

REVUE DE PRESSE SYRIE
Lundi 12 décembre 2011

- La World Policy Conference, organisée par l'Institut français des relations internationales à Vienne, s'est transformée en une conférence anti-syrienne. Après l'intervention belliqueuse du prince Turki al-Fayçal, Ehud Barak a prédit la chute imminente de Bachar el-Assad.
- Cependant aucun analyste n'entrevoit actuellement de scénario crédible d'un changement de régime sans intervention militaire étrangère.
- Lors du Sommet politique annuel de la Foundation for Defense of Democracies à Washington, des leaders républicains et démocrates ont souligné que faire tomber la Syrie était un préalable à toute guerre contre l'Iran. Ils ont aussi réaffirmé que la Syrie est trop forte pour qu'une telle guerre puisse être sous-traitée par les USA aux Européens ou au Conseil de coopération du Golfe.
- Dans un entretien au *Spiegel*, Burhan Ghalioun a réaffirmé que l'Armée syrienne libre doit rester dans un rôle défensif. Il a indiqué que s'il parvient au pouvoir, il ne fera pas la chasse aux bassistes comme Paul Bremer l'avait fait en Irak. Enfin, il a précisé que face à Israël, la nouvelle Syrie soutiendra l'initiative de paix saoudienne.

SYRIA PRESS REVIEW
Monday, December 12, 2011

- The World Policy Conference, organized by the French Institute of International Relations in Vienna, has turned into an anti-Syrian show. After the bellicose speech of Prince Turki al-Faisal, Ehud Barak predicted the imminent fall of Bashar al-Assad.
- But no analyst currently foresees a credible regime-change scenario without foreign military intervention.
- At the annual policy summit of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington, Republican and Democratic leaders stressed that Syria's defeat is a precondition for a war against Iran. They also reaffirmed that Syria is so strong that such a war couldn't be subcontracted by the United States to Europe or the Gulf Cooperation Council.
- In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Burhan Ghalioun reiterated that the Free Syrian Army must remain in a defensive role. He said that if he accedes to power, he will not hunt down Baath party members like Paul Bremer did in Iraq. Finally, he said that when it comes to Israel, Syria will back the Saudi peace initiative.

Valeurs actuelles (Hebdomadaire, Weekly) (France)

Le Hezbollah derrière Assad

Syrie De nombreux témoignages indiquent que la milice libanaise soutient le régime syrien dans le "grand jeu" qui oppose les sunnites aux chiïtes. Le Liban pourrait une nouvelle fois en faire les frais.

Malgré neuf mois de répression, le régime syrien de Bachar al-Assad n'arrive pas à briser la contestation, en majorité sunnite, soutenue par la Ligue arabe, par la Turquie et l'Occident. Alourdies, les sanctions visant le régime alaouite touchent le secteur pétrolier et gazier. Renforcée par de nombreuses défections de militaires, l'opposition s'endurcit, notamment dans la région de Homs, épice de la contestation. Une Armée syrienne libre (ASL) est née. Elle revendique 20 000 hommes et multiplie les embuscades contre les troupes d'Assad.

Le Hezbollah libanais surveille de près cette lutte à mort. Damas est son allié stratégique et la chute d'Assad lui porterait un coup sévère, comme à l'Iran, son parrain financier et idéologique. La fin d'Assad couperait le cordon ombilical syrien par où passent la plupart des armes iraniennes du Hezbollah. Président du Conseil national syrien (CNS, opposition), Burhan

Damas, en novembre : des partisans d'Assad avec le portrait du cheikh Nasrallah, le chef du Hezbollah. Cette complicité tend les rapports entre musulmans.

Ghalioun a prévenu : « Il n'y aura pas de relations privilégiées avec l'Iran. Rompre cette relation privilégiée signifie la rupture de l'alliance stratégique militaire. »

Le Hezbollah martèle que les troubles en Syrie résultent d'un complot américano-sioniste. Pour éviter ce "scénario du pire", le cheikh Hassan Nasrallah, patron du Hezbollah, aurait envoyé quelques "volontaires" pour aider Assad. Cette ingérence a été dénoncée par le quotidien koweïtien *Al-Siyassa*, puis par le *Beirut Observer*, sur la foi de nombreux témoignages. Le Hezbollah opère aussi au Liban, où s'intensifient, depuis mai, des enlèvements d'opposants syriens (treize auraient été livrés à Damas).

Devant une commission parlementaire réunie le 9 octobre, le général Achraf Rifi, chef des forces de sécurité intérieures libanaises, a dénoncé ces kidnappings. Embarrassé, le parquet militaire a classé sa déposition. Des sources diplomatiques indiquent aussi que le Hezbollah, membre dominant de la majorité parlementaire, voudrait impliquer les forces de sécurité libanaises dans la chasse aux opposants syriens.

Divulguées par la chaîne Al-Arabiya, les fuites sur ce projet ravivent les tensions avec l'opposition conduite par l'ancien premier ministre Saad Hariri, lui-même soupçonné de financer l'opposition syrienne, via les grands pays sunnites de la région, dont l'Arabie

Saoudite et le Qatar. Ce soutien sunnite à l'opposition syrienne est de plus en plus voyant. Le 27 novembre, des dizaines de milliers de personnes ont manifesté à Tripoli, bastion sunnite du Liban-Nord, pour dénoncer le soutien du Hezbollah au régime syrien.

Exclu de la Ligue arabe, lâché par ses voisins jordaniens et turcs, Bachar al-Assad fait front en pointant le grand affrontement régional à venir entre sunnites et chiïtes. Certains s'inquiètent des risques énormes que courent les minorités alaouites et chrétiennes de Syrie si la majorité sunnite (70 % de la population) arrivait au pouvoir, infiltrée par les Frères musulmans.

L'Iran est accusé de constituer un "croissant chiïte"

Interdits depuis 1982, date de leur soulèvement manqué contre Hafez al-Assad, les Frères syriens se sont réorganisés à l'extérieur, actifs depuis Londres. Sous la direction d'Ali Sadr ad-Din al-Bayanouni, ils participent à l'opposition. Modérés dans leurs discours, ils se présentent en "alternative démocratique", avec un adversaire désigné, l'Iran, accusé de vouloir reconstituer un "croissant chiïte" jusqu'au Sud-Liban.

Téhéran jouerait double jeu, estime pourtant une note des services de renseignements israéliens. Tout en soutenant Assad, les mollahs chercheraient à parler avec les Frères, via de discrètes médiations arabes, leur offrant une assistance militaire et financière. « Nous ne vendrons pas notre âme au diable, aurait répondu Al-Bayanouni. Les Frères ne coopéreront pas avec les Iraniens. »

Les détracteurs des Frères les accusent d'être plutôt à la solde de la Turquie, où ils ont réuni leur dernier congrès annuel. Même dans l'opposition syrienne, on soupçonne les Frères musulmans d'être le "cheval de Troie" d'Ankara pour l'après-Assad. Le projet turc de zones tampons, au nord de la Syrie, serait une phase de cette offensive diplomatique au service de la "grande Turquie" qui semble renouer avec les vieilles constantes de l'Empire ottoman.

MAXIME PEREZ



The Washington Post (USA)

23 reported killed in fighting in Syria

BY ALICE FORDHAM

BEIRUT — Clashes between Syrian troops and army defectors are said to have killed 23 people Sunday, while activists reported attacks on workers striking against the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Local Coordination Committees, an opposition group, said government forces burned down a factory near the country's largest city, Aleppo, because its workers were participating in the "strike for dignity" day.

A spokesman for the opposition in Homs said that most shops, markets and schools across the city were closed for the strike and that security forces had looted shut businesses.

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported fighting near the city of Idlib and in the rural areas around the capital, Damascus, with government forces pitted against army defectors and dissidents loosely grouped under the name Free Syrian Army. The fighting, which caused injuries but no confirmed deaths, is a sign that the nearly nine-month-old uprising is becoming increasingly violent.

"This has happened before," said Rami Abdulrahman, director of the organization, citing incidents of armed dissidents battling security forces around the southern city of Daraa last month in which dozens were killed on both sides before more soldiers were brought in to subdue the situation.

The violence Sunday came as anti-government demonstrators in Amman, the capital of neighboring Jordan, stormed the Syrian Embassy. The Associated Press reported that two diplomats and four employees were injured in the attack, adding to regional anxiety that the unrest in Syria could destabilize neighboring countries.

Jordan has close economic and social ties with Syria, and many Jordanians worry that the increasing violence in Syria — which has a strong sectarian flavor — could spill over the porous borders.

On Friday, an explosion in southern Lebanon wounded five French peacekeeping troops. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said in a radio interview Sunday that he had strong reason to suspect that the attack originated in Syria.

Former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri tweeted that the explosion was a message from Assad.

"There is a lot of nervousness," said Randa Habib, a political analyst based in Amman. "People are watching, scared of a spillover."

Habib said that although the overwhelming political and popular consensus condemned the Assad regime, Jordan was reluctant to impose sanctions approved recently by the Arab League, because it would be economically disastrous for the already-struggling country; Syria is one of Jordan's biggest trade partners. "It is too close for comfort," she said.

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Los Angeles Times (USA)

Defectors, army clash in Syria

Tanks mass at Homs, the opposition says, as a general strike aims to increase pressure on the president.

ALEXANDRA ZAVIS AND
ALEXANDRA SANDELS
REPORTING FROM BEIRUT

Fierce clashes broke out between security forces and army defectors in several parts of Syria on Sunday, activists said, as opposition supporters launched a general strike to press President Bashar Assad to step down.

Pressure has been mounting on Assad's regime from inside and outside the country as the death toll from months of unrest continues to rise. The United Nations says more than 4,000 people have been killed since March, when large-scale antigovernment protests began, precipitating a violent crackdown.

Some Syrians are now fighting back, including bands of defectors calling themselves the Free Syrian Army.

The Syrian National Council, an opposition umbrella group, has been warning for days about a possible bloodbath in the central city of Homs, where tanks are said to be massing and dozens of checkpoints being set up.

The government denies an assault is imminent.

Syrian officials have from the beginning blamed the bloodshed on Islamic militants and armed gangs, which it says are supported from abroad. Assad said in a recent interview that the majority of the casualties have been members of the army and other security services.

As many as 23 people were killed Sunday as government forces clashed with armed insurgents and protesters in a number of provinces, according to the Local Coordination Committees, a network of opposition activists that collects and disseminates information from around the country.

At least two were killed in pre-dawn fighting in Kfar Takharim in the northwestern province of Idlib, where two armored troop carriers were set ablaze, according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Government forces backed by tanks also stormed the southern village of Busra al Harir, near the Jordanian border, activists and residents told Reuters news agency. Heavy explosions and machine-gun fire were heard in the town and to the north in Lajjah, a hilly region said to harbor defectors.

The accounts could not be independently verified. Journalists are mostly barred from reporting in Syria and it was difficult to assess whether the strike was taking hold Sunday, the start of the workweek in Syria.

The Local Coordination Committees called for the open-ended "Strike for Dignity," which it described as the first step in a civil disobedience campaign to bring down Assad's regime. The group said the campaign would evolve in stages and include student boycotts, store closures and a civil servants' strike.

Amateur video was posted on YouTube purporting to show rows of shuttered stores and largely deserted streets in a number of cities and towns in the provinces of Idlib, Dara, Homs and Hama, which have been at the center of the uprising.

Students at the universities of Damascus and Aleppo were also taking part, along with some other areas in these provinces, the committees said. But businesses, government offices and schools appeared to be functioning normally in the centers of Damascus and Aleppo, the country's economic powerhouses.

"Here in Damascus it's business as usual," said one resident of the capital, reached by telephone.

An activist reached in Dara said "the security forces came and began breaking stores in the mar-

kets" that were participating in the strike in several cities and towns, triggering clashes with the Free Syrian Army in at least one area.

Security forces also ransacked stores in the Damascus suburb of Duma and in Kafir Natul in Idlib province, where some businesses were set on fire, according to committees.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency blamed the strike on "provocative parties" acting "within the framework of the political and economic campaign launched by the powers hostile to Syria, which aim to undermine the economic and social activities in the country and disable public life."

The country's economy is already hurting from several rounds of sanctions imposed by the European Union, Arab League, United States and former ally Turkey. But it also retains support from some of its neighbors and countries such as Iran, Russia and China.

In neighboring Jordan, the Syrian Embassy said a group of protesters entered the mission Sunday and beat up two diplomats, a security guard and several other staff members, according to the Associated Press.

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Der Spiegel (Hebdomadaire / Weekly) (Allemagne / Germany)

SYRIEN

„Wir respektieren die Deserteure“

Burhan Ghalioun, 66, Vorsitzender des oppositionellen Syrischen Nationalrats, über die Forderungen des Rats an das Regime in Damaskus und die internationale Gemeinschaft

SPIEGEL: Wollen Sie eine militärische Intervention wie in Libyen?

Ghalioun: Nein, wir haben noch lange nicht alle diplomatischen Mittel ausgeschöpft.

SPIEGEL: Aber Sie plädieren für die Einrichtung eines humanitären Korridors entlang der Grenze zur Türkei.

Ghalioun: Auch das darf nicht mit militärischen Mitteln geschehen.

SPIEGEL: Deserteure der syrischen Armee greifen aber militärische Ziele an.

Ghalioun: Wir respektieren die Deserteure, die ja nur überlaufen, weil sie nicht auf Zivilisten schießen wollen. Aber die „Freie Syrische Armee“ darf keine offensive Rolle spielen, sie muss defensiv bleiben. Darauf haben wir uns mit ihren Führern geeinigt.

SPIEGEL: Stehen nicht nach wie vor viele Syrer hinter dem Regime?

Ghalioun: Das glaube ich nicht. Aber um das Risiko für Leib und Leben geringzuhalten, will die Mehrheit der Syrer den friedlichen Charakter der Revolution bewahren. Wir teilen diese Sorge, deshalb setzen wir uns dafür ein, dass die Proteste gewaltfrei bleiben.

SPIEGEL: Ist mit diesem Regime noch eine friedliche Lösung möglich?

Ghalioun: Die Opposition ist nicht mehr bereit, mit Mördern zu verhandeln. Aber sie ist bereit, mit Militär-

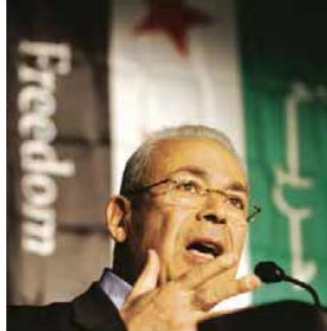
und Zivilbeamten zu sprechen, die nicht das Regime, sondern die Institutionen vertreten. Wir wollen nicht die Fehler wiederholen, die im Irak geschahen. Wir wollen, dass die staatlichen Institutionen – und damit die Ordnung und der soziale Frieden im Land – bewahrt bleiben. Das schließt die militärischen Institutionen mit ein. Es wird keine Änderung der militärischen Hierarchie geben, nur bei politischen Posten.

SPIEGEL: Welche Haltung vertreten Sie zu Israel?

Ghalioun: Meine Position ist die des gesamten syrischen Volkes: Die Rückgabe der Golanhöhen, die syrisches Territorium sind, ist die Bedingung für die Wiederherstellung der Souveränität Syriens. Ohne die Rückgabe des Golan gibt es keinen Kompromiss.

SPIEGEL: Erkennen Sie das Existenzrecht Israels an? Würden Sie mit der Regierung in Jerusalem verhandeln?

Ghalioun: Die gesamte arabische Welt hat die Existenz zweier Staaten – Israel und Palästina – schon durch die Initiative des saudi-arabischen Königshauses akzeptiert. Syrien wird keine andere Position vertreten als die Arabische Liga.



Ghalioun

Le Journal de Montréal (Canada)

L'ENTREPRISE SE CONFORME AUX SANCTIONS

Suncor annonce son retrait de la Syrie

CALGARY | (Agence QMI) L'entreprise canadienne Suncor Énergie a annoncé hier avoir suspendu ses activités avec la General Petroleum Corporation, en Syrie, à la suite des sanctions annoncées au début décembre par l'Union européenne.

« Depuis plusieurs mois, nous surveillons de très près l'évolution de la situation dans la région et avons affirmé clairement que nous nous conformerions à toutes les sanctions pertinentes imposées à l'encontre de ce pays, a affirmé le chef de la direction de l'entreprise, Rick George (photo), dans un communiqué. La situation actuelle en Syrie est très préoccupante et nos pensées vont vers la population syrienne dans l'espoir d'un retour à la paix le plus tôt possible. »

Des manifestations contre le régime de Bachar al-



RICK GEORGE
Chef de la direction

Assad paralysent le pays depuis le printemps.

Suncor Énergie affirme avoir entrepris de rappeler ses employés expatriés.

Perspectives de production stables

L'entreprise spécialisée dans l'extraction, la transformation et la distribution de pétrole, basée à Calgary, en Alberta, n'a pas modifié ses perspectives de production totale pour 2011 et 2012, car la production libyenne augmente graduellement et n'était pas comprise dans les perspectives actuelles.

The Guardian (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)



Mehdi Hasan

The precedents from Kosovo to Libya are alarming; but western-led military intervention in Syria would be a disaster

The brave but divided opposition will have to take down Assad on their own

Given the events of the Arab spring, some might say that the tale sign that a dictator's days are numbered is when his defiance turns to delusion. Last Wednesday, in an interview with ABC's Barbara Walters, a chuckling and snorting Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian dictator, tried to deny any responsibility for the attacks on his own people: "They are not my forces. They are the forces belonging to the government. I don't own them, I'm president."

This, of course, is denial of the highest order. Syria is a police state in which Assad and his Ba'ath party cronies call all the shots - literally. According to the United Nations, Syrian security forces have killed more than 4,000 since protests against the regime broke out in March. ("Some mistakes committed by some officials," shrugged Assad.)

His television interview has been interpreted by some as further evidence that the Syrian regime is on the back-foot. But is Assad really close to quitting? Or being toppled? Of the three dictators who have fallen since the start of the Arab spring, one (Gaddafi) is dead, one (Mubarak) is on trial, and one (Ben Ali) is in exile. Assad is reported to have turned down offers of safe haven in the Gulf and continues to show no mercy to the protesters. His Shabiha militias roam Syria's streets, shooting, maiming and torturing. Yesterday at least nine people were killed in clashes as opposition activists tried to call a general strike.

So it would be a mistake to write off the ruthless Syrian president, no matter how deluded he might seem on television. His regime has been remarkably resilient, despite having endured US-imposed sanctions for the past seven years. In 2005, following the assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri - allegedly on the orders of Syrian intelligence - many western analysts assumed that Assad, the young, pampered, UK-educated eye doctor, was finished. Yet he not only survived but emerged stronger, more determined and more outspoken on issues of Middle East diplomacy (from the civil war in Iraq to the calcified politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict). Syria, of course, is a key player in the region: the Americans and Israelis want Assad gone in order to try and pull Syria out of Iran's orbit and thereby further isolate the mullahs in Tehran (as well as Syrian-sponsored militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah); the Russians are defending Assad in order to protect their business interests in Damascus and to prevent any knock-on effects from a Syrian civil war on Russia's own restive province of Dagestan; the Turks have turned on Assad, their former ally, in order to bolster their new position as a regional power and diplomatic linchpin; and the Gulf Arabs just want to back a

Sunni majority against a minority Shia/Alawite regime.

Yet, as Flynn Leverett, a former Middle East analyst for the US National Security Council and the CIA, has observed: "It is far from clear that the Assad government is actually imploding... Moreover, no one has identified a plausible scenario by which the 'opposition', however defined, can actually seize power."

Leverett is right to put the word "opposition" in quotation marks. There is no singular, unified or cohesive movement against Assad. In a reflection perhaps of the country's array of religions, sects and ethnicities, Syria's dissident groups are diverse and divided. They cannot agree on tactics or goals, with credibility and legitimacy varying from group to group.

The biggest point of tension is between exiled opposition activists and protesters on Syria's streets.

"There have been a dozen conferences and statements in several cities but nothing to show for it," a protester told the Economist back in September. "Meanwhile we continue to go out and take the bullets."

Another major tension is between the

Syrian National Council (SNC) - formed in August from a multiplicity of opposition groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and the Kurdish Future Movement party, and led by the Paris-based Syrian academic Burhan Ghalioun - and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), composed of around 15,000 defectors from the armed forces.

Ghalioun is a popular figure in Washington, having told the Wall Street Journal earlier this month that a post-Assad Syria would cut off military ties with Iran and reduce its support for Hamas and Hezbollah. Yet his SNC insists that the Syrian opposition must not resort to violence or turn to armed resistance. The FSA, however, has launched attacks on Syrian soldiers and Ba'ath party offices. "We don't like [the SNC] strategy," the FSA coordinator Abdulsatar Makour told the New York Times last week. "We favour more aggressive military action."

Then there are the sectarian and ethnic tensions. The opposition has been desperate to downplay the fact that it is largely drawn from Syria's Sunni Arab majority and rejects claims that it is directing its protests and anger towards the privileged Shia Alawite

minority that rules the country. Yet in July the International Crisis Group, an independent, Brussels-based thinktank, published a report that claimed the opposition had "edified" out sectarian (ie anti-Alawite) slogans that at times are voiced on the streets" from the videos of protests that it regularly posts on the internet. In August, at a meeting of opposition figures in Turkey, the Kurdish delegation is reported to have staged a walkout when the other opposition groups declared their wish to keep the word "Arab" in the name of the Syrian republic.

Since Friday, however, the SNC has been focused on one particular task: warning western governments and journalists that Syrian forces are planning a massacre in the western city of Homs.

There are reports that western intelligence agencies have been training the FSA. More worryingly, if one looks at precedents from Kosovo in 1999 to Libya this year, this could mark the beginning of a descent down the slippery slope to war.

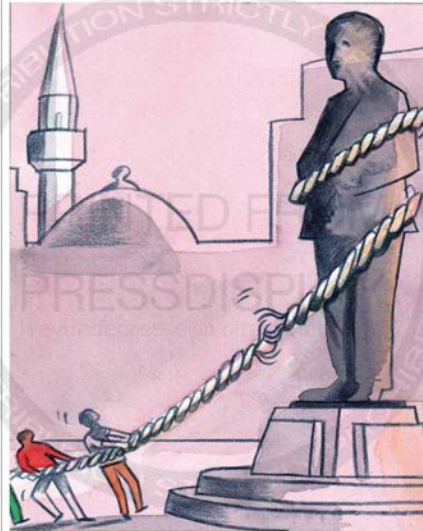
But a western-led military intervention in Syria would be a disaster. Unlike with Libya, there is no prospect of a UN security council resolution, and nor has there been a call for military action from the Arab League - or from Syria's internal opposition groups. "We reject foreign intervention - we think it is as dangerous as tyranny. We reject both," says Hassan Abdul-Azim, a leading member of the National Coordination Committee, a grassroots (and anti-SNC) umbrella group of nonviolent opposition activists inside Syria.

Logistically, a no-fly zone would be of little value in Syria, where Assad's security forces and militias are carrying out small-scale, street-by-street operations against unarmed civilians, rather than launching massed army assaults or air strikes.

So the west's approach in Syria should be Hippocratic: first, do no harm. Further sanctions might succeed in squeezing Assad's mafia-like regime, but sending British or American planes to carpet-bomb the suburbs of Damascus or Aleppo will do little to protect civilian lives or bolster the opposition.

The youth of Syria - brave, unarmed, idealistic - are being cut down by Assad's troops and yet the grim reality is that there is little the west can do to help them: we cannot control events in Syria or bring about a speedy end to the crisis. If the popular uprising against the Ba'athists is to succeed, Syrians - of all parties, sects and ethnicities - will have to make it happen on their own. The sad truth is, it is not our job to topple Assad.

Mehdi Hasan is senior editor (politics) at the New Statesman



It would be a mistake to write off the ruthless Syrian president, no matter how deluded he might seem on television

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)

L'Exèrcit Lliure Sirià i tropes del Govern inicien la primera batalla

Ofensiva militar contra el refugi dels desertors a prop de la frontera jordana

TOMÁS ALCOVERRO
Beirut. Corresponsal

A Busra al-Harir, a uns quaranta quilòmetres de la frontera siriana amb Jordània, es va iniciar ahir el que es considera l'enfrontament més important entre soldats de l'exèrcit siria i els seus desertors. El combat es va iniciar quan tropes de la XII Brigada, de guarnició a Isra, van assaltar aquella localitat envoltada de rocoses cadenes muntanyoses on s'amaguen els desertors per atacar objectius militars. L'ofensiva militar va comptar amb desenes de carros de combat, segons el canal Al-Jazira.

Fortes explosions van retrunyir en aquestes comarques de la província de Daraa, a la capital de la qual va començar fa nou mesos la insurrecció contra el Govern del rais Baixar al-Assad, encara de sort incerta. Al tancament d'aquesta edició es desconeixia el desenllaç de la batalla. Fonts de l'activisme siria van afirmar, d'altra banda, que almenys 22 persones van morir ahir, entre les quals una dona i quatre nens. Nou de les víctimes van morir a la ciutat d'Homs, sis a Hama, tres a Daraa, dos a Idlib i dues més als voltants de Damasc.

Han augmentat les desercions de militars i ara l'anomenat Exèrcit Lliure Sirià (ELS) actua sobretot en províncies com Daraa, Homs, Hama i Idlib, frontereres amb Jordània, el Líban i Turquia. El coronel Riad al-Assad, cap de l'ELS, afirma que està compost de vint-i-dues unitats, els noms de les quals, com



Funeral a Homs. Els participants al funeral d'Abdul Halim Baqur, mort per l'exèrcit a Hula (Homs), tiren arròs sobre el fèretre, en una foto subministrada a Reuters

Abu Obeida, Jaled Ben Walid o Harmusch, són populars entre la comunitat musulmana sunnita. El coronel assegura que el seu armament –fusells d'assalt kalàixnikov, pistoles...– prové dels mateixos desertors i nega que rebí ajuda financera i entrenament de països estrangers.

Va ser al mes de juliol quan aquesta organització de l'oposició militar es va donar a conèixer a través de la seva pàgina a Facebook, en què va anunciar els pri-

mers actes contra l'exèrcit i el règim, com un atac a un autobús de soldats i oficials en què van morir deu dels ocupants, i el llançament de coets sobre el cèntric edifici seu del partit Baas –al poder– a Damasc.

El Govern ha demanat a la comunitat internacional, i molt especialment als països àrabs, que ajudin a "buscar una solució honrosa" a aquest gravíssim conflicte, i posar fi al permanent flux d'armes procedent d'aquests paï-

sos. "Desitgem que donin suport a l'evolució de Síria –va dir un portaveu del Ministeri d'Affers Exteriors– i no als enfrontaments armats".

Ahir l'oposició havia convocat una vaga general a tota la República amb l'objectiu de pressionar el president Baixar al-Assad perquè posi fi a la violenta repressió contra els manifestants que, segons l'ONU, ja ha costat la vida a més de 4.000 persones i que –sempre d'acord amb les informa-

El Mundo (Espagne / Spain)

La montaña rebelde resiste el cerco de Assad

El primer territorio 'liberado' del país, acusa ya la falta de productos básicos

JAVIER ESPINOSA / *Jabal Zawiya*
Enviado especial

Los logros de Karim Saïra parecen excepcionales de largo duración que podría tener una conflictiva. Por ello inauguramos en mayo un nuevo centro médico dedicado a los «voluntarios» así los llaman, de su resistencia en las aldeas del villorrio. El primer supuesto de este campamento lo ocupó el fallecido que le da nombre: Abdel Karim Jallil. Las fuerzas del ejército sirio sólo le mataron el 25 de mayo, como recuerda la lápida. Con el paso del tiempo las montañas han aumentado. Ya son ocho. Entre las cumbres destacan al menos tres miembros del Ejército Libre de Siria (EJS).

El incremento progresivo de las víctimas enmarcado en este campamento es un reflejo de la compleja coyuntura en la que se encuentra sumido el reducido rebeldía de Jabal Zawiya, cercado por las tropas leales al presidente Bashar Assad, que por ahora parece querer rendir a sus habitantes por medio de un asedio de desgaste más que por la confrontación militar.

El reclutamiento comenzó de forma paulatina al asedio. Hace cinco meses. Según el relato de los logros, desde ese día las tropas leales al régimen de Damasco se dedican a confiscar los camiones que se usan llevar provisiones a la carnicería montañesa.

Aunque en una región agrícola como esta el alimento no constituye un problema, el cerco del ejército sirio ha generado una creciente carencia de productos básicos como el gasoil -el mismo que utilizan para los coches- o el gas.

«Tenemos comida, pero los precios se han disparado y esta es una región pobre»

«En las emergencias las mezquitas llaman a los domantes de sangre por el altavoz»

busano. La gente ha empezado a calentarse a la vieja usanza, con hogueras y maderas.

«No, lo siento. No tenemos gas. En la zona de Hamata que recibe Ahmad Nassar en poco más de media hora. El propietario de un comercio dedicado a la venta de gas busano explica que sus clientes se aglomeran hace tres días. «Normalmente los coches crean que necesitan no duraban sino una jornada. Cuando la población se enteró de que habían llegado se aglutinaron

frente a la tienda en colas enormes. Y la situación puede empeorar porque el día 7 destruyeron al conductor del camión que nos trae los bombones», dice Nassar. «Si, tenemos comida, pero los precios se han disparado. Esta es una región muy pobre y pagar 30 libras sirias por un kilo de azúcar es una fortuna para muchos familias», añade.

Por supuesto, la inflación ha perjudicado especialmente en el mercado negro de armamentos. Si antes un Akabuliev costaba 33.000 libras sirias (455 euros) ahora se cotiza a 100.000 (1.400). «¿Qué es imposible encontrar uno», asegura Nassar, un sistema de inflación que decidió hace tres meses en Hama y ahora forma parte de las fuerzas del Ejército Libre de Siria (EJS).

Un solo hospital

Los médicos de guerra (guerrillas) de la única posclínica de Karim Saïra también llevan muchas jornadas de hambre. «Hace 10 días que no viene el camión [que trae ese combustible], indica el campamento de la conexión. Desde hace 20 días tampoco reciben suministros de gasoil, aunque con sus reservas pueden cubrir las necesidades de un mes.

«Hace una semana prohibieron vender mazas (gasolinas) en Karim Saïra [la principal ciudad de Jabal Zawiya, en medio de los militares gubernamentales]. Uno de los vendedores se negó a seguir la orden y le mataron», asegura Mohamed al-Mohamad, que ahora refugio a los rebeldes como residente.

Son personas como este antiguo profesor de arte de 73 años quienes se encargan de alcanzar a la pequeña clínica de Karim Saïra trayendo desde Turqula los medicamentos complicados y peligrosos viajes ilegales desde Turqula. «Muy con 20 ó 30 kilos a la espalda. Lo hago un par de veces al mes», explica.

Con una sala de operaciones y capacidad para menos de 20 pacientes trasladada en los nueve habitantes que posea, el dispensario inaugurado en 1998 es el único hospital propiamente dicho para los rebeldes no sólo de Jabal Zawiya, sino de toda la región de Hama, ya que las zonas montañosas oficiales se encuentran sometidas a una estricta vigilancia de las fuerzas de seguridad. «A nadie se le ocurre ir a un hospital oficial. Si bien que se tornaría en la cárcel», precisa un doctor que trabaja en Hama a unos 30 kilómetros que no quiere dar su nombre.

El joven de 31 años guarda la boca que le sobrevivió en la carnicería. Como si fuera un ídolo. Sobhi Wadi fue operado en Karim Saïra hace poco más de un mes. El proyectil le atravesó por un brazo, se lo amputó y se le llevó en la tripa. La herida se curó de la aldea de Qanaa, cuando participaba en una manifestación



El retrato de Assad, detrás del water de una casa de Jabal Zawiya. / JAVIER ESPINOSA

Jornada de huelga sangrienta

El Cairo. Al menos 18 personas fallecieron ayer por la represión de las fuerzas sirias en una jornada de huelga general convocada en la mayoría de las govt días, la día al-Malacchinta de los Comités de Coordinación Local Ramo Zafwanah.

Según la activista, seis personas murieron en la provincia de Hama (norte), cinco en la de Hama (norte), tres en Hama (norte), tres en Hama (norte), tres en Hama (norte), tres en Hama (norte).

medios de Damasco, y otros en Deraa en el sur del país. Zafwanah, que en octubre fue proclamada con el Premio Solzhenitsin de Libertad de Conciencia que concedió Parlamento Europeo, explicó que la huelga general se notó en la mayoría de provincias del país.

La fundación de la Organización Siria de los Derechos Humanos apuntó que la huelga se extendió también en la ciudad de Alap (norte), la provincia de

Al Raqqa (norte) y al norte de Damasco, aunque que se ha informado al sur por de otras convocatorias anteriores. Los Comités también informaron de que un gran número de voluntarios heridos asistió las localidades de Bab al Haddad, Al Marjay y Al Amhayan, en la ciudad de Hama, capital de la provincia del mismo nombre, diecinueve en total. En otras ciudades mientras aviones de

combate sobrevolaban la zona. Entre los muertos figura un menor que falleció en la ciudad de Tadmor, en Hama, cuando efectivos de seguridad lo atacaron y atacaron a su familia e estaban en la mezquita de Al Qasaf.

En dicha localidad, un gran número de voluntarios heridos asistió la población para formar la un día al trabajo de quienes perdieron en la provincia. Empezaron en tiendas y los supermercados, mientras se producían choques entre tropas leales y soldados desarmados.

que se dirige hacia Jirrah Shagrat. Desde allí continúan trasladando en un sur de forma clandestina hacia Jabal Zawiya. «Prefiero morir de hambre en el camino que ser trasladado en un hospital por agentes de Assad», explicó el ex paciente.

Los empleados del mismo hospital de guerra extracomerciales. De decenas de heridos y muertos apilados en los pasillos, mientras los domantes se acumulaban en el mismo hospital para intentar seguir la ruta

correcta de sangre para transfusiones. «Cuando hay una emergencia las mezquitas llaman a los domantes por los altavoces. Los sacamos a sangre, hacemos una prueba para comprobar que vive y en ese mismo instante se le inyectamos el herido. No tenemos helado porque no hay un frigorífico para guardarlo. Eso no es lo único que nos falta. Se nos está acabando el oxígeno, la anestesia y hace semanas que no disponemos de muchos medicamentos básicos,

observa Jafar Jafar, uno de los responsables de la clínica. Aquí terminó el hecho el cadáver de uno de los militares del EJS ahogado en una refriega con los uniformados gubernamentales. En el mismo incidente resultó herido una persona que reposaba entre las camas de la habitación del centro sanitario. «Le vino muerte a mucha gente en este hospital. Pero sólo nos rendirán así, matándonos a todos», sentencia Nassar, el oficial doctor.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Bodies strewn, gunfire echoes as Homs becomes war zone

Wounded man says he lay for hours among dead comrades • Snipers prevent recovery of dead • Hundreds of army defectors fight loyalists backed by tanks

• By DOUGLAS HAMILTON
and ERIKA SOLOMON

BEIRUT (Reuters) – The dead can lie uncollected in Homs until the shooting dies down or darkness screens their recovery. In daytime, sniper fire and bursts from heavy machine guns make it too dangerous to retrieve the corpses of people shot on the open street.

Barak: Assad will fall within weeks, Page 3

Syrians told to open stores 'or they will be smashed,' Page 10

Accounts from people who have witnessed the scene in recent days, some who were wounded and then escaped abroad, say the shooting is heavy and often indiscriminate. Together with video distributed by opposition activists, it suggests that some parts of the city of well over a million people resemble a war zone.

Homs has become the center of resistance to months of repression by the army and security forces of Syria's President Bashar Assad. Assad insists there is



ANTI-REGIME protesters throw rice on the coffin of Abdal Haleem Baqour, killed by government army shrapnel, during his funeral in Hula, near Homs on Saturday. (Reuters)

no shoot-to-kill policy.

Muhammad, 20, is an army conscript who defected. He was shot while fighting in Homs a week or so ago and carried to safety. Now in Lebanon, he is recovering from multiple bullet wounds.

"I was lying on the ground for hours with my friends. Five of them were

dead. I eventually passed out and didn't wake up until much later that night when the gunfire stopped. Our friends could come retrieve our bodies," said Muhammad, who spoke on condition his family name was not used. "The

See HOMS, Page 10

No substitute for US leadership on Syria, experts say

• By OREN KESSLER
Jerusalem Post correspondent

WASHINGTON – Syria is too important a country for its crisis to be handled by any actor other than the United States, experts on Mideast geopolitics and national security said late last week at an annual policy conference in Washington.

The US and the European Union have imposed economic sanctions on Damascus and last month the Arab League suspended Syria's membership. But Western leaders have been loath to consider military intervention in Syria.

Tony Badran – a fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, the Washington think tank that organized the event – said neither the Arab League nor Turkey wield the necessary military or diplomatic clout to end a nearly nine-month government crackdown said to have killed at least 4,000 people.

"Syria is a pillar of the Iranian axis. Only the US can do this – it can't be outsourced," Badran said. "The US acting like a human-rights NGO just won't cut it."

Turkey, which shares a 900-km. border with Syria, has raised the possibility of creating a buffer zone along their the frontier,

but has also shrunk from the prospect of large-scale military action.

Andrew Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said military operations in the country would present difficulties not encountered in this year's NATO intervention in Libya. "Unlike Libya, Syria has a massive air defense system. The US could handle it, but not the Turks," he said.

Current and former US officials from both sides of the aisle called for Washington to show greater leadership against Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-New York) said America must honor its responsibility as the champion of freedom-seeking peoples worldwide.

"People care what the US says and look to it as a beacon of democracy. Shame on us if we shirk that duty," said Engel, who in 2003 sponsored the Syria Accountability Act aimed at ending the regime's support for terrorism in Lebanon, Gaza and Iraq.

Diplomatic cables published last year by WikiLeaks showed a number of Arab leaders pushing for military action against Iran's nuclear program and a tough policy against the Hamas government in the

Gaza Strip. Engel said action against the Syrian regime would likely be similarly well-received in private, even if condemned in public.

"Just as other countries vilify Israel but secretly approve of what it does, so too with the US," he said.

John Hannah, an Foundation for Defense of Democracies fellow and national security adviser to former vice president Dick Cheney, said the Syrian crisis must be viewed first and foremost as an opportunity to weaken Iran.

"This opportunity to take down this anti-Israeli, anti-US dictator [Assad] who is Iran's sole Arab ally and has extended its tentacles into Lebanon and Gaza is absolutely imperative," Hannah said. "It needs to be seen not just as a humanitarian crisis, but an opportunity to weaken the Iranian regime."

James Woolsey – chairman of the foundation and a former CIA director – lashed out at the Obama White House's foreign policy toward the leaders of Syria and Iran.

"From the start the administration gave the impression it would be easy on enemies and tough on allies. All it needs to do now is pretend Assad and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are allies," he said.



DEFENSE MINISTER Ehud Barak speaks at the World Policy Conference in Vienna yesterday. (Ariel Hermoni/Defense Ministry)

Barak: Assad will fall within weeks

• By YONI DAYAN

The regime in Syria is doomed to fall "within weeks," Defense Minister Ehud Barak said on Sunday.

Speaking at the World Policy Conference in Vienna, Barak added that Bashar Assad's fall would be a "blessing for the Middle East" and a "blow to the Iran-Hezbollah axis."

"We are witnesses these days to battles between Assad-family loyalists and rebel forces. This is a continuation of the deterioration of the regime's hold on power. Assad has already killed over 4,000 people in the streets of Syria, and his regime is heading towards its end," the defense minister said.

Barak reiterated his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and declared his and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's willingness to immediately engage in direct negotiations, without conditions, with the Palestinian leadership.

However, he questioned the Palestinian commitment to compromise, saying that "Netanyahu declared a moratorium on settlement building for 10 months, and Israel does not build new settlements... Altogether settlements take up only 2 percent of the West Bank, and therefore I don't accept the Palestinian claim that settlements are the obstacle to negotiations."

Barak also spoke about the recent surge in attacks from the Gaza Strip. "Since Friday, 36 rockets have been fired at Israeli towns. Israel will defend its citizens and will not allow the situation to continue," he said.

The defense minister added that even though Israel evacuated the Gaza Strip under prime minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan in 2005, "Hamas has fired over 10,000 rockets at Israel."

He said that extremist forces are actively working in Sinai, giving credence to a *Jerusalem Post* exclusive on Sunday that stated that Hamas has established forward bases and rocket production facilities in the peninsula, in an effort to protect them from Israeli air strikes.

Expressing his concern about Iran, Barak said the

Islamic Republic is "the entire world's problem" and called for an international effort to impose sanctions on the regime. "An Iranian nuclear weapon would change the entire Middle East and would start a regional nuclear arms race," he said.

Speaking about Israel-Turkey relations, Barak said he regretted the loss of life in the *Mavi Marmara* incident, but did not regret the siege of Gaza.

According to Turkish media reports, President Abdullah Gul avoided entering the conference in Vienna at the same time as Barak. He also refused to attend a luncheon hosted by Austrian President Heinz Fischer, or take part in a group picture of leaders at the conference, because of Barak's participation.

Barak responded by leaving the conference hall after Fischer delivered the opening address to the group, and before Gul spoke. The incidents indicate that there is still a diplomatic crisis with Turkey.

Herb Keinon and Yuakov Kutz contributed to this report.

Times of Oman

Iraq facing threat from Syria revolt



As the Syrian conflict takes on increasingly sectarian dimensions, **the crisscrossing rivalries** that had been held somewhat in check in recent years among Iraq's Shiite majority and its Kurdish and Sunni minorities also risk being inflamed

BAGHDAD: At the very moment American troops are pulling out of Iraq, the revolt in neighboring Syria is threatening to disrupt the fragile political consensus that U.S. forces spent most of the past few years striving to uphold.

As the Syrian conflict takes on increasingly sectarian dimensions, the crisscrossing rivalries that had been held somewhat in check in recent years among Iraq's Shiite majority and its Kurdish and Sunni minorities also risk being inflamed. Syria's sectarian makeup is almost a reverse image of Iraq's, with a minority, Shiite-affiliated Alawite regime confronting a protest movement drawn largely from the country's Sunni majority.

Iraq's Sunnis have accused Shiites of dispatching militiamen to help Syrian President Bashar Al

Assad, and Shiites here allege that Sunnis are volunteering to fight with the fledgling rebel Free Syrian Army. And both sides fear the consequences for Iraq of the region's rapidly shifting balance of power.

Unresolved issues

"Syria plays into a lot of the unresolved issues in Iraq," said Toby Dodge, an international relations analyst at the London School of Economics.

"It's a destabilising factor, and especially as we go into the post-withdrawal dynamic."

It is in the context of this complexity that Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari pleads for understanding of Iraq's much-criticised stance toward Syria.

Iraq's abstention from an Arab League resolution suspending

Syria's membership and imposing sanctions should not be interpreted as implicit support for Assad's regime but rather as a necessity born of Iraq's own political fragility, he said.

"My job is to find the mainstream view of all, in order not to allow the political situation to flare," he said.

"The conflict one way or another in Syria is taking on a sectarian dimension. (Iraq's) Shiites would react one way, the Sunni would react another way, and the Kurds would react in another way."

That Syria would erupt in revolt on the eve of the American departure could not have been anticipated in 2008 when President George W. Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki signed the security agreement spelling out that US troops must leave by the end of December 2011.

And Syria is not the only potential source of friction that risks unsettling Iraq once the Americans have gone.

Though sectarian violence has abated and Iraq has a coalition government in which the main Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish factions share power, many issues that the United States had assumed would be resolved remain unaddressed.

They, too, are resurfacing as the last few thousand US troops prepare to leave. - *Washington Post/Bloomberg*

News Service

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

Syrian crisis costs Gaziantep valuable cross-border trade

AYDIN ALBAYRAK GAZIANTEP

The tension with Syria seems to have cost Gaziantep, a booming province on the Syrian border, a lot. Not so much maybe in the way of exports, but as far as daily commerce in shopping is concerned the loss is big. Aleppo, which has a population of 5 million, is only 130 kilometers from Gaziantep, and its residents used to come in large numbers -- 50,000-60,000 people a month by some estimates -- to Gaziantep for shopping. Some would even spend the night. "These were unregistered exports, Kürsat Gönüç, general secretary of the Gaziantep Chamber of Industry, has told Today's Zaman and noted that Aleppo was important market for Gaziantep. "Before the crisis, some 800 vehicles were passing through the border gate daily," Gönüç said. "But now the number of visitors from the southern neighbor is perhaps only one-tenth of what it used to be," he adds.

This can also be seen at Gaziantep's prestigious Sanko Park shopping mall, which was said to receive 40,000 visitors from Syria on a monthly basis. Syrians would flock to Sanko Park particularly on Friday and Saturday, when the mall would host as many Syrian visitors as Turks, the two days being a sort of a weekend in Syria. Last Friday, though, there were quite a few Syrians in the mall. "Business activity has plummeted by nearly 90 percent," Mehmet Kösen, the manager of a jewelry store in the shopping mall, told Today's Zaman. However, the loss in revenue is not that great for shopkeepers because wealthy Syrians still come to shop, although Syrians in lower income brackets have stopped coming.

And the shopping benefits work both ways for the residents of Gaziantep. Apart from the huge sums formerly spent by Syrians in Gaziantep, Turks going for a daily visit to Aleppo would fill up their cars with gas as prices are much lower in Syria. And that contributed greatly to the competitiveness of the local economy because of cheap energy.

Syria has slapped a 30 percent tax on products imported from Turkey, to which, Turkey has declared, it will respond in kind. It has also doubled the price of oil and the toll Turkish drivers need to pay as well as making Turkish trucks wait for days at customs. The result? Exports, not only to Syria, but also via Syria, have now almost completely come to a halt. And, naturally, that had a direct effect on local transporters. Metin Kaplan, president of Nusretcan Lojistik, a transportation company in Gaziantep that used to run 10-15 trucks monthly to Arab countries by way of Syria, told Today's Zaman that all transportation via Syria had stopped. It's also the same for Özetor Lojistik, another local transportation firm, which used to run about 30 trucks a month on the same route. "I was supposed to send off a truck today, but I haven't because of Syria's attitude and the lack of security for Turkish drivers," Necdet Doğan, president of Özetor Lojistik, told Today's Zaman. "For a truck traveling to Jeddah by way of Syria, the transportation costs used to be \$3,200, but now are expected to reach \$5,000," Doğan added.

There are also local businessmen with investments in Syria who had to close shop after the turmoil there. Köksan Pet Packaging's plant in Aleppo was nearly ready to start production, with only the machinery needing to be installed, when the protests flared up. "It was a strategic investment for us because we would be able sell the product to other Arab countries without paying any duty, but we have stopped," said Murat Kökçüoğlu, a member of the board at Köksan. Also



Business activity plummeted by nearly 90 percent at Gaziantep's prestigious Sanko Park shopping mall which used to attract 40,000 visitors a month from Syria.

a member of the board of Gaziantep's Chamber of Industry, he believes the crisis with Syria won't hurt Gaziantep much economically. Although he agrees that Syria's contribution to the city's economy is considerable, he maintains that with an export figure of almost \$5 billion this year, Gaziantep could easily make do without it.

Gönüç also concedes that a loss of \$150-200 million in exports, Gaziantep's total exports to Syria, is no great cause for concern, but, he says, "As far as revenues in unregistered trade go, Gaziantep's loss is big," referring to the province's border trade with Syria. Noting that Aleppo, with its huge population and considerable purchasing power, is a large market for Gaziantep, Gönüç says, "Even if political relations get tense, economic relations shouldn't be allowed to suffer, since the crisis might drag on."

With a view to minimizing the losses of companies doing business with Syria, Mehmet Arslan, president of the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, during a workshop on special economic zones held in Gaziantep on Friday, called on banks and Turkish Eximbank to make things easier for those companies which might have gotten into financial difficulties because of the crisis between the two countries. He also felt the need to call on the government not to be led into an armed conflict with Syria. With Minister of Economy Zaten Çağlayan having announced at the workshop that in retaliation Turkey would also suspend the free trade agreement, which Syria has already done, it should be expected that the distance between Gaziantep and Aleppo, its nearby market, will get a little bigger.

Hard winter expected for sellers in Gaziantep

Tours organized in Syria included on their itineraries Gaziantep's various shopping spots, among them the Sanko Park shopping center, the Syrians' favorite, for Syrians to do their shopping in. But for the past two weeks, the Syrians have been nowhere to be seen, and their absence has had a very negative effect on the city's little retail shops.

The Syrian Bazaar (Günye Pazari) is a small covered bazaar that also has several shops around it. It was popular with low-income Syrians, who would sell the shopkeepers tea and various little items they brought with them and buy everything from cologne to cleaning supplies, saucers, snacks and nuts. For some Syrians, this was a contribution to the family budget, and there are also Turks who would earn a living by paying regular visits to Syria. Although it was Saturday, there were no Syrians around. The shopkeepers say very few Syrians came by over the last two weeks, and that shop revenues have nearly diminished by half.

"Some people here would go to Syria and bring with them several kilograms of tea, and a few cartons of cigarettes with which they would earn a modest living. But when this trade is cut off, burglaries and robberies will also increase in the border provinces," said a young man working at a shop in the bazaar. Mustafa Tepe, one of the shopkeepers in the bazaar, adds: "People used to go to Syria to engage in border trade, but now we can't go because they have a hostile attitude towards Turks."

Another traditional Gaziantep spot the Syrians would occasionally visit is the Elmeci Bazaar,

where you can buy spices, nuts and snacks, various dried fruits and dried-fruit roll-ups. Mustafa Senkaya says business fell around 20 percent with the disappearance of the Syrians.

The Zincirli Bedesten bazaar has shops that deal in copperware, spices, items with inlaid gems, and so on. A shopkeeper here says business went down in the bazaar by at least half.

Enes Cavişoğlu, the owner of Cavişoğlu Kebap, a trendy kebab restaurant near the Zincirli Bedesten which also offers tecti baklava, says they used to receive a large number of Syrian clients, but that they've been quite slow over the past month. What he says as far as shopkeepers of small shops are concerned is eye-opening: During winter business is down in general. In the winter, the Syrians used to serve as a lifeline. But this time we will experience a hard winter. Business is slacking in all sectors. One of the main items Syrians get from Gaziantep is textiles -- everything from clothes to shirts, undergarments and blankets. The shop manager of a Collezione store, a clothing chain, near the bedesten says business has plummeted by half on Fridays, when Syrians used to flock in large numbers to the southeastern city. The Syrians' contribution to the shop's revenues on other days was also non-negligible, but not as high, he adds.

Mustafa Bostoprak, the owner of Bostoprak Baklava, has a shop near the Syrian Consulate, which shut its doors nearly two weeks ago. Business has diminished by 25 percent for him. He says some of his Syrian clients used to buy several trays of baklava at a time.

Aller à la page suivante



Anti-gov't protesters throw rice on the coffin of Abdul Haleem Beqour during his funeral in Hula near Homs over the weekend.

Pressure on Assad as Syrian defectors fight loyalist forces in south

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Three other vehicles were burned in another clash near the southern village of Busra al-Harir, the group said. Similar battles took place in several other parts of the south, said the Observatory and another activist group called the Local Coordination Committees.

The Observatory said two people were killed in the clash with defectors in Kfar Takharim. Two other people who went missing days ago were tortured to death in the central province of Homs, and one person was shot at a checkpoint in the southern province of Daraa, the group said.

The LCC put Sunday's death toll at nine. It was impossible to resolve the discrepancy or to independently verify either death count.

Syria has banned most foreign journalists and prevented local reporters from moving freely. Accounts from activists and witnesses, along with amateur videos posted online, provide key channels of information.

The Syrian opposition called for a general strike on Sunday, the first working day of the week in Syria, saying it will go on until the regime pulls the army out of cities and releases detainees.

The LCC said security forces were breaking into shops closed for the strike in an attempt to force them to open. Residents in the capital, Damascus, said business continued as usual Sunday with shops, schools and other businesses operating normally.

The latest violence came a day after the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement that France was "deeply concerned" about the situation in Syria and warned Syrian authorities that they will be held responsible for any action against the population.

West warns Syria against storming Homs

France on Saturday called on world powers to "save the Syrian people" as it joined the United States and Britain in raising an alarm that Assad's forces may be about to storm the rebel stronghold of Homs.

In Damascus, the government denied any crack-down, 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," French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said, echoing concerns raised in Washington, London and neighboring 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 added in a statement.

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." **Beirut AP/Reuters**

Report: Syria arms missiles with chemical warheads

▶ The Syrian regime, which has endured nine months of civil unrest spurred by the Arab Spring as it swept across the Middle East, has armed its medium-range missile arsenal with chemical warheads.

According to a report published by the Sabah daily Sunday, Damascus armed 600 one-ton chemical warheads to use in the event of a foreign military intervention. Furthermore, President Bashar al-Assad ordered the deployment of 21 missile launchers along its border with Tur-

key. Syria's medium-range missiles that can be equipped with chemical warheads have a range of up to 1,300 kilometers and would include the southern and central provinces of Turkey.

According to the daily, the Syrian military keeps its stockpile of chemical warheads in secret facilities in and around the capital city of Damascus. In mid-November, President Assad held a special meeting with top commanders of the Syrian army and argued over how to respond to a possible military intervention by the international

community. Additionally, Russia, which stood by the Assad regime's defiance of international pressure on Damascus, sent 3 million gas masks to the troubled country. Most of those masks will be distributed to the regime's loyalists, the families of soldiers and Baath supporters. The distribution of the masks is set to be completed by the end of December, according to the daily.

Syria is believed to have had a chemical weapons arsenal for more than three decades. Following heavy defeats against Israel in conventional

warfare, international defense sources believe that following the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Hafez al-Assad, the former general of the Syrian Air Force, decided to bolster Syria's strategic position through the development of ballistic missiles to counter Israel's superiority in conventional warfare. The unchallenged superiority Israeli air forces led Syrian generals to push for other means to protect the regime. From then on, Syria has launched clandestine efforts to develop chemical warheads with ballistic missile delivery systems. **Istanbul Today's Zaman**

China Post

Syria activists call strike as Homs 'invasion' fears grow

DAMASCUS, AFP

A general strike was being observed on Sunday in several regions of Syria to step up the pressure on the regime, activists said, as fears grew of an "invasion" of the besieged protest hub of Homs.

In the latest bloodshed, two civilians were killed by heavy machine-gun fire in Kfar Takharim, in Idlib province bordering Turkey, where deserters and troops fought heavy clashes, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The casualties raised to almost 60 the number of people reported killed since Friday.

The general strike was being "very widely observed" in southern Syria's Daraa province, cradle of the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad that broke out in mid-March.

The Observatory said shops also kept their shutters down in most parts of Jebel al-Zawiya, another town in Idlib, on Sunday, the start of the working week.

In towns near the capital, security forces tried to open shops

by force and carried out arrests, said the rights watchdog and other activists. But "90 percent" of businesses in Douma, in the Damascus area, were closed.

The Observatory said schoolchildren and civil servants stayed at home, although life carried on as normal in central districts of Damascus.

"The strike was observed 100 percent in districts opposed to the regime" in the central city of Homs, such as Baba Amro, Deir Baalbeh, Khalidiyeh and Bayyada, it said.

In the wake of the general strike, activists are planning a campaign of civil disobedience to shut down universities, public transport, the civil service and major highways.

The opposition Syrian National Council and activists have warned of a looming bloody final assault on Homs.

Witnesses in Homs, besieged by government troops, have reported a buildup of troops and pro-regime "shabiha" militiamen in armoured vehicles who have set up more than 60 checkpoints, the SNC said.

The Syrian Observatory warned of "inhabitants' fears of a large invasion of the city," in a statement issued on Saturday.

"The arrival of hundreds of armoured vehicles to the city of Homs during the last two weeks estimated, according to witnesses," to number more than 200, the Britain-based rights watchdog said in the English-language statement.

"The spread of security leaks that the regime decided to extinguish the revolution in Homs within 72 hours by giving the security forces and shabiha unlimited powers to not be merciful towards the unarmed civilians."

The United States, France and Britain have all warned Damascus against any bloody assault on Homs.

The bloodshed, meanwhile, continues to claim more lives, with the Observatory saying at least 41 civilians, including seven children, were shot dead by security forces on Friday.

The Damascus region and Homs paid the heaviest price.

And at least 14 civilians were reported killed on Saturday, including four hit when security forces fired live ammunition and tear gas at mourners in Maaret Numan in Idlib province.

U.N. Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay, who has said more than 4,000 people have been killed in the government crackdown on dissent, is to brief the U.N. Security Council on Syria at a meeting on Monday.

Assad refuses to let investigators from two U.N. human rights inquiries enter Syria and is resisting Arab League calls to accept monitors despite being hit by regional sanctions on top of U.S. and EU measures.

Syria, which blames the violence on armed "terrorist" gangs, wants the bloc to lift sanctions in return for allowing in observers.

A League official said Arab foreign ministers will hold an emergency session on Syria by the end of this week in Cairo, following a smaller meeting of a ministerial task force.