

Press mistrustful of the League observers it clamored for

SYRIA PRESS REVIEW #13

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The press is much less loquacious today about Syria. It prefers to focus its attention on the terrorist attacks in Iraq.

After vociferating for three weeks that Syria should open its borders to Arab League observers, the Atlantic and Gulf press tries to downplay the importance of their arrival:

▶ 1. *The "regime" might display less violence in their presence since extensive massacres already took place before their arrival;*

▶ 2. *Observers may not be able to meet with the victims, since they were probably whisked off to an inaccessible location;*

▶ 3. *The head of the Arab League delegation, Sudanese General Mohamed Dhab, is likely to be complacent towards the crimes of the "regime" since, allegedly, he is himself a war criminal.*

Le Monde (France)

Syrie : la répression du soulèvement tourne au massacre

Plus de 250 opposants au régime de Damas ont été tués depuis le 19 décembre

Un nouveau cran dans la répression de «l'insurrection» syrienne a été franchi ces derniers jours lorsque doit débuter, jeudi 22 décembre, la mission d'observation de la Ligue arabe, qui est censée mettre un terme aux violences.

Selon l'opposition au régime de Bachar Al-Assad, 250 personnes ont été tuées entre lundi et mardi, notamment dans la région montagneuse du Djebel Al-Zawiya (nord), l'une des rares zones qui semblait sous le contrôle de l'Armée libre de Syrie (ALS), principalement composée de déserteres de l'armée régulière. Tandis que le Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale instance de représentation de l'opposition, parlait mercredi d'un «génocide à grande échelle», la France dénonce une «tuerie d'ampleur sans précédent».

«Nous sommes entrés dans la phase des massacres et il va durer», estime un analyste basé à Damas qui souhaite rester anonyme. La montée en puissance de la répression vient catalyser la radicalisation et l'émigration des bases du régime. Il n'y a plus d'opposition politique. On va pour tout :

«C'est pas le signe que le régime reprend la main. C'est le signe qu'il perd de plus en plus le contrôle»

Un analyste à Damas

Selon des témoignages convergents – quoiqu'irréversibles sur le terrain où les milices étrangères sont présentes non grates –, un bain de sang a été commis mardi dans le gros bourg de Kafr Awid, dans la province d'Idlib, située à quelques dizaines de kilomètres de la frontière turque. Les forces de sécurité du régime syrien y auraient mené un massacre pour endiguer un groupe d'opposants qui s'y étaient réfugiés, causant la mort d'une centaine de personnes.

Plusieurs sources, jointes par téléphone, parlent de «barrages», de «cadavres par milliers» (les routes), de «manifestants pourchassés dans les montagnes» et du fait que des femmes et des enfants auraient été utilisés comme «boucliers humains» par les miliciens pro-Assad. L'un des chefs de Kafr Awid, Ahmad Al-Falah, aurait été décapité et sa tête exhibée devant la conquête nord de la ville. «L'ennemi va continuer à chasser Kafr Awid par-

te aux déserteres», affirme Hamza Kodmani, la porte-parole du CNS. Des colères de l'indé s'en approchent à nouveau. On redoute une nouvelle attaque.

L'acharnement des autorités syriennes sur cette région s'explique vraisemblablement par sa proximité avec la Turquie, où de nombreux officiers de l'ALS ont trouvé refuge. Le régime de Bachar Al-Assad cherchera à éviter ainsi qu'une zone tampon de fait ne se mette en place, qui pourrait être ravitaillée en armes depuis les villes d'Anatolie voisines. Au mois de juin, de violents combats entre des groupes de déserteres et l'armée syrienne s'étaient déjà déroulés, dans une autre localité de cette région, Jar Al-Choughour.

Le déferlement de violence intervient alors que le mouvement de désobéissance civile, lancé le 15 décembre par l'opposition, prend de l'ampleur. Mercredi, des dizaines de chars ont pris d'assaut la ville de Dail, dans la province de Damas (sud), pour briser la grève qui y sévit depuis une semaine. Vingt-deux personnes, dont six déserteres, un civil et quinze membres des forces gouvernementales ont péri lors d'affrontements, rapporte l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Par ailleurs, cinq ingénieurs travaillant à un projet de centrale électrique ont été enlevés mardi à Hama (centre).

«L'insurrection en Syrie ne répond pas à peu d'intérêts qui privilégient jusqu'à la rébellion pacifique», explique l'analyste. Elle est le «compartiment étanche» du pays voulu par le pouvoir. Celui-ci est forcé de se recroquer autour d'un noyau familial, entouré de milices armées. C'est pour cela que c'est de plus en plus sauvage. Ce n'est pas le signe que le régime reprend la main. C'est le signe qu'il perd de plus en plus le contrôle.

Persuadé que la mission d'observation arabe n'est qu'une «manœuvre» du clan Assad, le CNS appelle à une réunion d'urgence du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies. La source à Damas met en garde cependant contre «le risque d'une frontalisation des tensions». Compte tenu du fait que la culture militaire ne se développe et que les «consciences confessionnelles s'accroissent», je ne suis pas sûr que le jour d'après le départ de Bachar ne nous ramène pas au jour d'après. Si la crise traîne en longueur, il faudra plutôt imaginer un scénario à la Libanais.

BERNARD BERTHOUD

Les Russes avaient provoqué la surprise, et les comptes rendus des autres Brics tendaient à confirmer les craintes du Conseil de sécurité (Bretzel, Indu, Chavaz et Adjevi du Sud), lorsqu'ils ont annoncé un projet de résolution mettant en jeu plus de précision sur les armes.

En guise d'accompagnement, les Espagnols, voulant par les Américains, ont fait apporter une longue série de marchandises au fort même, consistant à New

proclamação, os regimes autoritários, em nome do Estado, não interferem entre as decisões políticas por oposição e laços ideológicos criados por lealdade, ou simplesmente criados por lealdade, ou

oprit de nombreuses violations des droits de l'homme. Parmi les accusés figure la dernière d'une commission d'enquête et la possibilité de reprendre en justice des victimes contre les auteurs. Les Comités ont également souligné un retrait immédiat des forces de l'ordre des villages rebelles. L'ouverture aux

Boarder du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, à New York, université de Montréal.

Les aménagements permettront de rendre la « rivière » et le « canal » plus beaux, sains, agréables et dynamiques en Canal de France. Les Occidentaux restent éblouis. Mais on trouve l'inspiration de vos idées dans les choses. La Bascle, qui connaît la présidence française du Conseil de l'Europe, n'a tenu qu'une seule séance d'experts depuis le départ de son mandat. Sans la présidence générale, elle n'aurait pas pu organiser une conférence régionale.

L'effet d'observateurs de la ligne, ainsi que le postulat parallèlement de l'ordre le mouvement de l'observateur de l'observateur, ont été étudiés. - N° 10 dans la partie 10 de la série.

Le Figaro (France)

Un général controversé pour enquêter sur la répression

PIERRE FIECH

LA CRÉDIBILITÉ de la mission d'observation de la Ligue arabe en Syrie repose sur les épaules d'un général soudanais, ancien chef des services secrets, vétéran du Darfour et de la lutte contre les séparatistes du Sud.

Le général Mohammed Ahmed Dahi, âgé de 63 ans, devrait partir dimanche pour Damas, après l'arrivée, hier, d'un groupe d'éclaireurs. Il aura la lourde tâche de dire si la Syrie se conforme aux exigences du plan de paix arabe. Avec, à la clé, une victoire ou une défaite diplomatique cruciale pour Damas. Les opposants du Conseil national syrien ont déjà dénoncé l'incongruité de voir une figure militaire de Khartoum enquêter sur les crimes de la dictature syrienne, alors que le président soudanais Omar el-Béchir est inculpé par la Cour de pé-

nale internationale pour crimes contre l'humanité dans la province rebelle du Darfour.

Le général Dahi n'est pas lui-même inculpé, mais il est placé au cœur du pouvoir soudanais. Nommé chef des renseignements militaires le jour même

ment aérien de civils à l'utilisation courante de milices arabes esclavagistes.

Nommé ambassadeur au Qatar jusqu'en 2004, le général Dahi a ensuite dirigé la commission chargée de coordonner au Darfour l'action du gouvernement avec celle de l'ONU et de l'Union africaine, qui ont été toutes deux en but à de nombreuses vexations.

« Il fallait un militaire »

La Ligue arabe n'avait guère le choix, plaide un diplomate arabe. « Il fallait un militaire, avec l'expérience du terrain, il fallait aussi, comme c'est la règle, évaluer les ressortissants des pays trop proches. Enfin, la Syrie n'aurait jamais accepté un directeur issu des pays du Golfe, qui mènent l'offensive diplomatique contre le régime. »

L'expérience du général Dahi au Darfour pourra lui être utile. Les futurs dé-

la prison que l'on nettoie de fond en comble avant leur visite aux zones de combats interdites sous prétexte d'assurer leur sécurité.

Les observateurs ne seront pas dupes, assure le diplomate. « Si on les empêche de travailler, ils devraient en rendre compte dans des rapports quotidiens. » La mission, insiste-t-il, « devra dire s'il y a un retour à la normalité sur le terrain ». Cette « normalité », insiste notre interlocuteur, ce n'est pas seulement l'arrêt des violences, mais aussi la libération des prisonniers, par exemple. Le plan de paix arabe doit ensuite déboucher sur un dialogue avec l'opposition. Une issue rejetée par la rue syrienne. La manifestation d'hier était baptisée « Vendredi contre le protocole de la mort », en référence à l'accord sur l'envoi des observateurs arabes, une manœuvre du pouvoir selon les opposants. ■

Le plan de paix arabe doit ensuite déboucher sur un dialogue avec l'opposition

du coup d'État islamiste d'Omar el-Béchir, en juin 1989, il a par la suite dirigé les renseignements extérieurs en 1995, avant de prendre pendant quatre ans la direction des opérations militaires au Sud, de 1996 à 1999. La lutte contre les séparatistes sudistes, avant l'indépendance du Soudan du Sud, a comporté de nombreuses exactions, du bombarde-

De Standaard (Belgique / Belgium)

DEZE WEEK VIELEN MINSTENS TWEEHONDERD DODEN IN NOORDELIJKE PROVINCIE IDLIB

Arabische waarnemers landen in kolkend Syrië

De eerste waarnemers van de Arabische Liga landen gisteravond in Syrië. Ook in de grote steden Damascus en Aleppo begint het duidelijk te borrelen.

- Rebelle belandt in hoofdstad Damascus
- Engelstalige krant uit vlijmscherpe kritiek
- Bloedvergieten gaat onverminderd voort

VAN GAZI CORRESPONDENT
IN HET MIDDEN-GOSTEN

JOHN DE COCK

REINJOET | Het lijkt op een kleine symbolische actie, maar veel Syriërs is de symboliek niet ontgaan: onbekende durfalten gingen woensdag de groen-wit-zwarte vlag van de Syrische rebelle aan een toren van de Citadel van Saladin, het historische militaire bolwerk in de Oude Stad van Damascus.

De Syrische oppositie kon moeilijk een duidelijker teken geven dat de rebelle in het hart van de hoofdstad is aanbeland, nadat

maandenlang vooral de provincies op straat waren gekomen. Deze week trokken ook sporadische duizenden mensen door Midan, een volkswijk net ten zuiden van de Oude Stad, nadat daar een dertienjarig meisje was doodgeschoten door de 'vrijheidsregerie'.

Gisteren konden de afgezanten van Balaafna Engilish, de enige Engelstalige krant van Syrië, hun eigen niet geloven toen ze een vlijmscherpe kritiek op het regime lieten. Het blad is eigendom van een bekende regimegetrouwe familie en volgde sinds het begin van de revolutie strikt de regeringlijn. In de laatste editie voor de krant wordt gesloten om 'financiële redenen', kon de hoofdredacteur gisteren blijkbaar de censuur ontzeilen: het regime 'is totaal geliciteerd' van de werkelijkheid, schreef hij.

'De minister van Economie zegt dat de prijzen en de waardever-



Cynische boodschap van belogende Syrië: 'Supporters van Assad'.

sen stabiel zijn, terwijl iedereen die met zijn eigen geld moet betalen, weet dat alles minstens de helft duurder is geworden.' Of nog: 'Hoe kunnen de mensen de staatmedia geloven als die in negen maanden nog nooit zijn in geslaagd één beeld van oppositie-begrijping uit te zenden?'

'Bloed wordt generozer vergoten dan ooit', aldus de krant. Zonder verregaande toezeggingen – in de eerste plaats van het regime – ziet de toekomst er 'nog donkerder' uit. Naar Syrische

surveys is zo'n kritiek in een krant ongezien.

'Vredesproces'

Gisteravond landde in Damascus een kleine voorhoede van waarnemers van de Arabische Liga, die volgende week aan 150 monities moet bestaan. Zij moeten toezien op het naleven van het 'Arabische vredesprotocol' dat het regime van president Bashar al Assad na lang twisten afloot met de Liga. Het regime moet zijn hoger terugtrekken uit de straten,

duizenden politieke gevangenen vrijlaten en een dialoog met de oppositie aangaan.

'Het regime hoopt alleen op tijdswinst en probeert de internationale druk te massen', reageerde een Syrische oppositant gisteren aan *De Standaard*. 'Ze proberen de waarnemers te belazeren; legerwagens in Damascus worden

'Bloed wordt generozer vergoten dan ooit'

illegaal geschilderd om te dwarslopen of ze van de politie zijn. Gewone criminelen worden vrijgelaten in plaats van democratische opposanten. De doodstraf is al opgeheven tot zes levensjaren'.

Bij zware gevechten in de noordelijke provincie Idlib tussen het regeringsleger en deserteurs kwamen deze week minstens tweehonderd mensen om. Het lijkt erop dat het regime-Assad nog steeds orde op zaken weet stellen voor de waarnemers van de Arabische Liga arriveerden.

Tagesspiegel (Allemagne / Germany)

Kein Ende der Kämpfe und Massaker in Assads Reich

SYRIEN Ein sudanesischer General leitet die Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga

DAMASKUS/BERLIN *dpa/afp/taz* | Wenige Stunden vor Ankunft der ersten arabischen Beobachter in Syrien haben Aktivisten dem Regime von Präsident Baschar al-Assad neue Massaker an Oppositionellen vorgeworfen. Sie berichteten am Donnerstag, dass regimetreue Kräfte am Mittwoch im Bezirk Dschabal al-Sawija 70 Menschen getötet hätten. In dem Dorf Flaifel hätten die Regierungstruppen ein Massengrab ausgehoben, um ihre Opfer dort zu verscharren. Der Bezirk befindet sich in der nördlichen Provinz Idlib.

Ein Syrer aus Dschabal al-Sawija, der vor einigen Tagen in die Türkei geflohen war, sagte in einem Telefoninterview, Augenzeugen hätten ihm berichtet, die Armee habe auch am Mittwoch wieder mehrere Dörfer attackiert. Die Bewohner der Ortschaft Kafr Owaid seien aufgefordert worden, in ihren Häusern zu bleiben. Wer sich auf der Straße blicken lasse, werde erschossen. Alle Apotheken und das einzige Krankenhaus der Region seien zerstört. Ein Feldlazarett der Regimegegner sei beschossen worden. Die Opposition rief für Freitag unter dem Motto „Protokoll des Tötens“ zu neuen Massenprotesten auf.

Die Arabische Liga schickte am Donnerstag ein erstes Team von Experten nach Damaskus, das die geplante Beobachtermission von insgesamt 150 Personen vorbereiten sollte. Die Mission wird vom sudanesischen General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi geleitet, der auf eine lange Karriere in Militär und Geheimdienst zurückblickt. So war er vom 30. Juni 1989, dem Tag, als Präsident Omar al-Baschir die Macht ergriff, bis August 1995 Leiter des Militärischen Geheimdienstes. Nach einem kurzen Zwischenspiel als Chef der Auslandsspionage leitete er von 1996 bis 1999 die militärischen Operationen gegen den nach Unabhängigkeit strebenden Südsudan. Auch in Darfur, wo 2003 ein bewaffneter Konflikt ausbrach, war er im Einsatz, unter anderem als Ansprechpartner für die UNO.

Die Entsendung der Beobachter gehört zu einem Plan der Arabischen Liga vom 2. November. Sie fordert ein Ende der Gewalt, den Rückzug der bewaffneten Kräfte des Regimes aus den Städten und die Freilassung der Gefangenen. Mehrere Vertreter der syrischen Position erklärten, die Mission sei Teil einer Verschwörung des Regimes. **B.S.**

The Independent (Royaumne-Uni / United Kingdom)

Syrian 'bloodbath' on eve of Arab League's mission

By MATTHEW KALMAN
in Jerusalem

A town from the Arab League arrived in Syria yesterday amid an internal local curfew over a "bloodbath" that saw more than 200 people killed by President Bashar al-Assad's regime in just two days.

Activists have accused government forces of a major escalation in violence ahead of arrival of foreign observers. The advance delegation is tasked with arranging for the arrival of 20 foreign monitors at the weekend and eventu-

ally increasing the numbers to 300. "They are trying to buy time, one hour after another, hoping to gain the upper hand on the ground," said an activist from the village of Kfar Owaid, the scene of one of the most brutal acts in the uprising so far with more than 100 people slaughtered in the village on Tuesday. Eyewitnesses said troops surrounded residents and activists in a valley and unleashed a barrage of machine, tank shells, bombs and gunfire in an assault that one witness described as an "organised massacre".

At least another 99 people were killed yesterday as government troops in the city of Hama, says the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Up to 70 deserting soldiers were reportedly pinned down on Monday as they tried to flee their positions. Since the protests erupted in March, more than 5,000 people have been killed, according to the UN.

Barham al-Hadoud, leader of the Syrian National Council yesterday called on the UN to "urgently intervene". Turkey, once a close ally of Damascus, warned the violence was in stark contrast to the

spirit of the Arab League deal Syria signed up to and is raising doubts about the regime's "true intentions". The Turkish Foreign Ministry said yesterday: "We strongly condemn the Syrian leadership's policies of oppression against its own people, which are turning the country into a bloodbath." The UN toughened its rhetoric after the attack on Kfar

Owaid, accusing Syria of trying to "mow down" its own people. In the Syrian city of Aleppo, activists posted yesterday videos and photographs of thousands of government troops wearing the campaign firing line gun on the fourth day of a student sit-down protest.

Elsewhere, independent news channels posted videos of Syrian soldiers who they said had defected to the anti-government side, suggesting Assad is fast losing his grip on his security forces who are transferring their weapons and expertise to the opposition.

Publico (Portugal)

Observadores da Liga Árabe chegaram finalmente à Síria

Síria Síria

Dirigentes da missão internacional chegaram a Damasco no mesmo dia em que oposição denunciou "massacre sem precedentes" em Idlib

Os primeiros sete representantes de uma missão de observação da Liga Árabe à Síria chegaram ontem finalmente a Damasco, cerca de seis semanas depois do Presidente Bashar al-Assad ter concordado com a presença de monitores internacionais para avaliar a situação de segurança no país, após nove meses de results porparar.

A partida destes primeiros grupos, liderado pelo vice-secretário geral da Liga Árabe, Samir Safir al-Yazul, coincide com a denúncia de mais violência contra manifestantes por parte do regime. No sábado, arrancará um outro grupo, que incluirá especialistas em direitos humanos e questões de segurança, e observadores de assuntos jurídicos e administrativos - que mais tarde anunciarão quais os locais que pretendem visitar no âmbito da sua missão.

Segundo o Observatório Sírio para os Direitos Humanos, sediado em Londres, nos últimos dois dias mais de 250 pessoas foram mortas pelas forças do regime num "massacre sem precedentes" na cidade de Idlib, incluindo soldados que terão sido sumariamente executados depois de desertarem das

A repressão

6237

6237 pessoas já morreram desde Março, incluindo 915 militares, diz o Avaz; segundo o grupo de mobilização, 69 mil pessoas foram presas - destas, 27 mil permanecem detidas

filícias do exército. Outros foram denunciados mais 15 mortes, 17 na devastada cidade de Homs e três em Idlib, junto à fronteira com a Turquia.

O grupo de oposição Conselho Nacional da Síria, formado em Jarmabul, exigiu a concessão de uma reunião de emergência do Conselho de Segurança da Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU) para "discutir os massacres do regime em Jafar al-Zawiyra, Idlib e Homs", e para encetar a possibilidade de estabelecimento de "zonas de segurança" sob proteção internacional, onde a população poderá abrigar-se.

Numa carta emitida às Nações Unidas e citada pela agência estatal SANA, o regime voltou a descartar qualquer responsabilidade pela violência, acusando "grupos de terroristas" não especificados, que estão a receber "milhares de dólares em dinheiro, armamentos, apoio logístico e médico", com o objetivo de sabotar a Síria. Na mes-

ma missão, o regime alega que entre as 5000 vítimas da violência referidas pela Alta Comissária da ONU para os Direitos Humanos, Navi Pillay, encontram-se "mais de 2000 militares das forças de segurança e do exército".

A comunidade internacional de mobilização Avaz diz que outros que 6237 pessoas morreram na Síria desde o início da contestação ao regime de Bashar al-Assad, em Março, incluindo 915 membros do exército e polícia. Todas as mortes, informa a organização, foram confirmadas por três fontes independentes.

No mesmo comunicado, a Avaz diz que 69 mil pessoas foram detidas pelo regime. Até à data, 32 mil pessoas foram libertadas e 27 mil ainda permanecem encarceradas.

New York Times – International Herald Tribune (USA)

Arab League delegates arrive in Syria

BEIRUT

BY KAREEM FAHIM

Delegates from the Arab League traveled to Syria on Thursday to see whether the government of President Bashar al-Assad keeps its promises to withdraw heavy military weapons from the country's cities and start a dialogue with its opponents. The delegation's arrival is the first step in a planned deployment of hundreds of outside observers.

Meanwhile, human rights activists reported continuing violence in the Jabal Zawiya area, in northwestern Syria and near the Turkish border. At least 160 people have been killed over the past four days, activists said, after government troops mounted a large scale attack on defecting soldiers in the area.

A video posted on the Internet was said by activists to show the bodies of dozens of men who were killed in the fighting, many with badly disfigured faces. The video, posted by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in London, showed at least 43 bodies in a row on the ground.

At least 70 recently defected soldiers

were killed in the fighting, according to leaders of a militia, the Free Syrian Army, that is composed of defectors. They said other defectors were hiding in the mountains along with civilians who had fled their homes, and were surrounded by Mr. Assad's forces.

Turkey added strong criticism on Thursday to growing international condemnation of the Syrian government's violence. A statement on the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Web site called on Syria to end its "policy of oppression."

"No administration can emerge victorious from a fight against its own people," the statement said.

The head of the Arab League delegation, Samir el-Yazal, said he and the other members would work with top Syrian officials to choose where to send observers. The Associated Press reported.

Opposition groups and human rights activists have expressed doubts about whether the league's observers will be able to complete their work without interference from the Assad government. They have also questioned the choice of its leader, Gen. Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, a former head of military intelligence in Sudan.

Egypt premier seeks talks

Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzouri on Thursday called for national dialogue to resolve the Egypt's political crisis and pleaded for a two-month calm to restore security after weeks of protests and bloodshed. The Associated Press reported from Cairo.

Mr. Ganzouri, who was appointed by the military, also said it was eager to relinquish power to civilian rule, as demanded by some activists and those still staging protests in Cairo in the streets around Tahrir Square.

"They want to leave today, not tomorrow," he said without elaborating.

Few, if any, of the activists demanding an immediate end to military rule, however, are likely to take up the offer of dialogue. Instead, they are focused on finding ways to persuade and pressure the generals to quickly step aside, like offering them immunity over the deaths of protesters.

The death toll from violence over the past week near Tahrir Square reached 17 on Thursday after 2 protesters died of their wounds, the Health Ministry said.

Wall Street Journal (USA)



European Pressphoto Agency

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, center, with a delegation of clan leaders in Damascus on Thursday, shown in a handout photo from Syria's Sana news agency.

Arab Observers Head to Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT—Arab League delegates traveled to Syria on Thursday to arrange the deployment of foreign monitors under a plan aimed at ending the regime's deadly nine-month-old crackdown on dissent.

The delegates arrive in the midst of a new international uproar over activist reports that government troops killed more than 200 people in two days, with Turkey condemning President Bashar al-Assad over the "bloodbath."

The opposition says it suspects Mr. Assad's agreement to allow hundreds of Arab League monitors in after weeks of stalling is only a tactic to buy time and ward off a new round of international sanctions.

"The Syrian regime has exploited signing the Arab League initiative to escalate the brutal military campaign against revolting towns and cities," said Burhan Ghalioun, leader of the Syrian National Council, Syria's main opposition group.

Mr. Ghalioun called on the United Nations to "urgently intervene" to stop the bloodshed, saying

the Arab peace initiative was no longer enough.

Fresh raids and gunfire by government forces on Thursday killed at least 19 people, most of them in the central city of Homs and northern Idlib province, according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Local Coordination Committees.

Activists have accused government troops of a massacre on Tuesday in Kfar Oweid, a village in the rugged mountains near Syria's northern border with Turkey. A witness and activist groups said military forces surrounded about 110 unarmed civilians and trapped them in a valley, then proceeded to systematically kill all of them in an hours-long barrage with tanks, bombs and gunfire. No one survived the onslaught, the activists said.

Turkey, which before the uprising was a close ally of Syria, said the violence flew in the face of the spirit of the Arab League deal that Syria signed and raises doubts about the regime's true intentions.

"We strongly condemn the Syrian leadership's policies of oppres-

sion against its own people, which are turning the country into a bloodbath," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said. It added that no administration "can come out a winner from a struggle against its own people."

On Wednesday, the Obama administration said it was "deeply disturbed" by Tuesday's attack on Kfar Oweid and accused the Syrian government of continuing to "mow down" its people. The French foreign ministry said everything must be done to stop this "murderous spiral."

The United Nations says more than 5,000 people have died since March as Syria has sought to put down the uprising—part of the Arab Spring protests that have toppled long-serving unpopular leaders in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Activists said given the high death toll of the past few days, the government appears to be trying to control the situation on the ground before the full Arab League monitoring team arrives.

Activists said government forces appeared to have gained full control

of the rebellious Jabal al-Zawiya region, where Kfar Oweid is located, as of Wednesday evening.

Many activists blamed the Arab League for giving the Syrian regime a lifeline and a chance to kill more people, and called for nationwide protests on Friday against the observer mission.

In addition to the monitors, the Arab League plan calls for Syria to halt its crackdown, open talks with the opposition, withdraw military forces from city streets and allow in human-rights workers and journalists.

The 22-member Arab League has also suspended Syria's membership and leveled economic and diplomatic sanctions.

The Syrian government hasn't commented on the death toll in Kfar Oweid and other areas in the past few days, but state-run news agency SANA said Thursday that its forces stormed areas in southern and northern Syria, arresting and killings dozens of "terrorists" during raids and clashes. Syria blames terrorists and foreign agents for the uprising.

Los Angeles Times (USA)

First Arab League team arrives in Syria

ALEXANDRA ZAVIS
AND RIMA MARROUCH
REPORTING FROM BEIRUT

Syrian opposition activists said there was no letup in a government crackdown as an advance team from the Arab League arrived in the country Thursday to prepare for the arrival of observers to assess whether the government is complying with a peace initiative.

Antigovernment activists are skeptical that President Bashar Assad's administration is sincere about implementing the agreement, which calls for a withdrawal of security forces from the streets, the release of political prisoners and dialogue with the opposition.

They accuse the government of buying time and trying to avoid greater international involvement in a crisis that the United Nations says has killed more than 5,000 people since the start of major antigovernment protests in March.

Syrian officials lay blame for the bloodshed on foreign-backed armed gangs, but say they are committed to finding a political solution.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency said the government sent a letter to U.N. entities Thursday complaining that more than 2,000 members of its security forces had been killed, but that it still faced denials that terrorists are operating inside Syria.

Syria has barred most foreign journalists, making it almost impossible to verify the accounts of either side.

The Arab League delegation arrived amid an international outcry over reports that Syrian forces had killed more than 200 activists, residents and insurgents in two days of violence this week in a mountainous region near the Turkish border. Turkey, a former ally, is now harboring both armed and peaceful dissident groups from Syria. It accuses Damascus of cre-



Ugarit News Group

AN ARMORED VEHICLE is reportedly seen in Damascus in an image from video. Activists say there has been no letup in a government crackdown.

ating a "bloodbath."

The Jabal Zawiya region had become a haven for army defectors, and has been the scene of fierce clashes and major protests.

Mohammed Fizo, a member of the Syrian Revolution General Commission reached in southern Turkey, said government forces were going house to house Thursday in Jabal Zawiya, arresting males between the ages of 15 and 45. The organization is one of many groups that has formed in opposition to Assad.

"Anyone who participated in demonstrations is being taken away," Fizo said.

He questioned what the Arab League can achieve with so few monitors. A team of about 30 is expected to arrive in Syria this weekend and grow to about 150 by the end of December, according to a league official who asked not to be identified because he is not authorized to speak to journalists.

That "is not enough to understand what happened in the Jabal Zawiya mountains, not to mention the whole country," Fizo said.

The Local Coordination Committees, a network of opposition activists, said security forces killed as many as 35 people across the country Thursday.

The largest number of deaths, 25, was reported in the central Homs region, where there have been almost daily protests and escalating clashes between government forces and army defectors.

An activist reached in the city of Homs said there was no sign that the government was easing its crackdown.

The activist, who identified himself as Shadi, said he had seen an older man shot in the head at a checkpoint in downtown Homs on Thursday. "People don't have much hope or expectations from the observers," he said. "Do they really need more evidence that we are being killed?"

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Marrouch is a special correspondent. News assistant Amro Hassan in The Times' Cairo bureau contributed to this report.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Arab League deploys staff to Syria ahead of monitors' arrival

Observers are 'waste of time,' analyst says

• By OREN KESSLER

A team from the Arab League arrived in Syria on Thursday, ahead of the deployment of monitors to judge whether Damascus was implementing a peace plan to which it agreed last month.

The plan – to be supervised by some 150 monitors –

entails a withdrawal of troops from Syrian cities, the release of prisoners and dialogue with the opposition.

Arab League sources have said the advance team has a dozen members, including financial, administrative and legal experts to ensure monitors have free access across Syria. The government of President Bashar Assad stalled for six weeks before signing a protocol on Monday to admit the monitors; the main group is to arrive by the end of the month.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 21 people were killed on Thursday. Most were in the central city of Homs, but some were in the northern province of Idlib and the southern province of Deraa, where the anti-Assad protests first broke

SHABBAT	BEGINS	ENDS
Jerusalem	4:00 p.m.	5:20 p.m.
Tel Aviv	4:19 p.m.	5:22 p.m.
Haifa	4:08 p.m.	5:19 p.m.
Beersheba	4:21 p.m.	5:23 p.m.
Eilat	4:24 p.m.	5:26 p.m.



newal of the export authorizations. Such damages may have a material impact on the company's financial results," Elbit said.

Israel's ties with Turkey hit rock-bottom earlier this year, when Ankara expelled the Israeli ambassador after the United Nations published its report on the 2010 flotilla incident. The report justified Israel's sea blockade over the Gaza Strip. Since the flotilla, diplomatic and military ties have been at a bare minimum.

In response to Elbit's statement, the Defense Ministry stated: "The Defense Ministry is holding regular discussions with all of the relevant authorities and decisions are made on a professional basis and in line with security and diplomatic considerations." •

ARAB LEAGUE

Continued from Page 1

out in March. Thursday's deaths came after Syrian forces surrounded and killed 111 people this week in Idlib in the deadliest assault since the uprising began.

Analysts cautioned against raising expectations that the monitors' arrival would have an appreciable effect in stopping the violence.

"It's a complete waste of time, since the agreement has already been watered down by the regime," said

Michael Weiss, communications director at the Henry Jackson Society, a London-based foreign policy think tank. "The escalation in violence we've seen in the last 48 hours... was an attempt to clear the decks and destroy the revolution once and for all in advance of this bit of theater."

He told *The Jerusalem Post* by phone that "this regime is dead set on killing every man, woman and child who hits the street to protest in favor of toppling the government and instituting democracy. Anyone who thinks that will change, or that Assad will go quietly or accept some kind of asylum deal, is kidding himself."

Weiss authored a strategic briefing paper released this week, which argues that despite the hazards of military intervention, the creation of civilian "safe zones" is a prerequisite for avoiding a bloodbath of catastrophic proportions.

"The only way to prevent a Rwanda-style genocide in the country is through military intervention," he said. "By doing nothing we will be left with a failed state."

Conservative estimates place the toll from the nine-month uprising at 5,000 killed and 27,000 wounded, but Weiss believes the body count is closer to 8,000. With some 50,000 people missing, he

said, that figure could be much higher still.

Syrian authorities said on Thursday that 2,000 soldiers and security force members had been killed since March. That figure was nearly double the previous number given by Damascus, and follows weeks of escalating attacks by army deserters and gunmen against forces loyal to Assad.

"There are more than 2,000 martyrs among the security forces and army, at a time when some still refuse to be convinced about the presence of terrorists in Syria," Syria said in a letter to the United Nations published by state news agency SANA.

The letter came in response to assertions by the UN human rights chief that Syria's crackdown could constitute crimes against humanity.

Reuters contributed to this report. •

BARKAT

Continued from Page 1

On Wednesday, Barkat reportedly met with Rabbi Shlomo Aviner of the Ateret Kohanim Yeshiva, and on Thursday with the Or Etzion Yeshiva's Rabbi Haim Druckman. Druckman expressed support for the proposal, according to Israel Radio.

Approximately 60,000 Jerusalem residents live on the PA side of the barrier in municipal Jerusalem, in five major neighborhoods of Kafr

Daily Star (Lebanon / Liban)

Arab League team in Syria to set stage for monitors

BEIRUT: An advance team from the Arab League arrived in Syria Thursday ahead of the deployment of monitors to judge whether Damascus is implementing a peace plan it agreed last month.

The plan entails a withdrawal of troops from the streets, release of prisoners and dialogue with the opposition. Thousands have died in a crackdown on protests against President Bashar Assad and, increasingly, in fighting between mutinous troops and security forces.

Arab League sources have said the advance team, led by top League official Samir Seif al-Yazal, comprises a dozen people, including financial, administrative and legal experts to ensure monitors have free access across Syria.

The mission's leader, veteran Sudanese military intelligence officer General Mohammad Ahmad Mustafa al-Dabi, said its numbers would swell to a total of between 150 and 200 in the following days.

According to the protocol governing the mission, they will number an

"amount reasonable to accomplish the mission" and will include "Arab civilian and military experts chosen by Arab countries or organizations."

Their task will consist of "monitoring the cessation of violence on all sides, and to ensure the release of detainees arrested in connection with the current crisis," according to the text of the protocol.

Syria PAGE 9

Events in Syria are hard to verify because authorities have banned most independent reporting.

Syrian authorities said Thursday 2,000 soldiers and security force members had been killed in nine months of unrest.

The security forces' death toll was nearly double the previous figure given by Damascus and follows weeks of escalating attacks by army deserters and gunmen against forces loyal to President Bashar Assad.

"There are more than 2,000 martyrs

TURN TO PAGE 10

Arab League to set stage for monitors

FROM PAGE 1

among the security forces and army, at a time when some still refuse to be convinced about the presence of terrorists in Syria," Syria said in a letter to the United Nations published by state news agency SANA.

The letter came in response to accusations by the United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay that Syria's crackdown on protests – in which she said last week 5,000 people had been killed – could constitute crimes against humanity.

It also followed reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights that Syrian forces had surrounded and killed 111 people this week in the northern province of Idlib, in the deadliest assault since the uprising erupted in March.

The escalating death toll has raised the specter of civil war in Syria with Assad, 46, still trying to stamp out protests with troops and tanks despite international sanctions.

The Observatory said another 21 people were killed Thursday. Most were in the central city of Homs but some were in Idlib and the southern province of Deraa where the anti-Assad protests first broke out, inspired by the Arab Spring revolts which have overthrown rulers in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.

The British-based Observatory's director Rami Abdul-Rahman said Assad's forces appeared to be trying to crush opposition in Idlib and Deraa before the arrival of the main monitoring team.

Idlib has been a hotbed of the protest movement. As in other centers of unrest, peaceful protests have increasingly given way to armed confrontations, often led by army deserters.

The main opposition Syrian National Council said 250 people had been killed Monday and Tuesday in "bloody massacres," including a local imam it said was beheaded. It urged the Arab League and United Nations to protect civilians.

Germany's Foreign Ministry said Thursday it had summoned Syria's ambassador to Berlin to demand an immediate halt to the "brutal" repression of anti-regime demonstrators by government forces.

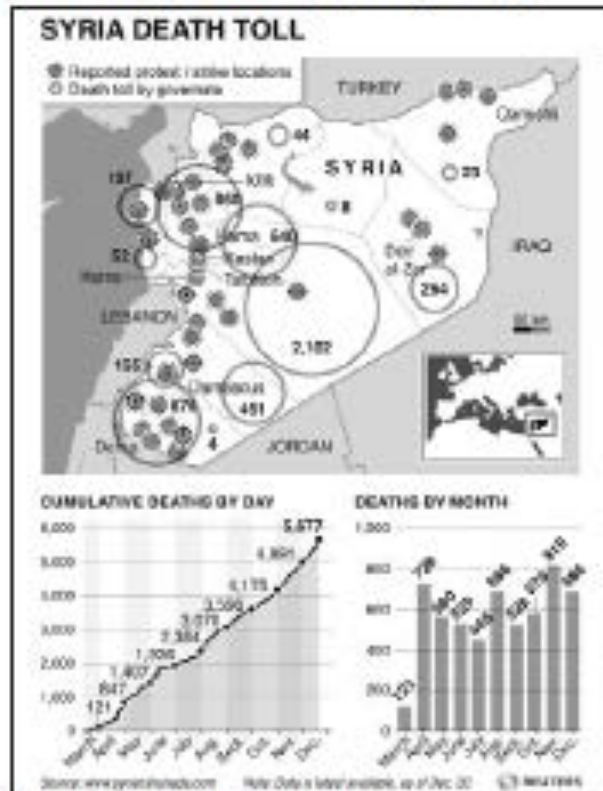
"The brutal acts by the security forces against the Syrian population are absolutely unacceptable and a flagrant violation of Syria's agreement with the Arab League," said Boris Ruge, in charge of Middle East affairs at the Foreign Ministry. "Given the crimes that have come out into the open, everyone should be asking himself if he can morally serve such a regime," he said in a statement.

Syrian officials say over 1,000 prisoners have been freed since the Arab League plan was agreed and that the army has pulled out of cities. The government has promised a parliamentary election early next year as well as constitutional reform which might loosen the ruling Baath Party's grip on power.

Syrian protesters called for protests Friday under the banner "death protocol," in reference to the Arab observers' protocol which the Syrian government signed Monday. Syrian pro-democracy activists are deeply skeptical about Assad's commitment to the plan. –Reuters, AFP

Daily Star (Liban / Lebanon)

Syria death toll higher, tops U.N. figures: rights group



Syria death toll as shown by an opposition website.

BEIRUT—A British-based rights group said Thursday the death toll in Syria's crackdown on an anti-government revolt is far higher than U.N. official figures and has reached more than 6,200 people including hundreds of children.

Syria is facing increasingly fierce international condemnation for its handling of months of demonstrations against President Bashar Assad's rule, partly inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings that have swept across North Africa and the Middle East.

Syria says it is fighting foreign-backed "terrorists" and Thursday announced that more than 2,000 of its security forces have been killed in the unrest.

Amnesty rights group said it had collected evidence of more than 6,200 deaths of civilians and security forces, 617 of them under torture. At least 400 of the dead were children, it added.

The figures were about 1,000 higher than the latest U.N. estimates, which have also been climbing sharply in recent months.

"No one can now turn a blind eye to the horror-show in Syria ... One in every 300 Syrians has either been killed or imprisoned," said Amnesty executive director Mickie Patel in a statement.

"The world faces a choice: Stand by while brutal civil war rips through

the country or it steps up the pressure to force Assad out," he added.

Security forces have detained at least 49,000 people since the uprising began in March, Amnesty said. Around 52,000 of them have since been released.

The death toll is rising sharply as the mainly peaceful protest movement against the Assad family's 41-year rule becomes overshadowed by clashes with armed rebel groups, who call themselves the Free Syrian Army.

Amnesty said that 917 in its count died in those clashes, with the casualties roughly divided between the armed rebels and Syrian security personnel.

This has been one of the bloodiest weeks of the nine-month uprising. The army's efforts to crush a revolt near the Turkish border Thursday killed more than 111 civilians and activists, another activist group said.

Amnesty said it had more than 50 monitors on the ground collecting data for its reports. Each person on its deathroll was confirmed by three individuals, it said, including a relative of the deceased and a cleric who handled the body.

The group estimates that 40 percent of the fatalities were in the central city of Hama, a protest hotspot and center of armed rebellion against security forces. —Reuters

Daily Star (Liban / Lebanon)

Terrorist charges anger refugees, Bekaa residents

Minister's Al-Qaeda comments rejected as
Arsal locals demand
Army deploy on border

By **Nabil al-Rahbi**
The Daily Star

ARSALAHASHITA HAMMOUD, Lebanon: The recent comments by Lebanese officials about the presence of Al-Qaeda fighters along the country's border with Syria are being met with exasperation and anger in the villages and towns where the number of displaced is steadily growing.

Defense Minister Fayer Ghosn made the accusation that fighters and weapons were being smuggled from areas in the Bekaa near Arsal, but for Ahmad Hleiti, a public relations official with the Arsal Development Association in the Bekaa Valley, Ghosn's comments were just an attempt to cover up for the Syrian army's intermittent incursions across the border.

Arsal saw one of its residents killed and another injured when Syrian troops fired on them last week.

"The minister of defense is the one who's responsible for controlling the borders and protecting them from incursions from the Syrian side," Hleiti said.

Residents are demanding that the army deploy all along the border, even if it means a temporary halt to lucrative smuggling in such areas.

The mayor of Arsal, Ali Muhammad Hajer, said suggestions of the entry of fundamentalist fighters and smuggling arms to Syria from crossings near Arsal were "completely true."

"All they're trying to do is put more pressure on the nearly 20 Syrian families who have taken refuge here and are receiving assistance from residents and some civil associations," he said.

Hajer said that Arsal's residents were fully ready to help the army, whether or not Al-Qaeda fighters or arms were being funneled into Syria.

However, he added that this should take place by erecting checkpoints near



Syrian children in Masha Hamroun try to remain upbeat, despite the rising death toll and flight of refugees.

the many crossing points along the porous border, and not inside the town.

Meanwhile, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of Syrians in Lebanon fleeing unrest continues to rise steadily, topping the 4,500 mark, although it is unclear whether this is due to more people crossing over or an increase in the number of people reg-

istering themselves with the U.N.

The village of Masha Hamroun in the Wadi Khaleel region of Akkar is one of the main destinations for refugees.

At the Arsal Center in Masha Hamroun, more than 200 Syrian nationals have gathered and are ready to tell their story to the media, although these refugees face a number of restrictions on their movement.

Young children welcome visitors by chanting slogans and waving pine and cypress branches, to emphasize that they are part of a peaceful protest movement against their government.

Their parents, meanwhile, focus on the political and other developments under way in Syria – the latest being the government's approval of a protocol to allow Arab observers enter the country.

Unsurprisingly, most of the refugees see the move as an attempt by the Syrian authorities to buy more time and reassert that the crisis could level off.

"If the Arab observers can get the regime to stop firing on demonstrators," said refugee Muhammad Ahmad, "then millions of people will take to the streets, demanding that the regime

be toppled."

Ahmad, who is in telephone contact with his family members in the border village of Tabbakh, says that "demonstrations in the army are rising, and the demonstrations are spreading to new areas, such as the Misan neighborhood of Damascus."

For Maher Ibrahim, who is also at the Arsal Center, there is no trust in the Syrian regime, merely hope that if the Arab observers enter Syria, refugees will be allowed to return.

Ibrahim was particularly critical of Herbolan, which has supported President Bashar Assad throughout the uprising, and biter that the situation is so different than five years ago, when tens of thousands of Lebanese were "seemingly welcomed in Syria during the July War."

"How can Herbolan consider what happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Libya a revolution, while the uprising of the Syrian people is an American-Israeli conspiracy?" he asked.

The spokesman for the refugees, Sheikh Abdul-Rahman Akkar, and his wife two weeks ago when she was gunned down by Syrian troops as she was returning from a visit to her family in Tabbakh. Two of Akkar's brothers have been arrested, and the fate of one remains unknown.

Akkar, insisting that the Syrian uprising will remain largely peaceful, is determined to see a "civil, pluralist" state arise in place of the Assad regime.

He was dismissive of the Arab League observers' mission, asking about the usefulness of issuing deadlines "to a killer, allowing him to kill more people," but is fearful that the authorities in Damascus intend to stir up problems among the ranks of the refugees to blame them for violence.

Akkar said the main problem faced by refugees is that the Lebanese government refuses to officially recognize them as such and issue the proper paperwork so that they can travel freely.

"It's as if we're in a prison, and can't leave. We have no papers allowing us to move around and not be arrested by Lebanese security personnel at the first checkpoint we try to cross," he said.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

KFAR OWAID MASSACRE WILL HAUNT SYRIA

**Arab League should take more forceful
action against the Al Assad regime**

The Syrian armed forces killed at least 111 people in one terrible day this week when they surrounded the village of Kfar Owaïd in the northern province of Idlib and unleashed a barrage of tank shells, rockets, gunfire, as well as bombs filled with nails according to witnesses. The bloodbath that left no survivors in the village, and the massacre was part of days of continuous action by the Syrian armed forces that left more than 200 Syrians dead.

This shocking death toll was perpetrated on the very day of the supposed start of the Arab League's plan to send in observers and stop the violence. The government's willingness to continue killing its own people means that it is difficult to trust it when it claims to be ready to accept the Arab League's plan to end the violence and send in observers to make sure that the troops stop shooting unarmed people.

The massacre was strongly condemned by governments around the world. The White House said it was "deeply disturbed"; France called it a "murderous spiral", and even the supine Arab League managed to remind the Al Assad government of its responsibilities to protect its civilians. More than 5,000 people have died in the nine-month uprising which has continued since March.

The killing this week requires the Arab League and its member states to take more forceful action. They cannot sit back and watch its proposals for the end of violence be ignored to such devastating effect. If the Arab League is capable of further action, then it should call another summit, and be prepared to entertain leaders of the Syrian opposition to understand how the League can facilitate a dialogue between the opposition and the government.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

No optimism in Syria

The future not look bright as the political and sectarian polarisation in the region has made things even worse

BY MARWAN AL KABALAN
Special to Gulf News

After weeks of diplomatic wrangling, the Syrian regime has finally agreed to sign a protocol to allow an Arab mission of military and civilian observers into the country. The protocol is part of an Arab League proposal to end a nine-month crackdown on protests against President Bashar Al Assad's rule.

Having come under huge Arab and international pressure to halt the brutal repression of the protest movement, the regime opted for compromise but as part of a strategy to buy more time to silence the opposition. Hence, it agreed to the Arab peace plan but without signing it.

The idea from the very beginning was to gain as much time as possible by trying to negotiate the League's proposal. Threats by the Arab League that if Syria does not sign the protocol the question would be referred to the UN Security Council forced Damascus to comply. The introduction of a draft resolution on the Syrian crisis in the UN Security Council by Russia has also put pressure on the embattled regime. Given the experience of the past months, however, few believe that the regime will honour the agreement.

Since the beginning of the uprising, the regime has imposed complete blackout, preventing any sort of independent reporting on the crisis. It is very doubtful therefore that the Arab observers will be able to verify the different accounts on the conflict, let alone alter its increasingly violent trajectory, as the

Arab League would like to have. In his latest press conference, Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Al Mua'alem, hinted at restrictions on the movement of the observers in some areas under the pretext of their safety. There are also different interpretations between the Syrian government and the Arab League on the nature and mission of the observers.

Arab League Secretary-General, Nabeel Al Arabi, stated that the protocol is mere mechanism to ensure the implementation of the Arab initiative on Syria. By contrast, the Syrian regime believes that the major task of the observers is to vindicate its contention that the unrest was the work of armed rebels, not peaceful protesters as maintained by the opposition and human rights activists.

Another major bone of contention between the two sides is the question of what has truly been agreed upon. The Syrian government says that it agreed to the protocol but not the peace initiative. The Arab League insists that the protocol is just the preamble of the initiative which Syria has already accepted on November 2.

The Arab peace plan calls on the Syrian government to remove its forces and heavy weaponry from restive cities, release all political prisoners, allow the Arab and foreign media to report freely from inside the country and finally open a dialogue with opposition groups in the Arab League Headquarters in Cairo.

One does not need to think hard to conclude that if the Syrian government agrees to implement these steps, it would certainly lead

to its demise. It is indicative that since the signing of the protocol last Monday, the daily death toll has more than doubled.

The conflict has been complicated as army defectors and armed fighters have joined opponents of the government. The political and sectarian polarisation in the region has made things even worse.

Iran, the government of Nouri Al Maliki in Iraq, and the Lebanese Hezbollah — all happen to be Shiite — are backing the regime of Al Assad. The Arab Gulf states alongside Jordan and Turkey are not hiding their support for the Syrian opposition. Syria today is in the middle of a zero-sum conflict with little prospect for political solution. The regime will exploit this situation to the maximum and will try to balk at implementing the Arab peace initiative until better conditions are in place. The opposition, playing against a master in political manipulation, has not so far proved to be as good in translating the sacrifices of Syrian protesters into political gains.

Caught in the middle of this situation, in the short run the future does not look bright for Syrians who at the moment do not have good reasons to be optimistic.

Dr. Marwan Al Kabalan is Dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy, Kalamoon University, Damascus, Syria.

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Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)



Bashar Al Assad meets a delegation of clan leaders from three cities located in the northeastern Syria, Deir Ezzour, Raqqa and Hasaka, in Damascus, on Thursday. — Reuters

League team arrives in Syria ahead of deploying monitors

CAIRO — An advance team from the Arab League arrived in Syria on Thursday ahead of deploying monitors who will assess whether Damascus is acting to end a bloody nine-month crackdown on protests against President Bashar Al Assad's rule, a League official said.

"We arrived in Damascus safely," Waguih Hanafy, a senior aide to Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby and who is travelling with the team, said by telephone from the Syrian capital.

Syria said that more than 2,000 members of its army and security forces had been killed in armed attacks since the uprising against President Assad erupted in March.

It gave the figure in a letter to the United Nations which was published by the state news agency SANA.

In Cairo, Sudanese General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa Al Dabi arrived for talks at the League headquarters to be briefed on his role in leading the 150-strong observer team that could be sent to Syria before the end of December, provided preparations go smoothly. Syria agreed in November to an

“ During our visit to Syria, we will work on some necessary arrangements to receive the mission on the ground

Samir Seif Al Yazal

Arab plan demanding an end to fighting, the withdrawal of troops from residential areas, the release of prisoners and the start of a dialogue with the opposition. It balked for six weeks over letting in monitors.

In that time, the League imposed economic sanctions and threatened to escalate the matter to the UN Security Council, while the death toll has soared as Syria has turned its troops and tanks against demonstrators. It finally signed a protocol on monitors on Monday.

Dabi, who coordinated between

Sudan's government and international peacekeepers there, told reporters at Cairo airport he would meet League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby to follow up on arrangements for the observer mission.

He said observers would work "with complete transparency to observe the situation in Syria", adding it would hold continuous meetings in the field with all factions, including the Syrian army, opposition, security forces and humanitarian groups. League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby told Reuters on Tuesday that 150-strong observers would demand free access to hospitals, prisons and other sites across the country.

He also said the team would issue daily reports that would be shown to but not vetted by the Syrian authorities. Elaraby said the monitors could be in Syria before the end of December.

The advance team making preparations for the mission is led by top League official Samir Seif Al Yazal and comprises 11 people, in-

2,000

Members of Syrian security forces killed so far

cluding financial, administrative and legal experts, officials said.

"During our visit to Syria, we will work on some necessary arrangements to receive the mission on the ground, such as accommodation, transport, communications and security," Yazal said shortly before he flew out of Cairo.

Elaraby said monitors would need no more than a week from arrival to see whether Syria was abiding by the peace plan. He said 14 four-wheel drive vehicles were being sent from Iraq to Syria to help out the observers. — Reuters

The National (EAU / UAE)

Syria monitors warned of deceptions

Torture victims being moved before Arab League team arrives

Phil Sands
Foreign Correspondent

DAMASCUS // Arab League monitors charged with overseeing an end to violence headed to Syria yesterday, with a promise of full cooperation from the authorities and warnings from activists that steps were already being taken to deceive them.

The advance group of about 12 officials, led by the senior Arab League figure, Samir Seif Al Yazal, will set up basic logistics for the monitoring teams, which are due to begin arriving on Sunday.

Their presence in Damascus coincides with one of the bloodiest periods of the nine-month uprising.

Opposition groups said more than 250 civilians and army defectors have been killed by security forces in the past 48 hours, mainly in Idlib and Deraa.

Military operations were also under way in the eastern desert city of Deir Ezzor, as well as rural Damascus, activists said.

Syrian officials describe recent military offensives as targeting only "terrorists" and have guaranteed Damascus will honour the Arab League observers agreement, signed in Cairo on Monday.

"It is in our interests to see this mission succeed, because its task is to examine the situation on the ground, and it will realise that things are not black or white - they are much more complex," said Jihad Makdissi, the foreign ministry spokesman.

The foreign minister, Walid Moallem, has said the observers will be allowed into protest hot spots. He believes the monitors' findings will support the government's insistence it is fighting armed insurgents, rather than violently suppressing largely peaceful political demonstrations as contended by

opposition groups, human rights monitors and Syria's international critics, including the United Nations.

More than 5,000 civilians and defecting soldiers have been killed by security services since March, according to the UN. It based its human rights report on testimonies collected from outside of Syria because its monitoring team was not permitted entry.

The Syrian authorities have said the report has no credibility because it was based on dubious sources.

Yesterday Syria's state-run news agency said more than 2,000 soldiers and members of the security forces have died in attacks in the past nine months. The figures were in a letter sent by the Syrian government to the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council.

The Arab League chief, Nabil Al Arabi, has acknowledged his observers faced a daunting task establishing the facts in a hotly contested environment that in places

already resembles a war zone. He called it a "completely new mission in every sense of the word".

But he also said it will take just one week to know if the Syrian authorities were complying with the deal, stressing "implementation in good faith" was essential.

Opposition activists said that good faith had already been undermined, not only by the ongoing use of deadly violence against protest neighbourhoods, but also by the authorities actively working to cover up their actions on the ground.

One of the clauses of the final protocol agreed by Syria and the Arab League prevents monitors from accessing military zones, which, according to opposition groups, gives the government wide scope to declare areas out of reach.

"They have already started moving wounded prisoners and torture victims into military facilities and military hospitals where they will be off limits to the observers," said one activist.

"They [the authorities] can put a few soldiers on guard at any building they want to hide and 'well, that's a military area so you can't go in'. They can also stop anyone talking to the ordinary soldiers."

A series of military and security installations in and around Damascus have been identified by activists as major detention facilities implicated in abuses of detainees. Those will all be out of bounds to the monitors under the terms the Arab League agreed.

No non-Syrians have been allowed to inspect detention facilities in military bases or security service offices, where the bulk of political prisoners are thought to be held. This year the Red Cross was, for the first time, given limited access to a prison for criminals in Damascus but there have been no repeat visits.

Syrian officials deny using torture against detainees and have said that all arrests are made in accordance with the law.

Arab League observers will also be required to inform the Syrian authorities in advance where they

plan to travel, although it is unclear if that will involve a detailed daily disclosure of the team's itinerary or a more general outlining of areas of interest.

With the Syrian government responsible for the monitors' safety, analysts said officials were certain to argue they must be told specific details about travel plans.

For the same reason, observers may not be able to visit areas the authorities deem to be too dangerous, activists said, or will be accompanied by armed Syrian security teams, further undermining their chances of unfettered access to protest areas.

"We expect lots of tricks, it will be a dirty game," an activist said. "Soldiers and secret police will be dressed up in ordinary police clothes, shabbiha [pro-government militia] will be pulled out of areas before the monitors arrive, any blood will be washed off the streets."

Activists say military units are routinely put in civilian clothes or police uniforms, and transported in ordinary buses, rather than clearly marked military vehicles, to hide their identities.

In some areas, including Homs, residents said armoured vehicles have been painted blue, in an effort to portray them as police rather than army equipment.

Under its November 2 agreement with the Arab League, Syria should have pulled all military forces out of urban centres, released all political prisoners and begun talks with the opposition.

Failure to implement that deal resulted in the Arab League imposing economic sanctions, in addition to Syria's suspension from the organisation.

At least 150 human rights, legal and security experts are expected to have taken up position in the country by the start of January. The mission is due to last for a month, with a possible one-month extension by agreement between Damascus and the Arab League.

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They have already started moving prisoners and torture victims into military hospitals where they will be off limits

Syrian activist

Oman Daily Observer

Arab League team in Syria to prepare monitoring

CAIRO — An advance team from the Arab League arrived in Syria yesterday ahead of deploying monitors who will assess whether Damascus is acting to end a bloody nine-month crackdown on protests against President Assad's rule, a League official said.

"We arrived in Damascus safely," Waguih Hanafy, a senior aide to Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby and who is travelling with the team, said by telephone from the Syrian capital.

In Cairo, Sudanese General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al Dabi arrived for talks at the League headquarters to be briefed on his role in leading the 150-strong observer team that could be sent to Syria before the end of December, provided preparations go smoothly.

Syria agreed in November to an Arab plan demanding an end to fighting, the withdrawal of troops from residential areas, the release of prisoners and the start of a dialogue with the opposition. It balked for six weeks over letting in monitors.

In that time, the League imposed economic sanctions and threatened to escalate the matter to the UN Security Council, while the death toll has soared as Syria has turned its troops

and tanks against demonstrators.

Dabi, who co-ordinated between Sudan's government and international peacekeepers there, told reporters at Cairo airport he would meet League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby to follow up on arrangements for the observer mission.

He said observers would work "with complete transparency to observe the situation in Syria", adding it would hold continuous meetings in the field with all factions, including the Syrian army, opposition, security forces and humanitarian groups.

League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby said on Tuesday that 150-strong observers would demand free access to hospitals, prisons and other sites across the country.

He also said the team would issue daily reports that would be shown to but not vetted by the Syrian authorities. Elaraby said the monitors could be in Syria before the end of December. The advance team making preparations for the mission is led by top League official Samir Seif al Yazal and comprises 11 people, including financial, administrative and legal experts, officials said. — Reuters

The Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

AL team arrives in Syria as observers

BEIRUT — An advance team from the Arab League arrived in Syria on Thursday ahead of the deployment of monitors to judge whether Damascus is implementing a peace plan it agreed last month.

The plan entails a withdrawal of troops from the streets, release of prisoners and dialogue with the opposition. Thousands have died in a crackdown on protests against President Bashar Al-Assad and, increasingly, in fighting between mutinous troops and security forces.

Arab League sources have said the advance team, led by top League official Samir Seif Al-Yazal, comprises a dozen people, including financial, administrative and legal experts to ensure monitors have free access across Syria.

The main group of around 150 observers is to arrive by the end of December.

Events in Syria are hard to verify because authorities have banned most independent reporting.

The escalating death toll has raised the spectre of civil war in Syria with Assad still trying to stamp out protests with troops and tanks despite international sanctions. Turkey has condemned Syria's policy of "oppression which has turned the country into a bloodbath". — AP

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

Turkey is uneasy and concerned over 'bloodbath' in Syria

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Turkey on Thursday said in the statement that the violence was in stark contrast to the spirit of the Arab League deal Syria signed on to and is raising doubts about Syria's "true intentions."

"We strongly condemn the Syrian leadership's policies of oppression against its own people, which are turning the country into a bloodbath," the Turkish Foreign Ministry statement said. "The protocol aims to take protection of civilians under guarantee, and within this framework it aims to end violence in the country in the first place, to prevent security forces and militia from intervening in pacifist demonstrations, and to ensure the withdrawal of those forces from provinces and other settlements," the ministry said.

It said no administration "can come out a winner from a struggle against its own people."

Syria signed an Arab League initiative on Monday that will allow Arab observers into the country, bowing to growing international pressure to end its bloody crackdown on a nine-month uprising. The regime's acceptance of observers after weeks of delays came after a warning from Arab leaders that they would turn to the UN Security Council for action to try to end President Assad's crackdown that the UN says has killed at least 5,000 people.

Despite the latest violence, the Arab League appeared to be going ahead with plans to send in its first delegation of monitors on Thursday.

The advance team, led by the league's assistant secretary-general, Sameer Seif el-Yazal, was to arrive in Syria later on Thursday. The team is to arrange logistics for an upcoming mission of around 20 experts in military affairs and human rights, which will head for Syria on Sunday, led by Lt. Gen. Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa of Sudan.

Another team of 100 observers will leave for Syria within two weeks, according to the plan.

Activists said the Syrian government appeared to be furiously trying to control the situation on the ground before monitors from the Arab League arrive under a plan to resolve the country's crisis.

"They are trying to buy time, one hour after another, hoping to gain the upper hand on the ground," said an activist in the northern village of Kfar Owaid near the Turkish border, where more than 100 people were killed on Tuesday.

Activists urge for an immediate international act to stop the mass murder by the regime.

The Syrian army launched a massive military strike in Homs to suppress defectors, but activists say most of the victims were civilians. **Today's Zaman** with AP