

# La prensa occidental silencia el contenido del informe de los observadores de la Liga Árabe

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*REVISTA DE PRENSA SOBRE SIRIA #35*

*Miércoles 25 de enero de 2012*

*Los medios internacionales ven en la conferencia de prensa del ministro sirio de Relaciones Exteriores, Walid Al-Muallem, la confirmación de los comentarios de ayer de la propia prensa sobre las decisiones del Comité ministerial ad hoc de la Liga Árabe (prolongación de la misión de observación y proposición de una hoja de ruta) y sobre el rechazo de algunas de ellas por parte de Damasco. .*

*Ninguno de esos medios de prensa informa a sus lectores sobre el contenido del informe de los observadores de la Liga Árabe, donde se estipula claramente que nunca hubo represión sangrienta contra manifestaciones pacíficas en Siria. Todos estos medios, siguiendo el ejemplo de la Alta Comisionada de la ONU para los Derechos Humanos, repiten las historias del Observatorio Sirio de los Derechos Humanos sin cuestionar su veracidad, sus métodos o su credibilidad. Así que los medios interpretan las palabras del ministro sirio de Relaciones Exteriores –quien señaló que el Estado sirio cumplirá con sus responsabilidades en materia de protección de la población frente a los grupos armados– como el anuncio de un recrudecimiento de la represión política.*

- El ex observador Anuar Malek prosigue su periplo internacional. Ahora se expresa desde el *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Ninguno de los medios de prensa occidentales que lo han entrevistado parece tener información sobre el pasado de este individuo ni haber leído lo que se dice sobre él en el informe de los observadores de la Liga Árabe. Lo único que interesa a los medios occidentales es que el hombre dice lo que ellos quieren oír. Este individuo ya ha sido entrevistado por *USA Today* (Estados Unidos), por el *National Post* (Canadá), por los diarios franceses *Libération* y *Le Monde*, y por el cotidiano suizo *Le Temps*.
- *L'Orient-Le Jour* anuncia que los bancos libaneses aplicarán las sanciones internacionales contra Siria. El gobernador del Banco Central Libanés se refiere, al parecer, a las sanciones unilaterales europeas, claramente violatorias del derecho internacional.

# Un plan arabe prévoit le départ à terme du président Bachar Al Assad de Syrie

La Ligue arabe a accentué la pression hier sur le régime syrien, en demandant à l'ONU d'appuyer son plan organisant le départ de Bachar Al Assad.

Damas a accusé les Arabes de « comploter » pour « internationaliser la crise ».

## En quoi consiste l'initiative présentée dimanche par la Ligue arabe ?

L'initiative poussée par le Qatar, et adoptée par la Ligue arabe dimanche, vise « *à un départ du régime syrien de manière pacifique* ». Elle appelle le dirigeant syrien, Bachar Al Assad, à déléguer « des prérogatives au vice-président pour traiter avec un gouvernement d'union » nationale appelé à être « *formé dans les deux mois* » avec « *une personnalité de consensus* » à sa tête et chargé de préparer des élections législatives et présidentielle « *pluralistes et libres* ». L'initiative arabe demande aussi au « *gouvernement et à tous les courants de l'opposition d'engager un dialogue sérieux dans un délai ne dépassant pas les deux semaines* » pour former le cabinet d'un.

La Ligue arabe veut rencontrer le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, à New York pour lui présenter son plan et demander l'appui du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies. Une résolution condamnant la répression en Syrie, soutenue par l'ensemble des pays européens et les Etats-Unis, est bloquée depuis plusieurs semaines au Conseil de sécurité par Moscou, qui s'oppose fermement à toute ingérence dans le conflit.

Les six monarchies arabes du Golfe ont, elles, décidé de retirer leurs observateurs de la mission arabe en Syrie, suivant l'Arabie saoudite qui avait annoncé son retrait de cette mission, dimanche, pour protester contre la poursuite de la répression de la contestation en Syrie.

## Quelle est la réponse de Damas ?

Lors d'une conférence de presse, hier, à Damas, le ministre syrien des affaires étrangères, Walid Al Mousallem, a rejeté le nouveau plan. La Syrie refuse désormais « *les solutions arabes* » à la crise, a-t-il ajouté, accusant les Arabes de « *comploter* » pour internationaliser la crise.

Le chef syrien de la diplomatie a reconnu que les sanctions provoquent une crise économique dans son pays, mais elles ne le feront pas plier. Il a affirmé que la Russie, alliée de Damas, n'accepterait jamais une intervention étrangère contre son pays : « *C'est une ligne rouge. (...) Personne ne peut douter de la relation syro-russe, car elle est historique et sert les intérêts des deux peuples.* »

Damas rejette le plan de la Ligue arabe comme une « *ingérence flagrante* » dans ses affaires et « *une atteinte à sa souveraineté* ». La Syrie ne reconnaît pas non plus l'ampleur de la contestation populaire, qui ne faiblit pas depuis mars, et affirme faire face à des « *gangs terroristes à la solde de l'étranger* » qui cherchent à semer le chaos dans le pays.

Parallèlement à la répression, les médias officiels continuent de faire état des réformes promises par le régime, en évoquant l'élaboration du projet de Constitution qui doit bientôt être présenté à Bachar Al Assad, avant d'être soumis à référendum. Mais la crédibilité du régime est largement entamée, l'opposition et un nombre croissant de pays étrangers réclamant ouvertement son départ.

AGNÈS ROTIVEL

# Golfstaaten ziehen sich von Syrien-Einsatz zurück

Kooperationsrat fordert mehr Druck der UN auf Assad / Neue Diskussion über Ende der Beobachtermission

Arabischen Liga Folge leiste und der Arabischen Kooperationsrat (GCC) wird alle seine Beobachter aus der Syrien-Mission der Arabischen Liga zurückziehen. Das gab das Generalsekretariat des GCC am Dienstag in Riad bekannt. Am Tag davor hatte der saudische Außenminister Saud al Faisal den Abzug der saudischen Beobachter angekündigt, da Syrien nichts unternommen habe, um einen früheren Friedensplan der Arabischen Liga in die Tat umzusetzen. Die sechs Staaten Saudi-Arabien, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Vereinigte Arabische Emirate und Oman hatten zuletzt 52 der 165 Beobachter gestellt, aus Saudi-Arabien kamen 22.

Der GCC begründete seine Entscheidung, dem saudischen Schritt zu folgen, damit, dass Syrien keiner Resolution der Arabischen Liga, Ahmad Ben Helli, die Liga

habe einen Termin mit UN-Generalsekretär Ban Ki-moon beantragt, um die Blutvergeltungen und das Töten von Unschuldigen andauern werde.

Der GCC hat den UN-Sicherheitsrat aufgefordert, mit allen erforderlichen Mitteln zu agieren, um die syrische Regierung zu überreden, die Einstellung der Beobachtermission diskutieren. Seit der Entsendung der ersten Beobachter am 23. Dezember sind nach Angaben syrischer Aktivisten 840 Menschen getötet worden.

Nachdem der saudische Außenminister Saud al Faisal den Abzug der saudischen Beobachter bekanntgegeben hatte, hatte er das erste offizielle Gespräch mit einer Delegation des oppositionellen Syrischen Nationalrats unter Führung von Burhan Ghalioun geführt. Saudi-Arabien habe in der Syrien-Krise die

arabische Führungsrolle übernommen, kommierte der Chefredakteur der panarabischen Zeitung „Al Sharq al Awsat“, Tariq al Humaid. „Das sei umso wichtiger, weil beim nächsten Gipfeltreffen der Arabischen Liga Ende März der Irak den Vorsitz in der Liga übernehmen werde. Der prominente saudische Kommentator Dschamal Khashoggi sagte, nach den Entwicklungen der vergangenen Tage gebe es für Assad und sein Regime keinen Weg zurück in die arabische Ordnung. Saudi-Arabien handle zum einen wegen der Grenzüberschreitungen des Regimes an seiner Bevölkerung sowie anderer, aber auch um dem iranischen Griff nach Syrien, einem sunnitisch-arabischen Land, ein Ende zu bereiten.“

Süddeutsche Zeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

## „Männer, Frauen, Kinder – für diese Leute sind alle Terroristen“

### Anwar Malek, einst Beobachter der Arabischen Liga in Syrien, über die Täuschungsversuche der Regierung und die Gewalt der Armee

Die Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga in Syrien ist als „farce“ ins Gerede gekommen, sei einer der Beobachter, der Algenier Anwar Malek, die Lage in der Stadt Homs als „Desaster“ bezeichnet und wegen der „Verbrechen des Regimes gegen die Menschlichkeit“ den Dienst quittiert hat. Die Liga-Beobachter machen durch ihr Schweigen neue Gewalt möglich, so Malek. Den Chef der Mission, den sudanesischen General Mustafa Ahmed al-Dabi, bezeichnet er als Luger.

**SZ:** Sie werden vom Missionchef als „Spinner“ abgetan, der „fern der Wahrheit“ rede. In Homs seien Sie krank geworden, könnten also wieder Übertritte der Armee noch Gefolter gezwungen haben.

**Anwar Malek:** Das sind Lügen. Es gibt Bilder, wo ich beim Einsatz auf dem Strand und im Krankenhaus in Homs bin. Bilder des syrischen Staatsfernsehers. Im Hotel war ich vier Tage – nachdem ich damals ausgewichen war – vorher war ich neun Tage im Einsatz. Der General deckt die Syrer. Er hatte in Damaskus Geheimtreffen mit Geheimdienstleuten.

**SZ:** Hat die Arabische Liga nach Ihnen Demission bei Ihnen nachgefragt?

**Malek:** Nein. Ich habe aber selbst versucht, den Liga-Generalsekretär anzurufen. Ich wurde abgewimmelt. Das Einzige, was mich interessierte, war die orangefarbene Weste und meine Telefon-

karte der Mission: Ich müsste sie zurückgeben. An Informationen hatte man kein Interesse. Stattdessen sagte man, ich hätte die Liga bombardiert.

**SZ:** Wie arbeitet die Mission in Homs?

**Malek:** Wir waren 18 Beobachter, wurden in Gruppen unterteilt. Wir konnten sagen, wo wir hinwollen. Aber es dauerte

immer. Wir wurden von drei, vier Autos mit Militär, Polizei und Geheimdienst bestellt. Man hat versucht, uns zu töten. Sie gaben vor, wir seien in der Straße oder an dem Ort, nach dem wir gefragt hatten – es stimmte nicht. Als Zivilisten getarnte Polizisten versuchten uns ebenfalls zu täuschen. Manchmal ließ die Opposition uns wissen, wo Panzer ste-

hen. Bis wir da waren, hatte die Armee sie weggefahren, kurz darauf waren sie wieder da.

**SZ:** Sie wollen Zeuge von Gräueltaten gewesen sein.

**Malek:** Ja, vor meinen Augen wurde ein Fünfjähriger in den Bauch geschossen. Ich sah eine Frau an einem Scharfschützen-Kopfschuss sterben. Das waren Menschen, die auf der Straße unterwegs waren. Ich habe Folter oder gesesehen. Da war die Leiche eines Mannes – den Namen habe ich vergessen – der gehäutet worden war wie ein Schaf! Er war zusammen mit seinen Geschwistern festgenommen worden. Ich sah drei tote syrische Soldaten, mit Schusswunden im Rücken. Es heißt, sie seien Terroristen. Ich denke, es waren Belehrer/werleger.

**SZ:** Welchen Eindruck haben Sie von den syrischen Verantwortlichen in Homs?

**Malek:** Im Hotel wohnten neben uns Beobachter sowohl der syrische Inneminister als auch Präsident Assads Schwager, Militär-Gehändlerchef As-Schawkat. Im Gespräch sagten sie uns, die Demonstranten seien „Terroristen“. Sie könnten das Problem mit der Armee in nur 15 Minuten lösen, fürchten aber den Aufschrei der Internationalen Medien. Männer, Frauen, Kinder – für diese Leute sind alle Terroristen.

**SZ:** Der Opposition wird vorgeworfen, sie entführe und foltere Angehörige der Assad-Familie Mindestens

Foto: AP



Die Beobachter der Arabischen Liga – zu verkennen an der orangefarbenen Weste – helfen, die Lage in Syrien zu beruhigen.

Le Temps (Suisse / Switzerland)

## Damas accorde un délai pour les observateurs

> **Syrie** Mission de la Ligue arabe

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AFP

Damas a donné son accord à une prolongation d'un mois de la mission des observateurs de la Ligue arabe en Syrie, a annoncé mardi soir l'agence de presse officielle Sana. «Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Walid Mouallem, a adressé ce soir une lettre au secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe, l'informant de l'accord du gouvernement syrien à sa demande de prolonger d'un mois la mission des observateurs de la Ligue, du 24 janvier au 23 février 2012», a indiqué Sana. Cela en dépit de la décision des monarchies du Golfe de retirer leurs observateurs en raison de «la poursuite de l'effusion du sang et des tueries des innocents».

Plus tôt, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Walid Mouallem, a rejeté en bloc le plan arabe prévoyant à terme le départ du président Bachar el-Assad considérant qu'il s'agissait d'une «atteinte» à la souveraineté syrienne. Il s'en est pris à ses pairs arabes, qu'il a accusés de «comploter» pour internationaliser la crise en recourant à l'ONU.

Après avoir adopté dimanche sa nouvelle initiative sur la Syrie, la Ligue arabe a annoncé avoir demandé une rencontre à New York au secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon pour la lui présenter et demander l'appui du Conseil de sécurité.

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)



# El régimen sirio cierra la puerta a la mediación de la Liga Árabe

Damasco acusa a Arabia Saudí de querer "internacionalizar" el conflicto

**TOMÁS ALCOVERRO**  
Beirut. Correspondiente

Intrincado contexto las víctimas de cada día, ya sea del lado de los manifestantes -la oposición asegura que 40 personas murieron ayer en Siria, 32 de ellos en la ciudad de Homs- como de las fuerzas militares del Estado -a la pasada semana murieron tres generales del ejército por las balas de los insurrectos-, son más que en otros conflictos despiadados simbólico carne de cañón.

Después de que el Gobierno de Damasco rechazase el plan propuesto por la Liga Árabe de permitir una transición pacífica del poder al estilo de la que pudo llevarse a cabo en Yemen para facilitar la dimisión del presidente de la república, Ali Abdullah Saleh, ya presto a viajar rumbo a Estados Unidos, Arabia Saudí y sus aliados del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo -Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrein, Omán y Emiratos Árabes Unidos- han decidido evaluar sus 55 observadores de la misión enviada a Siria que había prolongado su polémica labor por un mes más.

Ese actual primer ministro qatari

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**2014, ADIÓS DE EL ASAD?**  
El proyecto de Constitución limita a dos los mandatos del presidente

al Gobierno como a los elementos armados de la oposición- si no que adoptaron esta provocadora conjura extranjera. Siria continuará combatiendo a los disidentes y a los grupos armados, que se vengarán y hacen estragos en la población. El futuro será decidido por los sitiós.

El ministro declaró que en los días venideros se entregará a El Asad un borrador del nuevo texto constitucional, que será sometido próximamente a la nación en un referéndum. Según el diario damasceno *Al Watan*, en este

tari, que ya se alineó con las naciones de Occidente para conseguir una cobertura de la ONU a la intervención militar en Libia, ahora desgarrada y sin norte, quien impulsa estas nuevas medidas diplomáticas y sanciones económicas para forzar al traidor Bashar el Asad a dimitir.

El ministro de Asuntos Exteriores sirio, Uald Al Moalem, en una conferencia de prensa en Damasco, declaró ayer que "estas sanciones afectan a la población pero no influyen sobre la solución política". Con respecto a la

retirada de los observadores de la Liga Árabe dijo que "pueden dirigirse a Nueva York o a la Luna, siempre que Siria no pague su víaje". "Rechazamos la propuesta de la Liga Árabe porque es una violación a nuestra soberanía nacional", añadió, al tiempo que acusaba a los países árabes de organizar un "complot para internacionalizar" el conflicto sirio.

En El Cairo, los delegados de la Liga no discutieron el informe de un mes presentado por los observadores -informe en el que tanto se responsabilizaba de la

pecialmente cualquier plan de intervención militar extranjera como la adoptada en Libia.

El drama de la sangre derramada en Siria es que este escándalo-só confierto no es sólo una guerra civil, sino el resultado de un enfrentamiento de regímenes suníes como los monarcas absolutos y petrolíferos del Golfo, como Turquía, contra el poder alauí de Damasco, apoyado por los chiíes de la revolución islámica de Irán, los árabes chiíes de Iraq y sus infieles combatientes libaneses chiíes de Hizbuláh.

En el trasfondo yace la ambición del dominio de un Oriente Medio, nuevamente configurado, por el que luchan EE.UU. e Irán. Los sirios, como lo fueron también los libaneses durante décadas, son la carne de cañón inagotable. ¿Cuánto tiempo podrá durar esta cruenta guerra?●

#### VIGENTE EN EGIPTO DESDE 1981

## Fin del estado de emergencia

■ El jefe del Consejo Supremo Militar de Egipto, el mariscal Husén Tantau, anunció ayer en un discurso televisivo que hoy, primer aniversario de la revuelta que derroca a Hosni Mubarak, quedará abolido el estado de emergencia salvo "casos de vandalismo". Vigente desde el asesinato del presidente Anuar el Sadat en 1981 a manos de islamistas, la abolición de la ley ha sido una de las principales reivindicaciones de los activistas prodemocráticos, pues el estado de emergencia ampara de-

renencias arbitrarias y juicios ante tribunales de excepción. El ejército, que lleva meses diciendo que lo levantarán cuando haya estabilidad, pretende aplazar los ánimos de la calle cuando su compromiso democrático está cada vez más cuestionado. Hoy están convocadas manifestaciones en todo el país contra la junta militar. Sin embargo, algunos expertos señalaron que la mención al "vandalismo", término muy amplio, podría encubrir un levantamiento de la ley parcial y no total.

en tablas. No se esperan resultados políticos en el futuro, porque el régimen está empeñado en defenderte hasta el final y sus enemigos, tanto del interior como de sus poderosos protectores de mas allá de las fronteras, no cejan en atacarle.

Lo único cierto es que con una completa evacuación de los observadores -que sería otra gran derrota de la Liga Árabe- aumentaría este interminable baño de sangre. Un nuevo fracaso de esta institución tan "desprestigiada" abondará las divisiones entre sus gobiernos, que ya las sufrieron con las anteriores guerras de Líbano y de Iraq.

Frente a los países capitaneados por Arabia Saudí y Qatar hay otro grupo de miembros de esta organización regional -como Líbano, Iraq o Egipto- que se defienden hacia Siria y rechazan es-

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proyecto se limitan a dos los mandatos del jefe del Estado. El segundo mandato de Bashar el Asad concluye en el 2014.

La oposición al régimen no cree en sus promesas y exige, ante todo, el cese de las violentas represiones contra los manifestantes. La propuesta de la Liga Árabe se refiere también al diálogo nacional, a la elaboración de una nueva constitución, a la organización de un referéndum y de elecciones libres.

La situación en Siria entre el Gobierno y la oposición continúa

Publico (Portugal)

# Assad rompe os laços com os árabes e Liga pede reunião com secretário-geral da ONU

Ana Gomes Ferreira

A seu favor, o Presidente tem tido as divisões árabes e o travão da Rússia. Mas a tomada de decisões acelerou, enfraquecendo o braço-de-ferro de Assad

● O Governo sírio rompeu ontem os laços com a Liga Árabe, anunciando não aceitar mais a cooperação desta na resolução da crise no país. Em resposta, os árabes pediram uma reunião com o secretário-geral das Nações Unidas, Ban Ki-moon.

Diplomatas ouvidos pela AFP dizem que os países europeus querem que o Conselho de Segurança vote já na segunda ou na terça-feira um projeto de resolução para impor sanções ao regime.

“Definitivamente, a solução para a Síria não é a proposta pela Liga Árabe”, disse o ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros sírio, Walid al-Moualem. Acrescentou que pouco importa que a Liga leve a sua proposta à ONU ou “à lua”, que a resposta síria será a mesma. “Eles abandonaram o seu papel enquanto Liga Árabe e nós não queremos mais a solução deles para esta crise”, disse, antes de constatar: “Metade do universo está contra nós.”

Walid al-Moualem disse que a Liga apresentou condições que já sabia que não seriam aceites. “Em vez de discutirem o relatório [dos observadores, entregue no final da semana passada], tomaram uma decisão política que ataca a soberania síria.”

Esta ruptura levou o líder da Liga, o egípcio Nabil Elaraby, e o primeiro-ministro do Qatar (que detém a presidência rotativa da organização), Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, a escreverem uma carta a Ban Ki-moon detalhando o plano árabe para solucionar o con-



“Metade do universo está contra nós”, disse um ministro de Assad

flito sírio e pedindo um encontro em Nova Iorque para “obter o apoio do Conselho de Segurança” à proposta.

Ao exigir o afastamento do Presidente Bashar al-Assad e a criação de um Governo de unidade e transição, a Liga deixou claro que, para os parceiros árabes, o líder sírio é um pária – o

Irão é o único aliado declarado. Assad já ignorara um acordo com a Liga datado de Novembro, para pôr fim à violência contra os que diariamente (há quase 11 meses) se manifestam contra o seu regime totalitário, libertar os presos políticos e iniciar negociações com a oposição.

Porém, a Liga não parece ter (ou querer ter) meios para fazer cumprir as suas decisões sobre a Síria. Há visões contrárias sobre quais devem ser os próximos passos. E, da parte da manhã, um comunicado dos seis países do Conselho de Cooperação do Golfo (Bahrein, Kuwait, Arábia Saudita, Emirados Árabes Unidos, Omã e Qatar), divulgado pela TV Al-Arabiya, já apelava à ajuda internacional. Pedia aos “membros do Conselho de Segurança para adoptarem todas as medidas necessárias para implementar as decisões da Liga”.

“Pedimos à comunidade internacional para cumprir com as suas responsabilidades, e entre eles incluímos os nossos irmãos dos estados islâmicos e os nossos amigos na Rússia, na China, na Europa e nos Estados Unidos”, disse o ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros saudita, príncipe Saud al-Faisal. Apelava a que “toda a pressão possível” sejaposta sobre a Síria.

Para que uma resolução sobre a Síria possa ser aprovada, é necessário o voto favorável da Rússia, que tem ameaçado vetá-la. Mas que poderá mudar de atitude agora que há consenso na Liga sobre esta intervenção. “Espero que a Liga explique a situação e peça ao Conselho de Segurança para aprovar uma resolução apropriada que leve ao salvamento de vidas na Síria”, disse em Londres o chefe da diplomacia britânica, William Hague.

Ontem de manhã, os seis países do Conselho de Cooperação tinham anunciado que retiravam os seus delegados da missão da Liga na Síria por considerarem que o seu trabalho falhou. Os restantes observadores, porém, vão continuar no país.

Os dados da ONU registam um aumento no número de mortos desde o início da missão, a 26 de Dezembro de 2011 – cerca de 700 pessoas mortas, a acrescentar às cinco mil contabilizadas entre Março e Novembro.

The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)

# West seeks Russian support for fresh plan to tackle crisis in Syria

IAN BLACK

BRITAIN, the US and France are seeking Russian support for a new United Nations security council resolution to endorse Arab demands that Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, step down.

In a fresh twist to international diplomatic attempts to deal with the Syrian crisis, western countries have, in effect, abandoned attempts to impose UN sanctions on the Assad regime and are hoping for a new consensus for a political solution to the bloody 10-month impasse.

The basis for the new approach is the Arab League plan published on Sunday that called on Syria's president to hand over powers to his deputy and set up a national unity government with the opposition. Syria lambasted the plan as "flagrant interference" in its internal affairs and accused Arab states of attempting to "internationalise" the crisis.

The secretary general of the Arab League, Nabil al-Arabi, and Hamed bin Jassem al-Thani, the Qatari prime minister, are planning to brief the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon in New York in the next few days, according Mr Arabi's deputy, Ahmed ben Helli.

If Russia is supportive, the hope is to pass a UN resolution early next month forcing Mr Assad to confront solid international opposition for the first time since the uprising began last March.

Russia has so far backed Mr Assad and opposed punitive action or even verbal condemnation in part because it is angry at the way the UN was used to mandate the Nato intervention in Libya. However it formally welcomed the league decision, and western diplomats say they believe it will now be hard for Moscow to veto an explicit Arab call for the Syrian leader to step down.

On Monday a Kremlin envoy appeared to rebuke Mr Assad for

failing to promote a peaceful solution, although the foreign ministry was quick to insist Moscow's position was unchanged.

China has blocked anti-Syrian action but is thought likely to shift position if Russia does. The US has criticised Russia for supplying weapons to Syria, which received a shipment of Russian ammunition this month and has signed a \$550 million (£422 million) deal for 26 Yak-130 jet trainer aircraft.

However Syria's foreign minister, Walid al-Muallem, expressed confidence that Russia would stand by it. "Our relations with Russia have deep roots," he said.

The emerging diplomatic initiative overshadowed continuing doubts about the future of the troubled league monitoring mission in Syria, whose Saudi and other Gulf members have now been formally withdrawn. They may be replaced by observers from Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Turkey. - (*Guardian service*)

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

# Syria peace mission close to collapse

By Richard Spencer  
**Middle East Correspondent**

THE Arab League's peace mission to Syria was on the verge of collapse last night after Gulf states followed Saudi Arabia in pulling out.

Despite Syria last night agreeing a one-month extension to the mission, the Gulf Co-operation Council, which represents Saudi Arabia and the other oil-rich Gulf monarchies, said "the bloodshed and the killing of innocent people is continuing". Its decision, which reduces the size of the mission by a third, furthers the growing international divide between Western-

supporting states and a loose anti-Western coalition involving Iran, Syria's closest ally, Russia, Lebanon, Algeria and Iraq, who have opposed action against Damascus. William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, urged the Arab League to ask the United Nations Security Council to pass an "appropriate" resolution on Syria, something Russia and China have so far refused to allow.

After the Arab League's call on Sunday for Mr Assad to hand over power and hold elections, Walid al-Moallem, the Syrian foreign minister, said it had "had enough of Arab solutions". He claimed the league had deliberately put forward a peace plan

it knew would be rejected by Damascus as a pretext to "internationalise" the situation, adding that "half the universe" was now involved in a plot against the country.

"It is the duty of the Syrian government to take what it sees as necessary measures to deal with those armed groups that spread chaos," he said, suggesting that Mr Assad now sees himself as in a fight to the death with the opposition, with no compromise possible.

Syrian opposition groups, who have argued for the monitoring mission to end, are calling for UN intervention "to protect civilians".

The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

# Gulf countries pull support for Arab League's Syria mission

Nations cite as their reason the daily killing of protesters by President Assad's regime

By ALASTAIR BEACH  
in Cairo

The Arab League was in disarray last night after a coalition of Gulf nations withdrew their support for its beleaguered Syria observer mission and endorsed a United Nations solution.

Members of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), a regional body that includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, announced they could no longer support the mission due to the daily killing of protesters by President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

"The decision was made after careful and thorough monitoring of events in Syria and the conviction by the GCC that

of the Syria Comment news website, said. "Increasingly, analysts are coming to the conclusion that this is going to be a long, drawn-out battle."

The GCC announcement, which drew a scathing response from Mr Assad's regime, came after the Arab League delivered a peace plan on Sunday from its widely criticised monitoring mission.

The plan called for the four-decade-old Baathist regime to be replaced by a national-unity government within two months, followed by parliamentary and presidential elections to be held under the supervision of Arab and international monitors.

But Mr Assad's regime, which human rights groups say continued killing hundreds of civilians during the Arab League mission, swept aside the proposal and called it a "flagrant interference" in the country's internal affairs.

The Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said yesterday that "half the universe" was conspiring against Syria, a long-time stalwart of Arab nationalism and founding member of the Arab League. "It is the duty of the Syrian government to take what it sees as necessary measures to deal with those armed groups that spread chaos," he said.

The decision by the GCC to sever ties with the monitoring mission came after observers received substantial flak from rights groups and members of Syria's opposition over allegedly "providing cover" for Mr Assad. There was also criticism about the mission's lack of transparency and the tiny number of monitors assigned to cover the crisis.

But the move also reflects the frantic game of one-upmanship being played out across the Middle East. Gas-rich Qatar, pivotal in the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi, is keen to maintain its position at the helm of regional diplomacy and continue its political ascendancy.



**BASHAR AL-ASSAD**

The president called the mission a 'flagrant interference' in Syria's affairs

the bloodshed and the killing of innocent people there is continuing," a statement from the organisation said.

With the Arab world now divided on how to proceed – and with confusion reigning in the West – there are serious questions about how to deal with a potentially catastrophic unravelling of order inside Syria.

"There is considerable disarray within the Arab community about how to deal with Syria," Joshua Landis, creator

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

# Gulf Arab Nations Pull Syria Observers

By NOUR MALAS

Syria agreed Tuesday to give Arab League observers another month in the country to monitor a supposed cease-fire, even as Gulf Arab nations pulled out of the mission and characterized it as failed.

The Gulf Arab states said the Arab League's observer mission hasn't been able to hold Syria's government to its pledge to halt violence there. Brutal reprisals against antigovernment protesters continued, with the Local Coordination Committees, an activist network, saying security forces killed at least 60 people Tuesday, mostly in Homs.

The Gulf states pressed the United Nations Security Council to take up an Arab League plan that outlines a transition from President Bashar al-Assad's rule. Several international diplomats have said the plan gives new impetus to international efforts to end violence that the U.N. says had left more than 5,000 people dead since March.

The Arab League proposal, which asks President Assad to delegate power to his vice president and form a national unity government within two months, "is a game changer in tackling the conflict in Syria," the British ambassador to the U.N., Sir Mark Lyall Grant, said Tuesday.

Syria has rejected the league's plan, its decision to extend the work of the observer mission following the Gulf pullout appears designed to ward off mounting momentum for the Security Council to take action against President Assad's regime.

Foreign Minister Walid Muallem said Tuesday he was confident that Russia, which for months has stood

painted the Arab League transition plan as a mock-up of President Assad's own political reform agenda, which the government has billed as one way out of Syria's crisis.

"The difference is that the Arab League is relying on the Security Council, while we rely on our people," Foreign Minister Moallem told reporters in Damascus, again pitting Arab states and parts of the Syrian opposition appealing for international intervention against government supporters seeking a purely domestic solution.

"They have tried to draw a future for Syria that is very far from the will of the Syrians," he said. "As soon as the Arab League said it was going to the Security Council, we said their role is over."

The decision by the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council—whose members include Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait—underscored divisions within the Arab League over the monitoring mission.

Other nations in the regional group said they would keep their observers inside Syria. The league said other Muslim nations were also willing to send monitors to bolster the mission, which is left at some 110 observers after the Gulf pulled out their 55 members.

In its statement on Tuesday, the GCC questioned the commitment of other Arab states to the Arab League's actions against the Assad regime and urged them to pressure Syria to abide "actually and not by word only" by its promise to stop a crackdown on protesters.

—Matt Bradley in Cairo and Joe Loria at the U.N. contributed to this article.



A Syrian soldier stands a checkpoint in a neighborhood of Homs on Monday in an image taken from AFP Television.

Russia and China in October vetoed a draft resolution that would have condemned Syria for the bloody crackdown. Russian support for the bold Arab League plan would indicate a significant change in position toward its Syrian ally, a major buyer of Russian arms. Russia has called for political dialogue between the sides in Syria but has stood against foreign intervention.

Damascus, meanwhile, said Tuesday it wouldn't back down from fighting its opponents. But it also

against Security Council moves a resolution with Arab members that could command full council support for the Arab League decision.

"I think it's not that difficult to form a resolution which the Arabs themselves want, which commands full U.N. Security Council support for the Arab League decision, for their political plan, the sanctions that they have taken, on the transfer of power, on ending the violence," the diplomat said. "I don't see that such a resolution should be blocked by anyone on the council."

Arab ambassadors consulted with their counterparts at the U.N. on Monday and Tuesday on when the Security Council would be briefed by Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Arabi and Qatar's prime minister, who heads a league committee on Syria, according to the British ambassador. A Western diplomat said the Security Council was working on

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

## Bashar's Russian Pals

**B**ashar Assad is feeling lonely, though not yet lonely enough. First the Turks, Americans and Europeans de-friended him. Now formerly fraternal leaders at the Arab League want him deposed. The Syrian强人 forces have killed more than 5,400 people in 10 months and turned a peaceful protest movement into a virtual civil war. But he still has a few friends in low places.

The Iranians aren't giving up on him, and in Moscow Vladimir Putin won't abandon the son of the Soviet Union's favorite Arab tyrant, Hafez Assad. Far from it. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov last week rejected any talk of new UN sanctions or arms embargo on Syria. He even defended Moscow's right to arm Mr. Assad as he kills more civilians.

The business daily *Kommersant* reported Monday that Russia has signed a

\$550 million contract to sell Syria 36 combat jets. Two weeks ago, the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov called at the Syrian port of Tartus and, according to reports, dropped off a few tons of ammunitions.

The Russians have a stronger stomach for the Syrians' brutality than does the Arab League. A month ago, the group sent

an observer mission to Syria to monitor the regime's non-implementation of a plan to withdraw security forces from cities and residential areas. During their stay in Syria, the rate of killing rose. The Saudis, who won't win any Amnesty International contests, pulled out of the mission in horror. Qatar, which played an instrumental role in building support for armed intervention against Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, called for Arab forces to deploy and "stop the killing."

in the

words of its emir. The League didn't go that far this weekend but did propose a plan for Mr. Assad to hand power to a deputy and negotiate a transition with the opposition. The regime responded Monday by blasting this "blatant interference in its internal affairs."

**What Moscow and Damascus have in common.**

The Kremlin's support makes it harder to ease Mr. Assad out peacefully in Damascus. But perhaps Mr. Putin's loyalty can be explained by the fact that he faces his own growing opposition. His ruling party cheated in December's parliamentary elections and he has announced plans to stay in power for as long as another 12 years, after he runs for president again in March. The Russian people weren't happy. But Mr. Putin blamed protests on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Like his friend in Damascus, Mr. Putin also sees a Western plot behind every popular democratic uprising.

### Pepper . . . and Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Not only does this have the new gasoline-electric engine..."

The Washington Post (USA)

# League seeks U.N. assistance on Syria

Gulf nations withdraw their observers, call mission ineffectual

BY LIZ SLY

DAMASCUS, SYRIA — The Arab League sought help from the United Nations to address the escalating crisis in Syria on Tuesday, amid Syrian defiance of Arab efforts to broker a peace settlement and an upsurge of violence in which dozens of people died.

Gulf Arab countries pulled out of an Arab League monitoring mission, saying it was ineffectual, further casting into doubt the fate of an initiative aimed at ending the Syrian government's use of force to suppress a 10-month-old revolt against President Bashar al-Assad's rule.

Activist groups reported the deaths of at least 38 people, most of them in the flash-point city of Homs, as the government responded to the growing international pressure by stepping up its attempts to crush the revolt.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said at a news conference in Damascus that Syria felt justified in escalating the use of force because a report by the Arab observer team acknowledged that some protesters have taken up arms.

He signaled that the crackdown would intensify, saying there could be no reforms until the revolt had been suppressed. "It is the duty of the Syrian government to take the necessary measures to address the problem of those armed elements who are wreaking havoc throughout Syria," he said. "The Syrian government must quickly take the situation in hand to preserve stability."

Activists said a renewed crackdown appeared to be already underway. In Homs, at least 25 people were killed in shelling by security forces of two neighborhoods, said Homs activist Omar Shakir, who said at least three buildings collapsed. The Local Coordination Committees said 41 people were killed in Homs and 19 elsewhere in the country, including five defected soldiers.

"They are starting a new offensive, and I think in the coming days we will see a lot of blood," Shakir said.

The state news agency SANA reported that funerals were held Tuesday for 14 members of the security forces and two civilians killed the previous day in attacks by "armed terrorist groups."

On Sunday, the Arab League cited Syria's failure to stop the violence in its presentation of a transition plan that called for Assad to step aside, warning that the league would seek U.N. help if he did not comply.

On Tuesday, Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby and Qatari Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jasim al-Thani wrote to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon requesting a meeting of the Security Council to address ways that it could help implement the plan.

Earlier, the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates — announced the withdrawal of their observers from the Arab League's monitoring mission in Syria and urged the Security Council to take "all needed measures" to stop the violence, suggesting that they would be willing to countenance military intervention.

The New York Times – International Herald Tribune (USA)

# Syria signals that crackdown will go on

BEIRUT

## Monitors from Gulf bloc pull out as government vows to battle 'chaos'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Syrian foreign minister said Tuesday that "half the universe" was conspiring against his country, as the six nations that form the Gulf Cooperation Council withdrew from a monitoring mission in Syria because the government had failed to stop 10 months of violence.

International pressure is building on Syria, not only from the West but increasingly from Arab countries as well. The United Nations estimates that more than 5,400 people have been killed since the uprising began in March, sparked by the arrest of a group of teenagers who scrawled anti-government graffiti on a wall in the south of the country.

Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem on Tuesday signaled that the crackdown would continue, saying in Damascus that the government "would take any steps necessary to defend against chaos." Activists, meanwhile, reported more violence nationwide Tuesday, with more than 15 people killed and possibly many more.

Syria has claimed that armed gangs acting out a foreign conspiracy are behind the revolt, not protesters seeking change in one of the most authoritarian states in the Middle East.

"It is the duty of the Syrian government to take what it sees as necessary measures to deal with those armed groups that spread chaos," Mr. Moallem said during a televised news conference.

He also said it was clear that some Arab countries had joined the conspiracy against Syria — a clear reference to the Gulf countries' decision to withdraw their monitors and to Sunday's call by the Arab League for Syria to create a national unity government in two months.

The Arab League plan provides for Mr. Assad to give his vice president full powers to cooperate with the proposed government to enable it to carry out its duties during a transitional period. The Syrian government has rejected the plan as a violation of national sovereignty.

The decision Tuesday by the six oil-rich Gulf nations — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates — to pull out their monitors is a blow to an Arab League observer mission that has been mired by controversy, but which for many represented the only hope for an Arab solution to the crisis in Syria, away from outside intervention.

Now, the Gulf Cooperation Council, which had contributed 52 of the estimated 160 observers, has called on the U.N. Security Council to take all "necessary

measures" to force Syria to implement the Arab League's peace plan.

The Gulf council has long advocated referring Syria to the Security Council, putting it in conflict with other Arab states. Security Council action could open the door for more economic sanctions and possible military intervention, although Russia, which has veto power, is firmly opposed to punitive measures against Syria, its longtime ally.

"The decision was made after careful and thorough monitoring of events in Syria and the conviction by the G.C.C. that the bloodshed and the killing of innocent people there is continuing," the Gulf council statement said.

Mr. Moallem acknowledged that there was little hope for an Arab solution but tried to portray confidence, saying that Syria had the strong support of powerful allies in Iran as well as Russia.

The permanent representatives of the Arab League's 22 members were to hold an emergency meeting in Cairo on Tuesday night to review the situation following the Gulf council's decision.

The Arab League's observer mission has been heavily criticized for its failure to stop the Assad government's crackdown.

Saudi Arabia had announced Monday that it would pull out its observers, followed by the other Gulf council members.

**LIBYA** Forces loyal to the late Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi seized control of a city and raised the ousted regime's green flag, an official and military commander said Tuesday, in the most serious revolt yet against the country's government.

The retaking of the city, Bani Walid,

highlights the vulnerability of Libya's new leaders, who have faced mounting criticism as they struggle to unify the country and build state institutions from scratch three months after Colonel Qaddafi was captured and killed.

The seizure also appeared to be the first major, organized operation by armed remnants of the Qaddafi regime, adding to the security woes of the governing Transitional National Council. The council has so far made little progress in unifying armed groups. Instead it is left reliant on multiple "revolutionary brigades," militias made up of citizens turned fighters, usually all from a specific city or even neighborhood.

Hundreds of well-equipped and highly trained remnants of Colonel Qaddafi's forces battled for eight hours

Monday in Bani Walid with the local revolutionary brigade, known as the May 28 Brigade, which was eventually driven out, said Muhabarak al-Fatmani, the head of the Bani Walid local council. The Qaddafi loyalists then raised the green flag over buildings in the western city.

Mr. Fatmani said four revolutionary fighters were killed and 25 others were wounded.

Protests have surged in recent weeks, with people demanding that the interim leaders deliver on promises of transparency and compensation for those wounded in the fighting.

Bani Walid, located in the mountains 90 miles, or 140 kilometers, southeast of the capital, Tripoli, was one of the last Qaddafi strongholds to fall to revolutionary forces amid a months-long civil war. It held out for weeks after the fall of the regime, with loyalist fighters dug into its formidable terrain of valleys and crevasses.



WAEL AL-MOALLEM, the Syrian foreign minister, speaking Tuesday in Damascus.

**دول «التعاون» تسحب مراقبتها من دمشق لاستمرار تنزيف الدم**



**مُتَّهِمُونْ بِسُوءِيُونْ حَدَّ تَحَالَمْ بِشَارِ الْأَسْدِ فِي إِيَّاهَا عَلَوْنْ بِالْقُرْبِ مِنْ حَدَّصْ (أَيْ)**

Al-Ahram Hebdo (Egypte / Egypt)

**SYRIE . Les chefs de la diplomatie arabes ont lancé une nouvelle initiative qui prévoit un transfert de pouvoir du président Bachar Al-Assad à son adjoint. Une idée que Damas a catégoriquement refusée.**



Les protestataires veulent le soutien de l'Onu.

## Une nouvelle issue mort-née

**C**OMME PRÉVU, Damas a rejeté lundi dernier le nouveau plan arabe pour un règlement de la crise syrienne. Ce plan prévoit un transfert de pouvoir du président Bachar Al-Assad à son adjoint et un gouvernement d'union nationale. Il a été refusé non seulement par le régime syrien mais aussi par tous les partis de l'opposition, mais évidemment pour des raisons différentes.

Les Comités locaux de coordination (LCC), qui organisent la mobilisation sur le terrain, ont dénoncé l'initiative de la Ligue arabe, qui, selon eux, ne répond pas aux attentes de la population et à leurs sacrifices, mais donne un nouveau délai au régime pour poursuivre la répression en Syrie. Pour les LCC, la nouvelle initiative arabe ne dispose pas de mécanisme d'application, d'où la difficulté qu'elle aboutisse. Avis partagé par le reste de l'opposition syrienne. Cette dernière refuse ce plan parce que la mention du départ du régime ne figure néanmoins pas dans le texte final arabe.

Quant au régime syrien, il a catégoriquement rejeté ce nouveau plan, le qualifiant d'ingérence dans ses affaires intérieures, portant « atteinte à sa souveraineté nationale » et de « violation flagrante de la charte de la Ligue arabe ».

Cependant, le plan appelle Assad à déléguer des prérogatives au vice-pré-

sident pour traiter avec un gouvernement d'union nationale. Ce dernier doit être formé dans les deux mois. Selon un communiqué final, ce cabinet devra être présidé par une personnalité de consensus. Sa mission sera d'appliquer le plan arabe et de préparer des élections législatives et présidentielles pluralistes et libres sous supervision arabe et internationale. Essayant d'encourager tous les camps à approuver ce plan et l'appliquer, la Ligue a demandé au gouvernement et à tous les courants de l'opposition d'engager un dialogue sérieux sous l'égide de la Ligue arabe dans un délai ne dépassant pas les deux semaines pour pouvoir former ce gouvernement. Les ministres arabes ont également chargé le secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe, Nabil Al-Arabi, de nommer un « émissaire spécial » chargé de suivre l'évolution de la situation en Syrie.

### A quand un recours à l'Onu ?

Pour défendre le plan proposé par la Ligue, le ministre des Affaires étrangères du Qatar, cheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani, a estimé que l'initiative « visait un départ du régime syrien de manière pacifique. Si cette initiative n'est pas mise en œuvre, nous irons au Conseil de sécurité », a-t-il averti, en appelant de nouveau à l'arrêt de toutes les formes de violences, à la libération

des détenus et l'élimination de toute présence armée dans la rue. Cheikh Hamad a précisé que la Ligue allait informer l'Onu de l'ensemble des résolutions en vue d'obtenir son approbation. Le secrétaire général de la Ligue, Nabil Al-Arabi, a expliqué que la demande d'appui de l'Onu visait à donner plus de poids à l'initiative. L'appel arabe à un soutien de l'Onu a été favorablement accueilli par le chef du Conseil National Syrien (CNS), le plus important groupe de l'opposition, Burhan Ghalioun, qui a cependant affirmé que « toute transition en Syrie devra être précédée d'une annonce de départ de M. Assad ». Déjà, le CNS réclame le transfert du dossier à l'Onu et veut désormais une saisine de la Cour Pénale Internationale (CPI). Il demande aussi l'imposition d'un embargo aérien à la Syrie pour empêcher les raids menés par l'aviation syrienne pour bombarder les protestataires et leurs villes. En plus, l'opposition revendique la création de zones sûres en vue de l'acheminement de l'aide humanitaire.

Avis partagé par les autres camps d'opposition, les LCC ont estimé que la Ligue arabe avait échoué encore une fois à adopter une solution qui répond aux attentes des Syriens. « Sa nouvelle initiative donne au régime une couverture pour mater la révolte », ont-ils affirmé. « Les Syriens n'accepteront pas une solution qui ne

comporte pas un changement radical du régime répressif et corrompu », ont martelé les LCC dans un communiqué, en appelant la Ligue arabe à reconnaître son échec.

Négligeant les déclarations de l'opposition, surtout celles des LCC, les ministres de la Ligue ont décidé de prolonger sa mission d'observation dans le pays, malgré les critiques, notamment de l'opposition syrienne, contre son incapacité à faire cesser l'effusion de sang. En effet, plus de 5 400 personnes ont perdu la vie en dix mois de révolte et de répression en Syrie dont plusieurs centaines depuis le début de la mission arabe. La Ligue a décidé d'augmenter le nombre d'observateurs, tout en demandant au régime de « faciliter leur travail ». Les observateurs ont été déployés le 26 décembre après l'accord donné par le pouvoir à Damas à un protocole régissant leur mission, qui prévoit un arrêt des violences, le retrait des chars des villes et le déplacement libre des médias étrangers. Mais aucune des clauses n'a été respectée.

D'ailleurs, des divergences sont apparues durant la réunion arabe, dimanche dernier, l'Arabie saoudite ayant décidé de retirer ses observateurs, en arguant du non-respect par le régime des clauses du précédent plan arabe. ●

Maha Salem

# Les pays du Golfe retirent leurs observateurs de Syrie

Les monarchies du Golfe ont décidé mardi d'emboîter le pas à l'Arabie saoudite et de retirer leurs observateurs de la mission arabe en Syrie, appelant le Conseil de sécurité de l'Onu à faire pression sur Damas.Dans un communiqué, le Conseil de Coopération du Golfe (CCG) annonce que ses « Etats membres ont décidé d'adhérer à la décision du Royaume saoudien et de retirer leurs observateurs de la mission de la Ligue arabe » en Syrie, accusant Damas de ne pas se conformer au plan de sortie de crise arabe.Les 6 membres du CCG ont en outre appelé le Conseil de sécurité, dont ses 5 membres permanents, à « entreprendre toutes les mesures nécessaires pour exercer des pressions sur la Syrie et l'amener à appliquer (...) le plan arabe de paix », prévoyant un arrêt des violences dans ce pays.Ces développements interviennent au lendemain du rejet par les autorités syriennes d'une nouvelle initiative arabe adoptée, dimanche au Caire, et prévoyant à terme un départ du président Bachar Al-Assad.L'Arabie saoudite, chef de file du CCG, qui regroupe également Bahreïn, les Emirats arabes unis, Koweït, Oman et Qatar, avait annoncé dimanche dernier le retrait de ses observateurs de la mission arabe, très controversée.Elle a pris cette décision « car le gouvernement syrien n'a respecté aucune des clauses » du plan arabe de sortie de crise, avait indiqué son ministre des Affaires étrangères, le prince Saoud Al-Fayçal.Les observateurs avaient été déployés le 26 décembre dernier après l'accord donné par Damas à un protocole qui prévoit notamment un arrêt des violences, la libération des détenus, le retrait des chars des villes et la libre circulation des médias étrangers et des observateurs.Mais aucune des clauses n'a été respectée.

dans le cadre des réformes promises par le régime confronté à une révolte populaire, écrit mardi le quotidien *Al-Watan*.Le projet de Constitution sera présenté au président Bachar Al-Assad « dans les jours à venir » ayant d'être soumis à référendum, ajoute le journal proche du pouvoir. M. Assad avait annoncé le 10 janvier dernier que le référendum aurait lieu la première semaine de mars prochain.La commission « a décidé de limiter la fonction présidentielle à deux mandats de sept ans » chacun, précise *Al-Watan*, en citant une source proche de la commission.Selon le texte proposé, « si l'un des candidats n'obtient pas 51 % des voix, un second tour sera prévu entre les deux concurrents qui auront obtenu les meilleurs scores », ajoute-t-il.

## Une nouvelle Constitution pour limiter la présidence à deux mandats

La commission chargée d'élaborer une nouvelle Constitution en Syrie a prévu de limiter le mandat présidentiel à deux septennats,

abolissant le référendum présidentiel.En vertu de la Constitution en vigueur depuis 1971, le président est actuellement rééligible pour un nombre illimité de mandats. Le président Hafez Al-Assad, père de l'actuel président et décédé en juin 2000, avait ainsi effectué 5 mandats successifs.Bachar Al-Assad, qui a succédé en 2000 à son père, est confronté depuis la mi-mars à une révolte sans précédent contre son régime, réprimée dans le sang.Il a aussi promis des réformes mais sa crédibilité est largement entamée, l'opposition, les manifestants et un nombre croissant de pays étrangers réclamant ouvertement son départ.Le journal *Al-Watan* ne précise pas si la nouvelle Constitution aura un effet rétroactif, le président Assad devantachever son deuxième septennat en 2014.D'autre part, l'article 8 de l'actuelle Constitution, qui fait du parti Baass le « dirigeant de l'Etat et de la société », est remplacé dans le nouveau texte par un article stipulant le « pluralisme politique » et des « élections libres ».

## Salamé : Les banques libanaises se soumettront aux sanctions internationales

« Le secteur bancaire libanais se soumettra aux sanctions internationales prises contre la Syrie », a affirmé le gouverneur de la BDL, Riad Salamé, au cours de la conférence organisée par l'IRC. « Les banques libanaises, à la fois au Liban et à l'étranger, n'entreprendront aucune action, en particulier concernant la Syrie, qui risquerait de poser problème à leurs partenaires bancaires ou de les mettre dans la position de violer des lois dans leur propre pays », a déclaré M. Salamé.

Il a souligné que la Banque centrale libanaise était attachée à l'application des règles internationales en matière de transparence bancaire. « La Banque centrale enquêtera sérieusement sur toutes les plaintes (concernant des violations NDLR) et n'hésitera pas à prendre les mesures nécessaires », a-t-il averti.

La communauté internationale presse le Liban d'appliquer les sanctions internationales prises à l'encontre de son voisin syrien, qui incluent le

gel des avoirs gouvernementaux et la suspension de la coopération avec la Banque centrale syrienne et d'autres banques. M. Salamé a affirmé par le passé que Damas n'avait pas de fonds déposés à la Banque centrale libanaise et des responsables du secteur ont assuré avoir adopté des mesures strictes pour s'assurer qu'ils travaillaient en conformité avec les sanctions. Parmi ces mesures, un contrôle strict des transactions effectuées par les clients syriens et un contrôle

de l'ouverture de comptes par de nouveaux clients syriens. Le gouverneur libanais a attribué hier le ralentissement de l'économie libanaise aux « rumeurs » liant le secteur bancaire libanais à la Syrie, secouée par un mouvement de contestation réprimé dans le sang. « La croissance a diminué en 2011, principalement à cause (...) de rumeurs visant son secteur bancaire, en plus des révoltes et tensions dans la région », a déclaré M. Salamé.

(Source : AFP)

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

# Damas prolonge la mission d'observation, mais ferme la porte aux plans arabes

**Révolte** Les pays du Golfe retirent leurs observateurs ; Européens et pays arabes pour un vote la semaine prochaine à l'ONU.

Le régime syrien a accepté hier de prolonger d'un mois la mission des observateurs de la Ligue arabe déployés en Syrie depuis fin décembre. « Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Walid Moallem, a adressé ce soir une lettre au secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe l'informant de l'accord du gouvernement syrien à sa demande de prolonger d'un mois la mission des observateurs de la Ligue, du 24 janvier au 23 février 2012 », a indiqué l'agence SANA.

Toutefois, affirmant sa détermination à en finir avec la révolte réprimée dans le sang depuis mardi, M. Moallem a rejeté en bloc le plan de règlement proposé dimanche par la Ligue arabe prévoyant à terme le départ du président Bachar el-Assad, considérant qu'il s'agissait d'une « atteinte » à la souveraineté syrienne. « Finales les solutions arabes », a-t-il lancé lors d'une conférence de presse à Damas, accusant ses

pairs arabes de « comploter » pour internationaliser la crise, en recourant à l'ONU. « Ils tracent l'avenir de la Syrie loin de la volonté de son peuple, comme si nous étions un pays manquant de volonté, alors que c'est nous qui leur ont appris l'arabité, la démocratie et le pluralisme », a-t-il dit. « La solution doit être syrienne (...) et porter sur la mise en application du programme de réformes annoncées par le président Assad et sur l'ouverture d'un dialogue national », a-t-il ajouté. « Il nous est égal que l'Arabi (le secrétaire général de la Ligue) et Jassim (le Premier ministre du Qatar) partent à New York ou sur la lune, aussi longtemps que nous ne payons pas pour leurs billets. C'est leur affaire », a encore déclaré M. Moallem. « Si le CCG a peur de voir les faits en Syrie et veut retirer ses observateurs, c'est son problème », a-t-il aussi affirmé. Le ministre a en revanche rendu hommage au rapport

du chef des observateurs qui, selon lui, « a fait état de la présence de groupes armés commettant des actes de sabotage contre des bâtiments publics et privés et attaquant les forces de l'ordre et les citoyens ». M. Moallem a réaffirmé la détermination du régime à combattre les « groupes armés ». Il est du devoir du gouvernement syrien de décider de ce qui est nécessaire pour traiter avec ces groupes armés qui sément (le chaos). » Le peuple syrien appuie « la solution sécuritaire » pour mettre fin à la crise, « il veut en finir ».

## Les Arabes cherchent l'appui de l'ONU

La Ligue arabe a dit son intention de présenter sa nouvelle proposition sur la Syrie à Ban Ki-moon, secrétaire général de l'ONU, et de demander l'appui du Conseil de sécurité. Les six monarchies arabes du Golfe ont appelé le Conseil de sécurité à « entreprendre

toutes les mesures nécessaires pour exercer des pressions sur la Syrie et l'amener à appliquer le plan arabe de paix ». Elles ont aussi décidé de retirer leurs observateurs de la mission arabe en Syrie, en raison de « la poursuite de l'effusion de sang et des tueries des innocents ». L'appel des Arabes à l'ONU a été relayé par l'une des figures de l'opposition syrienne, Georges Sabra. Danis un entretien au quotidien *Liberation*, il affirme avoir quitté la Syrie et se trouver désormais en France, et a également assuré que « le peuple syrien mérite d'être protégé par l'ONU ». Selon des diplomates à l'ONU, la Grande-Bretagne, la France et l'Allemagne travaillent avec les pays arabes sur un projet de résolution qu'ils veulent soumettre au vote lundi ou mardi prochains. Ce projet appelle à suivre l'exemple de la Ligue arabe en imposant des sanctions à Damas.

Interrogé sur l'appui de

Moscou, M. Moallem a indiqué que « personne ne peut douter de la relation syro-russe, car elle est historique et seraient les intérêts des deux peuples. La Russie n'a jamais accepté une intervention étrangère en Syrie, c'est une ligne rouge ». Une résolution condamnant la répression en Syrie est bloquée au Conseil de sécurité par Moscou, qui s'oppose fermement à toute ingérence dans le conflit. Mais au cours d'un débat au Conseil de sécurité, ce sont les États-Unis, la France et la Grande-Bretagne qui ont épingle « l'ingérence » russe, dénonçant la fourniture d'armes par Moscou au régime syrien.

## Discussions russo-US « constructives »

Auparavant, des diplomates et responsables américains et russes s'étaient entretenus lundi à Moscou de la situation en Syrie. Le sous-secrétaire d'État américain aux Affaires du Pro-

che-Orient, Jeffrey Feltman, « a eu le sentiment d'avoir eu des discussions très constructives », a commenté hier la porte-parole du département d'Etat, Victoria Nuland. En outre, l'OTAN n'envisage aucune intervention militaire en Syrie, a assuré hier le commandant des forces de l'OTAN en Europe, après de récentes accusations de la Russie.

Sur le terrain, la répression a fait hier 58 morts selon la chaîne al-Jazira, trois nouvelles victimes civiles, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Par ailleurs, des militants de Hama ont affirmé que les forces gouvernementales avaient lancé une offensive contre la ville. Enfin, sur le plan économique, M. Moallem a admis que les sanctions européennes et américaines avaient provoqué une crise en Syrie, mais affirmé qu'elles ne feraien pas plier son pays.

(Source : agences et rédaction)

## Cinq banques et trois sociétés pétrolières sanctionnées par l'UE

Cinq banques syriennes et trois sociétés pétrolières figurent dans la liste des nouvelles sanctions adoptées lundi par l'Union européenne à l'encontre du régime syrien. Il s'agit des banques d'Etat Industrial Bank, Popular Credit Bank, Saving Bank et Agricultural Cooperative Bank, ainsi qu'une filiale de la Commercial Bank of Syria, déjà sanctionnée par l'UE, la Syrian Lebanese Commercial Bank. Les trois sociétés pétrolières

sont Dair ez-Zor Petroleum Company, Ebla Petroleum Company et Dijla Petroleum Company. Leurs avoirs en Europe sont gelés ainsi que ceux de 22 personnes, qui sont en outre interdites de visa. Parmi ces personnes figurent notamment 16 généraux accusés d'avoir ordonné à leurs troupes de tirer sur les manifestants, ainsi que des chefs des renseignements militaires ou des services de sécurité.



Le ministre syrien des Affaires étrangères, Walid Moallem, lors de sa conférence de presse hier à Damas. Ahmad Jadallah/Reuters

## La nouvelle Constitution limite la présidence à deux mandats

La commission chargée d'élaborer une nouvelle Constitution en Syrie a prévu de limiter le mandat présidentiel à deux septennats, dans le cadre des réformes promises par le régime confronté à une révolte populaire, a écrit hier le quotidien al-Watan. Le projet de Constitution sera présenté au président Assad « dans les jours à venir » avant d'être soumis à référendum, a ajouté le journal proche du pouvoir. M. Assad

avait annoncé le 10 janvier que le référendum aurait lieu la première semaine de mars. Selon le texte proposé, « si l'un des candidats n'obtient pas 51 % des voix, un second tour est prévu entre les deux concurrents qui auront obtenu » les meilleurs scores. Le journal al-Watan ne précise pas si la nouvelle Constitution aura un effet rétroactif, le président Assad devantachever son deuxième septennat en 2014.

The Daily Star (Liban / Lebanon)

# Syria: League can go to moon

**Moallem accuses  
Arabs of plotting  
to engineer foreign  
intervention**

killed in clashes between state forces and armed rebels in the flashpoint province of Homs.

Arab League officials said 55 Gulf Arab observers were being withdrawn while the other 110 members of the team would continue work in Syria. State news agency SANA said Moallem and Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby that Damascus had agreed to extend the monitoring mission until Feb. 23.

The Gulf Cooperation Council states said in a statement they were "certain the bloodshed and killing of innocent people would continue and that the Syrian regime would not abide by the Arab League's resolutions."

Elaraby and Qatari Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jassim al-Thani, who

headed the League's committee on Syria, sent a joint letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon giving details of the organization's latest plan for a political solution in Syria.

The letter asks for a joint meeting between them in the U.N. headquarters to inform the Security Council about developments and obtain the support of the Council for this plan, a League statement said.

The Saudi ambassador to Britain, Prince Mohammad Bin Naef, said the idea of resorting to the Security Council was to rally the world behind the Arab League peace initiative for Syria. "We pulled out [the monitors] because we didn't see any positive response from the Syrian government. But it is a process. Take it to the U.N. Security Council to get the support on that initiative," the Saudi ambassador told journalists in London.

"We hope it doesn't reach an escalation of a military intervention. The last thing we want is an unstable region. We hope the Syrian regime will comply with the Arab initiative. I think this is the logical way out, a peaceful solution, a peaceful transition. I think this is the only hope they have."

Moallem pointed contempt on the



SYRIA PAGE 8

Russian official said that his country has had arms delivered to Damascus.

"We are concerned about the supply of weapons into Syria, whether it goes to the government or illegal smuggling to the regime or opposition," Britain's U.N. Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant told the Security Council during a debate on the Middle East.

Without naming Russia by name, Lyall Grant cited a media interview in which a Russian official said his country's arms deliveries to the Syrian regime had no effect on the situation there.

"We fundamentally disagree," he told the 15-nation council. "It is glaringly obvious that transferring weapons to a volatile and violent situation is irresponsible and will only fuel the bloodshed."

The Syrian president has used troops and tanks to try to crush a popular revolt that began last March, killing over 5,000 people, according to U.N. figures.

Syria bought \$70 million worth of Russian weapons or 7 percent of Russia's \$10 billion in arms deliveries abroad in jet trainers for over half a billion dollars in 2010, according to the Russian defense think-tank CAST.

An unidentified Russian military source was quoted as saying in December that the country had delivered a shipment of Yakhont missiles to Syria, and a Russian newspaper reported Monday that it also had signed a deal to sell Syria nearly 40 fighter jet trainers.

French Ambassador Gerard Araud said it was "unacceptable that certain countries, including on this council, continue to provide the means of violence against the Syrian population."

The United States and their European allies have called for a U.N. arms embargo and other sanctions against Syria, but Russia vehemently opposes action. — Reuters

**Arab League's call for Assad to hand power to a unity government to defuse the violence.**

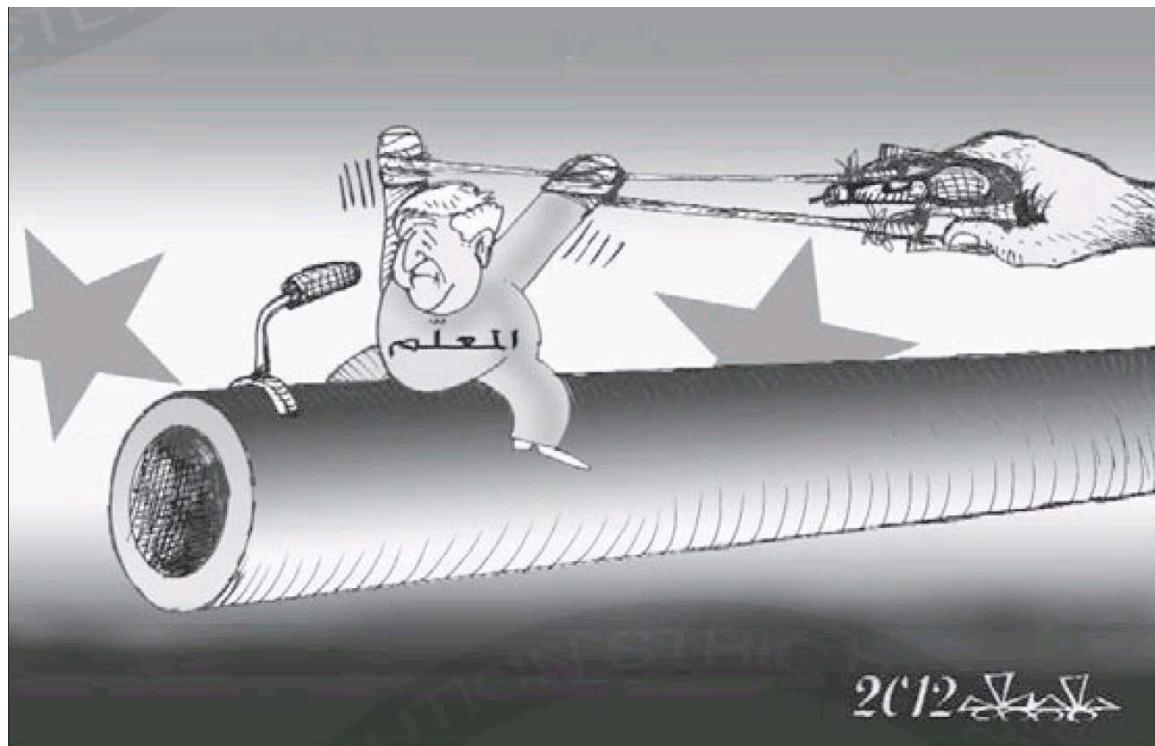
**He said that while "half the universe is against us," Syria's longtime ally and arms supplier Russia, which**

wields a veto on the Security Council, would never permit foreign intervention.

"That is a red line for them," Britain, France and the United States sharply criticized Russia Tuesday for supplying weapons to Syria, after a

Mercredi 25 janvier 2012, #35, p. 21 / Wednesday, January 25, 2012, #35, p. 21

Al Mustaqbal (Liban / Lebanon)



Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

# SAUDI ARABIA'S GULF ARABS QUIT SYRIA MONITORING MISSION

Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said at the time his country was quitting the mission because Syria had not implemented any part of an Arab peace plan agreed in November

PHOTO □ REUTERS AHMED JADALLAH



Syrians walk past damaged buildings in the restive town of Homs as Gulf allies joined Riyadh in pulling out of an Arab League monitoring team.

Saudi Arabia's Gulf allies joined Riyadh on Tuesday in pulling out of an Arab League monitoring team to Syria, risking the collapse of a mission whose presence has not halted violence in a 10-month-old revolt against President Bashar al-Assad.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said his government was still considering whether to let the monitors stay for another month and criticized the Arab League for calling Assad to step down.

"Definitely the solution in Syria is not the solution suggested by the Arab League, which we have rejected," he told a news conference. "They have abandoned their role as the Arab League and we no longer want Arab solutions to the crisis."

Syria is becoming an Arab and international pariah for its harsh response to an uprising against Assad in which thousands of civilians, soldiers and policemen have been killed. Envoy to the Cairo-based League were meeting later in the day to discuss whether the monitoring mission has a future, Sudan's ambassador to the 22-member body, Kamal Hassan Ali, said.

A League official said 55 Gulf Arab observers were being withdrawn from the 165-strong monitoring team. The Arab League demanded on Sunday that Assad step down in favor of a unity government to end the bloodshed, but said the observers should stay in Syria for another month.

Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said at the time his country was quitting the

## Gunfire, funerals and fear reign in restive Homs -- Syria's protest center

In Syria's restive city of Homs, soldiers are stationed behind sand barriers at street corners, most shops are closed and residents are nervous.

Scattered shooting is a reminder of violence that has hit the city and turned into battles between President Bashar al-Assad's government army and rebels who now control most of it.

"Every day we have a funeral. Every day we receive between four to five dead. There was one day we buried 20 soldiers," said Hisham Othman, an officer at the military hospital where the funerals of three security forces personnel were held on Monday.

"The terrorist groups have occupied two-thirds of the city of Homs. They are armed and supported by external forces. They bring weapons from Lebanon and Turkey. They are attacking the civilians and the security forces," he told reporters on a government tour of pro-Assad districts of the city. The coffins, wrapped in Syrian flags, were taken to ambulances which carried them to villages across Homs province.

Hospital staff and relatives threw rice at them as they were escorted with military music. Colleagues and officers saluted. *Homs Reuters*

mission because Syria had not implemented any part of an Arab peace plan agreed in November. "The GCC states have decided to respond to the decision of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia to withdraw its monitors from the Arab League delegation to Syria," the statement said. The Gulf Cooperation Council said in a statement. It said the GCC was "certain the bloodshed and killing of innocents would continue, and that the Syrian regime would not abide by the Arab League's resolutions."

The Arab League's demand for a change of government in Syria puts more pressure on the UN Security Council to overcome its divisions and take a stand on

the bloodletting there.

The Arab observers deployed late last month to assess Syria's compliance with an earlier Arab League plan.

"There has been some progress, but there has not been immediate or complete implementation as the Arab initiative requires," Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby said on Tuesday, adding that he would name a special envoy to Syria this week. A Syrian opposition group condemned the mission's leader, Sudanese General Mohammed al-Dabi, for a report in which he highlighted violence by Assad's adversaries as well as by the president's security forces. *Beirut Reuters/EP*

# Al Mua'alem signals crackdown on protesters will continue

SOME ARAB COUNTRIES HAVE JOINED FOREIGN CONSPIRACY, MINISTER SAYS

**Beirut** (AP) Syria's foreign minister has signalled that his country will continue its 10-month crackdown on dissent. Walid Al Mua'alem said yesterday it's the duty of the government to take any steps it sees necessary to protect against chaos.

His news conference came one day after President Bashar Al Assad's regime rejected an Arab-brokered plan to end the country's bloodshed.

The plan calls for a unity government within two months, which would then prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections to be held under Arab and international supervision. Syria has long held that a

Russia will never accept foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs. That is the red line."

**Walid Al Mua'alem**  
Syria's foreign minister

The Arab League has formally requested a meeting with United Nations' chief Ban Ki-moon to discuss its plan for resolving the Syria crisis and to ask for the Security Council's support, a senior League official said yesterday.

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## Request

The request was made jointly by the pan-Arab bloc's secretary general, Nabeel Al Arabi, and by Qatar's Prime Minister Shaikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani,

on their history and the interests of both people, Al Mua'alem said yesterday. It was clear that some Arab countries have joined the conspiracy and aim to "internationalise" the Syrian issue. However, he said that Syria will never accept "foreign interference" in Syria's internal affairs. "No one can doubt the strength of the Russian-Syrian relationship," based

"Russia will never accept foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs. That is the red line," he added. As for European and Arab sanctions against Syria, they won't bring any change to the political situation in the country and are only hurting the people, Al Mua'alem

who chairs a League panel on the crisis, Arab League deputy leader Ahmad Bin Helli told AFP. Meanwhile, the league began withdrawing 55 Gulf Ar-

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The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

# Gunfire, funerals and fear

Syrian terrorist groups accused of attacking civilians and security forces in Homs

**Mariam Karouny**

HOMS — In Syria's restive city of Homs, soldiers are stationed behind sand barriers at street corners, most shops are closed and residents are nervous.

Scattered shooting is a reminder of violence that has hit the city and turned into battles between President Bashar Al Assad's government army and rebels who now control most of it. "Every day we have a funeral. Every day we receive between four to five dead. There was one day we buried 20 soldiers," said Haitham Othman, an officer at the military hospital where the funerals of three security forces personnel were held on Monday.

"The terrorist groups have occupied two-thirds of the city of Homs. They are armed and supported by external forces. They bring weapons from Lebanon and Turkey. They are attacking the civilians and the security forces," he told reporters on a government tour of pro-Assad districts of the city.

The coffins, wrapped in Syrian flags, were taken to ambulances which carried them to villages across Homs province.

Hospital staff and relatives threw rice at them as they were escorted with military music. Colleagues and officers saluted.

Haitham Kassem, who was there to receive the body of his son-in-law, said that the 29-year-old slain policeman was "a harmless and kind person". "He was shot in the back. He was only a traffic policeman. What did he do to deserve this? He has a three-month-old baby. What was his fault?"

Journalists were later shown four charred bodies of soldiers who officials said were killed with three other soldiers in an ambush on a bus that was taking them home.



A damaged armoured vehicle belonging to the Syrian army abandoned in a street in Homs. — Reuters

Four civilians were also killed in the attack, they said.

Ahmad Salamy, 22, was lying on a bed in the hospital. "Yesterday I was walking in the street near my house when I heard the buzzing of bullets. I couldn't move. I was hit in my leg. My neighbours saved me."

Homs, a mainly Sunni city of more than a million people with a large minority from Assad's Alawite community, has seen some of the heaviest bloodshed of the 10-month uprising against Assad's rule, including reports of sectarian killings.

Colonel Mohsen Ibrahim said the military hospital receives between 10 to 50 wounded security forces personnel every day.

"These days we are receiving more complicated cases that lead to death because now the armed groups are using more sophisticated

weapons, including mortars and rocket propelled grenades," he said.

## Streets Empty

The main street of the city was almost empty during the day.

After leaving the military hospital, an information ministry employee accompanying journalists warned that violence might break out. "Please stay together and run to the bus when you hear shooting," he told them.

Soldiers in combat gear stood nervously behind sand barriers at every corner.

Traders said business was dead and one said he had not sold a single item of clothing for three months. Most shops at the Hamidiyah market were closed and the few which opened closed again at two in the afternoon. Litter covered

the streets. "People are very scared. The situation is not normal. We open our business for four hours a day," said a clothes seller.

"Down with Assad" was scribbled on one wall. "Syria's Assad" answered a slogan written on the wall facing it.

Many shopkeepers refused to speak but privately some said they were scared of the army while others said armed men were spreading fear across the city. "They are terrorising us, scaring us. We are not safe. They have beaten up my brother. They are attacking us with rocket propelled grenades. What did we do to them?" said Layal Al Ali.

Her friend Nuhad Hussein said: "Syria was safe, they are destroying it." They thanked the army at the checkpoints; the soldiers smiled.

"Do you know why people are not talking? They are scared of the

gunmen. They know they are watching and if they say what is really going on they will come and attack them after you leave," whispered a 21-year-old student who gave his name as Tony.

"The army is here to protect us. They keep attacking the army. What kind of freedom seeker is this who attacks his own army, the army of its country?" he said.

In the street a church and a mosque stand together. "All I want is safety," said a man in the market.

Another man urged him to say there were gunmen. "Tell them there are gunmen here. You are not seeing the gunmen?"

"I didn't see anything, all I want is stability," he said.

When sporadic shooting erupted a school teacher in her 50s smiled and said it happens every day and lasts for hours. "We are used to it now. This is the kind of life we are living," said the woman who wore a cross. She refused to give her name. "It is not safe," she said.

## Break Our Neck

"If you want to know the truth, you only have to look around you. It is obvious", said a young shopkeeper. "Please do not ask us any questions or talk to us. They will break our necks." When asked who, he said: "The people you are with."

Most city districts were off-limits to the journalists because they were either rebel-held or are considered hot spots.

A nearby street showed scars from the violence.

Buildings were burnt and pock-marked with bullet holes. A military armoured vehicle was left charred in the middle of the street. Sand barriers were destroyed.

One kilometre down the road, the rebel green, white and black flag could be seen waving, setting a limit beyond which government troops could not cross. — Reuters

The National (EAU / UAE)



**Speaking at her home in Aley last year, Raja Sharafeddine said her missing father, 88, in set picture, was no longer active in politics.** Spont Karm / Reuters

# Dissident vanished on walk in the country

## Fears Syrian, 88, was abducted in Lebanon

Eight months after he disappeared, family calls for help to trace former vice president who went into exile in 1996 after rift with leader

Zei Constantine

**ALEY, LEBANON //** On a warm May afternoon last year, Shibli Al Assam left his house in the Lebanese mountain town of Aley and set off on his daily stroll. The plan was to walk an hour-long route along the winding country lanes to the home of his daughter, Raja Sharafeddine. He never made it. Eight months later, the 88-year-old Syrian dissident is still missing. But his family said they know where he is and who is responsible.

"Everybody knows that the Syrians took him, but there is no material evidence to prove it," said Mrs Sharafeddine, sitting in the living room of her apartment overlooking the Aley hills. "Yes, of course, I believe he is in Syria, a 53-year-old mother of three."

Mr Al Assam is one of several Syrians who have gone missing in Lebanon in the past year and whose disappearances remain unsolved. Syria has denied involvement. But the apparent kidnappings have raised fears about the Syrian regime's reach inside Lebanon. Opposition activists believe a dozen Syrian nationals have been kidnapped in Lebanon in the past 12 months. Human Rights Watch has documented cases involving four individuals, including Mr Al Assam. The controversial report implicates

Nadim Houry, the international rights group's Beirut director, said he believed the main issue has been the almost systematic reluctance on the part of the Lebanese judiciary to prosecute crimes that appear to be politically motivated.

"What we do know is that the Lebanese judiciary is failing in investigating these cases," said Mr Houry. "This is not necessarily a generic issue of [the governing coalition] March 14 versus [the opposition alliance] March 14. It is an institutionalised unwillingness of the state and the judiciary that goes into deep freeze the second the motivation for any crime is suspected to political."

Although Syrian troops left Lebanon in 2005, the country still wields significant influence over its smaller neighbour. The March 14 coalition is led by Hezbollah, a group that remains soon after, before the other two disappeared.

The case of Mr Al Assam, a member of Syria's Druze minority, is more confusing. While he was taken on May 24, just five days after he and his wife Maisa arrived to Lebanon from the US, three people said they had seen vehicles with blacked-out windows driving around Aley's main roads. One month after the kidnapping another witness came forward to say he had seen Mr Al Assam hanging from a tree.

He also had not stepped foot inside Syria since 1986. He went into exile after Mr Al Assam's father,

Hafez Al Assad, with whom he had

political differences, came to power.

matching the description of the whereabouts seen in Aley, crossed the border into Syria.

Beyond tranches of information, including from contacts inside Syria – who two months ago said he was still alive in prison – the Al Assam family have little to go on.

With the investigation in Lebanon stalled, the family is now seeking international help to free him, while continuing to push the case locally. They have hired a UK-based lawyer and are appealing to the United Nations, as well as Arab and western diplomatic missions.

"We feel international pressure is the only way they can release my father," said Mrs Sharafeddine.

"I knew where my father is from the beginning, so I don't care about the tool who has taken him, I know who gave the orders."

"When somebody cuts my hand with a knife, I'm not going to blame the knife, I blame the man."

By Zei Constantine @zeiconstantine@thenational.ae

**It's very strange to target an old man, it's like holding a resentment from a long time ago**

Raja Sharafeddine

Associated Press / AP

Associated Press / AP