

Rusia retoma la iniciativa

*REVISTA DE PRENSA SOBRE SIRIA
Sábado 17 de diciembre de 2011*

La prensa francesa se enorgullece del proyecto de resolución ruso presentado al Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, interpretándolo como una victoria de Occidente. Según esa versión, Moscú se vio obligado a emprender esa iniciativa para no verse en mala posición en momentos en que el gobierno ruso está siendo acusado de haber “arreglado” las elecciones legislativas rusas y de apoyar los crímenes de lesa humanidad cometidos por orden de Bachar al-Assad.

La prensa anglosajona, sin embargo, prefiere no abordar el tema. Casi ningún diario precisa que el proyecto ruso de resolución retoma un texto que Rusia y China habían presentado en septiembre pasado, o sea antes del doble voto. No hay por lo tanto cambio alguno en la posición rusa sino una firme voluntad de no permitir que los occidentales monopolicen el debate.

- *ABC*, el diario monárquico español, que ha venido publicando una serie de reportajes fotográficos muy favorables a la “revolución” y contrarios al régimen sirio, publica un inesperado artículo de Daniel Iriarte.

Este reportero se halla en el norte de Siria con el Ejército Libre Sirio. Al ser conducido a un escondite, en una aldea del norte de Siria cuyo nombre no precisa, Iriarte se encontró casualmente con 3 libios: Mehdi al-Hatari (el célebre comandante de la Brigada de Trípoli, quien se encontraba en 2010 a bordo del *Mavi Marmara* en el momento del abordaje por parte de los piratas del ejército israelí), Adem Kikli (uno de los lugartenientes de Abdelhakim Belhaj, jefe histórico de Al-Qaeda en Libia y nuevo gobernador de Trípoli) y un tal Fuad.

El testimonio del reportero de *ABC* parece haber sido publicado a tenor de las revelaciones del ex primer ministro español José María Aznar, quien escribía el 9 de diciembre de 2011 que Abdelhakim Belhaj aparecía en la lista de sospechosos de los atentados perpetrados en Madrid el 11 de marzo de 2004.

Le Figaro (France)

Pourquoi Moscou durcit le ton contre la Syrie

**décryptage**

ALAIN BARLUET

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EN DÉVOILANT jeudi soir un projet de résolution à l'ONU condamnant la répression en Syrie, ce qu'il avait jusqu'alors refusé de faire, Moscou tente de préserver ses intérêts dans le pays et dans la région. « La position de la Russie devenait intenable » : ce constat d'un diplomate occidental à l'ONU traduit la prise de conscience qui a conduit Moscou à prendre ses distances avec le régime de Damas, dix mois après le début d'une répression qui a fait 5 000 morts.

Lundi, l'ambassadeur russe à l'ONU, Vitali Tchourkine, qui exerce la présidence tournante du Conseil de sécurité, s'était dit « troublé » par ce bilan des victimes, dans un rapport officiel des Nations unies. La description « effroyable » des violences infligées à la population syrienne avait suscité l'indignation des membres du Conseil, dont celle de l'ambassadeur français, Gérard Araud.

Intérêts stratégiques

En Russie, cette réprobation a commencé à trouver un écho dans la presse et dans l'opinion, au moment où la fraude électorale observée lors des récentes élections suscite par ailleurs un fort mécontentement. Mais, selon les observateurs à l'ONU, c'est avant tout le constat fait par les analystes russes que le régime de Bachar el-Assad est désormais condamné qui a conduit Moscou à faire volte-face et à convier le vice-président syrien, Farouk al-Chareh, pour un « entretien sérieux ».

La Russie fournit de longue date des armes à la Syrie qui demeure son principal allié dans la région. Outre ses intérêts commerciaux, Moscou dispose d'un point d'appui majeur sur le territoire de ce vieux partenaire, avec la base navale de Tartous, héritée de l'ex-URSS. « Les autorités russes n'ont pas

intérêt à un pourrissement de la situation. Elles anticipent une transition dans laquelle Moscou tient à avoir sa place », estime un diplomate occidental. Selon cette source, la volonté des Russes de préserver leur influence, mise à mal dans une région balayée par les révoltes arabes, explique également cette prise de distance inédite avec Bachar el-Assad.

Les pays émergents pourraient suivre

Depuis le début des révoltes en Tunisie et en Égypte, Moscou a montré une grande crispation, ne cachant pas son regret d'avoir voté, le 17 mars dernier, la résolution 1973 du Conseil de sécurité autorisant le recours à la force en Libye. Le 4 octobre, un veto russe-chinois a bloqué une première résolution condamnant la Syrie.

Le virage pris par la Russie est d'autant plus significatif qu'il a manifestement été coordonné avec d'autres membres rétifs du Conseil de sécurité.

Les Russes « anticipent une transition dans laquelle Moscou tient à avoir sa place »

Jeudi, en effet, les grands pays émergents du Conseil, comme le Brésil, sont montés au créneau pour défendre le projet de résolution russe. Ce texte, qui évoque les violences « exercées par toutes les parties » et élude toute sanction contre Damas, ne fait qu'esquisser une évolution sur le fond. Gérard Araud l'a jugé hier « creux » et « déséquilibré ».

Mettre sur le même pied la violence des forces de l'ordre et celle de l'opposition reste inacceptable pour les capitales occidentales. Le signe d'une évolution russe n'en est pas moins patent. L'ampleur des aménagements qui seront apportés au projet de résolution donnera la mesure de l'aggravamento diplomatique de Moscou vis-à-vis du drame à huis clos qui se déroule en Syrie. ■

Le Monde (France)

Volte-face russe sur le dossier syrien

La Russie a présenté au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU un projet de résolution condamnant les violences en Syrie

New York (Nations unies)
Correspondant

L'eau se renverse autour de Damas. Le plus fidèle allié du régime de Bachar Al-Assad au sein du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU vient d'opérer un véritable retournement, ouvrant la voie à une possible action de l'organe exécutif des Nations unies contre la répression sanglante en Syrie, qui n'aîné depuis plus de neuf mois.

La Russie, qui préside ce mois le Conseil, a contre toute attente, présenté jeudi matin devant le Conseil de sécurité un projet de résolution condamnant la violence perpétrée « par toutes les parties, y compris l'usage d'opérations de l'armée par les autorités syriennes ». Un geste diplomatique qui interrogera alors que l'ONU fait état d'un bilan de plus de 5 000 morts. « Cela ne peut plus durer », a déclaré le



En mai 2010, Bachar Al-Assad reçoit le président russe, Dmitri Medvedev, à Damas. (Photo : AP, SIPA)

milieu, il suffit temps pour la communauté nationale d'agir », avait déclaré à la veille le secrétaire général des Nations unies, Ban Ki-moon.

« Les Russes avaient toujours été surpris, même un brin triste, une certaine consternation, avant d'affirmer : « Il n'y a rien de tel que nous pour faire quelque chose ». Pour justifier cette geste, l'ambassadeur russe a fait remarquer, sarcasme : « Nous entendons des voix de plaidoyer de l'opposition au Conseil, mais aucune proposition n'est formulée ».

Nombreux sont les diplomates occidentaux à estimer que la Russie n'avait d'autre choix que d'agir, et Moscou doit donc sa position irréversible, souligne l'un d'entre eux. Il présente l'initiative après des mois de procrastination lorsqu'il a finalement décidé son avantage pour la paix du monde.

En octobre, la Russie et la Chine, déterminées à ne pas laisser les extrême-

ris libyens s'inscrire, avaient opposé leur veto à un projet de résolution présenté par des pays européens condamnant les violences et menaçant de sanctionner le régime syrien.

Le projet russe prévoit que « dans cette résolution, il devra être interprété comme une autorisation d'intervention militaire qualitative par tous les pays qui se sont à l'adresse

soi de France à l'ONU, Gérard Araud,

qui a estimé, lundi, que le silence du Conseil de sécurité, « moralement impunissable des méfaits du peuple syrien », était un « scandale », à qualifié récemment russe d'avoir « enterré » l'opposition, malgré jugé le projet de résolutions déstabilisatrice et souligné qu'il mettait beaucoup d'années à venir.

Le texte, qui s'inspire d'un projet russe-chinois diffusé en septembre

syrien et place sur un même plan, en termes de responsabilité des violences, les forces de l'ordre et les manifestants, la surprise et l'incrédulité des diplomates occidentaux face à l'initiative russe ont vite fuié à l'explosivité.

« Nous sommes prêts à travailler sur ce texte, a fait savoir le représentant permanent du Royaume-Uni, Michael Tamari, mais pour nous c'est d'être clair : nous pensons qu'il faut une résolution faisant d'abord de la grande sécurité et de la paix sur le territoire (...) et le cercle qui va créer la Russie ne correspond pas à cela ».

Les délégués européens du Conseil de sécurité (France, Royaume-Uni, Allemagne, Portugal), ont immédiatement chargé leurs experts de plancher sur les moyens d'amender le texte. « Nous allons maintenant entrer dans une longue séquence de négociations, explique un diplomate.

Les Occidentaux souhaitent une mise à l'index explicite des forces syriennes, un embargo sur les armes, une référence au rapport de la haute-commission aux droits de l'homme de l'ONU, Navi Pillay, évoquant des crimes contre l'humanité, et le plein soutien à l'initiative du plan de paix de la Ligue arabe, qui prévoit l'imposition de sanctions et l'envoi d'observateurs étrangers en Syrie. ■

ALEXANDRE GENET

Le pouvoir, contesté à Moscou, cherche à soigner son image à l'extérieur

CONFRONTÉ EN RUSSIE à une contestation de mai qui, pour la première fois en décennie, fragilise la légitimité de son pouvoir, Vladimir Poutine semble soucieux d'envisager quelques signes sur la scène internationale pour dissiper les critiques.

Deux aménagements consentiels, faites jeudi 15 décembre, ont donné cette impression. La première : une promesse d'aides financières russes pour la zone euro, suivie alors que le président Dmitri Medvedev prétendait à Bruxelles à un sommet Union-euro-pérophère. Mais où l'atmosphère était alors celle de la contestation de mai qui, pour la première fois en décennie, fragilise la légitimité de son pouvoir, Vladimir Poutine semble soucieux d'envisager quelques signes sur la scène internationale pour dissiper les critiques.

Le second signe est survenu à l'ONU, où après des mois de blocage sur la Syrie, la diplomatie russe a soudulement mis sur la table un projet de résolution déplorant l'usage d'opérations de l'armée pour réprimer les révoltes et exhortant le gouvernement syrien à cesser de réprimer ces dernières et exercer leur droit à la liberté d'expression.

Sans satisfaction, tant il est vrai, toutes les deux relèves des Occidentaux – probablement en partie en vue d'un malencontreux plan les violences perpétrées par les forces de l'ordre syriennes et celles attribuées à des groupes en lutte contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad – ce retournement russe traduit un souci manifeste de se sortir de l'ornière d'un tassement diplomatique qui

risquait de devenir gênant en termes d'image. Même si tout pu observe et efface ces derniers temps que son paravent traditionnel à l'ONU, la Chine, a été roué plus ou moins.

Chez Frappral, le geste russe, aussi doux soit-il, survient à l'apogée d'une nouvelle révolution, proche au bord, de la Ligue arabe, consacrée à la crise en Syrie. La Russie, sans l'hésiter complètement son allié syrien – point d'appui majeur au Moyen-Orient avec l'impétuelle entretien d'importants liens militaires (échanges d'armements) et diplomatiques.

Le dossier de la Syrie avait donc été au cœur des derniers temps à une sorte de commanditaire singulière des Occidentaux, en particulier de la France, en poste pour la mobilisation contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad. Moins le pays a reproché de rester à mal toute l'auton-

oméassance.

Le régime de Vladimir Poutine paraît ainsi ouvrir la voie à l'établissement des moyens de neutraliser l'effet négatif produit par la vague de contestation politique qui lui mena ce en interne. Il renoue son double mariage, l'un avec les Etats-Unis et l'autre avec les Occidentaux, et démontre à propos de l'Europe, dont la Russie est présentement comme une préoccupation permanente, l'autre à l'ONU, où Moscou semble vouloir donner des gages de multilatéralisme.

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Libération (France)

La Russie lâche Damas à demi-mot, l'ONU s'agit

DIPLOMATIE Malgré son ambivalence, le projet de résolution sur la Syrie déposé jeudi est un tournant réel dans la politique du Kremlin.

L'initiative évoque plus une manœuvre qu'un changement de fond. Le projet de résolution russe sur la Syrie présenté par surprise, jeudi, au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU n'en montre pas moins que jamais Damas n'a été aussi isolé dans l'arène internationale. Le soutien jusqu'ici sans faille de Moscou représentait une assurance tout risque pour le régime baasiste, vieil allié régional et ultime ancrage de la Russie au Proche-Orient, avec une base navale dans le port de Tartous (ouest).

Crédibilité. Le projet de texte russe est certes pour le moins ambigu. S'il dénonce «l'usage disproportionné de la force par les autorités syriennes», il propose toutefois de condamner les «violences perpétrées par toutes les parties» et s'inquiète «de l'approvisionnement en armes, il-légal, des groupes armés en Syrie». Mais le tournant est

réel. L'ambassadeur russe à l'ONU, Vitali Tchourkine, s'était dit «troublé» en début de semaine après le réquisitoire de la Haute Commissaire aux droits de l'homme de l'ONU, Navi Pillay, évoquant les atrocités commises depuis huit mois par les forces de répression du régime. Le patron de la diplomatie russe, Sergueï Lavrov, avait cependant dénoncé comme «immoral» le coup de gueule de l'ambassadeur français,

Tout va se jouer désormais autour des amendements que vont tenter d'apporter les Occidentaux.

Gérard Araud, sur le silence du Conseil de sécurité et sa «responsabilité morale» dans la perpétuation des massacres en cours.

Le Kremlin fait donc là un pas de plus, signe de sa crainte de perdre toute cré-

dibilité dans un monde arabe quasi unanime – à l'exception du Liban et de l'Irak, où les chiites ont un poids majeur dans les gouvernements – dans sa condamnation du régime d'un président syrien alaouite (secte proche du chiisme) et allié de Téhéran. Il s'agit surtout, pour Moscou, de ne pas insulter l'avenir en Syrie même.

Réerves. Les lignes ont donc commencé à bouger à

New York, où jusqu'ici le Conseil de sécurité était resté muet sur la Syrie, verrouillé par Moscou et Pékin, à l'exception d'une condamnation verbale des violences de l'été contre les ambassades américaine et française. Rien pourtant n'est encore joué. Le Quai d'Orsay a émis des réserves sur le texte russe, estimant «inacceptable de mettre sur le

même plan la répression du régime et la résistance du peuple». Un point de vue peu ou prou similaire à celui exprimé par la secrétaire d'Etat américaine, Hillary Clinton, affirmant que le texte contient en l'état «des éléments que nous ne pourrions pas soutenir». Mais aussi bien Paris que Washington et les autres capitales occidentales se félicitent de ce «développement positif» et espèrent pouvoir travailler avec la Russie sur un projet de texte «malgré ces désaccords». Tout se jouera donc ces prochains jours, voire semaines, autour des amendements que vont tenter d'apporter les Occidentaux avec le soutien de la Ligue arabe. Les diplomates ne doutent pas que «la séquence de négociation sera longue». Pour le moment en tout cas, Moscou a repris l'initiative et tient la main.

MARC SEMO

Libération



SYRIE 2000000 PERSONNES MANIFESTENT À HOMS CONTRE BACHAR AL-ASSAD

Plus de 200 000 Syriens ont défilé vendredi dans les rues de Homs (photo), dans le centre du pays, un des hauts lieux de la contestation contre le régime du président Bachar al-Assad, a affirmé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Cette organisation a précisé que les manifestants étaient sortis dans une dizaine de quartiers opposés au régime, comme Baba Amro, encerclés par un grand nombre de chabbîha, les milices loyales au pou-

voir. D'autres manifestations ont eu lieu près de Damas, à Idleb (nord-ouest) et à Deir Ezzor (est). Alors que la révolte est entrée dans son dixième mois, ce nouveau vendredi de la colère avait pour mot d'ordre le slogan «*Ligue arabe nous tue*». Les opposants estiment que les délais accordés, avant de prendre des mesures contre la répression, «donnent le temps au régime pour tuer davantage de Syriens». PHOTO SHAM NEWS NETWORK. YOUTUBE

« Bachar al-Assad doit partir ! »

SYRIE. L'ambassadeur de France à l'ONU, Gérard Araud, explique que le régime syrien, contesté par la révolte populaire et soumis aux pressions internationales, n'a plus d'avenir.

La révolte populaire contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad est entrée dans son deuxième mois et — en dépit d'une répression sanglante dont déjà fait près de 5 000 morts — le mouvement de contestation ne faiblit pas. Plus de 200 000 Syriens ont ainsi manifesté hier à Hama, la « capitale de la révolution » encerclée par l'armée. Les pressions internationales, elles, se multiplient. Ambassadeur aux Nations unies, Gérard Araud nous explique l'action diplomatique de la France pour faire bouger les choses.

Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU n'arrive pas à mettre d'accord sur une résolution condamnant la répression sanglante en Syrie. Comment sortir de cette impasse ?

GÉRARD ARAUD. Il y a en Syrie un potentiel de guerre civile et le régime joue la descente. Nous avons l'impression que le pays s'enfonce dans la guerre civile. C'est pourquoi nous demandons l'intervention de la Ligue arabe. Si y a demain une résolution du Conseil de sécurité, elle doit instaurer tout soutien militaire de la Ligue arabe qui s'est mobilisée. Elle appelle la Syrie au retrait des forces armées contre-tellé, à l'exception de l'armée régulière, des troupes de l'armée régulière, ou tout pour évincer durant des semaines.

Le Conseil n'a pourtant entendu



FRANCE



**Vous jugez lundi à scandaleux sur la répression en Syrie...
le silence des Russes ont déposé jeudi un projet de résolution...
Les Russes — qui avaient très hésité**

à notre projet de résolution le 4 octobre — ont sondé que leur défense avouée du régime d'Assad ne pouvait plus durer. Ils ont donc bougé et proposé un texte. Cela-ci est totalement incompréhensible : il renvoie dans à des instances, de plusieurs organismes, différents, de vides communis sur des hommes et des femmes pour les familles de dizaines de milliers d'innocentes de soldats ayant reçu non seulement l'ordre de tirer sur les manifestants, mais également de tuer sur leurs camions minotaux de tirer ?

Bachar al-Assad doit-il partir ?

Peut-on imaginer une réconciliation nationale avec Assad ? A cette question, la réponse nous semble évidemment non ! Assad doit partir, non parce qu'il va perdre sa tête, mais parce qu'il ne peut plus être partie d'une solution. Mais c'est aux Syriens de le décider. A la différence de la Libye, aucun moment il n'a été questionné il ne sera questionné d'une intervention militaire en Syrie. C'est qui doivent d'agir contre incuse comme un territoire fait pour justifier leur invasion,

NEW YORK DÉTACHÉES, LE 21 NOVEMBRE. Pour Gérard Araud, autorisé de la France à l'ONU, il n'y a Dennis une résolution du Conseil de sécurité, elle doit instaurer tout soutien l'initiative de la Ligue arabe qui s'est mobilisée.

La Tribune de Genève (Suisse / Switzerland)

La Russie menace Damas pour raisons tactiques

Moscou appelle à une résolution à l'ONU condamnant toutes les violences. Mais la proposition laisse sceptique

Cathy Macherel

Après neuf mois de violences en Syrie et de silence russe à l'ONU, le Kremlin serait-il enfin prêt à se rallier au reste du monde pour lancer un sérieux avertissement au régime de Bachar el-Assad? Sa proposition, annoncée jeudi, de condamner «toutes les violences en Syrie» via une résolution au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU a certes été saluée de Paris à Washington, mais non sans une grande dose de scepticisme. La qualifiant de «développement positif», la France a dit hier que c'était «inacceptable» que la Russie veuille placer sur un même plan d'égalité la répression du ré-

«Le but du projet n'est pas d'aboutir à une solution pratique, c'est juste pour faire bien»

Alexei Malachenko
Centre Carnegie à Moscou

gime et la résistance du peuple. Un point de vue totalement partagé par les Etats-Unis.

Hier, Moscou a peaufiné son discours de bonnes intentions en précisant que le vice-président syrien, Farouk al-Chareh, allait être reçu pour un «entretien sérieux». «Ceux qui disent qu'on va lui chanter des louanges ou lui caresser la tête se trompent», a assuré une source anonyme au sein du pouvoir à l'agence russe Interfax.

Dans la capitale russe pourtant, d'aucuns voient la démarche du Kremlin comme une simple tactique pour lustrer des relations diplomatiques passablement mises à mal ces derniers temps. Notamment à cause de l'isolement croissant de Moscou sur le dossier syrien mais aussi de la crise des élections législatives. Sur la Syrie, «la position russe n'a pas changé. Le but du projet n'est pas d'aboutir à une solution pratique, c'est juste pour faire bien», relève auprès de l'AFP Alexei Malachenko, du Centre Carnegie à Moscou. Et

d'ailleurs, le blocage au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU risque fort de durer. Hier, le Kremlin a précisé qu'il ne lâcherait pas le principe d'une condamnation des violences des deux camps en Syrie.

Le texte de la résolution russe s'inquiète aussi de «l'approvisionnement en armes, illégal, des groupes armés en Syrie». Or, si ce trafic d'armes existe, Moscou n'est pas franchement le mieux placé pour donner des leçons sur ce point. En novembre dernier, au Salon aéronautique de Dubaï, le directeur adjoint du Service fédéral russe de coopération militaro-technique Viatcheslav Dzirkaln, affirmait qu'en Russie continuait de livrer de l'armement à Damas, puisque aucune décision internationale ne l'en empêche.

Hier, l'armée syrienne a tiré sur la foule qui manifestait après la prière du vendredi à Homs, faisant au moins un mort. Selon le dernier bilan de l'ONU, les violences en Syrie ont fait plus de 5000 victimes depuis la mi-mars.

Publico (Portugal)

Rússia e China condenam pela primeira vez violência do regime sírio

O vice-presidente sírio foi convidado para "uma reunião séria" em Moscovo, mas a proposta russa não contém nenhuma penalização do regime de Assad.

● A Rússia e a China mudaram de estratégia quanto à Síria. Pela primeira vez, os dois países apresentaram no Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas uma resolução condenando a violência, incluindo a que é responsabilidade do regime do Presidente Bashar al-Assad.

O documento foi apresentado, para surpresa da maior parte dos países, durante uma reunião do Conselho - presidido este mês pela Rússia - dedicada à Síria, na quinta-feira à noite.

O texto condena a violência no país, que se arrasta há nove meses com uns estimados 5000 mortos, tanto por parte das forças de segurança do regime como pela oposição. Mas pela primeira vez inclui uma referência à

"força desproporcionada usada pelas autoridades" e pede explicitamente ao Governo sírio para "põe fim à repressão daquelas que usam os seus direitos de liberdade de expressão, reunião pacífica e associação".

"A reacção dos colegas foi muito construtiva", avallou o representante da Rússia nas Nações Unidas, Vitali Tchurkin, depois de a proposta ter sido apresentada aos outros 14 membros do Conselho de Segurança.

"Fizeram vários comentários e nós fizemos que temos a expectativa de podermos trabalhar juntos, de forma a adoptar uma resolução que traga efectivamente um fim à violência e à crise na Síria", prosseguiu Tchurkin, cujo país - membro permanente do Conselho de Segurança e, por isso, com direito de voto - tem usado o seu peso para bloquear todas as tentativas de aprovar sanções na ONU contra o regime de Assad.

As agências noticiosas russas avançaram entretanto que o vice-presidente sírio foi convidado para "uma reunião séria" em Moscovo. Diplomatas ocidentais nas Nações Unidas, sob anonimato, notaram em

200 mil protestam em Homs, 17 mortos

Na cidade de Homs, 200 mil pessoas manifestaram-se ontem, e nove foram mortas após uma invasão das forças de segurança. Em protestos noutras zonas - em Hama, Deraa e Damasco - e segundo as comissões locais de defesa dos direitos humanos, morreram oito pessoas. Já o Governo anunciou que centenas não houve mortos.

Os protestos destinavam-se a rejeitar a atitude da Liga Árabe, cuja proposta de paz exclui a punição dos responsáveis pela violência. A Liga adiou uma reunião prevista para hoje no Cairo para a dar mais tempo ao Governo sírio para avaliar o plano de paz. Um diplomata árabe em Beirute disse que o adiamento se deve aos esforços para que Assad se sinta pressionado a ceder pela mudança de atitude de Moscovo.

declarações às agências noticiosas que o texto proposto pela Rússia é "fraco", não reflectindo a gravidade actual de violação dos direitos humanos na Síria, uma vez que não contém nenhuma penalização do regime de Assad. Mas sinalizaram que estão dispostos a negociar os termos apresentados - o que abre a porta a uma solução no Conselho para ultrapassar o impasse em que ficou engalfinada a primeira proposta de resolução, de iniciativa ocidental.

Em tono crítico, a França reservou reservas à proposta russa, considerando "inaceitável por no mesmo plano a repressão do regime sírio e a resistência do povo sírio" e instando a que o Conselho de Segurança "condene os crimes contra a humanidade" cometidos pelas autoridades de Damasco. Mas sublinhou também "acolher [a iniciativa] como um desenvolvimento positivo": "A decisão russa reconhece que a profunda degradação da situação na Síria urge uma resolução do Conselho de Segurança", afirmou o porta-voz do Ministério francês dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Bernard Valero.

ABC (Espagne / Spain)



Combatientes del Ejército Sirio de Liberación enseñan sus viejos carnés de la Seguridad Estatal para mostrar que no son «terroristas»

Islamistas libios se desplazan a Siria para «ayudar» a la revolución

►ABC entrevista a un grupo de libios vinculados con el ex yihadista Belhadj que han viajado a Siria para «evaluar» los medios de apoyo a la insurgencia

DANIEL IRIARTE

ENVIADO ESPECIAL A YEBEL ZAWI (SIRIA)

El miliciano Brahim está preocupado. «Hay un control del Ejército en la entrada de la carretera», dice la campesina, lo que significa que las rutas de salida de Yebel Zawi están cortadas. Nos temíamos algo así, por lo que los muy escasos reporte-

ros extranjeros hemos decidido salir de Siria, ante el riesgo de quedarnos atrapados. Pero parece que llegamos tarde. Finalmente, cuando anochecen, Brahim encuentra una solución. Moviliza tres coches que, conducidos a oscuras, tratan de hallar una ruta alternativa. Tras horas de espera, logran hacerse cruzar las líneas enemigas por otro punto. Brahim se ríe, satisfecho: «¡El Ejército Sirio Libre ha encontrado una salida!», dice.

El convoy nos lleva hasta una casa de campo donde nos espera otro grupo que va a ser evacuado con nosotros. Y entonces llega la sorpresa: se trata de tres libios que, en sus propias palabras, han venido no a combatir, sino «a evaluar las necesidades de los hermanos revolucionarios sirios». Los libios no intentan ocultar sus identidades. Se trata de hombres cercanos a Abdelhakim Belhadj, actual gobernador militar de Trípoli y antiguo yihadista, relacionado con Al Qaida en el pasado.

Uno de ellos resulta ser un viejo conocido de los reporteros que cubrieron la guerra de Libia: Mehdi al-Hatemi, el antiguo comandante de la Brigada de Trípoli, que desempeñó un papel fundamental en la toma de la capital de Tel Aviv», nos cuenta. En febrero, Harati, que vive en Dublín y tiene pasaporte irlandés, se despidió de su mujer y su hijo y, junto con otros libios exiliados en Irlanda, se dirigió a Libia. Allí creó la Brigada de Trípoli, un grupo de luchadores de élite, entrenado por asesores de Qatar, que combatió ferozmente en la batalla final por la capital.

ABC ha constatado, además, su reciente paso por lugares como Bahréin, Sudán y Ankara, con propósitos no aclarados. Hace poco, Harati se vio implicado en un extraño episodio, cuando, según su propio relato, una banda de ladrones asaltó su casa, llevándose abundante joyería y 200.000 libras esterlinas (unos 238.000 euros). Haratile dijo a la Policía que una gran cantidad de dinero le había sido entregado por un agente de la CIA para financiar la lucha de su grupo contra Gadafi. El combatiente dejó esas 200.000 libras a su mujer, por si le ocurría algo, y se llevó el resto a Libia.

Mientras huimos hacia la frontera, los libios nos van dando algunas claves sobre su presencia en Siria. «Si por nosotros fuese, les enviaríamos las armas a los sirios mañana. Nosotros ya no las necesitamos», explica Harati. «Pero tendrían que entrar por Turquía, y los turcos no pueden autorizarlo porque no hay consenso dentro de la OTAN», asegura. Ya en la frontera, los tres libios dicen que vuelven a su patria. Así nos lo aseguran.

tal y la caída de Gadafi. El segundo, Adem Kikli, dice que trabaja para Belhadj, y lleva casi dos décadas exiliado en el Reino Unido. El tercero, Fuaad, parece ser un guardaespaldas. «Estamos aquí por iniciativa propia y personal, no por orden de nadie», asegura Adem. Y subraya que Harati renunció públicamente a su puesto en Tripoli el pasado 11 de octubre. Además, afirma que ha estado con otros libios, «unas cuantas decenas», que se han desplazado a Siria por su cuenta para ayudar a los insurgentes. Harati, no hay duda, es un hombre de acción. El personaje saltó a la palestra tras su participación en la Flotilla de Gaza en la primavera de 2010. «Fui herido en el asalto al Mavi Marmara, y estuve nueve días en una cá-

ABC (Espagne / Spain)

Abdul Hakim Belhadj

Jefe militar de Trípoli

El hombre que estuvo en todas las guerras

PERFIL

MIKEL AYESTARAN

Abdul Hakim Belhadj es el poderoso islamista con el que están vinculados los asesores libios que intentan ayudar a la revuelta siria. Fue emir del Grupo de Combatientes Islámico Libio (LIFG) y ahora lidera la comandancia de las fuerzas rebeldes en Trípoli. Su pasado vinculado a la yihad, su contacto directo con Bin Laden en Afganistán y su presunta vinculación con los cabecillas de los atentados del 11-M, según informes de la inteligencia española, encendieron las alarmas de la comunidad internacional al término de la guerra de Libia.

Rodeado de veteranos de la guerra afgana, Belhadj asegura que en su día dijo «no» a la oferta de colaboración con Al Qaida porque sus objetivos eran «nacionales»; su sueño



era echar a Gadaffi y no ha dejado de luchar hasta conseguirlo. Belhadj, sin embargo, admitió en declaraciones a ABC contactos telefónicos con cabecillas del 11-M como «el Tunecino» y su socio jordano Mohd Othman «por temas profesionales, nada vinculado con los ataques». Unos contactos que —reconoce— explicó en persona a agentes de la inteligencia española que acudieron a la prisión de Trípoli a interrogarle después del mayor atentado de la historia de España.

Después de tres décadas huyendo y viviendo bajo la etiqueta de ser un líder terrorista islamista, Belhadj tiene en sus manos la seguridad de las principales figuras del Consejo Nacional Transitorio (CNT), que no han dudado a la hora de confiar a este ex yihadista sus vidas.

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Our families have been taken hostage, say activists who fled Assad's violence

By Suha Ma'ayeh in Ramtha
and Richard Spencer
Middle East Correspondent

SYRIAN security forces are threatening family members of anti-Assad protesters and seizing them as hostages, activists from the restive southern province of Deraa have told *The Daily Telegraph*.

Virtually cut off from outsiders, the area, which sustained the first government tank assault of the uprising nine months ago this week, is now facing a military sweep intended to quell dissent. Separate families told independently how brothers and children of those wanted by the authorities have been targeted to force their relatives to give themselves up.

"They sent for me, saying they would kill my brother if I didn't hand myself in," one man, who called himself Abu Mahmoud, said in the Jordanian town of Ramtha after fleeing over the border last week. His name had appeared on the "wanted" list issued daily to troops.

Last Saturday, just after he left, they were as good as their word. "My brother was leading a protest march," he said. "A sniper shot him twice, one bullet in his chest and the other in his head."

For a while in March, Deraa was almost taken over by protesters, after demonstrations over the arrest of a group of teenagers for scrawling anti-regime graffiti developed into the first major confrontation of the uprising. But the protests were peaceful and the army shelled its way back in.

The struggle there has received less publicity than the fighting in Homs, where as many as 200,000 people staged one of the opposition's biggest single demonstrations yesterday, and Idlib to the north.

But this week, activists and refugees gave *The Telegraph* a detailed portrait of the regime's new tactics, as tanks are deployed to break the general strike which is the opposition's latest gambit to put pressure on the regime.

"There are barriers every 100 or 200 metres in Deraa as checkpoints," one resident said by Skype.

"Every day they get a new list of names that are wanted by the regime. We have soldiers who are contributing to our cause, sometimes for free, sometimes for money, who give us the lists."

Another refugee, Abu Ali, 34, said he and two of his cousins had organised protests, written slogans, distributed anti-regime leaflets and provided first aid for those wounded.

Early on, before army defections began and the struggle began to morph into open war, they were handed automatic weapons by sympathetic soldiers. Even so, they were shocked at the violence that has now developed.

"It is sanctioned to kill anyone who takes part in a protest," he said. "We want to protect ourselves."

"I saw a man with his seven-year-old, who was shot simply to make the father suffer. We saw women and children



KHALED DESOUKI/REUTERS

Election violence Two killed and 100 injured as Egyptian police break up demonstration

A woman is torn away from clashes involving Egyptian security forces and protesters, above, in Cairo as the country witnessed its worst violence in weeks yesterday.

Two people were killed and 100 were injured as

police broke up a demonstration.

In some of the bloodiest scenes since the overthrow of former president Hosni Mubarak in February, demonstrators threw petrol bombs as riot police stormed a sit-in outside the

cabinet office. Army troops fired shots, including live rounds, in an attempt to disperse the protest last night.

The clashes overshadowed the results of a second round of voting in which Islamic parties

consolidated their position. State television reported that 32 members of the security forces were wounded.

"Even if the sit-in was not legal, should it be dispersed with such brutality and barbarity?" Mohamed

ElBaradei, a presidential candidate, said. The clashes were the worst since more than 40 people were killed on the eve of the first parliamentary elections in November.

The Muslim Brotherhood-backed, Freedom and

Justice Party, won more than 36 per cent of the vote in the first round, followed by the fundamentalist al-Nour's with 24 per cent.

The main liberal coalition, the Egyptian Bloc, won almost 13 per cent.

Damien McElroy

killed, houses bombed and bodies mutilated."

In turn, the Free Syrian Army, a ragged band of defectors, has begun to retaliate.

Last month, it ambushed a convoy of armoured personnel carriers in Deraa, setting some on fire. Earlier this week, in its bloodiest attack yet, it killed 27 soldiers at three checkpoints.

As the clashes worsen, activists, even those not involved in violence, are being forced to escape, leaving their families to

face the consequences. Abu Jarrah, 31, one of the cousins, said the security forces told his father that they wanted to "pluck their eyes [out] and cut their bodies into pieces".

"They said that they would unearth us in 24 hours," he said. "A few days before we left, they stormed my neighbour's house and while he wasn't there took his 12-year-old son hostage. The next day they took the wanted man's brother hostage."

He said two of his own younger broth-

ers had been arrested and remained in custody. "I don't know where my youngest brother is," he said.

His other brother had been suspended from the ceiling by one of his hands and beaten with electric cables, according to an inmate who was later released.

The reports conform to accounts from Human Rights Watch, which alleged this week that officials and army officers had issued "shoot to kill" orders and sanctioned torture of detainees. Those whose

relatives are active in the opposition, like Abu Jarrah and Abu Mahmoud, are particular targets.

Abu Jarrah showed *The Daily Telegraph* the aftermath of a shooting. By coincidence, it was that of Abu Mahmoud's brother, although the two families do not know each other. In the video, the brother lies on the floor as he is given first aid.

"There is no God but Allah," he says, his head lolting. The treatment is to no avail, and they are his last words.

The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

SYRIA

Security forces open fire on protesters

Syrian security forces opened fire on anti-government protesters after Friday prayers at mosques around the country yesterday, as the army sent reinforcements to a southern area where army defectors launched deadly attacks on regime troops.

The Local Co-ordination Committees and the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least one person was killed in Homs, where more than 200,000 people marched against President Bashar al-Assad's government.

The protests came a day after army defectors killed 27 security personnel in Deraa in apparently co-ordinated attacks that were among the deadliest by rebel troops so far. An activist in Homs said about 10,000 protesters took part in a rally, at which crowds chanted "The people want to exe-



Syrians hold a pro-government rally in Damascus yesterday AP

cute the President." Security forces showed restraint, watching from a distance, said one activist. "It might be a goodwill gesture by the regime ahead of the Russian initiative," the activist said, referring to Russian attempts at the UN to end the crisis.

Russia began circulating a draft UN Security Council resolution on Thursday it said was designed to resolve the conflict in Syria. AP

Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)

Demand at mass rallies for Arab League action on Syria

MICHAEL JANGER

THOUSANDS OF Syrian anti-regime opponents marched nine months of unrest by demonstrating that the Arab League's response to Damascus's crackdown on dissent. The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights' spokesman, Farook al-Sharaa, reported mass demonstrations in the central Syrian city of Homs against the government of a longer meeting on Syria scheduled for

today. The protest movement is to allow more time for Damascus to accept the terms of a plan to halt denouncing violence by "all parties". Other protests were said to have been staged in Daraa, Dier al-Zor and Idlib. Local committees said at least 11 people were killed as Syrians voice demands for human rights. Late on Thursday, Russia's vice

"son", Russia's UN ambassador Vitali Churkin, said the resolution was needed to "give a strong message to the Arab League that we encourage them to continue their efforts, and working together with the government of Syria, to carry out its plans to deploy the monitoring mission in Syria". He said external powers seeking regime change must end intervention.

US secretary of state Hillary Clinton criticised Moscow's post-

three weeks ago by activists opposed to the appointment by the rising military council of the prime minister, Kamal al-Ganzouri, who had served under ousted president Hosni Mubarak. The conflict took place a day after fighting ended in the second round to arrest freely contested by the Muslim Brotherhood and ultraorthodox Salafis fundamentalists. About 20 people were injured and five have greater wounds.

The encampment was established

in a bid to end the crisis.

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The encampment was established

The International Herald Tribune (USA)

[Aller à la page précédente](#)

Syrians protest a lackluster response from Arab League

and begin negotiations. The resolution, however, does not call for sanctions, and its prospects for passage were unclear.

Activists and opposition groups reported at least 17 people in Syria were killed in violent confrontations with security forces during the Friday protests, including two minors and three women.

Some activists said the street demonstrators were energized by anger over the Arab League's delays in imposing economic sanctions on Mr. Assad's regime, which it had promised nearly three weeks ago. A meeting of Arab League foreign ministers on Syria, which was to take place this weekend in Cairo, was indefinitely postponed on Thursday.

The demonstrations, reported by rights activists and opposition groups, convulsed several regions as Mr. Assad faced what appeared to be an unexpected source of new diplomatic pressure from Russia, one of his most loyal allies. On Thursday, Vitaly Churkin, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, proposed a surprise Security Council resolution that called on all antagonists in the Syria conflict to stop the violence

for Russia to ignore the daily reports of killings coming out of the country.

Mr. Churkin, the Russian envoy, said that the draft resolution "considerably strengthens all aspects of the previous text," referring to a resolution drafted by European countries in October that both Russia and China vetoed.

The new resolution called on all Syrian parties to stop violence but said nothing about penalizing Mr. Assad's government. Western officials said they were pleasantly surprised, although they said it would need amendments to gain wider acceptance. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States would study the text carefully and that it would have to be reviewed by the Arab League as well.

Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Washington and a New York Times employee from Beirut.

BEIRUT
BY NADA BAKRI

Hundreds of thousands of anti-government demonstrators in Syria took to the streets on Friday, driven in part by new impatience with the Arab League over what they viewed as its repeated failure to penalize President Bashar al-Assad's regime over the violent repression of their nine-month-old uprising.

The demonstrations, reported by rights activists and opposition groups, convulsed several regions as Mr. Assad faced what appeared to be an unexpected source of new diplomatic pressure from Russia, one of his most loyal allies. On Thursday, Vitaly Churkin, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, proposed a surprise Security Council resolution that called on all antagonists in the Syria conflict to stop the violence

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nition. In response to the violence, at least

two members

resigned

in protest from a

new civilian

advisory

council

established

by Egypt's military rulers.

The fighting injected an unpredict-

able new variable into a looming con-

flict

between the military council

and the incoming Parliament over con-

trol

of the transi-

tional

gov-

ernment

and the drafting

of a new constitution.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Russia toughens stance on Syria

MOSCOW'S DRAFT UN RESOLUTION ELICITS MIXED RESPONSE

Gulf News Report

Dubai Nationwide protests sweeping Syria surged yesterday as the state security forces unleashed their guns on hundreds of thousands of protesters, killing 13 people.

The protests came after Russia, a longtime ally of beleaguered President Bashar Al Assad, drew a mixed response from Western governments to signs of toughening its stance on Syria at the UN Security Council. Russia began circulating a draft UN Security Council resolution on Thursday it said was designed to resolve the conflict in Syria. The draft calls for an end to all violence.

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta welcomed the Russian move and praised Turkey's "leadership" in putting pressure on the Damascus regime.

"I think it was an important step for Russia to indicate that they were willing to work with an effort in the United Nations to bring greater pressure on Syria," Panetta told a news conference, adding: "There's a lot to be worked through."

France attacked Russia's

EGYPT



Two killed, several injured in clashes

At least two people were killed in clashes yesterday between demonstrators and troops in the worst violence since the start of Egypt's first free election in six decades. A worker at a makeshift field hospital said a third person had died from gunshot wounds. At least 99 people were also injured.

The violence started overnight and continued throughout yesterday when military police tried to break up a sit-in by activists. The clashes erupted early yesterday after protesters accused the army of abducting and attacking one protester. The protesters have camped outside the cabinet headquarters since late November in opposition of the military rulers' appointment of Kamal Al Ganzouri as the new prime minister. They regard Al Ganzouri as an extension of the Mubarak regime.

Ramadan Al Sherbini/Correspondent
See also Page 11

proposed resolution as "totally unbalanced" and no immediate talks were called on the measure.

France's UN envoy Gerard Araud called the Russian text a "manoeuvre." Russia "gives the appearance of movement while presenting a text which is totally unbalanced and which is empty," he said in a live internet chat session with French newspaper *Le Monde*.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 200,000 protested in the besieged central city of Homs alone, vented

their frustration at the Arab League for postponing a meeting on Syria scheduled for today.

The 22-member League has proposed a peace plan, suspended Syria's membership and imposed sanctions but has not been able to agree on next steps after Syria refused to allow in monitors to ensure compliance with the proposal.

It was supposed to meet today, but an Arab League diplomat said divisions among member nations over what to do next forced a delay. Instead, a smaller

group of five Arab foreign ministers tasked with overseeing the implementation of the body's demands on Syria will meet today in Doha, he said.

The diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Oman favour an Arab-led solution to the Syrian crisis and reject Western political interference. Another camp led by Gulf nations, as well as Tunisia and Libya, is seeking the help of the international community in pushing for Assad's ouster, he said.

In Homs, the Local Coordination Committee (LCC) said anti-government rallies took place after Friday prayers all across Syria.

"The people want to execute the president," the crowds in Khaldiya chanted, according to an activist.

Meanwhile, the chairman of Libya's National Transitional Council, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, has called on Syria's president to step down, saying the Syrian people have the right to determine their own destiny.

— With inputs from agencies
See also Page 11

DEMANDS

Syrians in mass rally for Arab bloc action

Protesters demand Arab League speed up its response to a bloody crackdown by Al Assad's forces on dissent

Damascus (AFP) Hundreds of thousands of Syrians protested nine months into their uprising yesterday, demanding the Arab League hasten its response to a bloody crackdown on dissent, activists said.

The mass protests came after Russia, a longtime ally of Syria's embattled President Bashar Al Assad, drew a guarded response from Western governments for signs of toughening its stance at the UN Security Council.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 200,000 protested in the besieged central city of Homs alone, venting their frustration at the Arab League for postponing a meeting on Syria scheduled today.

"More than 200,000 demonstrators came out in several neighbourhoods of the city after Friday prayers," the Britain-based organisation said in a statement sent to AFP in Nicosia.

Video footage posted online also showed demonstrators taking to the streets of the capital Damascus and the protest hubs of Daraa in the south, Deir Ezzor in the east and the other restive central city of Hama.

Protest banners

"Security Council: Where Is Your Security, Stop Covering The Killers," said a banner carried by protesters in the town of Hass, in northwestern Idlib province, according to some of the footage on YouTube.

Organisers had urged protesters to press the Arab bloc over its postponement of today emergency



Brutal killing

An image grab taken on Thursday from a video uploaded on YouTube shows what looks to be Syrian soldiers standing over the bodies of men, who were allegedly killed by security forces and militia, in Rastan in Homs province.

CRACKDOWN

FALLOUT OF UPRISING

200,000

protesters in Homs alone

5,000

Syrians killed in the months-long conflict

20,000

Syrian army defectors

foreign ministers' meeting to give more time for Damascus to agree to a deal to end the bloodshed to avoid sanctions.

They had set the slogan for the protests as: "The Arab League is killing us - enough deadlines."

The 22-member bloc approved a package of sanctions against Damascus on November 27 after it failed

to meet a deadline to agree to an observer mission to monitor implementation of an Arab plan to protect Syrian civilians.

But on Sunday, Foreign Minister Walid Muallem wrote to the Arab League saying Syria would accept the monitors under certain conditions, including the lifting of the sanctions.

The bloc's number two

Ahmad Bin Helli said late on Thursday that the planned foreign ministers' meeting had been postponed indefinitely while talks continued with Damascus on its offer.

Also on Thursday the Arab League held new talks with the Syrian opposition on the eve of the opening in Tunisia of a three-day congress of the Syrian Na-

tional Council. SNC leader Burhan Ghaliun said it was vital that the opposition close ranks after the formation in Istanbul on Thursday of the National Alliance, another opposition grouping.

"We need to unite the opposition and make it stronger. We need to emerge from this congress with a higher level of organisation, clearer targets and more momentum," Ghaliun told AFP.

The SNC is generally regarded as the main civilian opposition coalition and includes the local committees running protests in Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as parties representing the Kurdish and Assyrian minorities.

However, announcing the formation of the National Alliance, Mohammad Bessem Imadi, a former Syrian ambassador to Sweden, charged the SNC had "lost contact with local revolutionary movements in Syria."

Targeted measures

The Syrian opposition has been pushing hard for the UN Security Council to take tough action against Damascus after a European draft that would have threatened "targeted measures" against regime figures was blocked by Beijing and Moscow in October.

The new text circulated by Russia late on Thursday still makes no mention of sanctions but strongly condemns the violence by "all parties, including disproportionate use of force by Syrian authorities," according to a copy obtained by AFP.

Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Syrians cry for Arab action

Mass rallies demand quick League response

DAMASCUS — Hundreds of thousands of Syrians protested nine months into their uprising on Friday, demanding the Arab League hasten its response to a bloody crackdown on dissent, activists said.

The protests came after Russia, a longtime ally of embattled President Bashar Al Assad, drew a guarded response from Western governments to signs of toughening its stance on Syria at the UN Security Council.

Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki told France 24 he opposes foreign intervention in Syria — reflecting the position of Russia and China.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 200,000 protested in the besieged central city of Homs alone, venting their frustration at the Arab League for postponing a meeting on Syria scheduled for today.

It also said at least six civilians were shot dead by security forces in Homs. A seventh person, wounded at dawn in Daraa province, cradle of the anti-regime dissent, also died of his wounds.

"More than 200,000 demonstrators came out in several neighbourhoods of the city after Friday prayers," the Britain-based group said.

Demonstrators also took to the streets of Damascus and the protest hubs of Daraa, Deir Ezzor and Hama, according to the Local Co-ordination Committees (LCC), which organises the protests.

Organisers had urged protesters to press the 22-member Arab bloc

› CAIRO CLASHES KILL 2



A protester throws stones at army soldiers inside a ministry building after setting fire to a police booth during clashes in Cairo on Friday. At least two people were killed as demonstrators clashed with troops wielding truncheons and electric prods in Cairo in the worst violence since the start of Egypt's first free election in six decades. — Reuters.

› SEE ALSO PAGE 18

over its postponement of the emergency foreign ministers' meeting to give more time for Damascus to agree to a deal to end the bloodshed to avoid sanctions.

They had set the slogan for the protests as: "The Arab League is killing us — enough deadlines."

On November 27, the Arab bloc approved a package of sanctions against Damascus after it failed to

meet a deadline to agree to an observer mission to monitor implementation of an Arab plan to protect Syrian civilians.

A League taskforce chaired by Qatar will gather in Doha today with delegates from Egypt, Algeria, Sudan and Oman, the bloc's No 2 Ahmed Ben Helli said. — AFP

› SEE ALSO EDIT

Moscow's Syrian surprise

Russia's resolution on Syria at the Security Council has indeed taken many by surprise. While the Russian resolution lacks punch in terms of condemnation and call for stricter deterrent measures against President Bashar Al Assad's regime, it does mark a change in the country's policy vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. For one Russia has chosen the Security Council venue signifying the need for the most powerful council within the United Nations to address the ongoing turmoil gripping Syria since months. If the intent was to deliver a strong message to Assad that allied Russia may be getting fed up of his use of brutal means to quell civilian protests and his obvious inability to contain the crisis. Things are bad in Syria. The UN has estimated at least 5,000 deaths since the start of the protests earlier this year. And now with civil war looming large as government forces battle it out with defecting units and ethnic-religious groups are forced to choose sides, Damascus continues to deny any responsibility.

Though Western states have criticised the Russian proposal for not even mentioning sanctions, it does even as admitted by them offer an opportunity to strengthen the terms. At least Russia taking note of the Syrian government's use of disproportionate force and "suppression of those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association" does signify displeasure and impatience. It also puts additional pressure on Assad who is now facing regional isolation having been suspended from the Arab League and also financial sanctions. Damascus had been counting on China and Russia to veto any Security Council Resolution as witnessed earlier in October. However, the continued violence has sparked fears of the strife spilling over the borders and triggering a regional confrontation, something even China and Russia would not like to see. At the same time that does not mean that both Moscow and Beijing would support any military intervention. This is something Russia has clearly stated even now as it circulated its own resolution. Besides, another contention in the Russian draft is the call for all sides including the opposition to halt violence. Many Western states do not share this view—debatable at this juncture since defecting forces are now fighting from the opposition's side. In any case the development is positive and further pressure on Damascus may yield at least some breakthrough, given how fast Assad is losing all options.

**Continued pressure
may succeed in
halting Assad's brutal
means to muzzle the
movement**

The National (EAU / UAE)

200,000 fill streets to rally against Syria regime

Biggest protest since July

At least four killed by security forces but activists fear the death toll is closer to 14

Phil Sands
Foreign Correspondent

DAMASCUS // Syrian protesters held their largest anti-regime demonstrations in months yesterday, with 200,000 taking to the streets in Homs, according to opposition activists.

A heavy security presence and army checkpoints preventing free movement meant protesters could not gather in a single, central area.

Instead, opposition figures in the city said neighbourhoods had held separate demonstrations as residents left mosques following Friday prayers, each involving thousands of people.

The scale of protests cannot be independently verified but footage on satellite news channels, apparently broadcast live from Homs, a key centre of the nine-month-old uprising, indicated that significant demonstrations were taking place.

The last time activists were able to stage such huge protests was in July, when more than 500,000 people were said to have taken part in anti-regime rallies in Hama, another central Syrian city.

A military assault at the end of July put a stop to such large-scale, open public dissent there.

Opposition activists have warned that Homs may now face a similar fate, with warnings that a build-up of troops and security forces may herald a planned attack.

Protests in Homs have been protected from attack by armed guards, mainly residents and army defectors carrying small arms, activists say.

But there have also been growing signs that a war is underway in the city, one already stained by sectarian bloodshed between the Sunni majority and Alawite minority.

Syria's president, Bashar Al Assad, and the main figures in his ruling circle are all Alawites.

Pro-government media denied any activists had taken to the streets in Homs on Friday, with the correspondent for Al Dounia television suggesting that opposition groups had built a film set-style mock-up portraying areas of the city in Qatar, from where they acted out fabricated rallies.

Syrian officials have repeatedly accused Qatar and GCC states of stoking the uprising as part of an

effort to overthrow Mr Al Assad in pursuit of an agenda driven by America and Israel.

At least four people were killed by security forces nationwide yesterday, according to human rights groups, although some activists said the actual number was 14.

It can take days for casualty figures to seep through and they remain a subject of much dispute.

Last week the UN human rights commission said more than 5,000 people had been killed by the security services since March as part of a "systematic" campaign of violence intended to crush largely peaceful anti-regime protests.

Mr Al Assad has dismissed such figures, saying that about 1,000 security personnel had been killed by "terrorists", who were also responsible for civilian casualties.

Sana, the official state news agency, made no mention of civilian deaths yesterday, but said security forces had killed members of an "armed terrorist gang" in Deraa, the southern province in which the uprising began in March.

The latest protests came after Russia proposed the text for a draft UN Security Council resolution that was more critical of its ally Damascus than a previous version, suggesting Moscow could be toughening its stance.

Under the new text, Russia condemned violence by all parties and ruled out foreign intervention, as it had done previously, but specifically referred to the "disproportionate use of force by the Syrian authorities".

It also called on the Syrian authorities to "put an end to suppression of those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association".

According to Russian news agencies, the Syrian vice president, Faruq Al Shara, arrived in Moscow yesterday for talks.

The Arab League's working group on Syria is due to meet in Doha today, after a planned meeting of regional foreign ministers to discuss a league peace plan was indefinitely postponed.

The Arab League imposed economic sanctions against Damascus last month after it failed to implement an agreed programme designed to end the crisis.

Since then, Syria has said it would grant access for independent monitors but with caveats that Arab officials refused to accept.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in London, said protesters yesterday vented their frustration at the league for the postponed meeting.

Organisers set the slogan for the protests as: "The Arab League is killing us – enough deadlines."

► psands@thenational.ae

 The Arab League's working group on Syria meets today

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

Turkish banks freeze \$500 mln belonging to President Assad

 Turkish banks have frozen roughly \$500 million in bank accounts belonging to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the first measure in Turkey's newly announced sanctions against the embattled Damascus regime.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry announced the freeze on Wednesday, stating that it came into effect after a series of meetings between the Foreign Ministry, the Finance Ministry's Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MA-SAK) and the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK).

Along with the \$500 million in the Syrian president's personal accounts, banks also plan to freeze an estimated \$150 million which Syrian state banks are currently holding in their

Turkish counterparts.

Turkish authorities first announced their willingness to consider a bank freeze in early October, and cited the regime's continued refusal to halt anti-protester violence as reason for this week's decision.

The measure comes as part of a decision by the Arab League and Turkey in late November to enact comprehensive sanctions against businesses close to the regime. It was the first time the Arab League had agreed to impose sanctions on one of its own members. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said of the sanctions in early December that they signaled the "end of the road" for any further negotiations between Ankara and Damascus. **Istanbul** Today's Zaman

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Un épais brouillard entre Moscou et Damas

- Imbroglio total autour d'une éventuelle visite de Chareh en Russie
- Paris critique la démarche russe à l'ONU et parle de « manœuvre »
- L'opposition réunie pour trois jours à Tunis



Plus de 200 000 personnes ont manifesté hier dans la ville martyr de Homs.

Photo YouTube

L'Orient-Le Jour (Lebanon / Liban)

Plus de 4 500 réfugiés syriens au Liban

Plus de 4 500 Syriens ont fui la répression sanglante de la contestation dans leur pays pour se réfugier au Liban, dont plusieurs centaines lors des deux dernières semaines, a indiqué hier l'ONU.

Selon un rapport du Haut-Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés (HCR), 4 510 Syriens sont désormais enregistrés dans le nord du Liban, alors qu'ils étaient 3 798 au début de décembre. La majorité des Syriens qui ont fui ces deux dernières semaines viennent de Homs et Tall Kalakh, deux régions proches de la frontière entre Liban et Syrie, où les forces du régime tentent d'étouffer depuis neuf mois la contestation populaire appelant au départ du président Bachar el-Assad.

Une grande partie de ces réfugiés se sont installés chez des « familles d'accueil » dans des villages frontaliers ou dans la mohafazat du Akkar.

Notons par ailleurs que dix-neuf Syriens blessés,

dont une fillette de 11 ans, ont été hospitalisés dans le nord du Liban durant la semaine écoulée, a ajouté la même source. « Plusieurs étaient dans le coma à leur arrivée dans les hôpitaux et une personne a succombé. »

Dons italiens de kits médicaux

Le ministère italien des Affaires étrangères a fait don hier de dix-sept tonnes de kits médicaux d'urgence aux déplacés syriens au Liban.

L'aide, d'une valeur totale de 200 000 dollars, a été acheminée à bord d'un avion-cargo A-300 en provenance d'un dépôt des Nations unies à Brindisi, en Italie.

L'aide sera distribuée, grâce aux efforts conjoints de l'UNHCR et du Haut Comité de secours, aux centres médico-sociaux au Akkar. Par ailleurs, l'Italie a fait don de groupes électrogènes, de citernes d'eau, de couvertures et d'autres articles de soins primaires dans le but d'améliorer les interventions d'urgence dans le nord du Liban.

Que se passe-t-il entre Moscou et Damas ?

Révolte Imbroglio autour de la visite de Chareh en Russie ; le CNS se réunit pour 3 jours à Tunis ; 22 morts hier en Syrie.

Casi un tercio de los total...

En cours de journée hier, on commençait par apprendre que le vice-président syrien Farouk al-Chachid s'était fait « faire », par la Russie à se rendre à Moscou pour « des entretiens sérieux ». Une heure au Kremlin dirigée par l'agence officielle TASS. Tous avaient été assuré que M. Chachid était attendu « bientôt » à Moscou pour un « entretien sérieux », avec des dirigeants de la Russie, un pays où les régimes syriens qui à Jusque-là détestaient leurs alliés, notamment des successeurs à l'ONU contre ce dernier. « C'est quelqu'un qu'on va lui demander des échanges qui lui conviennent », a assuré cette source, se ajoutant que la Russie « n'a pas l'intention des Syriens ».

Dans la soirée, une source bien informée, « dans très bonne case des Affaires étrangères », interrogée par le site www.sudouest.fr, affirmait que cette visite à Rio « était », et que c'était *Pedro* el-Chahed lui-même qui avait « souhaité rencontrer le président *Dentir* *Macedo* et le Premier ministre *Vladimir Poutine*. Cette demande a été rejetée et M. Chahed devrait s'entretenir avec le chef de la diplomatie *Sergio Lavrov* », précisait la source en question. « Après les efforts de *Macedo* visant à aider le régime syrien, il semblerait qu'il ait dû faire cette visite au Brésil dans un manque de sécurité alors qu'à la Syrie pat rapport aux accusations russes pour une attaque de crues », résumait-elle.

"Il faut dire que la Russie est montée en puissance il y a ce dernier jour et le dossier syrien, jeudi déjà, Moscou avait créé la surprise en déposant un projet de résolution au Conseil de sécurité - nouvelle version d'un projet russe-chinois précédent selon un diplomate russe - , dénonçant les violations commises en Syrie - par toutes les parties -, une situation sur l'ordre du régime et à celle de l'opposition, principalement les séparatistes qui ont multiplié les attaques contre l'armée. La seule cause finale est les positions européennes et américaines hésitantes, faisant référence à la violence perpétrée - par toutes les parties, y compris l'opposition - de la révolution de la fin des dernières années.

Washington, chef militaire du FBI à travaille sur la base de ce projet, cesse d'existé, mais démontre que nous ne pourrions pas dormir », continue l'appareil partiel, source au sein de l'Office de l'Intérieur et l'opposition. Le secteur américain à la Défense Leon Panetta a signalé le « pas important » que



Sur cette page faites l'opérateur passer sur YvesLyon. Puis passez-lui une paire de ciseaux : « Nous sommes perdus : pas d'assureur, pas de gars, pas de papa, mais des bouteilles par lesquelles d'Assaut ». un peu moins

constituent le projet russe, tout au Japonais qu'il y avait encore : « Sources de travail ». Il s'est par ailleurs libérée de la position en pointe d'Antarès qui a imposé des sanctions à la Syrie le appellé M. Assad à quitter le pouvoir. Signale-t-il que le Trésor US a annoncé hier que le chef de ses prochaines sanctions, David Calfee, entamait aujourd'hui une tournée de quatre jours en Arabie saoudite et s'abîmait commercialement à l'Irak, à la Syrie et à la Jordanie pour assurer la lutte contre le terrorisme international.

L'ambassadeur de France à l'ONU, Jean Arnault, a critiqué l'initiative russe, tout en admettant l'aspect positif de cette résolution. « C'est aussi une mesure, parce qu'elle (la Russie) le donne l'apparence d'un mouvement tout en présentant au tout ce qui est faiblement déstabilisant et crise », a-t-il dit, soulignant qu'il s'agit « négoiations de stabilité » pour durer quelques heures ou quelques mois. « On est au début de la négociation », mais il y a « urgence », a déclaré le porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères, Renaud Valençay. « Le Conseil de sécurité doit concilier ces crises contre l'humanité », a-t-il ajouté.

Rachid al-Assad pour sa part a chuté « et maintenant il a toute question », selon M. Chalhoun. « Il faut unifier l'opposition pour lui donner plus de force. Nous devons acheter ce temps avec plus d'organisation, plus d'entraide entre elles, plus d'ensemble », a-t-il poursuivi. « Ainsi au final, la Syrie deviendra démocratique et le peuple sera libéré quel qu'en soit le prix », a-t-il ajouté. Il se contentait toutefois sur la possibilité d'une intervention. Alors que, estimant qu'il fallait « discuter des options avec le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU », aujourd'hui jeudi et vendredi dimanche, les membres du CNS devaient à huis clos, et jusqu'

From [Book with Java](#)

C'est dans ce contexte que le comité du Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui représente la majorité des courants d'opposition au régime de Damas, s'est ouvert hier soir en banlieue de Tunis, selon une source syrienne. La presse

système et de l'opposition dans le but de négocier une période de transition en Syrie. Ce projet aurait nécessité l'accord de l'Iran et de la Russie.

Rappelons que si l'empereur à Istanbul, le CNS réunit toutes les tendances politiques, comptant 100 membres dans ses rangs. La Confédération de coordination (LCC) qui rassemble les manifestations sur la zone, les libertés, la confédération des Forces musulmanes indépendantes (la coalition d'Al-Qaïda en Syrie) ainsi que les partis kurdes et syriaques. Mais d'autres mouvements ont vu le jour telles l'Alliance syriaque des forces révolutionnaires dont la création a été annoncée jeudi à Istanbul, ou l'Armée syrienne libre, l'opposition armée composée de l'opposition syrienne, avec que le CNS est en contact.

De plus, une séance des ministres arabes des Affaires étrangères prévue aujourd'hui à Casablanca ne portera pas lieu, alors qu'une réunion du comité ministériel arabe chargé de coordonner les théâtres d'opérations sera tenue à Tunis.

**22 nouvelles victimes
hier...**

Sur le terrain, si malgré la répression exercée par le régime sécessionniste, il réussit à contenir l'insurrection entre dans un état mort, quelques 200 000 Syriens ont continuer à fuir à l'ouest, un bon tiers de la population, et des millions d'autres, en Syrie, alors que l'armée, pour déclencher la chute du régime de Bachar al-Assad, assiste à l'Asie centrale, libère et démontre la position de la

Liputan6.com

Celle-ci est accusée par les protestants de vouloir les juifs au contraire de nombreux chrétiens au pouvoir à Damas, ce qui donne « le temps au régime de faire du ravage en Syrie ». Sous la direction « La Ligue arabe » ou « la coalition de milieux de Syrie » sont donc dirigés à Hama, puis de Deraa, à Idlib, à Deir es Zor, à Hama, Hama et Latakia, malgré le déploiement massif des troupes près des mosquées, point de ralliement des révolutionnaires, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) et les Comités locaux de coordination (CLC).

Comme d'habitude, les forces du régime étaient aux aguets, prêts pour disperser les protestations. Elles ont tué 22 civils, alors la chaîne de télévision « Al-Jazeera »

de l'assassinat d'Assad et de ses militaires. D'ailleurs, les « contestations révolutionnaires » de nombreuses villes ont démonté les bastions radicaux des forces de sécurité syriennes contre des courtoisies civiles, comme à Hama, où une partie du matériel militaire a été capturée selon un opposant. A Tell Kalakh et à Deir es-Zor, les militaires pro-dictature ont subi la nouvelle défaite dans la bataille nationale systématique et ont été soumis à des coups de feu en blocs aériens, tandis qu'à Zahle, ils étaient l'objet d'un état de siège.

Siguramente que salió una señalización de TONYELI, la impresión de la noche a fallecido de 5 000 metros depuis la 12 min.

(Section 7, subsection
of 30-XXXXX)

The Daily Star (Liban / Lebanon)

Nearly 5,000 Syrian refugees in north Lebanon

BEIRUT/TRIPOLI: The number of registered Syrian refugees in northern Lebanon has nearly reached the highs of April, which saw an influx of some 5,000 displaced cross the border.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said Friday that there are now 4,510 Syrians registered with the agency and with Lebanon's Higher Relief Committee in the north of the country, up 238 from last week.

"Only a few of this additional number represent newly arrived persons," the report added. "The vast majority are those who had crossed into Lebanon earlier but only recently approached our office."

The U.N. says over 5,000 people have now been killed in Syria's ongoing unrest.

Many refugees fleeing to Lebanon have been pursued by Syrian army personnel, and arrive wounded. The UNHCR said "an additional 19 wounded persons were referred to hospitals in the north this week including an 11-year-old girl. Several were in a coma when they reached the hospitals and one person reportedly died from injuries."

According to UNHCR estimates, "over 100 wounded Syrians have been treated in various hospitals in Lebanon since the beginning of the influx."

The report says that registration permits that the Lebanese government agreed to issue to the refugees have been delayed.

"The certificates are a means to show that the person is someone who is registered with UNHCR and the HRC and is aimed to prevent fraud and facilitate access to needed services," the UNHCR said.

"Opposition was expressed this week in some quarters, as it was believed that the registration certificates conveyed rights to residency – which they do not," it added.

In Tripoli Friday, Syrian refugees who were injured by gunfire while protesting against Assad's government participated in the weekly demonstra-



Aid from Italy arrives at Rafik Hariri International Airport in Beirut.

tion staged in support of the uprising.

Several hundred residents of the neighborhood of Qibbeh took to the street following noon prayers and were led by a number of refugees, including young people and children, who were injured by gunfire by regime forces while protesting in Syria and later treated in hospitals in north Lebanon.

Delivering Friday's sermon at Hamza Mosque, Sheikh Zakaria Masri condemned the Syrian regime's brutality against its people, calling it worse

than Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

Masri said that like the Syrian regime, which is misleading the world by saying armed gangs are targeting the Syrian people, Hezbollah also misled the Lebanese when it claimed that the resistance liberated south Lebanon in 2000, when in fact, according to Masri, it came about thanks to a secret agreement between Iran and the U.S.

The Italian Embassy in Beirut announced Friday that Italy had sent 17 tons of humanitarian aid, worth

\$200,000, to assist the refugees.

The items include medical kits, power generators, blankets and water.

The cargo plane carrying the aid is being sent by the Italian Development Cooperation, following an appeal by the opposition Syrian National Council President Burhan Ghalioun.

The goods arrived at Beirut's airport, where Italian Foreign Ministry officials handed them over to the UNHCR and the Lebanese government. — *Antoine Amrieh, with The Daily Star*

Turkey: Syria to lose more than \$100 million in transport revenue

By Ibon Villelabeitia

Reuters

ANKARA: Turkey said Friday that Syria would lose more than \$100 million a year in transport revenues as Ankara finds alternative routes to export goods to the Middle East and Gulf.

Turkey is still trading with its neighbor but has sought new trade routes to the Middle East since relations with Damascus worsened. They broke down following Ankara's increased criticism of President Bashar Assad over his crackdown on a popular uprising that began in March.

"It will be Syria who loses in this process of introducing alternative trade routes," the Turkish Economy Ministry said in a statement.

It said it had finalized talks to start exporting goods to Egypt via sea in January and from there overland to the Gulf.

Turkish trucks will go by ship to Egypt and use its Nuweiba port to trade with Jordan and Safaga port to trade with Saudi Arabia. Turkey said it was also studying other routes.

"After alternative trade routes start operating, Syria's loss in transportation revenues will be over \$100 million per year."

Syria will lose 'in this process of introducing alternative trade routes'

It calculated this based on the 46,000 Turkish trucks that passed through Syria in 2010, with Syrian charges per truck of \$2,135.

Turkish truck drivers who return from Syria have described chaos on the road to Homs, a center of opposition to government forces, saying they were sometimes caught in the cross-fire and saw bodies lying by the road and burned-out military vehicles.

They have complained of being singled out by Syrian state forces because of Ankara's tough stance toward Damascus.

Muslim Turkey, a rising economic and political power in the Middle East, was one of Syria's closest regional allies and Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan built a strong rapport with Assad.

But as the violence worsened and Assad ignored Erdogan's advice to halt the crackdown and make urgent reforms, relations turned frosty and Erdogan has bluntly told Assad he should quit.

Earlier this month, non-Arab Turkey followed a move by the Arab League to impose sanctions on Syria which it said would target the government, including freezing state assets, banning entry by senior officials and suspending financial transactions. Syria responded by suspending a bilateral free-trade agreement and imposing a 30 percent tariff on all Turkish imports and prohibitive duties on fuel and freight.

Turkey was a major trading partner for Syria with bilateral trade last year totaling about \$2.5 billion.

Turkey and allies want Syria's Assad gone but not just yet

The main worry, Syria watchers say, is that what began nine months ago as a civic uprising is turning into a shooting war capable of spilling into a lethal sectarian conflict – especially as the predominantly Alawite rulers are whipping up the fears of Syria's minorities that they will be crushed by the country's Sunn majority.

This deadly cocktail could then be expected to Syria's fragile multi-confessional neighbors, particularly Lebanon and Iraq, where Damascus has fanned and exploited sectarian divisions in the past – and Turkey itself, where Ankara suspects Syria has already resumed support for Kurdish insurgents in the southeast.

While Ankara has publicly warned Damascus against encouraging the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) to step up its attacks, and raised the stakes by joining Europe, the United States and the Arab League in sanctions against the Assad government, most observers believe Turkey is extremely reluctant to take any military action.

"The key priority is for the opposition inside and outside [Syria] to come together, become a more credible option and include all sects and get their coordination right," Turkey's working on that," a senior Western diplomat in Ankara told Reuters. "What worries them is that if Assad went today there will be more chaos, more de-sectarian and they don't know who will emerge and they want the opposition to be ready."

"I don't expect any military action by the Turkish government unless there is an international consensus and a U.N. Security Council resolution or NATO operation," says Mustafa Akyol, author of "Islam without extremes: a Muslim case for Liberty."

"They will be more concerned

ANKARA: Turkey, with strong backing from its Arab and Western allies, very much wants Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down – but not just yet.

Under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his post-Islamist ruling party, Turkey has become the main organizing hub for Syria's opposition – the 260 member Abrair Syrian National Council, and the Free Syrian Army, comprising mainly Sunni army defectors.

But across the region and in Western capitals there are fears that Assad's opponents are not ready to take power, and that Syria's ethnic and sectarian mosaic could disintegrate and plunge the country of 22 million into chaos unless a way is found to smooth the transition.

"The key priority is for the opposition inside and outside [Syria] to come together, become a more credible option and include all sects and get their coordination right," Turkey's working on that," a senior Western diplomat in Ankara told Reuters. "What worries them is that if Assad went today there will be more chaos, more de-sectarian and they don't know who will emerge and they want the opposition to be ready."

Kurds in its ranks ... and the government believes that Assad is supporting Right now the PKK against Turkey," said Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat now head of the liberal EDAM think tank in Istanbul, says Ankara is wary of any return of decades ago, when Kurdish refugees from Saddam Hussein streamed over the Turkish border in the aftermath of the Gulf War, and might now move to create a safe haven or humanitarian corridor inside Syria.

"Turkey certainly doesn't want a repeat of 1991, when 550,000 Kurds crossed the border in a matter of days and we were caught unprepared," said Ulgen. "But Turkey would not do it [a safe haven] unilaterally. It still would need its partners and NATO support, but as things stand there is no reason why NATO would stay away from that." The U.S., France, and Turkey are on the same wavelength, said Ulgen, but Turkey would still want a Security Council resolution, and regional as well as NATO support, to go ahead.

In a surprising move, Russia, Damascus' longstanding ally, offered the

Security Council Thursday a new, stronger draft resolution on Syria, raising Western hopes of U.N. action following a sharp rise in sectarian killing.

The Western diplomat, by contrast,

thinks Turkey would be reluctant to

create a humanitarian safe haven because the Kurdish situation in Syria,

year [but] now that the screws have been tightened, it could be shortened," he added.

Like other Turkish officials, he emphasized the need for an inclusive, nonsectarian opposition platform – which would help shorten the conflict. "They should have somebody from every part of Syria so that they are as representative as possible, to encompass all the groups in Syria, including the Alawites."

Another senior Foreign Ministry official added: "There are many reasons and many factors, whenever they have to be representative of all the sects of Syrian society. They have to work on it. I don't see them there yet."

Nor does he see as viable another widely touted scenario: an internal coup or palace revolution against the Assad clan. "I don't see a coup possibility even by Alawites. Assad the老人 devoted a foolproof system against coups," he said, referring to Hafez Assad, Bashar's father, who held power for three decades before him.

Some Turkish views are bleaker. Soil Ozel, a prominent commentator and academic, said: "All the skeletons of sectarian strife have come out of the closet. Once the regime falls [I don't see how we avoid a major sectarian conflict if not a bloodbath.]"

He believes Turkey, which has its own unresolved ethnic divisions, will not remain untouched by this.

By Samia Nahoud
Ines