

El ejército sirio libera Duma y Hama

REVISTA DE PRENSA SOBRE SIRIA #36

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En su conferencia de prensa, el ministro sirio de Relaciones Exteriores, Walid al-Muallem, ya había señalado que el informe de los observadores de la Liga Árabe reconoce que el gobierno sirio está obligado a garantizar la seguridad de su pueblo. El ejército nacional sirio liberó inmediatamente las ciudades de Duma y Hama, parcialmente ocupadas por la Legión Wahhabita. Quedan aún algunos barrios de esas dos ciudades y una amplia zona rural en manos de los grupos armados extranjeros.

Sin embargo, según la prensa internacional –que sigue silenciando el contenido del informe de los observadores de la Liga Árabe– las fuerzas sirias de seguridad prosiguen en ambas ciudades la sangrienta represión contra manifestaciones pacíficas. A tenor de ese análisis, el Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo –al que pertenecen no sólo los Estados árabes del Golfo sino todas las monarquías árabes– ha decidido llevar el tema sirio al Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU, en un supuesto esfuerzo por remediar la falta de iniciativa de la Liga Árabe, pero sobre todo para legalizar una intervención militar.

- En su exilio parisino, Abdel Halim Khaddam, concede una entrevista al diario francés *Le Figaro*. Acusa al presidente al-Assad de querer dismantelar Siria para replegarse hacia un Estado alauita.

La entrevistadora Isabelle Lasserre no se molesta en cuestionar qué razón pudiera llevar al presidente al-Assad a alinearse así precisamente junto al plan de rediseño del Medio Oriente ampliado de los neoconservadores.

- En el *Corriere della Sera*, Lorenzo Cremonesi insinúa que las autoridades sirias pudieran ser responsables del asesinato del padre Basilius Nassar. El maquiavélico plan de los sirios sería garantizar el apoyo de la minoría cristiana haciéndole creer que existe un peligro islamista.

- En el Reino Unido, el *Daily Telegraph* reporta un encuentro con Omar Bakri Mohammed en su exilio libanés. Considerado por la opinión pública británica como el inspirador de los atentados de Londres, en julio de 2007, este personaje declara firmemente que los «hermanos de Al-Qaeda» están dispuestos a incrementar los atentados suicidas en Siria en cuanto así lo solicite la oposición.

- De regreso de un viaje de 11 días por el Medio Oriente, el senador estadounidense John Kerry responde a las preguntas de *Foreign Policy*. Según Kerry, Siria está al

borde de la guerra civil. Aunque no mencionó ninguna acción de Estados Unidos, indicó que Washington sigue de cerca los esfuerzos de la Liga Árabe y del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo.

- *L'Orient-Le Jour* aplaude la publicación de una carta abierta del Consejo Nacional Sirio sobre las relaciones del futuro gobierno (si el CNS lograra llegar al poder) con el Líbano. El texto del CNS –que aprueba los términos Sykes-Picot sobre la partición de la región, el acuerdo saudita de Taif y los reclamos israelíes sobre Shebaa– satisface plenamente a los políticos de la Coalición 14 de Marzo. Sin embargo, deplora el diario libanés, ese documento histórico –cuyo contenido reproduce íntegramente– no pasa de ser un proyecto que no cuenta aún con el aval del CNS.

- *L'Orient-Le Jour* revela también que la presidencia de la Liga Árabe, o sea Qatar, se puso en contacto con el egipcio Mohammed el-Baradei para nombrarlo enviado especial de la Liga Árabe en Siria.

Esta información fue posteriormente desmentida.

Khaddam : « Assad planifie la partition de la Syrie »

L'ex-vice-président syrien affirme que le régime transfère ses armes sur le littoral, pour créer un État alaouite au nord-ouest

POURQUOI ?
ISABELLE LASSERE

L'ancien vice-président syrien, Abdel Halim Khaddam, 73 ans, vit à Paris depuis qu'il a fait défection en 2005. En novembre, il a créé le Comité national de soutien à la révolution syrienne (CNSRS), un mouvement qui voudrait rassembler tous les courants de l'opposition. Il réclame depuis plusieurs mois une intervention militaire occidentale en Syrie, pays où il a conservé de nombreux contacts.

LE FIGARO. - Affirmez-vous que le régime de Bachar el-Assad est en train de transférer le matériel militaire de l'armée à l'ouest du pays, au bord de la Méditerranée, en zone alaouite ?

Abdel Halim KHADDAM. - Tout à fait. Bachar et son clan ont d'abord distribué des fusils et des mitraillettes dans les villages et les villages peuplés par leurs compatriotes alaouites. Depuis un mois, ils ont aussi commencé à transférer les armements lourds de l'armée, par la route, vers le littoral, en les dissimulant sur les collines et les hauteurs, 8 % de la population syrienne est alaouite, même si tous les Alaouites ne soutiennent pas Bachar el-Assad. Les zones alaouites partent du sud-ouest de Homs et remontent, via Hama, jusqu'à la ville de Lattaquié, sur le littoral.

De quel type d'armements s'agit-il ? Les missiles et les armes stratégiques ont déjà intégralement été transférés. Les tanks et l'artillerie, en partie seulement, car le régime a besoin d'en garder pour assurer la répression contre les manifestants dans les villes. Bachar a également prévu d'envoyer ses avions de chasse sur l'aéroport de Lattaquié.

Quel est le but du régime ?

Le président syrien a changé de tactique. Pendant longtemps, il a essayé d'envahir les villes et de bloquer les incursions. Mais cela n'a pas marché. Il applique donc aujourd'hui un autre plan, qui vise à créer une guerre de religion, une guerre interconfessionnelle. Je sais qu'il y a un mois, il s'est confié à l'un de ses affidés libanais et lui a dit son intention de créer un État alaouite d'où il pourrait mener une guerre fratricide et confessionnelle. Il est désormais prêt à créer sa république personnelle. Il envisage de s'installer à Lattaquié. Je suis sûr qu'il existe suffisamment d'abus souverains ou lui et son clan pourraient se replier.

Pensez-vous que Bachar el-Assad joue la carte de la partition de la Syrie ?

Oui. Il a en vain utilisé la force contre le peuple syrien. Il ne veut pas se rendre et subir le même sort que Kadafi, même si, aujourd'hui, son discours politique, celui d'un homme aux abois, ressemble



«Le président syrien a changé de tactique. Il applique aujourd'hui un autre plan, qui vise à créer une guerre de religion, une guerre interconfessionnelle», estime Abdel Halim Khaddam. JCH/THYS/AFP

La Syrie sous mandat français en 1926

Etat des Alaouites (1920-1936)



échec : la partition, certains insurpris n'hésiteront pas à faire appel à tous les radicaux du monde islamique. Les terroristes risquent donc d'entrer dans le jeu syrien. Le monde arabe se caractérise par un pluralisme ethnique et religieux. L'instabilité risque donc de se propager à toute la région.

Pourquoi l'armée syrienne libre n'a-t-elle pas essayé de bloquer les transferts des convois militaires à destination des zones alaouites ?

Parce que l'armée libre n'existe pas dans toutes les régions. Et parce que les routes sont contrôlées par l'armée régulière, celle de Bachar. ■

Quand la France créait l'« État alaouite »

Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'une partition de la Syrie est envisagée. En 1920, après la Première Guerre mondiale, débute le mandat français sur la Syrie confié par la Société des Nations. Le pays est divisé entre quatre entités politiques : l'État de Damas, l'État des Druzes, l'État d'Alep et le Territoire des Alaouites.

Le Figaro (France)

La Ligue arabe en pointe à l'ONU face au régime de Damas

ALAIN BARLHET

AFFAIBLIE sur le terrain par le départ des observateurs des pays du Golfe, la Ligue arabe privilégie désormais ses efforts à l'ONU. L'organisation panarabe a fait parvenir en début de semaine une lettre à Ben Ki-moon pour lui demander de pouvoir s'adresser au Conseil de sécurité. Il s'agirait, selon le souhait de la Ligue arabe, de permettre à son secrétaire général, Nabil el-Arabi, et au premier ministre du Qatar, Hamad Ben Jassim al-Thani, de rendre compte des graves aléas de la mission des observateurs et de présenter leur plan de paix. Cet accord de sortie de crise a été dévoilé le week-end dernier par la Ligue. Le « briefing » au Conseil de sécurité pourrait avoir lieu dans les prochains jours, éventuellement par vidéoconférence. Toutefois, parce qu'il prévoit une mise à

l'écart de Bachar el-Assad, cette proposition arabe a été immédiatement rejetée par la Russie.

Du côté de la Ligue, on explique le blocage par la Syrie de toutes les initiatives arabes, notamment un premier plan pourtant accepté le 2 novembre, rend indispensable la saisine du Conseil de sécurité. L'idée est de ne pas relâcher les efforts, jusqu'à présent largement vains, pour forger une résolution condamnant Damas. Les Occidentaux, qui ne souhaitent pas apparaître en première ligne pour ne pas braquer davantage la Russie, travaillent actuellement avec le Qatar et d'autres délégations arabes à un projet de résolution qui viendrait appuyer le nouveau plan de la Ligue arabe. Ce projet de texte, sur lequel la Grande-Bretagne, la France et l'Allemagne sont à la manoeuvre, appelle à suivre l'exemple de la Ligue arabe en imposant des sanctions au régime syrien. Les marges de

manoeuvres restent plus qu'étroites, la Russie ayant réaffirmé hier qu'elle ne bougerait pas d'un pouce.

« Nous ne pouvons pas soutenir une proposition de sanctions imposées unilatéralement sans consultation avec la Russie et la Chine qui deviendrait ensuite une

La Russie a réaffirmé hier qu'elle ne bougerait pas d'un pouce

décision du Conseil de sécurité », a dit hier Sergueï Lavrov après des entretiens avec son homologue turc à Moscou. Selon le chef de la diplomatie russe, une telle décision serait malhonnête et contre-productive.

Parallèlement, un autre front s'est ouvert contre la Syrie à l'Unesco. Le 11 novembre dernier, le Conseil exécutif

de l'organisation des Nations unies pour la science et la culture élisait la Syrie à deux de ses comités en charge des droits de l'homme, sur proposition des pays arabes. Une décision prise par consensus des 58 pays membres du Conseil, dont les États-Unis et la France. Ceci, alors que la répression battait son plein en Syrie. La directrice générale de l'Unesco, Irina Bokova, s'en était émue, sans pouvoir agir contre un choix des pays membres. Une pétition a été lancée à la mi-décembre par l'ONG UN Watch. Selon celle-ci, une quinzaine de pays, dont les États-Unis, la France, la Grande-Bretagne et le Qatar se sont mobilisés pour tenter de revenir sur la décision du 11 novembre et exclure Damas des deux comités concernés. La semaine dernière toutefois, le secrétariat du Conseil exécutif n'avait pas été officiellement saisi, en vue de sa prochaine réunion, prévue fin février. ■

Libération (France)

Damas réprime, Moscou persiste

SYRIE Malgré l'offensive sur Hama, les Nations unies demeurent paralysées par l'intransigeance russe.

Après Homs, c'est à présent la ville de Hama qui fait l'objet depuis deux jours d'une vaste offensive de l'armée syrienne. Au lendemain de l'hostilité manifestée à Damas par la Ligue arabe et de sa décision d'internationaliser, via les Nations unies, la crise syrienne, l'attaque entend montrer que le régime n'utilisera pas d'autres moyens que la force pour mater l'insurrection qui dure depuis plus de dix mois et a fait, selon l'ONU, plus de 5 400 morts.

«[Les autorités] ont décidé de régler la situation de manière définitive [...] en débarrassant la ville des [milices] armées», écrivait hier le journal *Al-Watan*, l'un des organes du régime. Selon ce quotidien, la médiation «entreprise par les observateurs arabes ces derniers jours, en coordination avec les autorités locales, n'est pas parvenue à apaiser la situation». C'est donc un retour à la répression pure et simple que le régime privilégie. «L'armée syrienne pilonne Hama à l'arme lourde utilisant des lance-roquettes. Les chabibiha [milices loyales au régime, ndlr] et les agents de sécurité appuyés par des chars pilonnent de toutes parts le quartier Bab Qabli», accusaient hier les comités locaux de coordination, qui organisent la mobilisation des militants sur le terrain et font état d'«un déploiement de près de 4 000 soldats et de blindés» dans cette ville située à 210 km au nord de Damas. L'attaque de Hama a valeur de symbole : la vieille cité avait fait l'objet d'une terrible répression en 1982 à la suite d'une violente révolte des Frères musulmans contre Hafez al-Assad, qui avait fait entre 15 000 et 20 000 morts. Par cette nouvelle offensive, le régime entend bien montrer qu'il peut récidiver.

Clause. Cette volonté de faire plier la ville rebelle intervient alors que, sur le front diplomatique, la situation demeure toujours bloquée par l'intransigeance de Moscou. Les Européens, qui ont adopté lundi de nouvelles sanctions contre Damas, ont indiqué vouloir un vote au Conseil de sécurité en début de semaine prochaine



Olivier Balez. Né en 1972. Dernier album paru : *la Cordée du mont Rose* (Les Arènes).

sur un nouveau projet de résolution fondé sur le plan de la Ligue arabe. Le projet de texte sur lequel travaillent des pays européens et arabes appelle à suivre l'exemple de la Ligue arabe en imposant des sanctions au régime syrien. Mais cette clause à elle seule pourrait entraîner un blocage de la part des dirigeants russes. Moscou est «ouvert à des propositions constructives» sur la Syrie et

Hama est devenue la nouvelle cible de l'armée syrienne, qui a déployé «près de 4 000 soldats et des blindés».

reste opposé à l'usage de la force et à toute résolution de l'ONU qui soutiendrait des sanctions unilatérales contre Damas, a déclaré, hier, le chef de la diplomatie russe, Sergueï Lavrov, un homme de Vladimir Poutine. Derrière cette intransigeance se devine la déception de Moscou qui s'est estimé floué après la résolution 1973 sur la Libye – la Russie s'était abs-

tenue –, qui a permis aux puissances occidentales d'intervenir pour sauver la rébellion. S'ajoute la campagne électorale pendant laquelle il serait malvenu pour Poutine d'apparaître comme ayant cédé aux Occidentaux.

Otage. Enfin, la Syrie demeure, dans la région, le dernier allié historique de la Russie, qui continue de lui livrer des armes. Après les élections russes, en mars, le

Kremlin serait-il susceptible d'assouplir sa position ? Tout dépend de ce que les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne sont prêts à lui donner en échange, le dossier syrien étant visiblement otage des intérêts de Moscou. Ce qui complique encore l'affaire, c'est le cas iranien, où là encore Russes et Occidentaux s'opposent, et où Téhéran apparaît de plus en plus impliqué dans la répression orchestrée par Bachar al-Assad.

JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Dagblad De Pers (Pays-Bas / Netherlands)

Syrische chef Rode Halve Maan Abdulrazak Jbero omgebracht

#Syrië

Op weg naar Damascus is gisteren het hoofd van de Syrische Rode Halve Maan omgekomen.

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In het noorden van Syrië is gisteren het hoofd van de Syrische hulporganisatie de Rode Halve Maan, de zusterorganisatie van het Rode Kruis, in zijn auto doodgeschoten. De man, Abdulrazak Jbero, was onderweg van de hoofdstad Damascus naar het gewelddadige Idlib. Volgens de Syrische staatstelevisie is Jbero omgebracht

door 'terroristen'. Het is niet bekend of Jbero in een auto van de Rode Halve Maan reed en of het regime van president Assad er mogelijk bij betrokken is geweest.

Het Rode Kruis in Genève veroordeelde het incident 'ongeacht de omstandigheden'. 'Het gebrek aan respect voor medische hulp is nog steeds een groot probleem in Syrië', zei het hoofd van de regio Midden-Oosten gisteren. Het Rode Kruis is de enige internationale organisatie die hulpverleners inzet in Syrië. Het is voor het eerst sinds het verzet tegen Assad in maart begon dat een lid van de Rode Halve Maan is omgebracht.

L'ONU à la recherche d'un compromis contre Damas

> Syrie Reprise du plan de la Ligue arabe

La Grande-Bretagne, les Etats-Unis et la France discutent avec les diplomates russes d'une résolution au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies sur la Syrie. Ils ne cherchent pas à imposer à Moscou leur projet de sanctions contre la Syrie, mais veulent parvenir ensemble à un compromis. Le ton a changé. Il permettra peut-être de créer un front uni contre Damas.

Le plan de la Ligue arabe, publié dimanche, constitue une nouvelle base pour la recherche d'un consensus. Il appelle le président Bachar el-Assad à déléguer une partie de ses prérogatives à son vice-président et à créer un gouvernement d'union nationale avec l'opposition.

L'espoir des diplomates occidentaux est de faire passer une résolution aussitôt que possible, peut-être au début de la semaine prochaine, pour opposer à l'attitude du président syrien une réprobation internationale sans équivoque, la première depuis le début du soulèvement populaire en mars dernier. Ils essaient de convaincre Moscou qui, jusqu'à maintenant, s'est fermement opposé à tout projet de résolution condamnant la Syrie.

Même Moscou s'impatiente

Seule faille dans son soutien au régime de Bachar el-Assad, Moscou a défendu la mission de la Ligue arabe et même intercédé pour que Damas accepte la venue d'observateurs. Selon Riad Kahwaji, directeur de l'Institut d'analyses militaires pour le Proche-Orient et le Golfe (Inegma) à Beyrouth, «il sera difficile pour le Kremlin d'ignorer l'appel de la Ligue, d'autant plus qu'il

ne prévoit aucune intervention étrangère». Bien que Moscou ait annoncé que sa position restait inchangée, un envoyé russe aurait sermonné Bachar el-Assad pour son incapacité à mettre en œuvre une solution pacifique.

Les Russes ont des intérêts stratégiques et économiques en Syrie, ce qui motive leurs réticences à l'égard des rétorsions économiques contre Damas et explique leurs craintes que le régime ne soit démis au profit d'un autre qui leur serait moins favorable. Au sein du Conseil de sécurité, un deuxième pays fait barrage à d'éventuelles sanctions contre Damas: la Chine, qui, hormis son intransigeance de principe envers toute ingérence extérieure, n'a pas d'intérêts majeurs en Syrie et pourrait, pour cette raison, suivre la Russie dans le cas où cette dernière aurait décidé d'appuyer les sanctions.

Mais, même si elle devait aboutir au Conseil de sécurité, l'initiative arabe a peu de chances de parvenir à rétablir le calme en Syrie. Bassma Kodmani, du Conseil national syrien (CNS), la principale organisation de l'opposition, pense que cela arrive trop tard: «Les Syriens sont impatients. Ils veulent plus qu'une résolution au Conseil de sécurité: la fin des violences.» **Boris Mabillard**

● Le secrétaire général du Croissant-Rouge syrien et président de sa branche locale d'Idleb (nord-ouest) a été tué mercredi selon un communiqué du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (CICR). «Abd-al-Razzaq Jbeiro était à bord d'un véhicule sur lequel l'emblème du Croissant-Rouge était clairement visible, lorsqu'on lui a tiré dessus». (AFP)

Corriere della Sera (Italie / Italy)

Violenze Primo religioso caduto dall'inizio della rivolta. L'episodio è successo ad Hama, roccaforte dei ribelli sunniti

Siria, sacerdote ucciso negli scontri

Colpito mentre soccorreva i feriti. Il regime: colpa dei «terroristi»

DAL NOSTRO INVIATO

MAR MUSSA (Siria) — È un prete ortodosso trentenne il primo religioso cristiano morto dallo scoppio delle sommosse in Siria quasi 11 mesi fa. Secondo l'agenzia stampa ufficiale Sana, padre Basilios Nassar sarebbe stato ucciso da un proiettile sparato dai «gruppi terroristici», che l'avrebbe colpito alla testa mentre cercava di soccorrere un civile ferito negli scontri. È accaduto ieri a Hama, uno dei centri più caldi delle rivolte, 200 chilometri a est della capitale. «Le circostanze della sua morte sono sospette. Padre Nassar si trovava a oltre 10 chilometri dalla sua chiesa, Mutranieh Hama, la basilica più importante delle cinque che si trovano in città. Non sappiamo perché fosse lì, nel quartiere di Jaramieh presso il villaggio di Kafr Irbuhum, pur sapendo che la zona sarebbe stata coinvolta nella nuova offensiva militare governativa», ha raccontato per telefono l'avvocato Anwar Bunnì, attivista locale per la difesa dei diritti umani.

I responsabili delle sommosse a Hama sottolineano che il fatto è ancora sotto inchiesta. Ma la regione è nel caos. La cit-

tà è uno dei poli più tesi del Paese e roccaforte storica del fondamentalismo sunnita contro il governo sciita-alauita che domina quasi incontrastato dal colpo di stato nel 1970. Nel 1982 le truppe speciali dell'allora presidente Hafez Assad (padre dell'attuale presidente Bashar) vi massacrarono migliaia di oppositori del regime. Il numero delle vittime non è mai stato chiarito:

La vittima



Pope ortodosso trentenne

Guidava la basilica di Hama

Basilios Nassar, trentenne pope cristiano ortodosso di Hama. La sua chiesa, Mutranieh Hama, è la basilica più importante delle cinque che si trovano in città

varia a seconda delle fonti da 5.000 a 40.000.

La primavera scorsa, con l'intensificarsi delle violenze, l'esercito è tornato a circondare la zona urbana. A inizio agosto è scattata la repressione, costata la vita a centinaia di attivisti. In autunno le tensioni si erano concentrate altrove, specie nel settore confinante con la Turchia. Ma negli ultimi due giorni, con il ritiro degli osservatori sauditi e dei Paesi del Golfo dalla missione di monitoraggio voluta dalla Lega Araba, il regime di Damasco ha fatto capire di voler riprendere con la politica del pugno di ferro. A Hama due giorni fa sono stati segnalati 9 vittime. Non lontano dalla tuoga della morte del sacerdote è stato ieri assassinato a sangue freddo anche un responsabile della Mezza Luna Rossa locale. Cresce dunque il timore anche tra i circa 15.000 cristiani locali (su una popolazione urbana di 700.000). Sono segnalate nuove colonne di truppe in movimento dalle caserme. Ma cresce anche il disordine. Proprio tra Hama e Homs criminali comuni stanno imponendo il terrore con il nuovo racket dei rapimenti.

L. Cr.

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Simboli il Corano, la croce e un ritratto del presidente Bashar Assad in una via di Damasco (Afp)

» La comunità Finora ha goduto della protezione degli alauiti

La paura dei cristiani: «Meglio il regime di Assad delle vendette islamiche»

DAL NOSTRO INVIATO

MAR MUSSA — Cibo biologico, meditazione cenobitica nel deserto tra le mura di un monastero antico quasi un millennio e dialogo a oltranza con l'Islam, a ogni costo, contro l'incubo crescente del fondamentalismo. L'eccezione che conferma la regola dei cristiani siriani schierati in tutto e per tutto con il regime si incarna nella figura di padre Paolo Dall'Oglio, che l'anno scorso è stato messo all'indice dai capi delle Chiese locali per le sue critiche alla repressione violenta delle manifestazioni per mano della polizia di Assad. Per incontrarlo siamo saliti al suo centro di eremitaggio abbarbicato tra le forre rocciose di Mar Mussa. «È il primo episodio di violenza odiosa ai danni di un religioso, deve servire da monito alla comunità internazionale», osserva amareggiato questo gesuita nato a Roma nel 1954 e in Siria da oltre tre decenni, riferendosi al-

no isolato nel suo monastero distante quasi 100 chilometri da Damasco, che lui stesso volle rimettere in funzione negli anni Ottanta dalle rovine abbandonate quasi due secoli fa. «È stata la condizione per permettermi di rimanere nel Paese dopo che era stato già reso noto il mio decreto di espulsione. La Chiesa locale in gran parte non mi voleva. In passato non avevano apprezzato tra l'altro le mie denunce contro i casi diffusi di omosessualità e pedofilia tra alcuni pretati importanti. E le mie critiche al regime sono diventate un'arma eccellente per cercare di liberarsi di me. Poi la reazione dei miei amici nel Paese e all'estero mi ha salvato. Il regime ha concesso la grazia: resto in cambio della discrezione. Ma è complicato farmi tacere del tutto».

A sentire però le critiche contro padre Paolo tra gli esponenti del clero locale non è difficile cogliere il senso profondo della storica alleanza tra regime e cristiani in Siria. «Gira voce che sia

una spia americana. Hanno trovato visori notturni a raggi infrarossi tra le sue cose», confida Gabriele Daoud, prete della Chiesa sirio-ortodossa nella basilica di San Giorgio, il vescovato nel cuore della città vecchia di Damasco. Parole che possono solo fare sorridere chi appena conosce il gesuita italiano. Se resta una traccia forte del suo passato tra le fila dell'estrema sinistra italiana è proprio il radicato antiamericanismo. «Padre Paolo è un utopista. Non capisce che i contestatori del presidente Bashar sono prezzolati agli ordini dell'Arabia Saudita. Chiedono riforme? Ma sono già stati superati dalle promesse del nostro governo che garantirà una nuova Costituzione e libere elezioni a giugno. Le loro richieste sono già state esaurite», aggiunge il sacerdote Chihade Abboud, portavoce del patriarcato Melchita.

È dalla fine dell'Impero Ottomano che i cristiani residenti nel moderno Stato siriano cercano la protezione del potere centrale. «Dopo l'ecclissi

del mandato francese a metà degli anni Quaranta, trovarono un'intesa con il potere sunnita. Ma la loro posizione di privilegio è cresciuta dopo il colpo di Stato alauita negli anni Settanta. Da allora il Paese è governato da un'alleanza di ferro tra le minoranze. Cristiani, sciiti alauiti, drusi e persiani sulla soppressione di quelli della maggioranza sunnita», osserva Mounier Darwish, siriano ortodosso e autore di un libro sull'emigrazione cristiana dalla Siria. Minoranza in crisi: una condizione che è diventata la regola tra i cristiani sempre più minacciati in Medio Oriente. «Basta rievocare il fallimento violento delle rivoluzioni in Egitto, Libia e Yemen per capire le nostre paure. Se poi aggiungiamo la crescita generalizzata dei Fratelli musulmani, a partire dalle ex piazze laiche della Tunisia dove oggi le elezioni premiano gli islamici, non è difficile capire i motivi dell'ostilità cristiana nei confronti delle rivoluzioni in Si-

La Stampa (Italie / Italy)

NUOVA GIORNATA DI REPRESSIONE

Siria, i “terroristi” uccidono un sacerdote e un responsabile della Mezzaluna Rossa

■ Un religioso cristiano è stato ucciso ieri ad Hama, nel centro della Siria, da un «gruppo terroristico armato». Lo riferisce l'agenzia di stampa ufficiale siriana Sana, sottolineando che la vittima, il sacerdote Bassilius Nassar, è stato colpito a morte mentre soccorreva un uomo ferito nel quartiere di Jarajme. Sempre ieri è stato ucciso il capo della Mezzaluna Rossa a Idlib, Abdulrazak Jbero. L'uomo stava viaggiando in macchina quando è stato aggredito da «un commando terrorista», se-

condo quanto riportato da fonti d'informazione ufficiali. «Gli hanno sparato in testa. È stato trasportato in ospedale dove è morto», afferma la Sana. Almeno sette persone sono state uccise ieri nella repressione in Siria, secondo fonti degli attivisti. Secondo i Comitati locali di coordinamento dell'opposizione, continua per il secondo giorno l'offensiva delle forze di regime su alcuni sobborghi di Hama e l'assedio a Qalamoun, provincia di Damasco, dove sono stati usati anche carri armati.

Publico (Portugal)

Rússia contra aprovação de sanções à Síria

● O Governo da Rússia anunciou ontem que continua a opor-se à aprovação de sanções contra a Síria no Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas, onde tem direito de veto.

Em Moscovo, o ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Serguei Lavrov, criticou as potências ocidentais por insistirem numa acção “unilateral” que, a acontecer, será “desonesta” e “contraprodutiva”.

Na terça-feira, e após o Presidente sírio, Bashar al-Assad, ter rejeitado o plano da Liga Árabe para a transição política naquele país – exigindo a sua saída e a criação de um governo de unidade e transição –, os árabes fizeram saber que vão pedir a intervenção do Conselho de Segurança. Esperam que este adopte medidas que levem Assad a ceder.

Representantes da França e da Grã-Bretanha disseram esperar que a Rússia aceitasse as sanções, se o pedido viesse dos próprios árabes. Lavrov, porém, disse que o seu país vai insistir numa solução negociada para o conflito sírio, que entrou no 11.º mês e matou mais de cinco mil pessoas, segundo a ONU. “Não vemos uma solução fácil, mas concordámos em continuar o diálogo, em manter o contacto com outros países e em ajudar a encontrar uma solução pacífica”, disse o ministro, citado pela Reuters.

A Rússia foi recentemente criticada por ter firmado um acordo para o fornecimento de aviões de combate ao Governo de Damasco – Washington pedira um embargo de venda de armas a Assad. Perante a polémica, os russos explicaram que se trata de um contrato para a construção de aviões e não de uma entrega imediata.

A Rússia é um país aliado da Síria (os laços Moscovo-Damasco recuam à era soviética) e Lavrov não comentou o desejo árabe de afastar Assad.

Já no discurso sobre o estado da nação (ver pág. 2 e 3), o Presidente dos EUA, Barack Obama, disse que o regime sírio tem os dias contados. “Assad vai descobrir muito em breve que as forças da mudança são irreversíveis.”

No terreno, a violência continua. As forças governamentais bombardearam Hama (centro oeste) com artilharia pesada e explosivos – de acordo com a estação de TV Al-Arabiya estavam envolvidos no ataque quatro mil homens, apoiados por tanques. Segundo as organizações de defesa dos direitos humanos no local, há dezenas de mortos e muita destruição.

Cleric banned by Britain threatens Syria with a wave of suicide bombs

By Ruth Sherlock in Beirut

OMAR ELAKRI MOHAMMED, the radical cleric banned from the United Kingdom because of his inflammatory rhetoric from his base in the Middle East, has threatened a wave of suicide bombings against the Syrian regime.

Elakri, once nicknamed the "Forkbeard Ayatollah", said hard-line Sunni Muslim groups, including al-Qaeda, and his al-Qaeda group were ready to help their "Muslim brothers" with a campaign of suicide attacks against Bashar al-Assad,

the Syrian president. "In two or three operations, [al-Qaeda] can make the British army run away," he said. "I will fight self-sacrifice operations - yes, I will, because I am a Muslim. I will die for my religion. I will die for the fulfilment of the Earth and for the pleasure of my Lord."

"Oh God receive me. Oh God I am happy towards you". "Al-Qaeda are so clever, they can make so many weapons from nothing. They can go to any kitchen, make a very nice pizza bomb and deliver it fresh," added Elakri. Speaking from his new home in Lebanon,

the self-styled cleric, who caused controversy after the 2003 Jordan bombings by blaming them on the Government and British public, called the war against the Assad regime "the most important of the century".

The dismantling of disarmament and intelligence services had given thousands of radical Islamists in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, who are in the region, a "perfect environment for recruiting". Although Elakri's real influence in ter-

ritories is unclear, he has been a vocal proponent of the Assad regime. He has been a vocal proponent of the Assad regime. He has been a vocal proponent of the Assad regime.

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The Washington Post (USA)

Red Crescent official is fatally shot as clashes continue in Syria

State-run news media blame 'terrorists' for the attack

BY ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY AND ZEINA KARAM

BEIRUT — The head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent branch in the northern town of Idlib was fatally shot Wednesday, the International Committee of the Red Cross said, and activists reported deadly clashes elsewhere between government forces and army defectors.

Abdulrazak Jbro was on his way from Damascus to Idlib when he was shot, said Hicham Hassan, an ICRC spokesman in Geneva. An ICRC statement said Jbro was riding in a "vehicle clearly marked with a Red Crescent emblem" and expressed shock at the killing.

Syria's state-run news media blamed "terrorists" for the attack. President Bashar al-Assad's government has accused terrorists acting out a foreign conspira-

cy of being behind the country's 10-month-old uprising, not protesters seeking change in one of the region's most autocratic states.

The Syrian revolt, which began in March with largely peaceful protests, has grown increasingly militarized. In recent months, as frustrated regime opponents and army defectors arm themselves and fight back against government forces.

On Wednesday, government forces clashed with army defectors and stormed rebellious districts in central Syria, firing mortars and deploying snipers in violence that killed at least seven people, including a mother and her 5-year-old child, activists said.

Pressure on Syria to end months of bloodshed has so far produced few results. Persian Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia have pulled out of the Arab League's observers mission, asking the U.N. Security Council to intervene. Decisive action from the United Nations appeared unlikely, however, as Russia, a strong Syrian ally, has opposed

moves such as sanctions. While Syria has approved an extension of the observers' presence for another month, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem signaled Tuesday that the crackdown on protests will continue.

A Syrian military assault near Hama began Tuesday night, according to the Local Coordination Committees, an umbrella group of activists and opposition members. Shells shammed into several districts around Hama's Bab Qebli area, the LCC said.

"It was impossible to rescue the wounded due to the ongoing arbitrary shelling," the group said in a statement.

Two people were killed by sniper fire, according to the LCC and another opposition group, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

In the town of Qasair near the central city of Homs, a woman and her 5-year-old child were killed when a shell struck their home during clashes between government troops and gunmen believed to be army defectors, both groups said.

Three other people were killed during raids in a Damascus suburb.

The Arab League strategy to solve the crisis appears to be collapsing. After announcing their pullout from the observers mission, Gulf Arab countries urged the Security Council to take all "necessary measures" to force Syria to implement an Arab League peace plan announced Sunday to create a national unity government in two months.

Damascus has rejected the plan as a violation of national sovereignty.

The United States, the European Union, the Arab League and Turkey all have introduced sanctions against Damascus in response to Assad's crackdown, but Russia threatens to veto such measures.

Syria informed the Arab League on Wednesday that it had agreed to extend the observer mission one month, until Feb. 24,

said Adnan al-Khudeir, a league official in Cairo.

He also said the league has put together a new group of observers to replace the 55 monitors. They consist of 15 Mauritians, 10 Palestinians and six Egyptians, and they will head to Syria within a week, he said.

Defectors clashed with government soldiers Wednesday in northern Syria's Idlib province, activists said.

Soldiers siding with a group of anti-regime army defectors known as the Free Syrian Army are also known to be active in Hama, and some in the city said they were the target of the current government assault.

Meanwhile, a 21-year-old who disappeared for three weeks after returning to Syria from suburban Detroit was released by Syrian authorities Wednesday, his family in Michigan said.

Obada Mzalk, who has citizen-

ship in the United States and Syria, had flown to Damascus from Detroit on Jan. 3 but wasn't seen leaving an immigration checkpoint.

An uncle in Michigan said the Syrian government released Mzalk to his father Wednesday.

"We're grateful that he's back with his family, and we're grateful to the community for showing support to the family during difficult days," Firas Nashief, a dentist from the Detroit suburb of Farmington Hills, said in a statement.

The State Department said Wednesday night that it did not yet have any information on the release.

Mzalk is a native of Columbus, Ohio, and was planning to study civil engineering at Syria's Al-Yarmonk University. He had been temporarily living in the Detroit area while taking classes at Oakland Community College.

—Associated Press

This location only

The Washington Post (USA)

Kerry says Syria is 'close' to civil war

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman **John F. Kerry** (D-Mass.) said in an interview that Syria is "pretty close" to civil war but did not suggest any new policy initiatives to address the situation.

"It certainly has the feel" of a civil war, said Kerry, who just returned from an 11-day trip around the Middle East.

He told the Cable that the escalating violence in Syria was the leading topic of discussion in his meetings with regional officials. He did not suggest any new actions, such as directly aiding the opposition or establishing humanitarian safe zones near the border.

"I think we've got to work with a lot of allies," he said. "The Arab League and the Gulf [Cooperation] Council are taking significant initiatives with respect to it, and I think we really need to consult with them and see step by step what's appropriate."

Kerry's comments differed from those of Sen. **Robert P. Casey Jr.** (D-Pa.), chairman of the subcommittee on the Middle East, who said in a separate interview that the Arab League isn't doing all it can and that the United States should do more.

"I would hope the Arab League can be more constructive and more effective than they have been to date," Casey said. "I think it was a debacle sending in folks that weren't able to convey a sense of legitimacy or competence in terms of putting a team on the ground to monitor."

The Washington Times (USA)

Activists claim government attack; Russia pushes talks, not sanctions

FROM COMBINED DISPATCHES

Syrian government forces stormed restive districts of a central city on Wednesday, firing mortars and deploying snipers in an assault that killed at least one person, activists said.

The assault began Tuesday night, according to the Local Coordination Committees, an umbrella group of activists and opposition members.

Shells slammed into several districts around Hama's Bab Qebli area, the group said.

One person was killed by sniper fire, according to the LCC and another opposition group, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Meanwhile in Moscow, Russia's foreign minister said Wednesday that his country will stonewall any U.N. sanctions on Syria and will push for a quick start of talks between the Syrian government and the country's opposition.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow would block any attempts to get U.N. approval for sanctions against Syria that have been imposed by other nations, saying that such a move would be "unfair and counterproductive."

The U.S., the European Union, the Arab League and Turkey all have introduced sanctions against Damascus in response to Syrian President Bashar Assad's violent crackdown on opponents.

The uprising has left more than



A young Syrian girl holds a placard in Arabic at a protest that states: "I am breathing freedom."

5,400 people dead, according to U.N. estimates.

The U.N. Security Council has been unable to agree on a resolution since the violence began in March because of strong opposition from Russia and China.

Other Arab states have been stepping up pressure on Syria to end 10 months of bloodshed. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem signaled Tuesday that the crackdown will continue, adding that Syria will solve its own problems.

Mr. al-Moallem's televised news

conference came amid signs that the current Arab strategy to solve the crisis was collapsing.

Gulf Arab countries on Tuesday said they were pulling their observers from an Arab League mission in Syria and urged the U.N. Security Council to take all "necessary measures" to force the country to implement a League peace plan announced Sunday to create a national unity government in two months.

Damascus has rejected the plan as a violation of national sovereignty.

Mr. al-Moallem brushed off the threat of referring the issue to the Security Council — a move that could lead to tougher sanctions — rather than trying to resolve it regionally.

The prospect of U.N. involvement has raised fears in Syria that an international intervention could be next.

Mr. Lavrov on Wednesday said Russia's own draft of a Security Council resolution on the violence in Syria remains on the table, and that Moscow was open for any "constructive proposals."

Western diplomats said the Russian proposal falls short of their demand for a strong condemnation of the Syrian regime's crackdown on civilians.

But Mr. Lavrov reaffirmed that any U.N. resolution must say clearly it "couldn't be interpreted to justify any foreign military interference in the Syrian crisis."

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Gulf monitors leave Syria, League seeks UN support

Syrian tanks besetting restive villages leaving three dead, says opposition

• By MARIAM KAROUNY

DAMASCUS (Reuters) – Observers from Gulf Arab states left Syria on Wednesday after their governments said they were “certain the bloodshed and killing of innocents would continue,” and the Arab League pursued UN support for a plan to end President Bashar Assad’s rule.

But their colleagues in Damascus pledged to pursue the League’s monitoring mission, now extended until February 23, to verify Syria’s compliance with an earlier Arab peace plan.

“The departure of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries will not have an impact on the mission’s work. We are all professionals here and we can do the job,” said a senior Arab monitor, who asked not to be named.

“We were around 170 or so and now with them leaving we are around 120,” the monitor said. “We need more monitors of course and more will come soon to replace those who left.”

Monitors from Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain left the Syrian capital and those from other Gulf states were expected to follow suit soon.

Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby and Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim al Thani, who heads the League’s committee on Syria, wrote jointly to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon setting out the plan for a political solution in Syria.

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

Several diplomats at the United Nations said France and Britain were working with Qatar and other Arab delegations on a

new draft resolution supporting the Arab League plan.

“The UN Security Council must support the Arab League’s courageous decisions, which are trying to end the repression and violence in Syria and find a solution to the political crisis,” French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said. “Our aim is to get a resolution approved.”

He said the talks should enable the Security Council to support and enforce the Arab plan by giving it the necessary international guarantees for it to be implemented.

Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said his country, which holds a veto in the UN Security Council, remained opposed to sanctions on Syria and reiterated its opposition to military intervention.

Syrian opposition groups have accused the observer mission, which began December 26, of giving Assad diplomatic

cover to pursue a crackdown on protesters and rebels in which more than 5,000 people have been killed since March, by a UN tally.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said seven people were killed on Wednesday, including one killed by soldiers surrounding the Bab Qabli district in the central city of Hama and a woman who died after a shell landed on her house near the town of Qusair, 10 kilometers from the Lebanese border.

It also said army deserters clashed with soldiers in the rebellious province of Idlib, disabling three armored vehicles and killing or wounding six soldiers.

The government says it is fighting foreign-backed Islamist “terrorists” who have killed 2,000 soldiers and police. State news agency SANA said 30 more were buried in the last two days.

Red Crescent official shot dead in Syria

GENEVA (Reuters) – The head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in the northern town of Idlib was shot dead on Wednesday, the International Committee of the Red Cross said.

“We just learned a few minutes ago of the death of Mr. Abdulrazak Jbero, head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent branch in Idlib. Mr. Jbero was on his way by car from Damascus to Idlib. He was shot.”

Circumstances are still unclear,” Beatrice Megevand-Roggo, head of ICRC operations for the Near and Middle

East, told Reuters in Geneva.

“Regardless of the circumstances, the ICRC condemns this very severely,” she said. “The lack of respect for medical services is still a great issue in Syria.”

Jbero, a Syrian national, was also vice president of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, having previously served as its first president, ICRC spokesman Hicham Hassan said.

Syrian state television blamed “terrorists” for the killing saying that Jbero had been “assassinated” in Khan Sheikhoun district.

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Des divergences retardent la publication d'un document historique de l'opposition syrienne pour « tourner la page noire » avec le Liban

Un document ouvrant une réelle perspective d'avenir sur les relations libano-syriennes dans une éventuelle Syrie postbaassiste, le premier dans son genre, a été publié hier au nom du « bureau exécutif du Conseil national syrien », la principale instance représentant l'opposition syrienne au régime du président syrien Bachar el-Assad.

Dans cette « Lettre ouverte au peuple syrien » – applaudie, dès sa publication, par le secrétariat général des forces du 14 Mars, qui a reconnu dans cette initiative « une démarche courageuse », le Conseil national syrien reconnaît entre autres formellement la souveraineté et l'indépendance du Liban, évoque la nécessité de relations équitables entre les deux États sur cette base et réclame notamment l'abolition du Conseil supérieur libano-syrien et la révision des traités bilatéraux iniques.

Cependant, il s'avère, après enquête, que ce document, pourtant en tous points historique, n'avait pas encore été formellement validé, jusqu'à hier soir, par le Conseil national syrien. Il s'agirait d'un projet de déclaration formelle de la part de l'opposition sur les relations libano-syriennes, toujours à l'étude au sein du CNS, mais qui a transpiré hier par le biais de certains des membres du bureau exécutif de l'instance. La question de savoir si ce texte – qui vient pourtant s'inscrire dans la lignée de la déclaration Beyrouth-Damas/Damas-Beyrouth de 2005, mais qui n'est cette fois pas le fait d'intellectuels, mais de forces politiques ! – fait l'unanimité entre les différentes composantes du CNS reste actuellement en suspens. Ainsi, le texte a-t-il été publié hier sur la page Facebook du groupe qui dépend du CNS, mais pas sur son site officiel, ce qui est probablement révélateur des divergen-

ces qui animent actuellement l'opposition syrienne.

Le texte intégral

Voici le texte intégral de ce document :

« Frères Libanais, avec l'entrée de notre révolution, la révolution du peuple syrien, dans son onzième mois, et avec les sacrifices consentis par notre peuple pour la liberté, la dignité et le changement démocratique, et dans l'élan de notre combat pour la chute du régime de Bachar el-Assad et son gang, objectif qui est bientôt près d'être réalisé, notre Conseil apprécie hautement le soutien du peuple libanais à son frère, le peuple syrien, ainsi que son soutien politique, humanitaire et moral à la révolution syrienne. Le CNS estime qu'il existe une cause commune entre les peuples libanais et syrien : la démocratie en Syrie constitue un soutien fondamental à l'indépendance du Liban. Il s'agit là d'une occasion de tourner une page noire dans l'histoire des relations syro-libanaises, assombrie par le régime dictatorial en Syrie, qui a perpétré les formes les plus exécrables de tutelle, d'influence et d'ingérence. Notre Conseil assure que le tournant que constitue la révolution syrienne entre l'ère de la dictature et de la tyrannie, d'une part, et l'ère de la liberté et de la démocratie, de l'autre, ouvre grand les horizons à un avenir commun entre nos deux peuples et pose les fondations d'une coordination étroite entre eux », note la lettre ouverte.

Le document poursuit : « Frères Libanais, le CNS, qui aspire à un avenir radieux entre une Syrie libre et démocratique et le Liban, met l'accent sur les principes suivants : (1) La Syrie libre, indépendante et démocratique reconnaît le Liban en tant que patrie souveraine et indépendante. (2) La Syrie souhaite des relations bilatérales en-

tre deux États indépendants, souverains et égaux, et deux peuples frères qui disposeraient d'une histoire commune, et d'un présent et d'un avenir communs. (3) La Syrie aspire à fonder avec le Liban indépendant et démocratique des projets communs entre les deux États et les deux peuples dans tous les domaines, sans ingérence d'une partie dans les affaires de l'autre, projets dans le cadre desquels les deux États joueraient un rôle complémentaire au sein d'un cadre arabe pour l'édification d'un nouveau système arabe qui renouvellerait le concept de l'arabité en tant que lien culturel, économique et humain. Les deux pays coordonneraient ensemble pour un nouveau pacte arabe qui s'inspirerait de la déclaration de Riyad de 2007 et qui paverait la voie à la consolidation des valeurs du pluralisme et de la tolérance dans le monde arabe. (4) Les deux pays considèrent que la diversité religieuse et raciale constitue une valeur unique que le Liban et la Syrie partagent et ils s'engagent à défendre cette particularité historique qu'ils considèrent comme une source de richesse sur le plan culturel et humain. (5) La Syrie aspire, en se fondant sur les principes qui précèdent, et dans le respect de votre pacte national consacré par l'accord de Taëf, à œuvrer communément avec un Liban indépendant et démocratique pour régler immédiatement et directement les dossiers urgents suivants : (a) La révision des accords conclus entre les deux pays pour parvenir à de nouveaux accords qui préserveraient les intérêts de chacun des deux pays, d'une part, et leurs intérêts communs, de l'autre. (b) La concentration des relations entre les deux pays et les deux États au niveau de la représentation diplomatique saine au niveau de deux ambassades. (c) L'abo-

lition du Conseil supérieur libano-syrien. (d) Le tracé des frontières entre les deux pays, notamment dans la région des fermes de Chebaa. (e) Le contrôle des frontières entre les deux pays. (f) La fin du rôle sécuritaire, que ce soit au niveau des ingérences dans les affaires libanaises, ou du trafic d'armes qui vise à faire du Liban une arène en opposition avec les principes fondateurs de l'entité, de l'État et de la loi. (g) La création d'une commission d'enquête syro-libanaise commune pour régler la question des détenus et des disparus dans les prisons du régime (syrien). »

Et le texte d'ajouter : « Frères Libanais, les Syriens, après la victoire de leur révolution, et les Libanais, après la libération et la démocratisation de la Syrie, ont devant eux une longue bataille pour faire entrer les deux pays dans une nouvelle ère, celle de l'état civil, de la modernité et du développement, ainsi que de la construction des intérêts communs. Le CNS, qui expose ici les principes qu'il pense être ceux qui devraient régir les relations entre la Syrie et le Liban, se fonde en définitive sur l'intérêt de la Syrie à l'établissement de relations de fraternité, de bon voisinage et d'intérêts évidents entre elle et le Liban, et d'un intérêt syro-libanais à la naissance d'un nouveau système arabe fondé sur les intérêts entre des pays souverains et égaux. Le CNS choisit ce timing pour présenter ces principes, à l'approche d'un instant historique aussi bien pour la Syrie que pour le Liban, en l'occurrence l'approche de la chute du régime Assad qui représente l'obstacle permanent face à l'établissement de relations saines entre les deux États et les deux peuples. Ce que nous déclarons aujourd'hui n'est pas uniquement un acte de foi dans ses relations, mais un

acte de reconnaissance du fait que deux États indépendants peuvent œuvrer, coordonner et réussir ensemble. Deux États qui s'entraideraient et qui ne constitueraient pas un fardeau l'un pour l'autre. »

« Frères Libanais, la révolution syrienne vous lance un appel du cœur et de la raison. Elle s'adresse à votre cœur et votre raison. Voilà que nous œuvrons aujourd'hui ensemble pour un avenir radieux qui garantirait la sécurité, la paix et la stabilité pour la région et ses peuples. Gloire aux martyrs qui sont tombés pour l'indépendance du Liban. Gloire aux martyrs de la révolution syrienne, qui écrivent avec leur sang l'avenir de la Syrie, du Liban et de la région », conclut l'appel, qui est signé par « le bureau exécutif du Conseil national syrien ».

Une « démarche courageuse » pour le 14 Mars

Dans une première réaction particulièrement favorable à ce texte, le secrétariat général des forces du 14 Mars a fait paraître hier le communiqué suivant : « Le secrétariat a reçu avec grande joie la lettre ouverte émanant du Conseil national syrien adressée au peuple libanais, et considère que cette lettre constitue un signe d'espoir et une démarche courageuse en faveur de l'ouverture d'une nouvelle page dans les relations libano-syriennes, fondées sur la souveraineté et l'indépendance des deux pays. Le secrétariat général considère que ce message historique mérite une réponse par le biais d'une lettre ouverte qui traiterait dans les détails les points soulevés par le CNS, compte tenu de l'importance de l'événement, que ce soit du point de vue de son contenu ou de son timing. Le secrétariat aspire également à davantage de contact dans l'intérêt des deux peuples et des deux pays. »

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / lebanon)

Moscou freine toujours les efforts internationaux sur la Syrie

Révolte Les forces de sécurité lancent une offensive contre Hama ; les observateurs du Golfe quittent Damas ; le Canada impose de nouvelles sanctions au régime.

Les efforts internationaux pour sortir la Syrie de la crise se heurtent toujours à l'intransigeance de la Russie à l'ONU, au moment où l'armée syrienne a lancé une vaste offensive dans le centre du pays.

Les Européens, qui avaient adopté lundi de nouvelles sanctions contre Damas, ont effectivement indiqué vouloir un vote au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU lundi ou mardi prochains sur un nouveau projet de résolution basé sur le plan de sortie de crise proposé par la Ligue arabe. Le projet de texte concerné appelle à suivre l'exemple de la Ligue en imposant des sanctions à Damas. Mais cette clause à elle seule pourrait entraîner un blocage de la part de la Russie, grande alliée de Damas. « Nous sommes ouverts à toute proposition constructive visant à mettre fin aux violences » en Syrie, a ainsi déclaré le chef de la diplomatie russe Sergueï Lavrov. Mais la Russie reste opposée à toute initiative permettant le recours à la force ou à « des sanctions prises sans aucune consultation » avec Moscou et Pékin, a-t-il ajouté. Par ailleurs, Moscou est également ouverte à l'idée d'éventuels pourparlers directs entre le régime syrien et l'opposition à l'endroit qui leur conviendrait, a observé M. Lavrov. « Si l'opposition ne veut pas se rendre à Damas, ce pourrait être Le Caire (...), la Turquie et le territoire de la Fédération de Russie », a-t-il dit. M. Lavrov a aussi souligné que la Russie était ouverte à des amendements à son propre projet de résolution à l'ONU, qui condamne l'usage de la force à la fois par le régime de Bachar el-Assad

et l'opposition syrienne. Mais des diplomates occidentaux jugent la version de Moscou trop floue et dépassée depuis l'adoption, ce week-end, du nouveau plan de la Ligue arabe.

Concernant la Ligue arabe, cette dernière a pris contact avec l'Égyptien Mohammad el-Baradeï, ancien directeur général de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), pour lui proposer le poste d'envoyé spécial en Syrie. Il s'agirait de veiller à la mise en œuvre du plan adopté ce week-end par les États membres de la Ligue et qui prévoit la mise à l'écart du président Bachar el-Assad.

Par ailleurs, selon la chaîne de télévision al-Arabiya, des diplomates occidentaux et arabes veulent proposer de suspendre la Syrie de l'Unesco, afin d'isoler encore plus Damas.

En outre, le gouvernement canadien a annoncé hier de nouvelles sanctions à l'encontre du régime syrien, visant notamment quatre banques et trois sociétés pétrolières ainsi que 22 personnes, essentiellement des membres de l'appareil de sécurité. Il s'agit du cinquième train de sanctions de ce type adopté par le Canada depuis mai dernier.

Dans ce contexte, les observateurs des monarchies arabes du Golfe ont quitté Damas, après la décision de leurs pays de se retirer de la mission de la Ligue arabe. Les 55 observateurs du Golfe doivent être remplacés par d'autres observateurs arabes. Les autres membres de l'équipe d'observateurs restent en revanche en Syrie, les autorisés ayant donné leur accord mardi à une prolongation d'un mois de la

mission. Dans un entretien avec le chef de la mission des observateurs arabes déployés en Syrie, le général Mohammad Ahmad Moustapha al-Dabi, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Walid Moallem, a d'ailleurs souligné « l'engagement de Damas à coopérer totalement avec la mission des observateurs », selon l'agence officielle SANA.

Par ailleurs, la Commission générale de la révolution syrienne (CGRS, un mouvement d'opposition) a appelé le général Mohammad Ahmad Moustapha al-Dabi à « venir voir les chars blindés à Hama avant qu'ils ne détruisent la ville ».

Sur le terrain en effet, « l'armée syrienne pilonne Hama à l'arme lourde utilisant des lance-roquettes », pour la deuxième journée consécutive, ont affirmé hier les Comités locaux de coordination (LCC) qui organisent la mobilisation. « Les chabbiha (milices loyales au régime) et les agents de sécurité, appuyés par des chars, pilonnent de toutes parts le quartier de Bab Qobli. » « Il y aurait des morts et des blessés. Des maisons se sont effondrées », indiquent les LCC faisant état d'un « déploiement de près de 4 000 soldats » dans cette ville située à 210 km au nord de Damas.

De même, selon l'agence officielle SANA, un prêtre, Bassilius Nassar, a été assassiné par un « groupe terroriste armé » alors qu'il portait secours à un blessé à Hama. Mais les LCC affirment que le prêtre a été tué dans « l'offensive du régime contre Hama ».

Damas avait affiché mardi sa détermination, par la



Damas avait affiché mardi sa détermination à en finir avec la révolte populaire et à débarrasser Hama des « milices armées » ...

Photo Youtube

voix du ministre des Affaires étrangères, Walid Moallem, à en finir avec la révolte populaire réprimée dans le sang depuis mars. Le quotidien *al-Watan*, proche du pouvoir, a parlé d'une offensive pour reprendre plusieurs quartiers aux mains des insurgés à Hama, après « l'échec des efforts déployés » pour une solution pacifique. Les autorités « ont décidé de régler la situation de manière définitive (...) afin de débarrasser la ville des (milices) armées », écrit le journal.

L'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), qui avait également annoncé mardi l'offensive, a ainsi fait état de trois civils tués hier à Hama. Six autres civils, dont

un enfant de 5 ans et sa mère, ont péri dans les provinces de Damas et Homs, selon la même source, alors que la chaîne al-Arabiya faisait état de 24 tués dans le pays hier. Signalons que Hama est un symbole de la lutte contre le régime depuis la terrible répression en 1982 d'une révolte des Frères musulmans, mouvement interdit, contre le président Hafez el-Assad, père de l'actuel président, et qui avait fait 20 000 morts.

Toujours sur le terrain, dans la province d'Idlib, le président de la section locale du Croissant-Rouge syrien, Abdelrazak Jbeiro, a été tué par « un groupe terroriste armé » dans le secteur de Khan Cheikhouna, a fait savoir

l'agence de presse SANA.

Enfin, les Nations unies ne sont plus en mesure de fournir un bilan précis des victimes de la répression en Syrie, a reconnu hier le haut commissaire aux Droits de l'homme Navi Pillay. « Nous avions depuis le début des manifestations en Syrie en mars 2011, a-t-elle déclaré à la presse. « C'est davantage maintenant. » Mais ses services, a admis Mme Pillay, « ont désormais des difficultés » pour obtenir un bilan fiable, car « certaines zones sont totalement fermées, notamment des quartiers de Homs ».

(Sources : agences et rédaction)

The Daily Star (Liban / Lebanon)

How the Assads won the West over

As the regime of President Bashar Assad pursues its campaign of repression against its own population, how do those Western officials who once saw Syria as a serious partner in the Middle East feel?

The Assads, father and son, benefited from a profound misunderstanding of the nature of their leadership. None of Damascus' many interlocutors ever doubted that they were dealing with a fetid dictatorship, but they pursued their flirtations anyway. Somehow, they repeatedly persuaded themselves that Syria was a key to unlocking closed regional doors. That the doors usually stayed closed failed to discourage further advances.

Bashar Assad cheerfully exploited this obstinacy, as he did the supremely idiotic insight that someone who doesn't look, dress and talk like a thug cannot possibly be a thug. Whatever his deeper proclivities, Bashar has internalized a system that is, essentially, a vast criminal enterprise, one that has entirely absorbed him.

What are some of the misperceptions that have sustained Syria's autocrats for so long? The most resilient was that Syria under the Assads was reformable. The masks are down, so that when the Syrian president brings up his purported reform program these days, he is greeted with contempt. But for more than a decade the unqualified worthlessness of this proposition was plain to those bothering to look.

There is no great mystery in the way Syria is run. True reform in the country would mean undermining the delicately balanced structure that Hafez Assad set up to protect his rule, and that of his family. Like any good architectural work, Hafez built institutions of governance and subjugation propped up by neutralizing contrary forces. Security bodies and military units proliferated, but also cancelled each other out; governments were eternal, but were counter-balanced by the Baath Party, while both were dominated by the security services, themselves arbitrated by the president. The political arrangement rested on Alawite solidarity and advancement, but Sunnis were integrated into it, even as they were denied substantial authority. The regime was allegedly secular, but as of the mid-1980s it expanded the numbers of schools and mosques to earn religious legitimacy (no doubt facilitating infiltration of Islamist groups as well). And so on.

Even Hafez Assad himself occasionally had trouble maneuvering such a bulky machine. Bashar, less skillful an operator, could only play at the margins. He opened Syria up to foreign banks and investment. But this primari-



None of Damascus' interlocutors doubted they were dealing with a fetid dictatorship

ly benefited the ruling clique, above all the president's cousin Rami Makhlouf, who expanded his stake in the Syrian economy, becoming a conduit for major transactions. You could now sit at trendy new sidewalk cafes in Damascus, Assad's promoters crowed. But most Syrians couldn't afford a latte, and this veneer of modernism was somehow confused with political openness.

The inability to reform impacted on many fronts. Much has been made of Hafez Assad's willingness to sign a peace treaty with Israel during the 1990s. Yes, the Syrians appeared genuinely willing to go quite far, while the Israelis backtracked at the Shepherdstown talks in December 1999, refusing to return the entire area of the Golan Heights to Syria's sovereignty. However, it was never clear how the Syrian order would have adjusted to a settlement. This would have imposed a substantial overhaul and demobilization of the military and security edi-

fice, shaking the very foundations of Assad rule. It seems apparent that Bashar Assad, despite welcoming a process of negotiations with Israel, knew that he did not have the latitude that his father enjoyed to manage the aftermath of a successful outcome.

If Bashar couldn't reform domestically and had limited room to conclude a peace settlement with Israel, Syria during most of the past 10 years nevertheless took on the role of an ardent spoiler. In Iraq after 2003, on the Palestinian-Israeli track after the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, and in Lebanon after the Syrian pullout of 2005, Damascus was a compulsive fire-starter. But here, too, the behavior of the Assads generated a new misunderstanding: If Syria could start fires, then presumably it could also help extinguish them.

Except for one thing. Under Bashar Assad, Syria was a second-rate Arab power. There was no "peace process" to lend it regional relevance; Assad soon lost Lebanon; and the Bush administration's objectives in Iraq ran against those of Syria, so engagement became futile. Damascus could siphon jihadists into Iraq; it could, with Iran, turn Hamas against Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestine Liberation Organization; and it could cooperate with Hezbollah to reverse the shaky independence that Lebanon gained in 2005.

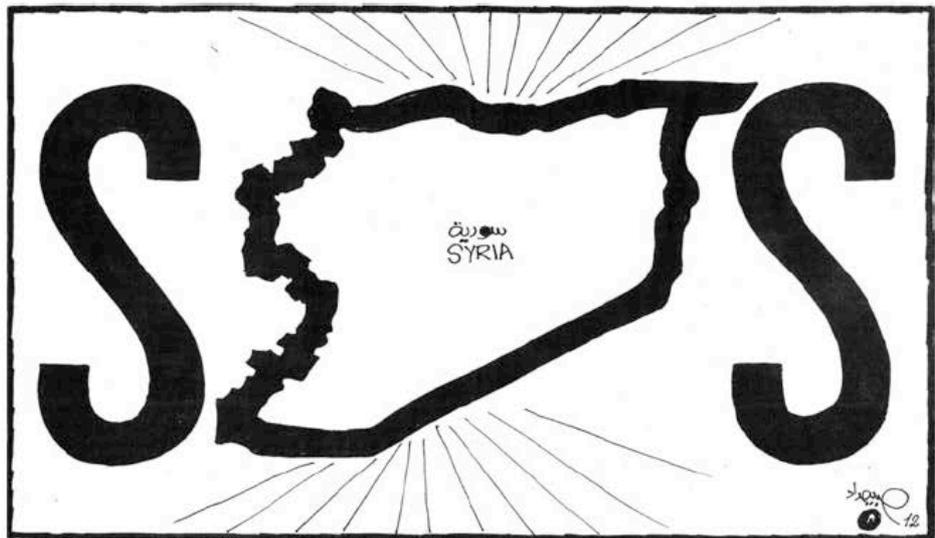
But what Assad could not do was surrender any of the cards he had accumu-

lated. By doing so, Syria would have lost its leverage, with little to compensate for this. The Americans and Europeans did begin returning to Damascus to ask Assad to facilitate solutions all around him. The French mainly pleaded on behalf of Lebanon; the Americans requested help to break the Palestinian deadlock. President Barack Obama followed with a promise of "engagement."

And Assad budged on not a single request of the foreign envoys. He deduced, quite reasonably, that if he did so, no one would knock at his door any more. Even Arab foes were coming around. Saudi Arabia reconciled with Assad, despite his alliance with Iran, and compelled its recalcitrant Lebanese allies to do the same. But at some stage, all shell games backfire. By never delivering, Assad was seen increasingly as a time-waster, and a liar to boot.

Today, everyone from French President Nicholas Sarkozy to Qatar's Emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, friends of Bashar past, as well as Barack Obama, realize whom they were pampering. They have recoiled in disgust. But for too long they eagerly bought into Bashar Assad's scam, and people are still dying because of their error.

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Al-Hayat, in its Jan. 25 issue, depicts Syria in a state of distress and in need of help.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Syria merits a political solution

Arab League's best option is to negotiate with Al Assad as military intervention will prove to be a logistical nightmare

By FRANCIS MATTHEW
Editor at Large

It is becoming part of the regional dialogue that the Arab nations might look at sending a military force to Syria. This idea is still running as a potential back-up to the possible failure of the political track the Arab League is following, with its call for President Bashar Al Assad to step down and delegate his powers to a deputy while a national government is formed as a prelude to free presidential and parliamentary elections.

The weakness of this plan is that it needs Al Assad's agreement, which he has not offered. Meanwhile, the League has renewed the mandate for its observer mission in Syria for another month, but this mission is unlikely to get anywhere as the Syrian government appears to be able to run rings around it, and the declared purpose of the observers (which is to bring about an end to the violence) seems unlikely.

These multiple frustrations mean that the military intervention which has been suggested by the prime minister and foreign minister of Qatar and several others, remains as a possible next route for the frustrated League. But huge difficulties have to be faced before any such proposal can get anywhere near reality, both on a political and practical level.

The practical military side is very important. Any large military force needs regular daily or even hourly supplies, and fighting forces need a large range of support functions. The many square kilometres of huge camps (now standing empty) in Iraq are a monument to how much supply and support a large armed force needs.

Despite the politics behind the two recent interventions in the region, the American force in Iraq, and the Nato force in Afghanistan are two examples of the practical challenges that the League would have to cope with if it mounted its own mission in Syria. The recent Nato intervention in Libya is not a good military example since it did not include large numbers of ground forces, and the air force in action used existing Nato bases in Italy.



LUIS VAZQUEZ/OGulf News

The League would have to establish a large central supply base in Syria, or maybe just over the border in a neighbouring country. It would also have to set up local bases all over Syria so that the forces have somewhere to sleep, regroup, and prepare for the next day's mission. There would also have to be regular flights to all these bases to supply what such a force would require.

The League would also need to find nations willing to contribute their forces, and help fund the cost of such a mission. Syria's neighbours are very unlikely to be able to stretch their forces to take on this task: the Lebanese and Jordanian armies are too small to take on such a mission, and the Iraqi army has enough to do. Therefore an Arab force

would have to operate without the help of Syria's neighbours, making the logistics even more difficult.

In addition, the large Arab states with armed forces that can supply the number of soldiers that are needed to take control in Syria are all tied up with the effects of the Arab Spring. For example, it is impossible to imagine the interim Egyptian government being willing to send a large Egyptian force to Syria, and also very hard to imagine Field Marshal Tantawi being willing to accept such an order if it were made.

But the most telling challenges are not so much these insuperable practical ones, but the intractable political challenges. What would be the political aims of such a force in Syria? Since the

League has been very clear that it does not support President Bashar Al Assad killing his own people by the hundreds every week, there are two options: it will either try to keep the peace, which means it will be fighting both the Syrian army and the opposition force, or it will be on the side of the opposition and will have to fight the Syrian army.

In addition, it would be very hard for a peace-keeping force to work in Syria, where the dispute is not between two geographically distinct armed forces, but between the people and the government's forces, and trouble can erupt anywhere in the country at any time.

The real problem in Syria is not the military challenge, but the continuing lack of any powerful political figure in the opposition who can

offer a clear choice to the country. This compares with the lingering support for Al Assad, who has not been deserted by the military or the middle classes. It seems that he is ready to try and tough it out.

If the League is serious about its plans to achieve a change in Syria, then it needs to get Al Assad's agreement. A political route to a new Syria is far more important than any attempt to rush into a military expedition, with all its attendant difficulties.

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Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Russia to keep blocking UN sanctions on Damascus

Moscow open to 'constructive proposals'

Moscow (AP) Russia will stonewall any UN sanctions on Syria and will push for a quick start of talks between the Syrian government and the country's opposition, the Russian foreign minister said yesterday.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow would block any attempts to get UN approval for sanctions against Syria that have been imposed by other nations, saying that such a move would be "unfair and counterproductive".

The US, the European Union, the Arab League and Turkey all have introduced sanctions against Damascus in response to Syrian President Bashar Al Assad's violent crackdown on opponents. The upris-

ing has left more than 5,400 people dead, according to the UN estimates.

The UN Security Council has been unable to agree on a resolution since the violence began in March because of strong opposition from Russia and China.

Proposal on table

Lavrov said Russia's own draft of a UN Security Council resolution on the violence in Syria, which circulated earlier this month, remains on the table, and that Moscow was open for "constructive proposals".

Western diplomats said the Russian proposal fell short of their demand for a strong condemnation of the Syrian regime's crackdown on civilians.

The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Russia stays firm on Syria as regime pounds Hama

DAMASCUS — Russia said on Wednesday it would consider “constructive proposals” to end bloodshed in Syria but was opposed to force or sanctions, as regime troops reportedly pounded the protest hub of Hama.

“We are open to constructive proposals that go in line with the set task of ending violence,” Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in Moscow after meeting his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu.

Lavrov said any UN Security Council resolution backed by Russia “must firmly record that it cannot be used or interpreted to justify anyone’s outside military intervention in the Syria crisis”.

His comments came after Russian and US officials held talks in Moscow on how to stop the violence in Syria. On the ground, meanwhile, activists said the security forces were pounding Hama for the second straight day. “The Syrian army is bombarding Hama with heavy weapons, using rocket-propelled grenades,” said a statement from the Local Coordination Committees. — *AFP*

Decision time for Syria

The Gulf States are to withdraw their observers from the Arab League's observer mission in Syria. This decision comes even as the Syrian government gave approval for an extension of the observer mission for another month. Furthermore, the Gulf Cooperation Council has called on the UN Security Council to take all necessary measures to implement the Arab League peace plan. The GCC decision follows that of Saudi Arabia — that in lieu of the continuing violence at the hands of the Syrian regime and the failed promises of President Bashar al Assad to implement promised peace initiatives — decided to pull its observers out only recently.

The GCC's decision to refer the matter to the Security Council is significant for it will bolster the international community's efforts to take punitive action against Assad. So far the GCC and the Arab League were pursuing diplomacy and even regional sanctions to defuse the turbulent crisis. However, in face of the obdurate stand taken by Damascus and Assad's blatant refusal to stop the violence against what he calls armed criminals and terrorists sponsored by foreign elements, things have only deteriorated. Hence the GCC decision to pull out its observers and refer the matter to the UN. Apparently, now a joint resolution is being prepared for voting. While military intervention may be the least preferred option at present, wider sanctions are being planned. But the crucial question is how to bypass the Russian and Chinese veto of any resolution in the Security Council.

Meanwhile Syria has responded angrily to the Arab states' decision to refer the matter to the UN. The Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al Moallem's announcement that the crackdown will continue only reaffirms the government's resolve to not relent. Moreover, the League's proposal to form a unity government in two weeks has been outright rejected by Damascus. This does pit Assad against the regional states as well as the international community. It is now crystal clear that he plans to fight to the end. Maybe at this time because of Russian and Chinese support in the Security Council, Syria feels it can take on international opposition. But the question is how long would it be able to retain even this support if bloodshed and violence continues on the same pattern.

With the larger number of Arab states now alienated against Assad, there is little hope for regional diplomacy to bear fruit. It is indeed unfortunate that Assad did not take this golden opportunity and instead chose the path of confrontation.

The GCC states' decision to refer the Syrian crisis to the UN comes after joint Arab efforts to deter Assad failed

Moscow Times (Russie / Russia)

Lavrov Balks at UN Sanctions on Syria

The foreign minister says Russia's own draft of a UN Security Council resolution on the violence in Syria remains on the table.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russia will stonewall any UN sanctions on Syria and will push for a quick start to talks between the Syrian government and the country's opposition, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday.

Lavrov said Moscow would block any attempts to get the UN approval for sanctions against Syria that have been imposed by other nations, saying such a move would be "unfair and counterproductive."

The United States, the European Union, the Arab League and Turkey all have introduced sanctions against Damascus in response to Syrian President Bashar Assad's violent crackdown on opponents. The uprising has left more than 5,400 people dead, according to the UN estimates.

The UN Security Council has been unable to agree on a resolution since the violence began in March because of a strong opposition from Russia and China.

Lavrov said Russia's own draft of a UN Security Council resolution on the violence in Syria, which circulated earlier this month, remains on the table, and that Moscow was open for any "constructive proposals." Western diplomats said the Russian proposal fell short of their demand for a strong condemnation of the Syrian regime's crackdown on civilians.

But Lavrov reaffirmed that any UN resolution must say clearly it "couldn't be interpreted to justify any foreign military interference in the Syrian crisis."

"We believe that our approach is fair and well-balanced, unlike the attempts to pass one-sided resolutions that would condemn only one party and, by doing so, encourage another one to build up confrontation and take an uncompromising stance," Lavrov said after the talks in Moscow with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. "We have seen that in Libya, and we will not allow the repetition of the Libyan scenario."



BEBETO MATTHEWS / AP

Protesters using fake blood, body bags and masks of Bashar Assad and Vladimir Putin outside the UN this week.



SERGEI KARPUKHIN / REUTERS

Lavrov meeting Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Wednesday.

Russia abstained in the UN vote authorizing military intervention in Libya, but harshly criticized NATO for what it saw as an excessive use of force and civilian casualties during the NATO bombing campaign against strongman Moammar Gadhafi's regime.

Rebels in Libya eventually succeeded

in overthrowing Gadhafi, but they had enormous military support from the security alliance. NATO jets flew 26,000 sorties, including 9,600 strike missions, against Libya in 2011, destroying about 5,900 Libyan government military targets in a nine-month campaign.

Russian officials have strongly warned

the West against emulating the Libyan experience in Syria.

Lavrov called for a quick start to talks between the Syrian government and the opposition, suggesting that they could be hosted by Egypt, the Arab League, Turkey or Russia.

Asked about the Arab League's call Sunday for a unity government in Syria in two months, Lavrov said Russia believes that the talks between the Syrian government and the opposition should start without any preconditions.

"We proceed from the assumption that all participants in such dialogue would seek to reach accord and show responsibility for the fate of the country and its people," he said.

Russia has been a strong ally of Syria since Soviet times, when Syria was led by the president's father, Hafez Assad. It has supplied Syria with aircraft, missiles, tanks and other heavy weapons. The 27-nation EU, in contrast, has imposed an arms embargo against Syria.

In December, a Russian ship apparently carrying tons of weapons made a dash for Syria after telling Cypriot officials it was heading to Turkey. Turkish officials said the ship went instead to the Syrian port of Tartus, which Russian warships use as a resupply stop.