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IRAQ: THE IRAQI SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOUR OF THE KURDS ON THE VALIDITY OF ARTICLE 140 OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Iraqi Federal Supreme Court took an extremely important decision on 30 July, ruling on a request submitted to it by Iraqi Parliament on Article 140 of the 2005 Constitution. This article concerns all the territories disputed between the Iraqi federal government and the Kurdistan

Region, which extend from the provinces of Diyalah and Kirkuk in the East to the province of Ninewa (Nineveh) on the Syrian border. It stipulates that the Iraqi executive authority elected in accordance with the 2005 Constitution inherits responsibility for implementing the elements of paragraph 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law

(established by the US Occupation Authorities), which provides that once the situation in these territories has been normalized (i.e. the return of original residents and the departure of those who had been forcibly settled) and a census has been held (to establish the electorate), a referendum must be held there "no later than 31 December

2007" to allow the residents of these territories to express their will, become part of the Kurdistan Region or remain under federal administration.

Since standardization, the census and referendum had in fact never even begun to be executed, the Supreme Court was asked whether the article now remained valid. The Arab and Turkmen parties in Kirkuk maintain that, as the 2007 date has passed, it has lost all validity. The Kurds are of course of the opposite opinion. The Court has just ruled in their favour: the fact that the **Iraqi Administrative Authority has not implemented the provisions of Article 140 before the scheduled date does not release it from its obligation.** Supreme Court spokesman Ayas al-Samuk said that the date specified in the implementation of article 140 of the Constitution had been set "in a manner of regulation" and that exceeding it did not affect either the essence

or the purpose of the article. He urged the parties concerned to implement it: "The Supreme Federal Court has therefore decided that Article 140 remains in force until now and until its requirements are implemented", an implementation that would "achieve the legislative objective sought, in accordance with the measures set out in Article 58 [...] of the Transitional Law (*Kurdistan-24*). It should be noted that last January, the Iraqi Bureau of Statistics announced that a national census should be launched by the end of 2020...

As could be expected, the Arab and Turkmen parties in Kirkuk did not wait much before rejecting the Court's decision, without proposing any alternative solution. Already on the 12th, after KDP and PUK had announced the day before their agreement on Tayib Jabar Amîn as a joint candidate for the post of governor of Kirkuk, Arab and

Turkmen residents gathered in town with Iraqi flags to chant slogans supporting the current interim governor Rakan Said al-Jabouri, a Sunni Arab accused by the Kurds of having restarted Saddam Hussein's Arabization policy. Iraqi security forces had been deployed to protect the PUK office. Some demonstrators had admitted that they had been incited to march by the *Majlis al-Arabi*, a group opposed to Kurdish domination. Some anti-Kurdish banners compared the "separatists" to ISIS, and a demonstrator who had been filmed chanting "We are Ba'athists, we are Saddamis" (*Rudaw*) was targeted the next day by an arrest warrant: the constitution prohibits any eulogy for the former regime (*WKI*). More than ever, opponents of any constitutional solution to the question of disputed territories appear to be defending the pure and simple resumption of Saddam Hussein's Arabization policy.

KURDISTAN: THE REGION IS FINALLY GETTING ITS NEW GOVERNMENT

On 10 July, Iraqi Kurdistan finally established a Regional Government (KRG), almost nine months after the parliamentary elections of 30 September 2018, which gave 45 seats out of 111 to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), 21 to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and 12 to the "Change Movement" (*Goran*). The KDP immediately indicated that it would seek a coalition with the PUK and *Goran*, but while the negotiations with *Goran* were quickly successful, those with the PUK were laborious and punctuated by clashes: this party wanted to include in the agreement the appointment of a PUK governor in Kirkuk, while the KDP considered that

this issue should be addressed after the agreement... On 1st July, the KDP announced that an agreement had been reached with the PUK on the name of a common candidate (which was not specified), which paved the way for the formation of the new cabinet. To allow more time for it, the parliamentary session, which should have ended on 1st July, had been extended until 15 July...

Finally, these three parties indeed share the majority of portfolios: nine for the KDP, party of Prime Minister Masrour Barzani (in addition to the post of President of the Region), six for the PUK, four for *Goran*. One seat goes to the Kurdistan

Democratic Socialist Party (KDSP), as well as one each to the Turkmen and Christian minorities. The Christian minister took his oath on a Bible that barely escaped destruction by ISIS. In the absence of a candidate, the Ministry of Natural Resources (mainly oil) remains temporarily in the hands of the Prime Minister. In addition, the new government counts three women: Ms. Begard Talabani (PUK), Agriculture and Water Resources; Ms. Kwestan Mohammad (*Goran*), Labour and Social Affairs, while Ms. Vala Farid (KDP), outgoing Speaker of Parliament, becomes Minister for Relations with Parliament. She was replaced as Speaker by Ms. Rewaz Fayak (PUK), elected by the MPs on 11

November, assisted by a Turkmen Vice-President, Ms. Mouna Qahwachi.

The new Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

Presidency

Nechirvan Barzani (KDP),
President

Mustafa Said Qadir (*Goran*),
First Vice-President

Jafar Sheikh Mustafa (PUK),
Second Vice President

Parliament

President: Rewaz Fayak (PUK)

Vice-Chairperson: Mouna
Qahwachi (Turkmen)

Cabinet

- Masrour Barzani (KDP),
Prime Minister
- Qubad Talabani (PUK),
Deputy Prime Minister
- Firsat Ahmed Abdulla (KDP),
Minister of Justice
- Reber Ahmed (KDP),
Minister of the Interior
- Saman Barzinji (KDP),
Minister of Health
- Alan Hama Said (KDP),
Minister of Education
- Sasan Awni (KDP), *Minister
of Municipalities and
Tourism*
- Pishtiwan Sadiq (KDP),

Minister of Religious Affairs
(Awqaf)

- Kamal Mohammed Salih
(KDP), *Minister of Electricity*
- Vala Farid (KDP), *Minister of
the Region in charge of rela-
tions with Parliament*
- Safin Dizayî (KDP), *Head of
the International Relations
Department*
- Shoresheh Ismail (PUK),
Minister of Peshmerga
- Aram Mohammed (PUK),
Minister of Higher Education
- Dara Rashid (PUK), *Minister
of Planning*
- Begard Talabani (PUK),
*Minister of Agriculture and
Water Resources*
- Mohammed Said Ali (PUK),
*Minister of Youth and
Culture*
- Khalid Salam Said (PUK),
Minister of the Region
- Awat Sheikh Janab (*Goran*),
*Minister of Economy and
Finance*
- Dana Abdulkarim (*Goran*),
*Minister of Construction and
Housing*
- Kwestan Mohammed
(*Goran*), *Minister of Labour
and Social Affairs*
- Kamal Muslim (*Goran*),
*Minister of Trade and
Industry*
- Abdulla Mahmoud (PSDK),
*Minister of Martyrs and
Anfal Affairs*
- Ano Jawhar (Christian),
*Minister of Communications
and Transport*

- Aydin Maruf (Turkmen),
Minister of the Region

The Erbil Parliament approved by a large majority the list submitted by the Prime Minister, who personally obtained 88 votes in the vote of confidence, while his Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani (PUK), who already held this position in the outgoing Cabinet, obtained 73 votes.

The Prime Minister then addressed the MPs, promising that his government would give priority to improving services and economic and administrative reforms. He also indicated that a delegation would quickly travel to Baghdad to strengthen relations (and probably discuss the issue of oil, an eternal bone of contention with Erbil). He also promised to fight corruption and tackle the serious financial crisis in Kurdistan, with, he said, "14 billion dollars in debt".

The Council of Ministers held its first meeting on the 15th, issuing several decrees, including one ordering ministers to respect the working hours used in their ministries... The next day, a KRG delegation went to Baghdad to discuss the situation in the disputed territories and the issue of oil revenues.

TURKEY: AFTER THE LOSS OF ISTANBUL, M. ERDOĞAN FURTHER INTENSIFIES REPRESSION

On July 11, the official results of the Istanbul election were published, confirming the defeat of the AKP by 806,014 votes. But the government had not even waited until that date to put an end to its "pseudo-opening": on 2 July it had rejected requests to visit Abdullah Öcalan by his

lawyers, then another the following week. But Mr. Erdoğan still has something to worry about, as the economic situation continues to deteriorate: on the 11th, the employment agency *İŞKUR* announced a 8.1% increase in unemployment in June, 69% in one year, while Turkey is flirting with recession...

Then power is locking itself into authoritarianism and represses all sides. After unsuccessfully trying to ban LGBTI parades in June, it has just withdrawn scholarships from students who had participated in them, particularly in Ankara, for "involvement in incidents of terror or anarchy". On the 6th, the Istanbul

police again prevented the gathering of the “Saturday Mothers” by blocking all access to Galatasaray Square (*TIHV*). This month the police also repressed all rallies of the *I Want My Job Back* movement, formed by officials dismissed by emergency decree (*TIHV*). Attempts to commemorate the Suruç attack, which killed 33 people and injured hundreds on 20 July 2015 among HDP youth gathered in support of Kobanê, were also fiercely attacked. Injured MPs Erol Katircioğlu (HDP) and Ali Şeker (CHP) had to be hospitalized; in Ankara, eight members of a group trying to read a statement in Sakarya Square were beaten up and imprisoned; in Urfa, the rally was also banned. While the filling of the Ilisu reservoir is reported to have begun, demonstrations in defence of the Hasankeyf site were also repressed. On the 21st a fire broke out in the city; activists accused the authorities of allowing it to develop, in particular by not sending helicopters.

Several demonstrations of solidarity with Syrian refugees have also been attacked. The position of the authorities towards refugees has changed radically, again for electoral reasons. After having long used them as a means of pressure on the European Union and the “pro-Kurdish” opposition, the authorities are now talking about sending them back to Syria at war: with the deterioration of the economy, the AKP does not want to lose the support of the MHP... On the 23rd, the Interior Minister announced the deportation of 80,000 Syrians before the end of 2019. The day before, the Governor of Istanbul had given until August 20 to refugees registered elsewhere in Turkey to leave the city (*Bianet*). On the 27th in Fatih (Istanbul), a solidarity rally, although legal and sup-

posedly protected by the police, was attacked by ultra-nationalists...

The HDP is still targeted by a campaign of arrests, often initiated by police raids on the homes of its officials. Already on 27 June, Dilan Ablay, a municipal councillor from Urfa, was arrested with his entire family. In Cizre, eight people were arrested while curfews were proclaimed in Dersim and Hakkari (*WKI*). At a checkpoint at Ağrı, Diyadin’s two co-mayors, having tried to protect a municipal driver from police brutality, were themselves attacked. One of them, hit on the head, was hospitalized; the surveillance videos from the town hall were seized illegally. On the 4th, a member of the HDP Youth Assembly in Kadiköy (Istanbul), İkrâm Doğan, testified that he had been taken into the forest by people declaring to be MIT agents, tortured and threatened with death (*TIHV*). On the 5th, nine people were arrested at Şırnak. The next day, Ankara police carried out further raids on two members of the HDP (*WKI*). On the 8th in Diyarbakir, police banned an HDP rally, prevented MP Dersim Dağ from reaching her office, and incarcerated her with two of her colleagues. HDP MP Saliha Aydeniz, who was protesting, was brutalized. On the same day, Mithat Kayan, Dersim (Tunceli) City Councillor, and Hüseyin Can were jailed after raids on their homes. Raids have also targeted the homes of three other HDP officials in Antalya. At Safiye Dalgıç’s house, members of the Special Forces put their guns to several relatives’ heads. Also on the 8th, it was reported that in Dersim, five people, including the father of an activist from the far-left TKP/ML-TİKKO, Özgüç Yalçın, had been charged with “propaganda for an illegal orga-

nization” for attending his funeral in 2015: he had died in a clash with the police. The defendants were sentenced to ten months in prison, but the verdict was suspended. On the 10th, the former mayors of Uludere and Şırnak were imprisoned, along with ten people in Erzurum, including the co-mayor of Karayazı; in Diyarbakir, the head of the local DBP branch was arrested. It was also on the 10th that the trial of the former HDP leader, Selahattin Demirtaş, who has now been in prison for almost three years, was restarted...

Less targeted than the HDP, the Kemalist opposition is not spared. For example, Canan Kaftancıoğlu, head of the Istanbul HPC: accused of “insulting the president” and “propaganda for a terrorist organisation” for her social network messages, she faces 17 years in prison (*Bianet*). At the end of the month, a new wave of arrests began: in Kars, eight people were imprisoned, and in Diyarbakir, police killed one person, described as a “PKK member” and wounded another. In Mardin and Diyarbakir, five political figures were imprisoned, including the co-mayors of the districts of Nusaybin and Bismil. In Izmir, twelve HDP members were jailed for “propaganda for a banned organization” (*WKI*).

Some rare semi-good news: still on the 10th, MP Leyla Güven was finally able to take the oath of office in parliament and take the seat she had conquered in June 2018. Imprisoned for ten months after her election, Güven had launched a hunger strike to protest against the isolation of political prisoners. Her first intervention in parliament was to call for an improvement in the treatment of prisoners who had participated in hunger strikes. On 19 July, the

Gaziantep Regional Court cancelled for procedural reasons the sentences of the former metropolitan co-mayor of Diyarbakir Gültan Kışanak and the former MP and BDP co-president Sebahat Tuncel, who had got respectively 14 and 15 years' imprisonment for "membership in a terrorist organisation". However, the Court rejected their requests for release...

Significantly, on the 15th, Mersin MP Ali Mahir Başarır (CHP) submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister of Finance regarding a Batman woman, Tenzire Çetin. In 2015, she, who did not speak Turkish and could not read or write, indicated that she could not answer the questions of *TurkStat* statisticians. She has just been informed by post she was fined 55,000 Turkish pounds (€9,000). Başarır asked in particular whether there had been other similar cases and whether the *TurkStat* employees involved would be prosecuted... (*Bianet*)

Another campaign of repression that has been going on for months is the one targeting the *Academics for Peace*, accused of "propaganda for a terrorist organization" for having signed in 2015 a petition condemning the violence of the security forces in Kurdistan in Turkey. According to the independent press agency *Bianet* (itself threatened with closure), between December 2017 and the end of June, 636 academics had gone to trial, and all those whose cases had been tried, 200, had been sentenced to prison. Of these 200, 36 verdicts were not suspended, 29 because their sentences were longer than 2 years, and 7 because they themselves refused the suspension. On 1st of July, several hearings were held for these cases. Two teachers from the Cultural University of Istanbul, Umut Azak and Erdem Üngür, and a third from the Işık University,

received one year and three months each, with a suspended verdict (*Bianet*). On 11 November, the Association of University Instructors (ÜNİVDER) called for the release of Füsün Üstel and Tuna Altinel. On the 12th, the day on which new hearings were held, Sibel Bekiroğlu was in turn sentenced to one year and three months in prison, her verdict suspended.

However, on the same day, another Istanbul Court reported that it was waiting for the Constitutional Court's decision to issue a verdict against three other academics. On 18 August, the Constitutional Court, following a request from CHP MPs, deprived the Higher Education Council from the power to launch investigations against academics, arguing that this [undermined] scientific autonomy and [exceeded] inspection powers' (*Bianet*). Füsün Üstel, who has been in prison since May 8, was finally released on July 22 following the Supreme Court of Appeal's decision that "persons convicted of terrorist propaganda cannot be considered members of a terrorist organization" and that they can be transferred to an open prison or released on probation. On 29 May, Tuna Altinel, a researcher in mathematics teaching in Lyon, arrested on 11 May, was released without judicial supervision. His imprisonment had provoked numerous reactions, including those of the Lyon Metropolitan Council (excluding the *Rassemblement national*), the European Mathematical Society, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Council for Higher Education and Research (CNESER), and in Turkey, students of the Franco-Turkish University of Galatasaray, where Altinel had graduated.

On the 30th, the Constitutional

Court ruled that the freedom of expression of ten academics had been violated by their conviction for "terrorist propaganda". Some university leaders, angered by this verdict, such as at the İbrahim Çeçen University in Ağrı or the Aydın, Altınbaş and Medeniyet universities of Istanbul, launched a signature campaign to denounce it, sending their staff for signature a statement openly condemning the Constitutional Court's decision as "scandalous". This is a crime, since according to article 138 of the Constitution, the decisions of the Constitutional Court are binding on everyone, and it also puts pressure on university employees. The text was circulated with 1071 signatures, a nationalist reference to the battle of Mantzikert (Malazgirt) which saw the Seljuqs enter Anatolia following their victory over the Byzantines in 1071... but according to several so-called signatories, their names were written down without them even being informed! All this suggests that, despite the Constitutional Court's verdict, the convicted academics, many of whom have lost their posts, will have to fight over their reintegration and compensation...

Another ongoing trial is the one on 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. Among the 16 accused, the only one still incarcerated now is Civil rights defender and businessman Osman Kavala, who has been in prison for more than 20 months. During the second hearing, on the 18th, the Court decided by a majority that he should remain in detention. As the indictment was drawn up six years after the facts, defence lawyer Evren İşler asked: "If there had really been a crime committed against the government, would the prosecutors have waited six years to act?"... On 31 December, the Council of Judges

and Prosecutors (HSK) changed the Court Board, effectively withdrawing the case from the hands of President Mahmut Başbuğ, who had voted on 18 December for the release of Kavala...

On 11 November, the HDP deputy of Siirt Meral Daniş Beştaş called for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into the increasing number of allegations of torture (*Bianet*). In particular, on the 3rd, the relatives of İrfan Kılıç were informed that he had committed suicide in the F-type prison of Kandıra, but the traces they saw on the body seem to point to a death under torture, and the family intends to request an investigation... (*TIHV*)

As for the friends of the government, even recent ones, no one bothers them: on 1st of July, the final hearing of the "Ergenekon" trial, opened 12 years ago by prosecutors since then accused of Gulenism, was held. 235 out of 239 accused were released (*TIHV*). Even knowing the arbitrariness of the charges, this collective acquittal is just as outrageous as the mass indictments currently underway. In addition, the former head of the *Halkbank* in the United States, Hakan Atilla, convicted in the case of sanctions against Iran, sent back to Turkey after his release, was welcomed on the 24th at Istanbul airport by Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, Mr. Erdoğan's son-in-law...

Nationalist intolerance reached new heights in the country: on the 19th in Trabzon, after the attack in which the Turkish vice-consul in Erbil was killed, nine tourists from Iraqi Kurdistan were almost lynched, simply because they wore scarves in the colours of the Kurdistan Region... They were finally expelled.

In July, Turkey continued its

anti-PKK military operations, including the "Claws" operation in Iraqi Kurdistan. At the end of June, a Turkish strike that had killed four people led to an official condemnation by the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which described it as a "unilateral act of war". On 30 June, Ankara, considering this statement "unacceptable", summoned the Iraqi ambassador, and the Turkish Foreign Minister stated that these operations would "continue resolutely". At the end of the month, *Kurdistan 24* reported an estimate by the commander of the Kurdistan border patrol, Sherko Zangana, that 400 villages had been evacuated by their inhabitants due to the conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK...

On the 4th, the Turkish media reported the death of two Kurdish militants the day before in an air strike in the Zab region, and on the 5th, four others in Xwakurk and three others in Qandil. On the 7th, the PKK confirmed the death on the 5th of a member of the Executive Council of the KCK (Union of Kurdish Communities), Diyar Gharib Mohammed, with two other militants, in a strike near the Qandil Mountains (the *Anatolia* Agency had dated his death earlier, from a strike on 27 June) (*Kurdistan 24*). On the 10th, further strikes were announced in which 15 PKK fighters were reportedly killed. Then on the 12th, the Turkish army launched Operation *Claws-2* in Iraqi Kurdistan to "destroy the PKK caves and shelters" in the Xwakurk region (*AP*). On the 16th, a Turkish soldier was killed by an improvised explosive device in Iraqi Kurdistan (*TIHV*). On the 18th, a Turkish corporal was killed near Xwakurk.

But the most significant attack of

the month occurred on the 17th in Erbil, where the Turkish vice-consul was shot dead with two other people in a restaurant in the Christian district of Ainkawa. This is the first attack of its kind. The perpetrator of the deadly fire, armed with two pistols, immediately fled. The PKK denied any involvement in the attack, but Ankara retaliated the next day with an air operation against Qandil, which according to the Turkish Minister of Defence destroyed several PKK shelters (*AFP*). On the 19th, a suspect was identified by Kurdistan Security: a 27-year-old Kurd from Diyarbakir named Mazlum Dağ, brother of MP HDP Dersim Dağ (a party that denounced the attack). Mazlum Dağ was arrested the next day with a man accused of complicity. The following night, Turkish air force wounded five civilians in the vicinity of Makhmur camp, which hosts Kurds from Turkey who had to flee the country in the early 1990s. The Turkish Ministry of Defence announced the deaths of two PKK members and one Turkish soldier, six of whom were wounded. Air strikes continued from 21 to 25, particularly near Dohuk, killing two PKK militants on the last day. On 27 July, the Turkish Ministry of Defence announced that it had "neutralized" 34 PKK militants in strikes on 17 and 19 July, sixteen on 17 July in Qandil and eighteen on 19 July in Karaçok, claims that could not be verified independently. On the 30th, at least seven other strikes damaged several farms in northern Iraqi Kurdistan, including near Amêdî.

Fighting also took place on the Turkish side of the border, particularly near Siirt: on 3 March, one soldier was killed and another wounded near Eruh; on 9 March, two others were wound-

ed near Pervari in the explosion of a bomb that was detonated as their vehicle passed by. On 7 June, the media gave a belated report on the death on the 22nd of June of three Kurdish fighters in a bombing near Tatvan (Bitlis). Another was killed on the 7th in a strike on Şırnak. On the 9th, a bomb killed two soldiers in Hakkari (*TIHV*). On the 10th, five MLKP and PKK militants were

killed in a clash with the Turkish army in the Munzur Valley (Dersim). On the 14th, three soldiers were killed and one wounded, again in Hakkari, and three Kurdish fighters killed (*AFP*). On the 15th, the PKK broadcast the video of the destruction of an anti-tank system and a radar dome by the PKK in an attack dated on the 5th in Şırnak (*AMN*). On the 16th, the

Ministry of Defence claimed the “neutralisation” of 174 PKK fighters, but the PKK immediately denied any loss (*Rûdaw*). On the 19th, a Turkish major was killed near Çalidüzü (Bitlis). On 29, sixteen villages in Tatvan (Bitlis) were placed under curfew during an anti-PKK operation. An identical measure had been imposed the previous week in the Dersim.

ROJAVA: UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE PERSISTS

On 1st of July, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), after several months of discussions, signed an agreement with the United Nations at the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva to end the drafting of underage fighters. The document, whose signature has been announced on the United Nations website, provides that children under 18 will have to leave combat units and that disciplinary measures will be taken to prevent any future recruitment.

In addition, the territories controlled by the SDF and the Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria are still facing attacks attributed to the dormant cells of ISIS, including numerous crop fires, and the threat of a military invasion of Turkey. Indeed, the latter continues to use threatening language, still relying in Syria onto jihadist groups such as those it uses as auxiliaries in Afrîn.

However, as shown by the various reports recently published by the *Reach* Centre on the humanitarian situation in North-Western and North-Eastern Syria in March, the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration remained safer and experienced far fewer popu-

lation movements than those held by the opposition, the worst situation, with 75 to 100% of displaced people being found in the regions occupied by Turkey, and in particular the Afrin region, controlled by the jihadists supported by this country (http://www.reachresource-centre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_syr_factsheet_hsos_regional_factsheet_nes_march2019.pdf, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/reach_syr_factsheet_hsos_northwest_syria_march2019_0.pdf).

Besides, tensions are also rising around the Idlib region, the latest held by the opposition, which is mainly controlled by the former local branch of Al Qaeda, *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham*, where the regime and its Russian ally continue their offensive. On the 2nd, the American command announced that it had hit *Tahrir al-Sham* there. On the 5th, bombardments killed fourteen civilians, including seven children. Since the end of April, more than 520 civilians have been killed, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). On the 11th, the SOHR estimated that more than 100 fighters from both sides, 57 from the regime and 44 rebels, were killed in a single day. The region

is home to three million civilians, many of whom had found refuge there after the regime took over rebel-held areas such as Eastern Ghouta (*AFP*).

In northeastern Syria, tension also increased between the SDF and regime forces after the *Asayish* (Kurdish security) of Qamishli arrested several regime soldiers. The Syrian army retaliated by arresting four members of the *Asayish*. The SDF also recently arrested a pro-Damascus journalist in Hassakeh province (*AMN*).

In Afrîn, the exactions of pro-Turkish jihadists continued. *Al-Monitor* reported on the 3rd that a Kurdish man, Aslan Brim Sino, was killed in a prison controlled by the *al-Mutasem* Brigade. He had been detained there for ten months after being kidnapped in the village of Baadalni by another faction, *Ahfad al-Rasul*. Already on June 24, the body of another Kurd, Rashid Khalil, had been found near a village, bearing traces of torture. He had been kidnapped with his 11-year-old handicapped son and the kidnappers were demanding a ransom of \$100,000 for each of them (*SOHR*). On the 11th, at least thirteen people, including eight civilians, six adults and two children, were killed in a car bomb

explosion outside a rebel road-block at the entrance to Afrîn, and 25 others were injured. A second explosion hit the city centre. The police attributed these attacks to the YPGs. In Qamishli, a car bomb attack on 11 November that injured about a dozen people near a church was claimed by ISIS, as well as a suicide car attack the following afternoon against the SDF Special Forces HQ in Tayyana (Deir Ezzor). The authorities strongly condemned these three attacks (*AFP*). At the end of the month, thirteen SDF members were wounded by another bomb in a village in Hassakeh.

On the 8th, the three-day “International Forum” on ISIS concluded in Qamishli, during which victims of the jihadist organization were able to testify. The next day, the Middle East Centre of the *London School of Economics* (LSE) published a report documenting ISIS’s attack on the Yezidi village of Kocho. This is the first publication of the *Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project*, which aims to identify all victims of the ISIS attack on Sinjar, following an approach similar to that of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia’s Demography Section (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2019/07/05/counting-mass-atrocity-a-demographic-documentation-of-isiss-attack-on-the-yazidi-village-of-kocho/>).

This project aims at creating a database that will facilitate the identification of victims exhumed from mass graves found in Iraq and Syria and the prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity.

In al-Hol camp, where many jihadist prisoners are held, increased security measures were taken on 3 July after a

woman who had been allowed to leave the camp to shop stabbed a guard before fleeing. A curfew was imposed and any exit from the camp was suspended until the recapture of the prisoner.

The future of the Autonomous Administration remains uncertain, as the Turkish government continues to be threatening. On the 9th, after the German government had rejected the day before an American request to deploy ground troops, Washington announced that the United Kingdom and France had given their agreement, without giving details on the number of troops planned (*WKI*). After the media reports announced that a major military operation was being prepared in Syria on the eastern Euphrates, YPG increased its presence on the Turkish border, while Washington advised Ankara not to launch a unilateral operation: Pentagon spokesman Sean Robertson said on *Kurdistan 24* that Washington would “consider unacceptable” any “unilateral military action in North-Eastern Syria by anyone, especially when American personnel may be present or close”...

On the 14th and 15th, however, the Turkish army, continuing its deployment on its South-Eastern border, launched numerous indirect attacks on SDF-held areas in Syria, rockets targeting Tell Rifaat town and Minagh airbase, recently described by the nationalist media as “natural extensions of the Afrîn operation” (*WKI*). On the evening of 22 December, tension escalated again after a rocket fire from the town of Serê Kaniyê (Ras al-Ayn) in Syrian territory (between Qamishli and Kobanê) wounded five civilians on the Turkish side at Ceylanpınar. The SDF described the incident as “a provocative action by unknown

persons seeking to sow discord and undermine the stability of the region” and announced that it would conduct an investigation. A suspect was arrested the next day. In response, however, the Turkish army launched an attack on several SDF border positions near Serê Kaniyê, reportedly killing five fighters. The Turkish Ministry of Defence announced the destruction of seven YPG sites (*AMN*).

On the same day, discussions took place in Ankara between Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar and US envoy for Syria James Jeffrey on the establishment of a security zone in northern Syria. The next day, Turkish diplomacy chief Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu expressed his dissatisfaction with the American proposals, accusing the United States of trying to buy time: “We are running out of patience”, he said, threatening a military operation again. On 26 September, the authorities in Damascus denounced these Turkish-American talks as “interference” (*AFP*), while the Turkish President reiterated his threats of invasion... The SDF replied that they would resist any Turkish invasion, while demonstrations protesting Turkish threats were held in several cities in Northern Syria (*WKI*).

After its meeting on 30 September, the Turkish National Security Council issued a communiqué no longer mentioning a “security zone” on the Syrian side, but referring to the ongoing work to establish a “peace corridor” on the Turkish-Syrian border... The communiqué specifies: “In view of the increasing threats to our country posed by the lack of authority on the border with Syria, it has been confirmed that the region will be cleaned of any terrorist risk as part of our border security and that our deter-

mined efforts to form a 'peace corridor' will continue. As for the 'peace corridor', it is not yet clear whether it will be supported by Astana's guarantors or whether it will be a line formed by Turkey" (*Bianet*).

With regard to intra-Kurdish relations in Syria, France offered to mediate discussions between the TEV-DEM (Movement for a Democratic Society), to which

the PYD, a party leading the autonomous administration, is affiliated, and the Kurdish National Council (*Encûmena Nîştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê*, ENKS), which includes about ten Kurdish parties, including the Democratic Party of Kurdistan in Syria, founded in 1957 and predominant until 2012. In the past, these two entities had concluded agreements but they had not really been implemented. The

situation may ease as a TEV-DEM official declared on the 9th in *Rûdaw* that he had no problem with Kurdish opposition parties reopening their offices, and that he invited them to participate in the future elections. The French mediation efforts were reported with disapproval on the 10th by the *Anatolia* State Agency, which criticized this country for "supporting the terrorist group PYD/PKK".

ROJAVA: THE FATE OF FOREIGN JIHADISTS AND THEIR FAMILIES DETAINED IN ROJAVA CONTINUES TO RAISE QUESTIONS

Since ISIS's military defeat, a thousand suspected jihadists have been imprisoned and 13,000 of their relatives, including women and children, have been living in Syria in camps for displaced persons under Kurdish control, with living conditions deemed "apocalyptic" by the Red Cross.

On July 2, lawyers for several families of these women and children filed a complaint against person unknown in Paris for arbitrary detention and confinement. They believe that the inaction of the French authorities makes them responsible for the situation of their clients, and hope that their complaints will lead to the case being referred to a judicial judge, a guarantor of fundamental freedoms. Despite several appeals introduced over the past year before the French administrative courts to force the State to repatriate its nationals, the families were unable to win their case, as the French administrative courts, including its highest court, the *Conseil d'État*, declared itself incompetent. Then several human rights associations published a common text calling for the repatriation of French children and the trial in France of French jihadists: the International Federation for

Human Rights, the League for Human Rights, the *Syndicat des avocats de France* (France's Lawyers Union), the *Syndicat de la magistrature* (Judicial Union), several academics and lawyers called on the French authorities to "repatriate as soon as possible and unconditionally all French children currently detained in Iraqi and Syrian territories" and to "adopt a strong diplomatic position aimed, while respecting the sovereignty of the States concerned, at ensuring that French nationals questioned on account of their membership in the Islamic State organisation are brought before the French courts to be tried".

The French Association of Victims of Terrorism made the same appeal: "We wish to recall Article 37 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989. States Parties shall ensure that no child is deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily".

Until now, in a context of strong hostility from the public to repatriation, the French State has stuck to its positions, those of repatriating children only, and "on a case-by-case basis": On 14 June, Prime Minister Édouard Philippe had

already rejected by letter the requests addressed to him by the Human Rights Defender, former Minister Jacques Toubon, and the President of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH), Jean-Marie Delarue. Both had been calling on the State to repatriate or improve the care of the children of French jihadists detained in Syria. Philippe argued that these minors are under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and that France has no "effective control" that would oblige a French Court to apply international conventions...

The transfer of many French prisoners to Iraq, where eleven of them were sentenced to death after trials deemed expeditious, has caused a new scandal. "A European state cannot hand over someone who may risk the death penalty", Raphaël Chenuil-Hazan, director general of *Ensemble contre la peine de mort* (ECPM, "Together against Death Penalty"), recalled in *Le Monde*.

In Syria, several dozen international experts met on the 6th in Amuda, near Qamishli, for a Forum involving 200 participants who came at the request of the authorities of the Autonomous Administration to examine the cre-

ation on the spot of a possible International Court to judge crimes committed by jihadists. The authorities, who call for the creation of this Court, also call on foreign countries to repatriate their nationals... "Ideally, a tribunal should be established in the region where the crimes were committed

so that the population itself can participate in the judicial process", argues one of the participants, Mahmoud Patel, a South African expert in international law. Stephen Rapp, former US War Crimes Ambassador and former prosecutor of the war crimes trial of former Liberian President

Charles Taylor, believes that the most realistic option would be to establish a Kurdish court with "international assistance conditional on respect for international law". Local authorities would be ready to try foreign jihadists in exchange for legal and financial assistance.

IRAQ:

THE NEW KURDISH GOVERNMENT IS STARTING DISCUSSIONS WITH BAGHDAD; TURKISH OPERATIONS ARE CAUSING TENSIONS

The new Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), led by Masrour Barzani, has clearly focused its efforts on establishing constructive relations with the Iraqi government. On July 10, in his address to the Erbil Parliament just after announcing his government, the new Prime Minister indicated that one of his main objectives would be to strengthen relations with Baghdad and resolve outstanding disputes between KRG and the Federal government. As early as the 16th, he led a high-level delegation to Baghdad to discuss the implementation of Article 140 of the Constitution and security cooperation: ISIS has continued to intensify its attacks in disputed territories. While the new President of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, inaugurated his diplomatic action abroad by going to France on the 12th July, where he was warmly received by President Macron, the Prime Minister made his first trip to Baghdad...

On the 22nd, Baghdad and Erbil formed a Joint Committee to try to resolve their disputes over KRG's oil obligations under the 2019 budget (*ISHM*). On the evening of the 25th, a federal delegation including Finance Ministers Fouad Hussein and Petroleum Minister Thamir Ghadhban arrived in Erbil to meet a Commission led by First and Deputy Prime Ministers Masrour

Barzani and Qubad Talabani. The following day, it was announced that several technical working groups would be formed under the aegis of the Joint Committee to seek pragmatic and constitutional solutions to disputes concerning disputed territories, budgetary issues and oil. These groups will start working in Baghdad in early August (*NRT, WKI*). On 31 December, the Finance Committee of the Baghdad Parliament asked to question the Minister of Finance about the payments made to the KRG while the latter has still not complied with its oil delivery obligations (*ISHM*).

On the 23rd, according to the head of Iraqi forensic medicine, Dr Zaid al-Youssef, the exhumations of more than 70 bodies, including those of women and children – from birth to 10 years old – discovered in the desert south of Muthanna province, near Tell al-Sheikhiya (300 km south of Baghdad), began. They are Kurdish victims of Saddam Hussayn's regime, brought from Germiyan and executed during Operation *Anfal* in 1987-88. The doctor indicated that underneath the remains being exhumed there could be "a second, deeper, layer" with additional bodies... About sixty mass graves have already been discovered in this province and it is quite possible that the same number remains. Interrupted over the weekend after a request

from the only survivor of these executions, Teymur Abdullah, the exhumation process resumed on the 29th. But a scandal broke on the 30th when relatives of victims wishing to enter the site to identify family members were prevented by an officer from doing so because of the Kurdish flag draped around their necks. The officer in charge was imprisoned and the governor of the province apologized officially; the Kurdish parties in the Iraqi Parliament condemned a lack of respect for the Kurdish flag, which is officially recognized in the Constitution, and on 31 March, Iraqi President Barham Salih received the families in Baghdad. But an Iraqi parliamentarian from Basra, Oday Awad (*Fatih* coalition), instead supported the offending officer, calling the apology a "shame" in the face of "the lack of respect shown for the Iraqi flag every day in the Kurdistan Region" (*Rûdaw*). On 17 July, the Kurdish Minister of *Anfal* Affairs had called on the federal government to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in order to allow the prosecution of genocide perpetrators...

With regard to the disputed territories, on 4 July, after numerous fires affected Kirkuk province, the recently established Committee of the Erbil Parliament to monitor the situation of the "Kurdish Territories outside the Region"

visited the province for the first time since it came back under Baghdad's control in October 2017. Its members did not enter the city but visited the Qarahanjir sub-district. The Committee is expected to submit its report shortly to the Presidency of the Kurdish Parliament, which will describe how it has noted an increase in violations of the rights of Kurdish residents. Its rapporteur, Mala Nasr, said: "We are trying to work for the return of the Peshmergas through the KRG and Kurdish parliamentarians in Baghdad, in order to put an end to the current situation in Kirkuk". On the 3rd of March, the Deputy Speaker of the Baghdad Parliament, Bashir Hadad, announced the formation of its own Commission on disputed territories, whose work will be monitored by the United Nations. On 6 June, another committee of the Federal Parliament, the Committee on Security, after visiting Kirkuk and the Sunni-majority cities of Kirkuk, Mosul, Diyala, Salahaddin and Anbar provinces, published its report calling for the rapid transfer of security to the Federal police, arguing that the many violations by the security forces, otherwise unable to stop jihadist attacks, have exacerbated tensions. But the Federal police are not without their stains either: Kurdish villagers in Daquq have accused them of illegally burning down five houses. Some MEPs supported the report, but also called for new police units to be formed from the local population, so that control could be returned to the residents.

In addition, ISIS has taken advantage of the "security vacuum" of 40 km separating Iraqi and Peshmerga forces to resume its activities, and this month, attacks and clashes have been literally incessant. In Diyala, a bomb wounded two soldiers on July 1st, a grenade killed a person in a market on July 3, and a new explosion

wounded a civilian on July 7, with two police officers arriving at the scene wounded in an ambush. On the same day, Iraq announced a major anti-ISIS operation called "Will to Victory" in Nineveh (Nineveh), Salahaddin, and Anbar, near the Syrian border (*ISHM*), involving 20,000 fighters from the army and *Hashd al-Shaabi* or tribal militias.

On the 9th, the Iraqi Prime Minister announced an agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Peshmerga in Erbil to jointly provide security for 500 km of the Syrian border. Regarding the security of the disputed territories and in particular Kirkuk, recalling the complexity of the situation, he indicated that his Government was continuing to discuss with the KRG. According to the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Peshmerga, Jabar Yabar, security in cities could be provided by the Federal police, with the Baghdad-Erbil agreement applying outside urban areas....

On the 12th, a few hours after the launch of another anti-ISIS operation in Diyala, four *Hashd* members were killed by a bomb near Sa'diya. On the 16th, jihadists attacked a village south of Kirkuk, killing two residents (*ISHM*). On the 17th, seven residents of Diyala were wounded by a bomb. The International Anti-ISIS Coalition had to resume its bombardments: on the 13th, an air strike killed four jihadists in Nineveh province (*Kurdistan-24*); between the 15th and 17th, three others strikes killed seven jihadists in Salahaddin and eight in Diyala, and on the 19th, a strike on a ISIS camp killed ten jihadists in Nineveh. In Khanaqin (Diyala), a civil society organization protesting against the deteriorating security situation launched a petition calling for the implementation of Article 140 of the Constitution, collecting 3,000 signatures in one day (*Kurdistan-24*).

On the 20th, the second phase of "Will to Win" was launched. The next day, the Iraqi army killed seven jihadists in Nineveh. On the same day, mortar fire and a bomb killed one person and wounded two civilians in a village in Diyala. On 23 March, jihadists attacked a village south of Mosul and killed two residents, and on 25 March, another village in Daquq (Nineveh), killing one person and injuring three civilians. On the 24th, nine members of the same family were killed in Daquq when the Federal police mistook their vehicle for a bomb car. An investigation into the incident has been opened. Many Kurdish villagers in the Daquq region are leaving their homes due to the increasing number of terrorist attacks and the deteriorating security situation. In Sinjar, five jihadists who tried to infiltrate a village on the 24th were intercepted by peshmerga and Haider Shesho's Yezidi *Ezidkhan* fighters, who killed four of them, two others detonating themselves (*Kurdistan-24*). On the 25th, jihadists executed two Yezidis before being chased by the Iraqi military, who killed three of them. On the same day, "friendly fire" between Iraqis caused the death of a police officer and several civilians. On the 26th, about ten mortars shells hit the Kakayi village of Topzawa, south of Kirkuk. Other shootings in nearby villages left one dead and two wounded, all civilians.

On 28 July, the Iraqi Ministry of Interior announced that, in coordination with the KRG, it had foiled a "large-scale terrorist plot" to carry out numerous attacks throughout the country, including Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region, during the month of Ramadan in May and June. 160 jihadists were arrested in Nineveh and 40 others in Baghdad. On the 29th, security forces announced that they had foiled an attack on security forces at the Olas oil field

in the Hamrin Mountains (Salahaddin), 200 km north of Baghdad. Attacks on the same site had already been repelled in May (*Kurdistan-24*). On the same day, a new explosion in Diyala killed two civilians. On the 31st, jihadists attacked a checkpoint in Salahaddin, killing three militiamen and two police officers, and another group attacked Kurdish security in Kifri (Diyala), with at least five people killed and eight injured (*ISHM*). On the same day, a US military delegation visited Erbil to discuss the security situation. The increase in ISIS's activity, American aid, coordination between Erbil and Baghdad, and the need to unify the 240,000 peshmergas of the Region, still mostly under separate chains of command by each of the two main Kurdish parties (*Kurdistan-24*), were discussed.

On the 23rd, the Iraqi Parliament approved an amendment to the Electoral Law setting the date of the next provincial elections as 1st April 2020. This decision does not apply to the Kurdistan Region, which will determine its date independently, but it concerns the province of Kirkuk, which is still *de facto* subject to martial law, with security being entrusted to

the Iraqi security forces... Opposed to this decision, the KDP and the PUK boycotted the session: they want the situation to be normalized before the election is held, fearing that in the current situation the Kurds will be deprived of their electoral rights. Kirkuk has not had a provincial election since 2005. Parliament had first failed on July 10 to amend the law, precisely because of the dissensions over Kirkuk...

Another feature of the month's news was the growing tension due to Turkish military operations. With Ankara's launch last May of a major anti-PKK offensive on the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan, four hundred villages had to be evacuated because of the Turkish strikes, and the number of civilian deaths caused by these strikes is increasing. Local opinion is beginning to question the Turkish military presence. On 2 July, additional peshmergas had to be sent to Dohuk after a group threatened to attack the Turkish military (*ISHM*). On 6 June, the Kurdish Parliament denounced the Turkish air strikes and called on Baghdad to fulfil its constitutional duty to protect Kurdish citizens and borders. Turkey is not alone concerned: on the 10th, the

KRG also called on Iran to stop bombing its border areas after a teenage girl was killed and two of her brothers wounded in Bradost (*Kurdistan-24*).

But relations with Turkey became even more complicated after the 17th, when, in the most serious attack in years on Erbil, the Turkish deputy consul in Kurdistan, Osman Kose, was shot dead in a restaurant in Erbil by a man with two pistols who was able to escape... The PKK denied any involvement, but the KRG accused him of being behind the attack. On 24 September, KRG Security announced the capture of the main suspect in this case, a Kurdish man from Turkey. On the same day, the KRG denounced the attack on seven tourists from Kurdistan by Turkish nationalists in Trabzon, simply because they wore scarves reproducing the Kurdish flag. These events come a few weeks after the announcement of the forthcoming opening of two new border crossing points with Iran and Turkey: in a context of growing economic difficulties for these two countries, the landlocked Kurdistan Region remains more than ever marked by economic interdependence with its neighbours...

IRAN:

INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS, INCREASED REPRESSION INSIDE, THE SITUATION IS WORSENING IN IRAN



sanctions continue to suffocate the Iranian economy. In June, the country exported only 300,000 barrels per day, compared to 2.5 million in April 2018. On 24 July, the Statistical Office announced that prices had increased by 48% compared to last July – the highest rate since 1975. But it is only an average, with a higher increase in fruit and vegetables, with a record

for meat: 95% (*Radio Farda*). More and more Kurds from Iran are choosing to work in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the economic situation is better. Without a long-term visa, they regularly return to Iran for a week and then come back... (*AFP*)

Internationally, after the attacks on foreign ships in the Gulf in June, the situation is beginning to look like a "tanker war": on 4 July, the Iranian tanker *Grace-1*,

accused of transporting oil to the Banyas refinery in violation of European Union sanctions against Syria, was detained in Gibraltar by the British authorities. Iran denied any Syrian destination, and on the 10th, President Rohani warned the United Kingdom about the "consequences" of its action. A few hours later, Iranian boats were trying to board a British tanker in the Strait of Hormuz. They had to give up when the frigate *HMS Montrose*,

who was escorting him, pointed its guns at them... On the 13th, the Foreign Office indicated that *Grace-1* could be allowed to leave Gibraltar if Iran guaranteed that it would not sail to Syria. On 14 July, Iran intercepted a Panamanian tanker, the *Riah*, accused of transporting contraband oil (which Panama confirmed), and on 19 July, a Swedish tanker flying the British flag, the *Stena Impero*, for “non-compliance with the International Maritime Code”...

This deleterious international situation increases internal tensions: worried, the regime intensifies its repression. In Kurdistan, armed clashes with Kurdish opposition parties are on the increase. Already, on June 30 in Choman, on the Iraqi side, fighting had already started between KDPI peshmergas and *Pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guards), who had used heavy artillery (*WKI*). On the 2nd, near Chaldiran (Western Azerbaijan), two *Pasdaran* died in a fight against a “counter-revolutionary group” (*Rûdaw*). According to the semi-official *Fars* agency, two Kurdish fighters were also killed and others wounded; weapons, explosives and means of communication were seized. The Kurdish party involved was not specified (*NRT*). Earlier the same day, Kurdish sources had reported a clash between *pasdaran* and members of the PJAK, the Iranian party of the PKK movement, and other reports spoke of an attack by *pasdaran* against *kolbars* (carriers) between Piranshahr and Choman.

On the 9th, the *Mehr* agency announced that three *Pasdaran* had been killed and one injured in an attack on their vehicle, also in Piranshahr. On the 10th, the KDPI claimed responsibility for the attack and reported that reprisal bombardments at its sites near Choman (Erbil) had killed three

people (*ISHM*). On the same day, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), after the death of a teenage girl near Sidakan (Bradost), called for Iran to stop its bombing. Then further clashes were reported on the Iranian side further south near Javanrud (Jwanro), where two Iranian soldiers were killed (*Kurdistan 24*). Confirming on 12 December that they had struck for three days, including with drones, “terrorist camps and training centres”, the *Pasdaran* recommended that residents “stay away” (*AFP*). These strikes forced the evacuation of five villages and made many fields inaccessible. On the 26th, further fighting broke out near Sarvabad (south-east of Marivan), where one *pasdar* was killed and two others wounded. Kurdish losses were not reported (*WKI*).

In addition to the fighting, the Kurdish provinces of Iran have been affected by numerous arson attacks. Some had already occurred at the end of June, near Sanandaj (on the 29th), and Saqqez where residents were able to control the fire (*WKI*). Another fire started on the 6th in Ravansar (between Kermanshah and Paveh), which according to the Kurdistan Human Rights Association (KMMK) injured three Kurds. In Saqqez, 128 arson attacks were started within one month (*WKI*). These attacks continued until the end of the month, affecting the Qorveh forest region near Sanandaj, as well as the Chardavol district (Ilam).

The regime also continued its deadly ambushes against Kurdish cross-border porters, the *kolbars*. Already, in the last week of June, at least one of them had been killed and two others wounded in Baneh, and one injured in Hawraman. During the first week of July, three others were killed and four wounded: among others, on the 4th, a Piranshahr *kolbar*

wounded earlier this month died of his injuries, and on the 6th, another one was killed near Sardasht. Since early 2019, the regime has killed 43 *kolbars* and wounded 79... On the 13th, a *kolbar* was seriously wounded near Khoy, and on the 15th an ambush against a group near Sardasht killed one and wounded three. The Human rights organization *Hengaw* reported that another was killed near the village of Gawalani (*WKI*). According to *Hengaw*, another *kolbar* was killed and six others wounded on the 20th near Chaldiran (or Siyah Cheshmeh). On the 21st, according to *Hengaw*, the *pasdaran* even penetrated 4 km into Iraq near Haji Omran. Confiscating 440 sheep belonging to nomads, they arrested eleven people, mostly shepherds who came to collect their animals. The men were released after a request by the KRG, but the sheep were not returned (*Kurdistan 24*).

On the 22nd, another *kolbar* was wounded near Nowsud. The KMMK accused the border guards of seizing the transported goods after the attack (*WKI*). Then on the 28th, Iranian border guards captured two fruit and vegetable sellers on the Iraqi side who had come by car to sell their products in Bradost, and then approached the border to look for ice. On the 27th, after another ambush against *kolbars*, the Iranians shot down twenty of their horses and confiscated the loads. According to the KMMK, the regime holds in Sanandaj for 12 million euros of goods confiscated from *kolbars*...

At the same time, arrests and convictions of activists continued. In Kamyaran, *Etelaat* (Intelligence Service) arrested Kurdish activist Sirwan Ibrahimy in late June during a raid on his home, confiscating his mobile phone and laptop, as well as Minat Rahmani, a

Kurdish teacher from the *Nozhen Cultural Association (KMMK)*. In Kermanshah, eleven Kurds were imprisoned, mainly environmental activists. In Sanandaj, a revolutionary court sentenced Kurdish activist Madeh Fatihi, who had already spent 20 months in detention from a previous sentence (*WKI*), to four years' imprisonment. On July 8, Maryam Mohammadi, a women's rights activist and member of the *Nedaye Zanane Iran* association ("Appeal of Iranian Women") was held incommunicado by the security forces. She had already been summoned to the prosecutor's office of Evin prison, along with two other women of the same association, Asrîn Darkaleh and Nergis Khorrami, who were then arrested in Tehran during the Women's Day ceremonies. Other members of *Nedaye Zanane Iran* are on parole... (*HRANA*) In Dehghan, *Ettelaat* arrested a Kurd named Mohammed Karawan for "links with an opposition Kurdish party". In Marivan, *Ettelaat* agents arrested five Kurdish members of an environmental initiative called the "Green Council". *Ettelaat* also arrested ten Kurds for political activism in Mahabad, Saqqez, Oshnavieh (Shno) and Bokan. In Urmia, the Revolutionary Court confirmed the seven-year prison sentence of a Kurd called Mohammed Hanoka for "belonging to a Kurdish opposition party". The KMMK estimates that 210 politically active Kurds have been detained since the beginning of 2019. In Sanandaj, Security Police arrested another Kurdish man, Ramadan Sultanian, on the 12th without formal charges. In Mahabad, *Ettelaat* officers held two brothers incommunicado, without specifying any charges either.

On 16 December, the CHRI (*Center for Human Rights in Iran*) released its report on the violation of children's rights in Iran (<https://iranhumanrights.org/w>

[p-content/uploads/Iran-Child-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf](https://iranhumanrights.org/w/p-content/uploads/Iran-Child-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf)). Among the data recorded are executions of minors (7 to date, and 90 minors are currently on death row in Iran, making Iran the sad record holder), child marriages (the legal age for girls is 13 years with the consent of the father and a judge), child labourers (there are reportedly three million), street children (estimated at 200.000), migrant children... Note that in addition to this particular report, the CHRI reports page (<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2018/10/fact-sheets-and-infographics-on-human-rights-in-iran/>) contains four other reports, one of which concerns human rights in general, and another the deaths of political prisoners in detention...

On the 16th, four Kurds convicted of murder were hanged in Urmia (*Hengaw*). On the same day, the Urmia Revolutionary Court sentenced a Kurdish man from Mako, Mohammed Mirzai, to five years in prison for "endangering national security" and "belonging to a Kurdish party". On the 22nd, the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence announced, according to ISNA, that it had arrested 17 people "spying for the CIA", some of whom risked the death penalty for "spreading corruption on earth" (*mofsed-e fil arz*). On the 29th, political prisoner Mohammad Nazari, detained in Urmia, was denied permission to go to the hospital for tests for his stomach cancer, discovered a month earlier. Nazari, a member of the Turkish-speaking Azeri community, was sentenced to death in 1994 for "belonging to a Kurdish opposition party". His sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in 1999, but he was never granted leave, even to attend the funeral of his father, mother, brother and sister (*Iran HRM*). In Sanandaj at the end of the month, activist Khalil Karimi,

sentenced to one year in prison for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic" after conducting strikes and protests in defence of workers' rights, had his sentence reduced to two months. In Ourmia, the Kurdish singer Peyman Mirzazadeh, sentenced on 20 to two years' imprisonment for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic" after singing Kurdish nationalist songs in a concert, and a hundred lashes (80 for "blasphemy" and 20 for "alcohol consumption"), went on hunger strike on the 29th, the day after he received the lashes, which left his back and legs in a terrible state (*Iran HRM*).

Two other pieces of news concern crimes committed by the regime in the past. On 9 July, the KDPI organised a demonstration in Brussels to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the murder in Vienna of its Secretary General Abdulrahman Ghassemlou in July 1989, which brought together several hundred people. The recently elected MEP Evin Incir, herself of Kurdish origin, indicated on that occasion that she wanted to raise the Kurdish issue in the Brussels Parliament.

Finally, on July 18, HRANA put online its report *Identifying and introducing the mass graves of executed in 1980's massacres in Kazerun* (<https://www.enhrana.org/identifying-and-introducing-the-mass-graves-of-executed-in-1980s-massacres-in-kazerun>). These are the mass executions perpetrated against tens of thousands of political prisoners throughout Iran between 1981 and 1988, whose victims were buried in secret mass graves. The one presented in the report was discovered in Kazerun (Fars), after others, found in Bandar-e Gaz and Ahvaz. The document, based on field research and interviews with witnesses, estimates that there are 40 to 50 victims.

HARASSMENT CHRONICLE: BEING A JOURNALIST IN TURKEY

Since 1908, the announced but ephemeral end of censorship of the Ottoman press, the “Press and Journalists Day” has been celebrated in Turkey on 24 July. But this year, professional organisations issued a press release (<http://bianet.org/english/media/210760-good-news-of-3-months-constitutional-court-rulings-on-press-freedom-violation>) recalling that the country currently has 134 imprisoned journalists, hundreds of whom have had their press cards cancelled, more than 10,000 of whom have lost their jobs, and that, with 95% of the media controlled by the government, Turkey is ranked 157th for press freedom... In such a context, they therefore consider that there is nothing to celebrate... (*Bianet*)

In addition, the authorities launched a new attack on the press and journalists on 6 June, under the cover of the “Turkish Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research” (Turkish acronym SETA). In a 200-page document presented as a “scientific study”, entitled *Extensions of International Media in Turkey (Uluslararası medya kuruluşlarının Türkiye uzantıları)*, the SETA has published a real personal file of journalists working for foreign media. Supposedly “independent, non-profit and non-partisan”, the SETA was founded in 2006 by... İbrahim Kalın, now spokesman for the Turkish Presidency! Last March, the organisation had already published a 666-page report entitled “PKK structures in Europe” (*Avrupa’da PKK yapılanması*) in which various structures were mentioned in a jumble, including solidarity associations with the

Kurds (and the *Kurdish Institute of Paris*). For lack of argument, pictures unrelated to the text were sometimes inserted “in the right place”... The new report lists the professional background and social network messages of journalists working in Turkish programmes of the *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Voice of America*, *Sputnik*, *Euronews* etc. It also mentions *Reporters Without Borders (RSF)* and several critical Turkish newspapers or websites such as *BirGün*, *T24*, *Bianet*, *Evrensel*, *Cumhuriyet* and *Diken*, which he accuses of “making their front page with anti-government information”.

This document caused outrage and concern. On the 8th, the Turkish Journalists’ Union (TGS) filed a complaint for “recording personal data” and “incitement to animosity and hatred”, followed on the 9th by the *Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)*, which also accused the SETA of “incitement to commit crimes” through the public (and illegal) dissemination of journalists’ personal data. The Association’s co-president, jurist Veysel Ok, said that by seeking to associate independent journalists with terrorism, the document puts their lives at risk, and looks more like “a police report rather than a scientific study”. On the same day, the TGS, the Association of Journalists of Turkey (TGC), the Centre PEN Turkey, the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), the Press Union, the Writers’ Union of Turkey (TYS), the Turkish Publishers’ Association (TÜRKYAYBİR), the News Union (HABER-SEN) and the Journalists’ contemporary association (ÇGD) denounced the report in a joint press conference and warned that they

would hold SETA responsible if anything happened to one of their colleagues (*Bianet*).

On the 10th, 21 international organisations in turn issued a joint statement with *Reporters Without Borders*. Noting that the report seeks to intimidate journalists by equating the exercise of their profession with links to terrorist organisations, they warn of the danger of such a “witch hunt” in the current Turkish context of “political tension and polarisation”. On the same day, CHP MP and former journalist Utku Çakırözer added to the outrage by revealing that SETA had been exempted from taxes in 2013 by the Council of Ministers. Noting that the tax exemption normally concerns activities in the “public interest”, Çakırözer ironically asked whether harassing journalists now falls into this category... On the 12th, the German Minister of State for Culture and Media, Monika Grütters, in turn condemned the SETA report, “[firmly rejecting] the accusations of biased information against *Deutsche Welle*”, recalling that “the freedom of expression and of the press are essential preconditions for any democracy”.

Just before these events, on 1st of July, the Free Journalists Initiative (*Özgür Gazeteciler İnisyatifi, ÖGİ*) published its quantitative report on violations of journalists’ rights for January-June 2019: 154 journalists were imprisoned, 34 detained, 11 of whom were subsequently arrested; 29 were investigated and 8 prosecuted... 287 were tried and 41 were sentenced, to a total of 119 years and 3 months’ imprisonment. Finally, 22 journalists were released and 1 media organization was the subject of a

police raid (TIHV). Almost at the same time, the Turkish Association for Freedom of Expression (*İfade Özgürlüğü Derneği, İFÖD*, founded in 2017) released the English version of its own report, *EngelliWeb 2018*, which more broadly concerns the blockages introduced in 2018 against websites, news articles and social media in Turkey: in 2018, the barely credible 54,903 sites were blocked. However, it is only the last addition to the 190,922 domains blocked before 2018. In total, there are 245,825 blocked domains... The İFÖD report also includes some data from *Twitter* sources: in 2018, the firm received from Turkey 1,105 court injunctions, 12,897 requests for withdrawal of posts and 22,998 requests for account deletions... (report in Turkish https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb_2018.pdf, in English https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb_2018_Eng.pdf. If ever the Turkish site was blocked (it might happen after all...), the English version is also downloadable from the United States (<https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/publications/engelliweb-2018-an-assessment-report-on-blocked-websites-news-articles-and-social-media-content-from-turkey/>). On the subject of blocked websites, on 16 July, the website <http://geziyisavunuyorum.org>, which has been informing the public since 20 May about the progress of the Gezi trial, was the victim of a blocking order (*Bianet*).

On 2 February, Tuma Çelik, HDP deputy of Mardin, called for a parliamentary inquiry into the impartiality of the TRT State television: according to a report from İsmet Demirdögen, a member of the RTÜK (Turkish Broadcasting Council), TRT gave 53 hours of broadcasting time to the AKP-MHP tandem before

the last elections, against 14 hours to the CHP, and... nothing to the HDP (*Bianet*).

At the same time, trials and convictions of journalists continued. On 2 February, the director of the *OdaTV* news site, Barış Pehlivan, was sentenced to five months' imprisonment for comments about Fethullah Gülen left by readers following a complaint filed by the latter's lawyers. On 3 July, cameraman Kamil Murat Demir, arrested at his hotel in Çorum where he had come to shoot a reportage, learned at the hearing of the charge against him: "propaganda for an illegal organization". He was released on bail.

Rare good news, on 5 July, the Constitutional Court overturned life sentences for "violation of the constitution" of journalists Ahmet Altan, his brother Mehmet Altan and Nazlı İlicak; but on the other count, support for the Gulenist organisation, accused by the authorities of the July 2016 coup attempt, it refused to release the defendants... (*Bianet*) In addition, it ordered the State to compensate several people convicted, for the "violation of their freedom of speech". Thus three journalists are to receive 95,207 Turkish pounds (about €15,000), and fifteen others should get 7,500 pounds each... But the requests of six former directors and journalists of the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper have been rejected.

On 7 July, the final hearing was held for Aslı Ceren Aslan, former executive director of the newspaper *Özgür Gelecek*, closed by emergency decree in October 2016. Arrested in February 2017, he received six years, ten months and fifteen days in prison for "propaganda for an illegal organization".

On the 9th, the case of Çiğdem

Toker was heard in Ankara. After she published an article in *Cumhuriyet* in October 2017 entitled "If you are looking for austerity check the tenders for the metro", *Şenbay Mining Corporation* requested £ 1.5 million in damages. On the 4th, the final hearing for 19 journalists from the *Dicle* agency, closed by emergency decree, was held at Şırnak. One of the witnesses, Aytaç Yalman, said he signed his statement under torture without reading it. Reporter Ziya Ataman did not present his defence due to the absence of a Kurdish translator at the hearing. The prosecutor requested sentences against nine of the accused, including for "damage to the unity and integrity of the State", "deliberate and premeditated murder of a public official by reason of his duties", "deliberate damage to public property by explosives". The nine accused were kept in detention and the trial was adjourned until 24 September. On the same day, the journalist Işıl Özgentürk received for her article in *Cumhuriyet* last January, "The new generation of veiled women", 18 months' imprisonment for "inciting public hatred and hostility and insulting the public" (TIHV). On the 9th, journalist Ferhat Parlak of the local daily *Silvan Mücadele* (*Silvan's Struggle*), who had been imprisoned for 15 months in Diyarbakir following the accusation made by an anonymous witness of "belonging to an illegal organisation", was released at his first hearing. The witness, Bilal Cesur, who finally appeared through the SEGBIS video system with his face uncovered, said "not knowing Parlak" and not knowing if he had any links with the organization or not... (*Bianet*) What about a charge of false testimony after a statement that threw an innocent man in jail for fifteen months??

On the 11th, Hüseyin Aykol, former "Co-Editor-in-Chief" of the daily *Özgür Gündem*, was jailed. He appealed against his sentence of three years and nine months in prison for participating in the newspaper's support campaign. His appeal having been dismissed, he should be imprisoned in Sincan (Ankara). Aykol is only one of the 38 defendants prosecuted for having agreed in solidarity to symbolically become the newspaper's editor for a day...

On the 16th, the fourth hearing was held for Deniz Yücel, *Die Welt's* former Turkish correspondent, accused of "propaganda for a terrorist organisation" for publishing an interview with Cemil Bayik, one of the PKK's founders, in 2015. Despite the Constitutional Court's ruling that his arrest violated his rights, Yücel was not acquitted. As the Court had not yet received the statement of the accused, who had returned to Germany after one year's preventive imprisonment, the Court adjourned the hearing to 17 October pending

its receipt. The Turkish President had personally described the journalist as a terrorist... (*Bianet*)

On the 18th, the two documentary filmmakers Ertuğrul Mavioglu and Çayan Demirel were sentenced to four years and six months in prison in Batman for "propaganda for a terrorist organisation" following their documentary *Bakur* ("North") on the PKK. The director of the *Committee to protect journalists* in New York, Carlos Martinez de la Serna, said these heavy sentences were "only the latest example of the use of the Turkish anti-terrorist law to crush freedom of expression", calling on the Turkish authorities to "drop the charges and stop the confusion between media coverage of terrorism and terrorism itself".

In a rare good news, on the 17th, Erol Önderoğlu, representative of *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) in Turkey, accused of "terrorist propaganda" for participating in the solidarity campaign with *Özgür Gündem*, was finally

acquitted after a long trial. He was facing more than 14 years in prison. Writer-journalist Ahmet Nesin and the President of the *Human Rights Foundation*, Sebnem Korur Fincanci, who were tried in the same trial, were also acquitted. RSF said it was relieved, while denouncing "three years of absurd procedures". But Önderoğlu, currently abroad, has not finished with Turkish justice: prosecuted, again for "terrorist propaganda", this time for having supported the "Academics for Peace", he will be tried on 7 November (*AFP, Bianet*).

Being cleared of a charge does not mean the end of the trouble: on the 24th, Ahmet Nesin, who was acquitted on the 17th in the *Özgür Gündem* case, faced with the administration's refusal to return his confiscated passport or to issue a new one, ended up filing a request to renounce Turkish nationality. According to his lawyer, 22 people are in the same case, some of whom have never been prosecuted.

TURKEY:

TURKEY'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE

Turkey's international relations continue to deteriorate. With the United States, President Erdoğan still refuses to give in on the purchase of the Russian S-400 defence system, having even declared after the G-20 that the American President supported it! On the 12th, the Turkish Defence Minister announced the receipt of the first elements of the system, which was broadcast on television. While American diplomats were visiting Ankara, Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu indicated on the 22nd that Turkey would not hesitate to retaliate if the United States maintains its decision to exclude Turkey from

the *F-35* stealth aircraft project. If Turkey does not receive the 100 aircraft ordered, he said, it will "turn to other sources" until it is able to "produce its own aircraft".

The situation is no better with the European Union. On 3 July, the EU delegation to the Council of Europe published on its website a statement on Human rights in Turkey expressing its concern about the situation, in particular for the Gezi demonstration trial (https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/council-europe_en/64979/EUDEL%20Statement%20on%20human%20rights%20in%20Turkey), full report in *PDF* format:

https://eeas.europa.eu/print-pdf/64979_en). In particular, it states: "The EU regrets that the fact that it has received legitimate foreign funding for civil society has been used as an incriminating factor in this case". The EU also warns that "concrete and sustainable improvements in the field of human rights and the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, including respect for the principle of the presumption of innocence and due process of law, remain essential for the development of EU-Turkey relations".

On 9 July, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Turkey had violated Selahattin

Demirtaş's freedom of expression by criminally condemning it for expressing its views in a television programme in 2010. The ECHR considers that the statements of Demirtaş "cannot be regarded as containing a call for the use of violence, armed resistance or uprising, nor as constituting hate speech". Speaking at the time as president of the Diyarbakir Human Rights Association, Demirtaş had called for consideration of the possible role of the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in seeking a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question in the country. However, one can only be shocked by the ridiculously low sentence handed down by the ECHR against Turkey: € 2,500 for moral damage at Demirtaş and € 1,000 for legal costs (*AFP*). This is nothing to deter the Turkish gov-

ernment from continuing the persecution of its opponents.

On the 15th, the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting decided to impose sanctions on Turkey following its drilling activities in Cypriot territorial waters (those of the Turkish Republic of Cyprus, recognised only by Turkey). At Turkey's request, the EU delayed the announcement of this decision by several hours to avoid a collision with the commemoration of the July 2016 coup attempt. On the 24th, in accordance with these sanctions, the European Investment Bank (EIB), Turkey's main foreign creditor, decided to suspend loans to the Turkish government. These sanctions remain symbolic, and Ankara soon made a mockery of them.

Concerned by the repression of Human rights defenders in Turkey, three NGOs have created the website *Keep the Volume up for Rights Defenders in Turkey*. This website, whose address is <https://www.ses-sizkalma.org/en/>, contains under the item "News" up-to-date information on ongoing trials. It should be recalled that an organization like İHD, founded in July 1987, has seen 15 of its directors and members murdered in 33 years. The first, Vedat Aydın was murdered in 1991 while he was provincial president of the HEP at Diyarbakır, and the last, Tahir Elçi, president of Diyarbakır, was shot dead in the street in 2015... His murderers are still at large.

L'élection d'Istanbul une gifle avant le KO final

« Si le monde était une nation, Istanbul en serait la capitale » ! Quand Napoléon Bonaparte a prononcé cette phrase l'ancienne capitale de l'Empire byzantin, Constantinople, comptait encore sous l'Empire ottoman de larges communautés grecque, arménienne et juive.

Istanbul a depuis certes changé de visage mais joue encore un rôle pivot dans la vie politique et économique de la Turquie. Le scrutin municipal du 23 juin opposant les forces laïques au Parti Islamiste AKP du président Erdogan dont le candidat a subi un échec cuisant avait valeur de test national.

Le combat électoral d'Istanbul était devenu synonyme du dernier carré de résistance et d'espoir d'une coalition hétéroclite de forces laïques et des minorités que compte le pays.

Istanbul, la mégapole aux sept collines qui compte 15 millions d'habitants et représente 30% de l'économie du pays est aussi « New York la Juive » des Kurdes. Nous pouvons pousser l'analogie plus loin et dire qu'Istanbul est la plus grande ville « kurde » dans le monde avec ses trois millions d'habitants issus des villes kurdes du Kurdistan turc. Sur les 18 millions Kurdes de Turquie ils sont plus de 5 millions, fuyant la répression et le sous-développement de leur région, qui ont élu domicile dans les grandes métropoles turques comme Ankara, Izmir, Antalya et Istanbul.

L'électorat kurde stambouliote est politisé et discipliné : issu pour la plupart de la grande vague de la politique de la terre brûlée au Kurdistan dans les années 1990 pratiquée par le régime dominé par les militaires à l'époque.

Plus de 4000 villages kurdes avaient été détruits, leurs populations poussées vers l'exile. Un problème déplacé vers les grandes métropoles avec des électeurs kurdes qui expriment leur colère via les urnes aujourd'hui.

Le candidat du pouvoir, l'ancien Premier ministre Benali Yildirim, savait qu'il allait perdre sans les voix kurdes. Celui de l'opposition, Ekrem Imamoglu, ne pouvait pas gagner sans celles-ci. Le gouvernement d'AKP du président Erdogan, qui a exercé

toutes sortes de pressions pour faire annuler le scrutin du mois de mars dernier qui ne lui a pas été favorable, a autorisé les avocats du dirigeant kurde en prison, A. Ocalan chef du PKK, de lui rendre visite après huit années d'interdiction de toutes visites.

Une opération de séduction envers l'électorat kurde. Lors de la dernière élection annulée, les Kurdes ont fait pencher le résultat en faveur du candidat de l'opposition en appelant à voter pour lui contre le candidat du parti islamiste et sans présenter leur propre candidat. Le candidat de l'opposition laïque avait devancé son adversaire islamiste de 13 000 voix.

Une démocratie qui ne sait pas perdre une élection n'en est pas une. C'est ce qui fait la Turquie d'Erdogan en annulant l'élection d'Istanbul. Cela nous rappelle le scénario de 2015 quand l'AKP a fait annuler les élections législatives pour avoir une majorité qui lui soit favorable.

Certes la Turquie dispose de la seconde armée la plus importante au sein de l'OTAN mais sa réponse militaire à la question kurde est de toute évidence un échec, avec un coût économique colossal et une société déchirée ; question qui est devenue son talon d'Achille.

Cela aurait pourtant pu être son point fort, mais la diversité n'est pas le point fort des régimes autoritaires. L'histoire de la Turquie moderne a été écrite en lettres rouges. Une histoire ponctuée par le génocide arménien, l'expulsion des Grecs et la question kurde, un pays qui se questionne sur sa modernité depuis sa genèse, sans avoir jamais pu faire une lecture synthétique et plurielle de cette histoire. Le nationalisme est génétiquement et intrinsèquement aveugle. Partout. La Turquie née sur les décombres de l'Empire ottoman à la sortie de la Première Guerre mondiale n'est pas une exception.

Avec l'arrivée d'AKP au pouvoir, après un règne sans partage des militaires pendant presque quatre-vingts ans, accompagnée d'une croissance économique et une relative ouverture sur la question kurde, nous avons été nombreux à croire en la naissance d'un Islam-démocrate, à l'instar de la Démocratie chrétienne en Occident. Malheureusement la

Turquie d'Erdogan est devenue le premier soutien et parrain du mouvement des Frères musulmans dans le monde arabo-musulman.

Cette organisation-parapluie dont sont issus des mouvements jihadistes en Egypte, au Soudan en passant par Hamas à Gaza. D'autres ont rejoint le Jihadisme international comme Jabhat al Nusra, affilié à l'Al-Qaïda, en Syrie, ou encore se sont mutés et rejoint Daech. La Turquie est devenue à partir de 2014 avec l'irruption de Daech en Irak et en Syrie, comme l'Iran à partir de 1979 pour l'islam chiite, une exportatrice d'islam sunnite politique hégémonique et envahisseur.

L'islam politique, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, est un outil d'expansion, un pion de domination, une instrumentalisation cynique de la masse des déshérités pour contrer la présence occidentale dans le Moyen-Orient et, par extension, il est anti-israélien. D'où la surenchère anti-israélienne des deux puissances islamistes, pourtant intrinsèquement rivales.

Le président turc, ancien maire d'Istanbul avant de devenir Premier ministre et président, sait mieux qui quiconque que celui qui contrôle la mairie d'Istanbul pourrait par la suite avoir des ambitions au niveau national. R. T. Erdogan qui aime se faire appeler « Rais » mise maintenant à mis toute sa crédibilité dans cette élection.

Mais le parti pro-kurde, le Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), devenu bête noire du parti islamiste dont son ancien dirigeant, S. Demirtas, et de dizaines de ses députés, cadres et anciens maires des villes kurdes démis de leurs postes et sont en prison, a su mobiliser l'électorat kurde en faveur du candidat de l'opposition.

Cette élection avait un double enjeu : le bras de fer engagé entre les forces laïques contre le parti islamiste d'une part et le parti pro-kurde, devenu aussi parti refuge des autres minorités religieuses et ethniques, contre ce même adversaire en prenant sa revanche et jouant le système, d'autre part. Une lueur d'espoir d'un Moyen-Orient fracturé qui a remporté une manche dans un combat de longue haleine.

SDF signs agreement with UN to rid its ranks of child soldiers

Kurdish units have long been listed in UN reports



A child carrying covers on his back walks past members of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces after leaving the last ISIS enclave of Baghouz. AFP



Arthur MacMillan

The US-backed but Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, named in UN reports on recruitment and use of child soldiers, has signed an agreement to end such practices and will rid its ranks of minors.

A statement released on Monday said SDF commander Gen Mazloum Abdi signed an action plan after a meeting in Geneva two days earlier with Virginia Gamba, the UN Secretary General's special representative for children and armed conflict.

The SDF effectively controls the People's Protection Units, or YPG, a mainly Kurdish militia that fought ISIS with American support.

The YPG has since 2014 been listed in the Secretary General's annual report on children and armed conflict.

The UN said the action plan represented a written undertaking from the SDF with concrete steps, in line with international law, to improve the protection of those under the age of 18. No timeline was disclosed.

"Through this action plan the SDF commits to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, to identify and separate boys and girls currently within its ranks, and to put in place preventive, protection and disciplinary measures related to child recruitment and use," the UN statement said.

Other groups listed in the Secretary General's report include the Syrian government, pro-government militias, and its rebel opponents Ahrar Al Sham,



the Free Syrian Army, ISIS, Jaish Al Islam and the Al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat Al Nusra.

Ms Gamba said the action plan was the culmination of months of talks between the UN and the SDF.

She said it was "the beginning of a process as it demonstrates a significant commitment by the SDF to ensure that no child is recruited and used by any entity operating under its umbrella".

"Action plans represent an opportunity for parties to change their attitude and behaviour so that grave violations against children stop," Ms Gamba said.

The six violations against children are: the recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming; rape and other forms of sexual violence; abduction; attacks on schools and hospitals; and the denial of humanitarian access.



Turkey continues bombing Iraqi Kurdistan amid Iraq's strong objection

Turkish fighter jets bombard Qandil Mountains inside Iraqi Kurdistan, leaving dozens of civilians killed and wounded.

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraqi Kurdistan — The Turkish air force bombed areas around the city of Sulaimaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan on June 29, killing four and injuring four others. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry condemned the incident, demanding that Turkey stop bombing Iraqi territory.

In another incident, Turkish fighter jets on late June 27 targeted two civilian cars on Kurtak road at the foot of the Qandil Mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan, killing three persons from one family and wounding five civilians from another family, including children. Ankara's reasoning for the strikes is to target the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the area.

The PKK, a Kurdish guerrilla force struggling for autonomy in Turkey, was formed in the late 1970s by Abdullah Ocalan, who is now imprisoned. The PKK launched an armed war against the Turkish army in 1984 that continues today. The PKK is described by Turkey, the United States and the EU as a "terrorist" organization.

The Qandil Mountains, a rough mountainous triangle area of northern Iraq stretching to the borders of neighboring Iran, is the stronghold of PKK fighters. Ankara, which accuses the PKK of launching assaults from the Kurdistan Region, has been targeting the region for decades; consequently, thousands of Kurdish villagers have been killed, injured and forced to evacuate their farms and orchards.

Bakr Baiz, the mayor of the town of Qaladze, 136 kilometers (85 miles) northwest of Sulaimaniyah, told Al-Monitor, "The Turkish fighter jets bombarded two civilian cars on Kurtak road, which connects Choman, Soran and Raniya districts; consequently three members of one family — a father a daughter and a son — were killed inside a minibus. Five other civilians from another family were injured inside the second car."

"This is the third time in recent years that Turkish jets have massacred entire members of a family, as they are either targeting cars or civilian houses," the mayor added.

He emphasized that the PKK fighters neither have activities in the area targeted by Turkish jets — as the area has no shared border with Turkey — nor any direct clashes with the Turkish army.

He said those killed were Abulla Ali Mina, 53, his daughter Kurdistan Abdullah, 30, and his son Haryad Abdullah, 21.

Sabah Ali Qaraman, an independent Kurdish journalist, posted a video on Facebook showing two civilian vehicles burning following the airstrike.

A Turkish airstrike June 26 in the Bradost area, 70 kilometers (43 miles) northeast of the Kurdistan capital, Erbil, killed one civilian and wounded another, in-

creasing the death toll to four civilians in that area in one week, locals told Rudaw.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said in a statement Saturday that the incident happened because of "PKK fighters' deliberate presence within the villages," thus "jeopardizing civilians' lives." The statement stressed that Erbil is not accepting the use of "its territory as a launch pad for attacks against neighboring countries," and asked Turkey not to target civilians.

However, Balambo Muhammed, a Kurdish lawmaker from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in the Kurdistan parliament and a member of the permanent committee on internal security, said such Turkish attacks on civilians cannot be accepted for any reason.

He told Al-Monitor that his party and others are trying to get the Kurdistan parliament and the KRG to tell Turkey to "cease its savage and inhumane deeds against civilians and seek a peaceful solution to the issue."

He said that Iraq under the ousted Baath regime and Turkey had an agreement to use each other's territories to safeguard their borders, and that the KRG should have ended that agreement after the 1991 Gulf War. He said that if the KRG "cannot terminate the agreement, it is the duty of the Iraqi federal government to review previous agreements with Ankara."

When he was still Turkish prime minister last year, Binali Yildirim said his country had set up 11 regional bases in the Kurdistan Region. Last week, Al-Monitor columnist Metin Gurcan, citing security sources, wrote that Ankara "is planning to maintain a permanent presence in northern Iraq in the aftermath of the ongoing land and air operations."

Meanwhile, Kawa Muhamad, a member of the Iraqi parliament from the Kurdish Gorran (Change) Movement, raised a petition June 29 with the signatures of 55 Iraqi lawmakers, calling on the presidency of the parliament to discuss the issue of Turkey's violation of Iraq's sovereignty, Turkey's military presence in the Kurdistan region and Turkey's targeting of innocent civilians. Lawmakers asked that Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, the country's interior minister and other important officials be invited to the parliament to "know the reality of the decades-long issue and finding a serious and permanent solution for it."

Nasr Harki, a member of the Iraqi parliament from the Kurdistan Democratic Party and a member of the defense and security committee, told Al-Monitor, "We, as the defense and security committee, are against the violation of Iraq's sovereignty by any country." However, he said the committee has taken no formal action on the matter.



Sarp Ozer/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images
Turkish Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar monitors air operations taking place toward Iraq's Qandil, Sinjar, Hakurk and Avasin-Bayyan regions at Combined Air Operations Center, Eskisehir, Turkey, June 12, 2018.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry, in a June 29 statement, spoke of the four civilians killed and four others wounded as the result of airstrikes by two Turkish fighter jets that day. "While we are keen to establish long-term strategic relations and to prevent acts emanating from Iraqi territory against the security of neighboring Turkey, we believe that unilateral acts of war violate Iraqi sovereignty and contradict the principles of good neighborliness that govern the relations between two countries and pose a serious violation of international humanitarian law," the statement read.

The ministry said that no matter Ankara's justifications, Turkey should stop its bombardment of Iraqi areas, respect Iraq's sovereignty and undergo joint cooperation to protect the border security of both countries.

Repeated civilian casualties as a result of Turkish airstrikes, artillery and cross-border operations, coupled with Baghdad and Erbil's incapability to stop the violations, has led to the establishment of a new force from the Qandil Mountains under the name Self-Defense Forces in the Kurdistan Region. The new force said it will target Turkish army bases inside the Kurdistan Region, thus fueling further instability for a region whose government still does not have a Cabinet, even though a president and prime minister were recently elected.

Several Kurdish political parties denounced what was termed the Kurtak massacre. Social media users across the Kurdistan Region posted photos of the victims, stirring a massive resentment toward the Turkish military presence in the region, and raising fears that Ankara under Erdogan's presidency plans to revive the Ottoman Empire's Mosul Vilayet and annex the Kurdistan region to Turkey.

Dana Taib Menmy is a Kurdish journalist from Sulaimaniyah who has been published by several Kurdish media outlets since 2006.

Peshmerga reinforcements sent to Amedi after video threatens Turkish ‘invaders’

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Peshmerga reinforcements have been deployed to Amedi, Duhok province in recent days after a video was published by a group calling themselves the Southern Kurdistan Defense Forces threatened to attack Turkish troops in the Kurdistan Region, a senior official in Duhok told Rudaw.

In a statement read in the video, published on June 27 by the PKK-affiliated media agency ANF News, the masked men say the “invaders in Southern Kurdistan will be our primary target.”

“The Neo-Ottomans have been threatening to invade all of Kurdistan, especially the Bradost, Kirkuk and Behdinan areas,” the filmed statement said in reference to Turkish operations in the Region.

A Zeravani Peshmerga unit reinforcement was sent to Amedi, a town in Duhok province historically vulnerable to Turkish military action, as a means of stabilising the area, said the official, who did not want to be named.

While Turkish military incursion in the Region are not a new occurrence, they have been stepped up in recent

weeks with the launch of Operation Claw, a large-scale operation aimed at disrupting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)'s logistical networks and isolating its Kurdistan Region headquarters in Qandil.

However, Idrees Harki, head of Duhok Provincial Council's security committee, believes the group in the video does not pose any real threat. “I believe the group is using media to stoke fear in Turkish troops, but they will not attack the Turkish troops on the ground,” he told Rudaw.

Duhok province is currently home to five Turkish military bases, established back in the mid-1990s when clashes erupted between Peshmerga forces and PKK fighters, with Turkey deploying more than 500 Turkish soldiers to Amedi.

“The group [...] will not conduct any attacks on the Turkish military bases. Their main aim is to destabilize the area; however they are not able to do that,” Harki told Rudaw.

The statement also made claims of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) collusion in the Turkish offensive,

saying that “certain Southern Kurdistan forces are acting as partners to this invasion.”

“The PKK-affiliated group are publishing this kind of video to put pressure on the Kurdistan Regional Government,” Harki said.

The KRG's response to Operation Claw has placed sole blame for Turkish airstrikes on the PKK for “endangering the lives of villagers” living close to the epicenter of clashes at the Turkey-Iraq-Iran border, telling the PKK to “stay away” from civilian-inhabited areas.

Zeravani Peshmerga reinforcements have arrived in an area blighted by civilian fear, with 198 of 348 Amedi villages evacuated by locals in the past two decades, and successive waves of crossfire civilian casualties, with five people in the Region killed by Turkish airstrikes in the last week alone.

The PKK has been fighting for greater Kurdish political and cultural rights in Turkey for over four decades, much of which has been in the form of armed insurgency. A short-lived peace process began in 2013 before breaking down on July 20, 2015.



July 07-2019

PKK confirms death of senior leader killed during Turkish airstrike in Kurdistan

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on Sunday confirmed the death of a senior leader Diyar Gharib Mohammed along with two other fighters following the bombardment by Turkish warplanes in the Kurdistan Region's Qandil Mountains.

Mohammed was a member of the Executive Council of the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), the greater political organization to which the PKK belongs.

The PKK has been engaged in a decades-long insurgency against Turkey over Kurdish rights and self-rule since the early 1980s in a conflict that has resulted in the death of over 40,000 people on both sides. Turkey, the EU, and the US have designated it a “terrorist organization.”

Shortly after Turkish-state media reported Mohammed's death in the mountainous Qandil region of the autonomous Kurdistan Region, where the PKK is headquartered, the armed group confirmed the killing as well.

Though the Anadolu Agency reported that the three were killed during an operation conducted on June 27, the PKK claimed in a statement that it happened later, on July 5.

Mohammed joined the PKK in 1992 and was one of the

seven members of the KCK's Executive Council when he died. His death is believed to mark the first senior PKK leader killed in Qandil in recent memory.

In August 2018, senior PKK commander Ismail Ozden, also known as Mam Zeki Shingali, was killed by a Turkish airstrike in northern Iraq's district of Sinjar (Shingal).

Over the past few years, Turkey has carried out military operations against PKK fighters based within the Kurdistan Region with continued regularity. Turkish forces have crossed into the region up to 30 kilometers deep in some areas to target the group.

Such attacks have led to the evacuation of many villagers from the Kurdistan Region as Ankara's warplanes continue to damage residential and agricultural lands, and, on occasion, kill civilian bystanders about whom there are no claims of PKK affiliation. Aggrieved locals have long urged both sides to take their conflict elsewhere.

During a session on Saturday, the Kurdistan Region's parliament denounced a recent wave of Turkish airstrikes that have killed five civilians and wounded six others.

“We condemn the attacks and airstrikes, as according to the Iraqi constitution, the federal govern-



KCK Executive Council member Diyar Gharib Mohammed, whose death was reported by Turkish media and later confirmed by the PKK. (Photo: Archive)

ment in Baghdad has a duty to protect the people and the Kurdish borders,” said Acting Speaker Dr. Vala Fareed in a statement released after lawmakers gathered to discuss new legislation.

She added, “We are asking the central government of Iraq to uphold its responsibilities by protecting the borders and to compensate the damage caused by the attacks.”

After Baghdad condemned the same attacks Turkey defiantly said it would “firmly” continue its airstrikes in Iraq, with its own Foreign Ministry summoning Iraq's charges d'affaires in Ankara.

Now is the moment for peace between Kurds and the Turkish state. Let's not waste it.



Cemil Bayik is one of the five founders of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

We are at a critical moment in the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish people. We have an opportunity to move a long-standing dispute toward a lasting solution. If we squander this opportunity, it might not come again for a generation.

Since the founding of the Turkish republic in 1923, Kurds have struggled to achieve full recognition as citizens. They have faced myriad forms of discrimination and oppression. After trying fruitlessly for more than five decades to make progress within the political system, we were left with no choice but to resort to armed resistance. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), born in 1978, launched a guerrilla war in 1984. While the Turkish state tried to use nationalism and political Islam to quash our struggle, our party demanded freedom for ethnicities and all faiths from the beginning.

In 1999, Turkish operatives captured PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in Kenya, in an operation supported by the United States. He was sentenced to life in prison on the island of Imrali, where he has been the sole inmate for nearly 20 years.

Ocalan's capture and imprisonment coincided with the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan and his party won early public support by emphasizing democracy, human rights and justice. Just a few years later, however, when asked about the Kurdish question, Erdogan replied: "If you don't think about it, it doesn't exist."

And yet it did exist, as even Erdogan was ultimately forced to acknowledge. We made a number of efforts to negotiate in good faith with the government, including corresponding cease-fires. Each time, the ruling party's commitment to peace lasted only as long as proved politically expedient.

Then, in 2012, the PKK implemented a cease-fire that we upheld despite huge obstacles. The PKK released all Turkish soldiers and police officers it had held in captivity, and our forces began a gradual withdrawal from Turkey. That opened a path to negotiations.

On Feb. 28, 2015, after two years of talks, representatives of the Kurdish people and the Turkish state reached an agreement expressing our shared hopes for peace. Yet when Erdogan found that the talks were no longer beneficial to his party's electoral future, he once again chose conflict.

The regular meetings that had been taking place between representatives of the Turkish state and our leader Ocalan ended. The war resumed with fresh force. Tanks and fighter jets flattened 10 Kurdish cities. The Turkish military brutally killed hundreds of civilians, including women, children and the elderly. Security forces often prevented families from retrieving the bodies of their relatives.

Once again, the state sought to deal a fatal blow to the Kurdish people. Holding power through religious extremism and racism at the cost of democracy and civilian lives, in its current form the ruling Justice and Development Party is a danger not only to the Kurds but also to the Middle East and the whole world.

Erdogan now sees the democratic revolution of the Kurds in Syria and the

defeat of the Islamic State as a threat to the Turkish state's Kurdish policy and his own authoritarian grip on power. Our organization wants to see the liberation of all the peoples of Syria and the true democratization of the country. The Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians of northeastern Syria have already put democratic autonomy, developed by Ocalan during his years in prison, into practice.



Nevroz Uysal, one of the lawyers for imprisoned Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, listens during a joint news conference with other members of his legal team in Istanbul in May. (Leftis Pitarakis/AP)

We have made our own mistakes in addressing these challenges. We were naive to think that the Kurdish question would be solved solely through dialogue with Erdogan's party. In trying to solve a conflict so complex and so connected to other challenges, we should have worked harder to include all the democratic forces of Turkey. In the same way, we should have mobilized pro-democracy forces in the Middle East and around the world to contribute to the democratization of Turkey and the solution of the Kurdish question.

In case there is any ambiguity on this score: We once again declare that we are committed to negotiating a political solution of the Kurdish question within Turkey's borders.

We will repeat what we have said before: Ocalan is our lead negotiator. We agree with all the points in Ocalan's most recent communications and specify that to ensure a lasting cease-fire, Ocalan's ability to work and contribute freely is indispensable to us. To be more precise, he must be transferred from Imrali prison to a safe house.

The world has an interest in supporting our aims. Today's crisis in Turkey is fundamentally a political one. It is a crisis derived from the bankruptcy of the Turkish republic's century-old Kurdish policy, a problem that lies at the heart of Turkey's current domestic, regional and global challenges. In this regard, Turkey desperately needs a new understanding of the "nation" that has room for different ethnic and cultural identities. Such an approach should be reflected by a new administrative system that reflects our region's historic diversity, freed from Ankara's centralizing stranglehold.

By solving its Kurdish question, Turkey could play a decisive role in furthering democracy, stability and peace in the Middle East. Yet the Turkish state refuses to do this. We, on the other hand, continue to strive for the democratization of the Middle East through the democratization of Turkey.

Le PKK, un mouvement résolument transfrontalier.

Partie 1 : l'Irak, une base arrière majeure pour le PKK

Un prisonnier surveillé 24h/24 par 165 caméras de vidéosurveillance, gardé par un millier de soldats, eux-mêmes encadrés par 250 officiers sur une île déclarée zone militaire, et à la surveillance duquel l'Etat turc consacre plus de 20 000 euros par jour : Abdullah Öcalan, surnommé « Apo » par ses fidèles, est en effet le prisonnier le plus surveillé de Turquie, en raison de son rôle de fondateur et dirigeant pendant plus de vingt ans du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK - Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan).

Le PKK est un groupe armé kurde initialement marxiste-léniniste qui, à sa création en 1978, s'était fixé comme but d'obtenir l'indépendance des territoires turcs peuplés à majorité de Kurdes. Depuis, ses objectifs et son architecture idéologique ont évolué, mais les actions armées contre les forces de sécurité turques, initiées officiellement le 15 août 1984, ont persisté de façon quasi-ininterrompue (1), provoquant la mort d'approximativement 50 000 personnes en l'espace de 35 ans.

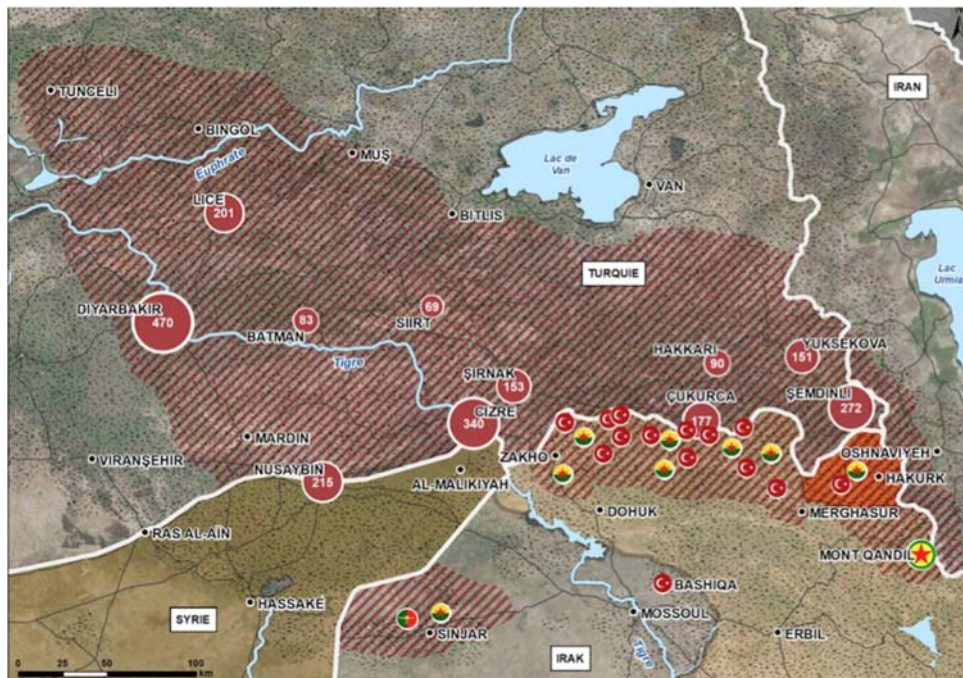
Aujourd'hui, malgré les appels à la reprise des négociations de paix lancés par Abdullah Öcalan depuis sa cellule de l'île-prison d'Imrali, le conflit entre le PKK et Ankara reste très intense : après plusieurs offensives en Syrie en 2016 et 2018 contre la filiale syrienne du PKK, le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD-Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat), les forces armées turques ont lancé une nouvelle opération, dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak cette fois, visant à toucher au cœur le PKK dont le QG est situé au mont Qandil, dans les montagnes frontalières de l'Irak et de la Syrie.

Le PKK est, de fait, un mouvement résolument transfrontalier, comme cet article va s'attacher à le détailler : si la Turquie est la principale cible des attaques du PKK, la base arrière de ce dernier est avant tout située en Irak (première partie) depuis laquelle officie également sa filiale iranienne ; son accroissement syrien a quant à elle grandement profité de la guerre en Syrie, dont le PYD contrôle désormais, directement ou indirectement, près d'un tiers du territoire, et où le mouvement kurde s'implante dans la durée (deuxième partie).

Le PKK en Irak : un mouvement à l'organisation éprouvée et maîtresse de son terrain

S'il est considéré comme une nuisance présentant de sérieuses menaces pour l'intégrité de la Région autonome du Kurdistan (RAK), celle-ci ne considère pas le PKK comme une organisation terroriste et le tolère sur son territoire, moins par bienveillance que faute de réels moyens politiques et militaires pour le contraindre.

Fort de cette situation, et jouissant dans certains cas de la coopération bienveillante de certaines autorités locales (2), le PKK s'est fortement implanté en Irak et notamment dans le nord du pays, dans la chaîne montagneuse du Zagros, où le mouvement kurde a la pleine maîtrise opérationnelle et tactique du terrain, comme évoqué dans un précédent article.



LE PKK, UN MOUVEMENT RÉSOLUMENT TRANSFRONTALIER | PREMIÈRE PARTIE : L'IRAK



Au fil des années, le PKK a ainsi développé un réseau très important d'abris, de caches d'armes ou encore de camps d'entraînement et/ou de formation idéologique. Le relief particulièrement accidenté de ces montagnes et la très faible densité de populations octroie aux combattants du PKK une liberté d'action et de déplacement dont ces derniers savent très bien tirer profit. La nature du terrain rend également le contrôle de la frontière irako-turque particulièrement difficile pour les autorités concernées ; celle-ci s'avère ainsi notablement poreuse et profite autant aux infiltrations de combattants du PKK et au transit de matériel qu'au trafic d'armes et de drogue, sur lequel le mouvement kurde s'est positionné comme un acteur en situation de quasi-monopole.

Le PKK étant initialement un parti politique, il s'est doté très rapidement de branches armées en Turquie, Irak, Syrie (3) et Iran (4), à travers ses filiales locales - le Parti pour une solution démocratique au Kurdistan (PÇDK-Partî Çareserî Dîmokratî Kurdistan) en Irak, en l'occurrence - parler du PKK comme d'un groupe armé est donc, en quelque sorte, un raccourci. En Turquie, tout comme en Irak, ces branches armées s'appellent les Forces de défense du peuple, les HPG (Hêzên Parastina Gel), créées en 2000 en remplacement de l'Armée populaire de libération du Kurdistan.

Il est impossible de déterminer exactement les effectifs de cette force, les estimations oscillant aisément entre 5 000 et 40 000 combattants (5). L'estimation de l'ampleur des HPG est d'autant plus compliquée que la porosité notoire des différentes forces nationales du PKK au Levant, qu'il s'agisse de celles actives en Iran, en Syrie, en Turquie ou en Irak, rend impossible une évaluation précise.

Sans mentionner la branche syrienne qui constitue un cas relativement singulier, et qui sera abordée en deuxième partie, les branches turque et irakienne du PKK sont nettement plus actives que la branche iranienne, qui parvient bien moins facilement à mobiliser les populations locales et qui doit faire face à la concurrence d'autres groupes kurdes iraniens d'opposition, au premier rang desquels le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan d'Irak (PDKI). De fait, le PJAK, malgré certains affrontements notables avec les forces de sécurité iraniennes et une participation centrale dans les trafics illégaux transfrontaliers, reste une émanation relativement discrète du PKK. Le mouvement d'Abdullah Öcalan s'entoure également de milices mineures ou de groupes partageant des desseins similaires au sien ; par exemple, étant donné le rôle majeur joué par le PKK dans l'évacuation de milliers de Yézidites persécutés par Daech à Sinjar en 2014, des membres de cette minorité religieuse ont créé les Unités de résistance de Sinjar

(YBŞ - Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê) avec le soutien du mouvement kurde afin de protéger leurs coreligionnaires contre de nouvelles exactions. Les YBŞ, composées d'environ 2 000 combattants, constituent un relais du PKK à Sinjar, dont ce dernier s'était retiré après que les armées turques et irakiennes aient menacé d'intervenir en 2018 si le mouvement kurde n'en retirait pas ses forces.

L'Irak, une clé de voûte du dispositif politico-militaire du PKK dans la ligne de mire d'Ankara

Le « pays des deux fleuves » se révèle donc être la base arrière du PKK par excellence. Ce statut explique l'attention toute particulière qu'Ankara porte au nord de l'Irak : depuis l'échec des négociations de paix à l'été 2015 et la reprise des hostilités, l'armée turque (Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri - TSK) a entrepris une campagne de frappes aériennes intenses contre les positions du PKK dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien. Ces frappes causent régulièrement la mort de civils parmi les populations locales (6). De nombreux villages ont également été vidés de leurs habitants en raison des bombardements, soit parce que leurs occupants ont préféré fuir d'eux-mêmes, soit parce que les autorités kurdes irakiennes les ont évacués préventivement (7).

Les bombardements turcs créent un vif ressenti au sein des populations locales, qu'elles soient pro-PKK ou non, et dont la rancœur s'est traduite, le 26 janvier 2019, par l'attaque d'une base turque au Kurdistan irakien : la mort de deux civils quelques heures plus tôt à la suite d'une frappe aérienne turque a conduit plusieurs centaines de Kurdes irakiens à s'en prendre aux installations militaires turques, brûlant des camions et des tentes. Pris de panique, un soldat turc a ouvert le feu et tué l'un des attaquants, tandis que de nombreux autres ont été blessés.

De fait, depuis le début de l'année 2018, l'armée turque s'est positionnée dans le nord de l'Irak et a installé de nombreuses bases ainsi que des avant-postes dans les montagnes afin de surveiller et contre les activités du PKK avec davantage d'efficacité. De nombreuses opérations menées par les forces spéciales turques dans les montagnes ont ainsi permis la neutralisation de combattants et d'installations du PKK. Ankara a par ailleurs lancé le 27 mai une offensive plus large, l'opération «

Griffe » (« Pence Harkâtî »), dans la zone tricontinentale irako-irano-turque, dans une perspective cette fois d'occupation du terrain (8).

La guérilla et la résilience comme armes de choix du PKK

Le PKK, quant à lui, oppose à l'armée turque une résilience toute particulière, acquise grâce à des décennies de lutte dans les montagnes. Les bombardements turcs ne permettent pas d'entamer sérieusement le potentiel militaire du mouvement, qui s'adapte très rapidement aux stratégies de son adversaire turc : désormais bien plus imprévisibles, davantage furtifs, les déplacements des combattants s'adaptent à la campagne turque de bombardements aériens et visent ainsi à obliger Ankara à réviser sa stratégie de bombardements statiques. L'opération « Griffe » s'inscrit ainsi dans cette optique.

Les modes opératoires d'attaque du PKK n'ont jamais réellement changé depuis sa création : à l'exception de certains cas d'attentats suicides, davantage le fait d'actions isolées désapprouvées par le parti, les HPG ont toujours non seulement privilégié des tactiques de guérilla classiques (embuscades, « hit-and-run », etc.), mais ont toujours cherché à limiter le risque de victime civiles (9) - ou du moins celles qu'ils jugeaient innocentes. C'est ainsi que certains civils ont fait l'objet de campagnes d'assassinat (magistrats turcs, maires...). La plupart des victimes civiles sont ainsi le fait de morts collatérales, à l'exception notable des attentats spectaculaires commis par les Faucons de la liberté (TAK - Teyrênbazê Azadiya Kurdistan) : ce groupe, dont l'existence très obscure est entourée d'un grand nombre d'interrogations pour le moment restées sans réponse fiable (10), a fait parler de lui à plusieurs reprises en réalisant des actions armées hautement meurtrières pour les civils, à l'instar de l'attentat du 13 mars 2016 à Ankara, au cours duquel l'explosion d'une voiture piégée dans un des quartiers les plus fréquentés de la capitale avait provoqué la mort 37 personnes. En-dehors du TAK, le PKK tente au maximum, aujourd'hui, de limiter les pertes parmi les civils et ciblent exclusivement les forces de sécurité turques (policiers, militaires, mais également gardiens de villages collaborant avec Ankara).

L'Irak constitue ainsi la base arrière incontournable du PKK pour ses opérations au Moyen-Orient. Sa filiale iranienne projette de là ses opérations en Iran quand elle n'est pas déployée dans le sud-est anatolien ou dans les montagnes du Kurdistan, tandis que les forces engagées en Turquie bénéficient du soutien logistique en provenance de l'Irak ainsi que des combattants qui y ont été équipés et formés. Les opérations militaires turques en cours témoignent du rôle central du pays des deux fleuves dans le dispositif politico-militaire du PKK. Toutefois, à la faveur du conflit en Syrie, le mouvement kurde est parvenu à fonder un nouveau bastion, qui sera l'objet de la deuxième partie de cet article.

Notes :

- (1) Plusieurs tentatives de négociations de paix ont été initiées sans succès entre le PKK et Ankara, notamment en 2013 et 2015.
 - (2) Un article sera prochainement écrit dans les Clés du Moyen-Orient sur les relations entre mouvements et partis kurdes.
 - (3) Les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG) à partir de 2011.
 - (4) Le Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan (PJAK) s'est dotée des Unités du Kurdistan oriental (YRK).
 - (5) Le chiffre de 40 000 combattants est avancé par le ministère turc de la Défense.
 - (6) Des chiffres publiés par le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan fin 201 affirmait que les frappes avaient tué 12 personnes en 11 mois, par exemple.
 - (7) Citons l'exemple du sous-district de Sidakan, où, selon le gouverneur local, près de 140 villages auraient été évacués.
 - (8) Un article sera prochainement consacré aux opérations extérieures turques menées en Syrie et en Irak.
 - (9) Cette volonté d'épargner les civils n'est pas forcément le fruit de considérations humanistes, mais avant tout une stratégie visant à donner une légitimité au PKK et à faire de lui une force de « résistance » et non terroriste.
- Beaucoup de questions se posent sur l'existence réelle de ce groupe, qui n'agit que très ponctuellement, mais pour des actions toujours très spectaculaires et/ou meurtrières. D'aucun indique qu'il s'agit d'un groupe dissident du PKK, d'autres d'une force spéciale qui n'est activée par le PKK que pour les actions de grande envergure. Le manque d'informations rajoute au mystère de ce groupe, dont le nom est associé, en Turquie, à un terrorisme extrémiste similaire à celui de l'Etat islamique.

AFP 05/07/2019

Explosion en Turquie: "sans doute un acte terroriste" selon Erdogan

L'explosion d'une voiture en Turquie près de la frontière avec la Syrie, qui a tué vendredi trois Syriens, est "sans doute un acte terroriste", a déclaré le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"Les premiers éléments laissent penser qu'il s'agit sans doute d'un acte terroriste", a-t-il dit aux journalistes à Istanbul. "Il est clair qu'il y avait une bombe dans la voiture", a-t-il ajouté.

"Nos collègues sont en train d'enquêter pour comprendre ce qu'il y avait derrière cela", a-t-il encore expliqué dans cette déclaration télévisée, ajoutant

que le gouvernement transmettrait des informations supplémentaires dans les heures à venir.

L'explosion a eu lieu à moins d'un kilomètre des bureaux du gouverneur du district de Reyhanli vers 10h00 GMT, selon l'agence officielle Anadolu.

Les images retransmises par la télévision turque montraient des flammes et une fumée épaisse s'échappant de la voiture alors que les pompiers tentaient d'éteindre l'incendie.

En mai 2013, une double explosion à la voiture

piégée dans ce même district de Reyhanli avait tué plus de 50 personnes, dans un des attentats les plus meurtriers de l'histoire moderne de la Turquie.

En 2015 et 2016, une série d'attentats attribués par le gouvernement à des groupes extrémistes et des militants kurdes avaient fait des centaines de morts.

Le dernier attentat important dans le pays est celui du Nouvel an 2017, lorsqu'un homme armé avait surgi dans un night-club d'Istanbul et tiré dans la foule, tuant 39 personnes.

Failure of Öcalan letter shows new direction for Turkey's Kurds

Two days before the Istanbul mayoral rerun election on June 23, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency announced that Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), had written a letter urging the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) to remain neutral in the coming vote.

Essentially dismissed by the HDP, Öcalan's letter and how key political figures like President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reacted to it still created a major political stir with great symbolic meaning.

To begin with, AA's announcement of Öcalan's letter was not an ordinary journalistic affair. Behind the announcement was the state's decision to have Öcalan involved in an ongoing election campaign.

By informing the public via its official news agency, the state expected people would be duly informed on Öcalan's opinions, leaving no discussion of authenticity.

Of course, shortly after the letter's release, sources close to the government interpreted it to mean that Öcalan was advising Kurds not to vote for Ekrem İmamoğlu, the main opposition candidate, but instead remain neutral, basically asking them to boycott.

Erdoğan publicly referred to Öcalan's letter in his remarks on the day before the vote -- a highly unusual moment in which a sitting president used the words of an enemy of the state, long known as the "baby killer," to influence voters. According to Erdoğan, Öcalan clearly wanted Kurds not to support İmamoğlu.

Erdoğan said the letter pointed to a leadership competition between Öcalan and Selahattin Demirtaş, the

jailed former HDP leader, and that Öcalan's message was meant to remind the HDP to stick to its own political orientation rather than support any other party.

The rise of Öcalan as a legitimate political actor able to influence Kurdish voters could be interpreted as a critical development in which the Turkish state has de facto recognised him as the leader of the country's Kurds.

Yet Turkish officials, including Erdoğan, publicly asked Kurds to follow Demirtaş, which suggests the state sees Demirtaş as more of a threat than the jailed leader of the PKK, which has led an armed insurgency in Turkey's southeast since 1984 and is labelled a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the EU.

With Demirtaş, Kurdish politics has received considerable positive attention from other sectors of Turkish society. Under Demirtaş's leadership, the Kurdish political project has succeeded in becoming a nationwide organisation at the expense of Erdoğan.

But, what was Öcalan's intention in the letter? Did he really want Kurds to stay neutral, which would favor Erdoğan's ruling party? Or perhaps the government's interpretation of Öcalan's letter was incorrect.

Given the ambiguous language of the letter, which is part of Öcalan's personal style, it is



not easy to comment on its message. Thus, it is first up to the Kurdish political leaders to inform the public on the main intention behind the letter.

So far, Kurdish leaders have commented very ambiguously on the letter, providing little detail about the gist of the message. One gets the impression that Kurdish leaders want to strategically maintain a certain ambiguity when it comes to Öcalan's letter.

In the meantime, the letter incident has demonstrated that there is a growing new dynamic in Turkish politics on the Kurdish issue. Many Turks are ready to embrace Kurdish politics as represented by new leaders like Demirtaş, whereas they remain vehemently against any process with Öcalan. The Turkish public has given a strong positive signal to Demirtaş while holding onto its very negative perception of Öcalan.

This new dynamic has within it a shift that it is difficult, even impossible for many Kurds to contemplate: that a new leader like Demirtaş could challenge Öcalan and the PKK.

REUTERS | July 27, 2019

Turkey says it 'neutralized' 34 PKK militants in air strikes on July 17-19

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey's Defense Ministry said on Saturday it had "neutralized" 34 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in northern Iraq in air strikes on July 17-19.

Sixteen militants were "neutralized" in air strikes on northern Iraq's Qandil region on July 17, and 18 in air strikes on the Karacak region on July 19, it said. The ministry commonly uses the term "neutralized" to refer to those killed but it can also refer to those wounded or captured.

The PKK, considered a terrorist organization

by Turkey, the United States and European Union, has waged an insurgency for autonomy in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast since 1984. It has fighters based in northern Iraq, mainly in the Qandil region.

The Defense Ministry said it had "neutralized" a total of 255 PKK militants in operations in northern Iraq since May 27, when Ankara launched an offensive there against the PKK.

Turkey frequently launches air strikes in the region but the latest campaign, dubbed "Operation Claw", has included artillery fire and ground operations.

[Interview]

Luc Pauwels : « Les Kurdes ont toujours été victime de leur situation géopolitique »

Luc Pauwels est né à Anvers en 1940. Vieux routier du Mouvement flamand, il se passionne depuis toujours pour l'Europe des Ethnies (Guy Héraud) et l'Empire européen (Alain de Benoist), cette Europe irremplaçable « *pourvue qu'elle se réveille* » (Peter Sloterdijk). « *Je veux y contribuer en tant que historien et essayiste* » nous dit-il, au cours d'une interview à propos de son nouveau livre intitulé « *Histoire du Kurdistan, le point de vue kurde* » paru aux éditions Yorán Embanner (un tome 2 est à suivre)

Un entretien qui va, à coup sûr, vous donner envie de vous procurer un livre passionnant pour découvrir un peuple que finalement, nous connaissons très mal.

Breizh-info.com : Pourquoi vous êtes-vous intéressé, après l'Ukraine, à la question du Kurdistan ?

Je m'intéresse à tous les peuples en quête à leur autodétermination et en révolte contre un (ou plusieurs!) jacobinismes oppresseurs qui veulent effacer leur identité, leur langue et leur culture. Cela se fait toujours selon le même schéma, si bien formulé par l'historien tchèque Milan Hübl (1927-1989): « *Pour liquider les peuples, on commence par leur enlever la mémoire. On détruit leurs livres, leur culture, leur histoire. Puis quelqu'un d'autre leur écrit d'autres livres, leur donne une autre culture, leur invente une autre histoire. Ensuite le peuple commence lentement à oublier ce qu'il est, et ce qu'il était. Et le monder autour de lui l'oublie encore plus vite* ».

La tâche des jeunes, des intellectuels d'aujourd'hui c'est d'empêcher que cela se fasse: « *No pasaran!* »

Breizh-info.com : Pourriez-vous nous définir géographiquement et historiquement le Kurdistan ?

Les Kurdes sont un très vieux peuple de souche indo-européenne qui descend des Mèdes. Aujourd'hui ils sont quelque 40 millions, établis à quelque 90 % sur quatre pays différents: la Turquie, l'Iran, l'Irak et la Syrie. Pendant des siècles les Empires ottoman et perse ont plus ou moins laissé faire les Kurdes dans leurs différentes principautés montagnardes. En même temps ils sont tenus en état de division et, de plus, instrumentalisés dans une lutte géopolitique permanente entre les Turcs et les Persans. Valeureux combattants ils s'usent et saignent sur les champs de batailles, mais ils n'en tirent aucun profit pour eux-mêmes,

pour leur propre peuple.

Vint alors le grand écrivain kurde Ehmedê Xanî (1650-1706) qui, un siècle avant Herder (1744-1803), prône que l'unité politique ne peut exister que si elle est l'émanation d'une unité ethnoculturelle: « *Pourquoi les Kurdes dans ce monde sont-ils tous expropriés ? Pourquoi sont-ils tous condamnés ?* » se demande Xanî. C'est le début du nationalisme populaire kurde qui se révoltera en permanence contre les nationalismes d'abord impérialistes, puis jacobins des Turcs et des Persans.

Après la Grande Guerre, le Traité de Sèvres (1920) garantit aux Kurdes enfin leur propre État à eux. Hélas, les Grandes Puissances cèdent aux pressions d'Atatürk et renient leur signature.

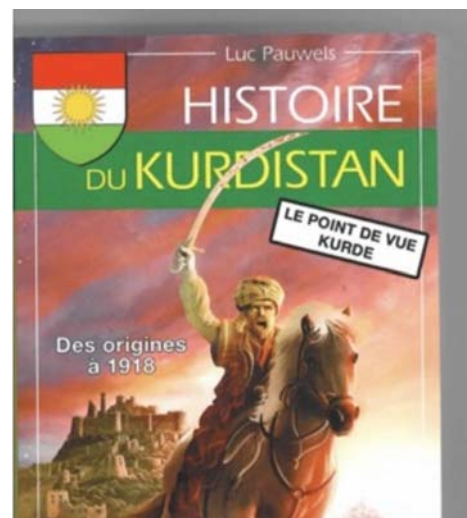
Breizh-info.com : Qu'est-ce qui explique que contrairement aux Arabes, aux Turcs et aux Iraniens, les Kurdes n'aient pas réussi à s'imposer, militairement, dans l'histoire, et aient toujours été persécutés finalement ?

Coincés entre deux énormes Empires, l'un turc-ottoman, l'autre persan, les Kurdes ont toujours été victime de leur situation géopolitique. Leur territoire montagnard n'ayant aucun accès à la mer, ils ont été coupés de l'évolution qu'a connue l'Europe. En même temps cette situation géographique a garanti leur survie, comparable à l'histoire de la Suisse. Un second élément important, surtout en Turquie, a été l'islam. Le sultan fut jusqu'en 1922 en même temps le calife, c'est-à-dire le chef religieux suprême de tous les musulmans sunnites. Une révolte contre le sultan turc fut donc à la fois un délit politique et un crime religieux. Les Kurdes étant en majorité musulmans – quoique souvent contre leur gré – cela a été un frein important à leur émancipation.

Breizh-info.com : A l'heure actuelle, les perspectives pour le Kurdistan s'améliorent-elles ?

Oui, les perspectives pour le Kurdistan s'améliorent, mais le contexte actuel est totalement différent de l'un pays à l'autre. En Iran la situation est totalement gelée, à cause du régime des ayatollahs. La persécution des Kurdes et de leurs aspirations culturelles y est institutionnalisée.

En Turquie le fond est identique, mais à la surface le régime d'Erdogan se soucie des apparences. Les partis kurdes ou pro-



kurdes se succèdent au parlement d'Ankara, l'une interdiction suivant l'autre depuis des décennies. En Syrie le territoire kurde a réussi une autogestion difficile dont personne ne sait si elle survivra à la guerre civile. Reste l'Irak où le nationaliste kurde Jalal Talabani (1933-2017), a été de 2005 à 2014 le président de ce pays difficile et où la Région autonome kurde tient toujours bien, malgré l'hostilité de Bagdad lors du référendum sur indépendance du Kurdistan irakien.

Breizh-info.com : On assimile souvent le peuple Kurde au communisme, à la révolution d'ultra gauche. Est-ce faire des généralités ? Pourquoi cette assimilation ?

Les régimes turques et iraniennes étant perçus comme étant de « droite », pas de quoi s'étonner que la résistance radicale kurde se réclame de la « gauche »...

Breizh-info.com : Y'a-t-il des films, des livres, que vous conseilleriez sur le Kurdistan, autre que le vôtre ?

Je vous conseille le site web www.institut-kurde.org de l'Institut kurde de Paris qui nous tient au courant de toutes les nouvelles publications sur le Kurdistan. L'institut dispose d'une importante bibliothèque, organise des conférences, des cours de langue etc. Si l'on veut être informé, c'est là qu'il faut commencer.

Propos recueillis par YV

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Trois Gardiens de la Révolution tués dans l'ouest de l'Iran

DUBAÏ, 9 juillet (Reuters) - Trois membres du corps d'élite iranien des Gardiens de la Révolution ont été tués par balles mardi à Piranshahr, dans l'ouest de la République islamique, rapporte l'agence de presse iranienne Tasnim, qui cite un communiqué des Gardiens.

L'agence ne donne pas de plus amples précisions. Des heurts ont lieu fréquemment dans cette région entre les forces de sécurité iraniennes et les groupes séparatistes kurdes basés en Irak voisin.

Nouveau gouvernement au Kurdistan irakien

Le Kurdistan irakien s'est doté mercredi d'un gouvernement sans toutefois attribuer le portefeuille du pétrole qui échoit de fait au Premier ministre Masrour Barzani, tenant de l'intransigeance face à Bagdad sur ce dossier sensible.

Près d'un mois après la nomination de Masrour Barzani, fils du leader kurde Massoud Barzani, 88 députés sur 111 membres du Parlement de la région autonome ont accordé leur confiance à 21 ministres.

Comme à l'habitude au Kurdistan irakien, les deux partis historiques, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du défunt président de l'Irak Jalal Talabani, se sont taillés la part belle.

Le PDK, grand vainqueur des législatives de l'automne, obtient neuf ministères - en plus du poste de Premier ministre, de celui de son chef de cabinet, et du poste de président du Kurdistan, at-

tribué au cousin de Masrour Barzani, Netchirvan Barzani. L'UPK gère six portefeuilles et le fils de Jalal Talabani, Qubad Talabani, conserve son poste de vice-Premier ministre. Le parti Goran, qui se présente comme une alternative à la gestion familiale de la région autonome du nord irakien, compte quatre ministres au gouvernement. Le Parti socialiste du Kurdistan en a un et un dernier est attribué à la minorité chrétienne en vertu d'une politique de quota.

Faute de candidat pour le poste de ministre des Ressources naturelles - le pétrole principalement -, le poste reste aux mains du Premier ministre.

L'or noir est la principale pomme de discorde entre les autorités fédérales à Bagdad et Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien. Les premières imposent aux Kurdes l'obligation de leur reverser les revenus générés par les 250.000 barils par jour exportés du Kurdistan. En échange, elles s'engagent à donner une part du budget fédéral à Erbil et à payer les salaires de ses fonctionnaires.

Régulièrement, les deux parties s'accusent d'avoir failli à leurs engagements respectifs.

Selon les experts, Masrour Barzani représente le courant le plus nationaliste du PDK et affiche une certaine intransigeance vis-à-vis de Bagdad, alors que Netchirvan Barzani incarne une ligne plus consensuelle.

Mercredi, le Premier ministre a évoqué les principaux défis de son gouvernement. Tout d'abord, a-t-il promis, une délégation gouvernementale kurde se rendra prochainement à Bagdad pour renforcer les relations. Ensuite, les ministres devront tenter d'affronter la grave crise financière qui touche le Kurdistan depuis plusieurs années. "Le gouvernement a actuellement 14 milliards de dollars de dettes", a-t-il déclaré, alors que la région, un temps paradis des investisseurs dans un Moyen-Orient déchiré par les crises, recherche aujourd'hui désespérément à redresser son économie, grevée par la corruption, et peine souvent à payer ses fonctionnaires.

La France et le Royaume-Uni acceptent d'envoyer des troupes supplémentaires en Syrie

Sous pression de Washington, la France a accepté de déployer des forces spéciales supplémentaires en Syrie, aux côtés de Londres, pour compenser le retrait des troupes américaines, révèle le magazine américain «Foreign Policy».

La France et le Royaume-Uni vont envoyer des forces spéciales supplémentaires dans le nord-est de la Syrie afin de permettre aux Etats-Unis de retirer leurs troupes terrestres, ont indiqué à Foreign Policy des sources informées des discussions. «Seuls partenaires des Américains ayant encore des forces terrestres en Syrie», ces deux pays, membres de la coalition internationale antiterroriste, s'engagent à augmenter légèrement leurs effectifs de 10 % à 15 %, a confirmé un responsable de l'administration Trump au magazine américain. Washington tenterait par ailleurs de convaincre ses deux alliés de contribuer financièrement à l'effort de stabilisation de la Syrie, ravagée par la guerre depuis plus de huit ans.

Cette décision intervient après le rejet par Berlin, lundi, de la demande américaine d'envoi de

troupes au sol dans le nord du pays. «Nous cherchons ici et parmi les autres partenaires de la coalition internationale contre l'Etat islamique (EI), comprenant 80 pays, «des volontaires prêts à s'investir», avait alors déclaré le représentant spécial américain pour la Syrie, James Jeffrey, lors de sa visite en Allemagne. C'est désormais chose faite, même si le responsable américain s'est dit «déçu» des efforts déployés pour convaincre ses partenaires européens.

OPÉRATIONS SECRÈTES

L'objectif américain est double : ne pas abandonner les forces kurdes qui ont livré des combats au sol contre l'EI, avec l'appui de la coalition, et qui sont menacées par Ankara, mais aussi maintenir une présence sur le terrain pour empêcher l'éventuelle résurgence du groupe jihadiste, passé dans la clandestinité. En revanche, ni le calendrier du déploiement, ni le nombre exact de troupes supplémentaires ne sont encore définis.

Officiellement, la France contribue à hauteur de 1 200 hommes aux opérations de la coalition contre le groupe Etat islamique (EI). En revanche, les

autorités françaises sont en général très discrètes sur l'utilisation de leurs forces spéciales. «Londres et Paris opèrent secrètement en Syrie, indique le site. Il est donc peu probable qu'une annonce soit faite publiquement.» Même chose du côté britannique qui a refusé de commenter les informations américaines.

SUCCÈS AMÉRICAIN

Pour Foreign Policy, il s'agit d'une «victoire majeure» pour l'équipe de la sécurité nationale de Donald Trump. Même si la hausse du nombre des troupes françaises et britanniques «ne permettra pas de combler totalement le vide laissé par le départ des forces américaines du territoire syrien».

En décembre 2018, le président américain avait pris ses alliés de court en annonçant brusquement le départ des 2 000 militaires déployés dans le nord-est de la Syrie, proclamant une victoire totale contre l'EI. Depuis cette annonce choc en décembre, le chef de la Maison Blanche a accepté que 400 d'entre eux restent déployés en Syrie, mais sans spécifier pour combien de temps.

La Turquie condamnée pour violation de la liberté d'expression d'un leader prokurde

La Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme (CEDH) a jugé ce mardi que la Turquie avait violé la liberté d'expression de l'opposant kurde Selahattin Demirtas en le condamnant pénalement pour avoir exprimé son point de vue lors d'une émission de télévision.

Après avoir examiné les déclarations faites en 2005 à la télévision par Selahattin Demirtas, leader prokurde actuellement emprisonné et dont la CEDH avait à l'automne réclamé en vain la libération, «la Cour estime que, prises dans leur ensemble, ces déclarations ne peuvent être regardées comme contenant un appel à l'usage de la violence, à la résistance armée ou au soulèvement, ni comme constituant un discours de haine».

Ancien dirigeant du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), Selahattin Demirtas est emprisonné depuis novembre 2016 et accusé de diriger une «organisation terroriste». Son procès doit reprendre mardi prochain en Turquie. En novem-

bre 2018, la CEDH avait sommé la Turquie de libérer Selahattin Demirtas «dans les plus brefs délais», estimant que sa détention prolongée poursuivait le «but inavoué (...) d'étouffer le pluralisme en Turquie». Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui accuse le HDP d'être la vitrine politique du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), organisation illégale armée, considérée comme «terroriste» par Ankara et ses alliés occidentaux, avait rapidement balayé cette décision estimant qu'elle n'était pas contraignante.

La CEDH s'est penchée ce mardi sur une autre requête datant de 2010 concernant les déclarations faites par téléphone dans une émission de télévision par Selahattin Demirtas, en qualité à l'époque, «de président de l'Association des droits de l'Homme et de porte-parole de la plateforme démocratique de Diyarbakir». Il y appelait «les autorités et l'opinion publique à prendre en compte le rôle que pourrait jouer Abdullah

Öcalan, le chef emprisonné du PKK, dans la détermination d'une solution pacifique au problème kurde ainsi qu'à améliorer ses conditions de détention», détaille la CEDH dans un communiqué. A la suite de ces déclarations, Selahattin Demirtas avait été inculpé de «propagande en faveur d'une organisation terroriste».

A l'unanimité, «la Cour estime que la procédure pénale engagée contre le requérant pour le chef de propagande en faveur d'une organisation terroriste, ne répondait pas à un besoin social impérieux, n'était pas proportionnée aux buts légitimes visés et qu'elle n'était, dès lors, pas nécessaire dans une société démocratique», a jugé la CEDH, bras juridique du Conseil de l'Europe installé à Strasbourg. Elle ne peut être saisie par un citoyen que quand tous les recours juridiques dans son pays ont été utilisés. En conséquence, la Turquie est condamnée à verser 2.500 euros pour dommage moral à l'opposant kurde et 1.000 euros pour frais de justice.

AFP 11 juillet 2019

Syrie: 13 morts dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée à Afrine

Beirouth, 11 juil 2019 (AFP) - Au moins 13 personnes, dont huit civils, ont été tuées jeudi dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée à Afrine, dans le nord de la Syrie, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

La ville d'Afrine et ses environs, majoritairement kurdes et situés dans la province d'Alep (nord), sont sous le contrôle de groupes rebelles alliés de la Turquie.

En mars 2018, Ankara avait pris le contrôle de la région, à l'issue d'une offensive menée de paire avec ses supplétifs syriens contre une milice kurde, les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG).

"L'explosion a eu lieu près d'un barrage (des forces rebelles pro-Ankara) à l'entrée" de la ville d'Afrine alors que des véhicules étaient massés pour inspection, a indiqué à l'AFP le directeur de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane.

Huit civils, dont deux enfants, ainsi que quatre combattants sont morts, selon M.

Abdel Rahmane. L'identité d'une dernière victime décédée reste inconnue.

L'OSDH a également fait état de plus de 30 blessés des suites de la déflagration.

"Parmi les civils tués, au moins six sont originaires de la Ghouta orientale", un ex-fief rebelle près de Damas reconquis par le régime syrien l'an dernier et dont des milliers d'habitants avaient été transférés vers le nord syrien, dont à Afrine, a ajouté M. Abdel Rahmane.

Théâtre d'incidents sécuritaires récurrents, la région d'Afrine constitue l'un des trois cantons de la région "fédérale" autoproclamée en 2016 par les Kurdes, une minorité ethnique en Syrie qui aspire depuis des décennies à une autonomie politique.

En janvier, trois civils ont été tués dans l'explosion d'une bombe dans un bus à Afrine, à la date anniversaire du lancement de l'offensive turque. Ankara considère les YPG comme une orga-

nisation "terroriste" et craint l'émergence d'un noyau d'Etat kurde à ses frontières, susceptible de galvaniser les velléités indépendantistes de la minorité kurde sur son territoire.

Outre les explosions, des échanges de tirs ont fréquemment lieu entre les YPG et des positions occupées par les soldats turcs et leurs supplétifs syriens, à l'ouest de la ville.

La moitié des 320.000 habitants de l'enclave d'Afrine ont fui leurs foyers lors de l'offensive turque, selon l'ONU, dont la majorité ne sont toujours pas retournés.

D'après l'ONU et l'ONG Amnesty International, des expropriations et autres types d'abus sont commis dans l'enclave par des combattants et des civils.

Déclenchée en 2011, la guerre en Syrie s'est complexifiée au fil des ans, impliquant des puissances étrangères. Le conflit a déjà tué plus de 370.000 personnes et déplacé plusieurs millions.

Exclusive: New Kurdish PM says priority is stronger Baghdad ties, rather than independence



Members of the new cabinet of the Kurdistan parliament headed by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani pose for a family photo, in Erbil, Iraq . July 10, 2019. REUTERS / Azad Lashkari



Masrour Barzani swears-in as Prime Minister of the Kurdistan region in front of the Members of the Parliament of the Kurdistan in Erbil, Iraq July 10, 2019. REUTERS/ Azad Lashkari

ERBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Two years after a failed independence bid plunged Iraq's Kurdistan Region into months of instability, the new regional prime minister said his priority was strengthening ties with Baghdad, signalling dreams of self-rule should be put on hold.

Masrour Barzani, sworn in as regional prime minister on Wednesday, told Reuters in an exclusive interview that under his leadership, the Kurdistan Regional Government's focus would be to establish a "strong and constructive" relationship with Baghdad, leaving the question of independence aside for now.

"This (independence referendum) happened in the past and it's a reflection of the enduring aspiration of a nation," said Barzani, speaking at his palace in the hillside village of Salaheddine, near regional capital Erbil.

"However, the focus of my government will be how to build a stronger relationship and partnership with Baghdad," he said, adding he would look to fix "those issues that were actually keeping us apart."

The independence bid was led by Barzani's father Masoud, who stepped down as Kurdish president in 2017 after the referendum backfired and prompted a military offensive from Baghdad.

At stake for the new premier are long-running disputes over independent oil exports, revenue sharing, security, and territory which have plagued ties between Erbil and Baghdad since a U.S.-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Barzani was instrumental in orchestrating the September 2017 referendum, which was held over the objections of Baghdad and regional powers. It was seen as the culmination of years of oppositional

politics by the semi-autonomous region.

The backlash was swift and pushed the country to the brink of civil war, threatening to undo the years of unprecedented autonomy the region had enjoyed. Relations eventually improved, cemented by a change of government in both capitals.

'A WIN-WIN SITUATION'

The region's oil exports have long been a source of contention with Baghdad. The Kurds, who control Iraq's only northern pipeline, had been exporting oil independently since 2013. Exports from Kirkuk were restarted in 2018, after a year-long freeze amid post-referendum disputes. Exports from smaller oilfields under the regional government's control continued.

As part of the 2018 and 2019 budgets, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) agreed to send 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) to federal authorities in exchange for Baghdad paying civil servants' salaries.

However, Iraqi officials, including the prime minister, complain that the KRG has not kept up its end of the bargain, having not sent a single barrel to Baghdad.

Barzani said negotiations on oil and gas were already underway and he sees room for "quick progress" on the file.

"There is great potential for a win-win situation," he said. "Working together in cooperation with each other, we can increase the production of oil."

Mutual benefits for both sides is a theme Barzani echoed regarding regional security.

Nearly two years since Iraq declared victory against Islamic State militants, the country has

seen a deterioration in security in the areas bordering the Kurdistan Region.

SECURITY

Barzani, formerly the region's security chief, said the threat from Islamic State isn't yet over. The group exploited the rift between the Kurds and Baghdad, he said, who fought side by side to defeat the militant group in 2017.

He is looking to establish a joint security mechanism in the so-called disputed territories, areas claimed by both Baghdad and Erbil, "to close that gap".

Masrour is the latest Barzani to head the regional government. His father Masoud, himself the son of a veteran Kurdish leader, still holds considerable sway over its politics.

His cousin Nechirvan held the premiership until last month when he was sworn in as president, following a regional parliamentary election in September 2018.

The Barzanis are one of two families that have dominated regional politics for decades. Though they enjoy continued support among their respective bases through extensive patronage networks, their continued grip on power has opened them up to allegations of mismanagement and corruption from voters, many of whom are owed years of back pay from the government.

Barzani said winning back hearts and minds was therefore a leading priority, as was tackling graft. "I'd like to see reform," he said. "To make sure that people have more trust in the government."

Reporting by Raya Jalabi, Editing by William Maclean



July 10-2019 | Sangar Ali Sangar Ali

Kurdistan Parliament confirms Masrour Barzani as new PM of KRG

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kurdistan Parliament on Wednesday confirmed Masrour Barzani as the new Prime Minister of the autonomous Kurdistan Region along with his government cabinet by a majority vote.

Barzani received 88 favorable votes from 106 lawmakers in attendance, and his deputy, Qubad Talabani, received 73.

The new Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) cabinet, comprised of 21 ministers, was also approved by majority vote. The post of the Minister of Natural Resources remains vacant for now as the candidate has yet to be chosen by the leading Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Barzani, the former Chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council (KRSC), formed his new cabinet within the legal timeframe of 30 days after he was instructed to do so by President Nechirvan Barzani on June 12.

The formation of the new government comes months after the parliamentary elections was held in the Kurdistan Region on Sept. 30.

The number of female ministers has gone up by two new members in the new KRG cabinet, from one in the previous government.

The following is the list of members forming the new KRG cabinet, as well as the number of votes they received:

Masrour Barzani (KDP) – Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) [88 votes]

Qubad Talabani (PUK) – Deputy Prime Minister of the KRG [73 votes]

Farsat Ahmed Abdullah (KDP) – Minister of Justice [84 votes]

Shorsh Ismael Abdullah (Gorran) – Minister of Peshmerga [73 votes]

Rebar Ahmed Khalid (KDP) – Minister of Interior [76 votes]

Awat Janab Nouri Salih (Gorran) – Minister of Finance and Economy [81 votes]

Saman Hussein Mohammed Barzinji (KDP) – Minister of Health [81 votes]

Alan Hama-Saeed Salih Mohammed (KDP) – Minister of Education [85 votes]

Dana Abdulkarim Hama Salih Abdulrahman (Gorran) – Minister of Housing and Reconstruction [80 votes]

Sasan Osman Awni Habib (KDP) – Minister of Municipalities and Tourism [85 votes]



The Kurdistan Parliament votes on the new KRG cabinet, July 10, 2019. (Photo: Kurdistan 24)

Aram Mohammed Qadir Amin (PUK) – Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research [76 votes]

Dara Rashid Mahmoud (PUK) – Minister of Planning [75 votes]

Kwestan Mohammed Abdullah Marouf (Gorran) – Minister of Labour and Social Affairs [74 votes]

Mohammed Saeed Ali (PUK) – Minister of Culture and Youth [75 votes]

Abdullah Mahmoud San Ahmed (KSDP) – Minister of Martyrs and Anfal [85 votes]

Begard Dilshad Shukrillah (PUK) – Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources [83 votes]

Kamal Muslim Saeed Qarani (Gorran) – Minister of Trade and Industries [85 votes]

Ano Jawhar Abdulmasih Abdoka (Christian minority) – Minister of Transport and Communications [80 votes]

Pishtiwan Sadiq Abdullah (KDP) – Minister of Endowment and Religious Affairs [77 votes]

Kamal Mohammed Salih Khalil (KDP) – Minister of Electricity [85 votes]

Khalid Salam Saeed [Khalid Shwani] (PUK) – Region Minister [68 votes]

Aydin Marouf Salim (Turkmen minority) – Region Minister [78 votes]

Vala Fareed Ibrahim (KDP) – Region Minister [83 votes]



Iraqi Kurdistan Cabinet finally sees daylight after 9 months

The new prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government has a Cabinet now, with all but one ministerial position filled.



Members of the Parliament of the Kurdistan region vote on the ministerial list of the Kurdistan Regional Government headed by Masrour Barzani in Erbil, Iraq July 10, 2019. REUTERS/ Azad Lashkari

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani presented his new Cabinet July 10, vowing to institute reforms and reinvigorate the semi-autonomous government in Erbil, Iraq.

Three main parties in Iraqi Kurdistan were able to reach an understanding on their ministerial nominations to finally form the new government: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Gorran (Change) movement. Parliament now has confirmed 21 ministers for the Cabinet, though the controversial post of the natural resources minister remains vacant.

In his inauguration speech, Barzani said that his cabinet's top priority will be providing services to the people, combating corruption, carrying out reforms, and developing relations with Baghdad.

The omission of that key position is due to disagreements between KRG President Nechirvan Barzani, who insists on Ashti Hawrami remaining in the post, while Masrour Barzani insists on appointing someone of his own choosing. Nechirvan Barzani did not attend the parliament session, an apparent protest against the new Cabinet. The Barzanis are cousins. The semi-autonomous region held parliamentary elections Sept. 30, but hadn't been able to form a Cabinet due to rivalries among the political parties — mainly between the KDP and the PUK. Out of the KRG legislature's 111 seats, the KDP won the election by securing 45 seats. The PUK came second with 21 seats, and Gorran came third with 12.

Appointing a new Kurdish governor for the oil-rich

Kirkuk province has been the main obstacle to forming the KRG government, but last week the KDP and the PUK agreed to back a joint candidate, a source close to the regional ruling circles told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity.

The parties selected Taib Jabar, a Kurdish engineer and poet from Kirkuk, as the new governor, replacing acting Gov. Rakan Saeed al-Jabouri, who is facing charges of corruption in office. According to the source, Jabar is close to the PUK, but doesn't have a partisan post. Influential neighbors Iran and Turkey haven't weighed in on the decision yet, the source added.

PUK spokesman Latif Sheikh Omar told Al-Monitor, "Concerning Kirkuk and the KRG, we and the KDP have made big steps forward."

Qubad Talabani, junior son of late Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, is the new deputy prime minister. According to the PUK's official news outlet, Sheikh Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa is vice president, Shorsh Ismail is peshmerga (militia) minister, Dara Rashis is higher education minister and Hama Hama Saeed is minister of culture.

As per their signed agreement with the KDP on Feb. 16, Gorran, previously an opposition party, was allowed to participate in the new Cabinet by selecting four ministers, the first deputy president and several senior government posts.

Khalil Sarkani, a member of Gorran's general council, told Al-Monitor, "We decided to participate in this Cabinet to make reforms by carrying out a shared

government program. We didn't emphasize posts, rather we stressed reforms." The Cabinet can't succeed unless all participating sides in the government work together, he added.

"We have a number of time frames for making reforms. If the government doesn't make reforms, we will make our own decisions," he warned, without providing specifics.

Rewaz Fayaq, a woman, is the new parliament speaker. Begard Talabani, a female lawmaker representing the PUK in the Kurdistan parliament, spoke with Al-Monitor before her appointment as minister and pointed out, "I think all the political parties nominated women for ministerial posts." She added, "We, as a group of Kurdish women leaders, held several seminars and put great pressure on the political parties to nominate women to run ministries in the new KRG Cabinet."

Having waited a long time, Kurdistan citizens hope the new Cabinet will be able to deal with the economic recession and high unemployment rate (estimated at more than 20% for the 18 to 34 age bracket), and normalize ties with the Iraqi federal government in Baghdad. However, some civilians and Kurdish critics say they see no bright future for reforms in the region, as both the KDP and the PUK are silencing journalists and activists through their own mainstream media, militias and oil resources.

Dana Taib Menmy is a Kurdish journalist from Sulaimaniyah who has been published by several Kurdish media outlets since 2006.



11-07-2019

Correspondant à Beyrouth, Paul Khalifeh

Syrie: deux attentats en 24 heures à Afrin et Qamichli

L'explosion de deux voitures piégées en moins de 24 heures dans une région contrôlée par l'armée turque et un bastion kurde en Syrie ont fait au moins 13 morts et une cinquantaine de blessés.

La première explosion a eu lieu près d'un barrage des rebelles pro-turcs à l'entrée de la ville de Afrin, au nord d'Alep, alors que des véhicules étaient massés pour inspection. Parmi les victimes figurent au moins huit civils, dont deux enfants.

L'ancien fief kurde d'Afrin a été pris par des rebelles soutenus par l'armée turque il y a près d'un an, après une bataille de plusieurs mois qui a fait des milliers de morts. Depuis, les rebelles et l'armée turque sont victimes d'attaques, imputées aux combattants kurdes, qui contrôlent encore un important quartier dans la ville même d'Alep.

La deuxième explosion a visé une église dans la ville majoritairement kurde de Qamichli dans le nord-est de la Syrie. La bombe, qui a fait au moins dix blessés, a endommagé la principale façade de l'église de la Sainte-Vierge des syriaques-orthodoxes ainsi que des immeubles voisins.



La voiture a explosé devant l'église syriaque-orthodoxe de la Sainte-Vierge, dans cette ville de Qamichli à majorité kurde, le 11 juillet 2019. Gihad Darwish / AFP

La ville de Qamichli est contrôlée en majorité par des forces kurdes soutenues par les États-Unis. L'armée syrienne et ses milices supplétives dominent l'aéroport et la plupart des quartiers arabes de la ville.

Qamichli est parfois le théâtre de combats entre l'armée syrienne et les miliciens kurdes ou d'attentats perpétrés par des cellules dormantes du groupe État islamique.



Jeudi 11 juillet 2019 Elysee.fr

Entretien avec le Président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Nechirvan Barzani

Le Président de la République a reçu mercredi 10 juillet le Président de la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, M. Nechirvan Barzani, à l'Élysée. Il l'a félicité pour sa récente élection à la tête de la région et pour la constitution du nouveau gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak.

Rappelant l'attachement de la France à l'unité et à la souveraineté de l'Irak, dans le respect de l'ensemble de ses composantes, et les liens particuliers qui nous unissent au Kurdistan irakien, le Président de la République a salué les avancées du dialogue entre Bagdad et Erbil.

Il a indiqué que la France continuerait de soutenir la région, comme l'ensemble de l'Irak, dans la lutte anti-terroriste, l'aide humanitaire et les actions de stabilisation.

Le Président de la République a rappelé que serait décliné à l'échelle du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan le renforcement de la coopération bilatérale prévu par la feuille de route stratégique franco-irakienne, notamment dans le domaine de l'éducation, des échanges économiques et des relations culturelles.

Il a indiqué enfin qu'il souhaitait se rendre en Irak dans les prochains mois.





Syria safe zone: Can US reconcile conflicting demands of Turkey, YPG

A US delegation is visiting Turkey for "safe zone" talks amid the Turkish army's increasing activities along the Syrian border, which are signaling a possible new military operation.

An American delegation led by US Syria envoy James Jeffrey has arrived in Turkey for July 22-23 meetings with its Turkish counterparts to make progress in plans for a proposed safe zone, which is expected to provide a buffer between Turkey's border area and parts of northern Syria controlled by Kurdish groups that Turkey considers a threat to its national security. The critical talks are expected to focus on five controversial points.

Moreover, the timing of the talks is telling because of three recent developments. One is that the leaves of Turkish soldiers serving along the border east of the Euphrates River have been canceled. Also, military activities have increased along the border area facing Kobani, which is under Syrian Kurdish rule. Finally, military fortifications around the area have increased expectations of an imminent Turkish operation in northeast Syria.

The operational picture northeast of Syria indicates absolute US aerial dominance. Turkey has assembled two armored brigades, two mechanized brigades and two commando brigades on the Suruc-Akçakale front for a grand-scale, corps-sized offensive military operation with a depth of 40 kilometers (25 miles).

It is essential to provide close air support to ground forces with combat planes, attack helicopters and armed drones. This means Turkey will have to persuade the United States to allow access to the airspace. During the 72-day-long al-Bab siege during Operation Euphrates Shield, the Turkish army bitterly learned the importance of close air support in Syria. A US green light is therefore essential. It is impossible for Turkey to conduct a unilateral military move east of the Euphrates bypassing the United States; thus, there is a necessity to get US approval for any operation in northeastern Syria.

The strategic questions the United States will have to deal with when approving such an operation will be how to accommodate two contrasting objectives: taking into account Turkey's concerns while also safeguarding the security of its local ally, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which constitute the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

To achieve this objective, for almost a year, the United States seemed to be in agreement with Turkey's proposal to create a buffer zone with a limited operation in the Kobani-Tell Abyad-Ain Issa triangle, adjacent to the Manbij region. This operation, whose sole objective would be to create a buffer zone that would be protected by fixed observation outposts in the Kobani-Tell

Abyad-Ain Issa triangle, would not resemble Operation Euphrates Shield — carried out against the Islamic State from Aug. 16, 2016, to March 17, 2017 — and Operation Olive Branch — which took place from January to March 2018 — launched against the YPG, which Turkey considers to be a Syrian extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) of Turkey. The United States and many other Western countries also consider the PKK to be a terrorist group.

This new military move will be defensive in nature — as was the case with the 12 Turkish observation posts around Idlib — closely monitored by the US military.

It appears that the tactical picture of Manbij is to be copied and pasted just to the east of the Euphrates River.

Of note, two rival camps appear to be emerging in Ankara on the US-proposed buffer zone stretching into the Kobani-Tell Abyad-Ain Issa triangle. The first camp says Turkey should cooperate with Washington to create a buffer zone as soon as possible on the grounds of eliminating the YPG's military presence along the border. The second camp says cooperating with the "unpredictable" Trump administration and what is seen as an unreliable US security bureaucracy in northeast Syria would eventually lead Turkey to recognize the de facto legitimacy of the YPG-affiliated Democratic Union Party and that Ankara should not attempt to work with the United States on the safe zone.

It appears that Jeffrey and his team have persuaded YPG officials to accept the creation of a buffer zone, but there are still some major points that need to be discussed:

Size of the buffer zone: Ankara has been insisting on creating a buffer zone starting from Jarablus to Akçakale with the depth of 40 kilometers, marking the max range of the 155 mm Storm Howitzer so as to provide indirect fire support for its ground units. When Ankara is able to deliver this indirect fire support, then there will no need for close air support for the Turkish military units creating fixed military outposts in the buffer zone.

The YPG, on the other hand, seems to agree on the creation of a limited buffer zone that is a maximum of 10 kilometers (6 miles) in depth and that excludes critical urban settlements such Kobani, Tell Abyad and Ain Issa. The YPG's offer is simply copying and pasting the operational picture in Manbij to the Tell Abyad-Kobani-Ain Issa triangle. In Manbij, the north is under the control of the Turkish military, backed by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and the south is under the US-controlled YPG; an east-west cease-fire line along the Hajur River constitutes the boundary of these two. The United States has been trying to find a solution to the size of the buffer zone.

Also controversial is the proximity of indirect fire support elements such as multiple-rocket launchers and mortars to the buffer zone. Ankara demands all such heavy weapons should be at least 20 kilometers (some 12 miles) from the buffer zone. The YPG insists that these weapons will be needed to protect the Kurdish population that will remain in the buffer zone and that a shorter distance is necessary.

Who will control the urban settlements? Ankara wants full control of Kurdish-majority Kobani and Tell Abyad, just as it is controlling Afrin at the moment, claiming that these are historically Arab-majority areas. The YPG, in contrast, does not want to withdraw from these city centers and transfer local governance to Turkish authorities.

Who will protect the airspace of the planned buffer zone? Ankara wants full control of airspace over buffer zone, seeking a US withdrawal from the airspace of northeast Syria. In contrast, the YPG has been insisting on a US declaration of a no-fly zone so as to guarantee US backing against Turkish air-supported offensive military operations.

Will the FSA factions be deployed to the northeast? Ankara claims that it is impossible to create a buffer zone without getting help from the FSA, but the YPG does not want any FSA footprint in the northeast, particularly in Kurdish-majority city centers.

Who will control/monitor the cease-fire line in the buffer zone? The Manbij model, which involved the creation of joint patrols from the Turkish and US militaries, would not work in the northeast because the area is too big and more risky. That is why the United States is very eager to invite European partners such as France and Germany to share the burden. I think that the United States' true objective for inviting European soldiers to the northeast is to assign them to control/monitor the boundary line separating the Turkish-controlled north from the YPG-controlled south as a bipartisan military force that would be welcomed both by Ankara and YPG.

It remains to be seen whether US officials will be able to accommodate the diverging interests of Turkey, a traditional ally currently having bitter relations with Washington, and the YPG, the only US proxy force legitimizing the US military presence in Syria.

If the Jeffrey-led US delegation cannot nail down these issues, then August may be a hot month for the Kobani-Tell Abyad-Ain Issa triangle.

Metin Gurcan is a columnist for Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse. He served in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Iraq as a Turkish military adviser from 2002 to 2008.

Deux ans après la libération de Mossoul, «la guerre est loin d'être finie»

Même si le groupe Etat islamique a été vaincu depuis la bataille de Baghouz, le régime syrien attaque sans relâche ses derniers opposants.

Depuis la fin du mois d'avril, Idlib est devenue la nouvelle cible principale du régime de Bachar al-Assad.

A lors que Mossoul (Irak) a fêté mercredi 10 juillet les deux ans de sa libération du joug de l'Etat Islamique (EI), le conflit en Syrie n'est pas encore terminé, après 9 ans d'affrontements et 370 000 morts.

Pour tenter de mieux cerner les enjeux actuels de cette guerre civile, nous avons interrogé Agnès Levallois, maître de recherche à la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS)

AUJOURD'HUI, LE GROUPE EI A-T-IL DISPARU ?

Il a disparu en tant qu'entité proto-étatique qui avait un projet de califat sur le territoire syro-irakien depuis la bataille de Baghouz (Syrie). Cela ne veut pas dire pour autant que l'organisation a complètement disparu, car ils restent des combattants qui se sont dissous dans la nature. Certaines opérations de nuisance peuvent être menées par des personnes qui s'en réclament alors que d'autres peuvent être récupérées de façon opportuniste.

La priorité désormais pour l'Irak, c'est de reconstruire le pays, remettre en place un Etat avec des infrastructures et une armée pour éviter qu'un phénomène comme Daech puisse réapparaître.

En Syrie, la question de Daech a pollué la perception de la situation. On a oublié les origines du conflit syrien qui était celle d'une population qui se soulevait pacifiquement contre un régime autoritaire. Maintenant que le problème de Daech est réglé, on pense que la guerre est finie et on ne s'intéresse plus à ce qu'il se passe en Syrie. Ce qui est dramatique pour la population syrienne qui se sent abandonnée.

PEUT-ON DONC DIRE AUJOURD'HUI QUE BACHAR AL-ASSAD A GAGNÉ LA GUERRE EN SYRIE ?

Je m'élève contre cette expression parce que je pense qu'elle n'a aucun sens. Si on entend par gagner le fait qu'il est encore au pouvoir, oui. Mais il ne contrôle qu'une partie de son territoire et il n'est pas en capacité de contrôler toute la Syrie, toujours divisée en plusieurs parties.

D'un côté, il y a la partie contrôlée par le régime de Damas qui représente à peine les deux tiers du territoire syrien. Ensuite, il y

a la zone autour d'Idlib que le pouvoir essaie de reprendre aux mains des rebelles sans y arriver. Puis le nord de la Syrie à la frontière avec la Turquie qui est contrôlée par l'armée turque. Et enfin, toute la partie nord-est qui est sous le contrôle des Forces Démocratiques Syriennes (FDS), c'est-à-dire les Kurdes.

Deux ans après la libération de Mossoul, «la guerre est loin d'être finie»

JUSTEMENT, QUE SE PASSE-T-IL À IDLIB ?

Depuis fin avril, on assiste à des bombardements incessants de la part du régime et des Russes sur l'enclave d'Idlib, dans laquelle se trouvent 3 millions de personnes. Il s'agit de la dernière grande poche de rebelles en Syrie.

Une partie de ces rebelles s'est radicalisée pour intégrer le mouvement Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, une émanation d'Al-Qaïda, ce qui sert d'argument à Damas et aux Russes pour justifier ces assauts. Sauf qu'en réalité, ces combattants radicalisés ne sont que 15 000 à 20 000 dans la région. Ce sont donc les 3 mil-



Depuis la fin du mois d'avril, Idlib est devenue la nouvelle cible principale du régime de Bachar al-Assad. AFP/Omar Haj Kadour

lions d'habitants de l'enclave qui vivent dans des conditions absolument épouvantables et subissent de plein fouet les bombardements du régime qui touchent les hôpitaux, les écoles et les infrastructures publiques.

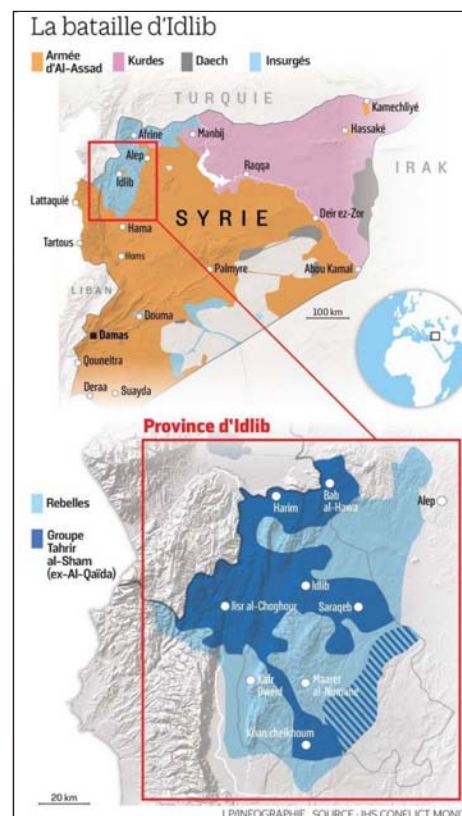
La population est donc prise dans une soufrière : ceux qui voudraient échapper à ce drame ne peuvent pas fuir vers Damas, aux mains du régime, et ils ne peuvent pas non plus aller vers le nord, en Turquie, puisque celle-ci ne veut plus ouvrir sa frontière. Cette dernière compte déjà au moins 3,5 millions de réfugiés syriens sur son territoire.

Le régime de Bachar al-Assad applique donc la même méthode que dans les anciennes zones assiégées comme la Ghouta Orientale afin de prouver qu'il est capable de mater l'insurrection : il bombarde toute la journée en empêchant la nourriture et les médicaments d'entrer dans la ville jusqu'à ce que la population crie grâce.

MAIS ALORS, QUEL EST LE RÔLE DES KURDES DANS CE CONFLIT ?

Les Kurdes ont toujours eu un statut particulier en Syrie. Avant la Révolution, une grande partie de la communauté n'avait pas de papiers. Lorsque la révolution a commencé en 2011, le régime a vite compris qu'il avait intérêt à empêcher les Kurdes de rejoindre le mouvement de révolte en proposant de leur donner la nationalité syrienne.

La population kurde syrienne est donc divisée en deux : une partie a accepté d'avoir enfin ses papiers alors qu'une autre a rejoint la Révolution par conviction.



Lorsque Daech est arrivé en Syrie, l'organisation a envahi la région majoritairement kurde. En travaillant avec la coalition internationale contre Daech, les Kurdes pensaient qu'ils allaient avoir l'appui de la communauté internationale pour faire valoir leurs revendications territoriales. Sauf que les Turcs sont fermement opposés à ce que les Kurdes syriens aient leur territoire, afin d'éviter qu'ils ne servent de base arrière aux revendications des Kurdes turcs.

Depuis que les Américains ont annoncé qu'ils quittaient la Syrie, les Kurdes se sont sentis abandonnés par les Occidentaux, surtout face à la menace éventuelle d'une invasion turque dans leur région. Le régime

syrien a donc compris qu'ils pouvaient continuer à amadouer les Kurdes en leur promettant un territoire afin de lutter contre les Turcs. Présents aux côtés des rebelles au début de la Révolution, les Turcs occupent aujourd'hui le nord du territoire syrien, ce qui est insupportable pour Bachar al-Assad en termes de souveraineté. Cependant, la Russie, à la fois alliée de la Turquie et de Damas, veille à éviter tout affrontement entre les deux pays, ce qui le mettrait dans une situation compliquée.

PEUT-ON ALORS PARLER DE RECONSTRUCTION EN SYRIE ?

Aujourd'hui, il y a des problèmes dans la partie est du pays, celle qui a été libérée du

joug de Daech et plus particulièrement dans son ancienne capitale, Raqqa. C'est une zone de peuplement arabe qui est contrôlée par les Kurdes puisque ce sont eux qui ont réussi à chasser Daech de la ville et de la région. Mais entre les autorités kurdes qui gèrent la ville et les populations arabes, des tensions ont commencé à apparaître.

Sur le terrain, la guerre est loin d'être finie. Rien n'est réglé, et quand on parle de la reconstruction de la Syrie, ça n'a aucun sens. De quelle reconstruction peut-on parler quand on voit encore tous ces conflits et acteurs qui n'ont pas fini de jouer les uns contre les autres ?

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Kurdistan irakien: Un diplomate turc tué dans une attaque à Erbil

Les autorités turques confirment la mort d'un employé de leur consulat dans une attaque survenue ce mercredi 17 juillet à Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan autonome irakien. Une autre personne a été tuée, et une troisième a succombé à ses blessures. L'attaque n'a pas été revendiquée.

Mercredi 17 juillet en début d'après-midi, un homme armé a tiré sur des employés du consulat général de la Turquie dans un restaurant d'un quartier très fréquenté d'Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien, tuant le vice-consul turc, a indiqué un officier de police sous le couvert de l'anonymat.

« Un employé du consulat turc et un civil ont été tués, tandis qu'un autre civil a été blessé », a indiqué un communiqué des forces de sécurité kurdes irakiennes. Le ministère turc des Affaires étrangères a confirmé la mort d'un « employé » de son consulat à Erbil. Le troisième homme, blessé, est mort jeudi 18 juillet, selon ses proches. Son cousin, sous le couvert de l'anonymat, l'a identifié comme Bachdar Ramadan, 26 ans, affirmant qu'il a rendu son dernier souffle dans la nuit de mercredi à jeudi.

LE TIREUR A PRIS LA FUITE

L'attaque, qui s'est produite dans une région irakienne où la Turquie dispose de bases militaires, n'a pas été revendiquée. Un premier bilan de source policière avait fait état de trois morts.

L'agence de presse étatique turque Anadolu a affirmé, citant le responsable du restaurant, que l'assaillant était seul, habillé en civil et muni de deux pistolets, et qu'il a directement pris pour cible les employés du consulat turc.

Il a pris la fuite, selon l'officier de police. Des témoins ont indiqué que des barrages avaient été mis en place dans et aux alentours du quartier d'Ainkawa où a eu lieu l'attaque, connu pour ses restaurants et commerces.

LE PKK AFFIRME N'AVOIR AUCUN LIEN AVEC LA FUSILLADE

Aussitôt depuis Ankara, le porte-parole du président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ibrahim Kalin, a promis une « réponse appropriée aux auteurs de cette attaque lâche », sans toutefois désigner de coupable. Le président Erdogan a ensuite condamné l'attaque sur Twitter. « Nous poursuivons nos démarches auprès du gouvernement irakien et des autorités locales afin de retrouver au plus vite les auteurs de cette attaque », a-t-il affirmé.



Des forces de sécurité kurdes montent la garde près du restaurant où a eu lieu la fusillade contre des diplomates turcs à Erbil (Kurdistan irakien), le 17 juillet 2019. I. AZAD LASHKARI / AFP

La mission de l'ONU en Irak a de son côté appelé à « un maximum de retenue » et a réclamé aux autorités irakiennes et kurdes de la région « une enquête diligente », tandis que Washington a dénoncé un acte de « violence gratuite ».

Le Kurdistan irakien est une région autonome frontalière de la Turquie. Les troupes turques y mènent depuis mai une opération contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qualifié d'« organisation terroriste » par Ankara, l'Union européenne et les États-Unis. Un porte-parole de la branche armée du PKK, Dyar Denir, a affirmé n'avoir aucun lien avec cette fusillade.

Une deuxième phase de l'offensive aérienne et terrestre de l'armée turque, qui vise surtout à détruire des abris utilisés par le PKK dans les montagnes irakiennes, a commencé vendredi 12 juillet au Kurdistan.

De nombreux experts irakiens ont déjà pointé du doigt la probable responsabilité du PKK - présent notamment le long de la poreuse frontière avec la Syrie - dans l'attaque de mercredi. Ils avancent notamment que le PKK a récemment annoncé la mort de commandants kurdes lors de raids turcs.

En Turquie, « l'armée s'est rapprochée des valeurs conservatrices et religieuses de l'AKP »

L'universitaire Sümbül Kaya souligne que les purges se poursuivent au sein de l'armée turque, trois ans après le putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016.

Sümbül Kaya est pensionnaire scientifique à l'Institut français d'études anatoliennes à Istanbul (IFEA). Elle est aussi l'auteure d'une thèse sur la socialisation militaire à l'université Paris-I. Elle analyse les changements survenus au sein des forces armées turques, trois ans après la tentative de putsch du 15 juillet 2016.

Quel est le bilan des purges menées au sein de l'armée turque après le putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016 ?

Après l'imposition de l'état d'urgence – de juillet 2016 à juillet 2018 –, l'armée a connu une vague de purges sans précédent. Elles se sont produites sur décret-loi, sans décision de justice, sans procès. Au total, plus de 16 677 membres de l'armée, tous grades confondus, ont été mis à pied. Plus de 1 567 militaires ont démissionné ou été licenciés.

Trois ans après la tentative de putsch, les purges ne connaissent pas de fin. A l'heure qu'il est, des procédures administratives et judiciaires sont en cours contre 7 335 membres des forces armées. Les arrestations et les mises en examen se poursuivent. Elles sont justifiées par la lutte en cours contre le mouvement du prédicateur Fethullah Gülen, accusé par les autorités d'avoir infiltré l'institution militaire et d'avoir fomenté la tentative de coup d'Etat.

Faire entrer l'armée dans les casernes n'était-il pas le principal souhait des islam-conservateurs au pouvoir, bien avant la tentative de putsch du 15 juillet 2016 ?

La transformation des relations entre le pouvoir civil et le pouvoir militaire a commencé dès 2002-2003, quand Recep Tayyip Erdogan et son Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islam-conservateur) sont arrivés au pouvoir.

Au nom de l'harmonisation avec la législation européenne, des lois ont alors été adoptées, qui ont affaibli les prérogatives de l'armée. Le Conseil de sécurité nationale a notamment perdu son pouvoir d'imposer des décisions politiques au gouvernement civil qui, jusqu'ici, était contraint de les appliquer.

On peut voir là une forme de revanche de la part de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui est resté très marqué par le coup d'Etat



L'armée turque devant le tribunal de Silivri, lors du procès des journalistes du quotidien « Cumhuriyet », le 11 septembre 2017. EMRAH GUREL / AP

« mou » de février 1997, quand le Conseil de sécurité nationale a fait fermer le parti Refah, la formation de l'islam politique dont il était alors membre. Lui-même a ensuite été condamné à cent vingt jours d'emprisonnement pour la lecture publique d'un poème religieux.

Le changement était progressif jusqu'à la tentative de coup d'Etat de 2016. Il est alors devenu plus radical. Quinze jours après, un décret-loi a complètement bouleversé l'anatomie de l'institution militaire.

La présence des militaires a diminué au sein des instances étatiques ; ils ont perdu, entre autres, leur monopole au sein du YAS, l'instance chargée des promotions des haut gradés au sein de l'armée. Leurs prérogatives ont été transférées au pouvoir civil. A l'heure actuelle, le YAS est composé essentiellement de membres de l'AKP, de ministres du gouvernement (justice, intérieur, affaires étrangères, en plus de la défense, qui y était toujours représentée), il ne reste pratiquement plus de haut gradés en son sein.

L'armée turque est donc passée sous le contrôle du pouvoir civil ?

Dans le discours officiel, cette transformation est justifiée par la nécessité de ramener l'armée sous le parapluie du pouvoir civil et aussi par la volonté de la rendre plus professionnelle. Cette politique vo-

lontariste, dont le maître mot est modernisation, s'est assortie d'un changement idéologique.

Le Parti républicain du peuple voit dans les revirements idéologiques de l'institution militaire le signe de son islamisation

Les forces armées turques se sont éloignées de certaines des valeurs kémalistes, la laïcité, entre autres, au profit d'un rapprochement avec les valeurs conservatrices et religieuses de l'AKP. Ces changements sont contestés par les partis d'opposition, notamment par les sympathisants du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, kémaliste), qui défendent l'héritage de Mustafa Kemal, dit « Atatürk », le fondateur de la Turquie moderne. Ils y voient une islamisation de l'institution militaire, évoquent une attaque contre l'armée, considérée par eux comme le dernier rempart du kémalisme.

Quelles sont les manifestations de ce revirement idéologique ?

A partir de 2017, les médias et les réseaux sociaux ont commencé à mettre en scène les prières collectives de haut gradés avec les soldats. Par exemple, en février 2017, des photos de Hulusi Akar, alors chef d'état-major, en train de prier à La Mecque aux côtés du président Erdogan ont largement été publiées dans les médias.





De la même façon, l'actuel chef d'état-major a été récemment montré en train de prier avec les conscrits auxquels il était venu rendre visite dans une garnison à Hakkari (sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde). Les mêmes scènes ont été vues lors de la conquête d'Afrin, la région kurde du nord-ouest de la Syrie prise par l'armée turque et ses supplétifs syriens en février 2018.

En février 2017, les normes vestimentaires ont changé avec la levée de l'interdiction du port du foulard islamique pour les femmes. Enfin, certains rituels ont été modifiés, notamment ceux qui accompagnent les repas ou les obsèques. Jadis, au moment des repas, une prière était prononcée en hommage à Dieu, appelé alors « *Tanrı* » en turc, un terme plutôt neutre, qui n'est pas réservé au seul islam sunnite. En novembre 2017, ce terme a été remplacé par « *Allah* ».

Autre changement, la *Marche funèbre* de Frédéric Chopin, qui, jouée par une fanfare, accompagnait habituellement les obsèques des militaires depuis 1932, a été remplacée par la prière du Takbir (« Dieu est grand »). Il n'y a plus de fanfare et hormis le Takbir, les obsèques ont lieu en silence.

Encore une fois, ces changements ont lieu au nom de la nécessité de placer l'armée sous le contrôle du pouvoir civil. D'ailleurs, le plus souvent, ils sont annoncés par le biais de directives émanant du ministère de l'intérieur.

Quels changements dans la politique de recrutement...

Les purges ont laissé un vide, les effectifs ont sensiblement baissé, ouvrant la voie à une nouvelle politique de recrutement, laquelle traduit la volonté des gouvernants de contrôler davantage le processus, avec des candidats au profil idéologique davantage conforme aux idées de la droite conservatrice.

Quinze jours après la tentative de coup d'Etat, les écoles militaires ont été fermées. Les élèves qui étaient en fin de cursus et se préparaient à entrer en fonction n'ont pas pu le faire. Ils ont dû retourner à la vie civile et reprendre des études dans d'autres universités.

Avec le décret du 30 juillet 2016, une réforme importante a vu le jour. Les élèves scolarisés dans les lycées religieux appelés *imam hatip* (là où les futurs imams sont for-

més) sont dorénavant admis à présenter les concours pour intégrer l'armée, chose impensable jadis.

Il y a quelques années de cela, j'avais pour ma part entendu pas mal de récits sur le fait que les nouvelles recrues militaires devaient parfois subir un examen des genoux, la présence de callosités à cet endroit étant censée révéler une pratique religieuse développée et qu'il fallait absolument cacher. Désormais, la tolérance est incomparablement plus grande.

A terme, on peut imaginer que cette nouvelle politique de recrutement favorisera l'émergence d'un profil de militaire en phase avec les orientations idéologiques de la droite conservatrice.

Toutefois, l'armée n'est pas une institution homogène, elle est traversée par les différents courants de pensée représentés au sein de la société. Le courant conservateur religieux va-t-il prendre le dessus par rapport aux autres ? Il sera intéressant de voir comment il va composer avec les cercles kémalistes, atlantistes, eurasiens, adeptes du rapprochement avec la Russie.

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Éditorial

La Turquie face à un choix géostratégique

Le réchauffement des relations entre Moscou et Ankara franchit un nouveau cap avec la livraison du système de missiles russe S-400. Erdogan lance ainsi un défi sans précédent à l'OTAN et aux Etats-Unis.

Livraison d'un système de missiles russe S-400, à Ankara, le 12 juillet 2019. HANDOUT / AFP

Éditorial du « Monde ». Trois ans presque jour pour jour après la tentative de coup d'Etat militaire qu'elle avait contribué à faire échouer, la Russie a commencé à livrer, vendredi 12 juillet, son système de missiles S-400 à la Turquie. Vladimir Poutine avait été le premier chef d'Etat à téléphoner à Recep Tayyip Erdogan pour souhaiter « *un retour rapide à la stabilité* ». Le président turc ne l'a pas oublié – pas plus qu'il n'a oublié la retenue de ses partenaires occidentaux, ni leurs critiques, justifiées, de la répression qui n'a jamais cessé, avec quelque 50 000 arrestations et le limogeage de plus de 150 000 fonctionnaires.

Le réchauffement des relations entre Moscou et Ankara, jusque-là adversaires dans le conflit syrien, avait commencé pendant l'été 2016. Depuis, il n'a fait que s'accroître. Le « nouveau tzar » et le « nouveau sultan » ont beaucoup en commun, leur conservatisme comme leur autoritarisme, leur goût de l'histoire comme leur volonté de rendre à leurs

pays respectifs ce qu'ils considèrent être le rang qui lui revient. Les S-400 sont le symbole de cette très inédite alliance russo-turque.

L'achat par la Turquie, en septembre 2017, de ces missiles de défense aérienne, pour 2,2 milliards d'euros, avait semé la consternation parmi ses alliés. Pilier du flanc sud-est de l'Alliance atlantique depuis 1952 et deuxième armée de l'OTAN par le nombre de soldats, la Turquie n'a certes jamais été un partenaire facile, surtout depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir en 2002 des islamistes de l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement). Réticente à l'engagement en Afghanistan, hostile à l'intervention en Libye et longtemps ambiguë vis-à-vis des djihadistes de l'organisation Etat islamique, la Turquie d'Erdogan inquiétait déjà de plus en plus ses partenaires.

Le jeu de Vladimir Poutine

Le défi lancé à l'OTAN par l'installation des S-400 – si toutefois elle est réellement menée à son terme – est sans précédent. Ces missiles vont compliquer les opérations militaires occidentales. Leur déploiement pose la question de leur compatibilité avec le reste de l'équipement des armées de l'OTAN et de la sécurité de l'Alliance face à une Russie toujours plus agressive. Il fait en outre le jeu de Vladimir Poutine, qui se sert de ces missiles et du dossier turc

pour enfoncer un coin dans les divisions au sein de l'OTAN.

L'administration Trump a donné jusqu'au 31 juillet à Ankara pour renoncer à cette acquisition, sous peine de sanctions économiques qui pourraient être fatales à une économie turque déjà affaiblie. Washington menace également d'écarter la Turquie du programme de construction des F-35, les chasseurs furtifs américains de dernière génération, auquel participent des entreprises turques. Le programme d'entraînement des pilotes turs sur ces avions a déjà été gelé.

Si Donald Trump donne de la voix, les autres membres de l'Alliance semblent pour le moment hésiter sur l'attitude à adopter, au-delà de l'expression de leur « *préoccupation* », et espèrent que les récentes déconvenues du parti de M. Erdogan aux élections municipales aboutiront à sa défaite à la prochaine élection présidentielle... en 2023. Les statuts de l'OTAN ne prévoient pas la possibilité d'exclure un Etat membre, ni même de le suspendre. La Turquie était déjà en voie de marginalisation, notamment en raison des purges opérées dans l'armée après le putsch raté de 2016. A elle, à présent, de faire en toute lucidité le choix géostratégique qu'impose l'affaire des S-400. Mais jouer sur les deux tableaux ne sera pas longtemps possible.

Golfe Persique : le détroit d'Ormuz, au centre du monde

Le couloir situé entre l'Iran et les Emirats arabes unis est stratégique pour le trafic pétrolier. Il est aussi le théâtre de multiples affrontements, depuis la guerre Iran-Irak jusqu'aux récentes tensions entre Téhéran et Washington.

Aux confins de l'Arabie et aux portes de la Perse, nimbé d'exotisme et de danger, le détroit d'Ormuz est à la fois bout et centre du monde, passage obligé et coupe-gorge. Cette image saturée de soleil, d'embruns et d'or noir, façonnée par la fameuse guerre des tankers des années 1980, à l'époque du conflit Iran-Irak, a été ranimée, depuis le mois de mai, par la soudaine escalade des tensions entre Washington et Téhéran. Six navires mystérieusement sabotés à l'entrée du golfe Persique, un drone américain abattu par un missile iranien, une avalanche de déclarations belliqueuses : Ormuz, le « cap Horn » des capitaines de pétroliers, est repassé en rouge sur la carte des points géopolitiques à risque.

En 2018, 21 millions de barils de brut ont transité chaque jour par ce couloir, soit un cinquième de la consommation mondiale d'or noir et un tiers du pétrole acheminé par voie maritime sur la planète. Un quart de la consommation mondiale de gaz naturel liquéfié a aussi circulé par cet étroit goulet. En plus d'être l'épine dorsale du système énergétique international, Ormuz se trouve sur la ligne de faille entre l'Iran et l'Arabie saoudite, deux puissances à couteaux tirés, qui se disputent la suprématie régionale.

La guerre économique décrétée par les Etats-Unis contre la République islamique, menée à coups de sanctions contre son industrie pétrolière, et les rituelles menaces de fermeture du détroit, proférées en riposte par les dirigeants de Téhéran, ont redonné au lieu son cachet sulfureux. Ultrasurveillé, ultramilitarisé, Ormuz est une boîte de Pandore géostratégique.

Territoire volcanique

Cette autoroute maritime, en forme de chicane, est dessinée par la péninsule de Musandam, une enclave omanaise à l'intérieur des Emirats arabes unis (EAU), et la baie de Bandar-e-Abbas, un port iranien entouré d'îles. Parmi celles-ci, Ormuz, qui a donné son nom au détroit. Ce territoire volcanique fut, aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles, un important comptoir sur la route des Indes et la capitale d'un petit royaume, rayonnant sur le Golfe et la côte d'Oman.

Long de 45 km, le passage fait 38 km de large



Une série d'attaques en juin contre des pétroliers dans le golfe Persique a accentué les tensions entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran. AP.

à l'endroit le plus resserré. Les eaux territoriales iraniennes étant peu profondes, les navires sont obligés de circuler dans des chenaux très étroits, de 2 milles nautiques (3,7 km), passant entre les îlots omanais de Quoin et Ras Dobbah. Un espace interdit à la navigation d'une distance équivalente sépare le couloir entrant du couloir sortant.

« Quand on entre dans le détroit, il faut prendre un virage à gauche à 90 degrés, explique le Français Bertrand Derennes, commandant de tanker à la retraite. On prend alors le rail de navigation obligatoire, et surtout, on ne doit pas dévier, un peu comme quand on passe au large de Calais, il y a un rail et on le suit. » Une fois le détroit effacé, le chenal s'élargit à 3 milles nautiques (5,5 km) mais passe entre trois îles (Grande Tomb, Petite Tomb et Abou Moussa) occupées depuis 1971 par l'Iran, au grand dam des EAU qui les revendiquent.



Des touristes sur l'île d'Ormuz, au large de la ville portuaire iranienne de Bandar-e-Abbas, le 29 avril. ATTA KENARE / AFP

« La zone est extrêmement étroite et en plus, elle est sillonnée par des petites embarcations de pêcheurs ou de contrebandiers, raconte Hubert Ardillon, un autre ancien de la marine marchande française. Le passage est compliqué en raison de la brume de chaleur qui restreint la visibilité. J'ai beaucoup joué de la corne de brume sur le détroit. »

Longtemps méconnu, Ormuz émerge sur la carte du fret maritime mondial durant la

seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, en raison de trois événements successifs : le début de l'exploitation, en 1951, de Ghawar, le plus vaste gisement d'or noir du globe, découvert trois ans plus tôt, sur la côte est de l'Arabie saoudite ; le choc pétrolier de 1973, conséquence de la guerre israélo-arabe du Kippour, qui multiplie le prix du baril par trois et ébranle les économies occidentales ; et la révolution khomeyniste de 1979, qui propulse au pouvoir à Téhéran un régime islamiste prosélyte, dans un pays chiïte, suscitant l'inquiétude des Etats sunnites du Golfe, notamment l'Irak, qui entre en guerre contre son voisin l'année suivante.

Attaques de l'armée irakienne

Ormuz devient cinq ans plus tard un mot familier dans les bulletins d'information occidentaux. En avril 1984, plusieurs navires faisant le plein de brut au terminal de l'île de Kharg, par lequel transitent 90 % des ventes de pétrole iraniennes, sont attaqués, à coups de missiles Exocet, par les Super-Etendard de l'armée irakienne. Le président Saddam Hussein, confronté à l'échec répété des offensives terrestres lancées par ses troupes, a décidé de porter le conflit dans les eaux du Golfe.

L'ambition du despote irakien est double : saper l'effort de guerre iranien en affaiblissant l'économie du pays, très dépendante des exportations d'hydrocarbures d'une part ; et pousser le régime de Téhéran à la faute, en l'incitant à bloquer le détroit d'Ormuz, ce qui

le rayon d'action de l'aviation irakienne s'étend, ce qui lui permet de poursuivre ses raids jusqu'à l'île de Larak, en face de Bandar-e-Abbas. Des dizaines de tankers sont coulés ou irrémédiablement endommagés. En mai 1987, des missiles irakiens touchent même une frégate américaine, probablement par erreur, tuant 37 marins.

L'Iran, qui dispose de chasseurs Phantom et Tomcat datant de l'époque du chah (1941-1979), réplique en attaquant les pétroliers qui viennent s'approvisionner au Koweït, au Qatar et aux Emirats, trois monarchies solidaires de l'Irak. La République islamique pose aussi des mines, plante des batteries de missiles antinavires le long de ses côtes et élabore une stratégie de harcèlement du trafic maritime confiée aux pasdarans, les gardiens de la révolution. Le 16 septembre 1986, des membres de cette force naissante et désordonnée, mêlant patriotes et fanatiques du régime, mitraillent un tanker koweïtien depuis des vedettes ultrarapides parties des îles Tomb et Abou Moussa. C'est le premier d'une longue série de raids maritimes menés par la future garde prétorienne du régime.

En réaction, les Etats-Unis lancent en juillet 1987 l'opération « Earnest Will » (« ferme volonté »). Les pétroliers koweïtiens sont rebaptisés et placés sous pavillon américain. Un croiseur, un destroyer et deux frégates de l'US Navy les accompagnent toutes les deux semaines, jusqu'à la sortie d'Ormuz. « Il s'agit

Ajr en flagrant délit de pose de mines sur les voies commerciales. La scène est filmée à la caméra infrarouge. Les soldats américains donnent ensuite l'assaut au bateau – une opération qui coûte la vie à cinq marins iraniens – avant de l'envoyer par le fond.

Téhéran crie aussitôt à l'agression. Depuis le podium de l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies où il est le premier dirigeant iranien à se rendre depuis la révolution, Ali Khamenei, alors président, soutient que l'*Iran Ajr* était un navire commercial. Mais, dans ses Mémoires, son successeur Akbar Hachémi Rafsandjani confesse la faute du régime. « Notre navire commercial emportait deux mines à destination de Bushehr », écrit-il. Nous étions convenus de rejeter l'accusation [américaine] (...) et de ne rien dire sur l'existence de ces deux mines. »

Le deuxième affrontement intervient le 19 octobre 1987, peu après qu'un missile antinavire a percuté un supertanker récemment passé sous la bannière étoilée, blessant grièvement le commandant et plusieurs officiers, tous américains. En représailles, des destroyers pilonnent deux plates-formes offshore qui servaient de repaire aux pasdarans, à proximité du terminal de Lavan. La troisième confrontation, une bataille aéronavale de grande ampleur, baptisée « Praying Mantis » (« mante religieuse »), survient en avril 1988, après l'explosion d'une mine au passage d'un navire américain. En réaction, l'US Navy anéantit deux frégates iraniennes et des bases des pasdarans situées dans les champs pétroliers de Sirri et Sassan.

Trois mois plus tard, le 3 juillet 1988, c'est l'épilogue tragique de la guerre des tankers : un croiseur américain, l'USS *Vincennes*, qui pourchassait, au mépris des consignes de sa hiérarchie, des vedettes de pasdarans dans les eaux iraniennes, ouvre le feu sur un Airbus d'Iran Air, reliant Bandar-e-Abbas à Dubaï, qu'il a confondu avec un avion de chasse hostile. Le tir provoque la mort des 290 passagers, dont 66 enfants, qui se rendaient au pèlerinage de La Mecque. Huit ans plus tard, les Etats-Unis se résolvent à verser 132 millions de dollars (117 millions d'euros) de dommages au gouvernement iranien, dont 62 millions de dollars destinés aux familles des victimes, mais refusent de présenter leurs excuses. Téhéran considère encore à ce jour ce tir comme volontaire.

Opération « Mante religieuse »

En tout, entre 1984 et 1988, plus de 500 vaisseaux ont été détruits et endommagés, pour la grande majorité du fait de tirs irakiens. Le trafic n'a jamais cessé à travers le détroit, les Iraniens n'ayant pas voulu prendre le risque de le fermer complètement et n'ayant de toute façon pas les moyens de le faire durablement. Davantage que les dommages causés à son industrie pétrolière, c'est la baisse du dollar et du prix du baril qui a mis l'économie de l'Iran à terre. L'opération « Praying Mantis » (« Mante religieuse ») a



L'ancien président iranien Akbar Hachémi Rafsandjani, ici le 17 juin 2005, est mort en janvier 2017. BEHROUZ MEHRI / AFP

provoquerait une intervention occidentale immédiate, d'autre part. Le 16 mai 1984, Akbar Hachémi Rafsandjani, le président du Parlement iranien et futur président de la République (1989-1997), a en effet lancé : « Nous ne tolérerons pas qu'il soit difficile d'exporter notre pétrole par l'île de Kharg tandis que d'autres pays continuent d'exporter le leur facilement. Le golfe Persique sera accessible à tous ou à personne. »

Pour tenter de mettre les clients de son industrie pétrolière à l'abri, Téhéran aménage des terminaux flottants, plus au sud du Golfe, qui sont ravitaillés par navettes. Mais grâce à l'aide de la France, qui l'équipe en Mirage F1,

de la plus importante opération d'escorte navale depuis la fin de la seconde guerre mondiale », rappelle Pierre Razoux, directeur de recherche à l'Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire, à Paris, dans *La Guerre Iran-Irak* (Perrin, 2013).

Lire aussi De Gibraltar à Ormuz, les incidents en mer avec l'Iran se multiplient Flagrant délit de pose de mines

La confrontation, inéluctable, éclate en trois temps : dans la nuit du 21 septembre 1987, un hélicoptère américain surprend le navire *Iran*

aussi accéléré la fin du conflit, survenue le 20 août 1988, en convainquant l'ayatollah Khomeyni (guide de la révolution de 1979 à 1989) qu'il ne pouvait pas mener deux guerres en même temps.

Le Golfe retrouve alors son calme, mais des incidents se produisent à intervalles réguliers, signe que la tension couve. En 1991, pour éviter que la coalition internationale venue libérer le Koweït n'envahisse son territoire par la mer, l'Irak mouille des centaines de mines. L'opération de nettoyage par des dragueurs allemands, italiens, français, belges et néerlandais durera plusieurs mois. En mars 2007, des marins britanniques occupés à fouiller un boutre, au large de la frontière irako-iranienne, sont arrêtés par les gardiens de la révolution, au motif qu'ils se trouvent dans les eaux de leur pays. Ils sont libérés deux semaines plus tard.

En juillet 2010, une vedette suicide endommage un tanker japonais, une opération attribuée aux Brigades Abdallah Azzam, un groupe affilié à Al-Qaïda. En janvier 2016, les pasdarans interceptent deux bateaux américains qui s'étaient égarés dans les eaux iraniennes et retiennent leurs dix marins pendant quelques heures. Les images des militaires, agenouillés, les mains sur la tête, tournent en boucle dans les médias iraniens et américains.

« Si notre pétrole ne peut pas passer par ce détroit, sans doute le pétrole des autres pays n'y passera pas non plus »

En mai 2018, la décision de la Maison Blanche de se retirer de l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien, signé trois ans plus tôt, renvoie Ormuz, vieille connaissance occidentale, au premier plan de l'actualité. A la politique de « *pression maximale* » mise en œuvre par Donald Trump pour l'obliger à accepter un accord plus contraignant, l'Iran répond par de nouvelles menaces de fermeture du corridor maritime. « *Si notre pétrole ne peut pas passer par ce détroit, sans doute le pétrole des autres pays n'y passera pas non plus* », clame, en mai 2019, le général Mohammad Bagheri, le chef d'état-major iranien. Le remake de la déclaration de Rafsandjani, trente-cinq ans plus tard.

La planète pétrole a changé

Entre ces deux dates, la planète pétrole a changé, et Ormuz aussi. Grâce à l'huile de schiste, les Américains sont devenus les premiers producteurs mondiaux d'or noir, devant les Saoudiens et les Russes. En 2019, les Etats-Unis n'importent plus que 16 % de leur pétrole du Proche-Orient – contre 26 % six ans plus tôt.

Les plus gros acheteurs de pétrole sont désormais asiatiques. Selon l'Agence d'information sur l'énergie du ministère de l'énergie américain (EIA), 76 % des exportations de brut ayant transité par Ormuz en 2018 étaient destinées à l'Inde et aux puissances extrême-orientales, surtout la Chine, le Japon et la Corée du Sud. Intimement lié à l'essor indus-



Des patrouilleurs de la marine américaine, près de Foujeyra (Emirats arabes unis), le 19 juin. KAMRAN JEBREILI / AP

triel des grands pays occidentaux dans la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, le détroit est devenu l'auxiliaire de la modernisation de l'Asie.

Autre constat : **malgré les attaques de tankers au mois de juin**, la destruction d'un drone américain par un missile iranien et les imprécations de Téhéran, le cours du baril n'a pas flambé. La guerre commerciale entre Donald Trump et son homologue chinois, Xi Jinping, suscite tellement plus d'inquiétude qu'elle a relégué au second plan sur les marchés pétroliers le « vieux » risque géopolitique d'Ormuz.

Des alternatives au passage par Ormuz

Le détroit compte d'ailleurs quelques concurrents, ce qui n'était pas le cas il y a trente ans. Soucieux de garantir l'écoulement de leur production en toutes circonstances, les Etats du Golfe se sont offert des alternatives au passage par Ormuz. Le pipeline Est-Ouest, qui traverse l'Arabie saoudite pour déboucher au port de Yanbu sur la mer Rouge, a une capacité de 5 millions de barils par jour. Les EAU disposent d'un oléoduc qui mène à Foujeyra, dans le golfe d'Oman, d'une capacité de 1,5 million de barils. Enfin, l'Irak possède une voie vers le nord, à travers le Kurdistan irakien vers le port turc de Ceyhan, d'une capacité théorique de 1,4 million de barils par jour. L'Iran, quant à lui, cherche à développer, malgré les sanctions américaines, son port de Chabahar, ouvert à l'océan Indien, et à le relier à Bandar-e-Abbas par un pipeline.

Lire aussi **Pétroliers attaqués en mer d'Oman : « On est dans une guerre de propagande entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran »**

Mais ces réseaux de contournement ne sont pas aussi efficaces qu'espéré. Une grosse partie du pétrole qui circule dans l'oléoduc saoudien est en fait destiné aux raffineries situées dans l'ouest du royaume. Le mauvais état du pipeline irakien ne permet pas d'exporter plus de la moitié du volume promis. A

l'heure actuelle, les monarchies du Golfe n'exportent qu'environ 3,2 millions de barils par jour par oléoduc. Si toutes ces voies terrestres fonctionnaient à plein régime, le total pourrait passer à 7 ou 8 millions. Ce qui laisserait tout de même plus de 12 millions de barils sans autre option qu'Ormuz.

Ces oléoducs ne sont d'ailleurs pas sans risque : le pipeline irakien a été attaqué à plusieurs reprises, et, en mai, des drones s'en sont pris à la route Est-Ouest, endommageant deux stations de pompage. Au même moment, quatre navires au mouillage à **Foujeyra** étaient la cible de mystérieux sabotages. L'auteur de ces attaques n'a pas été formellement identifié. Mais celles-ci s'apparentent aux provocations soigneusement calculées dont l'Iran a fait sa spécialité, à l'image de la destruction du drone américain, le 20 juin, revendiquée, elle, par Téhéran.

L'appareil d'observation a été abattu de nuit, à haute altitude, alors qu'il évoluait sur un parcours régulier et éminemment prévisible. Téhéran soutient que l'appareil avait pénétré dans son espace aérien. Les autorités iraniennes ont aussi pris soin de souligner qu'un avion de reconnaissance américain qui volait à proximité, avec 35 personnes à bord, a été épargné, afin de ne pas provoquer de pertes irréparables.

« *Les sabotages de tankers en mer d'Oman, en mai et juin, obéissent à la même logique, estime l'historien Pierre Razoux. Il n'y a pas eu de morts, les dégâts matériels sont limités. Les Iraniens se contentent de signaler que si les sanctions américaines les empêchent d'exporter leur pétrole, c'est tout le trafic dans la région qui souffrira avec eux.* »

Déménagement du détroit tous les deux ans

Téhéran sait qu'il n'a pas les moyens de verrouiller Ormuz. La disproportion des forces est encore plus nette que dans les années 1980. Les Etats-Unis ont ouvert, en 1995, une base navale permanente, à Bahreïn, où stationne leur V^e flotte, et déménagé le quartier général de leur commandement central au Qatar, au début des années 2000. L'armée

française s'est installée à Abou Dhabi en 2009. La Royal Navy britannique est présente à Oman et à Bahreïn. Ces marines effectuent des exercices conjoints de déminage du détroit tous les deux ans, pour la dernière fois en mai 2019, et demeurent convaincues qu'un minage d'Ormuz n'est pas à l'ordre du jour.

A supposer que l'Iran parvienne à damer le pion à toutes ces marines et à paralyser Ormuz pendant quelques jours, cela ne suffirait pas à créer une pénurie dommageable sur le plan financier. La plupart des pays disposent en effet de réserves stratégiques de pétrole pour faire face à ce genre de situation. Face à l'armada américaine, et à Riyad, qui s'est doté de la première force maritime régulière de la région, Téhéran ne peut miser que sur ses capacités de nuisance et de dissuasion, testées durant la guerre des tankers.

« Nous n'avons pas les moyens de la marine américaine, c'est évident. Mais en cas de conflit, il est certain que nous coulerons quelques-uns de ses navires, et peut-être un porte-avions »

La marine iranienne s'est bien équipée de « sous-marins de poche » auprès de la Russie et de la Corée du Nord. Mais elle n'a pas cherché à acquérir de bâtiments de surface de gros tonnage. La fierté des gardiens et du régime reste leur flotte de vedettes rapides, équipées pour certaines de missiles, et pour d'autres d'une simple mine prête à glisser sur

son rail. Les jeunes gardiens embarqués sur ces coquilles de noix s'entraînent sur des simulateurs à se lancer à l'assaut de bâtiments américains. « Nous n'avons pas les moyens de la marine américaine, c'est évident. Mais en cas de conflit, il est certain que nous coulerons quelques-uns de ses navires, et peut-être un porte-avions », veut croire un responsable iranien.

C'était l'objectif d'un exercice militaire iranien très médiatisé, en 2015, durant lequel les gardiens avaient fait exploser une maquette flottante de l'USS *Nimitz*, mastodonte des mers. A Téhéran, on garde aussi en tête un autre exercice militaire, américain celui-ci, organisé dans les eaux du Golfe en 2002 : une puissance armée « à l'iranienne » avait fictivement « détruit » seize bâtiments américains, dont un porte-avions.

Dans son bras de fer asymétrique avec les Etats-Unis et leurs alliés, l'Iran s'appuie aussi sur l'effet dissuasif de son arsenal balistique. Par temps clair, depuis les gratte-ciel d'Abou Dhabi, la vue porte sur la petite île d'Abou Moussa, équipée par Téhéran de batteries de missiles capables de frapper toute la côte des Emirats. Parmi les cibles probables en cas de conflit : des usines de dessalement, des aéroports, des installations pétrolières et gazières. De quoi mettre ces micro-monarchies à genoux en quelques frappes.

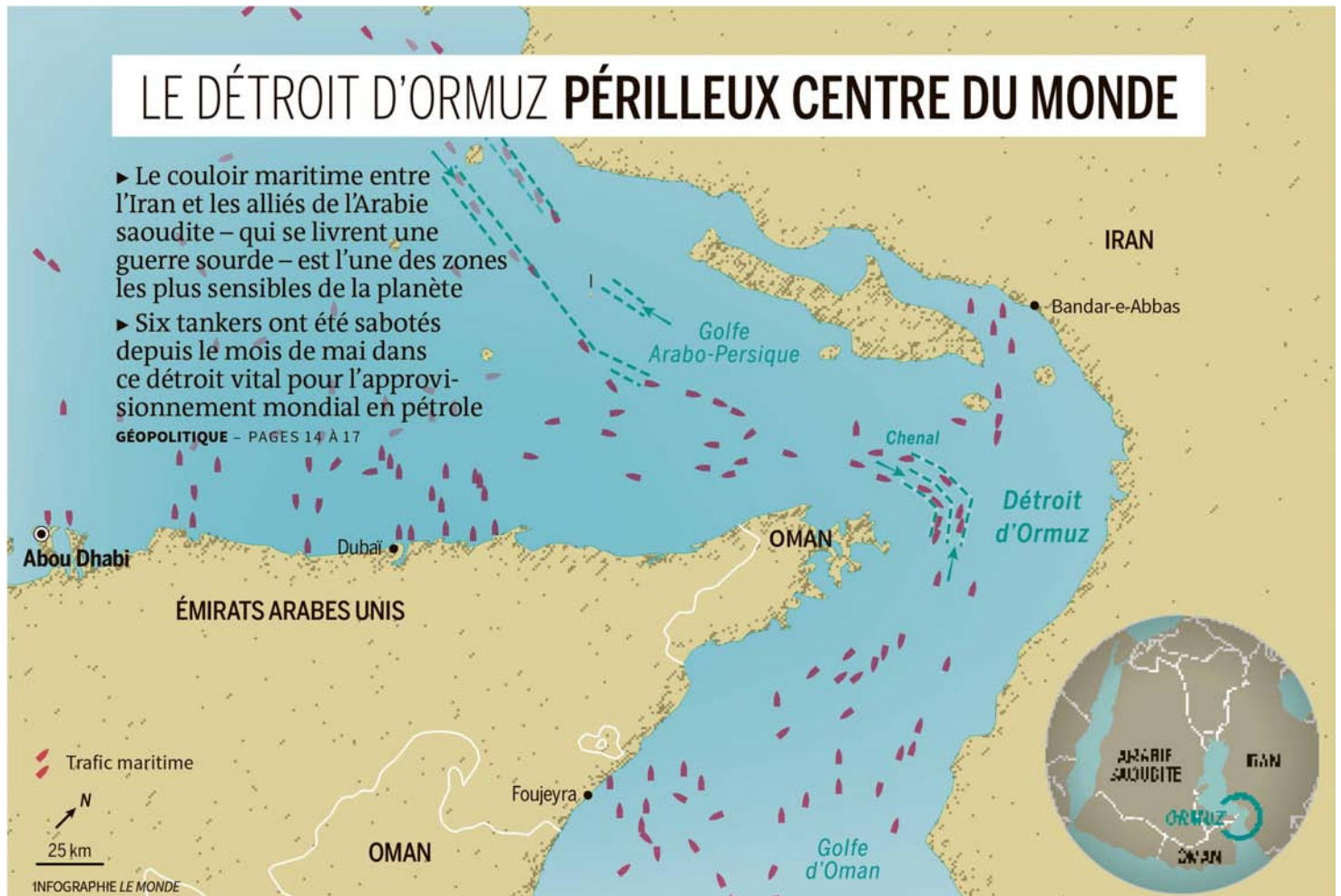
La stratégie de Téhéran

Pour l'heure, la stratégie de Téhéran est davantage économique que militaire. « Créer des

troubles dans le détroit, avec des mines par exemple, ou faire peur aux transporteurs, ça fait monter le prix des assurances, et donc, in fine, le prix du baril », expose un bon connaisseur du marché pétrolier. Exsangue du fait des sanctions américaines, qui entravent ses exportations d'hydrocarbures, l'Iran a besoin de vendre le peu de barils qu'il arrive encore à écouler au prix le plus élevé possible.

L'impact sur les coûts de transport est déjà sensible. Selon l'agence Bloomberg, les primes de risque dans le Golfe peuvent maintenant s'élever à 500 000 dollars, contre 50 000 dollars en début d'année. Cette hausse ne se reflète que timidement dans les cours actuels, elle ne représente pas plus de 25 cents par baril. Mais si la tendance s'accroît, l'effet se fera sentir. Pour les Iraniens, cette stratégie haussière est aussi une manière de mettre les Américains sous pression : les premiers à souffrir d'un pétrole cher seraient les Asiatiques et les Européens, qui seraient alors incités à se retourner contre la politique de Donald Trump, espèrent les dirigeants de Téhéran.

A ses capitaines qui croisent dans la zone, l'un des acteurs majeurs du secteur donne la consigne suivante : « Elever sa vitesse lors du passage dans le chenal iranien afin d'effacer le détroit le plus rapidement possible tout en assurant une veille visuelle et radar très attentive. Et une fois le détroit passé, naviguer en priorité au large des côtes des Emirats arabes unis et d'Oman, de façon à laisser les côtes iraniennes le plus loin possible. »



Clément Therme : « La crise irano-américaine renforce les “durs” à Téhéran »

Clément Therme est chercheur pour le programme Moyen-Orient de l'International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) de Londres. Ce fin connaisseur de l'Iran rejoindra le programme Nuclear Knowledge of Sciences Po en septembre 2019 comme chercheur post-doctorant.

Comment expliquer la stratégie suivie par Téhéran depuis le retour des sanctions américaines et le retrait de Washington de l'accord nucléaire, en mai 2018 ?

La République islamique entend mettre en œuvre une double stratégie fondée sur la dissuasion et le contournement des sanctions. Pour dissuader le président Trump de poursuivre l'escalade guerrière voulue, planifiée et peut-être même rêvée par certains membres de son entourage politique [comme \[le conseiller à la sécurité nationale\] John Bolton](#) ou [\[le secrétaire d'Etat\] Mike Pompeo](#), Téhéran essaie de démontrer le caractère contre-productif de la politique de « *pression maximale* » de Washington, en reprenant ses activités nucléaires volontairement suspendues après l'accord international de 2015. De plus, Téhéran menace Donald Trump d'une guerre régionale s'il décide de recourir à l'option militaire contre la République islamique.

Vu de Téhéran, les préoccupations de politique intérieure américaine finiront par l'emporter, dans la stratégie de Washington, jusqu'aux élections présidentielles prévues en 2020. Selon cette vision, M. Trump ne peut pas se permettre une guerre ouverte avec l'Iran. Néanmoins, malgré le caractère erratique des décisions du président Trump, il n'en reste pas moins que la guerre économique menée par les Etats-Unis constitue un nouveau défi pour la stabilité politique intérieure de l'Iran. Le risque d'un effondrement économique est réel – une récession d'au moins 6 % est annoncée pour 2019. La perte de légitimité populaire des institutions de la théocratie, qui est apparue dans l'espace public à partir de 1999, date des manifestations étudiantes de Téhéran, s'accompagne désormais d'une capacité de redistribution amoindrie de l'Etat iranien à ses clients, en raison de la chute des exportations pétrolières. Ces dernières sont tombées à moins de 500 000 barils par jour au mois de juin, sous l'effet des sanctions américaines.

Au-delà de la reprise de l'enrichissement d'uranium, quels leviers la République islamique peut-elle enclencher pour réagir aux pressions ?

Sur le plan diplomatique, pour contourner les sanctions, l'Iran entend diviser la communauté internationale en jouant la carte asiatique. Il renforce ses relations avec la Chine mais aussi avec la Russie, qui est intégrée dans cette stratégie orientale de la République islamique. Au niveau



Le Guide suprême Ali Khamenei, à Téhéran, le 19 juin. AP

régional, Téhéran s'efforce également d'empêcher le projet de l'administration Trump de constituer un front anti-iranien dans le golfe Persique. Pour ce faire, Téhéran s'appuie sur le sultanat d'Oman, le Koweït et le Qatar, qui ont des positions plus équilibrées par rapport à leur voisin iranien.

Depuis le mois de mai 2019 et l'accroissement des tensions militaires irano-américaines, les

Emirats arabes unis ont également changé leur stratégie vis-à-vis de Téhéran : Abou Dhabi craint désormais plus la menace d'une guerre ouverte irano-américaine que les réseaux d'influence de l'Iran au Moyen-Orient. Ces pays vont jouer un rôle de modérateur auprès de l'administration Trump afin d'éviter une déstabilisation régionale. Ils sont proches [des positions de la France](#) et du Japon, qui travaillent aussi à une désescalade.



Des manifestants protestent contre la possibilité d'une guerre avec l'Iran, devant la Maison Blanche, le 20 juin. JACQUELYN MARTIN / AP

Lire le récit : **Golfe Persique : Ormuz, un détroit sous surveillance/Le détroit d'Ormuz, au centre du monde**

L'Iran peut aussi riposter en utilisant ses réseaux d'influence au Moyen-Orient, même s'ils ne constituent pas l'ensemble homogène souvent comparé de manière caricaturale à un « Hezbollah régional ». Dans un contexte de guerre économique américaine contre l'Iran, ces réseaux ont une double fonction : contourner les sanctions économiques américaines et servir de leviers pour dissuader les Etats-Unis de lancer une action militaire contre l'Iran.

Au-delà de cette dimension défensive, ils ont également la fonction de diffuser l'idéologie de la révolution islamique. Depuis l'invasion américaine de l'Irak en 2003 et les « printemps arabes » de 2011, qui ont conduit à un affaiblissement de certains Etats dans le monde arabe, la République islamique a pu construire un réseau d'influence dont la dimension idéologique est structurante. L'un des paradoxes de cette influence idéologique à l'extérieur des frontières iraniennes, au Pakistan, en Afghanistan, en Irak et au Liban par exemple, est qu'elle apparaît aujourd'hui plus forte que l'emprise de l'idéologie khomeyniste à l'intérieur des frontières iraniennes. Ses principes, l'islamisme d'Etat, l'idéologisation de la religion chiite et la tutelle du juriste théologien, demeurent surtout prégnants parmi les obligés du système.

Comment cette crise influence-t-elle les riva-

« modérés » et « conservateurs ». Cette division apparaît de plus en plus artificielle pour les questions de politique intérieure, en raison de l'incapacité des premiers à réformer. Il n'en reste pas moins que, sur le plan de la stratégie internationale, il existe de véritables différences de méthode. Les modérés souhaitent donner la priorité à la survie de la République islamique, en insistant sur le développement économique. Face à eux, les plus conservateurs préfèrent défendre la dimension révolutionnaire de la politique internationale du pays inspirée par Khomeyni, et ce à n'importe quel prix économique avec pour repères le rejet de l'existence d'Israël et la volonté de renverser la dynastie au pouvoir en Arabie saoudite.

Le problème pour la population est que le régime présente comme un jeu à somme nulle l'alternative entre un Etat garant de la sécurité d'une part, et le développement économique du pays d'autre part. L'opinion publique souhaite majoritairement un gouvernement capable de poursuivre les deux objectifs de concert et non un gouvernement qui pourrait les conduire à un effondrement économique pour des motifs sécuritaires.

Mais de fait, la crise irano-américaine renforce les « durs » à Téhéran. En effet, le choix ne s'impose plus aujourd'hui entre défenseurs et opposants de la République islamique, mais entre « loyaux » à l'Iran ou « vendus » à l'administration Trump. La politique de changement de régime voulue par Washington affaiblit donc le

Face à l'escalade américaine, Téhéran fait l'expérience des limites de l'action européenne, notamment dans la sphère économique, comme on le voit avec l'échec du mécanisme de troc Instex [l'acronyme anglais pour « instrument de soutien aux échanges commerciaux »], qui est une coquille vide. Pour l'Iran, il y a deux choix possibles : négocier directement avec le président Trump afin de trouver une solution aux problèmes économiques du pays, ou bien se tourner vers la Chine, l'Inde et la Russie. Mais ces choix mènent l'un comme l'autre à des impasses : des négociations publiques avec les Etats-Unis demeurent impossibles pour le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, et les bénéfices économiques à attendre d'un rapprochement avec les économies russe, chinoise et indienne sont limités. La politique étrangère de la République islamique est bloquée. La surenchère nucléaire et les menaces sécuritaires contre la puissance militaire américaine dans le voisinage de l'Iran sont les deux seules options qui restent à sa portée.

Aucune des parties ne semble souhaiter une escalade. Pourtant, celle-ci paraît inéluctable. La médiation française que le président Emmanuel Macron veut mettre en place a-t-elle une chance de réussir ?

Le scénario de l'escalade militaire conduirait à l'effacement rapide de la diplomatie européenne, qui ne parvient pas à s'affranchir de son alignement stratégique avec les Etats-Unis. Bruxelles a investi son capital diplomatique dans le processus de négociation sur le nucléaire, mais c'est bien sous l'impulsion diplomatique de l'administration Obama que les négociations ont pu aboutir, d'abord à Genève en 2013, puis à Vienne en 2015. Le retour des Etats-Unis à une diplomatie iranienne plus idéologique et visant au moins implicitement au changement de régime montre les limites de Bruxelles en tant qu'acteur diplomatique sinon indépendant, du moins autonome, sur la scène internationale.

La médiation diplomatique française initiée par le président Macron et mise en œuvre par [l'ambassadeur de France au Liban] Emmanuel Bonne en visite à Téhéran pour la deuxième fois, mercredi 10 juillet, s'inscrit dans la tradition diplomatique française de tendance gaullio-mitterrandienne. Jacques Chirac, entre 2003 et 2005, avait proposé une action diplomatique pour trouver une solution politique à la crise du nucléaire iranien. Celle-ci avait échoué faute de soutien américain et en raison de l'élection de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad à la présidence de la République islamique, en 2005. Pour réussir, l'initiative diplomatique française doit obtenir des concessions diplomatiques américaines et conjurer le spectre de l'élection d'un président ultraconservateur en Iran en 2021. En effet, l'évolution du rapport de force au sein des élites politico-religieuses à Téhéran ne plaide pas en faveur de la recherche d'un compromis avec une puissance occidentale.



Un réacteur de la centrale atomique iranienne de Bushehr, le 26 octobre 2010. MAJID ASGARIPOUR / AP

lités internes dans l'appareil d'Etat iranien ? A l'intérieur de l'Etat, les divisions entre factions apparaissent à la fois comme une force et comme une faiblesse. Depuis la fin de la guerre froide, elles canalisent les mécontentements à l'intérieur du pays, en organisant une alternative entre

processus de démocratisation du pays, à l'intérieur des frontières iraniennes.

Dans quelle mesure l'Iran peut-il compter sur le soutien de la Russie et de la Chine dans la crise actuelle ?

Iran: frappes des Gardiens de la révolution au Kurdistan irakien

Voilà plusieurs jours que les bombardements s'enchaînent dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien, à la frontière iranienne. Les Gardiens de la révolution ont d'ailleurs reconnu publiquement ce vendredi 12 juillet avoir bombardé les bases arrières de mouvements d'opposition kurdes iraniens, qu'ils considèrent comme des terroristes. Ils affirment répondre à une attaque menée quelques jours plus tôt par la guérilla kurde contre l'armée iranienne.

Selon un tweet en anglais de la chaîne iranienne Press TV, les attaques ont été menées du côté irakien de la frontière.

Le communiqué des Gardiens de la Révolution indique que l'opération a eu lieu « le long de la frontière » en représailles à de récentes attaques kurdes qui ont fait cinq morts parmi les Pasdaran dans l'ouest et le nord-ouest de l'Iran.

Les bombardements fréquents dans cette zone ont forcé nombre de familles à fuir leurs villages ces dernières années. Les montagnes kurdes irakiennes servent également de refuge un peu plus à l'ouest au PKK, parti kurde de Turquie considéré comme organisation terroriste par Ankara. Le mois dernier, la Turquie a d'ailleurs lancé une



Les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien servent également de refuge aux combattants du PKK (illustration). AFP PHOTO/SAFIN HAMED

opération terrestre et aérienne dans les montagnes kurdes irakiennes.

Si les autorités du Kurdistan irakien ont condamné les bombardements, elles ont également demandé aux différentes guérillas kurdes

de ne pas utiliser leur territoire pour fomenter des attaques. Il est vital pour la région de conserver de bonnes relations avec ses grands voisins, particulièrement la Turquie, soutien politique et économique d'envergure.

AFP Samedi 20 juillet 2019

Le tueur présumé du vice-consul turc arrêté au Kurdistan irakien

Erbil (Irak), 20 juil 2019 (AFP) — Les autorités kurdes irakiennes ont annoncé samedi avoir arrêté deux suspects, dont le tueur présumé du vice-consul turc, abattu mercredi par balles avec deux Irakiens dans un restaurant d'Erbil.

Mazloum Dag, présenté par le contre-terrorisme kurde irakien comme un homme né en 1992 et originaire de Diyarbakir en Turquie, a été "arrêté par la police et le contre-terrorisme", a indiqué le Conseil de sécurité du Kurdistan irakien dans un communiqué, sans donner aucun autre détail.

Mazloum Dag est, selon l'agence étatique turque Anadolu, le frère de Dersim Dag, députée du principal parti prokurde de Turquie (HDP), la deuxième force d'opposition au Parlement.

Le second suspect arrêté "a aidé Mazloum

Dag à mener son action terroriste", ont ajouté les autorités kurdes irakiennes, l'identifiant comme Mohammed Biskesiz. Elles n'ont indiqué ni sa nationalité ni les circonstances de son arrestation.

Le HDP est régulièrement accusé par le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan d'être étroitement lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Cette organisation, considérée comme "terroriste" par Ankara, l'UE et les Etats-Unis, a de nombreuses bases dans le nord irakien, et notamment au Kurdistan. Depuis fin mai, la Turquie, qui possède également des bases en Irak, mène une vaste campagne pour la déloger d'Irak.

La branche armée du PKK a affirmé n'avoir aucun lien avec cette fusillade, mais Ankara a annoncé jeudi avoir lancé son opération aé-

rienne "la plus étendue" contre le PKK au Kurdistan irakien en réponse à "l'attaque cruelle à Erbil", la capitale du Kurdistan irakien.

De nombreux experts estiment probable que le PKK soit derrière cette fusillade --qualifiée de "terroriste" par Erbil-- alors que l'organisation a récemment accusé l'armée turque d'avoir tué plusieurs de ses commandants dans des raids en Irak.

Mercredi, un homme armé de deux pistolets munis de silencieux, selon des sources de sécurité, a tiré sur un groupe de diplomates turcs accompagnés d'Irakiens dans un restaurant d'un quartier huppé d'Erbil, ville réputée pour ses nombreux lieux de sorties.

Il a tué le vice-consul turc Osman Köse, enterré jeudi à Ankara, et deux Kurdes Irakiens, dont un, blessé, qui a succombé à ses blessures le lendemain.

Turkish diplomat, one other shot dead in Kurdish capital

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq (Reuters) - At least two people including a Turkish diplomat were shot dead on Wednesday in a rare attack in the capital of Iraq's northern Kurdish region, local security officials and Turkey's foreign ministry said.

A gunman opened fire at a restaurant in Erbil where Turkish diplomats were dining before fleeing in a car driven by an accomplice, two Kurdish security officials and a witness said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility as security forces began a search for the attackers.

Turkey, Iraq's central government in Baghdad and Kurdish authorities in Erbil condemned the attack, which took place weeks after Turkey launched a new military offensive against Kurdish separatist militants based in northern Iraq.

Ankara's main enemy in Iraq is the PKK group, which has based fighters in the mountainous border region, north of Erbil, during its decades-long insurgency in southeastern Turkey.

Turkey and the ruling Kurdish party in Erbil, the KDP, have blamed the PKK for other Turkey-related incidents in northern Iraq including the storming of a Turkish military camp earlier this year.

Turkey's foreign ministry said one of those killed on Wednesday was a diplomat working at its consulate to semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.

A statement from the Kurdish internal security service said two people were killed - the diplomat and another civilian - and one other person was wounded.

The Kurdish officials and Iraqi state television earlier said three people were killed and that they were all Turkish diplomats and included the deputy consul.

It was a rare major security incident in Erbil, where a new president and prime minister, part of a clan that has controlled the KDP for decades, recently took office.

The prime minister has said he is looking at strengthening the Kurdish regional government's relationship with Turkey. Slideshow (3 Images)

"Nobody invited them (the PKK) here," Prime Minister Masrour Barzani said in an interview with Reuters this month.

"We disapprove of their activities and ... of their presence here. We understand the con-



Kurdish security members stand guard near a restaurant where Turkish diplomats and Turkish consulate employee were killed in Erbil, Iraq July 17, 2019. REUTERS/Azad Lashkari

cerns of the neighboring countries about security issues," he said.

Ankara's forces have regularly carried out air raids against PKK targets in northern Iraq and in May dropped commandos on mountain ridges in a new operation against the militants.

Turkey has called for Baghdad to take a more active role in helping it eliminate the PKK, and has waged offensives in recent years against PKK allies in northern Syria.

Kurdish Forces Arrest Suspects for Assassination of Turkish Diplomat in Erbil

Irqi Kurdish authorities announced Saturday they had arrested two suspects involved in the murder of three people, including a Turkish diplomat, in the regional capital Erbil this week.

The autonomous region's security council first said its counterterrorism unit had arrested "the main perpetrator" Mazloum Dag, a 27-year-old from Turkey's Diyarbakir region.

The council had put out a wanted notice for Dag a day earlier in connection to Wednesday's killing of Turkish Vice Consul Osman Kose and two Iraqi nationals.

It later announced it had also arrested Mohamad Biskesz, identifying him as "one of the accomplices of Mazloum Dag".

It did not specify Biskesz's nationality or whether

he was apprehended with Dag or separately.

Turkey's Anadolu state news agency said Dag is the brother of Dersim Dag, a member of Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party, the People's Democratic Party (HDP).

The HDP, the country's second largest opposition group, is regularly accused by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of links to Turkey's outlawed separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The diplomat was one of at least two people shot dead on Wednesday when a gunman opened fire in a restaurant where Turkish diplomats were dining.

The HDP said it strongly condemned the attack on the diplomat, and said "using the attack as a reason to make one of our lawmakers a target

through the name of her brother is a provocation and unacceptable".

The shooter fled in a car driven by an accomplice, two Kurdish security officials and a witness said.

The attack took place weeks after Turkey launched a new military offensive against the PKK based in northern Iraq.

Ankara's main enemy in Iraq is the PKK group, which has based fighters in the mountainous border region, north of Erbil, during a decades-long insurgency in southeastern Turkey.

Turkey and the ruling Kurdish party in Erbil, the KDP, have blamed the PKK for other Turkey-related incidents in northern Iraq including the storming of a Turkish military camp earlier this year.

The Washington Post

By Masrour Barzani / July 18, 2019
Masrour Barzani is prime minister
of the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Why the Kurdistan region of Iraq is making a new start

After 16 years of upheaval in Iraq and five brutal years of war with the Islamic State terrorist group, a foe that imperiled all of humanity, we are embarking on a new journey toward building a stronger Kurdistan. The next four years will be a defining time for us, our neighbors and our allies in which we, the Kurdistan Regional Government, look past our recent traumas, consolidate our place in the region and secure a presence on the international stage. In short, we want to make a new start.

Last week, I formed a government to lead the Kurdistan region of Iraq. My mission is to change the way we do things, both at home and abroad. As prime minister, I will offer a different way of doing business that feeds off the challenges we've endured, builds on our achievements and responds to an evolving global dynamic.

The fight against the Islamic State, which we helped lead on behalf of the global community, has damaged us economically. The burden has become intolerable. The cost of war, federal budget cuts by the government in Baghdad and the mass movement of refugees to our lands has left us with billions of dollars in debt.

Throughout our hardships, we have remained a friend and ally of the West and a partner in the region. Since the Islamic State took over much of western Iraq and eastern Syria in mid-2014, we have shown that our fight against the terrorists was as much about protecting our allies as it was about safeguarding ourselves.

We have provided intelligence that has foiled terrorist attacks abroad and offered refuge to almost 2 million people fleeing persecution. We have clearly demonstrated our good faith as global citizens, sheltering Arabs, Kurds, Muslims, Yazidis, Christians, Turkmen and others. Ten kilometers from our parliament building is a thriving community of Christians, from all parts of the Middle East, who are building churches and worshipping in peace.

The cost of other refugees, however, is increasing and remains only partly funded. We cannot perform our role as hosts alone.

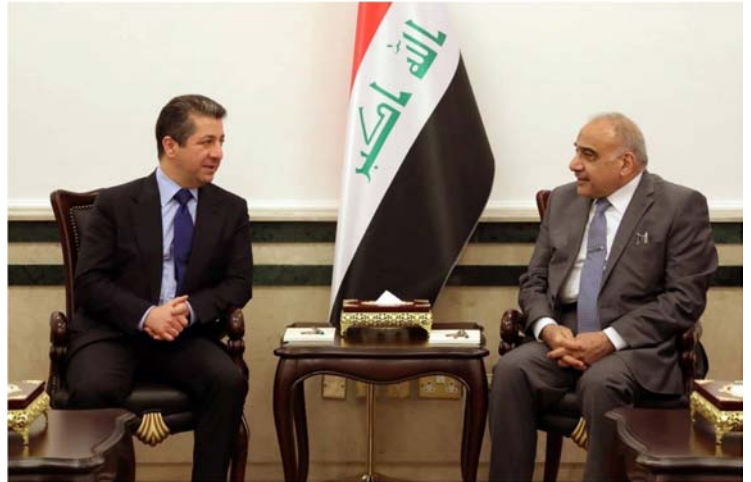
We need to secure a future for the displaced and for ourselves, and we seek the help of our friends in the West in several ways.

Our challenges begin inside Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been our homeland throughout the ages. As prime minister, I will implement reforms that will adopt global best practices and bring accountability to all arms of our civil service and cabinet.

My government will create a diversified economy that delivers growing prosperity for all. We will enact legislation to make Kurdistan a welcoming and attractive location for investors. We will integrate and modernize our armed forces. And we will transform public services and tackle corruption to ensure that government serves the people, not the other way around. Engaging us politically and financially will be essential to this transformation, and I call on our friends to do so.

I will also take steps to reset the relationship between Irbil and Baghdad, which has remained fraught for the past 16 years. For most of that time we have essentially governed ourselves, though without breaking our tie with Iraq.

By agreement, we have received a quota of the Iraqi budget. But the allocations are rarely delivered in full. It is time for a more constructive and stable partnership with Baghdad. This week I made my first visit as prime minister to Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, taking with me proposals to settle the disputes between us over oil, territory, budgets and the role of our armed forces. I want to ensure that our agreements are honored through a fair distribution of budget proceeds. A resolution would offer the bedrock for future



Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, right, meets with Masrour Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, in Baghdad, on Tuesday. (Iraqi Prime Minister Media Office via Reuters) (Handout/Reuters)

cooperation. Our future is wedded to a secure and democratic Iraq.

In 2017, Iraqi Kurdistan held a referendum on independence. The ballot was non-binding, but an overwhelming 93 percent of people voted in favor. While we would have welcomed greater support from the international community for our right to self-determination, our priority now is to create a strong, stable Kurdistan region anchored within the international community. We ask those whom we helped protect to acknowledge the constructive global role we have played by helping us build our economy.

Over many generations of conflict, every family in Iraqi Kurdistan has suffered a personal loss. We can no longer relinquish solidarity, or squander the sacrifices made by so many, through returning to the squabbling that plagued relationships between parties and neighbors.

We have many friends in the international community who wish us well, but it is time to do more. We reaffirm our role as honest brokers trusted by all. We do this through the prism of true friendship, having displayed our steadfast support for the interests of our allies, including the United States, and a commitment to democratic values. We need our friends to help us start again.



By Ece Toksabay, Tuvan Gumrukcu
July 18, 2019

Turkish defense firms set to lose billions after F-35 removal

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkish defense companies helping to build F-35 stealth fighter jets are set to lose work worth billions of dollars after Washington said it was removing Turkey from the program over its purchase of a Russian missile defense system.

Eight Turkish firms have been involved in producing the advanced fighter jets, supplying hundreds of items including parts for cockpit display systems and landing gear, on contracts the Pentagon said would have been worth \$9 billion over the course of the program.

The head of Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate acknowledged on Thursday that the U.S. decision to move the work elsewhere - and the potential for additional U.S. sanctions - would be a setback for those companies.

Ismail Demir said the losses would be only temporary, arguing that the companies could emerge stronger in the long run. But analysts said the move was a major blow to firms which had worked on the jet production for a decade, and would also limit Turkey's access to new defense technology.

"I don't know how companies will try to compensate for this, as they have been part of an established production chain since 2007," Sinan Ulgen, visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe and a former Turkish diplomat, told Reuters.

Turkish companies involved in the program are Roketsan, Havelsan, Alp Aviation, Ayesas, Kale Aerospace, Tubitak-SAGE, the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), and the Turkish leg of the Dutch Fokker Elmo, according to the F-35 official website.

None of the companies were immediately available to comment.

Demir said they would evaluate how to compensate for their losses. Kale Group said in April that if Turkey were to be excluded from the F-35 project, any lost

sales would be offset by turning to civil aviation.

But Ulgen said that finding swift alternatives to such highly specialized work was not easy.

"What can a factory that produces a part for the body of the F-35 do? What can it change into, where can it go? ... This isn't the automotive sector, where you make a part for a BMW and then sell it to Ford when there is a change," Ulgen said.

Unal Cevikoz, Deputy Chairman of the main opposition Republican People's Party, put the value of contracts that would be canceled at \$12 billion and said many jobs were at stake.

"These firms have almost 30,000 employees. What are these people going to do?" he said in a statement.

RUSSIA COULD STEP IN

Announcing Turkey's suspension from the program on Wednesday, the Pentagon said that Turkish companies produced more than 900 parts for the F-35.

The supply chain would be transferred to mainly U.S. factories in a move that would cost the United States between \$500 million and \$600 million, it said.

Washington had warned for months that it would act if Turkey took delivery of Russian S-400 missile defense systems, arguing that the S-400's radar and tracking software would undermine the F-35's stealth capabilities if the two were deployed together.

Turkey dismissed those concerns, saying that the two countries should set up a



FILE PHOTO: A view shows a new S-400 "Triumph" surface-to-air missile system after its deployment at a military base outside the town of Goardeysk near Kaliningrad, Russia March 11, 2019. REUTERS/Vitaly Nevar/File Photo

working group to assess any threat posed by the S-400s.

On Friday it took delivery of the first S-400 parts, finally sealing the deal with Moscow and marking a breach with Washington and other NATO allies.

As well as losing its role in F-35 production, Turkey's planned purchase of more than 100 jets is being canceled and it also faces sanctions under a 2017 law known as the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

That could further damage the Turkish defense industry, deal another blow to an economy in recession and accelerate Turkey's drift away from its Western allies.

Russian news agencies on Thursday cited Sergei Chemezov, the head of Russian state corporation Rostec, as saying Russia would be ready to supply its SU-35 fighter jets to Turkey if Ankara wants them.

"The F-35 move isn't a determining decision on its own, but it is an important indication on the direction of the relations in the current context. Turkish-American ties are more damaged than we have seen in our recent history," Ulgen said.

Fuyant le marasme économique, des Iraniens cherchent du travail au Kurdistan irakien

A un carrefour d'Erbil, un pick-up ralentit avant d'être pris d'assaut par une demi-douzaine d'Iraniens: étranglés par les sanctions américaines, ces travailleurs journaliers louent désormais leurs bras en Irak voisin pour nourrir leurs familles.

Rostam, Kurde iranien venu d'Ourmia, dans le nord-ouest de l'Iran, assure que le travail n'y manque pas, mais que là-bas, "la monnaie n'a plus aucune valeur".

"A la fin d'une journée de travail, on peut acheter un poulet. Mais une famille a besoin de plus qu'un poulet", explique l'homme de 31 ans, qui refuse de donner son nom de famille.

Les sanctions américaines ont fait grimper l'inflation en Iran, désormais officiellement à 52%, et le rial a perdu la moitié de sa valeur en un an.

Lui aussi Kurde comme la majorité de ces travailleurs iraniens venus en Irak, Riza Rostoumy dit gagner "25.000 à 30.000 dinars irakiens par jour", de 20 à 25 dollars. "C'est une bonne somme", se félicite celui qui triple ainsi ce qu'il gagnait en Iran.

Un bonus vital, renchérit Rostam, alors que les déclarations belliqueuses de Téhéran ou de Washington peuvent à tout instant faire flamber les prix en Iran.

"L'économie est totalement imprévisible, tu peux te réveiller un matin et découvrir que le prix de la nourriture a doublé dans la nuit", assure-t-il en sorani, le dialecte kurde le plus parlé en Irak et en Iran.

- "SOURCE DE RICHESSE" -

Comme Rostam et Riza, la majorité des Iraniens venus chercher du travail dans la zone industrielle d'Erbil sont entrés en Irak avec des visas de tourisme d'un mois.

Après 28 jours de travail, tous rentrent chez eux, les valises remplies de thé, de couches et autres biens de

consommation devenus inabordable en Iran.

Pour Adel Bakawan, chercheur associé à l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales de Paris (EHESS), ces travailleurs émigrés temporaires, non seulement "répondent à un besoin" au moment où les investissements reprennent doucement au Kurdistan irakien, mais sont également "perçus comme une source de richesse".

"En plus d'occuper des métiers dévalorisés culturellement et socialement dans la société kurde irakienne, les dépenses de ces journaliers iraniens assurent une source de revenus" à la région autonome, explique-t-il à l'AFP.

S'ils sont obligés de quitter régulièrement le territoire irakien, Rostam, Riza et les autres sont toujours rapidement de retour, en général après moins d'une semaine de repos chez eux.

A Erbil, beaucoup logent chez Khorsheed Shaqlawayee, un Kurde irakien de 54 ans qui a déjà transformé trois vieux immeubles en pensions pour travailleurs étrangers.

"L'automne dernier, je n'avais que 58 travailleurs iraniens dans mon hôtel, maintenant ils sont 180" à louer des chambres de neuf mètres carrés où peuvent dormir jusqu'à quatre personnes, pour trois dollars la nuit, se félicite-t-il.

Aujourd'hui, il affiche complet et est obligé de "refuser des clients, tous iraniens".

- "NOURRIR NOS FAMILLES" -

Les autorités kurdes d'Irak assurent n'avoir aucun chiffre sur ces travailleurs venus de l'autre côté de la frontière.



Les travailleurs irakiens, eux, disent n'avoir aucune animosité envers eux, comme Rebin Siamand, rencontré sur un chantier à Erbil.

"Ils sont payés autant que nous", assure-t-il.

Mais, prévient ce Kurde irakien de 27 ans, si les Iraniens se mettent à casser les prix ou à venir plus nombreux, ils ne seront plus accueillis de la même façon.

Depuis février, Souleimane Taha, un Kurde iranien, vient régulièrement en Irak vendre à l'arrière de son pick-up bleu de petites statues d'animaux en plâtre.

Diplômé de la faculté de mathématiques, Souleimane Taha a dû accepter ce petit boulot pour aider sa famille à survivre à Sanandaj, dans l'ouest de l'Iran, à 300 km de là. Il cherche désormais un appartement à Erbil pour accueillir ses amis et proches qui voudraient eux aussi chercher du travail en Irak.

"Avant les dernières sanctions, on mangeait de la viande trois fois par semaine. Aujourd'hui, seulement une fois", affirme-t-il à l'AFP.

"Si nous émignons, c'est simplement pour nourrir nos familles".

La Turquie riposte en Irak après l'attaque qui a causé la mort d'un de ses diplomates

Ankara a visé, dans une opération aérienne à Qandil, des installations du groupe PKK soupçonné d'avoir abattu un diplomate turc mercredi.

La Turquie a lancé, jeudi 18 juillet, son opération aérienne « la plus étendue » contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en Irak en réponse à l'attaque qui a causé la mort d'un diplomate turc la veille à Erbil, a annoncé le ministre de la défense Hulusi Akar.

« A la suite de l'attaque cruelle à Erbil, nous avons lancé notre opération aérienne la plus étendue sur Qandil et porté un coup sévère au PKK », a dé-

claré le ministre turc, selon des propos rapportés sur le site du ministère.

Mercredi en début d'après-midi, un homme armé a tiré sur des employés du consulat général de Turquie dans un restaurant d'un quartier très fréquenté d'Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien, frontalier de la Turquie.

Ankara a rapidement déploré la mort dans cette attaque de l'un de ses diplomates, Osman Köse, enterré jeudi dans la capitale turque. Des sources en Irak affirment que le vice-consul turc et deux civils irakiens ont perdu la vie dans l'attaque.

Lutter « jusqu'à ce que le dernier terroriste soit neutralisé ».

La Turquie mène depuis mai une opération militaire au Kurdistan d'Irak contre le PKK, qualifié

d'« organisation terroriste » par Ankara, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, notamment à Qandil et Sinjar où le groupe dispose de bases arrière.

Même si un porte-parole de la branche armée du PKK, Dyar Denir, a affirmé n'avoir aucun lien avec cette fusillade, de nombreux experts irakiens ont déjà pointé du doigt la probable responsabilité du groupe, qui a récemment annoncé la mort de commandants kurdes lors de raids turcs.

Dans l'opération lancée jeudi, l'armée turque a détruit notamment des abris, refuges et grottes appartenant au PKK, selon M. Akar, qui a promis que « la lutte contre le terrorisme se poursuivra avec une détermination croissante et jusqu'à ce que le dernier terroriste soit neutralisé ».



Syrian Kurdistan focus of foreign diplomatic attention

The United States, Britain, France and Saudi Arabia are seeing eye to eye on proposals to secure northeastern Syria.

QAMISHLI, Syria — Following a flurry of high-level meetings in Syria between Kurdish and foreign leaders, it seems some progress is being made on stabilizing the country's northeast region.

Abdulkarim Omar, a foreign relations leader in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), told news outlets July 15 that the United States has agreed to continue supporting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to combat Islamic State cells, and to maintain political and service support in northeast Syria.

Officials met July 13 in Ayn Issa, including William Robak, a US adviser to the global coalition forces, and leaders of the global coalition against IS. On July 9, Robak and US special envoy to Syria James Jeffrey had met with officials of the Civil Council of Deir ez-Zor, which is affiliated with the self-administered Rojava area. Also attending were elders of Arab tribes in the area of al-Omar oil field east of Deir ez-Zor.

Those meetings followed an international conference held July 6 to 8 in Amouda regarding the burden presented by an estimated 14,000 IS members detained by the SDF in Kurdish-run prisons and camps. That conference drew 200 foreign and Arab academics, politicians, experts and former diplomats and specialists on the issues of terrorism, in addition to Kurdish officials. They discussed the possibility of establishing an international court in Syria to try the prisoners.

Saudi Minister of State for Gulf Affairs Thamer al-Sabhan also visited Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa, on June 13. Sabhan met with US Deputy Secretary of State Joel Rayburn, US Ambassador William Roebuck and a number of Arab sheikhs and dignitaries. Sabhan called on Arab tribes to support the US-backed, Kurdish-led SDF to maintain stability and security in the area and ensure IS doesn't make a comeback.

Jeffrey had called July 7 on the global coalition countries to send ground troops to northeast Syria to compensate for a potential US troop withdrawal. So far, France and Britain have agreed, Germany has declined and Italy and Denmark are considering the request.

Melissa Dalton, a senior fellow and deputy director of the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, warned that in tandem with a US withdrawal from Syria, IS will make a strong comeback.

In a July 2 interview with Foreign Policy, she warned, "Without US or allied support to sustain the security and stabilization gains the coalition has made," IS will "reconstitute and be able to take territory."

Journalist and human rights activist Rana Habash al-Ahmadi told Al-Monitor the United States wants to coordinate with Saudi Arabia and coalition countries to help secure the area.

"The US wants these forces to run [a planned safe zone in northeast Syria] if Washington withdraws its forces from Syria. Jeffrey told the Arab tribes and officials of Deir ez-Zor military council that his government is seeking a political balance in northeastern Syria and will prevent attacks on the safe zone. Jeffrey was certainly referring to [attacks by] Turkey," Ahmadi said. "Washington wants to keep Ankara from achieving its plan to occupy the area east of the Euphrates."

A media center affiliated with the Deir ez-Zor Civil Council published a statement July 9 on Facebook indicating Jeffrey had said at the oil field meeting that the United States supports northeast Syria at the political, military, economic, health and education levels. He promised that the area will be fairly represented in negotiations for a political solution to the war.

Lebanese newspaper al-Modon reported the same day that Washington is reactivating the US-backed Revolutionary Commando Army, whose fighters mainly hail from Deir ez-Zor. Al-Modon added that the global coalition forces announced military drills with heavy weapons, including remote artillery and rocket launchers in the Tanf area on the Iraqi-Syrian-Jordanian border, with the commando army's participation. It said the army will be recruiting and establishing training camps for new members in Jordan.

The newspaper added that the Revolutionary Commando Army could be relied on as a domestic offensive force against Iranian militias in Deir ez-Zor province and on the Syrian-Iraqi border. "The news came in light of mounting US pressure on the Iranian militias in eastern Syria. This pressure was backed by Saudi Arabia," it wrote. "Sabhan ... promised generous support for the reconstruction of that province."

Researcher Socrates al-Alou said Iran sees Deir ez-Zor as an alternative route for the Tanf crossing, which was seized by the United States. Tanf is home to a military base for the global coalition.

"Iran wants to control Deir ez-Zor to achieve its strategic project of linking Tehran to Beirut through Iraq and Syria," he said. "The US aims to block this [project]. For the US, the city is a connection point among its areas of influence in Syria in the northeast [Kurdish areas] where several American bases are deployed."

The United States will also deter Turkey from expanding into eastern Syria, said Salah al-Din Bilal, director of the Asbar Center for Research and Studies.



William Robak (2nd L), US special adviser to the global coalition forces, meets with Deir ez-Zor civil council officials and local tribal figures, seen in an image uploaded June 13, 2019. Image Source: Twitter / @ShinoCan2

"The US presence in a safe zone east of the Euphrates and the US-Turkish agreement on this safe zone will make the self-management [region] and the SDF immune to Turkey's ambitions, because Washington will be the most key player in the safe zone and will not allow the Turks to kill its Kurdish allies," he told Al-Monitor by phone.

In March, after the coalition declared IS defeated in Syria, military councils were established in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Amouda, Qamishli, Hasakah, Dirik and Tell Abyad in northeastern Syria.

Journalist Nouredine Omar said, "The announcement of the formation of the military councils and the restructuring of these forces aim to ensure their participation in the safe zone that is expected to be established east of the Euphrates after a final agreement in this regard is reached between Ankara and Washington."

Omar revealed Ankara and Washington were discussing the possibility of Turkey accepting these councils as a military wing in the safe zone. "This is in line with leaks about a real desire by Riyadh to include the SDF in the Syrian High Negotiations Committee. According to media leaks, the SDF was invited to the [anticipated] Riyadh III conference."

More support is coming in from other areas as well.

The journalist Ahmadi talked about diplomatic delegations from France, Sweden and Norway that met with Rojava officials and promised to support them with service and humanitarian projects.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced that the global coalition sent 280 trucks loaded with logistical assistance, vehicles and reconstruction equipment from northern Iraq to the SDF areas on July 14, bringing the total number of shipments that have entered the area east of the Euphrates to 1,730 since March.

SDF Commander: We Will Open 600Km-Front in Response to Any Turkish Attack

The Arab-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander warned that any attack by Turkey and its loyal factions regions east of the Euphrates would lead to the opening of a 600-km long front in retaliation.

General Mazloum Kobani (Ebdi) said the front will be opened from al-Malikiyah, near the Iraqi border, to Ain al-Arab near the Euphrates River in the vicinity of the Turkish border.

He pointed out that his forces are ready to confront any provocations and conspiracies by the Turkish state, which mobilized large forces to its border with Syria, Kurdish-Syrian sites quoted him as saying in an interview with the Kurdish newspaper, "Yeni Ozgur Politika," which is published in Netherlands.

"Eastern Euphrates and Afrin are not similar. These are two separate areas. It is not possible to repeat here what happened in Afrin. We won't allow that," he stressed, warning of a great war if the Turkish army launches an attack.

"We took a strategic decision regarding Afrin, and we did not want to expand the fighting. Instead, we wanted to limit it to that area, which is indeed what happened."

The Turkish strategy is based on occupying Tel Abyad and Ain al-Arab, but any attack will

cause a permanent war until the forces withdraw.

Kobani noted that the SDF leadership has informed the US-led international coalition against ISIS about its decision, stressing that such a war would lead to a second internal war in Syria and would continue until Turkey withdraws.

The United States does not want that, and 73 countries in the international coalition do not want this, he added.

"This is an international issue and that's why there is great pressure on the Turkish state, while this pressure was not put in Afrin."

On Washington's position from a possible Turkish attack, Kobani explained that there is an agreement with the US regarding the war against ISIS.

"Our war against ISIS is now the aking place in Raqqa and Deir Ezzour," he said, adding that if any attack takes place against his forces, People's Protection Units (YPG) forces will withdraw to border areas, ending the war against ISIS.

Asked about the border safe zone, which was



Syrian Democratic Forces commander General Mazloum Kobani.

said to be established, Kobani said: "Turkish President (Recep Tayyip) Erdogan has stated since 2018 that the Turkish army has completed preparations and will begin with the East Euphrates operation."

"We know that over the past seven years we haven't attacked any area in Turkey, but our presence poses an issue for Erdogan and the Turkish state," he explained.

"We have said this before and I repeat now, we don't want a new war... We have asked US Special Envoy James Jeffrey to deliver this message, and he expressed his pleasure to do so," he stressed.

 REUTERS July 21, 2019

Iraqi Kurdish energy minister Hawrami moved to advisory role in new cabinet

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq (Reuters) - Long-serving Iraqi Kurdish natural resources minister, Ashti Hawrami, will take up an advisory role of Assistant Prime Minister for Energy Affairs in Prime Minister Masrour Barzani's newly-formed cabinet, Kurdish lawmakers said on Sunday.

Hawrami, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) energy minister since 2006, is seen as the mastermind behind the semi-autonomous region's plans to have an energy industry free from the Baghdad central government's control.

"Hawrami has been appointed as an assistant to Prime Minister Masrour for energy affairs. He will help run the energy portfolio until a new minister is appointed," said regional Kurdish lawmaker Sirwan Baban. Hawrami will be entitled to "carry out and im-

plement decisions, authorities and policies of the Kurdistan Regional Government (Iraq) in relation to the oil and gas sector", a copy of the prime minister decision reviewed by Reuters showed. The copy was verified by multiple regional officials.

The natural resources portfolio in the new regional cabinet is vacant and several sources said Kurdish political parties are yet to reach an agreement over who should fill the position.

"There are still differences between the key political parties over who will succeed Hawrami," said Baban.

Barzani, told Reuters in an exclusive interview that under his leadership, the KRG's focus would be to establish a "strong and constructive" relationship with Baghdad.

Chief among issues that strained relations be-



tween the regional capital Erbil and Baghdad is a disagreement over independent regional oil exports and revenue sharing.

Baghdad demands that the region's oil sales must be handled by the federal oil ministry and regional authorities contest that they have the power to sell oil and gas produced from oilfields located inside the region.


 Lundi 22 juillet 2019

Syrie: visite d'un haut responsable militaire américain en zone kurde

Qamichli (Syrie), 22 juil 2019 (AFP) — Le chef du commandement central américain chargé des opérations au Moyen-Orient (Centcom), le général Kenneth McKenzie, a effectué lundi une visite dans le nord-est de la Syrie, sous contrôle kurde, pour la première fois depuis sa prise de fonction.

M. McKenzie a été désigné fin mars à la tête du Centcom en remplacement du général Joseph Votel.

En mars, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), dominées par les combattants kurdes et appuyées par une coalition internationale conduite par les Etats-Unis, ont proclamé leur victoire contre le groupe Etat islamique (EI), après la conquête d'un dernier réduit des jihadistes dans l'est syrien.

Environ un millier d'hommes étrangers soupçonnés d'activités jihadistes sont détenus par les FDS. Quelque 12.000 femmes et enfants non-Syriens, proches des jihadistes, sont eux retenus dans des camps de déplacés, dans des conditions "apocalyptiques", selon la Croix-Rouge.

Sur leur site, les FDS ont indiqué que leur chef Mazloum Abdi —connu sous son nom de guerre

Kobani— s'est entretenu avec M. McKenzie au sujet des "problèmes des camps et des prisonniers de Daech détenus par les FDS", utilisant un acronyme arabe pour désigner l'EI.

Les discussions ont également porté sur les "plans d'action et de coordination" communs pour "poursuivre la traque" des jihadistes de l'EI. Désormais dispersés dans le désert s'étendant du centre de la Syrie à la frontière irakienne, ces derniers continuent de lancer des attaques.

Le porte-parole des FDS, Mustafa Bali, a posté sur Twitter des photos montrant les deux responsables accompagnés de l'envoyé américain de la coalition internationale anti-EI, William Roebuck.

La réunion s'est tenue dans la région de Kobané, à la frontière avec la Turquie, a indiqué à l'AFP M. Bali.

Face à la réticence des pays occidentaux à rapatrier leurs ressortissants soupçonnés de liens avec l'EI, les forces kurdes ont récemment appelé à l'instauration d'un tribunal international pour juger ces personnes.

Le président américain Donald Trump a an-

noncé fin 2018 le retrait de la majorité de ses 2.000 soldats déployés en Syrie avant de se rétracter et d'évoquer un retrait progressif.

Mais selon le général McKenzie, un départ de Syrie est inéluctable et a déjà commencé.

"Nous avons considérablement réduit" nos effectifs, a-t-il affirmé dans une vidéo relayée par North Press Agency (NPA), une agence locale, sans fournir davantage de détails.

"L'essentiel à l'heure actuelle est (...) d'empêcher la résurgence de l'EI", a-t-il ajouté.

"Nous allons les (les Kurdes) aider à le faire et par la suite, notre plan sera de partir", a assuré le responsable américain.

L'annonce initiale de M. Trump d'un départ hâtif des troupes américaines avait inquiété les Kurdes qui craignent une offensive turque contre les régions sous leur contrôle.

Ankara a déjà lancé une opération début 2018 contre les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), principale milice kurde en Syrie et colonne vertébrale des FDS, qu'elle considère comme "terroriste".


 Mercredi 24 juillet 2019 à 13h43

Zone de "sécurité" en Syrie: Ankara insatisfait des propositions américaines

Istanbul, 24 juil 2019 (AFP) — La Turquie n'est pas "satisfaite" des propositions américaines concernant la création d'une "zone de sécurité" en Syrie séparant la frontière turque de combattants kurdes soutenus par Washington, a déclaré mercredi un ministre, ajoutant qu'Ankara était à "bout de patience".

"Les nouvelles propositions américaines ne sont pas à un niveau satisfaisant. Nous devons le dire clairement. Nous avons l'impression qu'ils (les Etats-Unis) essaient de gagner du temps", a déclaré le chef de la diplomatie turque Mevlüt Cavusoglu.

"Nous devons trouver au plus vite un accord sur la zone de sécurité. Nous sommes à bout de patience", a-t-il ajouté lors d'une conférence de presse à Ankara.

La Turquie avait annoncé mardi que des responsables militaires américains et turcs avaient commencé à plancher sur la mise en place d'une "zone de sécurité" dans le nord de la Syrie.

La mise en place d'un tel dispositif avait été proposée en janvier par le président américain Donald Trump à son homologue turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, à un moment où Ankara menaçait de lancer une offensive contre une milice kurde soutenue par Washington.

Selon Ankara, M. Trump proposait de créer, dans le nord de la Syrie, une zone de plusieurs km de profondeur à partir de la frontière turque visant à séparer cette dernière des territoires contrôlés par cette milice kurde, les Unités de protection du peuple (YPG).

La Turquie, qui a déjà mené deux offensives entre 2016 et 2018 dans le nord de la Syrie contre les positions des YPG, menace désormais de lancer de nouvelles opérations.

Le gouvernement turc qualifie les YPG de "groupe terroriste" en raison de leurs liens étroits avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), une organisation qui livre une sanglante guérilla contre Ankara depuis plus de 30 ans.

Mais les YPG sont soutenues par plusieurs pays occidentaux, comme les Etats-Unis et la France. Les combattants kurdes ont notamment été en première ligne dans le combat contre les jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) en Syrie.

Turkey's Delicate Dance in Iraqi Kurdistan



HIGHLIGHTS

- After a brief hiatus following the September 2017 failed independence referendum, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) has reclaimed its place at the helm of the Kurdish government in northern Iraq.
- The return of the political status quo in the region will open the KDP up to deeper diplomatic and economic cooperation with Turkey, its most important external ally.
- The KDP will continue to grant Turkey leeway to increase its military operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party in exchange for closer economic and trade ties with Ankara.
- But in its effort to curtail an independent Kurdish state, the Turkish government will further irk its own Kurdish population, thus exposing itself to additional security and political risks at home.

On July 17, a Turkish diplomat was shot and killed in eastern Arbil, the capital of Iraq's northern Kurdish region. The assassination was likely perpetrated by a sympathizer of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the Kurdish group that Turkey has been targeting in regional military operations for decades. Ankara's high-risk tolerance will serve it well in the months ahead, as it continues to prioritize building its Iraqi-Kurdish ties — taking advantage of the economic leverage it wields over the newly formed Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). But just how much violence and political backlash Turkey can endure to prevent the formation of an independent Kurdish state will be tested because the ricks in the region, as evidenced by the latest incident, remain as high as ever.

A RETURN TO THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO

The KRG has operated as a semi-autonomous region of Iraq since the United States backed a no-fly zone over the province in 1992 to help shield ostracized Kurds from then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. In September 2018, the country held an election that failed to produce a government due to inter- and intraparty fighting over coveted

Cabinet positions. The election was the first attempt to return to political normalcy after a long-promised independence referendum in September 2017 yielded only lost territory and lost political capital for the Kurdish government. But after a couple of tumultuous years, Kurdistan politics are now seemingly returning to equilibrium.

In early July, the government selected a new, streamlined Cabinet. Longtime energy and foreign ministers have stepped down in recent weeks, creating space for fresh blood in the government for the first time in almost 15 years. But any new faces must still be approved by the old guard, which is led by the Barzanis — the leading family of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). On July 10, Mansour Barzani was sworn in as prime minister of the KRG, shortly after Nechirvan Barzani (the nephew of the former longtime President Massoud Barzani) was selected as the Kurdish government's president in June, thereby extending the clan's long reign as the dominant political force in the region. A chart listing the major Kurdish groups in Iraq.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is the KDP's primary rival, run by the Talabani clan. Other smaller parties, including Gorran, speckle the playing field and contest elections. But Iraqi Kurdish politics still primarily centers around the KDP and the PUK, with the latter jostling for dominance and the former typically coming out on top. Despite lacking both leadership positions in Arbil, the PUK is still a force to be reckoned with. In addition to having influence with the presidency in Baghdad via Iraqi President Barham Salih, the party has so far been able to thwart the KDP's ability to name a Barzani member to the now-vacant energy ministry position, and also maintains seats in the Kurdish parliament. Several key points of contention, such as control of the oil-rich Kirkuk province, will cause the two parties to butt heads in the coming months — thus reinstalling the familiar tug-of-war that has long defined Kurdish politics in Iraq.

A NEW CHAPTER FOR TURKEY-KURDISH COOPERATION IN IRAQ

The KDP's renewed place in power, along with its perpetual need to edge out the PUK, opens the door for Turkey to fortify its own economic, political and security ties in northern Iraq. Ankara has historically worked closely with the KDP because of its proximity (the Barzanis' tribal reach includes swaths of Iraqi Kurdistan that borders Turkey) and power (the Barzanis have always controlled the levers of the Iraqi Kurdish government including, most importantly, oil and gas policymaking).

Although the KDP-Turkish relations have hit low points over the years, Ankara has recently solidified its relationship with Arbil. Turkey is well-positioned as a much needed economic partner of the Kurdish government (and thereby, the KDP), providing the semi-autonomous region with a valuable trade route out for Kurdish oil. The two border crossings between Turkey and northern Iraq help facilitate \$10 billion in annual trade flow. And Turkey is currently in discussions with Arbil to open yet another border crossing to facilitate even more trade.

But for the KDP, this inflow of Turkish funds comes at a cost. Turkey and the KDP have a tacit understanding of Ankara's ability to target the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group — that is, as long as the KDP grants Ankara the freedom to conduct anti-PKK activities in the region, Ankara will continue to provide economic support to the Kurdish government in Iraq. This is possible in part because, among all the many inter-Kurdish rivalries across the region, there is none as pronounced as the animosity between the KDP and the PKK. So while there is an inherent tension in allowing Turkey to target fellow Kurds, the KDP's own deep-rooted distrust for the PKK helps facilitate this unspoken policy.

TURKEY'S RENEWED ANTI-PKK PUSH

Here, it is important to understand that when it comes to its regional strategy, Turkey's pri-

mary imperative is preventing the PKK or any of its secessionist sympathizers from forming an independent Kurdish state. Some within Turkey's own Kurdish population, which makes up roughly 20 percent of its population, have threatened to secede for decades. And Ankara knows that the establishment of a Kurdish state elsewhere in the region could fan the secessionist flames back home, which would have dire consequences for Turkey's territorial integrity, social stability and economy. A map of Kurdish regions in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

Thus, for years, one priority within Ankara's regional strategy has largely focused on keeping the PKK from gaining ground and spreading its message. In Syria, this has included amassing troops near Tel Abyad to fight against a PKK ally, the People's Protection Units. And in northern Iraq, this has meant going head-to-head against the PKK itself in places like Qandil (which is the militant group's current hub) and Sinjar.

Eager to secure more Turkish economic cooperation, the ruling KDP in Arbil will continue to grant Turkey leeway on its military operations in northern Iraq. And in turn, Ankara will capitalize on that added freedom to move more aggressively against the PKK, which it is already doing. Turkey is deepening its existing military presence in the province via a military operation against PKK militants called Operation Claw, which just recently entered its second phase. And as part of this phase, Turkish forces have also begun killing high-ranking PKK leaders.

THE INHERENT RISKS

These deepening operations, however, will

complicate Ankara's relations with its own Kurdish population at home. Ramped up military action against the PKK will ultimately hamper the prospects for negotiation between the Turkish government and Kurdish interest groups across the political spectrum while fueling the Peoples' Democratic Party's (the dominant Kurdish political party in Turkey, also known as the HDP) opposition against the country's ruling Justice and Development Party.

Allowing Turkey to continue fighting against the PKK also poses political risks for the KDP. Some Kurdish groups in the region are opposed to Arbil working so closely with Turkey, which they see as actively fighting against the whole of Kurdish interests. This delicate balance of allowing certain Kurds to be killed in order to maintain its lucrative ties with Ankara has always been difficult for Arbil to navigate. With its solidified place in power, the KDP is now in a better political position to withstand some of the potential domestic pressure from anti-Turkey Kurdish groups. But the more Turkey pushes against the PKK in the region, the harder it will be for the KDP to justify Ankara's actions with its citizens.

Targeting Kurdish insurgents in northern Iraq will make Ankara a target of retaliation anywhere their sympathizers reside.

But perhaps most importantly, the recent as-

Major Kurdish Groups in Iraq

KDP | Political Party

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was established in 1946. Massoud Barzani has led the party since 1979, while his nephew Nechirvan Barzani is now president of Iraqi Kurdistan.

PUK | Political Party

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded in 1975 by Jalal Talabani. The civil war between the KDP and PUK lasted from 1994 to 1998.

Gorran | Political Party

Gorran, the second-largest Kurdish party in Iraqi Kurdistan, split off from the PUK in 2009, undermining the PUK and KDP's dominance in Kurdish politics.

Peshmerga | Military Forces

The peshmerga are militia groups often tied to specific geographic areas or political parties. While many brigades are under the control of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, some serve as military wings of the PUK and the KDP.

Sources: Getty Images | Copyright Stratfor 2019

sassination of a Turkish diplomat in Arbil serves as an acute reminder that there is a direct link between what Turkey does in Iraq and what Turkey does at home. In other words, targeting Kurds in one place makes Ankara a target of retaliation anywhere their sympathizers reside. As Turkey broadens its anti-PKK operations in northern Iraq, it exposes itself to more risk of blowback and retaliatory attacks.

Violent clashes between PKK and Turkish forces are already a common occurrence in parts of the country. And this renewed anti-Kurd push in Iraq could result in even more frequent or deadly acts of violence in retaliation. But Ankara sees curtailing the PKK's ability to extend its reach as more important than protecting Turkey's overseas presence from overseas attack. And thus, the country will continue to take advantage of the KDP's renewed power to do just that — opening the door for more political backlash and bloodshed on both sides in the process.



By Audrey Wilson
July 25, 2019

U.S. and Turkey Spar Over Syria Safe Zone

After talks held in Ankara this week, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday that the United States and Turkey had not reached a deal over proposals for a safe zone in northern Syria controlled by Turkish forces—rather than the Kurdish People's Protection Units, better known as the YPG, a key U.S. ally. "We have no patience left," Cavusoglu said at a press conference.

The official U.S. line differs—the Ankara embassy released a statement calling the talks "productive"—but Turkey is firm. If it doesn't reach an agreement with the United States over a safe zone, it has threatened to launch a military offensive in northern Syria against the YPG, which would be its third cross-border operation since 2016.

What's the problem? Turkey and the United

States disagree sharply over the YPG's role in Syria. The U.S. military has worked closely with the militia in its fight against the Islamic State in Syria. Turkey, which has spent decades fighting Kurdish militant groups within its borders and beyond, considers the YPG to be a terrorist organization and has condemned the U.S. support.

Decades of misunderstanding. The new spat over a safe zone in Syria is just the latest development in a long-running disagreement between the countries: Turkey has been skeptical of U.S. support for Kurdish militias since the 1990-1991 Gulf War, Keith Johnson and Robbie Gramer report.

"It was a paranoia that, to Turkish eyes, would in decades come to be amply borne out as Washing-



A convoy of Turkish armored vehicles drive towards a crossing point between Syria and Turkey on a highway in the northern countryside of the Syrian province of Idlib on June 20. AAREF WATAD/AFP/Getty Images

ton boosted its support for Kurdish forces, even as it stopped short of advocating full Kurdish independence," they write.

Irak: les restes de dizaines de Kurdes exécutés sous Saddam Hussein exhumés

L'Irak a commencé à exhumer mardi les restes de plus de 70 Kurdes, dont des enfants, victimes du régime de Saddam Hussein, indique à l'AFP le chef de la médecine légale, submergée par l'identification de centaines de milliers d'Irakiens exécutés depuis des décennies.

"Plus de 70 corps, dont ceux de femmes, d'enfants --de la naissance à dix ans--" ont été mis au jour dans ce charnier situé à Tell al-Cheikhiya, à 300 km au sud de Bagdad, affirme le docteur Zaid al-Youssef.

Il ne s'agit que des corps découverts dans la couche supérieure de cette fosse commune, alors qu'"il pourrait y avoir une seconde couche plus profonde" avec des corps supplémentaires, ajoute-t-il.

"Les preuves récoltées indiquent qu'ils ont été exécutés sommairement en 1988", poursuit le docteur Youssef, soit en pleine campagne "Anfal" de Saddam Hussein.

Le dictateur, renversé en 2003 par l'invasion emmenée par les Etats-Unis, a été pendu avant de pouvoir comparaître pour "génocide" pour la mort d'environ 180.000 Kurdes dans le cadre de cette opération menée par son régime en 1987 et 1988.

"Les femmes ont les yeux bandés et ont été tuées par des balles dans la tête, mais portent également des traces de balles tirées à l'aveuglette dans divers endroits du corps", ajoute le chef de la médecine légale irakienne. Ce charnier a été découvert dans le sud de la pro-

vince de Mouthanna, dans le sud désertique de l'Irak, où se trouvait la tristement célèbre prison de Nougrat Salman, où sont passés de nombreux Kurdes et opposants politiques de Saddam Hussein. Ce sinistre centre de détention a été longuement évoqué lors du procès du président déchu en 2006, des témoins et survivants kurdes évoquant humiliations, viols et détentions d'enfants.

Depuis des décennies, des milliers de corps de victimes issues de toutes les communautés du pays multiethnique ont été enfouis dans des fosses communes dans l'ensemble des provinces d'Irak.

Le groupe Etat islamique (EI), vaincu en Irak fin 2017, a laissé derrière lui plus de 200 charniers qui pourraient renfermer jusqu'à 12.000 corps, selon l'ONU.

Les exactions des jihadistes ne sont toutefois que le dernier chapitre en date d'une série d'exécutions sommaires de masse.

Depuis le début de la guerre Iran-Irak en 1980, les



Des femmes qui seraient liées aux jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) escortées par des gardes dans le camp d'Al-Hol dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 23 juillet 2019 (AFP / DELIL SOULEIMAN)

conflits se sont succédé, avant que le pays ne s'enfonçe dans la guerre civile et les violences confessionnelles ou des jihadistes.

Selon les autorités, durant les années 1980 et 1990, le régime de Saddam Hussein a fait disparaître plus d'un million de personnes, dont les proches ne connaissent toujours pas le sort pour un grand nombre.

MilitaryTimes By: Suzan Fraser, | July 24, 2019

Turkey not satisfied with US proposal for safe zone with Syrian Kurdish fighters

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey on Wednesday slammed a new U.S. proposal for a so-called "safe zone" in northern Syria, saying it was "not satisfactory" and warning that Ankara may launch a new offensive to secure its border if an agreement isn't reached soon.

According to Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, U.S. envoy James Jeffrey and other U.S. officials held talks with Turkish officials in Ankara about Syria, including the setting up of a safe zone along the Turkey-Syrian border.

"The United States must come with proposals that are satisfactory to us or are close to our proposals," Cavusoglu said, adding that Turkey's patience "has run out."

Turkey views Kurdish fighters who have battled the Islamic State group alongside U.S. forces as terrorists, allied with a Kurdish insurgency within Turkey. Ankara wants the safe zone established east of the Euphrates River to keep the Kurdish fighters away from the border region.

Since 2016, Turkey has launched two cross-border offensives against ISIS and the Kurdish fighters. It has recently been sending reinforcements to its border area, signaling a possible new offensive.

Cavusoglu, speaking to reporters at a joint news conference with visiting Nicaraguan counterpart, Denis Moncada, said the U.S. delegation had offered new proposals on the safe zone, including possible joint patrols and "who would be in it and who would enter." He did not elaborate on what was unsatisfactory about the new Washington proposal.

The U.S. Embassy in Ankara said the issues discussed included "proposals to enhance Turkey's security along the border in northeast Syria."

"The discussions were forthright, positive and productive," the embassy statement read. "The U.S. and Turkey continue to exchange views on mutual concerns in Syria and we look forward to continuing these discussions, including through military-to-military consultations."



Members of the Syrian Democratic Forces stand in formation during a victory announcement ceremony over the defeat of the Islamic State group's so-called physical caliphate March 23, 2019, at Omar Academy, Deir ez-Zor, Syria. (Staff Sgt. Ray Boyington/Army)

Turkey and the U.S. have been divided on the size of the safe zone, who would control it and the degree to which the Kurdish fighters would pull back. Ankara wants Turkish troops to control the zone. "Our wish is for a safe zone to be established soon," Cavusoglu added. "Otherwise, we will do whatever is necessary ourselves."

Damas hostile à une «zone de sécurité» évoquée par Washington et Ankara

Les autorités à Damas ont dénoncé vendredi des pourparlers entre les États-Unis et la Turquie sur la création d'une «zone de sécurité» en Syrie, y voyant une «ingérence américaine destructrice».

La Turquie avait fait état mardi de discussions entre responsables militaires américains et turcs sur la mise en place de cette zone destinée à séparer la frontière turque de combattants kurdes soutenus par les États-Unis, dans le nord de la Syrie en guerre depuis 2011.

Sa mise en place avait été proposée en janvier par Washington, au moment où Ankara menaçait de lancer une offensive contre une milice kurde soutenue par Washington et impliquée

dans la lutte contre le groupe djihadiste Etat islamique (EI).

Selon Ankara, Donald Trump proposait de créer une zone de plusieurs km de profondeur à partir de la frontière turque pour la séparer des territoires contrôlés par cette milice des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG). «La Syrie réitère son rejet catégorique de toute entente américano-turque, qui représente une agression flagrante de la souveraineté et l'intégrité territoriale de la Syrie», a indiqué une source aux Affaires étrangères citée par l'agence officielle Sana, en condamnant «la poursuite de l'ingérence américaine destructrice».

Mercredi, le chef de la diplomatie turque Mev-

lüt Cavusoglu s'était dit «insatisfait» des propositions américaines sur la «zone de sécurité», sans autre précision. Les YPG sont soutenues par plusieurs pays occidentaux. Ces combattants kurdes ont été en première ligne dans le combat contre l'EI, proclamant en mars la fin du «califat» des djihadistes.

La Turquie a déjà mené deux offensives entre 2016 et 2018 en Syrie et menace de lancer de nouvelles opérations contre les forces kurdes. Le gouvernement turc qualifie les YPG de «groupe terroriste» en raison de leurs liens étroits avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), une organisation qui livre une sanglante guérilla contre Ankara depuis plus de 30 ans.

Iran: heurts meurtriers avec des insurgés à la frontière irakienne

Les Gardiens de la Révolution, l'armée idéologique du régime iranien, ont annoncé ce vendredi la mort d'un de leurs membres et celle de plusieurs «antirévolutionnaires» lors d'affrontements dans l'ouest du pays, près de la frontière entre l'Irak et l'Iran.

Une patrouille des Gardiens «a rencontré et combattu un groupe antirévolutionnaire à Sarvabad», dans le nord-ouest du pays, à quelques kilomètres de la frontière avec le Kurdistan irakien, a déclaré l'agence de presse iranienne Fars, citant les Gardiens.

Un des Gardiens de la Révolution a été «blessé et est mort en route pour de l'hôpital», a-t-elle

dit. Des «antirévolutionnaires ont été tués et blessés et un grand nombre de leurs armes et munitions ont été détruites», a-t-elle ajouté. Les Gardiens n'ont ni précisé le nombre de victimes ni indiqué si les «antirévolutionnaires» faisaient partie de cellules djihadistes ou de groupes kurdes opposés au régime iranien.

L'Iran affronte depuis près de 40 ans des activistes kurdes, qui utilisent des bases situées dans le Kurdistan irakien pour perpétrer des attaques contre les Gardiens de la Révolution et des institutions sur le territoire iranien. Le 12 juillet, les Gardiens de la Révolution iraniens ont annoncé avoir frappé des «terroristes» présumés au Kurdistan irakien voisin,

tuant et blessant plusieurs d'entre eux.

Selon le maire de la ville irakienne de Sidekan, Ehsan Chalabi, l'Iran avait «visé le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan d'Iran (PKDI)», installé au Kurdistan irakien et considéré par Téhéran comme une organisation terroriste. Une civile avait été tuée et deux membres de la même famille blessés, avait-il affirmé à l'AFP. Les Gardiens de la Révolution avaient affirmé le 11 juillet avoir tué cinq «terroristes» présumés lors d'affrontements près de la frontière avec l'Irak. Quelques jours plus tôt, ils avaient perdu trois de leurs membres dans une attaque visant leur véhicule et perpétrée par des «terroristes» selon eux.

Ankara menace d'intervenir militairement en Syrie

La Turquie lancera une opération militaire dans l'Est syrien en l'absence d'accord avec les États-Unis. Ils avaient annoncé le maintien d'un contingent de soldats auprès des Kurdes.

La Turquie s'impatiente. Ankara ne compte pas renoncer à la création d'une zone de sécurité dans le nord-est de la Syrie pour contrer ses ennemis, les combattants kurdes, alliés de Washington. La Turquie et les États-Unis en étaient convenus, après l'annonce par Donald Trump

en décembre du retrait des forces américaines du nord de la Syrie. Mais sous la pression des autres alliés occidentaux des Kurdes, en particulier de la France, Washington avait finalement accepté de garder un contingent de soldats auprès des Kurdes (400 sur ses 2 000 en Syrie). Ce qui mécon-

tenta Ankara.

En début de semaine, une délégation américaine, conduite par l'émissaire spécial de Washington pour la Syrie, James Jeffrey, a soumis des propositions aux autorités turques, qui ne les ont pas convaincues, a déclaré le ministre des Affaires étrangères,

➡ ➡

Mevlut Cavusoglu. Jeudi, son homologue de la Défense, Hulusi Akar, a réuni l'état-major pour étudier la possibilité d'une offensive militaire turque à l'est de l'Euphrate en Syrie.

Si aucun accord n'est trouvé avec Washington, la Turquie menace de lancer une nouvelle opération militaire en Syrie, la troisième en trois ans, avec l'objectif de défaire les combattants kurdes des YPG qu'Ankara considère comme une organisation terroriste et le prolongement en Syrie du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) qui mène une insurrection depuis 1984 contre le pouvoir turc dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Or les miliciens kurdes ont été les principaux alliés de Washington dans la guerre que la coalition internationale - à laquelle a participé la France - a gagnée contre Daech en Syrie.

Achat de missiles russes par la Turquie : « Situation très difficile », selon Donald Trump

CONCILIER DES OBJECTIFS CONTRADICTOIRES

Regrettant l'impasse des discussions américano-turques sur une zone de sécurité, Ankara exige que les États-Unis coupent leurs liens avec les YPG. En vain. Au contraire, selon nos informations, une réunion entre services de renseignements américains, français et représentants du YPG s'est tenue en mai dans la ville kurde irakienne de Souleymanieh. Américains et Français ont cherché à convaincre les Kurdes d'élargir leurs bases aux combattants arabes et à d'autres formations kurdes. Objectif : diluer les YPG - donc le PKK - dans une structure plus acceptable par la Turquie.

Dans un contexte de tensions provoquées par l'achat turc du système russe de défense anti-aérien S-400, la Turquie nourrit un autre grief à l'égard des États-Unis. Il concerne la ville de Manbij, dans le nord de la Syrie. Il y a un an exactement, Américains et Turcs s'étaient mis d'accord pour que les combattants kurdes évacuent cette ville, majoritairement arabe. Cette feuille de route n'a toujours pas été appliquée, regrette Ankara, qui estime qu'il y a « encore près d'un millier de terroristes » près de Manbij.

Ankara vient de renforcer sa présence militaire le long de sa frontière avec le Nord-Est syrien. L'établissement d'une zone de sécurité turque en territoire syrien est explosif.



Des soldats syriens soutenus par la Turquie participent à un exercice militaire le mercredi 24 juillet. NAZEER AL-KHATIB/AFP

D'abord pour les États-Unis qui doivent concilier des objectifs contradictoires : tenir compte des impératifs de sécurité de la Turquie, tout en sauvegardant celle de ses alliés kurdes.

Au cours des derniers mois de discussions, Washington et Ankara semblaient pourtant s'être entendus pour limiter cette zone de sécurité au triangle Kobané-Tell Abyad-Ain Issa, limitrophe de Manbij. Cela réduirait la présence turque à des postes d'observations fixes dans ces trois villes - à l'instar de la douzaine de postes turcs plus à l'ouest dans la province d'Idlib - sans entraîner une offensive militaire de l'ampleur des deux précédentes : la première contre Daech d'août 2016 à mars 2017, la seconde contre les miliciens kurdes d'Afrine de janvier à mars 2018. Mais des divisions turques auraient remis en cause cet accord.

REDÉPLOYER DES ALLIÉS

Ankara exige toujours qu'une telle zone de sécurité ait une quarantaine de kilomètres de profondeur, soit la portée maximale de ses canons Storm Howitzer de 155 mm. Mais les Kurdes ne seraient prêts à reculer que de 5 km, et à condition que la zone turque exclue les villes de Kobané, Tell Abyad et Ain Issa. « Les Kurdes se sentent assez à l'aise, confie un diplomate onusien. Tant qu'ils ont des soldats américains avec

eux, ils ne redoutent pas une offensive turque. »

D'autres litiges portent sur la présence d'armes lourdes - pas à moins de 20 km de la zone de sécurité, selon Ankara - et sur le contrôle de la sécurité dans les villes - revendiqué par la Turquie - ainsi que sur la protection aérienne de ladite zone - Ankara réclame le retrait américain des airs, tandis que les Kurdes tiennent au contraire à une zone d'interdiction aérienne garantie par leurs alliés américains.

Comme elle l'a fait à Afrine, la Turquie compte aussi redéployer dans cette zone des groupes de rebelles arabes syriens qui lui sont proches. Enfin, pour surveiller le cessez-le-feu dans cette zone, les États-Unis ont demandé à leurs alliés de s'acquitter de cette tâche. Berlin a refusé, mais Paris et Londres ont accepté. Selon un militaire français interrogé par Le Figaro, la France devrait donc renforcer de 10 % son contingent de forces spéciales dans le Nord-Est syrien, qui passerait à quelque 230 unités. « Si les durs à Washington décident de sanctionner Ankara pour son achat du S-400 russe, il faut craindre que la Turquie passe à l'action en Syrie », estime le chercheur Fabrice Balanche.

AFP Lundi 29 juillet 2019

Gardes poignardés, tentatives d'évasions: le danger EI dans le camp syrien d'Al-Hol

Gardes poignardés, tentatives d'évasions, un drapeau noir du groupe Etat islamique hissé par des partisans. Dans le camp de déplacés d'Al-Hol en Syrie, des femmes et enfants affiliés aux jihadistes affichent ouvertement leur hostilité aux Kurdes qui les détiennent.

La colère est contenue à grande peine dans ce camp du nord-est, où s'entassent plus de 70.000 personnes --des Syriens et des Irakiens, mais aussi des Françaises, des Belges ou des Allemandes.

Devant un journaliste de l'AFP, les femmes s'empresent de dénoncer le manque d'aide et les mauvais soins médicaux. Elles n'hésitent pas non plus à saluer le "calife" Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, le chef de l'EI dont on ignore le sort, assurant avec défiance qu'elles attendent ses ordres.

Irakienne et mère de trois enfants, Oum Souhaib admet que des gardes des Assayech, la police locale kurde chargée de la sécurité du camp, ont été attaqués.

"Deux ou trois fois, des Assayech ont été poignardés", lâche la jeune femme de 23 ans, reconnaissant la responsabilité des "Mouhajirat", les étrangères de l'EI.

"Pourquoi elles les poignent? Parce qu'ils font régner l'injustice", s'insurge l'Irakienne, couverte de la tête au pied par un niqab noir.

Elle accuse les gardes de mener des "descentes nocturnes" contre les tentes des "soeurs".

Veuve d'un Tunisien ayant rallié l'EI, son mari, dit-elle, est mort dans une attaque contre les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), l'alliance de combattants kurdes et arabes soutenue par Washington qui a mené la lutte contre les jihadistes.

- "Le retour du califat" -

En mars, ce sont les FDS qui ont proclamé la défaite du "califat", après avoir conquis l'ultime bastion de l'EI à Baghouz, petit village aux confins orientaux de la Syrie.

Tout au long des mois de bataille, des dizaines de milliers de personnes, dont des femmes et des enfants de jihadistes, ont été évacuées pour être transférées vers Al-Hol, dans une région du nord-est de la Syrie contrôlée par les Kurdes.

Au total, quelque 12.000 étrangers --4.000 femmes et 8.000 enfants-- se trouvent dans les camps du nord-est, selon les chiffres des autorités kurdes.

Un garde kurde escorte des femmes qui auraient été mariées à des membres du groupe Etat islamique (EI) dans le camp d'Al-Hol dans le nord-est de la Syrie le 23 juillet 2019. Nombre de femmes affichent leur hostilité aux gardiens kurdes et leur fidélité à l'EI (AFP / DELIL SOULEIMAN)

"Nous ne sommes venus au camp que pour suivre les ordres" de Baghdadi, lâche Oum Souhaib. Elle veut "le retour du califat, pour qu'on puisse s'y installer".



Des femmes qui seraient liées aux jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) escortées par des gardes dans le camp d'Al-Hol dans le nord-est de la Syrie, le 23 juillet 2019 (AFP / DELIL SOULEIMAN)

Partout dans le camp, des caméras de surveillance. Séparées des Syriens et des Irakiens, les étrangères et leurs enfants vivent dans un périmètre clôturé. Pour aller au marché, recevoir des aides ou se rendre aux cliniques, elles doivent être escortées par un garde.

"Il y a des tentatives d'évasion, ils nous considèrent comme des ennemis", reconnaît le responsable de la sécurité du camp, Amer Ali, en allusion aux partisans de l'EI. Il assure toutefois que la situation est sous contrôle.

Il y a quelques semaines, une étrangère d'un autre camp, Roj, avait tenté de s'échapper d'un hôpital de la localité de Malikiya (nord-est). Dans les toilettes, elle avait retiré son niqab noir et revêtu une robe blanche. Mais elle a été interpellée, selon deux sources médicales.

- "Toujours un danger" -

A la mi-juillet, une vidéo circulant sur les réseaux sociaux montrait le drapeau noir de l'EI hissé sur un lampadaire du camp d'Al-Hol, pendant que des femmes en niqab noir et des enfants scandaient "Dieu est le plus Grand".

L'EI "cherche à diffuser son idéologie à travers les femmes", ajoute M. Ali, reconnaissant l'authenticité de la vidéo.

Il assure que même les enfants caillaient les gardes: "Leurs mères leurs disent +C'est eux qui ont tué votre père et ont détruit notre maison+".

Les Kurdes, qui réclament le rapatriement des étrangères et de leur progéniture, avertissent que les enfants pourraient représenter "des bombes à retardement" s'ils ne sont pas rééduqués et réintégré.

Responsable des autorités kurdes chargé des déplacés, Chikhmous Ahmed est conscient des défis sécuritaires.

"Nous n'avons pas les moyens d'enrayer tout ce qui se passe, mais nous essayons de contenir les incidents", souligne ce responsable, reconnaissant des attaques contre les gardes ou les employés des agences internationales.

Les personnes retenues dans les camps "restent attachées à leur idéologie, et représentent toujours un danger", avertit-il.

Derrière son niqab noir, Oum Abdel Aziz ne cache pas sa colère. La jeune femme de 20 ans ignore tout du sort de son mari, arrêté à sa sortie de Baghouz il y a quelques mois.

"Pour nous, la mort vaut plus que cette vie et cette humiliation", lâche cette Syrienne. A Baghouz "c'était la prospérité. On avait de l'argent, ici on brûle dans les flammes de l'enfer".



By Julia Maenza | July 26, 2019

Julia Maenza is a National Security Research Intern at FPRI. She is a rising sophomore at the University of Michigan's Honors College, where she studies Political Science and Middle East Studies.

The Kurdish Struggle for Autonomy from the 1970s to the Present

As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump called himself a “big fan of the Kurds” and also defended Saddam Hussein’s use of chemical weapons against them, remarking “Saddam Hussein throws a little gas, everyone goes crazy, ‘oh he’s using gas!’” As president, Trump reportedly told an ally, “I love the Kurds.” Though one could blame this on President Trump’s often inexplicable behavior, his indecision on Kurdistan actually represents America’s policies towards the Kurds since Woodrow Wilson’s presidency. The Middle Eastern ethnic group has sought independence through a strong relationship with the United States, but seems to only have that when it benefits America. Still, many Iraqi Kurds fondly remember U.S. Operation Provide Comfort to shield them from Saddam Hussein’s aggression. In the past five years, they have further garnered Western attention for fighting the Islamic State, which they hoped would materialize into statehood. On the other hand, Syrian Kurds have a more complex relationship with the U.S. due to their sometimes alliance with the Assad regime, in which they share hatred for Turkey and an association with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) terrorist group. Going forward, it is uncertain if Kurds in the Middle East will gain independence, or continue to be used by major global powers.

THE ERA OF HAFEZ AL-ASSAD

Kurds in Syria have been noticeably marginalized since the 1960s, despite being around 10% of the population and significantly contributing to the cultural fabric of the nation. In 1963, around 20% of Syrian Kurds had their citizenship withdrawn, despite possessing identification cards. The Syrian constitution even labels Kurds as equivalent to Israelis, both labeled “a danger to Arabs.” Arab families moved into Kurdish lands to create an “Arab belt” and erase Kurdish traditions in the area. Regardless of the government’s blatant distaste for the Kurdish minority, Kurdish leaders still strategically courted Hafez al-Assad, and the PKK won his financial support in order to directly oppose Turkey. Though he may not have granted Syrian Kurds basic rights, Assad was more than willing to use their military power for his own interests, a seemingly historic trend for the Kurds.

Turkey’s complicated association with Syria is trumped by its violent relationship with its Kurdish minority. The PKK was formally established in 1978 after years of Turkish oppression. Turkey had banned the words “Kurds” or “Kurdish,” and instead referred to them as “mountain Turks.” Denied an ethnic identity, Abdullah Ocalan and other Turkish Kurds began their Marxist, violent, and strictly egalitarian militant group. Lower class Turkish Kurds founded this group—one that “wanted action, not ideological sophistication.” They declared that Kurds had a right to self determination, as Kurdistan has been split into four separate countries, with Turkey occupying the largest portion. For this reason, Turkish

Kurdistan must be the center of the rebellion. The PKK would then launch attacks on groups and tribes associated with the Turkish government, as well as ideologically similar groups for simply opposing them.

While Kurds in Syria and Turkey fought for, and were subsequently denied, land and recognition, Kurds in Iraq seemed to be obtaining it. The 1970 Iraqi-Kurdish Autonomy Agreement would have established Kurdistan as an autonomous region with Kurdish representatives and organizations. This deal fell apart in 1974 due to disputes over the oil fields of Kirkuk. However, this development ultimately proved that independence and recognition for Kurds would differ greatly between different countries.

THE “GOOD KURDS” IN IRAQ

Kurds in Iraq have certainly faced unique struggles, but seem to have the clearest path to statehood. Often seen as the “good Kurds” by the West (compared to Syrian Kurds, whose complicated connections to the PKK and Assad worry many potential allies), their reputation is bolstered by their opposition to America’s enemies. Their alliance with the U.S., however, has historically only served American interests. Iraqi Kurds have clearly sought recognition and autonomy since 1918. Though periodically denied this recognition from the British, the Iraqi central government, and the international community, the Barzani family led the fight for freedom and continue to do so today. During the 1970 negotiations for autonomy with Iraq, the U.S. covertly backed Kurdish rebels in Iraq in order to help the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran. In 1975, however, Iraq and Iran settled their disputes in Algiers, and the U.S., led by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, promptly abandoned the Kurds. The Pike Report noted, “Their adversaries, knowing of the impending aid cut-off, launched an all-out search-and-destroy campaign the day after the agreement was signed.” Before Mustafa Barzani’s death, he dejectedly reported that Kurds “do not want to be anybody’s pawns. We are an ancient people. We want our autonomy. We want sarbasti— freedom. I do not know who will take my place one day. But they cannot crush us.”

Beginning in 1988, Saddam Hussein began the Anfal campaign, designed to kill and displace a high number of Kurdish civilians. In particular, the Halabja massacre utilized chemical weapons



to wipe out a perceived opposition in the Kurdish town, and unapologetically killed men, women, and children. However, according to the Washington Post, the U.S. turned away, as “the relationship with Iraq at the time was deemed too important to rupture over the matter. The United States did not even impose sanctions.” Two years later, President George H.W. Bush accidentally inspired a Kurdish-led revolution against Saddam Hussein that he never meant to pledge support to. He noted during a speech, “There’s another way for the bloodshed to stop, and this is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside.” As Kurds and Shiites took up arms, the U.S. signed a ceasefire deal that allowed Iraq to continue using helicopters, which they then used to destroy rebel forces. As around 1.5 million Kurdish refugees fled from Iraqi forces and feared another Anfal campaign, the U.S. initiated Operation Provide Comfort through United Nations Security Council Resolution 688. The resolution included an enforced no-fly zone, let Kurds rebuild their lives and homes in Northern Iraq, and certainly allowed the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to develop into what it is today.

With the military and diplomatic support of the U.S., Iraqi Kurds held elections in 1992. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani, each won 50 seats, and the Christian groups received five. Despite free elections and international hope for the region, splits between the PUK and the KDP threatened the legitimacy that America’s support had provided. A full-blown civil war broke out in 1994, and continued until 1998. Once again, the U.S. helped the fragile region gain stability by brokering the Washington Peace Accords. Despite continuing tension between the two parties, the accords, coupled with American threats of ceasing support if the war continued, led to a necessary peace in Iraqi Kurdistan. This move



worried onlookers, as seen in The Washington Institute's "Kurdish Agreement Signals New U.S. Commitment." Here, author Alan Makovsky warned that this perceived support would lead to another misunderstanding, as it did in 1975 and 1991. He also pointed to international opposition from Turkey and the "rehabilitate Saddam" side, including France, Russia, and Arab states. He finished the article by stating,

If Washington's commitment is a bluff, intended merely to keep Saddam at bay, it may work for a while, but not indefinitely. If it is real, its implementation (at least, as understood by the Kurds) would require considerable diplomatic and possibly military costs, which, for the sake of long-term credibility, Washington would be obliged to bear. Whatever the case with the U.S. commitment, history suggests Saddam will soon want to test its limits.

U.S. support of Iraqi Kurdistan has always been thoroughly self-serving, something that the KRG seems to have no choice but to accept, as evidenced by its enthusiastic embrace of the U.S. when it finally conducted airstrikes against ISIS. Even when America seems to defy its better judgment to support the Kurds, its reasons are not ideological. The frequent about-faces, especially in 1975 and 1991, have underscored American commitment to its regional presence. If America did unequivocally support the Kurds, then it would more carefully consider the question of statehood instead of repeatedly asking Kurdish leaders not to hold a referendum. However, much of the KRG's success and stability is due to being an obvious and convenient allies against America's enemies.

SYRIA AND THE ARAB SPRING

Bashar al-Assad took power in 2000, and despite signaling that human rights would be a priority, his policies did not differ from those of his father. Much like his father, he maintained a complicated relationship with the country's Kurdish minority. In 2004, after years of mounting tension from systematic oppression, Kurds in Syria turned to violence when fights broke out during a soccer match in Qamishli when opposing fans brandished photos of Saddam Hussein to mock the Kurds. The fighting quickly escalated into a rebellion. Human Rights Watch reported "at least 36 people were killed, most of them Kurds, and over 160 people were injured. The security services detained more than 2,000 Kurds." This event worried Syrian officials, who had not seen Kurds as a significant threat in the past. They responded with banning Kurdish gatherings, but they continued to protest and meet.

Aside from proving the Kurds' political relevance and power, the 2004 violence also showed the link between Kurds in Iraq and Syria. The uprisings began from an emotional reaction to references of the Anfal campaign. Their rise to action came from being saddened by Iraqi Kurdish tragedies and inspired by Iraqi Kurdish success and autonomy. During the protests, they toppled a statue of Hafez al-Assad, and when the military backlash began, some even fled to Iraqi Kurdistan. Some activists sought to compare Qamishli to the 2011 protests that sparked the ongoing civil war. Due to the legacy of the Qamishli uprising, many expected Syrian Kurds to unite against Bashar al-

Assad. However, Syrian Kurds have not opposed the Syrian regime throughout the Syrian Civil War the way that many onlookers would have expected, as Assad's strategic courtship of the Kurds in Syria limited their resistance.

Assad realized that if another 10% of the country sided against him in 2011, his chances of maintaining power were slim. For this reason, he extended citizenship to the Kurds that had been disenfranchised in the 1960s through a legislative decree. In October 2011, as the Assad regime continued killing political dissidents, it chose a Syrian Kurdish opposition leader, Maashal Tammo. Some Kurds reacted violently, but the Democratic Union Party of Syria (PYD) put down some of these instances of rebellion, acting as "enforcers for the regime." The PYD's relationship with the Assad regime furthers their reputation in American foreign policy spheres as untrustworthy and less reliable than Kurds in Iraq. A Kurdish fighter even commented, "Sometimes I'm a PKK, sometimes I'm a PJAK [Kurdistan Free Life Party the PKK-allied affiliate, active in Iran], sometimes I'm a YPG [People's Protection Units in Syria]. It doesn't really matter. They are all members of the PKK." However, the U.S. became more willing to overlook the Syrian Kurds' flaws with the rise of the Islamic State.

ISIS AND THE INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION OF THE KURDS

The Islamic State (and similar groups in the region) originally grew when the Assad regime released hundreds of jihadi prisoners in 2011 in order to easily dismiss the protests as being run by both "Islamist extremists" and "agents of Israel and the West." In early 2012, one of these groups, Jubhat al-Nusra, gained attention for carrying out attacks that targeted both the regime and civilians. In 2013, however, ISI (The Islamic State of Iraq) and al-Nusra split, and the Islamic State proved their brutality—even towards other Islamic extremists. ISIS represented a greater enemy for differing factions to unite against, and allowed for Kurds to gain greater international attention than ever before.

The Islamic State in Iraq emerged in 2006 as a branch of al-Qaeda, comprised of disenfranchised Sunnis who resented U.S. intervention. As they had masterfully exacerbated Sunni and Shiite tension in Iraq, the group's entry into the Syrian Civil War was hardly surprising. In January 2014, ISIS took control over Raqqa, and declared the city the capital of their Caliphate. Shortly after, al-Qaeda cut ties with the group, announcing that "[al-Qaeda] is not the group responsible for their actions," and believed it was threatening their fight against the regime by fighting other rebels. In August 2014, ISIS attacked Sinjar, and took over 6,000 Yazidi girls and women as sex slaves, killed the men, and left thousands stranded on Sinjar Mountain. This brutal massacre led to international curiosity about the ancient religious and ethnic minority.

The 2014 Sinjar Massacre further convinced many Yazidis that they must only rely on themselves and not the greater Kurdish minority because the widely praised Kurdish Peshmerga—the armed forces of the Iraqi KRG—abandoned the Yazidis when it seemed clear that the battle could not be

won. Only the PKK remained to fight the ISIS militants. Despite abandoning the Yazidis, the Kurds publish plenty of propaganda about saving them. Whether or not the KRG truly sees Yazidis as Kurds, the Peshmerga leaving them to be killed and raped in Sinjar and the KRG imposing restrictions on goods leaving and entering Sinjar that make it impossible for them to rebuild their lives certainly sends a message that they are not a priority.

While both "bad" and "good Kurds" garnered international support through the fight against ISIS, they continue to face challenges to their existence and autonomy. Many suddenly excused the PKK from conducting terrorist attacks, and excused the YPG's clear connections to the terror group. Even with Turkey's protests and the YPG's concerning ties to the Assad regime, America's money and arms allowed Syrian Kurds to gain power and influence in the region. Regardless, the autonomy of a Kurdish region in Syria seems increasingly unlikely, especially with the American declaration that statehood is impossible. The U.S. has historically provided greater support for the Iraqi Kurds over the Syrian Kurds; they even became a talking point for about every 2016 Republican candidate to prove that they understand the Middle East. This relationship got them closer to statehood than ever before, culminating in an independence referendum.

Moving forward, the U.S. should advocate the inclusion of Syrian Kurds in peace talks in the country. Encouraging the PYD to have a voice in government is a far more sustainable plan than allowing it to be periodically used by major powers. As the United Nations seeks to organize peace talks that include the Security Council and several Middle Eastern countries, both Russia and the U.S. can include Kurds in the discussion. Additionally, the U.S. must not withdraw from Syria as previously announced, as doing so would threaten the freedom of Syrian minorities, including the Kurds. By creating a space where Kurdish voices help to rebuild their country, the U.S. will require less military commitment in the future. Fortunately, President Trump has "backed off" his promise to withdraw troops. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the U.S. should continue to promote business and investment, and therefore help to strengthen the region economically, not solely militarily. Additionally, the U.S. government should follow the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to support "full integration of security forces to better reflect the country's religious and ethnic diversity." By doing so, the KRG would avoid future instances like the abandonment of Sinjar, and more generally better represent the region. This seems unlikely, given the difficulties that the KRG has created for Yazidis to return to Sinjar. Hopefully, President Trump's conversation with Nobel Peace Prize winner Yazidi Nadia Murad will begin a conversation with Kurdish officials to ensure the protection and representation of ethnic minorities. As time goes on, the relationship between the U.S. and the Kurds during relative peace will be far more telling than when the U.S. is seeking to defend its interests in the region. Still, only time will tell whether Kurds will gain autonomy and power, or if major powers will continue to use them as pawns in the seemingly never-ending proxy war in the region.



By Lawk Ghafari | 28/7/2019

Largest ISIS Plot in Baghdad, Kurdistan Region Thwarted

Irraqi military intelligence may have foiled a giant terror plot targeting the Kurdistan Region, Baghdad and Basra.

Abu Ali al-Basri, head of the intelligence body known as Falcons Cell, told the state-owned Assabah newspaper that the Islamic State (ISIS) was planning its biggest attack of 2019.

"The aim of those attacks by ISIS was to show everybody that they are still alive and exist," al-Basri told the newspaper.

Iraqi forces reportedly thwarted the attack by destroying several ISIS bases with air support, as well as killing and arresting ISIS militants, according to the al-Basri's statement to Assabah.

Iraq announced victory over ISIS in December 2017, however the group has continued to carry out small-scale attacks in the country, especially in territories disputed between Erbil and Baghdad. ISIS is also still active in the desert Syria-Iraq border area following their defeat in Syria in March of this year.

In an attempt to squash the lingering ISIS threat, the Iraqi government announced the "Will of Victory" operation on July 7. The operation aims to clear the Iraqi desert areas of Anbar, Mosul and Salahaddin of ISIS remnants.

The operation is a collaboration between the Baghdad Operations Command, the Federal Police, the Army, intelligence services, the Hashd al-Shaabi paramilitary forces (PMFs), the Air Force and the US-led international anti-ISIS coalition forces.

Al-Basri told Assabah the Falcons Cell arrested 160 ISIS terrorists in Mosul, 40 in Baghdad and another two in Basra in relation to the plot.

The head policeman in the Nineveh province, where Mosul is located, did not confirm the figures in Assabah, but said his forces have arrested hundreds of ISIS fighters recently.

"We are continuously arresting ISIS militants in Nineveh, and for the past five months, we have arrested more than 600 ISIS militants in Mosul and its surroundings," Hamad Namis told Rudaw English.



The logo of Iraq's military intelligence known as Falcons Cell (Source: Falcons Cell)

Kurdistan Region security forces, known as the Asayish, declined to comment to Rudaw on the reported operation.

In May, a US Defense Department told the US think tank Center for a New American Security that around 10,000 ISIS fighters and supporters remain in Iraq and Syria. Since the loss of their territory, they have resorted to insurgent tactics including bombings, ambushes, kidnapping, extortion, and arson in Iraq.



By Sirwan Kajjo
July 29, 2019

Syrian Kurds Concerned with Turkey Military Buildup near Border

AMUDE, SYRIA - For weeks, Turkey has been amassing its troops near its border with Syria for what appears to be an imminent attack against U.S.-backed Kurdish forces that Ankara views as terrorists.

In this border town in northern Syria, locals say such an attack could throw the already-volatile region into further instability.

While the situation may seem calm at the moment, residents in Amude say they have been living in constant fear since the Turkish military has recently increased its threats to carry out an offensive against this Kurdish enclave that is controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

'Terror corridor'

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last week that his country is determined to destroy "to pieces" what he called a "terror corridor" in northern Syria.

Turkey views the SDF and its political wing, the PYD, as an extension of the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is a U.S. and EU-designated terrorist organization.

Kurdish fighters affiliated with the SDF, however, have played an effective role in the ongoing U.S.-led fight against Islamic State militants in Syria.

US mediation

In a bid to avoid a confrontation between its NATO ally Turkey and its SDF partners, the U.S. has assumed a mediation role.

Last week, CENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie visited Syria for talks with Kurdish military officials, while at the same time U.S. envoy for Syria James Jeffrey was in Ankara for discussions with Turkish officials to help defuse Kurdish-Turkish tensions.

"The Americans can play a decisive role in resolving problems between us and Turkey," said Mustafa Bali, an SDF commander and the group's spokesperson who was at the meeting with McKenzie. "We have always said that we as Kurds are not a threat to anybody. We are open to dialogue. We are open to discuss a solution for this problem."

"At the same time, we don't accept threats. When our people come under danger, we have the right to fight and defend ourselves," he told VOA.

Some Syrian Kurdish groups who oppose the SDF rule say that Turkey's sensitivities must be taken into account.

"As a neighboring country, Turkey would never allow the PKK to be on its border. Turkey considers the PYD here as part of PKK. So these threats would continue until a permanent settlement is reached," said Abdullillah Uje, an official with the Kurdish National Council.

'Nothing new'

For local residents, the Turkish threats have been part of their daily routines since the outbreak of Syria's civil war in 2011.



FILE - Turkish military trucks carrying tanks and personnel carriers are destined for the border with Syria, Jan. 14, 2019.

"Turkish threats are nothing new," said Sherin Ibrahim, a local radio journalist. "We've been living with those threats for years."

"I think what Turkey really wants is to control parts of our region so that Kurds and Syrian Democratic Forces will have no access to the border. It's all a political maneuver for more gains in the broader Syrian context," she told VOA.

Others say that Turkey has no right to invade a neighboring country under false pretenses.

"Those excuses that Turkey keeps using about securing its borders aren't valid. For almost nine years since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, not a single bullet or a bomb has been fired into Turkey from the Syrian side," said Dilshad Abdo, a Kurdish political activist.

Budget, pétrole... Bagdad et Erbil peuvent-ils s'entendre ?

Bagdad et le Kurdistan en crise économique ont repris ces dernières semaines les négociations autour du pétrole et de la part du budget allouée à la région autonome, deux litiges anciens dont la résolution reste incertaine pour les experts.

SUR QUOI PORTE LE DÉSACCORD ?

Les relations, tendues depuis des années, se sont encore refroidies en 2014. Alors que le pays faisait face à une percée jihadiste, le Kurdistan a commencé à exporter directement le pétrole de son sous-sol vers la Turquie. Erbil et le ministre du Pétrole de l'époque, Adel Abdel Mahdi, aujourd'hui Premier ministre, ont finalement trouvé un accord. Mais il n'a jamais été entièrement appliqué car Erbil réclame une part plus importante du budget fédéral et les deux parties s'accusent de faillir à leurs engagements.

OÙ EN EST-ON ?

Le Kurdistan exporte entre 400 000 et 500 000 b/j. Officiellement, il doit en exporter 250 000 b/j via la Somo, l'entreprise pétrolière d'État, et doit reverser au budget fédéral les revenus générés par le reste. En échange, Bagdad doit verser environ 12 % du budget fédéral à Erbil (8,2 milliards de dollars).

Le budget 2019 prévoit aussi une mesure inédite : Bagdad paiera les fonctionnaires du Kurdistan, qu'Erbil lui reverse ou pas ses pétrodollars. Mais dans les faits, si les salaires sont bien versés chaque mois par Bagdad, la part du budget allouée aux Kurdes ne l'a pas été par le pouvoir irakien, qui affirme que tout l'or noir du Kurdistan est toujours envoyé en Turquie sans passer par ses installations.

POURQUOI ERBIL VEUT-ELLE NÉGOCIER ?

Aussitôt nommé, le nouveau Premier ministre kurde, Masrour Barzani, est venu à Bagdad dans l'espoir de « laisser les disputes du passé derrière nous ». Le fait qu'il ait paru « pressé » d'apparaître à Bagdad « est un bon signe », note une source gouvernementale. Des comités techniques conjoints ont en outre été formés pour s'accorder sur le budget 2020.

Le Kurdistan semble décidé à négocier parce qu'il est étranglé financièrement : il a, selon M. Barzani, « une dette de 14 milliards de dollars », le double en réalité selon des experts. Quant aux salaires des fonctionnaires, ils ont atteint un record en 2019 : 8,9 milliards de dollars par an, selon Erbil. Bagdad ne lui alloue toutefois que 4,6 milliards, arguant de nombreux emplois fictifs parmi ses 1,2 million de fonctionnaires. Avec



Le nouveau Premier ministre kurde, Masrour Barzani, s'est récemment rendu à Bagdad dans l'espoir de trouver un compromis avec Bagdad sur plusieurs dossiers. Azad Lashkari/Reuters

seulement 3,5 milliards de dollars de recettes du pétrole une fois les frais déduits selon les experts, le Kurdistan n'a pas payé ses fonctionnaires depuis plusieurs mois, affirme l'économiste Ahmad Tabaqchali.

Le différend entre Bagdad et Erbil « est en train de tuer l'économie du Kurdistan : les gens ne savent pas s'ils seront payés à la fin du mois, cela affecte les salaires, les investissements, et plus encore », s'alarme le député kurde Sarkawt Chemseddine.

QU'EN PENSE BAGDAD ?

Erbil considère M. Abdel Mahdi comme un partenaire de choix : « Il a de l'empathie et a déjà conclu des accords avec les Kurdes », assure M. Chemseddine.

De son côté, le chef du gouvernement, un indépendant arrivé au pouvoir parce qu'il faisait consensus face à des députés ultra-divisés, est à la recherche d'une base plus solide.

Pris entre les poids lourds du Parlement, ennemis entre eux, il pourrait trouver chez les Kurdes, « des alliés naturels », estime M. Tabaqchali.

LES CARTES PEUVENT-ELLES ÊTRE REBATTUES ?

Les gages de bonne volonté des uns et des autres offrent « une base de dialogue », concède un responsable de la province pétrolière et disputée de Kirkouk. « Mais aucune décision ne résout réellement la question » jusqu'ici. Et s'ajoutent, dit-il, des « interférences régionales et internationales », alors que l'OPEP, les compagnies pétrolières étrangères et le grand allié américain commentent régulièrement la dispute entre Erbil et Bagdad.

Pour Ruba Husari, experte du pétrole irakien, le Kurdistan et le gouvernement fédéral sont « dans une impasse » : le premier refuse tout contrôle fédéral sur ses frontières, son pétrole et ses revenus et le second « ne s'adresse pas d'une seule voix aux Kurdes ». Donc « tout nouvel accord restera temporaire et aura les mêmes défauts que ses prédécesseurs », affirme-t-elle à l'AFP. Et pour le faire ratifier au Parlement, M. Abdel Mahdi devra convaincre les nombreux députés qui l'accusent déjà de faire trop de concessions au Kurdistan.

Ankara menace d'intervenir militairement en Syrie

GEORGES MALBRUNOT [@Malbrunot](#)

LA TURQUIE s'impatiente. Ankara ne compte pas renoncer à la création d'une zone de sécurité dans le nord-est de la Syrie pour contrer ses ennemis, les combattants kurdes, alliés de Washington. La Turquie et les États-Unis en étaient convenus, après l'annonce par Donald Trump en décembre du retrait des forces américaines du nord de la Syrie. Mais sous la pression des autres alliés occidentaux des Kurdes, en particulier de la France, Washington avait finalement accepté de garder un contingent de soldats auprès des Kurdes (400 sur ses 2 000 en Syrie). Ce qui mécontenta Ankara.

En début de semaine, une délégation américaine, conduite par l'émissaire spécial de Washington pour la Syrie, James Jeffrey, a soumis des propositions aux autorités turques, qui ne les ont pas convaincues, a déclaré le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Mevlut Cavusoglu. Jeudi, son homologue de la Défense, Hulusi Akar, a réuni l'état-major pour étudier la possibilité d'une offensive militaire turque à l'est de l'Euphrate en Syrie.

Si aucun accord n'est trouvé avec Washington, la Turquie menace de lancer une nouvelle opération militaire en Syrie, la troisième en trois ans, avec l'objectif de défaire les combattants kurdes des YPG qu'Ankara considère comme une organisation terroriste et le prolongement en Syrie du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) qui mène une insurrection depuis 1984 contre le pouvoir turc dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Or les miliciens kurdes ont été les principaux alliés de Washington dans la guerre que la coalition internationale - à laquelle a participé la France - a gagnée contre Daech en Syrie.

Regrettant l'impasse des discussions américano-turques sur une zone de sécurité, Ankara exige que les États-Unis coupent leurs liens avec les YPG. En vain. Au contraire, selon nos informations, une réunion entre services de renseignements américains, français et représentants du YPG s'est tenue en mai dans la ville kurde irakienne de Souleymanieh. Américains et Français ont cherché à convaincre les Kurdes d'élargir leurs bases aux combattants arabes et à d'autres formations kurdes. Objectif : diluer les YPG - donc le PKK - dans une structure plus acceptable par la

Turquie.

Dans un contexte de tensions provoquées par l'achat turc du système russe de défense antiaérien S-400, la Turquie nourrit un autre grief à l'égard des États-Unis. Il concerne la ville de Manbij, dans le nord de la Syrie. Il y a un an exactement, Américains et Turcs s'étaient mis d'accord pour que les combattants kurdes évacuent cette ville, majoritairement arabe. Cette feuille de route n'a toujours pas été appliquée, regrette Ankara, qui estime qu'il y a « encore près d'un millier de terroristes » près de Manbij.

Ankara vient de renforcer sa présence militaire le long de sa frontière avec le Nord-Est syrien. L'établissement d'une zone de sécurité turque en territoire syrien est explosif. D'abord pour les États-Unis qui doivent concilier des objectifs contradictoires : tenir compte des impératifs de sécurité de la Turquie, tout en sauvegardant celle de ses alliés kurdes.

« Si les durs à Washington décident de sanctionner Ankara pour son achat du S-400 russe, il faut craindre que la Turquie passe à l'action en Syrie »

FABRICE BALANCHE, CHERCHEUR

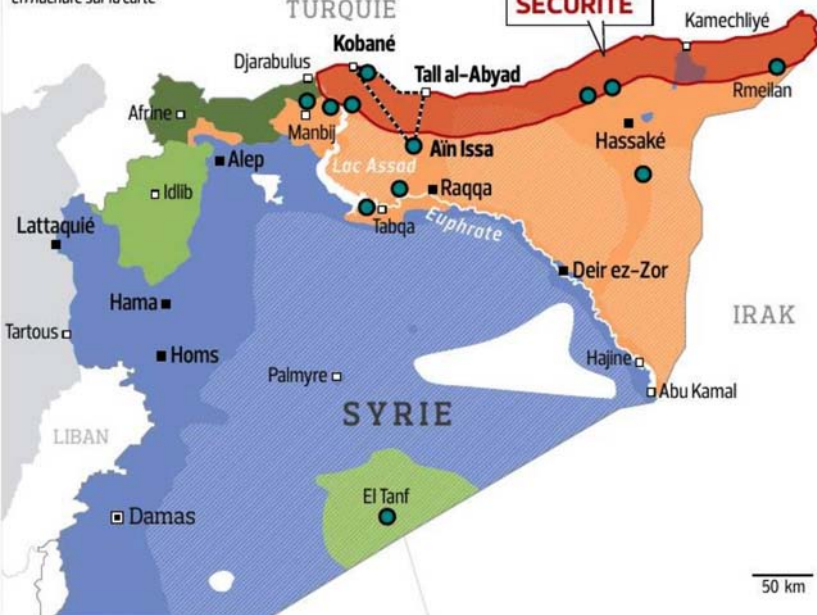
Ankara veut sa zone de sécurité dans le nord de la Syrie

CONTRÔLE (OU PRÉSENCE) JUILLET 2019

- Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS)*
- Rebelles syriens...
- Base américaine
- Régime syrien
- ... avec le soutien de l'armée turque
- Frontière d'une zone en cours de négociation entre Américains et Turcs

*YPG kurde et ses alliés arabes (avec le soutien des Occidentaux)

Les régions faiblement peuplées apparaissent en hachuré sur la carte



Sources : Anadolu Agency, Debka, Thomas van Linge et Isis.liveuamap.com

Infographie LE FIGARO

Au cours des derniers mois de discussions, Washington et Ankara semblaient pourtant s'être entendus pour limiter cette zone de sécurité au triangle Kobané-Tell Abyad-Aïn Issa, limitrophe de Manbij. Cela réduirait la présence turque à des postes d'observations fixes dans ces trois villes - à l'instar de la douzaine de postes turcs plus à l'ouest dans la province d'Idlib - sans entraîner une offensive militaire de l'ampleur des deux précédentes : la première contre Daech d'août 2016 à mars 2017, la seconde contre les miliciens kurdes d'Afrine de janvier à mars 2018. Mais des divisions turques auraient remis en cause cet accord.

Ankara exige toujours qu'une telle zone de sécurité ait une quarantaine de kilomètres de profondeur, soit la portée maximale de ses canons Storm Howitzer de 155 mm. Mais les Kurdes ne seraient prêts à reculer que de 5 km, et à condition que la zone turque exclue les villes de Kobané, Tell Abyad et Aïn Issa. « Les Kurdes se sentent assez à l'aise, confie un diplomate onusien. Tant qu'ils ont des soldats américains avec eux, ils ne redoutent pas une offensive turque. »

D'autres litiges portent sur la présence d'armes lourdes - pas à moins de 20 km

de la zone de sécurité, selon Ankara – et sur le contrôle de la sécurité dans les villes – revendiqué par la Turquie – ainsi que sur la protection aérienne de ladite zone – Ankara réclame le retrait américain des airs, tandis que les Kurdes tiennent au contraire à une zone d'interdiction aérienne garantie par leurs alliés américains.

Comme elle l'a fait à Afrine, la Turquie

compte aussi redéployer dans cette zone des groupes de rebelles arabes syriens qui lui sont proches. Enfin, pour surveiller le cessez-le-feu dans cette zone, les États-Unis ont demandé à leurs alliés de s'acquitter de cette tâche. Berlin a refusé, mais Paris et Londres ont accepté. Selon un militaire français interrogé par *Le Figaro*, la France devrait donc renforcer de 10 % son

contingent de forces spéciales dans le Nord-Est syrien, qui passerait à quelque 230 unités. « Si les durs à Washington décident de sanctionner Ankara pour son achat du S-400 russe, il faut craindre que la Turquie passe à l'action en Syrie », estime le chercheur Fabrice Balanche. ■

Le Monde DIMANCHE 28 - LUNDI 29 JUILLET 2019

En Turquie, la banque centrale cède aux pressions d'Erdogan

Le nouveau gouverneur a abaissé le principal taux d'intérêt de 425 points de base à 19,75 %. C'est la plus forte baisse depuis dix-sept ans

ISTANBUL - correspondante

Comme le souhaitait le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Murat Uysal, le nouveau gouverneur de la Banque centrale de Turquie (BCT) a décidé, jeudi 25 juillet, d'abaisser le principal taux d'intérêt de l'institution à 19,75 %, contre 24 % auparavant, soit une baisse de 425 points de base, bien plus forte que celle anticipée par les marchés. Cette baisse, la première de cette ampleur depuis dix-sept ans, était attendue. La BCT, dans un communiqué publié à l'issue de la réunion de son comité monétaire, l'a justifiée notamment par « le ralentissement de l'activité économique globale » et par « l'amélioration constante » du taux d'inflation (15,72 % en juin contre 18,71 % en mai).

Alléger les taux est l'idée fixe de M. Erdogan, avide de contrôler la politique monétaire depuis que ses pouvoirs présidentiels ont été élargis en 2018. Marqué par son éducation religieuse, selon laquelle l'usure est *haram* (« péché »), le leader turc mène une guerre sans merci contre les taux d'intérêts élevés, convaincu qu'ils ne font qu'aggraver l'inflation.

Maintenir le taux directeur à 24 %, comme c'était le cas depuis septembre 2018, était pour lui « inacceptable ». Pour avoir refusé de se plier aux injonctions présidentielles, Murat Cetinkaya, le gouverneur précédent, a été limogé le 6 juillet. La marge de manœuvre de son successeur est

étroite car il est pris en étau entre les pressions de M. Erdogan et les attentes des investisseurs, alarmés par les incohérences de la politique économique turque et les tensions géopolitiques.

Pour avoir acquis les missiles russes de défense antiaérienne S-400, dont les premiers éléments ont été livrés à Ankara ces jours-ci, la Turquie est menacée de sanctions par les États-Unis qui l'ont d'ores et déjà exclue du programme de fabrication des chasseurs furtifs américains F-35. Cette éviction risque de peser sur l'industrie turque de défense, dont les entreprises fabriquaient jusqu'ici plus de 900 pièces détachées pour le F-35.

Moins de trois semaines après sa nomination, le gouverneur a dû montrer sa loyauté au président, confirmant la perte d'indépendance de la banque centrale. Un mauvais travers sanctionné, le 12 juillet, par l'agence de notation financière Fitch qui, quelques jours après l'éviction de Murat Cetinkaya, a abaissé d'un cran la note souveraine de la Turquie, l'assortissant d'une perspective négative. Dans son communiqué, Fitch signalait « la détérioration de l'indépendance des institutions ».

Pour M. Erdogan, pressé de se porter au secours de l'économie défaillante, l'indépendance de la BCT n'est pas une priorité. La popularité du président turc s'est éteinte depuis que la récession

frappe et que la livre turque, la monnaie locale, s'est dépréciée de 30 % en 2018 à la suite d'une crise diplomatique d'ampleur avec les États-Unis.

L'inflation frappe les ménages

Lors des dernières élections municipales, le 31 mars, le parti présidentiel de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur) a perdu la main sur les grandes villes (Istanbul, Ankara, Adana, Mersin, Antalya) où 60 % de l'activité économique est concentrée. Prêt à tout pour contenter les entrepreneurs, qui formaient une part non négligeable de son électorat, M. Erdogan veut leur ouvrir les vannes du crédit.

Endettées en dollars, les PME, qui sont la colonne vertébrale de l'économie turque, se retrouvent aujourd'hui contraintes de restructurer leurs remboursements auprès des banques. Le crédit et les investissements se sont taris. L'inflation frappe durement les ménages, touchant de plein fouet cette classe moyenne que les islamo-conservateurs se targuent d'avoir fait naître.

Arrivé au pouvoir en 2003 au poste de premier ministre, M. Erdogan a gagné en popularité grâce au formidable essor économique qui a suivi, faisant de la Turquie un marché émergent prisé des investisseurs.

En 2018, la situation s'est détériorée. Le revenu par tête est

tombé à 9 632 dollars (8 652 euros) contre 10 597 l'année précédente. Pour l'année 2019, il devrait être inférieur à 9 000 dollars, selon les prévisions du FMI.

En perte de vitesse dans les urnes, surtout auprès des électeurs urbains, éduqués et productifs, l'AKP cherche à renouer avec les vieilles recettes (consommation et crédit facile) qui ont fait son succès jadis. Mais ce modèle pourrait avoir atteint ses limites. Malgré sa relative bonne tenue ces derniers mois, la livre turque reste fragile, soumise aux aléas du taux de change dans une économie très dépendante du dollar.

En cas de nouvelles tensions avec les États-Unis, la devise turque risque d'être exposée à de nouveaux chocs. « Le vrai défi pour le gouverneur viendra le jour où il devra relever les taux d'intérêt. Aura-t-il le courage de dire au pouvoir suprême que c'est nécessaire ? », s'interrogeait, jeudi, sur Twitter Timothy Ash, économiste au fonds d'investissement BlueBay Asset Management, à Londres. ■

MARIE JÉGO



Turkey threatens Syria invasion as US sanctions loom

Tensions between NATO allies Turkey and the United States continue to simmer this week as Ankara uses the threat of an incursion into Syria and Washington weighs economic sanctions to pressure each other to step back from the brink of a diplomatic crisis.

Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) will meet on Tuesday to discuss a slate of issues dividing the NATO allies, reported CNN Turk. On the agenda is Ankara's purchase of a Russian anti-aircraft system that Washington says will undermine NATO security and the US decision to kick Turkey out of its F-35 fighter jet program in response to the \$2.5 billion acquisition from Russia.

The MGK, which brings together President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his senior military commanders, will also weigh a potential military operation in northeast Syria, where US special forces remain alongside their Syrian Kurdish allies who Turkey considers a terrorist network, the broadcaster reported. Turkey has been threatening an operation since last year.

Erdogan has shown little appetite for compromise, despite the risk that onerous US sanctions required by Congress for entities that buy Russian military hardware could undermine a weak recovery in Turkey's \$750 billion economy. He appears to be betting that the United States will blink before imposing harsh penalties for fear it could wreck the 70-year-old alliance.

Last week, Washington dispatched its special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, for the latest round in long-running negotiations on jointly establishing a buffer zone that would remove the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from the Turkish border region.

But late last week, Erdogan signaled those talks will do little to deter Turkey from attacking the SDF, who have fought the Islamic State alongside US soldiers since 2014 but who Turkey considers a national security threat for their links to militants who have waged an insurgency since 1984 within Turkey.

"Regardless of the result of the meetings with the US over establishing a safe zone along the Syrian border, we are determined to shatter the terrorist corridor east of the Euphrates River," Erdogan told a meeting of his ruling Justice and Development Party on Friday.



REUTERS/Osman Orsal

Turkish soldiers stand next to a tank near the Turkish-Syrian border in Kilis province, Turkey Jan. 31, 2018.

The risk of encouraging a confrontation with Turkey in Syria may help delay US sanctions, analysts have said. White House officials were previously reported to be preparing for a decision on sanctions last week as Trump lobbied Republican lawmakers to forgo punishing Turkey. After Erdogan spoke, Trump again said on Friday that he does not blame Turkey for buying Russia's advanced S-400s.

Erdogan also said Turkey will purchase fighter jets from another country if the United States refuses to sell it the F-35, calling on the US Congress to drop its "obstruction" of weapons sales. "You're not giving us the F-35s? Fine, but excuse me, we will take measures and turn elsewhere," he said. Russia has already said it will sell Turkey its Su-35 fighter jets if it wants them.

Russia and Turkey have cooperated on Syria, despite supporting opposite sides in the eight-year war. A shaky cease-fire Erdogan negotiated with Russian President Vladimir Putin to protect Idlib province, the last rebel holdout in northwest Syria where more than three million civilians are sheltering, has been severely tested since April, with more than 400 civilians killed and at least 440,000 displaced, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on July 25.

Syria and Russia have stepped up shelling and airstrikes in the area, where Tahrir a-Sham, listed by the UN as a terrorist group, is the main rebel force. But other opposition fighters

that Turkey backs are also present and the Turkish military maintains observation posts to monitor the de-confliction zone.

Turkey itself controls more than 2% of Syrian land along its border after Russia effectively allowed it to enter and capture territory from both Islamic State and Kurdish forces.

Turkey is helping Russia "pinpoint" militants in northwest Syria and Ankara is being informed in advance of Russian airstrikes, the Russian General Staff said on Monday, according to Sputnik.

There was no immediate response to the claim from Turkish officials. Last month, Turkey denied a Russian Defense Ministry claim that the Turkish military had provided rebel coordinates for Russian jets to strike their positions.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces took control of two villages in the northwestern Hama province after opposition fighters withdrew, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Monday.

Ayla Jean Yackley is a freelance journalist based in Istanbul.



Kurdish cities in Syria witness bloody week

The Kurdish region in northern Syria has witnessed several explosions in the past month, with one of them targeting a church.

A series of successive explosions took place in Hasakah city in northeastern Syria, leaving about 14 civilians and military personnel wounded and causing extensive material damage. Two explosive devices detonated on the night of July 10, one in al-Ghazal neighborhood and the other on the highway between a fire station and Sinalco beverage company, opposite the Adnan al-Maliki School in Tell Hajar neighborhood.

Also on July 10, a motorcycle was detonated in the town of Markada, injuring three adults and a child. On the morning of July 11, three motorcycles exploded, two in al-Salhiya neighborhood near al-Mashmah roundabout, only 100 meters (328 feet) and about 20 minutes apart. Fifteen minutes later, the third motorcycle was detonated in al-Kalasa district near a police checkpoint. A member of the security forces was wounded in one of the three explosions and extensive material damage was caused.

Citizens in the targeted areas fear that further attacks will take place, forcing them to leave their homes.

Lazkin, from al-Salhiya neighborhood, told Al-Monitor on condition his last name was not used, "It seems we are far from getting rid of such conditions; every now and then some security incident occurs. Our children might have escaped death this time, but if the Islamic State [IS] ideology is not completely eliminated and proper, developed alternatives to the defected security structures are found, we could die in an explosion at any moment."

Meanwhile, IS claimed responsibility for the rigged van, truck and motorcycles that targeted Hasakah and Qamishli.

The media office of the Kurdish security organization Asayish issued a statement July 11, saying, "We assure all those who seek to undermine the security of our cities and the safety of our people that we will do anything to ensure maximum security and public safety. We will stand beside all the coexisting components on this land."

On July 11, a van exploded in Qamishli, targeting Assyrian worshippers during prayers at the Syriac Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary. Eleven people were injured and nearby shops were severely damaged.

Leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party Masoud Barzani condemned the bloody attacks on the Kurdish areas in Syria on July 11, saying, "We strongly condemn these terrorist operations, and we extend our condolences to the families of the victims of these unfortunate incidents and wish a speedy recovery for the wounded."



MUHAMMAD AHMAD/AFP/Getty Images

Syrian Kurdish security forces inspect the wreckage of a rigged car that detonated outside the Syriac Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary in the predominantly Christian neighborhood of al-Wasti in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli in northeast Syria, July 11, 2019.

Bashir Saadi, member of the executive office of the Assyrian Democratic Organization in Syria, told Al-Monitor that bombings in the past in the Christian-majority neighborhoods in al-Jazira during the Syrian war resulted in a "sense of instability among Christians, including Assyrians, who believe this poses a real threat to their existence."

Saadi believes that the security authorities of both the regime and the Kurdish self-administration "could not prevent the bombings or catch perpetrators and bring them to justice." He noted that in order to maintain their survival, Christians have no choice but to leave al-Jazira because of the bombings as well as the consequences of the ongoing Syrian crisis.

He added that the church bombing sends a clear message "of targeting Christians, including Assyrians, telling them that they are not welcome here and should leave."

The security forces of the self-administration set up checkpoints and deployed patrols on the main roads, at the entrance of popular neighborhoods, near churches and in Christian-dominated areas in Qamishli.

Asayish condemned the bombings carried out by "terrorist groups," and emphasized that the explosion near the church aims to "target security and civil peace in our regions. We call on citizens to be vigilant and immediately report any suspicious vehicle or activity to the nearest Asayish station in order to completely eliminate terrorism and its supporting cells."

On July 17, three people were injured when a

rigged car exploded at an Asayish checkpoint in al-Ghuayran neighborhood in Hasakah.

Yara Fedwan, a resident from Hasakah, told Al-Monitor, "It seems we will never enjoy peace and quiet. We have had five bombings in two days. It is not about the number of victims, but it seems [the perpetrators] want to send us messages so we leave."

Fedwan is following up on the aftermath of the bombings on Facebook and believes the IS threat is yet to be eliminated. "Staying in the safety of our homes all the time is not the solution, but it is dangerous to go outside. I believe the terrorists are just waiting for the right opportunity to kill us," she noted.

As a precaution, Asayish did not allow motorcycles on the streets for a whole week starting July 11. The decision banned civilians and military personnel from riding motorcycles, and only those with an official license plate from the self-administration were allowed out.

Saadi does not see any similarities between the bombings in Hasakah and those that occurred on the same day in Qamishli. "Motorcycles were used in the bombings in Hasakah and hit military targets, while the Qamishli attack targeted an important religious symbol for Christians," he said. "Hundreds of worshippers, women, children and the elderly could have died had the bombing occurred only a few minutes later."

Shivan Ibrahim is a journalist who holds a master's degree in philosophy. He writes opinion articles and covers social, political and civil topics in several Arabic and Kurdish periodicals and newspapers.



Can Syrian Kurds' offer unlock door to compromise with Turkey?

The Syrian Kurds have offered Turkey a 5-kilometer-deep buffer zone that would see the pullout of Kurdish forces and heavy weaponry, without seeking the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Afrin, but only that of aligned militia.

In early July, just as an international conference on the Islamic State (IS) was under way in the northeastern Syrian city of Amuda, Turkey amassed tanks at the border again, signaling resolve to enter the Kurdish-held territory east of the Euphrates. The rumbles of tanks, however, no longer give anyone the shivers. They are widely seen as Turkey's way of turning up pressure on Washington as bargaining continues on a planned safe zone along the border. And while threats have become workaday, the field of diplomacy has witnessed a remarkable Kurdish overture.

In his latest visit to Ankara on July 22, Jim Jeffrey, the US special envoy for Syria, may have achieved little, but the Syrian Kurds, it turns out, have conveyed a proposal to Turkey's intelligence agency as part of indirect contacts mediated by Jeffrey — a proposal that seems to have relieved the Americans and given them room to maneuver against Ankara.

In an interview with Al-Monitor at his headquarters in Hasakah, Mazloum Kobane — the commander in chief of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) whose real name is Ferhat Abdi Sahin — shared details about the safe zone offer and clarified the nature of contacts with Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT).

Kobane said that in December, after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened an imminent incursion into the eastern side of the Euphrates, the Kurds sought contacts with the Turkish side via the Americans and, in a bid at a compromise, made their own offer for a safe zone. The proposal rests on the following basics, as explained by Kobane:

Also read

MusicWhy Mashrou' Leila is banned from Lebanon's Byblos festival

- A safe zone with a depth of some 30 kilometers (18.6 miles), as demanded by Turkey, is not acceptable, but one with a depth of 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) could be possible.

- The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which dominate the SDF, would pull out from the zone and forces representing a

"local military council" would be deployed.

- The YPG is prepared to withdraw heavy weaponry from the zone. Other weapons with ranges reaching Turkey could be removed as well, including even those with ranges of up to 20 kilometers (12.4 miles).

- In return, Turkey would commit to non-aggression.

- An international monitoring force could be deployed in the area.

- Turkey cannot be part of the monitoring mission, which has to be neutral.

- Turkey could join the international force only on the following conditions: Locals displaced from Afrin must return home, while civilians and militias brought in after the city's seizure by Turkey must leave and seized properties must be returned. The process should proceed under the control of the Afrin Civil Council, coupled with international guarantees. Provided that progress is achieved, Turkish troops could take part in patrols in the safe zone.

- The zone would be off-limits to the militias favored by Turkey (the groups that have backed Turkey in the Euphrates Shield campaign), but civilians displaced from the area would be free to return.

Kobane said that the proposal was sent via Jeffrey and that there were indirect contacts with MIT members. He said direct meetings with MIT took place only years ago during the IS siege of the border town of Kobani and that MIT head Hakan Fidan was never present in them.

Regarding the presence of Turkish troops in Afrin, Kobane said, "We have not put any condition requiring the pullout of Turkish soldiers from Afrin. That's an issue for a later stage. The United States is the interlocutor. There has been no development thus far. The ball is in Turkey's court."

Asked about the scope of a possible Turkish operation, the SDF commander surmised that Turkey's strategy would be "to seize Gire Spi [Tell Abyad] and Kobani and stop there." Turkey has deployed two mechanized infantry brigades, two armored brigades and two commando brigades along



Turkish soldiers ride on a military vehicle in the center of Afrin, Syria, March 24, 2018. REUTERS/Khalil Ashawi

the 60-kilometer (37-mile) border stretch between Suruc and Akcakale, the Turkish towns facing Kobani and Tell Abyad, respectively.

The commander said his forces were ready to fight, if efforts at compromise fail and Turkey launches an incursion. "We have made our stance clear and made preparations — we will fight," he said.

Kobane warned that a Turkish intervention would trigger a sprawling war, implying that Turkey's seizure of Afrin last year was relatively easy because of a "strategic decision" the Kurds made at the time. "We did not want the war to expand. We wanted to keep it limited to Afrin," he said. "The eastern Euphrates, however, will not be the same. Any attack by the Turkish army will turn into a big war. If they attack Gire Spi [Tell Abyad], for instance, the war front will extend all the way from Derik to Manbij."

Kobane stressed that "everyone — Turkey, the United States and France alike" were aware of the Kurdish resolve to fight. "If we come under an attack, a border stretch of 600 kilometers [373 miles] will turn into a battlefield. It would mean the beginning of a second civil war in Syria," he said.

And what if the United States strikes a deal with its NATO ally that goes against Kurdish interests? "This is not about trust or mistrust; this is America's problem," Kobane said, reiterating the Kurds' determination to fight. "The SDF does not want to be a party sabotaging an agreement. We do not want a

war with Turkey. We will be only defending ourselves," he said.

While Jeffrey was visiting Ankara, US Central Command chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie and the US deputy envoy to the anti-IS coalition, William Roebuck, met with the SDF commander in Kobani. In a press statement after the meeting, Kobane stressed that "the SDF and the international coalition are largely in agreement on the issues discussed."

According to a Kurdish source knowledgeable about the meeting, the Americans promised to not allow a Turkish attack in the area. "This is the shared position of all coalition forces, not just the United States. The French are even calling for practical measures to prevent an intervention," the source told Al-Monitor.

In Ankara, Jeffrey and his Turkish interlocutors failed to make a breakthrough, but agreed to continue the dialogue. Several days later, however, Erdogan declared that Turkey is "determined to rip apart the terror corridor to the east of the Euphrates, regardless of how the talks with the United States ... end up."

Ankara has been pressing for a safe zone with a depth of 30 to 35 kilometers (roughly 19-22 miles), to be controlled by the Turkish military, including the airspace. It wants armed groups under the umbrella of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army deployed in the zone and for local Syrians who are currently refugees in Turkey to be resettled there. Moreover, Ankara continues to

insist on control of Manbij. The prime motivation behind this strategy, which encompasses all settlements adjacent or close to the border on the eastern side the Euphrates such as Kobani, Tell Abyad, Sari Kani, Amuda, Qamishli and Derik, is to fully dismantle the Kurdish-led autonomous enclave taking shape in the region. Nevertheless, Turkey could be prepared to make do with Tell Abyad and Kobani under the current circumstances, as the SDF commander points out.

Many observers believe Turkey will sustain pressure at the border in a bid to extract concessions, but will not launch a unilateral incursion without a green light from Washington. This, however, does not eliminate the risk of *faits accomplis*. Pointing to the buildup on both sides of the frontier, Kobane warned that the tense climate was providing easy ground for provocations. "A misstep or a spark could grow into a fire," he said.

In a telling example, a rocket fired from Kurdish-held Sari Kani hit Ceylanpinar across the border amid the flurry of diplomatic contacts July 22. At least five people were injured in the Turkish town. An SDF spokesman said later that the perpetrator had sought to foment unrest and had been caught.

Fehim Tastekin is a Turkish journalist and a columnist for Turkey Pulse who previously wrote for Radikal and Hurriyet. He has also been the host of the weekly program "SINIRSIZ," on IMC TV.