

REVUE DE PRESSE SYRIE  
Dimanche 11 décembre 2011

- Le Conseil national syrien appelle à la grève générale pour éviter la militarisation du conflit, c'est-à-dire pour ne pas se laisser voler le leadership par l'Armée syrienne libre.
- La France et les Etats-Unis dénoncent un assaut imminent de l'armée syrienne contre la population de Homs. Selon la porte-parole du Conseil national syrien, la population alaouite aurait été évacuée de la ville avant le carnage.
- La presse reconnaît désormais que des bandes armées terrorisent la population et tentent de provoquer la guerre civile. Mais elle nie que ces exactions soient le fait de bandes armées encadrées de l'étranger et affirme qu'elles sont au contraire perpétrées par les milices de Bachar el-Assad. Cependant, on ne comprend pas pourquoi un gouvernement souhaiterait la guerre civile dans son propre pays.
- La presse anglo-saxonne assure que le régime a perdu espoir et veut se replier sur un Etat alaouite. Elle ne relève pas que c'est le drapeau de l'opposition pro-US qui comporte les trois étoiles représentant trois Etats ethniques.

SYRIA PRESS REVIEW  
Sunday, December 11, 2011

- The Syrian National Council called a general strike to prevent the militarization of the conflict, that is to say not to be stolen the leadership by the Free Syrian Army.
- France and the United States denounced an imminent attack of the Syrian army against the people of Homs. According to the spokesman of the National Syrian Council, the Alawite population was evacuated from the city before the carnage.
- The press now recognizes that armed gangs terrorizing the population and attempt to provoke a civil war. But it denies that such abuses are the work of armed gangs framed abroad and says they are in fact perpetrated by the militias of Bashar al-Assad. However, we do not understand why a government would like the civil war in his own country.
- The Anglo-Saxon press ensures that the regime has lost hope and want to withdraw into an Alawite State. It doesn't notice that the flag of the pro-US opposition use three stars representing three ethnic states.

Le Journal du Dimanche (France)

# La peur d'un bain de sang

**Syrie** L'armée assiège Homs, bastion de l'opposition.  
Laquelle lance une campagne de désobéissance

Alexandre Duyck

Troisième ville du pays, Homs, encerclée depuis mardi par les forces de sécurité syriennes, est-elle sur le point de basculer dans l'horreur ? Vendredi, le département d'État américain a fait part de sa « profonde inquiétude ». Hier, le ministère français des Affaires étrangères a, à son tour, haussé le ton contre les autorités syriennes. « La France est profondément inquiète des informations faisant état d'une opération militaire d'envergure que les forces de sécurité syriennes seraient en train de préparer contre la ville de Homs », a déclaré le porte-parole du ministère, Bernard Valero. La France met en garde le gouvernement syrien et tient les autorités syriennes pour responsables de toutes les actions contre la population et des conséquences que pourrait avoir une telle opération contre la ville de Homs. »

Située au centre du pays, près de la frontière libanaise, Homs, 1,5 million d'habitants, est devenue la cible prioritaire des autorités en place.

Vendredi et hier, les forces de sécurité syriennes y ont ouvert le feu sur des manifestants, tuant 13 personnes. Ailleurs dans le pays, 23 manifestants ont été abattus en deux jours. Le Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui réunit la majorité des courants de l'opposition, dit « craindre un massacre » à Homs : « Toutes les informations, les vidéos, ainsi que les militants sur le terrain affirment que le régime se prépare à commettre un massacre collectif pour faire taire la révolution à Homs, et en faire un exemple pour les autres régions. »

« Une attaque d'ici à soixante-douze heures »

Autre figure de l'opposition, Imad Houssari, porte-parole des comités de coordination locaux en Syrie, a pu joindre des amis hier en Syrie : « Hier, 14 chars ont tenté de pénétrer dans les quartiers de Bab Amro et de Khaldieh, les plus mobilisés à Homs. Il y aurait 400 chars autour de la ville. L'armée se prépare. On pense que cette attaque va avoir lieu d'ici à soixante-douze heures. »

Il règne aujourd'hui une atmosphère qui ressemble à celle de Benghazi avant que Kadhafi tente d'y mater la rébellion. Le régime veut écraser le mouvement à Homs parce qu'elle est la capitale de la révolution aujourd'hui. Cette crainte d'une confrontation tragique intervient alors que l'opposition syrienne s'efforce de ramener la contestation sur une voie pacifique, comme l'explique ci-dessous la porte-parole du CNS Bassma Kodmani, en lançant une grève et une campagne de désobéissance civile. (avec G.L.C.)



Un pipeline acheminant du pétrole à la raffinerie de Homs a été bombardé, jeudi 8 décembre. EPA

NOUVEAU RÉSEAU  
TGV RHIN-RHÔNE.  
DÈS LE 11 DÉCEMBRE

TEMA VALERO

**Bassma Kodmani**, porte-parole du Conseil national syrien (CNS), instance de l'opposition

## « La grève contre la répression »

*Interview*

**Garance Le Calsne**

**En quoi consiste la campagne de désobéissance civile que vous lancez ?**

Elle commence ce dimanche par un appel à la grève, mais c'est un mouvement à plus long terme. L'idée est de démarrer par les plus déterminés pour qu'ils puissent entraîner les plus hésitants. L'appel à la grève se fera par secteur, pour aller crescendo. D'abord les étudiants, les élèves des écoles, les commerçants... Puis, et ce sera le plus difficile, les fonctionnaires. D'ici à la fin du mois, si le mouvement réussit à rassembler suffisamment, on passera à la désobéissance civile avec le refus de payer les impôts, les factures, pour paralyser les institutions de l'État.

**Est-ce une manière de redonner du souffle à la révolte ?**

Il faut redonner de la force à ceux qui appellent à la résistance pacifique contre ceux qui sont tentés par les armes. Les défections de militaires augmentent. Il y a maintenant des poches de militarisation dans le pays. Nous voulons y défendre les manifestations pacifiques.

**Cette militarisation est inquiétante...**

Elle représente un risque énorme, considérable. Le pouvoir a tout fait pour l'encourager dans sa stratégie de division. Il espère s'en sortir en montrant qu'il est le seul à même de sauver la Syrie

d'une guerre civile. Guerre civile dans laquelle il cherche à la plonger par tous les moyens. Les deux stratégies du pouvoir sont la répression et les divisions confessionnelles. À Homs, il y a une petite semaine, les forces de sécurité ont évacué la population de confession alaouite\*. On s'attend à un assaut imminent sur la ville. Elle est encerclée, les moyens de communication sont coupés. Les comités de coordination locaux qui ont lancé la campagne de désobéissance civile viennent d'ailleurs principalement de la région de Homs.

**Le but des grèves n'est-il pas aussi de toucher la bourgeoisie qui n'a pas encore basculé ?**

Bien sûr. Plus on restera dans la lutte pacifique, plus on aura de chances de mobiliser. Les hommes d'affaires de la bourgeoisie traditionnelle basculeront s'ils sont suffisamment nombreux et groupés pour qu'il n'y ait pas de risques de représailles. Tout est lié. Plus le mouvement de grève sera large, moins le pouvoir pourra s'en prendre aux grévistes. Face à un pouvoir qui réprime, résister par la grève est psychologiquement très mobilisateur. Les gens vont perdre leur travail peut-être, leur commerce qui sera incendié, mais ils ne perdront pas leur vie. Alors qu'ils se font tuer quand ils descendent manifester. Il faut absolument trouver une autre stratégie que simplement sortir dans la rue et prendre des coups. ● Photo : AFP

\* Branche du chiisme dont est issu le clan au pouvoir.

Sunday Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

# Syrian strife rips family apart

RUTH SHERLOCK in Akkar, Lebanon

AS MAJOR Haitham Enhammed prepared to return to Syria from his hiding place in Lebanon and fight for the overthrow of President Bashar al Assad's regime, his wife called him repeatedly on his mobile phone.

Mrs Enhammed, who is still inside Syria, wasn't calling to urge him to fight for freedom, or even to beg him to be careful. His wife, a member of the Alawite ethnic group that makes up Mr Assad's hard-core of support, was calling her Sunni Muslim husband to lambast the rebel movement he has joined, and bemoan the fact that he had left his family.

"She calls me every two hours to tell me how awful it is that the protesters – the 'terrorists', are killing the Alawite soldiers," said Major Enhammed.

An army defector aged 42, he has been married to a wife

of the minority Alawite sect for 15 years. He fell in love with her instantly when he saw her on a bus, and wooed her at some risk to his safety – they had to marry in secret after members of her family were outraged when she fell for a Sunni.

But true love conquered all, they had two children – a son, now 14, and a daughter, now 11. For years they lived happily in an Alawite neighbourhood in Homs. Then in March, as the Arab Spring swept across the region, the Syrian uprising began in their own town, which has since suffered more than any other in the country.

As it took hold, their religious differences started to matter, and soon began to tear their marriage apart.

Now Major Enhammed fears that he may never see his family again, at least not as a loving husband and father.

"My wife, she loves the army and she loves Bashar al Assad. She watches the state television and becomes saddened

by the soldiers and state security men being killed every day," he said, at a small house in Akkar, near the Syrian border, one of a string of small towns that have become a refuge and gathering point for men like himself.

His wife – whose first name Major Enhammed declined to give for her own protection – believed what state television told her, as did her family and community. The major, although in a privileged position as an army officer, saw a different reality each day in the streets.

"Every time I returned home I explained what was happening at the checkpoints."

"I said it was a sin that the *Shabeha* [regime thugs] killed protesters. But she doesn't understand what the *Shabeha* are. She wouldn't agree with me, she would become confused and say she is just against killing."

In recent weeks Homs has been rife with stories of sectarian killings, with people from both sects kidnapped and killed in incidents frighteningly reminiscent of the darkest days in neighbouring Iraq, their corpses dumped on the doorsteps of their neighbours. Activists blame such violence on the regime.

Regime *Shabeha* are trying to incite sectarian hatred," said Abo Rami, an activist speaking to *The Sunday Telegraph* from Homs after one such incident. "They kill Sunnis and blame it on the Alawites. Then they stage reprisals." Major Enhammed, who



Major Haitham Enhammed hides his face to protect his family

peaceful mass protests against the regime, has in Homs become a bloody battle of sectarian attacks and reprisals.

"If this continues, in two months time the whole country will be in a sectarian war," Major Enhammed said.

In recent weeks Homs has been rife with stories of sectarian killings, with people from both sects kidnapped and killed in incidents frighteningly reminiscent of the darkest days in neighbouring Iraq, their corpses dumped on the doorsteps of their neighbours. Activists blame such violence on the regime.

Regime *Shabeha* are trying to incite sectarian hatred," said Abo Rami, an activist speaking to *The Sunday Telegraph* from Homs after one such incident. "They kill Sunnis and blame it on the Alawites. Then they stage reprisals." Major Enhammed, who

and report back to the officer. If someone didn't want to follow the orders, they would wait until they left to go inside the city and they would shoot him from behind."

Describing the incident that convinced him the time had come to leave, Major Enhammed said: "There was a woman crossing the road coming towards the checkpoint, wearing a hijab.

"They didn't ask her where she was going, they just shot her."

As if that were not enough, *Shabeha* on the checkpoint then pounded the dead woman's neck with guns until they separated the head, which they put into a plastic bag.

Major Enhammed added: "There were protests going on and she had already crossed two checkpoints. But all she had been doing was shopping with her son."

His hope is that large-scale defections will bring down the regime.

Every day more former soldiers risk the journey across the border into Lebanon to join the Free Syrian Army. On Friday, more than 40 more protesters were killed in new violence in Syria – with some of the worst in Homs. One resident reported that "the earth was shaking" with explosions and gunfire.

"Armoured personnel carriers drove through the streets and opened fire randomly with heavy machine guns," he said. Two boys, ages 10 and 12, were hit by stray bullets near gov-

ernment checkpoints in Homs, according to activists. At least two other young teenagers were killed elsewhere, they said. The UN estimates that at least 4,000 people have died in the attempt by the Assad regime to suppress the protests.

Activists in Homs, communicating via the internet, said that they had been warned of a new army offensive tomorrow unless they stayed in their homes.

Last night France warned that Assad's tanks were preparing to move into Homs in force and called on the world to "save the Syrian people". "France is extremely concerned about information of a massive military operation being prepared by Syrian security authorities against the city of Homs," Bernard Valero, the French Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

As Major Enhammed spoke, in a darkened room thick with cigarette smoke, three new recruits arrived, still breathless but elated that they had escaped from Syria.

All of them were armed and willing to go back as an opposition army.

Major Enhammed is determined to continue the struggle and fight – even though he knows that continuing down this path could mean civil war for the whole country.

And that in turn may mean losing his family for ever. "I feel that I have lost them, and I fear for them, and for this I cry every day," he said.





Sydney Sunday Telegraph (Australie / Australia)

# Syria wants honourable end to crisis

## DAMASCUS

SYRIA has appealed to the international community to help it find an "honourable exit" to the crisis it is facing, notably by stopping the flow of weapons into the country.

"We are appealing to the outside world and our brothers in the Arab world to help Syria (prevent the) channelling (of) weapons" into the country, foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Makdisi told a news conference in Damascus.

Speaking in English, he added: "We want the others, all the others, to support the Syrian evolution, not the armed confrontation in Syria."

"If we all work together we can find an honourable exit to the crisis."

Mr Makdisi convened the news conference to denounce American news network ABC, which last week broadcast an interview with President Bashar al-Assad.

"The network distorted what the president said," Mr Makdisi said.

"It deliberately deformed the president's words ... by airing videos (of violence) to incite" action against Syria, the spokesman said.

"That was a deliberate mistake."

Mr Makdisi said ABC had edited the interview Mr Assad gave to veteran journalist Barbara Walters and broadcast only what it wanted the world to hear, leaving out long extracts of what the president said.

"The important thing (was) to show Syria is evil," Mr Makdisi said.

"The battle is political and we know that," he added.

Mr Makdisi stressed that Mr Assad is "appalled and saddened" by the deadly violence that has shaken Syria for nearly nine months.

"The president has promised accountability," he added.

Mr Makdisi also stressed Mr Assad's regime gave "no clear instructions to use live ammunition" against pro-democracy protesters who have held almost daily protests since mid-March.

Mr Assad denied in the interview with ABC that he ordered the killing of protesters in Syria and said that

## No government in the world kills its own people

"only a crazy person" would target his own people.

"We don't kill our people," he said.

"No government in the world kills its people, unless it's led by a crazy person."

Mr Makdisi said the network played up this quote as part of a concerted effort to give a negative image of Mr Assad.

The foreign ministry spokesman played part of the interview that was aired by ABC as well as another segment of the original tape to show that some of what Mr Assad said had been edited out.

Mr Assad in the interview also disputed UN claims that more than 4000 people have been killed in Syria in a security force crackdown on dissent since mid-March.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

# Nobel peace panel says Assad can't evade history

• By GWLADYS FOUCHE

OSLO (Reuters) – Awarding this year's Nobel Peace Prize, the head of the selection panel forecast that Syrian President Bashar Assad would succumb to a "wind of history" blowing through the Arab world and be forced to accept democratic change.

Presenting the prize in Oslo to three women who include a Yemeni activist whose Arab Spring protests helped undermine her country's veteran leader, Thorbjørn Jagland said: "No dictator can in the long run find shelter from this wind of history."

"It was this wind which led people to crawl up onto the Berlin Wall and tear it down. It is the wind that is now blowing in the Arab world."

Referring to 2011 Nobel laureate Tawakul Karman's efforts to unseat Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the bloody uprising in Syria, the head of the Norwegian Nobel Committee said: "Not even President Saleh was able, and President Assad in Syria will not be able, to resist the people's demand for freedom and human rights."

Suggesting Assad should want to be "on the right side of history," Jagland added: "The leaders in

Yemen and Syria who murder their people to retain their own power should take note of the following: Mankind's fight for freedom and human rights never stops."

Karman was in the Norwegian capital to share the prize with two Liberian women, newly reelected president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and rights activist Leymah Gbowee.

The prize citation honors "their nonviolent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work."

Jagland said women's rights must be a key focus in the aftermath of change in North Africa and the Middle East, where Islamists have taken advantage of freer elections this year.

"The promising Arab Spring will become a new winter if women are again left out," said Jagland, a former Norwegian prime minister. "Islam must be part of the solution."

"Only then will there be democracy and peace developments in this part of the world."

The laureates, receiving the prize on the 115th anniversary of the death of benefactor Alfred Nobel, will share an award worth \$1.5 million.

# Arab League to meet this week on Syria

CAIRO (Reuters) – Arab League foreign ministers will meet in Cairo at the end of the week to discuss a response to Syria's conditional acceptance of an Arab peace plan, Egypt's MENA news agency quoted a League official as saying on Saturday.

Syria faces sanctions from Arab nations in response to its violent crackdown on protests against President Bashar Assad.

The Arab League has repeatedly extended deadlines for Syria to agree to a plan that would see Arab monitors oversee its withdrawal of troops from towns. The latest expired on December 4.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualeem wrote to the League saying Damascus was prepared to sign an agreement that would allow League monitors into Syria, but only if certain conditions were met, MENA quoted the unnamed official as saying.

MENA quoted Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby as saying the foreign ministers would have to agree before responding to Moualeem's letter.

"We have once again called on Syria to sign the monitors agreement," MENA quoted the official as saying.

# West concerned Syrian forces planning to storm rebel city

**France joins US, Britain in raising alarm • Syria denies crackdown, cites Russia, China support**

• By DOUGLAS HAMILTON

BEIRUT (Reuters) – France called on world powers on Saturday to “save the Syrian people” as it joined the United States and Britain in raising an alarm that President Bashar Assad’s forces may be about to storm the rebel stronghold of Homs.

In Damascus, the government denied any crackdown, while accusing its opponents of taking up arms and warning the rebels’ supporters in the West that Syria could count on Russia, China and others to oppose any foreign intervention in its affairs.

In Homs, a pro-democracy activist said there was no clear sign of a troop build-up other campaigners had reported around the city on Friday. Opposition groups have called for businesses and labor not to work on Sunday, the first day of the working week in Syria, in what they have called a “Strike for Dignity.”

“France is extremely concerned about information of a massive military operation being prepared by Syrian security authorities against the city of Homs,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said, echoing concerns raised in Washington, London and Turkey.

“France warns the Syrian government and will hold the Syrian authorities responsible for any action against the population.”

“The entire international community must mobilize itself to save the Syrian people,” Valero said.

On Friday, a US State Department spokeswoman said: “It is extremely concerning that in places like Homs we have huge number of reports that they are preparing something large-scale.”

“They are not going to be able to hide who’s responsible if there is a major assault on the weekend.”

Syria rejected that characterization of events: “There is no policy of crackdown,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdesi told Reuters in an e-mail. “The Syrian forces are there to protect civilians and maintain law and order that is breached by those who are carrying arms against the state.”

“The story of peacefulness of the protest is no longer a valid story in some places,” he said. “Syria needs evolution and not armed confrontation.”

Separately, the official Syrian news agency



A SYRIAN living in Jordan holds up his national flag during an anti-Assad protest outside the Syrian Embassy in Amman on Friday. (Muhammad Hamed/Reuters)

SANA said the so-called BRICS group of developing economic powers – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – “reiterated its absolute rejection to any interference in Syrian affairs.”

It cited a message from Russia’s UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin to the Security Council, which has been the forum for sharp divisions over Syria between the Western powers on the one hand and Russia and China on the other.

Such differences, and Syria’s pivotal position at the heart of a web of regional conflicts, mean few see much possibility for the kind of Western military action seen this year in Libya.

The Arab League has been pressing Syria, under threat of sanctions, to remove troops from its towns and let in observers.

Turkey warned Syria on Friday it would act to protect itself if the crushing of protest threatened regional security and unleashed a tide of refugees on its borders.

The opposition Syrian National Council said in a statement about Homs on Friday: “News reports, videos and information from activists indicate that the regime is preparing to commit a massacre in the city to extinguish the flame of the revolution and ‘discipline’ the rest of Syria’s cities.”

However, some activists questioned whether the SNC statement was intended principally to galvanize international action.

One campaigner in Homs, a city of 1.5 million, saw little sign of an imminent offensive

on Saturday: “I have been hearing this since yesterday. I did a tour around the city and I did not see anything unusual. It’s the same checkpoints and the same number of soldiers.”

At least 24 Syrians were shot dead as protesters took to the streets following Friday prayers, according to a network of anti-government activists reporting events to a website based in Britain. Other activist sources put the toll as high as 37 dead.

At least 10 were killed in Homs, where Arab television showed demonstrators chanting “Bashar is an enemy of humanity.”

Peaceful demonstrations calling for reform began in Syria in March, inspired by the Arab Spring, but were met almost from the outset by lethal force. Activists say about 4,600 Syrians have been killed, about a quarter of them from security forces.

President Assad says some “mistakes” may have occurred but denies giving any shoot-to-kill order over the past nine months of violent repression, which has prompted defections from the military and led to the creation of a rebel Free Syrian Army.

The Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army are separate organizations. The council has urged the rebel army to stop attacking the army and limit itself to purely “defensive” actions, to avoid starting an all-out civil war.

UN rights chief Navi Pillay repeated her call for investigators to be allowed into Syria. She is due to brief the Security Council on Monday at the request of France.



# The unlikely victims of the Arab Spring?

*Syria, Hezbollah and Iran all stand to lose from regional upheavals*

ANALYSIS

• By ZVI MAZEL

Last week saw Iran's staunchest allies squirming on television. President Assad of Syria tried to enlist Barbara Walters while Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah briefly got out of his bunker to comfort his worried militants.

Though there is nothing to indicate that the move was a concerted one in view of the military alliance between the two, it does show that both men are acutely aware of the fact that the turmoil in Syria endangers them and also their patron, Iran, while Shia influence wanes in the Middle East.

There was something pathetic in the desperate efforts of the two leaders to pretend that all was well. Assad made a fool of himself by earnestly declaring in face of the evidence that it was not his forces that had killed unarmed protesters and that only a crazy man would massacre his own people.

One wonders whether he is blind or does not want to see. Casualties are piling up, resistance is not abating and he can't stop it. Does he believe that the tide can be stemmed forever? Has he become a tool in the hands of a military junta led by his brother Maher whom some call a ruthless murderer?

Though Assad was desperate to enlist world public opinion against the sanctions which are beginning to bite, he did not indicate by one word that he was ready to quit or to start talking with the opposition. A few days later he said he was ready to accept the Arab League ultimatum – withdraw his troops from urban centers and let in observers to check on the situation in Syria – but only if the League canceled its sanctions.

In any case, it appears too late to talk, the opposition being united in its call for Assad's departure. While the protests go on, there is now a "Free Syrian Army" made of deserters from the regular army – officers and enlisted men – and numbering a few thousand men.

It seems, at least at that stage, that the Syrian army is not in danger of disintegration. Assad is using mainly regiments belonging to his own Alawite minority and as such fanatically devoted to the regime.

Yet the combined effects of the protests, the attacks of the Free Syrian Army and international pressure are taking their toll,

while the country's economy unravels. There is an all too real risk of civil war which could lead to Syria being torn apart along ethnic and religious lines. That may be why the Sunni middle class and the Christian and Kurdish minorities are not keen to join the fray. Such is the case in the city of Aleppo, with its two and a half million mainly Sunni inhabitants, who have so far remained on the side lines. Hamas is reportedly considering leaving its Damascus headquarters for safer pastures. Interestingly, Russia and China are still behind Assad – realpolitik and economic interests being at work – but for how long?

Syria's neighbors are increasingly worried. Relations with Ankara are going from bad to worse; Turkey is letting opposition movements such as the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army operate from its territory, and threatens to set up a security zone along its border with Syria to protect civilians living there; it has already implemented sanctions against its neighbor. This led Assad to close a number of border crossing and to impose a tax on goods transiting through Syria on their way to Turkey.

Iraq, careful not to anger Iran while maintaining its close ties to the United States, is being cautious: It says it is in contact with opposition leaders (without naming them) but is against sanctions and supports the efforts of the Arab League.

Jordan is doing all it can to stay neutral in order not to anger Damascus and to preserve its vital trade with its powerful neighbor.

In Lebanon, opposition leader Sa'ad Hariri is saying openly that Assad is on his way out – peacefully or not.

A wary Israel keeps silent, fearing that the dictator at bay might launch his missiles against the hated neighbor while enjoining his Hezbollah ally to follow suit. An ally which does not feel so secure right now.

On the occasion of the recent Ashura celebrations in Beirut, Nasrallah made a rare appearance and hastened to go back to his bunker to deliver a blistering attack via video on – you guessed it – the US and Israeli dastardly plot against Syria conducted despite the fact that Assad was trying to implement reforms. He told militants who watched on huge television screens that Israel would pay the price of the changes

taking place in the Arab world.

There was nothing new there, nothing to comfort his supporters, especially after the head of the Syrian National Council had declared that after the fall of Assad, Syria would cut off ties with Hezbollah and would open negotiations to regain the Golan Heights by peaceful means. Nothing either to explain why the whole world and the Arab league were siding with the protests against Assad.

Another indication of Nasrallah's waning influence is to be found in the fact that a few days ago, he had to accept the decision of the Lebanon's Mikati government – a government he helped set up – to pay its share of the cost of the proceedings at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the assassination of Rafik Hariri – a court which has already issued warrants against four high-ranking Hezbollah officers. Najib Mikati had threatened to resign if Nasrallah blocked the move. Yet barely a year ago Hezbollah brought about the fall of the Sa'ad Hariri government over that very issue. Today Nasrallah had to swallow the bitter pill.

Hezbollah, with its tens of thousands of missiles, nevertheless remain a very real threat to Israel – as long as armaments keep flowing in from Syria. Should that flow come to a sudden halt following a change of regime, it would be a near mortal blow for the organization, which finds itself increasingly isolated inside Lebanon. We are not there yet.

What is clear is that Iran suffered a serious setback in its avowed policy of exporting its brand of Shia Islam revolution throughout the Middle East. Should Syria fall, Iran's bridgehead in the region will fall as well, and with it the network of finance and armament keeping Hezbollah afloat. As for the new Sunni regimes born of the popular uprisings, they might not be too keen on collaborating with a fanatic Shia regime striving to acquire nuclear weapons.

There is another considerable unknown: the opposition in Iran. Will the winds of changes blowing in the region spur it into renewed activity? This must be the question the ayatollahs are wrestling with today.

*The writer, a fellow of The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, is a former ambassador to Romania, Egypt and Sweden.*



Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

# World urged to save Syrians

FEARS OF MAJOR ASSAULT ON HOMS RISE  
AS MORE THAN 50 ARE KILLED IN 24 HOURS

*Gulf News Report*

**Dubai** France called on world powers to "save the Syrian people" yesterday as it joined the US and Britain in raising an alarm that President Bashar Al Assad's forces may be about to storm the rebel stronghold of Homs.

In Damascus, the government denied any crackdown, while accusing its opponents of taking up arms and warning the rebels' supporters in the West that Syria could count on Russia, China and others to oppose any foreign intervention in its affairs.

"France is extremely concerned about information of a massive military operation being prepared by Syrian security authorities against the city of Homs," French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said, echoing concerns raised in Washington, London and neighbouring Turkey.

As international pressure mounted on Syria to allow monitors into the country security forces fired on protesters killing at least 50 people during the past 24 hours.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 41 civilians, including seven children, were shot dead by Syrian security forces in the capital Damascus and the restive central city of Homs on Friday, while 14

## ARAB REVOLT

### WEST URGED TO DO MORE

One of the three women sharing the Nobel Peace Prize yesterday lambasted the international community for not backing revolution in her native Yemen and said Arab despots who turn against their own people should not receive immunity.

Accepting the 2011 award, Yemeni activist Tawakul Karman called on the western world to support the revolutions that swept through the Arab world this year and keep faith with democratic change that was both difficult and inevitable.

"The democratic world, which has told us a lot about the virtues of democracy and good governance, should not be indifferent to what is happening in Yemen and Syria," said Tawakul.

— Reuters

civilians were killed yesterday.

Activists called for a campaign of civil disobedience from today, the first day of the working week in Syria, with sit-ins at work, the closure of shops, universities and later a general strike.

The UN Security Council agreed on Friday to France's request for a briefing on Syria's crackdown on civilian rights from the UN hu-

man rights chief, overcoming resistance from Russia, China and Brazil, Western envoys said.

Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, president of the Security Council this month, said Navi Pillay's closed-door briefing would probably take place tomorrow. He dismissed suggestions from Western envoys that Russia had opposed the briefing, although he acknowledged Moscow and others had reservations.

Meanwhile, Arab League foreign ministers will meet in Cairo at the end of this week to discuss the situation in Syria, Egypt's Mena news agency quoted a League official as saying yesterday.

The ministers will discuss their response to Damascus' conditional agreement to allow League monitors into Syria.

## Wind of history

In Oslo, the head of the Nobel Peace Prize selection panel said yesterday Al Assad would succumb to a "wind of history" blowing through the Arab world and be forced to accept democratic change. Awarding this year's prizes in Oslo to three women who include a Yemeni activist whose Arab spring protests helped undermine her country's veteran leader, Thorbjørn Jagland said.

See also Page 15

# World pressure mounts for monitors as death toll rises

AL ASSAD REFUSES ENTRY TO HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATORS

**Damascus (AFP)** World powers piled pressure on Syria to allow observers to monitor spiralling deadly violence as activists condemned rights violations on yesterday's anniversary of International Human Rights Day.

Activists said 41 civilians were killed on Friday in flashpoint cities across Syria as the opposition warned the regime was planning a 'massacre' in the protest hub of Homs, where another nine civilians were killed yesterday.

"The world celebrates human rights as human rights are being violated in Syria," the opposition Syrian Revolution 2011 said in a message posted on its Facebook page.

UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay has said at least 4,000 people have been killed in a government crackdown on dissent in Syria since the anti-regime protest movement started in March.

Pillay is to brief the UN Security Council about Syria and the wider Middle East at a meeting tomorrow — her second address to the world body since August when the number of dead was estimated at more than 2,000.

## Resisting

"Now it is more than 4,000. Lives could have been changed if action had been taken sooner. It is not for me to determine what kind of action, it is for the Security Council," she told a UN news conference on Friday.

Syrian President Bashar Al Assad has refused to let investigators from two UN human rights inquiries enter Syria, and his regime is resisting Arab League calls for monitors despite being hit by crippling sanctions.

As the death toll mounted Britain and the United States expressed fresh concerns, and Washington urged Syria

## UPDATE



### Pall of gloom

A pall of smoke hangs over part of the city of Homs on Thursday. Security forces fired on anti-government demonstrations across the country on Friday.

## POLLS ON COURSE DESPITE VIOLENCE

Tanks fire on cities and people are killed on a daily basis across Syria, but this will not stop municipal elections from being held in the country.

The government has even called for a high turnout in municipal elections tomorrow, despite the violent unrest raging across the country which has left more than 4,000 people killed since protesters calling for the ouster of Al Assad took to the street nine months ago, according to United Nations estimates.

"Who is going to vote in these elections?"

Undoubtedly, the regime's followers, and not the free people of Syria, so it will be as if the regime is repeating itself," activists based in Lebanon said.

The Al Baath newspaper, mouthpiece of the ruling party of the same name, which has been in power since 1963, published a front-page editorial calling on Syrian people to participate in the elections.

"December 12 is an important moment," it said. "All citizens must take part in the municipal elections and vote for the candidates they consider best capable of defending the public interest," wrote Al Baath.

State television meanwhile was airing national songs and urging people to turn out at polls to show that "Syria remains a fortress of resistance and national unity."

— DPA

to allow independent monitors into the country.

Damascus, which blames 'armed terrorist gangs' for the violence, meanwhile appealed to the international community to help it find an 'honourable exit' to the crisis and stem the flow of weapons into Syria.

"We are appealing to the outside world and our brothers in the Arab world to help Syria [prevent the]

channelling of weapons' into the country, foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi said on Friday, speaking in English.

"If we all work together we can find an honourable exit to the crisis."

### Restive Homs

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 41 civilians, including seven children, were

shot dead by Syrian security forces in the capital Damascus and the restive central city of Homs on Friday.

Thirteen people were killed in the Homs region, five in the restive city of Hama, 18 around Damascus, two in Daraa, cradle of the protest movement, and three in the northwestern province of Idlib, the watchdog said.

The National (EAU / UAE)

# France fears for the Syrian masses

## But Brics nations rule out intervention

Syria's opposition and US are also worried that the regime will attack the city of Homs

Douglas Hamilton

BEIRUT // France called on world powers yesterday to "save the Syrian people" as it joined the United States and Britain in raising an alarm that president Bashar Al Assad's forces may be about to storm the opposition stronghold of Homs.

In Damascus, the government denied any crackdown, while accusing its opponents of taking up arms and warning the rebels' supporters in the West that Syria could count on Russia, China and others to oppose any foreign intervention.

Arab League foreign ministers will meet in Cairo at the end of this week to discuss a response to Syria's conditional acceptance of a peace plan, Egypt's Mena news agency quoted a league official as saying yesterday. Syria faces sanctions from Arab nations, while the league has repeatedly extended deadlines for Syria to agree to a plan that would see Arab monitors oversee the withdrawal of troops from towns. The latest expired on Tuesday.

In Homs, an activist said there was no clear sign of a troop build-up other campaigners had reported around the city on Friday. Opposition groups have called for businesses and labour not to work today, the first day of the working week in Syria, in what they have called a "Strike for Dignity".

"France is extremely concerned about information of a massive military operation being prepared by Syrian security authorities against the city of Homs," said the

French foreign ministry spokesman Bernard Valero, echoing concerns raised in Washington, London and Turkey.

"France wants the Syrian government and will hold the Syrian authorities responsible for any action against the population."

"The entire international community must mobilise itself to save the Syrian people," Mr Valero added.

On Friday, a US state department spokeswoman said: "It is extremely concerning that in places like Homs we have huge number of reports that they are preparing something large-scale."

"They are not going to be able to hide who's responsible if there is a major assault on the weekend."

Syria rejected that characterisation of events: "There is no policy of crackdown," said the foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Makdesi. "The Syrian forces are there to protect civilians and maintain law and order that is breached by those who are carrying arms against the State."

Separately, the official Syrian news agency Sana said the so-called Brics group of developing economic powers – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – "reiterated its absolute rejection to any interference in Syrian affairs".

It cited a message from Russia's UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin to the UN Security Council, which has been the forum for sharp divisions over Syria between the western powers on the one hand and Russia and China on the other.

Such differences, and Syria's piv-



Pro-regime demonstrators hold a rally in support of President Bashar Al Assad in Damascus on Friday amid growing concern from France and the US that the government will launch an offensive on Homs. Bassem Tellawi / AP Photo

otal position at the heart of a web of regional conflicts, mean few see much possibility for the kind of action seen this year in Libya.

Turkey warned Syria on Friday it would act to protect itself if the crushing of protest threatened regional security and unleashed a tide of refugees on its borders.

The opposition Syrian National Council said in a statement about Homs on Friday: "News reports, videos and information from activists indicate that the regime is preparing to commit a massacre in the

city to extinguish the flame of the revolution and 'discipline' the rest of Syria's cities."

However, some activists questioned whether the SNC statement was intended principally to galvanise international action.

One campaigner in Homs saw little sign of an imminent offensive yesterday: "I have been hearing this since yesterday. I did a tour around the city and I did not see anything unusual."

"It's the same checkpoints and the same number of soldiers."

At least 24 Syrians were shot dead as protesters took to the streets following Friday prayers, according to a network of anti-government activists reporting events to a website based in Britain. Other activist sources put the toll as high as 37 dead.

At least 10 were killed in Homs, where Arab television showed demonstrators chanting "Bashar is an enemy of humanity."

★ Reuters  
→ Shadi Ghanim's cartoon, a18



Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

## ESCALATING TROUBLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TURKEY'S ROLE

RAMAZAN GÖZEN\*

The Middle East has recently been going through some very interesting developments. Not only those related to the Arab Spring, but also some related regional developments are what we want to underline here. One of them is the Syrian civil war, which the Arab League has taken the decision to impose heavy sanctions on Damascus. This was immediately followed by the EU countries, many Arab states and Turkey asserting their economic, military and financial relations with the Syrian administration. The initial reaction from Damascus was even tougher and indicative to the beginning of tensions. Tens of thousands of Syrians gathered in the various squares of the Syrian capital of Damascus in support of President Bashar al-Assad and in condemnation of the sanctions. Another development was Iranian involvement. Upon the Iranian students' attack on the British compound in the capital Tehran, relations between Iran and Britain became instantly strained. This was followed by the EU countries expanding their sanctions on Iran and kicking off the process to ostracize Tehran.

The latest developments involving Syria and Iran point to an alarming escalation. A process of steadily sharpening polarization is being experienced in the Middle East and the global system. Although we are not in a position to make a prediction about how this polarization will end, we can say it does not bode well. What we are first and foremost in the regional perspective of that polarization between the oil-rich Gulf countries, the Western world and Turkey on the one hand and Lebanon, Iraq, Russia, China and Iran on the other. We believe there is a strong political divide in the international arena regarding Syria.

If the split were at the level of states alone, it could be controlled more easily. However, the crack in the Middle East brings along deeper social, religious and ethnic divisions. The split within Syria is very likely to be mirrored by the civilian populations in other countries. The peoples from Iraq to Iran, Syria, Lebanon, South Arabia, Palestine and Morocco, and even the Western countries may show reactions to these developments. The possibility that popular movements have the strength to shake regimes to their foundations, dissolve governments and finally disintegrating spill over into other countries should never be forgotten. Separatist organizations and those opting for violence and terror can carry out more provocative actions. In short, the polarization over Syria and Iran can turn into an uncontrollable conflict between the polarized countries and their supporters.

Whether the situation of polarization is going to deteriorate into an outright confrontation is contingent on the global actors and the developments to ensue. A look at political history shows us many of its examples. A climate of peace and cooperation in the international arena facilitates the settlement of regional crises, and anything to the contrary can cause crises to erupt into a hot confrontation. We see that the polarization in the Middle East finds its echo in the relations of the heavyweights of the international system. The Syria and Iran-related conflicts are based on the discord between the West, namely the US and the Western countries, and Russia and China. Neither Russia nor China is hard on Syria for what is happening there. They both say that the opponents' provocative actions should be criticized as much as the crackdown by the Damascus administration. We know that Russia wants to maintain its historic, strategic and political relations with Syria and safeguard its own interests. Likewise, Russia and China, owing to their military and economic interests, stand by Iran and are not in favor of harsh sanctions being imposed on Tehran. That is why the UN Security Council in charge of achieving international security could not pass a resolution for sanctions on Syria because it is almost certain that Russia and China will veto it. It is the Arab League and the EU that are trying to maintain the order of security where the UN falls short. The thing is that this method promotes the polarization between the powerful countries.

This polarization unfortunately makes things difficult for Turkey. Turkey has given support for pressure on Assad to be increased and sanctions to be imposed in order to halt the crackdown. It is obvious that Turkey has shown with this stance that it is on the Western axis and does not stand by Syria and its ally Iran. As a Western country and a NATO member, Turkey has opted to keep itself in the Western bloc. The thing is that Turkey needs to be very careful during this process of polarization, acting with caution. Turkey has to continue being a country making peaceful and multilateral initiatives conducive to regulating regional order, mediation, cooperation and dialogue as it did prior to the Arab Spring. Turkey needs a peaceful foreign policy more than ever in this period of polarization and tension. It is not the right time to close forward, it is only at these times that Turkey's importance and power can be understood and acknowledged. A Turkey of that standing will have a chance of being a state to write history by serving itself, its region and world politics.

*\*Ramazan Gözen is a professor of international relations at Abant İzzet Baysal University.*



## SURPRISING CHANGES

What happened that Turkish policy has shifted so strongly from developing friendly relations with neighbor and regional countries and shunning them from foreign intervention to our politics, if not totally antagonistic, relations. This question begs yet another one: What was the backbone of Turkish foreign policy? The short answer is peace and stability.

The long uneventful political outlook of Turkey was thus formed by economic growth that allowed its soil peace to expand beyond national boundaries. An import substitution economy gave way to an export growth economy that opened Turkey to the world.

Transfer of capital, labor and entrepreneurship require peace and stability. The Arab Spring was proof that we lacking in the "zero problems with neighbors" policy. You could either have to deal with rising nationalism and oligarchies. In the backbone of peace and stability in a country could come crumbling down when such governments lose legitimacy to the eyes of their people, hence, they are not sustainable in the long run. As the long lines of separate regions began to form, creating a chain reaction in countries with similar forms of government, Turkish policy makes abroad position. Such regions rendered Turkey's role abroad playground too rough and unpredictable to play in. They opted for supporting people rather than seemingly aggressive governments that could no longer sustain peace and stability in their own countries.

The realization of this fact brought a dramatic change in Turkish foreign policy that could be labeled as "populization". People were preferred to unpopular governments. The nature of diplomatic relations with Libya, Syria and Iran changed. As it did, it converged with the regional policies of the US and Europe. These actions also vitified for peace and stability in the Middle East. Though regions should go.

The wish of Turkey was the establishment of popular governments obedient to the rule of law and at peace within as without. Being the closest country to the trouble zone in front of us and providing a successful example for emerging democracies in a secular Islamic country, Turkey set a good example.

This was the wish of non-regional hegemonic actors, for Turkey rose to the occasion. The acknowledgment of this role came from both the EU and the US.

The ministers of foreign affairs of 11 EU member states (surprisingly including Germany) published a joint letter that contained the clues of what is to come in Turkey.

The letter states, "Turkey can contribute to our efforts in foreign policy." It can also contribute to increasing the EU's capacity for economic competition, energy security and stability. The statement is critical of the slow and steady pace of Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU. But the highlight came with the admission that "Turkey would strengthen the EU's global reach in the face of current global uncertainty." This is a statement in support of a likely transition to a neo-orthodox EU following the current crisis. The second clue for Turkey's approach regional position came from the US. In a news meeting that took place in Washington, D.C., where Turkish businessmen and politicians met with seven US senators and 57 congressmen, the changing political climate concerning the nature of the Turkish-American alliance was revealed in the words of House Rep. Leatham, chairperson of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Only a year ago Rep. Leatham was very critical of US-Turkish relations, criticizing Turkey for giving support to Iran and adopting an official anti-Israeli official rhetoric that was both "dangerous and irresponsible."

However, the same senator went on record only two weeks ago with a dramatically different statement revealing the change of attitude within American politics. "It is always a pleasure to speak about the power of Turkish-American relations. Both countries have built 'a key relationship that increased the security of our citizens within and without.' The issue raised the level of this relationship to a 'global strategic' partnership. She also went as far as saying that the fate of the Ottoman-Armenian cannot be determined politically by Congress. She tries to say what has happened was violent and tragic, but short of genocide. This is exactly what the Turks wanted to hear. These words point to a new phase in Turkey's relations with the EU and the US. In both cases Turkey is considered much more cooperatively and viewed as a possible partner in the global quest to build a more stable Eurasian region.

This will require boosting Turkey's democracy, helping it to solve the Kurdish problem, somehow negotiating it into the EU and resolving its conflicts with regional countries like Iran and Greek Cyprus. Let us see if it can achieve the global "win-win" strategy, since to play roles, while Turkey increases its own handbooks and helps enough being a regional power.