rese Seve*, which created quite a stir in Turkey, has returned to the stage with another play, this time without any dialogue, apart from two words pronounced in Kurdish. Performed in Istanbul, with the Destar Company, the performance had a grant of 21,000 Turkish lire (about 10,000 euros) from the Ministry of Culture.

Rese Seve (nightmare) had been performed without any untoward incident and even with

success in the Van theatre a few months ago. The dialogue was entirely in Kurdish, with surtitles in Turkish.

This second play, *Cerb*, which lasts for 70 minutes, shows four prisoners in a cell, forbidden to speak. In an interview given to the daily paper *Hurriet*, Metin Mirza, who wrote and directed the play, explained: "*Because of our identity, we have become involved in politics though we did not want it. I wished only to speak about the theatre here with you, but I know that this is impossible, for you as well as for me. The day when I can succeed in only speaking about*

the theatre in Turkey I will know that things have become normal in this country".

Asked about the government's "Kurdish initiative", Metin Mirza expressed his doubts: "*Unless the State takes concrete measures, the initiative will be no use*". Both Metin Mirza and his co-authoress Bertin Zenderlioglu only learnt Kurdish at the age of 20 years. Metin admits to having great difficulty in performing in Kurdish on the stage: "*A theatrical artist normally masters his own language. He or she is playing with words. But we have tried to learn Kurdish on the stage of a theatre.*

Thus some Kurdish intellectuals criticised our speech — but it is better that we should be able to do it”.

Even more than is the case with film, the Kurdish theatre has developed in the diaspora and does not have deep-rooted traditions. Metin indicates he had difficulty in finding subjects: *“The theatre is a form of accumulation and expression of news. It must be*

nourished by its own culture’s past, but unfortunately this is impossible for us. That is why we make the most of the wealth of Anatolian cultures”. In addition to these problems, Kurdish society does not really support the theatre. *“Unfortunately, our people’s theatrical culture is too weak. No one is interested in it, even if you give away free tickets. In fact, we have lost before we start”.*

Cerb stages four prisoners in a cell forbidden to speak. If they contravene this prohibition they are in danger of all kinds of psychological and physical violence. *“We want to show that people can communicate without words”.* The advantage of this absence of dialogue is that the Istanbul public can follow the play, whatever might be their speech.

DIPLOMACY:

MASRUR BARZANI’S SPEECH AT THE SENATE HOUSE

A conference took place in Paris, at the Senate over 28 and 29 January on the nuclear issue in the Middle East. Those taking part included several diplomats, research workers, and analysts of the Middle East as well as the French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and Javier Solana, formerly responsible for the European Union’s Foreign policy. The speeches mainly covered Iran, Palestine and Iraq. Masrur Barzani, who runs the Security Services for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, took the floor as spokesman for the Irbil government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to you all.

It is an honour to address you today, in the birthplace of many of the democratic ideals towards which we now strive. As I stand before you, I am reminded of the great traditions of the French people. The commitment to “liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression” for all men laid out over 200 years ago in the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.” These values, based in fraternity and equality, remain the foundation for all those seeking a more just world — a world where all men are represented fairly by their

political institutions and no man suffers brutal injustices by those entrusted to protect, preserve, and promote the common good.

Inherent in the struggle to realise these goals and the Declaration itself, are the warnings of the Baron de Montesquieu that *“constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go.”* He wisely recognised and history has since proven, that no government can aspire to the most basic of democratic ideals and no people can realise the most fundamental of human rights without adhering to a separation of power — without the knowledge that the government “should be set up so that no man need be afraid of another.”

Few places so clearly symbolise the inherent danger of ignoring this edict than Iraq. Since Iraq’s independence, Kurds, Arabs, and other communities have suffered from the unwillingness of some of the Iraq’s leaders to accept these basic principles.

Religious and ethnic minorities have faced genocide at the hands of leaders intent on creating an idealised strong, central state out of the post-war fabrication that is Iraq. In their never-ending quest for uniformity, they have

found not unity, but division and ruin.

The results have been devastating for all concerned — hundreds of thousands massacred — the vast promise of our people and oil wealth squandered. As one of the main components of Iraq, the Kurds have been the subject of a genocide war. They have been the victim of chemical attacks and a series of infamous Anfal operations during which more than 182,000 people, mainly women and children, perished, and 90 % of our villages were destroyed and levelled to the ground.

This is a well-known history, one that has resulted in a deep sense of mistrust and fear between individuals, communities, the people and the government — where the disadvantaged, weak or vulnerable expect the strong to pillage. Where a culture of revenge and retaliation have ruled.

It has been our hope that this tragic cycle would be broken by the adoption of federal democratic principles in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, ratified by over 80% of the voting Iraqi electorate. That a new era would begin where our differences would no longer be misconstrued as our greatest weakness,

but instead become our greatest strength — each component competing peacefully and contributing to the betterment of the whole. A future where power would be dispersed and limited, where, as Montesquieu advocated, no man need fear another.

However, the last few years have shown that many challenges remain. The security vacuum that has existed in many parts of the country has proven an invitation to international and local terrorists, who have played on our history of mistrust and won over segments of the population. Their repugnant attacks have rejuvenated the sense of insecurity between Iraq's communities, especially Shia and Sunni, which undermine even a basic sense of fraternity between us. Weak leaders have turned abroad, allowing foreign entities with dubious intentions to play a role in directing our development. Ineptitude has bred invasive corruption that has permeated our bureaucracies, attracting profit-seekers rather than civil servants. Under these circumstances, loyalty to sect and ethnicity not surprisingly continues to come before country.

This is the reality of Iraq. Wishful thinking and lofty solutions cannot change this legacy. We must accept and understand it, if we ever want to move beyond it and change the course of history. None of Iraq's people can thrive, while some languish in fear. No progress or development can be realised without confidence in the fundamental rules of the system.

Kurdistan region, however, despite all these challenges has managed largely to contribute to

the unity of the country. It is today the safest and the most secure part of Iraq, which in turn has helped the economy of the region to flourish. This was mainly possible because of the dominant culture of tolerance and religious coexistence. The whole Kurdish experience and the national reconciliation practiced in Kurdistan could be a clear indication of how Iraq could move forward.

At its heart, this is our struggle — to establish the sort of division of power and rule of law that characterize modern democracies. These values are embodied in our Constitution, but it is only in their full and just implementation that we can find peace and progress. Without embracing these values, we will inevitably slide again toward despotism, regardless of who leads.

For the Constitution is greater than any one conflict, issue, or law — it extends beyond oil and gas, Parliamentary seat allocation, or budgets — it's about what type of state, what type of people, what type of community Iraq will become. It is the source of our ability to feel confident and safe, to know that the new Iraq will be a break from the repressive past. It binds us together as different communities, secure in our differences but united in common goals of progress and justice ... I stand before you committed to the federal and democratic principles laid out in the Iraqi Constitution, not because I am a Kurd, but because, like all Iraqis, I am a victim of a despotic past.

In its recognition of the importance of strong local and regional governments, the Constitution thus reassures the long-suffering

Iraqi people that the new Iraq will avoid the over-centralisation of power that has brought such devastation. For the betterment of all Iraqis, it lessens the ferocity of the competition over any particular office, by delegating authority and responsibility more widely. This delegation is essential for addressing corruption and creating the virtuous cycle of peaceful competition that reduces incompetence over time.

My message to you today is not pessimistic then. In many ways, we are at an advantage. We have the answers to our biggest problems, we have voted on them and agreed to their promise. We know what we must do. All that remains are the fortitude, wisdom, and courage to implement the democratic and federal system proven so effective to governing diverse societies and protecting individual rights.

This is the only way forward, the only hope Iraq and its people have to creating the sort of unity and progress found elsewhere. We as Kurds, and more broadly as Iraqis, and you as Frenchman, Europeans and more broadly the international community cannot waiver in our commitment to these shared values. To overcome its most important hurdle of disunity, Iraq must be able to protect its people and give them confidence in its benevolence. It must reassure us that the powerful will no longer be oppressors. That regardless of origin — all Iraqis from Basra to Zakho, from Erbil to Baghdad, will have a say in their fate, will have the rights granted to them by our Constitution. This is the basis for our fraternity and the only hope for Iraq's future.

Turquie

ALTERNATIVES
INTERNATIONALES

DÉCEMBRE 2009

Les Kurdes veulent plus que des symboles

La volonté d'adhérer à l'Union européenne et l'autonomie du Kurdistan irakien poussent les dirigeants turcs à préparer la société à une décentralisation et à l'octroi de plus de droits culturels aux 12 millions de Kurdes de Turquie.

Depuis juillet 2009, l'«ouverture kurde» promise par le gouvernement d'Ankara agite la Turquie. Personne pourtant ne connaît avec précision les contours de cette nouvelle politique tantôt présentée comme un «projet d'unité nationale», tantôt qualifiée d'«ouverture démocratique». Et à l'heure où ces lignes sont écrites, personne ne peut davantage prédire ses chances de déboucher sur un changement tangible. Le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan ira-t-il jusqu'au bout dans sa volonté de résoudre la question kurde, en «payant le prix qu'il faut», comme il le rappelle souvent ? Ou fera-t-il marche arrière devant les campagnes contre lui, d'une violence inouïe, de la part des nationalistes turcs ? Quelle que soit sa ligne de conduite, le seul emploi du mot «ouverture» aura suffi à faire tomber l'un des tabous majeurs de la République instaurée en 1923

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Trois facteurs semblent avoir préparé le terrain pour cette «ouverture». En premier lieu, rompant avec sa posture rigide des années 2003-2008, la Turquie a été contrainte d'accepter l'existence d'une région kurde fédérée dans le nord de l'Irak voisin. Le bilan désastreux de l'incursion militaire qu'Ankara lança en février 2008 dans les montagnes irakiennes de Kandil contre les combattants du PKK turc (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), le soutien international dont jouit le Kurdistan irakien et le souci de maintenir les investissements que des ressortissants turcs y réalisent ont amené Ankara à infléchir sa politique à l'encontre de cette entité.

En deuxième lieu, le «camp kémaliste» – regroupant en Turquie aussi bien les militaires et une partie de la magistrature que l'intelligentsia ultranationaliste – a perdu la bataille qu'il avait engagée avec Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Les élections de juillet 2007 qui ont reconduit au pouvoir l'AKP d'Erdogan (Parti pour la justice et le développement), puis l'arrestation de militaires et d'intellectuels kémalistes après des révélations sur des coups d'Etat avortés, ont privé ce

camp (du moins pour un temps) de sa capacité à produire un discours hégémonique sur l'unité nationale, ce qui a élargi le champ de manœuvre du gouvernement. Enfin, les élections municipales du 29 mars 2009 se sont soldées au Kurdistan par la victoire écrasante du parti kurde DTP (Parti de la société démocratique), montrant que la République, qui avait toujours nié l'existence d'un «fait kurde» dans ses frontières, était nue

Force est aussi de constater que cette «ouverture» n'est pas sans lien avec l'évolution du PKK, qui avait lancé la lutte armée en 1978 et qui est l'«acteur de référence» de l'espace kurde. Après l'arrestation de son chef, Abdullah Ocalan, en février 1999, le mouvement avait décidé de retirer ses guérilleros de Turquie. Il y avait même dépêché, en gage de bonne volonté, plusieurs de ses dirigeants, qui furent aussitôt arrêtés. Depuis, il traverse un processus de «dé-radicalisation». Renonçant à son projet initial de transformer le Kurdistan en tête de pont d'une fédération socialiste au Moyen-Orient, puis en 1993 à l'indépendance des régions kurdes, le PKK vise désormais la mutation de la Turquie en une «république démocratique» reconnaissant les droits culturels et politiques des Kurdes dans le cadre de ses frontières existantes. De même, s'il continue à user de coercition disciplinaire dans ses rangs, il a en revanche renoncé à son ambition de devenir l'acteur unique de la société kurde.

Parallèlement à ce processus pourtant, le PKK a repris les armes, à partir de 2005, en réponse aux campagnes lancées contre lui par l'armée turque et au refus d'Ankara d'envisager une solution politique à la question kurde. La radicalisation de la jeunesse kurde, qui obéit entre autres à des causes socio-économiques et se traduit par de fréquents affrontements avec la police, l'a sans doute aussi contraint à prendre les devants pour prévenir l'émergence d'autres acteurs radicaux et sa propre fragmentation interne.

Cette «deuxième phase» de la guérilla du PKK s'inscrit paradoxalement dans un contexte de plus grande démocratisation de la Turquie, mais aussi de la société kurde elle-même où l'organisation d'Ocalan coexiste avec d'autres acteurs, dont le DTP (Parti de la société démocratique). Héritier des luttes pacifiques remontant à la fin des années 1970 mais qui se sont intensifiées notamment depuis les années 1990, le DTP

Turquie

ALTERNATIVES
INTERNATIONALES
DÉCEMBRE 2009

Les Kurdes veulent plus que des symboles

La volonté d'adhérer à l'Union européenne et l'autonomie du Kurdistan irakien poussent les dirigeants turcs à préparer la société à une décentralisation et à l'octroi de plus de droits culturels aux 12 millions de Kurdes de Turquie.

Depuis juillet 2009, l'«ouverture kurde» promise par le gouvernement d'Ankara agite la Turquie. Personne pourtant ne connaît avec précision les contours de cette nouvelle politique tantôt présentée comme un «projet d'unité nationale», tantôt qualifiée d'«ouverture démocratique». Et à l'heure où ces lignes sont écrites, personne ne peut davantage prédire ses chances de déboucher sur un changement tangible. Le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan ira-t-il jusqu'au bout dans sa volonté de résoudre la question kurde, en «payant le prix qu'il faut», comme il le rappelle souvent ? Ou fera-t-il marche arrière devant les campagnes contre lui, d'une violence inouïe, de la part des nationalistes turcs ? Quelle que soit sa ligne de conduite, le seul emploi du mot «ouverture» aura suffi à faire tomber l'un des tabous majeurs de la République instaurée en 1923.

Hamit Bozarslan

Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales

Trois facteurs semblent avoir préparé le terrain pour cette «ouverture». En premier lieu, rompant avec sa posture rigide des années 2003-2008, la Turquie a été contrainte d'accepter l'existence d'une région kurde fédérée dans le nord de l'Irak voisin. Le bilan désastreux de l'incursion militaire qu'Ankara lança en février 2008 dans les montagnes irakiennes de Kandil contre les combattants du PKK turc (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), le soutien international dont jouit le Kurdistan irakien et le souci de maintenir les investissements que des ressortissants turcs y réalisent ont amené Ankara à infléchir sa politique à l'encontre de cette entité.

En deuxième lieu, le «camp kémaliste» – regroupant en Turquie aussi bien les militaires et une partie de la magistrature que l'intelligentsia ultranationaliste – a perdu la bataille qu'il avait engagée avec Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Les élections de juillet 2007 qui ont reconduit au pouvoir l'AKP d'Erdogan (Parti pour la justice et le développement), puis l'arrestation de militaires et d'intellectuels kémalistes après des révélations sur des coups d'Etat avortés, ont privé ce

camp (du moins pour un temps) de sa capacité à produire un discours hégémonique sur l'unité nationale, ce qui a élargi le champ de manœuvre du gouvernement. Enfin, les élections municipales du 29 mars 2009 se sont soldées au Kurdistan par la victoire écrasante du parti kurde DTP (Parti de la société démocratique), montrant que la République, qui avait toujours nié l'existence d'un «fait kurde» dans ses frontières, était nue.

Force est aussi de constater que cette «ouverture» n'est pas sans lien avec l'évolution du PKK, qui avait lancé la lutte armée en 1978 et qui est l'«acteur de référence» de l'espace kurde. Après l'arrestation de son chef, Abdullah Ocalan, en février 1999, le mouvement avait décidé de retirer ses guérilleros de Turquie. Il y avait même dépêché, en gage de bonne volonté, plusieurs de ses dirigeants, qui furent aussitôt arrêtés. Depuis, il traverse un processus de «dé-radicalisation». Renonçant à son projet initial de transformer le Kurdistan en tête de pont d'une fédération socialiste au Moyen-Orient, puis en 1993 à l'indépendance des régions kurdes, le PKK vise désormais la mutation de la Turquie en une «république démocratique» reconnaissant les droits culturels et politiques des Kurdes dans le cadre de ses frontières existantes. De même, s'il continue à user de coercition disciplinaire dans ses rangs, il a en revanche renoncé à son ambition de devenir l'acteur unique de la société kurde.

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ne se confond pas avec le PKK, mais n'est pas non plus totalement distinct de lui. Obtenant jusqu'à 75 % de votes dans certaines villes kurdes et contrôlant près d'une centaine de municipalités, il dispose d'une indéniable capacité représentative au sein de l'électorat. Certains de ses membres sont issus des rangs de la guérilla, mais d'autres, de loin majoritaires, sont le produit de vagues successives de politisation des années 1970 à nos jours. Et nombre d'entre eux sont opposés à la lutte armée. Bien qu'il existe comme acteur politique à part entière, le DTP se considère comme l'émanation d'une lutte qui l'englobe mais le dépasse. Voire comme un simple médiateur entre le PKK et l'Etat. Enfin, d'autres acteurs, comme le Hak-Par (Parti du droit et des libertés), proche du Parti socialiste du Kurdistan (illégal), résolument hostiles à la lutte armée mais formulant des revendications plus radicales que le PKK - à commencer par un statut de fédération pour le Kurdistan -, sont également actifs sur la scène kurde.

L'évolution de la question kurde et l'avenir de la lutte armée dépendront autant des choix du PKK que des transformations que connaîtra la Turquie. Une amnistie, notamment pour les



5 000 combattants du PKK, puis une graduelle intégration de ses dirigeants dans le système politique, une décentralisation poussée accordant une large autonomie aux municipalités ainsi qu'aux futures régions à créer (aussi bien dans les provinces kurdes que dans le reste du pays), enfin l'élargissement des droits culturels au domaine de l'éducation, pourraient permettre une «dé-radicalisation» accélérée du mouvement. A l'inverse, le retour à une politique répressive, notamment à l'encontre du DTP, légitimerait l'option de la lutte armée. Avec ou sans l'aval des dirigeants du PKK. ■



LE GOUVERNEMENT TURC FACE À DES DÉFIS POLITIQUES, DES ÉLECTIONS ÉVOQUÉES

ANKARA, 9 janvier 2010 (AFP) —

REVERS sur une initiative en faveur des Kurdes, turbulences avec l'armée et hésitations sur le rapprochement avec l'Arménie: le gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc entame une année difficile et l'éventualité d'élections anticipées est de plus en plus évoquée.

"Que personne ne rêve, les élections auront lieu en temps normal", c'est-à-dire en 2011, a voulu rassurer vendredi le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, interpellé à répétition ces derniers jours par l'opposition et une partie de la presse sur l'éventualité d'élections législatives anticipées.

Aux dernières législatives, à l'été 2007, son Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, issu de la mouvance islamiste) avait obtenu 47% des voix, s'assurant quatre ans de plus d'un pouvoir qu'il détient depuis 2002.

Mais le parti est depuis en perte de vitesse et n'a rassemblé que 39% des suffrages aux élections municipales de mars 2009.

L'"ouverture démocratique" visant à mieux respecter les droits des 12 millions de Kurdes (sur 71 millions), annoncée cet été, s'est heurtée à la vive opposition des milieux nationalistes mais aussi d'une importante partie de la population qui y voit une menace à l'unité nationale.

Cette initiative a accouché, en novembre 2009, de réformes en demi-teinte, avant de sombrer avec la dissolution par la justice du parti pro-kurde, accusé de collusion avec la rébellion armée. Des émeutes et incidents meurtriers ont suivi.

La crédibilité du gouvernement en a souffert.

"Nous sommes aujourd'hui dans une situation pire qu'avant dans le dossier kurde, mal géré par le gouvernement", estime l'intellectuelle Nuray Mert, dans le journal Vatan.

Pour ce professeur de sciences politiques, le gouvernement a manqué de

vision politique pour régler un problème gangrené par plus de 25 ans de lutte armée kurde, et un lourd bilan de 45 000 morts.

L'année a par ailleurs débuté par de nouvelles tensions entre l'armée et le pouvoir politique. L'état judiciaire s'est resserré autour de l'état-major, avec des perquisitions sans précédent dans les archives secrètes de l'armée.

Il s'agirait cette fois d'un complot d'officiers visant le vice-Premier ministre, Bülent Arınç.

Depuis 2007, plus de 200 personnes, dont bon nombre de militaires, ont été écrouées dans le cadre d'une vaste enquête sur un réseau clandestin cherchant à déstabiliser le gouvernement. L'armée turque qui a renversé quatre gouvernements en 50 ans, est quotidiennement montrée du doigt.

"L'Histoire se souviendra de cette période comme d'une période très sombre", commente Mme Mert, accusant le gouvernement d'"autoritarisme".

"L'AKP nous dupe en se posant en champion de la démocratie, alors que le pays se dirige à grands pas vers un régime de parti unique", dit-elle, évoquant une lutte de pouvoir entre l'exécutif et les forces laïques telles que l'armée et certains corps de l'Etat.

Sur le plan extérieur, le rapprochement entre la Turquie et l'Arménie voisine, lancé en fanfare en 2009 après une longue hostilité autour de la question du génocide arménien sous l'empire ottoman, est suspendu à une hypothétique avancée sur la question du Nagorny Karabakh, qui divise toujours l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan, allié d'Ankara.

"Les accords ne seront pas ratifiés au Parlement (turc) tant que nos frères azéris n'auront pas obtenu gain de cause au Karabakh", a indiqué à l'AFP le vice-président de l'AKP Huseyin Celik.

La normalisation turco-arménienne semble aujourd'hui incertaine, alors qu'approche le 24 avril, date limite pour la ratification des textes signés par les deux pays.

De la contestation électorale à la revendication des libertés dans la rue : en six mois est née une opposition populaire aux autorités de Téhéran Ceux qui défient le pouvoir en Iran

Le 12 juin 2009, l'Iran s'est rendu aux urnes pour élire son président de la République sans se douter que ce banal exercice électoral serait le coup d'envoi d'une des plus massives et sanglantes contestations qu'ait connues la République islamique en trente ans d'existence. Dans les heures qui ont suivi le scrutin, des permanences de candidats réformateurs ont été attaquées, l'Internet brouillé, Téhéran quadrillée par les forces de sécurité. Peu après, le président fondamentaliste, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, réclamait la victoire avec un score écrasant (63%). Les autres candidats dénoncèrent une « fraude ». Ce fut le début de manifestations de masse dans le pays, réprimées par la force.

La photo de Neda, une jeune femme tuée par balles, fera le tour du monde. Ce qui n'était qu'un mouvement de contestation électorale avait trouvé son martyr, sa couleur fétiche aussi, le vert, couleur de la campagne de celui qui finira deuxième à l'élection, l'ex-premier ministre Mir Hossein Moussavi, appuyé par les réformateurs. Et lorsque le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, arbitre supposé de la vie politique iranienne, faisant la sourde oreille aux protestations, avalisera l'élection, le mouvement prendra un ton plus politique. Une opposition populaire, informelle et pacifique était née. Plus que des chefs, elle trouvera en M. Moussavi, mais aussi en Mehdi Karoubi (candidat réformateur malheureux, en juin) et Mohammad Khatami, l'ex-président réformateur, non des meneurs, mais des symboles de ralliement.

En six mois, 5 000 arrestations, des dizaines de morts et des procès arbitraires n'ont pas eu raison du mouvement. Pour l'achoura, le 27 décembre 2009, la situation a dérapé sans respecter la trêve de la fête religieuse, la police a tiré sur la foule. Des manifestants ont agressé les forces de l'ordre. Assez pour que l'ex-président Hachemi Rafsandjani, proche du mouvement vert, s'inquiète et appelle au calme, estimant que personne n'a rien à gagner par la violence.

Qui sont les personnages phares de cette opposition en marche ?

Moussavi, la figure de proue

A priori, rien ne prédisposait, à 68 ans, le tranquille technocrate Mir Hossein Moussavi, cet Azéri, devenu premier ministre de la République islamique pendant la guerre contre l'Irak (1980-1988), à prendre la tête d'un grand mouvement populaire de revendication. En fait, bien que proche du fondateur, l'ayatollah Khomeiny, et révolution-



De gauche à droite, et de haut en bas : Mir Hossein Moussavi, Mehdi Karoubi, Mohammad Khatami et Hachemi Rafsandjani. AFP

naire de la première heure, il avait quitté la scène politique depuis plus de vingt ans. En 1989, devenu Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, successeur de Khomeiny, avait décidé de supprimer le poste de premier ministre. Homme de sérail (il fut conseiller occulte des présidents Hachemi Rafsandjani et Mohammad Khatami), il se consacra à l'art. Une passion partagée avec sa femme, Zahra, docteur en sciences politiques, elle aussi engagée dans le mouvement.

Lorsqu'il annonce sa candidature à la présidentielle, car il croit la République islamique « en danger » en dépit du soutien des réformateurs, peu croient à son succès. Mais cet homme, nationaliste irréprochable et professionnel (il gère l'économie de guerre) a gardé une réputation intègre. Son discours d'ouverture envers les jeunes et la société, pétri d'idéal et de justice, sera, malgré lui, le catalyseur des espérances d'une foule d'Iraniens privés de liberté.

On le croyait timoré, la confiance des manifestants en fera un tribun contre la fraude et l'arbitraire. La répression (il vit sous haute surveillance) révélera son courage et une rare ténacité. Il se dit prêt à aller « jusqu'au martyr » pour faire entendre la cause du mouvement populaire. Pas un leader, un « accompagnateur ». « C'est vous qui m'avez donné la force, je ne fais que vous suivre ». Pour arrêter le cycle contestation-répression qui entraîne une radicalisation dangereuse de part et d'autre, le 1^{er} jan-

vier, il propose un plan de sortie de crise : libération des prisonniers politiques, respect des libertés, obligation pour le gouvernement de rendre des comptes.

Karoubi, l'imprécauteur

Natif du Lorestan, cet hodjatoleslam (religieux de rang intermédiaire) atypique et résolument réformateur, auquel on a pu parfois reprocher, dans le passé, un discours populiste et un goût prononcé pour la gestion de grasses fondations révolutionnaires, s'est révélé, à 72 ans, comme le représentant le plus courageux et combatif de la nouvelle opposition populaire.

Homme du sérail, lui aussi (il a été président du Parlement de 2000 à 2004), il avait mis en cause l'ingérence des miliciens islamistes à la présidentielle de 2005, gagnée par M. Ahmadinejad, dont il n'a eu de cesse de critiquer les dérives en matière de sécurité et d'économie. Populaire auprès des étudiants et des féministes, il a, juste avant la présidentielle de juin 2009, signé une pétition avec le Prix Nobel de la paix, Shirin Ebadi, pour demander l'arrêt des exécutions de criminels mineurs au moment des faits.

Le premier à dénoncer publiquement les tortures et les viols en prison des manifestants arrêtés, en dépit des pressions et des menaces, il a accumulé preuves et dossiers, obligeant le gouvernement à fermer un des centres de détention les plus arbi-

traînés et sanglants, la prison de Kharizak Il est, avec M. Moussavi, la cible de commandos de nervis à la solde des ultra-fundamentalistes. En début de semaine, sa voiture a été attaquée alors qu'il était à l'intérieur. En une autre occasion, des miliciens ont fait voler son turban. Son journal, *Etemad-e Melli*, a été fermé il y a quelques mois et, à présent, une procédure judiciaire est ouverte contre lui. Sa réponse à tout cela : « Je ne me tairai que mort ».

Khatami, le symbole

L'ex-président de la République (1997-2005), réformateur, bien qu'apparaissant rarement en première ligne, a joué les deus ex machina de la contestation des derniers mois, faisant jouer ses réseaux et son aréopage de technocrates pour aider les candidats réformateurs. Fin lettré, ce religieux affable et habile tacticien né près de Yazd, en 1943, et qui a étudié dans les écoles coraniques de Qom, la ville sainte, avant de devenir ministre de la culture et de l'orientation islamique, a représenté une certaine ouverture au sein de la République islamique.

Sa présidence a été marquée par un regain de liberté dans la société, la presse et l'édition, et une meilleure image de l'Iran à l'extérieur. Même si les étudiants, durement réprimés pour s'être révoltés en 1999, lui ont reproché de les avoir « lâchés », tandis que certains le critiquent pour n'avoir pas eu la force de faire évoluer les institutions et de redresser l'économie. À l'extérieur, son engagement pour le dialogue des civilisations et une suspension temporaire de l'enrichissement d'uranium lui ont ouvert des portes.

Élu contre la volonté du guide Khamenei, en 1997, il est vite devenu sa « bête noire ». M. Khatami avait même annoncé, en février 2009, sa candidature à la présiden-

tielle de juin, mais son entourage a estimé que les risques étaient trop grands, et il s'est désisté pour M. Moussavi. Les menaces contre lui étaient explicites. Ainsi, le journal officiel *Kayhan*, dont le directeur est directement désigné par le guide, a-t-il publié, en février, un éditorial conseillant à Mohammad Khatami de « penser au sort de Benazir Bhutto au Pakistan », assassinée en campagne électorale en 2007.

Même si son nom est moins vilipendé que ceux de MM. Moussavi et Karoubi, M. Khatami est la cible principale du pouvoir fondamentaliste en pleine radicalisation qui veut, à travers lui, abattre le symbole du réformisme. Des voix, parmi les religieux extrémistes et les Gardiens de la révolution, l'armée idéologique, ont réclamé son jugement et son exécution avec ses « complices », Moussavi et Karoubi.

Rafсанджани, un appui au cœur du régime

Hachemi Rafсанджани, 76 ans, ex-président de la République (1989-1997), ex-ministre de l'intérieur, ex-président du Parlement, est le Janus par excellence d'une révolution islamique à laquelle son pragmatisme, son clientélisme bien rodé et son art consommé de la volte-face politique « raisonnée » ont permis de survivre. Tous les autres fils ou presque de la révolution se sont entre-dévorer.

Passé par les séminaires religieux de Qom – il fit aussi de juteuses affaires immobilières dans la ville sainte –, l'hodjatolelam Rafсанджани a été, dès les années 1960, un adepte de l'ayatollah Khomeiny. Il a tenté de libéraliser l'économie pour remettre le pays sur pieds après la guerre avec l'Irak (1980-1988). C'est lui qui favorisa l'arrivée au pouvoir du guide actuel, Ali Khamenei,

à la mort de Khomeiny, en 1989, de façon à évincer le dauphin désigné, l'ayatollah Montazeri (mort en décembre 2009).

Mais entre le nouveau guide et son encombrant mentor, la rivalité s'est vite installée, s'exacerbant lors de l'élection de juin 2009, lorsque M. Ahmadinejad, « pou-lain » du guide, dénonça avec violence, à la télévision, les anciens dirigeants « corrompus » qui avaient « tenté de vendre le pays à l'Occident ». M. Rafсанджани, dont la réputation voyante d'affairiste est devenue un handicap, et ses ouvertures vers l'étranger, pour sortir l'Iran de l'isolement, un sujet de critique des fondamentalistes, était le premier visé. Le ranger aujourd'hui dans la catégorie des « opposants » inconditionnels serait excessif, surtout qu'en théorie, il reste un pilier du pouvoir. Il préside deux rouages essentiels, le Conseil du discernement et l'Assemblée des experts.

Toutefois conscient de ce que le guide veut, à la faveur de l'épuration en cours, en finir avec lui, M. Rafсанджани, déjà proche des réformateurs, leur a offert un appui tactique. Il se bat aussi pour la survie du régime, menacé, à ses yeux, par les dérives autoritaires actuelles, en prêchant l'unité. ■

Marie-Claude Decamps

Six mois de manifestations et de répression

Juin 2009

Le **12**, élection présidentielle. Le **13**, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad se dit vainqueur avec 63 % des voix. Mir Hossein Moussavi, appuyé par les réformateurs, et Mehdi Karoubi, autre candidat réformateur, dénoncent une « fraude ». Début des manifestations massives hostiles au pouvoir qui font 36 morts, selon les autorités, 72 selon l'opposition. 4 000 personnes arrêtées. Le **19**, le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, confirme la victoire de M. Ahmadinejad qu'il appuie sans réserve. Le **20**, la jeune Neda Agha-Soltan, tuée par balle en marge des manifestations, devient le symbole de la contestation.

Août

Le **1^{er}**, ouverture du procès d'une centaine de manifestants devant le tribunal révolutionnaire de Téhéran. La chercheuse fran-

çaise, Clotilde Reiss, arrêtée le 1^{er} juillet, est jugée à Téhéran pour avoir participé à des manifestations. Elle est assignée à résidence à l'ambassade de France, en attendant son jugement.

Septembre

Le **8**, arrestation de collaborateurs de MM. Moussavi et Karoubi. Dix jours après, manifestations à Téhéran. L'ex-président réformateur, Mohammad Khatami, est agressé par des nervis du régime. Des manifestants, battus et arrêtés.

Novembre

Pour l'anniversaire de la prise de l'ambassade américaine en 1979, le **4**, l'opposition « vampirise » les manifestations officielles et crie « mort au dictateur ».

Décembre

Le **7**, l'opposition manifeste lors de la Journée des étudiants. Nombreuses arres-

tations. Le **8**, le pouvoir lance un avertissement à M. Moussavi. Interdiction du journal réformateur *Hayat e No*.

Le **13**, Ali Khamenei lance une mise en garde sévère aux dirigeants de l'opposition. Le grand ayatollah dissident Hossein-Ali Montazeri meurt le **19**. Ses funérailles rassemblent des dizaines de milliers de personnes et se transforment en manifestation antigouvernementale. Le **27**, jour de la fête religieuse de l'Achoura, de violentes manifestations ont lieu à Téhéran et dans d'autres villes. Les forces de l'ordre tirent sur la foule. On compte huit morts (officiels) dont un neveu de M. Moussavi. Les manifestants attaquent les miliciens bassidjis.

Les jours suivants, des arrestations de proches de MM. Khatami et Moussavi se poursuivent. ■

La Turquie saisie par l'« ottomania »

L'opposition de pays européens à l'entrée d'Ankara dans l'UE contribue à mythifier l'âge d'or de l'empire perdu.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

TURQUIE Les visiteurs, ravis, en prenant plein les yeux et les oreilles. Réglée au volume maximum, la bande-son fait gronder les canons et rouler les tambours. Le sultan Mehmet II le Conquérant chevauche fièrement son destrier blanc, les murailles byzantines cèdent à l'assaut des janissaires. Sur 360° et en trois dimensions, une fresque géante reproduit la conquête de Constantinople c'est l'attraction phare du Musée historique panoramique de 1453. Depuis son inauguration il y a un an par le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, il voit défiler toutes les écoles d'Istanbul. « On revit la bataille en direct, c'est incroyable, s'enflamme Mutlu Turkoglu, professeur, aussi enthousiaste que ses élèves. Les jeunes Turcs doivent être fiers de leur histoire, c'est primordial pour leur identité »

Ce musée, fondé par la municipalité d'Istanbul, est révélateur de l'« ottomania » en vogue en Turquie. Après avoir longtemps méprisé « l'homme malade de l'Europe », les Turcs redécouvrent leur passé ottoman et se penchent avec nostalgie sur un empire qui, au faite de sa puissance, rayonna des Balkans à la péninsule arabique. « A partir de 1923, tous les efforts ont été concentrés sur la construction de la jeune République et sur son avenir, explique Nilufer Narli, sociologue. S'en est ensuivie une sorte d'amnésie. Aujourd'hui, on revient à une image plus positive »

La solennité des derniers honneurs rendus à Ertugrul Osman, le petit-fils du sultan Abdullamid II, en septembre, illustre le retour en grâce de l'Empire ottoman. En 1924, alors enfant, il avait été expulsé de Turquie avec les autres membres de la famille royale. En ordonnant l'exil, Mustafa Kemal, le fondateur de la République turque, liquidait définitivement les restes de l'empire. Pour les funérailles de l'héritier du trône, dix mille personnes et plusieurs ministres se sont massés à la cérémonie organisée à la Mosquée bleue.



En septembre, 10 000 personnes dont plusieurs ministres étaient présents à la Mosquée bleue d'Istanbul pour les funérailles de l'héritier du trône, Ertugrul Osman.

L'arrivée au pouvoir en 2002 du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), aux racines islamistes, et l'ascension d'une bourgeoisie musulmane, concurrençant l'élite traditionnelle laïque, ont contribué à alléger le joug kémaliste qui pesait sur l'histoire. La nouvelle diplomatie turque, conduite par Ahmet Davutoglu, active au Moyen-Orient comme dans les Balkans, est souvent qualifiée de « neo-ottomane ». « La Turquie réintègre des espaces où elle a été présente pendant des siècles », soulignait récemment Suat Kiniklioglu, porte-parole du comité des affaires étrangères au Parlement.

Tolérance religieuse

L'Empire ottoman devient un argument marketing. Pendant le ramadan, Burger King a concocté un menu du Sultan. Avec ses guerriers stylisés et enturbannés, les tee-shirts de la marque Ottoman Empire proclament que « l'Empire contre-attaque ». La jeunesse turque adore. Dans les rues d'Istanbul, les fontaines, bijoux d'architecture ottomane, qui, au mieux, avaient été laissées à l'abandon et, au pire, avaient été reconverties en poubelles par les habitants, sont aujourd'hui restaurées...

« Rêver d'être de nouveau un empire est irréaliste, l'époque et les acteurs ont changé, estime Gani Mujde, auteur de

l'un des succès du cinéma turc, *La République ottomane*, vu par 1,65 million de spectateurs en 2008. Dans son film, la Turquie moderne n'a jamais existé et Osman VII, un souverain fictif et incompétent, règne sur un pays aux mains des États-Unis. Pour le réalisateur, dont les ancêtres au Kosovo étaient sujets du sultan, assumer son identité ottomane est essentiel : « J'ai grandi dans le quartier de Phanar, à Istanbul, au milieu des Grecs, des Arméniens, des Juifs et des Kurdes.. Voilà l'héritage ottoman. Aujourd'hui, il ne faut pas ignorer cette dimension culturelle. »

Plutôt que la décadence ou l'affaiblissement de l'empire au XIX^e siècle, sa tolérance religieuse ou la Pax ottomane qui régnait sur le pourtour méditerranéen sont mis en avant. L'opposition de pays européens à l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'Union européenne contribue à mythifier un âge d'or perdu « Le message envoyé est "Vous n'appartenez pas à l'Europe", analyse Nilufer Narli. Le sentiment de rejet conduit à se tourner vers le passé pour trouver les éléments glorieux de son identité. Certains n'y voient qu'un État islamique. » Pour les Turcs, plongés en pleine introspection, la prochaine étape de la réconciliation historique passera par la redécouverte de la dimension européenne de l'Empire ottoman ■

Mir Hossein Moussavi

Le mal parti khomeyniste

“Accompagnant” le peuple sans le guider, cet ancien Premier ministre de Khomeyni, devenu opposant en chef par la grâce des manifs, est contre Ahmadinejad mais pour la république islamique.

Le Canard enchaîné 6 janvier 2010

« **J** E n'ai pas peur de mourir pour défendre les aspirations du peuple. » Le 1^{er} janvier, Mir Hossein Moussavi, ce petit architecte barbichu de 68 ans devenu le panache blanc de l'opposition iranienne, s'est de nouveau dit prêt à aller « jusqu'au martyr », tout en proposant une démocratisation progressive du régime en cinq points. Depuis qu'il s'est fait voler son élection à la présidence, le 12 juin, par Ahmadinejad, ce technocrate sans charisme, porté presque malgré lui par les manifestations insurrectionnelles, s'est vraiment révéilé, alors que c'était un « conservateur réformiste » (sic !) issu du sérail, choisi comme le candidat des réformateurs par défaut seulement, et par calcul stratégique.

Dénonçant inlassablement les fraudes et la violence, il a fait preuve de courage face aux nervis à moto bloquant son bureau le 8 décembre. « Vous avez une mission, accomplissez-la : tuez-moi, blessez-moi ou menacez-moi ! » Trois semaines plus tard, lors des manifestations de l'Achoura, le 27 décembre, c'est son neveu qui a été tué par balles... Dernier avertissement ?

« Mort, il serait un symbole beaucoup plus fort que vivant », juge le professeur à la Sorbonne Yann Richard, qui rappelle cependant que Moussavi, Premier

ministre de Khomeyni de 1981 à 1989 pendant la guerre Iran-Irak, fut associé à la féroce répression des opposants : des communistes du Toudéh aux nationalistes et aux libéraux, jusqu'au massacre des prisons en 1988 qui fit entre 15 000 et 30 000 morts, notamment chez les Moudjahidines du peuple. Un massacre que l'ayatollah Montazeri avait eu le courage de dénoncer sur le moment, ce qui lui avait valu de perdre aussitôt son statut de dauphin du guide Khomeyni : les funérailles de Montazeri, le 20 décembre, ont d'ailleurs relancé les manifs... Tandis que Moussavi, lui, a toujours refusé de revenir sur ces carnages, même devant les étudiants qui l'ont vivement interpellé lors de meetings en mai : « Où étiez-vous en 1988, et combien de personnes avez-vous tuées ? »

C'est tout le paradoxe Moussavi : qualifié en 1988 de « Saint-Just de l'islam » par « L'Express », il a un lourd passé, que vingt années passées ensuite dans l'ombre du régime à pratiquer de nouveau la peinture abstraite ont eu tendance à faire oublier... Heureusement pour lui, l'Iran compte 70 % de moins-de-30-ans qui ont donc la mémoire courte ! Après avoir été brièvement emprisonné sous le chah, Moussavi est d'abord et avant tout le poulain de l'imam Kho-



meyni et de l'ayatollah Beheshti, le théoricien du régime. Lors de la révolution de 1979, il dirige le bureau politique du Parti de la République islamique : apparatchik pur jus, il est le fondateur et rédacteur en chef du quotidien du parti, la « Pravda » khomeyniste. Ingénieur et architecte de formation devenu universitaire, il fut aussi l'un des leaders de la « révolution culturelle » consistant à fermer pour deux ans toutes les facs du pays...

Promu ministre des Affaires étrangères en 1981 contre la volonté du président Bani Sadr alors démis, il défend la prise d'otages à l'ambassade américaine dans les colonnes du « Herald Tribune » (10/10/1981). C'est ensuite à Khomeyni en personne et à son fils Ahmad qu'il doit d'être bombardé Premier ministre trois mois plus tard, puis maintenu en 1985 contre la volonté du président Ali Khamenei (aujourd'hui Guide suprême), qui l'exécra déjà ! Partisan de l'étatisation, Moussavi soutient l'effort de guerre (41 % du budget en 1987) d'une main de fer en instaurant contrôle des prix et cartes de rationnement.

Sitôt Khomeyni mort et son ennemi Khamenei devenu Guide suprême, Moussavi est congédié, et le poste de Premier ministre supprimé. Mais il a eu le temps in extremis de relancer en juin 1989 le programme nucléaire civil voulu par le chah, que Khomeyni avait abandonné. Membre du Conseil suprême de la défense nationale et, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, du Conseil de discernement islamique (instance d'arbitrage du

régime), c'est encore lui qui redonne une impulsion décisive sur le nucléaire en 2004 en poussant le président Khatami à s'impliquer.

Conseiller honoraire du président Rafsandjani (1989-1997) et plus écouté de son successeur réformateur Khatami (1997-2005), Moussavi, auréolé de son passé de Premier ministre de guerre, avait déjà été lui-même sollicité pour être le candidat des réformateurs en 1997, et surtout en 2005. S'il s'est finalement dévoué en 2009, c'est, dit-il, pour sauver la « République islamique en danger », en se réclamant de Khomeyni jusque sur ses affiches. Son choix du vert, couleur de l'islam, pour sa campagne n'est pas seulement tactique : il souhaite toujours réformer le régime de l'intérieur, et non le renverser.

Malgré une partie de la rue qui réclame la « République iranienne » et non plus « islamique », il ne semble pas prêt pour l'instant à jeter aux orties le « velayat e faghi », qui consacre la prééminence du religieux sur le politique.

Fine observatrice de l'Iran, où elle a mené des enquêtes sociologiques, Azadeh Kian Thiébaud nuance : « Les événements ont transformé Moussavi, il m'a bluffée ! » Une preuve entre toutes : il met désormais en avant son épouse émancipée, Zahra Rahnavard, docteur en sciences politiques, qui fut la deuxième femme présidente d'université d'Iran.

De là à voir ce digne « fils » de la révolution laïciser l'Iran, cela risque de ne pas Allah de soi !

David Fontaine

IRAN : MIR HOSSEIN MOUSSAVI PRÊT À MOURIR EN MARTYR



TODAYS ZAMAN

02 January 2010

Gov't to forge ahead with Kurdish initiative in 2010

ERCAN YAVUZ

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is resolute in its plans to bring about a conclusion to the long-standing Kurdish question through a massive democratization package in 2010. To this end, the party is working on a new roadmap to win the support of the opposition parties. If the governing party fails to win the support of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), it will ask them not to stand in the way of government efforts to resolve the issue. The greatest support for the democratization package will come from President Abdullah Gül.

The president is planning to hold a summit for political leaders at the Çankaya presidential palace, although the date of the summit has not yet been made public. Gül invited the leaders for a summit to reach a consensus on the Kurdish initiative in 2009, but the invitation was rejected by CHP leader Deniz Baykal and MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli.

The two leaders define the Kurdish initiative as a "foreign-backed plan to divide the country" and accuse the AK Party and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of "high treason." The president is also planning to host prominent figures in the country's executive, legislative and judicial bodies at the palace on Jan. 5. He is expected to request harmony among the state bodies from the participants.

The AK Party government announ-



ced its intention to settle the Kurdish question through peaceful methods during the summer but has not yet detailed its plan. The expectations are that the democratic initiative will grant the country's Kurds increased cultural and linguistic rights.

Turkey's Kurdish question has existed since the first years of the republic, but it turned violent in 1984 after the establishment of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). More than 40,000 civilians and security forces have been killed in clashes so far.

The government is also pinning high hopes on the General Staff to support its initiative. There are claims that the General Staff will hold secret meetings with high-level officials from the opposition parties on the details of the initiative package, although there is little hope that the meetings will secure the opposition's support.

Last week, the National Security Council (MGK) announced full support from the military brass for the government's Kurdish initiative. The council is also to present a roadmap in 2010 to prevent the obstruction of the initiative by the main opposition parties.

The AK Party is also planning to replace the coordinator of the Kurdish initiative, Interior Minister Besir Atalay, with a more proactive figure from the Cabinet to give some impetus to the plans. Atalay has been criticized for failing to establish strong ties with the opposition to gain their support for the initiative.

Since the government announced its ambition to peacefully settle the Kurdish question, Atalay has spoken with various civil society representatives, political party leaders, intellectuals and researchers to gather their opinions. He also met with academics, media representatives, journalists and writers in August at the Police Academy in Ankara to hear their contributions to the initiative. The government will make the details of the initiative more concrete in 2010 to refute criticism from opposition parties that the ruling party is not clear on the content of the package. The move will also be aimed at gaining the support of circles who have given the initiative the cold shoulder because of its ambiguity.

Though not officially confirmed, among the concrete suggestions of the initiative are: Turkey's unitary government will be protected; political campaigns in Kurdish will be allowed; Kurds will be allowed to be educated in their mother tongue; Kurdish is to be allowed in prisons; place names will be restored; Kurdish institutes will be established; children will not be classified as terrorists; the Active Repentance Law will be put into effect; hate crimes will be outlawed; and Kurds will be allowed freedom of expression.

AFP

IRAK / PÉTROLE: TENSIONS COMMUNAUTAIRES APRÈS L'ARRIVÉE D'UN NOUVEAU DIRECTEUR

KIRKOUK (Irak) -04 janvier 2010 -AFP

LE MINISTÈRE du Pétrole a annoncé lundi la nomination d'un nouveau directeur à la tête de la Northern Oil Company (NOC), appartenant à la communauté chiïte, provoquant des tensions communautaires dans la ville à majorité sunnite de Kirkouk, QG de la société.

Manaa al-Obeidi, un sunnite qui dirigeait depuis trois ans la NOC après l'enlèvement de son prédécesseur en 2007, a été remplacé par son adjoint, Hamid al-Saadi, un chiïte, a affirmé à l'AFP le porte-parole du ministère du Pétrole, Assem Jihad.

M. Obeidi "a atteint l'âge de la retraite et a été remplacé par son adjoint. M. Saadi possède une grande compétence dans le secteur pétrolier après avoir passé 40 ans à travailler pour la NOC", a-t-il ajouté

Trois autres directeurs -les chefs des départements de la prospection, des contrats et de l'expertise technique du ministère du Pétrole- ont été remplacés

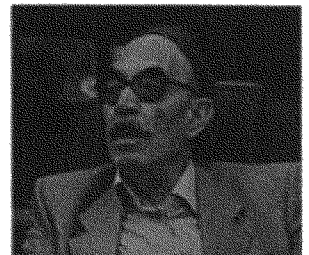
après leur départ à la retraite, a ajouté M. Jihad.

Mais la nomination d'un nouveau directeur chiite à la tête de la Northern Oil Company a provoqué des vagues chez les employés au siège de la société, situé dans la ville de Kirkouk, dans le nord, que se disputent kurdes, arabes et turcomans.

Des employés ont rejeté la nomination dans cette ville à majorité sunnite.

"Nous refusons cette décision. La situation à Kirkouk est compliquée et dangereuse, la ville fait partie des zones contestées. Nous avons besoin ici de consensus et non de crises supplémentaires", a affirmé Sabah Abdel Ali, le directeur des transports à la NOC, lors d'une conférence de presse à Kirkouk.

"Nous allons protester face à ces agissements", a-t-il ajouté.



President Jalal Talabani Talks to Asharq Al-Awsat

Asharq Al-Awsat

By Ma'ad Fayad

Baghdad, Asharq Al-Awsat- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani has said that his personal wish is not to nominate himself for another presidential term unless he is commissioned to do so by the main Iraqi political blocs, because he wants to dedicate himself to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and to writing his memoirs. Talabani adds: "However, I will relinquish my personal wishes for the sake of public interests, as I have done all my life."

President Talabani, who will move to Al-Sulaymaniyah to start his partisan duties as secretary general of the PUK as soon as he concludes his political work as president of Iraq in Baghdad, has favored Asharq Al-Awsat with a political interview, which is the first of its kind to an Arab newspaper before the end of his duties as president of Iraq and after his bilateral meeting with Masud Barzani, president of Kurdistan, in Dukan resort near Al-Sulaymaniyah last week.

President Talabani talks about his experience in the presidency, and about the Iraqi Government. He also talks in detail about the split of Nawshirwan Mustafa, the former leading member of the PUK, and describes him as "hostile to the PUK, and hostile to and opposing the Kurdistan Province Government."

The following is the text of the interview:

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How do you assess your presidential term as it approaches its end?

[Talabani] I believe that it was successful. In this term, we have played the role of coordinator and reconciliatory in the Iraqi political process, and we have been able to establish good foreign relations. We have consolidated our relations with our brethren in the Arab world, especially our greater sister Egypt, and with our brother, His Excellency President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, as we have established strategic relations. We have done the same with fraternal Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, the UAE, and with our neighbor Turkey, as we have laid down the foundation of the strategic alliance between the two countries. We have developed our relations with the important countries we visited, such as China, France, Britain, and the United States. We also have given momentum to the continuation of these relations through our monthly meetings, which I used to convene with the Arab and foreign ambassadors accredited to Iraq. We have worked to facilitate the affairs of the state, whose government is presided over by brother Nuri al-Maliki.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that your role would have been more effective if you had more extensive powers?

[Talabani] Let me correct something important for you. The powers of the president are already extensive, as ratified by the Iraqi Constitution. They are influential and significant powers. It seems that there is a misunderstanding, or lack of in depth knowledge of these powers, or it could be that the people have heard some media statements promoted by some people saying that the powers of the president are ceremonial, however this is not true.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] On the basis of what you said, have you used your complete powers, which the Constitution has allocated to you?

[Talabani] Yes, we have used them in everything related to the protection of the higher interests of Iraq and the Iraqis, and in everything related to the higher policies and the foreign policies. We have had a decisive decision to be the guardians of the safety and implementation of the Constitution. The government might not have appreciated the role of the presidency, and disagreements have occurred as a result of this; however, we do not deny that the prime minister has consulted the president about many issues, and has been trying to coordinate with us. Nevertheless, when there are disagreements between the prime minister's office and the Presidency Council, everyone goes his own way.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have you found the experiment of the Presidency



Council to be successful?

[Talabani] I will be frank with you. The experiment of the Presidency Council has been both, a success and a failure; it is like all aspects of life, they have their negative and positive sides. Its positive sides include that it materializes the wish of all the major entities that constitute the Iraqi society, namely the Sunni Arabs, the Shiite Arabs, and the Kurds. This is important at the stage through which we are going until our democracy and constitutional institutions become well established, until the situation settles in Iraq, and until we reach the stage in which the parliamentary majority governs the country. At this stage - let us call it interim stage - we consider the experiment to be successful. On the other hand, the negative aspects include that the objection by one member of the Presidency Council can hinder the smooth running of the situation, and the necessary laws and proposals; this hindering from one member of the council could hinder the issues of the state.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Will the experiment of the Presidency Council be repeated in the upcoming stage after the parliamentary elections?

[Talabani] I do not know, because this is one of the powers of the parliament. According to the Constitution, the Presidency Council has concluded its mission, and was installed for one time only; the appendix of the Constitution says that the Presidency Council is for one parliamentary term, and this term has ended; "the expression Presidency Council replaces the expression president wherever it is found in this Constitution, and the rulings of the president are restored after one parliamentary term." This means that in the next parliamentary term there ought to be a president, and the role of the Presidency Council ends.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] On the basis of your experience, will you nominate yourself as a presidential candidate in the next term?

[Talabani] Let me be frank with you. If it is up to my personal wish, the answer is no, I will not nominate myself for the presidency again, because I need to dedicate myself to doing more work at the PUK, being with my family, and to resting and writing my memoirs. However, if the main parliamentary and political blocs in Iraq commission me, I will not disappoint them, and I will not reject this commission.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Will you relinquish your personal wish?

[Talabani] By God, I will. The same as I have relinquished my personal wishes all my life for the benefit of the public interests, Iraq, and the Iraqis.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that the political equation will change if the president is chosen from the Shiite or Sunni Arabs?

[Talabani] No, it will not change, because the Constitution is there, and there will be no changes.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that for the Kurds the post of the speaker of parliament is better than that of the president?

[Talabani] This depends on the circumstances. Under the current circumstances, the post of the president is better for the Kurds than the post of the speaker of parliament. As for the normal circumstances, the post of the speaker is best for the Kurds. Do not forget that under normal circumstances there will be no quotas, and hence it will not be that this post is for the Kurds and that for the Shiite or Sunni Arabs, because the Constitution will not grant any privileges to any constituent group of the Iraqi people.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have you felt from the Iraqis support for Jalal Talabani as president of Iraq because of his personal qualities, or because he is a Kurd?

[Talabani] All my life I have struggled within the ranks of the Kurdish revolution and the Iraqi cause for a democratic Iraq, and I have defended the Kurdish rights within this Iraq. I am proud that my relations with the Iraqi and Arab progressive powers always have been good. Since I was a student at the Faculty of Law at Baghdad University, I have exerted good efforts so that there would be good relations between the Kurdistan Democratic Party [KDP] - I was a member of its leadership - and all the Iraqi national parties, such as the Communist Party, the Democratic National Party, the Independence Party, Baath Party, and others. As for the Arab arena, I am also proud that I was the first leading member of the KDP to travel to Syria and to establish relations with the then Syrian parties, as I met Akram al-Hurani, Michel Aflaq, and others; I was the first Kurd to contact President Jamal Abdul-Nasser, I met him several times, and I established good relations with the Nasirites. This qualifies me to be a good Iraqi. Before I was commissioned to be the president of Iraq I met all the main political blocs in Iraq, and they were unanimous in their agreement to this commission. I said to the brethren in the PUK Political Bureau that when I go to Baghdad as a president, I will take off the Kurdish dress, and wear the Iraqi cloak in order to behave as an Iraqi and as a president of all Iraqis.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] But the Iraqis reproach their president - perhaps a reproach stemming from love - for the fact that President Talabani has not visited them in their southern governorates, such as Basra, Al-Amarah, or Al-Nasiriyah. Is this for health or political reasons?

[Talabani] Despite my love for all Iraqis, this is only partly true, because I have visited Karbala, Al-Najaf, Al-Hillah, and Al-Samawah. I have not visited the other cities for many reasons, including the fact that the Sunni Arab regions were disturbed, their security was unstable, and they could not be visited, and I had to balance my visits to the Sunni and Shiite Arab regions, otherwise my visits would have been interpreted incorrectly in one way or another. The other reason is that when the security situation improved in Southern Iraq, for instance in Basra, this (security situation) did not improve in Mosul, and if I paid a visit to Basra, I should visit Mosul, because the two cities constitute two important poles in Iraq. This reproach is only partly true, and I accept it.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How do you assess the security situation in the light of the latest explosions in Baghdad and other places, and the work of the security organizations?

[Talabani] I believe that the current government has been able to play an important role in imposing security and stability, and in liberating the unstable regions from the terrorists and the militias. A short time ago, Al-Anbar Governorate was under the control of the terrorists, Basra was under the control of the militias, and the main roads linking the Iraqi regions were dangerous and unusable; today, Al-Anbar has been liberated from the terrorists, Basra has been liberated from the militias, the roads between Baghdad and the rest of the cities of Iraq have been secured, and security has been imposed in many regions, such as Baghdad, Karbala, Al-Najaf, Al-Hillah, Samarra, and Tikrit. Yes, there are terrorist cells, but such cells exist also in Pakistan and Algeria. There is a difference between the existence of secret terrorist cells that carry out explosions, and the existence of entire regions that are under the control of terrorists, as is the case in Afghanistan. Therefore, the national unity government has succeeded in this field, but it has not been able to put a complete end to the terrorists. This has its reasons, the security organizations have played an important role, and offered hundreds of martyrs, and we ought to appreciate their role and sacrifices, but are there shortcomings in these organizations? Yes, there are shortcomings in the security organizations, and also there are claims that terrorists and Baathists have infiltrated these organizations and hence facilitate the work of the terrorists. We cannot deny the achievements, but at the same time we do not deny the existence of negative aspects, such as the existence of shortcomings in the security plan and in the people who undertake the implementation of this plan. Nevertheless, huge achievements have been accomplished in this field.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] But after four years of this government, there is deterioration in the security situation, and the economic situation is bad. There is a lack of basic services, such as electricity, water, and municipal services?

[Talabani] Allow me to disagree with you on this. Why do you say deterioration? Look at the map of Iraq; you will find that the security situation in the south is safe, also in Kurdistan Province it is safe, and so it is in most of the regions of the country. There are terrorist activities in Ninawa Governorate, and in Baghdad, while in the past the terrorists had activities in and control over

most of the regions of Iraq. Therefore, there is no security deterioration, but there is incomplete implementation of security. Such terrorist operations occur in Algeria, in Saudi Arabia, and in other countries. Therefore, we have to assess the situation realistically.

As far as the economic situation is concerned, there is improvement in this field. The standard of living has improved a great deal since the Saddamist era [the era of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein]. The economic situation has improved, but we have not reached what we aspired for in this field because of many reasons. These reasons include that terrorism has not been eradicated, no five- or four-year plan has been implemented, and we have not reached the required standard of oil production in order to implement the planned projects.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Does this mean that you are satisfied with the performance of the government?

[Talabani] No, I am satisfied with some aspects, but I have remarks on other aspects of the government performance. However, in general, as the Iraqis say "something covers another thing," yes, I am satisfied, but there are shortcomings in the five-year plan, and in the oil policy, which has started to improve recently, and it is correct, good, and serves Iraq, and we congratulate those who are administering this step. What has taken place in the issue of contracts with the oil companies should have taken place two or three years ago. Yes, there are achievements and shortcomings, and we ought to mention them all. There is nothing perfect except the work of God Almighty.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] But there are disagreements between you and the prime minister, for instance what happened about the representation of Iraq at the Arab summit, which convened in Qatar, and Al-Maliki's insistence to attend the summit rather than you?

[Talabani] This took place with my agreement. I am the one who told the brother Amir of Qatar that the prime minister will represent Iraq at the Arab summit. This was not because of the insistence of the prime minister; he wished to do so, consulted us about this, and he did not impose himself, but we agreed that he would represent Iraq at the Arab summit.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What about your contradiction with Al-Maliki in his accusation leveled at Syria of being involved in the latest explosions in Baghdad?

[Talabani] There is an important point, let me explain it. I have a special relationship with Syria and with the Syrian brethren. I have said repeatedly that I owe a national, personal, and moral debt to the honorable Al-Assad family. I cannot forget the help and support given to us by President Hafiz al-Assad under extremely difficult circumstances, circumstances under which many Arab countries were not able to give us entry visas. I am proud of this relationship, and I understand its motives. Therefore, I have said repeatedly that Syria is my identical primary homeland, Iraq is my primary homeland, and Syria is my identical primary homeland. Moreover, my philosophy in work and solving problems relies on calm diplomacy, and sometimes hidden diplomacy. I do not like to solve problems by means of hard-line statements, media escalations, and altercations; I always prefer to solve the problems between the fraternal Arab countries and the friendly foreign countries in a secret diplomatic amicable manner away from stirring up problems. Therefore, regardless of the claims about Syria, I believe that solving the problems ought to be done through Iraqi-Syrian meetings, whether via a joint security committee or via mediators we commission.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Today, the talk is about the upcoming parliamentary elections, and that they are decisive and important. Do you think they are?

[Talabani] Yes, I think that they are decisive elections and they are a matter of destiny. These elections will lead either to a setback of the democratic process, or to its continuation.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] What is your prediction of the results of these elections?

[Talabani] Our reading confirms that they will be successful, and will support the continuation and development of the democratic process.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Do you think that there will be a change in the political process?

[Talabani] There might be a change in the individuals; for instance, a president other than Jalal Talabani might be elected, or another person might be elected as prime minister or as speaker of parliament. We have to be confident that the democratic process will continue. We will work to establish a national front consisting of the main political blocs that won the elections in order to establish

compatible, cohesive, and strong national unity, and to form a strong, compatible, and cohesive parliamentary bloc that will help the government in its work and in passing the laws.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] On this basis, will your alliances as "Kurdistan bloc" be the same ones that took place in the previous parliamentary term. Will you form an alliance with the same tendency with which you formed a coalition before?

[Talabani] Our policy always is to form alliances with all. In the past four years we have formed an alliance with the Unified Iraqi Coalition, which is described as Shiite, and with the Islamic Party. We have had good alliances that continued for periods of time with brother Iyad Allawi and the National Accord Movement. Today we have good relations with the Coalition, with the State of Law Coalition, with brother Jawad al-Bulani, with the Iraqi List, with the Islamic Party, and with the Communist Party. We do not restrict our relations and alliances to a single side or a specific direction; our policy is to hold alliances with all.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] There is talk about your participation in the elections with an Iraqi national list. How correct is this?

[Talabani] The current circumstances are not suitable for participating in an Iraqi national list. God willing, we will participate in the next elections with such a list.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Let us move to the PUK, whose secretary general you are. What do you think of the experiment of Dr Barham Saleh as prime minister of the government of the Kurdistan Province?

[Talabani] I think this is natural. If you go back to the history of Kurdistan federalism, you will find that from the beginning there was an alternation between us and the KDP in the chairmanship of the government and the parliament. The first government was formed with Dr Fouad Masum as prime minister and the speaker of parliament was from the KDP; then the government was formed with brother Nejrvan Barzani as prime minister, and the speaker of parliament from the PUK, in the current government the prime minister is Dr Barham Saleh, while the speaker of the parliament is from the KDP. This is a continuation of the alliance between the two principal Kurdish parties.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Have you felt some dissatisfaction from some leading members of the KDP with Saleh chairing the government?

[Talabani] No, we have not felt that. Today, I have met brother Masud Barzani, president of Kurdistan, and he stressed his complete support for and satisfaction with Dr. Barham Saleh.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Are you optimistic about Saleh chairing the government?

[Talabani] We are optimistic about this government. Dr Barham is clever, effective, active, and broadminded. He has very good capabilities, and I believe that he will employ them for making the duty now commissioned to him succeed.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] The Kurdistan parliamentary elections resulted in the emergence of tangible opposition represented by the Change Group headed by Nawshirwan Mustafa. What is your assessment of this opposition?

[Talabani] The fact is that this is the result of a split in the PUK. These differences have existed within the PUK for a number of years, differences in policies and stances. However, we were able to preserve the internal unity of the party by offering concessions, privileges, and reconciliations. However, we reached a stage after which it was not possible to continue, and hence a number of leading members of the PUK split. This has led to the formation of a tendency called the Change Group. In the beginning there was some kind of confusion and reshuffling of the cards, as those who split did not announce that they were outside the PUK, but they claimed that they were the reform wing of the PUK and presented themselves as such. They even wanted to sue me because they were removed from the leadership responsibilities in the PUK, and they issued a statement against me in the name of the reform leadership of the PUK. Thus some of the people who wanted reform became confused, and they believed that if this reform were to come from within the PUK this would be better. This confusion led many members of the PUK to vote for them; however, after it was shown that their claims were not true, hundreds of leadership cadres and thousands of the grassroots, even entire regions, returned in their entirety to the PUK. Other than that, the slogan of change is tempting and desirable. We have not denied the importance of

change, but who can undertake it? We believe that the fundamental change ought to be undertaken by the two principal parties (the PUK and KDP); anyone else cannot undertake the change, as he can only shout (scream). This is what time proves clearly every day. Anyway, this is not the first split in the PUK; this is natural, but whoever split has returned to the party.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] Did you meet Nawshirwan Mustafa and talk to him before the elections?

[Talabani] Yes I met him, and I said to him at the penultimate meeting: If you want to form a party or a tendency, we are prepared to help and support you; this is your right, and if you want the situation to end in a good way, as we have worked together for long years, and if you want the split to take place in an amicable way, you may withdraw and form your own organization. He said: No, I do not want to form a party, but I want reform; and you alone (Talabani) can undertake the reform. I said: I alone am the one who can undertake reform?! He said: Yes. I said: Then, I will begin the reform, and I want your support for this process. He said: Yes, I support you.

We sent him the first plan of reform, he added to it, amended it, and returned it to us after he approved it. We presented the plan to the Political Bureau, and waited for the convening of the political conference, and he supported these steps. Unfortunately, at the end they split in a hostile way, and focused their attack on the PUK. Through their miscalculations, they tried to destroy the PUK, but our party was not destroyed. Despite all this, we consider this split as a natural occurrence that takes place in political organizations.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] As the secretary general of the PUK, do you consider Nawshirwan Mustafa as someone who opposes or as someone hostile?

[Talabani] He is hostile to the PUK, and he opposes the government of the province and is hostile to it. Nawshirwan Mustafa does not believe in the concept of coalition; he wants an independent Al-Sulaymaniyah Governorate, an independent Dahuk Governorate, and also an independent Arbil Governorate that are linked in a sort of decentralized way to Baghdad.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] You have said that leading members had split from the PUK, and then returned. Do you think that Mustafa will return to the PUK?

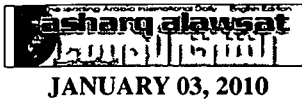
[Talabani] In the last conference we decided that they should not return, and we severed the link with them, because we suffered a great deal because of them and their disputes for long years.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] It is well known about your wife, Mrs. Hirokhan, that she does not appear as a leading member, and she prefers to work behind the scenes in her charities for children and women. This is despite the fact that she struggled with you in the mountains all along the years of the Kurdish revolution. How was she chosen an official in charge of the party organization in Al-Sulaymaniyah?

[Talabani] I have not intervened at all in this issue, and I did not discuss it with her. However, the comrades at the party's Political Bureau - especially brethren Mullah Bakhtiyar, Dalir Sayyid Majid, and others in the leadership - talked to her and convinced her to accept this mission despite her reluctance. She became convinced after they talked to her, therefore, she accepted this mission on the basis of the circumstances of the PUK. Our party presented, and still presents female leading members, we are at the forefront of the parties that appoint female ministers, and we have a minister in Baghdad, Minister of Environment Nirmin Khan.

[Asharq Al-Awsat] How do you assess your relations with the KDP?

[Talabani] Our relations with the KDP are more than distinguished, and my relations with brother Masud Barzani are more than excellent. We are pursuing the consolidation of these relations, and their transfer from the leadership to the grassroots of both parties; Together with brother Barzani we have decided to form a committee soon to undertake this mission.



Iraqi prime minister calls for end to oil deal row with Kurdistan

Asharq Al-Awsat

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki called for an end to a bitter row over oil contracts brokered by Iraqi Kurdistan, which has fuelled investor questions about the risks of doing business in war-torn Iraq.

In a rare direct reference to the feud between Arabs and minority Kurds, Maliki said on Sunday he had discussed the contracts -- which the largely autonomous Kurdish region signed with foreign companies -- with the region's Prime Minister, Barham Salih.

"We said it is time to look at this file and settle it with flexibility and realism, in order to preserve rights and interests in these contracts," Maliki was quoted saying on the government's national media centre website. "We hope to end this crisis."

He gave no details about how the two sides might settle the long-running feud, in which Iraq's Arab-led government in Baghdad has labelled Kurdish contracts illegal and Kurds have demanded reimbursement for exports from Kurdish fields.

Companies such as Norway's DNO, Turkey's Genel Enerji and London-based Heritage have struck production-sharing agreements for a handful of fields in northern Kurdistan.



thern Kurdistan.

In a move hailed as a Kurd-Arab breakthrough last year, oil was briefly exported through Iraq's main northern pipeline. The agreement fell apart and since then Kurdish authorities have demanded they be paid for those sales.

EXPORTS HALTED

The government's position is that Kurdistan can repay the companies out of their regular 17 percent cut of the federal budget.

DNO, a trailblazer in Kurdistan, said last month it had stopped drilling there after exports were halted.

But Maliki, signalling perhaps his federal government has not changed course, also wrote in an answer to a question submitted by a local journalist that revenue from

Kurdish oil exports will not be paid directly to Kurdish authorities.

"The revenues will be part of the national revenues that are distributed equally to all Iraqis," he wrote.

The dispute adds another element of uncertainty for investors in Iraq, where violence continues even as the country heads into national elections in March and U.S. forces prepare to withdraw by the end of next year.

Disagreement over the Kurdish contracts is part of the larger conflict between Arabs and Kurds, who make up about a fifth of Iraq's population, over disputed territories, oil resources and the strength of the federal government.

The hand of the central government may have been strengthened last month, when the Oil Ministry awarded a host of contracts of its own that could help quadruple Iraqi oil output.

Hussain al-Shahristani, Iraq's oil minister, banned oil companies doing business in Kurdistan from that auction.

Yet Barham Salih, who recently stepped down as Maliki's deputy prime minister, is also seen as a conciliatory figure who might be able to nudge Arabs and Kurds toward compromise.

AP Associated Press

Bombs in northern Iraqi city kill three

BAGHDAD — January 4, 2010 — (AP)

A pair of roadside bombs killed three people in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, including two of the city's police chief's guards, police and hospital officials said.

While violence in Iraq has dropped off dramatically since the height of the sectarian tensions of 2006 and 2007, smaller attacks such as those in Kirkuk continue. The northern city has also been a flash point for tension between the country's Arab and Kurdish populations who both claim the city as their own.

The first blast took place around 9.30 a.m. targeting a police convoy, a Kirkuk police officer said. The officer said two guards of the city's police chief were in the convoy and both were killed in the attack.

The police chief was not in the convoy.

Another roadside bomb targeting a police patrol went off minutes later about 200 meters down the street, killing a policeman, the officer said.

The casualties were confirmed by an official at the hospital.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

The motive for the attacks was not immediately known, though security personnel have frequently been targeted by insurgents who see them as collaborators with the government.

The oil-rich city of Kirkuk has been a center of controversy in Iraq.



An Iraqi policeman inspects a police vehicle on Monday damaged in a roadside bomb attack in Kirkuk, 180 miles north of Baghdad.

Under Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's program of Arabization, Kurds were kicked out of the city and Arabs moved in. After the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, Kurds began moving back to the city, but now many Arabs claim there are more Kurds than ever before.

U.S. sees troubles in Iran as opening for sanctions

WASHINGTON

White House points to domestic unrest and setbacks in nuclear effort

BY DAVID E SANGER
AND WILLIAM J BROAD

As President Barack Obama faces pressure to back up his year-end ultimatum for diplomatic progress with Iran, the administration says that domestic unrest and signs of trouble in Tehran's nuclear program make its leaders vulnerable to strong and immediate new sanctions.

The long-discussed sanctions would initiate the latest phase in a strategy to force Iran to comply with U.N. demands to halt production of nuclear fuel.

Mr. Obama's strategists said in interviews that Iran's top political and military leaders remained determined to develop nuclear weapons but that they were distracted by turmoil in the streets and political infighting and that the drive to produce nuclear fuel appeared to have faltered in recent months.

The White House wants to focus the new sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the military force believed to run the nuclear weapons effort. That force has also played a crucial role in the repression of anti-government demonstrators since the disputed presidential election in June.

Although repeated rounds of sanctions over many years have not dissuaded Iran from pursuing nuclear technology, a U.S. official involved in formulating Iran policy said the hope was that the current troubles "give us a window to impose the first sanctions that may make the Iranians think the nuclear program isn't worth the price tag."

While outsiders have a limited view of Iran's program, Obama administration officials said they believed that the

bomb-development effort was derailed by the exposure three months ago of the country's secret enrichment plant under construction near the holy city of Qum. Exposure of the site deprived Tehran of its best chance to covertly produce the highly enriched uranium needed to make fuel for nuclear weapons.

In addition, international inspectors report that at Iran's plant in Natanz, where thousands of centrifuges spin to enrich uranium for nuclear fuel, the number of the machines that are now operating has dropped 20 percent since the summer, which nuclear experts attribute to technical problems. Others, including some European officials, be-



Sanctions could be focused on forces that have led the crackdown on Iranian protests.

lieve the problems may have been accentuated by a series of covert efforts by the West to undermine the program, including sabotage on its imported equipment and infrastructure.

Those factors have led the White House policy makers to lengthen their estimate of how long it would take Iran to accomplish what nuclear experts call "covert breakout" — the ability to secretly produce a workable weapon.

"For now, the Iranians don't have a credible breakout option and we don't think they will have one for at least 18 months, maybe two or three years," said a senior official at the center of the White House's Iran strategy. The administration has told allies that the longer time frame would allow the sanctions to have an effect before Iran could develop its nuclear ability.

Another administration official said that Israeli officials, while still publicly hinting that they might take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities, "now feel that what's happening in Iran makes the country vulnerable to real sanctions" and might give Mr. Obama more time to persuade China and Russia to go along. A senior Israeli diplomat in Washington said that in back-channel conversations "Obama has convinced us that it's worth trying the sanctions, at least for a few months."

Sanctions will be a difficult balancing act for the United States, since it acknowledges that three previous rounds of sanctions have failed to deter Iran, and it also wants to avoid angering Iranians protesting in the streets by depriving them of Western goods. That is why the administration is focusing on the Revolutionary Guards, who are increasingly detested by the protesters and have built up billions of dollars of business interests in telecommunications, oil and construction.

Washington aims to get Arab and Asian nations to join Europe in cutting off financial transactions with front companies for the Revolutionary Guards. China and Russia have been reluctant and

could seize on the White House view of Iran's nuclear troubles to resist Mr. Obama's argument that new sanctions are needed now to punish Iran's defiance of the U.N. Security Council mandate that it cease enriching uranium.

Iran's insistence that its nuclear program is only for civilian purposes is roundly rejected by Western officials and, in internal reports, by international nuclear inspectors. Yet Washington's assessments of how much progress Iran has made toward a weapon have varied greatly over the past two years, partly a reflection of how little is known about the workings of its nuclear programs.

After reviewing new documents that have leaked out of Iran and debriefing defectors lured to the West, Mr. Obama's advisers say they believe the work on weapons design is continuing on a smaller scale — the same assessment reached by Britain, France, Germany and Israel.

The administration's current view of Iran's nuclear program was provided by six senior administration officials advising Mr. Obama on his strategy, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The administration's review of Iran's program, which they said was based on intelligence reports, information from allies and their own analysis, did not amount to a new formal intelligence assessment.

The officials, European officials engaged in the Iran issue and private experts described Iran's nuclear program as being in some disarray.

The biggest disruption came in late September, when Iran's covert effort to build an enrichment plant near Qum was exposed. Western intelligence agencies had been studying the underground plant from afar for a year, and two European officials say that Iranian nuclear spies recruited by Europe and Israel provided confirming evidence about the purpose of the plant.

International inspectors who were granted access to the underground site in October found that the plant was about a year from operation and that it was designed for just 3,000 centrifuges — not enough to produce the large amounts of fuel needed for commercial reactors, but sufficient for the stealthy production of highly enriched bomb fuel. (By comparison, the Natanz plant, which is ostensibly for producing reactor fuel, is designed for 54,000 centrifuges.)

U.S. officials say that the Qum plant is now useless to the Iranians. "They spent three years and tens of millions of dollars on a covert plant that they will probably never turn on," said the senior official involved in the White House strategy.

The official acknowledged, however, that Iran could have another secret facility that Western intelligence had missed



TURKEY: PEACE MAY COME TO PASS IN 2010

DIYARBAKIR, (Eastern Turkey), January 4, 2010 -

Analysis by Justin Hyatt (Inter Press Service)

WITH newfound liberties for the Kurdish minority and the government's 'Democratic Opening' initiative the prospects for peace in 2010 are brighter than they have been in the last 25 years. The fly in the ointment is the ban in December of the pro-Kurd, Democratic Society Party (DTP).

The Dec. 11, 2009 decision of the Constitutional Court declaring DTP illegal was a hard blow for the Kurds, the country's largest minority with about 20 million people. Expressing concern over the court ruling, the Presidency of the European Union called upon Turkey to reform its laws governing political parties.

The court decision was followed by protests and street clashes in which several people died, sparking fears of an extended period of unrest.

The grounds given for ordering the dissolution of DTP were its ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), classified as a terrorist organisation in Turkey and in several other countries. DTP had maintained that the PKK should have a seat at the negotiation table with its incarcerated leader, Abdullah Öcalan, given a prominent role.

Öcalan - who has been in jail for the last decade - is a beloved figure among the Kurds. It is feared that without him unity and peace will be difficult to reach. However, the Turkish government remains firm in its unwillingness to see the PKK as anything but an illegal guerrilla organisation, despite its unilateral ceasefire since March 2009.

The Istanbul-based Human Rights Association (IHD) claims that without the DTP there is no chance to carry on the democratic process. "DTP is the natural negotiator on behalf of the Kurds regarding the Kurdish question," explains Öztürk Türkdoğan, chairman of the IHD.

Following the ban most of DTP's members switched over to the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), a Kurdish back-up party established in 2008. It remains to be seen how this party will be able to pick up the pieces.

For much of 2009, however, the Kurds had reason to stay upbeat. In May DTP shocked the political establishment by doing exceedingly well in the local elections. They were able to place mayors in nine of the provincial capitals and take control of 98 municipa-

lities in eastern Turkey. The party could also send 21 members to Turkish parliament.

In August, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) came forward with its "Democratic Opening" initiative, which is meant to bring the country to a new level of freedom for Turkey's various minorities, especially the Kurds. In anticipation Turkish President Abdullah Gül had predicted that "good things will come to pass".

Secession from Turkey and complete independence are no longer the stated aims of the Kurds. They claim their goals are now to achieve greater freedom and maintain their identity and language.

Says Ercan Ayboga, a German Kurd formerly employed at the Diyarbakır municipality: "The important thing is that the Kurdish language is taught in schools and that Kurds are treated as equals in the federal constitution."

Recently, a rule that stipulated a limit to broadcast lengths of Kurdish language shows on television and radio was dropped. Other restrictions on the public use of Kurdish in meetings and elsewhere are also being eased.

Official recognition of Turkey's minorities is a possibility in 2010. It has already been announced that the constitution could be amended to make it possible to give full official recognition of the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group.

In some cases, it is women who are taking the initiative for peace. The "peace mothers" in Izmir are calling for violence in Turkey to be stopped. In their march in downtown Izmir they held signs stating "we are mothers and we are for peace."

Similarly in Istanbul, Turkish and Kurdish women went on the streets to declare that "women want peace". They began the 'Conscientious Objection for Peace' movement and declared their rejection of military service, so as to abstain from "fighting against our Kurdish brothers and sisters," - in the words of one attendee.

Sevgim Denizaltı, an Istanbul-based journalist, believes that the voice of people who want peace will be heard more loudly in 2010. "I think the solution is in the Turkish people's hands, especially in that of the women. If they can formulate their wish for peace more effectively than the nationalists, things can become better in 2010."

Emina Ayna, a leading Kurdish politician, is more forthright: "All policies of assimilation have failed. Democracy in Turkey will come by way of solving the Kurdish issue."

04 January 2010

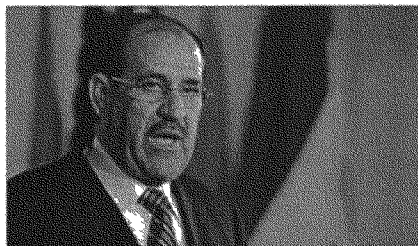
U.S. support for Kurds doesn't mean anything: Iraqi PM

Rudaw- Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, rejected reports that the Obama administration has given assurance to Kurds for the implementation of article 140 and other problems between Irbil and the central government.

In an interview with Rudaw, Nuri Almaliki, Iraqi Prime Minister, said "The U.S. guarantee does not mean anything."

In a response to a Rudaw question, about a statement from White House in which supports the implementation of the article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution to solve the issues of the disputed areas between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Central Government in Baghdad, Maliki said: "I haven't heard anything about those promises."

"It's not logical that a side can get an assurance from an outside (country), no matter



who is the outsider if it is the U.S. or any other (country)," Maliki said.

Furthermore he stated that the Kurds are an integral part of Iraq and they like any other Iraqi people are governed by constitution, that's why "the U.S. guarantees won't mean anything".

Regarding Maliki statement, the head of Kurdish coalition in Iraqi Parliament reiterated

that the U.S has promised support to Kurds and he confirmed those pledges is serious.

"Those supports are for the Kurds and all of it is present in the constitution and this not only for the Kurds, it's for all Iraq" Fuad Ma'asum the head of Kurdish alliance in Baghdad said.

Meantime concerning the issue of oil contracts between KRG and Baghdad, Maliki has revealed the time has come to solve this issue.

"Right now is the time to open this issue and try to solve it in a logical and peaceful way that can protect all the rights and interests" Maliki said, in a exclusive website that is used by journalist to contact the Prime Minister.

Maliki also confirmed that regarding this matter he has spoken to KRG's Prime Minister Barham Salih. © Rudaw

Kurdistan in Limbo



(Photo credit: Jon Vidar)

Andrew Lebovich

Graeme Wood has a fascinating piece in the current edition of *Foreign Policy* about his travels in the "limbo world" of unofficial or unrecognized states. These statelets, which control territory and have at least passably functional governments, range from those teetering on the edge of irrelevance--like Somaliland and Nagorno-Karabakh--to international flashpoints like Palestine and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Wood writes that these faux states are united by certain characteristics, and that, "totems of statehood are everywhere in these wannabe states: offices filled with functionaries in neckties, miniature desk flags, stationery with national logos, and, of course, piles of real bureaucratic paperwork designed to convince foreign visitors like me that international recognition is deserved and inevitable."

Yet of all the non-states that Wood visits, only one is now less sure than ever of the utility of independence: Kurdistan.

Kurdistan is perhaps the most official of the non-official states, with long-standing autonomy, strong security forces and a growing revenue stream. But as Wood points out, Kurdistan and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) have benefited from their leverage and autonomy within the Iraqi state; Kurdistan has established itself within the Middle East as a safe place for investment and a potentially large market for the import of goods and the export of

oil. In fact, Turkey, despite its large and historically restive Kurdish population, has emerged as a key economic partner for Kurdistan. The ruling Turkish AKP party sees a viable Kurdish region as a way to tie Turkey into the world's oil market while also maintaining a buffer against a potentially unfriendly or unstable Iraq. And as an International Crisis Group (ICG) report from November 2008 argued, the AKP now hopes to get help from the KRG against the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which has engaged in sporadic terrorism in Southern Turkey for the past 30 years. This potential cooperation comes less than two years after Turkish forces invaded northern Iraq in a bid to wipe out PKK sanctuaries, and even as Turkey sporadically bombards Iraqi Kurdistan.

Wood also intimates that independence no longer holds as much sway as it once did with Kurds, as many realize the benefits of a strong Kurdistan within an Iraqi state. And in an off-the-record briefing I attended last month several Kurdish officials sought to confirm this view, consistently affirming their desire to be a part of a democratic Iraq (albeit a federated one with strong regional administrations and generous revenue sharing).

And at the moment, the KRG has achieved grudging acceptance of its autonomy from the Iraqi central government. Despite previous efforts to blacklist any oil companies who signed contracts with the KRG, this past spring the Malaki government began allowing the KRG to export oil from two fields, providing needed revenue to the central state and helping integrate

Kurdistan more thoroughly into Iraq's economic and political structure.

Furthermore, Kurdistan's current relationship with its neighbors and the rest of Iraq are to the KRG and Kurds' benefit. A landlocked independent Kurdistan, even with the revenue from the disputed city of Kirkuk's massive oilfields, would aggravate tensions with neighboring states while still remaining dependent on these same states for trade and protection.

But it is unclear how long this tenuous calm might last, as several unresolved problems could upset Kurdistan's delicate balance and lead to future conflict or an irredentist resurgence.

The ICG's Joost Hiltermann, an Iraq expert, has argued that despite a realization among Kurdish leaders that independence is not viable, Kurdish nationalist aspirations live on and are in fact focused on the city of Kirkuk. However, the recently-passed Iraqi election law failed to deal with the status of Kirkuk or the long overdue (and constitutionally-mandated) census of Kirkuk, instead putting these issues off until next year. And despite progress in exporting oil and gas from Kurdistan, Iraq still has no agreement governing hydrocarbon revenue sharing, an issue to which the final status of Kirkuk, with its estimated 13% of Iraq's proven oil reserves, is central.

Moreover, the planned 2011 departure of American combat forces from Iraq continues to loom large; as Iraq's army grows stronger (in part due to an influx of American equipment) there is a greater risk of confrontation between Kurdish forces and the Iraqi army, as occurred in 2008 in parts of Diyala province as well as Kirkuk, where the Iraqi Army has strengthened its presence. And unlike 2008, American forces might not be around next time to keep tensions between the opposing sides from escalating.

Unsteady but real progress has been made in Iraq, as Kurdistan continues to integrate itself into Iraqi state institutions while maintaining partial autonomy from the central government and control over its resources. But care must be taken in the coming months and years, lest Kurdistan fail in its transition from limbo to province.

Iran's leaders face erosion of support

DUBAI

Release of secret dealings shows disillusionment in hard-line leadership

BY MICHAEL SLACKMAN

Beatings, arrests, show trials and even killings have failed to discourage Iranians from taking to the streets in protest. But those same tactics may be taking a toll on the regime itself, eating away at its legitimacy within its secretive core of

NEWS ANALYSIS

powerful insiders, Iran experts are saying. The evidence? Leaks.

They began in December. Leaks about private meetings of the intelligence services and Revolutionary Guards; an embarrassing memo from state-owned television on how to cover the protests; a note about how the security services have been using petty criminals to fill out the ranks of pro-government demonstrations.

There is no way to verify the accuracy of these leaks. But the government appears to have grown so angry and frustrated with what it calls a "soft war" to overthrow the state that it has made it a crime to be affiliated with many foreign news media outlets, dozens of nongovernment organizations and opposition Web sites deemed "anti-revolutionary."

Iran has always been deeply factionalized; even the ideologically grounded Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps is far from monolithic.

That may be even more true today, since the outbreak of a political crisis following the disputed presidential election in June. Even among the most ideologically committed, there are signs that some recognize the government's iron-fisted approach to the protests is not working, and indeed may be backfiring.

"I think the purged and discontented officials are the sources of increasingly revealing leaks to the press and to the Green Movement of activities and plans by leaders of the regime," said Abbas Milani, director of Iran studies at Stanford University and a sharp critic of the government.

The leaks could be a symptom of disillusionment and, perhaps, of the supreme leader's decision to marginalize all but the most loyal. Yet, while the leaks provide evidence of divisions, they can not answer questions about how deep the rifts go or what they say

about the trajectory of the crisis or the stability of the government

At the moment, at least, few if any experts are predicting the government will fall.

"There is enough commitment to the survival of the Islamic Republic among an array of forces in the government and society to assure the continued use of repression and violence," said Farideh Farhi, an Iran expert and author at the University of Hawaii. "But it is precisely the ineffectiveness of the methods used in controlling the crowds, combined with the unsuccessful effort on the part of some very hard-line forces to cleanse the Iranian political system of all rivals, that may persuade some leaders to change their minds."

So far, the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has shown no willingness to compromise with the opposition. He also retains the allegiance of the primary levers of power — the leadership of the Revolutionary Guards, the intelligence services, the Basij militia, the regular armed forces and the judiciary, Iran experts said.

But it is possible that internal pressure could — at some point — force a political compromise.

"Since June, there has been much anecdotal evidence that suggests deep divisions between the hard-line commanders of the Guards and between the Guards and members of the regular armed forces who are dissatisfied with the election and its aftermath," said Alireza Nader, an Iran analyst with the Rand Corporation in Washington. "The extent of these divisions are hard to gauge, but they have the potential to weaken Khamenei's grip at a critical juncture."

The main opposition leader, Mir Hussein Moussavi, last week demonstrated his own willingness to compromise when he issued a statement saying that the leadership could restore its legitimacy if it took several steps to loosen its

"I think the purged and discontented officials are the sources of increasingly revealing leaks."

grip on the opposition, freeing political prisoners and allowing freedom of speech, media and assembly. He did not mention his previous demand for a new presidential election.

But his overture was ignored, and for now the atmosphere remains hostile — and the leaks continue.

Mr. Milani, for example, pointed to what he said was a credible report based on information from the Military Command for Greater Tehran that the authorities have used criminals and prostitutes to intimidate protesters and fill the ranks of pro-government demonstrations.

"I was told the police call them 'percentage ladies,' and they come from the ranks of women arrested for a variety of petty crimes," the note said. "The smartest are handpicked and then offered their freedom in exchange for working for intelligence" or the Revolutionary Guards.

On Jan. 1, the Rouydad News Web site said that an opposition supporter within the Revolutionary Guards, or I.R.G.C., provided a detailed account of the funeral for Ali Moussavi, the assassinated nephew of the opposition leader, which was controlled by the Guards' own internal intelligence service.

"From early in the morning, the I.R.G.C. intelligence people arranged with the telecommunications organization, that mobile phones be cut off in the area of Behesht-e Zahra cemetery to make it impossible for the people to receive word," the account said. "The I.R.G.C. intelligence people told Mir-Hussein Moussavi that he was only to attend at the very last moment for prayers."

Recently, a memo was leaked from the state-owned national broadcaster IRIB that offered a guide for reporting on the protests, including ways to undermine the credibility of opposition claims of brutality by the Basijis and other security forces. "In continuing with the policies of normalization, pacification and clarification of national media to confront the sedition, the propaganda should focus on seditious people's hostility toward the Islamic regime and Islam," the memo said.

In another apparent leak, at the end of December, the Jaras opposition Web site reported on a meeting it said was held to discuss arresting the principal opposition leaders: Mr. Moussavi; the cleric and former Parliament speaker, Mehdi Karroubi; and the former president, Mohammed Khatami. The participants were said to include some of the leaders of the Revolutionary Guards and Intelligence Ministry, as well as a representative of the supreme leader's office. The report said that representatives of the Supreme National Security Council opposed the arrests while others supported the action.

So far none of them has been arrested. But if the three are arrested, if the repression continues and if the chorus of calls for executing protesters is heeded, some experts predict more leaks and perhaps more cracks within the leadership's base of support.

"There will come a point where people within the system, from the Basij or Revolutionary Guards, will start to question what they're doing and whether they can continue to be loyal to this regime," said Michael Axworthy, a former British diplomat and Iran expert who lectures at the University of Exeter.

Protesters are seeking change, not abolition of the Islamic Republic.

Another Iranian revolution? Not likely

**Flynt Leverett
Hillary Mann Leverett**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is not about to implode. Nevertheless, the misguided idea that it may do so is becoming enshrined as conventional wisdom in Washington.

For President Obama, this misconception provides a bit of cover; it helps obscure his failure to follow up on his campaign promises about engaging Iran with any serious, strategically grounded proposals. Meanwhile, those who have never supported diplomatic engagement with Iran are now pushing the idea that the Tehran government might collapse to support their arguments for military strikes against Iranian nuclear targets and adopting "regime change" as the ultimate goal of America's Iran policy.

Let's start with the most recent events. On Dec. 27, large crowds poured into the streets of cities across Iran to commemorate the Shiite holy day of Ashura; this coincided with mourning observances for a revered cleric, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who had died a week earlier. Protesters used the occasion to gather in Tehran and elsewhere, setting off clashes with security forces.

Important events, no doubt. But assertions that the Islamic Republic is now imploding in the fashion of the shah's regime in 1979 do not hold up to even the most minimal scrutiny. Anti-government Iranian Web sites claim there were "tens of thousands" of Ashura protesters; others in Iran say there were 2,000 to 4,000. Whichever estimate is more accurate, one thing we do know is that much of Iranian society

was upset by the protesters using a sacred day to make a political statement.

Vastly more Iranians took to the streets on Dec. 30, in demonstrations organized by the government to show support for the Islamic Republic (one Web site that opposed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election in June estimated the crowds at one million people). Photographs and video clips lend considerable plausibility to this estimate — meaning this was possibly the largest crowd in the streets of Tehran since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's funeral in 1989. In its wake, even President Ahmadinejad's principal challenger in last June's presidential election, Mir Hossein Mousavi, felt compelled to acknowledge the "unacceptable radicalism" of some Ashura protesters.

The focus in the West on the antigovernment demonstrations has blinded many to an inconvenient but inescapable truth: the Iranians who used Ashura to make a political protest do not represent anything close to a majority. Those who talk so confidently about an "opposition" in Iran as the vanguard for a new revolution should be made to answer three tough questions: First, what does this opposition want? Second, who leads it? Third, through what process will this opposition displace the government in Tehran?

In the case of the 1979 revolutionaries, the answers to these questions were clear. They wanted to oust the American-backed regime of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and to replace it with an Islamic republic. Everyone knew who led the revolution: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who despite living in exile in Paris could mobilize huge crowds in Iran simply by sending cassette tapes into the country. While supporters disagreed about the revolution's long-term agenda,

Khomeini's ideas were well known from his writings and public statements. After the shah's departure, Khomeini returned to Iran with a draft constitution for the new political order in hand. As a result, the basic structure of the Islamic Republic was set up remarkably quickly.

Beyond expressing inchoate discontent, what does the current "opposition" want? It is no longer championing Mr. Mousavi's presidential candidacy; Mr. Mousavi himself has now redefined his agenda as "national reconciliation." Some protesters seem to want expanded personal freedoms and interaction with the rest of the world, but have no comprehensive agenda. Others — who have received considerable Western press coverage — have taken to calling for the Islamic Republic's replacement with an (ostensibly secular) "Iranian Republic."

But University of Maryland polling after the election and popular reaction to the Ashura protests suggest that most Iranians are unmoved, if not repelled, by calls for the Islamic Republic's abolition.

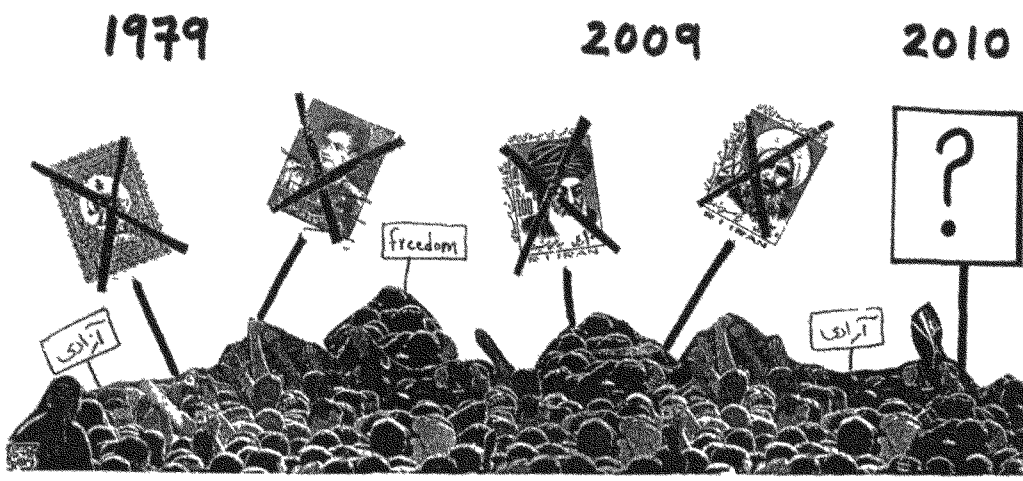
With Mr. Mousavi increasingly marginalized, who else might lead this supposed revolution? Surely not Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former president who became a leading figure in the protests after last summer's election. Yes, he is an accomplished political actor, is considered a "founding father" of the state and heads the Assembly of

Obama will make a huge mistake if he waits for Tehran's political dynamics to 'solve' his Iranian policy problems.

Experts, a body that can replace the Islamic Republic's supreme leader. But Mr. Rafsanjani lost his 2005 bid to regain the presidency in a landslide to Mr. Ahmadinejad, and has shown no inclination to spur the masses to bring down the system he helped create.

Nor will Mohammad Khatami, the reformist elected president in 1997, lead the charge; in 1999, at the height of his popularity, he publicly disowned widespread student demonstrations protesting the closing of a newspaper that had supported his administration.

Many of the Westerners who see the opposition displacing the Islamic Republic emphasize the potential for unrest during Shiite mourning rituals, which take place at three-, seven- and 40-day intervals after a person's death. During the final months of the shah's rule, his opponents used mourning rituals held for demonstrators killed by security forces to catalyze further protests. But does this mean that a



stream of mourning rituals for fallen protesters today will set off a similarly escalating spiral of protests, eventually sweeping away Iran's political order?

That is highly unlikely. First, Ayatollah Montazeri had unique standing in the Islamic Republic's history; it is not surprising that the coincidence of his seven-day observance with the Ashura observation would have drawn crowds. His 40-day observance — which will fall on Jan. 29 — and the early February commemoration of the 1979 revolution might also encourage public activism. But there is nothing in the Islamic Republic's history to support projections that future mourning rituals for those killed in the Ashura protests will elicit similar attention.

For example, in late 1998 four prominent intellectuals were assassinated, allegedly by state intelligence officers, prompting public outrage. Yet the mourning rituals for the victims did not prompt large-scale protests. In 1999, nationwide student protests were violently suppressed, with at least five people killed and 1,200 detained. Once again,

though, the mourning dates for those who died did not generate significant new demonstrations. Likewise, after the presidential election in June, none of the deaths associated with security force action — even that of Neda Agha-Soltan, the young woman whose murder became a cause célèbre of the YouTube age — resulted in further unrest.

In keeping with this pattern, the seven-day mourning observances for those killed in the Ashura protests generated no significant demonstrations in Iran. Clearly, comparisons of the Ashura protests to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, projecting a cascade of monumental consequences to follow, are fanciful. The Islamic Republic will continue to be Iran's government. And, even if there were changes in some top leadership positions — such as the replacement of Mr. Ahmadinejad as president by Ali Larijani, the speaker of the Parliament — this would not fundamentally change Iran's approach on regional politics, its nuclear program and other matters.

The Obama administration's half-hearted efforts at diplomacy with Tehran have given engagement a bad

name. As a result, support for more coercive options is building across the American political spectrum. The president will do a real disservice to American interests if he waits in vain for Iranian political dynamics to "solve" the problems with his Iran policy.

As a model, the president would do well to look to China. Since President Richard Nixon's opening there (which took place amid the Cultural Revolution), successive U.S. administrations have been wise enough not to let political conflict — whether among the ruling elite or between the state and the public, as in the Tiananmen Square protests — divert Washington from sustained, strategic engagement with Beijing. President Obama needs to begin displaying similar statesmanship in his approach to Iran.

FLYNT LEVERETT directs the New America Foundation's Iran Initiative and is a professor of international affairs at Pennsylvania State University. **HILLARY MANN LEVERETT** heads a political risk consultancy. They publish the Web site *The Race for Iran*.

Iraqi Sunni vows to fight his exclusion from election

BAGHDAD

BY NADA BAKRI

A decision to ban a prominent Sunni Muslim politician from Iraq's parliamentary elections in March stirred anger among his followers Friday and divided rival lawmakers, some of whom feared the repercussions of the move.

A parliamentary committee endowed with the power to vet candidates announced Thursday that the National Dialogue Front, led by Saleh al-Mutlaq, was one of 15 electoral lists that would be barred from taking part in the elections because it promotes the Baath Party of Saddam Hussein, which is banned by the Constitution.

Mr. Mutlaq had entered a coalition with former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi that many expected to fare well in predominantly Sunni provinces. Even moderate success could have ensured Mr. Mutlaq a say in deciding Iraq's next prime minister.

"There is a great popular resentment toward this decision, which lacks any legal justification," said Najim al-Harbi a supporter of Mr. Mutlaq's party in Diyala Province. "The Iraqi street is now boiling and demanding to go out in mass protests."

Mr. Mutlaq vowed to appeal the decision and assured his supporters that he would eventually prevail. "I will fight until the end," he said at a news conference Friday surrounded by aides and supporters. "I will fight in Parliament and outside Parliament and I call on everybody to vote." Sunnis largely boycotted the 2005 elections, handing Shutes and Kurds disproportionate power in the National Assembly.

The decision by the Accountability and Justice Committee could be ratified by the electoral commission as early as Sunday, a step seen as a formality. Once it is, Mr. Mutlaq can appeal the decision in court, whose decision would be final.

On Friday, even Shiite lawmakers seemed to be divided over a move that Mr. Mutlaq's allies warned could worsen sectarian tension in a country still shadowed by the horrific bloodletting of 2006 and 2007. While some insisted that the committee's decision simply upheld the ban against Baathists participating in politics, others worried about the backlash from Mr. Mutlaq's supporters.

Vice President Adel Abdul Mahdi suggested that a compromise was possible. "I believe that this issue is still within the corridors of power," he said after meeting Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf on Friday. "It hasn't become official yet."

Gunmen fire at opposition leader in Iran

BY NAZILA FATHI

In yet another sign of escalating tensions in Iran, pro-government demonstrators shot at the armored car of the country's most outspoken opposition leader, Mehdi Karroubi, his Web site, Saham News, reported Friday.

No one was hurt in the attack Thursday night, which appeared to reflect growing frustration that the recent government crackdown on dissent has failed to stop the opposition from lashing out at the country's leaders and occasionally staging protests that bring tens of thousands of people into the streets.

Mr. Karroubi, a midlevel cleric who ran in the disputed June presidential election, has been pushed and shoved by critics since then, and one threw a

shoe at him — a grave insult throughout the Muslim world. But this was the first time someone had shot at him.

The attack occurred in Qazvin, where Mr. Karroubi had traveled to attend a mourning ceremony for eight protesters who were killed during a demonstration on Dec. 28, his Web site reported.

It said that about 500 pro-government demonstrators gathered outside the building where Mr. Karroubi was staying, chanting slogans against him and throwing bricks and rocks at the third-floor apartment where he was. The police intervened after four hours to try to help him leave the city, but his armored car was shot twice.

"Many of the demonstrators were armed and kept daring Mr. Karroubi to leave the apartment building," the Web site reported. "The security forces were not able to disperse the assailants."

Mr. Karroubi said his guards refrained from returning fire, the Web site reported. "If my guards had engaged in shooting, unlike the assailants who shot without fearing arrest, they would have been summoned to court and tried," he said.



Designer of Kurdish flag passes away

January 6, 2010 - www.ekurd.net

BERLIN, — A German citizen who designed the Kurdish flag and organized a Kurdish uprising against the British, passed away at age 95. On 26th September 2009 Gottfried Johannes Müller dies after a long and fulfilled life in the bosom of his family

Gottfried Johannes Muller along with Ramzi Fath, a Kurdish citizen, designed the Kurdish flag in the early 1940s. Since then the flag with colors red, white, yellow and green, has been recognized by majority of Kurds in the world as their national flag.

Frank Haller, a close friend of Muller, told Rudaw that in the last days of his life Muller asked him to bring him a Kurdish flag so that he can take it with him to his grave.

"I was one of those people who talked with Muller and he asked for a Kurdish flag," Muller said. "When I took him one, he kept it until his death and he still has it in his grave", Haller, 53, said.

In 1943 he, as a German Major and Ramzi Nafie Agha carried out a mission to start an Kurdish uprising and to gain control of the oil fields for the Germans. In return, www.ekurd.net the Kurds would be assisted in creating an independent Kurdistan. But the operation failed and he was betrayed. He was captured by the British and Iraqi forces and sentenced to death, but escaped out of prison. Later he was captured again and he was sent to a military prison in Hamburg in Germany after the end of the World War. He was freed in 1948.

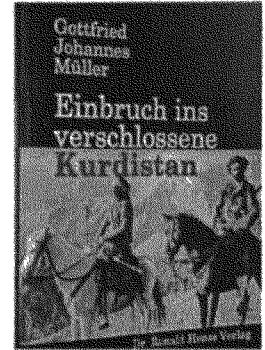
Muller has written a few books about his experience in Kurdistan and Kurdish issues and Kurdish people were close to his heart. Later he founded the non-profit Christian welfare organization Salem International in 1957 www.saleminternational.org

The Kurdish flag flown officially in Iraqi Kurdistan region (Southern Kurdistan) but unofficially flown by Kurds in Armenia. The flag is banned in Iran, Syria, and Turkey where flying it is a criminal offence"

According to Wikipedia, the Kurdish flag (also flag of Kurdistan, Kurdish: Alaya Kurdistanê, also called Alay Rengîn ("the colorful flag") first appeared during the Kurdish independence movement from the Ottoman



Gottfried Johannes Müller
(1914-2009)



Empire. It is said to have been created in the 1920s by the organisation of Xoybûn (Khoiboon). An earlier version of this flag was flown by the break-away Republic of Ararat in Turkey during the period 1927-1931.

Gottfried Johannes Müller (1914-2009)

It was later the flag of the Soviet-backed Kurdish state known as the Republic of Mahabad in 1946. It is flown by the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan. The flag is banned in Syria.

The main Kurdish characteristic of the flag is the blazing golden sun emblem at the center, which is an ancient religious and cultural symbol among the Kurds. The sun disk of the emblem has 21 rays, equal in size and shape. The number 21 holds importance in the ancient Yazdani religious traditions of the Kurds.[4]

The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP), which has used this tricolor flag for more than a half century, explains the symbolism of the colors as following:

Red symbolizes the blood of Kurdish martyrs and the continued struggle for Kurdish freedom and dignity.

Green expresses the beauty and the landscapes of Kurdistan.

White expresses peace and equality.

Yellow represents the source of life and light of the people.

THE INDEPENDENT

7 January 2010

Opinion



Gareth Stansfield: With US support, a brighter future beckons for the Kurds

Politics and diplomacy take unexpected turns in Iraq's Kurdistan Region Government (KRG). The President of the Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barzani, and his counterpart Jalal Talabani, the Kurdish President of Iraq, had a troublesome 2009. They failed to implement Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution that specifies a process for the resolution of the status of the "disputed territories of Iraq", a huge swath of land that, most importantly, includes Kirkuk and its oil-field.

Ethnic tensions were heightened by the January provincial elections, from which Kirkuk was excluded. In Ninevah the Kurds were removed from the provincial council and replaced by the Arab nationalist party Hadhba. And, in the Kurdistan National Assembly, Barzani and

Talabani faced a strong challenge in the form of the Gorran party. Perhaps the most pressing concern for President Barzani, however, remains the dispute over oil exploitation with the Iraqi government, which refuses to accept the legitimacy of contracts signed by the KRG with international oil companies.

But once again since 2003, US interests have coincided with Kurdish expectations. Needing elections to take place early in 2010 in order to maintain some semblance of normality in Iraq, the US desperately needed the Kurds to support the passing of the elections law. This they did and Barzani duly received a visit from Robert Gates and spoke with Biden and Obama. The statements that followed made a perfect Christmas present for the Kurds – unequivocal support on the disputed territories and oil questions, and a clear attempt to calm Kurdish leaders' nerves with affirma-

tions of support.

This does not mean independence for the Kurds. But it does mean that, following the 2010 parliamentary elections in Iraq, the political process will be one in which the Kurds enjoy considerable US support. Of course, the Kurds have heard promises from the US in the past (most notably in 1991) that failed to materialise. Yet this time seems to be different – if only because the US needs the Kurds to help maintain the trajectory of Iraq's political development. It will be interesting to see if the Kurds can make durable realities while their alignment with US interests lasts.

Gareth Stansfield is Professor of Middle East Politics at the University of Exeter and Associate Fellow at Chatham House

The rivalry between PUK and Gorran continues

By Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Rudaw, Erbil - Two months ago during the plenum of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani said his former friend and former senior PUK leader, was behind the civil war and responsible for the bombing of Halabja. Something which the leader of Kurdish opposition movement Gorran denies in a short interview. The rivalry continues between PUK and Change while the Iraqi elections are approaching, despite the fact they have a shared history.

A lot of the Change list leaders still have contacts with their former friends of the PUK. Most of them come from the same party PUK, which fought a civil war with the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) in the 1990s, but they recently decided to split off the PUK, because they say the party was unable to do reforms and combat corruption.

The senior PUK leader based in Erbil Mustafa Bakr still has a picture of Nawshirwan Mustafa in Peshmerge clothes with other PUK-leader on his table, during an interview. Nawshirwan Mustafa says he still has contacts with his former friends in the PUK. "We have political differences, but still contacts on the social level," says the Gorran leader.

But the political rivalry is becoming increasingly personal. During the plenum the Iraqi president heavily attacked the Change list leader and accused him of all the dark episodes in the history of PUK, like the civil wars and the chemical attacks in Halabja. In a short interview from his major power base in Slemani, Nawshirwan Mustafa said the allegations of Jalal Talabani weren't based on facts or documents. The Change list leader said that it was Saddam that threatened Halabja with chemical bombing and he is thus not responsible for the Halabja bomb attack in 16 March 1988, which killed thousands of people. Until recently, the Change list leader responded on the Sbeiy.com

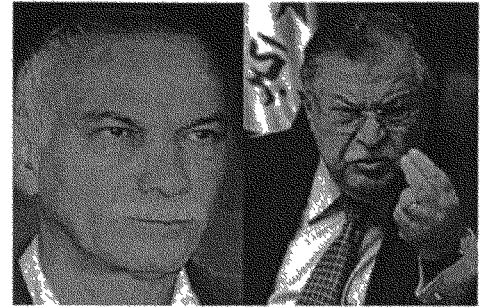
website to the statements of the PUK-leader.

On Gorran's tv-channel KNN, Nawshirwan Mustafa said he wondered why his friends with whom he had relations for more than 40 years, can blame all responsibilities of the former authoritarian regimes on him. Change list MP Kardo Mohammed Pirdawed says both PUK and Gorran are not responsible for the crimes of Saddam's regime, whose leaders were punished by the Iraqi court. Pirdawed says the history of the PUK doesn't need explanation.

Fareed Asasard, a prominent leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party (PUK) and director of Kurdistan's Strategic Studies Center, said that the people within the Change list and the PUK do not like the media war between the PUK-leader and the Change list head in the media of both Gorran and the PUK. "This is not good. Not only me, but also people in the PUK and Change do not want to read this." Asasard also says the Change wants to show it's different from the PUK, while the PUK also tries to distance itself from Gorran.

The senior Change list leader Safeen Malaqara based in Erbil said that it's true that the people don't like the former friends talking bad against each other and that it could damage the image of both political movements. But he said the Change list leader didn't reply yet to the statements of the PUK-leaders Kosrat Rasul Ali and Jalal Talabani and just answered propaganda against him. "But your analysis is true, that's it bad for all of them, but the reason people vote for Gorran is not because of Naswhirwan. The main reason is that the people are tired of the corrupted political parties. Why did the people vote for Change in Erbil? While the KDP is in power?"

Change list MP Pirdawed adds that the PUK-leaders want to damage the image of Change and want to show the Kurdish people the Change list is just a copycat of PUK and not anything new. Still he doesn't endorse the statements of the PUK and Change list heads. "I



don't endorse these statements, but Nawshirwan's statements are highly supported by the people. The response to it is necessary, since the mass media of both parties try to depict Gorran as a bad movement."

The media war of the former Kurdish elections still continues. After these elections of 25 July, the PUK controlled media said Gorran members were returning back to PUK. Senior PUK leader Mustafa Bakr said that Change cannot deliver on it's promises of reform, because they do not have the power to implement projects. "They were not able to carry out these promises, and returned to PUK." But the senior Change list leader Mam Rostam from Kirkuk said these people only returned because they needed money and jobs and that the PUK fired people in government institutions for voting for the Change list movement.

After Change won 25 seats in the Kurdish elections, it's planning to continue to win seats in the Iraqi elections, dividing the Kurdish bloc in to competing factions. Recently there also have been violence in the PUK-ruled province of Sulaymania, which Gorran blames on the ruling parties. The Change list was blamed for the violent demonstrations in the town Piramagrun on 24 December against the PUK-ruled local government, something which the residents of the town denied.

While the PUK says the Change list cannot be able to carry out it's promises to the people, the Change says it created an active parliament and a voice of the unrepresented people in Kurdistan. It's likely the competition between PUK and Gorran will continue, especially in formerly PUK-dominated regions like Kirkuk and Sulaimanyah. © Rudaw

Barzani calls for end of internal Kurdish fighting

Erbil - The Kurdish president Massoud Barzani affirmed that he will not allow internal fighting to resurge among Kurds calling to resolve political issues inside the Parliament reports Al Sumaria.

In a statement by Kurdistan Presidency Office, Barzani stressed that no party should be allowed to use present rows in aim to destabilize security in the region.



The Kurdish president called to halt all media debates among political parties after a stepped-up tone between Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Secretary General Jalal Talabani and his rival Nawshirwan Mustafa, head of the Change Movement (Gorran), reviving fears of the civil

war, the Kurdish political parties fought in the 1990s

Barzani's decision came after an extended meeting was held in Erbil joining Barzani, Kurdistan Parliament Speaker Kemal Kerkuki and political parties participating in Kurdistan Parliament.

Earlier Kurdish MPs asked Nawshirwan Mustafa and Jalal Talabani in a letter to stop the political statements and to respect the achievements the Kurdish politicians have made in the past. "The situation Kurdistan is in today, is not thanks to one party, but to all those that have fought for Kurdistan," the letter said. © Rudaw



Iraq's Security is Kurdistan's Security: An Interview with KRG Intelligence Chief Masrour Barzani

By: Wladimir van Wilgenburg

ACCORDING to Masrour Barzani, director of the Ajansi Parastini Asayishi Heremi Kurdistan (Kurdistan Region Security Protection Agency) of northern Iraq, Kurdish security agencies have the legal right to operate outside of the borders of the three provinces of the Kurdistan region. Barzani is the son of the current president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Masoud Barzani.

Barzani is also a leading member of the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which established the Parastin ("Protection") agency in the late 1960s as the intelligence arm of the KDP. Barzani is also director of the Parastin, which became a legal institution in 2004 and focuses on intelligence gathering, while the KRG's Asayish counterterrorism and internal security directorate has executive power and carries out operations against security threats. After 9/11, the KRG established an umbrella organization that coordinates between the security and intelligence bodies of the KDP and the Dazgay Zanyari ("Information Agency") of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the KDP's onetime rival and current partner, now led by Jalal al-Talabani, President of Iraq.

JF: Why is Iraq's Kurdistan region so safe? You can go out late at night here, while the Kurdistan region borders with dangerous areas like Mosul, Kirkuk and the Sunni triangle.

MB: This is a collective work of all people involved in providing security for this area. But the main reason is the culture of our people and our region. The people in the Kurdistan region do not support radicals or extremism. There is very good cooperation between our agency and our people. The support we get from our people is the key.

[There is also] the good system and mechanism that we have put in place, so that all organizations that are working in this field are closely coordinating and have joint centers to share information and to perform according to different situations that come up and to respond and face the challenges that we have.

JF: The Kurdistan region borders Kirkuk and Mosul. Some say the Sunni Arabs have grievances against the Kurds. Do you have a policy of accommodation towards the Arabs?

MB: This is a political decision. The Kurdish leadership has been trying tirelessly and will [continue to] try to make sure that this conflict will never become an ethnic problem between the Arabs and the Kurds. After 1991, there were more than 70,000 Iraqi troops that surrendered to the Kurdish forces, but the Kurds did not [take] revenge despite the fact that the wounds of the chemical bombardments and Anfal campaign were still fresh in the Kurdish mind. [1]

Secondly, there was a major drought here and in the rest of the country and many Arab tribes asked for Kurdish support. President [Masoud] Barzani called on the Kurdish leaders and requested that if Arabs want to come, they should make a good gesture and open our land to them. The third instance was in 2003, after the fall of the Saddam regime, [when] the Kurds were the only organized people with the most power at hand, they could really do much more [politically] than they did. They left all disputed, outstanding issues to the political process and to the Iraqi government to solve this problem, rather than taking over. The Kurds showed that they were here to create peace, harmony with other components in Iraq.



KRG Intelligence Chief Masrour Barzani

That is the intention of the Kurdish leadership and what our agency is also advocating. We are not there to do any harm to anyone based on their ethnic backgrounds. Our mission and duty is to fight terrorists. If someone happens to be a terrorist, they are treated as terrorists, not because of their religious or ethnic background.

JF: In the last elections in January 2009 the Sunni Arab list al-Hadba won the majority in Ninawa Province. Is this a threat to Kurdish security?

MB: When al-Hadba won the majority in the last provincial election, they decided not to include any Kurdish representatives that had won votes in their districts. [2] It was the decision of al-Hadba that the Kurds should not be part of the Mosul government. They decided to boycott the Kurdish representatives in their own local government. The Kurdish reaction was not to participate if they are not included in the government. It was their choice.

The Kurds have not been complaining much. Despite atrocities and allegations and complaints against the Kurds, the Kurds have not been so vocal and bold, complaining about their situation. This is not widely reported in the international community, but the truth is that Kurds are still victims of ethnic cleansing in Mosul and many of the disputed territories where the Kurds are not well protected.

JF: Is this one of the reasons you also operate outside of the Kurdistan region, because of the huge attacks against Kurds in Ninawa, while the Iraqi government does not want you to operate in the disputed regions?

MB: There is not a clear indication of who should run those areas in the disputed regions, because the fate of those areas is not yet clear. So we have to expedite the process of implementing article 140 to determine who will be responsible for the security and the political affairs of those areas. [3] For as long as these areas remain in ambiguity, there will be a problem or challenges [over] who controls these areas.

In the areas that are predominantly Kurdish, the Kurdish security forces and Kurdish administration have the right to protect their constituencies and Kurdish populations from the threats we have witnessed [bomb attacks against Kurds]. In those areas, we have tried and have expressed our willingness to closely coordinate and cooperate with other legal institutions in those areas, namely our Iraqi military, security or police and the Coalition forces, for providing security. So it is a joint effort to protect those people in these disputed territories. More recently there have been attempts to form joint committees.

JF: A New York Times editorial says Kurdish troops should be reintegrated into the Iraqi army, while Kurdish President Barzani has called for a

unified Kurdish army. [4] The United States is also trying to integrate the Kurds into the Iraqi security apparatus. How do you see this?

MB: Most of that stems from misunderstanding the Iraqi constitution or misreading it. The President never said he is going to create an army. He said he is going to reintegrate the armed forces of the Kurdistan region rather than having different groups [with] their own forces. That is his idea of creating the unified armed forces of the Kurdistan region. That does not mean it will be an army. Iraq will have one army. The Kurds were the very first ones who formed the core of the Iraqi military when nobody was willing to become an Iraqi soldier. Some of the Peshmerga [Kurdish militias] already joined the Iraqi army. If there is a need to reintegrate more troops, then obviously this is something which will happen.

Now when you look inside the security of Kurdistan, according to the Iraqi constitution, Kurdistan has the right to be responsible for the internal security of Kurdistan. It is the responsibility of the Kurdistan region to provide that security. Kurdistan is part of Iraq, so if we have security [forces] operating in the Kurdistan region or other parts of Iraq, that is security operating in Iraq collectively.

Once Kurdistan is secure and you have security forces operating in Kurdistan, they should be included in the overall defense policy of Iraq because Kurdistan cannot be seen as a separate entity—it is part of Iraq in terms of rights and duties. Protection of Kurdistan in this region is therefore protection of a part of Iraq. For as long as Iraq is a united country, obviously this is the mission of all of us to protect the country in the best possible way we can. When you look at the defense policy of Iraq, there is a budget that is supposed to be spent on defense, which is distributed from the overall budget. So this also should include the Kurdistan region, but unfortunately, until now the Kurdistan region has been deprived of this budget.

JF: *The White House declared it would support Article 140 and Article 142 (on constitutional amendments) of the Iraqi constitution. Some say it is a clear signal of U.S. support for the Kurdish position on Kirkuk. But on the other hand, you have people saying that President Obama wants a special status for Kirkuk.*

MB: Well, I am not in the position to be speaking on behalf of the Americans, but they tell you what is right. Iraq has a constitution; this constitution determines which way we should move to solve outstanding issues with the federal government. The best solution for the disputed territories is what the Iraqi constitution laid down through Article 140; it is very clear. The constitution should be the only way forward to solve those outstanding issues.

Every other article, including article 142, whatever is in the constitution, we have accepted that constitution. Most Iraqis, 80% of the Iraqis voted for that constitution. So we cannot be selective in picking one article or ignoring another.

There is a mechanism in the Iraqi constitution on how the amendments should be made. As long as we are committed to protecting and implementing the constitution, there should be no problems. The problems arise when there are alternative solutions to the constitution that have been pushed from time to time. These types of efforts are complicating the issue and they are contrary to the principles of democracy. This is running away from the principles of the constitution. As long as the constitution is the arbitrator, I do not think anybody would have any problems with it.

JF: *So in general, you are saying we should support the Iraqi constitution, while the New York Times says that the United States should not support Article 140, because the Kurds will use Kirkuk as a stepping-stone for independence. [5]*

MB: My question to them: Do you want democracy or do you insist that the Kurds should never get Kirkuk? My question to those people who wrote that article is this, are you against the Kurds in Kirkuk? What you

are saying indicates that although there is a democratic process and the Kurds will probably win, we should not let them win. This is against democracy; this is hypocrisy... They have to make up their mind, do they believe in democracy or not?

And why it is perceived that Article 140 is pro-Kurdish, who knows? Is there any indication in Article 140 that favors the Kurds? No. Article 140 asks for normalization of the situation, which means undoing the injustice to the people in Kirkuk. Conducting the referendum means letting the people of Kirkuk make the decision of where they want to be in the end; whether part of the Kurdistan region or not, either way it will still be part of Iraq.

Why is there so much sensitivity over why Kirkuk should not be part of the Kurdistan region? Is it a separate state? Is it different? No. They have to understand that Iraq, which includes Kurdistan, is one country. Kirkuk being [part of the Kurdistan region] or not, it would not make a difference. Kirkuk would still be part of Iraq. I am calling upon the conscience of the international community to make a judgment. OK, we have a democratic process and now they say you cannot apply the democratic process to this problem because they do not like the results beforehand.

JF: *The conclusion of some foreign analysts is that if Kirkuk becomes part of the Kurdistan region, Iraq could fall apart.*

MB: OK, can you make important decisions based on assumptions? Then how can they give themselves the right to make such important decisions based on assumptions, but they will deprive or prevent the Kurds or forbid the Kurds to make similar assumptions. The Kurds will also assume that they do not want a solution, because they have in mind to once again overrun the Kurds or to repeat the Anfal operations [or] repeat chemical bombardments.

JF: *Human Rights Watch says Kurdish security agencies mistreat minorities and Christians in Mosul, while the Christians support the Kurds in general. What's your response to this?*

MB: We say, let the facts speak. Our counterargument is: the majority of the Yezidis, Shabaks, Christians and Turkmen [ethnic and religious minorities] have voted for the Kurdistan list in the Kurdistan region, in Kirkuk and in Mosul. So, I do not credit these critics, who are criticizing and accusing the Kurds of mistreatment.

OK, here is a question to them: If Kurdistan is so bad, why do so many Arabs, Christians, Turkmen, Shabak and Yezidis who are fleeing those areas which are known for violence [come] to Kurdistan to seek protection, security and stability? We have the facts to speak. Everybody can say what they want, but they have very little to prove. We have much [evidence] to prove [our case] and many facts on the ground. We are not in need of talking so much.

Notes:

1. Anfal was the codename of the brutal and repressive campaign carried out against the Kurds of northern Iraq by forces of Saddam Hussein between 1986 and 1989.
2. Al-Hadba is a Sunni Arab political party formed to reduce Kurdish influence in the contested governorate of Ninawa.
3. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, related to the means of determining the status of contested areas of the Ninawa, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din governorates. Article 140 also seeks to normalize the situation in these areas by undoing the administrative changes and demographic policies introduced by Saddam Hussein.
4. "Iraq, the Kurds and the Americans," New York Times, December 17, 2009
5. Kirkuk has significant oil reserves that could provide the financial basis of an independent Kurdish state.

Mutlak blames Iraqi gov't for making concession to Kurds

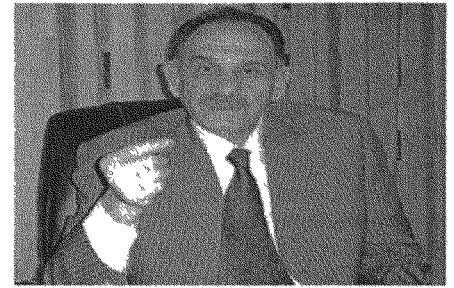
Baghdad - The Sunni politician Salih Al-Mutlak blamed the government for making concessions to the Kurds. He was recently expelled from Iraqi politics, for being allegedly a Baathist.

"The Iraqi government has made too many concessions to the Kurdish authorities in North-Iraq," he told Al Jazeera. "This is not in the national interest [of Iraq]," he added. According to Al-Mutlak the Kurds want to divide Iraq in several regions with the support of the Shia-dominated government, he warned the Kurds are becoming successful

in this.

Recently an Iraqi parliamentary committee has prevented al-Mutlak from running in elections due to his alleged connections with the deposed government of Saddam Hussein. Mutlak wants to the federal status of the Iraq government and end the autonomy of the Iraqi Kurds.

Mutlak is part of the Sunni Iraqi National Movement, which brings VP Tariq al-Hashimi, ex-Iraqi premier Iyad Alawi and Salih al-Mutlak's National Dialogue Front together. Al Jazeera warns that the banning al-Mutlak from Iraqi politics could result in



Sunni unrest and disillusionment (Photo: Rudaw).

Iraq deputy speaker: Ethnic cleansing against Kurds continues

Bagdad - The Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament Arif Tayfur said that political groups use violence against Kurdish families in the provinces of Diyala and Nineveh and force them to leave.

Tayfur says this could result in unfair Iraqi elections. "In the last period, there was found proof of commando's, formed by ex-Baathists of the Iraqi government and Al-Qaida groups, that forced thousands of



Kurdish families to leave the regions Jalawe and Saiidiye," he said.

The Iraqi politician asks the Iraqi government to end these 'Baathists practices' and to secure these regions and to let the Kurdish families return and protect them. Tayfur also criticized the governor of Nineveh Asil al-Nujaifi for failing to protect the Kurds.

Earlier the governor said he would not give 'one inch of land' to the Kurds and said the Kurdish armed forces in the disputed regions, should be replaced by the Iraqi government.

The Kurdish intelligence chief Masrou Barzani told the American thinktank Jamestown last week, that the ethnic cleansing of Kurds goes unreported, despite claims of Kurds threatening minorities in the disputed regions. In the last few months there have been an increased violence against Kurds and Kurds are forced to leave regions, inhabited by a majority of Arabs. Kurds fear this will influence their number of votes during the upcoming Iraqi elections on 7 March 2010 (Photo: newsmatique) © Rudaw

Possible Shia-Kurdish alliance in upcoming Iraqi elections

By Kovan Selim

Erbil - Shia and Kurdish parties want to cooperate for the upcoming elections in Iraq. Ammar al-Hakim has been visiting Erbil for days, to discuss a possible alliance.

Al-Hakim leads the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI), the second biggest Shia party, next to the Al-Daawa party of the Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. Al-Hakim hopes to continue good cooperation with the Iraqi Kurds, a policy that was set up by his father, who died of cancer last year. "We, the ISCI, have had good relations with the Kurdish parties for a long time. Together we fought against Saddam and build up Iraq. We want to continue this," Al-Hakim said during a press conference in Erbil.

Al-Hakim spoke with both the Kurdish president Massoud Barzani and the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani. "We are happy that the bro-



thers of the SIIC give us this proposal, and we are convinced that our long cooperation will continue," said the Kurdish president Barzani.

According to press reports, Al-Hakim made the ruling Kurdish parties KDP and PUK a proposal to participate in the upcoming Iraqi elections in March, with one list. The Kurdish political parties think cooperation after the elections is better. But Al-Hakim ensured the Iraqi Kurds it will support the Kurds, also

after the elections. Al-Hakim said he was sure that the problems between Baghdad and Erbil will be solved by democracy and dialogue.

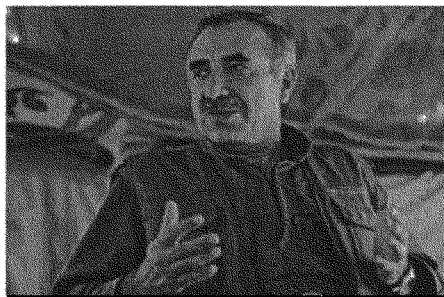
Ammar al-Hakim wants an united list to ensure Kurdish and Shia rights are guaranteed and this would change the policies of Nouri al-Maliki. Al-Hakim's party is part of the biggest Shia list, the Iraqi National Alliance, uniting the Badr organization, the Sadrists and parties. The Iraqi national Alliance chose Abdul-Mehdi as a candidate for the Prime Ministership of Iraq, while the State of Law Alliance, which includes Maliki's Dawa party, will probable again choose Maliki as a candidate.

After the Iraqi elections of 15 December 2005, the Kurds didn't want a Prime Minister from the Dawa-party, and wanted Abdul-Mehdi to become the new PM. But eventually Al-Maliki replaced the former PM Al-Jaafari, as a compromise candidate (Photo: Rudaw).

PKK: "The Kurdish people should defend itself"

Behdinan – The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) declared in a statement, that the Kurds should defend themselves against the 'provocations' of Turkey and Iran reports ANF.

The PKK said that the Turkish government is



trying to eliminate the PKK and the Kurdish people by pressuring them, referring to the closure of the DTP-party and mass arrests of Kurdish politicians. "If the assimilation poli-

cies and the lynch attempts do not stop, the Kurds will defend themselves," the PKK said. According to the PKK, the Kurdish population would not be responsible for the results, if anything happened.

The PKK also criticized the Iranian government for executing the PJAK-member Fesih Yasamini (28) and bombing the border regions, which killed Kurdish border inhabitants. Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) is an Iranian offshoot of the PKK. Yasamini was the second Kurdish activist executed in Iran in recent months. At least 17 other activists are on death row. © Rudaw

Ba'ath saga haunts Iraq's future

De-Ba'athification is derailing the national reconciliation process, but Sunnis will not necessarily choose to boycott elections



•Ranj Alaaldin

A The Iraqi government is treading a fine line after its Accountability and Justice commission (also known as the "de-Ba'athification" commission) moved to bar a prominent Sunni politician, Salah al-Mutlaq, and 14 others from contesting the national elections in March because of their ties with the outlawed Ba'ath party.

Mutlaq heads the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, which in last year's provincial elections performed well in Sunni-dominated areas. He is considered a key player, and for the forthcoming elections has joined forces with fellow former Ba'athist and former Iraqi premier Ayad Allawi, along with current vice-president Tariq al-Hashimi. Both command a significant following and the grouping, named the Iraqi National Movement (INM), should be a force to be reckoned with, especially if previous election results are anything to go by.

It is no surprise then that Sunni officials consider this another plot by the Shia-dominated government to outmanoeuvre and marginalise the Sunnis, who this time round are expected to come out and vote en masse and, therefore, threaten the dominance of Iraq's other major groups.

The whole affair may indeed seem like a sinister anti-Sunni campaign in anticipation of the coming elections. After all, Mutlaq's Ba'ath history has been known all along, and never stopped him from contesting the 2005 elections. INM officials have linked the decision to Iranian foreign minister Manuchehr Mottaki's visit to Baghdad, just one day before it was made.

Prolific Iraq commentator Reidar Visser refers to the "selective de-Ba'athification" process being pursued in Iraq, given that historically, he notes, the Shias and Sunnis alike co-operated with the old regime in their millions. He criticises the Iraqi government for singling out Sunni political opponents as Ba'athists and for silently co-opting political friends without mentioning their Ba'athist ties at all.

But while Visser's argument holds water to some extent, it is important to draw a line between those Ba'athists who were deeply embedded within the regime through and throughout (that is Mutlaq) and those that may have served the regime's opportunistic endeavours at any given point and who were not, therefore,

deep-rooted regime loyalists even if they thought they were (that is the Shia tribes, Kurdish Jash, and so on).

Moreover, the list issued by the commission also includes non-Sunni Arab groups. It includes, for instance, Jawhar al-Harki, a Kurd who calls himself a former adviser to Saddam; it also includes Arshad al-Zibari, again a Kurd who has been cited as a close friend and ally of Saddam's. Both are allied with the al-Hadba group in Mosul, which controls the provincial council there. Al-Hadba, dominated and funded by Ba'ath loyalists, is also part of the INM. Curiously, the commission does not ban them outright.

Historically, the Ba'athists have a habit of resurfacing and exploiting state and military structures, and there is still a significant group of Ba'athists within and/or beyond Iraq's borders that continue to prepare and mount terrorist atrocities. What is difficult to determine is whether those seemingly reconciled Ba'athists have truly changed their colours, and herein lays the concerns of not just Iraq's Shias and Kurds but also of current British ambassador to Iraq John Jenkins, who last week gave evidence to the Iraq inquiry. Further, Mutlaq himself has courted factions that still support the Ba'ath party, suggesting it continues to be a key component of Iraqi society.

What is not clear at this point is how the Arab street feels, an important factor in determining how the Sunni electorate will react on 7 March. Iraq's other dominant Sunni groups, such as the Anbar Awakening Council, led by Abu Risha, and the Iraqi Accord Front coalition, which used to include Tariq al-Hashimi, have so far provided a relatively muted response. They may see no reason to boycott the elections; the latter took part in the 2005 election despite a Sunni boycott, while the former will point out that Mutlaq himself decided to contest the 2005 election while they, along with the rest of the Awakening forces, were busy fighting coalition forces.

Mutlaq's coalition partners in the INM, made up mostly of pragmatists, are also unlikely to withdraw from the political process, despite threatening to do so. Further, it is hoped the Sunnis have largely left, or hope to leave behind their violent, exclusionary past in the new Iraq. It is difficult to imagine that they would make the same strategic mistakes.

Still, Iraq's electoral commission will decide whether to press ahead with the ban after it has received the commission's formal report. Suspected parties can then launch an appeal. However, the saga has already hurt the process of national reconciliation, imperative for long-term stability and US withdrawal plans, and as a result the damage may have already been done.

IRAN C'est un changement de régime. Depuis le début des troubles, les gardiens de la révolution – les fameux pasdarans – ont confisqué le pouvoir aux mollahs, piliers de la République islamique. Et désormais ils font régner la terreur

L'ordre des pasdarans

Ce n'est plus seulement un bruit de bottes. Venue des casernes, la menace se répand désormais par tous les canaux officiels du régime de la République islamique.

Un appel aux armes qui a pris ces derniers jours la forme d'un appel au meurtre. C'est l'ayatollah Haeri Shirazi, par exemple, qui affirme récemment sur la télévision d'Etat que les arrestations d'opposants sont une mauvaise stratégie parce qu'elles transforment ces contestataires en victimes, qu'il vaut mieux éliminer sans autre procès : « *Le fait de les tuer est commandé par l'obéissance à Allah et au Prophète. Ne pensez pas que le Guide suprême soit coiffé d'un turban moelleux. L'imam caché le soutient et son turban est de fer. Il brisera vos têtes.* » Ou l'ayatollah fondamentaliste Ahmad Jannati, chef du Conseil des Gardiens, qui, pendant son prêche du vendredi à la grande mosquée de Téhéran, menace ouvertement de mort les leaders de la révolte

« *Laissez-nous les mains libres pour rendre aveugle l'œil de la discorde* », demande aussi l'editorialiste de « Sob-e Sadegh » (« *Matin sincère* »), la revue politique des gardiens de la révolution. Une prière adressée au Guide suprême pour lui signifier que l'armée idéolo-

gique du régime, pas encore directement impliquée dans la répression, s'impatiente. Car jusqu'ici les assassinats, les milliers d'arrestations, les fermetures de journaux ont été commis par les miliciens de quartiers, les *bassidji* ou les forces de sécurité en civil, les *lebaschahs*. Or, loin d'intimider les protestataires, cette répression a au contraire renforcé la détermination d'une opposition peu structurée dont tous les observateurs avaient prédit l'épuisement.

La « république des képis »

« *Jusqu'à quand le régime va-t-il tolérer d'entendre les opposants appeler de leurs vœux sa chute ?* », s'interroge Ramin, qui s'est

rendu la semaine dernière, malgré l'interdiction formelle du régime, au cimetière de Behecht e Zahra où a été enterré le neveu de Mir Hossein Moussavi, tué par balle lors des célébrations de la fête de l'Achoura, le 27 décembre. Selon lui, lors des derniers rassemblements, c'est à peine si ses amis opposants évoquaient encore la fraude électorale qui a déclenché la crise politique, il y a sept mois. Ce qu'ils réclamaient, c'est la démocratie et la fin du *velayat*, ce pouvoir suprême du Guide qui demeure le fondement du régime. Si bien qu'aujourd'hui, dans les rues de Téhéran ou

d'Ispahan, on ne se demande plus si mais quand le Guide suprême va lâcher les pasdarans sur l'opposition.

Est-ce pourtant si simple de donner carte blanche aux ultras de la nouvelle nomenclature militaire, des jusqu'au-boutistes qui veulent éradiquer la révolution de velours à l'arme lourde ? Pas sûr. Car cela signifierait que le Guide décide de laisser les mains libres à un homme comme Abdollah Araghi, le commandant des gardiens de la révolution de Téhéran, qui a prétendu que les contestataires avaient prévu de renverser le régime bien avant le résultat des élections du 12 juin, affirmant : « *Le régime n'est pas en position de perdre du temps en jugeant les saboteurs. La Sécurité nationale exige que ces saboteurs soient punis aussi vite que possible.* » Ou au général Massoud Jazayeri, chef de la propagande du régime, qui a exigé des services de renseignement et de la justice une plus grande sévérité, déclarant : « *Les traîtres ne devraient pas être autorisés à faire la fête.* »

Pour ces anciens commandants de la guerre contre l'Irak, la révolte verte n'est pas une affaire politique mais un simple problème sécuritaire. C'est aussi ce dont Moshtaba Khamenei, l'héritier, celui qui commande à tout l'appareil sécuritaire des gardiens de la

révolution, voudrait convaincre son père. Tous appellent de leurs vœux l'instauration d'un état d'urgence qui les affranchirait une fois pour toutes du carcan juridique. Mais en Iran la Constitution ne permet la déclaration de l'état d'urgence qu'en temps de guerre, et pour moins de trente jours. Et l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei sait qu'une loi martiale risque de provoquer un embrasement. D'où sa volonté de temporiser, en ordonnant des assassinats ciblés, comme celui du neveu de Mir Hossein Moussavi, ou des arrestations périphériques, comme celle de la sœur de Shirin Ebadi, prix Nobel de la paix, qui visent à intimider les meneurs de la contestation. Surtout, il voudrait éviter d'imposer un régime d'exception qui le rendrait lui-même prisonnier de cette armée à



Gardiens de la révolution patrouillant à Téhéran

**L'AYATOLLAH KHAMENEI SAIT QU'UNE LOI
MARTIALE NE PROVOQUERAIT PAS UN EMBRASÈMENT
D'OÙ SA VOLONTÉ DE TENIR PRISE**

laquelle il devrait sa survie politique

Néanmoins, l'omniprésence d'une junte militaire devient de plus en plus évidente au fur et à mesure que la République islamique divorce de son clergé. « Depuis les événements de l'Achoura, la République islamique n'est évidemment plus celle des mollahs mais celle des képis », analyse un militant de l'opposition. Car en ce jour sacré entre tous pour les chiites, les nervis du régime ont ouvert le feu sur la foule, ce que même la Savak, la redoutable police politique du shah n'avait pas osé faire à la veille de la révolution de 1979. Un tabou a été levé. Et dans un pays où l'on revit de manière passionnelle et incarnée la tragédie de Hussein, le petit fils du Prophète, assassiné en 680 à Kerbala, chaque camp accuse l'autre d'être son Yazid, le calife omeyyade qui assassina le saint.

Qom, centre de la contestation


A coup d'anathèmes, le régime excommunique désormais les plus hauts dignitaires religieux qui osent condamner la répression. Comme à Shiraz, où les bassidji ont chanté des slogans contre l'ayatollah Dastgheib, un des *marja* (source d'imitation) d'Iran, membre de l'Assemblée des Experts. Une autre fois, c'est la maison de l'ayatollah Sane'i qui était attaquée par des miliciens en civil. « Sur huit sources d'imitation religieuse en Iran, il n'en reste plus qu'une, l'ayatollah Nouri Hamadani, pour soutenir inconditionnellement le régime. La légitimité religieuse de la République islamique s'érode un peu plus chaque jour », décrypte un journaliste iranien qui préfère garder l'anonymat.

Qom, le Vatican iranien, est devenu l'un des centres de la contestation. Le 21 décembre dernier, les funérailles du grand ayatollah dissident Hossein Ali Montazeri ont tourné à la manifestation antigouvernementale. Théoricien de la révolution islamique de 1979 et artisan de la Constitution de la République islamique, l'ayatollah devait succéder à l'imam Khomeini jusqu'à ce qu'il prenne ses distances avec les dérives du régime et son principe fondateur du *velayat-e faqih*, le « gouvernement du docte » qui confère au religieux la primauté sur le pouvoir politique. « Montazeri n'est pas mort, c'est le gouvernement qui est mort », scandait la foule qui suivait son enterrement en arborant des foulards, écharpes ou bracelets verts, signes de ralliement de l'opposition.

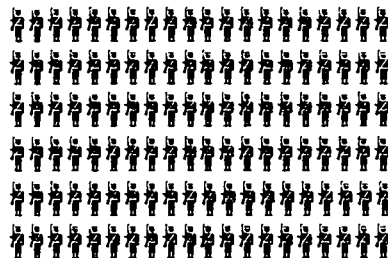
Un gouvernement de l'ombre

« Il y a encore des mollahs autour du Guide suprême, mais ils ont fait toute leur carrière dans les casernes. Sous le turban, on voit leur

Les chiens de garde du régime

 = 10 000 membres

Bassidji 1 200 000



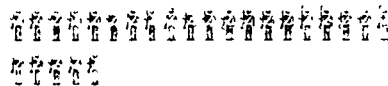
Gardiens de la révolution 400 000



Armée de métier 300 000



Police, gendarmerie 250 000



casquette », assure un universitaire iranien, en prenant l'exemple du général-ayatollah Saleh, membre des gardiens de la révolution, et qui supervise les questions nucléaires. Les gardiens sont-ils devenus les nouveaux apparatchiks de ce régime en crise ? Selon Mohsen Sazegara, un dissident qui fut l'un des fondateurs des gardiens de la révolution, cité par le rapport de la Rand Corporation : « Ils sont comme un croisement entre le Parti communiste, le KGB, une multinationale et la mafia ».

Déjà, plusieurs mois avant les élections de juin 2009, la militarisation du pays était effective. C'est à ce moment-là que les divisions des gardiens, auxquelles ont été incorporées les milices des bassidji, ont investi chacune des trente provinces d'Iran. Les gardiens ont alors formé un gouvernement de l'ombre qui a peu à peu dominé toutes les autres instances du pouvoir. Ils contrôlent non seulement des pans entiers du secteur judiciaire – les quartiers des prisonniers politiques, comme les sections 209 et 601 de la prison d'Evine à Téhéran – mais aussi les installations portuaires, les télécommunications et le bâtiment. C'est le « *milibusness* » : les gardiens sont les

premiers entrepreneurs de l'Iran. Ils ont notamment le monopole du commerce illégal de contournement de l'embargo. « Les sanctions, loin d'affaiblir la nomenklatura militaire du pays, la renforcent et transforment les généraux en millionnaires dont vous pouvez voir les placements fructifier dans les pays du Golfe

ou s'effondrer comme dans la crise de Dubai », explique un économiste iranien. Cette mainmise des gardiens de la révolution sur l'économie de l'Iran, favorisée par le président Ahmadinejad, a été confortée par le dédoublement de leur influence politique à la faveur de la crise politique de ces derniers mois.

Pourtant, les gardiens de la révolution ne sont pas encore prêts à prendre seuls les rênes du pouvoir : « Ils n'ont pas produit de personnalités représentant les différents courants politico-militaires qui pourraient être les chefs d'une junte », assure un analyste iranien, mais avec l'affaiblissement de Khamenei, cela ne saurait tarder. Certains proches du régime admettent que Khamenei est déjà de plus en plus dépendant de sa garde rapprochée, la division Mohammad Rassoul Allah commandée par le général Arahi. Avec la crise, le Guide suprême a aussi perdu son rôle d'arbitre entre des factions rivales qui se neutralisaient jusqu'à présent. Et depuis qu'il est privé du soutien des mollahs, donc de sa légitimité religieuse, il est autant cerné que protégé par ses gardiens. Reste que, comme tous les centres de pouvoir de l'Iran, les gardiens de la révolution sont divisés. Les idéologues sectaires et les sécuritaires s'opposent aux affairistes pragmatiques qui, ne pouvant quitter le pays leur fortune sous le bras comme l'avaient fait les barons du shah, sont enclins à trouver un compromis avec l'opposition.

Face à ce pouvoir sous pression, la stratégie de l'opposition est de gagner du temps. Comme l'explique un étudiant de l'université de Téhéran : « Nous devons rester un mouvement de désobéissance civile. Durer coûte que coûte. En attendant qu'ils se déchirent. »

SARA DANIEL

Iran:



7 Janvier 2010

Ces minorités qui peuvent tout faire basculer

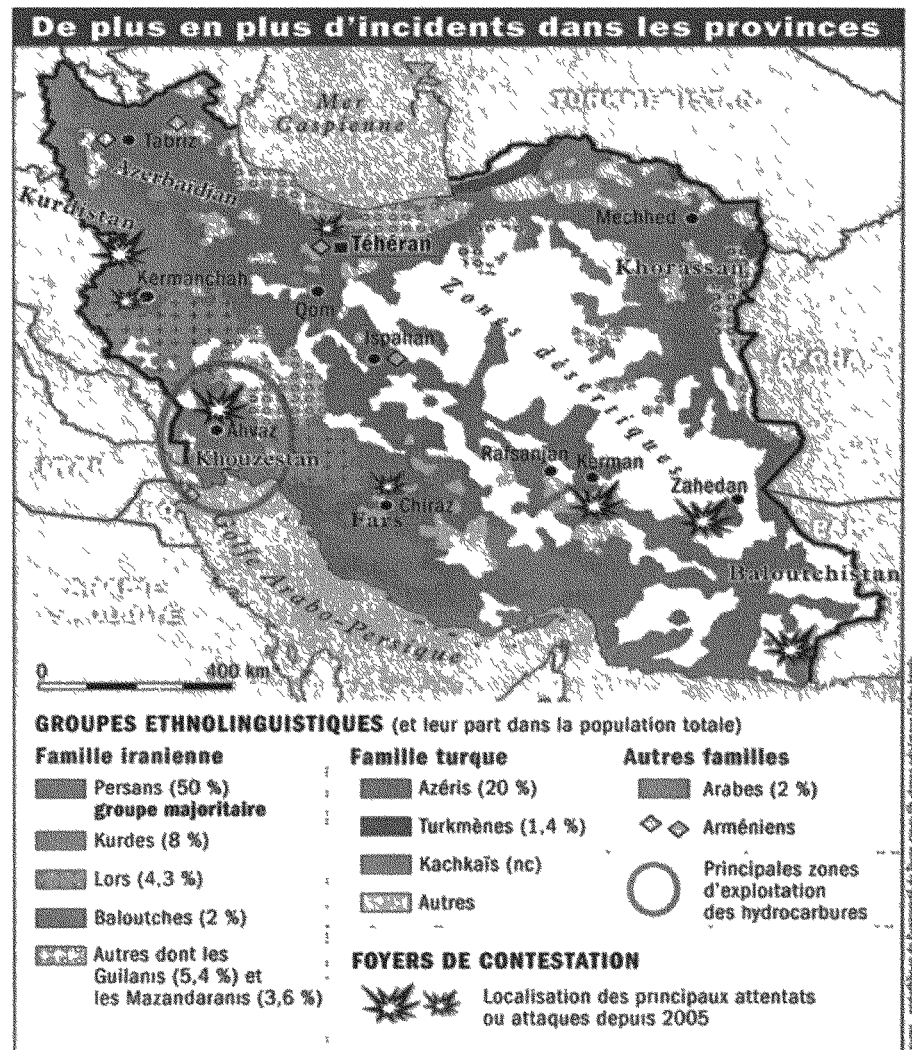
Les différents groupes ethniques pourraient soutenir le mouvement démocratique. Mais cet engagement ne sera pas sans contrepartie.

Selig S. Harrison

The New York Times

Dans l'Iran multiethnique actuel, la plus grande menace qui guette les ayatollahs et les généraux ne vient pas du Mouvement vert, mais des groupes séparatistes de plus en plus actifs dans les régions kurde, baloutche, azérie et arabe. Les minorités ethniques représentent environ 44 % de la population iranienne, majoritairement perse. S'ils s'associaient, le mouvement pour les réformes démocratiques et les insurgés ethniques pourraient sérieusement ébranler la République islamique. Toutefois, le Mouvement vert – tout comme une grande partie de l'establishment clérical, militaire et des affaires – est dominé par une élite perse bien établie qui, jusqu'à présent, a toujours refusé d'apporter son soutien aux revendications des minorités.

Celles-ci réclament des investissements plus importants pour assurer le développement économique des régions non perses, une part plus importante des profits générés par le pétrole et par les autres ressources naturelles exploitées dans leurs régions, la liberté d'utiliser sans entraves des langues autres que le persan dans le système d'éducation et le fait de ne pas être persécuté pour ses croyances religieuses. Au sein de ces minorités, certains responsables estiment que de tels objectifs peuvent être atteints par l'attribution d'une autonomie régionale dans le cadre de l'actuelle Constitution, mais la plupart d'entre eux veulent faire de l'Iran une confédération décentralisée ou obtenir leur indépendance. Les Etats-Unis devraient-ils fournir des armes et des ressources financières aux insurgés ethniques. Pendant la présidence de Bush, un débat a fait rage entre ceux qui, à la Maison-Blanche, se montraient favorables à un "changement de régime" à Téhéran et privilégiaient les interventions secrètes à grande échelle, afin de diviser le pays, et les modérés du département d'Etat, pour qui toute manifestation de soutien à l'égard des minorités risquait de compliquer les négociations pour l'obtention d'un accord nucléaire avec l'élite perse. Depuis que les Etats-Unis et Israël ont cherché à déstabiliser les zones kurdes de l'Irak de Saddam Hussein, le Mossad [les renseignements israéliens] entretient des contacts avec des groupes kurdes en Iran



et en Irak. Mais les Etats-Unis souhaitent maintenant un Irak uni au sein duquel les Kurdes, les chiites et les sunnites coopèrent. L'Iran veut lui aussi d'un Irak uni parce qu'il craint que ses propres ressortissants kurdes ne se rangent derrière ceux de l'Irak et de la Turquie pour créer un Kurdistan indépendant. Ainsi, le fait d'apporter son aide au PJAK [Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan], principal groupe rebelle kurde en Iran, pourrait à l'avenir nuire à la coopération entre l'Iran et les Etats-Unis, en plus de compliquer les négociations sur le nucléaire.

Les Baloutches et les Kurdes appartiennent à la confession musulmane sunnite. Ils se battent contre la violente répression religieuse et la discrimination culturelle et économique exercées par les chiites. La plus importante des minorités, les Azéris turcophones, appartient quant à elle à la confession chiite, et l'ayatollah Khamenei en est lui-même issu. Les Azéris d'Iran sont plus riches que les

autres minorités, mais ils ont l'impression que les Perses les méprisent. Les Arabes qui vivent dans la province du Khouzestan, dans le sud-ouest du pays, appartiennent eux aussi à la confession chiite. Comme la province génère 80 % des revenus du pétrole brut iranien, la menace séparatiste qu'ils représentent est celle que craint le plus Téhéran. Jusqu'à présent, les factions arabes, divisées, n'ont pas réussi à créer une milice. Elles effectuent cependant périodiquement des raids sur des installations de sécurité du gouvernement, bombardent des sites de production pétrolière et diffusent de la propagande en arabe sur les chaînes de télévision satellite depuis l'extérieur de l'Iran.

Les affrontements militaires les plus graves entre les gardiens de la révolution et les groupes séparatistes se sont déroulés sur la frontière kurde. En septembre 2007, l'Iran y a bombardé à plusieurs reprises les repaires du PJAK. Au

Baloutchistan, les gardiens de la révolution subissent régulièrement des pertes importantes à cause des milices du mouvement Jundullah [Armée d'Allah], qui opèrent de l'autre côté de la frontière, dans les zones baloutches du Pakistan et de l'Afghanistan.

Lorsqu'on les compare aux énormes manifestations qui ont eu lieu à Téhéran,

les actions désordonnées des insurgés ethniques peuvent sembler mineures. Mais, si les différents groupes ethniques parviennent à former un front uni et que l'opposition démocratique se joint à eux, les chances de réformer ou de renverser la République islamique, aujourd'hui faibles, deviendront une réalité.

Voilà pourquoi l'administration

Obama devra faire preuve d'une grande prudence au moment d'aborder la question. Les Etats-Unis seront en effet obligés de prendre conscience qu'il est impossible, d'une part, d'apporter son soutien aux groupes séparatistes et, de l'autre, de maintenir des relations diplomatiques avec le régime actuel.

Le Nouvel
Observateur

12 Janvier 2010

Le président irakien veut lever l'immunité de députés baassistes

Par Walid Ibrahim / (Reuters)

BAGDAD - Le président irakien Djalal Talabani a demandé au parlement de lever l'immunité de certains députés accusés de propager des idées proches du Baas, l'ancien parti au pouvoir sous le régime de Saddam Hussein.

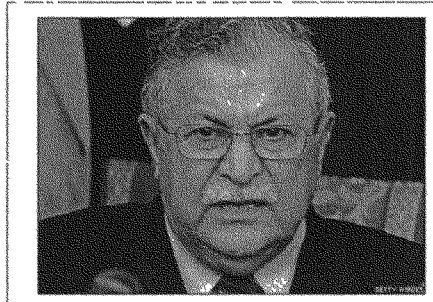
Le chef de l'Etat, un Kurde, estime que ces parlementaires, issus de la minorité sunnite qui dominait le pays jusqu'à l'invasion anglo-américaine de 2003, nuisent au processus de normalisation politique, à moins de deux mois des élections législatives de mars.

En vertu de la Constitution adoptée sous la houlette de l'occupant américain après 2003, les députés irakiens jouissent d'une immunité judiciaire pour leurs déclarations politiques et le président n'a pas les pouvoirs de les en priver.

Dans un communiqué diffusé lundi soir, la présidence ne s'est pas référée directement au Baas, interdit, mais demande au parlement d'agir contre des députés qui "portent atteinte à la base du système actuel".

L'initiative du président Talabani intervient quelques jours après les recommandations de la commission ad hoc chargée de passer au crible les candidatures en faveur de l'inévitabilité d'une quinzaine de partis soupçonnés de liens avec le baassisme.

Ces recommandations, si elles sont ratifiées par la commission électorale, peuvent



être contestées devant les tribunaux, comme compte le faire la Liste iranienne dirigée par le vice-président sunnite Tarek al Hachémi.

Ce mouvement laïque à dominante sunnite, qui compte dans ses rangs d'autres personnalités influentes comme le député sunnite Saleh al Moutlak, considéré comme proche du défunt Baas, et l'ancien Premier ministre chiite Iyad Allaoui, menace de boycotter le scrutin.

"VIOLATION CONSTITUTIONNELLE"

Un tel boycottage reproduirait une situation qui avait grevé politiquement les législatives de 2005, risque de relancer les tensions intercommunautaires, alors que la participation de la communauté sunnite, cette fois, était censée couronner un retour à la normale.

"Nous confirmons une nouvelle fois que la réconciliation nationale est indispensable. Mais nous disons que cela ne veut pas dire pour autant un retour au passé ou une récon-

ciliation avec ceux qui veulent ramener le pays à l'ère du crime et de la tyrannie", a déclaré Djalal Talabani dans son communiqué.

S'il ne cite pas le Baas dissous, Talabani épingle nommément le député sunnite Dhafer al Ani, l'accusant d'avoir fait l'éloge de la guerre Irak-Iran de 1980-88, du massacre de Kurdes durant la même décennie et de l'invasion du Koweït de 1990 comme des accomplissements de l'ancien régime.

"Nous constatons qu'Ani et ses amis, au lieu de s'efforcer de stabiliser le processus démocratique et de participer à la lutte contre le terrorisme et la criminalité, consacrent toutes leurs forces à porter atteinte à la situation actuelle", affirme-t-il.

Ani a pour sa part accusé Talabani de s'en prendre à lui parce qu'il avait appelé à son remplacement. "Demander au parlement de lever l'immunité de députés parce qu'ils expriment librement leur opinion est une violation constitutionnelle caractérisée", a-t-il ajouté.

Alors que les tensions politiques s'avivent à l'approche du scrutin de mars, le Premier ministre chiite Nouri al Maliki a estimé dimanche que les baassistes devaient "exclus du processus démocratique".

"Ils veulent ramener la violence et la dictature. Croyez-moi, si nous ne faisons pas le bon choix à cette élection, nous en reviendrons à la case départ **

Le Premier recensement depuis 1987 en Irak réalisé en octobre

REUTERS

BAGDAD, 16 janvier 2010 (Reuters)

Les autorités irakiennes procéderont en octobre prochain au premier recensement depuis 23 ans, une opération qui devrait notamment fournir la réponse à des questions politiquement délicates comme celle du nombre de Kurdes vivant dans la région riche en pétrole et ethniquement divisée de Kirkouk.

Différé depuis un an en raison précisément de ses implications politiques, le recensement, selon son responsable, Mehdi al Alak, devrait en outre mesurer le nombre d'Irakiens poussés par l'invasion de 2003 à quitter le pays où à y revenir.

Si les Kurdes sont plus nombreux à Kirkouk que les Arabes et les Turkmènes, cela renforcera leur revendication sur la région. De même le nombre total d'habitants au Kurdistan autonome détermi-

nera la part des revenus de l'Etat qui leur revient - actuellement 17%.

Mais, a souligné Alak, le recensement ne s'occupera pas de savoir si telle ou telle région appartient à telle ou telle communauté. "C'est l'affaire des hommes politiques", a-t-il souligné.

Le recensement de 1997 avait établi que l'Irak comptait 19 millions d'habitants et seulement "estimé" que trois millions de plus vivaient dans le nord. Il s'agira donc du premier recensement comptabilisant la population kurde depuis 23 ans.

Selon Alak le nombre total d'Irakiens dépasserait actuellement les 30 millions. Les opérations seront menées par 200.000 à 250.000 instituteurs et 10.000 à 15.000 autres fonctionnaires, qui ne poseront pas de questions sur l'appartenance des sondés à telle ou telle secte (chiïte ou sunnite) mais seulement à leur religion principale (chrétienne ou musulmane, par exemple).

Une série télévisée ravive la crise israélo-turque

LAURE MARCHAND

Notez qu'il est assis à un niveau inférieur au nôtre, qu'il n'y a qu'un drapeau israélien sur la table

DANY AYALON, VICE-MINISTRE ISRAËLIEN DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES

AFIN de s'assurer que la convocation de l'ambassadeur turc, lundi, ne passerait pas inaperçue, le vice-ministre israélien des Affaires étrangères, Danny Ayalon, a pris soin de faire remarquer aux journalistes le traitement réservé au représentant turc : « Notez qu'il est assis à un niveau inférieur au nôtre, qu'il n'y a qu'un drapeau israélien sur la table » L'objectif affiché de cet accueil, qualifié de « bizutage » par les médias israéliens, était de protester contre la diffusion d'un téléfilm turc « anti-israélien et antisémite », selon Danny Ayalon. Un épisode de *La Vallée des*

loups, une série très populaire dans les foyers turcs, met notamment en scène des agents du Mossad enlevant un bébé turc. Un responsable du ministre des Affaires étrangères a déclaré au quotidien israélien *Haaretz* que cette réprimande avait un second objectif : « Lieberman (le chef de la diplomatie israélienne) veut faire monter la pression avant la visite de M. Barak » en Turquie.

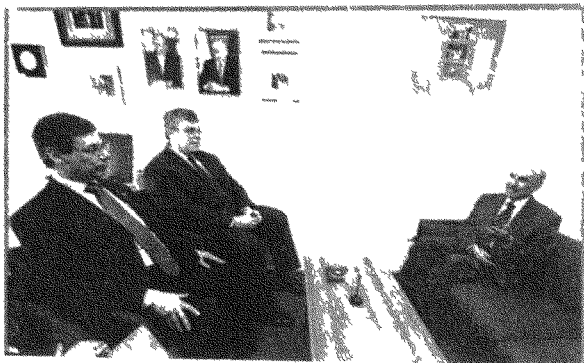
Repondant à une invitation du président turc, Abdullah Gul, le ministre de la Défense israélien est attendu dimanche à Ankara. À quelques jours de ce déplacement censé apaiser la crise que traversent la Turquie et Israël depuis plus d'un an, l'emballement diplomatique provoqué par *La Vallée des Loups* est révélateur de l'état de leurs relations bilatérales. Hier, c'était au tour de l'ambassadeur israélien d'être sermonné à Ankara pour « l'insolence » avec laquelle l'État hébreu avait traité son diplomate. Et les autorités turques réclament « des excuses ».

Surenchères turques

Le côté turc n'est pas en reste dans la surenchère. Les Israéliens ont « des capacités (militaires)

disproportionnées et ils s'en servent » avait dénoncé, lundi, Recep Tayyip Erdogan en faisant référence à un raid de Tsahal dimanche à Gaza. En janvier 2009, au sommet de Davos, le premier

ministre turc s'était emporté contre le président israélien, Shimon Pérès, qui justifiait l'offensive contre l'enclave palestinienne. Depuis, ses critiques régulières contre Israël, plébiscitées par l'opinion turque et celle des pays arabes, ont mis à mal l'alliance stratégique traditionnelle des deux pays dans la région. Fidèle à sa posture, M. Erdogan a fait savoir qu'il boycotterait la prochaine rencontre à Davos, comme il l'avait « promis » l'an dernier. Réagissant à ses dernières déclarations, le porte-parole du ministère israélien des Affaires étrangères a rétorqué que « la Turquie n'(était) pas en position de faire la morale à Israël ».



Le Monde
16 janvier 2010

Iran : polémique sur la mort d'un physicien

M. Mohammadi ne travaillait pas sur le nucléaire, affirme l'opposition

Les funérailles de Massoud Ali Mohammadi, jeudi 14 janvier à Téhéran, sous haute surveillance policière, ont donné lieu à de nouvelles tensions entre un millier de manifestants de l'opposition, selon des témoins, et les forces de l'ordre. Ce physicien de 50 ans est mort le 12 janvier à Téhéran dans l'explosion d'une moto piégée. Depuis, une polémique a surgi sur la nature exacte de ses activités.

Peu après l'attentat, les médias officiels, repris depuis par le président iranien, ont déploré la perte d'un « éminent scientifique nucléaire », dénonçant l'implication des services secrets américains et israéliens. Pourtant, l'un des pairs de Massoud Ali Mohammadi, joint en Iran par *Le Monde*, assure que le physicien « ne travaillait pas dans le domaine du nucléaire ». Son secteur d'activité était la physique

mathématique et la physique des hautes énergies »

La consultation de la littérature scientifique confirme que les travaux du scientifique assassiné, acceptés par les meilleures revues, ne concernaient pas la physique nucléaire. Le chercheur travaillait sur les aspects les plus ésotériques de la physique des particules – considérations théoriques très éloignées des problèmes de physique appliquée posés par la réalisation d'armes ou de réacteurs nucléaires. Ce fait n'écarte cependant pas complètement l'éventualité que le savant ait pu jouer un rôle dans le programme nucléaire de son pays.

Engagement politique

La question de son engagement politique est aussi au cœur de la controverse. Son collègue interro-

gédit « ne pas avoir eu connaissance d'un engagement politique » de sa part. C'est aussi ce qu'a déclaré à l'Agence France-Presse le directeur du département de physique de l'université de Téhéran, où enseignait le chercheur.

Au contraire, Ahmad Shirzhad, professeur de physique à l'université d'Ispahan et proche de l'opposition, affirme sur son blog que M. Ali Mohammadi a participé aux manifestations contestant l'élection de M. Ahmadinejad. Des sites Web proches de l'opposition ont également publié un document selon lequel le chercheur aurait signé un texte, avec plusieurs centaines de scientifiques, soutenant la candidature, en juin, de Mir Hossein Moussavi, arrivé deuxième à l'élection et devenu le chef de file de l'opposition.

À l'inverse, les Gardiens de la révolution affirment que le profes-



seur était l'un des leurs et enseignait à l'université Imam-Hossein de Téhéran, proche de l'aile dure du pouvoir et l'un des lieux où s'élabore le programme nucléaire.

M. Ali Mohammadi avait aussi été nommé par le gouvernement pour représenter l'Iran au sein du projet « Sesame », un accélérateur de particules basé en Jordanie destiné à la recherche fondamentale, fruit d'une collaboration entre les pays de la région (Iran, Israël, Jordanie, Égypte, Turquie, etc.)

Stéphane Foucart

AFP

IRAK: "ALI LE CHIMIQUE" À NOUVEAU CONDAMNÉ À MORT POUR LE MASSACRE D'HALABJA

BAGDAD —17 janvier 2010 - (AFP)

Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique", a été condamné dimanche à mort pour le massacre en 1988 de 5.000 Kurdes, une décision saluée comme une "victoire" et sous les cris de joie au Kurdistan.

"La haute cour pénale irakienne (...) condamne Ali Hassan al-Majid à la pendaison jusqu'à la mort pour avoir perpétré délibérément des meurtres, un crime contre l'Humanité", a affirmé le juge Aboud Moustapha Al-Hamami, lors d'une séance retransmise par la télévision publique irakienne.

A l'annonce de la peine, "Ali le chimique", vêtu d'un keffieh à damier blanc et noir et d'une longue robe noire, a déclaré "al-hamdoulillah, al-hamdoulillah" (Dieu soit loué) alors que quelques applaudissements étaient entendus dans la salle.

Il a également été condamné pour "le déplacement forcé et la disparition de civils", a ajouté le juge.

"Ali le Chimique", l'homme de main redouté de son cousin Saddam Hussein, a déjà été condamné à mort à trois reprises pour la répression des rébellions kurdes et chiites

Le tribunal a par ailleurs condamné à 15 ans de prison les anciens ministre de la Défense et chef des renseignements, Sultan Hachim Ahmed et Saber Abdel Aziz Hussein al-Douri. Un autre chef militaire, Farhan Moutlak al-Joubouri, a écopé de 10 ans de prison.

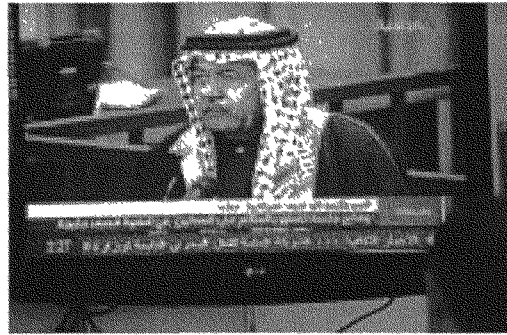
Ils ont été reconnus coupables d'un des pires massacres commis en Irak, qui a symbolisé la brutalité du régime de l'ancien président irakien, Saddam Hussein, lui-même exécuté en décembre 2006

Alors que la guerre avec l'Iran trait à sa fin, les combattants kurdes s'étaient emparé du village d'Halabja en mars 1988. Ali Hassal al-Majid était alors le chef d'état-major pour le nord de l'Irak et chargé par Saddam d'organiser la riposte.

L'armée irakienne avait pilonné la localité, forçant les Kurdes à se replier vers les collines alentours, laissant derrière eux les femmes et les enfants.

Le 16 mars en fin de matinée, des avions de chasse irakiens avaient survolé la zone, lâchant pendant cinq heures un mélange de gaz moutarde et des neurotoxiques Tabun, Sarin et VX

Selon les bilans établis après le gazage, 5 000 personnes avaient trouvé la mort, dont un très grand nombre de femmes et d'enfants. Des centaines d'au-



Ecran de télévision diffusant des images du procès d'Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique", 17 janvier 2010.

tres avaient été grièvement blessées.

A Halabja, des centaines de proches des victimes se sont rassemblés et ont accueilli le jugement avec des cris et des danses de joie

"Je suis ravie de la peine. Tout ce que je souhaite maintenant c'est qu'il soit pendu devant moi", a affirmé à l'AFP Chounam Hassan, une femme de 45 ans, ayant perdu son mari et deux de ses enfants.

"Je demande au gouvernement qu'il pourchasse tous ceux qui ont aidé à commettre le bombardement d'Halabja", a-t-elle ajouté.

"Le gouvernement doit faire que le bombardement soit reconnu comme un génocide", a renchéri Azad Kamal, 40 ans.

"C'est une victoire pour tous les Irakiens, l'Humanité et les Kurdes car Halabja est le plus grand crime de l'époque moderne", a souligné le ministre des Martyrs et des Déplacés du gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan, Majid Hamed Amin.

"Il s'agit d'une condamnation historique et la preuve que justice a été faite. La politique de répression est définitivement terminée", a estimé de son côté le ministre de la Culture du gouvernement kurde, Kawa Mahmoud.

"Ali le Chimique" a occupé le poste de secrétaire général du parti Baas dans le nord (1987-1989), coordonnant à la fois l'armée, la direction de la sécurité générale et les renseignements militaires engagés dans la répression contre les Kurdes, dite campagne Anfal de 1987-1988, qui avait fait près de 180.000 morts

agorakurde.com

16 Janvier 2010

Les Turcs approuvent l'interdiction du principal parti kurde de Turquie

Hommes et femmes politiques kurdes arrêtés et menottés. Un sondage effectué par le Centre de Recherche stratégique et social, MetroPOLL (Ankara) révèle que la majorité des Turcs sont opposés à "l'ouverture démocratique" envers les Kurdes et approuvent la dissolution du principal parti kurde (le DTP, Parti démocratique du peuple).

Plus de la moitié des sondés, 53,8%, ont répondu qu'ils ne soutenaient pas du tout "l'ouverture démocratique" lancée par le Gouvernement turc au début de l'automne 2009 et qui était censée régler "démocratiquement" la question kurde. 7,4% des sondés ont répondu qu'ils n'avaient pas d'opinion.

Interrogés sur la dissolution du Parti démocratique du peuple (DTP) le 24 décembre 2009, près de 70% des personnes ont déclaré approuver la décision de la Cour constitu-



Hommes et femmes politiques kurdes arrêtés et menottés

tionnelle alors que 25% se sont déclarés opposés à cette décision.

La majorité des personnes interrogées, 66,6%, a déclaré approuver l'arrestation, menottes aux poings, de politiciens kurdes soupçonnés de liens avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

(Source : rudaw.net)

A complicated figure reflects Iraq

RAMADI, IRAQ

As March election nears, a Sunni symbolizes the nation's divisions

BY ANTHONY SHADID

In the unforgiving badlands of western Iraq's Anbar Province, once a cradle of the insurgency and now a muddled landscape of corruption, simmering strife and spirited electoral campaigning, no one seems ready to pardon Hamid al-Hais.

Mr. Hais is a sheik, a title that conveys his tribal pedigree. But that moniker is too facile in describing one of the more complicated figures in Iraq today. He is also a veteran of the American-backed war against insurgents, a Sunni Muslim politician and now, in his most recent incarnation, an unlikely confederate of the Iraqi National Alliance, the Shiite Muslim standard-bearer in elections in March for Parliament.

A bid for national unity, Mr. Hais calls his foray across Iraq's entrenched sectarian divide. Many of his neighbors see it otherwise. A traitor to his sect, a stooge of neighboring Iran's Shiite government and a rank opportunist, they say.

Mr. Hais is a bit player in the larger drama of Iraq's March 7 elections, which U.S. officials hope will help bridge divisions in the country as the military withdraws its combat troops by August.

But in Mr. Hais's quixotic trek, there is a warning that the elections may just as easily deepen the cleavages — tribal, ethnic and sectarian — that still threaten Iraq's stability nearly seven years after the American-led invasion.

Nowhere is that warning more stark than Anbar, once a showcase of American success in quelling the insurgency. It is now an increasingly unsettled terrain beset by suicide attacks, bombings and assassinations that prompted a Sunni leader to declare that working as a politician here qualifies as the most dangerous job in Iraq.

"I always take the path that poses the most obstacles," Mr. Hais said, scoffing at the risk, as he took the wheel of his white sport-utility vehicle and careened through back roads of countryside he considers his. "I always go where no one else dares to go."

He quoted a song by Um Kalthoum, the Egyptian diva.

"A confident man walks like a king," he declared.

With hands like spatulas and girth that rivals his height, Mr. Hais struck an imposing figure as he campaigned along the irrigated farms and groves of date palms outside the provincial capital of Ramadi, populated by families that belong to his Albu Diyab tribe. Tribal loyalties still run deep in Anbar, and Mr. Hais



Wearing his Beretta on his hip, Hamid al-Hais spoke on his cellphone recently in Ramadi, Iraq. Mr. Hais says he is working for peace. Many of his neighbors call him a traitor.

suggested they would trump any misgivings his constituency might have over his alliance with Shiite parties that many Sunnis blame for some of the worst sectarian bloodletting in 2006 and 2007.

"I can't say all of them, but my feeling?" he said. "They'll follow me."

Mr. Hais, 42, still evokes his youthful days as a ne'er-do-well. In his car, he played loudly a frenetic strain of Arabic pop and, in jest, swerved toward a neighbor riding a bicycle. (The neighbor frowned.) On the trail, he walked with the swagger that a 9-millimeter Beretta gun in his leather holster brings. Most of his sentences seemed to end in an exclamation point.

"Listen to me!" the married Mr. Hais barked into the phone at his girlfriend. He hung up, shaking his head. "She's driving me crazy," he said.

But beneath the bluster is a compelling argument for an Iraqi identity that transcends sect and allows a man like Mr. Hais, from Iraq's most ardently Sunni region, to join hands with parties led by some of the most dogmatic Shiite clergy.

"We're actually working against sectarianism on the ground, not just through the beautiful words of our

"They're always calculating before they say a single word."

speeches," he said. "The interests of our country require it." So far, his words and actions have prompted more outrage than reconsideration. Many in Anbar remain angry about a weeklong trip Mr. Hais took in June to Iran, a country that many Sunnis believe dominates the government and poses a greater threat to Iraq's interests than the United

States. Since then, some neighbors have taken to calling Mr. Hais's villa, along the Euphrates, "the Iranian house" or "Khomeini's house."

"Absolutely, he's carrying out an Iranian agenda — without a doubt," said Dhari al-Hadi, an adviser to the governor of Anbar and deputy of Ahmed Abu Risha, a leading tribal figure in the province. "You wouldn't find anyone in Anbar who would dare go to Iran."

Mr. Hais's Shiite allies at times seem baffled by him, in an Iraqi version of culture shock. They respect his credentials in leading the fight against insurgents and feel confident he can win over enough of his tribe to capture a seat or two. But they are often taken aback at his free-wheeling comments in the alliance's meetings. At various times, he has promised to open bars in Ramadi, stop veiled women from entering Anbar University, break the legs of rival candidates and pursue Baathists in nightclubs in Syria.

"Crazy," a Shiite colleague said on condition of anonymity, fearful of provoking him. "Then again, if you call someone crazy in Anbar, they consider it a compliment." For his part, Mr. Hais finds his new colleagues too reticent. "They're always calculating before they say a single word," he complained.

Lately, though, Mr. Hais seems just as bewildered by his fellow Sunnis. On a crisp winter day last week, he made his way to the Nineveh Elementary School for Girls in a hard-scrabble neighborhood of Ramadi. Teachers there unleashed a torrent of complaints: trash-strewn streets, a lack of money for schools, and drinking water that mixed with sewage and, at times, blood running off from butcher shops.

Mr. Hais listened, slipped the princip-

al an envelope with \$1,000, then urged the teachers to organize demonstrations. "It's up to you to change the reality," he insisted.

Before long, a former army officer spoke up.

"I want to speak frankly," he said. "We hoped you wouldn't abandon your province and join the alliance." Others nodded. "We don't want Shiites coming into Ramadi," a woman shouted. "We

don't want Shiite places of worship here."

More criticism ensued. "We need someone like Saddam Hussein," a woman cried.

"Someone who will get you into a war and make you all widows?" Mr. Hais asked, with a grimace that suggested he might want his money back

"At least we're fighting Iramans and defending our country," she answered.

An hour later, the meeting ended uneasily. "They're worn out," Mr. Hais said, in explanation. But the anger seemed to be deeper, more intractable.

"He's a son of Ramadi," one of the teachers said. "We respect him in that way."

"But," she added, "he's made a mistake."

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune JANUARY 13, 2010

Huge plot spurs lockdown in Baghdad

BAGHDAD

Plan included bombings and a wave of political assassinations, Iraq says

BY TIMOTHY WILLIAMS

After learning of what they called a wide-ranging plot to bomb government ministries and other public places, to be followed by a wave of political assassinations, Iraqi officials responded Tuesday by bringing much of the capital to a virtual standstill while security forces conducted raids that they said netted large quantities of explosives.

It appeared that at least 4 suicide car bombers — and as many as 10 — were on their way to government buildings Tuesday morning when they were stopped by the police and arrested, the authorities said.

During raids on homes and warehouses in Baghdad that lasted throughout the day, the authorities arrested 25 people and recovered nearly a quarter-ton each of TNT and C4, about an eighth of a ton of ammonium nitrate solution and 60 mortar shells, according to a statement from Maj. Gen. Qassim Atta, spokesman for Baghdad Operations Command, which is responsible for security in the capital.

Even by Iraq's violent standards in recent years — during which mammoth explosions have become an everyday possibility in the capital — the plot would have been devastating if carried out as described.

The U.S. military and the Iraqi government have said they expect violence to increase sharply with the approach of national elections scheduled for March 7, as political parties vie for advantage and insurgents seek to spread chaos.

Government officials said Tuesday that the plot involved sending suicide drivers, their vehicles packed with explosives, to the Defense, Health and Trade ministries, and to other public places, including markets.

Other people would then have been sent to assassinate political and tribal leaders, two security officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to



Several candidates have been banned from the parliamentary elections, including Nehro Mohammed, a Kurd accused of supporting Baathism. His backers rallied Tuesday in Basra.

speak to the media.

"The situation is now stable," said Ali al-Dabbagh, the spokesman for Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. "Security officials have now controlled all the key areas. There is nothing to worry about."

The government did not immediately ascribe blame for the plot but has said in the past that elements of the outlawed Baathist Party and Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia were behind such attacks.

A series of bombings outside or near government buildings since August have killed more than 400 people and wounded more than 1,500 in Baghdad, leading to deep public skepticism about the capability of the security forces.

Mr. Dabbagh said at a news conference that the plot appeared to have been hatched to disrupt the March election, the third national vote in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

"These groups that are targeting the election and the political process want to confuse the public," Mr. Dabbagh said. "They want to bury this dream that all of us are waiting for."

The balloting is regarded as a crucial test of Iraq's fragile democracy, and its success could determine whether U.S. combat forces are able to withdraw from the country on schedule by the end of 2011.

Plans for the vote have already been somewhat tarnished. Last week, a par-

liamentary committee empowered to vet candidates rejected Saleh al-Mutlaq, a prominent Sunni, and prevented other political parties from running, alleging that they had ties to the Baath Party, which is banned by the Constitution. There have been protests in various Sunni areas since the committee's decision.

Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the parliamentary elections in 2005, giving Shiite Arabs and Kurds disproportionate power in Parliament and prompting increased violence in the country.

On Tuesday, the Shiite-led government forcefully denounced persistent rumors that a military unit sympathetic to Mr. Mutlaq might have had a role in the plot. "All these rumors are meant to shake the trust of citizens in its armed forces," said Maj. Gen. Mohammed Askari, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense. "The Iraqi Army is a professional organization and takes its orders from the commander in chief."

Hussein al-Shaalan, a member of the Defense and Security Committee of Parliament who said he was briefed by Iraqi security officials about the plot, said it had been unraveled with the help of the U.S. military. The Americans, Mr. Shaalan said he was told, notified the Iraqi government Monday evening that eight bomb-laden vehicles had entered the city.

The U.S. military in Iraq had no immediate comment

Maliki grasping at Shi'ite straws

Asia Times / Hong Kong

By Sami Moubayed

DAMASCUS - An alarmed Iraqi Sunni community has cried foul play following last week's mass arrests by Iraqi security forces within Sunni districts of the country. Hundreds of young people were arrested in Baghdad, Tikrit, Anbar and Mosul, all accused of illegal membership in the 170,000-man Awakening Councils.

These councils were originally founded by the former United States administration to help combat al-Qaeda. They have since snowballed to become a nightmare for Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who claims that once through with al-Qaeda, they will target their guns at Shi'ites. Meanwhile, the Judicial Council that is run by the Interior Ministry passed 77 death sentences in Baghdad last week, all targeting men accused of terrorism, mostly from the Sunni community.

The clampdown on Sunnis coincides with the release of Qais Khazali, the popular Shi'ite cleric who has been in jail since March 2007. A former associate of cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, Khazali was expelled from the Mahdi Army in 2004 and many now believe that he will be used by Maliki in the March elections to counterbalance the Sadrist bloc.

Muqtada's team is running for parliament in March in a coalition that does not include Maliki. His coalition, the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), was founded last August, and includes influential Shi'ite parties like the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC), the Badr Brigade, the Sadrists, ex-prime minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari and the Fadila Party.

Originally, Maliki had scoffed at the INA, refusing to join them, instead choosing to run independently in a 40-party coalition headed by him that

includes almost all of his ministers, including the powerful Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani, and a handful of Sunni tribal leaders from the Abu Rishah clan. Maliki's team, the State of Law Alliance (SoL), had operated on an independent platform during the provincial elections in January 2009, emerging victorious, thanks to a secular platform that appealed to both Sunnis and Shi'ites.

The prime minister perhaps thought he no longer needed Iran-backed politicians who were only popular within the Shi'ite community, wanting to come across as a seasoned statesman who appealed to all Iraqis, regardless of sect or regional affiliation. Three terrorist attacks in August, October and December, however, whipped up a death toll of nearly 400 people - making Maliki look incompetent before his own constituency, shedding serious doubt on whether he would be able to pull through on his own in March.

Last week, after meeting the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf, Maliki said that an understanding has been reached between his SoL and the INA, claiming that they will merge ahead of the elections. The INA threw dust in his eyes three days later, saying that no such alliance was in the making. Merging the two groups, it added, was too late, reminding that it had repeatedly tried, and failed, to get the prime minister to join the INA.

Additionally, they noted, such a merger was no longer constitutionally possible, given that it passed the given deadline for any election list modifications. Qasim Dawoud, a member of parliament and ranking member in the INA, expressed surprise at Maliki's statement, claiming that it was "baseless".

The INA position had Iran's fingerprints all over it, signaling how angry Tehran is with the prime minister. Maliki,

after all, had been brought to power thanks to the support of Shi'ite allies like the Sadrists and SIIC, back in 2006. The Sadrists, popular at a grassroots level in the slums of Baghdad, had helped legitimize the prime minister four years ago, when he was still a political nobody, marketing him in the eyes of young people, and the urban poor.

These young Shi'ites, who detested the United States occupation, were asked to believe in Maliki, whom they claimed, was not a creation of the US. In exchange for Sadrist support, Maliki turned a blind eye to the state-within-the-state they had created in Sadr City, rewarding them with strategic cabinet posts like Health, Education and Commerce. The 30-man Sadrist bloc in parliament firmly stood by the prime minister as he faced a barrage of criticism from Kurdish and Sunni opponents, helping bolster his cabinet during the difficult civil war that took place in 2006-2007.

The SIIC did the same within the upper echelons of the business community in the Shi'ite community, also helping shelter Maliki from a vote of confidence within parliament. To think that the prime minister would now turn his back on both - seeing them as a political embarrassment - was too much to digest. By the time Maliki realized that he could not win without support of INA members last week, it was already too late for rapprochement.

Maliki tried to salvage what he could of his deteriorating position, traveling to Najaf to meet with the grand ayatollah, hoping that by showing up at Sistani's side, he could help polish his own image in the eyes of ordinary Shi'ites. He unleashed an iron fist against Sunni youth - regardless of whether they were in fact involved in any terrorist operations - an attempt to silence Shi'ite fears of the Awakening Councils, but apparently, that too did not pay off.

He is now preparing to court the recently released Qais Khazali, who is popular at a grassroots level within the Shi'ite community. If that also fails, he will try to use Khazali in reverse, perhaps luring him into the SoL so that he can challenge the towering influence of the Sadrists. For his part, Muqtada has been watching developments in relative silence, only saying that if the INA were to merge with the SoL, Maliki would need to issue a general amnesty, setting hundreds from the Sadrist bloc free who are in jail for having taken up arms against the Americans, over the past four years.

Other members of the INA are no longer enthusiastic about joining hands with the SoL. The Maliki coalition is a losing horse, after all. Thanks to consecutive bombings, it has lost support of the Iraqi street, and due to Maliki's earlier election strategy, tarnished its relationship with Iran.

For obvious reasons, the Sunnis, who supported the SoL in the provincial elections one year ago, are also not going to be voting for Maliki this time because of repeated clampdowns on the Awakening Council and former Ba'athists.

Although Maliki and heavyweights like Hussein Shahristani might win independently in March, the State of Law Alliance - without Iran - is doomed to fail. Observers of the Iraqi scene should start bracing themselves for a landslide victory of the INA, meaning that heavyweights like Ammar al-Hakim, Jaafari and Muqtada will be back in the seat of power until 2014 - only this time without Maliki as premier.

Sami Moubayed is editor-in-chief of Forward Magazine in Syria.

AN OIL BOOMTOWN IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

Erbil is prospering, but tensions with Baghdad are increasing

By Ben Holland / (Bloomberg) –

Outside a newly built go-kart race-track in Erbil, the capital of Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, a poster urges would-be drivers to “feed the need for speed.”

Kurds are taking that advice to heart, racing ahead of the rest of the country in luring oil investment and rebuilding after decades of war and sanctions. They have hit a speed bump: a four-month standoff with Iraqi Prime Minister Nun al-Maliki over how to share the country's oil resources and where to draw internal boundaries.

The dispute, which led al-Maliki to refuse payments to oil companies hired by the Kurds, may threaten the boom that has given Erbil new homes, conference centers and underground fiber-optic cables. It may also jeopardize Iraq's stability as it approaches March 7 elections and the pullout of U.S. troops.

The tension “could potentially escalate into live fire” if al-Maliki's government tries to weaken Kurdish self-rule, said David L. Phillips, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a research institute in Washington. “Sectarian violence will never break Iraq but ethnic conflict can.”

Since the U.S. ousted dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, the north has stayed largely free of the violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Arab provinces that has killed about 100,000 Iraqis, according to the Web site Iraq Body Count. That stability strengthened the hand of Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani and helped attract investors.

Early Contracts

The Kurdish oil ministry started awarding contracts to companies such as Calgary, Canada-based Addax Petroleum Corp., later acquired by China Petrochemical Corp., and Oslo-based DNO International ASA as early as 2002 -- the year before Hussein's fall.

Now, those companies aren't getting paid because of the dispute with Baghdad.

Al-Maliki, whose central government controls export pipelines and collects all oil revenue, has refused to turn over money pledged by the Kurds to their producers, saying the Kurdish government had no right to sign its own contracts.



The Kurds responded by halting exports in October. DNO and the other producers are supplying the domestic market.

Not repaying the Kurds is “unfair and unreasonable and illogical,” and hurts the whole of Iraq by cutting oil sales, said Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of the Kurdish government's foreign affairs department.

Oil Production

Oil output in Kurdistan, which the local authorities say could soar to 450,000 barrels a day by the end of this year, has slumped to 20,000 barrels instead, from a peak of 100,000 last year. Nationwide, Iraq produces about 2.4 million barrels a day.

A dispute over Kurdish borders adds to friction between Barzani and the Baghdad government. Barzani says Kirkuk, a province southeast of Erbil that produces about one-quarter of Iraq's oil, should be part of Kurdistan because it is majority-Kurdish in population.

A referendum on that question has been delayed for two years and, meantime, Barzani and al-Maliki have bolstered their military forces there. Kirkuk was omitted from the 15 oilfields offered by al-Maliki to investors last month.

“If you don't have an agreement between Erbil and Baghdad then all these oil and gas fields can't be developed,” said Gareth Stansfield, an analyst at the Chatham House research center in London. “They've got each other by the throat and that's what makes it so dangerous.”

'Lots of Industry'

Those dangers don't overshadow the current boom for those in the Kurdish region who recall Hussein's chemical attacks in

the late 1980s and the decade of poverty and international sanctions that followed.

“A few years ago there was no money, no electricity, no banks,” said Dara Jalil Khayat, head of the Erbil Chamber of Commerce. “Now we have lots of industry and we're working on setting up a stock exchange.”

In the 1990s, when most Iraqi Kurds were living on United Nations handouts in an enclave protected by U.K. and U.S. warplanes, Baz Karim turned the offices of his family marble business into distribution posts for food and fuel.

Now Karim's Kar Group has about \$1 billion in energy and building contracts, and is mulling a stock market listing -- “maybe in two or three years, maybe in London,” Karim said at Kar's office, a villa in Erbil's suburbs. On his desk is a model of its successor, a 13-story skyscraper being built in Erbil.

Kar is extracting oil from the Khurmala field west of Erbil. Last year it opened a refinery that Karim says will produce 75,000 barrels a day by year-end for Erbil's growing fleet of private cars.

Tomato Paste

Investors from outside Iraq are seeking to profit in Kurdistan.

Andrew Eberhart's Marshall Fund, a U.S.-based private equity firm, runs a tomato-paste plant near Erbil that it took over from the UN food program. Eberhart, a former U.S. Army officer and later a banker at New York-based Citigroup Inc., got interested after a Defense Department-sponsored trip to Iraq in 2007. He's now looking at such opportunities as fast-food franchises and the dairy industry.

“The level of institutional interest in the U.S. and the U.K. is picking up,” Eberhart said. “There's plenty of really good opportunities there right now.”

Anger mounts as Iraq vote nears

BAGHDAD

BY ANTHONY SHADID
AND NADA BAKRI

A knot of young men stood outside the Umm al-Qura Mosque on Friday, once a nest of insurgent fervor where a year of relative tranquility has softened the jagged edges of nearby bullet holes. They were angry, frustrated and quick to punctuate their denunciations of a decision to bar scores of Sunni candidates from Iraqi elections in March with a single word: *sharaiyya*, Arabic for legitimacy.

"We're not going to boycott because our candidates were disqualified," said one of the men, Suheil Najm. "We'll boycott because the elections won't be legitimate."

The decision to disqualify nearly 500 candidates, many of them Sunni Muslim, plunged Iraqi politics into turmoil Friday. Leading candidates vowed a boycott of the vote, perhaps the most important since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Protests were threatened and anger rippled through Iraq's Sunni communities.

But beyond the din of recriminations, the decision posed an even greater challenge to Iraq's nascent body politic, lawmakers, officials and residents say. A hard-won legitimacy of the political process that had finally turned elections into an arena of contest for virtually all factions here looked dangerously tattered Friday, they said.

"The credibility of the state and the credibility of our elections is at stake," said Mahmoud Othman, an independent Kurdish lawmaker. "Time is running out."

The disqualifications, ratified Thursday, were the latest turn in a mercurial process that even rivals of the barred candidates acknowledged has been shrouded in secrecy and characterized by unpredictability.

They took U.S. and United Nations officials by surprise and have left Iraqi leaders scrambling for some kind of compromise weeks before the campaign for the March 7 parliamentary elections was supposed to officially start.

So far, the campaign has targeted some of the most prominent Sunni politicians, fixtures for years on Iraq's fickle political landscape. Among them were Defense Minister Abdul-Kader Jassem al-Obeidi and Saleh Mutlak, the head of the National Dialogue Front, whose alliance with Ayad Allawi, a former prime minister, was expected to fare well in Sunni provinces that were underrepresented in the last election in 2005.

"This is a perversion of the political process. It is a perversion of the democratic process," said Nada Jbouri, a Sunni lawmaker and an ally of Mr. Mut-

lak's. "When you eliminate candidates, it is no longer a fair representation of the people."

The dispute began last week when the Accountability and Justice Commission, in a statement to an Arabic-language satellite channel, said it would disqualify more than a dozen candidates and political parties from the vote because of their support of Mr. Hussein's Baath Party. The eventual list forwarded to electoral officials had about 500 names. Hundreds more will be forwarded Monday, said Falah Shanshal, a Shiite lawmaker whose committee oversees the commission's work.

"The commission's work was very professional. They went over 6,500 names in 10 days," he said. "All the documents were carefully checked. They did a great job."

But critics have questioned the very legality of the Accountability and Justice Commission. It inherited the responsibilities of the now-disbanded De-Baathification Committee, but Parliament has yet to approve its members, leaving the previous staff, including its director, Ali Faisal al-Lami, as powerful caretakers.

Hardly anyone seems to believe that the commission acted on its own. That lack of transparency has given rise to a raft of conspiracies in Baghdad that has already frayed electoral alliances, in particular Mr. Mutlak's with Mr. Allawi. More troubling, it has hampered efforts to reach a compromise, politicians and diplomats say, since no one seems to know who is driving the campaign.

"That's one of the main problems," said Mr. Othman, the Kurdish lawmaker. "It's very secret. It's not transparent. These decisions are being made behind closed doors."

Electoral officials say the candidates will have three days, beginning Monday, to appeal the decision before a seven-judge panel approved by Parliament. Some Iraqi officials, along with U.S. and U.N. diplomats, hope those appeals can secure a last-minute compromise, not unheard of in a political system accustomed to brinkmanship.

But in Baghdad's Sunni neighborhoods and in predominantly Sunni provinces to the north and west of the capital, where anti-Baathism is often seen as coded language for a campaign to disenfranchise Sunnis, many viewed the disqualifications as an indictment of Iraq's fledgling institutions and their attempt to portray themselves as representative.

The dispute has highlighted an issue that remains unresolved in Iraq: to what degree members of the banned Baath Party will be reincorporated into public life.

"If these decisions hold, it will prove that democracy, which was built on the foundation of the occupation, doesn't

exist in Iraq," Hassan Hadi, a professor, said after prayers in Falluja, west of Baghdad. "It will affect the entire future of the country."

Near the venerated Abu Hanifa Mosque in the Baghdad neighborhood of Adhamiya, where leaflets in 2005 promising to "wash the streets" with the blood of those who dared vote have given way to advertisements for satellite dishes, a religious instructor denounced the campaign as simple sectarian politics.

"The defense minister? How can they bar the head of one of the most important ministries?" asked Ammar Adnan. "It's a political game. It's not an issue of law."

The question of legitimacy had bedeviled Iraqi institutions since the first

days of the U.S. occupation, calling into question the credibility of the security forces, the constitution and the de facto sectarian and ethnic system it enshrined.

In the 2005 election, many Sunnis boycotted — out of fear or protest — and many have blamed their disenfranchisement for the onset of devastating sectarian carnage in 2006 and 2007.

With the 2009 provincial ballot in January, though, most factions had at least nominally subscribed to the elections as a tool for peaceful contest. In Sunni regions, most currents — religious, tribal and neo-Baathist — were represented, and Mr. Mutlak fared well in appealing to the still substantial support for Mr. Hussein's Baath Party there.

U.S. officials, in fact, were less worried about low Sunni turnout in March and more that the Sunni vote might be too splintered among various electoral lists to guarantee an effective say in ne-

Even rivals of barred candidates acknowledge the process has been characterized by unpredictability.

gotiations over the next prime minister. Now, diplomats worry that disenchantment and even a boycott could undermine what they viewed as one of the most remarkable accomplishments over the past seven years.

"Dangerous," a Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said in describing the ban. "This won't be good for the electoral process."

Weary and dejected, Mr. Mutlak agreed.

"It's going to be very hard to have a real democratic process," he said. "If Mutlak and big political parties can't protect themselves, how can an Iraqi citizen?"

Kurdish, Turkish journalists call for dialogue

MINHAC ÇELİK

Kurdish and Turkish journalists who met in Istanbul on Saturday to discuss the role of the media put forward suggestions for the purpose of eliminating misperceptions and prejudices that exist both among Iraqi Kurds and in Turkey.

More than 60 journalists from both Turkish and Kurdish magazines, television channels and newspapers convened on Saturday for a one-day meeting organized by the Medialog Platform, an entity affiliated with the Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV) that works to arrange opportunities for members of the media to discuss new projects and exchange opinions.

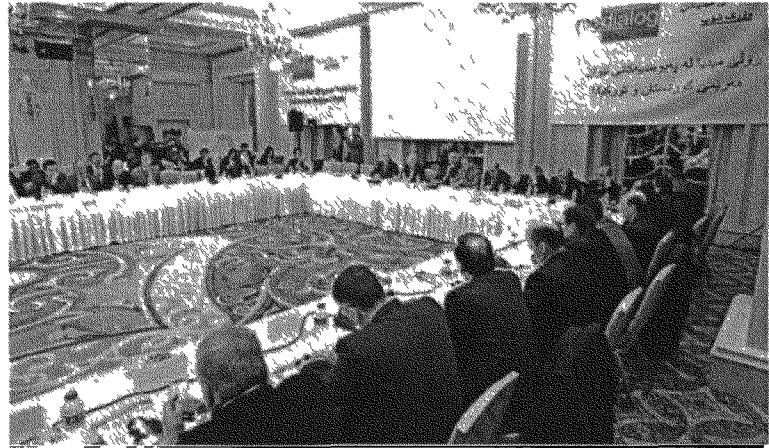
In the opening speech, Mustafa Yesil, the head of the GYV, highlighted the meeting of the Abant Platform, which took place in Arbil in February 2009 as a first and significant step taken to establish dialogue between Kurdish and Turkish intellectuals, and expressed the opinion that the Turkish perception of northern Iraq and the Kurds living there started to change after this event. Aza Hasseb Ali, a former minister in the Kurdish government, underlined that the negative view of Turkey had diminished when compared to the past because of the talks.

Ali also drew attention to the role of Turkish schools that have been operating since 1994 and praised the opening of Isik University in the region. "Although there is a border between Iraq and Turkey, we are closely dependent on each other; thus every development in Turkey has a direct effect on northern Iraq," Ali said.

State-oriented media, a hurdle to reflecting developments impartially

Yavuz Baydar, a columnist for Today's Zaman, expressed his criticism of the devastating effect military interventions have had on media freedom in Turkey but added that over the course of 20 years Turkey's taboos have begun to be abolished. "But we have a very long way to go to achieve a well-established democracy in Turkey," he stated.

Commenting on the attitudes adopted by the Turkish media, Mete Çubukçu, a veteran journalist with an interest in the Middle East, referred to



More than 60 journalists from Turkish and Kurdish magazines, television stations and newspapers convened for a meeting organized by the Medialog Platform.

two different approaches in media/state relations. "Either the state follows the media and makes some changes according to the reaction of the latter, or the stance of the media towards developments is shaped by the state. Unfortunately, the Turkish media have not been able to free itself from state policy and its concerns," said Çubukçu, adding that during the '90s, the Turkish media took a provocative stance towards the Kurdish issue and generally associated northern Iraq with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). "However," he emphasized, "after the start of the normalization process with northern Iraq, the media altered its line in accordance with the change in state policy."

Drawing attention to the factors affecting the Turkish view of northern Iraq, sociologist and journalist Alı Bulaç maintained that Turkey's national security concerns and the threat of separation in the country have been the main influences on perceptions about northern Iraq. "Northern Iraq in general was seen as a distant region which was very unstable and which constituted a threat to Turkish unity and whose leaders were unreliable. This negative approach, which is Orientalist, still prevails to some extent in Turkey," noted Bulaç, underlining that "Kurdistan" is a reality and accepted in the Iraqi Constitution. "But it is hard to accept this in Turkey."

Acknowledging that there are fears among Turks over a Kurdish separatist movement spreading in southeastern Anatolia, Mustafa Akyol, an author and journalist at the Star daily, condemned the military interventions that played

on this fear in order to maintain military tutelage in Turkey. Nevzat Çiçek, another journalist, criticized his colleagues who now oppose the government's attempts to resolve the Kurdish question and applaud past military interventions.

Talking about the difficulties for reporters in getting news from northern Iraq, he said, "It is much easier to be informed about Brazil. Turkish reporters do not know where the Kandil Mountains are -- this is a big problem. I suggest a group should be set up to provide news flowing from Kurdistan to Turkey."

Remarking on how Turkey has been viewed by Kurds in northern Iraq, Bakir Karim Mohammad Salih, the chairman of the Mukriyan Foundation, noted that the history books of the Saddam era told the Iraqi people that the Ottoman Empire was a colonial state which exploited Arabs and Kurds in Iraq and attempted to assimilate them.

Salih referred to the action being taken to secure minority rights and the use of the mother tongue, pointing out that there are Arabic newspapers in northern Iraq where the population is composed mostly of Kurds. "We don't see it as a danger," he said. He also claimed that if Turkey can resolve its Kurdish problem, relations between Kurds in Iraq and Turkey will reach a peak, and this will contribute to Turkey's rising influence in the region.

Fareed Saber Qader, the president of the Kurdistan Strategic Studies Center, noted there is no need for Turkey, a NATO member, to see northern Iraq as a threat. "The United Kingdom managed to forge friendly

relations with its former colonies. Keeping in mind that the Ottoman Empire had never pursued a policy of colonialist expansion, Turkey should also have intensified ties with the countries founded in the Ottoman Empire's territories," said Qader, highlighting the significance of the resolution of the Kurdish problem in terms of the northern Iraq autonomous administration and Turkey. Although military operations and the stance of the Turkish army towards Kurds may result in a

negative image of Turkey in the eyes of Iraqi Kurds, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) persistent efforts towards democracy in Turkey have influenced the Kurds in the region.

The editor-in-chief of Today's Zaman, Bülent Kenes, also cited the lack of democracy and the military's role in politics as the main reasons behind several of Turkey's problems. "There is no Kurdish question in Turkey, there is no Armenian or devout Muslim

problem in the country. What we have been suffering from is the role of the military in the civilian arena, which we are now challenging," he said.

Cengiz Çandar, a columnist at the Radikal daily, dismissed assertions that resolution of the Kurdish question is not possible through the initiative and emphasized that it is a long process that includes ups and downs. "It has started, and I believe the process is irreversible," he added.

Iraq Kurds want to resolve oil row, resume exports

REUTERS

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq January 17 2010 (Reuters)

The government of Iraqi Kurdistan said on Sunday it wanted to reach an amicable agreement with the Baghdad government over the sharing of oil revenue so it could resume exporting crude.

In a statement responding to a call from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to settle a dispute between Iraq's Arabs and Kurds over the country's oil wealth, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) said it was considering publishing contracts it has signed with foreign oil companies.

"The KRG is willing to enter a serious dialogue about the subject, and we are willing completely and in the interest of the Iraqi people to renew exports of crude oil from KRG fields at a level of no less than 100,000 barrels per day," it said.

The statement added that the Kurdish regional authorities hoped to boost output to 200,000 barrels per day this year and attain an output capacity of 1 million bpd within the next four years.

Iraq's Kurdish region is believed to be rich with oil reserves but development has been stalled by disagreement between the Arab-led government in Baghdad and the semi-autonomous Kurdish authorities over revenue.

The KRG has signed production sharing agreements with a string of foreign companies, including Norway's DNO <DNO.OL> and Turkey's Genel Enerji, but Iraq's Oil Ministry considers those deals illegal.

"In order to show our seriousness about the subject, we are contemplating publishing the ratified contracts with DNO and Genel," the KRG said.

Prime Minister Maliki on January 3 called for an end to the row over oil after he met with new KRG Prime Minister Barham Salih.

The Iraqi government briefly allowed the KRG to start exporting oil from two fields, Taq Taq and Tawke, over the summer but its refusal to pay the private firms running the oilfield projects led to the suspension of the exports.

The dispute over oil is part of a larger stand-off between Baghdad and the Kurdish region over disputed territories in Iraq's north that U.S. military officials fear could one day lead to Iraq's next broad conflict.

At the heart of the dispute lies the city of Kirkuk, which sits over a vast sea of oil and is claimed by the Kurds as their ancestral capital. The city's Arab and Turkmen population fiercely oppose Kurdish aspirations to have Kirkuk wrapped into their northern enclave, which has enjoyed virtual independence since after the 1991 Gulf War.

Salih was Maliki's deputy prime minister before taking up the KRG position. Analysts had predicted that his knowledge of national politics, diplomatic skills and personal connections might lead to a reduction in tensions between the two sides.

The federal government's hand has been strengthened recently against the Kurds by the success the Oil Ministry has had in securing agreements with international oil companies to develop oilfields south of the KRG border.

If successful, those deals could boost Iraqi national output to 12 million bpd, rivaling top producer Saudi Arabia, from 2.5 million bpd now, making Kurdish crude exports less important for a government that relies almost entirely on oil for revenue.

Rudaw.Net

19 JANUARY 2010

Al-Qaida produces anti-Kurdish video

Amsterdam - The terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq's (ISI) produced a anti-Kurdish video, called "Vanquisher of the Peshmerga" which was translated by the graduate student Christopher Anzalona last Monday.

The video was produced by its media outlet, the Al-Furqan Media Foundation. The ISI is an umbrella for several of the most militantly radical transnational jihadi-Salafi groups operating in Iraq, chief among them al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers/Iraq (AQI). "Peshmerga" are the Kurdish armed forces, which are protecting the border regions of the Kurdistan region.



The video condemns the participation of the Iraqi Kurds with America, Israel and the

Iraqi Shia and shows parts of Kurdish history. It also shows militants carrying out suicide attacks against Kurds and Kurdish security forces.

It also includes older footage of al-Qa'ida ideologue Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri reminding the Kurds that they have produced some of Islam's greatest figures, including the famed medieval military leader Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn al-Ayyub (Saladin). The suicide bombers are described as "heroes."

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A 4th death sentence for 'Chemical Ali'

BAGHDAD

1988 attack killed 5,000 in village in Kurd region; 3 others get prison time

BY NADA BAKRI

Ali Hassan al-Majid, the cousin of Saddam Hussein known as Chemical Ali, was convicted and sentenced to death Sunday for ordering the 1988 gas attack on a village in northern Iraq that killed more than 5,000 Kurds. It was Mr. Majid's fourth such sentence since his trial began in 2007.

"Thanks be to God," an unrepentant Mr. Majid said when the sentence was read.

Victims' relatives cheered in the courtroom when the chief judge, Aboud Mustafa, handed down the guilty ver-

dict, The Associated Press reported.

Two other officials from the Hussein regime — Sultan Hashem, who was defense minister, and Sabir al-Douri, the military intelligence chief — were each sentenced to 15 years in prison for their role in the same attack in Halabja, a village in the semiautonomous Kurdistan region. A third, Abdel Mutlaq al-Jbouri, a former regional intelligence chief, received a 10-year sentence.

In Halabja after the verdict, residents cheered and played songs from loudspeakers at a monument commemorating victims of the attack, The A.P. reported. Some in town visited the cemetery to remember relatives who died in the gassing.

Mr. Majid received his first sentence of death by hanging in June 2007 for his role in the military's Anfal campaign in the late 1980s, which killed as many as 180,000 Iraqi Kurds. The second sentence came in December 2008 for his involve-

ment in crushing a Shiite uprising in southern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, and the third in March for his role in killing and displacing Shiite Muslims in 1999.

Also Sunday, the U.S. military said in a statement that Mr. Hussein's foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, suffered a stroke on Friday.

Mr. Aziz, 74, who is serving a 22-year sentence in U.S. detention, was taken to a U.S. military hospital north of Baghdad for treatment, according to the statement.

"His condition is improving and he is still being closely monitored," Lt. Col. Pat Johnson said in the statement.

Mr. Aziz's son and his lawyer said he had lost his ability to speak.

Mr. Aziz is still a defendant in several court cases against the former regime. His lawyer, Badri Aref, said that he had asked the court to postpone the prosecutions because of Mr. Aziz's medical condition but that it had refused.

Israel calms feud with Turkey after snub of Ankara's envoy

ANKARA

Both countries express desire to end dispute and continue military projects

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Israel and Turkey said Sunday that they had smoothed over differences caused by a diplomatic dispute and were working to develop relations and further military projects.

After daylong talks with Turkish officials, Defense Minister Ehud Barak of

Israel said the countries had managed to move beyond a disagreement after Israel apologized for its treatment of the Turkish ambassador.

Mr. Barak is the first Israeli official to visit Turkey since a diplomatic feud erupted last week after the deputy foreign minister of Israel, Danny Ayalon, summoned the ambassador to complain about a television show depicting Israeli agents kidnapping children.

The ambassador, Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, was made to sit on a low sofa without a handshake. Mr. Ayalon told local TV stations that the humiliation was intentional. Outraged, Turkey threatened to recall the ambassador, and Mr. Ayalon apologized.

Mr. Barak said he believed the treatment of the ambassador "was a mistake, and the right step was taken according to the norms of diplomacy. It is appropriate that all the ups and downs in our relationship over the years should be solved and put behind us."

Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul of Turkey did not address the diplomatic dispute directly, but called Israel a "neighbor" and "strategic ally" with which Turkey had common regional interests.

Asked to comment on the state of relations with Israel, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that he was satisfied with Mr. Barak labeling the treatment a mistake and said Turkey would not pursue the matter further.

A high-ranking Israeli official who was present at the meetings said Israel had received no commitment from Turkey to make an effort to stop the TV portrayals in question. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said Turkey and Israel were important partners and that Israel had to use more diplomacy.

Mr. Gonul said that Turkey and Israel had completed 7 of 13 planned military projects, including the upgrade of F-4 and F-5 jets. Israel is to deliver 10 Heron aircraft to Turkey in the first half of this year, he added. Turkey hopes to use the drones to monitor Kurdish rebel positions.



Defense Minister Ehud Barak of Israel, center, with Turkish officers and officials Sunday at the tomb of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the Turkish republic.

Iraq's ban on democracy

A ban on 500 Sunni politicians is a seemingly small problem that could unravel Iraq's political fabric.

Kenneth M. Pollack
Michael E. O'Hanlon

WASHINGTON With Washington's attention understandably focused on the tragedy in Haiti, Iraq has slipped onto the back burner. Yet there is a major problem brewing there — one that could jeopardize President Obama's plan to draw down American forces and even re-ignite sectarian conflict.

Last Thursday, Iraq's Independent High Election Commission upheld a ban on nearly 500 Sunni politicians handed down (possibly illegally) some days earlier by the Accountability and Justice Commission. They were accused of having had ties to the Baath Party of Saddam Hussein.

Among those proscribed from running in the nationwide elections scheduled for March 7 were Defense Minister Abdul-Kader Jassem al-Obeidi and Saleh al-Mutlaq, one of Iraq's most influential Sunni politicians. Although confusion reigns, it is rumored that the brief appeal process will end Tuesday and, at present, it seems unlikely to ameliorate the situation.

The two commissions are dominated by officials appointed by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, so it's not surprising that many Iraqis believe that the prime minister's Shiite-dominated government is disqualifying large numbers of political rivals, particularly Mr. Mutlaq, who had already allied himself with Ayad Allawi, a former prime minister widely considered to be Mr. Ma-

liki's most dangerous foe. There is no evidence of this, but the perception is widespread and in Iraq, perception can do as much damage as reality.

Meanwhile, many informed Americans and Iraqis are pointing to Ahmed Chalabi, the one-time political favorite of the Bush administration, as the real culprit. Mr. Chalabi, they say, is trying to manipulate the elections to become prime minister by default.

It's true that many of the disqualified politicians were once Baathists. But Iraq needs reconciliation, not payback.

If this ban stays in effect, the likelihood of violence will skyrocket, and U.S. soldiers will be called on to halt it.

Any bans must be careful, selective and well-explained. They should not disqualify people like the defense minister — a former Baathist, but one who turned against the party in the 1990s and was imprisoned and tortured by the regime. Moreover, in recent

years he has served the new Iraqi government loyally.

Before the surge of American troops in 2007 and the so-called Anbar Awakening, many Iraqi Sunnis boycotted Iraq's elections in the belief that the system was rigged against them. This created a self-fulfilling prophecy when the elections took place without them and the resulting government was dominated by Shiite and Kurdish groups. This vicious cycle helped fuel civil war.

All of that changed after 2007, when American-brokered cease-fires and

political shifts convinced Sunnis that they would have a fair opportunity to elect their own leaders and participate in government at no disadvantage. In the provincial elections of January 2009, Sunnis finally voted in large numbers. Their return to the political process has been a key element in the rapid erosion of sectarianism from Iraqi politics.

The end of the civil war and the need to focus on political and economic reconstruction had revealed sharp differences among the various Shiite groups, which have been heightened by the emergence of Sunni parties with similarly varied views.

As a result, there has been a complete reorganization of Iraqi politics over the past year, with Shiite, Sunni and even some Kurdish groups creating cross-sectarian alliances that have largely replaced the previous sectarian blocs. It was a sign of this progress that Sunni parties, particularly Mr. Mutlaq's, were being courted avidly by a number of Shiite and secular parties, including those led by Mr. Maliki and Mr. Allawi.

If the ban is allowed to stand, it will do more than just throw a wrench in the works. It will persuade a great many Iraqis that the prime minister or other Shiites, like Mr. Chalabi, are using their control over the electoral mechanics to kneecap their rivals.

It may also convince many Sunnis that they will never be allowed to win if they play by the rules, and that violence is their only option.

That is an extraordinarily dangerous message to send right now, when the United States is trying hard to withdraw tens of thousands more American troops from Iraq and shift 50,000 or so from combat operations to advisory and training roles.

If this ban remains in effect, the likelihood of electoral violence will skyrocket, and American soldiers will inevitably be called on to halt it.

All is not yet lost — over the past few years, Iraqi politicians have developed

a penchant for last-minute compromise that has turned a number of near-catastrophes into mere close calls. In every one of those instances, however, it required rapid and determined American pressure to avert disaster.

The American Embassy in Baghdad is working feverishly to persuade the Iraqis to change course. Time is of the essence — especially if the Accountability and Justice Commission's appeals process ends on Tuesday. If the United States doesn't act before the deadline, the bans will become much harder to roll back.

The threat of crisis is real enough that Vice President Joe Biden, who has played a useful role in backing up Ambassador Christopher Hill on several occasions lately, will have to help. It even merits direct involvement by President Obama.

It is just this kind of seemingly small problem that could unravel the entire political fabric of Iraq.

KENNETH M. POLLACK is the director of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. **MICHAEL E. O'HANLON** is a senior fellow at Brookings.

TURQUIE Le bras de fer entre l'armée et le gouvernement se poursuit

Le quotidien libéral *Taraf* vient de révéler, documents à l'appui, l'existence d'un énième complot de l'armée visant à renverser le gouvernement islamo-conservateur de l'AKP. Cette fois, il s'agit d'un plan baptisé Balyoz (Massue) et préparé en 2003 par un général aujourd'hui en retraite, qui prévoyait des attentats sanglants contre deux grandes mosquées d'Istanbul et des incidents aériens avec la Grèce, afin de créer une situation de chaos et de faciliter la prise du pouvoir par l'armée.

Le rédacteur en chef de *Taraf*, l'écrivain Ahmet Altan, se montre très sévère à l'égard des militaires : "Nos généraux mêlent désormais allègrement activités professionnelles et activités criminelles. Comment quelqu'un qui pense que le devoir de l'armée est de faire sauter des mosquées, d'abattre ses propres avions de chasse et d'arrêter des centaines de milliers de personnes a-t-il pu devenir le commandant de la 1^{re} Armée [Istanbul] ? Comment cette personne a-t-elle pu parvenir à ce poste ? Quel est donc le critère pour devenir général dans notre armée ? Faut-il être capable d'évoquer calmement la façon dont on va tirer sur sa propre population pour être nommé général ? Combien d'officiers pensent comme lui ? L'existence d'un autre complot [dénommé Kafes (Cage), il avait été révélé par *Taraf* en novembre 2009] montre que des indi-

vidus de cette sorte sévissaient encore en 2009 au sein de l'armée turque. Si un véritable conflit avec un ennemi extérieur devait éclater, comment notre armée serait-elle en mesure de le combattre ? Il faut procéder à un grand nettoyage afin que nous puissions nous doter d'une nouvelle institution. Qu'attendons-nous pour le faire ? Qu'un général fou envoie les chars dans la rue ?"

Le chroniqueur politique Rusen Çakır relativise l'affaire dans le quotidien libéral de gauche *Vatan* : "Ces dernières années, on a beaucoup écrit sur la facilité avec laquelle l'armée turque produisait des partisans du coup d'Etat, mais on a peu glosé, en revanche, sur le fait que cette même armée était une structure capable de neutraliser ses propres éléments putschistes. Certes, en 2007, au moment de l'élection d'Abdullah Gül [AKP] à la présidence, l'état-major avait tenté d'intervenir en publiant une 'mise en garde électronique' de sinistre mémoire. Mais on peut néanmoins considérer que le choix de l'actuel chef d'état-major de s'abstenir désormais de ce genre de memorandum traduit la capacité de l'armée à tirer les leçons du passé. Il y aura évidemment toujours des putschistes dans ses rangs, mais ils ne pourront jamais mettre leurs plans à exécution. Pas seulement en raison des mécanismes de contrôle propres à l'armée, mais bien davantage du fait du

développement de la démocratie et de la société civile dans notre pays."

Dans ce contexte, la récente décision de la Cour constitutionnelle qui invalide la loi autorisant les tribunaux civils à juger des militaires, notamment pour tentative de putsch, est perçue comme une réaction de l'appareil d'Etat turc contre le gouvernement de l'AKP. Le célèbre commentateur Mehmet Ali Birand écrit à ce propos dans le quotidien populaire *Posta* : "Cette décision de la Cour constitutionnelle doit être considérée comme une importante victoire pour l'armée turque. Elle va quelque peu rassurer l'état-major, dont le moral était au plus bas depuis un certain temps, d'autant que cette décision a été prise à l'unanimité des membres de la Cour. Depuis environ deux ans, on assiste en effet à une lutte qui ne cesse de s'amplifier entre l'armée et l'AKP, qui veut placer l'état-major sous le contrôle des civils."

Le Monde

Dimanche 24 - Lundi 25 janvier 2010

La Cour constitutionnelle turque annule une loi sur les tribunaux militaires

Nouvelles tensions entre le pouvoir et l'armée autour de cette réforme réclamée par l'UE

Istanbul
Correspondance

La Cour constitutionnelle turque a invalidé, jeudi 21 janvier, une réforme du système judiciaire adoptée en juin 2009 par le Parlement, déclenchant une nouvelle crise entre l'armée et le gouvernement islamo-conservateur, engagé dans le processus d'adhésion à l'Union européenne.

Les gardiens de la Constitution turque ont rejeté à l'unanimité une loi qui obligeait les militaires

en exercice à répondre de leurs crimes devant la justice civile. Cette réforme, qui aurait mis fin au pouvoir exorbitant des tribunaux militaires, avait été saluée par Bruxelles comme un tournant décisif dans la démocratisation du pays.

Mais le chef de l'opposition kémaliste, Deniz Baykal, avait dénoncé « un coup d'Etat civil » du parti au pouvoir, l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement), et il avait déposé un recours pour faire annuler le texte. La décision de la Cour constitutionnelle, véritable

acte de défiance vis-à-vis du gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, porte un coup aux enquêtes lancées ces derniers mois contre des militaires impliqués dans des tentatives présumées de coups d'Etat.

Huseyin Celik, député proche du premier ministre, a exprimé le malaise du gouvernement, vendredi, en déplorant « un revers, au moment où la Turquie se démocratise ». Pour le ministre chargé des négociations avec l'Union européenne, Egemen Bagis, « cela montre à quel point la Turquie a besoin d'une réforme de la Constitution

Celle qui est en vigueur est comme un aimant qui tire la Turquie en arrière. Diriger un pays avec une Constitution écrite après un coup d'Etat ne permet qu'une démocratie minimale », a-t-il déclaré. A chaque nouvelle crise entre le gouvernement civil et les forces armées, la question de la révision de la Constitution issue du putsch de 1980 est évoquée mais aussitôt étouffée.

Affaires gênantes

L'une des conséquences de cet-

te décision devrait être le retour devant des juridictions militaires de plusieurs affaires gênantes pour l'armée « Les dossiers actuellement jugés par des cours civiles doivent être renvoyés devant la justice militaire », a noté, vendredi, le général Cubuklu, un porte-parole de l'état-major. En décembre, huit officiers mis en cause dans un éventuel complot contre un ministre avaient été interrogés par un procureur civil.

Le parquet d'Ankara a mené, jusqu'à mercredi, vingt-six jours de perquisitions au cœur des archives militaires. Des tentatives de coups d'Etat contre le gouvernement impliquant des hauts responsables militaires sont régulièrement révélées depuis 2007. Jeudi, le journal *Taraf* a publié les extraits d'un plan prévoyant notamment l'organisation d'attentats contre des mosquées à Istanbul et l'attaque de l'aviation grecque au-dessus de la mer Egée. Poursa défense, l'état-major a affirmé que le document était « un cas d'étude utilisé pour un séminaire » ■

Guillaume Perrier

Le Monde
23 janvier 2010

L'exclusion de sunnites des législatives met en péril la stabilité de l'Irak

Le vice-président américain, Joseph Biden, est dépêché à Bagdad pour réduire les tensions communautaires

Confrontée à la décision du gouvernement irakien, dominé par les partis chiites, d'exclure 511 candidats, en majorité sunnites, des élections générales du 7 mars, l'administration américaine, affolée par la perspective d'assister au possible retour en force du chaos et des violences interconfessionnelles, a décidé de dépêcher en urgence le vice-président Joseph Biden à Bagdad pour intervenir.

Prise en décembre 2009 dans des conditions obscures par la Commission suprême pour la responsabilité et la justice – une instance parlementaire largement dominée par des élus chiites qui sont eux-mêmes candidats aux élec-

tions –, ces 511 personnalités interdites sont accusées de nourrir des sympathies actives pour l'ancien parti Baas de Saddam Hussein. Largement rédigée par des juristes américains et entérinée par référendum national en 2005, l'article 7 de la Constitution interdit l'existence même de ce parti ainsi que la diffusion de ses dogmes.

Approuvée la semaine passée par la Commission nationale électorale, une instance théoriquement indépendante, la liste, et surtout « le principe » même de l'interdit est ardemment soutenu par le chef chiite du gouvernement, Nouri Al-Maliki.

Niant que les Arabes sunnites, qui bénéficiaient sous Saddam

Hussein, lui-même sunnite, d'un sort un peu plus enviable que les autres, soient visés en tant que tels, M. Maliki qui se représente à la tête d'une coalition de quarante petites formations dont certaines

sunnites, comparait, mardi, le Baas aux nazis, eux-mêmes « interdits d'élection en Europe après la guerre ».

Le premier ministre qui, contrairement aux Américains qui ciblent plutôt Al-Qaida en Irak, accuse régulièrement « les criminels baasistes » d'être derrière les attentats meurtriers de ces derniers mois, a ajouté que « jamais », il ne se réconcilierait « avec ceux qui voient Saddam Hussein comme un martyr ». Cette prise de position, approuvée par l'actuel parti numéro un de l'Assemblée, le

Seule une réconciliation nationale permettrait à Washington de retirer l'essentiel de ses forces d'ici au 30 août

Conseil suprême islamique fondé à Téhéran en 1982, est en contradiction directe avec les efforts américains en faveur d'une réconciliation nationale complète qui seule leur permettrait de retirer l'essentiel de leurs forces d'Irak d'ici au 30 août. Selon certaines informations non démenties, des agents de la CIA (l'Agence centrale de renseignement) discutent depuis des mois avec les chefs baasistes, exilés depuis sept ans en Jordanie, en Syrie et au Yémen, pour parvenir à un accord. Ces efforts ne sont pas, ou plus, soutenus par le gouvernement de Bagdad.

Tous les commentateurs étrangers de la scène politique irakien-

Le Parlement passera de 275 à 325 sièges

Les secondes élections législatives de l'après-Saddam Hussein auront lieu le 7 mars dans l'ensemble du pays, le Kurdistan autonome inclus. Sur la base d'une estimation statistique, la population serait passée de 22 millions en 1987, l'année du dernier recensement, à 30 millions d'habitants aujourd'hui.

A partir de cette estimation démographique, et après des mois de zizanies et de négociations entre les groupes ethniques et confessionnels, le nombre de sièges à l'Assemblée représentative, le Parlement, passera de 275 actuellement à 325. Les 18 provinces d'Irak ont toutes obtenu des sièges supplémentaires, celle de Bagdad passant de 59 à 68, Bassora de 18 à 24, Babylone de 11 à 16.

ne, sans exception, jugent que la liste des interdits, si elle est maintenue, peut faire voler en éclat la paix très relative qui commençait à s'instaurer entre la minorité arabe sunnite qui a perdu le pouvoir et la majorité chiite. « Cela démontre que la guerre interconfessionnelle n'est pas terminée », estime Pierre-Jean Luizard, auteur de nombreux ouvrages politiques et historiques sur le pays. « Le plus grave, poursuit ce chercheur du CNRS, est que la possibilité d'un coup d'Etat militaire, mené par des troupes d'élite présentement entraînées à l'étranger par les Américains, se renforce ».

Les premières élections générales de l'après-invasion en 2005 avaient été boycottées par 90 % des Arabes sunnites. Attentats et guerre civile avaient suivi.

Chacun espérait que le scrutin du 7 mars permettrait leur retour dans la vie politique et l'accélération de la reconstruction de l'Etat. La liste des bannis, dont le détail n'a pas été rendu public et qui concerne 8 % des 6 592 candidats déclarés, inclut notamment l'actuel ministre (sunnite) de la défense, Abdel Qader Jassem Al-Obeidi, et Salah Al-Motlaq, patron sexagénaire du Front de la concorde, l'un



Colère à Bassora, jeudi 21 janvier, contre l'avocat sunnite Dhaifir Al-Ani, candidat aux législatives déclaré inéligible par la Commission responsabilité et justice. ATEF HASSAN/REUTERS

des deux principaux partis représentant les sunnites

Critique acerbe et décidé de M Maliki au Parlement, M Motlaq, qui contrôle 11 sièges de l'Assemblée et qui a obtenu autour de 20% des voix dans les zones mixtes d'Irak aux élections régionales de janvier 2009, venait juste de passer un accord de coalition pour le prochain scrutin avec le parti nationaliste de l'ancien premier ministre chiite laïc, M. Iyad Allaoui. Celui-ci n'a pas - encore menacé de boycotter les élections si son partenaire n'était pas autorisé à concourir mais de nombreux sunnites évoquent publiquement cette éventualité

Dans le camp chiite, la tension monte également. Plusieurs milliers de manifestants ont défilé, jeudi 21 janvier, à Nadjaf, Kerbala et Bassora à l'appel de leurs formations aux cris de « Non au retour des assassins ! »

Pressé par Washington d'intervenir, le président (kurde) de l'Irak a saisi, jeudi, la Cour suprême du pays afin qu'elle vérifie si la Commission responsabilité et justice est ou non légale. Présidée par Ahmad Chalabi, politicien non élu, ancien favori de l'administration Bush avant que celle-ci se rende compte en 2007 que « son homme » travaillait aussi, sinon exclusivement, pour l'Iran, cette instance d'exclusion n'aurait jamais été entérinée par le Parlement ■

Patrice Claude

Le rapprochement turco-arménien en panne

Le génocide de 1915 et le conflit du Haut-Karabakh ralentissent le processus de réconciliation.



Le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, n'accepte pas le caractère «génocidaire» des massacres, mentionné par la Cour constitutionnelle arménienne.

A NUSCA/POLARIS/STARFACE

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

TURQUIE Les résistances turques à la reconnaissance du génocide de 1915 continuent d'entraver le rapprochement entre la Turquie et l'Arménie. Une référence indirecte à ce pan sombre de l'histoire par la Cour constitutionnelle arménienne a déclenché la colère d'Ankara, qui juge qu'elle « altère l'objectif et l'esprit des protocoles », signés en octobre par les deux pays afin de normaliser leurs relations.

Le 12 janvier, la Cour a validé ces accords, tout en mentionnant un article de la déclaration d'indépendance de l'Arménie qui soutient « les efforts pour la reconnaissance internationale du génocide arménien (...) dans la Turquie ottomane et en Arménie occidentale ».

Le premier ministre turc a estimé que cette mention des massacres commis par l'Empire ottoman, dont la Turquie nie le caractère génocidaire, était « inacceptable ». La réconciliation entre Ankara et Erevan « sera remise en cause à moins que cette erreur ne soit corrigée », a déclaré cette semaine Recep Tayyip Erdogan

« La Turquie exagère »

À l'automne dernier, Arméniens et Turcs avaient franchi un pas important pour mettre fin à près d'un siècle d'inimitié en s'engageant à établir des relations diplomatiques, à rouvrir leur frontière commune et à mettre en place une commission d'historiens. Mais, plus de trois mois après leur signature, les accords n'ont toujours pas franchi la dernière étape indispensable à leur entrée en vigueur et attendent d'être approuvés par les Parlements des deux pays.

L'enlisement de la dynamique enclenchée en octobre est essentielle-

ment dû à la partie turque, qui a clairement conditionné la ratification à des progrès dans les négociations sur le Haut-Karabakh, une province azerbaïdjanaise à majorité arménienne et occupée par Erevan. Mais ce conflit, hérité de la chute de l'URSS, est gelé. Un accord de paix n'est pas espéré à court terme et aucune avancée substantielle n'est attendue lors de la rencontre, le 25 janvier, entre les chefs d'État arménien et azerbaïdjanais, qu'a préparée le groupe de Minsk (coprésidé par la France, les États-Unis et la Russie). En choisissant de soutenir l'Azerbaïdjan, son allié turcophone et surtout l'un de ses principaux fournisseurs de gaz, Ankara se retrouve donc bloqué. La semaine dernière, à Moscou, le premier ministre Vladimir Poutine a profité d'une visite de son homologue turc pour désapprouver les exigences d'Ankara de subordonner la normalisation de ses relations avec l'Arménie au sort de l'enclave disputée, jugeant cet « unique paquet » fortement contre-productif.

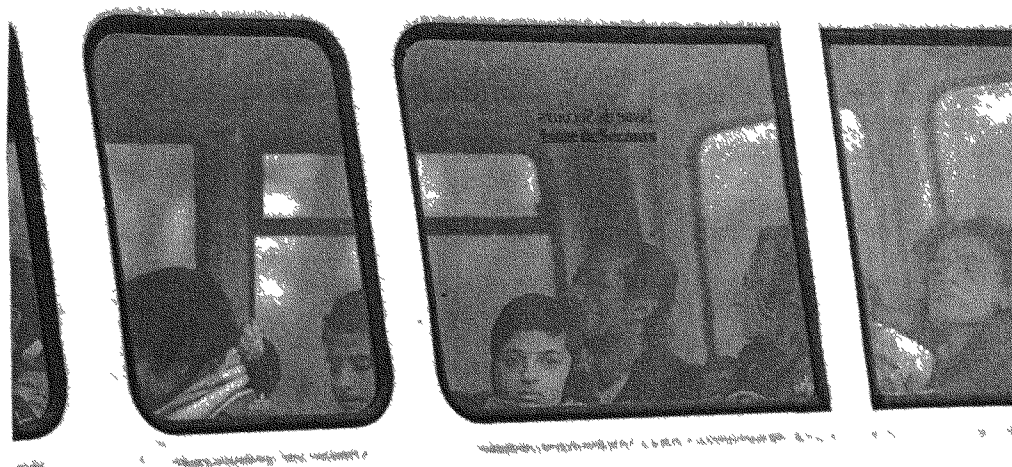
« La Turquie exagère car le protocole avec l'Arménie ne fait pas référence au Karabakh », commente Aybars Gorgulu, coordinateur des recherches turco-arméniennes à la Fondation turque des études économiques et sociales. Le gouvernement turc utilise la décision de la Cour arménienne « comme une excuse et cherche à faire porter la responsabilité du blocage du processus à l'Arménie », selon ce spécialiste. L'équation se complique d'autant plus pour Ankara que le 24 avril, date de commémoration des massacres de 1915, se profile et que, à cette période de l'année, la diaspora arménienne fait traditionnellement pression sur l'Administration américaine pour qu'elle reconnaisse le génocide. ■

la Croix

LUNDI 25 JANVIER 2010

L'errance de 124 clandestins s'est terminée sur une plage corse

Sans papiers et se disant Kurdes de Syrie, ils ont été trouvés vendredi matin dans le sud de l'île, avec parmi eux trente-huit enfants, dont neuf nourrissons. Alors qu'ils ont été placés en centre de rétention, les associations réclament pour eux le droit d'asile



Quelques-uns des immigrants kurdes en transit entre la Corse et le centre de rétention de Cornebarrieu, près de Toulouse. Les associations s'insurgent contre leur placement administratif

Ils espéraient débarquer en Suède ou en Norvège. C'est sur une crique de rêve, proche de Bonifacio (Corse-du-Sud), que les 124 clandestins ont été abandonnés dans la nuit de jeudi à vendredi. Un long périple dont les étapes, encore floues, commencent à se dessiner comme une errance à travers les pays du Maghreb et du Proche-Orient.

Comment sont-ils arrivés là ?

Ils auraient versé entre 2500 et 10000 € à leurs passeurs. « Certains disent avoir fait un court séjour en Turquie. D'autres ont été transportés de Jordanie jusqu'en Tunisie à bord d'un camion-citerne », affirme une traductrice ayant passé la nuit auprès d'eux.

Pourtant, les vêtements sont propres, les visages rasés, et les bébés bien portants. Ce qui paraît incompatible avec de telles conditions de transport. Ni avec l'éventualité d'un séjour de quarante-huit heures sur la plage de Paragnano avant d'être découverts. Alors, les autorités poussent leurs investigations.

La première piste est celle d'un cargo russe qui les aurait pris en charge en Tunisie. Mais des vérifications faites sur ce navire en Italie « n'ont pas apporté d'élément probant », selon Thomas Pison, procureur de la République à Ajaccio. L'enquête porterait désormais sur un navire ukrainien amarré à Fos-sur-Mer, près de Marseille. Il croisait au large de Bonifacio cette nuit-là et pourrait avoir débarqué les 124 personnes. Probablement avec l'aide de petites embarcations.

Comment ont-ils été pris en charge ?

Après avoir passé une courte nuit dans un gymnase de Bonifacio, tous ont été évacués sans trop de résistance, samedi matin. Pour les autorités, ces personnes entrées illégalement sur le territoire sont d'abord considérées comme des clandestins. Des arrêtés préfectoraux de reconduite à la frontière

Sur 34 Syriens qui ont fait une demande d'asile en 2008, 10 ont reçu une réponse positive de l'Ofpra.

ont donc été pris et les exilés ont été placés dans plusieurs centres de rétention administrative (CRA) sur le continent : 63 à Nîmes, 19 à Toulouse ou 11 à Rennes... Cette gestion du gouvernement a déclenché de vives protestations de la part des associations. « La protection des droits de l'homme doit l'emporter sur les mesures sécuritaires », affirme Amnesty International France.

Les associations soulignent qu'il y a parmi eux 29 femmes, dont trois enceintes, et 38 enfants. Ces étrangers « doivent pouvoir être accueillis dans un centre d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile avec toute l'information nécessaire », estime la Cimade.

Les Kurdes sont-ils menacés en Syrie ?

La population kurde de Syrie représente 6 % des 19 millions d'ha-

bitants. Elle est localisée dans le nord-est du pays, dans la province d'Alep, la Jazira et la banlieue de Damas, la capitale. La Syrie, à l'instar de la Turquie, n'a jamais voulu reconnaître une région sous la dénomination du « Kurdistan » comme l'ont fait l'Iran et l'Irak. En 2008, le vice-premier ministre syrien Abdullah El Derderi avait proclamé : « Il n'y a pas de Kurdes en Syrie. » Cela a été et demeure une souffrance pour cette minorité qui, en outre, n'a pas droit à la nationalité syrienne. Il lui est également refusé d'apprendre sa langue ou de pratiquer sa culture. La partie syrienne du Kurdistan est sous le contrôle de l'armée. Et pour la première fois des soulèvements importants se sont produits en 2004, 2005 et en 2008, donnant lieu à de violents affrontements avec la police et les forces armées syriennes. La répression a été très dure. Ce qui expliquerait le départ de Kurdes de Syrie.

Peuvent-ils bénéficier du droit d'asile ?

Même si le ministre de l'immigration Éric Besson assure que leurs situations seront étudiées au cas par cas, le fait de leur refuser une autorisation provisoire de séjour fait qu'ils n'ont pas accès à la procédure normale de l'asile, mais à la procédure dite « prioritaire ». Les étrangers n'ont qu'un délai de cinq jours et non vingt et un pour faire leur demande de protection. En cas de réponse négative de l'Office

français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (Ofpra), ils ne pourront pas être entendus devant la Cour nationale du droit d'asile (CNDA).

Les associations présentes dans les CRA ont introduit des recours administratifs contre ces placements.

Parallèlement, elles aident les exilés à déposer une demande d'asile qui

suspendra toute procédure d'expulsion. Selon un communiqué du ministère de l'immigration, 61 des 81 adultes avaient déjà choisi de demander l'asile. Il est difficile d'évaluer leurs chances d'obtenir le statut de réfugiés, car les précédents sont faibles. Selon les statistiques de l'Ofpra, sur 34 Syriens qui ont fait une demande d'asile en 2008,

10 ont reçu une réponse positive de l'Ofpra. On compte actuellement 230 réfugiés syriens sur un total de 140 000 personnes placées sous la protection de la France.

JULIA FICATIER,
BERNARD GORCE
et JACQUES CASONI
à Bonifacio



LUNDI 25 JANVIER 2010

En Turquie, le bras de fer entre le gouvernement et l'armée se durcit

Tablant sur l'érosion du soutien populaire dont souffrent les militaires, le gouvernement envisage de jouer le peuple contre l'armée pour modifier la Constitution

ISTANBUL
De notre correspondante

Le gouvernement et l'armée, engagés dans une lutte sourde depuis 2002, sont à couteaux tirés. La semaine dernière, la Cour constitutionnelle a annulé la réforme phare du gouvernement permettant de juger, en temps de paix, des militaires devant des tribunaux civils, pour des crimes commis contre la sécurité nationale. Cette loi, votée en juin, avait été saluée par l'Union européenne et avait permis de poursuivre des officiers soupçonnés d'appartenir au réseau ultranationaliste Ergenekon visant à faire tomber le gouvernement. Mais elle avait aussi créé une polémique du côté du parti kémaliste CHP, virulent opposant au gouvernement et proche des militaires, qui avait porté l'affaire devant la plus haute juridiction du pays.

Cette défaite juridique est un coup rude pour le parti de Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AKP) issu de la mouvance islamiste, qui, depuis son arrivée au pouvoir en 2002, tente de réduire l'influence de militaires, autoproclamés gardiens de la laïcité et auteurs de quatre coups d'État en cinquante ans. «Je ne m'attendais pas à une telle déci-

sion, a déclaré vendredi Egemen Bagis, ministre chargé des affaires européennes. *Elle va retarder notre travail consistant à hausser les standards démocratiques du pays dans le cadre du processus européen.* » Même surprise pour Salih Kapusuz, vice-président du parti au pouvoir : « Cette décision prouve qu'une nouvelle Constitution est inévitable. » Écrire une Constitution « civile » à la place de celle héritée du coup d'État de 1980 est l'un des objectifs du gouvernement. Or, sans soutien de l'opposition, qui craint la dissolution de l'État laïque, ce vœu est resté pieux. Acculé, le gouvernement souhaite désormais présenter un « mini-paquet de réformes démocratiques » au Parlement avant de s'en remettre au peuple via un référendum. Jouer le peuple contre l'armée, la tactique est osée, mais le gouvernement table sur l'érosion du soutien populaire dont souffrent les militaires depuis deux ans.

Car, dans cette lutte ouverte, si l'armée vient de remporter une bataille, elle est elle-même de plus en plus fragilisée. Après l'arrestation de plusieurs hauts gradés dans le cadre de l'enquête Ergenekon, c'est un nouveau projet de coup d'État, « le plus sérieux et le plus violent de ceux sortis jusqu'à présent », selon certains éditorialistes, qui a été révélé la semaine dernière.

Selon le quotidien *Taraf*, spécialisé dans la divulgation de ce type d'informations, trois généraux aujourd'hui à la retraite auraient imaginé, en 2003, un projet baptisé Balyoz (« masse »). Prévoyant des explosions de bombes dans

deux mosquées stambouliotes, un accident aérien avec la Grèce, des attaques contre des musées et l'arrestation de 200 000 opposants qui auraient pu être séquestrés dans des stades d'Istanbul, ce plan aurait été présenté à une assemblée de 162 militaires, dont 29 généraux. Toujours selon *Taraf*, les militaires auraient établi une liste de 137 journalistes prêts à coopérer avec l'armée en cas de coup d'État et une autre de 136 personnes qui auraient pu être arrêtées.

L'armée a aussitôt qualifié ces accusations d'« inacceptables » et assuré que l'assemblée en question était un « séminaire » visant à « entraîner les militaires », lors duquel aurait été établi « un scénario ». Simple exercice donc ? « Personne ne peut avaler ce numéro », estime Tamer Korkmaz, du quotidien pro-gouvernemental *Yeni Safak*, tandis que, sur son blog, une jeune femme, Beran Uzer, se demande si « sauver la République passera toujours par des coups d'État ».

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER

Le Monde
Mardi 26 janvier 2010

Le placement en rétention des Kurdes échoués en Corse est jugé illégal

Dimanche soir, 94 des 123 exilés avaient été remis en liberté par les juges des libertés. Le ministre de l'immigration, Eric Besson, a justifié leur rétention par un souci de « protection des personnes »

Remis en liberté ou probablement en passe de l'être, les 123 exilés kurdes découverts vendredi 22 janvier sur une plage du sud de la Corse auront finalement passé peu de temps en rétention. Dimanche soir 24 janvier, les juges des libertés et de la détention de Marseille, Nîmes et Rennes ont libéré 94 d'entre eux des centres de rétention administrative (CRA) où ils avaient été transférés samedi, 24 heures à peine après leur découverte. Ces décisions de justice ont aussitôt été qualifiées par les associations d'aide aux réfugiés de « désaveu des improvisations » du ministre de l'immigration, Eric Besson. Les juges ont notamment estimé que la privation de liberté de ces migrants s'était faite hors de tout cadre juridique légal « *puisque'ils n'avaient pas été placés en garde à vue* ».

Fallait-il placer en rétention ces exilés kurdes venant de Syrie, alors qu'ils sollicitent la protection de la France ? « *Face à des situations d'urgence, la protection des personnes prime sur le pointillisme procédural* », a fait valoir, dimanche soir, Eric Besson. Le ministre a expliqué avoir « *préféré un transfert rapide* » de ces personnes vers cinq centres de rétention sur le continent (Marseille, Nîmes, Lyon, Toulouse, Rennes), car c'était le « *seul cadre juridique disponible pour des ressortissants étrangers en situation irrégulière* ». Sans convaincre les associations d'aide aux réfugiés qui, en pleine campagne de élections régionales, ont dénoncé une grave atteinte au droit d'asile. Pour elles, la place de ces exilés, sans papiers ni visa mais demandant la protection de la France, était en centre d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile et non en rétention.

Contacté par *Le Monde* samedi, le préfet de Corse, Stéphane Bouillon assurait qu'il n'avait pas eu d'autre choix que de notifier à ces exilés un arrêté de reconduite à la frontière et donc leur placement en rétention « *pour les garder* ». Sans cela, l'Etat « *n'aurait eu aucune possibilité de vérifier qui ils étaient et si parmi eux il y avait des passeurs* ». « *Cela ne leur interdit*



Des migrants quittent le centre de rétention de Marseille, dimanche. ANNE CHRISTINE POUJOLAT/AFP

pas pour autant de demander l'asile », relevait-il.

En rétention cependant, les demandes d'asile sont examinées en procédure prioritaire et non en procédure normale. L'étranger dispose de cinq jours seulement (et non de 21) pour déposer son dossier. Il se voit retirer toute possibilité d'être entendu par la Cour nationale du droit d'asile en cas de rejet de sa demande par l'Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (Ofpra) qui statue dans des délais très brefs.

« Procédure normale »

Face aux critiques suscitées par le transfert en rétention de ces exilés kurdes, M. Besson a justifié son choix par le souci d'assurer à ces personnes « *une visite médicale, une évaluation individuelle de leur situation, un hébergement adapté notamment pour les familles et d'une assistance dans leur droit* ». Selon lui, « *il était impossible d'amener en quelques heures à la pointe sud de la Corse des dizaines d'interprètes, d'avocats, de médecins et de trouver sur place un local de rétention administrative respec-*

tant les normes en vigueur ».

Pressentant cependant la libération des exilés kurdes par la justice, le ministre affirmait dans le même temps que leurs demandes d'asile seraient instruites par l'Ofpra en « *procédure normale et non accélérée* ». Les associations continuent cependant d'exiger que soient retirés les arrêtés de reconduite à la frontière pris à leur rencontre, sans attendre que les tribunaux administratifs statuent définitivement sur leur légalité. Tant qu'elles sont encore sous le coup d'une mesure d'éloignement, les personnes, bien que libérées, ne peuvent en effet exercer leur droit d'asile en bénéficiant de la procédure régulière. Dimanche soir, les 94 réfugiés kurdes libérés ont dormi à l'abri, dans des lieux d'hébergement réquisitionnés par les préfetures des Bouches-du-Rhône, du Gard et d'Ille-et-Vilaine. Le cabinet du ministre de l'immigration expliquait que les préfets avaient été mobilisés pour leur trouver des places en centres d'hébergement d'urgence.

En Corse, l'enquête du parquet d'Ajaccio sur les conditions d'arrivée des 123 réfugiés sur le territoire

français se poursuit. Les recherches menées en Sardaigne pour tenter de retrouver le bateau qui les aurait déposés se sont révélées vaines. Les enquêteurs doutent de plus en plus que les migrants aient pu arriver directement par la mer. « *Il est possible qu'ils soient arrivés en Corse à bord d'un camion en provenance de Sardaigne et ayant fait la traversée par ferry* », expliquait samedi, le préfet de Corse. ■

Laetitia Van Eeckhout



Kurdish Criticism of US Grows

Some doubt American commitment to resolve disputes over oil-rich Kirkuk.

By Hemin H Lihony, Tiare Rath and Sirwan Rashid in Sulaimaniyah (ICR No. 320, 20-Jan-10)

A flurry of diplomacy between United States and Kurdish leaders has done little to curb growing wariness among Kurds who say their long-time ally is dragging its heels in efforts to settle potentially explosive claims over disputed territories.

Some Kurdish politicians have rejected assurances from the White House and Kurdish leaders who say Washington is committed to help resolve the status of Iraq's disputed areas, notably the oil-rich province of Kirkuk. Growing criticism of Washington represents an about-face for Kurdish popular sentiment that has lavished favour on the US for the past two decades.

"In the past US officials promised many things regarding Kirkuk to the Kurds but they were just words without deeds," said Mohammed Tofiq, a senior leader of the Kurdish opposition Change movement.

Kurdish officials, however, maintain that their ties with the US have never been stronger. They point to high-level Kurdish visits to Washington, and White House support for an Iraqi constitutional mandate, known as Article 140, to resolve the status of Iraq's disputed areas.

Article 140 states that a census and a referendum should have been held by 2007 to determine who will govern Kirkuk, a province claimed by Arabs, Turkoman and Kurds. While constitutionally mandated, the process has been continually delayed and remains a key point of contention between the Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG, and the Arab-led central government in Baghdad.

Kurds, who believe that Kirkuk is historically part of Kurdistan and would be annexed to the KRG in a referendum, are deeply frustrated with the Iraqi government for postponing the census. Many believe the support of their influential ally, the US, would push the process forward.

Arabs and Turkoman, however, believe Kurds are attempting to expand the Kurdish region's borders at any cost. Analysts warn that disagreements over Kirkuk could result in widespread violence. Some argue that any resolution should include a power-sharing agreement for the province's ethnic and religious groups.

The international community, including the US and the United Nations, has been cautious about not taking sides or urgently pushing the process – a point of frustration for Kurds who say the delays are unconstitutional.

Unlike Iraqi Arab representatives who saw it as tantamount to US interference in Iraqi affairs, Kurdish officials took heart from a White House statement last month affirming its support for the census and for "the full and fair implementation of the Iraqi constitution", including Article 140 and Article 142. Article 142 allows for amendments to the constitution.

"The White House statement is very important," said Fouad Massum, head of the Kurdish bloc in Iraq's parliament. "It's the first time we've seen such a statement from America."

Kurdish official media downplayed the White House's support for Article 142, instead focusing on the commitment to the census, which is now scheduled for October 2010.

But some Kurds say their community should not interpret the

statement as American support, arguing that the US position on resolving disputed territories remains vague.

Mahmud Osman, an independent Kurdish member of parliament in Baghdad, noted the White House statement "mentions Article 140. But it expresses its commitment to Article 142 of the constitution which calls for amending the whole Iraqi constitution, and this is against us".

Many Kurds fear that Iraqi Arab deputies will try to amend or eliminate Article 140 because of concerns that the census and referendum will give Kurds, who believe they are the majority in Kirkuk, control over the province.

"Unfortunately, Kurdish leaders make too much of [Kurdish relations] with the US and its promises," Osman said. "I don't think our relations reached 'the golden era' that some claim. I hope that this relationship is not overemphasised [in the future], because I doubt that it will result in anything."

Ako Hama Karim, a political sciences professor at Sulaimaniyah University in Iraqi Kurdistan, said, "The US doesn't have permanent friends – it has permanent interests.

"I think we, the Kurds, expected more from the US. People became upset once we realised that the US doesn't do everything we want and doesn't care as much about Kurdish demands."

Tofiq expressed scepticism about US-Kurdish relations, despite his regular contact with the Americans. Embassy officials met Change leaders last week in Sulaimaniyah.

"If the US doesn't care about our [Kurdish] demands then why should we consider them our close ally?" he said. "We believe that the US could have implemented [Article] 140 before."

Some Kurdish politicians said the White House statement was issued in exchange for Kurdish support of a US-backed elections law that paved the way for Iraq's parliamentary polls in March.

Kurdish lawmakers' backing for the law broke a deadlock that threatened to further delay the elections, and came shortly after KRG president Massoud Barzani spoke with US president Barack Obama and vice-president Joe Biden, who has close ties with Kurdish officials.

The Kurdish opposition press accused Washington of pressuring Kurdish leaders to support the election law which they say did not allocate enough seats to the KRG's three provinces.

"The Kurdish leaders placed our destiny in the hands of vague promises made by the US," Change's newspaper pronounced in a huge front-page headline, in reference to the White House statement supporting the census.

Reflecting the views of many ordinary Kurds, Nadhifa Slaih, a 49-year-old housewife, she said she was a huge supporter of the US after the invasion but today is disappointed.

"The US hasn't met our expectations," she said. "We still have electricity and water shortages, and politically Kirkuk is not solved."

Deeply suspicious of their neighbours and Arab Iraqis, many Kurds have long considered the US their strongest ally.

Kurdish Peshmerga fighters were a proxy force for the Bush administration in the 2003 Iraq war. When Saddam Hussein was overthrown, US troops and officials were received with flowers in Iraqi Kurdistan – in stark contrast to the resistance they faced elsewhere.

But despite the current wave of Kurdish criticism of the US, KRG leaders claim ties with Washington are stronger than ever.

Barzani is planning a trip to Washington to follow up a visit by KRG senior officials in late December, when they met

senior White House and Pentagon officials.

Article 140 was high on the agenda, said the KRG's minister of foreign relations, Faleh Mustafa, who was part of the delegation. In private meetings and in the White House statement, he said the US showed its "commitment to help us carry out a census" in Kirkuk.

And at a press conference this week in Erbil after meeting Kurdish leaders, US ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill appeared to reassure Kurds nervous about progress over the disputed province and US/Kurdish relations in general.

"With regard to promises, we have always maintained to the Kurdish authorities that we would be engaged in these disputed boundary questions and that we would be engaged on the basis of the Iraqi constitution . .

"Obviously we look forward to the successful resolution of issues including the disputed borders, that's where our focus is right now to make sure that we can be helpful in this regard.

"I think we can be a very good friend to the people of Kurdistan ... We look forward to a very strong relationship here, a relationship with Kurdistan in so far as it is part of Iraq."

Hemin H Lihony is an IWPR local editor. Tiare Rath is IWPR Iraq editorial manager. Sirwan Rashid is an IWPR-trained journalist.



January 19, 2010

I'm not in Arbil to press on Kurds – US ambassador

ARBIL / Aswat al-Iraq: U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Christopher R. Hill said on Tuesday that his current visit to Arbil city does not aim at putting pressures on the Kurdish leadership to give concessions to Baghdad with respect to suspended issues between Arabs and Kurds.

"I don't carry any message, and I'm not making an attempt to press on Kurds," Hill said in a meeting with journalists in Arbil, the capital city of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, including a reporter of Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

He said that he had an important meeting yesterday with the Kurdish President Masaod Barazani.

"Suspended issues between Arabs and Kurds are political, not related to U.S. withdrawal from Iraq," Hill said.

He said that the Baghdad – Arbil relations require more work to solve pending issues.

"We are optimistic that relations between the two sides will be improved after parliamentary election (March 7, 2010)," Hill said.

The US ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill held Tuesday, January 19, a press conference in Erbil at the U.S. Representation in Kurdistan Region in presence of the media channels of Kurdistan Region. PUK photo



FINANCIAL TIMES

January 19, 2010

Kurdish minister pushes for Iraqi oil deal with DNO

By Andrew Ward in Stockholm and William MacNamara in London

Shares in DNO, the Norwegian oil company, rose more than 16 per cent yesterday after authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan said they were ready to resolve a dispute with Iraq's central government over distribution of oil revenues and payment of foreign operators.

But the statement appeared to be a political overture, not a binding plan capable of breaking the deadlock that has prevented full-scale exploitation of Iraqi Kurdistan's estimated 40bn barrels of oil.

Ashti Hawrami, oil minister for the autonomous Kurdistan regional government (KRG) of Iraq, said in the statement that the KRG is prepared to resume international

oil exports after holding a "serious dialogue" with Baghdad over how to pay operators such as DNO and Turkey's Genel Energy.

Mr Hawrami proposed paying DNO a minimum amount that would cover DNO's cost of oil exports. The payments would come from Baghdad-controlled oil revenues. That step, he suggested, "would create a suitable and positive atmosphere" in which to restart oil exportation. Then all sides, he said, could resolve the thornier issues of operators' profits and out of which government's budget payments are paid.

Winning access to Iraq in 2003, DNO was able to start exporting oil from its Tawke field in June 2009. Those exports were

orchestrated by the Kurdish government. They were intended to mark the end of tensions with the central government, which continued to call the KRG's oil licenses illegal. But Baghdad retained all revenues from those exports and did not remit payments to the companies. The KRG did not pay operators out of its budget. In October DNO said it would halt oil exports until a payment mechanism was set up.

DNO declined to comment on the statement, including whether or not they endorsed a break-even payment plan.

Mr Hawrami appealed to Baghdad to consider the revenues it could gain by co-operating with a new plan. Those revenues could

rise from \$2.75bn in 2010 to \$25.62bn in 2014. Over those four years only \$6bn of the \$67bn in Baghdad-controlled revenues would need to be allocated to Kurdistan-based operators as compensation, he said.

Trond Omdal, analyst at Arctic Securities in Oslo, said the statement indicated momentum is building towards a deal. But he cautioned that much would remain uncertain until after Iraq holds parliamentary elections in March.

Turkish military's new coup plan irks some journalists

TODAY'S ZAMAN

A new plan allegedly drafted by members of the military aiming to overthrow the government failed to find coverage on a number of newspapers and news broadcasters' Web sites, a fate previously faced by several similar plans.

According to the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) had a systematic plan to foment chaos in society by bombing mosques and attacking popular museums with Molotov cocktails. The attacks' desired result was to increase pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government over failing to provide security to its citizens. The attacks were to eventually lead to a military coup.

The plan was exposed by the liberal Taraf daily on Wednesday, but did not find coverage on the Web sites of many newspapers and news broadcasters. According to journalists who spoke with Today's Zaman, their colleagues refrain from giving wide coverage to such plans out of fear that their covert cooperation with the armed forces for the preparation of a chaotic atmosphere in the country would be revealed. To prove their thesis, the journalists pointed to yes-

terday's Taraf report, which also stated that it would make public the names of 137 journalists who would cooperate with the armed forces after the implementation of the coup plan and 36 others who would be arrested and put behind bars.

"Some of our colleagues are concerned that their names are also included on that list. That's most probably why they turn a blind eye to the coup plan," said one journalist speaking on the condition of anonymity.

The journalist also said recent debates over Turkey becoming an authoritarian country through "civilian tutelage" could stand as evidence for cooperation between journalists and the armed forces against the government.

"Some media circles are already working to foment chaos in the country through such claims. They are now afraid to see their names in the expected list," the journalist added.

The Sledgehammer Security Operation Plan also accuses the AK Party of working to damage the secular order of Turkey and replace the republican system with Shariah rule.

Taraf exposed similar suspected military plots in the past, which sent shockwaves across the country. Among them were the Action Plan to Fight Reactionaryism and the Cage Operation Action Plan.

The Action Plan to Fight



Reactionaryism describes a TSK plan to damage the image of the AK Party government and the faith-based Gülen movement in the eyes of the public, to play down the Ergenekon investigation and to gather support for members of the military arrested as part of the inquest.

Ergenekon is accused of working to create a chaotic atmosphere in Turkey so people would welcome a military coup against the AK Party.

The Cage plan is believed to have been drafted by a group of Naval Forces Command officers to intimidate the country's non-Muslim population by assassinating some prominent figures in their communities and thereby undermine the power of the ruling party.

Plan's disclosure deepens fears among Turkey's Kurds

AYSE KARABAT

Kurdish politicians and intellectuals urged Parliament to take a break from their daily political bickering in order to discuss the situation and solutions in the aftermath of the disclosure of a new alleged plan by the military which, among other things, urges the cleansing of Kurdish and Arabic elements from Turkish culture.

According to the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) Security Operation Plan, which was published by Taraf daily in segments Wednesday and yesterday, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) plotted to create chaos and overturn the government. The TSK allegedly planned to bomb mosques and attack popular museums with

Molotov cocktails. The attacks' desired result was to increase pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government over failing to provide security to its citizens. The attacks were to eventually lead to a military coup. The Sledgehammer plan also spelled out actions to be taken after the coup, including the expurgating of Kurdish and Arabic elements from Turkish culture: "All national values including the Turkish Ezan [Call for prayer] should be implemented again and all the damage to Turkish culture which was caused by Kurdish and Arabic elements should be repaired," excerpts from the plan published by Taraf read.

Sırrı Sakık, a deputy from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party

(BDP), said that the discovery of such a plan is not surprising. "The mentality which is able to think of bombing mosques and shooting down its own plane of course would develop racist plans and implement assimilation policies. But the question is who we can trust for our security; we have to discuss this immediately," Sakık told Today's Zaman. He also suggested that politicians should put aside their daily political concerns and discuss the situation to develop solutions, if they aim to create a real democracy. Emin Aktar, chairman of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, also urged Parliament to take immediate action and reform the TSK.

"It is impossible to live with constant fear of a new military coup, the public should be reassured that

this will never be the case," Aktar told Today's Zaman.

Sezgin Tanrikulu, Diyarbakir representative of the Turkish Human Rights Foundation (TIHV), said that the military, in its existing structure, is a threat to democracy. "This Sledgehammer plan revealed the

realities that we knew but that were not paid attention to by the general public. We as Kurds were always under the threats mentioned in the plan. It is obvious that some people who had knowledge about this plan had tried to implement these plans - just remember the grassroots cam-

paign to not shop from Kurds," he told Today's Zaman. He also urged the government to take action as soon as possible and put the General Staff under the control of the Defense Ministry.

THE NEWS TRIBUNE

january 22, 2010

Milestone: Arab-Kurdish-American checkpoints

the news tribune

By Scott Fontaine

QARA TAPA, Iraq - The historic significance of the joint Arab-Kurdish-American checkpoint was lost on the driver of the black Kia sedan. The hassle was not.

"I work for the Interior Ministry!" he yelled, digging into his pocket and flashing his government badge to Fort Lewis troops, Kurdish peshmerga and Iraqi army soldiers. "Look at my ID! Why was I pulled over for inspection?"

The outburst - fairly typical for any government bureaucrat in Iraq - was about the most conflict troops witnessed on Jan. 13, the first full day of trilateral checkpoints that officials hope will defuse tensions among the military forces in disputed Diyala province.

More checkpoints went up this week on highways across Diyala, Ninevah and Kirkuk provinces. The operations were long-awaited, but the developments were kept quiet; The News Tribune agreed to hold publication about training until the checkpoints became active.

In Diyala, where tensions between Arabs and Kurds have long run high, Fort Lewis' 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment is training soldiers from both the Iraqi army and the Kurdish peshmerga.

The latter operate independently from Baghdad.

The 1-14 Cavalry is part of the larger 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division - a Stryker brigade from Fort Lewis.

At the province's first checkpoint, on the main highway near Qara Tapa, five soldiers from each force worked a 24-hour shift and battled fierce windstorms on the first full day of operation. They inspected about three or four cars per hour, a slow pace designed to get each side accustomed to working together.

"Honestly, we were worried," said Sgt. 1st Class Chris Silsby, a 36-year-old Lacey resident. "We were wondering: How many fights would we have to break up? But it's been all good so far."

Three weeks ago, American engineers

Members of the Peshmerga, left, and the Iraqi Army train with U.S. soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment this month at COB Cobra in northern Iraq. The long-time enemies are learning to work together at checkpoints.

Joe Barrentine/The News Tribune



began beefing up an Iraqi army checkpoint by adding concrete barriers. Two Strykers sat atop elevated firing positions to provide overwatch.

Each time a car entered the checkpoint, a soldier from the Iraqi army or the peshmerga approached and talked to the driver. If selected for a search, the driver pulled over to a gravel lot where soldiers looked through the interior, under the hood, in the trunk and under the car using mirrors.

Americans provided advice to the Arabs and Kurds after each search and made sure the inspected cars were indeed chosen at random.

"Some people have been confused when they drive through," said Staff Sgt. Daim Satar Jazel of the 1st Iraqi Army Division. "The truck drivers especially: When they come through here, they look surprised. They have not seen a checkpoint like this before."

The reaction from Iraqi politicians has been mixed. The leader of a group representing Arabs in Kirkuk called upon the Baghdad government to prevent joint missions, calling them "a rejected matter," according to a report in Al-Sumaria News on Wednesday.

But a member of the Iraqi parliament's defense and security committee said the checkpoints will be a crucial part of ensuring secure elections in the disputed areas.

At the heart of the Arab-Kurd tensions in Diyala lie history, oil and gas. Kurds say the province was firmly theirs before Saddam Hussein began relocating Arabs throughout Kurdish areas to shift the demographic balance. Kurds returned after Saddam's overthrow, and the peshmerga began operating farther south.

The region is rich in oil, which adds a layer of divisiveness. And many people vividly remember Saddam ordering the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds in the waning days of the Iran-Iraq war.

A series of recent standoffs between the Iraqi army and the peshmerga in the Khanaqin district of northeast Diyala province underscores the tension between the two groups.

In August 2008, Iraqi army soldiers entered the towns of Qara Tapa, Jalawla and Sadiyah and demanded the peshmerga leave. The Kurds' general in the area refused, forcing a standoff and prompting Kurdish politicians to fly to Baghdad to broker a deal.

But a week later, the Iraqi army entered the Kurdish city of Khanaqin and again ordered Kurdish forces to leave, sparking public demonstrations in the district's largest city. Kurdish President Massoud Barzani flew to Baghdad to meet with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

An American military spokesperson in Baghdad stressed that the Iraqi and Kurdish leaders settled the standoff through dialogue. And the peshmerga conducted joint patrols and checkpoints with the Iraqi army ahead of nationwide provincial elections in January 2009.

Today both the Iraqi army and the peshmerga patrol the countryside, often setting up checkpoints within sight of each other. U.S. military officials are hailing the formation of an Arab-Kurd "combined security architecture" in the three provinces as major progress.

Arab and Kurdish troops will live in the same area (though sleep in separate tents) and eventually staff joint command centers.

"Everyone's been monitoring the progress on this, but we've had to keep it low-key because of the political sensitivities," Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo, the top American commander in northern Iraq, told The News Tribune. "And I think on the troop level - the Arabs and the Kurds training side-by-side - what we've seen is encouraging."

Fort Lewis troops stationed at Combat Outpost Cobra began training the Iraqi army and peshmerga on Jan. 9. Sessions begin with basic classes to establish common vocabulary and then graduate to advanced scenarios, like responding to a roadside bombing or sniper attack.

The biggest hurdle in joint operations, Arab and Kurdish soldiers said in interviews, was the language barrier. When

Capt. Dave Shephard or another American wanted to address the crowd, he stood on a jersey barrier and talked while two interpreters translated.

But at the checkpoints, the Iraqi army soldiers and peshmerga talked to each other using Arabic. Interpreters were used primarily for American soldiers.

The American officer in charge of training says he has seen little trouble between groups.

"We haven't seen any conflict between these guys since we've started," said Shephard, a DuPont resident. "They don't seem to mix or intermingle that much, but at least we're not seeing the conflict."

Arab and Kurdish soldiers at the Jan. 9 training remained hopeful the opera-

tions will ease tensions among ethnic groups. Any dissension between the two sides, several of them said, remained on the political level.

"It'll be a good sign to show both Arabs and Kurds are working together," said Lt. Ahmed Hussein Amin, a platoon leader with the 34th Peshmerga Brigade. "Some people in Diyala are racist. They blame their problems on being an Arab or a Kurd. That excuse should be gone soon."

Staff Sgt. Salim Abdullah of 1st Iraqi Army Division hoped the operations will smooth relations between the two groups. But, he added with a nod toward the peshmerga, "hopefully we all will be working for the same country."



Iraq polls could heighten tensions over Kirkuk

KIRKUK, Iraq, January 26, 2010 (Reuters) - By Missy Ryan

*** Dispute over Kirkuk has festered since Saddam era**
*** Kurds likely to be kingmakers after March 7 vote**

IRAQI KURD Kamal Aga's face lights up when he recalls his childhood on a farm in Daquq, south of Kirkuk, where wheat and cotton fields stretched to the horizon and farmers of different ethnicities lived side by side.

That chapter of his life ended in his 20s when the lands of his prominent tribal family were seized in the 1970s, first in agrarian reform and then in the Baath party's push to move fellow Arabs into areas home to Kurds and other minorities.

Today, Aga lives in the disputed city of Kirkuk, working in a dingy office where he heads a commission seeking to settle some of the approximately 41,000 property claims like his own.

Only 7 percent of the claims have been resolved since the 2003 invasion, reflecting the challenges Iraq faces as it heads toward a March election which could help ease Kurd-Arab tensions over areas like Kirkuk or thrust Iraq back into open war.

The dispute over Kirkuk and other areas, which pits Iraq's Arab-led government against the largely autonomous Kurdish region in the north, has festered since Saddam's ouster in 2003.

It is now seen as the chief threat to Iraq's fragile security as U.S. forces prepare to end combat operations in August ahead of a full withdrawal by the end of 2011.

Kurds, who want to fold the region U.S. officials say may contain 3-4 percent of world oil reserves into their enclave, are likely to end up as kingmakers after the March 7 vote.

They may extract concessions for helping other factions form the next government, a prospect that frightens Kirkuk's Turkmen and Arabs, who say Kurds have treated them unfairly in their effort since 2003 to reverse Saddam Hussein's "Arabization"

Many Kirkukis say tensions stem from national politics and not from the realities on the ground.

"This is a feud among political powers treating Kirkuk like a cow that gives milk," said Waleed Saman, an Arab businessman.

"My brothers and I should be the decision makers. Close the door and give us 24 hours, and we'll come out with a solution."

LANGUAGE BARRIER

Yet changes forced on the city since 2003 do not promise a future in

which Arabs and Kurds will mix easily.

The Kirkuk Central School, a well-regarded boys school where Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, studied more than 50 years ago, is one example of the city's historic diversity.

All students at the school study Arabic and Kurdish, and can pursue other languages if they choose.

"We don't raise students to discriminate. We teach them to be brothers," said school official Mahmoud Majdab al-Rafaii.

But in Kirkuk's segregated neighbourhoods where more recent arrivals live, schools teaching at least partially in minority languages like Kurdish or Turkmen have taken root since 2003.

Some 460 schools, of a total of about 1,390 across the province, are funded by the government of northern Kurdistan, using its curriculum and books and teaching entirely in Kurdish.

The aim was to give minorities a chance to study in their own language. Yet the schools are producing future generations unable to communicate fluently with their Arab countrymen -- and Kurds brought up to believe disputed areas are theirs by right.

Kurdish textbooks identify Kirkuk as "the most rich oil-producing area in Kurdistan. Most residents are Kurds but Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians and Chaldeans also live there" -- a controversial claim in an area whose ethnic feuds have held up a national census and where no reliable demographic figures exist.

Fawzia Abdullah Awanees, a top education official, supports the language experiment but warns it could widen social gaps.

"We need integrated schools, which offer different languages, so people can live alongside one another," she said.

At the Kirkuk Property Disputes Commission, the process of sifting through thousands of complex, multigenerational and often overlapping property claims proceeds at a glacial pace.

Beyond the 41,000 claims the board is working through dating from 1968-2003, many more have sprung up after 2003, when Iraqis fleeing violence became squatters and Arabs brought into Kirkuk under Saddam fled in fear of Kurdish retaliation.

U.N. officials are trying to facilitate settlement as a step in building consensus needed to reach a solution on Kirkuk.

This week, parliament approved changes to expedite the slow claims process. Until the reforms take effect, Aga's hopes of reclaiming at least part of the family lands, occupied by Kurdish squatters after Arab families fled in 2003, are on hold.

"We still don't have one metre of land there," he said.

US prepared to train Kurdish armed forces

Hewler - US commander of coalition forces in Iraq, Gen. Raymond Odierno, is prepared to train the Kurdistan Region Guard Forces with approval of the Iraqi government.

The spokesman of the Kurdistan Region Guard Forces, Jabbar Yawar, said this in a press conference. "Odierno has spoken with the president and the prime minister of the Kurdistan region [Iraq] and indicated to be happy with uniting the Kurdish armed forces."



Currently, the two ruling parties PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and the KDP (Democratic Party of Kurdistan) have their own armed forces, but the Minister of the Kurdistan Region Guard Forces told Rudaw that they will unite the armed forces. "In the security agreement signed by Iraq and America, there is a point, about America trai-

ning the Iraqi forces. The American delegation is willing to train the Kurdish armed forces, if the central government approves this," Yawar added.

Yawar said that US general Odierno is happy that Iraqi, American and Kurdish troops will be deployed in the disputed regions of Mosul. The Sunni Governor Atheel al-Najafi said he was fiercely against deploying Kurdish troops in the region, reports the Arab daily Azzaman. "We have not agreed to the presence of the Peshmerga (even) as part of joint checkpoints as suggested by both U.S. and Iraqi sides," he said (Photo: Getty Images)

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THE TIMES January 18, 2010

Halabja, the massacre the West tried to ignore

Richard Beeston: comment

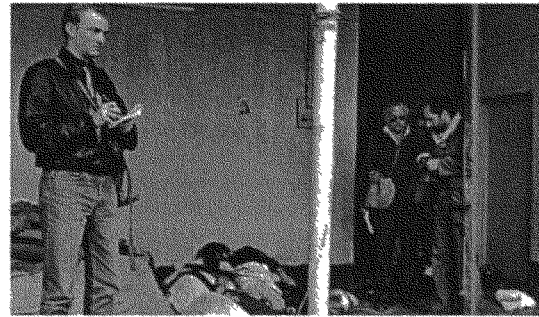
It has taken nearly 22 years for Ali Hassan al-Majid to be judged by Iraqis for perpetrating one of the worst massacres in modern history.

Even peering out from the smudged window of an Iranian military helicopter, it was clear that a terrible crime had been committed against the inhabitants of Halabja, as part of a campaign by Saddam Hussein and his commanders to teach Iraqi Kurds the cost of siding with the enemy — at that time Iran.

On the ground, the scale of the slaughter became clear. Entire families had been killed by the poison chemicals. Some died together huddled in makeshift shelters that offered no protection against the gas. One family was killed in their garden along with their pets.

Another succumbed as they tried to escape by car. We found the vehicle crashed into a wall with the driver and all occupants dead and the keys in the ignition. The most poignant memory of that day was a father in traditional Kurdish dress lying dead at the entrance to his home cradling a baby.

Those who survived were arguably worse off. Hundreds had been hit by mustard gas that burnt their eyes and lungs but did not kill them. Victims of this slow and painful poison are still dying of their injuries to this day.



Richard Beeston surveys the aftermath of the attack on Halabja in 1988

Even by Saddam's ruthless standards the massacre broke new boundaries. Yet what was more shocking was the cynical response of the West. The US attempted to blame this crime on Iran. Britain carried on business as usual with the regime in Baghdad. Saddam was shielded from any meaningful punishment. He went on to invade Kuwait two years later and ordered the massacre of thousands of Iraqi Shia Muslims in 1991.

The failure of the West to respond adequately to this outrage made it difficult for George Bush and Tony Blair to make a moral case for overthrowing Saddam in 2003.

But as the Iraq war comes under new scrutiny and more voices argue that Saddam should have been left in place, it is worth sparing a thought for those thousands of innocent Kurdish men, women and children who died in the deadliest chemical weapons attack on civilians in history.

Kurdish politicians enjoy Perwer's concert

Vienna - The Kurdish singer Sivan Perwer gave a huge concert in the Austrian capital of Vienna. Prominent Kurdish politicians from Iraq's Kurdistan region and Turkey enjoyed the concert.

Many Kurdish politicians enjoyed the concert, including the Kurdish president Massoud Barzani, former leader of the banned pro-Kurdish DTP party Ahmet Turk, former DTP MP Aysel Tugluk, Sirri Sakik of the new pro-Kurdish BDP-party, Dengir Mir Firat and Gelsen Orhan of the ruling AKP-party.

The Austrian president Heinz Fisher also gave a speech and said he was sad that the Kurdish question wasn't solved yet and hoped that Kurds will get all their freedoms to enjoy their culture and speak their mother language.



The AKP MP Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat told after the concert that he hopes Sivan Perwer returns to Turkey. Ahmet Türk agreed. Türk said he travelled not only to Vienna to listen to the Music of Perwer, but also to hear the 'voice of pain of our Kurdish people' embodied by Sivan Perwer

124 refugees found on beach in Corsica

PARIS

Many seem to be Kurds from Syria; France calls for joint maritime patrols

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

A boatload of 124 refugees, many of them apparently Kurds from Syria, were discovered Friday morning on a beach in southern Corsica, the local police said. It was the first time that illegal immigrants were able to land on the island, and they had been put there sometime Thursday night or even before, presumably by traffickers, the police said.

Such landings are common on Italian islands well to the south, but are rare for France. The group, which included 38 children, 9 of whom were nursing; 5 pregnant women; and one disabled person, were taken by the authorities to a gymnasium in the nearby town of Bonifacio, where they were fed and examined by doctors and the Red Cross, the local police prefecture said.

The local authorities also provided clothes, toys and cigarettes, while beds were provided from an airbase.

Translators were brought to talk to the migrants, none of whom had identity papers. The police said that most appeared to be Kurds from Syria or Iraq but that some could have come from the Maghreb, especially Tunisia, where the boat trip reportedly began.

The French minister for immigration, Eric Besson, said in a statement that some of the migrants identified themselves as Kurds from Syria and that others were from North Africa. He said that a suspect boat had since been spotted in international waters and was due to be stopped by Italian authorities



Refugees at a gymnasium in Bonifacio, Corsica, after being discovered on a beach Friday morning. They were fed and examined by doctors and given clothes, toys and cigarettes.

Jean-Jacques Casalot, a police officer, said on French television that "we were obviously quite surprised to see these Kurds reach Corsica, because generally they appear on the Italian coast."

Helicopters and ships were patrolling near the island in cooperation with the Italian authorities to look for other trafficking vessels or groups of refugees.

Mr. Besson urged a rapid meeting of European Union ministers to discuss the flow of illegal immigrants and how to better control borders and seacoasts, including joint maritime patrols. France and Italy want uniform rules for mi-

grants, but different countries of the union have different legal positions on immigration and refugee status.

"We cannot let the Mediterranean fall into the hands of human traffickers," Mr. Besson said.

France has largely avoided the migrant wave from the south, though it has a number of illegal migrants on its northern coast who continue to try to get across the Channel to Britain. In February 2001, more than 900 Kurds landed on the Côte d'Azur between St. Tropez and Cannes when a people-trafficking ship washed ashore

3 Baghdad blasts leave dozens dead

BAGHDAD

Major hotels are targets; attacks appear aimed at undermining authority

BY ANTHONY SHADID AND JOHN LELAND

In a coordinated attack as devastating as it was ruthlessly efficient, three bombs exploded minutes apart in Baghdad on Monday. They wrecked landmark hotels, undermined faith in Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and underscored the uncertainty of the political landscape weeks before parliamentary elections.

The bombings, cutting through snarled traffic at the afternoon rush, seemed to be the latest chapter in a

strategy that began in August and that has hewn to a relentlessly political logic. With similar attacks in August, October and December, insurgents have sought to wreck pillars of Baghdad's government and civic life, and to prove that Mr. Maliki's government and the security forces he often hails are unable to preserve the state's authority.

In streets strewn with broken glass, where the scent of shorn eucalyptus trees mixed with the stench of charred flesh, some survivors rued a sense of the inevitable. In past attacks, the blasts have thundered across the capital, followed by weeks of relative calm broken by another series. "We were expecting more," said Abbas Salman, gazing at a street where rescue workers carried severed legs and arms through crowds

of stunned onlookers.

The Interior Ministry said the bombings had killed 36 people and wounded 71. Although the death toll paled in comparison with earlier attacks — at least 122 in August and 155 in October — the attack on Monday hit a different kind of target. So far, the campaign has wrecked four government ministries, a provincial headquarters, a courthouse, colleges and a bank.

The three bombs exploded roughly 10 minutes apart. The first struck the Ishtar Sheraton at 3:28 p.m., followed 3 minutes later by another at the Babylon Hotel and then, at 3:37, one at the Hamra Hotel. The Hamra and the Sheraton are home to many of the capital's foreign journalists, though none were reported killed.

The blasts shook the city and shattered windows for kilometers around. In areas near the hotels, residents spilled into the streets wailing, as plumes of dust, smoke and debris wafted across the skyline. Staccato bursts of gunfire echoed through the streets as security forces tried to cordon off the bombing scenes. "By God, move!" one guard shouted. "Are you staring at people's disasters?"

Residents often answered with their own anger, a striking sign of the lack of respect the security forces, particularly the police, are often shown in the capital.

"How are they still getting through?" a survivor shouted at an officer.

"We have the right to complain!" another insisted.

Many ascribed the attacks to security forces, whose checkpoints punctuate virtually every street, intersection and bridge in Baghdad. Nearly all of them deploy a bomb-detecting device that Britain has banned for export on grounds that it is useless. The bombers had to pass through security checkpoints at all three hotels. At the Hamra, a day laborer who gave his name as Abu Haider said he had seen a car exchange gunshots at the checkpoint, then watched a second car speed through. "It was just seconds before the explosion," he said.

The bomb left a crater about 4 meters wide and 2 meters deep about 15 meters from the Hamra. It reduced the house in front of the hotel to rubble, from which rescue workers pulled bodies. A woman who gave her name as Um Riyadh emerged from the ruined hulk of a house across the street, blood on her head and face. "We lost the house," she said, crying. "We lost everything. Why should I stay in Iraq? I'm going to leave. There's no other solution."

Two weeks ago, Iraqi security forces, aided by intelligence from Americans, said they had foiled another large assault on the city by seizing a large amount of explosives.

Iraqi officials attributed the earlier attacks to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the homegrown terrorist group that Iraqi and American officials believe has foreign leadership and acts jointly with former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. But any such a collaboration has not been proved.

'Chemical Ali' executed in Iraq for attacks during Hussein era

BAGHDAD

BY NADA BAKRI

Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of Saddam Hussein widely known as Chemical Ali, was executed Monday for ordering a gas attack on a Kurdish village in northern Iraq and for his role in other attacks that became notorious symbols of the Hussein era.

An Iraqi court had sentenced Mr. Majid to death last week. He is known as Chemical Ali because of the attack on the village of Halabja, in which more than 5,000 Kurds died.

"I congratulate the Iraqi people for this sentence," said a lawmaker, Safia Suhail.

It was Mr. Majid's eighth sentence of death by hanging since 2007, when he received five death sentences for his involvement in the military campaign known as Anfal against Iraqi Kurds.

The delays in executing Mr. Majid came in contrast to the speed with which Mr. Hussein's death sentence was carried out. Mr. Hussein was sentenced Nov. 5, 2006; his appeal was rejected on Dec. 26 that year, and he went to the gallows within four days.

Mr. Majid received a sixth death sentence in 2008 for his role in crushing a Shiite uprising in southern Iraq and another last year for his role in killing and displacing hundreds of Shites in 1999.

"Thanks to God," an unrepentant Mr. Majid said when his eighth death sentence was read out in court.

Two others in the same case — Sultan Hashem Ahmed, a former defense minister, and Sabir Abdul-Aziz al-Douri, a former military intelligence chief — were sentenced to 15 years in prison. A fourth defendant, Farhan Mutlaq al-Jubouri, a former regional intelligence chief, received a 10-year sentence.

The sentence for the defense minister resolved a legal quandary that had held up Mr. Majid's execution for years.

His hanging appeared to require the execution of Gen. Hashem Ahmed, who was sentenced to death in the Anfal campaign along with Mr. Majid, but several top Iraqi leaders and American commanders wanted to spare him.

He was a top officer for decades, win-

ning respect from many Iraqis for his professionalism. Some American officials said he had helped limit the resistance of the Iraqi Army to the invasion in 2003, and many Sunni leaders said he was simply a soldier following Mr. Majid's orders.

After the 2003 American-led invasion, General Ahmed fled to Mosul, where Gen. David H. Petraeus — now the top



Ali Hassan al-Majid at his trial in 2007.

The attack on Halabja killed more than 5,000 Kurds. He had been sentenced to death on eight separate counts.

commander in Iraq but then a major general in charge of military operations in the north — praised him as a "man of honor and integrity" and asked him to surrender in a letter, stating that by doing so, he could "avoid capture, imprisonment and loss of honor and dignity befitting a general officer."

But because of his role in the Anfal campaign, both Shiite and Kurdish officials believed that if Mr. Hashem's life was spared, it could set a precedent by which others who committed crimes would also seek to be let off.

U.S. Urges Kurds to Settle Disputes With Baghdad

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States on Tuesday urged the leaders of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region to settle disputes over boundaries and oil revenues with Baghdad and to support Iraq's March 7 election.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said she would raise the points when she meets Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, for talks on Tuesday that aim to prevent Kurdish-Arab tensions destabilizing Iraq.

Kurds fear that a nationalist Arab government in Baghdad might try to curtail the virtual independence they have enjoyed since shortly after the 1991 Gulf War once U.S. forces withdraw from Iraq.

U.S. President Barack Obama aims to end combat operations in Iraq by August 31, 2010, before a full pullout by the end of 2011.

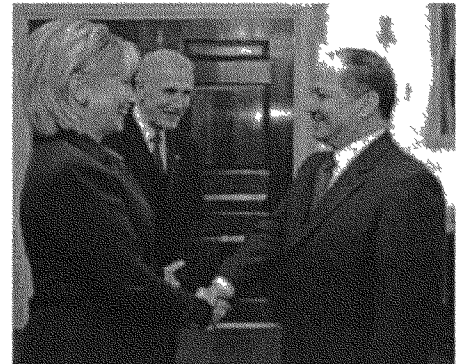
Clinton told State Department offi-

cial she would urge Barzani when they meet at 4 p.m. (1900 GMT) to "work toward a peaceful resolution of some of the disputed boundaries, particularly around Kirkuk, (and) to support the elections."

While stressing U.S. support for Kurdish security, she said, "We do expect that the Kurdish leadership will take an important role in trying to stabilize Iraq, trying to work with the Sunni and Shia leadership for the betterment of the entire country."

She specifically called for settling boundary disputes over Kirkuk and its surrounding province, which produces a fifth of Iraq's oil, and over revenue-sharing from hydrocarbon production.

Iraq's central government and semi-autonomous Kurdistan have since 2004 engaged in a long-running dispute over Iraq's vast oil and gas assets and the growing revenue generated by them. The discord threatens to aggravate the politi-



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meets with Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani

cal strains that already exist between autonomy-minded Kurds and Shi'ites.

"Working out the oil revenue law, for example, is something that is very important to all Iraqis and it will benefit all Iraqis if it can be finalized," Clinton said.

Obama reaffirms US support for Kurdistan

Washington - President Obama reaffirmed strong U.S. support for and engagement with a secure, prosperous, and autonomous Kurdistan Region within a united, federal Iraq on Monday in a meeting with the president of Iraq's Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani.

U.S. President Barack Obama offered on Monday to help in resolving differences between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Baghdad's central government before a crucial election in March reports Xinhua.

Obama encouraged Barzani to take constructive action on issues that divide Iraq, offering U.S. help for Iraq to move forward in forging a broad political consensus to resolve outstanding disagreements between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq, said the White House.

During the meeting, the Kurdish president Barzani stressed the importance for strategic long term US engagement with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. He stated that through the deepening and broadening of the United States' relations with Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, there



exists an opportunity to make significant progress on the many challenges facing the country.

As outstanding issues remain unresolved in Iraq, President Barzani affirmed the necessity for Iraq's constitution to be the arbiter of internal disputes, and informed President Obama that lasting stability in Iraq can be attained if and when Iraqis abide by, and implement, all the articles of the country's constitution.

Iraq is to hold parliamentary elections on March 7. The Kurds lamented the distri-

bution of parliament seats, saying they were under-represented.

U.S. officials have voiced concern about the lingering feuds between Iraq's Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish communities that would cause obstacles to political progress in the war-torn country.

On January 27, the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings will host the Kurdistan president Barzani, in a discussion about Iraq's elections (Photo: krg.org)

© Xinhua/Rudaw

AFP

Joe Biden en Irak pour éviter une crise politique avant les élections

BAGDAD, 22 janvier 2010 (AFP) -

Le vice-président américain Joseph Biden est arrivé vendredi en Irak pour tenter de dénouer une crise politique naissante après l'exclusion de centaines de candidats du scrutin législatif en mars

Les autorités irakiennes ont exclu des législatives 511 candidats accusés d'être des anciens membres ou partisans du parti Baas (interdit) de l'ancien président Saddam Hussein, une exclusion qui a provoqué le colère des sunnites et menace de réduire à néant les efforts de réconciliation chers à Washington

"Au cours de sa visite, (M. Biden) rencontrera le président Jalal Talabani, le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, le président du Parlement, Iyad al-Samarrai, et d'autres responsables politiques", a indiqué un communiqué de la Maison Blanche

"Il rencontrera aussi le représentant spécial du secrétaire général des Nations unies en Irak, Ad Melkert, pour discuter des efforts américains et internationaux en vue de soutenir l'Irak, plus particulièrement les élections nationales" prévues le 7 mars 2010, ajoute le texte

Il s'agit de la troisième visite en Irak de M. Biden, chargé spécialement par le président Barack Obama du dossier irakien.

Le ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères, Hoshyar Zebar, a précisé à l'AFP que M. Biden entendait "venir à la rescousse du processus électoral"

L'exclusion des candidats a provoqué la colère des sunnites --minoritaires dans le pays-- qui ont accusé les responsables chiites de vouloir marginaliser leurs candidats, ainsi que de séneuses réserves des Etats-Unis et de l'ONU.

Des figures politiques sunnites de premier rang ont été exclues, comme le chef du Front du dialogue national, Saleh Mottaq, qui s'est présenté aux élections sur la liste laïque de l'ancien Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui.

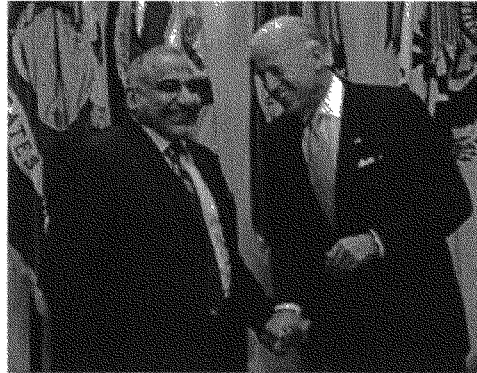
Washington, dont les troupes de combat s'apprentent à quitter l'Irak, veut éviter une répétition du scénario de 2005, lorsque les sunnites avaient boycotté les élections et étaient allés gonfler les rangs de l'insurrection et d'Al-Qaïda, poussant le pays dans le chaos des combats communautaires.

Mais M. Maliki a nié que cette interdiction vise la communauté sunnite.

"Je nie que les sunnites soient visés. Les sunnites seront des partenaires bien plus importants que la dernière fois lors de ces élections", a assuré mardi M. Maliki à la télévision publique

Le chef de la commission électorale, Faraj al-Haidari, a assuré de son côté à l'AFP que la liste des ex-baassistes à exclure comportait une part égale de chiites et de sunnites.

"Je pense que c'est 50/50. Il y a des chiites, des sunnites, des Kurdes, des



communistes, toutes les composantes de la société irakienne", a-t-il insisté.

Le gouvernement irakien a exigé vendredi que les ex-baassistes exclus désavouent le parti Baas pour pouvoir "réintégrer la société irakienne", sans toutefois faire mention d'une réinscription sur les listes électorales.

Les anciens baassistes "doivent déclarer leur innocence et condamner les crimes et les erreurs du régime de Saddam Hussein et du parti Baas", a indiqué le porte-parole du gouvernement Ali Dabbagh dans un communiqué

La polémique s'est encore aggravée jeudi après que le président Talabani a mis en doute la légalité du comité à l'origine de l'exclusion, le Comité pour la justice et l'intégrité, dirigé notamment par un ancien allié de Washington tombé en disgrâce, le chiite Ahmed Chalabi.

La présidence irakienne a demandé à la Cour suprême de se prononcer sur les fondements juridiques de ce comité, dont l'établissement n'a toujours pas été approuvé par le Parlement comme il est requis.

AFP

TURQUIE: 60 ARRESTATIONS POUR LIENS AVEC LE PKK

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 21 janvier 2010 (AFP) —

La police turque a arrêté jeudi 60 personnes lors d'opérations simultanées, les accusant de collaborer avec les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), a-t-on annoncé de source officielle.

Des unités antiterroristes de la police ont interpellé les suspects lors de raids menés simultanément dans les provinces de Batman, Diyarbakir (sud-est), Van (est) et Istanbul (nord-ouest), précise un communiqué du gouvernorat de Batman qui a coordonné l'opération

Les suspects sont notamment accusés d'appartenance au PKK, de recel au profit de cette organisation considérée comme terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, et d'avoir fourni des armes à ses rebelles, précise le document.

Des armes ont également été saisies lors des perquisitions

Le PKK a pris les armes contre Ankara en 1984. Le conflit a fait plus de 45.000 victimes, selon l'armée turque.

Le gouvernement a annoncé l'été dernier un projet de réformes visant à renforcer les droits des Kurdes.

Mais l'initiative, rejetée par une bonne partie de la population, a été mise à mal en décembre dernier lorsque la Cour constitutionnelle a prononcé la dissolution du principal parti pro-kurde de Turquie pour cause de liens avec les rebelles -- une décision suivie d'émeutes dans le sud-est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes-- et après la mort de sept soldats dans une embuscade du PKK

AFP

LE PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉGION AUTONOME DU KURDISTAN SE REND À WASHINGTON

ERBIL (Irak), 22 janvier 2010 (AFP)

LE PRÉSIDENT de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a quitté vendredi Erbil pour se rendre à Washington, où il discutera des prochaines élections législatives et de la question des régions disputées du nord du pays, a déclaré un responsable kurde.

"La visite du président Barzani intervient à la suite d'une invitation officielle du

président (Barack) Obama pour se rendre aux Etats-Unis", a affirmé Fouad Hussein, secrétaire générale de la présidence kurde

"Le programme de la visite comprend des entretiens et des rencontres avec des responsables et des membres du Congrès", a ajouté M. Hussein

Selon lui, les prochaines élections législatives irakiennes, prévues le 7 mars, et la question des territoires disputés entre le gouvernement kurde et le pouvoir central de Bagdad, seront au menu des discussions.

M. Hussein n'a pas précisé la durée de la visite.

Les trois provinces du Kurdistan (Erbil, Souleimaniyeh et Dohouk) représentent 40.000 km2, mais les forces kurdes, dans le sillage de l'invasion conduite par les Etats-Unis en 2003, ont étendu leur présence sur 75.000 km2 en prenant le contrôle d'une partie des provinces de Kirkouk, Ninive et Diyala.

Cette expansion a provoqué des tensions dans ces zones, parfois pétrolières, que revendiquent aussi bien le Kurdistan que Bagdad

Les Etats-Unis et l'ONU font pression pour parvenir à un règlement pacifique de ces disputes, craignant que le conflit entre Arabes et Kurdes ne ruine les efforts pour stabiliser l'Irak.

AFP

IRAK: L'HOMME DE MAIN DE SADDAM, "ALI LE CHIMIQUE", A ÉTÉ EXÉCUTÉ

BAGDAD, 25 janvier 2010 (AFP)

Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique", cousin et homme de main de Saddam Hussein, a été pendu lundi à Bagdad, une semaine après sa quatrième condamnation à mort pour le massacre de milliers de Kurdes en 1988.

Cette exécution, qui intervient plus de trois ans après celle de l'ancien dictateur, en décembre 2006, a provoqué la joie des habitants de la région autonome du Kurdistan (nord), qui le surnommaient le "boucher".

"Ali le Chimique" fut "l'un des sbires les plus sanglants, meurtriers et haineux du peuple irakien. Son nom a été associé aux fosses communes qui ont recouvert le sol irakien du nord au sud", a affirmé le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki dans un communiqué.

Cette exécution tourne "une autre page noire de l'oppression, des génocides et des crimes contre l'humanité commis par Saddam et ses agents pendant les 35 ans du régime abominable du parti Baas", a-t-il ajouté.

La télévision irakienne a diffusé deux images de l'exécution. Sur la première, on voit l'homme, cheveux et moustache gris, portant une tenue orange et un tee-shirt blanc, apparemment peu avant d'être pendu.

Sur la seconde image, quelques secondes avant l'exécution, deux bourreaux, le visage masqué, lui mettent une cagoule et lui passent la corde au cou.

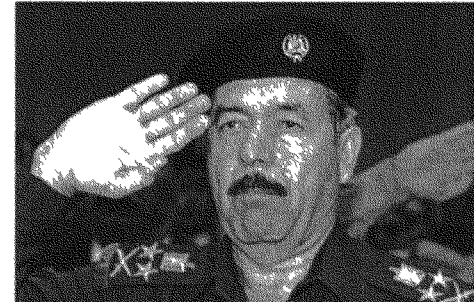
Le 17 janvier, "Ali le chimique" avait pour la quatrième fois été condamné à mort, pour le massacre en 1988 de 5 000 Kurdes. A l'annonce du verdict, il avait déclaré "al-hamdoulillah, al-hamdoulillah" (Dieu soit loué), qui furent ses derniers mots en public.

Cousin germain de Saddam Hussein, il avait été pendant plus de 35 ans son homme de main redouté, prêt à tout pour écraser la moindre velléité de révolte.

Agent de liaison militaire jusqu'au coup d'Etat qui porta en 1968 le parti Baas au pouvoir, il avait hérité du sobriquet infamant d'"Ali le Chimique" pour avoir ordonné en 1988 le bombardement au gaz de la ville kurde d'Halabja, tuant des milliers de personnes, femmes et enfants.

Peu après l'annonce de son exécution, de nombreux kurdes à Souleimaniyeh ont exprimé leur joie.

"Ali le Chimique mérite son sort. C'est un jour historique pour le peuple kurde



et irakien", s'est félicité le ministre des Martyrs et des Déplacés du gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan, Majid Hamed Amin.

"La justice irakienne a fait son travail (...) et si Dieu veut, les autres connaîtront le même sort", a-t-il ajouté.

"Je suis très heureux de l'annonce de cette exécution et j'espère qu'ils vont continuer à exécuter tous les autres impliqués dans des crimes contre les Kurdes", a réagi Kamel Abdolkader, 24 ans, dont les sept frères et soeurs ainsi que les parents ont été tués à Halabja.

"Mon père est mort à cause des attaques chimiques et mon frère souffre toujours de blessures par balles. Je suis content de cette exécution", a poursuivi Fadel Rifaat, 27 ans.

Dans le sud, les chiites exultaient aussi. "Nous sommes désolés que cette exécution ait pris tant de temps. C'est une victoire pour tous les martyrs", a indiqué Latif al-Hamidi, porte-parole du Conseil suprême islamique en Irak à Najaf, un des plus grands partis chiites qui fut réprimé par Saddam Hussein.

"Ali le chimique" n'avait pas exprimé de remords.

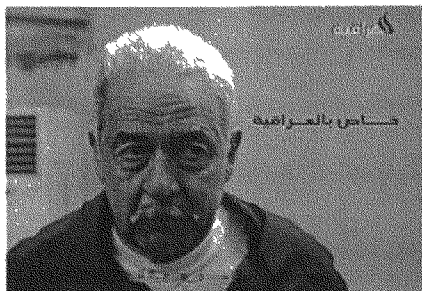
"C'est moi qui ai donné les ordres à l'armée de détruire des villages et de reloger les villageois. Je ne me défends pas. Je ne m'en excuse pas", avait-il dit en parlant de la répression de la rébellion kurde, la campagne Anfal de 1987-1988, qui avait fait près de 180 000 morts.

Comme le président déchu, il était originaire de la région de Tikrit (nord).

L'homme, qui était dévoué corps et âme à son cousin, avait aussi supervisé l'occupation du Koweït, la "19e province" aux yeux du régime. D'août à novembre 1990, il fut le gouverneur sanguinaire de ce pays envahi par l'armée irakienne, avant de reprendre en février 1991 le poste de ministre des Affaires locales.

AP Associated Press

Mon. January 25, 2010 6:50 PM ET



IN THIS image from Iraq TV station Al Iraqiyah TV, which is thought to show the scene moments before the death of Saddam Hussein's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as Chemical Ali, who was hanged Monday Jan. 25, 2010, at an undisclosed location. It is announced Monday that Al-Majid was executed after he received his fourth death sentence for the Halabja poison gas attack in 1988 that killed some 5,000 people and earned him the chilling moniker 'Chemical Ali'. (AP Photo / Al Iraqiyah via APTN) EDS NOTE NO TRANSLATION FOR ONSCREEN SCRIPT

«ALI LE CHIMIQUE», ÂME DE DESTRUCTION MASSIVE Le bourreau des Kurdes de l'ère Saddam a été pendu après quatre condamnations à mort

letemps / suisse

PAR PIERRE CHAM BONNET

Le bourreau des Kurdes de l'ère Saddam a été pendu après quatre condamnations à mort

Saddam Hussein avait bien le pouvoir de tuer à grande échelle en Irak. Sans bombe atomique ni technologie de pointe. Son arme secrète? Son aussi banal que moustachu cousin germain Ali. Ali Hassan al-Majid, son cadet de quelques années, comme lui natif du nord de l'Irak. Comme lui, originaire de la région de Tikrit, la féconde fabrique de tueurs sunnites de l'Irak postmoderne. Comme lui, exécuté par pendaison pour crimes contre l'humanité.

Ex-«Roi de pique»

Ali Hassan al-Majid était l'homme le plus dangereux de Mésopotamie après le feu maître de Bagdad, l'âme



de destruction massive de l'Irak totalitaire. L'homme au keffiyeh avait été condamné à mort pour la quatrième fois le 17 janvier dernier, pour le massacre organisé de 5000 Kurdes en 1988. Il a été pendu lundi «sans aucun trouble, ni cris de joie ou paroles offensantes», selon le gouvernement.

Exécuteur des basses œuvres du raïs, dévoué cousin, zélé lieutenant, il

collectionnait les massacres. Le sicaire du régime baassiste était plus connu sous le nom d'«Ali le chimique», après avoir orchestré la campagne «Al-Anfal» de 1988 durant laquelle l'Irak avait fait usage du gaz ypérite – entre autres – pour venir à bout de la rébellion kurde.

Ex-«Roi de pique» du jeu de cartes inventé par le Pentagone, il avait aussi été le secrétaire général du parti Baas dans le nord de l'Irak et ministre de l'Intérieur. Capturé par la coalition britannique-américaine en 2003, il ne s'était jamais repenti: «C'est moi qui ai donné les ordres à l'armée de détruire des villages [...]. Je ne me défends pas. Je ne m'en excuse pas. Je n'ai pas commis d'erreur», avait-il dit en parlant de la répression de la rébellion kurde qui a fait près de 180 000 morts.

Trois énormes attentats frappent Bagdad : 36 morts

IL ÉTAIT environ 15h30, heure de Bagdad, ce lundi. En quelques minutes, trois énormes explosions ont secoué la capitale irakienne : coup sur coup, trois hôtels du centre-ville ont été la cible d'attentats à la voiture piégée. Un premier bilan fourni par les services de sécurité irakiens fait état de 36 morts et 71 blessés.

Le même jour, Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit «Ali le Chimique» a été pendu notamment pour le massacre de 5.000 Kurdes en 1988.

Lundi, on ne savait pas si les attaques avaient un lien avec cette exécution.

A deux mois des élections législatives

«Le premier attentat a visé l'hôtel Palestine, le deuxième a eu lieu dans le garage de l'hôtel Babel et le troisième près de l'hôtel Hamra», indique le ministère de l'Intérieur. Les télévisions locales ont diffusé des images de la première attaque : des murs de béton destinés à la protection contre les explosions étaient à terre et plusieurs voitures entièrement calcinées.

Ces explosions interviennent à moins de deux mois des élections législatives, le 7 mars, malgré le renforcement des mesures de sécurité dans la capitale irakienne après des attentats



spectaculaires menées depuis août.

Le 19 août, un double attentat suicide contre les ministères des Affaires Étrangères et des Finances avait fait 106 morts et 600 blessés. Le 25 octobre, c'était au tour du ministère de la Justice et du gouvernorat de Bagdad d'être visés, faisant 153 morts et plus de 500 blessés. Le 8 décembre, cinq attentats simultanés avaient fait 127 morts et 448 blessés.



Spoils of Babylon

The National Interest

by *Joost R. Hiltermann*

THE FATE of Iraq may well rise or fall on Kirkuk as Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and Christians grapple for control of the province and the safety of their people. Oil riches abound in this land that straddles the border of Arab and Kurdish Iraq. And command of these resources is the prize for the taking. As the powers that be in Baghdad fight to hold on to the tenuous peace wrested from civil war, deciding the political fate of Kirkuk is treacherous enough to bring down the state. So far, the battle has largely taken place in a never-ending political drama, but if compromise cannot be reached—and soon—bloody conflict may well be the next step.

I FIRST visited the Iraqi province in April 1991, driving up from Baghdad in an international humanitarian agency's car. At the time, I was working as a consultant for the Boston-based Physicians for Human Rights, assessing civilian conditions in the wake of the U.S.-led war in Kuwait and Iraq. I got far more than I bargained for. A resurgent Iraqi regime had just crushed uprisings in the south and north of the country brought on by the George H. W. Bush administration's encouragement of rebellion and promises of support. But the White House quickly backtracked, leaving the insurgents to face the wrath of Saddam Hussein on their own.

THE TELLTALE signs of recent conflict were everywhere I went in Iraq. Shops were aflame in the center of Karbala with tank-shell damage to the facade of the adjacent al-Abbas mosque. In Basra, manned anti-aircraft batteries had been deployed in the middle of intersections, their guns trained at eye level. Throughout the entire country there was evidence of rocket fire on government buildings, and horrendous conditions in clinics and hospitals, with stories of corpses stacked in hallways and toddlers laid up in cribs, emaciated from lack of drinking water. Downed water-storage tanks and bombed power stations littered the landscape. In the north, overturned tractor-drawn carts of fleeing Kurds sat by the roadside, strafed by helicopter gunships. In the Sulaimaniya government hospital in northeast Kurdistan, a trickle of refugees was returning from the border with Iran, bearing terrifying land-mine injuries. And, in a hint of the vicious reprisals to come in the wake of the Kurdish rebellion against the Baghdad government, I saw a Kurdish insurgent (a pesh merga) being carried into a police station by two Iraqi soldiers, hanging upside down from a pole to which they had tied his hands and legs.¹

In Kirkuk we spent the night on relatively neutral ground: the government hospital (we consistently found medical personnel to be apolitical and focused on immediate humanitarian concerns). There, we were fed by a handful of Egyptian workers and got our fill of useful intelligence on the local situation. Later that day, as we returned from Sulaimaniya, we passed through Shorja, one of Kirkuk's downtown Kurdish neighborhoods. Bulldozers were razing houses, piling concrete upon concrete. The regime was punishing a population for its participation in, and support of, the rebellion (which had lasted a heady few days) by expelling Kurds from the city and demolishing their homes.

As I learned on subsequent trips to Iraq, this was more than a "mere" collective reprisal. This was the latest episode in a long-running, oftentimes vicious attempt at ethnically based population transfer.

UNTIL RECENTLY, not many people outside the Middle East had heard of this northern Iraqi province, Kirkuk. Once a backwater of the Ottoman Empire far from the cosmopolitan centers of

Baghdad and Mosul, for a long time the area presented a blend of ethnic groups—Assyrians and Chaldeans (both small Christian communities), along with Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs—who lived in relative harmony, frequently intermarried and commonly spoke each other's languages. The discovery of oil in the late 1920s transformed the town into a magnet for an impoverished peasantry, including many Kurds from Erbil, today the capital of Kurdistan, and Sulaimaniya, who flocked to the oil fields during the following three decades.

Ethnic conflict quickly came to the surface. The Kurds mounted a series of failed rebellions against the Iraqi government in the 1930s and 1940s, forcing their leaders to flee to the Soviet Union and Iran. And so it went until the 1958 military coup that overthrew the British-backed Hashemite monarchy and installed an Arab nationalist regime, changing the political equation and precipitating decades of fighting. Kurdish insurgents, long in conflict with the central government over autonomous powers, returned from Iranian exile to exploit the vacuum, but soon found themselves, yet again, in opposition to Baghdad's rule. Their rebellion was crushed in the early 1960s at a terrible cost in Kurdish lives and properties. It was then that Iraq's republican regimes began to Arabize the areas surrounding the oil fields, not just in Kirkuk, but all along a broad band of territory stretching from Syria in the northwest to Iran's border east of Baghdad.

After the Baath Party came to power in 1968, it pursued accommodation with the Kurdish rebel leader, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who used the Kurds' temporary, relative strength to extract a significant concession: the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region. But both sides interpreted the autonomy agreement, and the shape of the autonomous region, differently, with Kirkuk as the core of the problem, and the deal soon fell apart. The Kurds reverted to insurgency and the foundation of the present-day battle was laid fast. The Iraqi regime was loath to surrender control of Kirkuk's "supergiant" oil field (which contains 15 billion, or 13 percent, of Iraq's 115 billion barrels of proven reserves) and additional suspected hydrocarbon riches permeating rock formations underfoot. The Kurds' allies, the shah of Iran and the Ford administration, withdrew their support in 1975 and the insurgency collapsed, but not before solidifying the long-held hope that Kirkuk might one day become part of an independent Kurdistan. A deep-seated enmity between the Kurds and Baghdad soon followed.

For years, Saddam Hussein vigorously pursued Arabization by offering monetary inducement for relocation, confiscating property, transferring jobs, deporting people by judicial order, even changing a person's registered ethnicity by an administrative procedure termed "nationality correction." In 1988, the final year of the Iran-Iraq war, Arabization took the form of a counterinsurgency campaign called the Anfal that was not limited to, but was most lethal in, Kirkuk's rural hinterland. In a six-month period, the regime methodically killed tens of thousands of Kurdish villagers, consigned many more to heavily guarded, bare-bones housing estates and erased their villages.²

What I saw in Kirkuk in April 1991 was the regime's henchmen taking advantage of the Kurds' post-Gulf War uprising defeat to further Arabize Kirkuk. Little did I realize then that the bulldozers' rumble would resonate almost two decades later, magnified and transformed into a political roar. There is no doubt that the long-term policy of Arabization has come back to haunt Iraq, as the Kurds, returning in force after 2003, are seeking not only to regain lost properties and rebuild homes but to attach Kirkuk to their autonomous region, an ambition that Arabs and Turkmen are fiercely resisting. With the province's status remaining unresolved, the Kirkuk question has become the most divisive and most central issue of Iraqi politics today.

I RETURNED to Kirkuk in June 2003, this time for the International Crisis Group, and found the province in disarray. The Kurds had stormed into the city center ahead of American forces, seizing government institutions, and pushing out both Saddam's agents and the Arabs who had settled on Kurdish properties (many of whom left preemptively, fearing reprisals). This seemed yet another chance for the Kurds to rule Kirkuk, and, if all went according to plan, join it to the Kurdistan region. And thus the Kurds began a long and tenuous struggle to gain control at the local level, but they were up against fierce competition. The Arabs have always known their best hope for dominance lies in keeping Kirkuk under Baghdad's tight embrace, while the Turkmen, fearing domination by either side, have favored a special status (at least for the city) in which a degree of local autonomy would ensure greater control over Kirkuk's resources and destiny, with the Turkmen playing a major role as a significant minority group.

As in all of Iraq, the politics were complicated, with each ethnicity vying for supremacy as it attempted to work around the American agenda and a broken-down system in Baghdad. American commanders kept everyone in check. Despite strong sympathies toward their Kurdish allies that persist to this day, American officers recognized the area's ethnic diversity and enormous wealth, and sought to maintain stability by dividing power between local communities. They made their own calculations of each community's relative demographic and political strength, and when they established a city council in May 2003, they gave six seats each to the Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and Christians, reserving an additional six for "independents." In a nudge toward Kurdish interests, five of these six independents were also Kurds, thus granting them a dominant position and allowing them to appoint the governor. All seemed to be going well, at least at first, for the Kurdish cause. This gave rise to Arab complaints that the Americans favored the Kurds, while Kurdish leaders dissembled, declaring that their acceptance of this arrangement constituted a compromise on their part in light of their demographic majority (which no one could verify) and historic rights (which the other communities rejected).³

Eight months later, Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority, in the course of "refreshing" local governments to—among many ambitions—make them less dependent on the U.S. military and better representative of Iraqi demographics, created forty-seat provincial councils that replaced the city councils. In Kirkuk, it gave the Kurds thirteen seats, the Arabs twelve, the Turkmen eight and the Christians seven. Because many of Kirkuk's Christians are inclined toward Kurdish positions and, more importantly, averse to rocking the boat, they tended to vote with the Kurds on major issues. Thus, kept in a perfect twenty-twenty equilibrium, the council could make no significant decisions, inducing a temporary calm.

Still, the Kurds tried to improve their position in other areas. They took advantage of American protection and tutelage to strengthen their grip on the province's administrative and security apparatus, having seized key positions when they entered Kirkuk in 2003. Most importantly, the Kurdistan Regional Government also began to facilitate the return of Kurds displaced during Arabization. It enticed and compelled Kirkuk-origin Kurds residing in the larger Kurdistan region to move to Kirkuk. The government provided financial incentives to enable Kurds to purchase land and start housing construction in the city, while preventing them from buying property inside the larger Kurdistan region. It transferred civil servants to new jobs in the area and forced parents to register their newborns there. The absence of an impartial mechanism to oversee these returning Kirkukis, of course, led to chronic Arab and Turkmen doubts that the arriving Kurds actually had roots there. They suspected instead that the settlers were from Erbil and Sulaimaniya, or even Iran, Syria and Turkey. What was going on, they said, was Kurdification, a reverse ethnic cleansing—even if less violent than Arabization in its enforcement.

In Kirkuk's January 2005 provincial elections, the Kurds were on top once again, cementing their local power thanks in part to low turnout among Arabs and Turkmen (who either rejected the exercise or were deterred by threats of insurgent violence). The Kurds' Kirkuk Brotherhood list, an electoral slate of allied political candidates which comprised a handful of token Arabs, Turkmen and Christians, took twenty-six of forty-one seats on the new council,

while the Arab parties won nine and the Turkmen parties six. Using their electoral strength, the Brotherhood list appointed both the governor and council president, leaving the deputy-governor position for an Arab or Turkmen. Alas, the representatives from each group could not agree on a suitable candidate, thus leaving the post vacant. Not long after, the Arab and Turkmen council members, complaining of the use of Kurdish in official proceedings and other perceived wrongs, launched a boycott of the provincial government that was to last until 2008. In Kirkuk, it seemed that the Kurds were gaining control. But during all this working of the system at the local level, something quite different was afoot in Baghdad, setting the stage for a protracted stalemate.

KURDISH LEADERS never made a secret of their goal to incorporate Kirkuk into the Kurdistan region. To cement their primacy over the province, the Kurds needed to amend the Iraqi legal and constitutional order to recognize their special rights to Kirkuk. Their success at doing so, however, has been decidedly mixed. Kurdish leaders gained a partial victory in the form of the 2004 Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), a document intended to serve as Iraq's interim constitution while the country set up a sovereign government. Article 58 of the TAL officially created a process to reverse Kirkuk's Arabization, including through property restitution and compensation, the cancellation of agricultural decrees restricting Kurdish activity, the voluntary departure of those settled in Kirkuk by the previous regime and the return of those displaced (both with compensation), and the restoration of Kirkuk's pre-1968 administrative boundaries, which would make it easier to eventually incorporate Kirkuk into the Kurdistan region. The combination of these steps, if fully implemented, would almost certainly produce a Kurdish majority in Kirkuk province. In practice, however, the TAL made no mention of a referendum that would determine the ultimate status of Kirkuk, leaving this task to the drafters of the permanent constitution. And bottom line, no matter the number of "Kirkukis" returning to the area, without a decree as to the status of the province, it remains disputed and, de facto, a province directly under Baghdad's control.

In a further setback to the Kurds, the TAL also included Article 53(c), which barred Baghdad and Kirkuk from forming autonomous regions separate from the national government, in effect giving these two provinces a special status. As such, when the Iraqis began to draft their new constitution in 2005, the Kurds had a legal mandate to reverse Arabization, but still had no specific claim to the most valuable of assets—Kirkuk.

The 2005 constitution could have reversed this situation and given the Kurds a shot at gaining full legal control over the oil-rich province. Approved by 80 percent of votes cast nationwide in October 2005, the constitution served as the Kurds' biggest political triumph. Article 143 eliminated the TAL's stipulation that Kirkuk could not form a regional entity separate from the central government. And Article 140 laid out a process to resolve the status of Kirkuk and other disputed territories (which it left undefined) through a census and a popular referendum (whose nature it failed to specify) by December 31, 2007. Kurdish leaders who drafted this and several other key articles with the help of Western consultants such as Peter Galbraith (who has since come under criticism for his involvement in the process)⁴ calculated that a referendum based on a Kurdish majority in Kirkuk achieved via de-Arabization would place the province irrevocably inside the Kurdistan region.

So, through all these ups and downs, it looked as if the Kurds were set to finally achieve control of Kirkuk through perfectly legal means. But, as in much of Iraqi politics, nothing is quite so simple. Although the constitution is written in their favor, the Kurds have proved incapable of inducing the federal government to implement it. Two years after the deadline set in Article 140, Baghdad has yet to conduct a census and hold a referendum on Kirkuk. The government's foot-dragging reinforces the notion that Kirkuk is unique and deserving of special treatment—but that doesn't make it a part of the Kurdish region proper.

Making matters even worse for the Kurds, many in Iraq, including the first constitutionally elected prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, have questioned the constitution's legitimacy. The way in

which the document was drafted behind closed doors, lacking significant popular input and in the absence of elected Sunni Arab representatives, passed by a pliant parliament and subsequently endorsed by a mostly passive electorate (Shia religious leaders exhorted their flock to embrace the document) has done little to improve its credibility. Controversies swirl around a number of its provisions. Non-Kurds are especially irked by that Article 140—meaning that it may be impossible to implement.

Nonetheless, the Kurds continue to argue that their quest for Kirkuk has historical and emotional bases, and represents a thirst for justice after the terrible wrongs committed by Iraq's republican regimes, especially that of Saddam Hussein. One must remember, the Kirkuk question cannot be separated from the broader Kurdish aspiration for independence, and it can hardly be considered a coincidence that the Kurds' fervor over the disputed territories increases the closer one gets to Kirkuk. Just as Saddam's regime used Arabization as a tool to retain its grip on the province and thus preserve Iraq's economic strength and territorial unity, so the Kurds see Kirkuk's wealth as the economic basis for a bid—currently submerged but in preparation—for independence sometime in the future. Kurdish leaders realize full well that none of their powerful neighbors, be it Iran, Turkey or Syria, would tolerate an independent Kurdistan, given their own Kurdish populations, and that even if the Kurds were somehow to achieve statehood, theirs would be an entity as hopelessly landlocked as it is today. With Kirkuk, however, such a statelet would have significantly more leverage in its external dealings, and it holds out the hope of a more satisfying arrangement once regional dynamics change. In June 2007, a Kurdish leader asked me whether the Bush administration would attack Iran in its waning months. When I offered him a tentative “no,” he responded with deep disappointment. In his view, a U.S. war with Iran would change the political equation in the region, possibly allowing for a shift in boundaries, raising the Kurds' chances of success, just as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire had done. It is this sort of border-changing event the Kurds are waiting, and preparing, for.

A FREQUENT visitor to Kirkuk since 2003, I have built contacts with political leaders of all the parties that claim to represent the four communities living in the province, as well as journalists, intellectuals and other members of civil society. I have heard every conflicting historical and psychological narrative that keeps this profoundly unhappy place a cauldron of unrest. If the Kurds cite demographic numbers to support their case, Arabs and Turkmen present their own; in the absence of a census, none can be considered reliable. Likewise, if the Kurds invoke historical legacy, the Turkmen claim original dominance under the Ottomans who brought them to the region, while the Christians go so far as to declare themselves the descendants of the ancient Assyrians, under whose rule Kirkuk, then named Arrapha, was a small trading center; to both, the Kurds are late interlopers. Moreover, when the Kurds denounce Arabization, Arabs say that while the Baath regime did remove Kurds, many Arabs came to Kirkuk simply because they were attracted by the growing oil industry, as would occur in any economy even without state inducements (and much in the same vein as earlier Kurdish settlement in Kirkuk). Though the Kurds say this is not about oil, the others say of course it is only about oil, and that the Kurds are being disingenuous. All sides present documents that they claim support their narrative, denouncing their rivals' evidence as fraud.

In Kirkuk itself, everything is on hold. In governance, there is gridlock. The economy is at a near standstill, with oil production from a large but damaged oil field far below its pre-2003 performance, let alone its potential. And Western oil companies are hesitant to invest as long as the status of the territory in which the black gold lies remains unsettled. Although security has been relatively stable under Kurdish control, grievances continue to mount, especially among Arabs, who have long found themselves both at the forefront of the insurgency and at the receiving end of a joint U.S.-Kurdish antiterrorism campaign.

Local leaders, seeing no solution to their predicament, look to outside parties to bring solace, fearing that their rivals' patrons will prevail even as they loudly decry external interference in Kirkuk's affairs. Each major group has its own promoter and protector, but

none of these relationships is comfortable. Kirkuk's Arab politicians, who are Sunnis, look to Baghdad for support but see a Shia-Islamist-led government for which they harbor an innate distrust, even if Maliki shares their position on Kirkuk. For their part, the Kurds count on the United States to enable their acquisition of Kirkuk, but perceived betrayals in 1975 (when the Ford administration withdrew its support from Mullah Mustafa) and 1991 (when President George H. W. Bush allowed Saddam to crush post-Gulf War rebellions with helicopter gunships) have made them wary of U.S. intentions in a region where they suspect the bottom line will be Washington's relations with states such as Iraq and Turkey, not nonstate actors such as themselves. As for Turkmen, the Shia Islamists among them have turned their gaze toward Baghdad, while many Sunni and secular Turkmen appear to favor a scenario in which Turkey would step in, but only as a last resort.

Maliki's remarkable rise from a weak compromise prime minister in 2006 to a leader of considerable power and stature today can be attributed in part to his use of the Kirkuk issue to burnish his credentials among Iraq's majority Arabs. He sent troops to push Kurdish pesh merga and security agents out of mixed-population towns in Diyala, a province to the northeast of Baghdad that borders Kurdistan, in August 2008. He then began building up the Iraqi army's presence in Kirkuk, especially near the oil fields. Soon, army units ventured out on probing missions in majority-Kurdish areas to show the flag, acts that angered and alarmed the Kurds but that many other Iraqis received with satisfaction.

Moreover, as the process to resolve Kirkuk's status by census and referendum has ground to a halt, the Kirkuk question has vaulted to the top of the list of factors that could undermine the larger effort to stabilize Iraq. Once a sideshow in the endeavor to rebuild the country, it has now begun to contaminate politics.

KIRKUK HAS turned into a political hot spot and an elections spoiler. In July 2008, lawmakers passed a draft bill on provincial elections, which were tentatively scheduled to take place less than three months later. It contained a clause on Kirkuk, however, that so angered Kurdish parliamentarians that they boycotted the vote; the law subsequently triggered a veto by the presidency council, headed by a Kurd, Jalal Talabani. It took two months to hammer out an amendment that all sides could live with. The new provision postponed elections in Kirkuk province until after a parliamentary committee could investigate and make recommendations about power sharing, the voter registry and property disputes in Kirkuk. Since the committee proved incapable of completing its task, Kirkukis are still waiting for those elections.

Kirkuk's role as an election spoiler is not only limited to local politics. Disputes over its status are also curbing Iraq's ability to function as a democratic state. In October 2009, lawmakers were supposed to pass a law establishing a system for parliamentary elections due to be held in January 2010. But the parliament could not agree on a bill, forcing Iraq to resort to the laws governing the previous elections of December 2005—and amending them only where absolutely necessary. This, too, proved an almost-insurmountable challenge. And Kirkuk was at the heart of the matter. Legislators sparred over which voter roll would be used in the province. Would it be the one updated by the Iraqi High Electoral Commission as recently as September 2009, which took into account all the Kurds who had entered Kirkuk on the claim they had been expelled before 2003? Or the one created in 2004, before the Kurds started arriving in big numbers? Kurdish leaders favored the former option; Arab and Turkmen politicians from Kirkuk, the latter. Both sides feared that a decision on who gained the right to vote in Kirkuk would set a dangerous precedent that would prejudice the outcome of provincial elections and an eventual referendum on the province's status. That is because there is a prevailing perception in Iraq that Kurds will vote for Kurdish candidates, Arabs for Arabs, Turkmen for Turkmen and so on, and that the same will of course be true in Kirkuk.

In the end, the 2009 voter registry ruled the day and the law was passed, but loopholes remain. Challenges of election results are allowed in provinces where annual population growth has exceeded 5 percent—no surprise, as has happened in Kirkuk. And

those election results cannot be used as a precedent for changing current political or administrative arrangements; in other words, they will not have an impact on the status of Kirkuk. For all their efforts, Iraqi lawmakers only managed to kick the Kirkuki can further down the road.

And even that paltry legislative triumph has been short-lived. Tariq al-Hashemi, one of Iraq's vice presidents, indicated he would not join his colleagues on the presidential council to sign the bill into law. Political crisis ensued. And although Hashemi's veto had little to do with Kirkuk, the legislative wrangling over the province's representation greatly complicated the bill's initial parliamentary passage. So powerful is the Kirkuk issue, it has managed to delay national elections.

AND EVEN once Iraqis finally do go to the polls, the next opportunity for trouble is not far off. This time Kirkuk could turn out to be an even-bigger spoiler. The winners will set about cobbling together a governing coalition. Given the fragmented nature of Iraq's political landscape, however, this will be a complicated task that could take months. The biggest winner may not gain more than a quarter of the vote—respectable in any democracy perhaps but a dramatic departure from the 2005 elections, when the Shia Islamist alliance fell only ten seats short of an absolute majority. Prolonged postelection bickering is likely even though the Kurds will probably not reprise the role as kingmakers of Iraqi politics that they had in 2005 and 2006.

The Kurds' main electoral list, the Kurdistan Alliance bloc, will still play a major role in light of its proven ability to get out the vote in Kurdish areas. The bloc's principal condition for joining a new government will be a sworn commitment by its governing partners to make concessions on Kirkuk. Kurdish leaders have been coy about what demands they will make, but if previous experiences are anything to go by, the focus will be on concrete steps that would facilitate Kirkuk's incorporation into the Kurdistan region. These could include a firm date for a Kirkuk referendum, or a date for provincial elections in Kirkuk using the updated voter registry, or Baghdad's consent to pay oil companies that signed contracts with the Kurdistan Regional Government, including for fields located in disputed territories. It is doubtful, however, that political leaders would be willing or able to make any compromise on Kirkuk in the midst of resurgent Iraqi nationalism.

THE OBAMA administration has slowly, though not explicitly, begun to move its support behind some sort of special status for Kirkuk, a choice that would dissatisfy virtually everyone but seems the only way to keep the peace. The White House has started to focus energies on finding a way out of the Kirkuk conundrum ahead of the announced U.S. troop withdrawal, to be completed by the end of 2011. The shift from the Bush administration's support of Article 140 was moved along by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) which launched an investigation into the Kirkuk question after the 2007 referendum deadline was missed. The ensuing report supported neither Kirkuk as part of the Kurdistan region nor as a province directly under Baghdad's rule. Just as importantly, UNAMI rejected the notion of a referendum based on an ethnic vote, which it referred to as a "hostile referendum" that could only augur war. Instead it advocated negotiations that would produce a compromise agreement that then would need to be ratified by Kirkuki voters in what it called a confirmatory referendum. Such a compromise would most likely entail some kind of special status which would, for example, allow both Iraq's central government and the Kurdish government to have significant influence in the province and create a power-sharing arrangement inside Kirkuk for an interim period until Iraqi leaders reach a consensus on final status. No surprise, the UNAMI report deeply displeased Kurdish leaders. But nevertheless, given the report's endorsement by their only ally, the United States, they couldn't possibly reject its findings outright. The Maliki government also gave it the nod. Of course, little progress has been made since, but in Iraq, the fact that Baghdad and Erbil are still talking is seen as a blessing all the same.

The reason the shift in U.S. policy hasn't yet been turned into

action is because the Obama administration doesn't want to break the bad news to Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan region, lest the Kurds boycott the parliamentary elections and upset the U.S. withdrawal timetable. Nor has it wanted to put pressure on the Maliki government to make painful concessions—a special status is clearly not Maliki's preferred outcome—just as it is heading into an election. UN and U.S. diplomats have suggested, though, that they intend to tackle the Kirkuk question in earnest just as soon as the winners are known and well before a new government is formed. Meanwhile, they are considering a number of steps that would bring the sides closer together—anchoring in law the constitutional principle (to which all sides appear to agree) that revenues from oil sales should be distributed fairly across Iraq's population, and the integration of Kurdish regional guards into the federal army—before moving on to address Kirkuk's disposition. They hope that in effecting such steps, they can also facilitate the creation of a coalition government by removing the blockage Kirkuk would otherwise cause.

FRUSTRATED FOR over eighty years in their quest for independence, with Saddam's ouster, the Kurds saw a chance to make serious headway, focusing their energies on Kirkuk. Their window of opportunity, opened in 1991 and widened in 2003, now appears to be closing. The outcome is grim. Attempts to reverse Kurdish gains will be destabilizing. The same goes for any further Kurdish attempt to seize full control of Kirkuk.

The only sensible way forward is for all communities to acknowledge the intrinsic legitimacy of each other's narratives and to sit down and work out a deal. Such a deal could not be limited to Kirkuk; it would have to address the related questions of how the oil economy should be managed and revenues shared, and how power should be divided between the Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq. Kurdish leaders will have to decide what they value most: their region's long-term security, with a consensually defined and internationally guaranteed boundary, or that region's expansion in a manner that can only lead to endemic strife. The goal for all stakeholders should be to reach a long-term arrangement that would preserve Kirkuk's rich ethnic and cultural diversity; distribute power equitably between its main components; encourage investment in its oil and gas fields; restart its economy; protect the rights of all its denizens and their properties, regardless of their provenance; and leave open a future review of Kirkuk's status if conditions warrant it. The people of Kirkuk, largely ignored and forgotten in the political battles between Baghdad and Erbil, deserve no less. And only a peaceful settlement of Kirkuk's status holds the promise of keeping Iraq together and afloat following the American military's departure.

Joost R. Hiltermann is deputy program director for the Middle East and North Africa at the International Crisis Group.

1 For my accounts of my journey to postwar Iraq, see "Bomb Now, Die Later," *Mother Jones* (July/August 1991); and "Assessing the Damage in Iraq," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Summer 1991).

2 See Human Rights Watch, *Iraq's Crime of Genocide: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds* (New Haven, ct: Yale University Press, 1995); an earlier version is available at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/1993/07/01/genocide-iraq>.

3 The International Crisis Group has analyzed developments in Kirkuk from 2003 onward. Its reports are available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org>.

4 For Peter Galbraith's controversial role in assisting Kurdish leaders in the drafting of the Iraqi constitution, see James Glanz and Walter Gibbs, "U.S. Adviser to Kurds Stands to Reap Oil Profits," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2009.

5 The International Crisis Group outlined a possible deal in *Oil for Soil: Toward a Grand Bargain on Iraq and the Kurds* (Brussels, October 28, 2008).

'Chemical Ali' and Blair, the hero

The execution of Ali Hassan al-Majid for gassing Kurds reminds us that Tony Blair's war in Iraq at least righted some wrongs



Ranj Alaaldin

Ali Hassan al-Majid, the infamous general and henchman of Saddam Hussein, was executed yesterday for his genocidal onslaught on the Kurdish population of Halabja in 1988.

Many of the 5,000 Kurds killed that day died almost instantly as the cloud of poison gas settled upon them. Others suffered a slower, more gruesome death as the gas gradually liquidated their organs but did not actually kill them.

Today, the few surviving victims suffer from their injuries; birth defects, breast, lung, skin, and other cancers, along with miscarriages, infertility and mental disorders have painted a dark, permanent, mark on their lives.

"Chemical Ali", as he became known for his attack on Halabja, or the "Butcher of Kurdistan" for his co-ordination of the wider al-Anfal operation that systematically destroyed scores of villages and killed more than 120,000 Kurds in a campaign of gassings and mass executions, yesterday finally paid the price for his crimes.

Justice will have been served for the Kurds and his execution provides some degree of closure for those who bore the brunt of the operations in the towns and villages of Halabja, Karadagh, Doli Khoshnawati and Barwari Bala.

Harman Mohammad, a Kurd from Halabja who now studies at the vibrant Kurdistan University in Erbil, told me about his experience of the exodus that followed the attack. "I was just an infant, my mother held me close to her chest; we were vomiting and temporarily blinded as we tried to escape." Emotions were running high, he explained, but many feel Majid was given an easy exit and point out that he was not

actually executed for genocide but for crimes against humanity, a verdict that does not really fit the crime.

Some were more pragmatic though – "Chemical Ali has been dead for a long time," one Kurd told me, referring to Majid's capture and imprisonment since 2003.

Visiting Halabja last April amid Iran's shelling of its mountainous terrain, it was clear that despite its scenic surroundings and attempts to move on from the past, the town continues to be haunted by a gloomy and grey atmosphere, a stark reminder of Majid's legacy that may always be there. Largely neglected over the years, Halabja needs investment and redevelopment, although they have increased over the past two years.

It is ironic that in the same week Majid is executed, Tony Blair is to appear at the Chilcott Inquiry on Friday with the anti-war left looking to put him on trial for Britain's involvement in the 2003 war. Kurds will remember how after the Halabja attack Britain carried on as usual in its relations with Iraq. Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group explains how the US blamed the attack on Iran without ever providing evidence to support those claims.

Majid saw no need to worry about a response from the west, as historian Charles Tripp neatly describes in yesterday's Guardian:

Majid's attitude to this slaughter was captured on videotape when he told a group of party officials in the middle of the campaign: 'Who will say anything? The international community? Fuck them.'

All too aware of Britain's tacit acquiescence to the Halabja gassing and not naive about Britain's past record in the Middle East – it was Winston Churchill who first sanctioned the gassing of the Kurds and it was Britain that denied them an independent Kurdish state – the Kurds know the Iraq war of 2003 did not, essentially, have anything to do with them.

But then, after a moment's thought, it becomes clear that Blair, in removing Saddam and the Ba'ath regime from power, has somewhat reversed the wrongs of history and, against all odds, in favour of the Kurds (even if this was not the principal intention in the first place).

As put to me at the weekend by Kurdistan's prime minister, Barham Salih, Blair is, quite simply, a hero to the Kurds. "He has transformed our lives by replacing the certainty of tyranny with the uncertainty of politics," Salih said.

The Kurds call Halabja the Kurdish Holocaust; because of Blair's intervention, they can now also stand chest out, head high and breathe the famous words: "Never again."

PKK attacks coincide with Sledgehammer timeline

MELIK DUVAKLI

The terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which declared a cease-fire after the capture of its leader in 1999, started its attacks again in 2003, the year when the Sledgehammer coup plan was drafted by a military general.

The date of the plan's conception and the PKK's resumption of its deadly attacks seem to be more than a coincidence, as the Sledgehammer generals specifically wrote that terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda and the

PKK, which would be staged simultaneously in urban areas, particularly in Istanbul, would be the last phase of increasing violence and chaos in the country before the military could seize power. The plotters would then declare a state of emergency and then martial law.

Many observers recall certain developments on the PKK and al-Qaeda front in those years. In August 2003, four years after its terrorist leader was captured, the PKK restarted its blood attacks after a lengthy truce. In this first assault,

the PKK killed six police officers and five Turkish soldiers. According to Kurdish intellectual Ümit Firat, the PKK, resuming its fighting this time, did not have the Turkish state as its target but the government of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

In July 2003, the PKK announced that it would continue its attacks and began Molotov cocktail assaults at various spots in the East and Southeast. On Aug. 6, the Mardin attack, which left six police officers dead, followed. Throughout August, a

number of police stations and checkpoints in ʔrnak's Cizre district, Diyarbakır's Silvan and Dicle districts, Siirt's Eruh district, Mardin's Gercüs district and the Tunceli province were attacked. Four police officers died, and many others were injured. On Dec. 1, 2003, five Turkish soldiers died and four were injured in Nusaybin, a district in Mardin, when a land mine was detonated remotely by the PKK.

The terrorist group's comeback actually caused a rift inside the PKK. Some members of the higher ranks of the PKK, including Osman Öcalan, Nizamettin Tas, Halil Ataç, Hıdır Yalçın, Dursun Ali Küçük, Kani Yılmaz (code name Faysal Dunlayıcı), Mehmet Esiyok and Selahattin Gun (collectively referred to as the reformists), were against the attacks, according to intelligence sources. However, the PKK's "traditionalist"

commanders, such as Cemil Bayık, Murat Karayılan and Duran Kalkan, wanted to fight. The same order came from Öcalan's jail cell in April 2004. In May of that year, the PKK held an extraordinary congress in which it declared war again. About 750 members of the PKK who opposed armed fighting left the organization.

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Iraq's 'Chemical Ali,' 68, hanged for attacks on Kurdish civilians

By William Branigin

Ali Hassan al-Majeed, an Iraqi general who became known as "Chemical Ali" for ordering poison-gas attacks on Kurdish civilians, was hanged Monday in Baghdad after a special tribunal handed him his fourth death sentence for crimes against humanity during the regime of his cousin, Saddam Hussein.

Gen. Majeed, 68, received his final sentence Jan. 17 for his most notorious offense: the March 1988 chemical-weapons attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja in northeastern Iraq. An estimated 5,000 Kurds died and as many as 10,000 others were injured when Iraqi aircraft dropped a variety of chemical bombs containing mustard gas, nerve gas and other toxic agents. It was the deadliest chemical attack against civilians in history.

Authorities delayed carrying out Gen. Majeed's three previous convictions in part so that survivors of the Halabja attack could have their day in court. The hanging of the man also known as the "Butcher of Kurdistan" set off rejoicing in Iraq's Kurdish region and among Kurdish politicians in Baghdad.

Over nearly three decades as the right-hand man of Hussein, the former Iraqi dictator who was executed in December 2006, Gen. Majeed earned a reputation for exceptional ruthlessness in a regime known for its brutality. He commanded a scorched-earth campaign, code-named Anfal, that killed an estimated 180,000 people in less than a year as part of a drive to crush a Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq. Operations he directed against uprisings by Shiite Muslims in southern Iraq also resulted in thousands of deaths.

"Majeed was Saddam Hussein's hatchet man. He was involved in some of the worst crimes of the Iraqi government, including genocide and crimes against humanity," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. "Majeed represented the worst of the Iraqi government, and that's saying quite a lot."

Gen. Majeed served his cousin, to whom

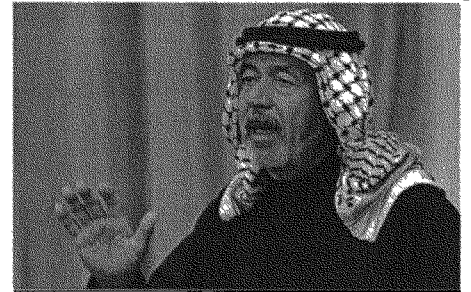
he bore a striking resemblance, as a military adviser, intelligence chief, interior minister, defense minister and military commander at various times during his career. After Hussein invaded neighboring Kuwait in August 1990, Gen. Majeed headed the occupation for three months as military governor, presiding over the brutal repression and systematic looting of the oil-rich emirate.

Born in Tikrit -- also Hussein's home town -- on Nov. 30, 1941, Gen. Majeed grew up in a poor family and received little formal education. He was a driver in the Iraqi army and a motorcycle messenger before his fortunes turned in 1968, when Hussein's Baath Party regained power. He rose in the hierarchy with Hussein, the regime's strongman, who formally assumed the presidency in 1979 and began a purge of Baathist officials deemed disloyal. As targeted officials were led out of a videotaped meeting one by one, many of them to be executed later, Gen. Majeed told Hussein he had been "too gentle, too merciful."

Following an unsuccessful 1982 attempt to assassinate Hussein in the town of Dujail, a Shiite stronghold north of Baghdad, Gen. Majeed directed a campaign of collective punishment in which hundreds of residents were arrested, many were tortured and dozens were executed.

It was as head of the Northern Bureau of the Baath Party in the late 1980s that Gen. Majeed led the Anfal campaign, ordering the use of chemical weapons against autonomy-seeking Kurds. More than 4,000 Kurdish villages were razed and their inhabitants either massacred or deported to southern Iraq, according to human rights organizations.

After Iraq's defeat in the Persian Gulf War in early 1991, Gen. Majeed was named interior minister and given responsibility for crushing revolts by Iraqi Shiites in the south and Kurds in the north. Among the victims in the south were Iraq's marsh Arabs, whose numbers were decimated by disappearances, executions and forced relocations.



When U.S. forces invaded Iraq in March 2003, Gen. Majeed was serving as commander of the country's southern region and was listed as the Americans' fifth-most-wanted man. He survived a U.S. airstrike the next month but was eventually captured by U.S. troops in August 2003.

During his first trial, in 2006, on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity for his role in the Anfal campaign, Gen. Majeed was unapologetic, insisting that he was right to order the demolition of Kurdish villages near the end of the Iran-Iraq war because they were "full of Iranian agents."

In one of a series of tape-recorded conversations that were played during the trial, Gen. Majeed told senior Baath Party officials in 1988, referring to the Kurds: "I will kill them all with chemical weapons! Who is going to say anything? The international community? [Expletive] them!"

Gen. Majeed received the death sentence after that trial and a subsequent one in which he was charged with involvement in suppressing Shiites in the south in 1991, when tens of thousands were reported killed. A video that later emerged showed Gen. Majeed personally shooting captured Shiite rebels in the head with a pistol and kicking others in the face as they sat on the ground. Gen. Majeed was also sentenced to death in March 2009 for a 1999 crackdown against Shiites who had risen up in reaction to the assassination of a revered Shiite cleric.

"Justice has been done," leading Kurdish legislator Fouad Masoum told Reuters in Baghdad after Monday's hanging. "This criminal has gotten what he deserved for the atrocities he committed against innocent people. I hope he will be a lesson for others."

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune
JANUARY 27, 2010

Patrols aim to calm Iraq's 'trigger line'

MOSUL, IRAQ

U.S. soldiers join troops from both sides of tense Arab-Kurdish divide

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS

Strings of checkpoints have appeared on the roads that lead out of this volatile city, guarded by hundreds of American soldiers working with Iraqi Arab and Kurdish troops. The joint operation in one of Iraq's ethnic trouble spots began with a deliberate lack of fanfare, but it is the most significant military mission by U.S. forces here since they largely retreated to bases outside Iraq's cities in June.

More than two dozen checkpoints now punctuate a snaking line that traces — from Syria to Iran — the unofficial and very much disputed boundary between Iraq's federal forces and those of the Kurdish regional government. At times these forces have operated virtually as opposing armies rather than as compatriots of a single nation, but at the new checkpoints, they now are living and operating together for the first time since the war began.

Guarding checkpoints — a task the American military never relishes — invites attacks by insurgents, who remain particularly active in northern Iraq. And every night during a three-night stretch, rockets or mortars landed near three of the checkpoints in Diyala Province, though they caused no casualties, according to a U.S. military spokesman and an Iraqi military official. "You stay static," as First Sgt. Tony DeSardo, of the U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division, put it on Saturday, "you'll get hit."

The operation began this month after labored negotiations with Iraq's Arab and Kurdish leaders. The immediate goal is to bolster security before bitterly contested elections in March in an ethnic patchwork of lands that has been devastated by attacks.

The ultimate strategy is to defuse political tensions along a fault line that could easily rupture, sundering the country once American forces leave, or even before. The operation underscores the extent to which the U.S. military remains an arbiter of Iraq's most intractable conflicts.

"What we're doing is forcing the wound to close," Lt. Col. Christopher L. Connelly, a battalion commander with the First Armored Division, said at one of the new checkpoints being erected on the highway that links Mosul to Erbil, capital of the Kurdish region.

With time running out before Presi-



U.S., Arab and Kurdish soldiers searching travelers at a checkpoint outside Mosul, on the disputed boundary between Iraqi federal forces and those of the Kurdish regional government.

dent Barack Obama's deadline for withdrawing combat troops in August, the mission has become the most urgent in Iraq.

The U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, proposed the checkpoints, along with joint patrols involving the three sides, after a series of incidents last year threatened open conflict between Iraqi and Kurdish forces. The plans were stalled for months amid deeply rooted suspicions between Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and the Kurdish president, Massoud Barzani.

"What we have sought to do is separate the politics from the security piece, and of course, that's very hard to do," said Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr., the deputy commander in Iraq. "But we keep bringing it back to focusing on: O.K., where and how do we provide the best security to the Iraqi people? And how does that create the environment that will someday allow for political process to take place?"

This northern front, or "trigger line," dates from the American invasion in 2003. As Saddam Hussein's army collapsed, Kurdish forces called the pesh merga pushed from their three provinces in the north and occupied sections of territory in Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala provinces that the Kurds claimed as theirs historically.

They have controlled the areas ever

since, despite repeated calls by Iraq's government and regional Sunni leaders for them to withdraw to the "green line" that established the internal Kurdish boundary before 2003.

As Iraq's new security forces have grown more assertive in controlling territory on the southern side, the effect has been to square off two suspicious forces along a seam that has been ex-

With time running out before the deadline for withdrawing U.S. troops, the mission is the most urgent in Iraq.

plotted by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and other insurgents for attacks, and by politicians for political points.

Last May, the pesh merga prevented the newly elected governor of Nineveh, a Sunni, from crossing the line to drive to Bashiqra, a town nominally under his authority. Although the facts of the incident were disputed, all agreed that violence was only narrowly averted.

Since then, a series of hair-trigger confrontations has raised tensions. So have bombings in villages of small ethnic minorities along the line populated by Assyrian Christians, Turkmens and Shabaks. Insurgents struck with such precision between the two opposing au-

thorities that American and Iraqi officials suspect they were trying to provoke an Arab-Kurd war.

Political leaders in Diyala, Kirkuk and Nineveh have condemned the new security operation, seeing the checkpoints as de facto recognition of Kurdish territorial claims. While many Kurds serve in the Iraqi Army, the pesh merga operate under the command of the Kurdish government; their presence, along with that of the Kurdish intelligence service, is viewed by many Iraqis as illegitimate.

"What guarantees are there that the pesh merga will ever withdraw?" Qusay Abbas, a member of Nineveh's regional legislature, which has publicly opposed the operation, said at his home

in a small village near one of the new checkpoints. Last week, he said, Kurdish soldiers detained and threatened him when tried to visit a mosque in a neighboring village.

American commanders emphasize that the checkpoints are not meant to preclude negotiations between Arabs and Kurds over the final boundaries of the Kurdish region, though the hope is that cooperation on the ground will give momentum to a political — and peaceful — resolution of the underlying dispute.

The duration of the operations remains unclear. Ultimately the Americans hope to withdraw. For now, American platoons are hunkering down with their Iraqi and Kurdish counterparts in

primitive camps beside the checkpoints, muddied by winter rains. Joint patrols have begun to ensure security in the immediate vicinity.

At one checkpoint on the road to Bashiqa, near where the governor was stopped, there is a small sign of progress. Until last week, the Arabs and the Kurds maintained separate checkpoints, separated by a mile and a chasm of distrust.

Now platoons from both forces, along with the Americans, have consolidated into a single base in the middle, flying the Iraqi and Kurdish flags.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune JANUARY 28, 2010

Merkel assails Iran as Israeli president pays visit

BERLIN

In Bundestag speech, Peres praises chancellor, who has shifted her tone

BY JUDY DEMPSEY

Praising Chancellor Angela Merkel's increasingly tough stance against Iran's nuclear program, President Shimon Peres of Israel said Wednesday that the Iranian regime was "a danger to the entire world."

In a solemn speech before legislators in the Bundestag, Mr. Peres said Iran was a "regime that threatens destruction, accompanied by nuclear plants and missiles and who activates terror in its country and in other countries."

He said Israel, like its neighbors, identified "with the millions of Iranians who revolt against violence."

"Like them, we reject a fanatic regime which contradicts the United Nations Charter," he said.

Mr. Peres, a former prime minister, was wrapping up a four-day state visit to Germany, his first as Israeli president. His speech coincides with a major shift in tone from Mrs. Merkel, who has supported all initiatives by the United Nations and the United States to prevent Iran from obtaining the ability to produce nuclear weapons.

But one of her biggest problems has been trying to persuade German companies from doing business with Iran.

"There is a long tradition of economic cooperation between Germany and Iran," Mrs. Merkel said Tuesday at a news conference with Mr. Peres. She

said that because of existing sanctions and the threat of even more sanctions, there had been a significant reduction in trade. "But we believe it is only effective if you try to introduce international sanctions on as broad a base as possible."

German exports to Iran in 2008, the latest year for which figures are available, totaled €3.9 billion, or \$5.5 billion, compared to €3.6 billion in 2007. German imports from Iran amounted to €577.8 million compared to €583 million in 2007, according to the Foreign Ministry.

Just this week, Siemens, the German engineering and electronics conglomerate, said it would turn down any further orders from Iran.

"Some time ago, we reduced our business activities with customers in Iran," the chief executive, Peter Loscher, said in response to questions at a shareholders meeting in Munich on Tuesday.

He said that the board agreed last October to take no further orders but that existing ones would be fulfilled. Mr. Loscher said the orders were exclusively civilian.

Ronald S. Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress, welcomed the move by Siemens. "This is a timely and courageous decision by Mr. Loscher, for which he deserves praise, especially because a lot of money is at stake for Siemens," he said in a statement.

After talks with Mr. Peres in the Chancellery, Mrs. Merkel said the issue of sanctions would be tackled next month when France takes over the rotating chairmanship of the U.N Security Council. "The world community is ready to work on sanctions," Mrs. Merkel said. "We have shown patience, but this does not seem to have had any effect. so the

time has come for the international community to discuss sanctions."

The Iranian authorities, meanwhile, stepped up their criticism of the Germany position. On Wednesday, an unnamed Iranian intelligence official accused German diplomats of being involved in antigovernment clashes that took place last month and said two diplomats had been detained, according to the Iranian news agency ISNA.

But Andreas Peschke, German Foreign Ministry spokesman, said the diplomats were not detained.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran has repeatedly denied the existence of the Holocaust and questioned the existence of Israel. "The fact that the Iranian president has questioned Israel's right to exist is completely unacceptable for a German chancellor," Mrs. Merkel said.

In his Bundestag speech, Mr. Peres praised Mrs. Merkel's policies. "And you, Madam Chancellor, Angela Merkel, you have conquered the hearts of our nation with your sincerity and your warmth," he said. "You said to the American Senate and House of Representatives that 'an attack on Israel will equate an attack on Germany.' We shall not forget this."

MATCH

26 JANVIER 2010

LE COMBAT DES RÉFUGIÉS KURDES DÉBARQUÉS EN CORSE

Les 123 clandestins retrouvés vendredi sur une plage corse ont recouvré la liberté. Mais leur bataille pour obtenir le droit d'asile ne fait que commencer.

Marie Desnos - Parismatch

Une première victoire pour ces 123 clandestins qui secouent la France depuis la fin de semaine dernière. Ces personnes découvertes vendredi sur une plage corse, qui se présentent comme des Kurdes de Syrie (pour la plupart, ou du Maghreb pour les autres), ont été remises en liberté. Le ministre de l'Immigration, Eric Besson, a assuré qu'il annulerait, dès la réception de leurs dossiers de demande d'asile, les arrêtés préfectoraux de reconduite à la frontière pris à leur rencontre, jugés illégaux par les juges des libertés et de la détention (JLD).

Cinquante-sept hommes, 28 femmes –dont cinq enceintes et une handicapée–, ainsi que 38 enfants dont neuf nourrissons, ont été retrouvés vendredi sur la plage de Paragnano, au sein d'une réserve naturelle située entre Bonifacio et Pianottoli-Caldarelo, à l'extrême sud de la Corse. Ces immigrés, qui ne parlent pas français pour la plupart, ont d'abord été transférés dans un gymnase de Bonifacio avant d'être conduits, samedi dans cinq centres de rétention administrative (CRA) du continent : à Marseille, Lyon, Rennes, Nîmes et Toulouse, l'île de Beauté ne disposant pas d'infrastructures adaptées.

UN PÉRIPLE PAR LA

JORDANIE ET LA TUNISIE

Selon les premiers témoignages recueillis, ils seraient partis le 15 janvier



Les clandestins ont été jugés par petits groupes, dans les 5 villes dans lesquelles on les avait envoyés. Des jugements qui leur ont tous été favorables. | Photo Maxppp

de Syrie, seraient passés par la Jordanie puis la Tunisie avant d'embarquer à bord de plusieurs navires et d'être finalement débarqués en zodiac, conduits par des passeurs, sur la côte corse. Ces Kurdes expliquent se sentir totalement exclus par la Syrie, et brimés dans leur culture. Ils auraient dépensé 5000 dollars par personne et la moitié par enfant pour quitter ce pays.

Peu habitué à ce genre de débarquement –contrairement à l'Italie ou l'Espagne– l'Hexagone a quelque peu été pris de court, et les décisions du gouvernement critiquées, notamment par le monde associatif. Le placement immédiat de ces clandestins en CRA, et dont leur privation de liberté hors de tout cadre juridique, avait notamment été pointé comme «grossièrement irrégulier» et constituant un frein aux démarches administratives permettant de demander l'asile.

«NOUS LES SOIGNONS, NOUS LES NOURRISSONS, ET NOUS LES RACCOMPAGNERONS CHEZ EUX»

Mais Nicolas Sarkozy a défendu le travail de son gouvernement. «Je ne laisserai pas la France» devenir l'Italie, où des boat-people accostent sur les côtes, a lancé le chef de l'Etat face à Laurence Ferrari, lundi soir –avant de se retrouver face à onze citoyens et Jean-Pierre Pernault. «Nous les soignons, nous les nourrissons, nous les réconfortons et nous les raccompagnerons chez eux», quand les autorités saurons d'où ils viennent, a-t-il ajouté.

La France n'a pas connu un tel débarquement de clandestins sur ses côtes depuis 2001, quand quelque 900 Kurdes s'étaient échoués sur une plage du Var à bord d'un vraquier. Eric Besson a assuré que les dossiers seraient examinés «au cas par cas.»

IRAK: OPÉRATIONS CONJOINTES DE L'ARMÉE AMÉRICAINE AVEC ARABES ET KURDES

AFP

BAGDAD, 26 janvier 2010 (AFP)

L'ARMÉE AMÉRICAINE a commencé à mener des opérations conjointes avec l'armée irakienne et les Peshmergas, les combattants kurdes, dans des zones disputées du nord de l'Irak, a annoncé mardi le commandant des forces américaines en Irak, le général Ray Odierno.

Ces opérations sont destinées à faire baisser les tensions dans ces régions que se disputent le gouvernement central de Bagdad et les autorités kurdes autonomes d'Erbil (nord)

Mais cette mesure semble avoir eu l'effet inverse, provoquant la colère des communautés arabe et turcomane qui ont rejeté une force "illégitime" qui risque de "légitimer" la présence des Peshmergas au-delà du Kurdistan

Des barrages, contrôlés par les trois forces, ont été établis dans ces zones situées dans les provinces de Kirkouk, riche en pétrole, Ninive et Diyala, a affirmé le général Odierno.

"D'ici le 31 janvier, tous les barrages seront en place et nous allons commencer les patrouilles", a-t-il dit, sans préciser le nombre de soldats américains



déployés dans ces régions.

"Il s'agit de protéger la population (...) qui a été visée par Al-Qaïda et d'autres qui essaient d'exploiter les divergences politiques. Cette force (tripartite) a été mise en place pour essayer de mettre fin à la vulnérabilité des gens dans les zones disputées", a insisté Ray Odierno

L'établissement de cette force tripartite avait été annoncé à l'été 2009 au

moment d'un regain de tension entre Kurdes et Arabes.

Les trois provinces du Kurdistan (Erbil, Souleimaniyeh et Dohouk) représentent 40.000 km², mais les forces kurdes, dans le sillage de l'invasion conduite par les Etats-Unis en 2003, ont étendu leur présence sur 75.000 km² en prenant le contrôle d'une partie des provinces de Kirkouk, Ninive et Diyala.

Les Etats-Unis et l'ONU font pression pour parvenir à un règlement pacifique, craignant que le conflit entre Arabes et Kurdes ne ruine les efforts pour stabiliser l'Irak

Le chef de la police de la province de Kirkouk, le général Jamal Taher, un Kurde, a affirmé à l'AFP que la force conjointe américano-arabo-kurde dans cette province était composée de "100 à 150 membres de la police et de l'armée irakiennes, des Peshmergas et de l'armée américaine".

La formation de cette force a toutefois provoqué la colère de la communauté turcomane, qui refuse toute présence kurde à Kirkouk. "Cette présence est

illégal et inconstitutionnelle", a affirmé Tourhane al-Moufti, un membre du conseil provincial et membre du Front turcoman

"Les forces de l'armée et de la police à Kirkouk sont déjà conjointes et des Kurdes sont à leur tête. Déployer cette force tripartite n'a aucune utilité", a-t-il argué

La communauté arabe de Kirkouk s'est également opposée à un tel déploiement "Cette force légitime la présence des Peshmergas à Kirkouk, qui sont une force spéciale du Kurdistan", a martelé un dignitaire arabe, Hussein al-Joubouri

"La présence kurde vise à couper Kirkouk du reste de l'Irak", a-t-il ajouté

De son côté, un cheikh sunnite de l'une des plus grandes tribus de Kirkouk, Abdallah Sami al-Assi, a conseillé de "renforcer le soutien aux forces armées irakiennes existantes". "Le présence de la force tripartite va avoir l'effet inverse et sa présence n'a aucune justification", a-t-il insisté.

PLUSIEURS REBELLES KURDES TUÉS PAR LES FORCES ARMÉES IRANIENNES (PRESSE)

AFP

TEHERAN, 27 jan 2010 (AFP)

Plusieurs rebelles kurdes ont été tués lors d'affrontements lundi près de la frontière turque avec les forces armées iraniennes, qui ont arrêté le meurtrier supposé d'un procureur assassiné la semaine dernière dans cette région, rapporte mercredi la presse.

"Lors d'affrontements entre les forces armées et les contre-révolutionnaires membres du PJAK (Parti pour une Vie Libre du Kurdistan, ndr), l'assassin du procureur du district de Khoy (nord-ouest) a été arrêté et plusieurs membres de ce groupe ont été tués", a déclaré Vahid Jalalzadeh, le gouverneur de la province de l'Azerbaïdjan occidentale cité par la presse

Le PJAK est lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui lutte contre le

gouvernement turc dans le sud-est anatolien.

"La personne arrêtée est actuellement interrogée par les forces de sécurité", a ajouté M. Jalalzadeh.

Le procureur de Khoy, Vali Haji-Gholizadeh, avait été tué par balles le 18 janvier

Les régions iraniennes frontalières de l'Irak et la Turquie, où vivent des minorités kurdes, sont le théâtre d'affrontements périodiques entre les forces armées iraniennes et le PJAK, basé dans le nord-est de l'Irak

L'Iran accuse les Etats-Unis de soutenir ce mouvement ainsi que d'autres organisations ethniques aux frontières de l'Iran, ce que Washington a toujours démenti. Les Kurdes représentent environ 7% de la population en Iran.

l'Observateur

27 Janvier 2010

Clandestins kurdes : les réactions des politiques

Voici les principales réactions des politiques après le placement dans plusieurs centres de rétention de clandestins kurdes découverts vendredi sur une plage de Corse :

Benoît Hamon, porte-parole du PS : "Eric Besson et le gouvernement viennent de subir un revers sur ce sujet. Nous nous félicitons que la loi ait été rappelée au gouvernement". Il a salué l'action de la Cimade et de la Ligue Droits de l'homme qui ont "rappelé que la procédure dont ont été l'objet ces hommes et ces femmes n'étaient pas légale".

Il faut que ces "populations soient traitées conformément à la loi, comme des demandeurs d'asile et non comme des immigrés clandestins", a insisté le porte-parole, estimant que si ces clandestins avaient pris des "risques", c'est parce qu'ils se "sentaient menacés" dans leur pays.

"M. Besson prétend être le meilleur avocat de la générosité et de la patrie des Droits de l'Homme, apparemment ce n'est pas automatique dans sa tête". (Déclaration lors d'un point presse heb-



Plusieurs des 124 migrants kurdes ont été placés dans un centre de détention de Marseille, puis été relâchés deux jours plus tard.

domadaire, lundi 25 janvier)

Michel Rocard (PS) : L'ancien Premier ministre socialiste ne trouve pas qu'Eric Besson soit un bon ministre de l'Immigration, évoquant une politique "qui n'est pas à l'honneur de la France". "J'aime que les juges honorent la France", a déclaré Michel Rocard sur RMC à propos de la décision de plusieurs juges des libertés et de la détention de remettre en liberté des réfugiés

kurdes interpellés dimanche en Corse et transférés dans des centres de rétention. "Ce qui est intolérable, c'est d'avoir une position qui soit : tout oui, n'importe qui rentre, ou qui soit : tout non, personne ne rentre. La France n'est pas un camp de concentration", a-t-il dit. Alors qu'on lui demandait si Eric Besson était un bon ministre de l'Immigration, il a répondu: "je ne trouve pas". "Je n'aime pas faire image sur ce qui n'est pas à l'honneur de la France".

"La difficulté du problème de l'immigration c'est que c'est un problème qu'on ne peut pas traiter sans une certaine brutalité policière. En tirer fierté et la généraliser est quelque chose que je ne supporte pas", a-t-il ajouté.

"Mais surtout, ce qui est insupportable ce sont les quotas, c'est le principe que l'on doit chaque mois expulser un chiffre quelconque de gens [...] ça c'est une honte, ce n'est pas la France de la déclaration des droits de l'Homme", a-t-il aussi déclaré. (Déclaration sur RMC, lundi 25 janvier)

Pierre Moscovici, député PS du Doubs, sur LCI : "La France est un Etat de droit

et quand il y a des vices de formes, ils doivent être sanctionnés. On ne peut pas arrêter des gens et les mettre dans des centres de rétention dans n'importe quelles conditions. Derrière ça, il y a plusieurs problèmes : le problème de la sécurité des frontières, le problème de ceux qui véhiculent ces immigrés, qui font de la véritable traite d'êtres humains et qu'il faut condamner et combattre, et puis il y a le problème des réfugiés eux-mêmes" qu'il faut "traiter humainement". (Déclaration sur LCI, lundi 25 juin)

Les Verts condamnent "les conditions hâtives et opaques dans lesquelles ont été expédiées les auditions à Bonifacio et s'est ensuite effectué le transfert". Ils "exigent que les personnes toujours retenues soient immédiatement libérées et que leurs demandes de droit d'asile soient examinées aussi sereinement que la loi le permet". "Comment M. Besson peut-il avoir le cynisme d'affirmer que 'face à des situations d'urgence, la protection des personnes prime sur le pointillisme procédural'?". (Communiqué, lundi 25 janvier)

Jean-Michel Baylet (PRG) : "Il est inacceptable qu'un ministre prenne ses aises avec la loi, au motif qu'elle serait trop contraignante pour ses services. Les droits des migrants Kurdes doivent être "respectés" et l'Ofpra doit "disposer de tout le temps nécessaire pour statuer sur les demandes d'asile car le droit d'asile est reconnu comme un droit constitutionnel fondamental et autonome par le quatrième alinéa du Préambule de 1946". (Communiqué, lundi 25 janvier)



TURQUIE: UN COMITÉ EUROPÉEN REND VISITE À ÖCALAN DANS SA NOUVELLE CELLULE (PRESSE)

ANKARA, 27 janvier 2010 (AFP)

Une délégation du Comité antitorture (CPT) du Conseil de l'Europe a rendu visite mardi au chef des rebelles kurdes de Turquie Abdullah Öcalan dans sa nouvelle cellule, rapporte mercredi la presse turque.

Les six membres de la mission ont "inspecté" les nouvelles dispositions mises en place par les autorités turques pour le chef-fondateur du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), une organisation considérée comme terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, précise l'agence de presse Anatolie.

La délégation a aussi rencontré pendant plusieurs heures les cinq autres détenus transférés pour tenir compagnie à Abdullah Öcalan sur l'île-prison d'Imrali, dans le nord-ouest de la Turquie, indiquent les journaux.

Öcalan, 61 ans, purgeait en solitaire depuis 1999 une peine de prison à vie dans cet l'établissement de haute sécurité où il était l'unique détenu.

Mais à la mi-novembre il a été transféré dans une autre cellule du même pénitencier où il peut côtoyer plusieurs heures par semaine ces autres détenus, comme l'avait recommandé le CTP lors d'une précédente mission en 2007.

L'ennemi n°1 de l'Etat turc s'était plaint de ses nouvelles conditions carcérales par le biais de ses avocats, ce qui avait provoqué des émeutes dans le sud-est anatolien, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes.

Pour répondre aux critiques, le ministère de la Justice a procédé à des améliorations dans la structure de la cellule et publié des photos de sa prison pour montrer que ses conditions étaient identiques aux autres prisonniers incarcérés dans des établissements de haute sécurité



30 Janvier 2010

Des étrangers en leur propre pays

En Syrie, au moins 300 000 Kurdes ont été déchus de leur nationalité.

Par MARC SEMO

Nul ne sait précisément combien sont - au moins 300 000, peut-être le double - les Kurdes syriens sans papiers dans leur propre pays. «C'est la seule population de cette importance au Moyen-Orient qui est condamnée à vivre clandestinement sur son propre territoire», relève Kendal Nezan, président de l'Institut kurde de Paris. L'histoire des Kurdes - au moins 35 millions de personnes écartelées principalement entre quatre pays (Turquie, Iran, Irak, Syrie) - a été le plus souvent tragique. Mais le sort des Kurdes syriens massivement déchus de leur nationalité par le régime baasiste, est assurément l'un des plus poignants.

«Cette population kurde du nord de la Syrie est incontestablement aujourd'hui la plus discriminée de toutes les popu-

lations kurdes», souligne Kendal Nezan. «Ils vivent comme assignés à résidence à perpétuité», insiste un Kurde syrien qui, jusqu'à son installation en France, n'avait jamais eu d'autre document d'identité qu'une feuille avec des tampons certifiant seulement «qu'il ne figure pas sur le registre d'état civil des Arabes syriens». Aux yeux des autorités baasistes, il était considéré comme «un étranger non ressortissant d'un pays étranger». Telle est la terminologie officielle pour définir la situation de ces Kurdes qui représentent entre un quart et un tiers du 1,5 million de Kurdes du pays.

La vie de ces Kurdes du Nord-Est syrien installés là depuis des siècles a basculé en 1962 quand le parti Baas, au pouvoir, décida de réduire drastiquement dans les statistiques le nombre des Kurdes.

Une fauche arbitraire. Les maires et les responsables locaux du parti désignaient aux recenseurs les «bonnes» familles kurdes et celles qui ne l'étaient pas. Plus de 120 000 personnes furent déchues de leur nationalité. «C'est un châtiment éternel et irréversible qui s'étend à tous les descendants», raconte un intellectuel kurde syrien.

Ils ne peuvent pas quitter le pays faute de passeport. Une femme perd sa citoyenneté si elle épouse un «sans-papiers». Ils ne peuvent être soignés dans les hôpitaux qu'en versant des pots-de-vin. Les enfants vont à l'école, obligatoire, mais ne peuvent obtenir de diplômes. Les emplois publics leur sont interdits. Ils ne peuvent posséder en leur nom propre terrains, maisons, troupeaux ou boutiques. Ils s'arrangent grâce aux solidarités

familiales car, dans la même tribu, il peut y avoir des sans-papiers et d'autres qui ont conservé la citoyenneté.

Pour les autres Kurdes syriens, la vie est en revanche plus ou moins normale, du moins comme elle peut l'être sous une dictature. Mais chaque tentative pour revendiquer des droits culturels ou politiques spécifiques est écrasée. Les tensions restent vives. Ainsi, en mars 2004, des incidents après un match de football dans la ville de Qamichli à majorité kurde ont dégénéré en émeute. Une statue d'Hafez al-Assad a été renversée et la répression aurait fait une cinquantaine de morts.

KURDS DON'T NEED A COUNTRY TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL STATE

Hussain Abdul-Hussain

Success stories of state-building in the Middle East have been few. The United Arab Emirates has certainly been one. Qatar, and to an extent Bahrain and Jordan, are now featuring high on good governance indexes. Yet the most impressive of all has been Iraqi Kurdistan.

Less than 25 years ago, Iraqi Kurds suffered one of the Middle East's worst genocides of modern history. In 1986, Iraq's former president Saddam Hussein ordered Operation Al Anfal, killing close to 150,000 Kurds over the course of three years. That number exceeds all the deaths resulting from more than 60 years of conflict between the Arabs and Israel, which has seen at least half a dozen wars.

Al Anfal's commander, Saddam's cousin Ali Hassan al Majid, also known as Chemical Ali after he ordered the gassing of the Kurdish village of Halabja, went after the Kurds again in 1991 to crush their revolt against tyranny and unfavourable living conditions.

One chapter was closed when Chemical Ali was executed less than a week ago. But like the Middle East's Arabs, Iraq's Kurds were not only the victims of external factors. Starting in 1994, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under Jalal Talabani, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) under Massoud Barzani, embarked on a bloody war that lasted until 1998.

Also last week, Mr Barzani – during a speech at the Brookings Institute in Washington – thanked the veteran diplomat Martin Indyk, who was in the audience, for helping to conclude a ceasefire between the two Kurdish parties.

In the aftermath, Iraqi Kurdistan has emerged from civil war to become one of the Middle East's most promising regions. One can only hope that the way Iraqi Kurds did it might inspire the Arabs.

First, the Kurds befriended America. In the Kurdish collective memory, Malla Mustafa Barzani,

Massoud's father, is frequently remembered as saying that Washington, and its ally the Iranian shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, had let him down when his Peshmerga forces were in the middle of a brutal war with Saddam's army in 1975.

But by 1991, the Kurds acted less dogmatically and more realistically as they let bygones be bygones as America stepped in to protect them from Saddam's brutality and help them to set up an autonomous Kurdistan. The alliance between America and Iraqi Kurds has served the interests of both.

And since then, the Kurdish leadership has been smart enough to also understand the limits of its alliance with Washington. By 2003, as the marines made their way into Baghdad, the Kurds understood that America depended on their help, which included abandoning their decade-old policy of detachment from Baghdad.

The Kurds understood that the international status quo would force them to reconnect with Baghdad. Thus, they moved to their second best option: they rejoined Iraq but made sure it would be a federal union that would give their northern region enough cultural, economic and political independence.

Since then, the Kurds have not wasted time in crying foul over surrendering their historic quest for independence. Instead, they founded a new formula: Iraqi Kurdistan would remain part of Iraq as long as Baghdad has democratic rulers. The emergence of a dictator would force the Kurds to go their separate way, fair and square. This position won the Kurds further kudos in the capitals of the world.

More importantly, unlike some Arab leaders and their signature policies of double talk about Israel – promising peace in English and talking war in Arabic – Kurdish leaders have preached to their people that the autonomy or rights they had earned, whether in Iraq or Turkey, were the best they could get.

Meanwhile, the Kurd's quest for an

independent state has all but vanished. This means that Kurds would not be blowing themselves up, and that their leaders would not be insisting on independence in a populist manner like several Arab and Iranian leaders often do regarding Palestine.

"Co-operate with the Turkish government, we have a great opportunity to arrive at a deal in everybody's interests there," Mr Barzani told a Turkish Kurd at his Brookings Institute lecture who was protesting against the ban on Kurdish parties in Turkey. Mr Barzani, who had met the US president Barack Obama and vice president Joe Biden, had no illusions about his powers or how the world operates. Even though he hails from a family of fighters, Mr Barzani was clearly renouncing the mostly counterproductive violence.

This newfound Kurdish wisdom has penetrated all the way into Kurdistan, as Iraqi Kurds held free and fair elections for their regional parliament last year, when a considerable opposition bloc emerged. Mr Barzani himself was re-elected Kurdistan's president with 68 per cent of the vote, a percentage that makes many Arab presidential elections, with poll numbers exceeding 90 per cent, look silly.

Democracy, still not ideal, is now taking root in Iraqi Kurdistan.

And with democracy comes good governance and economic prosperity. For that, the Kurds have been tapping their human capital assets from their diaspora. Again, compare that to most Arab countries where brain drain has become an unstoppable trend.

The Kurdistan state-building experiment in northern Iraq, even if only within the limits of autonomy, is far from perfection. Yet it is one of the most impressive in the Middle East. It should certainly serve as a model for several Arab countries to emulate.

Hussain Abdul-Hussain is a Visiting Fellow with Chatham House, London

"Assessing Iraq's Future": President Barzani's interview with Brookings Institute

The Kurdish Globe

Saban Center for Middle East Policy director Kenneth Pollack interviews Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani in Washington, D.C., during the President's recent visit to the United States.

Q: Welcome to the Brookings Institute. I must ask a question on many Americans' minds, because it has been an issue concerning Iraq that has been in the newspapers. We've all read about the recent moves to attempt to ban about 500 Iraqi politicians because of their association with the Baath Party. It is something that got a great deal of ink here in the United States, and I would like you to explain what is going and how concerned we should be about it.

A: I thank you very much for providing me with this opportunity to be at the Brookings Institute with you. I would like to thank the audience here. I believe there has been a little bit exaggeration with this issue. In Article 7 of the Iraqi Constitution, all those who have committed crimes, promoted principles of the Baath Party, and cooperated with terrorists are not to be given the opportunity to participate in the political process in Iraq. In fact, issues have been mixed and people have been mixed together concerning those who are to be covered by this Article and those who do not deserve to be covered by it. Before departing Iraq, I also had a phone conversation with Mr. al-Maliki. Our view is that those who have not committed crimes against the Iraqi people, those who have not participated in the Anfal operations or other operations against innocent Iraqi people, and those who show commitment to the Iraqi Constitution should be given an opportunity to participate in the political process and the upcoming elections. In fact, it does not include only the Sunni Arabs--there are Shiites and Kurds among them.

Q: Mr. President, thank you for that answer. Let me expand on that, as obviously there are other concerns about the elections. It would be very helpful if you could

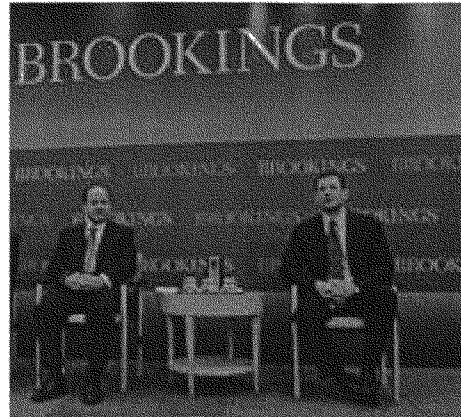
give us a sense of what you are looking for from the election coming up in March. What hopes will they produce, and what do you fear could be the result if things go badly?

A: There is no doubt that the forthcoming election is an important one for the people of Iraq and of Kurdistan Region in particular. We expect the current Iraqi political map to change. The most important is to attempt to have the largest number of Iraqis to take part in it, and also ensure that it is a fair and transparent election. On another hand, we believe coalitions will be made after the elections. We--in the Kurdistan Region--have decided to enter alliances after the election on the basis of commitment to the Constitution; that will be our criteria for entering alliances. I don't expect any list alone can win enough seats to form a government, but it has to ally with other blocs.

Q: Mr. President, obviously the world has been much concerned about the potential of this election to go badly. What are your nightmare scenarios? What keeps you up at night? What is it about the election you most fear? Is there some sort of scenario out there you are most afraid of?

A: The biggest fear is that the closer we get to the election and during the election, there will be attempts by terrorist groups to carry out their actions. The other thing is that we have asked our friends to help us and support us in the election to ensure there will be no forgery or double-voting, which is a main fear. If we have a transparent election, we will accept and respect whatever the election results are. For that, we depend on reliable, neutral, international observers to be part of that process. Technically and logistically, the United Nations and other friends of the Iraqi people have to help us in that process.

Q: Mr. President, you of all people are well aware that your friends beyond Iraq's borders--your neighbors--have often had great interest in Iraq's internal affairs. Are you concerned about the possibility that any of the Iraq's neighbors will try to get involved in the elections?



Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani during an interview at the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C., on January 27. GLOBE PHOTO/Handout: Kurdistan Presidency Office

A: Unfortunately, the interference of neighboring countries continues.

Q: Is there a way that the U.S. or other countries can help to push back on that interference in a way that it would be more effective than we have done so far?

A: In fact, Iraqis can put an end to this interference. I don't believe there is much that the U.S. or friends of Iraq can do. The Iraqi political parties and the Iraqi federal government have to move on in order to prevent interferences. We agree to have friendly and neighborly relations based on mutual respect and interest, and that should be the criteria for a good relationship. Iraqis should not create any opportunity for such interferences in the internal affairs of Iraq. The more they have that opportunity, the more it is difficult for the U.S. to be able to play an effective role in preventing such interferences.

Q: Mr. President, if I could pick up another point you raised that I think is very important, it is your expectation--which I think is shared by many other experts--that it is unlikely that one party in the election is going to secure an outright majority. What this suggests to many observers in Iraq is that we may have a long and difficult process of government formation, and I'd like to pick up on this theme of the American role and ask how you think the United States can be helpful in helping the Iraqis to overcome those obstacles, those hurdles.

A: In fact, there is always a role for the United States to play using its weight, its effectiveness, its influence to help the Iraqi people overcome the difficulties and problems that we face. Once again, I

would like to reiterate that the Iraqi political forces can help the United States so that the United States will be able to help them succeed in the process. If the political forces in Iraq seek a solution, then I think there would be a role for the United States to play to help them.

Q: Why don't we look now beyond the election, because obviously the election is an important milestone but it's only another step in the path; it is not the end of the path. After the election we are going to need to have some very difficult negotiations regarding the real bedrock future of Iraq, and I think it would be helpful for us, Mr. President, if you laid out very clearly going into these negotiations what you believe the wide answers on the issue of greatest importance to you, Kirkuk, the other disputed internal territories, the hydrocarbon law--where you believe that these issues need to come out as we move forward with these negotiations?

A: Of course, the problems are twofold. One side are the problems that are relevant to Iraq and the federal government in Baghdad, and the other one is relevant to the issues between the KRG and the federal government. In fact, issues related to Iraq as a whole are commitment to the Constitution, participation in power-sharing arrangements, governance system in Iraq, the culture of self-imposition, and the culture of unilateral decision and ruling in the country. The other, related to the relation between KRG and Baghdad, includes Article 140 of the Constitution, which is relevant to Kirkuk and other disputed territories. In fact,

Article 140 is not only relevant to Kurdistan Region, Kirkuk, and other disputed areas. There are other areas in Iraq that have been affected by that because of the manipulation of the gerrymandering of the internal boundaries in Iraq as well. But, as far as we are concerned for going down the road to solve the issues of Kirkuk and other disputed territories, until now we do not find any other alternative better than Article 140 of the Constitution, since it is eventually going back to the vote of the people to determine the future. In fact, the most important thing for us is determining the identity of Kirkuk, and we believe that all the historical, geographical, and demographic facts prove that Kirkuk has been part of Kurdistan. Having said that, we have agreed and we have shown flexibility to go back to the vote of the people to determine their own status. The moment this is implemented on the ground, we pledge that we will be ready and willing, and we show flexibility to make sure that there will be genuine power sharing in the administration in Kirkuk. The other point, regarding the issue of oil and gas--according to the Constitution, we agree that oil and gas belong to all the people of Iraq. To that we don't have a problem. The difference is on revenue sharing. Based on a political agreement, we agreed our share to be 17 percent for the Kurdistan Region. We deserve more than that, but this was what was agreed upon until a census can be held. The right thing we think is to allocate the share of the Kurdistan Region in order to go into a separate account relevant to the KRG to be monitored and transparent, but not to be at the control and for us to be at the mercy of Baghdad and then to use it as a political pressure card to influence the region to cut in whenever they like. According to the Constitution, the Peshmarga forces are legal and constitutional forces. We believe that their funding should come from the federal government based on the fact that the Peshmarga are a part of the defense structure and defense system of Iraq. The other issue we have is regarding restructure and rebuilding of the Iraqi army. After 2003, we were hoping for and were working toward rebuilding the new Iraqi army based on a new system with a new culture and education. But right now, if you look out of the total makeup of the Iraqi army, 8% of them are Kurds, 48% are Shiites, and 44% Sunni Arabs. We do not see any

justice in that? It has to be adjusted and a true representation of Iraqi society.

Q: Mr. President, thank you very much for your explanations; they were very helpful. I would like to bring you back if I could to Kirkuk. As you are aware, the United Nations has suggested a variety of different compromise solutions, including some that might put Kirkuk in a special status. It is on its own province or a province that has dual representation in between both the KRG and the central government. What is your reaction to these different proposals? Is that something that you might envision as potential solution to the dispute of Kirkuk at some point?

A: The issue of Kirkuk is a very important and sensitive for us, the Kurds, and also for Iraq. This has been one of the main reasons behind the Kurdish movements and struggles with the successive Iraqi governments in the past. We want this problem to be solved and not have it remain as it is. During the time the Constitution was drafted, that was the main provision for us to continue participating in the political process--for a solution to be found for Kirkuk on the basis of Article 140. Even then we have left the final decision for the people of those areas to determine. Therefore, there is no alternative to this article. This is running away from constitutional text that is very clear. We regard other alternatives as unsuitable solutions that won't solve the problem, but complicate it more.

Q: Mr. President, I'd like to turn your attention a little bit farther abroad now. You have--because of a difficult geographic position--a great deal of experiences, as I mentioned earlier, with some of Iraq's neighbors; and with one of Iraq's neighbors we have particularly problematic relations--the United States, that is. And that is Iran. And today the United States once again is confronting Iran and trying to figure what policy we should adapt. I was wondering if you had any wise advice for us on how to think about Iran, and what you think the United States should be thinking in terms of the new policies toward Iran.

A: This is a difficult question. I don't see myself in a position to be able to give advice to the United States because everybody is watching the situation the same way as we do. But certainly Iran is an important country in the area. Iran

seeks a great role. Then, that depends on the United States, Europe, and the international community whether they would be willing to give that role to Iran to play. Any violence that happens there normally will have an impact on our situation as well. Therefore, we hope to utilize peaceful means and dialogue to reach a solution rather than using violence and force. We in the Kurdistan Region are not in a position to be a part of this struggle.

Q: Mr. President, I started out with very specific questions; I'd like to end my questions with a much wider one. You've led your people for 30 years; you fought for people for even longer. I think it will be very helpful for us to hear straight from your lips your vision for Iraqi Kurdistan. What is it that you would like to see? What role would you like to see it play within Iraq--within the region? Where would like your people to be in five years--in 10 years?

A: Fortunately, we proudly can say that the security situation in Kurdistan Region is very good. That is attributed to the culture and awareness of our people, who have been cooperating with the region's security apparatus. We are working on building institutions in the region. On tragic sufferings our people have had, from now on we will try for them to live in peace and also to compensate them for some of their sufferings. I can admit and say that we have such started. We are still learning, just as a student in the early stages. We have shortcomings, but we have serious desire. So long as Iraq is governed by this Constitution, we will--based on the decision made by the Kurdistan Parliament--remain and move within the boundaries of Iraq. Also, we will work and cooperate with Baghdad and the political forces to build a federal democratic Iraq. And Kurdistan Region can play the role of bridge between Iraq and Turkey and Europe. Kurdistan also could be a business gate for the country until security and stability is accomplished in the rest of Iraq. It can be a gate to welcome companies and investors through the region into the country. This is our desire, and it is what we work for. But there is also the fact, I have stated and I would reiterate--God forbid, if Iraq goes back to dictatorship, we will not be able to live under a dictatorial regime.

Questions from floor:

Q: Turkish "Newsweek" magazine: If the PKK refuses to drop its weapon and Turkey continues its military operations, will you consider cooperating with Turkey?

A: Barzani: Right now there is an opening process in Turkey, and these efforts are to find peaceful solutions. Let's focus on that. So, we strongly support this peaceful process we support the Turkish government's ending this problem. But all of us are convinced that wars or military ways or political pressures will never bring any solutions. God forbid if that is chosen. We will not be part of that solution.

Q: Hussein Abdul Hussein, "Al-ra'y" newspaper: Head of opposition, Nawsherman Mustafa, said he will not join the KDP and PUK list in the upcoming election. Will it affect the Kurdish interest in Baghdad?

A: There is a difference between same stand and same list. In the last election we did not run on one list. Kurdistan Islamic Union had run for the election on a different list. But in Baghdad we had one voice regarding the strategic issues and national interests. Recently, we had a meeting with all political parties in Kurdistan, and we agreed to have one voice regarding the strategic issues and national interests.

Q: "The Nation" magazine: Did you condemn the decision of Saleh Motlaq's disqualification for the upcoming election, or did you support it? Do you see any role by Iran in this case?

A: My answer is that we in Kurdistan don't have the culture of retaliation and revenge. At the same time we don't have sectarian problems in Kurdistan. Just like you, I read in the newspaper that he was disqualified; I have not been consulted regarding this decision. I haven't heard that Motlaq has participated in killing Iraqi people. If he shows a commitment to Iraq's Constitution, I have no objection if he runs in the upcoming elections. Generally speaking, all Iraqi neighbors have an agenda in Iraq. Maybe Iran's agenda is wider. Certainly each of the countries would like to have some to be part of the election process, and some would like to be out of the process.

Q: Brookings Foreign Policy Program: We Americans see Iraq's biggest problem as terrorism. If you could explain two things: number one, where is it

coming from? What are the sources of terrorism? Number two, as the United States army withdraws, do you expect it will erase all the developments?

A: The terrorism phenomenon has become very dangerous in the whole world, and day after day it is growing I believe there are many sources. Certainly it comes from outside Iraq, but to identify it is difficult. In fact the political situation in Iraq must be remedied since it paves the way for Iraq to become stable. Otherwise, it will be difficult to stabilize Iraq through the military; there must be a true national reconciliation. Regarding the withdrawal of the

U.S. army, I want to thank the American people and government for their contribution, and we appreciate the sacrifices they made in freeing the Kurdish and Iraqi people. But we have to expect that one day these forces have to come back. The most important question I asked President Obama was, as the U.S. Army withdraws, will American commitment end in Iraq? He responded that "U.S. engagement will remain in Iraq."

Q: Kani Ghulam: There was a constitutional court in Turkey that banned a Kurdish party there. What is your position regarding that decision, and what is your

advice for the Kurds in Turkey? Ankara always seeks advice from Brussels and Washington in regards to the Kurdish question. Have they approached you regarding that issue?

A: We didn't view the constitutional court's decision as a right decision because we didn't believe that would serve the peace process that is underway; it was against democracy. And also my advice to our Kurdish brothers in Turkey is to have a good and positive response, and be cooperative with the Turkish government so that we do not lose this opportunity--so that we continue pursuing the peaceful process. We have a conti-

nued dialogue with Turkey.

Q: McQuire: In wide and recent efforts by the PUK to reform, particularly since the July regional elections, are there parallel and similar efforts by the KDP to undertake internal reforms?

A: We are heading towards holding the KDP Congress this year. Whatever reform is needed will be conducted there.

The interview is published by Brookings Institute, edited by the Kurdish Globe.

Guardian

31 JANUARY 2010

Turkish Kurd, 15, jailed for eight years over 'terror' crimes at protest rally

- Teenager claimed she was mistaken for a protester
- Turkey is breaching child rights, campaigners warn

Robert Tait in Istanbul

A 15-YEAR-old girl who was arrested at a demonstration in support of a banned Kurdish group has been jailed in Turkey for nearly eight years after being convicted of "terrorist" offences, including allegedly throwing stones at police.

The case comes amid renewed scrutiny of Turkey's human rights record after it was named as the worst violator of the 47 signatory states to the European convention of human rights.

The girl, a Turkish Kurd who has been named only as Berivan, was detained in the south-eastern city of Batman last October at a rally for the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is regarded by Turkey, the US and EU as a terrorist group.

A court in Diyarbakir found her guilty of "crimes on behalf of an illegal organisation" after prosecutors alleged she had hurled stones and shouted slogans. She was also convicted of attending "meetings and demonstrations in opposition to the law" and "spreading propaganda for an illegal organisation" despite claiming in court that she did not know what the word propaganda means.

In her defence, the girl denied throwing stones or being part of the demonstration but said she had only stopped to



Kurds wave flags for the PKK and the Democratic Society Party (DTP) at a rally. Photograph: Mustafa Ozer/AFP/Getty Images

watch it out of curiosity, while on her way to visit an aunt. She was arrested after police mistook her for a demonstrator, she said. She had confessed to the crimes only after being beaten in custody.

In an emotional letter published by the Turkish newspaper, Star, the girl said she had been visiting Batman on a family holiday and pleaded to be released. "I want to get out of here. I want to be with my family. I always cry here. I cannot get used to this," she wrote. "I have been in jail since 9 October. My heart hurts and I miss my family so much."

As she heard her daughter being sentenced, Berivan's mother exclaimed in court: "Did she murder The murderers are not sentenced to such a long prison term."

The initial 13-and-a-half-year sentence was later reduced on appeal to seven years and nine months because of her age.

The conviction highlights Turkey's practice of jailing children for terror-related offences under counter-terror-

ism legislation introduced in 2006. The law allows courts to try juveniles as adults and to jail them for up to 50 years. Recent official figures revealed that there are currently 2,622 minors in Turkish prisons.

Some 737 minors have been charged under the counter-terrorism legislation since its introduction, according to the Diyarbakir Human Rights Association. Out of 267 tried in the city last year, 78 were given extended jail terms. Last November, a prosecutor demanded sentences of 23 years each for six youths, aged 13 and 14, who were charged with throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.

Campaigners say many of those jailed have been wrongly accused and condemn the convictions as a breach Turkey's obligations as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While most of those jailed are boys, an additional building was recently opened at a prison in Diyarbakir to hold girls aged under 18 who are convicted of participating in banned demonstrations.

Last week, Turkey was identified as the worst violator of the European convention on human rights between 1959 and 2009. According to figures released by the European court of human rights, the country accounted for almost 19% of all violations, with 2,295 judgements issued against it. Turkey also had the highest proportion of violations in 2009, making up 347 out of 1,625 negative rulings. The most common violation was the denial of the right to a fair trial. Turkey also had 30 rulings against it following complaints of inhumane or degrading treatment.

• This article was amended on 1 February 2010 to clarify that the jailed teenager is a Turkish Kurd.