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Contents:

- **SADDAM HUSSEIN EXECUTED BEFORE BEING TRIED FOR HIS MASS CRIMES IN KURDISTAN.**
- **THE BAKER-HAMILTON REPORT ON IRAQ: REJECTED BY BOTH THE KURDS AND THE SHIITES.**
- **IRAQI KURDISTAN: A PROVISIONAL AGREEMENT WITH BAGHDAD ALLOWS NEGOTIATION OF CONTRACTS WITH FOREIGN INVESTORS.**
- **TURKEY-E.U.: FREEZE OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH ANKARA, WHICH REFUSES TO NORMALISE ITS RELATIONS WITH NICOSIA.**
- **TEHERAN: THE FIRST ELECTORAL SETBACK FOR MAHMUD AHMEDINJAD.**
- **GEORGE BUSH CONSULTS WITH THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT'S COALITION PARTNERS TO FORM A MODERATE BLOCK WHILE THE PRIME MINISTER LAUNCHES A NATIONAL RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE IN BAGHDAD.**
- **TONY BLAIR VISITS ANKARA AND BAGHDAD.**
- **A DIPLOMATIC BALLET IN THE MIDDLE EAST AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF POLITICALLY REHABILITATING DAMASCUS AND TEHERAN.**
- **THE NUMBER OF IRAQI CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE REACHES AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL IN DECEMBER.**
- **STRASBOURG: THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS COURT FINDS ANKARA GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF THE KURDISH PLAYWRIGHT, MUSA ANTER, AND OF VIOLATIONS OF THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OF KURDISH JOURNALISTS AND BUSINESSMEN.**
- **READ IN THE TURKISH PRESS: THE REPORT OF THE OF THE TURKISH FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH (TESEV) REGARDING THE FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF KURDS.**
- **AS WELL AS ...**

SADDAM HUSSEIN EXECUTED BEFORE BEING TRIED FOR HIS MASS CRIMES IN KURDISTAN

At dawn on 30 December, three years after being captured in a "rat hole" in his native region of Tikrit, Saddam Hussein was executed by hanging. Iraqi television broadcast pictures, showing him () with his hands tied behind his back, refusing to be blindfolded, pushed to the gallows by two masked hangmen who put the rope round his neck. The broadcast stopped short of showing the hanging itself, which

took place just before 6.00 a.m. (3.00 a.m. GMT). A private television later broadcast stealthily take pictures of his body, with a broken neck, in a bloodied white shroud. The execution of his two co-accused, his half-brother, Barzan al-Tikriti, former head of the Intelligence Services, and Awad al-Bandar, former president of the Revolutionary Court, was postponed at the last moment.

The timetable and circumstances of

the Iraqi former dictator's hanging gave rise to a diversity of reactions both in Iraq and abroad. It all happened as if Prime Minister Maliki wanted to fulfil his promise to finish with Saddam Hussein before the end of the year. His subordinates must have worked frantically to carry out, in record time, all the administrative formalities required and get round President Jalal Talabani's opposition to the death sentence.

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While considering that they could not, in the place of the families of hundreds of thousands of victims, pardon Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish leaders would have liked the tyrant to be tried for his mass crimes and be sentenced to life imprisonment at the end of these trials.

Finally, recalling the fear that the Baathists might kidnap hostages to secure the release of their leader, the prime Minister, supported by the other Shiite coalition partners decided to speed up the execution process, without even taking into account the customary truce observed on the occasion of the Moslem Feast of the Sacrifice.

His decision, considered a proof of his determination, was widely approved by the Shiite population. The news of his hanging was greeted by joyful firing into the air at Najaf, a Shiite holy city, but with relative indifference in Baghdad. Here, the announcement of the ex-dictator's death was only greeted by a few shots in the air in quarters that were essentially Shiite. The Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, welcoming the *"execution of that criminal Saddam"*, launched an appeal for reconciliation directed at the old regime's supporters whose *"hands were not stained with blood"*.

The President of Iraqi Kurdistan,

Massud Barzani, took note of the hanging while recalling the importance of continuing the *Anfal* proceedings, in which the former president was being tried for genocide against the Kurds. *"We hope that the execution of Saddam Hussein will open a new chapter in Iraq's history and that it will mark the end of the use of force and violence against civilians"* declared Massud Barzani, in a communiqué dated 30 December. *"It is important that this execution should not be an excuse for not revealing the extent of the crimes committed during the Halabja and Anfal operations, as well as the massacre of thousands of Kurds and of members of the Barzani clan"*, the President of autonomous Kurdistan nevertheless qualified.

The Party for a Democratic Society (DTP) the principle pro-Kurdish organisation in Turkey, for its part, denounced the execution. *"Even though the Kurds suffered the most during his period in office (...) Saddam Hussein should not have been hanged"*, considered Aysel Tugluk, DTP co-president, in a communiqué. Mrs. Tugluk pointed out that her party was opposed to capital punishment and considered that hanging the ex-dictator could produce the outcome of still further inflaming the situation in Iraq, which is already torn apart by sectarian violence. *"Saddam had already been sentenced in peoples' awareness. This punishment is much more severe than the death sentence that we must reject"*, she further stated.

Immediately welcomed in Washington: the execution *"will not put an end to the violence in Iraq, but it is an important stage in Iraq's road to a democracy that can govern itself (...) and be an ally in the war against terrorism"*, declared the US President George W. Bush in a

communiqué. Saddam Hussein *"has paid"*, the British government considered, while still reaffirming its opposition to the death sentence, while the French Foreign Ministry *"took note"* of the execution and called on the Iraqis to *"work towards reconciliation and national unity"*. The Finnish presidency of the European Union, states it has always been against capital punishment, considered that the execution *"could also turn out to become the carrier of future divisions in Iraq"*. The execution was also seen as a *"new tragedy"* in the Vatican, which is opposed to capital punishment, as well as the Council of Europe, that considers that Iraq had missed an opportunity *"to rejoin the civilised world"*. The Russian Foreign Ministry regretted that international appeals for clemency had not been heard while the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, stated that she *"respected"* the verdict, while recalling that Berlin was opposed to capital punishment.

On 30 December, Iran welcomed the execution of Saddam Hussein, described by Teheran as the *"author of the most horrible crimes against humanity"*. *"With Saddam's execution, the case of one of the worst criminal dictators has been closed"*, commented the Iranian State Television service. Also demanded that the Iraqi Criminal Court, set up to try Saddam Hussein, sentence him for crimes committed during the Iran-Iraq war, and in particular for the use of chemical weapons against Iranian troops. As soon as Saddam Hussein's death was announced, demonstrations of joy took place in several parts of Teheran, but also in Khorramshahr, a port city on the Iraqi borders, where scenes of popular rejoicing

were reported by official Iranian media. Khorramshahr had been occupied by Iraqi forces at the beginning of the invasion of Iran in 1980. The Iranian Army liberated the city during a decisive battle in May 1921.

In the Arab countries, reactions were mainly official and token. The hanging of Saddam Hussein, taking place, as it did, on the first day of the Moslem Feast of the Sacrifice caused "*surprise and consternation*" according to the SPA news agency, that reflects the official views of the Saudi kingdom. Its Jordanian neighbour expressed the hope that it would have no negative effects on the country. In Gaza the death of Saddam Hussein was described as a "*political assassination*" by the Islamic movement Hamas. Finally, several thousands of demonstrators came out on the streets to protest against this execution in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Human Rights defence organisations regretted the execution. "Saddam Hussein was responsible for many terrible violations of human rights. However, these acts, however brutal they may be, cannot justify his execution – a cruel and inhuman punishment", declared Human Rights Watch, for its part. In the view of Amnesty International, this was "a missed opportunity" for obliging the former dictator to face up to his crimes.

On 19 October 2005, at the opening of his first trial for crimes against humanity, for the deaths of 148 inhabitants of the village of Dubail after an attempted assassination, Saddam had taken advantage of

the platform provided by the court. In July he stated that, in the event of his being sentenced to death, he should, as an officer, be shot not hanged. In the course of his trial, he alternately played the tune of Arab nationalism, Islam and Iraqi patriotism. He presented himself as a pious Moslem, never going anywhere without his copy of the Qoran.

Since last July, Saddam Hussein has been on trial in a second charge in which he was accused of genocide against the Kurds in the context of the *Anfal* campaign carried out during 1987 and 1988, in the course of which over 180,000 people were killed in mass executions or chemical bombardments. The *Anfal* trial, in which six other people are being charged, including one of his cousins, Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as "*Chemical Ali*" will continue, but all charges against Saddam Hussein are extinguished by his death under Iraqi law. The chemical attack carried out by the Iraqi Air Force in 1988 on Halabja, where some 5,000 people were killed in a few minutes and some 10,000 others injured, as well as the execution, in 1983, of some 8,000 members of the Barzani tribe, are two other separate cases covering the massacre of Kurds.

As far as the *Anfal* trial is concerned, Mr. Badih Aref Ezzat, the lawyer representing Tareq Aziz, Saddam Hussein's former Deputy Prime Minister, announced that this wished to give evidence in the *Anfal* case before Saddam Hussein's execution. Tareq Aziz "*has asked to be able to give evidence in the Anfal case before Saddam Hussein's death sentence was carried out – and this was also Saddam Hussein's wish*", he declared,

adding that "*Mr. Aziz told me that he had important information that would provoke great embarrassment inside and outside*" Iraq, without giving any details. Tareq Aziz, who was Saddam Hussein's spokesman on the international stage, surrendered to American troops in April 2003. He has, since then, been detained by the Americans and his family constantly calls for his release because of the deterioration in his state of health.

Another disturbing fact – a document presented at Saddam Hussein's trial in which the Iraqi officers were ordered to "*cooperate with the Turkish party in accordance with the agreement signed with them for hunting down refugees*" was handed to the Iraqi High Criminal Court on 21 December. This document was presented by the Iraqi Prosecution as one of the proofs that Saddam Hussein had, indeed, given the order to eliminate 182,000 Kurds. The Turkish authorities immediately went on to the defensive, recognising that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had, indeed, tried to secure Turkish support against the Iraqi Kurds in the 80s, but that Ankara had apposed this. Nuzhet Kandemir, formerly special representative for relations with Iraq, indicated to the daily paper *Milliyet* that this proposal had been made to him by Taha Yacin Ramadan during a meeting in Baghdad in 1988, a few months after the launching of the murderous campaign against the Kurds called *Anfal*. "*We will push the Kurds Northward, you will block their way and we will be able to put an end to the problem in a fundamental manner*", Mr. Ramadan had planned, according to Nuzhat Kandemir. The former ambassador

states that Turkey, on the orders of the then Prime Minister, Turgut Ozal, had rejected this offer. The former ambassador added, however, that the document undoubtedly referred to another Turco-Iraqi security agreement, signed early in the 80s, authorising both countries to cross their common border in pursuit of Kurdish fighters.

In the course of this hearing, the Iraqi Public Prosecutor, Munkith al-Farun, had exhibited documents from the General Staff, dated April 1988, ordering the destruction of "the saboteurs' bases" by air and artillery bombardment using "the special weapon", a reference to the use of chemical weapons. The Prosecutor had ordered, on four occasions, that the microphones be switched off so as to continue, in camera, discussion of the documents regarding "Iraq-Turkish relations" at the time and then showed the court a memo ordering Iraqi officers to "cooperate with the Turkish party, in accordance

with the terms of a protocol of cooperation providing for the turning back of Kurdish refugees". A letter dated 28 April 1988 demanding "the destruction of all the houses" of a village and concluded with "inform the President, may God bless him," was also presented. Another document, from then Chief of the General Staff Nazar Abdel Kareem and dated 21 August of the same year, ordered "deal with the populations with strikes using the special weapon so as to create panic" and expressing the hope of "the total destruction of the Northern zone (...) before the possibility of a fresh conflict with Iran". Finally a circular dated April 1988 ordered the Iraqi forces "to use the special ammunition against the enemy forces for as long as possible and to strike the saboteurs' bases as hard as necessary". This letter is "initialled by a signature that we believe is that of Saddam Hussein", according to the Prosecutor. "This is the first time in history that an army has used chemicals against its own people", he concluded.

fails to show substantial progress in the area of security.

During a Press Conference, Mr. Baker considered that there was no "magic formula" for resolving the crisis in Iraq. "A slide to chaos could bring about the collapse of the Iraqi government and a humanitarian crisis. Neighbouring countries might intervene", according to the report. "Clashes between Sunnis and Shiites could spread and Al-Qaida could win a propaganda victory and broaden its operational base", warned the Commission. At regional level, it recommended a diplomatic offensive, and, above all, directs discussions with Teheran and Damascus "to try and secure their commitment to conducting constructive policies towards Iraq and other regional problems". It recommends "dissuasive" and "incentive" measures.

The day after the publication of the report, US President George W. Bush recognised the necessity for a "new approach" during a discussion with British Prime Minister Tony Blair aimed at reviewing the different strategies open to them. Following a discussion with Tony Blair, he admitted that the situation in the country was "bad".

Moreover, the reactions to this report and to its recommendations only served to underline the sectarian divisions of the new Iraq. Divergences centred on certain of the most sensitive themes in present day Iraq: national reconciliation, the sharing of the wealth in oil and the role of neighbouring countries in the efforts to extricate the country from the present chaos.

The Kurds sharply criticised the report. "Unrealistic and

THE BAKER-HAMILTON REPORT ON IRAQ: REJECTED BY BOTH THE KURDS AND THE SHIITES

A long expected report, the fruit of eight months work by the Iraq Study Group (ISG), on the United States' strategy in Iraq recommends a gradual disengagement, the US Army having, henceforth, to focus its mission on training, equipping and supporting the Iraqi forces rather than on fighting. The commission, co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Democrat Congressman Lee Hamilton, thus published its report on 6 December without proposing either a precipitous retreat or a

limitless deployment. "The military priorities must change". The independent commission, composed of five Republicans and five Democrats opt rather for "completing the mission of training and equipping" before the end of March 2008. To this end it calls for increasing the number of US troops allocated to training Iraqi troops from the present 3-4,000 to a final figure of 10-20,000, this increase coming from units already in Iraq. On the other hand it suggests that Washington reduce its "political, military and economic support" for Iraq if the Baghdad government

unacceptable", thundered Massud Barzani, President of Iraqi Kurdistan, in a communiqué published on 8 December, criticising the ISG report. "We will, in no circumstances, conform to this report", insisted Mr. Barzani in a communiqué published 8 December. "Despite our gratitude to President George W. Bush and his Administration for having overthrown the old regime and for their efforts to build a new Iraq, we think that several of the recommendations of the Study Group are unrealistic and inappropriate", he added. Mr. Barzani criticised the fact that the reports authors had never visited Kurdistan during the nine months they worked prior to drawing up the report. "The report contradicts what James Baker told us over the phone two days ago, assuring us that the special status of Kurdistan was taken into account", the President of Kurdistan further stressed. The report suggests delaying the application of Article 140 of the Constitution, which envisages a referendum to decide the future of the oil-producing province of Kirkuk that the Kurds claim. "Any delay would have serious consequences and will not be accepted by the people of Kurdistan", warned Mr. Barzani, rejecting the recommendations for sharing the revenues from oil discovered in Kurdistan. Mr. Barzani also protests against the return to office of ex-members of the Baath or that Iraq's neighbours should have a say (in Iraq's affairs).

Similarly, on 10 December, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani sharply rejected the report, considering that it "was an attack on Iraq's sovereignty". "The Hamilton-Baker report is unjust. It contains some dangerous articles that attack the sovereignty of Iraq and its

Constitution. I reject it as a whole", the Iraqi President stated, without beating about the bush, before journalists at his official residence. The Iraqi President showed particular hostility at several key points of the report. Thus he attacked the implied will to involve former Baathists in the political process in Iraq, "which is part of a long struggle of the Iraqi people against the dictatorship", and the increase in the number of American advisors integrated into the Iraqi units. Mr. Talabani also criticised the recommendation, contained in the report, of threatening the withdrawal of aid in the event of lack of progress. "This amounts to treating Iraq like a new colony on which any conditions can be imposed, by denying the fact that we are a sovereign and respected country", he considered. As for General Wafiq al-Samarrai, President Jalal Talabani's adviser on security questions, he considered, when speaking in a broadcast on the Pan-Arab television channel *Al-Jazeera*, that the date of 2008, when the Iraqi Army could become totally autonomous, was realistic "and even earlier if suitable measures are taken meanwhile".

The Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Barham Saleh, considered, for his part, that the conclusions in the Iraq Study Group's report, "were no surprise" and stressed that the Iraqis should assume responsibility for their own security. "The situation is serious, very serious in fact, and cannot be tolerated", declared Barham Saleh on the *Al-Arabiya* satellite television channel. "Absolute dependence on foreign soldiers is not possible. The priority must be to strengthen the Iraqi security forces". "In fact, the recommendations are, at least in

principle, in accordance with an Iraqi national vision that hopes for the strengthening of Iraqi capacity, the handing over of security files to the Iraqis and respect for the will of the Iraqis", added the Deputy Prime Minister. He pointed out, however, that "there could well be details about which our views diverge".

For Dr. Mahmud Othman, head of the Kurdish alliance in the Iraqi Parliament, Washington wants gradually to withdraw its support for the Iraqi government so as to put pressure on it to increase its efforts to dismantle the different militias and to fight against sectarian violence. "This is a two-edged weapon and could prove to be negative because, under the Geneva convention, the occupier is responsible for the country in all its aspects and they should be facing up to their responsibilities not abandoning them", he had stated before the publication of the report. "On the other hand, this could make the Iraqi government face reality and the necessity of acting to stop this chaos".

Furthermore, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, head of the SCIRI (Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) and the principle Shiite political figure, judges that the report includes "inexact information based on dishonest sources". He also rejected the connection made between Iraq and the settling of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Another Shiite leader considered that the Baker-Hamilton report's conclusions were partial and biased in favour of the Sunni Arabs. "We are all in the same boat, we are not only fighting internal criminals but international terrorists. We need help for this", was the view of Haidar al-Ibadi, a Member of Parliament from the Prime

Minister's Dawa party.

While the Sunni Arabs are in agreement with the report's assessment, they are not about the solutions proposed. They consider the idea of involving Syria in the search for a solution particularly "positive". However, the solutions proposed, "are not up to the analysis of the situation", deplored the Ulema's Association, through its spokesman Sheikh Mohammed Bashar al-Fayadh. The same tune from Falah Shanshal, a Shiite Member of Parliament of the Sadrist Bloc: "Iraq is capable of building its own army without the help of others", he retorted.

The ISG's report invites the US Administration to develop diplomatic relations with Syria and Iran to bring stability to Iraq. It also advocates direct negotiations between Israel, Syria, the Lebanon and the Palestinians, considering that a settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict would improve the situation in Iraq. Thus Syria, on 7 December, reacted favourably to the Baker-Hamilton report, welcoming the importance the document gave to settling the Israeli-Arab conflict and reiterating Damascus' determination to recover the Golan, annexed by Israel. According to a leading official of the Foreign Ministry speaking off the record, but quoted off by the Syrian official news agency, the Iraq Study Group's

report is "positive since it deals with the role of Iraq's neighbours in bringing security and stability to Iraq". He explained that Damascus could help ease the situation in Iraq in exchange of the return to its sovereignty of the Golan, occupied by Israel since 1967. "Syria's priority is to totally recover the occupied Arab Golan Plateau", he indicated. The US President had replied to the ISG's suggestion of negotiating with Syria and Iran that "the countries that take part in discussions must not finance terrorism, must help the young democracy to survive and must help the country's economy".

Iran reacted cautiously to the ISG's proposals. "The United States' decision to withdraw from Iraq do not require negotiations with any other country of the region", considered, on 7 December the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mr. Manushehr Mottaki, on the Al-Jazzier TV channel. "This report contains certain important points (...) it seems that certain aspects of American policy in Iraq are considered to be mistakes" he pointed out.

If the ISG's conclusions intensify the pressure on the White House in favour of reorienting the present policy in Iraq – already demanded by the American electors in November – George Bush is not bound to follow its recommendations. All the more so as other options are at present

being studied by the Pentagon, the State Department and the National Security Council.

Furthermore, according to a report of the International Crisis Group (ICG), published on 19 December, Iraq is on the point of "disintegrating". The ICG considers, in particular, that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's National Unity Government is not representative. "The country and its institutions are in danger of sinking into chaos", threatening the stability of the whole region, says in alarm the Chairman of the ICG, Gareth Evans, in this report. "The Baker-Hamilton Commission, and the renewal it represents of American policy in Iraq, are, a first important step, but radically insufficient if we want to avoid the collapse of Iraq and a regional war", the ICG considers. "All the Iraqi political actors involved in violence must be brought to the negotiating table and put under pressure until they accept a compromise", the ICG stresses. "The Iraqi government and the security forces cannot be considered allies that we support: they are simply part of the many part of the many actors in the conflict", notes the organisation. The Baker Commission talks about a "government of national union representing the Iraqi people" – "this is not at all true" according to the ICG, that proposes "a new multilateral approach that really puts pressure on the national actors".

IRAQI KURDISTAN: A PROVISIONAL AGREEMENT WITH BAGHDAD ALLOWS NEGOTIATION OF CONTRACTS WITH FOREIGN INVESTORS

On 19 December, Iraqi leaders reached a provisional agreement regarding a draft law on the country's oil resources, which allow the regions

to negotiate contracts with foreign investors but leave the last word with the central government, according to sources close to the negotiations. The Kurdistan region, for its part, has accepted to re-

examine the contracts that it has already made with foreign oil companies regarding its oil fields, to check their conformity with the law. Amongst these companies is the Norwegian DNO.

Iraq has great need of foreign investment to put back on its feet a very sick economy that remains

very dependent on the export of crude oil, of which the country has the third largest reserves in the world. Sources close to the negotiations indicate that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has "signalled his approval" of the draft, which, however, still needs the green light from the political parties and be adopted by the government. The Bill envisages the creation of a National Oil Council (directed by either the Prime Minister or the Deputy prime Minister) that would have the power of rejecting any contract proposed for a field. The regions, in the presence of a representative of the national oil organisation, would negotiate in accordance with specific parameters and investment models decided by the National Council, which would be responsible for oil policy. In the event of a refusal, or if the region insisted on a contract, a commission of experts would be charged with arbitrating. The Oil Minister, the Governor of the Central Bank, a representative of each of the regions and oil, financial and economic experts would sit on the National Oil Council. A contract would only become effective if the National Council accepted it. If it rejected a project within a 60-day deadline, the contract would not be effective. The Bill also provides for the two national Iraqi oil companies to be transformed into a single holding

company with several operating subsidiaries to manage the various stages of production. The Bill also calls for the setting of Iraqi oil policy at national level and recommends that the Ministry of Oil be restructured and transformed into a regulatory body and that all oil revenue be centralised in a single fund.

On 2 December, the Kurdistan Prime Minister had made public the failure of discussions with the central government in Baghdad regarding an agreement on the budget and the sharing of oil revenues. "We have been unable to reach agreement on the budget, on the oil law or on the sharing of oil revenue. I hope that the situation will not become more acrimonious", Nechirvan Barzani had said at the time, during a Press Conference in Irbil. The Kurdistan Prime Minister had met the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, and the Oil Minister, Hussein Shahrstani in Baghdad to discuss what percentage of the oil revenues, Iraq's principal source of budgetary revenue, should be allocated to Iraqi Kurdistan. "The government proposes to allocate us 13% of these revenues but we have replied that this is not enough – we want 17%", Mr. Barzani had explained.

The Iraqi Constitution allows for each of the country's regions receiving a share of the oil revenues. At the same time the government of the autonomous region of Kurdistan

asked Baghdad to be able to continue signing oil contracts with foreign countries, from which it would retain the benefits. The two parties also failed in their efforts to reach an agreement on the application of Article 140 of the Constitution that foresees the organisation of a referendum to enable certain Kurdish regions to join Kurdistan.

On another level, on 14 December, thirteen trucks loaded with domestic fuel oil arrived at Suleimaniah from neighbouring Iran. "Trucks carrying Iranian produced fuel oil arrived following an agreement between the local authorities and the city of Kermanshah last September", announced the governor of Suleimaniah, Zana Mohammed Saleh. "Thirteen trucks, transporting the first part of this fuel oil, arrived today", he indicated, pointing out that each truck contained 30,000 litres of fuel oil intended for domestic heating and cooking. Seven other trucks were also expected to arrive from Iran the next day. The agreement between the Iraqi Kurdish leaders and the Iranian authorities covers the importing of 300 million litres of Iranian fuel oil over a period of three months, to deal with a shortage of refined oil products in Iraqi Kurdistan. Despite having some of the world's greatest oil reserves, Iraq is suffering from a shortage of refined products, mainly due to a weakness in refinery infrastructures and to sabotage by the insurgents.

TURKEY-E.U.: FREEZE OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH ANKARA, WHICH REFUSES TO NORMALISE ITS RELATIONS WITH NICOSIA



On 14 December, the heads of states and governments, in summit meeting, agreed to freeze eight of the 35 chapters of the negotiations taking place with

Ankara, because of Turkey's refusal to normalise its trade with Cyprus as it had committed itself to do in "the Ankara protocol". The Foreign Ministers of the E.U. countries had, on 11 December,

already decided to suspend discussions on eight chapters mark out the discussions with the Turks because of Ankara's persistent refusal to open its sea and air ports to Greek Cypriot traffic. The 25 first agreed to suspend the eight chapters, thus *de facto* slowing down Ankara's advance towards membership of the E.U. (already

expected to take at least 10 to 15 years). They also decided not to finalise any other chapter so long as Turkey fails to accept to open its sea and air ports to Greek Cypriot traffic – its refusal on this point being the source of the sanction by the 25. They also found a compromise “if necessary” for the annual evaluations till 2009 of such progress as Turkey may have made. Finally, they agreed to “thaw out” the suspended chapters “at any moment” in the event of Turkish progress.

On December 13, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, described the freezing of negotiations as “a credible and equitable decision”. This decision “taken unanimously by the Foreign Ministers of the E.U. countries, is a credible and equitable decision because it (the E.U.) sends a very strong signal to the Turks – that obligations must be observed”, was his analysis. “It is a strong signal, but a signal that is not intended to close the door on Turkey. It is not only a matter of not opening the eight chapters, but of not finalising any of the 35 chapters until Turkey respects its obligations”, he pointed out.

In reaction, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, denounced an “injustice”. “Despite all our good will, the decision of the E.U. Council of Ministers is,

unfortunately an unjust one”, he declared to his Justice and Development

Party’s Parliamentary group. “*Relations between the E.U. and Turkey are going through a harsh trial, despite all our efforts to resolve the blockage*”, Mr. Erdogan added. The Turkish Prime Minister nevertheless declared that Turkey was determined to continue putting into practice the reforms needed for its entry into the European Union. “*In the coming period, we know full well that we have to carry out our reforms with the same determination*” he pointed out. For his part, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul, deplored “*the lack of vision*” of his European opposite numbers. As for the Turkish press, the present situation is not the worst scenario since the 25 are agreed to unfreeze the chapters in the event of Turkish progress. “*The European train has braked*” headlined the daily *Radikal*, while for *Zaman* (moderate Islamic) “*the E.U. train is continuing on its way*”. The Turkish authorities refuse to allow ships or planes to enter their sea or airports that come from the Cyprus Republic, which occupies the Greek part of the island, divided since the Turkish invasion in 1974. They demand that the E.U. first end the economic isolation of the “*Turkish Republic of North Cyprus*” – that is recognised by Ankara only.

according to the government. The two previous local elections in Iran’s history, following their being set up in 1999 by the then president Mohammed Khatami, had drawn between 50% and 55% to the polls. However, four years ago less than 12% had taken part in the Teheran municipal elections. According to the final results, the winners were essentially “*moderate conservatives*” opposed to the present very radical President, followed by reformers. These results may well embarrass Mahmud Ahmedinjad, whose anti-Israeli rhetoric and inflexible stand on the nuclear issue have provoked condemnation in the West. The two polls on 15 December were a test for President Ahmedinjad, who has already lost the support of many conservatives, who considered that he was spending too much time in confrontations with the West at the expense of the economic question. The Iranian President, for whom these elections were considered to be a first test of popularity, since taking office in 2005, avoided any fundamental analysis of these first results. Mr. Ahmedinjad simply declared: “*The people have won*”.

In Teheran, supporters of President Mahmud Ahmedinjad, former Mayor of the city, where he built up his popularity, arrived last in the municipal elections, behind both the conservatives and the reformers, according to the State television. Four “*reformist*” candidates are also due to join the Council, whereas the reforming camp, which had controlled the municipality, was completely eliminated at the 2003 elections. Only two candidates of the ultra-conservative “*The good odour of service*” list were amongst the first fifteen. One of these was the

TEHERAN: THE FIRST ELECTORAL SETBACK FOR MAHMUD AHMEDINJAD

According to the final results made public on 21 December by the Iranian Ministry of the Interior, the opponents of the Iranian President have taken the lead in the municipal elections and in the Assembly of Experts, thus

making a first electoral setback for Mahmud Ahmedinjad. The electors had to elect over 113,000 local councillors out of 235,000 candidates. Overall, the participation in these elections was about 60%, that is, 26 million of 46.5 million Iranian electors,

President's sister, Parvine Ahmédinjad, who was placed 10th. The second candidate came 14th. Several Iranian women came at the top in several important provincial cities. This was particularly the case in Shiraz (Southern Iran), with a 25-year-old student, Fatemeh Hushmand, close to the reformists, and also in Arak (Centre) and Ardebil (Northwest).

Regarding the elections to the Assembly of Experts, a body of 86 clerics responsible for watching over the Supreme Guide, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the presidents opponents were also very much in the lead. Former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, beaten by Mr. Ahmédinjad in the 2005 presidential elections, was easily elected. On the other hand, his main rival, Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, generally seen as Mahmud Ahmédinjad's spiritual mentor, only just managed to get elected. The latter's list, called "The experts of the Theological Schools and

Universities" failed completely in the Holy City of Mashhad. The Assembly, where the supporters of Ayatollah Mezbah Yazdi will only be a handful, remains dominated by the "Association of Fighting Clergy", the conservative block loyal to the Supreme Guide, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The elections for the Assembly of Experts took place at provincial level in each province. In Teheran Province, there were 16 seats. The candidates chose in which one of the 30 provinces they wanted to stand. Teheran draws the most eminent public figures. During the previous election for this body, in 1998, the electoral turnout was 42.5 %. This time, its being held at the same time as the municipals encouraged the greater turn out.

Otherwise, the Iranian authorities have blocked access to the web site for sharing videos on line, YouTube.com. The free press organisation *Reporters sans Frontières* expressed its concern at this measure, that it perceived as an intensification of Internet

censorship by the regime. Net surfers who tried to log on to this site were greeted by the following message: "On the basis of the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this site is not authorised". This same explanation also appears in the place of sites that are pornographic or run by the country's political opposition groups. The Iranian government regularly blocks Web sites and blogs, and this banning message has been appearing more and more over the last year. It is mainly used to counter messages from opposition groups, but also Iranian pop music clips that YouTube.com puts on line. According to *Reporters sans Frontières*, the New York Times Web site is also blocked, as is the English language version of the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. The Iranian authorities refuse to discuss the matter. *Reporters sans Frontières* also recalls that the Iranian authorities banned broadband access to the news from the West in October. The authorities deny these news items.

GEORGE BUSH CONSULTS WITH THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT'S COALITION PARTNERS TO FORM A MODERATE BLOCK WHILE THE PRIME MINISTER LAUNCHES A NATIONAL RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE IN BAGHDAD

Because of the persistent discontent at the failure to suppress the violence, the principal partners of the coalition governing Iraq are examining, in the wings, ways of getting rid of Prime Minister Nur al-Maliki. Discussions aimed at forming a new parliamentary block, enabling the replacement of the present government and excluding the supporters of the radical Shiite Imam, Moqtada al-Sadr, are mentioned. The new alliance could be led by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim,

who met US President George W. Bush on 4 December. He is unlikely to claim the position of Prime Minister, preferring to remain above the day-to-day concerns of office. One of the key people in such a possible alliance, the Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi, of Sunni denomination, went to Washington on 10 December to meet George W. Bush, three weeks earlier than planned. The other Vice-President, the Shiite Adil Abdul-Mehdi, who had been suggested before the emergence of Nuri al-Maliki, is said to be in the

running for the Premiership.

On 13 November, George W. Bush particularly consulted the Kurds before taking time to think about a new strategy. Telephone discussions with the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani and the President of Kurdistan, Massud Barzani, confirmed that his agenda was still fluid and that one of his working hypotheses was the formation of a "moderate block" to strengthen Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's fragile political base. "Over the last few days we talked about a moderate block that would include Sunni leaders, Shiites and Kurds" (the three main Iraqi communities) and Messrs Talabani and Barzani "enter this moderate block (...) not only by contributing a

broader support to the government but also by acting against those who want to destabilise it by terrorist actions" stated the White House spokesman, Tony Snow.

It was in this context that the Conference of National Reconciliation completed its work on 17 December. The 200 delegates present proposed a series of "recommendations", including the return of former members of the Baath party (formerly the sole party under the Saddam Hussein regime) to the army. This measure, that could be seen as a gesture of opening towards the Sunni community, covers several tens of thousands of ex-officers, and could convince many ex-Baathists, today active in the opposition, to lay down their arms. The various proposals made at the conference "are declarations of good intentions that remain to be put into practice", admitted, however, Nasser al-Ani, spokesman of the conference. "A single important practical measure was recommended", which still has to be presented to Parliament by Mr. Maliki, "is the payment of significant pensions to ex-servicemen", explained Mr. Ani. After the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in April 2003, Paul Bremmer, the former American governor of Iraq, dissolved the Iraqi Army, which at the time was some 400,000 strong, largely composed of Sunni Arabs. Many observers, at the time, had considered this a mistake, which had pushed many former soldiers into the ranks of the insurrection. The Baath Party remains banned, in accordance with Article 7 of the Constitution, "but, in their individual capacities, its members may take part" in the conference, stressed a Shiite member of Parliament, Abbas al-Bayati, a member of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

(SCIRI).

The conference had begun its work on 16 December, in Baghdad, in a conference centre in the "green zone", the highly protected sector of the city centre where all the principal Iraqi institutions and the US embassy are located. Its sessions had been broadcast live by the national television service. On 3 December the Iraqi President had rejected the proposal of UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, for holding an international conference on Iraq, considering that the Iraqis themselves should decide the fate of their country. Jalal Talabani was the second Iraqi leader to take this stand, after Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim. "We are an independent and sovereign nation, and it is we who must decide the fate of our nation", Mr. Talabani had declared, according to a communiqué issued by his office.

The conference was promised at the beginning of December, but its realisation remained uncertain until the last few days. As its initiator, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, took the stand. "The new Iraqi Army has opened its gates to members of the old Army, to soldiers and officers, and the government of national union is ready to welcome those who wish to serve the nation", declared Nuri al-Maliki. He made the point that the number of places in it would, no doubt be limited, because of the army's size, but that those who were not accepted would receive a pension. For many Shiites and Kurds, victims of the Baathist repression, the idea of re-integrating ex-Baathists in the Army and the administration is unacceptable. For many Sunni Arabs, on the other hand, they are political actors who cannot be ignored.

The Committee of Moslem Ulemas

had announced that it would boycott the conference: "We have too often seen, in the past, the government sign agreements that it later denounces", explained sheikh Mohammed Bashar al-Faidhi, spokesman of this body, the principal Sunni religious organisation. Its leader, Sheikh Hareth al-Dari, at present a refugee abroad, is accused of inciting sectarian violence. His absence was "no surprise" for the Kurdish member of Parliament Mahmud Othman, who considered that the Committee is in "perpetual refusal". The Sunni Arabs principally criticise Maliki's government for not attacking the militia that they consider responsible for the violence. Omar Abdul-Sattar Mahmud, of the Iraqi Islamic Party (Sunni) calls for them to be purely and simply broken up to "stop the terror". The radical Shiite leader, Moqtada al-Sadr, whose Mahdi's Army is a 60,000-man strong militia, is considered a counter power, suspected of having actively participated in the sectarian violence. The Sadr tendency, which has 6 Ministers and 32 members of Parliament (out of 275), has nevertheless always been present at the negotiating table.

The White House hoped that Mr. Bush would be able to make a new strategy public before Christmas. He was obliged to push this back to after the New Year. The Administration invoked the complexity of the task and the multiple implications of a new policy. Iraq's neighbours are worried at what the new policy might be. On 13 December the *New York Times* reported that Sunni Saudi Arabia had warned the United States that it might support the Sunni Arabs in the event of a war against the Iraqi Shiites if the American troops withdrew.

TONY BLAIR VISITS ANKARA AND BAGHDAD

On 17 December, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, visited Baghdad to affirm his support for his Iraqi opposite number, Nuri al-Maliki. Arriving in the greatest secrecy in the course of the morning he went to the "green zone", the highly protected sector of the City centre, where he met Mr. Maliki and the Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani. Mr. Blair declared that Great Britain *"will support the Iraqi government and people to ensure that your democracy be not destroyed by the terrorism, by the sectarianism (...) of those who want to live in hate rather than in peace"*. *"Innocent blood is being shed today, but it is not shed by the democratically elected government, or those who support it"*, Mr. Blair considered. Nearly 7,100 British soldiers are at present deployed in Iraq, principally in the Basra region (550 Km South of Baghdad). Mr Blair's journey comes at a time when he is under increasing pressure from his countries public opinion to withdraw the British contingent from Iraq.

The British Prime Minister had earlier visited Turkey and Egypt as part of a regional tour. During his short stay in Ankara, Tony Blair met Mr. Erdogan in the evening of

15 December to inform him of his support for Turkey's membership of the European Union and to discuss the Cyprus question and events in the Near East. He took parting a joint press conference with his Turkish opposite number, Recep Tayyip Erdogan before leaving for Cairo on 16 December.

Furthermore, on 12 December, before his trip to the Middle East, Tony Blair had declared at a press conference that Iran represented a *"major threat"* to the stability of the Middle East and that there was no chance of associating Teheran in efforts to check violence in Iraq. *"I do not believe that we have the slightest reason to hide the fact that Iran is a major strategic threat to the cohesion of the whole region"*, Mr. Blair had indicated. *"At this time Iran is creating the maximum of problems for moderate governments and to ourselves in the region – in Palestine, in the Lebanon, and in Iraq"*, he continued. *"I observe then region as a whole at the moment and everything Iran is doing is negative"*, had added Mr. Blair. He had, nevertheless sent an envoy to Damascus to propose to the Syrians the *"strategic"* possibility of cooperating with the international community and ceasing to support terrorism, on pain of remaining isolated...

al-Assad and Prime Minister Mohammad Naji Otri on bilateral relations and to strengthen their close cooperation. He revealed that a free trade agreement would come into effect on 1 January 2007, noting that Syria is an important country regionally, with which Turkey has good neighbourly relations.

Damascus was also the last stage of a four-day tour of the Near East by the German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. On 4 December he visited Syria to meet his Syrian opposite number, Walid Muallem, and Bashar al-Assad. Last August he had cancelled, at the last minute, a visit to the Syrian capital following an anti-Israeli speech by President al-Assad. Moreover, following the report of the Iraq Study Group (ISG) that recommends contacts with Damascus and Teheran, the US Democratic Senator for Massachusetts, John Kerry, George Bush's the defeated rival at the last presidential elections judged that Washington's refusal to dialogue with Syria and Iran was a *"mistake"* and also visited Damascus to meet Bashar al-Assad in mid-December.

For his part, Bashar al-Assad made a working visit to Moscow on 18 December, during which he had discussions with his Russian opposite number, Vladimir Putin. According to Evgeni Posukhov, the Russian diplomat in Damascus, Mr. Assad, for whom this is the second visit to Moscow since 2005, examined the *"difficult situation"* in the Near East and the *"means of settling the crises"* in the region with his Russian opposite number. *"This new Russia wants to keep a special role of negotiator with Bashar al-Assad"*, notably wrote Fedor Lukianov, editor in chief of the

A DIPLOMATIC BALLET IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF POLITICALLY REHABILITATING DAMASCUS AND TEHERAN

Diplomatic visits have accelerated in the Middle East in general, and in Syria and Iran in particular throughout December. First the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, visited Iran on 2 December to meet

the Iranian Supreme Guide, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and President Mahmud Ahmédinjad to examine the latest developments in Iraq, Syria and the Lebanon as well as bilateral relations. Then he went on to Syria on 6 December for discussions with President Bashar

review *Russia in global politics*. The two countries intend to raise their trade from its present level of about \$300 million to \$600 million, according to the Russian diplomat. Mr. Assad, whose country had been the principal Near Eastern ally of the ex-USSR, made his first visit to Russia in 2005, thus renewing bi-lateral cooperation. Syria continues to buy the bulk of its weaponry from Russia.

According to the official daily paper *Al-Baas*, quoting the Syrian Ministry of the Interior, Syria has received more than 800,000 Iraqi refugees since the beginning of the conflict in their country. Of this total, 648,000 Iraqis reached Syria in the months immediately following the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, according to a Ministry official quoted by the paper. This influx of refugees can be attributed to the Syrian laws that make it easy to obtain a visa for Arabs as well as Syria's proximity to Iraq. Iraqi refugees can secure a one-year residence permit, renewable annually if they have a regular

source of income in Syria, own property or enrol their children in a Syrian school, according to the official cited by *Al-Baas*. The majority of the Iraqi refugees have settle in or around Damascus. Most of them come from the middle classes and are living on their savings.

Furthermore, Syria and Iraq have re-opened embassies in their respective capitals. Damascus and Baghdad have thus put an end to a diplomatic breach of over 20 years. The Iraqi flag was thus hoisted over the Iraqi Embassy in Damascus during a ceremony attended by Syrian and Iraqi leaders. A similar ceremony took place in the Mansur quarter of Baghdad, outside the green zone, the authorities declared on 11 December. Iraq and Syrian had broken off diplomatic relations when Damascus sided with Iran during the Iraq-Iran war, in the 80s. The two governments agreed, the month before, to re-establish full diplomatic relations during a visit to Baghdad by the Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mualem.

half were killed in the last four months of the year victims of acts described as terrorist by the Iraqi authorities. Of these, half were killed in the last four months of the year. The Ministry reports 1,930 civilians killed in December – a figure three and a half as great as January's (580), which was before the tide of violence following the bomb attack against the Shiite mosque in Samarra, in February. The Ministry of the Interior recorded the deaths, in December, of 125 Iraqi police and 25 soldiers – figures similar to those for November and October. The US Army, for its part, announced the deaths of 112 US soldiers in December – its heaviest casualty list in two years. On 31 December, the Pentagon announced the death of a Texan soldier in Baghdad, bringing the total of Americans killed in Iraq since the beginning of the war to at least 3,000, according to a body count made by Associated Press based on official communiqués. At least 820 US soldiers were killed in Iraq in 2006, 111 of whom in December, the most murderous month that year.

THE NUMBER OF IRAQI CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE REACHES AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL IN DECEMBER

The number of Iraqi civilian victims of violence reached a record level in December, after having considerably increased the month before, as shown by figures coming from the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. The number of civilians killed in Iraq in November increased by 43% as compared with October, itself particularly bloody. According to figures from the Ministries of the Interior and Defence, 1,847 civilians were killed in November

throughout Iraq, as against 1,289 in October, marred by murderous attack on the occasion of Ramadan. Furthermore, the number of insurgents killed in November was more than twice as many as in October, reaching 423 as against 194 the month before, according to the two Ministries.

The statistics, that are considered to be indicative, rather than necessarily covering all the deaths from violence, show 12,320 civilians killed in 2006. Of these,

Further more, according to a Pentagon report published on 19 December, Iraq experienced 959 attacks a week between 12 August and 10 November – a record since Congress demanded, in 2005, that the Pentagon set up this kind of report. *"In the course of the last three months; the number of attacks has increased by 22%. Part of this increase is due to the seasonal peak in violence during the month of Ramadan"*, stresses this report, to the US Congress, which covers the period from 12 August to 10 November. The Pentagon report points out that the coalition forces remain the principle target of these attacks

(68%) and that half of these attacks took place in only two provinces, (Baghdad and Anbar). But, in terms of the death-roll, it is the Iraqis who suffered most. The number of civilian victims (killed and injured) increased by 2% over the period examined. The Pentagon points out, however, that violence against Iraqi civilians remains localised. *"Outside the Sunni triangle, more than 90% of Iraqis feel very safe in their neighbourhoods"*, the report claims. It also stresses that *"the number of attacks against infrastructures has continued to drop"* but that *"the cumulative effect of their attacks and the ineffectiveness of the repairs and maintenance"* of these infrastructures weighs heavily on the supply of essential services for the Iraqis. The report, moreover, considers that the political process of national reconciliation *"has made little progress"*, *"sectarian violence in Iraq has considerably increased despite the meetings between religious and tribal leaders"*. As against this, the Pentagon recognises that *"violence in Iraq creates a serious threat to political progress"*. *"The group that at present has the most negative impact on the security situation in Iraq is the Mahdi's Army, that has replaced Al-Qaida in Iraq as the most dangerous accelerator of lasting sectarian violence in Iraq"*; states the report with reference to the militia run by the radical Shiite chief Moqtada Sadr. The report also shows that, at present, only two provinces are not ready for transferring responsibility from the Coalition to the Iraqi forces: al-Anbar (West) and Basra (South). Two provinces, Muthanna and Dhi Qar (South), have already been transferred to the Iraqis and others are ready or partly ready for transfer.

All statistics in Iraq are controversial. The figure of 3,700

civilians killed in October, the latest figure put forward by the United Nations, based on data provided by the Ministry of Health and the Baghdad morgue, are considered exaggerated by the Iraqi government. According to UNO's figures, an average of 120 civilians are killed every day. The *Associated Press* news agency calculates its figures of American casualties since 2003, on the basis of official communiqués, thus:

- Number of troops died in Iraq since the end of the main combat operations was announced on 30 April 2003: 2,861
- Percent of the troops killed since 30 April 2003: 95%.
- The bloodiest months since the beginning of the war, in March 2003: November 2004 (137 dead); April 2004 (135); December 2006 (111); January 2005 (107); October 2006 (105).
- Percent deaths by military corps: land Army (68%); Marines (29%); Navy (2%); Air Force (1%): A single death is recorded amongst the Coast Guards.
- Percent deaths by terms of service: active service (79%); National Guard (13%); Reservists (8%).
- The most murderous Iraqi provinces: Anbar (1,115 deaths); Baghdad (686); Salaheddin (336); Nineveh (193); Babil (93).
- Percent deaths due to non-hostile action: 20%.
- Deaths from sickness: 56.
- Percent killed by home-made bombs in the last year: 44%.
- Percent officers amongst those killed: 10%.
- Number of killed over 45 years: 70.
- Number of killed under 18: 26.

- Number of women killed: 62.
- Percent women amongst the dead: 2%.
- Percent deaths by community: Whites 72%, Hispanics 11%, Blacks or Afro-Americans 9%, Undetermined 5%, Asians 2%, Native Americans 1%, Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders 1%.
- Number of dead from California (the State with the highest casualties) 308.
- Number of dead from Wyoming (the State with the lowest casualties) 8.
- Number of dead from Texas 263.
- Number of dead from New York State 137
- Number of dead Porto Ricans: 24.
- Percent of deaths from Southern States (as defined by US Census): 36%.
- Percent deaths from North-East States (as defined by US Census): 15%.
- Dates for passing each stage of 500 killed since March 2003:
 - 500 17 January 2004.
 - 1,000 7 September 2004.
 - 1,500 3 March 2005.
 - 2,000 25 October 2005.
 - 2,500 15 June 2006.
 - 3,000 31 December 2006.

American losses in Iraq compared with the other major conflicts in which the US has been engaged: 3,000 as of 31 December 2006.

- WWI: 116,000
- Vietnam: 58,000
- Korea: 36,000
- Gulf War I: 382

N. B. Figures based on those of the US Defence Department and

the *Associated Press*. Most statistics are based on the figure given by the Pentagon on 28 December 2006 of 2,988. AP's figures, which take into account the deaths reported by journalists in Iraq, have always been ahead of those of the Pentagon. The percentages by ethnic minority were last updated on 2 December 2006. Furthermore, Rob Portman,

Director of the White House's Budget Office, indicated that the cost of the war in Iraq for the Budget Year 2007, which began last October, is likely to exceed \$110 billion. According to Associated Press calculations, based on the estimates of Congress's two official budget bodies, the cost of the Iraq war, begun in March 2003, was \$290 billion as of the end of the

2006 budget year (end September 2006), of which \$254 billion are military costs, according to a report dated 22 September 2006. The Congressional Research Service evaluated total at \$319 billion, pointing out that this represents 73% of the expenditure on the "war against terrorism" launched following the 11 September 2001 attacks.

STRASBOURG: THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS COURT FINDS ANKARA GUILTY OF THE MURDER OF THE KURDISH PLAYWRIGHT, MUSA ANTER, AND OF VIOLATIONS OF THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OF KURDISH JOURNALISTS AND BUSINESSMEN

On 19 December, Turkey was found guilty by the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, following the murder in 1992 of Musa Anter, a well known writer and editorialist and one of the founders of the People's Labour Party (HEP). His three children, who accuse the Turkish authorities of having carried out an "extra-judicial execution", will jointly receive 25,000 euros damages and 3,500 euros costs. According to the European Court, Turkey had been lacking in its obligation to protect the life of Musa Anter, knowing that he was being threatened, and to then conduct an effective enquiry into the circumstances of the death of this well known man, at that time Director of the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul.

On 20 September 1992, Musa Anter was killed with five bullets by an unknown man, while in Diyarbakir where he had been invited to a festival organised by the municipality. The murder was committed by a gendarme of the

JITEM (the Gendarmerie Intelligence and anti-terrorist Service) who later repented and confessed this murder in a book published in 2004. The European Court considered, for its part, that no concrete fact proved that an extra-judicial execution was committed by agents of the State, but it was convinced that Turkey could have taken measures to protect Musa Anter, a particularly exposed target, because of his political commitments.

The Strasbourg judges also found Turkey guilty in another case on the same day. Turkey will have to pay 25,000 euros damages to a Turkish couple, today residing in Cologne (Germany), victims of torture by the police during their interrogation by the anti-terrorist section of the Istanbul police in 1994.

Moreover, the European Court for Human Rights found Turkey guilty of violating freedom of expression in several cases, particularly ones linked to the Kurdish question. Among the five petitioners, two – Erdal Tas and

Mehmet Emin Yildiz, respectively chief editor and owner of the daily *2000'de Yeni Gündem* – had been sentenced to heavy fines by the Istanbul State Security Court for having published articles summarising statements by leaders of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Two others, Bülent Falakaoglu and Fevzi Saygili, at the time chief editor and owner of the daily paper *Yeni Evrensel*, had been sentenced to the same penalty for having sharply criticised two policemen, who the Court considered had thus become potential "targets" for terrorist organisations.

The last, Mehmet Erol Yazar, President of the Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen (MUSIAD) had been sentenced for a speech allegedly inciting hatred on the basis of a distinction founded on membership of a race or region. The ECHR considered the grounds accepted by the Turkish courts for limiting the freedom of expression of the five petitioners were insufficient and judged that the sentences passed on them "disproportionate", as in many other similar cases. It awarded the petitioners a total of 24,000 euros damages and 9,500 euros costs.

**READ IN THE TURKISH PRESS:
THE REPORT OF THE OF THE TURKISH FOUNDATION FOR
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH (TESEV) REGARDING
THE FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF KURDS**

Following the publication of a report entitled “*The results of the internal displacements in Turkey*” by the Turkish Foundation for Economic and Social Research (TESEV) the Turkish daily Milliyet interviewed Dr. Dilek Kurban, director of the TESEV programme and Dr. Deniz Yukseker, lecturer at the University of Koç, about the forced displacements carried out in the 90s by the Turkish authorities. The following are extensive extracts taken from this interview by the journalist Derya Sazak:

It is still too early to say that there are improvements but we know that the government is becoming aware of the report and showing a certain interest in it. Van Province has been chosen as a pilot region. A plan called “Service for the displaced population” has been drawn up in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the Van Governorate was revealed in September, but there have not yet been any concrete results. Moreover, in 2004, a compensation law was passed leading to 200,000 applications from villagers who had been victims of those forced displacements. To date, 27,000 applications have succeeded but we have observed that the compensation given is very small and in no way realistic (...) The State recognised that it had displaced 360,000 people. The Turkish Parliament, in a report published in 1998, gives a figure of 378,000 people. Civil society associations, for their part, talk of between 3 and 4 million people. We, at TESEV, think that these figures are not realistic but without having carried out demographic research

*think estimate their number at a million. According to the Ministry of the Interior, over 900 villages and 2,000 hamlets were evacuated. A report drawn up at the request of the State Planning Office by Hacettepe University Population Research team, which has not yet been published, should enable to understand these statistics more clearly”, points out Mr. Deniz Yukseker, adding: “Citizenship must be restored in Turkey after these forced displacements, which are illegal even in periods of armed confrontation. The Parliamentary report, which goes back to 1998, expresses the same idea. The Prefect responsible for the State of Emergency Region (OHAL) was given the authority to displace people for security reasons, but this was carried out in an illegal manner. It is time to face up to these forced displacements”. “The Turkish State has the authority to displace the population in a legal context for security reasons. This is called “evacuation”, and international law allows this. However, the situation in the South-East (**Editor’s Note:** Turkish Kurdistan) it was applied illegally. As we have revealed in our research, this took place in many places under “threats”. The villagers were first called on to become “village protectors” (**Editor’s Note:** State regional auxiliary militia) – then, in the event of a refusal, told to evacuate their village within two days! If they did not evacuate, the village was burn to the ground! We have collected many testimonies in which the events had many similarities”, stresses Dr. Yukseker. Dr. Dilek Kurban, for his part, pointed out that “the victims at the beginning of the 90s decade applied to*

the European Court for Human Rights, which found Turkey guilty and sentenced it to heavy fines. The Turkish Republic, recognising that it was administratively responsible for the region as a State, accepted to settle the compensation due to breaches of rights committed by anyone whatsoever. But the State has never accepted that it had evacuated villages and accused the PKK. 1,500 petitions have been filed against Turkey and, on the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the European Court decided to carry out a pilot scheme in collective cases. Taking into account the petitions of January 2006, the European Court reached the following conclusion: a new internal legal system regarding compensation must be applied. In practice, applications to the European Court are blocked but the compensation is too small and the procedure too slow”.

As for the solutions recommended, Dr. Kurban pointed out that “we, as part of TESEV think that the Kurdish question is a major obstacle in the way of democratisation. The source of the problem is the Kurdish question, thus the solution is also linked with that of the Kurdish question (...) Turkey has never accepted the term civil war (...) If this was accepted it would be possible to evacuate civilians for their own security, on condition that this was only temporary. The victims of of displacements were, to a large extent those who refused to assume the role of “village protectors”. It can thus be seen as a punishment. Moreover, the armed clashes have ceased since 1999 but these people have still not been able to return to their villages. Thus it is not temporary and, even so, humanitarian aid from the United Nations was refused until 2002 (**Editor’s Note:** or from the Red Crescent) for this population. Even if at least 355,000 people have been displaced, this is a great catastrophe and the State should deploy as much

effort as for an earthquake". Dr. Deniz Yukseker indicated emphatically "they are not concerned that this event is breach of the Constitution" and added that "the State announces the return of 150,000 people to their homes. However there are no means of subsistence in these villages since the agriculture and stock breeding have been destroyed and that there are no roads or electricity, not to mention conditions of security. Thus the people just remain there for the summer ...". Still on the subject of solutions Dr. Kurban stressed that "We have still not heard of any solution from the government regarding the fate of this population (...) A citizen goes before the (compensation) Commission stating that his village was evacuated

by the gendarmerie, who simply reject the allegation and the petition is refused. We will not be able find any solution without macro-political development. The system of village protectors must be abolished and the region must be cleared of mines. Without this the people will never be able to return home ...) By a decision of the Council of Ministers, the recruiting of village protectors ended in 2000, but today there is a system of voluntary protectors. They have no official tenure, are not paid but are armed (by the State)". Dr. Deniz Yukseker added that "since the system has been in existence, village protectors have been involved in over 5,000 crimes and offenses, particularly "acts of terrorism". This system constitutes a security problem in itself".

Parliament, Bulent Arinc, for having refused to meet a group of Kurdish activists in December. "We see this as a blow against peace", he pointed out. "In the eyes of our people the government has failed to pass the test", he added. Mr. Turk declared that his party, which has no seats in Parliament, will continue to work for a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish question. However, "we are always ready to pay the price, to pay with our lives for freedom and democracy", he added.

The retired general, Edip Baser, charged since August 2006 with coordinating the fight against the PKK with Washington had, the day before, declared on the NTV news channel, that he would discuss "concrete priority steps" with his opposite number, the retired US general Joseph W. Ralston when they met in January and to ask for measures against the PKK. "We (Turkey) have a timetable in mind" he had continued. "If we have not achieved concrete steps between now and the due date of this timetable (...) then we say that there is no reason to continue wasting our time and will put an end to this joint effort". Their paths could "separate" if the United States rejected measures that Turkey judged appropriate for fighting the PKK he had added. Mr Baser had recognised that it was "not realistic to expect major concrete steps against the PKK overnight" but had stated that Ankara hoped to see signs of progress as from the start of next year. General Baser also stressed that in case of need, Turkey could conduct operations beyond its borders with Iraq, thus into Iraqi Kurdistan and that "this is not a question in which anyone else could interfere".

The PKK unilaterally declared a cease fire at the end of September, to take effect as from 1 October,

AS WELL AS ...

• **A SPLIT IN THE KURDISTAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF IRAN (PKDI).** On 7 December, one of the leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran announced that he was leaving the party to form his own party with several of the cadres and activists. "Our departure is the outcome of two years of disagreement with the party regarding our demands for reforms and the setting up of a collective leadership", explained Abdallah Hassan Zadeh, former General Secretary of the KDPI, speaking from his office near Irbil, in Iraqi Kurdistan. For its part, the Party announced in a communiqué that after "many meetings between the two camps it had not been possible to find common ground, which explains the split". The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, founded in 1945, is the principal Kurdish opposition movement in Iran and has several offices in Iraqi Kurdistan. Two of

its General Secretaries, Dr. Abdulrahman Ghassemlou and Dr. Sadegh Charafkandi, were assassinated by agents of the Iran secret services in 1989 and 1993, respectively in Vienna and in Berlin.

• **TURKEY PRESSING WASHINGTON TO HELP IT NEUTRALISE THE PKK DESPITE ITS UNILATERAL CEASE FIRE.** On 23 December, the principal pro-Kurdish party in Turkey, denounced Ankara's "indifference" to the cease fire unilaterally decreed by the fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). "We expect the government to take advantage of this process aimed at putting an end to the blood bath, but unfortunately (...) the State remains indifferent", declared Ahmed Turk, president of the Party for a Democratic Society (DTP) in Diyarbakir. He particularly criticised the Speaker of

essentially calling on Ankara to negotiate. On the same day, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan rejected this out of hand, demanding that the PKK lay down its arms and surrender. Military operations against the PKK had been increased when, at the end of June 2004 the PKK had ended an earlier unilateral cease fire, which it had been observed for five years. On 8 December, the Turkish General Staff stated that the crash of an army helicopter the day before, which had caused the deaths of a non-commissioned officer and wounded five other soldiers had been due to Kurdish fighters in the region. The aircraft had landed in a mountainous region of Bingol Province in the course of a combat operation against the PKK and was damaged on takeoff by a remote controlled explosion. Additionally, on 5 December three Turkish soldiers were killed and 14 others wounded by the explosion of two mines near the locality of Güclükonak, in Sirnak province. Furthermore, on 5 December the Iranian governmental daily paper *Iran* reported that the security forces had arrested 87 members and sympathisers of Kurdish organisations and killed nine others in the province of West Azerbaijan since the previous March. *“Twenty-two members and 65 sympathisers of terrorist groups have been arrested since the beginning of the Iranian year”* (which begins on 20 March) declared Hassan

Karami, commander of the province’s police force, as quoted by the paper. *“Nine other members were killed during clashes with the police”*, he added. He also made the point that seven members of the police forces had been killed, three of whom by stepping on mines. The province of West Azerbaijan is mainly inhabited by Kurds, who also inhabit the neighbouring province of Kurdistan as well as those of Ilam and Kermanshah. The first two provinces are regularly the scene of armed clashes between Iranian troops and activists of Kurdish parties, particularly those of PEJAK, an Iranian Kurdish group close to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party)

In another context, on 5 December, the Maastricht court rejected a demand by Turkey for the extradition of Nedim Seven, who is accused of murderous terrorist attacks on behalf of the PKK. Nedim Seven, 38 years of age, was arrested in the South of the Netherlands during a routine identity check in August. Following the appeal against the first refusal to extradite him in October, he was placed in detention, but the court ordered the immediate lifting of this detention. The judges justified their decision on the grounds that it had been established that he had been tortured by the Turkish security forces after his arrest in Adana in 1989, shortly after a pro-Kurdish demonstration. The

“demand of extradition (...) was linked” to his alleged membership of the PKK, the court considered. Yet *“it has been sufficiently established that Mr. Seven’s torture occurred in relation”* to this political membership, which constitutes a violation of his fundamental rights, the court continued. On 15 September, the Netherlands Supreme Court had already forbidden the extradition of a woman leader of the PKK, Nuriye Kesbir, considering that she was in danger of being tortured and that the guarantees given by Ankara were insufficient.

• **DAMASCUS: THE SYRIAN COURTS ARE GAGGING ALL DISSENT.** On 10 December, the National Organisation for Human Rights in Syria (NOHRS) indicated in a communiqué that a Syrian had been sentenced to twelve years imprisonment for being a member of the Moslem Brotherhood, a banned organisation. *“Muhammed Thabet Helli was sentenced to 12 years in prison for membership of the Moslem Brotherhood by the High State Security Court”*, an Emergency Law court whose verdicts are without any right of appeal, pointed out Ammar Qorabi, leaders of NOHRS. Syrian law awards death sentences for membership of the Moslem Brotherhood. However, since the mid-90s members of the Moslem Brotherhood are no longer executed, their sentences being commuted to long terms in prison.

Le pouvoir irakien, attaqué par la guérilla sunnite, est paralysé face aux milices chiites

« SI LES MILICIENS de l'« Armée du Mahdi » n'avaient pas été là, le 23 novembre, ce ne sont pas 200 morts que nous aurions eus dans les attentats de Sadr City, mais beaucoup plus » : Abou Mariam, joint par téléphone, n'est pas un militant de la cause de l'imam Ali, figure vénérée des chiites. Il est de confession sunnite, marié à une femme chiite certes, mais il est l'un des derniers sunnites, parmi quelques milliers, qui osent encore résider dans l'immense faubourg de 3 millions d'habitants, à 98 % chiites, de Sadr City, dans la partie est de Bagdad.

Le commentaire d'Abou Mariam illustre l'extrême complexité de la tâche assignée au premier ministre irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki, pressé par Washington de démanteler les milices armées qui empêchent toute stabilisation du pays.

A l'instar du Hezbollah au Liban, l'« Armée du Mahdi », fondée début 2004 par le jeune prêcheur chiite radical Moqtada Al-Sadr, dernier fils d'un grand ayatollah adulé et assassiné sur ordre de Saddam Hussein, ne se préoccupe pas, seulement, de défendre la communauté chiite les armes à la main.

Echec retentissant

Lors des multiples attentats à la voiture piégée subis par les chiites, à Sadr City mais aussi à Hilla, à Nadjaf et ailleurs, ses milliers de membres – dont au moins 7 000 en armes – savent aussi se faire, au quotidien, assistants sociaux, pourvoyeurs d'emplois et d'aides financières aux plus pauvres, organisateurs de prières collectives, gardiens d'immeubles, policiers de la circulation, brancardiers, ambulanciers, donneurs de sang pour les hôpitaux...

Dans un pays où ceux qui accordent encore du crédit à la police et à ses multiples excroissances paramilitaires sont devenus rares, le rôle des milices, chiites mais aussi sunnites et kurdes, n'a cessé de s'étendre, rendant évidemment presque impossible des dissolutions autoritaires.

« Débarrassez-moi des bandes de tueurs sunnites qui écumant Bagdad, posent des bombes et tirent au mortier en pleine ville, et je vous jure qu'après, je pourrai m'attaquer aux milices chiites. » Selon plusieurs sources, tels ont été en substance les termes du marché proposé, en juin, par Nouri Al-Maliki au général George Casey, le commandant américain venu le rencontrer dans la capitale irakienne.

Quelques jours plus tard commençait l'opération « En avant tous ensemble », censée mettre 60 000 hommes, dont un tiers de soldats américains, dans les rues de Bagdad pour « nettoyer » la

capitale des insurgés sunnites qui s'y activent en toute impunité.

Les deux phases successives de l'opération ont été un échec retentissant, et les deux alliés n'en finissent pas de s'en rejeter mutuellement la responsabilité. « Nous n'avons jamais reçu les renforts irakiens promis », affirment les Américains. « Ils n'ont jamais tenu un seul quartier après l'avoir soi-disant "nettoyé" », accusent les Irakiens.

Guerre ouverte

Le fait est qu'aujourd'hui, la guerre ouverte pour le contrôle de Bagdad se poursuit de manière plus meurtrière que jamais pour les civils. Qui peut l'arrêter ? « Le problème est politique », s'en va répétant le pre-

mier ministre, qui a convoqué pour décembre une « conférence des partis » politiques à Bagdad. Objet ? Mettre un terme aux récriminations permanentes entre les partis théoriquement réunis dans le « gouvernement d'unité nationale », obtenir des uns et des autres qu'ils cessent de se désolidariser des actions de ce gouvernement, et de menacer à tout bout de champ d'en sortir, de démissionner, voire de « prendre les armes ».

Bref, avant même de pouvoir tenir, à l'extérieur de l'Irak, une « conférence de réconciliation » avec les représentants de tous les groupes d'insurgés en armes – à l'exception des combattants d'Al-Qaida en Irak et de leurs alliés –, il s'agit pour M. Maliki d'obtenir la paix et l'unité à l'in-

térieur même d'une équipe gouvernementale qui reste nettement dominée par les partis chiites.

Récemment, le vice-président sunnite de la République, accusant M. Maliki et les siens d'« accaparer tous les postes », menaçait de démissionner.

Mercredi 29 novembre, ce sont les trente élus du mouvement de Moqtada Al-Sadr et les six ministres qui lui obéissent qui ont « suspendu », jusqu'à nouvel ordre, toute participation au travail parlementaire et gouvernemental. Ils protestent ainsi contre la rencontre d'Amman entre Nouri Al-Maliki et George Bush, « le criminel qui a fait tuer tant d'Irakiens et dont les forces occupent toujours notre pays ». ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Le président iranien interpelle le peuple américain

NEW YORK (Nations unies)

CORRESPONDANT

Dans une lettre adressée au peuple américain, le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, dénonce « les guerres et les calamités causées par l'administration américaine » et prétend engager un « dialogue » avec les « nobles » habitants d'un pays dont il exalte les « valeurs » communes avec l'Iran.

La missive de cinq pages a été diffusée, mercredi 29 novembre, par la représentation diplomatique de Téhéran auprès de l'ONU. Elle fait écho à une lettre de 18 pages, restée sans réponse, envoyée en mai par le président iranien à son homologue américain, George Bush.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad plaide pour un retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak, au nom « des mères et des proches (de soldats) qui ont exprimé leur mécontentement », mais aussi pour que l'administration américaine puisse consacrer ces « dépenses militaires astronomiques » au « bien-

être » des « innombrables Américains qui vivent dans la pauvreté ».

Le peuple américain a, selon le président iranien, montré lors des élections du 7 novembre, qui ont donné une majorité aux démocrates au Congrès, son « mécontentement » à l'égard de politiques « illégales et immorales » qui, de Guantanamo à Abou Ghraïb, auraient pour effet de « propager le terrorisme ». M. Ahmadinejad prévient aussi « les vainqueurs des dernières élections » qu'ils seront « jugés par le peuple et par l'histoire ».

Le dirigeant iranien qui, par le passé, a qualifié l'Holocauste de « mythe », affirme que Washington « fournit un soutien aveugle » aux « sionistes » parce que ces derniers se sont, selon lui, « imposés dans une partie substantielle de la banque, de la finance, des secteurs culturels et médiatiques ».

Le département d'Etat américain a qualifié la lettre de « numéro de relations publiques ». ■

PHILIPPE BOLOPION

Dans les montagnes d'Irak, les soldates du PKK prônent un nouveau féminisme



MONT QANDIL (Irak), 29 nov 2006 (AFP) - 07h45 - "Quand une femme abandonne son foyer et prend les armes, ce n'est pas anodin, c'est une révolution sociale. Nous ouvrons les yeux de la société kurde", assure Arshem Kurman, femme et combattante du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Dans une région du monde où la soumission des femmes est la règle, elles jouent un rôle primordial dans les rangs du mouvement de libération kurde, réfugié dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, près de la frontière iranienne.

Revendiquant jadis un marxisme orthodoxe, le PKK, qui lutte pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien de la Turquie, où les Kurdes sont très nombreux, assure aujourd'hui être converti à la paix et engagé dans un processus démocratique.

Il a cependant conservé une structure militaire qui a donné naissance à un féminisme guerrier unique. Celui-ci n'avait rien d'acquis. Il a fallu et il faut toujours lutter contre les préjugés de la société, parfois partagés par leurs camarades masculins, admettent les femmes du PKK.

"C'est là toute l'importance du martyr, c'est ce qui donne du poids à notre cause", juge Arshem Kurman, soulignant que ce sont les femmes tombées au combat ou qui ont mené des attentats suicides qui ont obligé les hommes du mouvement à les prendre au sérieux.

"Des femmes meurent tous les jours, alors quel meilleur façon de faire passer notre message", ajoute cette instructrice respectée, qui décrit comment une Kurde a tué plus de 50 soldats turcs au cours d'un attentat suicide dans les années 1990.

Au cours de ces années, le PKK a mené 15 attentats suicides. Onze d'entre eux l'ont été par des femmes, mais depuis 1999 et l'arrestation de son chef historique, Abdallah Ocalan, le PKK se déclare prêt à participer à un règlement pacifique du conflit avec les autorités turques.

Dans le camp bâti sur le Mont Qandill, la plupart des bâtiments affichent cependant des portraits de Vian Jaf, qui s'est immolée par le feu en février près de la frontière turque pour protester contre la condition des Kurdes dans ce pays, même si, officiellement, la direction du mouvement n'approuve pas ce geste.

Gagner le respect des hommes et obtenir qu'ils les traitent en égales n'est pas facile dans les sociétés machistes du Moyen-Orient, avouent les femmes du PKK.

"Une femme ne peut pas s'élever dans ce contexte. Dans la société traditionnelle kurde, seuls les hommes ont droit à la parole. Si le mari n'est pas à la maison, c'est le fils aîné qui parle, quel que soit son âge", témoigne Reha Baran.

"Dans nos sociétés retardées, les femmes sont confinées aux marges. Notre but, c'est de les faire revenir au centre de la vie publique", explique-t-elle.

Reha Baran enseigne comment les femmes ont été privées de leurs droits, et comment elles peuvent les reconquérir, à un public composé de militantes féministes et de responsables du PKK, dans une école bâtie en pierre.

A charge ensuite pour eux de transmettre ces idées révolutionnaires dans leurs villages et leurs unités, afin qu'elles se répandent dans la société kurde, sans toutefois s'aliéner le soutien des populations.

Pour les jeunes combattantes du mouvement, vivre l'arme à la main, aux côtés de leurs camarades masculins est bien plus intéressant que la vie qui les attendait au village.

Une dizaine d'entre elles, âgées de 15 à 21 ans, boivent du thé en contemplant le coucher du soleil sur les monts Qandil, couronnés de neige. Elles éclatent de rire lorsqu'on leur demande si elles n'auraient pas préféré rester dans leurs foyers, élever leurs enfants.

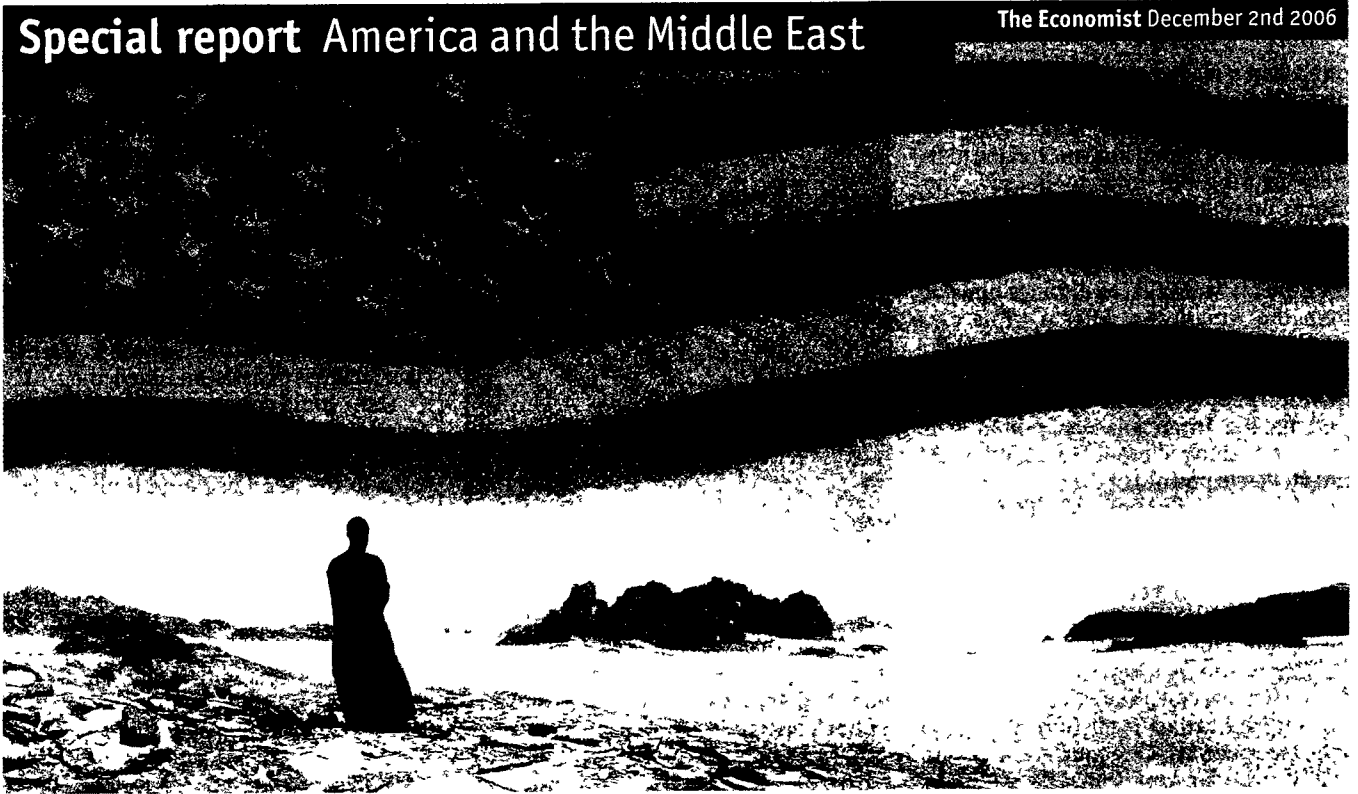
"Les femmes dans ces familles n'ont pas le droit de s'instruire. Il arrive même que le mouvement aide certaines jeunes filles malheureuses à s'échapper de leurs familles pour nous rejoindre, en particulier en Iran", explique Rojbin Hajjar, une Kurde venue de Syrie.

"Nous ne sommes pas seulement un modèle pour les femmes du Moyen-Orient, mais pour celles du monde entier", juge Sozdar Serbiliz, femme et chef de guerre.

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Special report America and the Middle East

The Economist December 2nd 2006



Blood, tears and still no victory

BAGHDAD

After meeting “the right guy” for Iraq, George Bush mocks the idea of a graceful exit

GEORGE BUSH returned to the Middle East this week a diminished figure. At home he has been thumped by the voters. In Iraq his dreams of an example-setting democracy have trickled away in blood. For all the brave words he exchanged with Iraq's prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, in Amman at mid-week, it is widely assumed that his real aim now is simply to arrange a way for America to leave Iraq as soon as it decently can. Only then would the Republicans have a chance of retaining the White House in 2008. And only after it has left Iraq will America be able to restore its tattered influence in the wider Middle East.

Such, at any rate, is the conventional wisdom. But is it correct? And did anyone tell Mr Bush? The president certainly faces a daunting array of problems in the region. In this special section we look at four of them: actual civil war in Iraq, potential civil war in Lebanon, the stalemate in Palestine and the hostility of an Iran that seems intent on acquiring nuclear weapons. And yet despite all that has gone wrong in Iraq, America remains by far the strongest external power in the Middle East—and for the next two years Mr Bush will remain its president.

On his way to Amman, Mr Bush did not talk as if he felt like a weakling. He insisted

at a NATO summit in Riga that American troops would not leave the battlefield until the mission in Iraq was complete. And after meeting Mr Maliki in Amman, he promised again that the troops would stay just as long as Iraq's government wanted them to. Liberty had to prevail in the Middle East, the president declaimed, “and that's why this business about graceful exit simply has no realism to it at all.”

Realism is in the eye of the beholder. The fact that Mr Bush met Mr Maliki in Jordan's capital rather than in Baghdad highlights how anarchic Iraq has become. Most of Iraq's politicians claim to want the same thing America wants: a united, non-sectarian state and an end to the violence that has killed tens of thousands in the past year alone. But with a diffuse network of Sunni guerrillas pitted against equally disorganised Shia militias, nobody has the authority to deliver. The governments that are party to the conflict, in Iraq and beyond, are several steps removed from the actual killing: all they can do is to cajole others to cajole the armed groups.

Mr Maliki succeeded in pressing Mr Bush to allow more Iraqi soldiers to come under his direct control. At present most of them answer to the American chain of command. But this will not have a huge

impact on the ground. Building up the Iraqi army, which suffers badly from ill-discipline and sectarian tensions but still appears to respond, more or less, to the prime minister's orders, is taking time. “It's not easy for a military to evolve from ground zero,” Mr Bush conceded.

Another basic problem is the domestic political weakness of Mr Maliki. After their meeting, Mr Bush said that the Shia prime minister was “the right guy” for Iraq and that it was in America's interest to help him. Privately, however, the Americans are increasingly unhappy about supporting a government that does not appear to be making enough effort to restrain Shia militias and reach out to the Sunnis.

Behind the scenes, Mr Bush probably tried to encourage Mr Maliki to detach himself from Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical Shia cleric whose followers are believed to be responsible for a large share of the sectarian killing. Mr Maliki, however, needs Mr Sadr, who is one of the few leaders to have any influence over the Shia sectarian gangs, most of which claim association with his Mahdi Army but in practice operate autonomously. The young firebrand does appear to be doing a bit to restrain his more out-of-control followers.

Before the summit, the *New York Times* ►►

► published a leaked memo written by Stephen Hadley, Mr Bush's national security adviser, saying of Mr Maliki that he "wanted to be strong but was having difficulty figuring out how to do so". The memo emphasised Mr Maliki's need to put some distance between himself and Mr Sadr. Mr Sadr is meanwhile putting pressure on Mr Maliki to distance himself from the Americans. After a triple car-bombing in the Mahdi Army's east Baghdad support base of Sadr City killed more than 200 people last week, Sadrist officials said that the Americans were primarily to blame for failing to provide security. They

threatened to pull out of the government if Mr Maliki went through with his meeting with Mr Bush, though in the event, the Sadrists merely "suspended participation", a good step short of a full walk-out.

In Washington, debate is transfixed on the report expected next week from the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan committee promising sagacious advice on how America can best extract itself from the quagmire (see page 45). One much-leaked idea is said to be for American talks with Iran and Syria about how they could help calm Iraq, perhaps in the context of a regional peace conference that would touch on Pal-

estine too. But Iran and Syria do not feel they need America's invitation to become involved. Syria established formal ties with Baghdad last week after a break of 25 years. This week, Iraq's president visited Tehran (see next story) while Mr Maliki was packing for Amman. Iraq's neighbours have their own interest in limiting the chaos. That does not make them eager to help America. And nor did Mr Bush say anything in Amman to suggest that he is in the market for that "graceful exit". ■

The Economist December 2nd 2006

Iran and America

What hope of a grand bargain?

Two countries, never in tune

FOR close to three decades America and Iran have had little to say to each other officially except by megaphone. Now George Bush's Democratic critics want him to talk to both Iran and Syria to help find a way out of Iraq. Iran's fiery president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was this week hosting his Iraqi counterpart, Jalal Talabani, in Tehran, certainly pretends to the role of regional power-broker: he says America should get out of Iraq.

But Iran is not only a player in Iraq's violent politics. It also arms Hizbullah in its face-off with Israel, and funnels cash to militant Palestinian factions, including Ha-

mas. It supports Syria's meddling in Lebanon, and continues to defy UN Security Council demands that it suspend the most dangerous bits of its nuclear programme.

What to do about Iran divides the Bush administration in part because the stakes are so high. Mr Ahmadinejad's virulent rhetoric, his desire to see Israel "wiped from the map" and his bid for wider Muslim leadership make an Iranian bomb a nightmare for America, Israel and a Europe soon to be in range of Iran's missiles. Some Iranian officials hint that they might consider helping in Iraq only if pressure on the nuclear programme is lifted.

Americans debate whether a "grand bargain" might bury the hatchet. The idea would be to end Iran's support for terrorism and clear up nuclear suspicions by restoring relations, improving political and trade ties and addressing Iran's security concerns. The trouble is, Iran's interests seldom chime with America's.

A bid by some in Iran's leadership to open a dialogue after America's invasion of Iraq in 2003 was rebuffed by the Bush administration, whose loudest voices were for "regime change". A missed opportunity? Iran's continued arming of anti-Israeli terrorists, and its refusal to hand over members of al-Qaeda, supposedly under "house arrest" in Iran but suspected of having planned further attacks, helped kill the proposed talks.

Iran's ruling factions are likewise divided over how, or whether, to deal with America. Mr Bush's predicament in Iraq has emboldened the hardliners. For now, Iran appears not to want serious talks.

In an effort to strengthen the hand of European diplomats trying to talk Iran out of its nuclear ambitions, Mr Bush last year agreed to a package of trade and other incentives, including some advanced nuclear technology. In May this year he said America would take part in negotiations, once Iran suspended its suspect nuclear ac-



Iraq's president meets Iran's

tivities. Each time he took a step towards Iran, it stepped up its nuclear work. An offer from America's ambassador in Baghdad to discuss ways of quelling the violence in Iraq was likewise spurned.

With his coffers full of oil money, and Europeans dependent on his oil, Mr Ahmadinejad is confident he can ride out any sanctions. He boasts that with America tied down in Iraq, it is in no position either to try a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities or assist an Israeli one.

That could prove a miscalculation. America has been gambling on a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue, with some in the administration hoping other talks might follow. But Mr Bush insists that, despite Iraq, all options are open.

Oil, meanwhile, is off its peak and increasing Saudi capacity could soon cope with a threatened Iranian oil cut-off. The extent of Iran's military support for Hizbullah in its war with Israel earlier this year alarmed Arab neighbours. And at home, the economy needs the investment that Mr Ahmadinejad's threats scare away. Iran can miss opportunities too. ■

Zeyno Baran

The Coming Coup d'Etat?

TURKEY IS A HAUNTED LAND. TOO OFTEN IN ITS HISTORY, the past has been prologue. It may be so again. Almost 10 years ago, the Turkish military ousted a popularly elected Islamist prime minister. The circumstances that produced that coup are re-emerging today. Once again, an Islamist is in power. Once again, the generals are muttering angrily about how his government is undermining the secular state—the foundation of modern Turkey. As I rate it, the chances of a military coup in Turkey occurring in 2007 are roughly 50-50.

I saw the last one coming, thanks to a conversation with a senior military officer not long before the events of February 1997. "I asked the Iranian generals after the 1979 revolution why they had done nothing to stop it. By the time they realized how far the Islamists had come, they replied, it was too late," he told me. "We will never let that happen in Turkey." Indeed, this very principle is enshrined in the bylaws of the Turkish General Staff, which declare that the military is "the sole protector" of Turkish secular democracy and of the "principles of Atatürk."

And so it is now. Though most Turks agree that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is more moderate than his ousted predecessor, Necmettin Erbakan, he is nonetheless an Islamist. The outgoing president Ahmet Necdet Sezer publicly warns that Erdogan's government is broadening its fundamentalist platform day by day, and challenging the basic principles of secularism as defined in the Turkish constitution. Pointedly, Sezer reminds the Turkish armed forces of their pledge to serve as its guardians.

The hawkish new chief of the General Staff, Gen. Yasar Buyukanit, echoes that theme. In a speech at the opening of the academic year at the Turkish War Academy on Oct. 2, he asked: "Are there not people in Turkey saying that secularism should be redefined? Aren't those people occupying the highest seats of the state? Isn't the ideology of Atatürk under attack?" Buyukanit went on to declare that an affirmative answer to any of these questions would confirm that Turkey is threatened with "Islamist fundamentalism."

In recent weeks I have spoken with Turkey's most senior officers. All made



MAN IN THE MIDDLE: Erdogan and the brass

Once again, the generals are muttering angrily about how the government is undermining the secular state—and Turkey.

clear that, while they would not want to see an interruption in democracy, the military may soon have to step in to protect secularism, without which there cannot be democracy in a majority Muslim country. These are no-nonsense people who mean what they say.

Why is this happening? Chiefly because of the European Union. Never mind Cyprus, or the new human-rights laws Turkey has willingly passed under European pressure. The real problem is the EU's core demand: more civilian control over the military. That, senior officers say, would inevitably produce an Islamic Turkey. As they see it, the nation simply cannot afford to follow the EU on issues that would theoretically ensure, but in reality endanger, its future as a *secular* democracy—that is, a country in which

state and mosque are separated and in which freedom of (as well as freedom from) religion is guaranteed for all.

The Turkish military is especially wary of how the EU is coping with its own Islamic problem. European governments are reaching out to Islamists, ostensibly in order to transform them into allies against domestic terrorism. That may work in the short-run, Turkish critics say. But a similar strategy would be intolerable to a majority of Turks, who fear that once the gates open to "moderate" Islamists, more radical forces will enter and take over.

With Turkey and the EU so sharply diverging, the danger is that the Turkish military, supported as in 1997 by other secularist groups, will no longer feel bound by the need to keep Turkey on its European path. And this time, unlike the past, the United States is in no position to restrain them. That's partly because of Iraq, and Turkey's unhappiness with what it sees as Washington's kid-glove treatment of Kurdish terrorists operating out of northern Kurdistan, and partly because of its embrace of Erdogan, most literally

when he met George W. Bush the same day that Buyukanit made his remarks in Turkey. The United States opposed the 1997 coup, and it will do so again. But as one senior Turkish official recently put it: "If there were a coup, what would the U.S. do—enact sanctions against Turkey?"

To be sure, the military may exert its influence without resorting to force. And if a coup were to happen, it would not necessarily translate to a nondemocratic Turkey. More likely, it would simply mean the end of Turkey's current "Islamist experiment" and a return to a more conservative government—stalwartly secular, yes, but a democracy nonetheless. Ironically, this Turkey might ultimately be seen to be a better member of Europe than today's.

BARAN is a Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute.

Sword Of the Shia

He can deal out death through his black-clad followers and roil the government any time he chooses. Why Moqtada al-Sadr may end up deciding America's fate in Iraq.

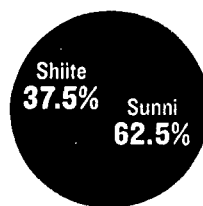
ONE WAY TO UNDERSTAND Moqtada al-Sadr is to think of him as a young Mafia don. He aims for respectability, and is willing to kill for it. Yet the extent of his power isn't obvious to the untrained eye. He has no standing army or police force, and the Mahdi Army gunmen he employs have no tanks or aircraft. You could mistake him—at your peril—for a common thug or gang leader. And if he or his people were to kill you for your ignorance, he wouldn't claim credit. But the message would be clear to those who understand the brutal language of the Iraqi Street.

American soldiers who patrol Sadr's turf in Baghdad understand. They can spot his men. "They look like they're pulling security," says First Lt. Robert Hartley, a 25-year-old who plays cat and mouse with the Mahdi Army in the Iraqi capital. The Sadrists use children and young men as lookouts. When GIs get out



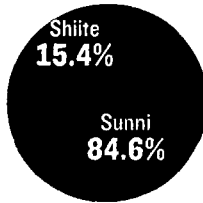
DAYS OF WRATH
A sermon for the faithful at his father's mosque in Kufah during last week's Friday prayer services
PHOTOGRAPH BY WATSON RUIZZALE FOR NEWSWEEK
STY: MAGEE

SUNNI AND SHIITE POPULATION, 2006 IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Total 253 million

GLOBALLY



Total: 1.385 billion

Oil Revenues, 2005

In \$ billions*

Saudi Arabia	100
Iran	48
UAE	45
Kuwait	43
Iraq	28

of their Humvees to patrol on foot, one of the watchers will fly a kite, or release a flock of pigeons. Some of Sadr's people have even infiltrated top ranks of the Iraqi police. Capt. Tom Kapla, 29, says he knows who they are: "They look at you, and you can tell they want to kill you."

Sadr is a unique force in Iraq: a leader from the majority Shiites who has resisted American occupation from the start. He's a populist, a nationalist and an Islamic radical rolled into one. Part of his power is simply that he's powerful. Large numbers of impoverished Shiites view Sadr as their guardian—the one leader who is willing not just to stand up for them but to strike back on their behalf. "People count on the militias," says Lieutenant Hartley, who deals with Sadr's thugs on a regular basis. "It's like the mob—they keep people safe."

The longer Sadr has survived, the greater his prestige has grown. Iraqis and foreigners who meet him are impressed by the transformation. He's more diplomatic and commands more respect. He used to greet visitors at his Najaf office sitting on pillows on the floor. Now he has a couch set. His concerns are high-minded: he speaks of fuel shortages and cabinet politics. In the past, Sadr was shrugged off as a rabble-rouser and a nuisance. Now he is undeni-

ably one of the most popular leaders in the country. He is also its most dangerous, for he has the means to wage political or actual war against any solution that is not precisely to his liking. He is driven by forces America has long misread in Iraq: religious sentiment, economic resentment and enduring sectarian passions.

And he is now a primary target of Sunni insurgents bent on provoking all-out civil war. Last Thursday, Sunni militants carried out their deadliest attack since 2003. Multiple car bombs, accompanied by mortars, killed more than 200 people in Sadr City, a Shiite slum of 2 million people in Baghdad that is dominated by the Mahdi Army. Shiite forces responded immediately by firing

mortars at a revered Sunni mosque in Baghdad, and by torching other holy places. Only the presence of U.S. troops—and a wide curfew over the city—prevented far bloodier revenge attacks.

More than anyone, Sadr personifies the dilemma Washington faces: If American troops leave Iraq quickly, militia leaders like Sadr will be unleashed as never before, and full-scale civil war could follow. But the longer the American occupation lasts, the less popular America gets—and the more popular Sadr and his ilk become.

To many, Sadr's brand of Shiite politics—homegrown, populist and ruthless—seems a natural outgrowth of the ruin left in Saddam Hussein's wake, and a powerful part of what Iraq has become. The United Nations calculates that an unprecedented 3,709 Iraqi civilians were killed in October.

Death squads connected to the Mahdi Army, as well as to other Shia and Sunni groups, capture and execute civilians in cold blood, sometimes dragging them out of hospitals or government ministries. Corpses turn up on the street with acid burns on their backs, or electric-drill holes in their knees, stomachs and heads. Among ordinary Iraqis, the United States bears much of the blame for the bloodshed—just

This story was written by Jeffrey Bartholet with reporting from Kevin Peraino and Sarah Childress in Baghdad; Michael Hastings in Amman; Dan Ephron, Michael Hirsh and John Barry in Washington; Christopher Dickey in Paris; Melinda Liu in Beijing; Rod Nordland, Stryker McGuire, Mark Hosenball and Rebecca Hall in London; Babak Dehghanpisheh in Beirut; Scott Johnson in Cape Town; Christian Caryl in Tokyo, and Malcolm Beith and Karen Fragala Smith in New York

for being there. As Sadr put it to NEWSWEEK earlier this year, "The occupation is the decision maker ... any attack is [America's] responsibility."

The story of the U.S. confrontation with Moqtada al-Sadr is, in many ways, the story of American folly in Iraq. It's a story of ignorance and poor planning, missteps and confusion. Key policymakers often disagreed about the importance of Sadr and about

how to deal with him. The result was half-measures and hesitation. But the story isn't just about past failures. It also contains lessons—and warnings—about the future.

LITTLE MORE THAN 'MULLAH ATARI'

MOQTADA AL-SADR DID NOT APPEAR on anyone's radar screen ahead of the

2003 invasion. Even among Iraqis, although he came from an important clerical family he was seen as a weak figure. Moqtada's father, Muhammad Sadr al-Sadr, had been a leading ayatollah, a rival to Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and other top clerics. But gunmen—assumed to be working for Saddam—murdered the elder Sadr along with two of his sons in 1999. Moqtada was 25 at the time.

On the evening after his father's funeral, Moqtada presided over a memorial service at the Safi al-Safa Mosque in Najaf. A storm was raging outside. At about 8 p.m., three men wearing suits and ties swaggered into the mosque. Their jackets bulged where handguns were holstered. They were smirking, recalls Fatah al-Sheikh, a family friend who was present. Everyone in the mosque knew they were Saddam's men. One of the visitors offered Moqtada a package: a brick of bank notes wrapped in crisp white paper. "It was a message from Saddam Hussein," Sheikh recalls. "They wanted to tell Sayyid Moqtada, 'We killed your father.' They wanted to see if Sayyid Moqtada could be bought." Moqtada declined the money, refused to shake hands and told the men to leave the mosque. A cleric followed the men out, apologized on Moqtada's behalf and accepted the money—knowing that to refuse it would mean a death sentence. Fearing immediate retribution anyway, Moqtada cut short the memorial and canceled two days of official mourning.

Sheikh says that for the next four years, Saddam's secret police followed Sadr wherever he went. One hot summer day, Sheikh recalls seeing Sadr leave the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf. Sheikh walked up and said

hello. Sadr squeezed Sheikh's hand tight and opened his eyes wide. "He was trying to give me a signal." Then Sheikh saw why: two men dressed in *dishdashas*, standing behind Sadr and near a Toyota with tinted windows, were watching.

Saddam kept a close eye on Sadr because the young man inherited a wide network of mosques, schools and social centers built up by his father. The network was focused on the impoverished masses of Iraqi Shiites—the sort of people other religious and secular leaders didn't have much time for. Even some educated Shiites dismissed Moqtada as a *zatut*, or ignorant child. Some called him "Mullah Atari," because he apparently enjoyed videogames as a kid. He certainly lacked

his father's stature: in his theological studies, Moqtada never reached beyond the level of *bahth al-kharij* (pregraduation research), according to a study by the International Crisis Group. But it's clear now that most everybody underestimated him.

THE TIME BOMB STARTS TO TICK

TOP AMERICAN OFFICIALS MAY HAVE been misled, as in so many other things, by depending heavily on well-heeled Iraqi exiles for advice. The outsiders, who had lived for many years in London or Wash-

ington or Tehran, disagreed vehemently with each other on what an invasion would mean. But some told Americans what they wanted to hear: you will be greeted as liberators, especially by the Shiites and Kurds long oppressed by Saddam.

American officials listened to Ahmad Chalabi, the well-known scion of a secular Shiite banking family. Another prominent exile was Abdul Majid al-Khoei, who was supposed to be a key guide to the Shia religious community. Both had been away from Iraq for many years, and were strangers to the place they had left behind.

Al-Khoei paid with his life. The Lon-

don-based exile returned to the holy city of Najaf, where he was born and raised, under U.S. military protection. He quickly organized a local council to get electricity and water flowing again, apparently with CIA money. (The CIA declined to comment.) But al-Khoei's father had been Iraq's top ayatollah—and a bitter rival of Sadr's father—during Saddam's rule. Now the sons were competing for power and influence. Sadr castigated al-Khoei as a U.S. agent, and demanded that he turn

IN BAGHDAD, CORPSES TURN UP WITH ACID BURNS ON THEIR BACKS, OR ELECTRIC-DRILL HOLES IN THEIR KNEES.

Iraq

over the keys to the tomb of Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law. A gilded cage surrounding the tomb contains a box for pilgrims' donations, a huge and vital source of income for religious leaders.

As al-Khoei and a colleague visited the shrine on the morning of April 10, 2003, an angry mob attacked them with grenades, guns and swords. "Long live Moqtada al-Sadr!" the mob cried out. Al-Khoei was stabbed repeatedly, then tied up and dragged to the doorstep of Sadr's headquarters in Najaf, where he was still alive. A subsequent investigation by an Iraqi judge found that Sadr himself gave the order to finish him off: "Take him away and kill him in your own special way."

Yet it wasn't clear at the time of the killing what Sadr's personal role was, and "we didn't want one of our first acts in country to be taking out one of the most popular leaders," says a U.S. military officer familiar with Army intelligence on Sadr. The officer, who did not want to be named discussing intelligence matters, says the Army was worried about provoking riots. When Sadr's father was killed in 1999, Saddam violently crushed protests by angry Shia mobs. "We thought that tens of thousands would take to the streets in Nasiriya, Karbala and Baghdad. It always comes back to that—not enough guys on the ground."

One courageous Iraqi judge, Raid Juhi, doggedly investigated the case. He exhumed the bodies of al-Khoei and his colleague, and wrote up a confidential arrest warrant for Sadr in August 2003. "From that moment through April 2004, the issue was whether we were going to enforce the arrest warrant," says Dan Senor, a senior official in the Coalition Provisional Authority at the time.

The CPA, the Pentagon and the military on the ground were in disagreement. The Marines in southern Iraq were particularly wary of stirring up trouble. As it was, the United States was preparing

to hand off the area around Najaf to a multinational force with troops from Spain and Central America. Still, the Coalition had a secret arrest plan, and momentum toward nabbing Sadr was building. "The pivotal moment was Aug. 19, 2003," says Senor. "We were down to figuring out the mechanisms of ensuring that the operation was seen as Iraqi, executed on an Iraqi arrest warrant. I remember it was late afternoon and we had just received a snowflake from [U.S. Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld ... with nine different questions, rehashing how we were going to do this, to make sure it was



TO BREAK A STALEMATE

In his search for allies, Chalabi (center) helped persuade Sadr to join the political system. Many argue that to do otherwise would disenfranchise a key bloc of poor Shia.

not seen as an American operation." (A "snowflake" was a Rumsfeld memo.)

Suddenly word came that insurgents had detonated a massive truck bomb at the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Senor recalls rushing to the scene with Hume Horan, a top U.S. diplomat and Arabist. Horan leaned over to Senor and said, "We should take down Sadr now, when no one's looking." But there was enough chaos to deal with already. The U.N. bombing was "a huge distraction," says Senor, "and the Sadr operation was forgotten."

TAKING ON IRAQ'S NEW TALIBAN

THE U.S. INVASION HAD DESTROYED AN economy already crippled by years of international sanctions. Countless young men were unemployed, invigorated by the atmosphere of violent change but also poor and fearful. They wanted to be part of the new order—whatever it would be. The country was also awash in guns and other weapons, including those looted from Saddam's vast and unsecured arms depots. The Sadrist network was perfectly positioned to capitalize on the situation. Sadr himself was

determined to lead a national movement—using a potent mixture of anti-occupation militancy and millennial preaching about the coming of the mysterious 12th imam, who Shiites believe will save mankind. "Moqtada is absolutely hooked on the concept of the reappearance of the Mahdi," says Amatzia Baram, the director of the Ezri Center at Haifa University.

The first sighting of black-clad militiamen identifying themselves as part of Mahdi Army seems to have come in September 2003 in the southern town of Kufah.

"I do not care what the Americans have to say about this, and I never did," said Sadr when asked about the new militia by reporters later that month. "Only the Iraqi people can choose who they want to protect their country." The U.S. military, fighting an ever-growing insurgency by the minority Sunnis, who had lost power with Saddam's downfall, didn't want to instigate a two-front war. But that left the United States without a strategy. If American forces weren't going to fight Sadr, it made sense to try to entice him into a political process: But other Iraqi leaders, including prominent Shiites, may have opposed that idea.

In the winter of 2004, a senior adviser to Ambassador Paul Bremer, the American proconsul in Iraq, was traveling in the south, meeting with friendly clerics and community leaders. "I could see how frightened they were of [Sadr] and his Mahdi Army," recalls the aide, Larry Diamond. "I

'I WANTED TO GO AFTER HIM WHEN HE HAD 200 FOLLOWERS,' SAYS BREMER. 'THE MARINES RESISTED DOING ANYTHING.'

was driven past an area, a kind of compound where his black-clad army was training for the upcoming revolution to seize power and take over. It just dawned on me that these people were going to make this place an authoritarian hell of a new sort, Taliban style, and would murder a lot of our allies in the process."

Diamond went to Bremer and gave him his assessment: the United States urgently needed to act against Sadr. Bremer responded that he was waiting for a new plan from Coalition forces. "I first wanted to go after him when he had probably fewer than 200 followers," Bremer recalled in an interview with NEWSWEEK last week. "I couldn't make it happen ... the Marines were resisting doing anything." But in the meantime, on March 28, 2004, Bremer suspended publication of Sadr's newspaper after it ran an editorial praising the 9/11 attacks on America as a "blessing from God."

The response was swift: mass demonstrations, which led to the first of two Sadr uprisings in 2004. In a final meeting between Diamond and Bremer on April 1, Diamond pressed the point that the United States needed more troops in Iraq. It was around 8 p.m., and Bremer's dinner was sitting on a tray uneaten. He looked exhausted. "And he just didn't want to hear it," says Diamond. "In retrospect, I think he had gone to the well on this issue of more troops during 2003, had gotten nowhere ... and had just resigned himself to the fact that these troops just weren't going to come. I think the tragedy is that everyone just gave up."

When fighting did break out, American forces hammered the Mahdi Army in Baghdad and Najaf—first in the spring and then again, after a broken ceasefire, in the late summer. Some of the worst fighting came in August, as Sadr's militiamen made their stand around the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf. They turned the area into a no-go zone, sniping at any sign of movement. U.S. forces retaliated by laying waste to large swaths of central Najaf. In the end, Ayatollah Sistani brought his influence to bear on the renegade cleric and encouraged a ceasefire. Attempts to enforce the arrest warrant against Sadr and several aides were dropped, and Sadr's forces disarmed in Najaf or headed out of town. They were badly bloodied,

and some militants were shellshocked. Others bragged about how they had fought back tanks with AK-47s, or disabled Humvees with a single grenade. Scores of militiamen were dead, but Sadr's prestige was, if anything, enhanced: he had fought the mighty United States to a stalemate.

GETTING SADR INSIDE THE TENT

SADR NEEDED A NEW STRATEGY, HOWEVER. He wasn't strong enough to defeat the occupier head-on, nor could he eliminate his Iraqi rivals. So he took up what he calls



GET OUT OF JAIL FREE

Prime Minister Maliki (left) has forced the U.S. military to remove roadblocks from Sadr City's perimeter and to release detainees who were jailed in sweeps against death squads

"political resistance"—working from within the system. Chalabi played an important role here. Washington's favorite Iraqi had found that he had little popularity in his homeland, so he was seeking alliances. Chalabi also felt, as did many other Iraqis and Americans, that it was better to bring Sadr inside the process than to have him trying to destroy it. "Sadr is respected because of his lineage and because he speaks for the disenfranchised, the scared and the angry," says a Chalabi aide, who did not want to be named because of the sensitivity of the subject. "In that sort of situation, it makes absolute sense to try to get him inside the system."

Sadr made the most of the opening. Politicians in his Sadr bloc won 23 of 275 seats in the January 2005 elections and, after fresh voting nearly a year later, now hold 30

seats. In both cases, because of divisions between other large Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni parties, Sadr was able to play kingmaker. Two prime ministers since 2005—Ibrahim Jaafari and the current Iraqi leader, Nuri al-Maliki—have depended on his swing votes for their majority. But Sadr himself stayed out of government, and kept his distance. That way he could pursue a dual strategy—rebuilding his militia even as he capitalized on his control of key ministries, like Health and Transportation, to provide services to the poor and jobs to his followers.

The Sunni insurgents were pursuing a new strategy, too. In early 2004, U.S. forces had intercepted a worried letter from the Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, to Osama bin Laden. Zarqawi fretted that his fight against American forces was going poorly. But he had a plan: "If we succeed in dragging [the Shiites] into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger," he wrote.

Throughout 2005, Sunni insurgents launched increasingly vicious attacks on Shiite civilians and holy places. Sistani regularly called on his followers to exercise restraint, which they did with remarkable forbearance. But Sadr, who had long positioned himself as an Iraqi nationalist—and who had cooperated with Sunni fighters in the early stages of the insurgency—now publicly called for Sunnis to disavow Zarqawi. New battle lines were being drawn.

The turning point came on Feb. 22, 2006, when assailants bombed the golden-domed Askariya Shrine in Samarra. This was the burial place of the 10th and 11th imams, and one of the holiest sites of the Shia faith. After the Samarra bombing, many Shiites felt compelled to lash back. Caught in a vicious street fight against Sunnis, they decided that they'd rather have a dirty brawler in their corner (like Sadr) than a gray-bearded holy man (like Sistani). "We have courage, large amounts of ammunition, good leaders, and it is a religious duty," says Ali Mijbil, a 26-year-old mechanic who serves in the Mahdi Army. "So why don't we fight them? We've been kept under Sunni



Click on our map of casualties in Iraq at xtra.newsweek.com

Iraq

rule for more than 14 centuries. It is the proper time to rule ourselves now.”

Sadr still insists his main fight is with foreign invaders. He’s the one Shia leader who has opposed the U.S. occupation from the beginning, and who has continued to call for a strict timetable for American withdrawal. An overwhelming majority of Iraqis now agree with him. A September poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org found that 63 percent of 501 Iraqi Shiites surveyed supported attacks against Americans. Even in Baghdad, where ethnic tensions are worst, Shiites agree with Sunnis on one thing: the poll found that 80 percent of the capital’s Shiites wanted U.S. forces to leave within a year. That number has changed dramatically in a matter of months. A January poll found that most Shiites wanted U.S.-led troops to be reduced only “as the security situation improves.”

In Washington, some politicians still talk about “victory,” while others aim only to stabilize the country and leave with some semblance of dignity. Many in the U.S. capital are dusting off yesterday’s proposals for tomorrow’s problems—more training, more troops, disarming the militias, more stability in Baghdad. The GOP presidential front runner for 2008, John McCain, would prefer to increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq by 20,000, at least temporarily. He has also called for Sadr to be “taken out.” But it may be too late.

The movement may now be more important than the man. Sadr “is faced with a common problem,” says Toby Dodge of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. “He can’t control the use of his brand name, the use of his legitimacy.” Some elder followers of Sadr’s father have broken away, disillusioned with the son. And some young toughs seem to be freelancing where they can. Renegade factions could eventually threaten Sadr’s power. If he were to fall, “you’ll end up with 30 different movements,” says Vali Nasr, a scholar and author who has briefed the Bush administration on Iraq. “There are 30 chieftains who have a tremendous amount of local power. If you remove him, there will be a scramble for who will inherit this movement ... It’s a great danger doing that. You may actually make your life much more difficult.”

HOW THE MAHDI ARMY WORKS

FOR NOW, SADR AND HIS MAHDI ARMY have the initiative. They can stir up trouble without much fear of retribution. A case in point: When kidnapers grabbed an Iraqi-American translator in Baghdad

How He Calls the Shots

With a growing private army and a pivotal group of parliamentary seats at his command, the radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr continues his rise as one of the country’s most powerful figures. A look at his influence—and his competitors:

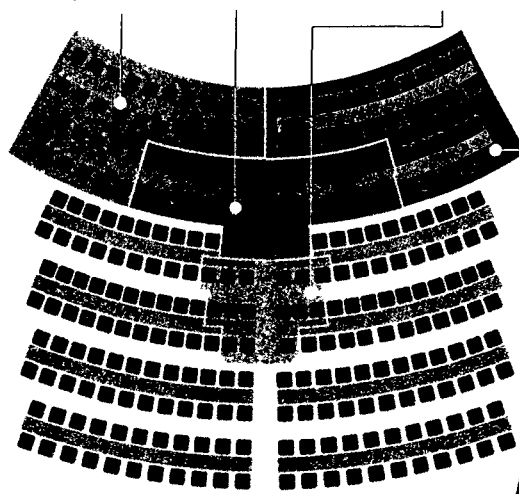
UNITED IRAQI ALLIANCE

The UIA, an alliance of conservative Shiite groups—including Sadr’s—holds 128 parliamentary seats, significantly more than any other bloc.

The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) is closely tied to—and reportedly funded by—Iran

The party of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, **Dawa** possesses no organized militia. It also has fewer clerics than SCIRI

Though its ideology is close to that of the Sadrists, **Fadhila** has its own agenda and has sometimes clashed with Sadr’s camp



IRAQI PARLIAMENT SEATS

THE MAHDI ARMY
Sadr and his deputies enjoy heavy support among the Shiite poor, particularly in the Baghdad slums of Sadr City (named for Sadr’s father) and in cities like Basra in the Shiite south. Additionally, they control six cabinet posts, including the ministries of Transportation and Health.

OTHER BLOCS

The rest of the Parliament’s 275 seats are mostly divided among three other umbrella groups. Like the UIA, they originated as smaller factions that were brought together by shared interests.

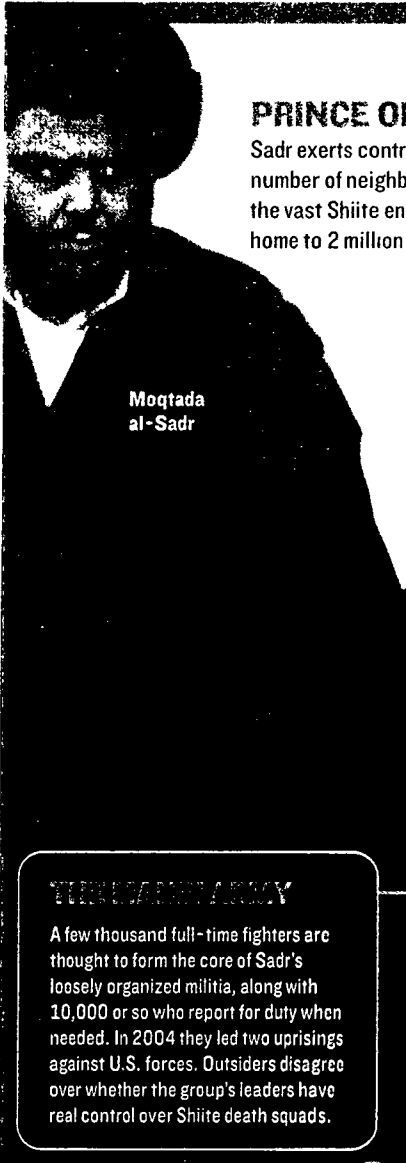
IRAQI LIST
Former prime minister Ayad al-Allawi (left) created this coalition of mostly secular Sunni and Shiite Arabs and Kurdish groups. It captured 28 seats in last December’s elections.

IRAQI ACCORD FRONT
Led by Adnan al-Dulaimi (left), the major Sunni bloc won 44 seats in the December 2005 elections. The group is plagued by Sunni distrust of the Shiite-led government.

KURDISTAN ALLIANCE
Made up of the two main Kurdish camps, the KDP and PUK, which is led by the president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani (above). The alliance holds 53 seats.

last month, U.S. soldiers sealed off the Sadr City neighborhood where they believed he was being held. But Prime Minister Maliki—who depends on Sadr for political support—quickly ordered the Americans to remove their roadblocks. Maliki has also forced the U.S. military to release men picked up during raids in Sadr City on suspicion of belonging to Shiite death squads.

When the U.S. fails to respond to provocation, it loses credibility. And when it does respond, it can also lose. Last week, before the massive car-bomb attacks, U.S. and Iraqi forces carried out a pinprick raid in Sadr City to get intelligence on the kidnapped military translator, Ahmed Qusai al-Taayie. Like so many other U.S. military strikes in Iraq, however, it came at a price. American forces captured seven militia-



Moqtada al-Sadr

PRINCE OF BAGHDAD

Sadr exerts control over a growing number of neighborhoods besides the vast Shiite enclave of Sadr City, home to 2 million or more Iraqis.



THIRDMILL ARMY

A few thousand full-time fighters are thought to form the core of Sadr's loosely organized militia, along with 10,000 or so who report for duty when needed. In 2004 they led two uprisings against U.S. forces. Outsiders disagree over whether the group's leaders have real control over Shiite death squads.

INDEX

- Sunni militias
- Madhi Army
- Badr Brigades / SCIRI (Shiite)
- U.S. military
- Iraqi security forces
- Popular committees or neighborhood watches

ARMED RIVALS

More than 20 sectarian militias are believed to operate in Iraq, clashing frequently with U.S. troops and with one another. Many seem to function with little centralized leadership, and revenge killings among the factions frequently target civilians as well as fighters.

BADR BRIGADES

The armed wing of SCIRI, Iraq's largest Shiite party, headed by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim (left), has

some 6,000 fighters. The group was first recruited, equipped and trained by Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.



3,000 Iraqis and as many as 20,000 members all told, along with 1,000 or so foreign jihadists.

SUNNI INSURGENTS

U.S. officials have estimated that the Sunni insurgency, which has no single leader, fields perhaps



Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. Others, however, patrol Baghdad and other cities with the Iraqi security forces.

PESHMERGA

The combined militias of the Kurdish parties may include up to 100,000 fighters, most of whom provide security for the

men, including one who might have information on al-Taayic. But police said a young boy was among three people killed in the raid. A member of Parliament from Sadr's movement promptly showed up at the morgue, and held the corpse of the boy in his arms as he railed against the American occupation.

U.S. forces have tried hard to win hearts and minds. They've spent \$120.9

million on completed construction projects in Sadr City, for instance—building new sewers and power lines—and projects worth an additional \$197 million are underway. But the United States doesn't always get credit for the good works. When the Americans doled out cash to construct four health clinics in Sadr City during the past year, Sadr's men quickly removed any hint of U.S. involvement. They also put up

signs giving all credit to their boss, according to Lt. Zeroy Lawson, an Army intelligence officer who works in the area.

The Mahdi Army has other sources of cash. It's taken control of gas stations throughout large parts of Baghdad, and dominates the Shia trade in propane-gas canisters, which Iraqis use for cooking. Sometimes the militiamen sell the propane at a premium, earning healthy prof-

Iraq



Friday marked the anniversary, on the Islamic calendar, of the killing of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and his two eldest sons. After the previous day's bombings, Moqtada told government officials that he was out of the country. But that seems to have been a feint—to keep possible enemies off balance. In fact, he appeared at the Kufah Mosque, where his father used to lead worshipers in chants of “No, no to America; no, no to Israel; no, no to the Devil!”

As word spread that Moqtada would lead prayers, people crowded into the mosque, most of them clad in black as a sign of mourning. Sadr asked worshipers to pray for his dead relatives, and also for those who had been killed in Sadr City. He again called

for the United States to set a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. He urged a top Sunni sheik to issue three *fatwas*: one against the killing of Shiites, another against joining Al Qaeda and the third to rebuild the shrine in Samarra. He compared his father's followers to those of the Prophet Muhammad. “After the prophet died,” he intoned, “some of his followers deviated from his teachings, and the same has happened with followers of my father.” The “cursed trio”—Americans, British and Israelis—were trying to divide Iraq. “We Iraqis—Sunnis and Shia—will always be brothers.”

No one in Iraq talks about arresting Sadr for the murder of al-Khoei anymore. That seems like ages ago—back when Sadr's armed supporters were estimated in the hundreds, compared with many thousands today. Now diplomats speak of trying to keep Sadr inside the political system, hoping he can tame his followers. He's a militant Islamist and anti-occupation, they say, but he's also a nationalist, and not as close to Iran as some of his rivals. Nobody knows whether Sadr is dissembling when he speaks about Iraqi unity, or preparing for all-out war. What is clear—more today than ever before—is that it's time to stop underestimating him. ■

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

Mahdi Army fighters pose with pictures of Sadr and the burned-out wreckage of a U.S. First Infantry Division Humvee struck by a rocket on the outskirts of Kufah, April 2004

10 followers he believed were suspect. They had been using the Mahdi Army name, but Sadr believes they're really tools of Iranian intelligence, says Sheikh.

Sadr has tried to distance himself from atrocities, insisting that they're carried out by renegades or impostors. Many Sunnis, to whom Sadr has become a dark symbol of Shiite perfidy, don't buy it. “If he says, ‘Kill Alusi,’ I will be killed,” says Mithal al-Alusi, a moderate Sunni member of Parliament. “If he says, ‘Don't kill Alusi,’ I will not be killed ... Nobody can go against his orders or wishes.” The Association of Muslim Scholars, which is loosely linked with Sunni insurgents, says the Mahdi Army has attacked some 200 Sunni mosques, and killed more than 260 imams and mosque workers.

All the killings will be remembered, and it will be a miracle if they go unanswered. Memories of martyrdom—and the desire for revenge—can last forever. Last

its; at other times they sell it at well below market rates, earning gratitude from the poor and unemployed.

A key source of Sadr's income is Muslim tithes—or *khoms*—collected at mosques. But his militiamen also run extortion and protection rackets—demanding money to keep certain businesses and individuals “safe.” One Iraqi in a tough neighborhood, who did not want to reveal his name out of fear, says he pays the local Mahdi Army the equivalent of \$13 a month for protection.

Analysts believe that Iran has also provided support to Sadr, but not much. Tehran began supplying Shia insurgents, including the Mahdi Army, with a special type of roadside bomb, using a shaped charge, in May 2005. These are often disguised as rocks and are easy to manufacture locally. But diplomats say they are made to the exact design perfected by Iranian intelligence and supplied to Lebanese Hizbullah in the 1980s.

Yet Tehran's main Shiite clients in Iraq are rivals of Sadr, who is often critical of Persian influence. Sadr worries that Iran may be trying to infiltrate his movement, and he's almost surely right. Fatah al-Sheikh, who is close to Sadr, says the boss sent a private letter to loyal imams around Baghdad in the past two weeks identifying

SADR WORRIES THAT IRAN MAY BE TRYING TO INFILTRATE THE MAHDI ARMY, AND HE'S ALMOST SURELY RIGHT.

La Suisse tolère l'ouverture à Berne d'une sorte d'ambassade... kurde!

DIPLOMATIE • La Suisse ne s'est pas opposée à l'ouverture à Berne d'une représentation permanente du Kurdistan, seule province d'Irak épargnée par la guerre civile.

MICHEL WALTER

Depuis vendredi, la police bernoise et l'armée suisse ont apparemment une nouvelle mission diplomatique à surveiller celle du «Gouvernement régional kurde».

Situation très inhabituelle, voire surréaliste, puisque le Kurdistan est une province de l'Irak, Etat officiellement reconnu par la Suisse. C'est un peu comme si le Texas ouvrait une ambassade à Berne. Ou que le canton de Zurich accrédite un diplomate au Kremlin.

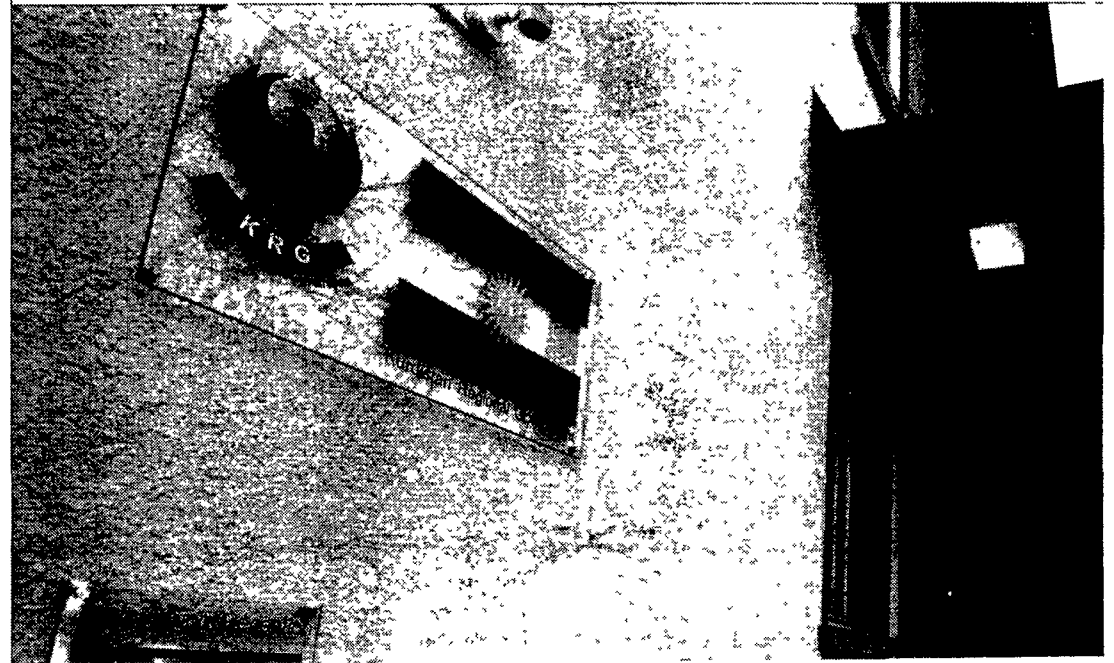
Tous les attributs

Mais si l'on en croit Kaddur Fawzi, chef de la nouvelle mission kurde à Berne, tout s'est passé dans les règles. Le Département fédéral des affaires étrangères aurait donné son feu vert. (Voir le démenti ci-dessous). Et les autorités chargées de la protection des ambassades à Berne l'assurance que la représentation kurde serait protégée comme les autres missions diplomatiques. (Une affirmation dont nous n'avons pas pu obtenir la confirmation de la part de la police bernoise).

La mission du Kurdistan – 5 millions et demi d'habitants – a en tout cas tous les attributs extérieurs d'une ambassade. Bâtement superbe dans le quartier diplomatique, drapeau flottant fièrement, plaque en métal, écusson officiel de la province («Kurdish Regional Government») et éclairage intense le soir pour raisons de sécurité.

«Rien d'anormal»

Détails piquants: la villa qui tient lieu d'Ambassade – et que M. Fawzi vient d'acquérir à titre personnel – était jusqu'à récemment une école coranique libyenne! Elle est située



juste à côté de l'ambassade... d'Irak. Et à quelques centaines de mètres de l'ambassade... d'Irak.

Selon M. Fawzi, cette double représentation dans un même pays d'entités officielles irakiennes, qui peut paraître étrange, n'a cependant rien d'anormal. Elle serait conforme à la Constitution irakienne. Et la mission permanente irakienne à Genève – l'ambassade de Berne, en voie de réouverture, n'est pas encore opérationnelle – aurait donné son accord. Ce que la mission de Genève n'a pas voulu nous confirmer.

A noter que M. Fawzi, qui est dentiste de profession, habite la Suisse depuis longtemps, qu'il est marié à une Suissesse et qu'il possède la na-

tionalité suisse. Il continuera à traiter des patients, mais occasionnellement seulement car, nous dit-il, il veut désormais se consacrer corps et âme à son travail diplomatique.

Dans un premier temps, la mission comprendra, en plus de M. Fawzi, deux employés, mais il est prévu d'étoffer bientôt ces effectifs.

Une zone autonome

Rappelons qu'en vertu de la Constitution irakienne approuvée après la deuxième guerre d'Irak, le Kurdistan irakien – grand comme deux fois la Suisse – jouit d'une autonomie étendue par rapport à Bagdad. Cette autonomie n'est cependant pas vraiment nouvelle puisqu'elle existe

de facto depuis 1992 suite à la 1^{re} guerre d'Irak (guerre dite du Golfe)

Officiellement, le Gouvernement régional kurde affirme vouloir tout faire pour rester dans le giron irakien pour autant que l'Irak devienne un véritable Etat fédéral et que cessent les affrontements entre factions ennemies (chiïtes et sunnites notamment). Tout le monde sait cependant que bien des dirigeants de la province aspirent à l'indépendance et que l'indépendance est aussi le scénario souhaité par d'influents milieux occidentaux.

Selon les nationalistes kurdes, un Etat kurde, s'il voyait le jour, serait la sixième puissance pétrolière du monde. I

DES MISSIONS UN PEU PARTOUT DANS LE MONDE : PAS DE COMMENTAIRES DE BERNE

Le Gouvernement autonome – «Gouvernement régional» – du Kurdistan irakien (mais le terme «irakien» n'est jamais utilisé) possède un réseau très étendu de missions permanentes dans le monde. Cela dans les cinq continents.

En Europe, ces missions sont actuellement au nombre de neuf, y compris celle de Bruxelles (Union européenne). La représentation de Berne est la dernière en date mais elle existait déjà à l'état latent depuis un certain temps puisque l'actuel chef de mission, M. Fawzi, exerçait déjà des fonctions analogues depuis son domicile de Saint-Gall. mw

Interrogé par «La Liberté», le Département fédéral des affaires étrangères (DFAE) dément absolument avoir donné «son feu vert» à l'ouverture en Suisse d'une représentation kurde. Il ne s'agirait d'ailleurs que d'un «bureau» qui ne bénéficierait d'aucun privilège et d'aucune immunité diplomatique. Seule la représentation d'un Etat souverain aurait en effet le caractère d'une mission diplomatique. Ce qui ne serait évidemment pas le cas en l'occurrence.

Le DFAE reconnaît qu'il était «informé» de l'intention des personnes concernées d'ouvrir un tel bureau. Mais comme ce bureau n'aurait aucun

caractère officiel, «il n'appartiendrait pas au Département des affaires étrangères de commenter la chose». Le département tient en outre à préciser qu'il n'entretient «aucun rapport officiel avec le bureau en question ni avec son représentant». Mais il refuse absolument de dire si cette position vaut aussi pour l'avenir. Il dément les affirmations du chef du bureau kurde, M. Fawzi, selon lesquelles il serait en contact assez régulier avec des fonctionnaires du DFAE et aurait notamment eu des entretiens avec le chef de la division politique Afrique/Moyen-Orient et avec la cheffe du service «Moyen-Orient». mw

Trouvons une stratégie commune pour apaiser le Moyen-Orient

LE FIGARO

7 décembre 2006

La situation politique et les problèmes de sécurité sont extrêmement préoccupants dans la vaste région comprise entre la vallée de l'Indus et la rive est de la Méditerranée.

Quand les États-Unis sont intervenus militairement en Irak en 1991, leur objectif était d'entraîner un changement radical dans toute cette région. Aujourd'hui, il est clair que pour l'essentiel ils n'y sont pas parvenus, quel que soit le domaine considéré. Et même un succès, la tenue d'élections libres en Irak, menace de diviser le pays, plutôt que de l'unifier.

Les relations de pouvoir au Moyen-Orient sont instables, en transformation constante, ce qui n'entraîne pas un effet de dominos vers la démocratisation, mais soulève la menace d'une chute en dominos vers le chaos.

En 1991, la décision de partir en guerre contre l'Irak pour libérer le Koweït a marqué le début du rôle de l'Amérique comme seul pouvoir militaire hégémonique dans la région. La décision de mener la guerre contre l'Irak pour la deuxième fois et d'occuper le pays en mars 2003 a transformé cette hégémonie en responsabilité directe des États-Unis quant à l'avenir du Moyen-Orient.

Le positionnement des États-Unis comme acteur principal au Moyen-Orient pouvait déboucher sur deux scénarios différents. S'ils réussissaient en utilisant leur puissance militaire, cela pouvait conduire à un nouveau Moyen-Orient, démocratique, mais si en dépit de leur force militaire ils échouaient, cela pouvait entraîner un vide de pouvoir déstabilisateur pour la région. C'est ce deuxième scénario, prévisible depuis le début, qui est devenu une réalité.

L'objectif même de la guerre en Irak s'est transformé d'une mission de démocratisation à une mission de stabilisation très coûteuse en termes de vies humaines et de moyens financiers. À la place d'un réaménagement radical des relations entre les pouvoirs dans la région, l'objectif se réduit maintenant à maintenir le statu quo.

Par
Joschka Fischer *



« Une nouvelle politique moyen-orientale doit privilégier une offre globale à la Syrie, pour la détacher de l'Iran, et la résolution des points de friction »

Au mieux, les États-Unis peuvent maintenant espérer un retrait qui leur permettrait de sauver la face. Le récent scrutin aux États-Unis était un référendum sur la guerre en Irak. Le résultat conduit à un calendrier vers « l'irakisation » et à un retrait américain avant la prochaine élection présidentielle.

Derrière la trop prévisible fin de la mission américaine de stabilisation en Irak se profile une guerre civile qui menace de se transformer en guerre entre Arabes et Iraniens par milices interposées, avec pour enjeu le contrôle de l'Irak, du Golfe, du Liban, des territoires palestiniens et au-delà. Il faut aussi prendre en compte le risque important présenté par le vide de pouvoir en Irak qui pourrait fusionner le conflit israélo-arabe, la situation en Irak et en Afghanistan en une mégacrise régionale.

À la lumière du retrait américain à venir, les pouvoirs régionaux réévaluent leurs intérêts et leurs objectifs. Les principaux acteurs seront l'Iran, la Syrie, l'Arabie saoudite, l'Égypte, la Jordanie, le Pakistan, la Turquie et Israël. Avec la guerre en Irak, les États-Unis ont perdu leur position de pouvoir unilatéral, cela

tant au Moyen-Orient qu'ailleurs. À l'avenir, plusieurs grandes puissances se manifesteront au Moyen-Orient, notamment les États-Unis, la Russie, la Chine et l'Inde. Espérons que l'Europe sera de la partie, car sa sécurité se joue dans cette région.

L'enjeu n'est plus seulement l'Irak, mais l'avenir de toute la région. Nous pourrions nous estimer heureux si le chaos naissant peut être limité à l'Irak.

La reconnaissance par Washington que l'Irak ne peut plus être gagné ni même stabilisé sans un changement de structure au niveau de toute la région est venue très tard, peut-être même trop tard. Les États-Unis devront trouver un accord avec leurs alliés et entamer des pourparlers directs avec tous les autres acteurs pour essayer de parvenir à un nouveau consensus régional.

Si ce changement de politique avait eu lieu il y a un an ou même au début de l'été dernier, les perspectives auraient été meilleures. Avec chaque jour qui passe, la position américaine dans la région s'affaiblit encore et les chances de réussite d'une nouvelle stratégie politique s'éloignent.

Le plus grand danger vient de l'Iran, le premier bénéficiaire du vide de pouvoir en Irak. L'Iran a des ambitions hégémoniques qu'il cherche à réaliser en s'appuyant sur son potentiel militaire, ses réserves en pétrole et en gaz, son programme nucléaire, son influence sur les chiites dans toute la région et ses tentatives pour mettre fin au statu quo dans le monde arabo-musulman.

Néanmoins, ce pays est relativement isolé. Ses seuls alliés dans la région sont la Syrie et le Hezbollah. D'autre part, il est menacé par une coalition anti-iraniennne de facto de tous les autres pouvoirs régionaux rassemblés par leur crainte d'une domination iranienne.

Si l'Occident – l'Amérique et l'Europe – agit vite et résolument dans le cadre d'une stratégie conjointe, il reste une chance de stabiliser la situation. Mais, pour y parvenir, il sera nécessaire de réexaminer les relations avec les principaux acteurs de la région.

Cela passe par une stratégie fondée sur des moyens de nature politique et non sur une menace d'intervention militaire ou de changement de régime. À la pla-

ce, il faut des négociations directes, des garanties de sécurité et une aide à l'intégration politique et économique. Pour réussir, cette stratégie nécessite aussi le recours à une menace réaliste d'isolation envers ceux qui continuent à miner la stabilité régionale, ainsi que des progrès substantiels dans la résolution du conflit israélo-arabe.

Une nouvelle politique moyen-orientale doit donc privilégier quatre éléments : 1) une offre globale à la Syrie, pour la détacher de l'Iran, et la résolution des points de friction ; 2) une offre de négociations directes à l'Iran portant sur une perspective de normalisation complète des relations ; 3) une initiative décisive et réaliste pour résoudre le conflit israélo-arabe ; 4) une architecture de sécurité régionale centrée sur la stabilisation de l'Irak et de l'Afghanistan.

* Ancien ministre des Affaires étrangères et vice-chancelier allemand de 1998 à 2005. Chef de file du parti des Verts pendant presque vingt ans, actuellement professeur à la Woodrow Wilson School de l'université de Princeton.

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Une région à la frontière du précipice

La crainte d'un éclatement de l'Irak pourrait imposer la solution diplomatique.

Le Groupe d'études sur l'Irak a recommandé hier l'établissement de discussions directes avec l'Iran et la Syrie, traités jusqu'ici en parias par Washington, afin que ces deux pays contribuent à stabiliser l'Irak. La veille, le Premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, avait annoncé une «conférence régionale pour combattre le terrorisme», tout en rejetant l'idée du secrétaire général de l'ONU, Kofi Annan, d'une conférence internationale à laquelle Washington est hostile.

Iran

Conservé tous les fers au feu

Il y a le discours officiel, tranchant, voire menaçant, comme celui du président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad qui, dernièrement, appelait les peuples du Proche-Orient à «expulser les occupants étrangers», en particulier d'Irak où «ils n'ont apporté que la corruption et la mort». Acôté de la propagande, il y a une politique iranienne plus subtile, mais soigneusement tue. «Si vous nous demandez ce que nous pensons au fond de notre cœur, la réponse est "non, nous ne voulons pas que les Américains quittent l'Irak"», confie un haut responsable iranien, sous couvert d'anonymat, contredisant les appels répétés du ministère des Affaires étrangères au retrait des forces américaines de l'an-

cienne Mésopotamie, et aussi d'Afghanistan. Pour quelle raison? «La crainte d'un éclatement de l'Irak en trois, dont nous ne voulons à aucun prix.» D'où une stratégie compliquée qui donne l'impression qu'il y a plusieurs acteurs iraniens alors que la politique à l'égard de l'Irak est de la seule responsabilité du Guide suprême, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Elle

consiste à soutenir les gouvernements irakiens successifs, qui s'emploient à stabiliser le pays, et, en même temps, les groupes armés chiïtes qui participent à sa déstabilisation et à l'enlèvement des forces américaines. Pourquoi? «C'est notre assurance pour demain», répond le même responsable. «En fait, souligne un diplomate occidental, la politique iranienne est profondément opportuniste. Elle soutient le cabinet Al-Maliki, mais, comme il n'arrive à rien, elle appuie aussi les groupes armés dans l'espoir d'avoir toujours une part de gâteau.»

J.-P.P. (à Téhéran)

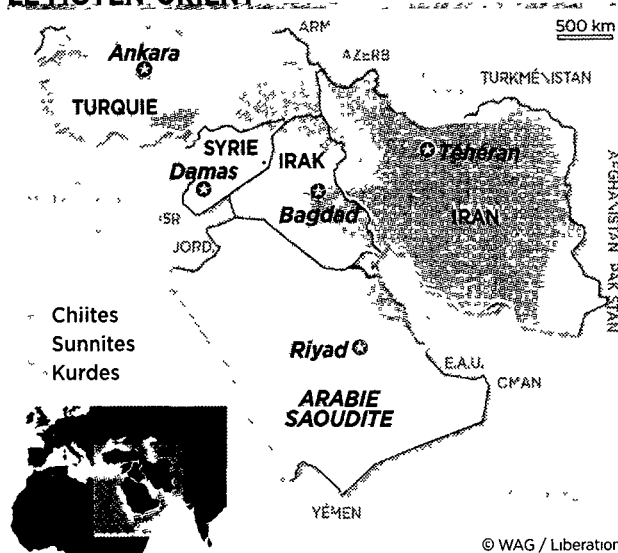
Turquie

Garder le contrôle sur les Kurdes

Un éventuel éclatement de l'Irak inquiète toujours plus Ankara, et le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est rendu ces derniers jours en Jordanie, en Syrie et en Iran. Pilier du flanc sud-est de l'Otan avec son armée de 600 000 hommes et grand allié régional

de Washington, la Turquie n'en critique pas moins ouvertement la politique de l'administration américaine, qui favorise l'émergence d'un quasi-Etat kurde au nord de l'Irak, au risque de relancer la question kurde en Turquie même, où vivent 13 millions de Kurdes. Les militaires turcs ont plusieurs fois menacé d'intervenir au-delà de la frontière contre les rebelles kurdes turcs du PKK. Ankara use aussi de son influence sur le gouvernement de Bagdad et sur la minorité turkmène afin d'éviter que la ville de Kirkouk, et ses riches réserves pétrolières, ne passe sous contrôle kurde. Mais, réalisme diplomatique oblige, la Turquie commence à miser sur une coopération avec les dirigeants kurdes irakiens, qui garantissent la stabilité dans

LE MOYEN-ORIENT



© WAG / Liberation

cette zone limitrophe. «Ceux-ci savent avoir besoin de la Turquie pour exporter leur pétrole, et c'est de Turquie qu'arrive la quasi-totalité de leurs importations», selon Sefi Tashan, spécialiste des relations internationales à l'université Bilkent d'Ankara.

MARC SEMO

Syrie

Sécuriser la frontière

En Irak, les intérêts de la Syrie ne correspondent pas à ceux de son allié stratégique iranien. Depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein, la Syrie est devenue le lieu de transit pour les candidats au jihad irakien venant du monde arabe. Le contrôle de la frontière syro-irakienne est donc un enjeu essentiel pour l'actuel gouvernement irakien et les Etats-Unis. Sans compter que nombre d'anciens cadres bassistes irakiens ont trouvé refuge à Damas, d'où ils financent la guérilla en Irak. Enfin, la Syrie a multiplié les contacts avec les représentants de la communauté et des tribus sunnites d'Irak. Un change-

ment d'attitude de la Syrie contribuerait certainement à une diminution de la violence en Irak, mais aurait un prix, notamment au Liban. Pour autant, il ne faut pas surestimer la capacité de la Syrie à contrôler ses frontières, ni sous-estimer les risques d'un retour de boomerang jihadiste sur le régime syrien.

C.A.

Arabie Saoudite

Défendre les sunnites

Riyad se pose en défenseur des sunnites d'Irak face au nouveau pouvoir chiïte en Irak. A un autre niveau, c'est en Arabie Saoudite qu'Al-Qaeda recrute la majorité des candidats aux attentats suicides anti-chiïtes en Irak et récolte ses financements. Une diminution de la violence pourrait accélérer le retour des jihadistes vers le Royaume et déstabiliser la monarchie saoudienne. Pour l'instant, Bagdad et Riyad s'accusent de ne pas coopérer dans la lutte antiterroriste. ◆

C.A.



En Iran, échos de la guerre civile voisine

Des chiites qui ont fui Bagdad pour Qom racontent la peur et les morts.

Qom (Iran) envoi spécial

Même si le gouvernement irakien ne veut toujours pas le reconnaître, Bagdad a bel et bien sombré dans la guerre civile. «On ne le dit pas, mais elle a déjà commencé. Pas seulement à Bagdad, mais dans tout l'Irak. Il suffit de s'appeler Hassan, Hossein, Ali ou Jaafar pour que l'on te tue», explique Ali Jaber, 50 ans, un commerçant qui vit à Abou Tchir, un faubourg chiite, à la limite du grand quartier de Ad-Doura, dans le sud de la capitale. Il sait de quoi il parle: ses deux frères, Morteza et Khadder Hossein, ont été assassinés dernièrement dans le souk de Charjaa, en plein cœur de la ville. «Par deux hommes masqués qui ont tiré sur eux à bout portant et se sont enfuis», raconte-t-il, en pleurant. Deux de ses cousins ont connu un sort analogue. C'est ce qui explique notamment qu'il soit venu avec sa famille se réfugier pendant quelques semaines à Qom, l'une des grandes villes saintes iraniennes. Le prétexte invoqué est un pèlerinage qui le conduira ensuite à Mechhed, l'autre grand sanctuaire du chiisme en Iran. «C'est vrai, on vient aussi en Iran pour être un moment tranquille», reconnaît-il.

Centres d'accueil

Les autorités iraniennes ne sont pas dupes. A Qom, elles permettent à ces exilés temporaires, qui arrivent par centaines, de séjourner dans un centre d'accueil pendant plu-

sieurs semaines. Celui-ci est placé sous la responsabilité directe du «bureau» du Guide suprême de la révolution islamique, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Les Irakiens ont la possibilité de dormir, de se laver et de faire la cuisine. Le vendredi, ils y reçoivent de la nourriture. Pas davantage. Sans doute pour ne pas que leur séjour se pérennise.

Selon tous les témoignages des «pèlerins», le quotidien des habitants de Bagdad est devenu terrible. Ainsi, Ali Jaber affirme qu'il n'y a plus de chiites dans le quartier d'Ad-Doura, où ils étaient minoritaires. Toutes les familles chiites ont dû en partir sous peine d'être massacrées. Désormais, le quartier est entièrement contrôlé par les milices de Majid Jabouri, un leader sunnite dont la famille est traditionnellement liée au clan de Saddam Hussein. Selon ce commerçant, l'épuration communautaire se poursuit actuellement dans d'autres quartiers mixtes: Jamaa, Adel, Saïdiya, Soueb... «Les sunnites dressent de faux barrages pour arrêter les chiites. Après, ils leur coupent la tête. Mais ils ne font pas que les tuer. Ils les torturent aussi. Des fois, ils remplacent la tête de la victime par celle d'un chien [animal considéré par l'islam comme impur, ndlr], ou alors ils la cousent dans son ventre.» Selon un autre témoignage, provenant d'un autre endroit de Bagdad, il est arrivé que l'on couse dans le corps d'un père la tête de son propre fils. Ali Jaber accuse le puissant

Conseil des oulémas, la principale association religieuse sunnite, de cautionner ces violences: «Il encourage les sunnites à tuer tous les chiites.» Le président de cette organisation, cheikh Hareth ad-Dari, a d'ailleurs fait l'objet, le 16 novembre, d'un mandat d'arrêt, annulé depuis par le chef du gouvernement, le chiite Nouri al-Maliki.

«Même quand la police découvre des explosifs dans le coffre d'une voiture, elle a peur d'en arrêter les occupants.»

Samir Hachem, commerçant de Bagdad

qu'elle revendait ensuite», raconte Samir Hachem. Pour lui aussi, la seule protection possible vient des deux principales milices chiites, l'Armée du Mehdi, du jeune

chef radical Moqtada al-Sadr, et les brigades Al-Badr, le bras armé de l'Assemblée suprême de la révolution islamique en

L'Etat impuissant

Dans son quartier d'Abou Tchir, le commerçant vit sous la protection des milices chiites. Mais c'est une sécurité

relative en raison des attentats à la voiture piégée qui visent les marchés et des roquettes tirées depuis Ad-Doura par les hommes de Majid Jabouri.

Autre commerçant, plus jeune d'une dizaine d'années, Samir Hachem vit dans la grande banlieue chiite de Sadr City. Il a été témoin des attentats à la voiture piégée qui ont tué plus de 200 personnes le 23 novembre dans ce quartier. «La police irakienne voit les gens

mourir devant ses yeux mais ne peut rien faire. Même quand elle découvre des explosifs dans le coffre d'une voiture, elle a peur d'en arrêter les occupants», assure-t-il.

Pareille impuissance est reprochée aussi à Nouri al-Maliki, le chef du gouvernement, dont ils préféreraient le prédécesseur, Ibrahim Jaafari, encore plus complaisant à l'égard des milices chiites – et plus lié à Téhéran.

Milices «protectrices»

Malgré tout, à la différence de nombre de quartiers, les écoles de Sadr City continuent de fonctionner sous la sur-

veillance de la police. Mais chaque famille se doit d'amener, puis de revenir chercher, les écoliers tant la peur des kidnappings est grande. «Si la famille ne peut pas payer, l'enfant est tué immédiatement. Il y a quelques jours, on a arrêté une bande spécialisée dans l'enlèvement des jeunes filles

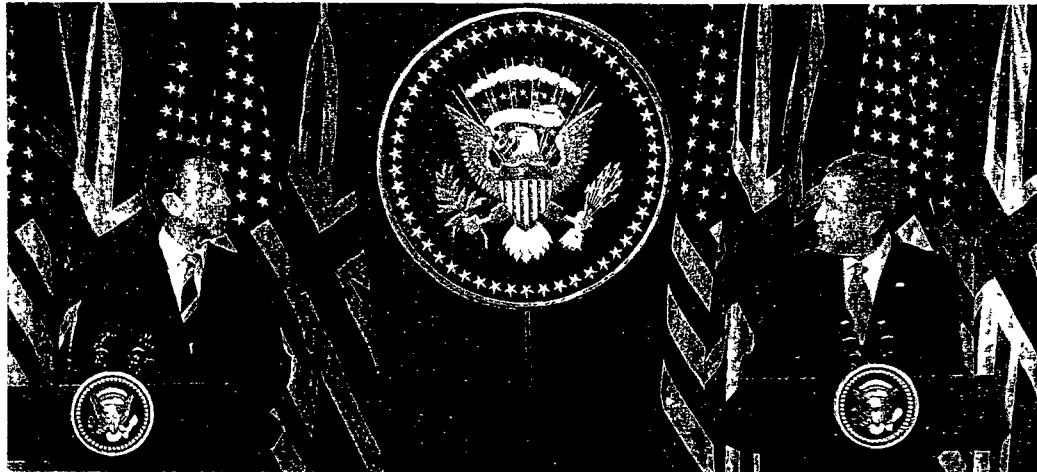
Irak (Asrii), deux formations liées à l'Iran. Il accepte de reconnaître du bout des lèvres que ces milices chiites se livrent aussi à de graves exactions contre les sunnites, et qu'elles contribuent à entraîner le pays dans sa descente aux enfers. «Si elles le font, c'est parce qu'elles sont obligées de répliquer, car c'est contraire à la doctrine chiite. Sans elles, les sunnites auraient déjà tué tous les chiites d'Irak. Grâce à elles, le peuple a une armée», insiste-t-il.

Décus des Américains

Malgré la course sans fin à la violence, Samir Hachem et Ali Jaber déclarent souhaiter le départ des troupes américaines. «Tout ce qu'elles font, c'est regarder les gens s'entre-tuer en se croisant les bras. Nous, nous leur avions souhaité bienvenue quand elles sont entrées en Irak, mais elles n'ont pas tenu leurs promesses», déclare le premier. Mais la guerre civile ne risque-t-elle pas de s'aggraver en cas de départ des soldats américains? «S'ils s'en vont, je pense que les dirigeants religieux chiites et sunnites peuvent arriver à se mettre d'accord entre eux», répond Ali Jaber. Sans grande conviction. ◀

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Irak : Bush et Blair cherchent la réponse à Baker



En présence de Tony Blair, le président américain a répété, hier, son vieux discours sur « les radicaux qui utilisent le terrorisme pour stopper la progression de la démocratie. » Stefan Zaklin/Sipa

Il est peu probable que Bush accepte la stratégie de sortie qui lui est proposée.

De notre correspondant à Washington

MALGRÉ toutes leurs précautions, les membres du Groupe d'étude sur l'Irak (ISG), coprésidé par James Baker et Lee Hamilton, se sont peut-être brûlé les doigts sur l'Irak. Les solutions qu'ils proposent, détaillées dans leur rapport de 142 pages publié mercredi, sont loin de susciter le mouvement de réconciliation nationale qu'ils espéraient. Et il est douteux qu'elles soient mises en œuvre dans leur ensemble par la Maison-Blanche.

Les cinq démocrates et cinq républicains de la commission indépendante ont recherché le consensus, adoptant leurs 79 recommandations à l'unanimité. « C'est le seul conseil bipartisan que vous aurez », a dit Lee Hamilton à George W. Bush. Ils ont essayé d'éviter tout règlement de comptes, traçant « une voie pour aller de l'avant » sans ressasser les vieilles questions sur les justifications de la guerre ou les erreurs commises dans sa conduite. Ils ont tâché de trouver une voie médiane entre un départ précipité et un engagement indéfini. Ils ont suggéré d'élargir l'effort diplomatique à l'ensemble de la région, pour apporter une réponse politique à un conflit « dont la solution ne sera pas militaire ». Efforts louables, mais pour l'essentiel infructueux : quelle que soit l'intention des auteurs, le rapport expose

la faillite de la politique actuelle ; en voulant couvrir tout l'éventail des problèmes, il permet à chacun de choisir ce qui l'arrange ; et sa philosophie même risque d'être rejetée par l'Administration.

Mettre à plat la stratégie américaine en Irak, c'est rédiger un acte d'accusation. À travers ses recommandations, le rapport Baker-Hamilton dresse l'inventaire de ce qui aurait dû être fait, de ce qui a été fait de travers et de ce qui ne peut plus attendre. On y découvre que, sur les mille employés de l'ambassade américaine à Bagdad, six parlent couramment l'arabe.

Les « sages » y lancent des idées nouvelles, comme celle d'un « groupe de soutien international », impliquant d'inverser trois ans de cavalier seul américain. Ils prônent une « offensive diplomatique globale » au Proche-Orient à laquelle résistent depuis longtemps la Maison-Blanche et le départe-

ment d'État. Ils introduisent un critère de conditionnalité dans la poursuite de l'aide américaine à Bagdad, principe dont Bush se méfie. Ils pressent l'Administration de définir avec clarté ses objectifs, sur le maintien de bases permanentes ou le contrôle des ressources pétrolières.

Réconciliation hors d'atteinte

C'est une révolution culturelle qui est demandée au locataire de la Maison-Blanche, invité à faire entrer l'Irak et la Syrie dans le jeu en dialoguant directement avec eux, contrairement à la ligne qu'il a fixée. Celle-ci a peu de chances de changer : le porte-parole du président, Tony Snow, n'a pas écarté des rencontres dans le cadre du « groupe de soutien », s'il voit le jour, mais un face-à-face Washington-Téhéran demeure « exclu tant que l'Iran n'a pas suspendu de façon vérifiable ses activi-

tés d'enrichissement » d'uranium.

De même, George Bush semble peu enclin à faire pression sur Israël pour négocier des accords de paix avec « tous ses voisins », dont certains régimes sont jugés infréquentables. Enfin, le salut qu'attendent James Baker et Lee Hamilton de la communauté internationale n'est pas garanti : qu'espérer d'un « groupe de soutien » associant des voisins mal intentionnés et des Européens réticents ?

L'impact du rapport risque d'être plus ressenti à Washington qu'à Bagdad. George Bush est libre d'y puiser des idées, mais la révision interne amorcée par son administration lui permettra d'écartier ce qui le dérange. Pour inspirer une nouvelle politique, il faudrait une pression collective du Congrès. Or, la réconciliation nationale espérée n'est pas en vue. Les élus ont pris dans le document

ce qui les arrangeait, mais aucun ne s'est engagé à l'appliquer tel quel. Nancy Pelosi, chef de la prochaine majorité démocrate, a applaudi au « constat d'échec de la politique de Bush ». Joseph Biden, sénateur démocrate aux ambitions présidentielles, a estimé que c'était « un pas en avant insuffisant pour quitter l'Irak sans laisser le chaos ». John McCain, probable candidat républicain en 2008, a rejeté toute « limitation de durée » au déploiement militaire et jugé « tenu, au mieux », le lien entre l'Irak et le conflit israélo-palestinien.

Les experts ne sont pas en reste. Si Richard Haas, président du Council on Foreign Relations, salue « la meilleure chance de progresser », pour Anthony Cordes-

Le rapport du Groupe d'étude sur l'Irak en quelques phrases clés

■ Le rapport Baker recèle quelques phrases appelées à nourrir le débat, dont celles-ci, relevées hier par la presse américaine : « Il n'y a pas de formule magique pour résoudre les problèmes de l'Irak. » « La situation en Irak est grave et se détériore. » « C'est une guerre longue et coûteuse. » « Il n'y a pas de chemin garantissant le succès, même si les perspectives peuvent être améliorées. » « Un glissement vers le chaos pourrait entraîner l'effondrement

du gouvernement irakien et une catastrophe humanitaire. Les pays voisins pourraient intervenir. » « Des affrontements entre sunnites et chiïtes pourraient se propager et al-Qaïda pourrait remporter une victoire de propagande. » « La position mondiale des États-Unis pourrait se retrouver diminuée. » « Si le gouvernement irakien ne fait pas des progrès substantiels (...), les États-Unis devraient réduire leur soutien. » « Les États-Unis devraient discuter directe-

ment avec l'Irak et la Syrie pour essayer d'obtenir leur engagement à mener des politiques constructives à l'égard de l'Irak et d'autres problèmes régionaux. » « Les États-Unis doivent accomplir des efforts réels pour dialoguer avec toutes les parties en Irak à l'exception d'al-Qaïda. » « Les États-Unis ne peuvent pas atteindre leurs objectifs au Proche-Orient s'ils ne s'occupent pas directement du conflit israélo-palestinien. »

man, expert du Centre d'études stratégiques (CSIS), « attendre qu'un gouvernement irakien faible et divisé agisse contre les forces qui déchirent le pays est inepte : c'est le triomphe de l'espoir sur l'expérience ». Danielle Pletka, vice-présidente de l'American Enterprise Institute, refuge des néoconservateurs, se dit « stupéfaite par la superficialité » du rapport, dont les « recommandations sont simplistes, fondées sur des hypothèses fausses » et des « clichés éculés ». William Kristol, éditeur du *Weekly Standard*, dénonce « une reddition déguisée ». Le fond du débat est là : le rapport Baker-Hamilton ne propose rien d'autre qu'une stratégie de sortie. Les mots « victoire » ou « démocratisation » n'y figurent pratiquement pas. Un tel renoncement n'est pas encore officiel.

PHILIPPE GÉLIE

L'embarras des autorités irakiennes

■ Face à un diagnostic sans la moindre complaisance, les autorités irakiennes réagissent avec une satisfaction tout officielle, qui cache mal leur frustration. « Le rapport Baker correspond aux vues du gouvernement, selon lesquelles la sécurité doit être transférée aux Irakiens », se félicite le vice-premier ministre, Barham Salih, qui veut privilégier les aspects à ses yeux positifs du document, comme le désengagement progressif des troupes américaines d'Irak ou les craintes de voir al-Qaïda « remporter une victoire de propagande », si la lutte antiterroriste était relâchée.

Pour les alliés irakiens de Washington, ce rapport contient, en effet, des recommandations embarrassantes : en particulier, la menace de « réduire » l'appui américain au gouvernement Maliki, s'il ne réalise pas « des progrès

substantiels vers des objectifs de réconciliation nationale, de sécurité et de gouvernance ».

« C'est injuste », estime le député Mahmoud Othman, pour qui « la puissance occupante américaine est responsable du pays ». La mise en garde de Baker rappelle l'avertissement lancé la semaine dernière par George Bush au premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, qui se serait vu offrir « une dernière chance » lors de sa rencontre en Jordanie avec le président américain. Pour calmer l'impatience de Washington, Maliki a annoncé la tenue d'une conférence de réconciliation en décembre à Bagdad. Les Kurdes, associés également au pouvoir en Irak, expriment des réticences sur l'appel en faveur de la préservation d'un État central fort, garant d'un partage équitable de la manne pétrolière, selon Baker, mais incompatible

avec leurs aspirations sécessionnistes.

Si la minorité sunnite, de son côté, approuve le bilan désastreux dressé par la commission américaine, elle critique, en revanche, l'absence de calendrier fixé pour un retrait des troupes étrangères, sa principale revendication avant d'envisager une plus grande implication dans le jeu politique local. Les sunnites comptent poursuivre la mobilisation des pays arabes en leur faveur. Face à ces manœuvres, Kurdes et chiites vont tout faire pour convaincre Bush de prendre ses distances vis-à-vis d'un texte qui jette une lumière crue sur leur administration de l'Irak. D'où le voyage aux États-Unis du leader chiite Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, qui vient d'être reçu à la Maison-Blanche par George Bush.

G M

Israël rejette le rapport Baker, la Syrie l'apprécie

Le premier ministre israélien n'envisage pas de négociations prochaines avec la Syrie

Le premier ministre israélien Ehoud Olmert a marqué son désaccord, hier, sur le lien entre la guerre en Irak et le conflit israélo-palestinien établi par une commission américaine coprésidée par l'ancien secrétaire d'État James Baker. Parmi les 79 recommandations contenues dans un rapport remis avant-hier au président George W. Bush, figure en effet celle d'« un engagement renouvelé et permanent des États-Unis envers une solution globale de paix » au Proche-Orient.

« Cet engagement doit comprendre des discussions directes avec et entre Israël, le Liban, les Palestiniens – ceux qui acceptent le droit à l'existence d'Israël – et la Syrie », précise le rapport Baker, qui se prononce pour une conférence internationale sur le modèle de celle de Madrid qui avait conduit aux accords d'Oslo entre Israël et les Palestiniens en 1993.

Pour obtenir un accord de paix global dans la région, Washington devrait par ailleurs presser Israël de restituer le plateau du Golan en échange d'un arrêt du soutien de Damas aux groupes radicaux palestiniens et libanais et des ingérences au Liban, ajoute le document. Les États-Unis devraient offrir des garanties de sécurité à Israël, y compris en proposant le déploiement à la frontière d'une force internationale, à laquelle ils pourraient participer.

« Le rapport ne reflète pas la position des États-Unis mais une opinion aux États-Unis », a réagi hier Ehoud Olmert. C'est avant tout une affaire intérieure américaine.

Le fait que la Syrie tente de déstabiliser le pouvoir au Liban et soutienne le Hamas prouve qu'il y a peu de chance de pouvoir entamer des négociations avec ce pays dans un proche avenir », a-t-il précisé.

« Ce rapport est avant tout une affaire intérieure américaine. »

À Damas, un responsable du ministère des affaires étrangères a en revanche qualifié de « positif » et « objectif » le rapport Baker. De son côté, le ministre iranien des affaires étrangères Manouchehr Mottaki a estimé que le retrait américain d'Irak ne nécessitait pas un dialogue avec Téhéran.

Aux États-Unis, deux sortes de critiques étaient exprimées hier envers le rapport Baker. Des membres influents du Congrès, notamment Joseph Biden et Tom Lantos, qui présideront à partir de janvier respectivement la commission des affaires étrangères du Sénat et celle de la chambre des représentants, ont dénoncé

le lien établi entre l'Irak et le Proche-Orient. Des experts militaires ont jugé irréaliste le délai de quinze mois laissé à l'armée irakienne pour pouvoir garantir la sécurité du pays. Quant au sénateur républicain John McCain, candidat probable à la Maison-Blanche en 2008, il a estimé que

les troupes américaines devraient être renforcées sur le long terme.

J.-C. P.
(avec AFP)



Turkey and the European Union

The ever lengthening road

ISTANBUL

The obstacles in the way of Turkey's membership of the European Union get ever more daunting

FIRST they tied our arms, now they are going to tie our legs." The words of a top Turkish official sum up the gloom in Ankara as European Union leaders prepare for next week's summit in Brussels, where they will once again argue over Turkey. Whatever the outcome, Turkey's prospects of being the EU's first mainly Muslim member have never seemed so bleak.

Turkey's long-delayed membership talks opened almost 15 months ago amid much fanfare. "Hello Europe" read one newspaper headline. But the talks soon ran into trouble over Turkey's rejection of the EU's demand that it fulfil its legal obligation to open its ports and airports to traffic from Cyprus (ie, the internationally recognised Greek-Cypriot republic). The Turks rebuffed a deadline of December 6th, insisting that they will not give way until the Europeans fulfil their own promise to end the trade embargo on Turkish northern Cyprus.

The European Commission has proposed the suspension of eight of the 35 chapters in the membership talks. This week the French president, Jacques Chirac, and the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, endorsed this plan, and also called for a full review of Turkey's progress in early 2009. "We don't want to set any kind of ultimatums," said Ms Merkel, who wants Turkey to accept a "privileged partnership", not full membership. "But we want

the commission to say to us what has been achieved and how we could proceed."

Late into the week, negotiations continued under the Finnish EU presidency. A Turkish offer to open one port and one airport to Cyprus seems unlikely to work as it is clearly dependent on a reciprocal offer by the Greek-Cypriots. If no compromise is found, little progress will be made. Rela-

tions will worsen if Nicolas Sarkozy becomes France's president next spring: unlike Mr Chirac, he is fiercely against Turkish membership.

Turkey's hopes are now pinned on the Americans. President Bush is expected to embark on a round of telephone diplomacy this week. He may secure a reduction in the number of frozen chapters. But regardless of their number, suspended chapters can be reopened only with the unanimous approval of all EU members. This "leaves the door open for them to impose further intolerable conditions on us," comments the top Turkish official.

Most Turks believe that Turkey's detractors simply do not want a large, Muslim country in their midst. Their aim is to wear down Turkey's resistance and induce it to walk away. Yet the mildly Islamist prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, says he will not fall into that trap. "Forcing Turkey to abandon the [negotiating] table would be a dreadful mistake; Europe, not Turkey would stand to lose," he said this week. He

added that Turkey would pursue its membership goal with determination and, moreover, that it had a plan B and C.

Nobody seems to know what such plans might entail, but government sources hint that consultations with the EU over, say, Afghanistan and Iraq, or on drugs and human trafficking, may be slowed down. Instead Turkey will try to repair relations with America that remain fraught over Iraq, especially over the increasingly autonomous Kurds in northern Iraq. It will also build up its role in the Middle East, the Caucasus and the oil-rich former Soviet central Asian countries.

Cocking a snook at the Europeans could help Mr Erdogan's AK party to win votes in parliamentary elections due next

November. Public support for the EU has already dropped to well below 50%, down from highs of 80% or more two years ago. Mr Erdogan will also take heart from the economy, which has grown by an annual average of 7% since 2001, four times as fast as the EU's. The markets seem unfazed by the rows over EU membership; the Turkish lira rose against the dollar this week.

But economic progress hinges on whether Mr Erdogan sticks with his IMF-imposed reforms. It may also depend on whether he decides to become president when the incumbent, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, retires in May. Turkey's militantly secular generals recoil at the thought of both the presidency and the government being run by Islamists. How far they might go to stop this remains a vexing question. The EU membership talks have provided the most effective rein on the generals so far.

Just as ominously, Mr Erdogan's claim that he will continue with political reforms, regardless of what happens over the EU, is beginning to look shaky. Article 301 of the penal code, under which Orhan

Pamuk, Turkey's best-known novelist, was prosecuted last year, remains on the books. Human-rights abuses against the country's 14m Kurds have been curbed but by no means stopped altogether.

Meanwhile, Mr Erdogan's tired assertion that rejecting Turkey would provoke a "clash of civilisations" by sending a message to the Muslim world that the EU is a Christian club, is exaggerated. "Turkey has no real connection to the Arab world, so whether Turkey gets into Europe or not doesn't really matter to the ordinary guy in Amman or Riyadh," says Yusuf Al Sharif, a Palestinian commentator. "There isn't even an Arab cultural centre in Turkey." Mr Erdogan's overtures to Iran and Syria (he visited both countries this week) have less to do with Muslim solidarity than with a

common desire shared by all three to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq.

In short, both sides in this dispute need to regain some perspective. Turkey is right to feel cheated over Cyprus (the Greek-Cypriots won EU membership even though they voted in April 2004 against the UN's Annan plan to reunite the island, whereas the Turkish-Cypriots remain isolated even though they voted in favour). But it must also show that it is sincere about pursuing EU-inspired reforms. If the EU is to regain its moral authority with the millions of Turks who long to have a full-blown modern democracy, it needs to prove that membership of its club is not only the best way to achieve that goal—but also one that is still genuinely on offer. ■

Iraqis near a draft law on dividing oil revenue

Measure, if passed, could help narrow political divisions

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: A group of Iraqi politicians and ministers is close to finishing a draft of a national oil law that, if enacted, would be the most significant legislation passed by the government so far and help narrow some of the country's major political schisms, Iraqi and American officials say.

The officials said the authors have reached agreement on one of the most divisive issues in Iraq: How revenues from the oil industry should be distributed. The working draft calls for the central government in Baghdad to collect oil revenues and distribute them to provinces or regions based on population, the officials say. The measure could calm some Sunni Arabs who oppose regional autonomy because of fears that Sunnis would be excluded from a fair share of oil wealth, which is concentrated in Shiite and Kurdish regions.

The law could also encourage foreign investment in the oil industry, although security would remain a major concern for companies operating outside the relatively safe region of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The national oil law lies at the heart of debates about the future of Iraq, particularly the issue of having a strong central government or robust regional governments. The question of oil has also exacerbated sectarian tensions, because of the worries of Sunni Arabs, who are leading the insurgency, over the potentially lopsided distribution of oil wealth.

General George W. Casey Jr., the senior American commander here, and Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador, have urged Iraqi politicians to put the oil law at the top of their agendas, saying it must be passed before the year's end.

The report released this week by the Iraq Study Group said an equitable oil law was a necessary cornerstone to the process of national reconciliation, and thus to ending the war.

A final sticking point over approval of oil contracts remains, so there is a chance that parts of the working draft could be scrapped. But a deal could be reached within days, according to officials involved in the writing. The law would then go to the cabinet and Parliament for approval.

The Kurds, who already have an autonomous region in the north, had put up a fight to have regional governments collect and redistribute oil revenues, particularly ones from oil fields yet to be exploited. They had also proposed that revenues be shared among the regions based on both population and crimes committed against people under Saddam Hussein's rule. That would give the Kurds and Shiites a share of the oil wealth larger than the proportions of their populations.

But the Kurds on the drafting committee have shelved those demands, said Barham Salih, a deputy prime minister who is a Kurd and chairman of the committee.

"Revenue sharing is an accepted principle by all the constituent elements of the Iraqi government, including the Kurds, and that is the unifying element that we're all hoping for in the oil law," Salih said in an interview.

An American official here who has tracked the negotiations said the Kurds were willing to make concessions because a national oil law could attract more foreign oil companies to exploration and development in Kurdistan. A large foreign oil company would have more confidence in signing a contract with the Kurds if the company were to operate under the law of a sovereign country rather than just the law of an autonomous region, the official said on the condition of anonymity.

Furthermore, the official said, some Kurdish leaders believe that the concessions are a worthwhile price to pay for having a stake in the much larger revenue pool of the entire country's oil industry. The southern fields of Basra accounted for 85 percent of total Iraqi crude production last year, partly because northern production was hampered by insurgent sabotage. The south has an estimated 65 percent of the country's 115 billion barrels of proven reserves.

But the Kurds are still holding out on the issue of oil contracts. They insist that the central government should not have final approval over contracts signed by the regions to develop future oil fields, American and Iraqi officials said. The Kurds, who have recently discovered two new fields in the north after signing exploration contracts with a Turkish company and a Norwegian company, argue that the Constitution guarantees the regions absolute rights over such contracts.

"There are those among us who say we cannot go back to the former days of centralization, which were not conducive to good business practice and to the idea of federalism that is enshrined in the Constitution," Salih said.

Officials met Thursday night to try to resolve the issue, but could not reach an agreement. The committee includes politicians and ministers representing the major Shiite, Sunni Arab and Kurdish blocs in government.

A possible compromise floated by the Kurds is to allow a proposed body called the Federal Petroleum Council, whose mission would be to set oil policy, to reject a regional contract only if it can muster a two-thirds vote, and only if the contract does not meet very specific criteria.

"The Kurds are afraid that if they left the contracting up to the central government rather than themselves, the center might defer contracts," said the American who is tracking the law. "For example, the government might find it easier to contract for production in the south or develop only the fields there."

As for revenue distribution by population, the American official said a national census expected to be taken next year should determine the share of revenue that goes to each province or region. But the proposed census and any talk of demographics are volatile issues here — Sunni Arabs often claim they are at least 60 percent of the population, not the 20 percent that is often cited, and so have the right to rule over the Shiites and Kurds. The Shiites are generally estimated to be 60 percent of the population, and the Kurds 20 percent.

If doing a census next year is too politically fraught, or if security conditions prevent it, then revenue percentage could be determined by the household counts recorded in rolls used by Saddam Hussein's government to distribute rations in the 1990s.



Thanassis Cambanis/The Boston Globe

Two forensic experts, Michael Trimble, left, and Greg Kehoe, inspecting a mass grave in Nitra, Iraq. U.S. experts have given chilling testimony at the trial of Saddam Hussein.

Accounts of atrocities aired at Saddam's trial

Children were herded into mass graves

By John F. Burns

BAGHDAD: It has been the most chilling testimony in the 14 months since Saddam Hussein and his associates first went on trial: an account of how Iraqi death squads took 301 victims to remote desert sites in the late 1980s, herded them into pits dug by power shovels and gunned them down.

Among the victims, the court has been told, nearly 80 percent were women and children, with 90 percent of the children 13 years old or younger.

After two years' forensic work, American experts were in court last week to detail findings from three mass grave sites dating from Saddam's so-called Anfal military campaign against Iraqi Kurds. The sites were chosen from more than 200 mass graves identified since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the experts said what they found there, and in other graves, revealed "the same pattern over and over again," of a systematic program to carry out mass killings quickly, efficiently and in secret.

The testimony seems likely to stand as the closest any account will get to the final torment suffered by many of the 180,000 Kurds prosecutors say were killed in the campaign. Moreover, with the experts' reliance on computer-aided analytical tools and graphics available only in recent years, their evidence may constitute the most complete narrative any court has heard of how mass killings on the scale commit-

ted in Iraq have been carried out.

As he has at other moments when the court heard accounts of atrocities against civilians, Saddam listened impassively, showing little more than a bookkeeper's interest. The former Iraqi leader, who is 69, took copious notes and offered only brief, mostly matter-of-fact comments. At one point, he demanded to know the precise geographic coordinates of the exhumed graves, and their proximity to main roads. He added that the court should not take his interest in the details as an acknowledgment that he or his co-defendants "had anything to do" with the killings.

At no point did he express remorse or pity. If his mind was on violent death, his remarks suggested that it might have been in anticipation of his own, as much as because of what had happened to the Kurds. On Nov. 7, Saddam and two associates were sentenced to death in another case, involving the execution of 148 men and boys from the Shiite town of Dujail, north of Baghdad. Testimony in that case ended last summer as the Anfal case began.

The Dujail sentences are subject to an automatic appeal, scheduled to begin Monday before the nine-judge appeal bench of the Iraqi High Tribunal, the court trying Saddam. If the sentence against Saddam is upheld, he could go to the gallows sometime between mid-January and mid-March, even before a verdict in the Anfal trial, according to Iraqi court officials, who have held doggedly to three or four sessions of the Anfal trial each week despite the inten-

sifying sectarian violence that has shaken Iraq in recent weeks.

Parts of the forensic experts' story had been told before, on visits by reporters to the grave sites, and to the American-run forensics laboratory at Baghdad Airport, where the mass graves team did much of its work. But this was the first time that the men accused of directing the killings — Saddam and six co-defendants, including Ali Hasan al-Majid, known among Iraqis as Chemical Ali for his role in chemical weapons attacks against the Kurds — had been confronted in open court with details of what happened at the mass graves.

The principal forensic witness was Michael Trimble, a 53-year-old forensic archaeologist from St. Louis, Missouri, temporarily assigned to the court from the Army Corps of Engineers. He told of finding tangled piles of victims, many with eyes blindfolded and wrists bound and roped together chain-gang style; of one mother lying dead with her right hand clutching a baby in a blanket who, like the mother, had been killed with a single pistol shot to the head; and of another mother with the bones of an unborn child that remained folded in her dress as her body decomposed.

Trimble, director of an international mass graves team, described other features of the killings: how men were separated from women and children before being herded in groups into the wedge-shaped pits; how some victims were forced to squat beside the graves while awaiting pistol shots to the back of the head; how others, standing in the pits, including girls as young as 5, were raked with automatic fire that had some raising arms and hands defensively, then "twisting and turning and trying to get away."

Trimble gave figures indicating that at one mass grave, south of Samawa in Iraq's southern desert, more than 600 automatic rifle rounds had been used to kill 114 victims, 85 of them children, and that 12 of the dead had been struck by between 13 and 22 bullets each.

At two mass graves near Hatra, southwest of Mosul, he said, a quarter of the 25 women killed and a similar proportion of the 98 children who died suffered no gunshot wounds, suggesting, though Trimble did not say so, that some may have been buried alive.

Among both adults and children at the Samawa site, he said, the largest number of bullets struck the victims' legs, along with other strikes that shattered their skulls, spines, ribs, arms and hands.

Trimble said the ballistic evidence conformed with something seen at mass grave sites elsewhere in the world, that the killers often squat and fire first at the victims' legs. "And there's a reason," he said. "When you shoot people in the legs, and bring them down, it's much easier to dispatch them."

Saddam's lawyers have dismissed the prosecution case, saying that what happened to the Kurds occurred while Iraq was fighting an eight-year war with Iran, and that actions against the Kurds were justified by Kurdish support for Iran.

Annan describes Iraq as being in a civil war

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations said Sunday that Iraq had descended into a civil war that was even deadlier and more anarchic than the 15-year sectarian bloodshed that tore Lebanon apart.

"When we had the strife in Lebanon and other places, we called that a civil war. This is much worse," Annan said in an interview with the BBC.

Annan joined a growing number of foreign and Iraqi leaders, policy makers and news organizations who have said that Iraq is in the grip of civil war. Colin Powell, President George W. Bush's first secretary of state, said last week at a conference in the United Arab Emirates that Iraq was in a civil war. A former Iraqi prime minister, Ayad Allawi, said the same thing in March.

The Bush administration continues to deny there is a civil war. But the Iraq conflict meets the common scholarly definition: armed groups from the same country are fighting for control of the political center, control of a separatist state or to force a major change in policy.

On Nov. 27, Annan warned that when it came to civil war in Iraq, "we are almost there."

The debate over the term "civil war" erupted more fiercely last week in the United States, after NBC and other major news organizations said they were ready to apply it to Iraq. The discussion is highly political because supporters of the war fear that calling the Iraq strife a civil war would further erode support among Americans, even though polls show that a vast majority already consider this a civil war.

In Baghdad, meanwhile, President Jalal Talabani rejected a call by Annan for an international conference to reach a solution to the widening sectarian

war, saying the Iraqis were working to end the bloodshed themselves.

Annan suggested last week that an international conference that included all of Iraq's major political groups and representatives from around the region could help end the fighting.

"We have an ongoing political process and a Council of Representatives that is the best in the region," Talabani said Sunday in a written statement, using the formal name of the Iraqi Parliament. "We became an independent sovereign state and we decide the issues of the country."

Talabani's stand on the issue contradicts not only Annan, but also the recommendation by a growing number of American policy makers that the United States and Iraq should hold a conference that would bring together all the countries in the region to try to re-establish stability in Iraq. Such a meeting might include Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia, all of which have been accused by various American and Iraqi leaders of fomenting violence here.

The Iraq Study Group headed by James Baker is expected to recommend this week that the United States open up diplomatic channels with Iran and Syria to discuss their roles. That suggestion has been received coolly by the White House, where some senior officials said opening talks with those two countries would in itself be a major concession to their authoritarian, anti-American governments.

On Saturday, a powerful Shiite leader, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, also rejected Annan's call for a conference. Hakim has chafed at the idea that countries in the region dominated by Sunni Arabs could get more involved in Iraq. Hakim comes from a prominent religious family and has close ties to Iran. He was scheduled to meet with Bush in Washington this week to discuss the deterioration of the

government of the prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

Like virtually all Kurds, Talabani is wary of interference here by Turkey, which has warned that it will invade the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan if the Kurds make any move toward independence or try to take control of the oil city of Kirkuk.

Talabani's office released the president's statements after he met in the morning with Representative Christopher Shays, the Republican from Connecticut who is advocating a timetable for withdrawing American troops. Like Annan, Shays is also pushing to convene a conference of Iraq's neighbors.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military said Sunday that its forces killed two women, one child and six insurgents on Saturday in assaults on two buildings in the town of Garma in Anbar Province. The women and child were killed with five of the insurgents during an air strike on one house, the military said.

The U.S. military announced eight deaths of service people on Sunday. Two soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb while on patrol in Anbar on Saturday and three marines died the same day in Anbar from combat wounds. Another soldier was killed Saturday by a roadside bomb near Taji. A soldier died in combat in Baghdad on Sunday. In addition, the air force said Major Troy Gilbert, a pilot listed as missing after his F-16 crashed last Monday in Anbar, had been killed in the incident.

In Baghdad, the police found at least 50 bodies across the city. One of them, Hideab Majhool Hasnawi, the head of a leading Iraqi soccer club, was identified in the morgue. He was abducted last Wednesday.

The head of the popular Talaba club and a member of the Iraqi Soccer Federation, Hasnawi was the latest in a number of sports figures, performers and professors who have been kidnapped and executed lately.

Khalid al-Ansary in Baghdad and Iraqi employees of The New York Times in Falluja, Mosul and Basra contributed reporting.

Report forces president to accept that Iraq policy isn't working

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg

WASHINGTON: In 142 devastatingly stark pages, stuffed with adjectives like "grave and deteriorating," "daunting," and "dire," the Iraq Study

News Analysis Group report is an impassioned plea for bipartisan consensus on the most divisive foreign policy issue of this generation. Only one person — President George W. Bush — can make that hap-

pen.

The commissioners — five Democrats and five Republicans — tried to be kind to Bush, adopting his language when they accepted the goal of an Iraq that can "govern, itself, sustain itself and defend itself."

But gone is the administration's talk of Iraq as a beacon of democracy in the Middle East. Gone is any talk of victory.

Instead, the report forces the president to accept the painful truth that cost Republicans control of Congress:

his policy in Iraq is not working, and it the American people do not support it. If Bush embraces the report's blueprint for changing course, he himself will have to reverse course — and meet Democrats more than halfway.

The study group, for instance, calls for direct engagement with Iran and Syria; so far, Bush has refused. While Bush has steadfastly resisted a timetable for withdrawal, the report says all combat brigades "not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq" — note

the careful use of the conditional, could — by the first quarter of 2008.

So while Bush called the report “an opportunity to come together and work together,” it was no surprise on Capitol Hill that Democrats were quicker to embrace it than Republicans, who seemed to be adopting a kind of wait-and-see posture, praising the report for its seriousness and depth as they searched for clues about just what Bush would do.

“In a sense,” said Dennis Ross, a Middle East envoy who worked for both President Bill Clinton and the first President Bush, “what you have here offers the Democrats a ready handle to show, ‘We’re prepared to be bipartisan on the issue of Iraq, because we’ll embrace the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

Are you prepared to be bipartisan as well?’ It’s an asymmetrical situation, because he has the policy, and he’s the one who has to change the policy.”

Bush has spent weeks trying to shape the political climate in which he would receive the report. He ordered up a Pentagon study, and commissioned his own White House review. He went to Amman to meet with the prime minister of Iraq, then returned to Washington to receive a powerful Iraqi Shiite leader at the White House.

Those moves have been aimed at giving Bush the flexibility he needs to do pretty much whatever he wants; the president himself has repeatedly said he would consider all advice. But, meeting with him in the Oval Office on Wednes-

day morning, the commissioners made a pointed appeal to Bush to give their study greater weight than the others, if only because it has the backing of both sides. “This is the only bipartisan advice you’re going to get,” the Democratic co-chairman of the panel, Lee Hamilton, told Bush, according to an account from the president’s press secretary, Tony Snow. Commissioners said afterward that the president — who later proclaimed the report “an opportunity to come together and work together” — seemed to absorb that plea.

“I don’t want to put too much in his mouth now,” said Lawrence Eagleburger, who was secretary of state under Bush’s father, “but there was not one bit of argument. He didn’t come back on us.”

U.S. panel calls the Iraq situation ‘grave’



James Baker 3rd, left, and Lee Hamilton, the co-chairmen of the bipartisan commission, on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

support of the Iraqi government.”

Bush has taken the opposite approach, commission members noted, and as recently as last week, he assured Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki that the U.S. commitment to Iraq would be undiminished until victory is achieved, and that he was not looking for a “graceful exit.”

But the commission headed by former Secretary of State James Baker 3rd and Lee Hamilton, a retired Democratic

member of congress from Indiana, made clear that while Americans will be in Iraq for years to come, the Iraqis must understand that the American military commitment is not “open ended.”

It is time, they concluded, to “begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly,” and they acknowledged that their detailed prescription of a far more aggressive diplomatic agenda in the Middle East, incentives for reconciliation and reform in Iraq and an overhaul of the U.S. military role may end in failure.

“The current approach is not working, and the ability of the United States to influence events is diminishing,” Hamilton said Wednesday morning at a news conference on Capitol Hill, after the panel presented its conclusions to Bush and leaders of Congress, and prepared to do the same with Iraqi leaders by video conference. “Our ship of state has hit rough waters. It must now chart a new way forward.”

The report was presented to Bush a day after the Senate Armed Services Committee unanimously recommended confirmation of Robert Gates to succeed one of the war’s main architects, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

While Washington is awash in advisory panels, what played out Wednesday, from the White House to Capitol Hill, was a remarkable condemnation of American policy drift in the biggest and most divisive military conflict to involve U.S. forces since Vietnam.

It was all the more unusual because Baker was the secretary of state to Bush’s father, and because the group itself, as its members noted repeatedly, came up with a strategy that was embraced by both parties.

In rebuke to Bush, report maps a troop pullback over 15 months

By David E. Sanger

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan commission warned Wednesday that “the situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating,” and handed President George W. Bush both a rebuke of his current strategy and a detailed blueprint for a fundamentally different approach, including the pullback of all U.S. combat brigades over the next 15 months.

In unusually sweeping and blunt language, the panel of 10 Republicans and Democrats issued 79 specific recommendations, including direct negotiations with Syria and Iran and a clear declaration to the weak and divided Iraqi government that if it does not “make substantial progress” on reconciliation and security in coming months, “the United States should reduce its political, military or economic

While the panel was careful to modulate its wording to avoid phrases and rigid timelines that would, in the words of one member "set off the president," it also clearly attempted to box him in, presenting its recommendations as a comprehensive strategy that would only work if implemented in full. That appeared to be a warning to Bush, who in recent days has said he would consider the independent panel's findings alongside studies by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council, suggesting he would pick the best elements of each of them.

It also abandoned the definition of "victory in Iraq" that Bush laid out as his own strategy a year ago, walking away, for example, from any short- or medium-term goal of turning Iraq into a democracy.

"We want to stay current," Hamilton said briskly when asked about that decision, and Baker defended the decision to ignore Bush's past statements and embrace his latest formulation of the mission in Iraq: to create a country that can defend itself, govern itself and sustain itself.

"That was the latest elaboration of the goal," Baker said, "and that's the one we're working with."

Their findings left Washington buzzing with speculation over whether Bush, who on Wednesday morning thanked the members for their work and, in a private meeting, did nothing to push back against their findings, would decide on a huge reversal in policy. To do so would mark an admission that three and a half years of strategy had failed, and that Bush's repeated assurances to the American people that "absolutely, we're winning" were based more on optimism than realism.

His national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, has said that the president would announce a major change of course in "weeks, not months," but given no hint how extensive it would be.

Democrats largely embraced the report. Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic leader, said the group had done "a tremendous and historic service" by saying "there must be a change in Iraq, and there is no time to lose."

But other Democrats were clearly disappointed that the commission did not embrace rapid withdrawal, as Representative John Murtha called for a year ago, or partition of the country, as Senator Joseph Biden, the Delaware Democrat soon to head the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has said is necessary.

Bush can easily embrace some of the findings, including a call for a five-fold increase in imbedded American trainers in the Iraqi forces, which the panel said should happen down to the level of companies of Iraqi military. The committee rejected a more strict timeline for withdrawal advocated by William Perry, the defense secretary under President Bill Clinton, though Perry convinced the commission to set clear goals for the withdrawal of troops.

The commission had blistering critiques of current policy. It said that intel-

ligence agencies had far too few people working on the causes of insurgency. It noted that the total cost of the Iraq invasion and its aftermath could be "as high as \$2 trillion," or 20 times higher than some administration estimates in 2003.

The report painted a particularly dire picture of prospects in Iraq if matters continue to deteriorate.

"A slide toward chaos could trigger the collapse of Iraq's government and a humanitarian catastrophe," the report

said in its executive summary. "Neighboring countries could intervene. Sunni-Shia clashes could spread. Al Qaeda could win a propaganda victory and expand its base of operations. The global standing of the United States could be diminished. Americans could become more polarized."

The co-chairmen write that "there is no magic formula to solve the problems of Iraq."

Yet, the panel also found that "all options have not been exhausted."

It held out hope that if its recommendations were implemented effectively and the Iraqi government moved toward national reconciliation, "Iraqis will have an opportunity for a better future, terrorism will be dealt a blow, stability will be enhanced in an important part of the world, and America's credibility, interests and values will be protected."

While urging contacts with Iran and Syria, the commission was not overly sanguine about how easy this would be.

"Iran appears content for the U.S. military to be tied down in Iraq," it said, noting that this position limited U.S. leverage.

The report quotes an Iraqi official as saying, "Iran is negotiating with the United States in the streets of Baghdad."

While Syria had given hints of being more helpful — indicating a readiness for dialogue with the United States and restoring diplomatic ties to Iraq last month — its approach to date in Iraq had largely been to "countenance malign neglect," doing little to patrol its border with Iraq.

"Miracles cannot be expected," the review said, "but the people of Iraq have the right to expect action and progress."

The goal: Building a new consensus

on a way forward

By Brian Knowlton and David Stout

WASHINGTON: The bipartisan report on Iraq received a largely warm reception Wednesday as a serious effort not just to find better approaches in Iraq but to do so while seeking to forge a pragmatic consensus here around one of the toughest foreign policy challenges of the time.

"I wish we had this kind of report in the Vietnam War," said David Gergen, a no-nonsense former White House adviser in both Republican and Democratic administrations, "because if it had come early enough we might have spared a lot of lives." He spoke on CNN.



Larry Downing/Reuters

George W. Bush at the White House on Wednesday with the co-chairmen of the panel, Lee Hamilton, left, and James Baker 3rd.

Some Democrats saw the report as a clear repudiation of much of the administration's recent approach — as when James Baker 3rd, the former secretary of state who was co-chairman of the panel, said plainly that “stay the course,” a formulation long associated with the president but now abandoned, was “no longer viable.”

Democrats said that Bush must change his approach and be ready to cooperate with members of Congress in finding a way forward, and eventually out of Iraq.

“Their report underscores the message the American people sent one month ago: There must be change in Iraq, and there is no time to lose,” said Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, who will be the Democratic majority leader in the new Congress. “It is time for the Iraqis to build and secure their nation, and it is time for American combat troops to be redeployed.”

Some Republicans saw the report as ratifying an urgent search by the administration for responsible ways to edge out of Iraq, heavy on political and diplomatic dimensions but avoiding a hasty withdrawal that could leave the region in chaos.

A prominent Senate Republican, Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, praised the group's findings.

“The report is an acknowledgment that there will be no military solution in Iraq,” said Hagel, a member of the Foreign Relations and Intelligence committees. “It will require a political solution arrived at through sustained Iraqi and region-wide diplomacy and engagement.”

“The president and Congress now must work together to frame a new policy that will allow the United States to leave Iraq and the Iraqi people to make their own decisions as to their future,” Hagel said.

Many people saw the report as drawing power both from the eminence of its members — five Democrats and five Republicans, including two former secretaries of state, a former defense secretary and a former Supreme Court justice — and by its insistence on the need to move American public opinion on Iraq from polarization to commonality.

“We believe that a constructive solution requires that a new political consensus be built, a new consensus here at home and a new consensus abroad,”

Baker said. “And it is in that spirit that we have approached our study group's task on a bipartisan basis.”

His language was a striking echo of that used a day earlier by President George W. Bush's nominee for defense secretary, Robert Gates, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he wanted to help build an approach on Iraq that would be made durable through strong, bipartisan support.

The Armed Services Committee, clearly sympathetic to his views, later unanimously recommended his confirmation by the full Senate, and that was expected shortly.

And Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic congressman from Indiana and the Iraq panel's co-chairman, said the tone of the report reflected “a very pragmatic” approach. “We tried to set forth here achievable goals,” he said.

Tony Snow, the White House spokesman, rejected the suggestion that the report was a repudiation of administration policy — the White House and Pentagon had long since acknowledged grave problems in Iraq and begun reviewing its options, he said — but he embraced the notion of consensus.

“What you have here, I think, is a basis for both political parties actually to begin working together,” Snow said.

He said that White House officials, when they met earlier with the commission members, were particularly struck by this: “The one thing they thought was absolutely important was to rebuild a sense of national unity on this.”

Indeed, several panel members stressed this during a joint briefing.

Sandra Day O'Connor, who stepped down from the Supreme Court early this year, urged journalists to help engage Americans in the problem. “It's up to you, frankly,” she said. “You're there interpreting this and talking to America. I hope that the American people will feel that if they're behind something in broad terms, that we'll be better off. I think we will.”

Leon Panetta, a former chief of staff to President Bill Clinton, said: “This country cannot be at war and be as divided as we are today. You've got to unify this country, and I suggest to the president that what we did in this group can perhaps serve as an example.”

“We have made a terrible commitment in Iraq in terms of our blood and

treasure,” Panetta continued. “And I think we owe it to them to take one last chance at making Iraq work and, more importantly, to take one last chance at unifying this country on this war.”

And Alan Simpson, a former Republican senator from Wyoming, lamented that “the American people see the Congress and the administration as dysfunctional.” He recalled how he and Panetta, though from different political parties, would lunch together when Simpson

was assistant majority leader and spell out what they could or could not get done. He deplored the loss of bipartisanship but said it might yet be revived.

“Maybe it's corny, maybe it won't work,” he said, “but it's sure as hell better than sitting there where we are right now.”

The study group's leaders, judging by remarks, have a less idealistic vision of Iraq than Bush, who has often described a new country as a beacon of democracy. It seemed to contrast sharply to the ideologically driven approach of neoconservative advisers in the administration.

Still, while lawmakers welcomed the Baker report as pointing to a possibly better way forward, some saw it as confirming their dim view of the past.

“The Iraq Study Group report represents another blow at the policy of ‘stay the course’ that this administration has followed,” said Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, the senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee. “The American people rose up again staying the course in Iraq, because the course is not working.”

Baker said the bipartisan study group had deliberately waited until after the mid-term elections to deliver its conclusions. But Hamilton, the panel co-chairman, and other members, avoided raising any undue optimism about Iraq. “We do not know if it can be turned around,” he said. “We have an obligation to try.”

Les autorités irakiennes refusent la conférence internationale

Le premier ministre irakien Nouri Al-Maliki a annoncé, mardi 5 décembre, la tenue d'une conférence de réconciliation, dans un pays déchiré par les violences confessionnelles. « *Tous les partis, qu'ils soient au gouvernement ou non, participeront à cette conférence* », a affirmé le premier ministre sur la chaîne de télévision publique iraquia.

M. Maliki a en revanche écarté l'idée d'une conférence internationale avancée par le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Kofi Annan. Le chef de la principale coalition

chiite, Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim, s'était lui aussi opposé à cette initiative lundi, lors d'une visite à Washington en jugeant « *inacceptable pour le peuple irakien que*

ces questions soient débattues dans des conférences internationales » alors que l'Irak dispose selon lui d'un gouvernement qui compte parmi « *les plus forts de la région* ».

Le président irakien, Jalal Talabani, s'était également démarqué de l'initiative de M. Annan.

— (AFP.)

Le Monde
7 DÉCEMBRE 2006

Bob Gates : « Nous ne sommes pas en train de gagner la guerre en Irak »

Etats-Unis Les démocrates louent la « franchise » du secrétaire à la défense désigné par Bush

WASHINGTON
CORRESPONDANTE

Si l'n'a pas enthousiasmé tous les républicains, Robert Gates a fait l'unanimité chez les démocrates, qui ont loué sa « franchise ». Dès le début de l'audition devant la commission des forces armées du Sénat, mardi 5 décembre, le démocrate Carl Levin a posé la question : « Sommes-nous en train de gagner en Irak ? » Robert Gates a pesé ses mots. « Non, monsieur. »

Pour un homme choisi par George Bush pour succéder à Donald Rumsfeld au ministère de la défense, ce n'était pas un mince aveu. Il y a exactement cinq semaines, le président américain s'emportait quand on lui posait la même question : « Bien sûr que nous sommes en train de gagner ! » C'était avant les élections de mi-mandat du 7 novembre, la « claque » infligée par les électeurs et la démission de M. Rumsfeld.

Plusieurs sénateurs ont voulu s'assurer qu'ils avaient bien entendu. « Vous ne croyez pas que nous sommes en train de gagner en Irak ? », a insisté John McCain. « Non, monsieur », a répété Robert

Gates. « En conséquence, le statu quo est inacceptable ? », a repris le républicain. « C'est exact », a répondu M. Gates.

Après la pause déjeuner, le futur secrétaire à la défense a fait une mise au point. « J'ai vu les informations à la télévision, en mangeant mon sandwich, a-t-il expliqué. Je maintiens mon commentaire. Mais je faisais référence à la situation générale en

Irak. Nos soldats font un travail formidable. Il n'y a pas une seule bataille qu'ils aient perdue. »

L'affaire était de toute façon entendue. Avec un langage aussi direct, Robert Gates, 63 ans, a obtenu un vote unanime des quatorze membres de la commission après cinq heures seulement de débats. Seul M. Levin, qui avait voté contre la confirmation de M. Gates quand celui-ci avait été nommé à la direction de la CIA, en 1991, par George Bush père, est revenu sur l'affaire Iran-Contra des ventes d'armes secrètes des Etats-Unis à l'Iran, dans laquelle le rôle de M. Gates n'a jamais été vraiment éclairci. Le vote du Sénat dans son ensemble n'est plus qu'une formalité.

« Merci pour votre franchise. C'est quelque chose qui a cruellement manqué à votre prédécesseur », a remarqué Hillary Clinton. Sachant qu'il devra travailler avec un Congrès démocrate, M. Gates a pris soin d'apparaître comme l'anti-Rumsfeld : non agressif, prudent, un homme de bonne volonté ayant repris du service alors qu'il était le tranquille président de l'Université A & M. du Texas.

Il a promis de se mettre « d'urgence » au travail en commençant par se rendre à Bagdad pour y entendre l'opinion des chefs militaires. S'il estime qu'il ne faut pas attendre de miracles ni de « nouvelles idées », il s'est déclaré ouvert : « Toutes les options sont sur la table. »

Sur le fond, il a développé des thèses relativement consensuelles. Il partage

avec le président Bush le refus d'un calendrier précis de retrait qui reviendrait à dire aux insurgés « combien de temps ils ont à attendre avant de [les] voir partir ». Mais il n'a pas hésité à se distinguer en soulignant l'erreur commise en 2003 en n'envoyant pas à Bagdad des troupes en nombre suffisant. Selon lui,

la présence de l'armée américaine sera nécessaire « pendant longtemps », les Irakiens n'ayant que peu de capacités logistiques et pas de puissance aérienne. Mais les effectifs seront « considérablement réduits ».

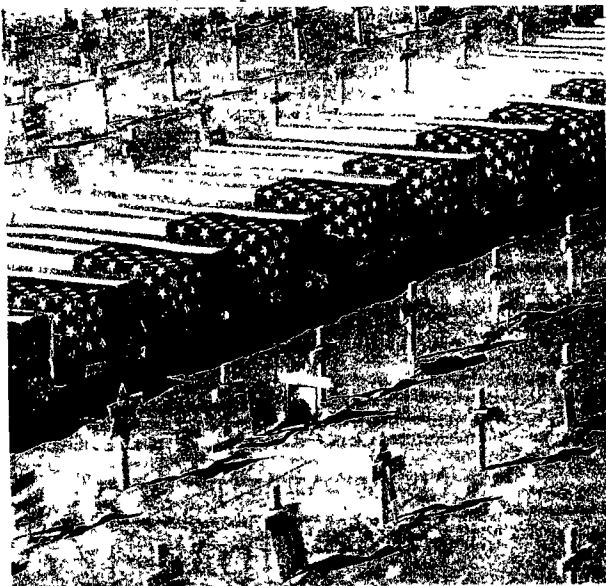
M. Gates a été interrogé sur le rapport qu'il a co-rédigé en 2004 pour un cercle de réflexion, plaçant pour des pourparlers directs avec l'Iran. Il n'y est plus aussi favorable. « Les circonstances ont nettement changé », a-t-il dit, citant l'arrivée au pouvoir de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Il continue à penser qu'il serait utile de disposer d'un « canal de communication » avec Damas et Téhéran comme au temps de la guerre froide avec Moscou et Pékin mais il n'a pas semblé y placer beaucoup d'espoir.

A plus long terme, il serait cependant salutaire de trouver le moyen d'amener ces pays « à être plus constructifs ». Très clairement, il a exclu toute attaque contre l'Iran, sinon « en dernier recours absolu ». « Nous avons vu avec l'Irak ce qui se passe une fois que la guerre est lâchée. »

M. Gates n'a pas voulu dire s'il pensait que l'invasion de 2003 avait été une erreur : « Tous les services du monde, même les français, croyaient que Saddam Hussein avait des armes de destruction massive. » Mais quelle que soit la manière dont la guerre a commencé, a-t-il ajouté, « il semble que tous les "bad guys" du Moyen-Orient sont maintenant actifs en Irak ».

Il a parlé du danger de « chaos » et de conflit régional en cas de retrait américain « mal conduit », l'Arabie saoudite ou la Turquie ne pouvant « laisser les sunnites irakiens être victimes d'une épuration ethnique ». ■

C. LS



Chaque dimanche depuis le 15 février 2004, les vétérans de Santa Monica (Californie) installent à Arlington West, sur la plage, un mémorial provisoire en l'honneur des soldats américains tombés en Irak. Depuis le début du conflit, l'US Army a perdu près de 3 000 hommes. GABRIEL BOUYS/AFP

Rapport Baker : des scénarios pour sortir de la crise en Irak et au Moyen-Orient

Nous publions des extraits des recommandations que James Baker et Lee Hamilton, coprésidents de la commission d'étude sur l'Irak, formée de républicains et de démocrates, ont remis mercredi 6 décembre au président américain Bush

LETTRÉ DES COPRÉSIDENTS JAMES A. BAKER III ET LEE H. HAMILTON

Il n'existe aucune formule magique pour résoudre les problèmes de l'Irak, mais un certain nombre de mesures peuvent être prises afin d'améliorer la situation et protéger les intérêts américains.

Beaucoup d'Américains sont mécontents non seulement de la situation en Irak, mais également des conditions dans lesquelles se déroule notre débat politique concernant l'Irak. Nos dirigeants doivent adopter une approche bipartisane susceptible de mettre fin de manière raisonnable à ce qui est devenu une guerre longue et coûteuse.

Notre pays mérite un débat qui privilégie la substance par rapport à la rhétorique, et une politique à long terme financée de manière adéquate. Le président et le Congrès doivent travailler de concert. Nos dirigeants doivent se montrer francs et directs à l'égard du peuple américain afin d'obtenir son soutien.

Personne ne peut garantir à l'heure actuelle qu'une quelconque série de mesures enrayera les affrontements confessionnels, la violence croissante ou un glissement dans le chaos. Si les tendances actuelles se poursuivent, les conséquences potentielles seront graves. En raison du rôle et de la responsabilité des Etats-Unis en Irak, et des engage-

ments que notre gouvernement a pris, les Etats-Unis ont des obligations spéciales à l'égard de ce pays.

Les Etats-Unis, qui entretiennent des relations et ont des intérêts à long terme au Moyen-Orient, ne doivent pas s'en désengager. Dans ce rapport qui exprime leur opinion unanime, les dix membres du groupe d'étude sur l'Irak présentent une nouvelle approche, car nous pensons qu'il y a une meilleure façon d'aller de l'avant. Toutes les options n'ont pas été épuisées. Nous pensons qu'il est encore possible de mener des politiques différentes susceptibles d'offrir à l'Irak la possibilité d'un avenir meilleur, de combattre le terrorisme, de stabiliser une région critique du monde et de protéger la crédibilité, les intérêts et les valeurs de l'Amérique.

Les recommandations que nous faisons dans ce rapport exigent un niveau considérable de volonté politique et de coopération de la part des corps exécutif et législatif du gouvernement américain. Elles exigent une mise en œuvre habile. Elles exigent des efforts convergents de la part des agences gouvernementales. Et leur réussite dépendra de l'unité du peuple américain dans une période de polarisation politique. Les Américains peuvent et doivent exercer leur droit à un débat exigeant au sein d'une démocratie. Mais la politique étrangère des Etats-Unis – comme toute batterie de mesures

éventuellement prises en Irak – sera vouée à l'échec si elle n'est pas soutenue par un large et durable consensus.

RÉSUMÉ

La situation en Irak est grave et va en se détériorant. Aucune voie ne peut garantir la réussite, mais les perspectives peuvent être améliorées.

Les défis irakiens sont complexes. La violence augmente tant en fréquence qu'en létalité. Elle est alimentée par l'insurrection sunnite, les milices et escadrons de la mort chiïtes, Al-Qaida et une criminalité galopante. Les conflits confessionnels constituent le principal obstacle à la stabilisation.

Même si le peuple irakien dispose d'un gouvernement démocratiquement élu, celui-ci ne progresse pas de façon satisfaisante vers la réconciliation nationale, ne parvient pas à assurer un minimum de sécurité ni à fournir les services essentiels. Le pessimisme est généralisé. Si la situation continue de se détériorer, les conséquences pourraient être graves. Un glissement vers le chaos pourrait entraîner l'effondrement du gouverne-

ment et déclencher une catastrophe humanitaire. Les pays voisins pourraient intervenir. Les affrontements entre sunnites et chiïtes pourraient se généraliser. Al-Qaida pourrait remporter une victoire de propagande et élargir sa base d'opérations. La position globale des Etats-Unis serait susceptible d'en souffrir.

Approche externe

Les politiques et les actes des pays voisins de l'Irak affectent grandement sa stabilité et sa prospérité. Sur le long terme, aucun des pays de la région ne bénéficierait d'un Irak plongé dans le chaos. Pourtant, les voisins de l'Irak n'agissent pas suffisamment pour aider l'Irak à parvenir à la stabilité. Certains agissent même dans le sens de sa déstabilisation. Les Etats-Unis devraient lancer immédiatement une nouvelle offensive diplomatique visant à construire un consensus international pour la stabilité de l'Irak et de la région.

Vu la capacité de la Syrie et de l'Iran à peser sur le cours des événements à l'intérieur de l'Irak, et leur intérêt à ne pas



Le président George Bush entouré des coprésidents du Groupe d'étude sur l'Irak, James Baker (à droite) et Lee Hamilton (à gauche), mercredi 6 décembre, à la Maison Blanche à Washington. PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP

voir le chaos s'y installer, les Etats-Unis devraient tenter d'engager un dialogue constructif avec ces deux pays. L'Irak devrait stopper le flot d'armes à destination de l'Irak et fermer les camps où s'entraînent les Irakiens, respecter la souveraineté et l'intégrité territoriale de l'Irak et user de son influence sur les groupes chiites irakiens afin d'encourager la réconciliation nationale. La Syrie devrait contrôler sa frontière avec l'Irak afin d'interrompre le passage de fonds, d'insurgés et de terroristes à destination ou en provenance d'Irak.

Les Etats-Unis ne pourront atteindre leurs objectifs au Moyen-Orient s'ils ne

*Personne ne peut garantir
à l'heure actuelle
qu'une quelconque série
de mesures
enrayera
les affrontements
confessionnels,
la violence croissante
ou un glissement
dans le chaos*

traitent pas le problème du conflit israélo-palestinien et celui de l'instabilité régionale. Les Etats-Unis doivent s'engager à nouveau et de manière ferme dans la voie d'une paix entre Arabes et Israéliens sur tous les fronts : Liban, Syrie, et, en ce qui concerne Israël et la Palestine, respecter l'engagement pris en juin 2002 par le président Bush en faveur de la solution des deux Etats. Cet engagement doit inclure des pourparlers directs avec, par et entre Israël, le Liban, les Palestiniens – ceux qui reconnaissent à Israël le droit d'exister – et la Syrie.

Approche interne

Les questions les plus importantes concernant l'avenir de l'Irak sont à présent de la responsabilité des Irakiens. Le gouvernement irakien devrait accélérer sa prise en main de la sécurité du pays en augmentant le nombre et la qualité des brigades de l'armée irakienne. Pendant le déroulement de ce processus, et afin de le faciliter, les Etats-Unis devraient augmenter de façon significative le nombre de personnels militaires, y compris des troupes de combat, intégrés dans et appuyant les unités de l'armée irakienne. Au fur et à mesure que ce processus se déroulera, les forces de combat américaines pourront commencer à se retirer d'Irak.

Au premier trimestre de 2008, et à moins de développements imprévus dans la situation sécuritaire sur le terrain, toutes les brigades de combat non nécessaires à la protection militaire pourraient être évacuées d'Irak. A ce moment-là, les forces de combat américaines en Irak ne pourraient être déployées que

dans des unités intégrées aux forces irakiennes, des équipes de réaction rapide

ou d'opérations spéciales, ainsi que pour l'entraînement, l'équipement, le conseil, la protection militaire, et pour les opérations de recherche et de secours. La recherche de renseignements et le soutien logistique se poursuivraient. Une des missions essentielles des forces de réaction rapide et d'opérations spéciales serait de réaliser des frappes contre Al-Qaida en Irak.

Il est clair que le gouvernement irakien aura encore besoin de l'assistance des Etats-Unis pendant un certain temps, en particulier pour s'acquitter de ses responsabilités en matière de sécurité. Les Etats-Unis doivent toutefois bien faire comprendre au gouvernement irakien qu'ils pourraient mener à terme leurs projets, y compris leurs plans de redéploiement, même si le gouvernement irakien ne procédait pas aux changements auxquels il s'est engagé. Les Etats-Unis ne doivent pas promettre inconditionnellement de maintenir une forte présence de leurs troupes en Irak.

Tout en procédant au redéploiement, les responsables militaires devraient renforcer l'entraînement et l'éducation des troupes rentrées aux Etats-Unis afin de restituer à notre armée toutes ses capacités de combat.

Les Etats-Unis devraient travailler en étroite collaboration avec les dirigeants irakiens afin de parvenir à réaliser des objectifs, ou jalons spécifiques dans le domaine de la réconciliation nationale, de la sécurité et de la gouvernance.

Ne promettons pas de miracles, mais le peuple irakien peut légitimement attendre des mesures et espérer des progrès. Le gouvernement irakien doit montrer à ses propres citoyens – ainsi qu'à ceux des Etats-Unis et des autres pays – qu'il mérite un soutien solide.

ÉVALUATION

Le succès n'est aucunement garanti en Irak.

A. Evaluation de la situation actuelle en Irak

1. Sécurité

Les attaques contre les forces américaines, les forces de la coalition et les forces de sécurité irakiennes sont incessantes et en augmentation. Les sources de la violence sont multiples : insurrection sunnite, Al-Qaida et groupes djihadistes affiliés, milices et escadrons de la mort chiïtes, criminalité organisée. La violence confessionnelle – en particulier à Bagdad et dans ses environs – est devenue le principal obstacle à la stabilité.

La plupart des attaques antiaméricaines sont toujours le fait des insurgés sunnites. Al-Qaida n'est responsable que d'une petite partie de la violence en Irak, mais elle a signé quelques-unes des actions les plus spectaculaires. C'est la violence

confessionnelle qui cause le plus de victimes civiles. Les milices chiïtes impliquées dans la violence confessionnelle constituent une menace substantielle à la stabilité immédiate et à long terme.

2. Politique

Peu après son entrée en fonctions, le premier ministre Al-Maliki avait esquissé un louable programme de réconciliation nationale. Cependant, le gouvernement irakien n'a pris aucune mesure concernant les éléments-clés de la réconciliation nationale. La situation sécuritaire ne pourra s'améliorer tant que les responsables n'agiront pas dans le sens de la réconciliation nationale. Les responsables chiïtes doivent prendre la décision de dissoudre les milices. Les sunnites doivent décider de poursuivre leurs objectifs dans le cadre d'un processus politique pacifique, et non par la violence.

3. Economie

L'Irak a enregistré quelques succès économiques, et le pays dispose d'atouts considérables pour sa croissance. Mais le développement économique est entravé par l'insécurité, la corruption, le manque d'investissements, une infrastructure en ruine et l'incertitude. La croissance immédiate et à long terme dépend en premier lieu du secteur pétrolier. De nombreux indicateurs économiques sont négatifs. Au lieu d'atteindre les 10 % de croissance fixés pour cette année, le pays n'aura enregistré qu'une progression d'environ 4 %. L'inflation est supérieure à 50 %. Les estimations concernant le taux de chômage oscillent entre 20 % et 60 %. Le climat des investissements est morose, avec un taux d'investissement étranger inférieur à 1 % du PIB.

4. Soutien international

Le soutien international pour la reconstruction de l'Irak a été timoré. Les donateurs internationaux s'étaient engagés sur un montant de 13,5 milliards de dollars pour la reconstruction, mais moins de 4 milliards ont effectivement été versés. Les politiques et les actes des voisins de l'Irak influencent fortement sa stabilité et sa prospérité.

De tous les voisins de l'Irak, l'Iran est celui qui a le plus d'influence en Irak. L'Iran entretient depuis longtemps des liens avec de nombreux politiciens chiïtes irakiens, dont beaucoup ont dû s'exiler en Iran sous le régime de Saddam Hussein. L'Iran a fourni des armes et des moyens financiers, et assuré l'entraînement de miliciens chiïtes en Irak, ainsi qu'un soutien politique aux partis chiïtes irakiens. Certains rapports affirment également que l'Iran a fourni des « dispositifs explosifs improvisés » à des groupes – y compris des insurgés sunnites – qui s'en prennent aux forces américaines. Un haut responsable sunnite nous a affirmé : « Chaque fois que vous retournez une pierre en Irak, vous trouvez l'Iran dessous. »

Des responsables américains, irakiens et internationaux ont également évoqué les points de friction entre les Etats-Unis et l'Iran, parmi lesquels le programme nucléaire iranien, le soutien iranien au terrorisme, l'influence de l'Iran au Liban et

dans la région, et l'influence de l'Irak en Irak. L'Irak semble satisfait de voir les Etats-Unis embourbés en Irak, une position qui limite les options américaines à l'égard du programme nucléaire iranien et permet à l'Irak de peser sur la stabilité de l'Irak. Les pourparlers envisagés entre les Etats-Unis et l'Irak sur la situation en Irak n'ont pas eu lieu. Un officier irakien nous a dit : « L'Irak négocie avec les Etats-Unis dans les rues de Bagdad. »

La Syrie joue elle aussi un rôle contre-productif. Les Irakiens sont furieux de ce qu'ils considèrent comme un appui syrien aux tentatives de saper le gouvernement irakien. Ce n'est pas tant que les Syriens prennent une part active aux événements, mais ils jouent un rôle passif : ils détournent

la tête lorsque des armes et des combattants étrangers franchissent leur frontière pour passer en Irak, et laissent d'anciens responsables baasistes se réfugier en Syrie. Tout comme l'Irak, la Syrie se réjouit de voir les Américains englués en Irak. Cela dit, les Syriens ont indiqué qu'ils souhaitaient un dialogue avec les Etats-Unis, et ont accepté en novembre de rétablir des relations diplomatiques avec l'Irak après une rupture de vingt-quatre années.

En dehors du Royaume-Uni et de nos autres partenaires dans la coalition, la communauté internationale n'a joué qu'un rôle limité en Irak. Les Nations unies – agissant en vertu de la résolution 1546 du Conseil de sécurité – n'ont qu'une faible présence en Irak ; elles ont collaboré à l'organisation des élections, à la rédaction de la Constitution, à l'organisation du gouvernement et à la mise en place des institutions. La Banque mondiale, qui n'a accordé que des ressources limitées, entretient un et parfois deux représentants en Irak. L'Union européenne y a un représentant.

5. Conclusions

Les Etats-Unis se sont investis massivement dans l'avenir de l'Irak, à la fois sur le plan financier et sur le plan humain. Jusqu'en décembre 2006, près de 2 900 Américains ont perdu la vie en Irak. 21 000 autres ont été blessés, dont beaucoup grièvement. Jusqu'ici, les Etats-Unis ont dépensé à peu près 400 milliards de dollars pour la guerre en Irak, et les dépenses continuent de représenter environ 8 milliards de dollars par mois. Les Etats-Unis devront de surcroît s'acquitter des futurs « coûts additionnels ». S'occuper des anciens combattants et remplacer le matériel perdu coûtera plusieurs centaines de milliards de dollars. Certaines estimations placent à 2 trillions de dollars le coût final de l'engagement américain en Irak.

Malgré cet énorme effort, la stabilisation de l'Irak semble irréalisable et la situation ne cesse de se détériorer. Le gouvernement irakien n'est pas actuellement en mesure de gouverner, de se maintenir et de se défendre sans l'aide des Etats-Unis. Nous n'avons pas convaincu les Irakiens qu'ils doivent prendre en main leur propre avenir.

Si les Irakiens continuent à considérer les Américains comme une force d'occupation, les Etats-Unis pourraient bien devenir la pire menace pour eux-mêmes sur ce territoire qu'ils ont pourtant libéré de la tyrannie

B. Conséquences d'une détérioration prolongée de la situation en Irak

Si la situation continue de se détériorer, les conséquences pourraient être graves pour l'Irak, pour les Etats-Unis, pour la région et pour le monde.

Un effondrement de l'économie et du gouvernement irakiens paralyserait un peu plus encore un pays déjà incapable de subvenir aux besoins de sa population. Les forces de sécurité pourraient éclater suivant les lignes de fracture confessionnelles. Le fait qu'un grand nombre de réfugiés seraient obligés de changer de région en Irak, ou de gagner les pays voisins, pourrait entraîner une catastrophe humanitaire. Le nettoyage ethnique pourrait sévir à grande échelle. Le peuple irakien pourrait

être soumis à un nouvel homme fort qui userait de moyens politiques et militaires musclés pour faire prévaloir l'ordre sur l'anarchie. Les libertés seraient réduites ou perdues.

D'autres pays de la région redoutent que la violence puisse pénétrer chez eux. Un Irak plongé dans le chaos pourrait conduire ces pays à intervenir afin de protéger leurs propres intérêts, risquant ainsi de déclencher une guerre régionale généralisée. Plusieurs ambassadeurs de pays voisins nous ont dit craindre l'éventualité d'affrontements entre chiïtes et sunnites à travers le monde islamique. Le terrorisme pourrait prendre de l'ampleur.

L'Irak constitue un test pour les capacités militaires, diplomatiques et financières des Etats-Unis et pèse lourdement sur elles. La prolongation des problèmes en Irak pourrait conduire à une polarisation accrue aux Etats-Unis mêmes. 66 % des Américains désapprouvent la façon dont le gouvernement conduit la guerre, et plus de 60 % ont l'impression qu'il n'existe aucun plan clair pour progresser. Les élections de novembre ont été largement considérées comme un référendum sur les progrès réalisés en Irak.

L'Irak est une épreuve et un fardeau pour les capacités militaires, diplomatiques et financières des Etats-Unis. Si l'Amérique devait donner l'impression d'avoir échoué là-bas, c'est toute sa crédibilité et son influence qui s'en trouveraient affectées, au cœur du monde musulman, dans une région essentielle à l'approvisionnement énergétique mondial. Cela entamerait de surcroît l'influence des Etats-Unis dans le monde.

Si les Irakiens continuent à considérer les Américains comme une force d'occupation, les Etats-Unis pourraient bien devenir la pire menace pour eux-mêmes sur ce territoire qu'ils ont pourtant libéré de la tyrannie.

LES DIFFÉRENTES OPTIONS

1. Retrait précipité

Nous estimons qu'il serait une erreur de la part des Etats-Unis d'abandonner le pays en retirant précipitamment leurs soldats et leur aide. Un départ prématuré entraînerait très certainement une augmentation des violences religieuses et une détérioration accrue de la situation.

2. Maintien de la politique actuelle

La politique américaine actuelle ne fonctionne pas. Le maintien en l'état de cette politique ne ferait que remettre à plus tard l'heure du bilan, qui n'en serait alors que plus lourd.

3. Augmentation des effectifs militaires

L'augmentation soutenue du nombre de soldats américains en Irak ne peut rien contre la cause essentielle des violences en Irak, l'absence de réconciliation nationale.

4. Transfert du pouvoir à trois régions

Le transfert du pouvoir à un Irak divisé en trois régions semi-autonomes sous la houlette d'un pouvoir central faible présente des risques trop importants.

LA MARCHÉ À SUIVRE : UNE APPROCHE NOUVELLE

A. Construire un consensus international

Recommandation n° 1 : les Etats-Unis, en collaboration avec le gouvernement irakien, doivent lancer une nouvelle offensive diplomatique globale, et ce avant le 31 décembre 2006.

Recommandation n° 2 : en ce qui concerne les acteurs régionaux, cette offensive diplomatique doit se fixer les objectifs suivants : soutien à l'unité et à l'intégrité territoriale de l'Irak ; cessation des interventions et actions de déstabilisation ; sécurisation des frontières irakiennes.

Recommandation n° 4 : un groupe d'aide internationale à l'Irak doit être formé immédiatement après le lancement de la nouvelle offensive diplomatique.

Recommandation n° 5 : ce groupe d'aide doit intégrer tous les pays limitrophes, les grands acteurs de la région, les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, l'Union européenne et, bien sûr, l'Irak. Les autres pays (par exemple l'Allemagne, le Japon et la Corée du Sud) souhaitant participer sont également les bienvenus.

Recommandation n° 9 : les Etats-Unis doivent entrer en contact direct avec l'Iran

et la Syrie afin de faire en sorte qu'ils s'engagent à pratiquer une politique constructive en Irak et sur d'autres enjeux régionaux. Dans cette ouverture du dialogue avec la Syrie et l'Iran, les Etats-Unis doivent prendre en compte les facteurs aussi bien incitatifs que dissuasifs afin d'aboutir à des résultats constructifs.

Recommandation n° 13 : les Etats-Unis doivent renouveler et maintenir leur engagement envers une paix globale entre Arabes et Israéliens, et ce sur tous les fronts : d'une part pour le Liban et la Syrie, d'autre part pour Israël et la Palestine dans la ligne de l'engagement pris par le président Bush en juin 2002 en faveur d'une solution à deux Etats.

Recommandation n° 14 : ces efforts doivent passer (le plus tôt possible) par la convocation et la tenue inconditionnelle de rencontres, sous l'égide des Etats-Unis ou du Quartet (Etats-Unis, Russie, Union européenne et Nations unies), d'une part entre Israël, le Liban et la Syrie, et d'autre part entre Israël et les Palestiniens qui reconnaissent le droit à l'existence de l'Etat hébreu. Ces rencontres auraient pour but de négocier des accords de paix comme à la conférence de Madrid en 1991, et ce en deux volets distincts – l'un libano-syrien, l'autre palestinien.

Recommandation n° 16 : dans le cadre d'un accord de paix global et solide, les Israéliens doivent restituer le plateau du Golan.

Recommandation n° 17 : en ce qui concerne le volet palestinien, parmi les conditions d'une paix négociée figurent : le respect des résolutions 242 et 338 du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU et du principe « terres contre paix », bases incontournables de la paix ; des négociations durables qui régleraient les grandes questions juridiques relatives aux frontières, aux colonies de peuplement, à Jérusalem et au droit au retour et la fin du conflit.

Recommandation n° 18 : il est essentiel que les Etats-Unis fournissent à l'Afghanistan une aide politique, économique et militaire accrue, en y affectant notamment les moyens libérés dès lors que des forces militaires quitteront l'Irak.

Les Etats-Unis doivent entrer en contact direct avec l'Iran et la Syrie afin de faire en sorte qu'ils s'engagent à pratiquer une politique constructive en Irak

B. Aider les Irakiens à se passer des Américains

Recommandation n° 19 : le président et les hauts responsables américains chargés de la sécurité nationale doivent entretenir des rapports étroits et fréquents avec les dirigeants irakiens. En matière de diplomatie ouverte [celle tournée vers l'opinion, vers le public], le président doit rendre publique la teneur de ces échanges de la façon la plus détaillée possible, afin que les

Américains, les Irakiens et les pays de la région soient bien informés.

Recommandation n° 22 : le président doit déclarer que les Etats-Unis ne cherchent pas à établir des bases militaires permanentes en Irak.

Recommandation n° 23 : le président doit réaffirmer que les Etats-Unis ne cherchent pas à prendre le contrôle du pétrole irakien.

Calendrier proposé par le premier ministre irakien Nouri Al-Maliki : d'ici à juin 2007, tenue d'élections provinciales ; d'ici à avril 2007, les Irakiens reprennent le contrôle de l'armée ; d'ici à septembre 2007, les Irakiens reprennent le contrôle des provinces.

Recommandation n° 27 : la réconciliation politique passe par la réinsertion des baasistes et des nationalistes arabes dans la vie de la nation, hormis les grandes figures du régime de Saddam Hussein, qu'il faut exclure.

Recommandation n° 28 : partage des revenus pétroliers. Les revenus pétroliers doivent revenir au gouvernement central et être répartis sur des bases démographiques. Aucune formule confiant aux régions la gestion des revenus des futurs gisements ou le contrôle des gisements n'est compatible avec la réconciliation nationale.

Recommandation n° 30 : Kirkouk. L'extrême dangerosité de la situation à Kirkouk nécessite un arbitrage international pour prévenir les violences communautaires.

Recommandation n° 35 : les Etats-Unis doivent œuvrer activement à l'implication de toutes les parties prenantes en Irak à l'exception d'Al-Qaïda. Ils doivent trouver un moyen d'ouvrir le dialogue avec le grand ayatollah Sistani, Moqtada Al-Sadr et les chefs des milices et des insurgés.

Recommandation n° 38 : les Etats-Unis doivent appuyer la présence en Irak d'experts internationaux neutres qui conseilleront le gouvernement sur les processus de désarmement, de démobilisation et de réinsertion [des miliciens].

Recommandation n° 40 : les Etats-Unis ne doivent pas s'engager sans limite de durée à maintenir d'importants effectifs militaires en Irak.

Recommandation n° 41 : les Etats-Unis doivent faire clairement comprendre au gouvernement irakien qu'ils mèneront à bien leurs projets, y compris les redéploiements prévus, que l'Irak ait ou non accompli les changements prévus. Il n'est pas question que les autres besoins de l'Amérique en termes de sécurité et le futur de notre armée soient les otages de l'action ou de l'immobilisme du gouvernement irakien.

Recommandation n° 42 : notre objectif doit être d'avoir terminé notre mission de formation et d'équipement à la fin du premier trimestre 2008.

Recommandation n° 43 : les priorités militaires en Irak doivent changer, l'absolue priorité devant être donnée à la forma-

tion, à l'équipement, au conseil, à l'assistance ainsi qu'aux opérations antiterroristes.

Recommandation n° 50 : l'ensemble de la police nationale irakienne doit passer sous la tutelle du ministère de la défense, dans le cadre duquel les commandos de police seront intégrés à la nouvelle armée irakienne.

Recommandation n° 51 : l'ensemble de la police irakienne des frontières doit passer sous la tutelle du ministère de la défense, qui assumera l'entière responsabilité du contrôle aux frontières et de la sécurité extérieure.

Recommandation n° 57 : sur le modèle de l'intégration des formateurs militaires américains au sein d'unités de l'armée irakienne, l'intégration des formateurs américains de police doit être étendue et le nombre de formateurs civils augmenté afin que les équipes puissent intervenir à tous les échelons des forces de police irakiennes, y compris dans les postes de police locaux.

Recommandation n° 62 : le gouvernement américain doit, le plus tôt possible, apporter au gouvernement irakien une assistance technique pour préparer un projet de loi sur le pétrole définissant les droits des gouvernements régionaux et locaux et créant un cadre fiscal et juridique pour l'investissement.

Recommandation n° 64 : l'aide économique américaine ne doit pas être revue à la baisse, mais au contraire augmentée pour passer à 5 milliards de dollars par an.

Recommandation n° 72 : le coût de la guerre en Irak doit être intégré dans la proposition de budget du président à compter de l'exercice 2008 : la guerre est dans sa quatrième année, et le processus budgétaire ne doit pas être contourné. Les demandes de fonds pour la guerre en Irak doivent être présentées avec clarté au Congrès et aux Américains.

Résolution n° 77 : le directeur du renseignement national et le secrétaire à la défense doivent consacrer beaucoup plus de moyens d'analyse à la compréhension des menaces et des sources de violence en Irak.

Recommandation n° 79 : la CIA doit envoyer davantage d'agents en Irak pour mettre sur pied et assurer la formation d'un service de renseignement efficace et construire un centre de renseignement antiterroriste qui facilitera l'action antiterroriste basée sur le renseignement. ■

Traduit par
Gilles Berton et Julie Marcot

Le rapport Baker inquiète les Kurdes irakiens

LE FIGARO lundi 11 décembre 2006

MOYEN-ORIENT

Les responsables kurdes irakiens craignent d'être les victimes d'une éventuelle redistribution des cartes dans la région.

Le ministre israélien des Affaires étrangères, Tzipi Livni, est arrivé hier à Washington pour évoquer le rapport Baker avec ses interlocuteurs américains. Cette visite intervient alors que le possible changement de cap de la politique des États-Unis au Proche-Orient suscite une inquiétude grandissante en Israël.

LE RAPPORT Baker, qui propose un changement radical de la politique américaine en Irak, provoque une levée de bouclier au Kurdistan autonome. Les responsables de cette région quasi indépendante depuis la chute du régime de Saddam craignent de faire les frais d'un retour de Washington à la realpolitik. Allié des États-Unis, le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a jugé « irréalistes et inappropriées » les conclusions du groupe d'études sur l'Irak (ISG). « Nous n'allons en aucun cas nous conformer à ce rapport », a-t-il assuré. D'autres responsables kurdes, comme le député Mahmoud Othmane, ont estimé la nouvelle approche conseillée par l'ancien secrétaire d'État aux Affaires étrangères de Bush père, en opposition totale avec leurs aspirations. Ils redoutent un affaiblissement de leur gouvernement régional qui lorgne sur les champs pétrolifères de Kirkouk.

Les critiques concernent à la fois les principes et la méthode prônés par James Baker. Les Kurdes voient d'un mauvais œil l'attention particulière accordée aux sunnites, autrement dit aux Arabes, une communauté accusée d'avoir colonisé le nord de l'Irak sous l'ancien régime, et s'inquiètent d'une centralisation des pouvoirs.

Une plus grande prise en compte des intérêts des pays limitrophes – Turquie, Iran et Syrie – est également source de préoccupation. Seule partie de l'Irak épargnée par la guerre civile, le Kurdistan redoute d'être sacrifié sur



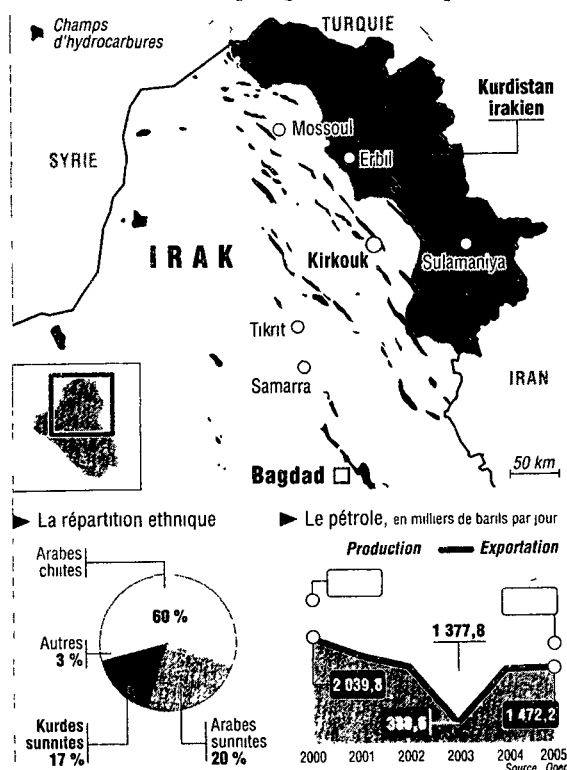
Des bidons d'essence sont vendus sur le bord des routes d'Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien. Les Kurdes voient d'un mauvais œil l'attention particulière accordée aux sunnites dans le partage des ressources pétrolifères.

l'autel des bonnes relations américano-turques.

Massoud Barzani accuse l'« ami américain » de ne pas avoir voulu l'écouter. Le rapport de l'ISG, qui évite d'abord la question de l'entité politique kurde, est en effet particulièrement sévère avec les projets kurdes d'annexion du secteur pétrolier de Kirkouk. Il demande, ni plus ni moins, le report de l'organisation du référendum consacré à l'avenir de la capitale pétrolière où vivent désormais une majorité de Kurdes, mais aussi des Arabes et des Turkmènes. Les Kurdes s'appuient sur l'article 140 de la Constitution pour planifier une consultation populaire en 2007. Une initiative qualifiée d'« explosive » par l'ISG, qui préconise des « arbitrages internationaux » pour désamorcer les violences entre communautés. « Tout délai aura de graves conséquences et ne sera pas accepté par le peuple du Kurdistan », rétorque Massoud Barzani.

Mise sous tutelle

L'ISG préconise aussi de centraliser les revenus des hydrocarbures à Bagdad puis de les redistribuer en fonction du nombre d'habitants de chaque province. Il estime incompatible avec une politique de réconciliation nationale la formule permettant une prise de contrôle par la région autonome kurde des nouveaux gisements. Si elles étaient appliquées, ces recommandations mettraient fin aux privilèges du Kurdistan, unique province à revendiquer



vouloir garder pour elle l'intégralité des dividendes des découvertes pétrolifères. Ces questions controversées sont au cœur d'interminables tractations entre Bagdad et le gouvernement autonome kurde. Les Kurdes réclament 17 % des revenus pétroliers, mais le gouvernement central propose d'en reverser seulement 13 %. Et ils exigent de pouvoir continuer à signer des contrats avec des grandes sociétés étrangères en vue de l'exploitation de zones regorgeant d'or noir.

Enfin, les Kurdes reprochent aux auteurs du rapport d'être favorables à une mise sous tutelle gouvernementale de toutes les

forces de sécurité. La mesure aurait pour conséquence l'abandon par les forces de sécurité kurdes de la surveillance des frontières extérieures du Kurdistan autonome et, à terme, la dissolution des peshmergas, les milices kurdes.

L'émotion soulevée par un possible revirement de la politique américaine est accentuée par l'extrême dépendance des Kurdes vis-à-vis de leur parrain américain. Assisté par son conseiller spécial, le diplomate américain Peter Galbraith, Massoud Barzani proteste avec d'autant plus de vigueur qu'il sait sa marge de manœuvre étroite.

THIERRY OBERLÉ

Le Point

14 décembre 2006



MICHAEL KLEINFELD/UP/GAMMA

INTERVIEW RICHARD PERLE

L'une des grandes figures du mouvement néoconservateur

« Le rapport Baker n'est qu'un feu de paille »

Le Point : Regrettez-vous l'intervention en Irak ?

Richard Perle : Nous sommes intervenus en Irak pour empêcher Saddam Hussein de fournir des armes de destruction massive à des terro-

ristes qui pourraient les utiliser pour tuer des Américains. Même si aucun stock d'armes de destruction n'a été trouvé, nous ne pouvions pas le savoir.

Est-ce la faute aux néoconservateurs si la guerre a mal tourné ?

La conduite de la guerre n'a rien à voir avec une vision « néoconservatrice ». En fait, la plupart des néoconservateurs se sont opposés à l'occupation qui a suivi la chute de Bagdad. Nous aurions dû immédiatement restituer l'Irak aux Irakiens, avec injonction de préparer des élections. Au lieu de cela, nous avons permis à une libération de se transformer en occupation. Rappe-

lez-vous le retour de De Gaulle en France quand Paris se libérait. Voilà le bon modèle.

Voyez-vous dans le rapport Baker une approche constructive ?

Le rapport Baker contient quelques bonnes idées et quelques nouvelles idées. Malheureusement, les bonnes idées ne sont pas nouvelles. Et les idées nouvelles ne sont pas bonnes. L'« offensive diplomatique » [vers la Syrie et l'Iran] qu'il propose est absurde et même dangereuse. Cela serait vu par les Irakiens comme un signe de capitulation.

Préconisez-vous une attaque préventive contre l'Iran ?

Je suis partisan de travailler avec l'opposition intérieure en Iran.

Le rapport Baker met-il un point final à l'influence néoconservatrice ?

Le rapport est purement tactique. Ce n'est qu'un feu de paille ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR H. V.



CORENTIN FOHLEN-MAXPPP

INTERVIEW ANDRÉ GLUCKSMANN

Philosophe

« L'Europe et la France n'ont pas de solutions autres que verbales »

Le Point : Regrettez-vous d'avoir soutenu l'intervention américaine en Irak ?

André Glucksmann : Je ne regrette nullement la chute d'un dictateur aussi terrible. Saddam Hussein a causé la mort d'Irakiens par millions. Sa chute a été saluée par un grand nombre de ses sujets. L'intervention était justifiée, mais l'après-Saddam fut mal préparé.

Comment qualifiez-vous aujourd'hui cette opération militaire ? Un désastre ?

Le désastre, c'est l'après-guerre. Il tient à la sous-estimation par tout le monde, dont les Américains, du désert social et mental provoqué par trente années de totalitarisme en Irak. L'erreur, c'est d'avoir sous-évalué les effets à long terme d'une telle oppression. Les Etats-Unis ont confondu une dictature hitléro-stalinienne avec les dictatures latino-américaines de droite et de gauche où la société civile est moins radicalement décomposée.

Que peut donc faire l'administration américaine ? Un retrait pur et simple ?

Une question préalable : que dit et fait l'Europe ? Puisque beaucoup d'Européens ont critiqué la conduite américaine et prétendent se retrouver dans le rapport Baker, force est de constater qu'aujourd'hui nos grands politiques croisent les doigts, souhaitant en secret que les Américains ne rapatrient pas trop rapidement leurs troupes. L'Europe et la France en

particulier n'ont pas de solutions autres que verbales.

Le retrait précipité d'Irak aurait lieu sur un fond inquiétant, non pas de vietnamisation, mais de somalisation. On compte actuellement 3000 morts irakiens par mois, soit autant chaque mois que le nombre total de GI tués depuis 2003. Il ne s'agit donc pas d'une insurrection antiaméricaine comme au Vietnam, mais d'un front terroriste contre les civils.

Dans « Le discours de la haine », vous dénoncez l'antiaméricanisme. La guerre en Irak ne l'a-t-elle pas alimenté ?

L'antiaméricanisme existait avant cette guerre. Les Américains ne sont pas des anges. Je l'ai toujours dit. Mais les antiaméricains oublient que les civils irakiens ont été et restent aujourd'hui même assassinés par les zélotes de Saddam.

L'une des conséquences de la guerre est aussi le renforcement de l'Iran...

Les mollahs iraniens n'ont pas attendu l'intervention en Irak pour se doter d'un programme nucléaire militaire, avec le soutien de la Russie, de la Corée du Nord et la complaisance chinoise. Bombes humaines, prolifération nucléaire, chantage au pétrole et au gaz : voilà des défis qui dépassent l'Irak, ils vont dominer le siècle. Sans entente transatlantique, nous partons perdants. Il faut donc tirer ensemble, Europe-Etats-Unis, le bilan de nos erreurs réciproques ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR OLIVIER WEBER

The Iraq report ■ By Kenneth M. Pollack

Don't count on Iran

WASHINGTON As anticipated, the Iraq Study Group has recommended that the United States begin talks with Iran to solicit its assistance in stabilizing Iraq. This recommendation seems so sensible that the Bush administration's past reluctance to follow it is hard to fathom. Still, administration officials are right to counter that talking to Iran is not a policy, let alone a solution to America's problems in Iraq.

The real questions are these: What do we Americans say to the Iranians if we can get them to the table? What can they do in Iraq? What would they be willing to do in Iraq? And what will they want in return?

We should have engaged Iran in Iraq years ago. Before and during the war in Afghanistan, the Iranians were quite helpful to the United States. They shared our hatred of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and they provided us with extensive assistance on intelligence, logistics, diplomacy and Afghan internal politics. After we turned our sights on Saddam Hussein, the Iranians suggested that they would be willing to cooperate on that too. Unfortunately, the Bush administration declined the offer, preferring to lump Tehran with Baghdad and Pyongyang in the "axis of evil."

None of this should suggest that Iran was helping us for reasons other than blatant self-interest, or that it had suddenly given up its antipathy toward us. But it was demonstrating real pragmatism and being very helpful on issues of mutual concern, which should have been good enough.

Today, large numbers of Iranian intelligence agents have infiltrated Iraq, where they seem to be providing money, weapons and other supplies to virtually all of Iraq's Shiite militias. There are reports that Hezbollah is training Iraqi Shiite militiamen in Lebanon at Iran's behest. And the Shiite warlords all know that in an all-out civil war, Iran would be their only backer.

All of that gives the Iranians influence over the Shiite militias — influence that could be helpful to the United States as it tries to forge a new strategy toward Iraq. We should be careful,

however, not to exaggerate Iran's influence. The problems in Iraq were not caused by the Iranians, nor can Iran solve them all.

Most Iraqis dislike the Iranians. In fact, "dislike" is too mild a term. In 2004 and early 2005, when it still seemed as if the United States-led reconstruction of Iraq might succeed, Shiite politicians were bending over backward to demonstrate that they were independent of Iran for fear their constituents would not support them otherwise.

Furthermore, while Iranian support is no doubt gratefully received, the evidence suggests that it is now more a supplement than a necessity for the major militias. At this point, the main Shiite groups — the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the Mahdi Army, and the Fadhila Party among others — have considerable sup-

The limits on Iranian influence in Iraq are a double-edged sword.

port among the population and are accused of making enormous amounts of money off oil smuggling and organized crime.

So Tehran can influence the behavior of the Shiite groups, but it probably would have a hard time forcing them to do things they do not want to do — like disbanding their militias, accepting a national reconciliation agreement, participating in an equitable oil-sharing scheme or accepting any of the other major changes that the Bush administration is seeking. If Iran were to threaten to end its support for these groups, they would most likely tell Tehran to get lost. What's more, the Iranians seem to understand this, having so far proven reluctant to try to force any of the Shiite groups to radically change course.

The limits on Iranian influence are a double-edged sword. They mean that we cannot count on Iran to solve Iraq's problems, but they also mean that we

need not offer the Iranians the world in return for their assistance. Right now, Tehran and its bombastic president are riding high in the Middle East, and they will doubtless want something in return for helping America deal with Iraq. For instance, they may demand that the United States drop its objections to their nuclear program or cave in to Hezbollah's demands for a greater say in Lebanon.

Especially given the likely limits on what Iran can deliver in Iraq, these would not be prices worth paying. Instead, the United States should emphasize a shared interest in preventing Iraq's further implosion, as chaos there could easily spread to Iran — a danger most of Tehran's leaders seem to appreciate.

In exchange for Iran's assistance, America should recognize Iran's legitimate interests in Iraq, keep it (generally) apprised of military operations, and possibly even develop a liaison relationship with the Iranian military and intelligence services by which the two sides could exchange limited information, thereby dampening Iranian fears of malign American intentions.

Much of this could be accomplished by forming a standing contact group made up of Iraq's neighbors — similar to the international support group proposed by Baker-Hamilton. The Iraqi government and the coalition forces would regularly brief this group and seek its advice, which should be ignored only with good reason. In return, the members of the contact group would commit to providing specific kinds of economic, political, diplomatic and even military support.

There are at least three good reasons to try this approach. First, no neighboring state is likely to significantly alter strategy unless they all do. Second, U.S. efforts to work with Iran in Iraq cannot come at the expense of our traditional allies among the Sunni states of the region: Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Finally, the problems in Iraq have become so daunting and so intertwined that we need every ounce of help we can get.

We can't simply expect Iran to save Iraq for us. We Americans need a new, feasible plan of our own. Only then will

we know how best Iran can help, and what we are willing to pay for that help. Talking to Iran without such a plan would be fruitless, if not folly.

Kenneth M. Pollack is the director of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution and the author of "The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America."

Baker and Hamilton firm on Iraq report

They defend 'responsible way forward' despite Baghdad and conservative critics

By Brian Knowlton

WASHINGTON: The leaders of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group defended their approach Sunday as "a responsible way forward," even as criticism rose from American conservatives and from the president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, who said it contained "some very dangerous articles."

The group's co-chairmen, James Baker, a former secretary of state, and Lee Hamilton, a former congressman, appeared on four television programs, rejecting the criticisms calmly but firmly.

"Nothing we do can absolutely guarantee success," Baker said on NBC-TV. But as the country faced a mounting crisis, he said, the unanimous recommendations of the 10-member group "might give us the way forward."

"What we're saying in this report is we want to conclude this war," Hamilton added, "we want to conclude it in a responsible way."

As the administration concludes its own internal review, President George W. Bush has appeared reserved about, or even skeptical of, the panel's key recommendations, including the withdrawal of most U.S. combat troops by early 2008 and the establishment of a regional dialogue to include Iran and Syria.

Administration officials say some of the panel's recommendations appear impractical or unrealistic. With the president expected to announce new directions for Iraq in the next two weeks, a small group inside the National Security Council has been racing to come up with alternative ideas.

Conservative Republicans have increasingly raised their own doubts and their skepticism now vies with the largely supportive reviews of Democrats and some moderate Republicans.

Critics call the 2008 target date unrealistic; say a stepped-up emphasis on training Iraqi forces seems unlikely to bring dramatic improvement; contend that bringing Iran and Syria into talks can only mean trouble; and deplore as defeatist the report's scant mention of the goals of democracy for Iraq — and of an American "victory."

Officials from the White House, State Department and Pentagon, as well as foreign diplomats, describe a deep reluctance in the White House to follow a core strategy of the study group: to pressure Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki to rein in sectarian vi-

olence or face reduced U.S. military and economic support.

While Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is said to have cautiously embraced the commission's approach on pressuring the Maliki government, people in the National Security Council and the vice president's office are said to oppose it as too risky.

The British prime minister, Tony Blair, who during a Washington visit Thursday joined Bush in welcoming the commission report, seemed reluctant Sunday to threaten the Maliki government with diminished support.

"I think we've got to plan to succeed," Blair said on ABC-TV. "And I think that if we start saying to the people that we're fighting in Iraq that we're ready to get out, irrespective of

the success of the mission, I think that would be very serious for us."

In Baghdad, Talabani added his voice to others' criticisms, saying that the report "is not fair, is not just, and it contains some very dangerous articles which undermine the sovereignty of Iraq and the constitution."

He called it "a type of insult to the Iraqi people" and said it seemed to treat Iraq almost like a colony.

Talabani, a Kurdish leader and a staunch U.S. ally, singled out the recommendation that thousands of officials from the ousted Baath party, many of them Sunnis, be allowed to return to their jobs, The Associated Press reported. And embedding large numbers of U.S. trainers with Iraqi units would undermine Iraqi sovereignty, he said.

Kurdish officials are also concerned that the plan might take control of oil revenues from Kurdish authorities.

Baker, asked about Talabani's comment, called it "disappointing." But he noted that the study group found some form of oil revenue-sharing among Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis "indispensable" to any hopes for national reconciliation. Without reconciliation, he added on CNN, the world could expect "not just a broad-based civil war but a wider regional war."

From the American right, the report has endured pointed criticism. The Wall Street Journal's editorial page called it a "strategic muddle," the talk-show host Rush Limbaugh labeled it "stupid" and The New York Post portrayed Baker and Hamilton as "surrender monkeys."

The two men were good-natured

Sunday about such comments.

But more seriously, Baker said on CNN, "America has a huge problem here, the administration has a big problem here and it's not going to be solved by those kinds of comments and editorials, and it's not going to be solved, frankly, by a resort to politics as usual."

Many people on the right oppose talks with Syria or Iran unless they first cease support for terror groups. In Iran's case they insist it halt work on uranium enrichment.

Blair, who has urged such talks, said that as for Syria, "I don't think there's any problem with doing that at all, and I don't think the president's got a problem with doing that."

Iran was more problematic.

"It's undermining the Iraqi government," he said, and "trying to build a coalition of extremism in the region."

But Baker, unflappable during the four television appearances, seemed particularly convinced of the wisdom of such talks.

"What do we lose?" he said on NBC-TV. "We don't give up anything."

Hamilton added: "Iran and Syria are major players. Now to try to isolate them, to shove them aside, to say they don't have any impact here, I don't think that gets you anywhere."

Moderate Republicans clung to the

report as mapping a way Bush could begin the process of disengagement from a costly and difficult war.

"Clearly staying the course is wrong," Representative Christopher Shays, Republican of Connecticut, said on CNN. "We need a diplomatic effort in the neighborhood. All of that makes tremendous sense."

Democrats remained mostly supportive of the report.

"The fact it's being shot at from the right and the left shows to me it's pretty sound," Representative Jane Harman of California, a member of the intelligence committee, said on CNN.

Jim Rutenberg, David E. Sanger, John M. Broder and Robin Toner contributed reporting.

iht.com/americas

Go online for complete coverage of the Iraq Study Group, including the full text of the report.

Kurds warn White House not to adopt Baker-Hamilton report



December 12, 2006

By Mohammed A. Salih and Jamal Ekhtiar
The Globe - Erbil

President of the Kurdistan Region dismissed the report by the Iraq Study Group (ISG) as "unrealistic and inappropriate" and lashed out at the major recommendations of the group, saying it will endanger Iraq's territorial integrity and that Kurds will "in no way abide" by it.

The furious reaction by Masoud Barzani came two days after the report by the ISG, co-chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker III and former Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton, was released last Wednesday.

The report described the situation in Iraq as "grave and deteriorating" and made 79 recommendations to President George W. Bush on Iraq and wider Middle East problems.

"We think that the Iraq Study Group has made some unrealistic and inappropriate recommendations for helping the U.S. to get out of these (Iraq) difficulties," Barzani said in his sharply worded statement released last Friday.

"If under this pretext, these inappropriate recommendations are imposed on us, we declare, on behalf of the people of Kurdistan, that we reject anything that is against the constitution and the interest of Iraq and Kurdistan."

Barzani considered the ISG's failure to visit Kurdistan during the nine months that they were preparing the report "a major shortcoming that adversely influenced the credibility of the (ISG) assessment."

He threatened that Kurds will seek independence should the White House implement key proposals by the Baker-Hamilton report on Kirkuk, federalism, changes in the constitution, and control of oil resources.

"The part of the report that calls for postponing the implementa-

tion of the constitutional article (140) on Kirkuk will lead to an explosive situation in the country," Ghafour Makhmouri, a member of Kurdistan Parliament in Arbil, told the Globe.

On Friday, Barzani told a gathering of Kurdish lawmakers and ministers in Baghdad that the real problem in Iraq will arise when Kurds feel there are parties hindering Kirkuk's annexation to Kurdistan.

Groups of Turkomans and Arabs in the city are opposed to the idea and call for Kirkuk to be given the special status of a separate federal region.

Kurds are also against a major recommendation of the report that cautions against Iraq's devolution into three regions. Along with Shias, they advocate federalism on ethnic and sectarian bases.

They disapprove major changes to the constitution as well as that might imperil their gains of federalism, "normalizing Kirkuk situation" and control of oil resources.

Iraq's President, Jalal Talabani, also a Kurd, expressed support for the statement by the Kurdish regional president and branded the report's recommendations as "dangerous".

The ISG's 96-page report advises Bush to launch a New Diplomatic Offensive and engage Iraq's neighboring countries, including Iran and Syria and Turkey, to help the U.S. resolve Iraq's tense situation.

"Politically, Iran and Syria scored a victory over the U.S., and the report's recommendation to negotiate with them is an undeniable proof for that," Kamal Saadi, Head of Law Department in Arbil's Salahaddin University told the Globe.

"It is these neighboring countries that do not let Iraq administer itself. They disrupt the country's security and political situation and help terrorists infiltrate into Iraq and are settling

their old scores with America on Iraq's soil."

Kurds fear the neighboring countries' involvement in Iraqi affairs will negatively affect their position in the country.

Turkey does not recognize Kurdistan's federal status and

has threatened to use military force should Kurds secede from Iraq.

Likewise, Iran and Syria are concerned about Kurds' growing influence and weight in Iraqi politics.

All three countries have sizable Kurdish populations with separatist tendencies, which, they worry, will be inspired by the gains of their fellow Kurds in Iraq.

Amid concerns in Iraq and the U.S. on the report's fate, the Bush administration has shown little willingness so far to adopt the report.

On Thursday, Baker told the U.S. Senate that Bush should treat his report as a whole and not in a selective manner.

Bush, however, is not considering all points of the report. During a joint news conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, one day after the report was released, he made it clear that talking with Iran and Syria is not an option.

Kurds feel they have not been rewarded for their assistance to the U.S. during the war on Iraq and its aftermath. They fear the ISG report, if implemented, will practically lead to a situation similar to 1975, when after the Algeria Accord between Iran and Iraq, Kurdish self-rule in northern Iraq collapsed and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced.

"Such positions (in the report) are against the concepts of democracy and human rights that America calls for," Makhmouri noted.

"It will damage America's credibility among the peoples who count on its help for their liberation."



Kurdistan Regional President Massoud Barzani and US ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad talk to each other at a meeting of Kurdistan parliament in Erbil May 7, 2006.

TURKEY AND KURDS: GIVE PEACE A CHANCE!

The unilateral "cease-fire declaration" of 1st October 2006, declared by the PKK and by KONGRA-GEL, opens new and unprecedented political prospects for peace and reconciliation in Turkey. The search for a negotiated and non-violent political solution to the "Kurdish question" in Turkey also concerns the European Union and the entire international community. After the cease-fire, it is the task and duty of the Turkish authorities to take this new opportunity to engage in a public and transparent political process of discussion with the representatives of the Kurds of Turkey about the "Kurdish question".

That is why we ask the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to embrace the spirit and the letter of the recent European Parliament's report "on Turkey's progress to accession to the EU", adopted on 27th September 2006 by the peoples' representatives of the 25 European Union's Member States, especially those paragraphs asking Turkey to enter into direct discussions with the representatives of the Kurds of Turkey, a political process that will certainly have our support, the support of all European institutions and of the international democratic civil society.

We must support the cease-fire to give peace a chance, we must support the opening of direct discussions between Turkey and representatives of the Kurds to give democracy a chance, and the basic rights of the Kurdish people must finally be recognised.

Signatories of the Appeal: TURKEY AND KURDS: GIVE PEACE A CHANCE!

Harold Pinter, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, UK; **Imre Kertész**, Nobelprize Owner (Literature) Budapest/Berlin, **Venerable Thich Quang Do**, Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), Rafto Prize 2006; **Bianca Jagger**, Council of Europe Goodwill Ambassador, UK; **Vo Van Ai**, President of Que Me; **Jean Ziegler**, Genf/Zurich, United Nations Special Rapporteur / UN Task Force Iraq; **Paulos Testagiorgis**, Lawyer and Rafto Prize Laureate 2003, Eritrea/USA; **Vittorio Agnoletto**, EP-Kurds Group, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Monica Frassoni**, Chair MEP-V-ALE Group, **Francis Wurtz**, Chair MEP-GUE/NGL Group; **Hélène Flautre**, Chair DROI, MEP-V-ALE; **Luisa Morgantini**, Chair DEVE, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Frieda Brepoels**, MEP-PPE; **Marie-Arlette Charloti**, MEP-PSE; **Jiri Mastalka**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Ewa Pettersen Hedkvist**, MEP-PSE; **Renate Sommer** MEP-PPE; **Jens Holm**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Panagiotis Beglitis**, MEP-PSE; **Britta Thomsen**, MEP-PSE; **Marios Matsakis**, MEP-ADLE; **Jean Lambert**, MEP-V-ALE; **Bernat Joan i Mari**, MEP-V-ALE, **Feleknas Uca**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Baroness Sarah Ludford**, MEP-ADLE; **Roberto Musacchio**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Baart Staes** MEP-V/ALE; **Adamos Adamou**, MEP-GUE; **Pierre Jonckheer**, MEP-PSE; **Bairbre De Brún**, MEP; **Inger Segelström**, MEP-PSE; **Dimitri Papadimoulis**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Umberto Guidoni**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Tatjana Zdanoka**, MEP-V-ALE; **Willy Meyer Pleite**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Mary Lou McDonald**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Pierre Jonckheer**, MEP-Green/EFA; **Jan Andersson**, MEP-PSE; **Miguel Portas**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Anna Hedh**, MEP-PSE, **Gabriele Zimmer**, MEP-GUE/NGL, **Asa Westlund**, MEP-PSE; **Giusto Catania**, GUE/NGL; **Vincenzo Aita**, MEP-GUE/NGL; **Enrico Speroni**, MEP-NI, **Bernadette Bourzai**, MEP-PSE; **Chiesa Giulietto** MEP-PSE, **Sven Wolter**; **Dr. Mehmoūd Othman** Member of National Assembly of Iraq; **Bodil Ceballos**, Member of Swedish parliament; **Gunvor G Ericson**, Member of Swedish parliament; **Peter Radberg**, Member of Swedish Parliament, **Pater Wolfgang Jungheim**, Pax Christi Nassau-Lahnstein, **Rashidi-Kalhur Ardishir**, President, Southern California Division United Nations Association of the USA; **Mel Boynton** Claremont, CA; **Diawer Ala'Aldeen**, Professor in Medicine, Editor-in-Chief, Zanin Scientific Journal, **Dr. Dilan Roshani** Nottingham, UK; **Tove Skutnabb Kangas** dr.phil., Roskilde University, Denmark & Åbo Akademi University, Finland; **Robert Phillipson**, Professor, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark; **Dr Ahmadzadeh Hasham**, Lecturer in Kurdish Studies; University of Exeter, UK; **Jaffer Sheyhollisami**, Linguistics & Applied Language Studies, Carleton University, Canada; Sen. **Giovanni Russo Spena**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Albonetti Martino**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Alfonzi Daniela**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Allocca Salvatore**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Boccia Maria Luisa**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Bonadonna Salvatore**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Capelli Giovanna**, Italy-Senate; Sen.; **Caprilli Milziade**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Confaloneri Giovanni**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Del Roio Jose Luiz**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Di Lello Giuseppe**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Emprin Erminia**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Gaggio Adelaide**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Gagliardi Rina**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Giannini Fasco**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Grassi Claudio**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Liotta Santo**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Malabarba Luigi**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Martone Francesco**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Menapace Lidia**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Nardini Maria Celeste**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Palermo Anna Maria**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Sodano Tommaso**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Tecce Raffaele**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Turogliatto Franco**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Valpiana Tiziana**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Vano Olimpia**, Italy-Senate; Sen. **Zuccherini Stefano**, Italy-Senate; **Mecozi Alessandra** FIOM -Italy; **Prof. Dr. Deltcho Balabanov**, Sofia, Bulgaria; **Eva Bulling-Schroder**, Member of German Parliament; **Ulla Hoffman**, member of Central Committee of The Swedish Left Party, Member of Parliament; **Kalle Larsson**, member of Swedish Parliament (The Left Party); **Siv Holma**, Member of Swedish Parliament (The Left Party); **Amineh Kakebaveh**, member of International Committee of The Swedish Left Party; **Anelli Dostan**, Psychotherapist, Sweden; **Karla Lopes**, member of Swedish Parliament (The Swedish Green Party); **Hama Dostan**, Novelist, Sweden; **Dr. Helen Coley**, Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK; **Eugene Schoulgin**, writer, Norway; **Céline Delforge**, Député ECOLO; **Mahfoudh Romdhani**, Députée PS Vice-Président du Parlement Bruxellois; **Jan Beghin**, Vice Président et Député du Parlement Bruxellois; **Bernard Granjon**, ancien président de Médecins du Monde, **Jacques Fath**, Membre du Comité exécutif national du Parti communiste français, **Renée Le Mignot**, vice présidente du MRAP, chargée des questions internationales, **Christian Guyonvarc'h**, vice-president of the Region of Brittany, **Jean Paul Nune**, CIMADE, **André Métayer**, Président de l'association «Amitiés kurdes de Bretagne»; **On. Iacopo Venier** PDCI-Italy; **Vendola Nichi**, presedente regione della puglia-Italy; **Paolo Beni** Arci-Italy, **Rafaella Bollini**, Arci-Italy, **Lionel Vandenberghe**, sénateur-Spirit, au parlement fédéral de la Belgique; **Cornil Jean** sénateur PS/Belgique; **Belhouari Talbia**, députée fédérale PS/ Belgique; **Maes Nelly** Présidente du parti Alliance Libre Européenne/Belgique; **Genot Zoé** députée fédérale ECOLO Belgique; **Galand Pierre** sénateur PS Belgique; **Laloy Marie-José** sénatrice PS parlement fédéral de la Belgique; **Wiriya Rawenduzay**, Dr, veteran anti violence activist, Austria; **Dr. Khidir Masum**, President of Koya, University - Iraqi Kurdistan; **Hemin Seydi**, lecturer; **Dr. Nasir Simayi**, Psychologist and Lecturer; **Suleyman Chukeli**, Lecturer, The Collage of Education, University of Koya; **Tony Benn**, former Labour MP and Cabinet Minister, UK, **Lord Rea**, House of Lords, UK, **Lord Dholakia**, House of Lords, UK; **Martin Caton MP**, UK; **John Austin MP**, UK; **Hywel Williams MP**, UK; **Elyfn Llwyd MP**, UK; **Angus Robertson MP**, UK, **Mark Thomas**, Comedian and Broadcaster UK; **Liz Davies**, Chair Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, UK, **Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui**, The Muslim Parliament, UK; **Shauna Gillan**, Barnster Matrix Chambers, UK; **Brendan Finucane QC**, Bar Human Rights Committee for England, Scotland and Wales; **Prof. Bill Bowring**, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK; **Stan Newens**, former MEP and President of Liberation, UK; **Richard McKane**, Poet and Translator, UK; **Frances Webber**, Barrister, Garden Court Chambers, UK, **Smita Shah**, Barrister, Garden Court Chambers, UK; **Ben Hayes**, Statewatch, UK; **Judith Vidal-Hall**, Editor of Index on Censorship, UK; **Lindsey German**, Convenor, Stop the War Coalition, UK; **Nick Hildyard**, Policy Analyst, UK; **Stephen Smellie**, Secretary UNISON South Lanarkshire Branch and member of UNISON Scottish Committee, UK; **Jnathna Bloch**, Co-author of "Global Intelligence", UK; **Desmond Fernandes**, Political Analyst, UK; **Margaret Owen**, Author and International Human Rights Lawyer, UK; **Marion Kozak**, women's human rights campaigner, UK; **Roger Tompkins**, Humanist and International Lawyer, New Zealand and Cyprus; **Maggie Bowden**, General Secretary "Liberation", UK; **Baroness Helena Kennedy QC**, House of Lords, UK; **Richard Younger-Ross MP**, UK; **Bob Russell MP**, UK; **Linda Gilroy MP**, UK; **Alyn Smith MEP**, UK; **Stewart Hemsley**, Chair Pax Christi, UK; **Hugo Charlton**, Barnster UK; **Matt Wrack**, FBU General Secretary, UK; **Michael Ivers**, Barnster, UK; **Dave Stamp**, ASIRT, UK; **Nimalan Seevaratnam**, Campaign for Truth and Justice, UK; **Emma Ginn**, National Coalition Against Deportation Campaign, UK, **Jeremy Hughes**, UK; **Mark Barratt**, People in Common; **Nancy Furlog**, Code Paik, UK; **HansBranscheidt**, Mezopotamian Development Society e V., Germany

Mesopotamische Entwicklungsgesellschaft, Postfach 35, 61440 Oberursel, Germany.



La photo de l'exécution de onze Kurdes, prise en Iran en 1979, avait décroché le Pulitzer anonymement.

Un photographe sort de l'ombre

EN AOÛT 1979, une photo prise en Iran fait le tour du monde. Un peloton d'exécution composé de soldats de la République islamique fait feu sur une dizaine de Kurdes sans armes. Elle est d'abord publiée dans le grand quotidien iranien *Ettela'at*, puis, par l'intermédiaire de l'agence UPI, dans des centaines de publications du monde entier.

Quelques mois plus tard, elle remporte le prix Pulitzer. De manière anonyme. En effet, le journal *Ettela'at* juge plus prudent de ne pas dévoiler l'identité du photographe.

Au fil des ans, l'image devient un symbole de la violence du régime de Khomeyni, et le mystère demeure. De temps à autre, tel ou tel photographe iranien à l'étranger se targue d'avoir pris ce cliché, sans apporter de preuve décisive.

Anonymat

Dans son édition du 4 décembre, le *Wall Street Journal* affirme avoir retrouvé le véritable auteur.

Selon un long article de Joshua Prager, spécialiste des enquêtes au quotidien économique new-yorkais, il s'agirait de Jahangir Razmi, âgé aujourd'hui de 58 ans, vivant à Téhéran.

Il était en reportage dans le Kurdistan iranien en août 1979. Il a assisté à la mascarade de procès qui a abouti à l'exécution des onze Kurdes. Les photos sont parties par avion à Téhéran, tandis que le reporter restait sur place. Le rédacteur en chef d'*Ettela'at* a décidé la publication de la photo et opté pour l'anonymat de son auteur : « Je voulais protéger Razmi », explique-t-il au *Wall Street Journal*.

Joshua Prager a rencontré d'anciens collègues du photographe, des membres de la rédaction d'*Ettela'at* et d'anciens responsables d'UPI, l'agence qui a réceptionné la photo à Bruxelles, au lendemain de la parution en Iran. En outre, il affirme que M. Razmi lui a montré des planches-contacts (épreuves papier avant tirage) de la sinistre exécution, qui conten-

ent des clichés jamais publiés.

Le journaliste américain a commencé à s'intéresser à l'histoire de cette photo à partir de l'été 2002, en lisant un livre consacré aux lauréats du prix Pulitzer.

Vrais et faux informateurs

« J'ai mis beaucoup de temps à remonter la piste, a-t-il expliqué au *Monde* par téléphone depuis New York. Quand, finalement, j'ai pensé que le photographe était toujours en vie à Téhéran, j'ai tenté de contacter M. Razmi des Etats-Unis, mais c'était très difficile de naviguer entre les vrais et les faux informateurs. Je ne parle pas persan, et, quand j'ai enfin réussi à rencontrer M. Razmi à Téhéran, en août 2005, j'ai réalisé que j'avais parlé au téléphone avec des interlocuteurs qui se faisaient passer pour lui, mais qui n'étaient pas lui. »

Le journaliste américain souligne qu'en 1979 le photographe a fait les choses en règle. « Il avait la permission d'un juge pour prendre ces photos. Il a donné les néga-

tifs aux autorités quand elles les lui ont demandés. Il n'a pas touché un centime avec ces clichés publiés à l'étranger. Aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas lui qui a cherché à me contacter, mais plutôt l'inverse. »

Convaincu de détenir ainsi les preuves que Jahangir Razmi est bien le véritable auteur des photos, Joshua Prager prépare un livre sur cette affaire. A la suite de la publication de l'article du *Wall Street Journal*, l'agence UPI a contacté les membres du jury Pulitzer pour leur suggérer d'attribuer nommément le prix à Jahangir Razmi. ■

CATHERINE BÉDARIDA

L'Iran conteste la Shoah et provoque l'indignation

Israël Le premier ministre Olmert dénonce « la haine vis-à-vis des juifs »

Le Monde
13 décembre 2006

La « conférence » organisée à Téhéran sur la Shoah – qui devait se conclure, mardi 12 décembre, par un message du président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – a suscité une vague de protestations indignées en Israël, aux Etats-Unis, en Europe.

Jamais une tribune internationale n'avait été ainsi offerte aux négationnistes

de la Shoah comme Robert Faurisson et Georges Thiel, condamnés par la justice française, l'Américain David Duke, ex-dirigeant du Ku Klux Klan de Louisiane, ou l'Australien Fredrick Toeben, qui fut détenu en Allemagne pour incitation à la haine raciale. Les interventions rapportées par les agences de presse soulignent que cette « conférence », sous couvert d'anti-

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad conspué par des étudiants

Lors d'une visite du président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, à l'université Amir-Kabir de Téhéran, lundi 11 décembre, un petit groupe d'étudiants a crié « Mort au dictateur ! » et brûlé ses photos sous ses yeux, selon l'agence estudiantine ISNA. M. Ahmadinejad a répliqué qu'il avait « l'honneur de brûler pour le bénéfice des idéaux de la nation et la défense du régime », ajoutant : « Les Américains doivent savoir que, même si le corps d'Ahmadinejad est brûlé mille fois, Ahmadinejad ne reculera pas d'un centimètre sur ses idéaux. » Quelques échauffourées ont suivi et – fait rare – la télévision d'Etat a mon-

tré des images. On ne sait pas si des arrestations ont eu lieu. Dimanche, des centaines d'étudiants avaient dénoncé la répression contre l'association islamique des étudiants (réformateurs) et la « suspension » de 20 de ses membres. La veille, des étudiants avaient publié un communiqué critiquant « l'interdiction d'accès aux universités des professeurs indépendants » et soulignant la « banqueroute » et la « dégradation de l'image internationale » du pays. La semaine dernière, 2 000 à 3 000 étudiants avaient manifesté à Téhéran, pour la première fois depuis deux ans. – (AFP, Reuters.)

ISRAËL DÉFENSE

M. Olmert sous-entend qu'Israël dispose de l'arme atomique

JÉRUSALEM
CORRESPONDANT

La possession par Israël de l'arme atomique n'est un secret pour personne. Les experts estiment que l'Etat juif possède entre 80 et 200 ogives nucléaires. Mais les autorités israéliennes n'avaient jamais voulu le reconnaître, ni adhérer au traité de non-prolifération (TNP), se réfugiant derrière ce que Shimon Pérès – considéré comme le « père » de la bombe israélienne – a appelé la « politique d'ambiguïté ». Désormais, « l'ambiguïté » ne semble plus faire illusion.

Le premier ministre israélien, Ehoud Olmert, en voyage en Allemagne, a commis, lundi 11 décembre, un lapsus significatif. Interrogé à propos du programme nucléaire iranien, il a répondu : « L'Iran a menacé (...) de rayer Israël de la carte. Pouvez-vous dire que c'est une menace comparable, quand on cherche à obtenir l'arme nucléaire, à celle de pays comme la

France, les Etats-Unis, Israël ou la Russie ? Israël ne menace aucun pays de quoi que ce soit et ne l'a jamais fait », a-t-il ajouté. Miri Eisin, porte-parole du premier ministre, a immédiatement fait savoir que ce dernier n'avait pas voulu dire qu'Israël possède la bombe atomique, précisant qu'« Israël ne sera pas le premier pays à introduire l'arme nucléaire dans la région ».

Déjà, la semaine dernière, le nouveau secrétaire à la défense américain, Robert Gates, avait mis à mal la « politique d'ambiguïté » d'Israël en déclarant que « l'Iran est entouré de puissances nucléaires avec le Pakistan à l'est, la Russie au nord et Israël à l'ouest ». Ses propos avaient provoqué des réactions courroucées. Cette fois, l'opposition de droite comme celle de gauche ont critiqué le premier ministre et demandé sa démission. ■

MICHEL BÔLE-RICHARD

sionisme, réveille un vieux révisionnisme à prétention scientifique.

Selon l'AFP, Fredrick Toeben est venu à Téhéran avec une maquette du camp de concentration de Treblinka pour tenter de démontrer que l'existence des chambres à gaz est un « mensonge absolu ». De son côté, Robert Faurisson a rendu hommage au président Ahmadinejad « pour son courage, son héroïsme, sa clarté ». Après lui, il a répété que l'Holocauste est un « mythe ». Cette « conférence » a d'ailleurs tourné au culte de la personnalité du président iranien, qui a compris « l'importance de l'Holocauste comme dogme qu'on ne peut pas questionner dans le monde occidental », comme l'a dit Fredrick Toeben.

Dès son discours d'ouverture, Manouchehr Mottaki, ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, avait levé l'équivoque sur le sens de la conférence : la dénonciation d'Israël à travers la mise en cause du sionisme, dont les « méthodes » sont comparées à celles du nazisme.

« Aujourd'hui, ceux qui prétendent être antinazis sont eux-mêmes des racistes et colonialistes et ce qu'ils ont fait de des gens n'est pas différent des crimes des nazis », a affirmé M. Mottaki. Pour lui, l'antisémitisme est un « phénomène européen » et « dans la longue histoire de l'Iran, il n'y a aucun document établissant une seule manifestation d'antisémitisme ». Quelques rabbins antisionistes participent à la réunion, comme le Britannique Ahron Cohen, pour qui « la Shoah a réellement existé et nous lui avons survécu. Mais elle ne peut en aucune manière être utilisée pour justifier les injustices qui frappent les Palestiniens. »

La communauté juive d'Iran (25 000 personnes contre 60 000 avant la révolution khomeiniste de 1979) a exprimé son opposition. Seul député juif du pays, Moris Motamed a déclaré que « nier l'Holocauste est une immense insulte ».

Cet amalgame de thèses révisionnistes et antisionistes a suscité un tollé dans le monde. Surtout en Israël : « Cette conférence est nauséabonde et prouve l'ampleur de la haine vis-à-vis des juifs et d'Israël », a commenté le premier ministre, Ehoud Olmert.

A Washington, l'administration américaine a évoqué un « geste honteux ». A Paris, Philippe Douste-Blazy, ministre des affaires étrangères, a exprimé l'« inquiétude » du gouvernement.

A Berlin, lors d'une réunion du Centre pour l'éducation politique – qui refuse d'apparaître comme une « contre-conférence » qui ferait trop d'honneur à Téhéran – Raul Hilberg, l'un des principaux historiens de la Shoah, a dressé un nouveau bilan du génocide et répété que « tous les documents sont là pour prouver que ceux qui nient cette réalité ont tort ».

Pierre Besnainou, président du Congrès juif européen, appelle les dirigeants européens à « prendre toutes les sanctions qui s'imposent » contre Téhéran. ■

HENRI TINCQ

Les Kurdes jugent le rapport « irréaliste » et « inapproprié »

LE PRÉSIDENT de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a rejeté, vendredi 8 décembre, le rapport rédigé par le groupe d'études américain qui propose une nouvelle stratégie en Irak. M. Barzani l'a jugé « irréaliste et inapproprié ». ce rapport évoque notamment le sort de la région de Kirkouk, riche en pétrole, que revendiquent les Kurdes irakiens.

Par ailleurs, des responsables irakiens ont annoncé, vendredi, que la conférence de réconciliation nationale annoncée par le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, le 5 décembre, aura lieu à partir du 16 décembre. Annoncée de longue date, cette conférence a été reportée à plusieurs reprises. Elle doit théoriquement réunir « toutes les forces politiques » irakiennes pour tenter de mettre un terme aux affrontements confessionnels qui ravagent le pays.

Le Comité des oulémas musulmans, la principale organisation religieuse sun-

nite, a cependant annoncé aussitôt vendredi qu'il allait la boycotter. « *Le Comité ne participera pas à la conférence de réconciliation nationale organisée par le gouvernement. Nous avons trop vu par le passé le gouvernement signer des accords qu'il a plus tard dénoncés* », a expliqué Mohammad Bashar Al-Faidhi, porte-parole de l'association. Une enquête a été ouverte en Irak contre le responsable du Comité des oulémas, Hareth Al-Dhari, accusé d'inciter à la violence confessionnelle. Ce dernier a, depuis, quitté l'Irak. En marge de ces controverses, l'armée américaine se retrouve au centre d'une nouvelle polémique après la mort de 20 personnes dans un raid mené au nord de Bagdad, vendredi matin. Ce raid visait, selon elle, des « terroristes » d'Al-Qaida.

Des témoins irakiens ont en revanche indiqué que cette opération avait entraîné la mort de « femmes et d'enfants innocents ». Le lieutenant-colonel Christo-

pher Garver, porte-parole de l'armée américaine, a affirmé que l'armée a vérifié qui étaient les victimes. « *Il n'y avait aucun enfant parmi les terroristes tués. Malheureusement, les terroristes sont connus pour leur capacité à exagérer ou fal-*

sifier les informations après les succès des opérations de la coalition », a-t-il affirmé.

Enfin, le chef des services saoudiens de renseignement, le prince Muqrin Ben Abdelaziz Al-Saoud, a affirmé, vendredi, à Manama (Bahreïn) que le maintien de la présence des troupes américaines en Irak contribuait à « *créer plus de terroristes* ». Il a toutefois estimé que le moment n'était pas venu pour ces troupes de quitter l'Irak, mais a souhaité l'établissement d'un calendrier pour leur retrait.

L'Iran, de son côté, s'est dit prêt, dans certaines circonstances, à « *aider* » les Etats-Unis à retirer leurs troupes d'Irak, par la voix du ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Manouchehr Mottaki, samedi à Manama. - (AFP)

Herald  Tribune December 12, 2006

Iran draws Holocaust skeptics to conference

By Nazila Fathi

TEHRAN: Holocaust deniers and skeptics from around the world gathered at a government-sponsored conference here Monday to discuss their theories about whether six million Jews were indeed killed by the Nazis during World War II and whether gas chambers existed.

In a speech opening the two-day conference, Rasoul Mousavi, head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies, which organized the event, said the conference was an opportunity for scholars to discuss the subject "away from Western taboos and the restriction imposed on them in Europe."

The Foreign Ministry had said that 67 foreign researchers from 30 countries were scheduled to take part. Among those speaking on Monday were David Duke, the American white-supremacist

politician and former Ku Klux Klan leader, and Georges Thiel, a French writer who has been prosecuted in France over his denials of the Holocaust.

Duke's remarks were expected to assert that no gas chambers or extermination camps were built during the war, on the ground that killing Jews that way would have been much too bothersome and expensive when the Nazis could have used much simpler methods, according to an advance summary published by the institute.

"Depicting Jews as the overwhelming victims of the Holocaust gave the moral high ground to the Allies as victors of the war and allowed Jews to establish a state on the occupied land of Palestine," Duke's paper says, according to the summary.

One of the first scheduled speakers, Robert Faurisson of France, also called the Holocaust a myth created to justify the occupation of Palestine.

The conference prompted outrage in the West. The German government summoned the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Berlin to protest. The French foreign minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, warned that the conference would be strongly condemned if it propagated claims denying the Holocaust.

The conference was being held at the behest of the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who likewise called the Holocaust a myth last year, and repeated a well-known slogan from the early days of the 1979 revolution in Iran: "Israel must be wiped off the map."

He has spoken several times since then about a need to establish whether the Holocaust actually happened.

Most of the speakers at the conference on Monday praised Ahmadinejad's comments. Bendikt Frings, 48, a psychologist from Germany, said he believed Ahmadinejad was "an honest, direct man," and said he had come to the conference to thank him. "We are forbidden to have such a conference in Germany," he said. "All my childhood, we waited for something like this."

Fredrick Toben, from Australia, said Ahmadinejad had opened an issue "which is morally and intellectually crippling the Western society."

He said he was jailed for six months in 1999 because of his ideas, and that a court in Germany had ordered him arrested if he spoke out publicly again denying that the Holocaust took place.

The conference included an exhibition of various photos, posters and other material meant to contradict the accepted version of events, that the Nazis murdered millions of Jews and other "undesirables" in death camps during the war. New captions in Persian on some familiar photos of corpses at the camps argued that they were victims of typhus, not the German state.

Anti-Zionist literature, including a 2004 book by the American author Michael Collins Piper, about Zionist influence in America, was on display. So, apparently, was a video recording of 12 Holocaust survivors telling their stories, suggesting that the views represented at the conference may not have been entirely one-sided.

Barry R. McCaffrey

Beyond Baker-Hamilton

One Approach to a Last Try at Stability in Iraq

A collapse of the Iraqi state would be catastrophic — for the people of Iraq, for the Middle East and for America's strategic interests. We need a new political and military approach to head off this impending disaster — one crafted with bipartisan congressional support. But Baker-Hamilton isn't it.

Our objective should be a large-scale U.S. military withdrawal within the next 36 months, leaving in place an Iraqi government in a stable and mostly peaceful country that does not threaten its six neighboring states and does not intend to possess weapons of mass destruction.

The courage and skill of the U.S. armed forces have been awe-inspiring. Our soldiers, Marines and Special Operations forces have suffered 25,000 wounded and killed, with many thousands permanently maimed, while fighting this \$400 billion war.

But the situation in Iraq is perilous and growing worse. Thousands of Iraqis are killed each month; hundreds of thousands are refugees. The government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is largely dysfunctional. Our allies, including the brave and competent British, are nearly gone. Baghdad has become the central battlefield in this struggle, which involves not just politically inspired civil war but also rampant criminality and violence carried out by foreign jihadists. Shiite and Sunni Arabs overwhelmingly anticipate and endorse a U.S. strategic withdrawal and defeat.

We could immediately and totally withdraw. In less than six months, our 150,000 troops could fight their way along strategic withdrawal corridors back to the sea and the safety provided by the Navy. Several million terrified refugees would follow, the route of our columns marked by the burning pyres of abandoned military supplies demolished by our rear guard. The resulting civil warfare would probably turn Iraq into a humanitarian disaster and might well draw in the Iranians and Syrians. It would also deeply threaten the safety and stability of our allies in neighboring countries.

There is a better option. First, we must commit publicly to provide \$10 billion a year in economic support to the Iraqis over the next five years. In the military

arena, it would be feasible to equip and increase the Iraqi armed forces on a crash basis over the next 24 months (but not the police or the Facilities Protection Service). The goal would be 250,000 troops, provided with the material and training necessary to maintain internal order.

Within the first 12 months we should draw down the U.S. military presence from 15 Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), of 5,000 troops each, to 10. Within the next 12 months, Centcom forces should further draw down to seven BCTs and withdraw from urban areas to isolated U.S. operating bases — where we could continue to provide oversight and intervention when required to rescue our



BY YAHYA AHMED — ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. troops inspect the site of an attack on an American convoy in Kirkuk, northern Iraq, earlier this month.

embedded U.S. training teams, protect the population from violence or save the legal government.

Finally, we have to design and empower a regional diplomatic peace dialogue in which the Iraqis can take the lead, engaging their regional neighbors as well as their own alienated and fractured internal population.

We are in a very difficult position created by a micromanaged Rumsfeld war team that has been incompetent, arrogant and in denial. The departing defense secretary, in a recent farewell Pentagon town hall meeting, criticized the alleged distortions of the U.S. media, saying that they chose to report a few bombs going off in Baghdad rather than the peaceful

scene he witnessed from his helicopter flying over the city. This was a perfect, and incredible, continuation of Donald Rumsfeld's willful blindness in his approach to the war. From the safety of his helicopter, he apparently could not hear the nearly constant rattle of small-arms fire, did not know of the hundreds of Marines and soldiers being killed or

wounded each month, or see the chaos, murder and desperation of daily life for Iraqi families.

Let me add a note of caution regarding a deceptive and unwise option that springs from the work of the Iraq Study Group. We must not entertain the shallow, partisan notion of rapidly with-

drawing most organized Marine and Army fighting units by early 2008 and substituting for them a much larger number of U.S. advisers — a 400 percent increase — as a way to avoid a difficult debate for both parties in the New Hampshire primaries.

This would leave some 40,000 U.S. logistics and adviser troops spread out and vulnerable, all over Iraq. It would decrease our leverage with Iraq's neighbors. It would not get at the problem of a continuing civil war. In fact, significantly increasing the number of U.S. advisers in each company and battalion of the Iraqi army and police — to act as role models — is itself a bad idea. We are foreigners. They want us gone.

Lack of combat experience is not the central issue Iraqis face. Their problems are corrupt and incompetent ministries, poor equipment, an untrained and unreliable sectarian officer corps (a result of Rumsfeld's disbanding the Iraqi army), and a lack of political will caused by the failure of a legitimate Iraqi government to emerge.

We need fewer advisers, not more — selected from elite, active military units and with at least 90 days of immersion training in Arabic. Iraqi troops will not fight because of iron discipline enforced by U.S. sergeants and officers. That is a self-serving domestic political concept that would put us at risk of a national military humiliation.

All of this may not work. We have very few options left. In my judgment, taking down the Saddam Hussein regime was a huge gift to the Iraqi people. Done right, it might have left the region and the United States safer for years to come. But the American people have withdrawn their support for the war, although they remain intensely committed to and protective of our armed forces. We have run out of time. Our troops and their families will remain bitter for a generation if we abandon the Iraqis, just as another generation did after we abandoned the South Vietnamese for whom Americans had fought and died. We owe them and our own national interest this one last effort. If we cannot generate the political will to take this action, it is time to pull out and search for those we will hold responsible in Congress and the administration.

The writer is a retired Army general and adjutant professor of international affairs at West Point. He served four combat tours and was wounded in action three times.

Iraqis weigh alliance to marginalize Sadr

New coalition would bolster Maliki

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: Several of Iraq's major political parties are in talks to form an American-backed coalition whose aim is to dampen the influence within the government of the radical Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr and extremist Sunni Arab politicians, senior Iraqi officials say. President George W. Bush is directly pushing party leaders to create the coalition, the officials said.

A major goal of the parties is to support Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a conservative Shiite, so that he no longer has to depend on Sadr, one of the most powerful figures in Iraq, and could even move militarily against him if needed, the officials said. Sadr controls a militia with an estimated 60,000 fighters that has rebelled twice against the U.S. military here and is accused of widening the sectarian war by murdering Sunni Arabs in reprisal killings.

The proposed coalition cuts across ethnic and sectarian lines. The groups involved in the talks include the two major Kurdish parties, the most influential Sunni Arab party and two powerful Shiite parties, including Maliki's.

The Americans, who are increasingly frustrated with Maliki's ties to Sadr, appear to be working hard to help build the coalition. Bush met last week in the White House with the leader of the other Shiite party, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, and is meeting this week with the head of the Sunni Arab party, Tariq al-Hashemi.

In late November, Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with leaders and envoys from Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt to try to get them to persuade

moderate Sunni Arabs in Iraq to support Maliki, which would give the prime minister more leverage to break with Sadr.

Last month, Bush's national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, wrote in a classified memo that Washington should press Sunni Arab and Shiite leaders to support Maliki if he sought to build "an alternative political base."

Iraqi officials involved in the talks said they had grown frustrated with militant politicians within the government.

"A number of key political parties, across the sectarian-ethnic divide, recognize the gravity of the situation and have become increasingly aware that their fate, and that of the country, cannot be held hostage to the whims of the extreme fringe within their communities," said Barham Salih, a deputy-prime minister and senior member of one of the major Kurdish parties.

"Should these parties succeed in transcending the sectarian fault lines to

work together on the national 'democratic' project in Iraq, then Iraq will have a chance," he said.

The talks come at a time when Sadr's relationship with Maliki has shown signs of strain. On Nov. 30, Sadr suspended his political representatives — 30 legislators and 6 cabinet ministers — from participating in the government. Maliki called for the Sadr loyalists to return, but the politicians said they would do so only if Maliki and the Americans set a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. That demand was reiterated Sunday by Sadr in a fiery written message from his home in Najaf.

Any plan to form an alliance across sectarian lines, and one that isolates

Sadr and Sunni extremists, carries enormous risks. The entire point of giving Sadr a voice in the political process was to persuade him to use political power to effect change rather than doing so through force of arms. If Sadr thought he was being marginalized, he could ignite another rebellion, this time with a militia that has grown vastly since 2004, when U.S. troops struggled to put down two uprisings.

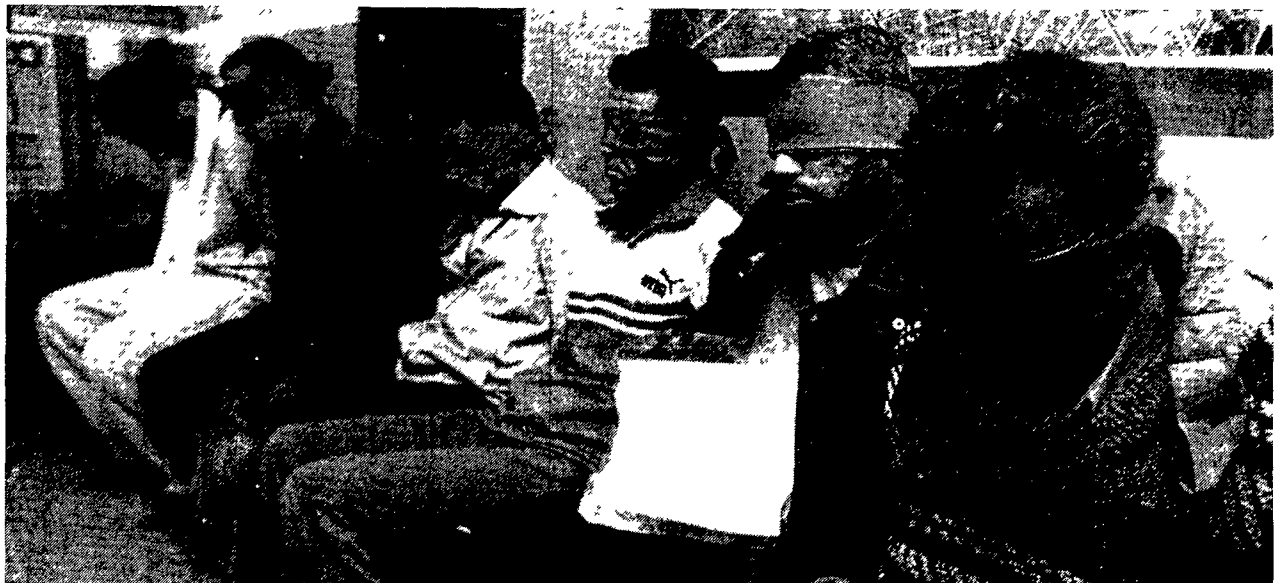
But senior U.S. commanders said that the attempts to make peace with Sadr through politics may have failed, and a military assault on his strongholds may be inevitable. His greatest support lies in the Sadr City district of Baghdad, with 2.2 million people, and in areas of the southern Shiite heartland, where his militia has clashed often with Hakim's.

On Monday, Falah Shanshal, a Sadr legislator, denounced the idea of any political coalition that would exclude Sadr officials. "We're against any new bloc, new front or new alliance," he said. "We have to make unity between us, to be one front against terrorism and to liberate the country from the occupation. Any new alliance will never be useful in this situation."

Iraqi officials said another big risk was a backlash against the parties involved in the talks from other leaders in their own ethnic or sectarian communities.

For Hakim and Maliki, any attempt to join Sunni Arabs in an alliance against Sadr could invoke the wrath of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most powerful Shiite cleric in Iraq. Since the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the ayatollah has worked hard to bring various feuding Shiite factions into one greater coalition to rule Iraq. Right now, that coalition, which includes Sadr, is the dominant bloc in the 275-member Parliament.

Abdul Razzaq al-Saiedi, Kirk Semple, Sabrina Tavernise and Qais Mizher contributed to this article.



Karim Kadim/The Associated Press

Men suspected of kidnapping, who were captured in an Iraqi Army raid, waiting Monday in the army's headquarters in Baghdad.

PROCHE-ORIENT DANS L'ATTENTE D'UNE NOUVELLE POLITIQUE AMÉRICAINE EN IRAK

L'Arabie saoudite s'interroge sur un soutien aux sunnites irakiens

IL Y A EU d'abord la tribune publiée le 29 novembre, dans le *Washington Post*, par un conseiller saoudien en faveur d'un soutien aux sunnites d'Irak. Puis le brusque départ, le 11 décembre, de l'ambassadeur du royaume à Washington, Turki Al-Faiçal, dont ce conseiller était un proche. Et enfin des informations du *New York Times*, mercredi 13 décembre, sur les propos prêtés au roi Abdallah

lors de sa dernière rencontre avec le vice-président américain Dick Cheney, à Riyad, le 25 novembre. Autant d'éléments qui trahissent l'inquiétude des Saoudiens devant le borbier irakien, l'éventualité d'un retrait américain, et les ambitions régionales de l'Iran.

En Irak, Riyad redoute désormais le déchaînement de la guerre civile entre sunnites et chiïtes en cas de retrait américain. Dans une telle situation, écrivait Nawaf Obeid, conseiller diplomatique pour l'ambassade saoudienne à Washington, le royaume n'aurait d'autre choix que d'intervenir pour défendre la minorité sunnite et empêcher des « massacres ».

Le conseiller faisait état d'appels déjà lancés à la monarchie saoudienne, notamment de la part

des chefs des confédérations tribales liés aux confédérations irakiennes, en faveur d'un soutien politique, financier, voire militaire aux sunnites d'Irak. M. Obeid avait précisé qu'il ne s'exprimait pas au nom des autorités saoudiennes et il était tombé en disgrâce dès la publication de sa tribune.

La menace d'un engagement de Riyad en Irak dans le cas d'un retrait américain aurait pourtant été le message principal, selon le *New York Times*, que le roi Abdallah

aurait fait passer à M. Cheney en novembre. La Maison Blanche s'en est démarquée en assurant que cette hypothèse ne s'inscrivait pas dans le cadre de la politique saoudienne. Officiellement, en effet, le royaume n'intervient pas en Irak autrement que pour soutenir financièrement les efforts de reconstruction.

La menace iranienne

L'impasse en Irak et un éventuel retrait américain alimenteraient des analyses divergentes au plus haut niveau saoudien, et des dissensions qui pourraient expliquer le départ soudain de Washington de l'ambassadeur Turki Al-Faiçal à propos duquel aucune indica-

tion n'a été donnée à Riyad, comme c'est la coutume. Arrivé de Londres où il officiait également comme ambassadeur après avoir long-

temps dirigé les services de renseignement, Turki Al-Faiçal aurait expliqué sa décision pour des raisons privées. Elle pourrait aussi bien découler des rapports de forces entre les membres de la famille royale.

Le prédécesseur de M. Al-Faiçal à Washington, Bandar Ben Sultan est le fils du prince héritier, Sultan Ben Abdel Aziz, du puissant clan des Soudeiri. Après avoir passé plus de vingt ans à Washington, il aurait conservé des contacts étroits avec l'administration américaine. Cet entretient aurait pu compliquer la tâche du nouvel ambassadeur à un moment critique des relations entre les deux pays, alors que la situation pourrait inciter certains, au sein de la famille régnante, à une politique plus agressive. Les marges de manœuvre saoudiennes en Irak sont pourtant limitées. Une partie des djihadistes sunnites qui opèrent en Irak souhaitent ouvertement la chute de la famille régnante en Arabie saoudite.

Les inquiétudes du royaume sont renforcées par les ambitions



Le roi Abdallah redoute une adhésion des sunnites irakiens aux thèses d'al-Qaïda, en cas d'éclatement de l'Irak. Rabih Moghrabi/AFP

de l'Iran, dépeint comme une menace majeure par le conseiller diplomatique qui envisageait dans l'article du *Washington Post* l'utilisation de l'arme du pétrole (réduire les prix en augmentant la production) pour priver le régime de Téhéran de moyens financiers. Son influence grandissante en Syrie depuis cet été et au Liban, de même que ses projets nucléaires, ne peuvent qu'aggraver le malaise saoudien. ■ GILLES PARIS

Saudis say they may fund Iraqi Sunnis in war against Shiites

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune
December 14, 2006

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON: Saudi Arabia has told the Bush administration that it might provide financial backing to Iraqi Sunnis in any war against Iraq's Shiites if the United States pulls its troops out of Iraq, according to U.S. and Arab diplomats.

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia conveyed that message to Vice President Dick Cheney two weeks ago during Cheney's visit to Riyadh, the officials said. Abdullah also expressed strong opposition to diplomatic talks between the United States and Iran, and pushed for Washington to encourage the resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, senior Bush administration officials said.

The Saudi warning reflects increased fear among America's Sunni Arab allies about Iran's growing influence in Iraq, coupled with its nuclear ambitions.

King Abdullah II of Jordan has also expressed concern about rising Shiite influence and about the possibility that Iraqi troops would be used by the Shiite-dominated government against the Sunni populace.

A senior Bush administration official said Tuesday that part of the administration's wider review of Iraq policy involves the question of how to harness a coalition of moderate Iraqi Sunnis with centrist Shiites to back the Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

The Saudis have argued strenuously against a U.S. pullout from Iraq, citing fears that Iraq's minority Sunni population would be massacred. Those fears, U.S. officials said, have become more pronounced as a growing chorus in Washington has advocated a draw-down of American troops in Iraq, coupled with diplomatic outreach to Iraq, which is largely Shiite.

"It's a hypothetical situation, and we'd work hard to avoid such a structure," an Arab diplomat in Washington said. But, he added, "if things become so bad in Iraq, like an ethnic cleansing, we will feel we are pulled into the war."

Bush administration officials are also working on a way to form a coalition of Sunni Arab countries and a moderate Shiite government in Iraq, along with the United States and Europe, to stand against "Iran, Syria and the terrorists," another senior Bush administration official said Tuesday.

Until now, Saudi officials have promised their counterparts in the United States that they would refrain from aiding Iraq's Sunni insurgency. But that pledge holds only as long as the United States remains in Iraq.

The Saudis have been wary of supporting Sunnis in Iraq because their insurgency there has been led by Qaeda extremists opposed to the Saudi mon-

archy. But if the sectarian war in Iraq worsened, the Saudis would be likely to line up with Sunni tribal leaders.

The Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Turki al-Faisal, who told his staff Monday that he was resigning his post, recently dismissed Nawaf Obaid, a consultant who wrote an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* two weeks ago contending that "one of the first consequences" of a U.S. pullout from Iraq would "be massive Saudi intervention to stop Iranian-backed Shiite militias from butchering Iraqi Sunnis."

Obaid also suggested that Saudi Arabia could cut world oil prices in half by

raising its production, a move that he said "would be devastating to Iran, which is facing economic difficulties even with today's high oil prices." The Saudi government disavowed Obaid's column, and Turki ended his contract.

But Arab diplomats said Tuesday that Obaid's column reflected the view of the Saudi government, which has made clear its opposition to a U.S. pullout from Iraq.

In a speech in Philadelphia last week, Turki reiterated the Saudi position. "Just picking up and leaving is going to create a huge vacuum," he told the World Affairs Council. "The U.S. must underline

its support for the Maliki government because there is no other game in town."

On Monday, prominent Saudi clerics called on Sunni Muslims to mobilize against Shiites in Iraq. The statement called the "murder, torture and displacement of Sunnis" an "outrage."

The resignation of Turki, a former Saudi intelligence chief, was supposed to be formally announced Monday, officials said, but had not happened by late Tuesday. "They're keeping us very puzzled," a Saudi official said.

Hassan M. Fattah contributed reporting from Dubai.

Holocaust conference: As much about Iran's ambition as its beliefs

By Michael Slackman

CAIRO: Iran's so-called Holocaust conference earlier this week was billed as a chance to force the West to reconsider the historical record and, thereby, the legitimacy of Israel. The question, then, is why the Iranians would invite speakers with so little credibility in the West, including a former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard and disgraced European scholars.

But that question misses the point. Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, sees conference participants like David Duke, the former Louisiana Klan leader, and France's Robert Faurisson, who has devoted his life to trying to prove the Nazi gas chambers were a myth, as silenced truth-tellers whose stories expose Western leaders as the hypocrites he considers them to be.

Just as Soviet leaders used to invite Americans who suffered racial or political discrimination to Moscow to embarrass Washington, Ahmadinejad enjoys pointing out that countries like Germany, France and Austria claim to champion free debate yet make Holocaust denial illegal.

He has also repeatedly tried to draw moral equivalency between questioning the Holocaust and the decision in Europe last year to publish cartoons lampooning the Prophet Muhammad. It wins him favor at home and across the Arab world for standing up to the West, and allows him to present himself as morally superior to the West.

But there is another important point. Ahmadinejad actually seems to believe that the volumes of documentation, testimony and living memory of the Nazi genocide are at best exaggerated and part of a Zionist conspiracy to falsify history so as to create the case for Is-

rael. As a former member of the Revolutionary Guards, he was indoctrinated with such thinking, political analysts in Tehran said, and in fact as a radical student leader, he championed such a view.

Now he has a platform to promote his theories and try to position himself regionally as a reasonable man simply asking the hard questions. The meeting included no attempt to come to terms with the nature of the well-documented Nazi slaughter, offering only a platform to those pursuing the fantasy that it never happened. In addition, the organizers of the conference, a small circle around the president, have been building ties with neo-Nazi groups in Europe.

"He is connected to people in Iran who trust his way of doing things and who seriously believe the Holocaust did not take place," said Martin Ebbing, a German journalist based in Tehran who has closely followed the issue with the president. "They seriously believe it."

Evidence of that came in a revealing interview last May with the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. The interviewer mostly wanted to discuss Iran's nuclear ambitions and its refusal to give up uranium enrichment, but the discussion kept returning to the Holocaust. At one point, the exasperated interviewer actually lectured the Iranian president on Germany's culpability.

"In our view, there is no doubt that the Germans unfortunately bear the guilt for the murder of six million," the *Spiegel* journalist said to Ahmadinejad.

The president gave little ground, saying Germans should rid themselves of such guilt. "I will only accept something as truth if I am actually convinced of it," he said.

Across the Middle East, contempt for Jews and Zionism is widespread and utterly mainstream. Many say the Holo-

caust has been wildly exaggerated and used to justify the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 at the expense of Palestinians, a move viewed as yet another example of Western imperialism.

Anti-Western rage fueled the 1979 Iranian revolution, and Ahmadinejad has tried to rekindle the energy of the revolution by spreading Iran's influence beyond its borders. Battling Washington, chiding Arab leaders and claiming to promote the Palestinian cause have made him extremely popular on the streets from Cairo to Morocco.

Such actions have also helped turn attention away from his inability so far to deliver on promises of economic populism, including a redistribution of Iran's enormous economic wealth and greater social justice for the bulk of the country that is struggling to make ends meet.

The president's ideas do not resonate in all corners of Iran, though, and some political scientists there say they have served to embarrass officials who, even if they agree, do not want to see a focus on Holocaust denial further isolate Iran.

"I raise two questions about this conference," said Ahmad Shirzad, a reformist politician and former member of Parliament. "First, how much does this solve the problems our people are faced with? And secondly, which one of our goals were realized? It looks like he wants to make news and do provocative things."

Others see an even more ambitious post-Iraq agenda reflected in Ahmadinejad's high profile on the issues of Jews, the Holocaust and Israel.

"It is for public consumption in Arab countries," said Mustafa El-Labbad, editor of *Sharqnameh Magazine*, which specializes in Iranian affairs and is published in Cairo. "It is specifically directed toward deepening the gap between the people and their regimes and toward embarrassing the rulers so that the regional power vacuum, especially after Iraq, can be filled by Iran."

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

December 14, 2006

New Iraqi law on oil stalled by dispute on division of powers

By Edward Wong

BAGHDAD: Iraqi politicians are split along ethnic and sectarian lines in negotiations to resolve the final sticking point in a draft of the national oil law, the oil minister says. The issue involves the division of powers between the central government and regional governments in negotiating oil contracts.

The minister, Hussain Shahrستاني, said he believed the parties could work through their differences, which would allow them to unveil the draft soon.

The law would be the first step to opening the door to foreign investment in Iraq's oil sector by setting rules for how Iraq would handle bids on contracts. Up to 60 oil fields would be offered for development in various rounds of bidding, Shahrستاني said.

It is unclear whether foreign oil companies would tolerate the risks and security costs of operating in Iraq, especially if the violence worsens.

American and Iraqi officials also consider passage of the oil law to be a crucial step in the process of national reconciliation because the law would lay out guidelines for the distribution of the country's oil wealth.

Shahrستاني and other officials say an Iraqi committee has reached agreement on critical principles in the draft, most importantly on a measure that would allow the central government to collect current and future oil revenues and redistribute them to the provinces or regions by population.

Sunni Arabs, who are leading the insurgency, have been opposed to the idea of regional autonomy because they believe they would not get a fair share of the country's oil wealth, which is concentrated in the Shiite south and Kurdish north. So putting oil revenue collection and distribution in the hands of the central government — and giving the money to regional governments based on population — would in theory placate the Sunni Arabs to a degree. Sunni Arab areas in Iraq have little or no apparent oil reserves.

But representatives of the main Sunni Arab, Shiite and Kurdish political blocs are still at odds over the issue of contracts, Shahrستاني said in an interview this week. A 11-member committee made up of those representatives is reviewing and revising a draft of the oil law written by the Oil Ministry. If the committee reaches agreement, then the law would go to the cabinet and Parliament for approval.

The Sunni Arabs want the process of negotiating and signing exploration

and development contracts to be put entirely in the hands of the central government, said Shahrستاني, a conservative Shiite. The committee's Sunni Arab representatives, who are members of a political bloc called the Iraqi Consensus Front, are proposing that the Oil Ministry negotiate and approve all contracts, Shahrستاني said.

At the other extreme are the Kurds, who want regional governments to negotiate the contracts and have final say over them, Shahrستاني and other Iraqi officials said. According to the Kurdish proposal, a central body called the Federal Oil and Gas Council, set up to make policy, would simply review the contracts to make sure they conform to a standard set of criteria, the officials said. The Kurds recently discovered two new fields in the north after signing contracts with a Norwegian company and a Turkish company.

The committee's Shiite Arab representatives, who are members of the United Iraqi Alliance, the main Shiite political bloc, fall in between the Sunni Arab and Kurdish camps. They argue that the regions should have the right to negotiate the contracts but that the contracts must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the federal council, Shahrستاني said.

If the committee members can resolve their differences on the contracting issue, then the final draft would be finished quickly, Shahrستاني said.

The top American officials here have been putting increasing pressure on the Iraqis to present a draft and perhaps even approve the law by the year's end.

In its report, the Iraq Study Group said that an equitable distribution of oil was necessary for national reconciliation and recommended that the central government retain full control of revenues and oil fields, much to the chagrin of the Kurds, who have enjoyed autonomy since the American military established a no-flight zone in the north in 1991.

Once the oil law is approved, the federal council will announce a round of bids for development of discovered fields, Shahrستاني said. The Iraq National Oil Co., which was shut down by Saddam Hussein in 1987 but is expected to be re-established by the law, would be able to compete with foreign companies in making bids.

The Iraqi officials assigned to choose the oil fields to be offered in the first round of bids would try to come up with a geographically equitable list, so regions would not feel ignored,

Shahrستاني said. Iraq has 80 discovered fields. Twenty are already producing oil and will be assigned to the Iraq National Oil Co., Shahrستاني said. Development of the others would be offered up for bids, he added.

Oil contracts signed with foreign companies by Saddam Hussein's government would be reviewed by the federal council to see whether they should be honored or scrapped, Shahrستاني said. For example, a Saddam-era contract the Iraqi government had signed with Lukoil, the largest oil company in Russia, and another with a Syrian company would be revisited, he said.

As for revenue distribution, the various parties have agreed that the money will be divided out to the regions through the central government's budget process, Shahrستاني said.

That means the central government would be able to divert money to finance its needs before giving the rest out to the regions. Earlier in the negotiations, the Kurds had insisted that the money, if collected by the central gov-

ernment, would not be funneled into the central government's budget process, but would be split up and given out to the regions automatically.

The Kurds have raised two other issues for discussion, Shahrستاني said.

They are demanding that any contracts the Kurds have signed so far in the north should be honored. They also want assurance that the contested oil-city of Kirkuk will be included in Iraqi Kurdistan if people in the province vote for it to join the Kurdish north in a referendum scheduled for 2007.

In continuing violence, the country's widening Sunni-Shiite sectarian rift was highlighted Thursday by a brazen mass kidnapping in central Baghdad.

Masked gunmen in elite police uniforms abducted 20 to 30 men in the morning from a neighborhood of automobile spare parts shops, an Interior Ministry official and witnesses said.

The men released several Shiite hostages after beating them in a room and asking whether they were Sunni or Shiite, said a man who was freed.

In the region around Kut, the police found 17 bodies by a small river, police officials said. All the victims had been shot and killed after being tortured.

In Baghdad, a car bomb exploded by an Iraqi Army patrol, killing two people, including one soldier, and wounding seven others, including three soldiers. Mortar rounds in western Baghdad killed a woman and wounded two others.

A car bomb killed two policemen who were trying to defuse it and wounded four civilians late Wednesday, The Associated Press quoted police officials as saying. The officials said explosives experts successfully defused a second car bomb in the same area.

The Economist December 16th 2006

Kurdistan

America between the Turks and Kurds

ANKARA AND WASHINGTON, DC

As tension rises between the Turkish government and Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, the Americans are in a quandary



cans have been telling the Turks to stay out of Iraq, despite the PKK's provocations.

So far Turkey has obeyed, hoping that America would deal with the PKK itself. Its failure to do so is perhaps the biggest cause of rampant anti-American feeling in Turkey. In July Turkey's mildly Islamist prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is said to have warned President George Bush, in several telephone calls, that he might be unable to restrain his hawkish generals after 15 Turkish soldiers were killed in PKK attacks in a single week. Some 250,000 Turkish troops then briefly massed on the Iraqi border, jolting the Americans into naming a former NATO commander, Joseph Ralston, as a "special envoy for countering the PKK" (his own description). But the PKK's attacks went on, despite its proclaimed ceasefire in September.

One big reason for Turkish restraint against the PKK in Iraq has been repeated warnings from the European Union, which Turkey has been bent on joining. But that restraint may weaken as the EU, or at least some of its leading members, continues to snub Turkey in its efforts to obtain membership.

If Turkish forces do invade Iraq, Amer- ►►

IT IS looking ever more awkward for the Americans to keep two of their closest allies in the Middle East simultaneously sweet: Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds, who enjoy extreme autonomy in what is now the only stable part of Iraq. Kurds there are particularly rattled by several of the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, co-chaired by a former secretary of state, James Baker (see page 46). The Turks, for their part, are increasingly angered by a renewal of attacks in Turkey by guerrillas of the home-grown Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Moreover, they have never liked the idea of an autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, seeing it as a magnet for Kurdish nationalism in the region—especially in Turkey itself.

Indeed, there is a growing chance that the Turkish army will, perhaps as the snows melt next spring, invade northern Iraq in an effort to clobber the PKK in its safe haven just inside Iraq (see next article). The Iraqi Kurds might then feel obliged to help their ethnic kinsmen fight back against the Turks. At that point, it is unclear what the Americans would do, for they deem it vital to stay friends with both the Turks, who are members of NATO, and the Iraqi Kurds, who have hitherto been by far the most pro-American group in Iraq.

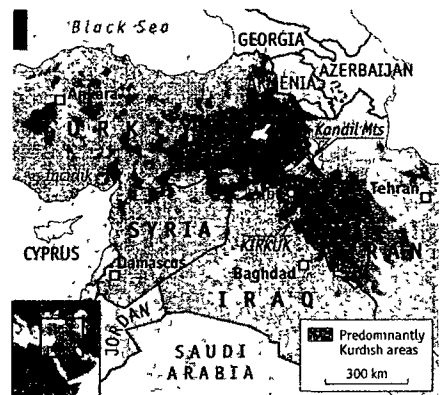
Iraq's Kurds disliked the Study Group's suggestion that Iraq's central government should tighten its control over Iraq's provinces. They hated a recommendation that

a promised referendum on Iraq's disputed oil-rich province, Kirkuk, be postponed. And they were horrified by the report's call for America to improve relations with Syria and Iran, which have both long suppressed Kurdish nationalism.

The Iraqi Kurds' biggest worry now is that an American wobble might hasten the feared Turkish invasion of their enclave. The Turks would argue that they merely wish to knock out some 5,000-odd PKK rebels in the mountains close to the border, then withdraw. But Iraq's 4m-5m Kurds fear that the Turks' true aim would be to ruin their successful experiment in self-rule, which has been inspiring Turkey's own restive Kurds, some 14m-strong.

"It's no longer a matter of if they [the Turks] invade but how America responds when they do," says a seasoned NATO military observer. America would be loth to let the Iraqi Kurds help their PKK kinsmen fight back, since Turkey is a cherished NATO ally and a pivotal Muslim state in the region. Turkey's airbase at Incirlik, in southern Turkey, is a hub for non-combat materiel flown in for American and allied troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The increasingly confident Iraqi Kurds sometimes helped Turkey fight against the PKK in the 1990s, but now they say they will no longer kill fellow Kurds. Instead, they have been strengthening links with their Turkish cousins, offering jobs and scholarships in northern Iraq. The Ameri-



ica's response will depend largely on the scope and scale. Most probably, they would not penetrate far into the country. "If they did, they would find themselves in the position that we do in Iraq, bogged down in a guerrilla insurgency," says Henri Barkey, an American expert on the Kurds who served in the State Department during the Clinton administration.

Plainly, it is in America's interest to cut a deal between the Turks and the Kurds, including a plan to disarm the PKK for good, in return for wider cultural and political rights for Kurds in Turkey. Conceivably, Turkey might then be persuaded to accept the reality of an autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan; optimists point to burgeoning trade links across the border. But pessimists, especially in Turkey, say the Turks (as well as the Iranians) will never tolerate Kurdish independence, which is how they see the Iraqi Kurds' present extreme autonomy.

If it comes to a stark choice, it is hard to say which way the Americans would tilt. A

vigorous debate is taking place in Washington. The self-described realists favour Turkey: the country is a tested ally and far bigger, richer and more powerful than today's fledgling Iraqi Kurdistan. The neo-conservatives may favour holding on, at all costs, to the only solid ally within a federal Iraq, namely the Kurdish regional government. But the mood may recently have shifted in favour of the Turks. "The Iraqi Kurds are not the angels they were made out to be," says an American official.

With Turks and Kurds digging their heels in, the Americans hint that they may be resigned to a limited Turkish operation that aims at PKK bases close to the Turkish border; and they would tell the Iraqi Kurds to stay put. But some in the Bush administration say the Americans should actually help Turkey swat the PKK in Iraq. "At this rate," says another American official, "we're not only going to lose Iraq but Turkey too." That, for America, is a prospect too ghastly to contemplate. ■

is tightening again—and breeding discontent. Friend and foe acknowledge that the PKK could easily add to the 5,000-plus guerrillas it has, scattered across the border zone and operating in Turkey.

For all that, the group is not prospering as Mr Karayilan suggests; it is being squeezed by events beyond its control. Gone is the time when the PKK could successfully manipulate rivalries between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria (countries that have, between them, parcelled out the historic region of Kurdistan) and move fighters with impunity between the four.

Iraq's current wobbly overlord, America, considers the PKK a terrorist organisation. Syria and Iran, fearing American hostility and apprehensive lest the autonomy enjoyed by Iraq's Kurds prove contagious, have cosied up to their former rival, Turkey. Mr Karayilan laments that both countries have got into the habit of handing over PKK militants to the Turks.

In Iran's case, at least, the PKK senses an opportunity. The defeat of Iran's own reform movement has reopened old divisions between the Shia Islamic Republic and its mostly Sunni Kurdish minority. Step forward the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan, better known as PJAK, the PKK's Kandil-based Iranian affiliate, which began attacking Iranian forces in 2004 and claims to have more than 2,000 members.

Guerrillas without a proper war; a personality cult whose object is incarcerated; a revolutionary force that has renounced revolution: to the uninitiated, Kandil resembles a never-never land whose inhabitants eagerly imbibe Mr Ocalan's "democratic-ecological paradigm" in timber schoolrooms and extol the virtues of sexual abstinence, the better to prosecute a cause whose ultimate goal has been lost from view. But no amount of fresh-faced zealots can conceal the PKK's quandary.

Fight or die?

Unless it fights, suggests a former PKK militant in Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, the group will unravel, as it nearly did in 2003, before defectors were assassinated or silenced. But if the PKK returns to full-scale war, America and the Iraqi Kurds will find it harder to resist, as they do at present, Turkey's demands that they act against it—though senior Iraqi Kurds are wary of challenging fellow Kurds. That need not take the form of a military assault; an embargo on food, fuel and arms may be as effective. In any event, it may have been Iraq's Kurdish leaders who persuaded the PKK to announce a ceasefire.

For its part, America wants to keep Iraqi Kurdistan, the lone bright spot in its long Iraqi night, at peace. But "no country has ever been able to secure these mountains," smiles Mr Karayilan. "How are the Americans going to do what the Turks have struggled for years to achieve?" ■

The Economist December 16th 2006

Turkish Kurds in Iraq

Lonesome rebels

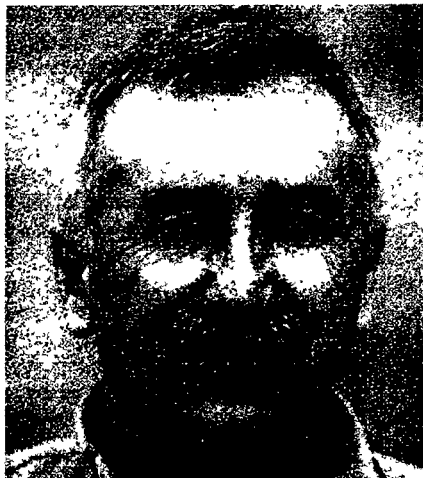
KANDIL MOUNTAINS

Turkey's Kurdish guerrillas may feel a cold wind of isolation

IN A chilly mountainside hut, near the spot where Iraq's Kandil mountains meet Turkey and Iran, Murat Karayilan, a guerrilla leader, is watching the news. Snacking on sunflower seeds, he flicks from Roj TV, a Denmark-based satellite station that backs his Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in its revolt against the Turkish state, to the mainstream channels beamed from Istanbul. The reception is excellent, the news less so. A year since—according to Kurds—Turkish agents firebombed a bookshop owned by a Kurdish nationalist in a mainly Kurdish town, Semdinli, attempts to find the culprits have come to nought. "Some people in Turkey", he sighs, "don't want peace."

To many Turks, especially those who have lost family members to PKK bullets since the rebellion started in 1984, Mr Karayilan's peacenik patter is a bit rich. Three months have elapsed since he announced the ceasefire that the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, had urged from his Turkish prison cell, where he has been locked up since 1999, yet fighting between his Kurdish guerrillas and Turkey's army goes on, albeit a bit less fiercely than in the summer.

Mr Karayilan insists that his men (and women, for the PKK prides itself on its commitment to sexual equality) are only replying to Turkish attacks. But, he hints, unless peace-seekers in Turkey's govern-



Karayilan says he wants peace too

ment soon "show their hand"—by giving the Kurds more cultural freedoms, ending Mr Ocalan's solitary confinement and announcing an amnesty for Kurdish militants in Turkey—the PKK may go on the offensive again next spring.

The PKK has dropped its demand for an independent country in Turkey's Kurdish-majority south-east, but it remains, as Mr Karayilan boasts, the "ultimate force" in the region. After a modest relaxation earlier this decade, Turkey's policy towards Kurdish nationalists and their aspirations

Pour Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Israël, « comme l'URSS, va bientôt disparaître »

En concluant la « conférence » sur la Shoah, le président iranien a de nouveau souhaité la « disparition » de l'Etat juif. Israël et les capitales occidentales se disent « choqués »

Jusqu'à son terme, la conférence négationniste sur la Shoah, organisée par le régime iranien, aura donné dans la provocation. Mardi 12 novembre, à Téhéran, le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad s'est lui-même rendu devant les 300 participants et intervenants – dont la plupart ont mis en cause le fait historique de la Shoah – et a une nouvelle fois annoncé la disparition de l'Etat d'Israël.

Pour le président iranien, qui avait déjà déclaré lors de sa prise de fonctions, en août 2005, qu'Israël constituait une « tumeur » au Proche-Orient et devait être « rayé de la carte », les jours du « régime sioniste » sont comptés.

« Lorsque j'avais dit que ce régime disparaîtrait, j'avais exprimé ce que les peuples avaient dans leur cœur. Les réseaux du régime sioniste m'ont alors beaucoup attaqué. Mais tout comme l'URSS a disparu, le régime sioniste va bientôt disparaître », a déclaré M. Ahmadinejad sous les applaudissements. L'existence d'Israël, a-t-il insisté, est de moins en moins assurée, et sa disparition est « ce que Dieu a promis et ce que toutes les nations veulent ».

La « conférence » de Téhéran sur la Shoah a largement donné la parole à des révisionnistes occidentaux célèbres, comme le Français Robert Faurisson et l'Australien Frederick Toeben, qui nient le génocide des juifs pendant la seconde guerre mondiale. La seconde journée de ce colloque a traité de thèmes ainsi définis : « Défi à l'histoire officielle de l'Holocauste », ou encore « L'Holocauste, talon

d'Achille d'un cheval de Troie juif ».

A sa diatribe contre Israël, le président Ahmadinejad a ajouté : « L'Iran est votre pays et le pays de tous les libres-penseurs. Aujourd'hui, l'Holocauste est devenu une idole pour les grandes puissances. Peu importe que l'Holocauste se soit produit ou pas, peu importe si son ampleur est grande ou limitée, il s'agit d'un prétexte pour créer une base pour agresser et menacer les pays de la région. »

Le président iranien a aussi exprimé le souhait de créer une « commission de la vérité, formée par des chercheurs internationaux pour faire des recherches sur l'Holocauste », sans que cette commission soit soumise aux pressions « des grandes puissances ».

Ces interventions de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ont soulevé une nouvelle tempête

de réactions indignées dans le monde. En visite à Berlin, le premier ministre israélien, Ehoud Olmert, et la chancelière allemande Angela Merkel ont rejeté « avec la plus grande fermeté » cette initiative révisionniste iranienne. « L'Allemagne n'acceptera jamais cela », a martelé Angela Merkel. Cette conférence a montré le « caractère inacceptable » du

gouvernement iranien et le « danger » qu'il représente pour l'Occident, a ajouté Ehoud Olmert.

Le premier ministre britannique, Tony Blair, qui doit se rendre prochainement au Proche-Orient, s'en est aussi pris à l'Iran, qu'il a accusé de « menace stratégique majeure » pour la région. Il s'est dit « incroyablement choqué » par la conférence sur la Shoah, qualifiée de « symbole de sectarisme et de haine envers les gens d'une autre religion ».

A Washington, le porte-parole du département d'Etat, Sean McCormack, a

déclaré que le comportement du président iranien était « méprisable » et a qualifié ses propos de « totalement révoltants », avant d'ajouter : « A notre époque et dans une région qui tente de tourner la page sur son passé, ce genre de déclaration est absolument sidérant. »

L'Union européenne (UE) a également fait part, mardi, de sa « profonde inquiétude » et condamné « toute tentative de nier ou de remettre en question la Shoah ». La présidence finlandaise de l'UE s'est déclaré « choquée par les efforts continus du gouvernement iranien pour remettre en question ou banaliser les faits historiques indéniables de l'Holocauste et de ses horreurs ».

Pour le chef de la diplomatie française, Philippe Douste-Blazy, les déclarations du président iranien ne manqueront pas d'avoir des conséquences dans les discussions en cours au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur un projet de résolution sanctionnant l'Iran pour son programme nucléaire.

Ehoud Olmert a poursuivi, mercredi 13 décembre à Rome, sa tournée européenne. Il devait rencontrer le président du Conseil, Romano Prodi, et le pape Benoît XVI.

A cette occasion, le Vatican a aussi rappelé sa position sur la Shoah : « L'Eglise aborde l'expérience vécue par le peuple juif durant la seconde guerre mondiale avec un grand respect et une grande compassion », déclare un communiqué, qui ajoute : « Le souvenir de ces faits terribles doit rester un avertissement pour les consciences, afin d'éliminer les conflits, de respecter les droits légitimes de tous les peuples et d'exhorter à la paix, dans la vérité et dans la justice. » ■

HENRI TINCO

« Aujourd'hui, l'Holocauste est devenu une idole pour les grandes puissances »

Le président iranien Ahmadinejad

UE-IRAN MOUDJAHIDINS DU PEUPLE

L'opposante iranienne Maryam Radjavi reçue au Parlement européen

BRUXELLES, STRASBOURG
BUREAU EUROPÉEN

Mardi 12 décembre a été une bonne journée pour Maryam Radjavi, la présidente du Conseil national de la résistance iranienne, vitrine politique du mouvement des Moudjahidins du peuple : elle a été reçue officiellement au Parlement européen par le groupe politique qui y est le

plus important, celui du Parti populaire européen-démocrates européens (PPE-DE, conservateurs et centre-droit), afin d'y présenter son action politique. Au Parlement, de plus en plus d'eurodéputés estiment, à l'instar du socialiste portugais Paulo Casaca, qu'elle représente « la seule organisation d'opposition au régime des mollahs ».

Le PPE-DE avait invité Maryam Radjavi en juillet, mais le gouvernement iranien avait alors menacé de rompre les négociations sur le dossier nucléaire et la visite avait été repoussée. Lorsque M^{me} Radjavi s'est présentée devant le groupe, mardi, les eurodéputés de l'UMP sont sortis pour marquer leur mécontentement : « Les Moudjahidins du peuple assassinent à tour de bras. Nous ne fréquentons pas ces gens-là », a expliqué Alain Lamassoure, porte-parole de l'UMP.

M^{me} Radjavi a assuré, au cours d'une conférence de presse, que c'est à tort que les Moudjahidins du peuple ont été pla-

cés sur la liste des organisations terroristes de l'Union européenne, et que leurs avoirs ont été gelés, au lendemain des attentats du 11 septembre 2001, puisqu'ils auraient renoncé à toute activité militaire depuis juin 2001.

M^{me} Radjavi s'est félicitée de ce que la Cour de justice des Communautés européennes ait annulé, mardi, une décision relative au gel de ces avoirs, prise en 2005 par le Conseil de l'Union européenne. Le tribunal de première instance de l'institution luxembourgeoise a jugé que la déci-

sion n'était pas motivée, que les droits de la défense n'avaient pas été respectés et qu'il n'avait pu lui-même en contrôler la légalité, faute de savoir avec certitude sur quelle décision nationale elle se fondait. Selon l'Écossais Struan Stevenson (PPE-

DE), qui participait à la conférence de presse de M^{me} Radjavi, « *c'est le Royaume-Uni qui a réclamé le gel de ces avoirs, parce que les mollahs l'ont demandé à Jack Straw* ».

Nouvelle décision

A Bruxelles, le chef du service juridique du Conseil, Jean-Claude Piris, a indiqué que l'Union européenne allait, à l'avenir, améliorer ses procédures afin de les rendre plus transparentes et plus respectueuses des droits de la défense.

Une nouvelle décision devrait être prise prochainement, selon ces nouvelles procédures, sur le gel des avoirs. En attendant, celui-ci est maintenu, la décision annulée ayant été, entre-temps, remplacée par une autre... qui n'a pas encore été attaquée.

M^{me} Radjavi a assuré que l'arrêt du tribunal allait permettre de rayer les Moudjahidins du peuple de la liste des organisations terroristes. « *Cet arrêt confirme l'argument de la résistance iranienne, selon lequel l'étiquette de "terroriste" est, depuis le début, une question purement politique destinée à apaiser les mollahs* », a-t-elle déclaré.

Questionnée sur la raison pour laquelle elle porte un foulard, alors que sa compatriote Shirin Ebadi, lauréate du prix Nobel de la paix, a refusé de porter le hidjab, obligatoire en Iran, pour recevoir son prix en Norvège, M^{me} Radjavi a répondu : « *Personne ne me l'a imposé ; c'est le choix libre de chaque femme de porter ce qu'elle veut.* »

THOMAS FERENCZI
ET RAFAELE RIVAIS

EU freeze on talks 'unfair to Turkey,' Ankara declares

By Katrin Bennhold

BRUSSELS: Turkey reacted angrily Tuesday to a decision by the European Union to impose a partial freeze on membership talks and said relations were going through a difficult test.

The decision on Turkey set the scene for a European summit meeting Thursday where EU enlargement will figure prominently. The next phase of expansion takes place Jan. 1, with the entry of Romania and Bulgaria increasing the size of the bloc to 27 members.

EU foreign ministers agreed Monday to punish Turkey for refusing to open its ports and airports to Cyprus, an EU member. They suspended talks on 8 of the 35 issues under negotiation ahead of the possible accession of the mainly Muslim country more than a decade from now. The decision is expected to be endorsed by EU leaders at their summit talks on Thursday.

"This decision is unfair to Turkey," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised speech. "Let us not forget that our friends in the EU also have promises they have not fulfilled."

He said that relations between Turkey and the EU were "going through a serious test, despite all our efforts."

Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said the EU's decision represented "a lack of vision."

Turks are bitter that they are being punished for not trading with Cyprus at a time when the EU has not fulfilled a two-year-old pledge to end a trade embargo on the Turkish Cypriot north of

the island. They point out that Turkish Cypriots backed a United Nations plan to unify the island in 2004, while Greek Cypriots in the south rejected it. But the Greek part of the island still became a member of the EU and now has veto power over Turkish accession.

Egeman Bagis, Erdogan's chief foreign policy adviser, said the Cyprus dispute was being used as a smokescreen in the debate over whether Turkey should join the EU. "Some countries in the EU unfortunately want to keep it as a Christian club," he said in a telephone interview. "Some countries are using Cyprus — and Cyprus is happy to be used."

The focus on Cyprus was also criticized from a different direction.

"The Cyprus issue has distracted from the fundamental issues," said Joost Lagendijk of the Netherlands, chairman of the EU's Joint Parliamentary Committee with Turkey.

"Human rights, minority rights, women's rights, freedom of speech — those are the issues that go to the heart of Turkey's compatibility with the European Union," he said.

A report by the European Commission last month that criticized Turkey's refusal to trade with Cyprus also faulted Ankara for backsliding on many promised reforms. Turkey's limitation of the rights of Kurds and other minorities was sharply condemned, as were continuing reports of cases of torture and limits on freedom of expression.

Erdogan's government has still not scrapped Article 301 of the penal code,

which has allowed the prosecution of Turkish writers and academics for insulting "Turkishness." A writer, Ipek Calislar, and a publisher, Fatih Tas, are scheduled to be tried under the measure next week.

The fact that the EU's decision Monday did not mention human rights violations was criticized by an Armenian lobby group. "The silence of the member countries on other Turkish violations are a lapse that seriously endangers European integration," a statement from the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy said.

Naif Bezwan, a Kurdish researcher at Osnabrück University in Germany, said: "Of course it's unacceptable that Turkey does not recognize a member of the very Union it wants to join, but when it comes to Turkey's compatibility with the EU the main issue is how Turkey deals with religious and national minorities."

Lagendijk said he hoped that a pledge Monday by EU foreign ministers to seek an end to the economic isolation of the Turkish part of Cyprus over the next six months would refocus the negotiations on economic and political reforms.

"You would hardly find anyone in Turkey siding with the EU on Cyprus," he said, "but you'll find a lot of people calling for our support on human rights and political reforms."

Erdogan on Tuesday vowed to press ahead with reforms.

"Our reform process will continue with the same decisiveness," he said.

But Bagis, his adviser, said some damage had already been done. Ahead of presidential and legislative elections in Turkey next year, the mood has turned more nationalistic, and the EU's demand on Cyprus is one reason why support for EU membership has fallen sharply over the last two years, analysts say.

"All these statements take away the people's motivation," Bagis said. "What am I supposed to tell our voters?"

IRAK CONFÉRENCE DE RÉCONCILIATION

M. Maliki tend la main en direction des anciens baasistes

LA CONFÉRENCE de réconciliation nationale irakienne convoquée le 16 décembre par le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, s'est conclue, dimanche soir 17 décembre, par une série de « recommandations » dont les principales concernent les anciens cadres du régime de Saddam Hussein. Ces derniers avaient été brutalement écartés après l'intervention américaine de 2003. Parmi les autres « recommandations » figurent la réinstauration du service militaire, la clarification des compétences des régions, et la mise au point d'un calendrier de départ des troupes étrangères.

S'agissant du sort des membres de l'ancien parti unique Baas, la conférence a repris la proposition du premier ministre, samedi, de les réintégrer dans l'armée, ou de

leur verser des pensions. Cette mesure concerne théoriquement 350 000 anciens officiers. Elle pourrait convaincre de nombreux anciens baasistes, aujourd'hui actifs au sein de l'insurrection sunnite, de déposer les armes.

Enlèvements

L'insécurité qui règne à Bagdad a été illustrée, dimanche, par l'enlèvement en plein jour de 25 employés du Croissant-Rouge irakien et d'un nombre indéterminé de civils. Ces enlèvements par des hommes armés non identifiés, confirmés par une porte-parole de l'organisation, ont eu lieu dans les locaux du Croissant-Rouge. En fin de journée, six personnes ont été libérées. Par ailleurs, l'armée américaine a annoncé, samedi et dimanche, la mort de cinq soldats tués au combat. Soixante-trois

marines ont été tués en Irak depuis le début de décembre.

Alors que le premier ministre britannique Tony Blair a salué dimanche, lors d'une visite surprise en Irak, le « courage » des soldats britanniques déployés dans ce pays et réaffirmé son soutien au gouvernement « démocratiquement élu » de son homologue irakien al-Maliki, le débat reste vif aux Etats-Unis sur les moyens de remédier à la crise irakienne. L'ancien secrétaire d'Etat américain Colin Powell a estimé, dans un entretien à CBS, dimanche, que l'armée américaine ne devait pas être utilisée comme une force de police de la ville pour sécuriser Bagdad. « Je ne suis pas persuadé qu'une autre hausse du nombre de soldats à Bagdad [décidée] dans le but de mettre fin aux violences communautaires, cette guerre civile,

marcherait », a-t-il estimé.

Le chef de la prochaine majorité démocrate au Sénat, Harry Reid, a indiqué de son côté être prêt à un accroissement des troupes sur place seulement « pour deux ou trois mois » et dans le cadre « d'un programme pour nous sortir de là, comme prévu, l'an prochain ». Le président George Bush doit annoncer au début de 2007 une inflexion de la politique menée en Irak par les Etats-Unis. Dans ce contexte, M. Powell a assuré : « Nous devons parler avec un pays comme la Syrie. » L'ancien secrétaire d'Etat a estimé que le cas de l'Iran est plus difficile même s'il est également favorable à une ouverture. « Ily a une hostilité qui dure depuis 27 ans, ils sont difficiles à aborder et ils se comportent vraiment très très mal », a-t-il estimé. — (AFP.) ■

Iranians deal blow to Ahmadinejad

The Associated Press

TEHRAN: Iranian reformers and moderate conservatives asserted Monday that they had struck a blow against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by winning most of the seats in local elections and exposing public discontent with the president's hard-line political stances and inefficient administration.

The voting for local councils represented a partial comeback for reformists, who favor closer ties with the West and a loosening of social and political restrictions under the Islamic government. In past years, hard-liners drove reformers out of the council, Parliament and finally the presidency, leaving the once popular movement demoralized.

But the victory in Friday's elections was for moderate conservatives, supporters of the cleric-led power structure who are angry at Ahmadinejad, saying he has needlessly provoked the West with his harsh rhetoric and has failed to address the faltering economy.

The election does not directly effect Ahmadinejad's administration and is not expected to bring immediate policy changes. It selected local councils that handle community matters in cities and town across the country.

But it represented the first time the public has weighed in on Ahmadinejad's stormy presidency since he took office in June 2005. The results could pressure Ahmadinejad to change at least his tone and focus more on high unemployment and economic problems at home.

Reformist candidates upset his hard-liners

Ahmadinejad has escalated Iran's nuclear dispute with the United States, pushing ahead with uranium enrichment despite UN demands that Iran suspend the process. As a result, Europe has come to support Washington's calls for sanctions to stop a program they fear aims to develop nuclear weapons, a claim Iran denies.

At the same time, Ahmadinejad has angered Europe and the United States by proclaiming that Israel should be "wiped off the map" and hosting a conference that was meant to cast doubt on whether the Nazi Holocaust took place.

"Ahmadinejad's list has suffered a decisive defeat nationwide," said the Islamic Iran Participation Front, the largest reformist party. "It is a big no to the government's authoritarian and inefficient methods."

In councils of some major cities — such as Shiraz and Bandar Abbas in the south — not one pro-Ahmadinejad candidate won a seat, according to partial results released by the Interior Ministry.

In Tehran, the capital, candidates who support Mayor Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf, a moderate conservative, were on track to win 7 of the 15 council seats. Reformists appeared to win four and Ahmadinejad's allies had three, the partial results showed. The last seat would probably go to an independent. Final results were expected Tuesday.

Anti-Ahmadinejad sentiment was visible in a parallel election held to select members of the Assembly of Experts, a body of 86 senior clerics that monitors the supreme leader and chooses his successor. Several pro-reform clerics were barred from running, but conservative opponents of the president appeared to outperform his supporters.

A former president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who lost to Ahmadinejad in the 2005 runoff, won the most votes of any Tehran candidate to win re-election to the assembly. Also re-elected was Hassan Rowhani, Iran's former top nuclear negotiator whom Ahmadinejad accused of making too many concessions to the Europeans.

By contrast, Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi — regarded as the president's hard-line spiritual mentor — won an assembly seat with a low number of votes. One Yazdi ally was defeated by a more moderate conservative cleric in the city of Qom.

Turnout in the local council vote was more than 60 percent — substantially higher than the 50 percent in the last one, held in 2002.

The moderate conservative camp — typified by Qalibaf, the mayor, and his supporters — emerged as a strong political force, positioned between pro-Ahmadinejad hard-liners and the reformists. In their campaign, the moderate conservatives stressed promises to improve living standards, modernize the economy and promote "competency" in administration.

Qalibaf and his supporters do not

International Herald Tribune
Tuesday, December 19, 2006

back moving closer to the United States and they oppose giving up uranium enrichment, a position shared by almost all camps in Iran, where the nuclear program is a source of national pride.

But they oppose extreme stances that fuel tensions with the outside world and they have accused Ahmadinejad of provoking the West.

The moderates also tolerate the less restrictive social rules on mixing of sexes and women's dress, while many hard-liners want to re-impose tougher restrictions.

One moderate headed to victory in the council, a former Tehran police chief, Morteza Talei, was popular

among reformers because his officers did not crack down on the few anti-government protests that have occurred at universities during Ahmadinejad's presidency.

Still, the moderate conservatives criticize the reformers, accusing them of seeking to end the clerical rule created after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

A political analyst, Mostafa Mirzaei-an, said Iran's political lineup was moving toward "a coalition between reformers and moderate conservatives, at the expense of hard-line extremists who support Ahmadinejad."

The moderates' showing raised hopes for the reformers, especially

since many of their candidates were barred from running by Parliament committees that have the power to vet those running.

Among the apparent victors in Tehran was Massoumeh Iftikhar, who served as Iran's first female vice president during the term of Mohammad Khatami, the pro-reform president.

Khatami was elected in 1997 and reformers gained control of Parliament soon after. But in recent years, hard-liners succeeded in regaining the legislature by using cleric-run bodies to bar top reformists from running.

En Iran, les proches du président Ahmadinejad essuient leur premier revers électoral

Le Monde
Mardi 19 décembre 2006

Selon les premiers résultats, les ultraconservateurs sont tenus en échec aux municipales. Mentor politique de M. Ahmadinejad, l'ayatollah Mezbah Yazdi est devancé à l'Assemblée des experts

Le président ultraconservateur Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vient-il d'enregistrer son premier revers électoral depuis son arrivée au pouvoir à l'été 2005 ? Les Iraniens qui, contre toute attente, s'étaient fortement mobilisés – avec une participation record de 60 % – semblent avoir mis en échec la stratégie du clan conservateur au pouvoir, qui voulait s'imposer lors du double scrutin du vendredi 15 décembre.

Il s'agissait à la fois d'élire les conseillers municipaux dans tout le pays, de même que les 86 membres de l'Assemblée des experts, ce rouage clé du régime chargé de contrôler, voire désigner ou révoquer le guide suprême de la révolution. Or, selon les premiers résultats officiels donnés dimanche soir par le ministère de l'intérieur et cités par l'agence Isna, les partisans de M. Ahmadinejad arrivent souvent derrière les conservateurs modérés et les réformateurs aux municipales et ne réussissent pas à évincer leurs adversaires à l'Assemblée des experts.

C'est même le contraire qui est en train de se produire : l'ancien président iranien, le pragmatique et affairiste Ali Akbar Hachémi Rafсандjani, devenu récemment, en raison de ses prises de position plus ouvertes et moins antioccidentales sur le dossier nucléaire, l'adversaire le plus craint par M. Ahmadinejad, est en voie de remporter un véritable plébiscite à l'Assemblée des experts, avec l'appui des réformateurs. Il aurait plus de 1,5 million de voix à Téhéran. Et même si, au final, l'Assemblée reste dominée par les conservateurs, mis en place patiemment ces dernières années par le Guide, l'ayatollah Ali Kha-



L'ex-président Hachémi Rafсандjani (à droite) vote, le 15 décembre, à Téhéran, où il arriverait en tête à l'Assemblée des experts. AP

menei, l'échec de l'ayatollah fondamentaliste Mezbah Yazdi, mentor politique du président Ahmadinejad, qui ne finirait qu'à la sixième place, est très symbolique.

Aux municipales, l'offensive des ultraconservateurs est également contenue. A Téhéran, la bataille a été particulièrement disputée. Les premiers résultats au conseil municipal de la ville, qui compte quinze sièges, montrent que sept candidats de la liste des conservateurs modérés de l'actuel maire de Téhéran, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, rival malheureux de M. Ahmadinejad à la présidentielle, sont en tête.

« Le peuple a gagné »

Les réformateurs, évincés du conseil municipal en 2003, ont quatre candidats qualifiés, contre trois seulement pour la liste de M. Ahmadinejad, intitulée « La bonne odeur de servir ». Parvine Ahmadinejad, sœur du président, n'arrive qu'en onzième position.

Enfin, petite originalité de cette élection, plusieurs femmes sont en tête dans des villes importantes comme Chiraz, au sud du pays, où c'est une étudiante de 25 ans qui semble l'emporter ; de même à Arak, au centre et Ardébil au nord.

Le seul commentaire de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, dimanche, a été des plus laconiques : « Le peuple a gagné, a-t-il affirmé, les ennemis qui veulent le mal pour l'Iran pensaient avoir trouvé un point de fai-

blesse, mais le peuple iranien a montré son intelligence et sa grandeur au monde entier. » La presse réformatrice, en revanche, avant même les résultats définitifs attendus entre lundi et mercredi, tirait la leçon de cette double élection. « Les premiers résultats montrent que les Iraniens sont plutôt favorables aux forces modérées », commentait le quotidien réformateur *Etemad-e-melli*. Dans l'entourage de l'ex-président réformateur Mohammad Khatami, une lueur d'espoir est revenue après la série d'échecs infligés à ses partisans, qui avaient successivement perdu les élections municipales de 2003, les législatives de 2004 et la présidentielle de 2005.

Reste à savoir, commentaient certains analystes iraniens joints par téléphone lundi matin, ce qui a été le plus déterminant dans ce « réveil » réformateur, entre le succès de leur stratégie de présenter un front uni (en 2005 ils avaient largement perdu en raison de leur dispersion) ou les premières déceptions de l'électorat devant une politique populiste qui tient mal ses promesses ? Peu avant les élections, M. Ahmadinejad avait reconnu publiquement qu'il avait épuisé son budget trois mois avant la fin de l'année iranienne qui s'achève le 20 mars et avait précisé qu'il demanderait une rallonge au Parlement. ■

MARIE-CLAUDE DECAMPS
(AVEC AFP ET REUTERS)



Time for Iraqi Kurdistan to play its Kurdish cards in neighbouring countries; for its own survival

Behrooz Shojai
Globe Political Desk

The Baker-Hamilton report is a clear indication, if not a warning, of the fragility of Kurdistan's position. It is true, that external factor, namely the international political conditions at the end of the first Gulf War facilitated this historic experiment, but Kurdish endeavours should not be ignored. The key factor, I believe, is this issue. Since the beginning of 1990s we have anticipating antagonists' miscalculations.

Saddam Hussein's "mistakes" in Kuwait and Second Gulf-War are the best examples. Relying entirely on Great Power politics is not, only a sign of the reactive approach in the Kurdish politics – read Kurdish national movement-, but also a policy which may well undermine the entire Kurdish nation-building project, particularly in Iraqi Kurdistan. Let alone in the international arena, even within the regional context, the Kurds are not major players. Depending on the Regional and Great Power interests, they can be – and they have been – used in or "sold out" during international "horse-trading". The main reason behind this not so clean game has been that fact that the Kurds, ideologically and practically have never given trans-national feature to their national movement. On the contrary, on the transnational level different Kurdish national movements have been used against each other. The achievement in Southern Kurdistan paves the way for a new approach; namely, using the trans-national nature of Kurdish nationalism for the Kurdish interests. Only in such case the Kurds will be considered a real, if not a formidable, factor in the region. From the point of the view of Kurdistan of Iraq it means that it should actively

work for the consolidation of the Kurdish- national movement in other parts, to which it is adjacent to. Iraqi Kurdistan needs buffer zones towards its northern and eastern neighbours; and the best buffer zones are the Kurds in these areas.

Until the USA intervention in Iraq the Kurdish authorities always talked about the "tender" Kurdistan Regional Government in Southern Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan); all Kurdish activities from other parts in South were restricted, if they could be restricted. The Kurdish movement in Eastern Kurdistan (Iranian Kurdistan) reached the minimum of activities since the Iranian revolution in 1979. The PKK, of course, ignored these restrictions and it grew during 1990s. In neither case were the interests of Iraqi Kurdistan and other parts were in concert.

Considering the situation now the movement in Turkish Kurdistan is experiencing a conceptual crisis within its political discourse and Iranian Kurds are left out without political leadership, because its political movement and leadership has been exiled and as such pacified and outdated. The political movement in Iraqi Kurdistan has a moral and strategic obligation towards Iranian Kurdistan, in that it has to reactivate and vitalise the movement in this part. Morally because, apart from being their brethren, defending Kurdish rights in Iranian Kurdistan and Iran, in general, is a matter of universal human rights. The traditional precautionary measures are just a bad excuse and a disservice both to the movement in East and to the people of South. Strategically because a strong Kurdish movement in East would keep the Iranian government busy with its "own Kurdish problem" and constrain sit

from interfering in South. Restricting Iranian Kurdish movements obviously has not constrained Iran from interfering in Kurdish internal affairs in South.

Northern Kurdistan is more problematic in that the movement is still vital, but rather confused, disoriented and astray. The main Kurdish organization in Turkish Kurdistan, i.e. PKK, has since the beginning of 1990s become a battle field for reformists and conservative left wing. Reformists are those who advocate a liberal notion of Kurdish nationalism, the leftists, stubborn apoists are in opportunist allegiance with the captured leader, Apo (uncle) Ocalan. Their political discourse alternates concurrently with Ocalan's ideological adventures from Democratic Republic to Social Confederation and recently to Democratic Nation. In all cases nothing infringing the Kemalist notion of Turkish statehood, subsequently nothing mentioned about eventual Kurdish sovereignty in Turkey.

The confusion within the political discourse of PKK has led to armed struggle, a recent truce and now intimidation of armed struggle again. The political reason offers us only a peaceful way of solution in North, all other options are counter-productive, because the winners will be hardliners within Turkish political establishment, who are against Turkey's EU-membership.

The political establishment, including all its political parties, in Iraqi Kurdistan should apply two strategic approaches towards Turkey's Kurdish population; supporting and changing the power balance within PKK in the favour of liberal nationalists, who can implement a clear-cut national discourse closely related to quest for

sharing the sovereignty with the Turkish population in Turkey and last but not least to democratizing the national movement in North. The second strategy would be to win the sympathy of the Kurdish population in North. The Kurdish authorities here would play an important role. In this sense the authorities have done nothing or nothing of importance. A good example is the flood catastrophe in northern cities; after the flood not a single Kurdish NGO or Kurdish authorities were engaged in rescue activities in North. Some people would say that the Turkish government would stop all attempts of support by South. Tens of municipalities are governed by pro-Kurdish mayors; one could coordinate the supply through these municipalities. Even if the government stopped all support at the very border, the people of North would feel the support of their brethren in South, not to mention the care from their government. South needs North's sympathy; to get that sympathy it has to do something about it. The achievement in South should be materialized not only for Southern Kurds, but also for all Kurds all around the world, particularly those in North. And Northern frontiers are of immense importance for South's further survival. By securing the northern frontier South can breathe freely and not be dependent so much on international political conjuncture. South and North need reconciliation and cohesion; it is for both side's sake. And it is crucial for the entire Kurdish national.

The survival of Southern achievements is important for the Kurds as nation, but this survival cannot be realized without South's support to other parts of Kurdistan.



The Kurdish case for Kirkuk

By Dr. Nouri Talabany
The Globe

While Kirkuk's demography has been in flux in recent decades, largely a result of ethnic cleansing campaigns implemented by Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein, but when free from that regime, many Kurdish refugees have returned to their homes in the city and its immediate environs. Many diplomats and analysts may be tempted to delay decisions about the final status of Kirkuk, whether it should remain as it is, or joins Iraq's Kurdistan Region, any delay could be counter-productive to the goals of peace and stability.

A Mixed City

Historically, the majority of the city's population was Kurdish and Turcoman. The Turcomans traced their families back to the Ottoman era. Later, Arabs began to settle in the region. Writing of the ethnic composition of the city, the Ottoman encyclopaedist Shamsaddin Sami, author of the *Qamus al-A'lam*, published in Istanbul in 1897 found that, "Three quarters of the inhabitants of Kirkuk are Kurds and the rest are Turcomans, Arabs, and others. Seven hundred and sixty Jews and 460 Chaldeans also reside in the city."

The Kurds predate other resident groups; the northern and eastern districts of the cities have been traditionally Kurdish. Turcomans later migrated to the region. According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the local Kurdish population in Kirkuk was joined by a Turcoman minority as far as the ninth century C.E., when caliphs installed Turcoman garrisons in the region. In his history of the various Iraqi provinces, Iraqi historian Abdul Majid Fahmi Hassan placed the Turcoman migration in the

mid-seventeenth century when Ottoman Sultan Murad IV wrested the region from Iranian control. As Murad returned to Istanbul, he left army units in position to control the strategic route linking Baghdad and Anatolia; the Iraqi Turcomans descended from these troops. Prominent Turcoman families in Kirkuk, such as the Neftçiler and Awçî, trace their ancestry to Murad's troops; moreover, the prominent ethnic Arab Tikriti family also traces their presence in the region to Murad's soldiers, and the Sultan's gift of land in and around Kirkuk as a reward for their military service against the Iranians.

In the late Ottoman period, Kirkuk was the administrative center of the wilayet

(province) of Sharazur. In 1879, it became a sanjak (district) within the vilayet of Mosul. Further changes occurred in the region in 1918 when the British army occupied the Mosul wilayet and created a new Arbil governorate. In 1921, the British estimated the population of the Kirkuk region to be 75,000 Kurds; 35,000 Turcomans; 10,000 Arabs; 1,400 Jews; and 600 Chaldeans. A League of Nations Committee that visited the Mosul wilayet in 1925 estimated that the Kurds comprised 63 percent of Kirkuk's population, the Turcomans, 19 percent, and the Arabs, 18 percent.

Many Kurds grew crops and raised livestock near the streams and wells in the northern and eastern parts of the Kirkuk region while, in the city of Kirkuk, Arab, Assyrian, and Armenian migration to the city accelerated after the 1927 discovery of oil. From 1935, Arab families migrated to the nearby Hawija plain, southwest of Kirkuk, after the Iraqi government launched a large-scale irrigation project to open the drier southwestern portion of the region to agricul-

ture. Other Arabs settled in Kirkuk as civil servants or serving as officers and soldiers in the Second Division of the Iraqi army, most of which was stationed in Kirkuk.

Because there was no census taken in Iraq until 1947, however, such figures are estimates, and the 1947 census itself is of little help because it gives no precise details of the ethnic composition of the population. However, the 1957—widely acknowledged as the most valid because it was the least politicized—broke down population by mother tongue, finding Kirkuk was 48.3 percent Kurd, 28.2 percent Arab, 21.4 percent Turcoman, and the rest Chaldean, Assyrian, or other.

While demography might shift with time, Kirkuk's various communities have a long history of coexistence. Politically, Kurds have a long tradition of leadership in Kirkuk. On a national level, most Kirkuk representatives in the Iraqi parliament were Kurds and a smaller number of Turcomans. Local Arab representatives entered the parliament after settlement of the Hawija region. In the late Ottoman era, the sultan's governors mostly nominated Turcomans as mayor although, on certain occasions, Kurds also held the position. Later, during the monarchy, Kirkuk's mayors were mostly Kurds from the Talabany family. It was only during the late Ottoman era and the Iraqi



People demonstrating against Kirkuk Arabization process and demand normalization of the city.

monarchy, that many Turcomans became mayors. The first Arab mayor took office in 1969, when the Baathist regime appointed Muzhîr al-Tikritî.

Until 1955, the Kirkuk had just one high school and the majority of the students had Kurdish and Turcoman backgrounds, with smaller numbers of Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Armenians. Most Arab students were the children of civil servants, military personnel, or employees of the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC).

By long-standing tradition, the Kurds, Turcomans, Chaldeans, and Jews have had their own cemeteries. The Arabs, being a minority, buried their dead in the Turcoman cemeteries. However, in 1991, Saddam Hussein's government created special cemeteries for Arab settlers and banned Arab Shi'ites from taking their dead back to Najaf for burial in order to bolster the Arab claim to the city. The Baathist regime subsequently began to rewrite Kurdish tombstone inscriptions with Arabic in order to retroactively alter the demography.

Ethnic Cleansing

The Ba'athists sought to implement their Arab nationalism by force. In June 1963, the short-lived Ba'athist regime of Ali Saleh al-Sa'adi destroyed thirteen Kurdish villages around Kirkuk and expelled the population of another thirty-four Kurdish villages in the Dubz dis-

trict near Kirkuk, replacing them with Arabs from central and southern Iraq.

After the Baath party consolidated power in 1963, the National Guard (al-Haras al-Qawmi), recruited Arab Ba'athists and Turcomans who systematically attacked ethnic Kurds. Between 1963 and 1988, the Ba'athist regime destroyed 779 Kurdish villages in the Kirkuk region—razing 493 primary schools, 598 mosques, and 40 medical clinics. In order to prevent the return of the Kurds, they burned farms and orchards, confiscated cattle, blew up wells, and obliterated cemeteries. In all, this ethnic cleansing campaign forced 37,726 Kurdish families out of their villages. Given the average rural Kurdish family size of between five and seven people, this policy forced over 200,000 Kurds to flee the region. The Kurds were not the regime's only victims. During the Iran-Iraq war, the central government destroyed about ten Shi'ite Turcoman villages south of Kirkuk.

The Iraqi government also compelled urban Kurds to leave Kirkuk. It transferred

oil company employees, civil servants, and teachers to southern and central Iraq. The Ba'athist government renamed streets and schools in Arabic and forced businesses to adopt Arab names. Kurds could only sell real estate to Arabs; non-Arabs could not purchase property in the city. The government allocated thousands of new residential units for Arabs

only. Ethnic cleansing intensified after the 1991 Kuwait war when the Republican Guards crushed a short-lived uprising. In 1996, the regime passed an "identity law" to force Kurds and other non-Arabs to register as Arab. The government expelled from the region anyone who refused. In 1997, the Iraqi government demolished Kirkuk's historic citadel, with its mosques and ancient church. Human Rights Watch estimated that between 1991 and 2003, the Iraqi government expelled between 120,000 and 200,000 non-Arabs from Kirkuk and its environs.

In September 1999, the U.S. State Department reported that the Iraqi government had displaced approximately 900,000 citizens throughout Iraq. The report continued to describe how "Local officials in the south have ordered the arrest of any official or citizen who provides employment, food or shelter to newly arriving Kurds."

A New Beginning for Kirkuk?

In April 2003, coalition forces and the Iraqi Kurdish

pushmerga liberated Kirkuk from Baathist control. Many victims of Saddam's ethnic cleansing campaign sought to return to the region, only to be prevented by U.S. authorities. Many remain in tent-city limbo. Article 58 of the March 8, 2004 Transitional Administrative Law sought to settle disputes in Kirkuk by means of an Iraqi Property Claims Commission and "other relevant bodies." In practice, however, successive Iraqi governments have done little, creating suspicion among many Iraqi Kurds as to the central government's intentions. The uncertainty over Kirkuk's status has impeded local development and sidelined the issue of refugee resettlement.

Article 140 of the new Iraqi constitution has adopted Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law, which necessitates the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk, by which the legislature meant the assistance of the return of internally displaced people and their reclamation of seized property. Arabs installed in the region should be helped to return to southern and central Iraq, should they so de-

sire. The four sub-districts of Kifri, Chemchemal, Kalar, and Tuz-Khurmatu annexed to neighboring governorates by the regime in 1976 should be returned to the governorate of Kirkuk. Article 140 also states that a local census must be organized and a referendum held to decide the future of the province. The set deadline for the implementation of this article is December 2007. However, if Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki does not implement the article within the allocated time, ethnic and sectarian unrest could explode in Kirkuk, the effects rippling out throughout Iraq.

A report by the International Crisis Group proposes that the Iraqi government invite the U.N. Security Council "to appoint an envoy to start negotiations to designate the Kirkuk governorate as a stand-alone, federal region for an interim period," and recommended postponing the constitutionally-mandated referendum because of the threat that it could further exacerbate an already uncertain security situation.

There is no need for another envoy. With many

Arab League nations and Turkey opposed to the expansion of Kurdish self-rule, an U.N. envoy would not have the confidence of most of Kirkuk's residents. Nor should outside organizations, however well-meaning, delay implementation of Article 140. A wide swath of Iraqi society accepted the constitution after extensive consultation. And, on August 9, the Iraqi government nominated a high committee chaired by the Minister of Justice to implement Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution without delay.

Until the December 2007 referendum, which the U.N. has expertise to organize, it will be impossible to know whether local residents wish Kirkuk to be absorbed into the Kurdistan Regional Government. Many Kurds do, but others are afraid of being pushed aside by established patronage networks and political machines imposed from outside the city.

Rather than destabilize the region, formal resolution of the dispute over Kirkuk's status should calm the city. Various ethnic and sectarian communities

co-existed peacefully in Kirkuk until Abdul-Karim Qasim's 1958 coup d'état. The central government in Baghdad rather than local politics fueled most subsequent conflicts. Any census is sure to confirm the majority status of Kurds inside Kirkuk. They will demand the right to have their voice heard through the ballot box. But Kurdish empowerment through the democratic process need not mean disenfranchisement for the local Arabs and Turcoman communities. There is no reason why the various communities within Kirkuk cannot coexist peacefully again.

Dr. Nouri Talabany, professor of Law, author of several books and articles about Iraqi Kurdish history. He is currently an independent member of parliament in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Kirkuk rejects Baker-Hamilton Report

Hundreds of people in Kirkuk organized a demonstration against the Iraqi Study Group's report on Dec 12, 2006. The demonstrators were from different ethnicities such as Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens and several political factions, gathered in front of the US Consulate and chanted various slogans like, "No... No... Baker-Hamilton."

Some recommendations of the report, released on Dec. 6, directly put the achievements of the Iraqi Kurds in danger such as postponing the referendum in Kirkuk that is expected to be held no later than 2007. It is against article 140 of Iraqi constitution that asks for holding the referendum and normalizing the situation in that city. The report also recommends for empowering the central government and reinforcing the former Iraqi Ba'ath members in their jobs. This is a clear intervention in the Iraqi constitution.

The people of Kurdistan have rejected the report in various occasions; making petitions and demonstrations are one of them

and the Kirkuk demonstration is the latest one.

Rizgar Haji Hama, head of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's Democratic Organizations in Kirkuk, said that they will go against anything that contradicts the Iraqi constitution.

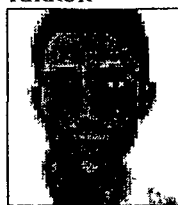
The demonstrators submitted a letter in Kurdish and English to the Consulate.

Adnan Kirkuki, member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party's Kirkuk branch, said Kurds were not consulted during the entire nine months of preparing the report.

"We won't let any outside will to be imposed on us," he said.

He also said that they will continue to put pressure on the U.S. through peaceful means to reject the items that are not in favor of the Kurds.

KIRKUK



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"This is an apparent violation of the Iraqi constitution," Kirkuki said.

Some Arabs participated in the demonstration. Hassan Fathullah, 46, an Arab, said, "We reject it by all means, because it will put the future of the city in danger."

The report describes Kirkuk as a barrel of explosive and time bomb and it has angered the people of the city.

Tahssin Kahyya, a Shia Turkmen in the committee to implement article 140, condemned the report for using such a word to describe Kirkuk, "The report is way too far from the reality, because we, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and Assyrian have lived together for a very long time."

"This report is just a (number) of recommendations, because the constitution is above everything,"

he said.

Babakir Sidiq, head of Kikuk's committee to implement article 140, said that people will reject the report, "because 68 percent of the Iraqi people have voted in favor of the constitution."

"We are working to implement article 140 and the report wants to create obstacle. The report is talking about centralization," he said, "We have been working for de-centralization in the last three years, now it wants to bring back dictatorship."

The demonstration ended peacefully and police escorted the crowd during the entire time of the protest.

The demonstrators spent more than an hour in front of the US consulate three representatives, two Kurds and a Turkman, met with the consulate officials.

After the meeting the representatives told the crowd that the US consulate has assured them the voices of the demonstrators will be taken into consideration and that the Baker-Hamilton report doesn't represent the official U.S. policy.



The Kurdish Globe

December 19, 2006

Irak, scénario autour du retrait américain

Le départ des Etats-Unis est désormais plus que plausible. Les conséquences de la guerre sont déjà désastreuses pour la région

Maintenant que le peuple américain a admis que la guerre en Irak ne peut être gagnée, que va-t-il se passer ? Réponse : les Etats-Unis vont vouloir diminuer leurs pertes et se retirer. L'hypothèse la plus probable est que ce retrait s'amorcera d'ici quelques mois pour être plus ou moins achevé à l'automne 2007. Si cela n'était pas le cas, la guerre dominerait les prochaines élections américaines comme elles ont dominé les dernières, ce dont ne veulent ni les démocrates ni les républicains.

Rapatrier 140 000 hommes avec tout leur équipement est une opération d'une extrême complexité. En 1945 et en 1973, les Etats-Unis s'étaient contentés d'évacuer leurs troupes, laissant la plus grande partie de leur matériel à leurs protégés européens, puis sud-vietnamiens. Dans le cas irakien, les choses se présentent différemment.

L'équipement militaire moderne est tellement précieux que même la plus grande puissance de la planète ne peut se permettre d'en abandonner de grandes quantités ; de ce point de vue-là, le modèle serait non pas le Vietnam ou la seconde guerre mondiale, mais la première guerre du Golfe. En second lieu, le matériel éventuellement laissé en Irak tomberait très probablement entre les mains des ennemis de l'Amérique. Le Pentagone n'aura donc d'autre

choix que d'évacuer d'Irak des millions de tonnes de matériel militaire par le même chemin utilisé pour l'y apporter - c'est-à-dire de le ramener au moins jusqu'au Koweït. Cette opération prendra beaucoup de temps et coûtera extrêmement cher. Elle entraînera inévitablement des pertes : les convois se dirigeant vers le sud seront la cible de tirs et d'attentats.

Les troupes américaines laisseront derrière elles un pays dévasté, dont l'infrastructure a été anéantie et où l'industrie pétrolière

Martin Van Creveld

Professeur à l'Université hébraïque de Jérusalem, expert en histoire et stratégie militaires

re, qui fournissait autrefois 90 % de ses revenus au pays, n'est plus qu'un champ de ruines. Une estimation récente parle de 150 000 morts irakiens. Et le pire est qu'aucun signe n'indique l'émergence d'un gouvernement capable de maîtriser la situation. Du fait de ce vide, il ne fait pratiquement aucun doute que chiïtes et sunnites vont continuer encore

longtemps à se déchirer ; et comme si cela ne suffisait pas, certains chiïtes pourraient également se battre contre d'autres chiïtes. Les Kurdes seront les bénéficiaires de ces affrontements. Depuis quelque temps déjà, ils expulsent discrètement la population arabe des provinces septentrionales de l'Irak, jetant ainsi les fondations de leur futur Etat.

Une longue période sera nécessaire avant qu'un Irak unifié voie le jour, s'il le voit jamais. Un Irak morcelé renforcera considérablement - à déjà, à vrai dire, considérablement renforcé - la position de Téhéran. L'Irak jouera à coup sûr un rôle majeur dans le devenir de l'Irak, mais dans quelle direction exercera-t-il son influence, et quel en sera l'impact exact, cela personne ne le sait. Une seule chose en tout cas est absolument sûre. Pour s'assurer qu'aucun (e) futur (e) président (e) américain (e) ne se mette dans l'idée d'attaquer

l'Irak comme a été attaqué l'Irak (c'est-à-dire, au fond, sans aucune raison), les Iranfens vont tout faire pour se doter le plus vite possible d'armes nucléaires.

Un Iran puissant constituerait une menace pour l'approvisionnement du monde en pétrole et ne manquerait donc pas d'inquiéter Washington. Afin de contrer les ambitions de Téhéran, les forces

américaines devront donc demeurer dans la région pour une période indéterminée ; elles seront probablement stationnées au Koweït (dont une bonne partie du territoire a d'ores et déjà été transformée en une vaste base américaine), à Oman et dans d'autres pays du Golfe. On ne peut qu'espérer que ces forces, et la volonté politique qui les soutiendra, seront suffisamment solides pour dissuader l'Irak de se lancer dans l'aventure.

Plus encore que les Etats-Unis, certains pays du Moyen-Orient ne manqueront pas de s'inquiéter de la puissance iranienne. Tout en se tournant vers Washington pour leur propre protection, il est pratiquement certain que plusieurs d'entre eux envisageront de démarrer leur propre programme nucléaire. Chaque fois qu'un pays se dotera d'un arsenal nucléaire, ses voisins se demanderont s'ils ne devraient pas faire de même. A terme, l'Arabie saoudite, la Turquie, l'Egypte et la Syrie pourraient finir par devenir des puissances nucléaires. Il est pour l'heure impossible de dire en quoi cette nouvelle configuration pourrait influencer sur l'équilibre régional.

Un Irak dépourvu de gouvernement et en proie à une guerre civile chronique constituera une pépinière idéale pour toutes sortes de terroristes. On peut supposer que la plupart d'entre eux se contenteront de participer et de tirer profit de la guerre civile, mais d'autres auront sans aucun doute à l'esprit des objectifs plus larges. La plupart opéreront à l'intérieur de l'Irak, mais on peut parier que certains s'en prendront aux régimes des pays arabes voisins, comme la Jordanie ou le Koweït.

Certains pourraient atteindre le Liban, d'autres Israël. D'autres encore tenteront d'étendre leurs activités aux pays occidentaux. Il est parfaitement envisageable

qu'un nouveau Ben Laden installe son quartier général quelque part en Irak, d'où il pourra diriger ses opérations.

La guerre en Irak a affaibli la position des Etats-Unis sur la scène internationale ; la secrétaire

d'Etat Condoleezza Rice peut certes aboyer, mais elle est pratiquement incapable de mordre. Les forces armées sont à ce point ébranlées et démoralisées

Les troupes laisseront derrière elles un pays dévasté, dont l'infrastructure a été anéantie et où l'industrie pétrolière n'est plus qu'un champ de ruines

qu'elles ne parviennent à regarnir leurs rangs qu'en enrôlant des grands-mères de 41 ans. C'est pourquoi la première tâche qui incombera à Robert Gates, le nouveau secrétaire à la défense, et à ses successeurs sera de reconstruire les forces armées afin qu'en cas de besoin on puisse de nouveau faire appel à elles.

Mais surtout, les Etats-Unis doivent soigneusement reconsidérer leur politique étrangère. Quel rôle la plus grande puissance du monde doit-elle jouer dans l'arène internationale, et quelles sont les limites de ce rôle ? Limites notamment économiques liées à ses déficits commercial et budgétaire.

Il est peu probable que ces questions reçoivent une réponse rapide ; à vrai dire, elles risquent de devoir attendre que l'élection présidentielle américaine de 2008 expédie ce qui reste de l'administration Bush dans les poubelles de l'histoire. ■

Texte traduit de l'anglais par Gilles Berton

Dans un entretien au « Washington Post », le président américain se démarque du rapport Baker-Hamilton

M. Bush envisage des renforts en Irak, où la guerre « n'est pas gagnée »

WASHINGTON

CORRESPONDANTE

Cinq semaines après la défaite des républicains aux élections de mi-mandat et deux semaines après la publication du rapport Baker-Hamilton plaidant pour un changement de stratégie en Irak, le président George Bush a fait, mardi 19 décembre, une proposition allant nettement à contre-courant : augmenter les effectifs des forces armées américaines.

Dans une interview publiée par le *Washington Post*, M. Bush a indiqué que cette idée ne s'appliquait pas à l'Irak en particulier mais à l'armée en général, durement mise à l'épreuve par la « guerre antiterroriste ». Pour l'Irak, il a indiqué que sa décision n'était pas prise. Selon la Maison Blanche, l'augmentation des effectifs est l'une des possibilités à l'étude concernant le changement d'approche promis au lendemain des élections du 7 novembre. Pour la première fois, M. Bush a admis que les États-Unis ne gagnaient pas la guerre. « Nous ne gagnons pas, nous ne perdons pas », a-t-il dit.

Le président a annoncé son projet d'expansion de l'armée en prélude à son entretien avec le journal. « Quelques

remarques avant que nous ne commençons, a-t-il dit. Il est évident que je suis en train de réfléchir à la marche à suivre en Irak, et je parle à beaucoup de gens, et aussi de la marche à suivre dans cette lutte idéologique. Il y a une réflexion dont je veux vous faire part, je suis enclin à penser que nous devons augmenter le nombre de nos soldats, l'armée de terre, les marines. » Il a indiqué avoir demandé au nouveau secrétaire à la défense, Robert Gates, de lui faire des recommandations en ce sens.

La déclaration de M. Bush est intervenue alors que Washington est en proie à un vif débat sur l'envoi de renforts en Irak, pour une durée de temps dite « limitée ». La solution diplomatique d'un dialogue avec la Syrie et l'Iran, préconisée par le rapport Baker-Hamilton, n'est pratiquement plus discutée, à l'exception d'une fraction des démocrates tels que les sénateurs John Kerry et Christopher Dodd, qui sont arrivés, mardi, à Damas pour une visite désapprouvée par le département d'Etat.

Le débat se concentre maintenant sur l'option militaire, non pas celle d'un désengagement des troupes de combat tel que l'a proposé la commission bipartite, mais sur un accroissement des forces. Cette solution est préconisée par le présidentiable républicain John McCain et par les néoconservateurs du cercle de réflexion American Enterprise Institute,

qui ne cachent pas leur plaisir d'avoir enfin été débarrassés de Donald Rumsfeld, coupable à leurs yeux de n'avoir jamais voulu mobiliser un nombre d'hommes suffisant.

Certains démocrates, tels que Harry Reid, leur chef de file au Sénat, ne sont pas hostiles à la possibilité d'accroître brièvement les effectifs en Irak. Devant le consensus en train de se dessiner, les chefs militaires n'ont pas hésité à faire part de leurs inquiétudes, au risque de se trouver en porte-à-faux avec les autorités civiles. Quelques heures avant de recueillir son entretien avec M. Bush, le *Washington Post* avait publié un article répercutant – de manière anonyme – l'hostilité des plus hauts responsables de l'armée. Pour ceux-ci, affirmait le quotidien, un accroissement des effectifs n'aurait de sens qu'accompagné de vigoureuses initiatives politiques et économiques.

Le porte-parole de la maison Blanche, Tony Snow, a démenti toute divergence. « Ils travaillent ensemble. Le président a le plus grand respect pour la chaîne de commandement », a-t-il dit. Les chefs militaires considèrent que leurs unités sont déjà au bord du point de rupture. M. Bush a reconnu que l'armée était, sinon « pratiquement cassée » comme l'a dit, dimanche, l'ancien secrétaire d'Etat Colin Powell, mais du moins « éprouvée ».

La prise de position de M. Bush intervient aussi alors qu'un supplément budgétaire doit être demandé au nouveau Congrès en février 2007. Le président n'a pas caché qu'il entend mettre la majorité démocrate au pied du mur. « La question fondamentale, c'est de savoir si les républicains et les démocrates seront capables de collaborer avec cette administration » pour donner à l'armée les moyens de mener une guerre longue, a-t-il dit. ■

CORINE LESNES

Plus haute autorité chiite aux États-Unis, l'imam Al-Sahlani « ne sous-estime pas la lassitude des Américains »

NEW YORK

CORRESPONDANT

Plus haute autorité chiite d'Amérique du Nord, originaire de Bassora dans le sud de l'Irak, l'imam Fadhel Al-Sahlani a fui les persécutions du régime de Saddam Hussein dont sa famille a été victime. Il dirige depuis seize ans le centre islamique Al-Khoei dans le Queens, à New York, fréquenté par 5 000 familles chiites. Modéré, il est le représentant officiel aux États-Unis du grand ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, le chef spirituel incontesté

des 14 millions de chiïtes en Irak, où Fadhel Al-Sahlani s'est rendu à plusieurs reprises au cours des dernières années.

Sollicité par l'administration américaine pour la conseiller, l'imam se dit « étonné que le gouvernement américain en soit encore, trois ans et demi après l'invasion, à chercher à comprendre la situation du pays ». Il explique ne pas avoir été surpris par le chaos et la violence qui règnent en Irak. Mais il « n'imaginait pas que cela durerait aussi longtemps ».

« Le problème, dit-il, est que l'autorité du gouvernement n'a toujours pas été éta-

blie : la police est presque inexistante, les criminels font ce qu'ils veulent. » « Pendant des décennies, rappelle-t-il, il n'y avait pas de loi, seulement la parole de Saddam [Husseïn]. » Le dignitaire religieux cite ainsi la réunion, « il y a deux mois, des plus grands et des plus respectés chefs religieux chiïtes et sunnites » d'Irak. « Ils ont signé un accord et appelé solennellement à la fin des tueries. Cela n'a servi à rien ! », constate-t-il. Un rapport de l'ONU indiquait ainsi que le nombre de civils tués en Irak avait atteint un niveau

record en octobre avec 3 709 morts, victimes de violences intercommunautaires.

Pour autant, l'imam ne veut pas croire à la partition du pays, même s'il la redoute. Selon lui, « cela créerait une guerre permanente [alors qu'il] est toujours possible de faire cohabiter les chiïtes, les sunnites et les Kurdes ». « La racine du problème, explique-t-il, ne se trouve pas au sein même des communautés qui cohabitent depuis des siècles. Je ne veux pas diminuer l'ampleur de la violence et des haines, mais je crois que si on s'attaque à l'origine politique de cette violence, au jeu des pays de la région et aux différents intérêts qui pour prendre le pouvoir alimentent le chaos, la violence s'affaiblira. Il faut construire une certaine forme de confiance entre dirigeants chiïtes et sunnites. »

Ne pas exagérer le rôle de l'Irak

Deux semaines après la publication du rapport Baker censé offrir une alternative à la politique de l'administration Bush en Irak et plaidant pour le lancement d'une « nouvelle offensive diplomatique », notamment à destination de l'Irak

et de la Syrie, l'imam Sahlani estime qu'il « faut imposer aux puissances étrangères de cesser leurs interférences ». « Je crains que les voisins de l'Irak ne le fassent pas sans contrainte », ajoute-t-il.

C'est la raison pour laquelle il ne souhaite pas et ne croit pas à un départ précipité et proche des troupes américaines. « La présence militaire de la coalition est indispensable encore un moment, sinon ce sera un désastre », précise-t-il. Cela reviendrait, d'après lui, à laisser le champ libre aux extrémistes, et notamment au leader radical chiïte Moqtada Al-Sadr, dont l'objectif « est de prendre le pouvoir par les armes ».

Dans le même temps, l'imam Sahlani « ne sous-estime pas la lassitude des Américains ». Un récent sondage montrait que sept Américains sur dix souhaitaient le retrait de leurs troupes déployées en Irak. Mais, avertit l'imam, « ce serait bien trop coûteux d'abandonner l'Irak, bien plus que la défaite au Vietnam. (...) Cela donnerait à Al-Qaïda une énorme victoire qui permettrait de galvaniser ses partisans, d'humilier les Etats-

Unis, de prouver ses affirmations sur la faiblesse américaine et occidentale et enfin d'avoir la possibilité de créer un sanctuaire au cœur du Moyen-Orient ». « Cela reviendrait aussi à affaiblir, voire déstabiliser, les régimes modérés alliés des Etats-Unis comme l'Égypte, l'Arabie saoudite, la Jordanie », précise-t-il.

Par ailleurs, l'imam estime qu'il ne faut pas surestimer l'influence iranienne sur la communauté chiïte irakienne : « Nous sommes arabes et ils sont perses, nous n'avons pas la même langue, ni la même culture, ni la même histoire et ni toujours les mêmes intérêts. » Il reconnaît pourtant que « certains groupes chiïtes obtiennent de l'aide de l'Irak ». « Leur loyauté et leur reconnaissance sont liées à cela », ajoute-t-il.

Pour l'imam Al-Sahlani, la malédiction de l'Irak « est d'être devenu le champ de bataille de la région, les sunnites contre les chiïtes, les Saoudiens contre les Iraniens, les Turcs contre les Kurdes, Al-Qaïda contre les Etats-Unis ». ■

ERIC LESEI

La justice turque veille sur le culte d'Atatürk

TURQUIE

Une journaliste a été jugée puis acquittée, hier, pour atteinte à la mémoire de Mustafa Kemal.

Istanbul

L'HISTOIRE OFFICIELLE de la République turque n'avait pas retenu cet épisode rocambolesque. Une nuit de 1923, pour échapper à une mutinerie de soldats, Mustafa Kemal aurait fui le palais présidentiel par une porte dérobée, caché sous un tchador. Pour avoir relaté cette évasion sous des vêtements fémi-

nins et religieux dans *Latife Hanim*, une biographie de la première épouse d'Atatürk, la journaliste Ipek Calislar comparaisait hier devant un tribunal correctionnel d'Istanbul. Elle risquait, en même temps qu'un rédacteur en chef du quotidien *Hürriyet* qui a publié les passages incriminés, une peine de quatre ans et demi de prison pour « insulte à la mémoire d'Atatürk ». Les deux prévenus ont été acquittés.

Après avoir lu cette version de l'équipée nocturne du « père de tous les Turcs », un lecteur outragé avait lancé une pétition, à l'origine des poursuites, affirmant : « Prétendre

que Mustafa Kemal, dont nul d'entre nous n'oserait juger le courage, a fait une telle chose est la plus grande insulte qui soit. » En Turquie, le fondateur de la République, mort en 1938, fait l'objet d'un véritable culte de la personnalité, forgé par ses successeurs. Et la journaliste Ipek Calislar n'est pas la première à faire les frais de cette loi de 1951 censée protéger la mémoire du premier président de la Turquie moderne. Selon les décomptes de l'association Bianet qui répertorie les atteintes à la liberté d'expression, ces derniers mois « onze personnes ont été déférées devant un tribunal au nom

de ce texte, et deux ont été condamnées à de la prison ». Il s'agit d'éditeurs, de journalistes ou de défenseurs des droits de l'homme. Habituellement, cette loi concernait plutôt des islamistes présumés.

Campagne médiatique

La dernière victime en date est un professeur de l'université Gazi d'Ankara. Au mois de novembre dans une conférence, Atilla Yayla a déclaré : « Le kémalisme a davantage à voir avec la régression que le progrès (...) Dans le futur, on nous demandera pourquoi il y a des statues de cet homme partout. » Ces propos, jugés

irrévérencieux, ont donné lieu à une campagne médiatique contre leur auteur qui a été suspendu par le recteur de la faculté où il enseignait, et un procureur a ouvert une enquête.

En Turquie, les gardiens du dogme surveillent toute atteinte à la doctrine kémaliste et ils se montrent de plus en plus tatillons. Au printemps dernier, le maire d'une petite ville des bords de la mer Noire, membre de l'AKP, le parti islam-conservateur au pouvoir, a ainsi été emprisonné pour cause d'outrage. Au cours d'une cérémonie, il avait déposé une gerbe de fleurs devant une statue représen-

tant le grand homme tout en mastiquant du chewing-gum. Pour le camp nationaliste, l'héritage de Mustafa Kemal est menacé par le gouvernement qui disposerait d'un « agenda islamiste caché ». Et, Atatürk, soixante-huit ans après sa disparition, reste plus que jamais adulé dans cette république laïque. Tous les écoliers connaissent par cœur son *Discours à la jeunesse*, qui trône dans les salles de classe du pays. Et depuis le début de l'année, six millions de visiteurs sont allés s'incliner sur sa tombe, au mausolée d'Anitkabir à Ankara.

L. M.

Irak : comment l'argent du pétrole finance la guerre civile

Le détournement est estimé à quatre ou cinq milliards de dollars chaque année.

LE FIGARO
21 décembre 2006



Des éléments de la Garde nationale irakienne, lors du contrôle d'un convoi suspecté de détourner du pétrole. AP

GOLFE

Dans un pays en pleine déliquescence, le marché noir du brut, de plusieurs milliards de dollars l'an, nourrit la corruption des officiels et alimente la guérilla.

LES EAUX du Golfe sont-elles, soudain, devenues très poissonneuses ? Chaque mois, 50 à 60 nouveaux bateaux de pêche sont fabriqués à Bassora, dans le sud de l'Irak. On y recense désormais 1 600 esquifs ! « Une telle flotte permettrait d'approvisionner toute la péninsule Arabique en crevettes géantes », sourit un responsable du syndicat local des pêcheurs. Il révèle le mystère de ce boom du cabotage : la contrebande de pétrole. Le fléau est estimé, en privé, à quatre ou cinq milliards de dollars chaque année par le vice-premier ministre, Barham Salih. Le manque à gagner est considérable, dans un pays qui compte utiliser la manne de l'or noir pour sa reconstruction. C'est aussi une pièce maîtresse de la corruption, du terrorisme et de la criminalité.

« L'Irak produit environ 2,2 millions de baril chaque jour, explique un expert pétrolier occidental, il en exporte 1,5 million, le reste se partage entre les raffineries et la contrebande, c'est-à-dire à peu près 350 000 barils quotidiens ». Sous Saddam Hussein, l'exploitation du pétrole, nationalisé en 1972, était une affaire d'État. Le trafic existait, mais était strictement contrôlé. Mais dans un pays en pleine déliquescence, la contrebande s'est propagée tous azimuts, de manière alarmante, estime l'inspecteur général américain en Irak, Stuart Bowen, dans un récent rapport.

Le brut peut être siphonné dans les dépôts ou détourné à partir des oléoducs. Il est ensuite acheminé par terre ou par mer, à travers les frontières terrestres ou via les ports illégaux sur le Chatt al-Arab, la voie

d'eau au confluent du Tigre et de l'Euphrate, près de Bassora. Le trafic est très rentable, qui touche aussi bien les zones kurde et sunnite que le sud chiite. Le chauffeur peut empocher jusqu'à 800 dollars pour transporter la cargaison jusqu'à son embarquement. Il corrompt le policier en versant en moyenne 500 dollars à toute patrouille qui voudrait fouiller son

La manne de l'or noir

L'Irak a exporté pour environ **40 milliards de dollars US** de pétrole depuis l'opération militaire américaine de mars 2003.

Le pays se situe au **deuxième rang des réserves mondiales** prouvées de brut, d'environ 115 milliards de barils. Cependant, les réserves réelles seraient largement supérieures, les recherches ayant été ralenties par les années de guerre.

L'Irak produit en moyenne **2,2 millions de barils par jour**, dont 300 000 à 350 000 qui sont écoulés sur le marché noir.

55 % des actes de vandalisme dont souffre l'industrie pétrolière visent les oléoducs par où transitent les exportations de brut.

Huit ports illégaux ont vu le jour sur le Chatt al-Arab.

chargement. « Après paiement de tous les frais, précise le rapport, le profit de la contrebande atteint 8 400 dollars par camion de pétrole écoulé au noir. » Les trafiquants peuvent aussi revendre sur le marché irakien des produits raffinés importés des pays voisins, comme le Koweït ou la Turquie.

Le laisser faire des autorités issues de l'après-guerre a encouragé les contrebandiers à profiter du vide sécuritaire et de la porosité des frontières. Entre le 1^{er} septembre 2004 et le 15 février 2005, pas moins de 1 551 camions partis des entrepôts de Bassora ne sont jamais arrivés à leur destination finale. Le trafic alimente un vaste réseau d'intérêts politico-criminels. La guérilla sunnite tout d'abord, qui bénéficie de l'expérience des anciens saddamistes.

« Une dangereuse mafia »

L'insurrection capterait entre 40 et 50 % du trafic, soit 2 milliards par an, de loin sa principale source de financement, qui lui assure une survie pendant des années encore. Les officiels ensuite. Au cours d'une récente opération de police conduite sur trois semaines, 400 000 barils de brut, qui devaient passer clandestinement en Syrie par le poste frontière de Rabyah, furent saisis.

En amont, ses parrains avaient offert un million de dollars pour que le responsable de la commission sur l'intégrité publique de Mossoul ferme les yeux ! Des fonctionnaires irakiens et syriens des ministères de l'Intérieur, des Finances et du Pétrole étaient complices. Le cas est loin d'être isolé. En 2005, 450 employés de l'administration pétrolière furent congédiés pour avoir tenté de revendre du pétrole hors d'Irak.

« Les gangs pétroliers sont devenus une dangereuse mafia qui menace les responsables de la lutte anti-corruption », affirme Ibrahim Bar al-Ouloum, ex-ministre du Pétrole. L'ancien député Mishan Jbouri n'a pas résisté aux offres sonnantes et rébuchantes : le ministère de la Défense lui avait demandé d'utiliser sa tribu pour sécuriser, entre Kirkouk et Bayji, le pipeline d'exportation vers la Turquie, régulièrement saboté par la guérilla. En échange d'un partage du butin, le parlementaire sunnite laissa des insurgés, liés aux trafiquants, infiltrer la police tribale. Aujourd'hui en fuite, Jbouri est accusé d'avoir dérobé l'équivalent de plusieurs millions de dollars.

À Bassora, « des personnalités politiques influentes dirigent ces opérations de contrebande », accuse Salim Hussein, directeur de la société Basra Oil Products. Il est de notoriété publique que Mohammed al-Waeli, le gouverneur de la cité méridionale proche de l'immense champ pétrolier de Rumeila, a partie liée avec les trafiquants. Il appartient au Fadila, le parti chiite qui contrôle le ministère du Pétrole à Bagdad.

A quelques mois d'un début de retrait militaire britannique de Bassora, le contrôle de la contrebande est l'un des principaux enjeux de la lutte sanglante que se livrent les milices chiïtes rivales. Ici, le gros du trafic conduit en Iran, que Bagdad accuse de donner refuge aux contrebandiers. Régulièrement, des garde-côtes irakiens, lancés à la poursuite de trafiquants, sont attaqués depuis des navires iraniens, sans doute de mèche avec les voleurs.

L'État impuissant contre la guérilla

Pris en tenaille entre la guérilla sunnite et les milices chiïtes, l'État est impuissant. Il est difficile de sécuriser les 7 000 kilomètres d'oléoducs. Il est impossible de contrôler les 200 000 camions qui sont entrés en Irak via le poste frontière kurde de Zakho en 2005. « Si la contrebande est devenue un sport national, c'est aussi parce que les Irakiens n'ont pas confiance dans un État qu'ils jugent illégitime », estime Yahia Said, expert pétrolier à la London Economic School.

« En raison de l'insécurité, aucune autorité n'est présente à certains postes frontières », regrette le rapport américain, qui préconise la création d'un département spécial au ministère de l'Intérieur pour combattre le pillage des ressources de l'Irak. Un ministère de l'Intérieur dont dépendent les gardes frontières, infiltrés par des milices chiïtes, elles-mêmes impliquées dans le trafic. « L'imbroglio donne une idée de ce que pourrait devenir la contrebande de pétrole en cas d'éclatement de l'Irak », prévient un diplomate européen.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

La répartition des recettes pétrolières, un enjeu colossal

Déterminante pour l'avenir de l'Irak, la loi sur l'exploitation des gisements pétroliers pourrait être examinée bientôt par le Parlement.

LES « MAJORS » occidentales sont dans les starting-blocks. Le projet de loi sur les conditions d'exploitation des gigantesques réserves pétrolières irakiennes est en voie de finalisation. Après des mois d'après discussions à Bagdad, les différents partis politiques sont parvenus à s'entendre sur l'un des aspects les plus controversés d'un texte qui va dessiner, en creux, l'avenir institutionnel de l'Irak : comment répartir la manne pétrolière ?

Comme le préconise le récent rapport américain Baker-Hamilton, celle-ci resterait du ressort du gouvernement central, qui redistribuerait les recettes aux régions, au prorata de leur population. Un Conseil national chargé de la politique pétrolière, présidé par le premier ministre, sera créé. Les Kurdes et, à un degré moindre, les chiïtes, dont les zones de population concentrent 85 % des

gisements pétroliers, exigeaient au contraire que ces ressources soient gérées par les provinces. Les deux groupes ethnico-religieux au pouvoir à Bagdad pensaient ainsi se donner les moyens de l'autonomie territoriale. Mais en matière pétrolière, les Américains restent attachés à l'unité de l'Irak.

Selon l'accord qui se dessine, les régions seraient autorisées à négocier des contrats avec des investisseurs étrangers mais le dernier mot resterait au gouvernement central. Le Conseil national de la politique pétrolière aura le pouvoir de rejeter tout contrat proposé pour un gisement. Le premier ministre irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, a « signalé son approbation » hier du projet de loi, a indiqué l'agence Reuters.

Pressions kurdes

Les Kurdes, qui ont reculé sur le partage des revenus, ont fait pression sur le ministre du Pétrole, Hussein Charistani, pour parapher les futurs accords pétroliers. Selon le projet d'accord, la région du Kurdistan a cependant accepté de réexaminer les contrats

qu'elle a déjà passés avec des compagnies pétrolières étrangères sur ses gisements pour vérifier leur conformité avec la nouvelle loi. Parmi ces compagnies figure la norvégienne DNO.

Ces derniers mois, le gouvernement autonome kurde (nord) a en effet signé plusieurs contrats d'exploitation. Mais à Bagdad, Hussein Charistani avait récusé ces accords, les jugeant « illégaux ». Pour l'instant, aucune des « majors », les grandes compagnies pétrolières américaines ou européennes, n'a encore soumis un dossier sur le marché kurde. Et ce, malgré les clins d'œil des responsables du Kurdistan. Ainsi, est-ce à la demande de Jalal Talabani que celui-ci a rencontré les responsables de Total, le mois dernier, lors de sa visite officielle en France, en tant que président de la République.

Les « majors » ont besoin d'un cadre législatif clair avant de revenir opérer en Irak. « Et ce cadre, c'est le gouvernement central qui peut le fixer », souligne un responsable d'une compagnie européenne.

Absent d'Irak depuis 2004, en raison de l'insécurité, Total lorgne toujours les deux champs pétroliers de Noomar et Majnoun, au sud du pays. Le groupe français avait reçu la promesse de Saddam Hussein d'une concession de ces gisements, estimés entre 20 et 30 milliards de barils. Aujourd'hui, Total s'estime encore bien placée pour les exploiter. À condition, toutefois, que le gouvernement irakien ne remette pas en question tous les accords datant de l'ère Saddam. Or sur ce point également, le débat est vif. Les chiïtes ne veulent pas récompenser ainsi les pays qui se sont opposés à la guerre qui leur a permis de se débarrasser de Saddam.

G. M.

LE FIGARO

21 décembre 2006

Pour le démantèlement de l'Irak

Assiste-t-on à la fin d'un Etat récent qui de putsch en dictature avait su s'imposer régionalement ? Certains analystes l'affirment

Aux petites heures du matin du 22 février, des insurgés irakiens – presque certainement des sunnites liés à Al-Qaïda – détruisirent le sanctuaire chiïte Al-Askariya de Samarra. Depuis ce jour, le sanglant chaos irakien est devenu sans conteste une guerre civile.

Dans l'après-midi du même jour, les responsables irakiens se rassemblèrent à Bagdad au quartier général du chef kurde Massoud Barzani, où je séjournais à son invitation. Malgré les fortes paroles appelant à l'unité nationale, tous avaient conscience de ce qui se profilait : la guerre civile. Et ils savaient qu'ils étaient impuissants à l'empêcher.

L'explosion de violence qui a débuté ce jour-là a désormais atteint des proportions ahurissantes. La capitale irakienne, qui abritait autrefois un mélange hétérogène de sunnites et de chiïtes ainsi que quelques Kurdes, chrétiens et mandéens [*adorateurs de saint Jean-Baptiste*], est aujourd'hui nettement divisée en un secteur sunnite à l'ouest et un secteur chiïte à l'est. Les Kurdes et les minorités non musulmanes partent de plus en plus au Kurdistan, où règne une relative sécurité, ou bien quittent le pays. Pour les millions

d'autres qui restent, la vie est devenue à la fois difficile et angoissante.

Dans l'est de Bagdad, dominé par les chiïtes, la sécurité et ce qui tient lieu de loi et d'ordre sont assurés par l'Armée du Mahdi, une milice chiïte liée au religieux radical Moqtada Al-Sadr. Dans la partie occidentale de la ville, à majorité sunnite, de nombreux quartiers sont contrôlés par Al-Qaïda, par des groupes terroristes qui s'en inspirent, ou par des baasistes. Les institutions nationales irakiennes sont une plaisanterie. Le gouvernement d'unité nationale tant vanté, dirigé par le premier ministre Al-Maliki, est en permanence au bord de l'implosion. De son côté, l'armée irakienne est divisée en bataillons largement homogènes de sunnites, chiïtes et Kurdes, dont les unités refusent de manière régulière d'obéir aux ordres de la direction civile légale si ces ordres vont à l'encontre des souhaits de leurs chefs religieux ou ethniques.

Au mieux, neuf provinces irakiennes sont sûres, et trois d'entre elles sont situées au Kurdistan, donc constitution-

Peter W. Galbraith

Conseiller de Massoud Barzani et ancien ambassadeur américain en Croatie

nellement et fonctionnellement indépendantes du reste de l'Irak. Les six autres provinces sûres se trouvent dans le Sud chiïte ; elles aussi sont gouvernées indépendamment de Bagdad, et l'on y voit les milices chiïtes appliquer une loi islamique à l'iranienne sans tenir aucun compte des libertés censément garanties par la Constitution irakienne.

Dans un contexte de guerre civile, une stratégie visant à établir un gouvernement d'unité nationale doté d'institutions assurant la sécurité nationale, comme la police et l'armée, n'a aucune chance de marcher. Non seulement le gouvernement d'unité nationale est profondément divisé, mais de surcroît il ne gouverne rien, et surtout pas Bagdad. Policiers et militaires ne sont pas les garants impartiaux de la sécurité publique, ce sont des combattants impliqués dans une guerre civile.

Le groupe bipartisan d'étude sur l'Irak, coprésidé par l'ancien secrétaire d'Etat James Baker et l'ex-représentant démocrate Lee Hamilton, recommande un retrait programmé de la plus grande partie des troupes américaines avant 2008, certains devant rester pour former et appuyer l'armée et la police irakiennes. Ce projet semble procéder de l'idée que l'armée et la police sont ou peuvent être des garants neutres de la sécurité

publique. En réalité, ce sont avant tout des chiïtes ou des sunnites, et ils ont choisi leur camp dans la guerre civile.

Le groupe d'étude recommande également l'ouverture de pourparlers avec la Syrie et l'Iran. Pour l'instant, même s'ils y étaient disposés, ni l'un ni l'autre de ces pays ne pourrait faire grand-chose pour résoudre la crise irakienne. La guerre civile irakienne se nourrit d'elle-même, et, sauf avancée majeure avec la Syrie ou l'Iran sur des questions qui n'ont rien à voir avec l'Irak, aucun de ces deux pays n'a les moyens d'aider les Etats-Unis à s'extirper du borbier irakien.

Reconnaître que l'Irak est plongé dans la guerre civile clarifie les choix possibles

pour les Etats-Unis. Ceux-ci peuvent soit tenter d'unifier un Etat qui n'a jamais fonctionné et qui est rejeté par une grande partie de la population, soit accepter le fait que l'Etat n'existe plus, et conclure des accords séparés avec les régions sunnite, kurde et chiïte du pays.

S'ils choisissent la première solution, les Etats-Unis devront jouer le rôle de tampon entre sunnites et chiïtes irakiens, mission qui requerra des troupes beaucoup plus nombreuses qu'aujourd'hui, durera des années et occasionnera d'innombrables pertes supplémentaires.

La seconde solution ouvre une voie de sortie pour les Etats-Unis. Un Irak divisé en régions autonomes serait constitué du Kurdistan dans le nord du pays, d'une région chiïte rassemblant les neuf provinces chiïtes du Sud, et enfin d'une région sunnite comprenant les trois provinces qui se trouvent au cœur de l'insurrection actuelle : celles d'Anbar, de Ninive et de Salaheddine. Si les limites de la région chiïte correspondraient sans problème à celles des provinces qui la constituent, la frontière mal définie entre la zone de peuplement sunnite arabe et la zone kurde se trouverait contestée.

La Constitution irakienne prévoit un référendum à la fin de 2007 pour établir définitivement cette limite et décider si la province de Kirkouk, riche en pétrole, sera intégrée au Kurdistan ou restera dans l'Irak arabe. Bagdad devrait garder un statut de « région capitale » pour le pays dans son ensemble, mais elle devra peut-être être, elle aussi, partagée afin de refléter sa division de facto entre un secteur occidental sunnite et un secteur oriental chiïte.

S'il est pratiquement sûr que le Kurdistan deviendra indépendant dans un avenir pas si éloigné, le fait que sunnites et chiïtes irakiens soient animés d'un même sentiment national pourrait leur permettre de coexister de façon plus ou moins lâche au sein d'un même Etat. De toutes les populations irakiennes, seuls les Arabes sunnites s'opposent à la partition – certains par nostalgie de l'époque où ils dirigeaient le pays, d'autres parce qu'ils rejettent tout ce qui s'est passé depuis que Saddam Hussein a été chassé du pouvoir. Mais puisque le Kurdistan existe déjà et que le Parlement irakien a voté une loi approuvant la création d'une région chiïte, les sunnites ont le choix entre créer leur propre région ou devenir un vide politique coincé entre le

Kurdistan et le Sud chiïte.

En fait, les sunnites auraient sans doute beaucoup à gagner d'une partition de l'Irak. Dans une région qui leur serait propre, ils pourraient entretenir une armée et assurer leur propre sécurité.

Les sunnites craignent d'être privés des ressources pétrolières, situées dans le nord et le sud du pays. Or, pour faciliter la partition, chiïtes et Kurdes ont d'ores et déjà accepté de garantir aux sunnites une part proportionnelle des revenus pétroliers irakiens, et, d'autre part, de larges zones des régions sunnites n'ont pas encore été prospectées.

Les voisins arabes de l'Irak redoutent qu'un éclatement du pays n'établisse un précédent dangereux pour leur propre intégrité, mais ils pourraient également estimer qu'un Sud chiïte irakien sous influence iranienne vaut mieux qu'un contrôle iranien sur l'ensemble du territoire.

Les voisins arabes redoutent qu'un éclatement du pays n'établisse un précédent dangereux pour leur propre intégrité

La Turquie, qui abrite quelque 14 millions de Kurdes, craint qu'un Kurdistan indépendant ne contribue à exacerber le sentiment séparatiste kurde en Turquie. Pourtant, jusqu'à présent, le gouvernement d'Ankara a réagi avec pragmatisme et développé des liens

économiques et politiques avec le Kurdistan, qui est, comme la Turquie, laïque, non arabe, pro-occidental et favorable à la démocratie. Un Kurdistan indépendant servirait de tampon entre la Turquie et un Irak dominé par l'Iran.

De fait, l'actuelle guerre civile irakienne est en train de faire voler en éclats un Etat créé par des étrangers qui, durant ses quatre-vingts années d'existence, n'a apporté que souffrance et misère à la majorité de sa population. Un des grands atouts d'une éventuelle partition est qu'elle constitue une solution irakienne à un problème irakien. Et il n'y a aucune raison de penser qu'entériner l'éclatement de l'Irak aggraverait la situation. Avec un peu de chance, cela pourrait même contribuer à faire baisser la violence. ■

Traduit de l'anglais par Gilles Berton
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U.S. hands Iraqis control of Najaf

By Marc Santora

NAJAF, Iraq: More than three years after the initial invasion, and two years after U.S. forces put down a revolt here by the militia of Moktada al-Sadr, Najaf on Wednesday became the first province under American control to be handed over to the Iraqis. It is the third province in the country to have power transferred.

Even as a debate continues in Washington about what should be done to help pacify much of the country, especially Baghdad, coalition forces say they want to turn over all provinces in Iraq by the end of 2007.

The transfer means that the Iraqi government will get control over its 8th Army Division, which has roughly 10,000 soldiers. Shiite leaders, who control both this province and the national government, have been anxious to get more operational control over the Iraqi Army, which the U.S. military has been laboring to train.

But security in the city of Najaf was already largely under Iraqi control, as American forces, cognizant of the religious importance of the area, have steered clear after putting down an uprising by the Sadr militia, known as the Mahdi Army.

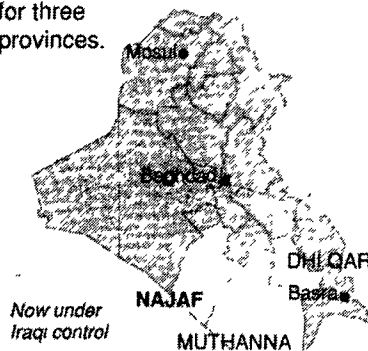
As the center of Shiite scholarship and the home of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Najaf has not been plagued with the kind of sectarian violence that is tearing Baghdad and other major cities apart.

But there have been struggles between Shiite factions, and residents privately expressed concern that many Mahdi Army members were still armed and ready to fight if provoked.

Mowaffak al-Rubaie, the Iraqi national security adviser, attended the trans-

Handover in Iraq

With Najaf, Iraqi security forces have now assumed responsibility for three provinces.



fer ceremony and also used the trip to meet with Sistani, discussing the problem of militias.

Briefing reporters after his conversation, he said he told Sistani of the government's "plans to reinstate and integrate the militias and armed groups."

He said Sistani agreed with this goal. "His eminence called for national unity and the cohesiveness of Iraqis and to rally around the national unity government," he said.

The local authorities closed all the roads in the city before the transfer ceremony, and while the security situation is relatively stable here, foreigners still had to travel escorted by military convoy.

Inside a soccer stadium at the heart of this ancient city, the Iraqi Army, the police, border control officers and the fire brigade paraded for over an hour before a delegation of top American and Iraqi military officials, attempting to display their competence and fealty.

Major General Kurt Cichowski, who attended the ceremony, said: "It is a major step forward in improving security and strengthening the authority of the government."

There was music and chanting and a karate demonstration. Dozens of new vehicles, many paid for by the multinational forces, were driven around the stadium, adorned with plastic flowers.

The general public did not attend the event.

As soldiers paraded past a grandstand with top American and Iraqi military officials, as well as dozens of tribal leaders, a group of commandos with their faces blackened gathered for a demonstration of their courage.

Each man reached into his right pocket, pulled out a frog and bit its head off. They threw the squirming legs to the ground as the leader of the group held aloft a live rabbit. He slit its belly and plunged his mouth into the gash. The carcass was then passed around to the rest of the soldiers who all took a bite.

It was explained later that this practice was especially popular among Saddam Hussein's feared Fedayeen militia, whose members had done the same thing with live snakes and wolves.

■ Abizaid to retire in early '07

General John Abizaid, who commands U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan as head of the Central Command, plans to retire early next year, his command said Wednesday, Reuters reported from Washington. The departure of Abizaid, 55, who has served in his post since July 2003, longer than any previous commander, could set the stage for strategic changes under review by Bush.

Sunnis losing ground in Baghdad

At least 10 districts have become almost entirely Shiite

By Sabrina Tavernise

BAGHDAD: As the United States debates what to do in Iraq, this country's Shiite majority is already moving toward its own solution.

In a broad power grab in Baghdad Shiite militias are pushing Sunnis out, forcing them to flee to an increasingly embattled territory in the western part of the city. At least 10 mixed neighborhoods have become almost entirely Shiite this year, say residents, local officials and U.S. and Iraqi military commanders.

It is a fight for control of Baghdad that Sunni militants were once winning. For the first two years of the war, they forced Shiites out of neighborhoods across the city, systematically killing bakers, barbers and trash collectors, jobs often held by Shiites. But in February, after the bombing of the Samarra mosque, Shiite militias struck back, pushing west from eastern strongholds and redrawing the sectarian map of the capital.

Shiites are seizing power broadly. The Shiite-dominated government is demanding more control over the Iraqi security forces, but militias have settled deeply within their ranks and the Sunni public is terrified at the prospect.

There are plans for a new bridge that would isolate a violent Sunni area in the east and a proposal for land handouts in towns around Baghdad that would bring Shiites into what are now Sunni strongholds.

Sunni political control in Baghdad is all but nonexistent: Of the 51 members of the Baghdad Provincial Council, which runs the city, just one is Sunni.

In many ways, the changes are a natural development.

Shiites, a majority of this nation's population, were locked out of the ruling elite under Saddam Hussein and now, after decades of oppression, have

power that matches their numbers.

Sunni Arabs now say that an emboldened militant fringe will conduct broader killings without being stopped by the government, or, some fear, with its help.

That could, in turn, draw Sunni countries into the fight and lead to a protracted regional war, precisely the outcome that the Americans most fear.

The Shiite-dominated government publicly condemns violence against Sunnis and says it is trying to stop the militias that carry it out. But the cleansing continues unabated and Sunnis say the government is somehow complicit.

"They say they're against this, but on the ground they do nothing," said Mahmud al-Mashhadani, the speaker of Parliament, a Sunni. He moved his fam-

ily to the better protected Green Zone in October.

The debate reaches to the heart of the U.S. enterprise here.

While President George W. Bush is considering injecting more troops to help prevent an escalation in sectarian violence, many in the Shiite-led government are saying the Americans should stay out of that fight. Shiite and Sunni militias are at war, they say, and protecting the Sunni side will simply prolong it.

"If you don't allow the minority to lose, you'll carry on forever," said a senior Iraqi official. "It would be painful at the beginning, but then you'll have a historic deal that would allow the majority to rule."

starting to lose Sunnis.

"This is the fault line now," said the Iraqi official, pointing to an area in western Baghdad near Mansour. "It's at the west of the west."

The general, a Shiite who commands a brigade in western Baghdad, said he blamed Iraqi political leaders, both Sunni and Shiite, and the militias they command.

"Now we face a new style of splitting the neighborhoods," he said. He asked that his name not be used because he could be killed for talking. "The politicians are doing this."

In the neighborhood of Na'ariya in southern Baghdad on Saturday, the local office of Moktada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite cleric, was arranging for a Shiite refugee family to occupy a house



Johan Spanner for The New York Times

A Shiite refugee family that fled Baquba after Sunnis killed the father, a son and kidnapped another son. "We are a ship that sank under the ocean," said the mother.

The Americans do not trust the Iraqi security forces and are institutionally unable to back one side, the official said.

They appear to be leaning toward sending more troops. "The Americans are very close to making a fatal strategic mistake."

In an army base in northern Baghdad, an Iraqi Army general moved his hand across a map of the capital. The city is dividing fast, he said, writing, "Sunni" and "Shiite" in graceful Arabic script across each neighborhood.

Neighborhoods in the east — most vulnerable to militias from Sadr City, the largest eastern district and one of its poorest — have lost much of their minority Sunni populations since February.

Even the solidly middle class neighborhoods of Zayuna and Ghadier, very mixed as little as six months ago, are

that had just recently been owned by a Sunni family who had fled the neighborhood after a spate of killings.

"They told us it's safe here, it's a Shiite neighborhood," said Mustafa, one of the family's sons. "The Mahdi Army is protecting the area," he added, referring to Sadr's militia.

The family knew about the Sunnis, but had no sympathy. In July they fled Baquba, a relentlessly violent town north of Baghdad, after Sunni militants killed the father (a man in his 70s), kidnapped a brother and killed another brother as he was returning to their house to collect their belongings after the funeral.

Around 400 Shiite families have fled Baquba to Na'ariya and nearby Baghdad Jedidah in the past few months, said Mustafa, citing local officials in Sadr's office.

"We are a ship that sank under the ocean," said his mother, Aziza, 46, sit-

December 23-24-25, 2006

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

ting on a cushion on the floor, her two small daughters hovering nearby.

Besides, Mustafa said, Shiite militias pursue only Sunnis with suspicious affiliations. Pamphlets from Al Qaeda were found in a house behind the one they have occupied, he said, and the family ran away. Shiites from Baquba are living there now, he said.

The Sunni militias, on the other hand, "are killing anyone who is Shiite," Aziza said. "My husband was an ordinary man." (A relative in a separate interview said one of Aziza's sons had killed more than 10 Sunnis since coming to Baghdad in the autumn. The fam-

'The Americans are very close to making a fatal strategic mistake.'

ily denied any involvement in militias.) But the fighting devours ordinary men, regardless of sect.

A Sunni man named Bassim, his Shiite wife and their three children, 1 to 3 years old, said Shiites forced them to leave their home in Hurriya, west of the Tigris, one afternoon this month. Bassim left his jobs — as a butcher in Shuala, a neighborhood now militantly Shiite, and as a hospital cleaner in another Shiite area — because it was dangerous to be a Sunni in those areas.

He has stayed home since September, said his wife, Zahra Kareem Alwan. It had become too dangerous to go out.

"My husband is a Sunni, but he has nothing to do with insurgents," she said, holding her sobbing daughter on her hip in a school in Al Adel, a Sunni neighborhood in western Baghdad where the families took temporary refuge early this month.

By Alwan's account, in early December, an enraged Shiite neighbor banged on her door. His brother had just been killed and he demanded, gun in hand, to see her husband. She refused, and the neighbor threatened her children, who had gathered near her, hearing the commotion.

"He said, 'I will kill them. They are Sunnis. They are my share,'" Alwan recalled. Soon after, they fled with other families to Adel.

An American colonel advising the Iraqi Army unit that controls the area said Shiites occupied the houses within 48 hours. Americans counted about 180 families who had fled. The Iraqi general said it was 50.

Shiite political leaders were skeptical. "These are lies," said Hadi al-Ameri, head of the security committee in Parliament and a member of the Badr Organization, the armed wing of one of Iraq's most powerful Shiite parties. "It's merely propaganda to create fears among Arabs," a reference to Sunni Arab countries.

The main problem, Ameri said, was Sunni insurgents and their suicide bombs. He talked with an intensity that spoke of deep scars inflicted by the past regime.

"They want to go back to the old equation, when they were the officers and the Shia were just soldiers and slaves," Amari said, referring to the Sunni elite under Saddam Hussein. "This will never happen again. They should believe in the new equation."

Iraqi cellphone rings are also an indication of the Shiite mood. A popular one in northeast Baghdad plays a tune with the words: "if you can't beat me, don't fight me."

Ameri, a Shiite politician who works closely with Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, one of Iraq's most powerful Shiite leaders who met with Bush last month in Wash-

ington, talked with confidence.

The Americans would not be around for much longer, he said, and Iraqis were now thinking strategically.

Using the unlikely analogy of Saddam draining the marshes in southern Iraq to destroy the marsh Arabs, he talked about plans to encircle Baghdad using a network of rivers, a dam and several highways to choke off supply lines of Sunni militants.

"He divided it, drained the water and within two to three years it was a desert," he said. "I believe Baghdad will be like this."

Militias are already doing their part to defend Shiites. In a Shiite mosque in northern Baghdad, refugees from the embattled northern village of Sabaa al-Bour, many of them women in black abayas, gathered in October asking for food and shelter. Killings of Shiites in the town had enraged leaders in Baghdad, and Hazim al-Aaraji, the religious leader in the mosque, had provided aid. But weeks had dragged on, and one morning in October, a volunteer walked through the refugees telling them to go back home.

The Mahdi Army was there now, she said. The town was now safe for Shiites.

Shiites are also making inroads on the local and federal levels.

Baghdad's municipal government is taking bids for designs of a bridge that would connect Greyat with Khadamiya, two major Shiite areas in northern Baghdad on opposite sides of the Tigris River. Adhamiya, a Sunni area where the bridge is now, would be bypassed altogether.

"The former regime refused to make the connection because it would strengthen the Shia," said Naem al-Kaabi, a deputy mayor of Baghdad.

Qais Mizher contributed reporting.

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The Syria Gambit

Does the regime of Bashar al-Assad hold the key to America's problems in the Middle East? Some in Washington like to think so, but they are probably wrong.

BY CHRISTOPHER DICKEY

HOLED UP IN THE GRAND Serail, the center of government in the heart of Beirut, five surviving members of Lebanon's cabinet have been living in fear. Just last year they were leaders of a mass movement that forced Syrian troops out of the country and seemed to open the way for a thriving democracy. But

those memories now seem as old and fragile as shards of Phoenician glass. One by one, brutally and spectacularly, Syria's high-profile opponents in Lebanon have been eliminated. The most recent: Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel, the son of a former president, gunned down in November. Since then, no minister has been sure if, or when, he'll be next.

As its enemies cower, the Syrian regime crows—even as it denies responsibility for the murders. "Our relations with Lebanon will be stronger than when we had our Army in that country," Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa boasted in the Arab press earlier this month. "Syria is on a roll," concedes Jonathan Paris, a fellow at Washington's Hudson Institute and a frequent critic of Damascus. "As in the '90s, Syria is seen as the indispensable player."

President George W. Bush, let it be said, is not convinced. Put aside for a moment the poor Lebanese. The Syrians themselves “deserve a government whose legitimacy is grounded in the consent of the people, not brute force,” a White House statement declared last week. Bush called for a regime in Damascus “that fights corruption, respects the rule of law, guarantees the rights of all Syrians and works toward achieving peace in the region.” The coterie around Syrian President Bashar al-Assad wouldn’t qualify on a single count.

But the Iraq Study Group’s recommendations for new strategic approaches to the Middle East put dialogue with Damascus near the top of the list, and a parade of U.S. senators, including Democrat John Kerry and Republican Arlen Specter, already is on the way to Assad’s palace for grips and grins. Such is the growing international consternation about the Iraq debacle’s impact that any force for regional stability, even a regime run like Al Capone’s Chicago, is likely to be asked for help. Syria, it is believed, could help calm Iraq by closing its

borders to insurgents who frequently come and go with impunity. If Lebanon is not to descend into civil war, Syria’s cooperation is critical. Ditto for the occupied territories. There’s even hope that Damascus can be seduced away from Iran, countering its hegemonic ambitions in the greater Middle East. “Syria is a key partner,” says Syrian political scientist Marwan Kabalan, “in all these regional issues.”

In fact, “key spoiler” would be a more accurate phrase. Palestinian terrorism, Hizbullah’s guerrilla warfare, the Sunni insurgency in Iraq—the Assad regime can’t fully control any of those threats, but it can make all of them worse. Syria’s foreign policy is essentially a protection racket. To prevent harm, you pay it off. In a none-too-veiled threat, an editorial in the government-controlled daily Al Baath warned last week that if the Bush administration fails to engage Syria, “it will continue to wallow and sink in the quagmire and the situation in the region and the world will continue to be subjected to upheavals and instability.”

The price of protection can be money, dialogue and, especially, respect—which lends the dictatorship legitimacy. Lebanese opponents of Syria fear their freedom could be part of the bargain, too. And the Israelis see the Iraq Study Group ready to put the future of the Golan Heights on the table. If a dialogue with Washington finally does begin, the wheeling and dealing could be as unpre-



dictable as it is complex. But can it work?

The Iraq Study Group hinges its recommendation on one key judgment: “No country in the region will benefit in the long term from a chaotic Iraq.” Yet as Jonathan Paris points out, Syria thrives on the level of unrest that exists right now. “If you were Bashar, the one thing you would be afraid of is regional stability,” says Paris, “because then Syria’s 19 million people would ask why they are ruled by this clique

among the Shiite religious parties fighting the Sunnis in an increasingly vicious civil war. “America has two different options,” says Syrian author and political analyst Sami Moubayed. “Either they deal with Syria, while excluding Iran, or vice versa. Dealing with both is impossible and dealing with neither is also impossible.”

In fact, the hope of some analysts in Washington and Tel Aviv is that Syria eventually can be pressured and persuaded to play a less disruptive role. An analogy might be Libya, which renounced terror, gave up weapons programs and made its peace with the West in 2003. But the years of boycotts and international isolation that finally forced Libyan leader

Muammar Kaddafi to come around were imposed only after criminal investigations nailed members of the Libyan regime for blowing up an airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. Then the workings of a special tribunal were key to convicting at least one of culprits and forced the Kaddafi government to assume some of the responsibility.

The only hope of marshaling the same kind of pressure on Syria is to nail the Assad regime in a United Nations-backed tribunal

“If the Bush administration fails to engage Syria, it will continue to sink in a quagmire.”

of 15 or so who run the country like it is their own bank.”

Meanwhile, Assad’s supposed tools—the Sunni radicals of Hamas and the Shiite revolutionaries of Hizbullah—have links to Islamist groups that might someday threaten the Assad regime directly. (It’s still a capital crime to be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, which nearly overthrew the Syrian regime in the early 1980s. Yet Hamas is nothing more or less than the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood.) Despite an alliance with the mullahs in Iran that goes back more than a quarter century, Syria’s secular regime and Assad’s minority Alawite sect, seen as heretical by many Islamic fundamentalists, simply do not have the same interests as Tehran’s.

In Iraq, for instance, Damascus is linked mainly to ex-Baathist and Sunni tribal leaders, while Iran’s strength is

investigating the Valentine’s Day massacre of ex-prime minister Rafik Hariri and bystanders in Beirut last year, and the other high-profile killings since. That’s what the five Lebanese ministers in the Grand Serail are holding out for. And that is precisely why they’ve been put under siege by Hizbullah and other Syrian allies trying to destroy altogether the government of Prime Minister Fuad Siniora. “Political assassination is very, very common in Lebanon,” says Ahmad Fatfat, one of the ministers in the Serail. “We need the tribunal to stop this. If we cannot succeed in this project, it is impossible to preserve our democracy.”

Indeed, if they cannot succeed, it may be impossible to preserve the shreds of the Bush administration’s policies in the Middle East. But the Assad regime, so good at spoiling, so good at surviving, is likely to go on. ■

Iran's influence spreading to Afghanistan

December 27, 2006

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

By David Rohde

ISLAM QALA, Afghanistan

Two years ago, foreign engineers built a new highway through the desert of western Afghanistan, past this ancient trading post and on to the outside world. Nearby, they strung a high-voltage power line and laid a fiber-optic cable, marked with red posts, that provides telephone and Internet access to the region.

The modernization comes with a message. Every 8 to 16 kilometers, or 5 to 10 miles, road signs offer quotations from the Koran. "Forgive us, God," declares one. "God is clear to everyone," says another. A graceful mosque rises roadside, with a green glass dome and Koranic inscriptions in blue tile. The style is unmistakably Iranian.

All of this is fruit of Iran's drive to become a bigger player in Afghanistan, as it exploits new opportunities to spread its influence and ideas farther across the Middle East.

The rise of Hezbollah, with Iran's support, has demonstrated the extent of Tehran's sway in Lebanon, and the American toppling of Saddam Hussein has allowed it to expand its influence in Iraq. Iran has been making inroads into Afghanistan, as well.

During the tumultuous 1980s and 1990s, Iran shipped money and arms to groups fighting first the Soviet occupation and later the Taliban government. But since the United States and its allies ousted the Taliban in 2001, Iran has taken advantage of the central government's weakness to pursue a more nuanced strategy: part reconstruction, part education and part propaganda.

Iran has distributed its largess, more than \$200 million in all, mostly here in the west but also in the capital, Kabul. It has set up border posts against the heroin trade, and next year will begin work on new road and construction projects and a rail line linking the countries. In Kabul, its projects include a new medical center and a water testing laboratory.

Iran's ambassador, Muhammad Reza Bahrami, portrayed his government's activities as neighborly good works, with a certain self-interest. Iran, he said, is eager to avoid repeating the calamities of the last 20 years, when two million Afghan refugees streamed over the border.

"Our strategy in Afghanistan is based on security, stability and developing a strong central government," he said. "It not only benefits the Afghan people, it's in our national interest."

Still, there are indications of other motives. Iranian radio stations are broadcasting anti-American propaganda into Afghanistan. Moderate



Max Becherer/Polaris, for The New York Times

A sign inscribed "God is great" posted on a highway in Afghanistan built by Iran.



Afghan subcontractors building a school as part of the reconstruction effort in Herat, near a library built by Iran.

Shiite leaders in Afghanistan say Tehran is funneling money to conservative Shiite religious schools and former warlords with longstanding ties to Iranian intelligence agencies.

And as the dispute over Iran's nuclear program has escalated, leading the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran on Saturday, Iranian intelligence activity has increased across Afghanistan, American and Afghan officials say. This has included not just surveillance and information collection but the recruitment of a network of pro-Iranian operatives who could attack American targets in Afghanistan. Last week, in London, British officials charged the interpreter for NATO's commanding general in Afghanistan with passing secrets to Iran.

Discerning Iranian motives, however, is notoriously difficult. Government factions often have competing agendas. Even so, the question of Iran's intentions in Afghanistan has come under a microscope in recent weeks amid debate in Washington over whether to deal with Tehran as part of a possible solution in Iraq. Some American officials suggest that Iran's seeming cooperation in Afghanistan may be something of a model for Iraq.

So far, even as it declines to talk with

the Iranians about Iraq, the Bush administration has adopted a posture of uneasy détente over Afghanistan. American officials say that they are watching closely, and no evidence has emerged of recent arms shipments to Iranian proxies, as it did in Iraq, or of other efforts to destabilize the country. Iran's Shiite leaders appear to be maintaining their historic opposition to the Sunni Taliban, who consider Shiites heretics. Iran, they also say, is failing to gain popular support among Afghans, 80 percent of whom are Sunni Muslims.

Of far greater concern, according to American, European and Afghan officials, is Pakistan, America's ostensible ally against terrorism. They say the Pakistanis have allowed the Taliban to create a virtual ministate and staging base for suicide attacks just across Afghanistan's eastern border. Suicide attacks have quintupled, to 115 this year from 23 in 2005, killing more than 200 Afghan civilians.

Western diplomats say that, at the very least, Iran's goals in Afghanistan are to hasten the withdrawal of American troops, prevent the Taliban from regaining power and keep the Afghan west firmly under Tehran's sway.

"Keep this area stable, but make it friendly for them," said a senior Euro-

pean diplomat in western Afghanistan. "Make it difficult for outsiders to operate here."

Afghanistan, analysts say, is one example of the way Iran is increasingly spending its oil money in a variety of countries to realize its self-image as an ascendant regional power.

One Western official said that by focusing on high-profile construction projects, diplomacy and public rela-

'I'm not saying Iran is gaining power all over the world. I'm saying the U.S. is losing it fast.'

tions, Iran was, in effect, employing American Cold War tactics to increase its soft power in the region.

In Iraq, that means not just financing an array of Shiite political parties and militias; the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, said Tehran was already providing power and planned to build three hospitals and set up a \$1 billion loan fund for Iraqi businesses. Similarly, Iran gave Hezbollah not just weapons and training but money for roads, schools and social services that made it the de facto government in south Lebanon. Iran has a small but growing presence in Syria, too.

Iranian officials cast themselves as a counterweight to the United States, which they say has mishandled opportunities to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq.

"U.S. policies, particularly under the current administration, have created a huge amount of resentment around the world," said a senior Iranian official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly. "I'm not saying Iran is gaining power all over the world. I'm saying the U.S. is losing it fast."

Afghanistan, a fragile mosaic of eth-

nic and religious groups, has long been susceptible to intervention from more powerful neighbors. As the world's largest predominantly Shiite country, Iran is the traditional foreign backer of Afghanistan's Shiites, roughly 20 percent of the country's population.

During the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s, Iranian Revolutionary Guards financed and trained fundamentalist Shiite militias, as well as Sunni fighters. In the civil war after the Russian withdrawal in 1989, Iran was a patron of the Northern Alliance, while Pakistan supported the ultimately victorious Taliban.

When the Taliban were ousted in 2001, Iran promised to help stabilize Afghanistan. In Germany that December, it was Iranian diplomats who stepped in to save foundering talks to form a new Afghan government, persuading the Northern Alliance to accept the agreement. Soon after, Iran pledged \$560 million in aid and loans to Afghanistan over five years, a "startling" amount for

a nonindustrialized country, according to James Dobbins, the senior American envoy to Afghanistan at the time.

A week later, President George W. Bush situated Iran on the "axis of evil." But even as they assailed that characterization, Dobbins said, Iranian officials privately offered to train Afghan soldiers. The Bush administration rejected the offer.

Today, the \$4.5 billion American training and reconstruction effort dwarfs Iran's. But while the United States has built schools, government buildings, roads and clinics, a 2005 government audit found that reconstruction had been slowed by inconsistent financing, staff shortages and poor oversight. Amid the Taliban resurgence and public perception of corruption in the government of President Hamid Karzai, recent opinion polls show optimism declining across the country.

Iranian officials said they had focused on roads and power as a quick way to strengthen Afghanistan's economy. A major project has involved upgrading roads linking Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Chabahar, on the Gulf of Oman.

In many ways, Muhammad Reza Dabbaghi, an engineer, embodies Iran's new approach in Afghanistan. Dabbaghi is the top executive here for the Iranian company that built the 113-kilometer highway through the desert to Iran two years ago, is paving much of the northwestern city of Herat and hopes to build the new railway, all with Iranian financing.

Dabbaghi said his company was trying to work in neighboring countries, but he complained that the United States was spreading "mass propaganda," lobbying governments not to hire Iranian companies, especially in Afghanistan.

In Kabul, American contractors, advisers and aid projects clearly dominate the city, but Iran is there, too. In addition to a handful of Iranian advisers at government ministries, Iranian experts have trained more than 1,200 Afghan teachers, librarians and diplomats.

Last year, the Iranian Embassy opened the Iranian Corner, a room in Kabul University's main library filled with computers, books and magazines from Iran, promoting Iran's ancient culture and modern achievements. Librarians say it is more popular than the adjoining United States Embassy-sponsored American Corner, primarily because it has a better Internet connection.

Afghanistan's economic reliance on Iran has increased in another way, as Taliban attacks have slowed the economy. Each morning, hundreds of Afghan men line up outside the Iranian missions in Herat and Kabul for visas to work in Iran. Iranian officials said they expected to issue up to 450,000 visas to Afghans this year, nearly twice the 250,000 issued in 2005.

In the murky world of western Afghanistan, centuries of Iranian influence have left many local people with a perception of Iran as all-powerful nemesis. Many said their lives would be in danger if they publicly criticized Iran

or its Afghan proxies. Behind every suspicious event in the Afghan west, they contend, lies an Iranian hand.

Such accounts are clearly exaggerated. Still, Western and Afghan officials say that, beyond its much-trumpeted reconstruction program, Iran is also engaging in a range of activities it is less eager to publicize.

Qari Ahmad Ali, a Shiite commander once backed by Iran, said that since 2001, his former patrons had funneled millions of dollars to Shiite schools and charities in western Afghanistan. He said the Sadaqia Madrasa, one of the largest Shiite religious schools in Herat, was at the center of an effort to spread Shiite fundamentalism.

"Iran does not have military activities," Ali said. "They have political and social activities."

A senior Afghan intelligence official said that Radio Mashhad, a state-run station in northeastern Iran's largest city, broadcast anti-American messages over the border.

"Iran is providing a lot of assistance for religious and cultural activities in Afghanistan," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the secret nature of his work. "That is the easy way to build influence."

Moderate Shiites agreed. "We worry about the situation," said Abbas Noyan, a Shiite member of Parliament. "Right now, the Iranians have a strong hand."

In interviews, three Shiite officials said new religious schools were being built with Iranian money. They also said that more Afghans were celebrating formerly obscure Shiite holidays.

Western diplomats said Iran's influence waned two years ago, after the United States doubled aid to Afghanistan and removed Ismail Khan, the governor of Herat and a powerful Iranian-backed warlord who dominated the west.

Since then, though, American troops have turned responsibility for Herat over to the Italians, and this year, the United States cut aid to Afghanistan by 30 percent. Iran, meanwhile, has kept its aid money flowing steadily and continued to back its proxies in the region, according to a Western diplomat.

In February, Herat experienced its first religious violence in decades. Six people were killed as Sunnis and Shiites staged gun battles on city streets, according to religious leaders.

Some local officials blamed Khan's protégé for fomenting the violence. Others attributed it to rising grass-roots Sunni-Shiite tensions.

In Kabul, though, Afghan government officials, desperate for aid, say they have decided to trust Iran's intentions.

"History may prove that overly optimistic," said Jawed Ludin, Karzai's chief of staff. "But it is in our interests today to trust our Iranian neighbors and expect the same in return."

Alan Cowell contributed reporting from London, Michael Moss from Baghdad and Michael Slackman from Damascus.

December 27, 2006

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

In Kurdish custody, with no trial in sight

Prison population includes insurgents, but legal system fails to sort out fates

By C.J. Chivers

SULAIMANIYA, Iraq: The inmates began their strike with an angry call. "Allahu akbar!" — God is great — they shouted, 120 voices joining in a cadence punctuated by whoops.

They thrust their arms between the metal bars and ripped away the curtains and plastic sheets covering the windows facing the prison courtyard. Their squinting faces were exposed to light.

Their Kurdish guards gathered, ready to control a prison break.

There was no break. The inmates were able only to shove their bunks against the doors and barricade themselves in their cells. They settled into a day of issuing complaints.

They were not allowed the Koran, they said. Their rations were meager and often moldy. Sometimes the guards beat them, they said, and several inmates had disappeared. The entire inmate population had either been denied trials or had been held beyond the terms of their sentences, they said, lost in legal limbo in the Kurdish-controlled region of Iraq.

The prison strike here, on Dec. 4, ended when the local authorities agreed to transfer three unpopular guards and to allow copies of the Koran in the cells. But it exposed an intractable problem that has accompanied Kurdish cooperation with the United States in Iraq.

The Kurdish prison population has swelled to include at least several hundred suspected insurgents, and yet there is no legal system to sort out their fates. So the inmates wait, a population for which there is no plan.

The Kurdish government that holds the prisoners says they are dangerous, and points out that the population includes men who have undertaken terrorist or guerrilla training in Iraq or Afghanistan. But it also concedes to being stymied, with a small budget, limited prison space and little legal precedent to look back on.

"We have not had trials for them," said Brigadier Sarkawt Hassan Jalal, the director of security in the Sulaimaniya region. "We have no counterterrorism law, and any law we would pass would

not affect them because it would not be retroactive."

The problems reach back to before the American-led invasion, when northern Iraq was a Kurdish enclave out of Saddam Hussein's control.

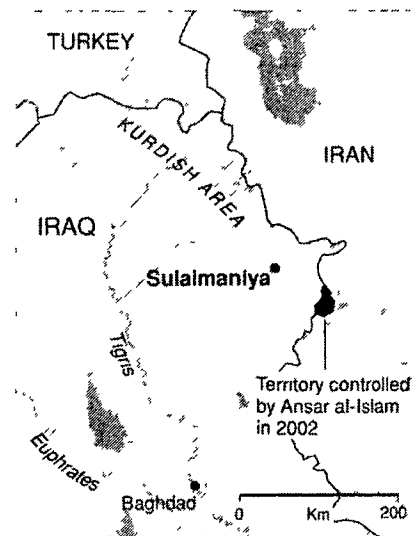
At the time, the Kurds in northeastern Iraq were fighting Ansar al-Islam, a small insurgent and terrorist group that seized control of a slice of territory along the Iranian border in 2002.

The Kurds captured several prisoners and suspected insurgents, but had no clear idea what to do with them, other than to hold them in cells.

Several weeks after the war started in 2003, an attack by American special forces and Kurdish fighters pushed Ansar al-Islam off Kurdish turf. But the border with Iran had not been sealed before the attack.

Most of the insurgents escaped.

In the years since, Ansar al-Islam's ideological war has spread throughout Sunni Arab regions of Iraq, becoming a far more dangerous insurgency. Kurdish jails have swelled with people accused of participating in it.



Many of the detained men exude menace. But others claim innocence. And Kurdish officials say they have a limited capacity to disentangle the groups.

Brigadier Hassan Nouri, the Kurdish security official responsible for the prisons in northeastern Iraq, said the detainees' status resembles that of the American-held detainees in Guantánamo Bay. "We cannot let them go, and we will hold them as long as we have to," he said.

The size of the detainee population is unclear. In this prison run by the local security service on a Kurdish military base at Sulaimaniya's outskirts, 120 accused insurgents are held.

Hania Mufti, a researcher for Human Rights Watch who has investigated the prison conditions and the absence of due process for the inmates, said that about 2,500 people were being held by the security services of the two ruling Kurdish parties. She estimated that two-thirds of them had been accused of participating in the insurgency.

Mufti said she has encouraged Kurdish political leaders to set up an independent commission to review each of the cases of the accused insurgents.

"We're not saying, 'throw open the doors of the prisons,'" she said, but rather are suggesting that the Kurds create a means to examine the merits of



Christoph Bangert for The New York Times

The Sulaimaniya prison, where as many as 30 inmates live in a cell about six meters by seven meters large and share a toilet.

each man's detention, and to determine why and whether each of them should be held and for how long, and under what conditions.

Kurdish officials have not yet developed such a policy; the detainees are essentially warehoused. The strike in early December exposed the strains the unresolved status had placed on the Kurdish government and the inmates alike.

The four visible cells here, spaces of about six meters by seven meters, or 20 feet by 24 feet, each were packed with 30 men. The men shared a toilet on the floor outside the cells, in a hall. The group seethed. One inmate shouted at two journalists through the bars, "Stop your hatred toward Islam! Otherwise we will kill you!"

Speaking from a law enforcement perspective, Jalal said the close quarters and evident anger had made many of the inmates more radical, and that the prison serves as an insurgents' nest.

The detainees themselves blame the Kurds. As the disruption began, one inmate who had been outside the cells to meet a family member was swiftly pushed into a guard bunkroom and left with two journalists.

The man, Yunis Ahmad, of Kirkuk, said he had been held two years without being charged. He was briefly detained, he said, by the American military, and then turned over to the Kurds.

Behind him on the wall of the guards' room hung two pieces of heavy electric cable, a common tool for beatings.

Ahmad said that the Americans had treated him decently, interviewing him politely and giving him food and juice. But since being in Kurdish custody, he said, he had been tortured, including having a bed placed on him and then being nearly crushed with weights and having his arms almost pulled from his shoulder sockets by the guards.

"I promise you, if they pulled your arms like that, you will confess to being

in Al Qaeda," he said.

He was an Islamic cleric, he said, and his brother was an insurgent.

He said he did not know the reasons for his incarceration. "The people who are here don't know why they are here," he said.

The International Committee for the Red Cross has an office in Sulaimaniya.

Its head of mission declined to comment about the prisoners' allegations, other than to say that the organization visits the prison and the inmates and is in contact with the Kurdish authorities.

The U.S. military said it was also not directly involved in these jails. "We just don't have that role in the Kurdish legal system," said Major Derrick Cheng, a spokesman for the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division.

"We have security overwatch in the area, but we don't have an immediate or direct role in the prisons."

Ahmadinejad aux Occidentaux : « L'Iran est un pays nucléaire »

Uranium enrichi Sourd aux sanctions de l'ONU, Téhéran va installer 3 000 centrifugeuses à Natanz

Téhéran persiste et signe : il ne reviendra pas sur son programme nucléaire. Au lendemain de l'adoption à l'unanimité au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, samedi 23 décembre, d'une résolution fixant des sanctions à son encontre, le régime iranien a défié l'ONU en annonçant, dimanche, une accélération de ses activités d'enrichissement d'uranium.

« Notre réponse immédiate à la résolution du Conseil de sécurité est que dès aujourd'hui nous allons commencer nos activités pour installer 3 000 centrifugeuses sur le site de Natanz, et nous irons de l'avant à toute vitesse », a déclaré Ali Laridjani, négociateur en chef iranien, au journal conservateur *Kayhan*.

Le président iranien, Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad, qualifiant la résolution de l'ONU de « morceau de papier déchiré », a affirmé pour sa part : « Que l'Occident le veuille ou non, l'Iran est un pays nucléaire, et il est de son intérêt de vivre aux côtés de l'Iran nucléaire (...). Les signataires de la résolution vont bientôt regretter leur action superficielle et triviale. »

Le Parlement iranien a lancé, dimanche, une procédure d'urgence pour voter une loi obligeant le gouvernement à réviser sa coopération avec l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA). Plusieurs députés ont pris la parole pour demander que l'Iran quitte le traité de non-prolifération (TNP) et expulse immédiatement les inspecteurs de l'AIEA présents sur son territoire.

En dépit des réactions iraniennes, le

Le Monde

26 DÉCEMBRE 2006

vote unanime des premières sanctions contre l'Iran depuis que les activités nucléaires clandestines de ce pays ont été révélées, en 2002, après avoir été tenues secrètes pendant dix-huit ans, a un parfum de victoire pour les Occidentaux. En dépit de quatre mois de négociations tendues, jusqu'au bout, en effet, une abstention russe était à craindre.

De fait, la résolution 1737 est le fruit d'un difficile compromis, et les sanctions ont été édulcorées à la demande de Moscou. Elles consistent pour l'essentiel en un embargo sur les matériaux et les technologies « sensibles » qui pourraient, bien que l'Iran nie vouloir se doter de l'arme nucléaire, aider Téhéran à y parvenir. Les avoirs de vingt-deux personnes et organismes liés au programme nucléaire iranien sont également en partie gelés.

Si l'Iran cesse ses activités controversées, les sanctions seront suspendues. Si, dans soixante jours, l'AIEA constate le contraire, de nouvelles sanctions seront étudiées.

Quel sera l'impact de cette résolution au pouvoir limité ? Le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Philippe Douste-Blazy, a appelé les autorités iraniennes à coopérer pour rompre leur « isolement » : « Il est grand temps pour l'Iran, a dit le ministre, de revenir à la raison. » Les Etats-Unis, qui militaient pour un texte plus sévère, envisagent, de leur côté, des mesures financières plus contraignantes. ■

La justice irakienne ordonne que l'ancien président Saddam Hussein soit pendu



Le processus qui conduira l'ancien maître de l'Irak au gibet semble désormais inéluctable. Mardi 26 décembre, au terme d'une journée particulièrement sanglante à Bagdad, la cour d'appel a confirmé la sentence du Haut Tribunal pénal irakien condamnant Saddam Hussein à la mort par pendaison pour son implication dans la tuerie de 148 chiites du village de Doujaïl, en 1982.

La décision doit encore être validée par la signature du président irakien, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, ainsi que par celle des deux vice-présidents du pays. Mais il ne s'agit là, selon certains juristes, que d'une simple formalité.

Selon la Constitution irakienne, la sentence doit être appliquée dans un délai de trente jours suivant la décision de la cour d'appel. Le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Mali-

ki, a plusieurs fois promis « une exécution avant la fin de l'année ».

Le procès en cours pour « génocide contre les Kurdes » dans la campagne militaire d'Anfal, en 1987-1988, se poursuivra. Nul doute, cependant, que les arguments à charge contre Saddam Hussein tomberont d'eux-mêmes dès lors que l'ancien président aura été exécuté.

La décision de la cour, dénoncée par de nombreuses organisations de protection des droits de l'homme, a été saluée par la Maison Blanche, qui y a vu « une journée [qui] fera date dans les efforts des Irakiens pour remplacer la loi du tyran par l'Etat de droit ». Hasard du calendrier, la nouvelle est survenue le jour où le nombre des Américains morts en Irak dépassait celui des victimes des attentats du 11 septembre 2003.

Au même moment, au sud de l'Irak, les troupes britanniques ont lancé une vaste offensive dont l'objectif est de « nettoyer » la province de ses éléments les plus criminels afin de pouvoir transférer, d'ici avril, l'essentiel des tâches sécuritaires aux institutions locales. ■

Le Monde
28 décembre 2006

A Bassora, les Britanniques s'attaquent à la police, infiltrée par les milices

L'OPÉRATION militaire lancée à Bassora dans la nuit de Noël par plusieurs centaines de soldats britanniques, accompagnés d'autant de troupiers irakiens, a suscité la colère des chefs de la police locale. L'offensive, au cours de laquelle sept Irakiens, civils et policiers, ont été tués et le commissariat du quartier de Jamiat rasé à l'explosif, « était illégale et violait les droits de l'homme », a commenté, mardi 26 décembre, le général Mohammed Hammadi, chef de la police de la province de Bassora. Son second, le général Ali Ibrahim, a précisé que le commandement de la police n'avait « pas été prévenu ». Si cette information était authentique, elle confirmerait ce que chacun sait dans le sud de l'Irak, à savoir que les 7 200 soldats britanniques ne font plus confiance aux institutions qu'ils ont eux-mêmes contribué à mettre en place dans la

seconde ville d'Irak, y compris la police.

De fait, un porte-parole du ministère de la défense expliquait, le 27 septembre à Londres, combien « la police de Bassora [était] désormais infiltrée par les milices chiites de même que par des gangs criminels ». Lundi, avant de faire sauter le bâtiment de Jamiat – l'un des 17 commis-

sariats de police de cette ville de plus de 1,2 million d'habitants – l'armée britannique avait découvert dans un sous-sol 127 détenus dans un état lamentable. Beaucoup avaient eu les mains et les pieds écrasés sous la torture, le dos constellé de brûlures de cigarettes.

Prisonniers de droit commun et « politiques » – c'est-à-dire, pour l'essentiel, de confession sunnite – cohabitaient dans un cloaque officiellement à la charge de « l'Unité de police des crimes sérieux ». Selon un porte-parole de l'armée britannique, « plusieurs d'entre eux devaient être purement et simplement exécutés incessamment et c'est pourquoi nous sommes intervenus ».

Exode des sunnites

Ce n'est pas la première fois que les troupes étrangères découvrent des prisonniers torturés dans les sous-sols et les arrière-cours des commissariats de police, voire du ministère de l'intérieur à Bagdad. Ces pratiques contribuent largement à l'exode. A Bassora, la minorité sunnite, qui représentait 3 % à 4 % de la population, a diminué de plus de moitié. De même dans les petites villes alentour où, à la suite des assassi-

nats et des menaces, leur proportion est passée d'environ 30 % à moins de 15 %.

Dans la province de Bassora, où les pouvoirs locaux sont exercés par les partis chiites fondamentalistes qui ont remporté les élections de janvier 2005, ce sont les milices, affiliées ou non à des partis, qui tiennent le haut du pavé, siphonnent le pétrole des pipelines et s'affrontent régulièrement à coups de mortier pour le contrôle de la plus riche province pétrolière d'Irak.

L'offensive britannique de Noël à Bassora s'inscrit cependant dans une opération plus large, dénommée « Sinbad », lancée le 28 septembre. Pour Londres, l'objectif est de « nettoyer » la province de ses éléments les plus criminels afin de transférer aux institutions locales, d'ici à avril, l'essentiel des tâches sécuritaires. « Si tout va bien, a expliqué Gordon Brown, ministre qui doit succéder à Tony Blair en 2007, nous pourrions envisager de retirer une partie de nos troupes – des milliers – dès l'an prochain. » ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

LE FIGARO

27 décembre 2006



L'ex-dictateur avait accueilli la sentence, le 5 novembre dernier, en criant à la cour « Dieu est plus grand que l'occupant ».

Selon la loi irakienne, aucune autorité ne peut user du droit de grâce ni commuer les peines prononcées. D. Bandic/AP

Saddam Hussein sera exécuté

Tous les recours en justice ayant été épuisés, l'ex-dictateur irakien devrait être pendu dans les trente jours.

PROCHE-ORIENT

La Cour d'appel a confirmé hier la peine de mort contre l'ancien dictateur.

SADDAM HUSSEIN peut être pendu « à n'importe quel moment », à partir d'aujourd'hui. C'est ce qu'a déclaré hier à Bagdad un juge de la Cour d'appel, Arif Shaheen. Le tribunal venait de confirmer la condamnation à mort de l'ancien président irakien, rendue le 5 novembre. Les statuts du tribunal prévoient que la sentence devrait être exécutée dans les trente jours. Saddam Hussein avait été condamné à mort pour l'exécution de 148 villageois chiïtes de Doujaïl, dans les années 1980, en représailles à un attentat contre le convoi présidentiel.

L'ex-dictateur avait accueilli la sentence un Coran à la main, tremblant et en criant à la cour : « longue vie à l'Irak », « Dieu est plus grand

que l'occupant », avant d'être évacué de la salle. Son demi-frère Barzan al-Tikriti, ancien chef des services de renseignement, et l'ancien président du tribunal révolutionnaire, Awad al-Bandar, avaient également été condamnés à la peine capitale. Leur appel a lui aussi été rejeté et leur condamnation à mort confirmée, selon la télévision publique Iraquiya.

« Le jugement de la Cour d'appel est prévisible, nous n'avons pas été du tout surpris, car nous sommes convaincus que c'est un procès politique à cent pour cent », a commenté d'Amman, en Jordanie, l'avocat du président déchu, M^e Khalil Doulaïmi. « Ce jugement figure dans les agendas américain et iranien visant à diviser l'Irak et à l'engager dans une guerre civile », a poursuivi M^e Doulaïmi.

Selon la loi irakienne, aucune autorité, pas même le chef de

l'État, ne peut user du droit de grâce ni commuer les peines prononcées, a rappelé le porte-parole du tribunal, Raed Jouhi. « Ceci s'applique à l'ancien président Saddam Hussein qui a été reconnu coupable de crimes contre l'humanité », a-t-il souligné. Le premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, avait indiqué peu après la condamnation à mort de l'ex-dictateur qu'il s'attendait « à ce que l'exécution se déroule avant la fin de cette année ».

« Les voies d'appel épuisées »

Maliki avait ajouté que son pays ne renoncerait pas à son « droit » d'exécuter l'ancien homme fort. Quant au président irakien Jalal Talabani, il avait reconnu récemment avoir un jour signé un appel international contre la peine capitale, mais avait plus tard précisé que le droit irakien prévalait sur ses convictions personnelles.

« Une fois que toutes les voies d'appel auront été épuisées, le jugement devient exécutoire et le président n'a pas à signer d'arrêté d'exécution », avait-il déclaré lors de son voyage à Paris, début novembre.

Le verdict avait été alors dénoncé par plusieurs ONG de défense des droits de l'homme, suivies par de nombreux pays d'Europe, où la peine capitale a été supprimée. Le premier ministre britannique, Tony Blair, avait rappelé son opposition de principe à la peine de mort. Hier, la Grande-Bretagne a de nouveau réagi, mais un ton en dessous. « Nous sommes opposés au principe de la peine de mort mais la décision appartient aux autorités irakiennes », a précisé hier un porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères britanniques.

La Maison-Blanche a jugé que

cette journée « ferait date » pour les Irakiens. Mais l'Inde, qui avait des relations étroites avec le régime de Saddam, a appelé à la clémence, espérant « que la peine de mort contre l'ancien président irakien Saddam Hussein ne sera pas appliquée ».

Autre procès

L'exécution du dictateur l'empêcherait d'être jugé en personne pour les autres crimes retenus par le tribunal. Saddam Hussein est actuellement accusé dans un autre procès, pour avoir ordonné et mis en œuvre les campagnes militaires Anfal en 1987 et 1988 dans le Kurdistan (nord) qui ont coûté la vie à 180 000 Kurdes, selon l'accusation.

C'est pendant cette campagne que la ville martyre d'Halabja avait été attaquée à l'arme chimique. Plus de 5 000 personnes, dont les trois quarts de femmes et d'en-

fants, avaient été tuées immédiatement, et 7 000 de plus affectés par les gaz.

De nombreux membres de la communauté kurde, au premier rang desquels le président irakien Jalal Talabani, avaient déclaré que Saddam Hussein ne devait pas être exécuté avant la fin du procès Anfal. Mais le pouvoir issu des dernières élections gagnées par les chiïtes pourrait avoir intérêt à éliminer au plus vite Saddam pour tenter de conforter une autorité ébranlée par la guerre civile. Il est ainsi possible que le procès de l'offensive Anfal se poursuive sans le principal intéressé. Saddam Hussein n'aurait pas non plus l'occasion d'évoquer cette période, pendant laquelle il combattait l'Iran, avec les encouragements de l'Europe et des États-Unis.

PIERRE PRIER (AVEC AFP, REUTERS)

December 30-31, 2006

Herald Tribune

Iraq is preparing to hang Saddam

'We will do it very soon,' judge says; some are stunned by speed of events



Pool photo by David Furst

Saddam Hussein in court on Nov. 5 as he received the death sentence for killings in the mainly Shiite village of Dujail in 1982.

By Marc Santora

BAGHDAD: The close of the final chapter of the brutal reign of Saddam Hussein approached Friday night as Iraqi officials prepared the last legal notice necessary before his execution — a “red card” that will be presented to the former dictator to inform him that his end is near, Iraqi officials said.

“We will do it very soon,” said Muneer Haddad, a judge on the Iraqi High Tribunal who will represent the court at the execution. He said the execution would probably take place “tonight or tomorrow.”

The pace of events left even some of the U.S. advisers working on the case stunned, a Western official said.

For all the guidance the Americans provided, in the end the dictator’s demise did not go the way they expected, the official said. “It just goes to show that the Iraqis call the shots on something like this,” the official said.

It was still possible that the execution could be delayed, Western and Iraqi officials cautioned. A senior Iraqi official said there could be other legal hurdles.

A leading member of Parliament from the dominant Shiite majority behind Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki said in an interview with Reuters that he was waiting only for a ruling from clerics on whether the start of the Id al-Adha holiday Saturday —

which coincides with the hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca — meant the execution should be postponed for a week.

If it goes ahead, Maliki would seem to have forced through a decision popular with Shiites in the face of resistance

from Saddam’s fellow Sunnis and popular with Kurds eager to see Saddam executed for carrying out a campaign of genocide against them.

But Haddad, the judge, said all that remained was the technical legal matter of court officials’ filling out the red card, the formal notice of impending execution created during the Saddam era and widely used by his much-feared secret police.

Iraqi and American officials have kept outsiders, including his legal team, from contact with him, said Najib al-Nauimi, one of Saddam’s lawyers, who was in Qatar.

There has been heated debate among Iraqi officials about how swiftly to carry out the death sentence, which was handed down Nov. 5 and upheld Tuesday. The appeals court said the hanging had to take place within 30 days.

An Iraqi official close to the negotiations on when to execute Saddam expressed deep disappointment that after years of forensic investigation, detailed litigation and careful deliberation, the process could be compromised in the final hours by politically driven haste.

“According to the law, no execution can be carried out during the holidays,” said an official involved in the negotiations. “After all the hard work we have done, why would we break the law and ruin what we have built?”

The Muslim holiday of Id al-Adha begins Saturday for Sunnis, which is Saddam’s sect, and Sunday for Shiites, who were oppressed under Saddam’s rule but who now control the government. Iraqi law seems to indicate that executions are forbidden on the holiday.

Haddad dismissed those concerns, injecting some of the sectarian split that is ripping this country apart into his response to a question on the subject. “Tomorrow is not Id,” he said. “The official Id in Iraq is Sunday.”

As for Saddam’s being a Sunni, Haddad said: “Saddam is not Sunni. And he is not Shiite. He is not Muslim.”

His comments seemed to reflect the views of Maliki, whose government is ultimately responsible for the final decisions regarding Saddam’s fate.

Speaking in Baghdad on Friday to the families of people who had been killed while Saddam ruled, the prime minister was blunt in his desire to see Saddam executed quickly.

“Anyone who rejects the execution of Saddam is undermining the martyrs of Iraq and their dignity,” he said. “Nobody can overrule the execution sentence issued against Saddam.”

Without specifying a time, date or place, he said, “There is no review or delay in implementing the execution verdict against Saddam.”

Esam al-Gazawi, another lawyer who represented Saddam, said in Jordan that while one of his colleagues in Baghdad had been asked to collect Saddam’s personal belongings, he had no idea when the execution would actually take place.

“No one knows when it’s going to happen except God and President Bush,” he said.

Gazawi said he had been told that Saddam had met with his two half-brothers, Sabawai and Wataban, who are also in custody, but no other family members.

“His sons are dead and his daughters are here in Amman, so he met no one,” he said. Saddam’s two sons, Uday and Qusay, were killed by American soldiers after the 2003 invasion that toppled him from power.

After his government collapsed, Saddam went into hiding and was eventually found in a hole near his hometown, Tikrit. He was charged in three cases, all for crimes against humanity.

The first case involved the killing of almost 150 Shiite men and boys in the small town of Dujail in 1982, after an attack on his motorcade there. Saddam was found guilty and sentenced to die by hanging.

A trial on the far more sweeping charges that he directed the killing of 50,000 Kurds in an organized ethnic cleansing campaign is continuing.

The final case, involving the savage crushing of a Shiite uprising, which left thousands dead, has yet to go to trial.

Saddam thought he would rule Iraq forever

December 30-31, 2006

Herald Tribune

By Neil MacFarquhar

For decades, it seemed that Saddam Hussein's unflinching hold on Iraq would endure. The tyrant who oppressed Iraq for more than 30 years — unleashing devastating regional wars and reducing his once promising, oil-rich nation to a claustrophobic police state — managed to cling to power even after his disastrous military adventures against first Iran and then Kuwait, where a U.S.-led coalition routed his unexpectedly timid military in 1991.

Saddam's personal conviction that he was destined by God to rule Iraq forever was so strong that he refused to accept that he would be overthrown in April 2003, even as American tanks penetrated the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, in what became a bitterly contentious, bloody occupation.

The former despot then eluded capture for eight months, during an intensive manhunt, and he maintained even after his capture that he was Iraq's rightful president. High Value Detainee

No. 1 — his U.S. military code name — heaped scorn on the Iraqi judge who referred to him as the "former" president after asking him to identify himself on the first day of his trial.

"I didn't say 'former president,' I said 'president,' and I have rights according to the Constitution, among them immunity from prosecution," Saddam growled from the docket. The outburst underscored the boundless egotism and self-delusion of a man who fostered such a fierce personality cult during the decades that he ran the Middle Eastern nation that joking or criticizing him in public could bring a death sentence. The tongue of one senior general convicted of such a crime in 1990 was reportedly cut out before the officer's execution.

Saddam's own death sentence stemmed from the ruthless revenge killing of 148 Shiite Muslim men and boys from the small town of Dujail just north of Baghdad, after a 1982 attack on his motorcade there. It was one of countless assassination attempts that he survived.

Saddam was due to face a series of trials over incidents of far greater magnitude, but Iraqi prosecutors started with Dujail because the evidence was clearcut, including Saddam's signature on at least one execution order.

If a man's life can be boiled down to one physical mark, the wrist of Saddam's right hand, tattooed with a line of three dark blue dots, is significant.

The mark is commonly given to children in rural, tribal areas. Some urbanized Iraqis have removed or at least bleached theirs, but Saddam's former confidants told The Atlantic Monthly that he never disguised his.

Ultimately, underneath all the socialist rhetoric, underneath the Koranic references, the tailored suits and the invocations of Iraq's glorious history, Saddam as ruler was basically a village peasant attempting to be a tribal leader on a grand scale. His rule was paramount, and sustaining it was his main goal behind all the talk of developing Iraq by harnessing its considerable wealth and manpower.

Mosques, airports, neighborhoods and entire cities were named after him.

While Saddam was in power, his statue guarded the entrance to every village, his portrait watched over each government office and he peered down from at least one wall in every home. His picture was so widely displayed that a joke quietly circulating among his detractors in 1988 put the country's population at 34 million — 17 million people and 17 million portraits of Saddam.

Throughout his rule, Saddam unsettled the ranks of his Baath Party with bloody purges and packed his jails with political prisoners to defuse real or imagined plots. In one of his most brutal acts, he rained poison gas on the northern Kurdish village of Halabja in 1988, killing an estimated 5,000 of his own citizens who were suspected of being disloyal and wounding about 10,000 more.

Even after his fall, Saddam showed no remorse. When four members of the temporary government that replaced him visited him after his capture in December 2003, they asked about some of his more brutal acts.

Saddam responded, according to Adnan Pachachi, a former Iraqi foreign minister, that the Halabja attack had been Iran's handiwork; that Kuwait was rightfully part of Iraq; and that the mass graves were filled with the bodies of thieves who had fled the battlefields. Saddam declared that he had been "just but firm" because Iraqis needed a tough ruler, Pachachi said.

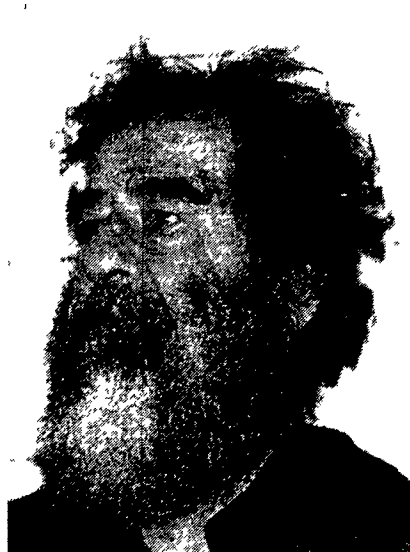
Aside from his secret police, the main factor that preserved his power was his practice of filling the regime's upper ranks with members of his extended clan, regardless of their qualifications. Their Corleone-like feuds became the



Saddam with his sons, Uday, left, and Qusay, right. Below, a portrait of Saddam in 1968 as he gained power, and after his capture, right. Bloodshed was a major theme of his life, starting with his first political assignment, an assassination attempt.



Polaris



AFF

stuff of gory public soap operas.

Saddam once sentenced his eldest son, Uday, to death after Uday beat Saddam's food taster to death in front of many horrified party guests; he later rescinded the order. The husbands of his two eldest daughters, whom he had promoted to important military positions, were gunned down after they defected and then inexplicably returned to Iraq.

Saddam was born in 1937 in a mud hut on stilts near the banks of the Tigris River near the village of Tikrit, 160 kilometers, or 100 miles, northwest of Baghdad. He was raised by a clan of landless peasants. His father apparently deserted his mother before his birth. (Government accounts said the father had died.)

"His birth was not a joyful occasion, and no roses or aromatic plants bedecked his cradle," his official biographer, Amir Iskander, wrote in "Saddam Hussein, the Fighter, the Thinker and The Man," published in 1981.

Saddam told his biographer that he had not missed his father while growing up in an extended clan. But persistent stories suggested that Saddam's stepfather had delighted in humiliating the boy and had forced him to tend sheep. Eventually Saddam ran away to live with relatives who would let him go to school.

Saddam's first role in the rough world of Iraqi politics came in 1959, at age 22, when the Baath Party assigned him and nine others to assassinate Abdul Karim Kassem, the despotic general who ruled Iraq. Violence was a quick way for a young man who had grown up fatherless in an impoverished village to advance himself; bloodshed became the major theme of his life.

During the failed assassination, Saddam suffered a bullet wound in the leg. The official version portrayed Saddam as a hero who had dug a bullet out of his own leg with a penknife; the other version suggested that the plot had failed because Saddam had opened fire prematurely.

Saddam sought asylum in Egypt, where President Gamal Abdel Nasser

nurtured the region's revolutionary movements.

Soon after returning to Iraq, Saddam married his first cousin and the daughter of his political mentor, Sajida Khairallah Tulfah, on May 5, 1963. The couple had five children including two sons, Uday and Qusay, and three daughters, Raghda, Rana and Hala.

Saddam had mistresses, including several prominent Iraqi women, but he never flaunted them.

Saddam's wife, three daughters and about a dozen grandchildren are still alive. Uday and Qusay, along with Qusay's teenage son, Mustapha, died in July 2003 during a fierce gun battle with U.S. forces in a villa in the northern city of Mosul. Denounced by an informant, they had been the two most wanted men in Iraq after their father.

The first years of Saddam's marriage coincided with political tumult in Iraq, with at least six coups or attempted re-

volts erupting between the assassination of King Faisal II in 1958 and the putsch in July 1968 that brought the Baath Party to power.

Saddam's main role while he was still in his early 30s was organizing the party's militia, which became the seed of the dreaded security apparatus. By November 1969, he had eliminated rivals and dissidents to the extent that President Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr appointed him vice president and deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, as the cabinet was known.

Saddam remained head of the intelligence and internal security agencies, in effect controlling Iraq.

The Arab Baath Socialist Party, whose name means "Renaissance" in Arabic, had been formed in the 1930s to promote a secular, socialist creed as the ideal path to achieving Arab unity. But that dogma proved a sinister excuse for the imprisonment, exile or execution of all potential rivals.

No other Arab despot matched the savagery of Saddam as he went about bending all state institutions to his whim. His opening act, in January 1969, was hanging about 17 so-called spies for Israel, as many as 13 of them Jews, in a central Baghdad square. Hundreds of arrests and executions followed as the civilian wing of Baath gradually eclipsed the Iraqi military and the era of coups ended.

Saddam invariably made sure that those around him were complicit in his bloody acts, which he identified as patriotism, making certain that there would be no guiltless figure to rally opposition.

In an authoritative account of Saddam's regime called "Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq," a self-exiled Iraqi architect, Kenaan Makiya, writing under the pseudonym Samir Al-Khalil, estimated that at least 500 people had died in the purge that consolidated Saddam's power.

Saddam's titles reflected his status as an absolute ruler modeled after one of his heroes, Josef Stalin of the former Soviet Union. They included president of the republic, commander in chief of the armed forces, field marshal and prime minister. In addition, the state-owned press referred to him repeatedly as the Struggler, the Standard Bearer, the Knight of the Arab Nation and the Sword of the Arabs.

The eight-year war that he undertook against neighboring Iran, beginning with an invasion in 1980, resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths on both sides. His invasion of Kuwait in 1990 brought an overwhelming military response from a broad coalition of other countries.

In keeping with a ruling technique that used violence to achieve and sustain power, Saddam's biggest investments were in his military. He ended the Iran-Iraq war with one million men under arms.

By then Iraq had embarked on extensive projects to acquire a homegrown arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biolog-

ical weapons. Iraq had become a regional power, and Saddam expected to dominate the Arab world much as his hero, Nasser, had done in the 1960s.

During the 1990s, Saddam repeatedly took Iraq to the brink of renewed warfare by refusing UN weapons inspectors the unfettered access they required to catalog and destroy what was believed to be an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, as specified in the cease-fire agreement after the ejection of the Iraqis from Kuwait.

The United Nations maintained strict economic sanctions against Iraq until 1996, when some oil exports were allowed to pay for food, medicine and war reparations. The sanctions, devastating to ordinary Iraqis, proved a boon to Saddam and his henchmen. The Government Accountability Office in the U.S. Congress estimated that the Iraqi leader had siphoned at least \$10 billion from the program by making oil trades off the books and demanding kickbacks.

Still, in an effort to end sanctions, Baghdad over the years offered at least five different "full, final and complete" weapons disclosures, which the United Nations dismissed as woefully incomplete.

During his presidency, each of Saddam's 20 palaces was kept fully staffed, with meals prepared daily as if he were in residence to conceal his whereabouts. Delicacies like lobster, which were imported for him, were first dispatched to nuclear scientists to test them for radiation and poison.

Saddam was particularly phobic about germs. Even top generals summoned to meet him were often ordered by his security guards to strip to their underwear and their clothes were then washed, ironed and X-rayed before they could get dressed to meet him. They had to wash their hands in disinfectant.

Saad al-Bazzaz, an Iraqi writer and editor, said that Saddam, having risen so far beyond the village and cheated death so many times, believed that God had anointed him.

Iraq under Saddam had a stifled quality. Imprisonment, torture, mutilation and execution were frequent occurrences, at least for those who chose to dabble in anything vaguely political. Simple information like the weather report was classified. There was no freedom of expression — even foreign newspapers were banned — and no freedom to travel. Contact with foreigners was proscribed.

There were widespread reports that Saddam himself periodically carried out the torture or even execution of those he felt had crossed him.

Saddam often tried to draw parallels between himself and the famous leaders of Mesopotamia, one of the earliest civilizations in the region, as well as Saladin, the 12th century Kurdish Muslim military commander who expelled the Crusaders from Jerusalem.

What preoccupied him, Saddam said, was what people would be thinking about him 500 years from now.

Un procès qui laissera un goût d'inachevé à de nombreux Irakiens

LE FIGARO
SAMEDI 30 - DIMANCHE 31 DÉCEMBRE 2006

La plupart des crimes commis par le régime du dictateur ne seront pas jugés.

LES FAMILLES des victimes de Saddam ne pouvaient rêver d'une meilleure vengeance : la pendaison du dictateur irakien à l'origine de la mort de plus d'un million de personnes. Mais à l'instar de nombreuses organisations de défense des droits de l'homme, elles restent sur leur faim et s'interrogent sur l'équité de ce procès inachevé.

« C'est un procès imparfait qui a été expédié, et qui enterre des secrets qu'on n'aura pas eu le temps d'éclaircir », soupire Hossein Mohammadian, un Kurde de Sardacht, petite ville du nord-ouest de l'Iran voisin, bombardée au gaz chimique par l'armée irakienne en 1987. Il regrette, comme beaucoup d'autres, que l'ancien dictateur soit exécuté pour un seul de ses crimes, le massacre de 148 civils dans la ville chiite de Doujail, en 1982. Or, sur la longue liste des crimes contre l'humanité commis par Saddam, figurent des actes d'une plus grande ampleur : l'opération Anfal contre les Kurdes, dont le procès est en cours, le gazage de Halabja en 1988 – qui fit au moins 5 000 victimes ! –, ou encore l'écrasement de la rébellion chiite en 1991. Sans compter d'autres dossiers passés aux oubliettes : la guerre Iran-Irak (1980-1988) et l'invasion du Koweït en 1990.

« Les contraintes de temps l'ont malheureusement emporté sur la notion de justice », constate Hanny Megally, le directeur du programme Afrique et Moyen-Orient à l'ICTJ (International Center for Transitional Justice), une organisation non gouvernementale basée à New York.

« Un très mauvais exemple »

Chez Human Rights Watch, une autre organisation de défense des droits de l'homme, qui a suivi de très près le procès, on s'interroge également sur son équité. « La façon dont le procès de Doujail s'est déroulé va nuire à



Les familles de victimes de la dictature irakienne sont restées sur leur faim devant une condamnation prononcée pour un seul des crimes du raïs. C. Bouroncle/AFP.

la crédibilité de la justice irakienne dans son ensemble. Pour un pays en pleine transition politique, c'est un très mauvais exemple », déplore Richard Dicker, en charge du programme de justice internationale au sein de HRW. L'organisation, qui condamne ouvertement l'exécution de Saddam, a relevé une série d'atteintes à l'indépendance et à l'impartialité du pouvoir judiciaire irakien, parmi lesquels des délais trop courts impartis à la défense des accusés et le remplacement de certains juges sous la pression du gouvernement. « Bien entendu, nous ne remettons pas en question la culpabilité de Saddam, mais il aurait été bon de pouvoir la prouver dans le cadre d'un procès équitable », ajoute Reed Brody, conseiller juridique au sein de HRW.

Organisé sous l'égide du Haut Tribunal irakien, créé à l'époque de Paul Bremer, le procès de Saddam Hussein et de sept de ses lieutenants a démarré à l'automne 2005. Il s'est déroulé dans l'enceinte ultraprotégée de la zone verte, qui héberge

l'ambassade américaine et les bureaux des principaux officiels irakiens. Avec de nombreux rebondissements liés au contexte de violence et de guerre civile : l'assassinat de trois avocats de la défense, d'un témoin de l'accusation et la démission de deux présidents de cour. « On aurait espéré que les erreurs du procès Doujail, liées entre autres aux aléas de l'Irak d'aujourd'hui, puissent être corrigées au cours des autres procès », regrette Hany Megally. Mais le Haut Tribunal irakien en a décidé autrement.

La condamnation à mort par pendaison de l'ancien raïs, prononcée le 5 novembre dernier, a été ratifiée le 26 décembre par la Cour d'appel. La sentence peut survenir à n'importe quel moment dans le mois qui vient. Mais les audiences liées à l'affaire Anfal, qui ont commencé cet été, devraient se poursuivre sans Saddam. En revanche, personne n'est en mesure de confirmer, depuis Bagdad, si les autres accusés, impliqués dans les autres crimes, auront rendez-vous avec la justice.

« La frustration des familles de victimes de ces autres crimes est

compréhensible », remarque Reed Brody. « Pour elles, il est important de pouvoir faire la lumière sur ce qui s'est passé. » Et puis, il y a ce grand point d'interrogation qui reste toujours sans réponse : pourquoi ne pas avoir laissé le temps d'ouvrir les dossiers liés aux attaques chimiques (notamment Halabja en Irak et Sardacht en Iran) orchestrées par Saddam Hussein ? « Cela aurait forcé Saddam à faire des révélations qui auraient embarrassé les Américains, mais aussi certains pays européens qui fournirent, à l'époque, Bagdad en armes chimiques », remarque Hunain Kaddo, membre du Parlement irakien. « Cela montre que le tribunal irakien reste sous influence américaine », déplore, pour sa part, Saeed Abu Taleb, un député iranien.

DELPHINE MINOUI

The worst case scenario

Iraqi Kurds are increasingly restless about the future of the region, the promised referendum and the debate over withdrawal of western troops.
Chris Kutschera reports

THE FATE OF Kirkuk, Khanakin and Sinjar and their eventual reintegration into the Kurdish region continues to hound Baghdad. Former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi created a 'normalisation commission' with a view to addressing the Kurdish displacement. The commission, chaired by Hamid Majid Musa, secretary-general of the Iraqi Communist Party was allocated a budget of \$80m but remained without members, without headquarters, and without money because the \$80m was never transferred.

The situation deteriorated still more under Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, who encouraged the Shi'a Arabs who fled Kirkuk after the fall of Saddam Hussein to come back.

But during his July meetings at Erbil with Massoud and Nechirvan Barzani (president and prime minister of the Kurdish region), Nuri Al Maliki, the new prime minister of the Iraqi government dwelt at length on the implementation of article 140 of the new Iraqi constitution, which stipulates the organisation of a referendum in the disputed areas before December 2007.

He announced the creation of a new 'normalisation commission' of nine members, chaired by justice minister Hachem Chibli – a liberal Shi'a whose wife is Kurdish – with a budget of \$200m, which was immediately transferred. He even discussed details of the normalisation of the situation in Kirkuk, and the departure of the Arabs transplanted by Saddam Hussein within the framework of his campaign of Arabisation: their houses should be bought back, and they should be provided with tents and money in order to resettle in Southern Iraq, allowing the Kurds to return home.

Moreover, Al Maliki committed himself to reintegrating the districts which were arbitrarily detached by Saddam Hussein (Kifri, Tuz Khurmatu, Kalar and Chemchemal) into the governorate of Kirkuk. This, he said, would be implemented by government decree in March 2007. A census would take place in July 2007 and the referendum in December 2007. Already several thousand Shi'a Arabs from Kirkuk have sent a delegation to the Kurdish parliament in Erbil indicating they are ready to move if provided with the necessary assistance.

Whether this timetable will be respected and Al Maliki can impose his will on the other members of the government remains to be seen. Experts underline that the 'commission for the solution of conflicted property' has already received more than 40,000 files, of which only 3,000 have been resolved.

But even if the authorities in Baghdad display their goodwill, it will be physically impossible to solve tens of thousands of cases within one year and to organise and assist the departure of the Arabs and the return of the Kurds who, in most cases, have no houses or schools.

And many Kurds are convinced that, in spite of the prime minister's commitment, Arab leaders in Baghdad will do everything in their power to postpone a referendum indefinitely. One concern is that no-one knows how it will be organised: district by district, or globally for the disputed areas.

The Kurdish leaders are divided on what line to follow if this happens. "If the Arabs refuse to organise the referendum, we will apply the law of *sinjar* – i.e. we will use force," says a Kurdish general. "There is no way to compromise on the date of the referendum, it

KURDISH LEADERS TALK MORE AND MORE OPENLY OF INDEPENDENCE, SATISFIED FOR THE TIME BEING WITH A FEDERAL SOLUTION

is December 2007. If we do, we destroy everything," claims Adnan Mufti, a PUK politician and the speaker of the Kurdish parliament. Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani is more conciliatory: "There is no other option if we want a working federal solution. But the question of Kirkuk is a very complicated issue. What is most important is to have a strong will to solve the issue. If needed, we must be patient. Maybe the referendum will not take place at the fixed date. We want a political solution."

Many Kurds are haunted by the fear that the US, UK and Turkey will push Baghdad on proposing a 'special statute' for Kirkuk, which would, in fact, scrap its reintegration into a Kurdish region whose fate is already very uncertain.

Meanwhile, Kurdish leaders talk more and more openly of independence. Massoud Barzani has repeated several times that it is a 'legitimate right', but that the Kurds, aware of geopolitical conditions, appear satisfied for the time being with a federal solution.

Barzani's adviser, Fuad Hussein, says Kurds and Arabs should agree on a truly federal solution, with the creation of three federal regions – Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish – with Baghdad as a federal capital. "If not," he says, the Kurds will separate... "provided we enjoy the support of the US and the presence of American bases in Kurdistan." If not? Hussein only answers: "What can the *peshmergas* (Kurdish fighters) do against Turkey?"

Those demanding some form of independence tend to forget the brief existence of the Republic of Mahabad (22 January-17 December 1946). Set up in Iranian Kurdistan under the shadow, if not the protection, of the Soviet armed forces which occupied the northern part of Iran, the Kurdish Republic governed by Qazi Mohammed collapsed when the Soviets were forced to withdraw their forces from Iran and abandoned the Kurds.

The Kurds are perhaps too complacent about US support. Their current situation is based on a 'Region of Kurdistan', created in 1991 at the initiative of a US, British, French



and Turkish coalition. It continued developing until the end of Saddam Hussein's regime, under the protection of the western air forces based at Incirlik, in Southern Turkey and still enjoys American protection nowadays.

Kurdish leaders claim serenely that there will not be any big change in American policy in the near future, that the US will not abandon Iraq, and that the "treasons" of the 1975 Algiers agreement and of the 1991 Kurdish uprising will not be repeated. "We had and we have shared interests with the US," claims Khaled Salih, spokesman of Nechirvan Barzani. "Removing Saddam Hussein, recreating an Iraqi state, protecting Iraq from its neighbours' interferences. The Americans will still be here in coming years."

"We are now an important factor in Iraq," adds Adnan Mufti. "We have a strong presence in the government and we are at the top of the American interests list. We are not worried about our American relations. Massoud Barzani was welcomed as president of the Kurdish Region at the White House by President George W Bush, and many Kurdish delegations were received in Washington... And the Americans cannot withdraw from Iraq. If they do, they lose the war against terrorism."

Under constant questioning, Salih acknowledges some repetition of the Vietnamese fiasco and agrees the withdrawal of the Americans from Iraq is an "unpleasant scenario" but he qualifies: "I do not believe they would leave Kurdistan, because they know the Kurds like them, and they would need to protect an important Nato ally, Turkey, from the Arab chaos."

Mufti dismisses a US departure as less than 5% likely: "The civil war goes on, the Americans leave, the Turks invade us, the Iranians come in to support the Shi'as, and the Saudis to support the Sunnis. And then what happens to the poor Kurds? Several million Kurds cannot go to the mountains. No way."

On the other hand, American scholar, Michael Gunther, recently reminded a Kurdish audience that: "The US is on the other side of the world and will not stay here forever."

And many Kurds do not conceal the fact that they are worried. "The situation remains unstable," confides Petros Harbole, Chaldean bishop of Dohok "If the Americans leave, the Turks will invade us. We cannot resist for even one month." ■

MASSOUD BARZANI, welcomed as the president of the Kurdish region by George Bush, says independence is a "legitimate right"

Saddam Hussein a été pendu à Bagdad

Irak « La justice a été rendue au nom du peuple », s'est félicité le chef du gouvernement, Nouri Al-Maliki

Trois ans ou presque, jour pour jour, après sa capture par l'armée américaine, dans une cache, dans sa région natale de Tikrit, Saddam Hussein a été exécuté par pendaison, samedi 30 décembre, peu avant 6 heures, heure de Bagdad. L'ancien dictateur souhaitait mourir « avec les honneurs dus à un chef militaire », sous les balles d'un peloton d'exécution. Le premier ministre irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki, qui avait exprimé le désir de voir disparaître Saddam Hussein avant la fin de l'année, s'est félicité de « l'exécution du criminel Saddam ». « La justice a été rendue au nom du peuple irakien, a-t-il déclaré, ce qui rend à jamais impossible le retour de la dictature et du parti unique. »

Aux Etats-Unis, le président George Bush a déclaré, dans un communiqué diffusé de son ranch texan de Crawford, que la mort de Saddam Hussein représentait une « étape importante sur le chemin de la démocratie en Irak, une démocratie qui pourra se gouverner, se soutenir et se défendre par elle-même ».

Les Irakiens ont appris la mort de l'homme qui dirigea leur pays d'une main de fer pendant un quart de siècle par la télévision nationale Iraquia, alors que retentissaient les premiers appels à la prière marquant le début de l'Aïd al-Adha, la fête la plus sacrée du calendrier musulman. « Nous voulions qu'il

soit exécuté un jour spécial », a expliqué le conseiller à la sécurité nationale irakien, Mouaffaq Al-Roubai.

Selon ce témoin des ultimes instants, Saddam Hussein a écouté la lecture de la sentence vêtu de noir, coiffé de son chapeau et un Coran dans les mains. Il a confié le nom d'une personne à qui il souhaitait que ce Coran soit remis. Puis, au moment de monter sur la potence, il a refusé le bandeau qu'on lui tendait. Il a gravi les marches « sans opposer de résistance, avec résolution et courage. Il a crié "Dieu est grand", puis il est mort sur le coup ».

Saddam Hussein avait perdu son pouvoir avec l'invasion américaine de l'Irak et la chute de Bagdad, le 9 avril 2003, puis sa liberté en décembre de la même année. Très vite un Tribunal spécial, financé par les Américains, fut organisé pour juger ses crimes. Au terme d'un long procès émaillé d'incidents, le raïs déchu a été condamné à mort, le 5 novembre, pour « crimes contre l'humanité », pour avoir fait exécuter 148 habitants chiïtes du village de Doujaïl, en 1982. Les autres procès, notamment celui qui juge actuellement la campagne d'Anfal de 1987-1988 pour laquelle Saddam Hussein était accusé de « génocide » contre les Kurdes, se déroulera sans sa présence.

L'exécution s'est déroulée à Bagdad, en dehors de la « Zone verte », dans un lieu que Mouaffaq Al-Roubai n'a pas vou-

lu préciser « car ce n'est pas bon », peut-être à l'intérieur de Camp Justice, selon d'autres sources irakiennes, l'ancienne base des services de sécurité du régime baassiste, aujourd'hui régulièrement utilisée pour les exécutions de condamnés à mort.

M. Roubai a assuré que les Irakiens sauraient tout. « Tout a été filmé, depuis la remise de Saddam aux Irakiens jusqu'à la potence », a-t-il dit, ajoutant que la télévision nationale Iraquia allait diffuser très rapidement les images. « Montrer ces images relève d'une décision politique de nos dirigeants. C'est une question très sensible et nous ne voulons pas exciter certaines personnes. » Il a souligné que « le processus a été totalement irakien. Les Américains sont restés hors du lieu d'exécution. Les étrangers sont restés à l'extérieur. »

Outre M. Roubai, deux magistrats, le représentant de la cour d'appel, le juge Mounir Haddad et le procureur général Mounqith Al-Faroun étaient présents, ainsi qu'un médecin et un représentant du premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki.

Toujours selon M. Roubai, le corps du condamné « pourrait être remis à sa famille pour être enterré ». La fille de Saddam Hussein, Raghd, qui vit en exil en Jordanie, a demandé que son corps soit inhumé « temporairement au Yémen, jusqu'à ce que l'Irak soit libéré et qu'il puisse être réinhumé en Irak », a rapporté une source proche de la famille.

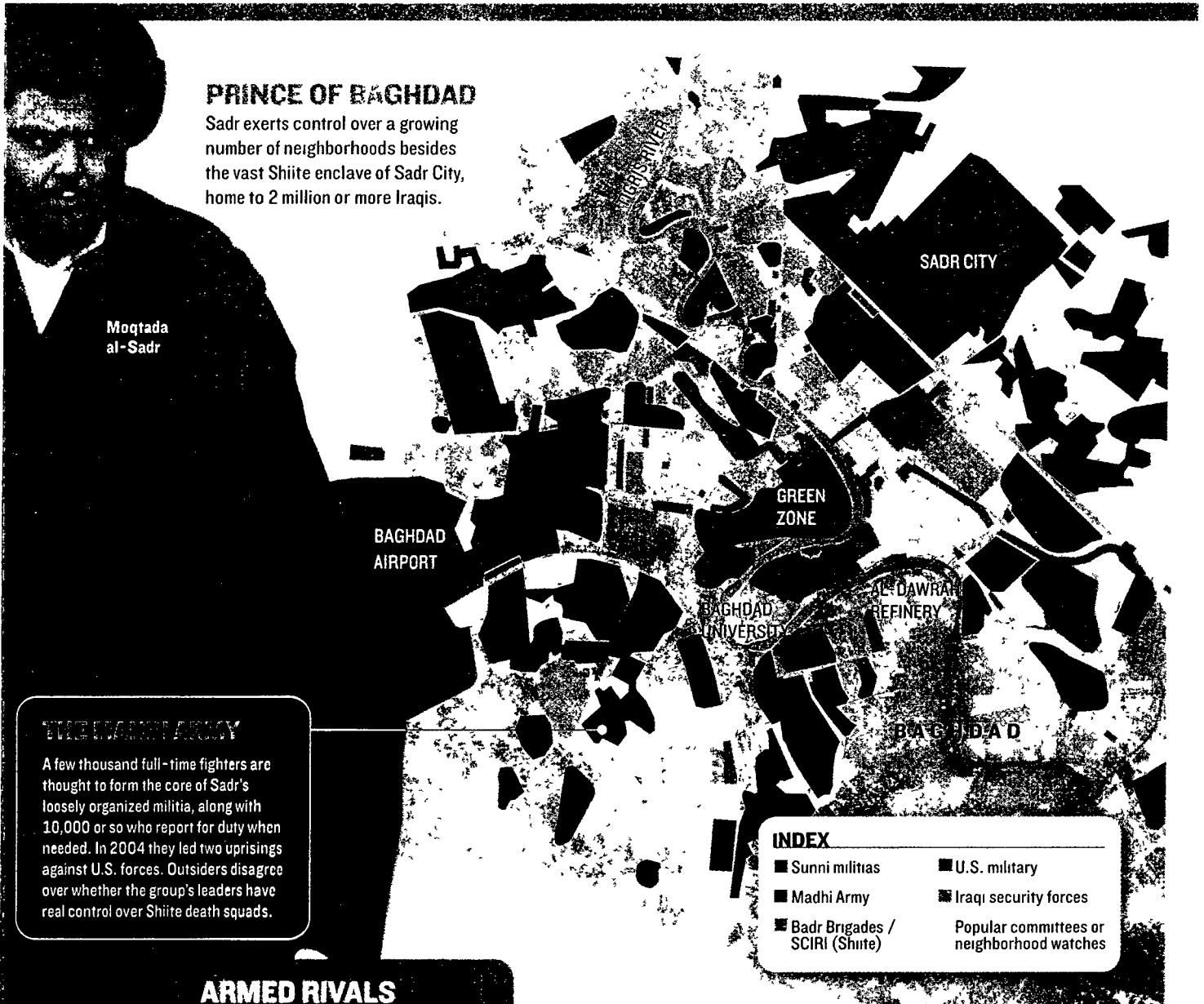
Dans une lettre manuscrite rendue publique peu après la confirmation de sa condamnation à mort par la cour d'appel, le 26 décembre, l'ancien dictateur s'est exprimé une dernière fois aux Irakiens. « Je m'offre en sacrifice, avait-il écrit. Si Dieu le tout-puissant le désire, mon âme ira auprès des martyrs et verra Dieu sereinement. » « O grand peuple d'Irak, ajoutait-il, ton unité t'empêchera de sombrer dans la servitude », et il concluait : « O braves, pieux Irakiens engagés dans une résistance héroïque. O fils d'une nation unique, dirigez votre hostilité contre les envahisseurs. Ne les laissez pas vous diviser. Longue vie au djihad et aux moudjahiddines ».

Les deux co-accusés de Saddam Hussein dans le procès de Doujaïl ayant également été condamnés à mort devaient être exécutés peu après Saddam Hussein, peut-être dès samedi. ■

CÉCILE HENNION
(AVEC AFP, AP, REUTERS)



Peu après l'annonce de la mort de Saddam Hussein, samedi matin, des habitants de Sadr City, quartier chiite de Bagdad, manifestent leur joie en promenant dans les rues, au bout d'une corde, un mannequin à l'effigie du dictateur exécuté. AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP



PRINCE OF BAGHDAD

Sadr exerts control over a growing number of neighborhoods besides the vast Shiite enclave of Sadr City, home to 2 million or more Iraqis.

Muqtada al-Sadr

THE MAHDI ARMY

A few thousand full-time fighters are thought to form the core of Sadr's loosely organized militia, along with 10,000 or so who report for duty when needed. In 2004 they led two uprisings against U.S. forces. Outsiders disagree over whether the group's leaders have real control over Shiite death squads.

INDEX

- Sunni militias
- Madhi Army
- Badr Brigades / SCIRI (Shiite)
- U.S. military
- Iraqi security forces
- Popular committees or neighborhood watches

ARMED RIVALS

More than 20 sectarian militias are believed to operate in Iraq, clashing frequently with U.S. troops and with one another. Many seem to function with little centralized leadership, and revenge killings among the factions frequently target civilians as well as fighters.

BADR BRIGADES

The armed wing of SCIRI, Iraq's largest Shiite party, headed by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim (left), has

some 5,000 fighters. The group was first recruited, equipped and trained by Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.



3,000 Iraqi fighters and as many as 20,000 members all told, along with 1,000 or so foreign jihadists.

SUNNI INSURGENTS

U.S. officials have estimated that the Sunni insurgency, which has no single leader, fields perhaps



Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. Others, however, patrol Baghdad and other cities with the Iraqi security forces.

PESHMERGA

The combined militias of the Kurdish parties may include up to 100,000 fighters, most of whom provide security for the

men, including one who might have information on al-Taayic. But police said a young boy was among three people killed in the raid. A member of Parliament from Sadr's movement promptly showed up at the morgue, and held the corpse of the boy in his arms as he railed against the American occupation.

U.S. forces have tried hard to win hearts and minds. They've spent \$120.9

million on completed construction projects in Sadr City, for instance—building new sewers and power lines—and projects worth an additional \$197 million are underway. But the United States doesn't always get credit for the good works. When the Americans doled out cash to construct four health clinics in Sadr City during the past year, Sadr's men quickly removed any hint of U.S. involvement. They also put up

signs giving all credit to their boss, according to Lt. Zeroy Lawson, an Army intelligence officer who works in the area.

The Mahdi Army has other sources of cash. It's taken control of gas stations throughout large parts of Baghdad, and dominates the Shia trade in propane-gas canisters, which Iraqis use for cooking. Sometimes the militiamen sell the propane at a premium, earning healthy prof-