

El proyecto de guerra se estanca

REVISTA DE PRENSA SOBRE SIRIA #28
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El más amplio destaque han recibido en la prensa las declaraciones del secretario general de la ONU a favor de que el Consejo de Seguridad autorice una intervención militar en Siria, al igual que las del emir de Qatar pronunciándose por una intervención militar árabe.

Exceptuando a la prensa china, los demás medios de prensa prefieren pasar por alto la amnistía decretada por el presidente al-Assad y la liberación de cientos de detenidos que habían sido arrestados durante los incidentes.

El mensaje del día de los servicios vehiculado a través de los servicios de propaganda de Estados Unidos se concentra en la desertión del general Muhammad Abdul-Hamid al Awwad y del diputado de Homs Imad Ghaliun así como en la creación de una unidad de enlace entre el Consejo Nacional Sirio y el Ejército Sirio Libre. O sea, el poder de al-Assad se desorganiza mientras que la oposición se organiza.

El hecho es que estas desertiones no son significativas. El diputado Ghaliun es un primo del presidente del Consejo Nacional, ambos portan incluso el mismo apellido. En cuanto a las relaciones entre el Consejo Nacional de Transición y el Ejército Sirio Libre, la realidad es que siguen siendo catastróficas.

- En el diario francés *Le Figaro*, Georges Malbrunot se plantea la siguiente interrogante: ¿Por qué se mantiene el régimen sirio? El autor reconoce que el presidente al-Assad no sólo cuenta con el respaldo de la mayoría de sus conciudadanos sino que el miedo que inspiran los islamistas le está aportando además nuevos aliados.
- El *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* ofrece un recuento del enfrentamiento marino entre un navío alemán y lanchas rápidas sirias.
- *Jane's Defence Weekly* se hace fielmente eco del punto de vista de la OTAN. Destaca, sin embargo, que con el respaldo de Rusia, el presidente al-Assad parece hacerse incluso más provocador.
- Sami Mubayed destaca en el *Gulf News* que la estrategia del presidente al-Assad es en realidad de inspiración rusa. El presidente sirio se dispone a modificar la constitución para poner fin al monopolio del partido Baas y pronto nombrará un nuevo gobierno que incluirá personalidades de la oposición.

Le Monde (France)

Ligue arabe

La proposition du Qatar sur l'envoi de forces arabes en Syrie fait débat

MANAMA. La proposition de l'émir du Qatar, Hamad ben Khalifa Al-Thani, d'envoyer des soldats arabes en Syrie pour tenter d'y contenir la violence pourrait être examinée par la réunion du comité ministériel de la Ligue arabe, le 21 janvier au Caire, a indiqué, dimanche 15 janvier, le chef de l'organisation panarabe, Nabil Al-Arabi. Il s'agit de la première prise de position de ce type de la part d'un dirigeant arabe. Dimanche, Amr Moussa, l'ancien chef de la Ligue arabe et candidat à la présidentielle égyptienne, a estimé que l'organisation devrait « *étudier* » cette idée. En revanche, le président tunisien, Moncef Marzouki, a estimé qu'une telle opération équivaldrait à un « *suicide* ».

A Damas, l'agence de presse officielle SANA a rapporté dimanche que le président syrien, Bachar Al-Assad, avait accordé une amnistie « *pour les crimes commis dans le cadre des événements depuis le 15 mars 2011 jusqu'au 15 janvier 2012* ». Pour l'opposition, cette amnistie n'a guère de sens car la plupart des prisonniers ne sont même pas inculpés et sont détenus dans des lieux secrets, sans aucun contact avec l'extérieur. – (AFP.) ■

Le Figaro (France)

Pourquoi le régime syrien tient-il ?



la lettre
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Contrairement à ce que prédit Ehoud Barak, le ministre israélien de la Défense, Bachar el-Assad ne devrait pas quitter le pouvoir au cours des prochaines semaines. « Le régime est secoué par la révolte, mais il n'est pas encore menacé », assure un diplomate occidental en poste à Damas.

Après dix mois d'une impitoyable répression qui a fait plus de 5 000 morts, le pouvoir a réussi, jusqu'à maintenant, à sanctuariser Damas et éviter que la contagion révolutionnaire ne gagne Alep, la deuxième ville du pays. Contrairement à ce qui a souvent été écrit, sa garde prétorienne, la IV^e Division, dirigée par Maher, le frère de Bachar, n'est pas encore intervenue en province : ses quatre unités (40, 41, 42 et 43) demeurent fidèlement stationnées autour de Damas.

Jouant sur l'épouvantail islamiste, le régime dispose encore du soutien des minorités, alouïte - celle dont il est issu -, chrétienne, druze et kurde (soit environ 25 % de la population) auxquelles il conviendrait d'ajouter le réseau des affidés du parti Baas à travers le pays (2,5 millions d'adhérents) et de nombreux commerçants de Damas et d'Alep, c'est-à-dire au total sans doute pas loin de 50 % de la population. Cette réserve pourrait lui permettre de faire avaliser par referendum son projet de réforme de la Constitution en mars prochain. « Mais ce qui est plus inquiétant, selon un des responsables de l'opposition en exil, c'est de voir de plus en plus de gens avoir peur du chaos, en cas de renversement brutal du

franken pour vendre le pétrole que l'Europe ne lui achète plus. Et les sanctions nites et alouïtes ne présage rien de bon. Après avoir piégé - grâce à son allié russe - la Ligue arabe mi-décembre, Damas a couronné ses observateurs pendant leur première mission sur place. Celle-ci est à juste titre contestée par de nombreux pays. Mais la Ligue ne

divisions d'une opposition minée par les

Face à une opposition éclatée, certains redoutent qu'Assad parvienne à débaucher des adversaires encore prêts au compromis pour former un gouvernement d'union nationale

quelles de personnes. Ses adversaires ont, jusqu'à maintenant, échoué à s'unir et à parler aux minorités pour les rassurer. « Nos deux grands fleuves », reconnaît un proche de Barhan Ghhalouh, le président du Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale des composantes de l'opposition. Fin décembre, après des mois d'obstruction à l'égard de la Coordination nationale, l'autre formation importante de cette opposition, Ghhalouh signalait au Caire avec Haytham

Manna un texte commun sur la transition en Syrie. Mais quelques heures après, un grand nombre de cadres du CNS, réputés proches de la mouvance islamiste, contraignait Ghhalouh à se rétracter. Des indiscrétions laissent aujourd'hui entendre que l'ex-universitaire à la Sorbonne serait sur un siège éjectable à la tête du Conseil. Ces fractures obscurcissent la crédibilité des opposants à Assad auprès des Syriens de l'intérieur,

« y compris des jeunes révolutionnaires exaspérés par ces clicavacs. Les nombreux indices attendent de leurs représentants à l'étranger qu'ils mettent sur pied un véritable programme de transition en vue de l'après-Bachar. « Mais nous en sommes encore incapables, ne disions-je pas trop importantes », confesse Haytham Manna. « Chaque fois, cela lui, que nous insistons sur la mise en place d'un État laïque, les islamistes rejettent cette idée. » Enfin, les faveurs - niées discrètes - du CNS pour l'internationalisation du conflit sont loin de faire l'unanimité en Syrie. « Le régime en jase pour dénoncer une opposition à la botte c l'étranger », souligne le diplomate.

Face à une opposition éclatée, certains redoutent qu'Assad parvienne à déboucher des adversaires encore prêts à compromettre. Ces dernières semaines, le régime a envoyé plusieurs emissaires Dubaï ou Paris proposer à des opposants de constituer un gouvernement d'union nationale. « J'ai refusé, nous dit l'un d'eux. Le pouvoir me laissait la liberté de composer un gouvernement, mais il se gâtait les ministères de l'Intérieur et de la Défense. Tant que le système sécuritaire est en place, je ne veux pas être son otage. »

En coulisses, Moscou continue de s'activer pour mettre en œuvre « une solution yéménite », c'est-à-dire confier, par exemple, au vice-président sunnite Farouk al-Sharrah le soin de secondar ur période de transition en gardant Bachar jusqu'aux prochaines élections. Le régime syrien est « mort politiquement », mais nul ne sait quand il finira par tomber.

RETROUVEZ CHAQUE SEMAINE
La Lettre prospective Moyen-Orient
de Georges Malbrunot sur
www.lefigaro.fr/prospectives

Libération (France)



**BAN KI-MOON:
«LA SITUATION
EN SYRIE EST
INACCEPTABLE»**

Pour le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, qui s'exprimait hier à Abou Dhabi, *«la situation [en Syrie] a atteint un point inacceptable»*. Invitant le Conseil de sécurité à *«traiter [cette crise] de manière sérieuse et cohérente»*, son appel semblait s'adresser avant tout à la Russie et la Chine, qui ont opposé leur veto en octobre à un projet de résolution. *«Je sais qu'il y a quelques divergences d'opinions [au] Conseil de sécurité, mais nous ne pouvons pas laisser la situation se poursuivre ainsi»*, a-t-il insisté. Déplorant la violence de la répression, qui a fait plus de 5 000 morts depuis mars, le Sud-Coréen a tenu à apporter son soutien aux observateurs de la Ligue arabe. Leur représentant, Nabil al-Arabi, a par ailleurs déclaré samedi que leur mission serait réévaluée le 21 janvier au Caire. PHOTO AFP

De Welt (Allemagne / Germany)

20 000 Deserteure in Syrien – Iran liefert Waffen an Assad

DAMASKUS/PARIS – Die von Deserteuren gegründete Freie Syrische Armee erhält immer mehr Zulauf. Nach Angaben von Aktivisten setzten sich in der Provinz Idlib am Montag 20 Soldaten von der Regierungsarmee ab. Fünf von ihnen seien auf der Flucht erschossen worden. Auch aus dem Umland der Hauptstadt Damaskus wurden Kämpfe zwischen Deserteuren und der regulären Armee gemeldet. Desertierte Offiziere hatten in den vergangenen Tagen erklärt, zur Armee der Fahnenflüchtigen gehörten inzwischen 20 000 Soldaten.

In Paris wurde bekannt, dass der Iran nach Ermittlungen von UN-Experten gegen ein Waffenembargo verstoßen und illegal Waffen an das Regime in Syrien geliefert hat. Die Verstöße gegen die UN-Resolutionen 1747 und 1929 seien den Mitgliedern des Sicherheitsrates gemeldet worden, teilte das französische Außenministerium mit. Ein Sprecher bezeichnete die Waffenlieferungen als schockierend.

Folgen Sie **Emil
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Syrisches Schnellboot bedrängt „Alster“ im Mittelmeer

Berlin: Seemännische Unhöflichkeit / Aufklärungsmission

löv. BERLIN, 16. Januar. Ein Aufklärungsschiff der Deutschen Marine ist im Dezember vor der syrischen Küste von einem Boot der syrischen Streitkräfte aggressiv bedrängt worden. Ein Sprecher des Verteidigungsministeriums bestätigte am Montag diesen Vorfall. Das Flottendienstboot „Alster“ habe in internationalen Gewässern im „östlichen Mittelmeer“ eine Aufklärungsmission unternommen. Dabei habe sich ein syrisches Schnellboot genähert und „in sehr geringem Abstand“ den Kurs des deutschen Schiffes gekreuzt. Die Besatzung habe bewaffnetes Personal an Bord des syrischen Bootes gesehen. Einen Bericht der Zeitschrift „Der Spiegel“, wonach die Syrer mit einer Kanone auf die „Alster“ gezielt hätten, stellte der Sprecher als übertrieben dar. Er bewertete das Verhalten als „seemännische Unhöflichkeit“ und „schlechte Seemannschaft“.

Die Bundeswehr hat insgesamt drei solcher Flottendienstboote, deren Besatzungen mit sehr leistungsfähigen Geräten weiträumig elektronische Signale abhören, Schiffsverkehr beobachten und Radarsignaturen identifizieren können.

Der Sprecher wies die Formulierung zurück, es handle sich um ein „Spionageboot“; sein Auftrag sei vielmehr „Aufklärung“. Die unbewaffnete „Alster“ fährt nicht im Rahmen eines internationalen Einsatzes mit einem Mandat des Bundestages, sondern im nationalen Auftrag.

Deutsche Flottendienstboote waren schon öfter im Mittelmeer eingesetzt, nach Einschätzungen in der Deutschen Marine allerdings in der Regel im Rahmen multinationaler Einsätze wie „Active Endeavour“ (Anti-Terrorismus) und Unifil (gegen Waffenschmuggel vor Libanon). Als im vergangenen Sommer der Luftkrieg der Nato über Libyen begann, an dem sich Deutschland nicht beteiligte, wurden die deutschen Schiffe aus der Operation „Active Endeavour“ herausgelöst, darunter das Flottendienstboot „Oker“. Die „Oker“ fuhr dann unter nationalem Kommando, hatte aber nach Darstellung des Ministeriums keinen Aufklärungsauftrag, sondern die Besatzung nahm in einem italienischen Hafen Wartungsarbeiten vor. Der Vorfall nun mit der „Alster“ vor Syrien ereignete sich zu Beginn ihres viermonatigen Einsatzes.

Iran liefert Waffen an Syrien

Der Iran hat nach Ermittlungen von UN-Experten illegal Waffen an das Regime in Syrien geliefert. Die Verstöße gegen die UN-Resolutionen 1747 und 1929 seien den Mitgliedern des Sicherheitsrats gemeldet worden, teilte das französische Außenministerium gestern in Paris mit. Ein Sprecher bezeichnete die Waffenlieferungen an das gewaltsam gegen Oppositionelle kämpfende Regime von Präsident Baschar al-Assad als zutiefst schockierend. Konkrete Angaben zu Art und Menge der nach Syrien gebrachten Waffen machte er allerdings nicht. Der Iran bestritt gestern gegenüber dem TV-Sender al-Arabija, sich in den Konflikt einzumischen. US-Medien hatten am Wochenende berichtet, dass der Anführer der iranischen Revolutionsgarde sich im Januar mit hochrangigen syrischen Beamten in Damaskus getroffen hatte. Die USA interpretierten laut Bericht des „Wall Street Journals“ den Besuch als Beweis dafür, dass der Iran Syrien bei der Niederschlagung der Demonstrationen militärisch unterstütze. *DPA, FTD*

Publico (Portugal)

Ban Ki-moon exige fim da “violência inaceitável” na Síria

● O secretário-geral das Nações Unidas pediu aos membros do Conselho de Segurança que esqueçam “divergências” e actuem o quanto antes para pôr fim ao banho de sangue na Síria. “As mortes atingiram um nível tão inaceitável que não podemos deixar que a situação continue como está”, avisou Ban Ki-moon, no segundo alerta em 24 horas sobre a situação na Síria.

O secretário-geral repetiu que o Presidente Bashar al-Assad tem de “deixar de matar e ouvir o seu próprio povo”, mas os principais destinatários da mensagem foram a Liga Árabe - a missão na Síria deve continuar, mas os observadores “precisam de ter um claro sentido de acção” - e as grandes potências: “Espero que o Conselho de Segurança actue de forma coerente e com consciência da gravidade da situação.” Em Outubro, China e Rússia vetaram uma resolução propondo sanções; dois meses depois, Moscovo avançou com um projecto condenando tanto o regime como a oposição pela violência, num texto rejeitado pelos ocidentais.

Ontem, cinco pessoas morreram quando milícias pró-Assad dispararam contra uma padaria em Homs (Centro) e, na província de Idlib (Noroeste), cinco manifestantes foram feridos a tiro na mesma altura em que a zona era visitada por observadores da Liga Árabe, revelou o Observatório dos Direitos Humanos sírio. Na mesma província, cinco soldados de um grupo que tentava desertar terão sido mortos em confrontos com outros militares. Já em Aleppo, segunda cidade do país, as forças de segurança entraram na universidade, detendo estudantes que se manifestaram contra Assad.

The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)

Ban Ki-moon calls for UN action over killings in Syria

MICHAEL JANSEN

UN SECRETARY general Ban Ki-moon yesterday urged the UN Security Council to take up the unrest in Syria to halt killings. "The casualties have reached such an unacceptable stage we cannot let the situation continue this way," he said, praising Arab League monitors seeking to end the crackdown on protests and calling on them to continue their mission.

In Syria, a senior Syrian military officer was shot dead on the outskirts of Damascus while, in Egypt, a legislator from the restive city of Homs announced his defection to the opposition. Brig Gen Muhammad Abdul-Hamid al-Awwad's assassination was reported by the Syrian news agency Sana as Imad Ghanioun surfaced in Cairo.

He told al-Arabiya satellite television channel, "The people of Homs are under siege and the city is disaster-stricken. There is no electricity, piles of garbage fill the streets . . . The sounds of nightly shelling terrify children . . . The Syrian people are living their worst period." He said many lawmakers back the uprising but have not gone public with their stand. He was the first to defect.

Earlier this month, Brig Gen Mustafa Ahmad al-Sheikh became the most senior officer to desert. He took refuge in Turkey where he plans to organise operations of the rebel "Free Syrian Army" which has been carrying out ambushes against loyalist troops and attacking government facilities.

A middle-ranking Muslim cleric employed in the office of the mufti of the republic, the senior Muslim figure, has also defected.

Meanwhile, the proposal for Arab League military intervention in Syria made by Qatari prime minister Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani has prompted Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki to express concern that this could lead to a regional "explosion".

Sheikh Hamad's call has been seconded by an editorial in the *National*, an English daily published in Abu Dhabi, but is likely to be opposed by Egypt, Algeria and Sudan as well as Tunisia.

France has accused Iran of violating a UN embargo by providing weapons to Syria. "The UN panel of experts on Iran has identified and informed the security council of several violations," said foreign ministry spokesman Romain Nadal. "These arms deliveries are illegal and deeply shocking because they benefit a regime that has chosen a kind of repression that the UN rights council has repeatedly said constitutes crimes against humanity . . . We condemn these violations and call on Iran and Syria to comply with security council resolutions."

Iran is barred from exporting munitions or weapons under council resolutions adopted in 2007 and 2010.

An unnamed Iranian Revolutionary Guards officer has denied the accusation but said that Tehran would aid Syria if attacked by external forces.

A Russian ship, allegedly carrying arms, may have docked and unloaded the materiel at a Syrian port before proceeding to Turkey.

The expatriate Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army have held talks on restructuring the army to "allow for rapid deployment" and streamline recruitment.

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Syria's opposition roused as regime figures abandon Assad

By **Richard Spencer**
Middle East Correspondent

THE regime of President Bashar al-Assad has suffered a series of high-profile defections, handing the Syrian opposition a propaganda coup amid growing demands for international intervention. Following the flight to Turkey of a brigadier-general, Mustafa Ahmed al-Sheikh, a second military leader was filmed announcing his defection to opposition supporters in Homs province.

In a clip posted on YouTube, he is shown brandishing his identity card to a cheering crowd standing in front of the green, white and black revolutionary flags. Imad Ghalioun, a member of par-

'Stur' on ayatollah Ahmadinejad's aide found guilty

The media adviser of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, has been found guilty of insulting Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's spiritual leader. Ali Akbar Javanfekr, who

runs Iran's IRNA news agency, was sentenced to a year in prison and a five-year ban on media and political activities for references he made to Khamenei on his website. He denied the charge and said he

planned to appeal the verdict. It was a setback for Mr Ahmadinejad, whose long-running battle against hardline conservative judges and legislators is intensifying ahead of elections in March.

liament from Homs, announced from Cairo that he had left in protest. "The Syrian people are living their worst period," Mr Ghalioun told the Arabiya news channel. "The people of Homs are under siege and the city is dis-

aster-stricken. There is no electricity, piles of garbage fill the streets." Diplomats, analysts and even members of the opposition have insisted that Mr Assad's power base is still not under direct threat. After arriving in Turkey,

which has become the base of the opposition Free Syrian Army. Gen Sheekh said he estimated 20,000 soldiers had defected from the 300,000-strong army.

However, there are unmistakable signs of Mr Assad's grip failing. Parts of Homs and the northern province of Idlib are under regular attack, and Assad forces raided Aleppo University on Sunday night after a protest by students.

David Cameron yesterday said Syria should face United Nations sanctions if it failed to halt repression.

Last night the UN said it would start training Arab League observers monitoring the crackdown. It has agreed to begin the training in Cairo after League foreign ministers meet this weekend.

SYRIA

Homs MP defies Assad to defect

A Syrian MP has fled the country to join the opposition against President Bashar al-Assad, saying the people are suffering sweeping human rights violations.

Imad Ghalioun, who represents Homs, said the city, which has been one of the most active in the uprising against Mr Assad's rule, is a disaster after months of being a focus of the regime's fierce crackdown.

"The Syrian people are living their worst period," Mr Ghalioun said, from Egypt. AP

Jane's Defence Weekly (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Assad defiant as crackdown on rebels continues

JEREMY BINNIE *JDW Middle East/Africa Editor*

LONDON

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad gave a defiant speech in Damascus on 10 January, saying the suppression of the 10-month uprising against his rule would continue.

Assad promised reforms, but said they would do nothing to stop rebels and a vaguely defined international conspiracy from trying to destabilise Syria. "There will be no compromise with terrorism ... no compromise with those who conspire with foreigners against their country," he said. He also criticised the Arab League, describing it as a tool of Syria's foreign enemies.

Syria signed an agreement with the Arab League in December that committed it to ending its heavy-handed response to the uprising and agreed to the deployment of a team of observers.

Nevertheless the violence has continued and the US has claimed that the Syrian military has not withdrawn from populated areas as agreed. "We're still seeing all kinds of regime arms

- **Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has said he will continue to suppress what he described as 'terrorism'**
- **The US and Israeli militaries expect the Syrian regime to be toppled by the uprising**

and weapons in residential neighbourhoods," US Department of State spokesperson Victoria Nuland said on 9 January.

There is a growing consensus that Assad's days are numbered. Israel Defence Force (IDF) chief Lieutenant General Benny Gantz told a parliamentary committee on 10 January that he expected the Syrian regime to fall.

He added that the IDF was preparing to resettle members of the Alawi minority that dominates the Syrian regime in the disputed Golan Heights: a move that would likely result in continued tensions between Israel and any future government in Damascus.

General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, made similar comments in December. "We're trying to think ahead about what it will mean to the people when the regime in Syria changes, as we think it will," he told reporters.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government still has international support. In what was widely seen as a show of solidarity, a Russian naval task force led by the aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* arrived in the Syrian port of Tartus on 7 January. Russia described the visit as a scheduled refuelling stop rather than a political gesture.

Tartus is a convenient port for the Russian navy as it has a permanent presence there, but the carrier could have docked elsewhere if Moscow did not want to appear supportive of Syria. ■



Admiral Kuznetsov visited Syria between 7-10 January in what Russia described as a scheduled refuelling stop.

PA Photos: 1441078

La pression et le ton montent

DAMAS | (AFP) Deux groupes de l'opposition politique et militaire au président syrien Bachar al-Assad ont accentué leur pression en annonçant hier leur collaboration, le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, sommant le Conseil de sécurité, divisé sur le dossier syrien, d'agir.

« La situation a atteint un point inacceptable. J'espère sincèrement que le Conseil de sécurité traitera cette crise d'une manière sérieuse et cohérente », a dit le secrétaire général lors d'une conférence de presse à Abou Dhabi, en marge d'un sommet sur l'énergie.



PHOTO LES ARCHIVES

■ **Bachar Al-Assad**

De son côté, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui rassemble les principaux courants de l'opposition, a expliqué avoir mis en place avec l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), constituée de déserteurs, « un bureau de liaison et un téléphone rouge afin de suivre les développements sur le plan politique et sur le terrain ».

Lors d'une réunion, dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, des responsables des deux groupes ont évoqué « la restructuration des unités de l'ASL et l'édification d'une structure moderne et souple (...) qui permettra de déployer rapidement des unités militaires et d'accueillir le nombre croissant d'officiers et soldats » déserteurs, selon un communiqué du CNS.

La Syrie est secouée depuis le 15 mars par une révolte contre le régime du président Assad, qui a envoyé ses troupes, assistées par des milices, dans les villes rebelles pour tenter de faire taire la contestation, faisant au moins 5 000 morts selon une estimation de l'ONU début décembre.

Devant cette répression, de nombreux soldats ont déserté et rejoint l'ASL, qui revendique 40 000 combattants. Ses opérations contre l'armée régulière et les forces de sécurité ont déjà fait des dizaines de morts.

La Presse (Canada)

L'échec de la Ligue arabe

Ébranlés par le Printemps arabe, ses dirigeants avaient accepté avec réticence la mission de paix en Syrie



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C'était écrit: bien encadrée par le pouvoir et méprisée par l'opposition, la mission de la Ligue arabe en Syrie visant à faire cesser les violences est un échec. À tel point d'ailleurs que le riche et influent émir du Qatar appelle maintenant à une intervention militaire pour «arrêter la tuerie».

La Ligue arabe n'a jamais rien fait d'utile. En 1979, elle a même suspendu l'Égypte pendant 10 ans parce que ce pays avait osé signer la paix avec Israël. Elle a été incapable d'éviter une guerre criminelle américaine contre l'Irak en 2003 et encore moins d'empêcher le président soudanais, aujourd'hui inculpé par la Cour pénale internationale, de massacrer son peuple au Darfour.

Les dirigeants arabes – véritables propriétaires de ces pays – qui siègent à la Ligue tremblent à la moindre manifestation de rue. Ils veulent conserver leur pouvoir et sont prêts à tout pour y arriver. Ébranlés par le Printemps arabe où plusieurs de leurs collègues tortionnaires ont été balayés, ils ont accepté en novembre dernier avec beaucoup de réticence l'envoi d'une mission de paix en Syrie.

La mission a pour objectif d'observer la situation et de faciliter la cessation des violences, la libération de détenus, le retrait de l'armée des villes et la libre circulation dans le pays des observateurs arabes et de la presse.

Le chef de la mission, un général soudanais ami du président inculpé par la CPI, avait affirmé le 26 décembre pouvoir dire en une semaine si toutes les parties – le régime de Damas et l'opposition – respectaient le mandat de la mission. Il y a 10 jours, le général a déposé un premier rapport, et la Ligue arabe, visiblement satisfaite «des progrès», a décidé la poursuite et le renforcement de la mission.

Le régime syrien va tomber, c'est certain, mais comment? La Ligue arabe n'y jouera aucun rôle tant elle est discréditée.

Malheureusement pour elle, tout dérape depuis. De 20 à 40 personnes sont tuées quotidiennement en Syrie, et les journalistes étrangers sont devenus des cibles. Des observateurs ont claqué la porte en déclarant qu'ils «pensaient servir le régime syrien [...] et lui donner une plus grande chance de continuer à tuer».

Pendant ce temps, sur la scène diplomatique internationale, disons charitablement que c'est le cirque. Vendredi dernier, le chef de la Ligue arabe a affirmé

redouter une «guerre civile» en Syrie tout en déclarant sans rire qu'«il n'y a assurément aucun doute que le rythme des morts violentes a baissé grâce à la présence des observateurs», contredisant un haut responsable de l'ONU qui affirmait exactement le contraire devant le Conseil de sécurité.

Samedi, les États-Unis ont accusé l'Iran de vendre des armes à la Syrie alors qu'un navire russe a mis le cap sur la Syrie et que Moscou a promis de maintenir ses ventes. Enfin, dimanche, l'émir du Qatar, n'attendant même pas le dépôt jeudi d'un autre rapport de la mission et un nouveau sommet arabe dimanche prochain, s'est dit favorable à l'envoi de troupes arabes en Syrie afin de mettre fin à la tuerie. Le scénario libyen, appuyé et financé par le Qatar, serait-il maintenant sur les rails?

Après 40 ans de tyrannie, le régime syrien n'a que ce qu'il mérite, même si on ne peut écarter la main de puissances occidentales dans le déroulement de la révolte actuelle. Ce régime va tomber, c'est certain, mais comment? La Ligue arabe n'y jouera aucun rôle tant elle est discréditée. Une intervention militaire étrangère est une lubie.

Alors les Syriens, du moins ceux opposés au régime, devront lutter ferme. Et selon le premier général syrien à avoir rompu avec le régime, «il faudra encore plus d'un an pour renverser le président en raison de la loyauté et du suréquipement de membres du clan» au pouvoir. On n'a pas fini d'entendre parler de la Syrie.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Eleven more killed in Syria

Some prisoners freed after Assad proclaims amnesty • Arab foreign ministers to discuss the future of monitors next week

• By ALISTAIR LYON

BEIRUT (Reuters) – Eleven people were killed in Syria on Monday in a 10-month-old struggle between President Bashar Assad and his foes that a peace plan monitored by Arab observers has failed to quench.

Arab foreign ministers will meet on Sunday to discuss the future of the mission sent last month to check if Syria is abiding by the agreement it accepted November 2.

The Arab plan required Syria to halt the bloodshed, withdraw the military from cities, free detainees and hold a dialogue.

Hundreds of people have been reported killed in Syria even since the monitors deployed on December 26 as pro-Assad forces try to crush peaceful protests and armed resistance to his rule.

Random gunfire from pro-Assad militiamen killed five, including a woman, and wounded nine in the restive city of Homs, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

It said five soldiers were killed when they tried to change sides during a clash with rebels in the northwestern province of Idlib,

adding that 15 soldiers had succeeded in defecting.

The state news agency SANA said an “armed terrorist group” had shot dead Brig.-Gen. Muhammad Abdul-Hamid al-Awad and wounded his driver in the countryside near Damascus.

The latest violence erupted a day after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Assad to “stop killing your people.”

Assad’s harsh response to the uprising has killed more than 5,000 people, by a UN count. The Syrian authorities say 2,000 members of the security forces have also been killed. The deaths of 32 civilians and soldiers were reported on Sunday.

The head of the Arab monitoring mission is due to report to an Arab League committee on Thursday before Arab foreign ministers gather to consider their next step on Syria.

Qatar, which heads the committee, has suggested Arab troops step in, an idea that is anathema to Damascus, and which Arab nations such as Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria are likely to oppose.

The League could also refer Syria to the UN Security Council if it concludes that its own peace effort has failed.

The council has been paralyzed so far because Russia and China oppose any resolution that could lead to UN sanctions or Western military action against Syria.

There is little Western appetite for any Libya-style intervention. The United States, the European Union, Turkey and the Arab League have announced economic sanctions against Syria.

On Sunday, Assad proclaimed the latest of several amnesties for “crimes” committed during the uprising and some prisoners were later freed in the presence of Arab monitors in Damascus.

Kinan al-Shami, of the Syrian Revolution Coordination Union, said hundreds of detainees appeared to have been released, but they represented only a fraction of at least 40,000 people he said had been jailed without charge since March, many of whom have been held in secret police buildings or makeshift prisons.

Among those freed, Shami said, was Syrian actor Jalal al-Tawil who was shot and captured while trying to flee to Jordan two weeks ago. He had earlier been beaten in a Damascus protest.

Assad, who retains the support of core military units, is backed by his own Alawite minority as well as some minority Christians and some majority Sunni who fear chaos, civil war and the rise of Islamists if he is toppled.

The northern commercial city of Aleppo, like central parts of the capital Damascus, has mostly escaped the turmoil, but security forces stormed Aleppo University campus overnight in pursuit of students who staged an anti-Assad protest on Friday.

Activists said dozens of students were beaten in the raid in which students who belong to a pro-Assad militia also took part.

Aleppo residents say big Sunni merchants in the city still support Assad, and that the authorities have also recruited Sunni tribesmen from the countryside to patrol the streets.

The president, 46, who appeared in public twice in as many days last week, is eager to show that his people love him.

SANA reported on Sunday that a 10-km.-long letter, which it billed as the world’s longest, was being written and signed by Syrians across the country as a “message of loyalty to the homeland and its leader.”

L'opposition syrienne s'organise et accentue la pression sur Assad

Révolte Un troisième député fait défection ; Ban somme le Conseil de sécurité d'agir.

La pression s'est accentuée sur le régime syrien hier, avec une nouvelle défection et l'annonce d'une coopération entre deux groupes d'opposants politiques et militaires.

Le député Imad Ghalioune, membre de la commission du Budget au Parlement syrien, a annoncé à la chaîne al-Arabiya s'être réfugié en Egypte, appelant l'opposition à « réaliser les intérêts du peuple qui veut parvenir à la liberté ». Avant lui, deux députés indépendants avaient annoncé fin avril leur démission pour protester contre la répression du soulèvement populaire qui a débuté le 15 mars. De son côté, l'opposant Nawaf al-Bachir, chef de la plus grande tribu de Syrie, a expliqué à al-Arabiya être « venu en Turquie pour activer l'opposition ».

Mise en place d'un bureau de liaison

L'armée syrienne libre (ASL), composée d'insoumis, et le Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui rassemble les principaux courants de l'opposition, ont pour leur part mis en place « un bureau de liaison et un téléphone rouge afin de suivre les développements sur le plan politique et sur le terrain », a expliqué le CNS. Lors d'une réunion dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, des

responsables des deux groupes ont évoqué « l'édification d'une structure moderne et souple (...) qui permettra de déployer rapidement des unités militaires et d'accueillir le nombre croissant d'officiers et soldats » qui ont quitté les rangs loyalistes, poursuit le communiqué. Notons que l'ASL revendique 40 000 combattants.

Parallèlement, l'ASL a demandé hier à la Ligue arabe de transférer le dossier syrien devant le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, et appelé ce dernier à agir, accusant le régime de poursuivre la répression sans tenir compte du plan arabe de sortie de crise. Une demande qui fait écho à un appel du secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon, qui a sommé le Conseil de sécurité d'agir « d'une manière sérieuse et cohérente » sur la Syrie. Déclarant que « la situation a atteint un point inacceptable », M. Ban a appelé de nouveau le président Assad à « arrêter de tuer », et estimé « important que les Nations unies tiennent un discours et agissent d'une manière cohérente ».

Moscou présente une nouvelle version de projet de résolution

Toujours du côté de l'Onu, Moscou a présenté au Conseil de sécurité une nouvelle version de son projet de résolution, qui ne

semble pas modifier sur le fond sa position sur la Syrie, selon des diplomates occidentaux, mais sera discuté aujourd'hui au niveau des experts. Les Nations unies ont annoncé qu'elles allaient commencer par former dans les prochains jours des observateurs de la Ligue arabe afin de les aider à évaluer la situation en Syrie.

Toujours au niveau des tractations diplomatiques, l'ancien vice-ministre chinois des Affaires étrangères, Ji Peidong, a été reçu à Alger par le ministre délégué chargé des Affaires maghrébines et africaines, Abdelkader Messahel, pour discuter notamment de la situation en Syrie. A l'issue de cette audience, M. Peidong, membre du conseil consultatif de la politique extérieure au ministère chinois des Affaires étrangères, cité par l'agence APS, a souligné que Pékin souhaite que la sécurité et la stabilité régnent dans les pays de la région pour qu'ils puissent mieux se consacrer au développement.

Par ailleurs, Téhéran va aider la Syrie en cas de frappe militaire étrangère contre Damas, a affirmé à la chaîne al-Arabiya un responsable iranien des gardiens de la révolution. « L'Iran n'est pas encore intervenu dans la crise syrienne », a ajouté ce responsable sous le couvert de l'anonymat, indiquant



Des poubelles entassées au milieu de la chaussée à Maarrat al-Nehmon.

Ces journalistes ont acquis la conviction « qu'ils ont été délibérément conduits par les services de sécurité gouvernementaux dans un lieu dont le bombardement était programmé », ont écrit hier Alexandre Vanut et Vincent de la Morandière dans un communiqué.

(Sources : agences et rédaction)

Plusieurs violations de l'embargo sur les armes, selon Paris

« Le panel d'experts des Nations unies sur l'Iran a identifié et informé le Conseil de sécurité de plusieurs cas de violation de l'embargo sur les armes à destination ou en provenance de l'Iran mis en place par les résolutions 1747 et 1929 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies », a affirmé hier le porte-parole adjoint du ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Romain Nadal. Il était interrogé sur des informations américaines assurant que l'Iran fournissait des armes à Damas pour l'aider dans sa répression des manifestants. « Ces livraisons d'armes sont illégales et profondément choquantes, puisqu'elles bénéficient à un régime qui a fait le choix d'une répression, que le Conseil des droits de l'Homme des Nations unies a qualifiée à plusieurs reprises de « crimes contre l'humanité », a ajouté M. Nadal.

La répression encore et toujours : 21 morts

Sur le terrain, les forces de sécurité ne chôment pas, elles ont tué au moins 21 personnes hier, selon al-Arabiya. La plupart d'entre eux dont une femme sont tombés sous les balles à Homs, a précisé l'Observatoire syrien pour les droits de l'homme.

Six soldats ont par ailleurs trouvé la mort en tentant de changer de camp lors d'une fusillade avec des rebelles, dans la province d'Idlib, ajoute l'Observatoire, selon lequel 15 de leurs camarades sont parvenus à rompre les rangs. L'agence de presse officielle SANA a signalé quant à elle la mort du général Moham-

Joumblatt critique la version d'Assad de la révolte syrienne

Le chef du PSP, Walid Joumblatt, a de nouveau axé son éditorial hebdomadaire sur la révolution populaire en Syrie, en se référant principalement au dernier discours du président syrien, Bachar el-Assad, mais sans le nommer.

« Loin des discours interminables qui développent des concepts pour la plupart tombés en désuétude, il faut comprendre que les révolutions populaires ont leurs mobiles objectifs. Il s'agit d'une action qui progresse et ne revient jamais en arrière. Les peuples arabes révoltés rejettent l'oppression, la tyrannie et la corruption et n'acceptent plus les partis et les chefs uniques. La langue de bois employée pendant des années pour contrôler les peuples n'a plus d'effets sur les hommes libres et les révolutionnaires du monde arabe », a d'emblée affirmé M. Joumblatt, qui a critiqué les tentatives de mettre en avant des théories en rapport avec le terrorisme. Selon lui, « même s'il est vrai que des bandes considérées comme

étant terroristes exploitent l'état de chaos provoqué par les solutions répressives de sécurité imposées par le régime face aux revendications politiques et sociales légitimes des protestataires, il reste que cela n'occulte pas le fait que des peuples veulent concrétiser leurs aspirations à la liberté, à la démocratie et à une vie digne ».

Après avoir rappelé les noms des héros des révolutions tunisienne, égyptienne, yéménite et libyenne et donné un bref aperçu du parcours révolutionnaire de chacun d'eux, le chef du PSP a jugé « injuste de classer les enfants de Deraa et d'autres (villages syriens) dans la catégorie des terroristes, tout comme tous ceux qui croupissent dans les prisons et qui ne sont que des partisans de la liberté ».

« Les milliers de militants pacifistes parmi les hommes, les femmes, les enfants et les vieux qui font face sans armes à l'oppression ne sont sûrement pas des terroristes », a-t-il fait valoir, estimant que « s'il faut suivre cette logique du complot,

la révolution américaine contre la tyrannie britannique serait la concrétisation d'un complot français », a-t-il dit avant de poursuivre : « La Résistance française conduite par Charles de Gaulle de Grande-Bretagne face aux nazis serait un complot britannique. Le soutien égyptien et tunisien à la révolution algérienne serait un complot égypto-tunisien. L'accueil de la France à l'imam Khomeyni ferait de la révolution islamique de 1979 le résultat d'un coup d'État préparé par la France. »

« En donnant libre cours à cette imagination fertile, suivant cette logique, on placerait tous les mouvements légitimes de libération et l'appui interne et externe dont ils bénéficient dans le cadre d'un complot, ce qui est absolument inacceptable », a encore affirmé le chef du PSP.

Il a plaidé en faveur d'une « application à la lettre de l'initiative arabe de sortie de crise, à même de permettre aussi l'édification d'une Syrie nouvelle, guérie, démocratique

que et pluraliste ». Il a souligné que la poursuite de l'effusion de sang « risque de plonger le pays dans une guerre civile aux conséquences destructrices ou de générer une nouvelle fuite en avant aux conséquences tout aussi désastreuses ».

M. Joumblatt a invité l'Iran à prendre une initiative quelconque en faveur du peuple syrien, rappelant que ce dernier s'était tenu aux côtés de la révolution iranienne contre le régime du chah, puis contre les attaques de l'Irak. Il a lancé le même appel à la Russie « qui a accordé des milliers de bourses scolaires aux enfants syriens et soutenu leur pays au plan militaire et de développement ».

« La présence de navires de guerre (au large des côtes syriennes), aussi importante soit-elle, n'est pas le meilleur moyen pour traiter avec cette crise », a-t-il dit.

Une entente autour de la stratégie de défense
Évoquant ensuite l'actualité locale, le chef du PSP a rap-

porté qu'il n'avait pas pris rendez-vous du secrétaire général du Hezbollah, Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, et qu'il continue à plaider en faveur d'un dialogue « en toutes circonstances entre les Libanais pour en finir avec les divorces politiques ». Il a dans le même temps réaffirmé son attachement à la Résistance « et notamment à sa mission de défense, conforme à l'intérêt national libanais, face à l'ennemi israélien », tout en soulignant la nécessité de « parvenir à une entente autour d'une stratégie nationale globale de défense et d'un rejet du recours aux armes à l'intérieur du pays ».

« Nous sommes soucieux, tout comme la Résistance, de la préservation de la stabilité interne et de la paix civile », a-t-il observé.

Il a évoqué les divergences de vues avec le Hezbollah au sujet de la crise syrienne, mais sans les commenter. « Nous les laissons au dialogue direct, loin de toute polémique médiatique », a insisté M. Joumblatt.

Calls mount for U.N. action on Syria stalemate

BEIRUT: Western diplomats dismissed a new Russian draft resolution on the Syria crisis distributed Monday at the U.N. Security Council, as calls mounted for the U.N. to step in to take decisive action on the increasingly desperate Syria stalemate.

Claiming a peace plan monitored by Arab observers has failed to douse a 10-month-old struggle between President Bashar Assad and his foes, the renegade Free Syrian Army urged the Arab League to step aside and let the U.N. handle the crisis in Syria.

In a statement signed by Free Syrian Army leader Riyad al-Asaad, it called on the 22-member bloc to "quickly transfer the case of Syria to the U.N. Security Council."

The statement, sent to AFP in Nicosia, appealed to the international community to "act quickly against the regime through Chapter 7 of the U.N. charter to maintain peace" in Syria.

The Syrian Free Army is made up of deserters and says it has 40,000 troops stationed in neighboring Turkey. And, in a sign of increasing coordination and support for a militarized opposition force, the umbrella group The Syrian National Council said in a statement it had set up a liaison office and a hotline with the SFA to follow political developments on the ground.

Earlier, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Abu Dhabi reiterated a call for Assad to "stop killing, and

listen to his people," urging the Security Council to act on a situation which has reached an "unacceptable stage."

"I hope the U.N. Security Council handles Syria in a coherent manner and with a sense of gravity," but did not recommend any specific action.

"The casualties have reached such an unacceptable stage we cannot let the situation continue this way," Ban said.

Arab foreign ministers will meet Sunday to discuss the future of the Arab League mission sent last month to check if Syria was abiding by the

agreement it accepted on Nov. 2.

The Arab League's plan required Syria to halt the bloodshed, withdraw the military from cities, free detainees and hold dialogue with the opposition.

About 200 Arab League observers

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A member of the Free Syrian Army stands guard during a patrol in the western border town of Zabadani.

are working in Syria to verify whether the government is abiding by its agreement to end the military crackdown on dissent, but so far they appear to have made little impact.

Adding to criticism of the initiative, the leader of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, was quoted Sunday as saying Arab troops should be sent to Syria to stop the deadly crackdown – the first statements by an Arab leader calling for the deployment of troops inside Syria.

An Arab League official said Monday that Qatar has not made any proposals to the League to send troops. The official cautioned that the only Arab nation that could have potentially sent troops to Syria would have been Egypt, due to the size of its army and its historic ties with Syria, but that this is not likely to happen.

The Egyptian military is tied down in its own nation's turmoil since the ouster of longtime President Hosni Mubarak last February. Egyptian troops are also under increasing pressure to safeguard Egypt's sensitive borders with Israel, the Gaza Strip, Libya and Sudan.

The League official spoke on condition of anonymity.

The new Russian resolution was circulated as Germany again complained about the slow pace of talks, but diplomats said there is no apparent change in the Russian position opposing any strong U.N. action against President Bashar Assad's crackdown on protests which has left upwards of 5,000 people dead.

"It is high time for the council to have serious negotiations," a spokesman for Germany's U.N. mission said, stressing how there have been no talks among all 15 members of the council on a Syria resolution for more than three weeks.

Russia and China vetoed a European resolution on Syria in October calling for a move by Western nations toward regime change in Syria.

Russia proposed its own resolution in December but Britain, France, Germany and the United States have said the text is not acceptable because it puts opposition violence on the same level as the government's assault.

Activists reported 12 people were killed across the country in continued violence Monday. Random gunfire by pro-Assad militiamen killed five people, including a woman, and wounded nine in the restive city of Homs, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. A sniper later shot dead a 16-year-old girl there, it added. It said five soldiers were killed when they tried to change sides during a clash with rebels in the northwestern province of Idlib, adding that 15 soldiers had succeeded in defecting.

Meanwhile, a member of Syria's parliament reportedly fled the country to join the opposition, saying the Syrian people are suffering sweeping human rights violations.

Imad Ghalioun, who represents the central city of Homs, told Al-Arabiya TV that the city is a disaster after months of being a focus of the regime's fierce crackdown. – *The Daily Star, with agencies*

'Russian initiative' to guide Syria?

Policy-makers could be relying on the Yemeni solution, which produced a win-win scenario for Saleh and the opposition

BY SAMI MOUBAYED
Special to Gulf News

Contrary to what many people believe, the biggest pressure currently being applied on Damascus is not from the Arab League, or from the US, or Europe. It is from Russia, their main ally. The Russians, many in Syria believe, have been mandated by the international community to find a solution to the crisis. They have been through this before and know that one-party rule and a police state cannot last forever.

The Syrian state needs to be democratised from within, they claim, like what happened to them after collapse of the Soviet Union, rather than being dismantled completely, as in the case of Iraq in 2003. This, of course, is music to the ears of Syrian officialdom. The Russians are worried that if the regime falls in Syria, more pressing than presidential elections would be fundamental issues like who is going to traffic police on the streets, who is going to collect garbage, who is going to control the borders, who is going to administer jails, and who is going to handle the economy?

They happen to know the Syrian scene inside out; they know who matters in Syria, and what buttons to push to make change happen. Russia has a clear vision for what it wants from Syria, whereas the Americans — apparently — do not. The US has asked Syria's President Bashar Al Assad to step down, but to date, it has

provided no road map as to how this can be done, and what the transition period would look like. Moscow, however, is seemingly more in the picture on how it wants Syria to look three, six, and 12 months from now.

For starters, Russia wants to maintain its political and military influence in the Arab world, via Syria. What Russia worries about is losing that influence to the Americans and the Turks who, it believes, will take the lion's share of the spoils, if the Syrian regime falls — completely ejecting Russia from the Middle East at large.

Orderly transition

Russian policy-makers have been very impressed by the Yemeni solution, which produced a win-win scenario for President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the Yemeni opposition. It still believes that such an outcome can be achieved for Syria, and is laying the final touches on a 'Russian initiative' which doesn't necessarily mean replacing Al Assad before presidential elections in 2014. Before such an initiative sees the light, Russia wants Al Assad to do the following: 1) Dismantle the Baath Party monopoly on power through an upcoming Baath Party Congress 2) Introduce a new constitution 3) Begin a power-sharing process, no matter how sluggish, with the Syrian opposition. The Baathists would

probably resort to arms to defend themselves. The transition — as far as Russia is concerned — needs to be orderly, neat, and more importantly, taken up willingly by the Baathists themselves. Russians feel that they can make that happen, only via Al Assad.

A new constitution is already in the works, which drops Article 8, a controversial 1973 article that says that the Baath Party "is the leader of state and society". Those changes would go hand-in-hand, according to the Russians, with a cabinet of national unity that includes members of the opposition. Consultations are currently under way for a new cabinet, replacing the nine-month government of Adel Safar. The idea is either to name an opposition figure as prime minister, or keep a Baathist at the job (until Article 8 is formally abolished) and give the opposition the job of deputy prime minister.

Reportedly, certain figures in the Coordination Committee, a broad coalition of opposition figures that includes secularists and Kurds, will be invited to join the

new government. The Coordination Committee's two heavyweight leaders, Hassan Abdul Azeem and Haitham Manaa, have already said that they would not join such a government, although other figures are toying with the idea — if presented to them as part of a 'democracy package' that comes with real Russian guarantees. Many of them have been invited to Moscow, specifically for this purpose.

Will the demonstrators back down, given that they listen neither to the Russians or to Syrian officialdom or to the Coordination Committees? They have been calling for nothing less than complete regime change. Most foreign players have gotten carried away with the Syrian opposition, forgetting that it commands very little influence on the Syrian street and cannot end the demonstrations, even if wanted.

The presidential speech, the new cabinet, and the upcoming Baath Party Congress that will be held in early February — all have Russia's fingerprints. The main challenge remains: how can the Syrians — and Russians — restore calm to the Syrian street? That is a subject to which Moscow, to date, does not have an answer to, and certainly, not does the Syrian government.

Sami Moubayed is editor-in-chief of Forward Magazine in Damascus, Syria.

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By Alamy 4, SHAMS/Corbis

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Monitors face a challenging task

THEY HAVE TO VERIFY WILDLY DIVERGENT VERSIONS OF EVENTS UNDER PERILOUS CONDITIONS

BY ALEXANDRA ZAVIS

Zabadani, Syria When observers from the Arab League drove into this mountain town in southwestern Syria, a hotbed of dissent against President Bashar Al Assad, they received a hero's welcome. Residents mobbed the observers' car, clamoured to tell of their plight, and carried one of them away on their shoulders in celebration. But just hours later, the five League representatives sped away under a hail of bullets. It was impossible to determine who was doing the shooting.

The episode on Sunday was a rare glimpse into the conflict that is threatening to plunge Syria into civil war, and the challenges faced by about 160 monitors who are trying to verify wildly divergent versions of events under dangerous conditions.

Opposition activists and some monitors have declared the mission a failure, saying it was not given the time, the resources or the independence to determine whether the government is fulfilling its pledge to end a military crackdown.

Town under siege

In better times, Zabadani was famous for its cherry, apricot and apple orchards, and for the gracious summer homes built by members of the Syrian elite and wealthy visitors from the Gulf. Residents said that on Friday, security forces surrounded the town and began pummeling them with tank rounds and gunfire. "Kids are dying here and we can't take them to the hospital," one man said on Sunday. "We've been three days without electricity or water."

The five monitors, including representatives from the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar, were dispatched to investigate what was happening. Syrian officials, who are responsible for the mission's security, informed the team that explosive devices had been found on the road to

“With these things, we never know if it's a real threat or they are just trying to keep us away.”

An Arab League observer

Zabadani and urged them not to go. If the observers insisted, they said, their security escort could not accompany them into the town, which residents acknowledge is defended by military defectors fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army.

It was not the first time they were presented with such a choice, the observers said. In some cases, they decided against a visit. This time, they said they would see how far they could get on their own.

"With these things, we never know if it's a real threat or they are just trying to keep us away," one said.

They set off from Damascus in a convoy full of armed security force members. Less than half an hour from the capital, they entered an area that looked and felt like a front line in a war. The road emptied of traffic and checkpoints dotted the way. Outside Zabadani, the security escort peeled off.

Fleeing families

As they got closer, the monitors came across families fleeing on foot and in cars. Asked whether there was trouble ahead, a woman in a black coat snapped back, "If there weren't trouble, we wouldn't be escaping."

The town appeared eerily deserted until the observers turned down a narrow street dubbed 'Free Syria' in bold black graffiti on a wall. Young men raced into the road to clear away an improvised checkpoint and lead the vehicles to a small square where hundreds of people were waiting for



Documenting evidence

A delegate from the Arab League observer mission speaks with some of the prisoners who were freed from Adra Prison on the outskirts of Damascus on Sunday. Some monitors have declared the mission a failure, saying it was not given the independence to determine whether the government is fulfilling its pledge to end a military crackdown.

them. The crowd erupted in cheers and chants. Frantic men and women surrounded the vehicles, eager to tell their stories.

Residents said security forces had killed 14 people, injured 350 and detained 568 in a town of about 30,000 people since March. "Till now, they are around Zabadani," a 67-year-old man said.

"They only left because of you and after an hour, they will be back."

Leading the monitors to the edge of the town, they pointed down a road where six armoured vehicles could be seen in the

distance. Go and look, they said, the security forces are hiding tanks in the bushes. When the observers demurred and said they needed to leave, elements of the crowd started kicking and stoning their vehicle.

Afraid their car was about to be overturned, the observers sped off into the no man's land between the town and the government checkpoint. They approached carefully, waving their orange vests in the air before getting too close to the government forces.

After several anxious moments, they were waved forward, but then told there

were suspicious wires in the road ahead and they could go no farther. Some raised their guns and chanted, "Bashar, we sacrifice our souls and blood for you."

Eruption of gunfire

When they were finally led away by an armoured carrier, there was an eruption of gunfire. Bullets zinged past the car, but it was not clear where they were coming from or who was the intended target. Another tank rolled by, headed to Zabadani.

By the time the members of the team reached their hotel, residents were call-

ing their cellphones to report that the town was being shelled. One observer said it felt as though the whole episode had been staged, but he could not say by whom. Did the townspeople push them forward to provide cover for an attack by the Free Syrian Army? Or, were the security forces using them as an excuse to send in the army?

— Los Angeles Times

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Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

UN chief urges Security Council to act on Syria

ABU DHABI — UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Monday appealed to the Security Council to act with “seriousness” on Syria, where he said the situation has become “unacceptable.”

“The situation has reached an unacceptable point,” Ban told reporters on the sidelines of an energy summit in Abu Dhabi.

“I sincerely hope that the Security Council will handle this in a sense of seriousness and gravity and in a coherent manner.

“I’ve been urging and appealing to President (Bashar) Al Assad to stop killing... and to listen to his own people,” he said.

“Leaders should always be connected with the people. When a leader is disconnected from the reality and from the people, then this situation is inevitable,” he added of 10 months of deadly protests against Assad’s regime.

Ban said he hoped the UN would act coherently, acknowledging differences of opinion on how to address the situation in Syria. “It is important that the United Nations speaks and acts in a coherent manner,” he said.

“We cannot let this situation continue like this.” “I highly appreciate and commend the efforts by the league of Arab states, by dispatching monitors and engag-



Ban Ki-moon — *KT photo*

ing in discussions with President Assad,” he said.

“I sincerely hope they will be able to carry on,” he added.

Meanwhile, the political and military opposition to Syrian President Bashar Al Assad announced on Monday they have set up a hotline to coordinate their action, as foreign and internal pressure mounts on his regime.

A member of Syria’s parliament meanwhile has left the country to join the opposition against Assad’s regime, saying the people are suffering human rights violations.

Meanwhile, eleven more people were killed in fresh violence in Syria. — *Agencies*

Hotline set up to help topple Assad

Opposition council and rebel army unite

Groups agree on ways to bolster fighters' capabilities and how to deal with claimed daily arrival of deserters from Syrian security forces

Zoi Constantinou
Foreign Correspondent

BEIRUT // Syrian opposition groups announced yesterday that they had set up a hotline to help coordinate organisations working to bring down the regime of President Bashar al Assad.

The Syrian National Council (SNC) said the decision to set up a hotline and a liaison office was made during talks with the main armed opposition group, the Free Syrian Army.

The rebel army, which is largely composed of defected Syrian soldiers, and the SNC talked on Saturday. They also discussed ways of bolstering the armed group's capabilities against Syrian security forces.

Talks between the two groups also focused on restructuring the rebel army units and ways to absorb what the opposition has said is the daily arrival of soldiers deserting their Syrian military posts.

The Free Syrian Army, which is led by a former Syrian army colonel, Rami al-Mohammar, said 40,000 men have joined its ranks in the 10 months since the uprising against the regime of Mr al-Assad began.

Yesterday, Syria's state news agency

reported that an "armed terrorist group" shot and killed a high-ranking member of the Syrian army in the area of Ghouta.

The regime maintains it has lost more than 2,000 members of its security forces since the uprising began. The UN estimates that more than 5,000 people have been killed in the violence that erupted when government forces launched a crackdown on anti-regime protests that began in March of last year.

The Local Coordination Committees said yesterday that more

The Free Syrian Army says 40,000 men have joined its ranks in the 10 months since the uprising began



Soldiers of the Free Syrian Army demonstrate against President Bashar Al Assad in the northern town of Maaret Al Human yesterday. Reuters

Main (Lupre), the French foreign minister, has condemned what he described as the "silence" of the Security Council in the face of the mounting death toll in Syria. France also yesterday accused Iran of repeatedly violating a UN arms embargo against Syria.

"These arms deliveries are illegal and deeply shocking because they benefit a regime that has chosen to monitor compliance with the plan has been criticised, with some alleging it has been exploited and used as a cover while authorities continue using deadly force against protesters.

The 22-member organisation is due to meet on Sunday to discuss the mission's progress, as Arab foreign ministers consider their next step on Syria.

A team of Arab League observers reportedly visited the coastal town of Banias and the northern Syrian town of Maaret al-Numan on Sunday, where they were met by thousands of anti-government protesters. Video posted on the internet,

which could not be independently verified, appeared to show a crowd of demonstrators shouting "victory for our revolution".

Also on Sunday, the Syrian government announced a general amnesty for peaceful demonstrators, army deserters and those who carried unlicensed weapons.

Opposition groups quickly dismissed the proposed pardons, which the Muslim Brotherhood described as "neither serious nor credible".

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★ With additional reports by Agence France-Presse, Reuters and the Associated Press

The National (EAU / UAE)

Military intervention should be the last resort for Syria



Syria
Faisal Al Yafai

The seas are getting choppy, but the tide has yet to turn. As the Syrian uprising enters a new calendar year, and with around 6,000 bodies now buried because of it, a political solution seems more elusive than ever. Each passing day makes one less likely.

The uncertainty is crippling, and is making Syrian society choppier. The country is becoming more dangerous: the last few weeks have brought explosions to the centre of Damascus and an apparent suicide bombing.

The attacks have spooked Syrians, wary of their once-safe country becoming a hotbed of sectarian strife. (Those who blame the Assad regime in some way for the terrorist attacks suggest that this fear is precisely what the government wants.)

The rumoured killings of Alawites – the Shia sect to which President Bashar Al Assad and many of his key supporters belong – in Homs can be explained by the predominance of Alawites in the military-security apparatus. But Christians, who make up 10 per cent of the population, fear that they would be next if sectarian strife grips the country.

At the same time, the protests are becoming more dangerous. Clashes between the army and defectors from it are becoming

more frequent. The line between an armed insurgency and peaceful mass protest is growing harder to delineate – a phenomenon entirely due to the brutality with which the Assad regime has sought to quell the unrest.

But the tide has yet to turn decisively against the president. Mr Al Assad remains defiant and many, perhaps a majority, of Syrians are still cautious, willing to watch and see.

This was just how Tripoli remained under the control of Muammar Qaddafi for so long after the uprising began: fearing the repercussions of choosing the wrong side, many residents were reluctant to rise up until the rebels entered the city.

The international response has so far failed to quell the army's brutality, failed to offer protesters a safe haven and failed to convince Mr Al Assad to take a way out.

It is in this context that the idea of military intervention has resurfaced. Arguments over the use of foreign militaries to affect regime change have circulated since the dark days of 2003, when Syria was part of the domino chain that many claimed would inevitably be toppled post-Saddam Hussein.

But now even Arab leaders are mooting it. This week the Emir of Qatar suggested that Arab troops could end the bloodshed.

Military intervention seems like a bold decision; its use has been partly rehabilitated by the experience of Libya, and the Arab Spring has offered several opportunities where intervention might have been tried in the name of safeguarding citizens.

Yet military intervention has a way of spiralling out of control. Whether it is an Arab army marching through the streets of Damascus (and which Arab army would that be? Under whose command?) or Nato planes bombing Syrians, intervention is bloody and brutal.

In Syria, intervention could not be clean and would not be quick. Therefore it is essential every other possible step be first exhausted.

There are few good options in Syria; the road to intervention might one day need to be walked. But not yet. For now, as tempting as it is to argue for a big, quick solution, Syrians would be better served by a series of smaller ones.

In particular, a three-pronged approach involving Syrian civil society, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Syrian National Council (SNC), combined with external pressure from the Arabs, Turkey and Russia, offers the best chance of a minimally bloody solution.

When Mr Al Assad said, in a television interview last week, that "the majority of Syrian people are in the middle", he described the situation accurately. The SNC and the FSA need to widen the group of people who believe there is a better alternative to Mr Al Assad's rule.

The SNC are not doing enough to convince Syrians they can guarantee a stable, orderly transition. The political squabbling so far has

been at best undignified, at worst a dereliction of duty. Members of the Council often talk as if they are preparing to lead the country, when in fact they can only ever lead a transition. Post-Assad, Syrians will need to choose their leaders, not be led by a group of people who have spent many years outside their country.

The second plank is the Free Syrian Army. As the ranks of army deserters swell, the announcement this week that a senior officer has defected to Turkey and will lead a military council to encourage more defections is positive. Defections will weaken the basis of Mr Al Assad's ability to repress and remain the swiftest way to weaken his power.

The third plank is civil society. A countrywide general strike last month was supported mainly outside of Aleppo and Damascus, the centres of Mr Al Assad's rule. But this tactic's power lies in demonstrating the extent to which the president has lost control of the country.

None of these, by themselves, will be able to deliver a knockout blow to Mr Al Assad, who, it is clear, intends to fight to the bitter end.

But together, they may convince enough Syrians within the country and enough supporters without (especially Russia and China) that Mr Al Assad's rule must end.

Such a path may yet avoid the bloodshed of intervention, a last resort that has brought immeasurable harm to countries west and east of Damascus.

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Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

11 MORE KILLED IN SYRIA DESPITE ARAB MONITORS

Random gunfire from pro-Assad militiamen killed five people, including a woman, and wounded nine in the restive city of Homs, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The SANA news agency said Brigadier-General Mohammed Abdul-Hamid al-Awad was shot dead

Eleven civilians were killed in Syria and a brigadier was assassinated on Monday in violence that has not abated despite an Arab peace plan monitored by Arab League observers. Arab League foreign ministers will meet on Sunday to discuss the future of the mission sent last month to check if Syria is abiding by the Arab plan it accepted on Nov. 2.

The plan required Syria to halt the bloodshed, withdraw the military from cities, free detainees and hold a dialogue. Hundreds of people have been reported killed in Syria even since the monitors deployed on Dec. 26 as forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad try to crush peaceful protests that began 10 months ago, as well as armed resistance to his rule.

Random gunfire from pro-Assad militiamen killed five people, including a woman, and wounded nine in the restive city of Homs, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The state news agency SANA said an "armed terrorist group" had shot dead Brigadier-General Mohammed Abdul-Hamid al-Awad and wounded his driver in the countryside near Damascus. The latest violence erupted a day after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Assad to "stop killing your people."

Assad's harsh response to the uprising has killed more than 5,000 people, by a UN count. The Syrian authorities say 2,000 members of the security forces have also been killed. The deaths of 32 civilians and soldiers were reported on Sunday.

'Stop killing your people'

"Today, I say again to President Assad of Syria: stop the violence, stop killing your people. The path of repression is a dead end," Ban told a conference in Lebanon on Sunday.

Syrian legislator joins opposition

A member of Syria's parliament has left the country to join the opposition against President Bashar Assad's regime, saying the Syrian people are suffering sweeping human rights violations. Imad Ghalioun, who represents the central city of Homs, told Al-Arabiya TV that the city, which has been one of the most restive in the uprising against Assad's rule since March, is a disaster after months of being a focus of the regime's fierce crackdown.

"The Syrian people are living their worst period," Ghalioun said late on Sunday from Egypt. "The people of Homs are under siege and the city is disaster-stricken," he said. "There is no electricity, piles of garbage fill the streets ... The sounds of shelling all night terrify children." He added that there are many legislators who support the uprising but have not said so publicly. Thousands of people have been killed in the government's crackdown on a 10-month-old uprising, which has turned increasingly militarized in recent months with a growing risk of civil war. **Beirut AP**

The head of the Arab monitoring mission is due to report to an Arab League committee on Thursday, ahead of a wider meeting of Arab foreign ministers to consider their next step on Syria. Qatar, which heads the League committee on Syria, has suggested Arab troops step in to stop the killing, an idea which is anathema to Damascus and which several Arab countries, including Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria, are likely to oppose. An Arab representative to the Cairo-based League said it had received no formal proposal for such military intervention.

The League also has the option of referring Syria to the UN Security Council, which has so far failed to take any action due to opposition from Russia and China to any resolution that could lead to UN sanctions or Western military action. There is little Western appetite for any Libya-style intervention. The United States, the European Union, Turkey and the Arab League have announced economic sanctions against Syria. Assad proclaimed an amnesty on Sunday for "crimes" committed during the uprising and some detainees were later freed in the presence of Arab monitors in Damascus. Kinan al-Shami, of the Syrian Revolution Coordination Union, said hundreds of detainees appeared to have been released, but they represented only a fraction of at least 40,000 people he said had been jailed without charge since March, many of whom have been held in secret police buildings or makeshift prisons. Among those freed, Shami said, was Syrian actor Jalal al-Tawil who was shot and captured while trying to flee to Jordan two weeks ago. He had earlier been beaten in a Damascus protest.

Assad has issued several amnesties in recent months, but opposition groups say thousands of people remain behind bars and many have been tortured or abused, with some killed in custody. The movement to end more than four decades of Assad family rule began with largely peaceful demonstrations, but after months of violence by the security forces, army deserters and insurgents started to fight back, prompting fears of civil war. Assad, who retains the support of core military units, is backed by his own Alawite minority as well as some minority Christians and some majority Sunni Muslims who fear chaos, civil war and the rise of militancy if he is toppled. **Beirut Reuters / AP**

The Washington Times (USA)

SYRIA

Lawmaker leaves country to oppose Assad's regime

By **ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIRUT | A member of Syria's parliament has left the country to join the opposition against President Bashar Assad's regime, saying the Syrian people are suffering sweeping human rights violations.

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garbage fill the streets. ... The sounds of shelling all night terrify children."

He added that there are many lawmakers who support the uprising but have not said so publicly.

Thousands of people have been killed in the government's crackdown on a 10-month-old uprising, which has turned increasingly militarized in recent months with a growing risk of civil war.

The U.N. says about 400 people have been killed in the past three weeks, on top of an earlier estimate of more than 5,000 killed since March.

The U.N. chief demanded Sunday that Mr. Assad stop killing his people and said the "old order" of one-man rule and family dynasties is over in the Middle East.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, delivering the keynote address at a conference in Beirut on democracy in the

Arab world, said the revolutions of the Arab Spring show people will no longer accept tyranny.

"Today, I say again to President Assad of Syria: Stop the violence. Stop killing your people," Mr. Ban said.

Mr. Ban has been highly critical of the Assad government's deadly crackdown on civilian protesters since the killings began.

Mr. Bari's speech was his toughest against the continued survival of authoritarian regimes in the face of the growing international clamor for democracy.

Syria agreed last month to an Arab League plan that calls for a halt to the crackdown, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry such as tanks, from cities, the release of all political prisoners, and allowing foreign journalists and human rights workers in.

About 200 Arab League observers are working in Syria to verify whether the government is abiding by its agreement to end the military crackdown on dissent. So far they appear to have made little impact.

The leader of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, was quoted Sunday as saying Arab troops should be sent to Syria to stop the deadly crackdown — the first statements by an Arab leader calling for the deployment of troops inside Syria.

An Arab League official said Monday that Qatar has not made any proposals to the league to send troops.

The official cautioned that the only Arab nation that could have potentially sent troops to Syria would have been Egypt, due to the size of its army and its historic ties with Syria, but that this is not likely to happen.

China Daily (Chine / China)



SYRIAN PRISONERS RELEASED

PHOTO BY **BASSEM TELLAWI** / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Arab League observers wearing orange vests oversee the release of Syrian prisoners carrying their belongings as they leave Adra Prison on the north-east outskirts of Damascus, Syria, on Saturday. Syria's state news agency SANA said President Bashar al-Assad has granted a general amnesty for crimes committed during the unrest of the past 10 months. SANA said the amnesty issued on Sunday covers those who have peacefully demonstrated, those who have carried unlicensed weapons and those who hand over their weapons to authorities before the end of January.