

Der Westen sucht den “B” Plan

PRESSESCHAU SYRIEN #48

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Im Vordergrund der internationalen Szene appelliert die Türkei für die Schaffung einer „Gruppe der Freunde des demokratischen Syriens“, nach dem Model der „Kontaktgruppe für Libyen“, während die italienische Presse die Möglichkeiten für eine indirekte, militärische Intervention der NATO studiert. Falls jedoch eine solche stattfinden sollte, würde sie gegen das internationale Recht nach dem doppelten Veto von Russland und China verstoßen, und müsste daher geheim abgesprochen werden.

Hinter den Kulissen spielt sich ganz was anderes ab. Die russische Delegation hat ihre Garantie für ein geheimes Abkommen zwischen mehreren Partnern angeboten. Laut unserer Quellen wurden türkische Kriegsgefangene und iranische Zivilgeisel freigegeben. Dafür sollte die Türkei nicht in Syrien eingreifen und der Iran verzichten, Rebellengruppen in der Türkei zu unterstützen.

Da der Kriegsplan in Syrien gestört ist, sucht der Westen nach einer alternativen Strategie. Jedoch haben sich schon mehrere Staaten von dem Spiel zurückgezogen.

Zwei besondere, bewusste Falschmeldungen müssen erwähnt werden:

- Ein Bericht von « Ärzte ohne Grenzen (MSF)» bringt fünfzehn Zeugenaussagen von Patienten und Ärzten, die die Sicherheitskräfte beschuldigen, den verletzten Rebellen Pflege zu verweigern, oder selbst willkürlich zu amputieren oder zu foltern. MSF unterstreicht in der Einleitung, dass es ihr nicht möglich war diese Aussagen zu prüfen, aber veröffentlicht sie, weil sie wiederholt passiert sind. Nun sind die Beobachter der arabischen Liga, die versuchten sie zu prüfen, zum Schluss gekommen, dass sie ohne Begründung sind. Wenn auch *Le Monde* diesen Bericht mit Vorsicht behandelt, macht *Libération* dagegen ihre Schlagzeilen daraus.
- Das syrische Observatorium der Menschenrechte (Büro der Muslimbrüder in London) behauptet, dass 18 Säuglinge in Inkubatoren des Al-Walid Spitals in Homs gestorben seien (siehe auch z.B. *ABC* oder *Diario de Noticias*). Es handelt sich hier um die genaue Wiederholung der berühmten Fabel, die von dem Public Relation Büro Hill & Knowlton mit Hilfe der Tochter des Kuwait Botschafters in Washington und Amnesty International inszeniert wurde, um den „Desert Storm“ Angriff auf den Irak zu legitimieren. (Sitzung des 10. Oktober 1990 vor dem Congressional Human Rights Caucus)

Haaretz (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)



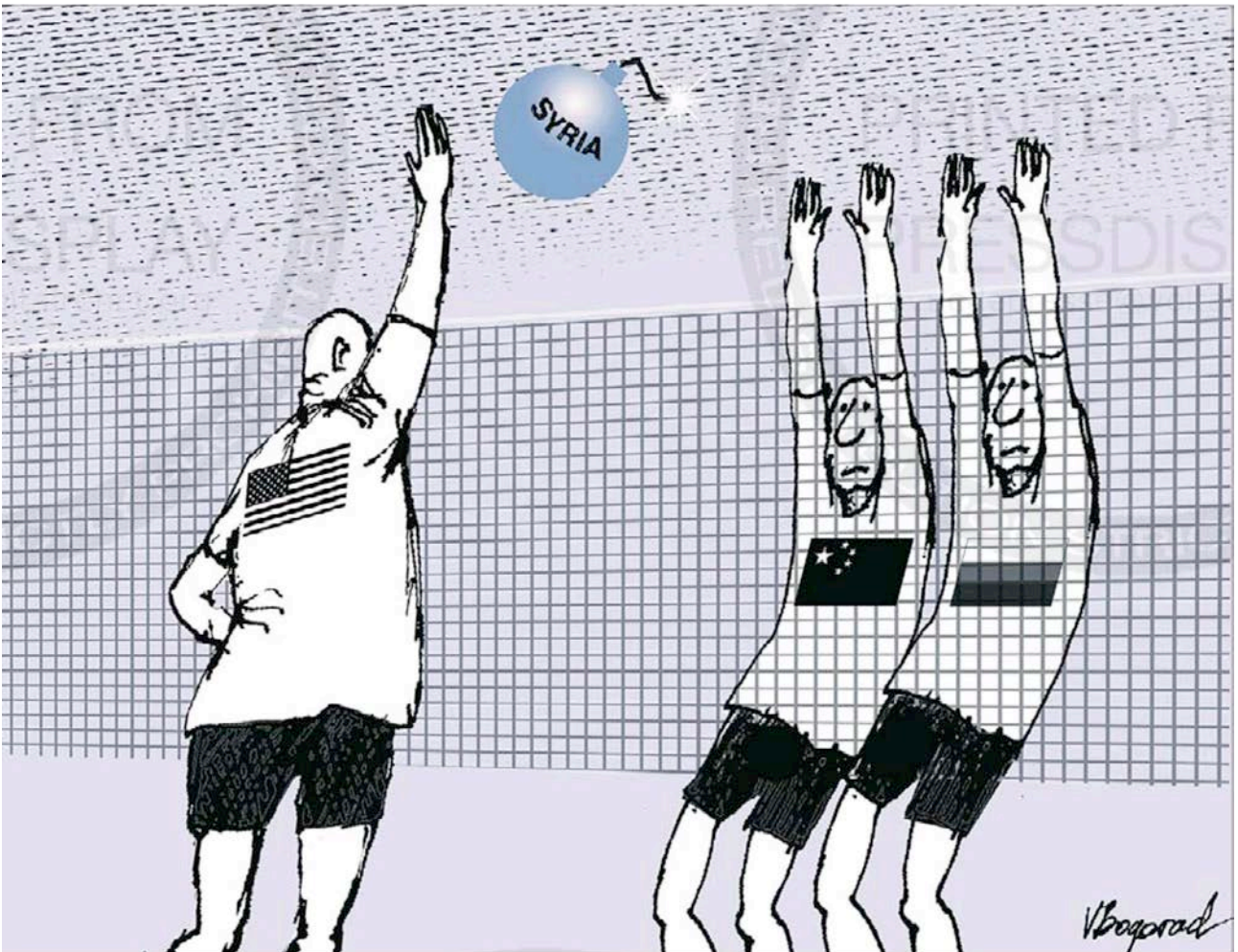
Amos Biderman | amosb@haaretz.co.il

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)



RAMACHANDRA BABU / Gulf News

The Moscow Times (Russie / Russia)



Le Monde (France)

La médecine, arme de la répression en Syrie

Médecins sans frontières dénonce la persécution des praticiens qui soignent les opposants

Depuis ses débuts, il y a bientôt onze mois, la répression en Syrie n'épargne pas les enfants dont 400 sont morts sur un total de plus de 7000 victimes, selon le décompte tenu par des militants des droits de l'homme. Mais l'implacable machine répressive du régime de Bachar Al-Assad présente une autre « particularité », moins connue : elle vise en priorité les blessés et les personnels soignants. La médecine transformée en arme de persécution : c'est cette pratique aujourd'hui systématique en Syrie – comme ce fut le cas en Tchétchénie, en Bosnie et plus récemment à Bahreïn – que dénonce Médecins sans frontières (MSF) dans un communiqué et un rapport rendus publics mercredi 8 février. « *Aujourd'hui, en Syrie, résume Marie-Pierre Allié, présidente de MSF, les blessés et les médecins sont pourchassés et courent le risque d'être arrêtés et torturés par les services de sécurité.* »

Après des mois de silence, l'ONG française, qui a longtemps espéré – sans succès – obtenir l'autorisation de travailler en Syrie, a décidé de prendre la parole. « *Dès le mois de mai, nous avons été interpellés par des médecins syriens vivant à l'étranger et en contact avec leurs confrères de l'intérieur* », raconte Dounia Dekhili, responsable adjointe des urgences à MSF.

Sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité, les entretiens réalisés par MSF dans les pays limitrophes de la Syrie démontrent une volonté systématique des forces de sécurité d'empêcher les soins aux manifestants blessés, de les traquer jusque dans les lieux hospitaliers, d'arrêter et de persécuter les médecins se risquant à travailler pour des structures clandestines. Il en résulte des carences médicales catastrophiques en personnel médical et en matériel, alors que le pays compte probablement plusieurs dizaines de milliers de blessés par balles et que le nombre de morts quotidiens dépasse régulièrement la centaine depuis une semaine.

Les témoignages, recueillis par MSF dans les pays limitrophes (Liban, Jordanie, Turquie) où ont fui les civils syriens, sont anonymes pour raisons de sécurité. Le « patient 2 » résume la situation : « *En Syrie, on ne peut pas aller dans un hôpital, parce que soit ils vous amputent du membre blessé soit ils vous emmènent en prison. J'ai été détenu deux fois et, ce que j'ai vu, c'est que certains prisonniers sont abandonnés, jusqu'à ce que leurs blessures pourrissent. Ils n'étaient pas emmenés à l'hôpital, certains sont morts juste à côté de moi pendant que d'autres urinaient du sang à cause des hémorragies internes dont ils souffraient.* »



« Les snipers ouvrent le feu sur tout véhicule transportant des blessés »

PRÉSENT À HOMES pour Le Monde, dans les quartiers contrôlés par l'opposition syrienne, le photjournaliste Mani raconte une ville en état de guerre : « Quartier de Karm Al-Zaitoun. Les snipers loyalistes font de nombreuses victimes civiles jour après jour. Installés

dans les étages immeubles, sur les toits ou sur les barreaux des forces gouvernementales, ces tireurs embusqués tuent et mutilent les passants avec une terrifiante régularité. Les blessés sont évacués vers le centre de santé le plus proche pour recevoir les premiers soins, puis vers une clini-

que privée s'ils sont grièvement atteints. Le transport doit se faire avec beaucoup de précautions, car les tireurs embusqués ouvrent le feu sur tout véhicule transportant des blessés. Le 26 janvier, cet homme touché à la poitrine ne surviva pas à ses blessures. » ■ PHOTO: MANI POUR « LE MONDE »

Tous les hôpitaux publics sont obligés de rapporter aux représentants des services de sécurité présents dans les locaux l'identité des admis et la nature de leurs blessures. Le Croissant-Rouge est lié au régime et le ministère de l'intérieur a pris le contrôle de la banque du sang. « *L'hôpital est un lieu*

Des établissements comme l'hôpital militaire d'Homs sont transformés en centres d'interrogatoire

dangereux », confirme M^{me} Dekhili, de MSF, soit parce que l'on peut y être arrêté, soit parce que l'on peut s'y voir refuser des soins, et même y être amputé de force, comme le confirme le patient 1, blessé à la main. « *Normalement*

dans les pires circonstances, ils auraient retiré un doigt ou tout simplement fait un bandage, mais ils m'ont amputé à partir du poignet (...). L'hôpital de Damas ? Ils avaient tout ce qu'il fallait et ils auraient pu traiter ma main. Mais le plus étrange est qu'ils l'ont amputée. » Le patient 4 assure s'être vu refuser des soins pendant vingt-cinq jours, à l'exception d'une perfusion.

Pire, le patient 5 a été envoyé dans un centre de torture où il a perdu la moitié de sa main. M^{me} Dekhili, de MSF, explique avoir recueilli des témoignages selon lesquels des patients stabilisés ont été retrouvés le lendemain à la morgue par leur famille.

Il arrive que les établissements eux-mêmes, comme l'hôpital militaire d'Homs, soient transformés en centres d'interrogatoire par les services de renseignement, parfois avec l'aide du personnel soignant. A l'inverse, il advient

que le personnel hospitalier traite les blessés en falsifiant leur identité et la nature de leurs blessures.

Conséquence logique de ces entraves, un système de santé clandestin a été mis sur pied avec les moyens du bord. Outre les cliniques privées, qui sont particulièrement surveillées, il s'agit essentiellement de fermes, de caves, garages ou salles de bains transformés pendant quelques jours ou quelques heures en lieu de soins. L'équipement est rudimentaire. Le patient 3 raconte avoir vu un infirmier recoudre des plaies avec une aiguille et du fil, sans anesthésiant.

Ces cliniques improvisées doivent constamment déménager de peur d'être mises au jour par les services de sécurité. Les militants y conduisent médecins et blessés les yeux bandés, par crainte d'infiltrations. Le personnel soignant qui y travaille est une cible privilégiée de la répression. C'est ce

qu'explique le « médecin 1 », un chirurgien généraliste obligé de quitter la Syrie, où il risquait d'être arrêté et torturé à l'instar de nombreux confrères. Il souligne les carences en échographes, tables d'opération et respirateurs artificiels. « *Il manque aussi des stérilisateurs, des anesthésiants,*

des poches de sang, des antibiotiques et des fixateurs internes pour les fractures », complète Dounia Dekhili.

MSF travaille avec des réseaux de Syriens à l'étranger qui essaient de faire parvenir de l'aide médicale dans leur pays. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Fauteuils & Canapés Club
Haut de Gamme

SOLDES
jusqu'à
-50%

Syrie: l'offensive meurtrière contre Homs se poursuit

Les observateurs de la Ligue arabe vont retourner sur le terrain, a annoncé le secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon,

GEORGES MALBRUNOT (AVEC AFP ET REUTERS)

MOYEN-ORIENT Pour le cinquième jour consécutif, l'armée syrienne a bombardé Homs mercredi, faisant au moins une cinquantaine de morts, en dépit des promesses la veille du président Bachar el-Assad de mettre fin aux violences.

Depuis l'aube, les tirs de roquettes et d'obus de mortier ont été extrêmement intenses contre le quartier rebelle de Bab Amro, a indiqué Omar Chaker, un militant joint par l'AFP. Selon lui, ces bombardements seraient destinés à préparer le terrain à un assaut terrestre de ce quartier où certaines zones sont déjà entièrement rasées. L'électricité et les communications ont été coupées, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de

l'homme (OSDH), basé à Londres. La nuit de mardi à mercredi, au moins 67 personnes avaient péri sous les tirs de roquettes ou sous les armes des miliciens pro-syriens, selon des militants de l'opposition, tandis que les chars pénétraient dans le quartier d'Inchah, voisin de Bab Amro.

Parmi les victimes de ces bombardements nocturnes, on compte les membres de trois familles (soit une vingtaine de personnes), liquidées par des miliciens entrés de force dans leurs maisons dans les quartiers de Karm al-Zeitoun et Nazhane. Selon un militant joint par l'AFP, les victimes auraient été égorgées, mais il était impossible de vérifier l'information, les autorités syriennes restreignant drastiquement l'entrée des journalistes dans le pays. Selon Damas, « un groupe armé » aurait fait exploser



Un homme pleure un parent, victime des violences à Homs. Selon des militants de l'opposition, au moins 67 personnes auraient péri sous les tirs de roquettes ou sous les armes des miliciens pro-syriens dans la nuit de mardi à mercredi. AP

une voiture piégée à Homs, provoquant la mort de plusieurs personnes. Dans l'espoir de mettre fin au bain de sang, qui a fait plus de 5 000 morts en onze mois, la Turquie a annoncé mercredi œuvrer à la tenue « dans les plus brefs délais » d'une conférence internationale.

Moscou manipulé, selon Juppé
Quelques heures auparavant, le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'était entretenu au téléphone avec le président russe, Dmitri Medvedev. Le sort de Bachar el-Assad doit être réglé par les « Syriens eux-mêmes » à l'issue de négociations entre le pouvoir et l'opposition, a estimé le chef de la diplomatie russe, Sergueï Lavrov, au lendemain de sa visite à Damas. Selon lui, Assad a « confirmé qu'il était prêt à envoyer une délégation officielle syrienne à une rencontre inter-syrienne à Moscou ».

Sarkozy exhorte Medvedev à soutenir le plan de la Ligue arabe

NICOLAS SARKOZY a demandé mercredi par téléphone au président russe Dmitri Medvedev son « plein soutien » au plan de la Ligue arabe afin de convaincre le numéro un syrien Bachar el-Assad de quitter le pouvoir. Selon l'Elysee, le chef de l'Etat a sollicité cet appui de son homologue russe pour « prévenir une guerre civile qui menacerait l'intégrité de la Syrie et la stabilité

A. BA.

A l'étranger, les États-Unis ont fait part de leur « scepticisme » vis-à-vis de ces promesses. De son côté, Alain Juppé ne croit « absolument pas » aux engagements de Damas de mettre fin à la violence. « C'est vraiment une manipulation (...) dans laquelle nous n'allons pas tomber », a affirmé le ministre des Affaires étrangères sur France Info, ajoutant que Moscou se « trompait complètement » dans ses « arguments » sur le dossier syrien.

Pour sa part, l'Union européenne s'apprêterait à renforcer ses sanctions contre Damas. Il s'agirait d'imposer un embargo sur l'importation des phosphates syriens, sur les vols commerciaux entre Damas et l'Europe et sur les transactions financières avec la banque centrale. Certaines de ces mesures seraient adaptées lors d'une réunion des ministres des Affaires étrangères de l'UE, le 27 février. ■

zoom

Vaste opération antigang de la police londonienne

Scotland Yard a mené 300 raids mercredi matin contre de présumés gangs criminels, conduisant à 158 arrestations. Des quantités « significatives » de drogues ont été saisies. C'est la première opération d'envergure menée par l'équipe antigang de la police londonienne. Elle comprend quelque 1 000 policiers et a été mise en place par le nouveau chef de la Metropolitan Police, Bernard Hogan-Howe. Les quelque 250 gangs identifiés par la police londonienne

Libération (France)

ÉDITORIAL

Par FRANÇOIS SERGENT

« Valeurs »

Les témoignages effroyables des opposants syriens que nous publions, les photos qui nous parviennent de gamins tués, de mains réduites à des moignons, de bras raillardés montrent l'innommable horreur d'un régime qui a fait de la torture une méthode de gouvernement. C'est ce même régime que le ministre de l'Intérieur, si soucieux des «valeurs» et de «civilisation», a défendu et complaisamment fréquenté lorsqu'il était le plus proche conseiller de Sarkozy. Depuis, comme le montre notre enquête, d'autres experts, journalistes et demi-soldes de l'extrême droite ont pris le relais. Ils ne sont pas les seuls. A l'ONU, les Russes et les Chinois se sont opposés à une résolution pourtant bien timide mais qui aurait malgré tout marqué la condamnation par la communauté internationale du boucher de Damas. On connaît les raisons des régimes chinois et russe, qui ne veulent pas que le précédent syrien autorise le reste du monde à s'intéresser à ce qui se passe au Tibet, en Tchétchénie ou en Ossétie. Ce veto opposé par la Russie devrait interpellier ses partenaires du G8. Le couple au pouvoir à Moscou partage-t-il vraiment les mêmes principes que la communauté des nations ou de la Ligue arabe, qui a fini par renier ses années de défense des dictatures ? Le prochain sommet du G8, en mai à Chicago, pourrait être une bonne occasion d'interroger Poutine, vraisemblablement fraîchement élu président (avec les méthodes que l'on sait) sur ses «valeurs».

L'une des victimes des sévices infligés par le régime de Damas expose ses plaies, à Amman, mardi.
PHOTO MATHIEU CELLARD



Les victimes d'Al-Assad

Des Syriens réfugiés en Jordanie ont rapporté à «Libération» les tortures infligées par les services de sécurité.

Par AUDE MARCOVITCH
Envoyée spéciale à Amman (Jordanie)

Jihad s'assied sur un petit lit au-dessus duquel a été suspendu un drapeau aux bandes verte, blanche et noire et aux trois étoiles rouges, le nouveau symbole des Syriens en insurrection contre Bachar al-Assad. Il tient sa main un peu à l'écart, comme si ce chicot énorme et purulent, où ne subsistent qu'un auriculaire et un bout d'index, ne lui appartenait plus vraiment. Cette main, Jihad l'a perdue dans une des tortures que les hommes du régime syrien prodiguent à tous ceux qu'ils incarcèrent. Le visage étonnamment calme et le sourire tranquille, comme déconnecté des cruautés qu'il a endurées, il raconte. En septembre, lors d'une manifestation à Deraa, petite ville du sud où ont été observés les premiers signes d'opposition au pouvoir, l'homme de

34 ans est arrêté par les militaires. Lors de son interrogatoire, on lui demande de se prosterner devant une photo de Bachar al-Assad. Il refuse. Il va même jusqu'à déchirer le cliché qu'on lui brandit devant les yeux. «Ils m'ont dit à deux reprises qu'ils allaient me couper la main, mais je ne pensais pas qu'un Syrien pouvait couper la main d'un autre Syrien», raconte-t-il. Après avoir été fouetté avec des câbles, reçu des décharges électriques sur les jambes, Jihad est finalement suspendu en croix, les yeux bandés. Il sent qu'on lui attache quelque chose à la main et entend ses tortionnaires s'éloigner de quelques pas. Après quelques secondes, ils activent un détonateur et font exploser sa main.

«BALLE EMPOISONNÉE». Comme Jihad, quelques dizaines de Syriens ont pu passer clandestinement en Jordanie pour faire soigner leurs blessures. L'organisation humanitaire Médecins sans frontières (MSF) a monté un programme à leur attention à Amman, la capitale, où sont traités les cas de chirurgie reconstructrice (lire aussi page 5). Antoine Foucher, chef de mission de MSF, estime à 400 le nombre de Syriens blessés suffisamment valides pour pouvoir atteindre les frontières turque, libanaise ou jordanienne. «Un chiffre important qui est un indicateur du fort niveau des violences sur le terrain», juge-t-il. Côté jordanien, les autorités ont mobilisé leurs hôpitaux, notamment près de la frontière, pour accueillir les blessés. Mais le royaume préfère

L'ESSENTIEL

LE CONTEXTE

Des centaines de victimes de la répression du régime syrien affluents en Jordanie, la plupart ont été torturées.

L'ENJEU

Malgré la répression, la contestation continue.

rester discret sur ses actions, pour maintenir un semblant de calme dans ses rapports avec son grand voisin du nord. Khaled Abou Ziyad, 28 ans, loge avec Jihad et huit autres blessés dans un petit appartement perché sur une des collines d'Amman. C'est une association de femmes syriennes qui paie le loyer. Lui aussi a perdu une main, lors d'une manifestation : «J'essayais de filmer le plus possible sur mon téléphone portable, pour envoyer les séquences aux télévisions. Je le tenais en hauteur au-dessus de la foule et, à un moment, ils ont tiré sur ma main. La balle était empoisonnée et, par la suite, la blessure s'est infectée.» Arrêté à deux reprises lors de manifestations et conduit dans des camps militaires installés depuis plusieurs mois à Deraa, il y a subi ce qui semble être la torture rituelle infligée aux détenus, l'électricité. «Ils m'ont mis des charges sur la poitrine et



racontent leur calvaire

les parties génitales, et quand ils faisaient circuler le jus, je pensais souvent connaissance. D'autres fois, ils m'installaient sur une roue et étraient mes jambes et mes bras.» Dans une logorrhée difficile à interrompre, Khaled parle de sa haine de ce pouvoir qui s'est retourné contre son peuple et qui l'humilie, évoque ses six frères, tous arrêtés, tous torturés. «Certains n'y survivent pas. Un de mes amis avait été arrêté, raconte-t-il. Quelque temps après, les militaires sont venus jeter son corps devant la maison ses parents.» A la question de savoir qui sont les tortionnaires, les blessés sont partagés. «Il y a des alaouïtes [la communauté dont est issu le régime, ndlr], c'est sûr, on l'entend à leur accent», dit l'un en expliquant que les tortures sont généralement subies les yeux bandés. Un autre estime que «des Iraniens sont là aussi». «Ils évitent de parler pour ne pas qu'on sache qui ils sont», relève-t-il. «Il y a un peu de tout», conclut un troisième.

BRAS MEURTRIS. Comme un millier d'autres prisonniers, Khaled a été libéré en novembre, lorsque le président syrien a fait un geste de bonne volonté à l'intention de la Ligue arabe. Des amis l'ont conduit à l'un des points médicaux de fortune installé secrètement chez des particuliers. Il y a reçu des soins très rudimentaires, à la hauteur des moyens dérisoires dont disposent ces structures informelles. Razi

Marwan, 22 ans, arrêté quarante-trois jours, qui est sorti des services de sécurité syriens avec des plaies dues à l'électricité et les bras meurtris après avoir été suspendu des heures, a été soigné par une de ces cellules de soins improvisées. Dans sa fuite vers la Jordanie, il a emporté quelques produits médicaux. D'un sac en plastique, Razi sort des flacons remplis d'une solution d'eau salée, des bandes élasti-

Jihad sent qu'on lui attache quelque chose à la main et entend ses tortionnaires s'éloigner de quelques pas. Après quelques secondes, ils activent un détonateur et font exploser sa main.

ques et des compresses de gaz. C'est tout. «Pour soigner ma main, ils n'avaient que ça, explique à son tour Jihad. Et du fil à coudre. C'est un médecin qui a refermé les blessures avec du fil, et j'ai reçu quelques pastilles du type paracétamol comme calmant.» Hormis le problème de leur approvisionnement, ces centres de soins doivent être constamment déplacés, pour ne pas éveiller l'attention des services de sécurité. Razi et ses camarades racontent le cas d'un médecin sévèrement battu par l'armée pour avoir soigné un blessé dans son appartement. Au dernier étage d'un hôtel d'Amman, Ahmed, 27 ans, fait sa séance de physiothérapie dans une salle aménagée à cet effet. C'est dans ce bâtiment que Médecins sans frontières loge

une partie des patients qui ont reçu des soins orthopédiques. Mince jeune homme à la voix timide, Houssam a été blessé de deux balles dans la jambe alors qu'il participait à un cortège funéraire en août. Pour passer côté jordanien, il évoque un court périple dangereux. «Si les militaires m'avaient vu ? Ils m'auraient fait ça», dit-il en passant le pouce sous sa gorge.

CHARBONS ARDENTS. Saed est installé à une table de la vaste salle des fêtes de l'hôtel. Le visage buriné, un keffieh sur de la tête, il est, à 46 ans, l'un des patients syrien les plus âgés croisés à Amman. Originaire d'un petit village près de Deraa, il a été arrêté à trois reprises pour avoir participé aux manifestations dans la région. «Ils ont voulu me filmer et me faire passer à la télévision. Je devais dire que j'étais un des meneurs, que j'avais reçu des fonds d'Arabie Saoudite et des armes de Jordanie, que j'avais commis des actions terroristes et que je regrettais. Je ne pouvais évidemment pas dire ça, non seulement parce que ce n'était pas vrai, mais parce que tout mon village m'aurait tué après.» Alors Saed a eu le pied brûlé par des charbons ardents, puis troué par de l'eau brûlante. Comme d'autres, il a subi des violences sur ses parties génitales. On lui a fait boire de grandes quantités d'eau, puis ses tortionnaires lui ont en serré le sexe dans des liens pour l'empêcher d'uriner. Résultat : infection des reins. Il précise dans un pâle sourire : «80% de ceux qui ont subi ça restent impuissants.»

REPÈRES



SYRIE

Superficie	185 200 km ²
Population	21,2 millions
PIB par habitant	2 129 €
Evolution du PIB	+3,2 %
Inflation	4,4 %
Chômage	8,3 %
Illettrisme	20,4 %
119 ^e sur 187 sur l'indicateur de développement humain (IDH)	
Sources : données 2010 - FMI, CIA, Pnud 2011 et BM 2006	

«Nous condamnons évidemment toute forme de violence d'où qu'elle vienne. Mais il ne faut pas se comporter comme un éléphant dans un magasin de porcelaine. Il faut laisser les Syriens décider eux-mêmes de leur sort.»
Vladimir Poutine hier

LES FAITS DU JOUR

- **L'armée syrienne a bombardé à l'artillerie lourde la ville rebelle de Homs pour le cinquième jour consécutif**, faisant au moins 50 morts hier, selon les militants. Les communications et l'électricité ont été coupées, et la nourriture se raréfie.
- **Des dizaines de chars ont continué hier de pilonner Zabadani** pour le 7^e jour d'affilée. L'objectif est de faire plier cette ville de la province de Damas devenue une place forte de la révolte.
- **Les autorités d'Ankara œuvrent à organiser dans les plus brefs délais une conférence internationale** avec les acteurs régionaux et internationaux, a déclaré hier le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoglu, affirmant que «la Turquie ne permettra pas que la région s'installe dans l'instabilité».

Homs hanté par le souvenir du massacre de Hama

Plus Bachar al-Assad promet la paix, plus Homs brûle et plus le carnage s'intensifie en Syrie. Hier, selon divers témoignages, les bombardements contre cette grande ville proche de la frontière libanaise étaient les pires de ces cinq derniers jours et ils auraient tué plusieurs dizaines de personnes. C'est avec des chars, de l'artillerie, mais avec aussi des hélicoptères et des snipers – qui tirent sur les femmes, les enfants, les vieillards lorsqu'ils se hasardent dans les rues pour chercher un peu de nourriture – que le régime s'efforce de reconquérir la ville qui résiste à présent depuis dix mois. Des forces loyalistes et des *chabbiha* (milices de voyous aux ordres du pouvoir) ferait aussi des incursions dans les quartiers tenus par les rebelles, dont celui de Baba Amr, le cœur de l'insurrec-

tion. Une situation que le leader druze Walid Boumbhatt, dans un appel aux consciences lancé via Libération, a qualifié d'«*extrêmement grave et dramatique*», comparant les événements en cours à Homs à «*la bataille de Stalingrad*». **Fosses communes.** A présent, le dictateur syrien ne cherche même plus à cacher ses intentions, comme il le faisait lorsque les observateurs de la Ligue arabe étaient présents dans le pays. Ce qui se dessine avec le siège de Homs, c'est une stratégie de mettre fin à la rébellion par les armes et dans les plus brefs délais. Dès lors, c'est le fantôme de Hama, bien présent dans la mémoire collective du pays, qui resurgit. En 1982, du temps de Hafez al-Assad, le père de Bachar, cette ville du centre de la Syrie s'était soulevée à l'instigation des Frères musulmans. Une insurrec-

tion violente mais dont la répression prit la forme d'un châtiment collectif contre la population. – essentiellement sunnite – tout entière. Selon l'enquête menée par Libération en 2000, entre 15 000 et 25 000 personnes furent alors massacrées par les troupes d'élite de Rifaat-Assad (l'oncle de Bachar), la plus part ensevelies ensuite dans des fosses communes sur lesquelles furent bâties des édifices gouvernementaux, notamment le luxueux hôtel Cham. Des quartiers entiers furent détruits, des mosquées historiques rasées, des minarets tronçonnés...

Aujourd'hui, tout indique que le pouvoir syrien se prépare à renouveau, précisément trente ans plus tard, l'exemple de Hama. Mais cette fois contre une ville autrement plus importante: avec plus d'un million et demi d'habitants, Homs est la

troisième ville syrienne. «*Mais la situation n'est pas identique à celle d'hier*, remarque depuis Paris le politologue Ziad Majed. *La société n'est plus la même. Aujourd'hui, se manifeste une solidarité de tout le pays envers la population de Homs, ce qui n'était pas le cas en 1982. A cette époque, Hama avait été abandonnée à son misérable destin. Elle l'avait été d'autant plus que cette révolte avait une coloration islamiste.*» Le contexte international élit aussi complètement différent, avec un Liban à feu et à sang, la guerre entre l'Irak et l'Irak, la confrontation entre l'Est et l'Ouest...

Urgence. Le président syrien semble également avoir réalisé que le temps joue contre lui, que son isolement sur la scène internationale va grandissant, que l'Iran, son principal allié, est lui-même accablé de soucis et que l'économie du

pays sombre. «*Vistiblement, Bachar al-Assad a décidé d'accélérer son offensive pour mettre fin à l'insurrection. Je crois que les Russes [le ministre des Affaires étrangères Sergueï Lavrov était mardi à Damas, ndr] lui ont dit qu'il fallait en finir au plus vite, avant les élections russes, et qu'ils ne pouvaient prendre indéfiniment sa défense devant le Conseil de sécurité*», souligne le même chercheur. Il y a effectivement une certaine urgence pour le régime syrien. Mardi, le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a fait savoir qu'il préparait une initiative visant à unir les efforts de ceux qui, en Occident comme dans le monde arabe et au-delà, voulaient la démission de Bachar al-Assad et qu'il s'adresserait au président russe.

Envoyé spécial à Beyrouth
JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Dans les rangs de l'Etat ou dans ceux de groupuscules d'extrême droite, les soutiens au régime d'Al-Assad s'activent en sous-main.

Des réseaux français au service de la Syrie

L'engagement de la France au plus haut niveau contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad suscite des interrogations discrètes, y compris parmi certains diplomates et experts de la région. «On s'est planté», disait franchement l'un d'entre eux début janvier, à propos de la capacité de résistance du régime. Il reste en effet dans la haute administration de nombreux nostalgiques de l'époque où la coopération entre la France et la Syrie était pleine de promesses, notamment au plan sécuritaire, quand Claude Guéant faisait des sauts réguliers à Damas en 2007 et 2008, ou de ceux qui craignent une relève islamiste après le renversement du pouvoir.

Plus direct, Jean-Marie Le Pen, accusant récemment l'Occident de vouloir «mettre au pouvoir les islamistes partout dans cette région du monde», a réjoui les médias officiels syriens. Ses propos vont droit dans le sens du message essentiel d'un régime qui se dit victime d'un «complot américano-sioniste» agissant à travers des bandes de terroristes salafistes.

«Ré-information». Cette théorie du complot contre la Syrie, bastion auto-proclamé de la résistance à Israël et aux plans occidentaux dans la région est relayée en France par une galaxie improbable de mouvements. On y retrouve péle-mêle des militants anti-impérialistes, des pro-palestiniens, d'autres d'extrême droite en passant par le Réseau Voltaire de Thierry Meyssan. Certains experts et «géostratèges» diffusent les mêmes messages. Dans la droite ligne de la communication officielle syrienne, ces différents milieux s'emploient depuis des mois à dénoncer les médias arabes et occidentaux «qui enfoncent les gens dans la tromperie et la duperie» sur la «réalité» de ce qui se passe en Syrie. Une «agence de ré-information sur l'actualité en Syrie» a été spécialement créée en juin pour épinglez médias et journalistes français en particulier. Son site (infosyrie.fr) a été construit par Riwal, une agence de communication parisienne, qui confirme être «en charge du développement et de la maintenance mais n'intervient en aucun cas sur le contenu ou la ligne éditoriale», selon Frédéric Chatillon, son gérant. Figure connue de l'extrême droite, cet

ancien du GUD ne serait donc qu'un «prestataire de service», selon les termes de Marine Le Pen qui l'a défendu récemment dans une interview sur France Inter.

A travers sa branche Riwal Syria, «spécialisée dans la promotion des sociétés privées et des institutions publiques syriennes en France», l'agence a mené des campagnes ces dernières années pour des sociétés syriennes réputées, tel le confiseur Ghraoui ou le ministère syrien du Tourisme. Frédéric Chatillon s'est occupé personnellement du développement syrien de sa société, grâce à ses contacts dans les milieux d'affaires proches du régime. «L'activité de Riwal en Syrie a été maintenue malgré le gel de la majeure partie de notre activité sur place. Nous attendons des jours meilleurs car nous sommes persuadés que la crise sera surmontée grâce aux réformes annoncées», explique Chatillon. Il

Des mouvements s'emploient depuis des mois à dénoncer les médias arabes et occidentaux «qui enfoncent les gens dans la tromperie et la duperie» sur la «réalité» en Syrie.

se montre aujourd'hui peu disert sur les éventuels conseils en communication qu'il continuerait d'apporter au gouvernement de Damas. Pourtant, le 30 octobre encore, il apparaît dans une manifestation «pro-Bachar» au Panthéon filmée par Canal+.

Voyage de presse. Comme d'autres, Frédéric Chatillon a trouvé dans la cause du régime syrien une belle occasion de faire des affaires tout en servant ses convictions. Bien moins discrets, certains de ses amis se sont lancés activement dans les relations publiques de Bachar al-Assad, tels Alain Soral, ancien membre du comité central du Front national qui anime le mouvement Egalité et Réconciliation, Christian Bouchet, également lepéniste, ou encore le Belge Michel Collon, «spécialiste de la désinformation» comme il se présente lui-même sur son blog. Ces militants ont participé à un voyage de presse en Syrie en août 2011, aux côtés de journalistes russes, chinois et libanais ainsi que de Thierry Meyssan. Ce

dernier qui s'est fait connaître par son ouvrage *L'Effroyable imposture*, mettant en cause la réalité des attentats du 11 Septembre, est quasiment installé à Beyrouth. Commentateur régulier sur al-Manar, la chaîne du Hezbollah, il est l'un des propagandistes affichés de l'axe anti-impérialiste Iran-Syrie-Hezbollah. Ce genre de littérature est largement relayé par certains milieux pro-palestiniens antisionistes, notamment Palestine Solidarité, une plateforme d'ONG proches du Hamas dont le site renvoie en premier lieu sur celui du Centre d'information palestinien à Gaza.

Profil bas. Dans cette constellation, apparaît également Richard Labévière, ancien de RFI, présenté comme «grand journaliste français» sur le site officiel Syria News quand il parle du «complot» auquel la Syrie est confrontée, mené par Israël et s'appuyant sur les Frères musulmans. Cet auteur d'un ouvrage au titre trompeur *Quand la Syrie se réveillera*, paru en janvier 2011 et faisant la promotion du pays de Bachar al-Assad, fait profil bas ces derniers temps. Il s'est rendu à Damas en décembre pour «une mission d'information et d'évaluation» menée par une

ancienne ministre algérienne avec le Centre international de recherche et d'étude sur le terrorisme (Ciret), présidé par Yves Bonnet, ancien chef de la Direction de la surveillance du territoire (DST). Richard Labévière a refusé de commenter ou de répondre aux questions de *Libération*, après avoir été cité comme référence par une élégante sexagénaire qui, à la fin d'une conférence d'un chercheur syrien à l'Institut du Monde arabe le 10 janvier, a lu un texte sur le soutien financier de la CIA aux protestataires.

Le peu d'influence, voire la contre-productivité de tous ces défenseurs qui livrent leurs témoignages, analyses et «informations alternatives» sur des sites confidentiels (reprenant souvent les mêmes articles), ne semble pas déranger leurs sponsors syriens. Ces derniers, des milieux d'affaires proches du pouvoir, sont sollicités par le régime pour contribuer bon gré mal gré à ses opérations de communication.

HALA KODMANI

Valeurs actuelles (France)

Le chemin russe de Damas

Syrie Dernier grand allié du régime syrien, la Russie pourrait lâcher Assad contre des compensations. Ses intérêts stratégiques sont en jeu.

Un groupe aéronaval russe de huit bâtiments de guerre et navires d'appui conduit par le seul porte-avions de la flotte russe, l'Amiral-Kouznetsov, vient de faire escale, les 8 et 9 janvier, dans le port syrien de Tartous. Sana, l'agence de presse syrienne, n'a pas manqué de

ses intérêts stratégiques dans la région sont en jeu. Le général Nikolai Makarov, chef de l'état-major général de l'armée russe, a dû désamorcer la crise : « Cette mission d'entraînement n'a rien à voir avec la situation au Proche-Orient. Les navires russes ont fait une escale à Tartous pour se réapprovisionner, parce que ce port abrite la seule base navale de la marine russe dans cette région. » Sergueï Lavrov, le ministre russe des Affaires étrangères, précisait : « Si quelqu'un a l'intention d'utiliser la force par tous les moyens, nous ne pourrions certainement pas nous y opposer. »

Moscou a pour l'instant choisi de se battre sur le front diplomatique. Vitali Tchourkine, son représentant permanent au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, est à la manœuvre pour freiner les velléités coercitives de l'Onu contre



souligner ce « signe de solidarité avec le peuple syrien ». Banale dans le cadre d'une campagne normale d'entraînement, cette visite prend un relief particulier alors que la Russie, principal soutien au régime contesté de Bachar al-Assad, vient d'exercer son droit de veto au Conseil de sécurité de l'Onu pour bloquer une résolution condamnant le régime syrien.

Cette escale à grand spectacle serait, aux yeux de certains, la preuve que la Russie est prête à en découdre sur ce dossier avec les Occidentaux, parce que

le régime syrien. Son pays dispose d'une "arme fatale" : son droit de veto de membre permanent du Conseil. Déjà utilisée en octobre dernier, elle a été de nouveau mise en œuvre ce 4 février. Sur ce dossier, la Russie peut compter sur une alliée de poids : la Chine. Les deux pays s'opposent à toute ingérence dans les affaires intérieures d'un État membre, principe reconnu par l'article 2.7 du chapitre I de la Charte des Nations unies.

La position russe n'est pas seulement fondée sur des principes. Dans cette région, la Russie défend d'abord et avant tout sa présence, construite de longue date. La Syrie est un client important (armes, énergie) de Moscou, un partenaire militaire de premier plan, dont l'importance est soulignée par ce port de Tartous, la seule base navale offerte aux Russes en Méditerranée. Ils ont commencé à l'aménager pour accueillir de plus grands navires, y compris des porteurs d'armes nucléaires.

Près de 20 milliards de dollars d'investissements russes en 2009

La Russie est le principal fournisseur d'armes de la Syrie, avec des contrats en cours évalués à 4,5 milliards de dollars (chasseurs Mig-29SMT, systèmes de défense antiaérienne, missiles tactiques Iskander, deux sous-marins conventionnels de classe "Amour"). Le dernier accord, en date du 23 janvier, porte sur la livraison de trente-six avions d'entraînement Iak-130 pour une valeur de 550 millions de dollars. Les investissements russes en Syrie ont atteint 19,4 milliards de dollars en 2009. Stroïtransgaz construit une usine de traitement de gaz naturel et Tatneft contribue à l'extraction de pétrole dans un joint-venture avec la société pétrolière d'État syrienne.

Moscou ne peut que s'opposer à des sanctions économiques qui bloqueraient ses entreprises. Échaudée par l'exemple de la Libye (avec un manque à gagner de 4 milliards de dollars), dossier sur lequel le Kremlin s'est fait avoir en mars 2011 – la résolution de l'Onu avait débouché sur une intervention de l'Otan –, la Russie craint qu'une solution militaire ne ruine ses relations avec un nouveau régime qui ne lui serait pas favorable.

Cette position n'est pas totalement verrouillée. Le Kremlin sait que le régime Assad peut s'effondrer, ce qui l'incite à garder le contact avec l'opposition syrienne. Moscou voudrait organiser avec la Ligue arabe, en Russie, une rencontre entre le pouvoir et l'opposition. Les divisions des opposants rendent la tâche difficile, mais le Kremlin semble prêt à accepter toute solution qui lui permettrait de garantir sa présence à Tartous et la pérennité de ses contrats économiques. PIERRE LORRAIN

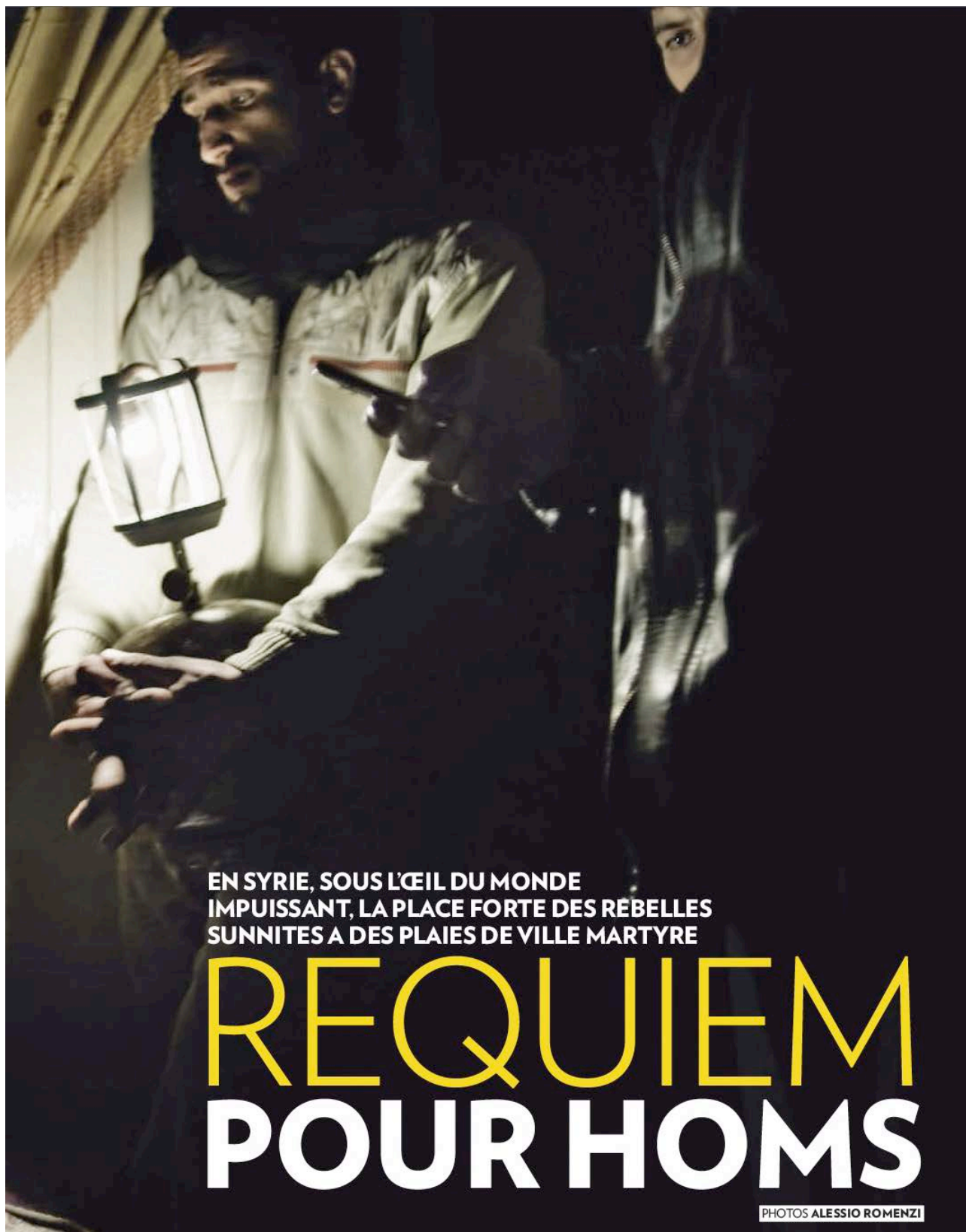
Les présidents syrien Bachar al-Assad et russe Dmitri Medvedev. Une alliance militaire et commerciale de plus de quarante ans.

Paris-Match (France)

L'hécatombe se poursuit en Syrie. Alors que le monde entier, à commencer par la Ligue arabe, demande à Bachar El-Assad de se retirer, la répression s'est intensifiée ces derniers jours. Dans la nuit du vendredi 3 au samedi 4 février, 230 civils de Homs, la ville rebelle, ont été tués lors d'un terrible bombardement. Le lendemain, la Russie et la Chine, toutes deux membres du Conseil de sécurité, ont mis leur veto à une nouvelle résolution de l'Onu présentée il y a deux semaines par le Maroc. Bien qu'elles aient appelé elles-mêmes à un retour au calme, ces deux puissances ne veulent pas céder aux Occidentaux et à leurs alliés comme elles l'avaient fait au moment de la révolution libyenne. Sergueï Lavrov, le ministre des Affaires étrangères russe a dénoncé la « réaction hystérique » de l'Occident. Alors qu'il s'apprêtait lundi à partir pour Damas, une vingtaine de civils sont tombés sous les tirs de l'armée régulière. Le même jour, les Etats-Unis ont fermé leur ambassade dans la capitale syrienne.

Sur son lit de mort, Mohammad Baakour abattu le 27 janvier par un sniper de l'armée syrienne dans la petite ville d'Al-Qsair, à 25 kilomètres au sud-ouest de Homs. Il avait 14 ans. Près de 400 enfants ont trouvé la mort depuis le début de la révolte en mars 2011.





EN SYRIE, SOUS L'ŒIL DU MONDE
IMPUISSANT, LA PLACE FORTE DES REBELLES
SUNNITES A DES PLAIES DE VILLE MARTYRE

REQUIEM POUR HOMS

PHOTOS ALESSIO ROMENZI



Manifestation anti-Assad le vendredi 27 janvier à Al-Qsair. La ville est assiégée par l'armée depuis début novembre. On y a recensé au total 65 morts.



Des membres de l'Armée syrienne libre rejoignent leurs positions dans les faubourgs d'Al-Qsair. Ils sont de plus en plus nombreux à ouvrir directement le feu contre les forces du régime.



POUR LES CIVILS EN PREMIÈRE LIGNE, LES MAISONS SE TRANSFORMENT EN HÔPITAUX DE FORTUNE

Samedi 28 janvier, à Al-Qsair, un adolescent blessé par un tir de l'armée syrienne reçoit les premiers soins des mains d'infirmiers improvisés.



Hôpital de campagne installé dans une banale maison aménagée à la va-vite et dont l'adresse doit absolument demeurer secrète.

Die Welt (Allemagne / Germany)

Endspiel um Assad

In Syrien kämpfen auch der Iran und die Türkei: Beide Länder ringen um Einfluss

■ Ankara unterstützt verdeckt die Rebellen. Teheran demonstriert Einigkeit mit Damaskus

Der regierungsnahe syrische Radiosender Schams FM strahlte eine bemerkenswerte Nachricht aus: Syrien und die Türkei verhandelten heimlich über die Freilassung von 49 türkischen Geheimdienstoffizieren, die auf syrischem Gebiet gefasst worden seien, wo sie Rebellen der „Syrischen Freien Armee“ (FSA) unterstützt hätten. Der Sender berichtete, Damaskus fordere als Bedingung für die Überstellung der Agenten die Einstellung aller Infiltrationen durch türkische Sicherheitskräfte, einen Stopp der Ausbildung syrischer Rebellen durch die Türkei und die Aushändigung syrischer Rebellenführer, die von türkischem Gebiet aus den Aufstand in Syrien leiteten. Die Meldung ist eine Warnung an die Türkei: Damaskus sieht Ankara als Aggressor.

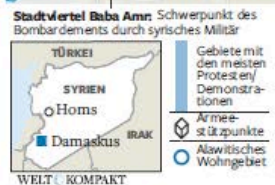
In der Meldung hieß es zudem, jegliche Vereinbarung solle vom Iran gegengezeichnet werden, als Syriens engstem Verbündeten. Das führt zur nächsten bemerkenswerten Nachricht: Kurz davor hatte die FSA die Freilassung von elf gefangenen Iranern bekanntgegeben und der Türkei für ihre Vermittlung sowie für ihre Unterstützung gedankt.

Die Türkei und der Iran stehen einander in Syrien als Gegner gegenüber, womöglich sogar auf dem Schlachtfeld. Noch vor einem Jahr nannte der türkische Ministerpräsident Recep Tayyip Erdogan den syrischen Diktator Baschar al-Assad seinen „Bruder“. Und der Iran galt als befreundete Nation beider Länder.

Mittlerweile ist die Türkei der große Drahtzieher hinter dem syrischen Aufstand und der Iran ist die Hand, die Assad bewaffnet. Es geht darum, wer in Zukunft – neben Israel – die dominante Macht im Nahen Osten sein wird. Stürzt Assad, so verliert der Iran nicht nur Syrien, sondern auch einen großen Teil seiner Einflussmöglichkeiten im Libanon über die schiitische Hisbollah – und wohl auch sein Anse-



Kämpfer der „Freien Syrischen Armee“ demonstrieren ihre Macht



HOMS UNTER DAUERBESCHUSS

Assads Truppen sind den fünften Tag in Folge mit massiver Gewalt gegen die Menschen in der **Protesthochburg Homs** vorgegangen. Nach Angaben von Menschenrechtlern wurden beim Beschuss der Stadt bis zu **100 Menschen getötet**. Damit bereitet die Armee offenbar eine Bodenoffensive vor. „Die humanitäre Situation ist grasslich“, sagte ein Beobachter.

hen im Gazastreifen. Die Türkei wäre plötzlich die Macht, die in Damaskus das größte Gewicht besäße. Israel wäre nicht mehr von Kräften umkreist, die vom Iran, sondern von der Türkei abhängen.

Vermutlich ist die Türkei, trotz aller Reibereien mit Israel in den

vergangenen Jahren, ein berechenbarer Akteur. Eingebunden in die Nato und EU-Beitrittsaspirantinge von Ankara wohl keine existenzielle Bedrohung aus.

Vieles deutet darauf hin, dass in Syrien das Endspiel bevorsteht. Nach der an Russland und

China gescheiterten UN-Resolution gegen Syrien tritt nun die Türkei als die federführende Macht auf, um eine breite Koalition gegen das Assad-Regime auf die Beine zu stellen. Außenminister Ahmed Davutoglu sagte, er werde mit dem arabischen Emir von Katar über eine „road map“ zu Syrien sprechen und danach in Washington das weitere Vorgehen beraten. Ministerpräsident Erdogan werde mit dem russischen Präsidenten Dmitri Medwedjew telefonisch verhandeln. Ziel sei die Einberufung einer Syrien-Konferenz.

Nicht nur diplomatisch schiebt sich die Türkei damit an die Spitze der internationalen Bewegung gegen Assad, auch militärisch hängt derzeit alles von Ankara ab. Die Rebellenarmee (FSA) operiert vornehmlich von türkischem Staatsgebiet aus.

Sie wächst ständig, ist aber noch keine imposante Streitmacht. Ziel ist, den syrischen Sicherheitskräften wo immer möglich mit plötzlichen Guerilla-Angriffen zuzusetzen, um danach schnell den Rückzug zu suchen.

Ganz offen hat bislang nur die libysche Übergangsregierung gesagt, sie habe – über die Türkei – bereits mehrere Hundert Kämpfer nach Syrien geschickt und wolle auch Waffen liefern. In den USA wird derzeit überlegt, „humanitär“ in Syrien einzugreifen, eine finanzielle Unterstützung der Rebellen wird offiziell abgelehnt.

Vermutlich gibt es mittlerweile ein gewisses Maß an verdeckter finanzieller Unterstützung, aber bislang finanzierten die Rebellen sich vor allem aus einer Quelle: syrische Geschäftsleute im Ausland spenden Geld für die Aufständischen. Syriens Rebellen haben einen Vorteil, den ihre Waffenbrüder in Libyen nie hatten: Sie sind professionelle Soldaten, die ihr Handwerk kennen. Sie haben eine Chance auf den Sieg, auch ohne Invasion von außen.

MASSAKER

Seit mehreren Tagen die Stadt Homs unter Beschuss. Es gibt viele Tote. Hier ein Video der umkämpften Stadt <http://bit.ly/jyxpQP2>



Das libysche Beispiel

Warum China im UN-Sicherheitsrat gegen eine Syrien-Resolution stimmte / Von Petra Kolonko

PEKING, 8. Februar
 Als im März 2011 der Sicherheitsrat der Vereinten Nationen über eine Flugverbotszone über Libyen abstimmte, enthielt sich China zusammen mit Deutschland, Brasilien, Indien und Russland der Stimme. Die Resolution, die das Ziel hatte, einen Waffenstillstand zu erreichen und Zivilisten zu schützen, wurde verabschiedet. China hatte Einwände und beharrte auf einer friedlichen Lösung, verzichtete aber auf ein Veto, mit Rücksicht vor allem auf die Wünsche der Arabischen Liga und der Afrikanischen Union. Die guten Beziehungen zu den arabischen und afrikanischen Staaten waren China so wichtig, dass es seine Prinzipien der Nichtmischung hintanstellte und eine Verabschiedung der Resolution ermöglichte.

Bei der jüngsten Abstimmung über die Resolution zu Syrien gab China diese Rücksichtnahme auf. Obwohl die Arabische Liga hinter der Resolution stand, legte China mit Russland ein Veto ein. Die Arabische Liga reagiert erzürnt, China und Russland hätten durch das Veto diplomatisches Ansehen in der arabischen Welt verspielt. Die Beziehungen zu den Staaten Nordafrikas und des Nahen und Mittleren Ostens sind für Peking sehr wichtig. Peking baut auf traditionelle Bande aus antimerkantilistischer und antikolonialer Gemeinsamkeit, doch für die neue Wirtschaftsmacht China steht die Sicherung von Öl und anderen Ressourcen aus der Region im Vordergrund. Peking ist daher auch besonders an eine instabile Lage in der Ölregion gelegt.

Noch Mitte Januar bereiste der chinesische Gesandte für den Mittleren Osten die Region und versicherte, dass China die Arabische Liga als die richtige Organisation sehe, um die Krise in Syrien zu lösen. Dass es trotzdem mit dem Veto die Resolution aufhielt, kann zum Teil auf diplomatische Fehlkommunikation zurückzuführen sein, wie dies das Pekinger Außenministerium nach der umfassenden internationalen Kritik am Montag andeutete. Peking teilt aber vor allem die russischen Befürchtungen, dass aus der Syrien-Resolution ein neues „Libyen“

Nach Auffassung Pekings haben die Vereinten Nationen nicht das Recht, Machtwechsel zu verlangen.

Die Vereinten Nationen hätten nicht das Recht, Machtwechsel und militärisches Eingreifen zu verlangen, schreiben chinesische Zeitungen, sie bezeichnen ein solches Vorgehen als völkerrechtswidrig. Die „Volkszeitung“ verlangt, man dürfe es nicht zulassen, dass der Weltfriedensrat zu einem Ermächtigungsorgan „einger Staaten“ werden könnte.

Anderere scheuen sich nicht, Namen zu nennen. Den Vereinigten Staaten wird vorgeworfen, mit internationalem Druck nur eine Durchsetzung ihrer Interessenpolitik im Mittleren Osten erreichen zu wollen. Die Vereinigten Staaten und Europa wollen nur unter dem Vorwand der Demokratisierung ihre Einflusszone ausdehnen. Nachdem das Gaddafi-Regime gefallen sei, wolle man jetzt auch Assad zum Rücktritt bewegen.

Die „Global Times“, die im chinesischen Meinungsspektrum am nationalistischsten ausgerichtet ist, feierte das Abstimmungsverhalten Chinas im Sicherheitsrat als einen Wendepunkt. Von jetzt an sei die Zeit der Enthaltungen vorbei, und China solle so abstimmen, wie es denke.

Während die offiziellen Kommentatoren Amerika und Europa keine humanitären Beweggründe zu gestehen wollten, gibt es in den Internetforen auch in China Stimmen, die das chinesische Veto kritisieren und sich mit der syrischen Bevölkerung solidarisieren. Gegen diese Kritik aus dem eigenen Land setzt China das Argument, die humanitäre Situation habe sich in Afghanistan oder im Irak nach den ausländischen Interventionen nicht gebessert.

Kritik, wie sie von arabischen Ländern geübt wurde, dass China dem Assad-Regime

zur Seite stehe und ihm mit dem Veto einen Freibrief für weitere Gewalt gegeben habe, begegnet die chinesische Nachrichtenagentur Xinhua damit, dass sie die Darstellungen in den Medien anspricht. Sie beschuldigt die Opposition in Syrien, mit falschen Berichten über die Opfer in Homs den Aufstand anzustacheln. Die Toten, die gezeigt wurden, seien Opfer der Aufständischen und nicht der Regierungstruppen gewesen.

Die Ablehnung von Militäreinsätzen und des Dringens auf Machtwechsel sind für Peking eine Frage des Prinzips in der Außenpolitik, das angesichts der Zuspitzung der Krise noch einmal bekräftigt wird. Schließlich dürfte bei Pekings Ablehnung gegen von außen beförderte Machtwechsel auch eine Rolle spielen, dass die Frage des Machtwechsels oder einer Intervention aus humanitären Gründen irgendwo einmal auch im Zusammenhang mit China aufgeworfen werden könnte. Bei der Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz reagierte der stellvertretende chinesische Außenminister Zhang Zhijun empfindlich auf eine Erklärung des amerikanischen Senators McCain, nach welcher der arabische Frühling auch nach China kommen werde.

Auch in Peking wird vorerst kritisch bemängelt, dass China und Russland kein alternativen Plan für ein Vorgehen in Syrien haben. Das Pekinger Außenministerium lenkte am Dienstag etwas ein und kündigte eigene Anstrengungen an. China hoffe, dass der Wunsch des syrischen Volkes nach Reformen respektiert werde. China unterstütze Bemühungen der Arabischen Liga und erwäge, Vermittler in die Region zu senden.

Der Tagesspiegel (Allemagne / Germany)

Mutmaßliche Spione forschten Syrer in Berlin aus

Bundesankwaltschaft ermittelt wegen Agententätigkeit/ Syrische Gemeinde in Deutschland uncins / Homs erneut beschossen

VON FATMA KEILANT
UND FRANK JANSSEN

BERLIN - Die beiden mutmaßlichen syrischen Spione, die am Dienstag in Berlin festgenommen wurden, sind entgegen ersten Annahmen keine Diplomaten und genießen daher auch keine Immunität vor Strafverfolgung. Sie kamen am Mittwoch in Untersuchungshaft, wie die Generalbundesanwaltschaft bestätigte. Der Ermittlungsrichter des Bundesgerichtshofs setzte am frühen Abend in Berlin die Haftbefehle gegen den 47-jährigen Deutsch-Libanesen Mahmoud El A. und den 34-jährigen Syrer Akram O. in Vollzug.

Nach Tagesspiegel-Informationen sollen die beiden intensiv die Ausforschung Oppositioneller betrieben haben. Bei Demonstrationen fotografierten sie die Teilnehmer und leiteten die Bilder und andere Informationen nach Damaskus wei-

ter. Vorgeworfen wird ihnen deshalb „geheimdienstliche Agententätigkeit“ nach Paragraph 99 des Strafgesetzbuchs.

In Syrien geht die Gewalt ununterbrochen weiter. Das Regime von Baschar al Assad rückte am Mittwoch mit militärischer Macht in die Stadt Homs vor und nahm das Viertel Baba Amro unter Beschuss. Das berüchteten Aktivisten. Sie sprachen von Dutzenden von Toten. Drei Familien seien zudem von Milizionären in ihren Häusern massakriert worden, hieß es. Die Eindringlinge hätten 20 Menschen mit Messern getötet. Wegen der eingeschränkten Bewegungsfreiheit für Medienvertreter in Syrien ist es schwer, diese Angaben zu überprüfen.

Daran gemessen verhalten sich die in Deutschland lebenden Syrer auffallend ruhig. Nur selten einmal gibt es eine Demonstration – zuletzt am vergangenen Sonntag. Es waren rund zwei Dutzend Menschen anwesend. In Berlin leben im-

merhin 2176 Syrer, rund 29.000 sind es bundesweit. Ein Grund für ihre Zurückhaltung dürfte Angst sein. Die Arme des Regimes reichen bis nach Deutschland; wer sich hier regimiekritisch zu Wort mel-

det, muss um sich und seine Familie bangen. Die Botenschaft gilt längst als reiner Geheimdienstposten.

Die Festnahme Spione ist da ein weiterer Hinweis. Eine Bespitzelung syrischer Oppositioneller in Deutschland durch den Geheimdienst des Assad-Regimes ist laut Pro Asyl seit Jahren bekannt. Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Flüchtlinge kritisierte am Mittwoch, entsprechende Erkenntnisse seien bisher ba-

gen wie harte Sanktionen gegen die Regierung in Damaskus. Ähnlich äußerte sich die US-Regierung. Gemeinsam mit anderen Ländern wolle man die regionalen Sanktionen gegen das Assad-Regime verschärfen, sagte Außenamtssprecherin Victoria Nuland. Ziel sei es, „das Geld zu verringern, das er bekommt, um seine Kriegsmaschinerie weiter anzufeuern“.

Zudem müsse der demokratische Dialog in dem Land gestärkt werden. Westwelle (FDP) kritisierte auch den russischen Außenminister Sergej Lawrow dafür, dass er sich mit seiner Unterstützung Assad „so klar auf die falsche Seite der Geschichte gestellt“ habe.

Die in Deutschland lebenden Syrer sind gespalten. Längst nicht alle lehnen

Assads Regime ab, aus den unterschiedlichsten Gründen. „Es ist etwa halbhalbe“, erklärt ein Sprecher des deutsch-syrischen Vereins in Berlin. „Viele profitieren von dem Regime, etwa syrische Studenten an deutschen Unis. Sie haben oft ein Stipendium der Regierung, das sie gefährden würden, wenn sie sich kritisch äußern.“ Das bestätigt Nabil Bushnaq vom Verein „Ibn Rushd“, der sich für geistige Freiheit in der arabischen Welt einsetzt. „Auch viele Geschäftsleute profitieren vom Regime“, so Bushnaq. „Ihr Geschäft wäre sofort zu Ende, wenn sie in die Opposition gingen.“

Still halten auch die Angehörigen der vielen religiösen Minderheiten in Syrien. Es gebe in dem Land eine große Glaubensvielfalt, bisher ohne Konflikte, so Bushnaq. „Viele stützen das Regime auch deshalb, weil sie fürchten, dass Religionskonflikte ausbrechen, wenn die Regierung stürzt.“ (mit dpa, KNA)

Studenten fürchten um Unterhalt, Kauffleute um ihr Geschäft

Das Syrien-Problem aus russischer Perspektive

Warum Moskau die internationale Empörung über seine Haltung zum Assad-Regime nicht nachvollziehen kann – gehe es dem Kreml doch nur, wie sein Gesandter in Wien betont, um mehr Objektivität und friedlichen Dialog.

Sergej Netschajew

Seit dem Beginn der Zusammenstöße in Syrien trat Russland konsequent für die sofortige Einstellung der Gewalt ein, egal, von welcher Seite, setzte sich für die Aufnahme eines friedlichen Dialogs zwischen den Machthabern und der Opposition, für die Durchführung von demokratischen Reformen im Interesse aller Bürger ein. Die territoriale Integrität und die Souveränität Syriens als eines der Schlüssel-länder des Nahen Ostens, von dem die Stabilität und Sicherheit dieser Region maßgebend abhängt, sollten gewährleistet werden. Im Bestreben, ein solches Einverständnis zu erreichen, unterhielt Russland aktive Beziehungen sowohl mit dem offiziellen Damaskus, als auch mit Vertretern der syrischen Opposition, den arabischen Nachbarn Syriens und anderen Staaten.

Ein wichtiges Ereignis war die Annahme der Initiative der Arabischen Liga, eine Beobachtermission nach Syrien zu entsenden. Der Bericht der Mission bestätigte unsere Einschätzung, dass neben den Machthabern auch bewaffnete extremistische Gruppierungen für die Gewalt im Land verantwortlich sind. Es geht um aktive Versuche, die Oppositionsbewegung für einen Machtwechsel in Syrien – nach dem libyschen Muster – zu nutzen. Deshalb werden den Oppositionskreisen von verschiedenen Seiten „Ratschläge“ gegeben, mit der Regierung keine Kompromisse und Vereinbarungen einzugehen. Die Aktivitäten der Extremisten werden aus dem Ausland reichlich finanziert und mit illegalen Waffenlieferungen gefördert. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass eine solche Linie nur zu einer Ausweitung der Zusammenstöße führen und die Opferzahl

unter der friedlichen Bevölkerung erhöhen wird.

Ende des vergangenen Jahres hat Russland im UN-Sicherheitsrat einen Resolutionsentwurf eingebracht, der den Gewaltverzicht von der Regierung als auch von der Opposition, den Beginn eines Dialogs und die Ausschließung der Möglichkeit einer gewaltsamen Einmischung von außen zum Ziel hatte. Es ist bedauerlich, dass einige Mitglieder des Sicherheitsrates sich der Annahme dieser Resolution widersetzen. In dem Ende Jänner vorgestellten alternativen Resolutionsentwurf wurden einseitige Schlussfolgerungen über die ausschließliche Verantwortung der syrischen Regierung für die Gewalteskalation gemacht. Für die Erreichung einer Einheit im Sicherheits-



„Äußere Kräfte sollen nicht hetzen“: Sergej Netschajew.

Foto: russemb

rat nahm Russland trotzdem an der Arbeit an diesem Resolutionsentwurf teil. Die Hauptaufgabe war dabei die Gewährleistung einer adäquaten Darstellung des realen Krisenbilds und der Ausschluss der Möglichkeit, dass Ergebnisse des politischen Prozesses in Syrien durch den UN-Sicherheitsrat aufgezwungen werden. Denn die Zukunft Syriens darf nur von seinen Bürgern bestimmt werden. Andernfalls hätte der Sicherheitsrat eine Seite im Bürgerkrieg unterstützt, was absolut unzulässig ist.

Wir schlugen vor, in die Resolution einen Aufruf an die syrische Opposition aufzunehmen, sich von den bewaffneten Extremisten abzugrenzen. Jene Länder, die auf die bewaffneten Gruppen Einfluss ausüben konnten, sollten zur Beendigung der Gewaltanwendung beitragen. Weiters empfahlen wir, einen Aufruf an die Regierung Syriens über den Rückzug von Armeeeinheiten und Sicherheitskräften aus den Städten mit der gleichen Forderung an die bewaffneten Gruppen zu ergänzen.

Es ist tief zu bedauern, dass die genannten Änderungen abgelehnt wurden. Bei manchen unseren Partnern hat der politische Wille gefehlt, eine objektive Position zum Syrienproblem zu formulieren. Denn alles wurde im Voraus auf eine Karte gesetzt – das Regime von Assad um jeden Preis loszuwerden, ohne die diesbezügliche Entscheidung dem syrischen Volk zu überlassen. Unter diesen Bedingungen war Russland gezwungen, gegen den unausgeglichenen Resolutionsentwurf zu stimmen.

Doch auch nach dem Scheitern des Resolutionsentwurfs besteht die Aufgabe der internationalen Gemeinschaft darin, zu einer möglichst raschen Einstellung des Blutvergießens – und zwar von allen Seiten – sowie zum Beginn eines nationalen Dialogs beizutragen.

Der jüngste Besuch des russischen Außenministers in Damaskus und seine Verhandlungen mit der syrischen Staatsführung bestätigen, dass Russland weiterhin bestrebt ist, alles Mögliche für die Wiederherstellung der Stabilität in Syrien und die Durchführung notwendiger demokratischer Reformen, einschließlich der Verfassungsreform, zu unternehmen. Wir treten für die Fortsetzung der Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga, mehr noch: für ihre Aufstockung und Präsenz in allen Krisengebieten des Landes ein. Wir sind bereit, den politischen Dialog zwischen allen syrischen Kräften zu fördern. Im Rahmen der Verhandlungen mit Außenminister Lawrow hat Präsident Assad seine Bereitschaft zu solchen Gesprächen bereits bekundet.

Unser Ziel ist absolut klar. Das Volk Syriens braucht Frieden, Versöhnung und Dialog. Und alle äußeren Kräfte sollten auch dazu beitragen, anstatt zu hetzen und zum Bürgerkrieg aufzuwiegeln. Denn zu behaupten, dass nach einem gewaltsamen Regimewechsel in Syrien ein sofortiger Übergang in Richtung Demokratie und Rechtsstaat erfolgen wird, wäre naiv und verantwortungslos. Die traurige Erfahrung anderer zwangsweise „demokratisierter“ Staaten zeugt eher vom Gegenteil.

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La Tribune de Genève (Suisse / Switzerland)

Blessés et médecins sont des cibles en Syrie

L'état répressif se resserre autour de Homs. MSF proteste contre la persécution des soignants. L'ambassade suisse reste ouverte

L'offensive de l'armée syrienne sur les villes de la résistance se durcit encore, faisant désormais une centaine de morts par jour et des milliers de blessés. Les promesses du président Bachar el-Assad de faire cesser les violences, relayée mardi par le chef de la diplomatie russe, étaient aussitôt démenties sur le terrain, hier.

Toujours sous le feu des bombes et des roquettes, la ville d'Homs semblait coupée du monde. Sans communication, sans électricité ni approvisionnement. La chaîne Al Arabiya a également fait état de l'utilisation de boucliers humains par l'armée durant le siège d'Homs. Trois familles entières auraient été tuées dans la nuit de mardi à mercredi par les forces de sécurité et leurs sbires. Le quartier de Baba Amro, considéré comme un foyer d'insurgés, serait entièrement détruit, selon la télévision de Dubaï.

Soignant l'afflux de blessés arrivant au nord du Liban, en Jordanie et en Turquie, l'ONG Médecins sans frontières (MSF) qui ne peut intervenir sur le territoire syrien, faute d'autorisation, est sorti de son silence, hier. Sa présidente, Marie-Pierre Allié, dénonçait dans un communiqué la « persécution systématique des personnels soignants et des blessés » par les forces de sécurité du régime.

Selon les témoignages recueillis par MSF, « les médecins et les blessés sont pourchassés et courent le risque d'être arrêtés et torturés ». Les ambulances sont prises pour cible et les hôpitaux mobiles sont détruits, raconte un médecin syrien sous le sceau de l'anonymat. Ceux qui se portent au secours des

blessés dans la clandestinité ne se risquent plus à demander des poches de sang à la banque centrale car elle a été placée sous l'autorité du Ministère de la défense. Les médicaments et le matériel médical trouvés dans les maisons par les militaires sont confisqués. Dans un témoignage mis en ligne sur Internet par *Le Monde*, un blessé explique qu'en Syrie, « à l'hôpital, soit on vous ampute du membre blessé, soit ils vous emmènent en prison ».

Suite aux rappels d'ambassadeurs annoncés par plusieurs pays européens, comme la France ou

«Les médecins et les blessés sont pourchassés et courent le risque d'être arrêtés et torturés»

Témoignages

recueillis par
Médecins sans frontières

l'Italie, et la fermeture de l'ambassade américaine, mardi, le DFAE, joint par la *Tribune de Genève*, a indiqué que « toutes les options sont ouvertes ». Jugeant « inacceptables les agissements des forces de sécurité syrienne », Berne a rappelé son ambassadeur pour consultation en août dernier. Depuis, c'est un chargé d'affaires qui dirige la représentation suisse. Elle est en contact régulier avec les 150 ressortissants restés dans le pays, lesquels sont invités à le quitter depuis la fin du mois de novembre. Le DFAE précise enfin qu'aucun Suisse n'a été victime des événements en cours en Syrie.

Olivier Bot

Syriens Aufstand wird zum Stellvertreterkrieg

Russland ergreift mit dem Besuch von Aussenminister Lawrow in Damaskus die Initiative

Moskau will die syrischen Bürgerkriegsparteien an einen Tisch bringen. Der russische Vorstoss signalisiert, dass die syrische Krise zum Spielball der internationalen Machtpolitik geworden ist.

Jürg Bischoff, Beirut

Der syrische Präsident Bashar al-Assad hat dem russischen Aussenminister Lawrow bei dessen Besuch in Damaskus am Dienstag versichert, er sei dazu entschlossen, einen nationalen Dialog unter Einbezug der Opposition einzuleiten. Eine Regierungsdelegation solle demnächst zu Gesprächen mit Oppositionellen nach Moskau reisen, teilte das russische Aussenministerium mit. Assad erklärte sich auch bereit, weiterhin mit der Arabischen Liga und deren Beobachtern zusammenzuarbeiten, um die Lage in Syrien zu stabilisieren.

Veto verhärtet die Fronten

Lawrows Reise nach Damaskus signalisiert Russlands Absicht, in der syrischen Krise selbst die Initiative zu ergreifen. Ob das gelingen kann, scheint zweifelhaft. Zwar kann Moskau dank seinem Einfluss in Damaskus Assad zu Konzessionen drängen, doch hat es mit seinem Veto in der Uno den Westen und die Araber vor den Kopf gestossen und dürfte auf dieser Seite wenig Bereitschaft zur Zusammenarbeit finden. Und die Exilgruppen mit ihrem Anspruch, die syrischen Aufständischen nach aussen zu vertreten, zeigen keine Bereitschaft zum Dialog mit dem Regime.

Seit der Säterung der arabischen Beobachtermission hat die Gewalt in Syrien sprunghaft zugenommen. Die Regierungstruppen haben die Peripherie der Hauptstadt von Rebellen gestäubert und bombardieren seit fünf Tagen Homs, um die bewaffneten Aufständischen aus den Quantaren zu vertreiben, in denen sie sich festgesetzt haben. Nach dem Bruch in der Uno dürfte sich die Gewaltspirale immer schneller die-



Einwohner des Ortes Baba Amro, die wegen der Regierungsoffensive in Homs in einem Keller Zuflucht gesucht haben.

hen, genährt durch die politische und materielle Unterstützung, die beide Seiten im Konflikt von ihren jeweiligen Freunden erhalten. Die Lage genährt an den Kalten Krieg, als Bürgerkriegsparteien stellvertretend für die Grossmächte aufeinander losgingen.

Arabische Lösung?

Die Schuld an dieser Entwicklung trifft in erster Linie das Regime in Damaskus, das den Protest unbewaffneter Demonstranten mit Gewalt unterdrückte, mit der Folge, dass sich der Aufstand wie ein Buschfeuer ausbreitete. Verantwortlich dafür sind aber auch jene Gruppen syrischer Exilpolitiker, die sich zu Führem einer Bewegung erklär-

ten, die sie weder ausgelöst hatten noch lenken können. Obwohl westliche Politiker einen militärischen Eingriff wie in Libyen schon früh ausgeschlossen, nährten die Exilanten die Hoffnung der Aufständischen, dass die Nato Assad von der Macht bomben würde.

Dieses Ziel verfolgten auch Saudi-arabien und Katar, deren Herrscher im Aufstand gegen Assad eine Gelegenheit sahen, Syrien aus dem Bündnisystem herauszutreiben, das Iran in der arabischen Welt aufgebaut hat. Sie unterstützen zuerst eine «arabische Lösung», die angeblich einer Internationalisierung der syrischen Krise vorbeugen sollte. Assad liess zur Überraschung vieler die arabischen Beobachter ins Land, welche die Erfüllung des arabischen

Friedensplans überwachen sollten. Nach einem Monat zogen die Saudi, denen die anderen Golfstaaten folgten, ihre Beobachter allerdings zurück. Gleichzeitig setzten sie durch, dass ein neuer arabischer Plan, der den Abgang Assads von der Macht forderte, an die Uno weitergeleitet wurde.

Abgesägte Beobachter

Der Bericht, den die arabische Beobachtermission abklärte, ist fragmen-tarisch und oft widersprüchlich. Er bestätigt, dass Sicherheitskräfte mit Gewalt gegen Zivilisten vorgegangen sind, aber auch, dass vorseiten der Aufständischen Waffengewalt ausgeübt wird. Er kritisiert die Medien dafür, dass sie die

Ereignisse übertrieben und verfälscht hätten. Er beschneigt der Regierungstruppen aus Wohngebieten zurückgezogen und Gefangene freigelassen zu haben. Ein Ende der Mission, heisst es am Schluss des Berichts, würde jeden bisher erreichten Fortschritt umkehren und könnte zu Chaos führen.

Ob die Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga, hätte man ihr die dazu nötige Zeit gelassen, zu einer Beurteilung der Gewalt und zu einem Ansatz einer politischen Lösung geführt hätte, kann mit Fug bezweifelt werden. Das saudische Verhalten zeigt aber, dass Riad keine solche Lösung wünschte, sondern nur den Abgang Assads im Auge hatte. Die USA und die Europäer lassen mit ihren Voraussagen vom einem baldigen Ende des syrischen Regimes die gleiche Haltung erkennen. Russland und China hingegen geht es wohl weniger um Assad selbst als darum, eigene Positionen in der Region gegenüber westlichen Ansprüchen zu verteidigen.

Alle Akteure, vom Assad-Regime über die syrische Opposition bis zu den arabischen Staaten, haben mit ihrer Politik genau das bewirkt, was sie anfänglich verhindern wollten: die Internationalisierung der syrischen Krise. Der Wunsch der Syrer nach Würde und Freiheit ist damit zum Spielball der Politik der Grossmächte geworden, deren Priorität politischer und wirtschaftlicher Einfluss in der Region ist, kaum aber das Wohl der syrischen Bevölkerung.

Keine Waffen für die Rebellen

(dpa) . Die USA erwägen derzeit keine Waffenlieferungen an die syrische Opposition. Am Dienstag hatten mehrere amerikanische Kongresspolitiker, unter ihnen der republikanische Senator John McCain, einen solchen Schritt gefordert. «Im Moment erwägen wir einen solchen Schritt nicht», sagte ein Sprecher des Weissen Hauses. Im Zentrum der Überlegungen stehe vielmehr die humanitäre Hilfe für die syrische Bevölkerung. Eine Sprecherin des Aussenministeriums sagte, die Regierung glaube nicht, dass mehr Waffen in Syrien die richtige Antwort seien.

Guerra civile Ancora sanguinosi bombardamenti su Homs. Voci non confermate di una strage di neonati Siria, il Pentagono prepara i piani Ma la Ue esclude un intervento militare. Secco avvertimento di Putin

WASHINGTON — Due se-

gnali che cambiano la percezione e la cornice della crisi siriana negli Usa. Il primo arriva dal Pentagono. I generali — hanno confidato ufficiali anonimi alla Cnn — hanno iniziato l'esame delle opzioni militari possibili. Devono essere pronti, hanno spiegato, nel caso che la Casa Bianca ritenga di ricorrere alla forza. È evidente che al Pentagono ci stanno lavorando da tempo e l'indiscrezione, pilotata, è per indicare un probabile cambio di rotta. L'altro segnale, che serve a giustificare il primo, è «il tonno» di molti media americani su quanto avviene in Siria. Ecco allora grande spazio alle testimonianze che rivelano la repressione del regime. La Casa Bianca, frustrata dall'atteggiamento di Russia e Cina all'Onu, espone soluzioni diverse. Dunque, è ai leader europei nuove sanzioni che incidano sulla già debilitata economia siriana. Intenzioni in queste ore i contatti con i partner. A cominciare dai turchi che hanno in mente una conferenza internazionale. Un forum che potrebbe approssimare altre iniziative, come quelle più «muscolari». Se la diplomazia — che resta per Obama lo strumento principale — dovesse fallire si penserà ad altro. Gli aspetti suggeriscono alcuni scenari: armi ai ribelli (in modo



diretto o indiretto), patto di azione con Qatar e Arabia Saudita, uso della Turchia come base d'appoggio per gli insorti, imposizione di corridoi per l'approvvigionamento e per l'evacuazione (e i soccorsi) e blindati di colpo i ribelli. È soprattutto il ricorso a due attori irrisolti in questo tipo di conflitti: unità speciali e droni. In realtà, secondo alcuni

ne informazioni, i commandos qatarioti e i ghesi sarebbero già attivi, con un paio di «uffici di coordinamento» a Iskenderun, Turchia. Una località dove è stato segnalato l'arrivo di aerei cargo legati a operazioni clandestine. Per quanto riguarda i droni non c'è problema: sono nelle basi turche da mesi.

L'opzione militare ha però degli avversari. Non sono pochi gli addetti ai lavori che la scoraggiano, evocando l'ipotesi finale male. Anche Ronald Reagan nell'83 si rese conto che la Siria era un osso duro. E vero, tanto è cambiato da allora, ma perché — avvertono — in Siria c'è un altro genere di problema: il dissenso pieno dal Cremlino, corso al

Santa Sede

Ahmadinejad invita il Papa a visitare l'Iran

TEHRAN — Il presidente Mahmoud Ahmadinejad è pronto ad accogliere in maniera eccitata e con entusiasmo» Benedetto XVI se il Papa volesse accettare l'invito a visitare la repubblica islamica rivoltagli oltre un anno fa dal leader iraniano. Lo ha annunciato ieri l'ambasciatore di Teheran presso la Santa Sede, Ali Akbar Nasiri, in un comunicato diffuso sui siti del ministero degli Esteri. «Per certe visite sono ne esitate le condizioni», dicono oltre

Teheran. Il Vaticano, dicono fonti diplomatiche, non sta peraltro tentando di svolgere alcuna mediazione tra Iran da un lato e Usa e Israele dall'altro per distendere un eventuale conflitto militare.

capazitate del prezioso cliente Assad. Per Vladimir Putin, fingendo di non vedere ciò che accade, ha sostenuto che «devono essere i siriani a decidere» sul presidente. Quindi ha sollecitato il rais a affidare al numero due Faruk Al Shara il compito di negoziare. Fonti irachene sostengono che il Cremlino ha pensato anche a una «sostituzione» di Assad ma non è sicura del nuovo «cavallo». Per questo sostiene di affidarsi all'Onu ammonendo l'Occidente a non intendere «iniziative unilaterali» affrettate.

Dai molti fronti della guerra civile continuano ad arrivare notizie drammatiche, in particolare da Homs. Ieri è

Contatti

Sul dossier siriano la Casa Bianca ha intensificato i contatti con gli alleati europei, la Turchia e il Golfo

esplosa un'auto bomba che ha causato morti tra soldati e civili. Attacco attribuito al «terrorista». L'opposizione segnala dozzine di vittime in seguito a un intenso tiro sulle zone abitate. In un ospedale avrebbe perso la vita 18 neonati che erano nelle incubatrici: il regime ha staccato le elettricità e ha bloccato le macchine. Una storia inverificabile. Più precise le denunce di «morte di senza frontiere» che documentano torture e violenze ai danni del dottor chi è osato occuparsi degli insorti feriti.

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La Repubblica (Italie / Italy)

Intervento militare in Siria, no della Ue

Stop dell'Europa a Washington: "Assad non è Gheddafi". Svelate le mail del regime

DAL NOSTRO INVIATO ANGELO AQUARO

NEW YORK — L'ombra tragica del massacro si allunga sulla città martire di Homs mentre al Pentagono i generali allertati da Barack Obama calano la carta dell'intervento. Nessuno scalpita per scendere in armi in quel fazzoletto di Medio Oriente dove Israele sta già meditando l'attacco preventivo all'Iran che si arma dell'atomica. Ma il portavoce di Barack Obama conferma: «Nessuna opzione è esclusa». Dopo l'impeaso all'Onu che il segretario di Stato Hillary Clinton ha definito una «arsa» — col niet alla risoluzione anti-Siria di Mosca e Pechino — anche i russi ora temono lo scatto di forza. Il presidente Dimitri Medvedev telefonò al collega francese, Nicolas Sarkozy, avvertendolo di evitare «misure bilaterali precipitose». «Non dobbiamo agire come un toro in un negozio di cineserie», rincarata verso gli Usa il premier russo Vladimir Putin. Come se il toro scatenato e accettato dal sangue non fosse invece Bashar Al Assad. Medici Senza Frontiere racconta che in Siria i feriti non possono più neppure essere trasportati negli ospedali. Sono arrestati insieme ai medici che tentano di salvarli: «Anche la medicina è usata come arma di persecuzione».

È l'ultima vergogna. La Cnn rilancia l'appello dei resistenti. «Danny» continua a implorare via Skype l'intervento dell'Occidente e mostra in tv le bombescastrate sui ribelli di Homs. La città è al quinto giorno di assedio. Ma la tela che sta tessendo Putin, che ha spedito a Damasco il ministro degli esteri Sergey Lavrov, sembra quella di Penelope: serve solo a far prendere altro tempo. I russi dicono che il vice del presidente-dittatore vuole riaprire il dialogo con l'opposizione e chiede all'Occidente e ai paesi arabi di «cominciare il dialogo». Ci crede solo Recep Tayyip Erdogan che alza il telefono per chiamare il vicino di Damasco: ma dopo 11 mesi di rivolta Assad non sembra avere intenzione di passare la mano.

Prendere tempo invece sì. Come ha fatto poco più di un mese fa alla tv americana Abc. Gli hacker di Anonymous, quelli già protagonisti della guerriglia informatica in difesa di WikiLeaks e Occupy Wall Street, sono riusciti a entrare nel fortino elettronico del regime: per la verità protetto da un'intelligenza da babbeivisto che la password era "12345". Lo scandalo è nell'ammissione delle montagne di falsità che Assad si preparava a riversare alla conduttrice Barbara Walters. A consigliarlo erano Sheherazad Jaafari, figlia del-

l'ambasciatore siriano all'Onu Bashar Jaafari, e Luna Chebel, ex giornalista di *Al Jazeera* poi mica per niente cooptata nello staff di Assad. «È molto importante e vale la pena menzionare che all'inizio della crisi sono stati fatti alcuni "errori" perché non c'era una

"forza di polizia" all'altezza», si legge nelle email secondo la ricostruzione del giornale israeliano *Haaretz*. «La psiche degli americani può essere facilmente manipolata se messa di fronte alla parola "errore commesso". Varrebbe anche la pena menzionare co-

Le conseguenze di un attacco a Damasco

Abbattere il regime filoiraniano di Damasco servirebbe a indebolire il potere di Teheran nel mondo arabo dominato dai sunniti

Gli sciiti
Sono concentrati in Iran, sud dell'Iraq, sud del Libano ma ci sono significative comunità in Arabia Saudita, Siria, Afghanistan. Predominano dove c'è il petrolio in Iran, Iraq e Arabia Saudita

Turchia
A maggioranza sunnita, con una componente alawita, predica buoni rapporti con i confinanti, compreso l'Iran. Sostiene i ribelli sunniti nella rivolta siriana

Siria
È l'unico Paese arabo a maggioranza sunnita alleato con l'Iran. Sfilare la Siria - il "cuore del mondo arabo" - all'Iran vorrebbe dire privare Teheran di una posizione importante di potere nel mondo arabo. Damasco sostiene anche l'Hezbollah libanese, sunnita sciita, e il palestinese Hamas, sunnita

Libano
L'Hezbollah, il partito degli sciiti maggioranza (45%) rispetto ai sunniti (27%), fa parte con Siria e Iran dell'"asse" che gli Usa e i Paesi del Golfo vorrebbero neutralizzare

Giordania
È un bastione della fede sunnita, il re Abdullah II ha lanciato l'allarme contro l'influenza della "mezzaluna sciita" nel mondo arabo



sta succedendo adesso a Wall Street e il modo con cui la polizia Usa ha soppresso le manifestazioni con i cani e con la forza».

È il solito giochetto delle sinistre e destre estreme di tutto il mondo: il vero cattivo è lo Zio Sam. Che invece stavolta non vuole starsene con le mani in mano. È sempre la Cnn a raccogliere le confidenze di «due alti ufficiali» che confermano: il Pentagono «sta cominciando a vedere cosa si può fare». Ponte aereo con i residenti? No-fly zone come quella che impedì i massacri di Muammar Gheddafi? La Clinton ha già lanciato l'idea di una «coalizione di amici» dopo il flop all'Onu. «Ma la Siria non è la Libia», avvertono fonti Ue contrarie a ogni tipo di azione militare. Il ministro italiano Giulio Terzi, che proprio oggi vede a Washington Hillary, esprime «irritazione» per il massacro in Siria: l'Italia ha già richiamato l'ambasciatore e intanto studia i piani di evacuazione dei nostri concittadini. Ci si prepara già al peggio: ma il peggio per i siriani, che contano ormai più di cinquemila vittime, è cominciato da un pezzo.

Le e-mail

Colpa della polizia
È molto importante dire che alcuni errori sono stati fatti perché non c'era una polizia ben organizzata
Sheherazad Jaafari



Psiche manipolabile
La psiche degli americani può essere manipolata se messa di fronte alla parola "errore commesso"
Luna Chebel

L'Unita (Italie / Italy)

→ **Diplomazie** Bruxelles: lo scenario bellico noi lo escludiamo

→ **L'assedio** A Homs salta l'elettricità all'ospedale: morti 18 neonati

Guerra in Siria, scontro Usa-Ue Pentagono: pronti i piani d'attacco



Homs carro armato danneggiato dai ribelli anti regime

I Ventisette stanno studiando nuove sanzioni contro il regime di Assad, ma sono contrari all'opzione militare. Che per la prima volta viene evocata esplicitamente dagli Stati Uniti, come viene rivelato dalla Cnn.

EMIDIO RUSSO
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Per la prima volta si parla esplicitamente di un intervento occidentale in Siria. L'ipotesi in Siria rimbalza tra le due sponde dell'Atlantico, opponendo Washington a Bruxelles. Mentre la cronaca degli orrori da Homs e da Damasco si fa di giorno in giorno più cruda e dopo il sostanziale stallo delle Nazioni Unite dopo il veto opposto da Russia e Cina, per la prima volta il Pentagono ha cominciato a passare in rassegna le risorse militari disponibili e a studiare un ipotetico piano di attacco contro Bashar al-Assad: la notizia l'ha rivelato il canale satellitare americano Cnn. Ma questo scenario viene escluso categoricamente dall'Unione Europea che, tramite fonti di Bruxelles, ha sottolineato che «la Siria non è la Libia». I Ventisette stanno studiando un ulteriore inasprimento delle sanzioni contro Damasco (tra cui il blocco dell'esportazione di fosfati e metalli preziosi), che potrebbe essere deciso dal Consiglio esteri di fine febbraio. E hanno inviato un team di esperti a Beirut ed

Amman per far fronte alla possibile evacuazione dei cittadini europei e del personale diplomatico (l'Ue ha mantenuto aperta la sua delegazione a Damasco).

Le diplomazie, intanto, continuano a giocare le loro carte. La Turchia ha lanciato l'idea di una conferenza internazionale sulla Siria. Quanto alla Russia, se il premier Vladimir Putin ha ribadito il suo *njet* a interferenze esterne ribadendo che «sarà il popolo siriano a decidere del proprio futuro», il presidente Dmitry Medvedev ha invece sottolineato la necessi-

IL CASO

L'ultima di Battisti «Sì, parteciperò al carnevale di Rio

■ L'ex terrorista Cesare Battisti sfilerà al prossimo carnevale di Rio de Janeiro. Lo riferisce il quotidiano brasiliano *O Globo*, sottolineando che l'ex componente dei proletari armati per il comunismo è amico di Francisco Ferreira, direttore del «Cordão do bola preta», uno dei principali «blocos» che organizzano il carnevale nella città carioca. Non solo. Battisti è stato anche accolto a braccia aperte dall'ex senatore José Nery ad una riunione della commissione dei diritti umani della camera.

ta di continuare a cercare soluzioni coordinate, anche in sede Onu, «per aiutare i siriani a risolvere la crisi». Parole che sono sembrate di apertura rispetto alla posizione intransigente che ha portato al veto russo-cinese al Consiglio di Sicurezza. Il ministro degli Esteri italiano, Giulio Terzi, ha espresso la «grande preoccupazione» e «l'irritazione» dell'Italia per il massacro della popolazione civile, aggiungendo che la crisi siriana sarà al centro dei colloqui tra il premier Mario Monti e il presidente americano, Barack Obama che si incontreranno oggi alla Casa Bianca.

Ma la contabilità della morte in Siria non si ferma mai. L'assedio su Homs da parte delle forze fedeli ad Assad continua imperterrita. L'artiglieria del regime martella senza sosta la «città martire» di Homs, dove in poche ore si sono contate 52 vittime. Senza parlare della strage di 18 neonati, che si aggiungono ai 400 minori già morti nel Paese secondo l'Unicef. I piccoli erano nelle incubatrici e hanno perso la vita quando le bombe hanno provocato un black-out all'interno dell'ospedale di Al Walid. Notizia negata dalla tv di Stato siriano, ma ribadita dagli attivisti anti-regime. Gli attivisti hanno inoltre denunciato il massacro di 20 civili per mano dei miliziani shabiha. La tv pubblica, invece, ha riferito dell'esplosione di un'autobomba, ad opera di «terroristi», che avrebbe ucciso «diverse persone». «La situazione umanitaria è tremenda», è stato il grido di allarme di un attivista locale. Si parla di interi nuclei familiari uccisi, di torture e uccisioni di massa. ♦

COMUNE DI ALBENGA (SV)

Si rende noto che è stato pubblicato il bando per procedura aperta per l'appalto del Servizio di raccolta, trasporto e smaltimento rifiuti solidi urbani e servizi complementari nel territorio comunale di Albenga. Importo annuale del servizio € 4.300.000,00 oneri fiscali esclusi; importo totale € 21.500.000 di cui € 500.000,00 per oneri di sicurezza. Cat. servizio 16. Territorio comunale della Città di Albenga. Scadenza delle offerte: ore 12 del 19.03.2012. Responsabile del Procedimento: Dr. Gaetano Noè. Il testo integrale del bando e del disciplinare di gara è disponibile all'Albo Pretorio del Comune, sulla GURI, su www.comune.albenga.sv.it e www.appaltiiguria.it. f.to: Il Direttore di area: Dr. Gaetano Noè

El Mundo (Espagne / Spain)

El embajador de Siria, entre los invitados al congreso del PP

C. R. DE GANUZA / Madrid

El PP ha invitado a todo el cuerpo diplomático acreditado en España al congreso de Sevilla del 17 de febrero en que reelegirá presidente a Mariano Rajoy. Hasta hace pocos días, el partido del Gobierno barajaba traer a algún mandatario extranjero (se evaluaron hasta dos nombres de primera fila), pero las fuentes consultadas, al tiempo que negaban haber tenido dificultad alguna en sus gestiones, aseguraban ayer que se ha impuesto la idea de reducir la presencia internacional a los embajadores.

Eso sí, sin excepción alguna. Tanto es así que se han cursado invitaciones al embajador de Cuba, y al mismísimo embajador de Siria, Hussam Edin Aala, antes, claro, de que éste fuera convocado anteayer por el Gobierno español en señal de protesta por las acciones violentas del régimen de Asad, y de que el propio embajador español en Damasco, Julio Albi, fuera llamado a consultas a Madrid.

Las mismas fuentes reflexionaban ayer sobre la manera de enmendar este problema, pero insistían en ponderar el éxito que representó la primera y masiva presencia del cuerpo diplomático en la convención del PP de Málaga, el pasado octubre. Acudieron dos ministros extranjeros –de Portugal y de Marruecos–, el presidente de la Asamblea legislativa de Chile y 29 embajadores.

Siria asienta en Homs el pilar de una guerra civil

Más de 400 personas han muerto desde el sábado

TOMÁS ALCOVERRO
Beirut. Corresponsal

Los países árabes, uno tras otro, han sufrido en los últimos 40 años sus guerras internas, al margen de los conflictos bélicos con Israel. En 1970 fue Jordania; entre 1975 y 1990, Líbano; poco después Iraq y Kuwait; el año pasado Libia, y ahora le ha llegado el tiempo a Siria. Es como una fatalidad de su historia.

En Homs, después de la visita del ministro ruso de Asuntos Exteriores a Damasco para entrevistarse con el rais El Asad, los soldados sirios han intensificado sus bombardeos sobre el barrio de Bab Amro con el objetivo de aplastar definitivamente su resistencia. Según los activistas, más de medio centenar de personas murieron ayer. Los muertos desde el sábado superan los 400. Los ataques del régimen parece que son indiscriminados. Los rebeldes hablan de francotiradores en las azoteas, de *chabiba* (milicianos del régimen) disparando a las viviendas.

En este ambiente de histeria y pánico, provocados por los disparos de la artillería pesada, circulan rumores como que 16 niños nacidos prematuramente murieron en las incubadoras de un hospital a causa de un corte eléctrico. Es peligroso salir a la calle. No hay teléfono ni internet. Los insurrectos, que se sienten abandonados por el mundo, piden la intervención de la comunidad internacional para evitar este asalto despiadado.

La versión oficial, transmitida por televisión, acusa a los francotiradores de atacar la Universidad del Baas, varios puestos de vigilancia de la policía y la refinería de Homs, dos de cuyos depósitos fueron pasto de las llamas. De acuerdo con sus noticias, se han trabado nuevos combates entre las fuerzas de seguri-

dad y los insurrectos en Hama, en Zabadan, a 30 kilómetros de Damasco. En medio de esta confusión no está claro si los soldados dispararon sólo sobre miembros del Ejército Sirio Libre, al que quieren aplastar después de cinco días de choques, o sobre los barrios de población suní.

Hasta ahora el mando militar –dominado por los alauíes– no ha utilizado el grueso de los 400.000 soldados, que son mayoritariamente suníes, para no poner a prueba su lealtad en caso de recibir órdenes de disparar contra sus correligionarios suníes de la rebelión.

Cada vez es más difícil verificar el número de víctimas morta-

les, que la ONU coloca en 5.400 y la oposición eleva a 7.000. Y el Gobierno se refiere siempre a los 2.000 soldados y policías que han perdido la vida en estos once meses de revuelta.

Lo único cierto es que ninguna iniciativa de paz ha dado resultado. En Moscú, el ministro ruso de Asuntos Exteriores, a su regreso de Damasco, ha declarado que en cada bando “hay gente que no quiere el diálogo sino la lucha armada”. Un dirigente del opositor Consejo Nacional Sirio en el exilio ha rechazado la mediación rusa y ha reiterado que las reformas ofrecidas por El Asad son insuficientes. “Los crímenes que ha cometido –ha

Represión con saña contra heridos y médicos

■ La dictadura siria ejerce “una represión sin piedad” contra opositores heridos y médicos, denunció ayer Médicos Sin Fronteras (MSF) basándose en los testimonios de pacientes y sanitarios. “Los heridos son perseguidos y corren el riesgo de ser detenidos y torturados... La medicina es un arma de persecución”, declaró Marie Pierre Allié, presidenta de MSF. “Sólo unos pocos heridos han hallado refugio en países vecinos”, agregó. “Incluso se han llevado a una herido anestesiado de la sala de operaciones”, aseguró un testigo. Y, las ambulancias son perseguidas. El Asad no autoriza a MSF a trabajar en Siria.

La sociedad roza la esquizofrenia, mientras los dos bandos radicalizan sus posturas

afirmado– le impiden continuar en el poder”.

El primer ministro turco, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, al frente de otra iniciativa diplomática, llamó por teléfono al jefe del Gobierno ruso, Vladímir Putin, para tratar sobre la situación siria.

Como se ha escrito muchas veces, Siria no es Libia, pero en el transcurso de estos diez meses se ha visto cómo la sociedad se encamina a la esquizofrenia. La oposición, que empezó siendo pacífica, ahora cuenta con un grupo armado, el Ejército Libre Sirio, cada vez más aguerrido. La respuesta del régimen, por su parte, es cada vez más implacable. Basta con ver los informativos de televisión, con sus mesas redondas, para percatarse de que parece inevitable una larga y catastrófica guerra civil.●

La oposición siria denuncia la muerte de 18 bebés en un hospital de Homs

- ▶ Aseguran que los niños murieron al dejar de funcionar sus incubadoras por un corte de la luz durante el ataque
- ▶ El Gobierno niega la información, al tiempo que mantiene el bombardeo de la ciudad con armas de grueso calibre

DANIEL IRIARTE
CORRESPONSAL EN ESTAMBUL

El régimen sirio no da tregua a la asediada ciudad de Homs. Ayer, el Ejército volvió a bombardear los barrios rebeldes de la ciudad, en un continuado ataque en el que murieron al menos cincuenta personas, según la oposición. Varias divisiones blindadas penetraron en el barrio de Inshadat, desde el que bombardearon con artillería las áreas en las que se concentra la contestación al Gobierno.

«Los bombardeos se intensifican a primera hora de la mañana. Luego, el fuego de morteros y cohetes se reduce, pero las ametralladoras pesadas y el armamento antiaéreo siguen siendo intensos. Los tanques están en las principales calles de la ciudad, y preparados para penetrar en profundidad en las áreas residenciales», afirmó un representante de la oposición

a la cadena Al Yasira. «Algunas áreas están totalmente cercadas, sin teléfono ni internet», indicó otro miembro de la oposición.

«Aparentemente, los bombardeos están preparando el terreno para un asalto terrestre. Algunas zonas de Baba Amro están totalmente arrasadas», aseguró otro militante. «Empiezas a escasear la comida, y los rebeldes no tienen material médico. El Ejército ha destruido todas las infraestructuras, ha bombardeado las reservas de agua y las plantas eléctricas», comentó.

Según los activistas de la ciudad, dieciocho bebés prematuros murieron en sus incubadoras a causa de un corte de electricidad en el hospital Al Walid. Una interrupción del suministro que aseguran que fue deliberada por parte del Gobierno, aunque también pudo ser causada por el ataque. En todo caso, el Ministerio de Sanidad sirio negó la información y aseguró que mantiene el suministro de elec-

Putin defiende a su aliado Al-Assad

R. MAÑUECO

Rusia respondió ayer a las críticas de la comunidad internacional lanzadas por vetar el pasado sábado la resolución de condena al régimen de Bashar al-Assad contraatacando con reproches. Lo hicieron casi al mismo tiempo el primer ministro, Vladimir Putin, el presidente Dmitri Medvédev, y el ministro de Exteriores, Serguéi Lavrov. «Ayudémosles, asesorémosles, limitemos incluso su capacidad para utilizar armas, pero no interfiramos en sus asuntos bajo ningún concepto», manifestó Putin en relación con lo que está sucediendo en Siria, durante un encuentro con representantes de distintas confesiones religiosas.

darles. Una situación que ya había denunciado ABC el pasado diciembre. «En Siria, los heridos y los médicos son perseguidos y corren el riesgo de ser detenidos y torturados por los servicios de seguridad. El mantenimiento de los hospitales es insuficiente. El aparato de seguridad utiliza la medicina como arma de persecución», afirmó la presidenta de MSF, Marie Pierre Allié. «Solo algunos heridos logran encontrar refugio en los países vecinos o pueden ser atendidos en las condiciones adecuadas. La mayor parte de los heridos no van a los hospitales públicos por miedo a ser torturados o arrestados», dijo.

La oposición acusó también a la «shabbiha» (las milicias progubernamentales) de asesinar a sangre fría a al menos veinte civiles, cuyos hogares asaltaron por el único motivo de ser sospechosos de simpatizar con la oposición. Una información que ABC no ha podido confirmar de forma independiente, pero que coincide con algunos hechos descritos a este periódico por los activistas de la ciudad de Daraa, en la que se iniciaron las protestas contra el régimen hace casi un año.

«Están actuando como si estuviesen en la cima de su poder, y pueden hacer cualquier cosa para impedir que caiga el régimen de Assad», asegura un portavoz del Observatorio Sirio de Derechos Humanos. Este grupo se negó a facilitar información sobre la religión de las víctimas, pero se

tricidad y entrega de material médico con normalidad.

No obstante, Médicos Sin Fronteras (MSF) aseguró ayer que el régimen sirio ejerce una «represión sin piedad» contra los opositores heridos y los médicos que intentan ayu-

Publico (Portugal)



Homs está a ser alvo de uma "repressão sem misericórdia"

Envio de ajuda
Ankara disponível para organizar conferência de apoio aos sírios

● A Turquia quer voltar a assumir o papel de liderança contra o regime de Bashar al-Assad e anunciou estar disponível para organizar uma conferência de apoio ao povo sírio.

"Queremos ter este encontro na nossa região para mostrar a nossa solidariedade e a legitimidade regional. Pode ser na Turquia, pode ser noutro país", disse numa entrevista à Reuters o ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Ahmet Davutoglu. "Não chega ser um observador. E tempo de enviar uma mensagem forte."

Os turcos foram dos primeiros a fazer subir o tom das críticas contra Damasco, mas recuaram depois de chegarem a anunciar que poderiam permitir aos desertores lançar ataques a partir do seu território.

Para Ankara, se o Conselho da Segurança da ONU não consegue proteger civis, cabe aos países que estejam de acordo encontrar formas de pôr fim às mortes e de levar ajuda aos que estão encurralados por assaltos militares.

Washington também está a ponderar fazer chegar ajuda aos sírios. "Estamos a reflectir sobre a possibilidade de fornecer ajuda humanitária", afirmou o porta-voz da Casa Branca, Jay Carney, em resposta a uma pergunta sobre uma eventual tentativa de armar a oposição, como defendera na véspera o influente senador republicano John McCain. Muitos opositores pedem precisamente o envio de ajuda, mas na situação actual é pouco claro como é que isso pode ser feito sem a abertura de um corredor protegido - pelo menos por ar - por meios militares.

Um dia depois da visita do seu chefe da diplomacia a Damasco, o primeiro-ministro russo, Vladimir Putin, repetiu que Moscovo não aceitará qualquer ingerência externa na Síria, apelando aos países ocidentais e árabes para "não se comportarem como elefantes numa loja de porcelana". Os russos (seguidos pelos chineses) vetaram no sábado uma resolução do Conselho de Segurança a condenar a violência e a pedir a Assad para deixar o poder.

A três semanas das presidenciais russas, nas quais Putin se candidatara para recuperar o seu antigo cargo, "a Rússia mantém uma posição clara e firme", ditada por interesses de Estado", disse à AFP o analista Boris Dolgov. Damasco é actualmente o único árabe aliado dos russos.

A Rússia, que recusa evocar a partida do Presidente sírio, criticou ainda a decisão dos seis países que formam o Conselho de Cooperação do Golfo de retirar os seus embaixadores de Damasco e expulsar os enviados sírios nas suas capitais. Washington também já encerrou a sua representação em Damasco e vários países europeus chamaram nos últimos dias os diplomatas sírios para consultas. S.L.

Milícias do regime degolam três famílias inteiras em Homs

Médicos Sem Fronteiras denunciam "repressão sem misericórdia" contra feridos e 18 prematuros morrem nas incubadoras de um hospital sem luz

Sofia Lorena

● A maioria dos disparos está a ser feita de longe e a oposição armada não tem como se defender ou contra-atacar. Mas ontem também foi o dia em que os tanques sírios avançaram para zonas residenciais da cidade de Homs. Durante a noite, membros da milícia Shabiha do regime entraram em três casas e mataram as três famílias que ali viviam: 20 pessoas, incluindo pelo menos duas crianças de cinco e sete anos e um adolescente de 15.

Ao todo, e segundo diferentes relatos de activistas, pelo menos 50 pessoas foram mortas nos bombardeamentos da noite contra a cidade, há cinco dias debaixo de fogo. As descrições falam dos piores raids até agora, um dia depois do Presidente Bashar al-Assad ter prometido travar a violência.

"Esperamos que o balanço aumente, já que muitas vítimas ainda estão sepultadas debaixo de escombros", disse Rami Abdel Rahman, chefe do Observatório Sírio dos Direitos Humanos, com sede no Reino Unido.

"Desde a madrugada os bombarde-

amentos intensificaram-se extremamente e eles usam *rockets* e granadas", descreveu Omar Shaker à AFP. Como outros, este activista está convencido de que os raids aéreos preparam o terreno para um assalto terrestre centrado no bairro de Bab Amr, um dos que mais resistiu ao regime.

"Os tanques já estão a tentar entrar no bairro de Bab Amr", contou outro activista à Al-Jazira. Vários relatos dão conta de avanços de tanques em áreas residenciais da cidade de 1,5 milhões. "Os tanques estão em algumas das estradas principais da cidade e parecem prontos a entrar mais nas zonas residenciais", disse Mohammad Hassan, outro activista, à Al-Jazira.

Há poucos jornalistas em Homs - como em toda a Síria - e os seus movimentos estão limitados, o que torna impossível uma confirmação independente dos números de mortos e feridos. Mas a oposição só denuncia as baixas que confirma através de diferentes relatos, da descrição de familiares e de activistas que vejam os corpos e os documentos das vítimas. O Observatório dos Direitos Hum-

anos não teve dúvidas em denunciar o ataque das Shabiha que chacinou as famílias Ghantawi, Tirkawi e Zamel. "Os milicianos entraram em três casas durante a noite e degolaram uma família de cinco - o pai, a sua mulher e os seus três filhos, uma família de sete noutra casa e uma de oito numa terceira", afirmou Abdel Rahman.

Entre os mortos de ontem está também Mazhar Tayyra, conhecido de vários *media* internacionais. O estudante de 24 anos dava apoio à agência de notícias francesa, gravando vídeos a partir de Homs "que integram os raros testemunhos autênticos da repressão sobre a cidade", colaborava com o diário britânico *Guardian*, com o alemão *Die Welt* e ainda com a Al-Jazira e a CNN. "Foi socorrer feridos atingidos por volta da uma da manhã e foi atingido. Morreu três horas depois no hospital", contou à AFP um amigo.

Crianças mortas e torturadas

A televisão pública síria noticiou um ataque de "grupos terroristas armados" contra a refinaria de Homs, uma das principais do país. Mas segundo o

Observatório dos Direitos Humanos, as Forças Armadas é que já "destruíram todas as infra-estruturas da cidade, bombardeando reservatórios de água e postes eléctricos".

A electricidade só existe a espaços. Informações recolhidas pelo correspondente da BBC no Líbano, Jim Muir, dão conta da morte de 18 bebés prematuros, que não sobreviveram às falias das incubadoras fruto dos cortes de electricidade no hospital.

A UNICEF disse na terça-feira ter informações de que 400 crianças já foram mortas pela violência desde o início da contestação ao regime, em Março. A agência da ONU diz saber ainda que "pelo menos outras 400 foram presas, algumas "torturadas e alvo de abusos sexuais sob detenção".

E a organização não governamental Médicos Sem Fronteiras acusou ontem o regime de uma "repressão sem misericórdia" contra os feridos e contra quem lhes pode prestar cuidados. "Hoje na Síria, os feridos e os médicos são perseguidos e correm risco de serem presos e torturados. A medicina é usada como arma de perseguição."

Diário de Notícias (Portugal)

18 prematuros morrem durante ataque a Homs

Síria. Responsável da ONU pede ação urgente para proteger civis. Bruxelas prepara plano para retirada de europeus do país de Assad

LUMENA RAPOSO

As forças sírias intensificaram ontem o cerco à cidade de Homs e os bombardeamentos ao bairro sunita de Bab Omr, em cujo hospital morreram 18 prematuros. Esta vaga de violência ocorre um dia após a visita do chefe da diplomacia russa Serguei Lavrov a Damasco e quando a União Europeia anunciou estar a preparar um plano para a eventual retirada dos seus cidadãos ainda no país de Bachar al-Assad.

O “dia da repressão mais violenta” foi como o Observatório dos Direitos Humanos sírio classificou a situação ontem em Homs, onde dezenas de civis perderam a vida em consequência das operações militares das forças do regime. Segundo a mesma fonte, todos os membros de três famílias foram mortos em zonas diferentes daquela cidade de 1,6 milhões de habitantes, no centro do país, e considerada a “capital da revolta”.

E neste quinto dia de ataques das forças de Assad a Homs, que provocaram 47 mortos, o hospital AlWalid foi particularmente visado o que provocou a morte de 18 prematuros que se encontravam em incubadoras.

De acordo com ativistas pró-democracia e opositores de Assad, enquanto o exército ataca a cidade com a sua artilharia, os *shabiha*

cidade. *Shabiha*, ou fantasma, é o termo pelo qual são conhecidas as milícias pró-Assad.

Rami Abdul Rahman, que preside ao Observatório em Londres, revelou que elementos das *shabiha* entraram durante a noite em três casas, na cidade de Homs, e assassinaram as pessoas que lá encontraram, ou seja, três famílias uma de cinco elementos, outra de sete e uma terceira de oito.

Em declarações à Reuters, Rahman avançou tratar-se das famí-

lias Ghantawi, Tirkawib e al-Zamel. E sublinhou: “As *shabiha* estão a agir como se estivessem no auge do seu poder e que tudo podem fazer para impedir a queda do regime de Assad.”

Estas denúncias e a continuação dos bombardeamentos – a que se juntam agora atentados com carros armadilhado que ninguém reivindica – levaram a alta-comissária da ONU para os direitos humanos, Navi Pillay, a lançar um apelo a uma urgente ação da comunidade internacional para proteger os civis sírios.

Por seu turno, e com o objetivo de proteger os seus cidadãos que queiram deixar o país de Assad, a UE decidiu reforçar as suas missões nos países vizinhos da Síria. Ao mesmo tempo, Bruxelas prepara-se para reforçar as sanções contra o regime de Damasco sem, no entanto, deixar de estudar hipóteses de conseguir a resolver a crise síria pela via pacífica.

Posição idêntica foi ontem avançada pelo Presidente russo Dmitri Medvedev que, em comunicado, defendeu a importância de continuar a procurar uma solução para o conflito na Síria, “incluindo no Conselho de Segurança da ONU”. Mas para Medvedev, a solução deve ser alcançada “sem ingerência estrangeira”.

A situação na Síria será tema, sábado, da reunião do Conselho de Cooperação do Golfo (CCG) –

REAÇÕES

Reino Unido cético sobre missão russa

► David Cameron afirmou ter “confiança muito limitada” nos resultados da visita que o chefe da diplomacia russa, Serguei Lavrov, realizou na véspera à Síria. Ao falar no Parlamento em Londres, o primeiro-ministro britânico voltou a criticar a Rússia, por ter vetado no Conselho de Segurança a resolução sobre a Síria, e a “violência” de Damasco. Por seu turno, o chefe do Governo russo Vladimir Putin disse que Moscovo condena “toda a forma de violência, venha de onde vier” e pediu à comunidade internacional para não agir

Europa prepara plano de evacuação

Massacre na Síria após veto da Rússia e da China

A União Europeia está a preparar um plano de evacuação de europeus na Síria. Uma delegação chegará a Damasco para coordenar o plano de saída. A falta de entendimento no Conselho de Segurança incendiou a acção do Governo contra a população, acusa a ONU.

A alta-comissária para os Direitos Humanos da ONU pediu ontem “medidas eficazes” para proteger a população síria, considerando que o fracasso do Conselho de Segurança em conseguir um acordo agravou “a tendência do Governo para massacrar o povo”. “Estou consternada com o ataque deliberado do Governo sírio a Homs, assim como com a utilização de artilharia e de outras armas pesadas, para o que parecem ser ataques indiscriminados em áreas civis da cidade”, disse Navi Pillay num comunicado.

“O fracasso do Conselho de Segurança em conseguir um acordo sobre uma acção conjunta forte parece ter agravado a tendência do Governo sírio de massacrar sem tréguas o povo para esmagar a contestação”, assinalou.

Acordo de 2005

A responsável da ONU para os Direitos Humanos sublinhou que, em 2005, os líderes mundiais “acordaram que, quando um Estado falha manifestamente em proteger a população contra graves crimes internacionais, a comunidade internacional tem a responsabilidade de intervir to-



O bairro muçulmano sunita de Bab Amro, em Homs, tem sido o alvo das tropas sírias

Ataques a Homs

18 PREMATUROS MORREM

18 bebés prematuros do hospital Al Walid morreram quando as incubadoras pararam de trabalhar devido ao corte de energia.

CARRO-BOMBA

Pelo menos 50 pessoas morreram, ontem, em Homs. O regime acusou “terroristas” de explodir um carro-bomba e lançar mísseis.

MÉDICOS E FERIDOS PERSEGUIDOS

O regime sírio “reprime sem piedade” os feridos e o pessoal médico que os tenta socorrer, denunciou hoje a organização Médicos sem Fronteiras.

mando em conjunto, no momento oportuno e de forma decisiva, medidas de protecção”.

O apelo de Pillay é feito no mesmo dia em que o ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros da Turquia declarou que Ancara procura organizar, “o mais rapidamente possível”, uma conferência internacional sobre a crise síria. Ontem, o primeiro-ministro turco, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reuniu-se com o presidente russo, Dmitri Medvedev, após o veto russo e chinês.

Ontem, o Exército Sírio voltou a lançar uma nova ofensiva contra bairros residenciais de Homs, nomeadamente em Bab Amr, onde estão refugiados elementos da oposição ao Governo. ■

The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)



ARTHUR BEESLEY

EUROPEAN DIARY

Europe is likely to step up sanctions against Syria this month

SYRIA'S BRUTAL crackdown on the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad advances by the day. As casualties mount, concern intensifies that the bloodshed could continue for months.

"We're facing a wall and we have to find a way of climbing over that wall and moving ahead. That's what we're doing," says a senior diplomat in Brussels, who declines to be named.

Assad's bloody response to the 11-month revolt presents a growing challenge to Europe and the world. More than 6,000 people have died and many others have been detained, tortured and abducted.

With military action by the western powers ruled out and a UN Security Council resolution vetoed by Russia and China, the limits of political and diplomatic action are plain to see.

European and American sanctions have been in place for months, some ambassadors have been recalled, and the smiling dictator himself is now a global pariah. Yet still he will not yield.

"You're asking me: is this going to drag on? I don't know, but I fear," the diplomat says.

"If you still have the regime in Damascus that is refusing to go into anything that looks like an end of violence and the start of a political process – as requested by the Arab League and a lot of countries in the international community – we are facing a major problem."

Europe is likely to step up sanctions this month with a freeze on the assets of the Syrian central bank and a ban on the importation of phosphates and gold. This is in addition to an oil ban, travel bans on regime chiefs and the freezing of other assets.

However, the suggestion of a ban on commercial flights to and from the country is being resisted. The same goes for a mooted mass recall of European ambassadors, which was rejected by member states on Tuesday even though France, Italy, Britain and other countries have either withdrawn their top diplomats or called them home for consultations.

The dominant view remains that it is better to maintain a presence in Damascus, the objective being to deepen contacts with rebel factions and to keep a closer eye on events on the ground.

If the rhetoric suggests all of this will eventually tighten the noose around Assad, the anxiety remains that the violence will lead to all-out civil war in the country.

Russian foreign minister Sergei

Lavrov returned from a trip to Damascus two days ago, saying Assad had promised to implement reforms and bring a halt to the crackdown.

No one believes that, however. "I recall my Turkish colleague telling me that he had spent six hours with Bashar to convince him, and then the next day there were 100 dead," said French foreign minister Alain Juppé.

What can be done? There's talk in Paris and Brussels of mobilising the "Friends of Syria" contact group of western powers, Arab states and EU countries. One objective here would be to support the opposition and an Arab League reform plan.

Another would be to press Russia to rethink its security council veto. A further suggestion, promoted by EU foreign policy chief Cathy Ashton, is to set up a group of regional

and global organisations such as the UN, the Arab League, the Islamic Confederation and the EU. This would work like the "Cairo Group" that oversaw some of the international politicking around the rebellion in Egypt against Hosni Mubarak.

In question, too, is whether a suspended Arab League observation mission is revived or fully withdrawn. All of that, however, is the realm of moral pressure, to which Assad is immune.

Looming over this unhappy panorama is the anxiety that any formal move to arm the rebels would further the drift to civil war. At the same time, the prospect of military intervention along the lines of the Libyan campaign is such a no-no in the Arab world that western diplomats are loath to utter the name "Nato" in certain company.

That includes the Russians and Chinese, who are said to demonstrate "certain emotions and reservations" at the very mention of Libya.

Much of this has its roots in the instinctive distaste at the very notion of a "regime change" operation, a legacy of the Iraq invasion. Moreover, Syria's location in the Middle East cauldron presents a host of tricky questions that did not arise at the time of the Libyan intervention.

"We are left with very few options other than sanctions on one side, humanitarian assistance on the other side and otherwise contingency planning," says the European diplomat.

"That doesn't mean that we're not being active in political and diplomatic terms, but you need two to tango and if the other side doesn't respond, you're left with very few choices."

The dominant view is it's better to keep a presence in Damascus

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Military action may be only way to stop onslaught in Syria, Washington warns

Diplomatic methods are running out, says US, after Russia and China blocked UN resolution which condemned violence of Assad regime

DIPLOMACY

By Alex Spillius and Rosa Prince in New York

THE international community may be forced to "militarise" the crisis in Syria unless president Bashar al-Assad stops the onslaught on his people, a senior US official warned yesterday.

The official from the State Department told *The Daily Telegraph* that while the White House wanted to exhaust all its diplomatic options, the debate in Washington has shifted away from diplomacy and towards more robust action since Russia and China blocked a United Nations resolution condemning Syria.

The Pentagon's Central Command has begun a preliminary internal review of US military capabilities in the region, which one senior official called a "scoping exercise" that would provide options for the president if and when they were requested.

The White House said it was talking to allies about holding a "Friends of Syria" meeting in the near future and was considering delivering humanitarian aid to affected areas in the country.

"We are, of course, looking at humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, and we have for some time. We're consulting with our international partners, and we anticipate this being one of the focuses of the discussions that we'll have," said Jay Carney, the White House press secretary.

Influential figures in Washington have recommended setting up a "humanitarian corridor" or safe haven, while others, such as Senator John McCain, have said it was time to consider arming the rebels of the Free Syrian Army.

Any plan to supply aid or set up a buffer zone would involve a military dimension to protect aid convoys or vulnerable civilians.

"The decision-makers have not determined we are at a point of no return," the senior official told *The Daily Telegraph*. "There is still a window, it is just that that window is closing.

"I don't know how much longer it is going to go on before people start looking at what else is on the table, because nothing is off the table.

"We definitely don't want to militarise the situation. If it's avoidable we are going to avoid it. But increasingly it looks like it may not be avoidable," he said.

"There is always hope that this can be solved without it turning into a full-scale civil war and without the use of force, but it really involves Bashar al-Assad receiving

Fall-out Hague clashes with Beijing and Kremlin

Britain engaged in sharp exchanges with Russia and China yesterday that laid bare the chasm in their opinions on Syria.

In a half-hour telephone call with Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, William Hague made clear he was "appalled at the continuing violence, in particular in Homs", the city that has been under intensified attack from the regime since late last week.

Diplomatic sources said that the Foreign Secretary was taken aback to hear Mr Lavrov say that "there was no proof President Assad was bombarding Homs".

The Russian said he had been assured by the Syrian president that he was not using heavy weaponry against his own people, despite overwhelming evidence from civilian witnesses.

In Parliament, David Cameron said that the leaders in the Kremlin had to "look at their conscience and realise what they have done" after Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on Syria last weekend.

He said he had "very little confidence" in Mr Lavrov's visit to Damascus, which gleaned only a vague promise of reform.

China's foreign ministry, which has repeatedly defended Beijing's decision, said Mr Hague's earlier condemnation of the veto was "extremely irresponsible" and had "ulterior motives".

"China's action is righteous and fair and any efforts to stoke discord in China-Arab relations will be in vain," said Liu Weimin, the foreign ministry spokesman.

Alex Spillius

ing the wake-up call." Any outside military involvement in Syria has been regarded as more difficult and more risky than the mission in Libya.

It has a complex geography and ethnic mix and is the linchpin of a volatile region. But since the Russian veto at the UN, there is no doubting an extra urgency in the attitude of concerned governments and agencies.

In a bid to end the diplomatic stalemate, Ban Ki-moon, the global body's secretary general, last night proposed a joint UN-Arab League peace envoy to Syria.

"How many deaths will it take to stop the slide into civil war and civilian strife?" he said, adding that the Security Council's failure to reach a resolution had emboldened the regime and was "disastrous for the people of Syria".

Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, proposed holding a conference

"as soon as possible" to "promote international understanding with all countries concerned". He is due to hold further talks in Washington soon with Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state.

Unal Cevikoz, the Turkish ambassador to Britain, said delivering humanitarian aid could be discussed at the proposed conference, but like the Western powers, his country remained against military options, including arming the Free Syrian Army.

He denied reports that discussions on military options between the US and Turkey were already under way.

"Humanitarian aid may become necessary. There is growing scarcity of food that may lead to famine. It is a serious crime not only to kill but to create the conditions of exterminating a city and its people," he added, referring to the city of Homs, which Mr Assad's forces have bombarded for five days.

The Turkish initiative would run parallel, he said, to the "Friends of Syria", but it would aim to bring together a broader range of nations.

"Today we are at a very critical juncture and the international community has to take the initiative and has to move forward with strong messages to the Syrian regime," said Mr Cevikoz.

Turkey, which has a 560-mile border with Syria, has been at the forefront of international criticism against Damascus and has become a haven for opposition activists. After 11 rounds of sanctions against Syria, the European Union is also discussing further sanctions, including freezing the assets of Syria's central bank, banning the importation of Syrian phosphates and suspending trade in gold and other gems.

"We're trying to make things change," said a senior EU official. "We're facing a wall, and we have to find a way of climbing over that wall and moving ahead."

The opposition to Mr Assad has been calling for a humanitarian corridor or buffer zone or a Friends of Syria group for months. The Syrian National Council, the principal opposition body, endorsed military intervention in December.

The Arab League has shown unprecedented initiative in drawing up a plan for democratic transition in Syria. Qatar, the current president of the 22-nation group, is rumoured to be secretly supplying rebels as it did in Libya.

Radwan Ziadeh, a member of the SNC executive, said the US had to take a more prominent role. "Everyone is waiting for signals from Washington," he said.

Editorial Comment: Page 29

The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Assad is not firing artillery at civilians, claims Russia

DIPLOMACY

By **KIM SENGUPTA**

Diplomatic Correspondent

There is no proof that Bashar al-Assad's regime is using its heavy weapons to bombard Homs, the Russian Foreign Minister is said to have declared yesterday. Sergei Lavrov's comments on the besieged city came during a telephone conversation with the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, as the Syrian opposition reported dozens more dead and injured.

During the half-hour conversation, Mr Lavrov – according to senior diplomatic sources – stated that Mr Assad had assured him he was not using heavy weapons in urban conflict zones like Homs and had no intention of doing so. The television images of killings and destruction showed just one side of the story, Mr Lavrov held.

Mr Hague is said to have

assured Mr Lavrov that “Syria was not Libya” and that the UK has no intention of a military entanglement. He raised the issue of continuing arms sales by Moscow to the Assad regime, which drew the riposte from Mr Lavrov that this was not illegal.

Mr Lavrov, who visited Damascus on Tuesday, defended the use of the veto, along with China, to block a UN resolution calling on Mr Assad to stop attacks on his own people and step down. The Foreign Minister insisted that the removal of the Syrian President cannot be a precondition for a negotiated end to the strife.

In the Commons, David Cameron was dismissive of Russia's unilateral attempt at a diplomatic intervention, saying he had “very little confidence” it would end the fighting. He told MPs the international community had now to work with Syrian opposition groups to co-ordinate a response to the Assad regime.

New York Times - International Herald Tribune (USA)

Russia tries to push diplomacy for Syria

MOSCOW

Kremlin envoy says talks with the opposition will be sought by Damascus

BY MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ AND ALAN COWELL

Fresh from talks with President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, Russia's foreign minister announced on Wednesday that the Syrian vice president Farouk al-Sharaa would seek to open talks with opposition forces in Syria and called on Western and Arab leaders to support such efforts.

"We consider this willingness to be an important factor to be taken into consideration, and hope that all who have some kind of influence over the opposition will urge them to begin such dialogue," the foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, said at a news conference in Moscow.

President Dmitri A. Medvedev discussed the crisis with the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Wednesday, saying that Moscow supported continuing talks to end the conflict, including within the U.N. Security Council, as long as no country interfered with Syria's sovereignty. According to a Kremlin statement, Mr. Medvedev said the latest draft of the Arab League-backed resolution before the Security Council "would not have allowed for an unbiased evaluation of the situation in Syria, or have guaranteed that calls for an end to shooting and bloodshed were addressed to both sides in the conflict."

Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian prime minister, urged outsiders to allow Syrians to make their decisions independent of outside intervention.

"We should not act like a bull in a china shop," Mr. Putin was quoted by the news agency Ria Novosti as saying. "We have to give people a chance to make decisions about their destiny independently, to help, to give advice, to put limits somewhere so that the opposing sides would not have a chance to use arms, but not to interfere."

Moscow's stance drew only dismissive responses from Western nations angered by Russia's decision, along with that of China, to veto the resolution on Syria last week.

In Paris, Foreign Minister Alain Juppé described the Syrian promises of talks as "manipulation" while, in London, Prime Minister David Cameron



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A wounded Syrian rebel being evacuated by comrades on Wednesday in Idlib, where government troops had reportedly attacked.

said he had "very little confidence" in Russia's initiative.

Adding to the turmoil, Turkey, a major regional player and neighbor of Syria, was said to be weighing its own initiative toward securing a broad consensus on ending the violence.

The diplomacy seemed to have no immediate impact on the fighting. News reports said that for the fifth consecutive day Syrian troops bombed civilian areas of the central city Homs and attacked other areas in the northern province of Idlib, the southern city of Dara'a and the mountain town of Zabadani.

Reuters reported that government forces in Homs had used tanks, rockets and mortars to subdue resistance, and quoted activists as saying that almost 50 people had been killed in the latest attacks. The death toll could not be independently confirmed.

The onslaught was described by activists as an apparent attempt by the authorities to make good on their threat to crush all resistance — a bloody counter-

point to the diplomatic maneuvering as Mr. Assad faced mounting international isolation. Mr. Lavrov visited Damascus on Tuesday at the head of a high-ranking delegation dispatched by the Kremlin, a move that has been interpreted as an effort by Russia to seize the diplomatic initiative in Syria after it joined China in blocking the U.N. resolution to halt the violence.

On Wednesday, Mr. Lavrov called the visit "productive," while admonishing Western and Arab countries for recalling their ambassadors from Syria in outrage over Mr. Assad's increasingly violent response to the 11-month-old popular uprising.

"I do not think that recalling ambassadors helps create conditions that would be favorable for the realization of Arab League initiatives," Mr. Lavrov said.

In Washington, the Obama administration, which closed the U.S. Embassy in Damascus on Monday, hinted that it was seeking ways to provide what it called humanitarian support to Syrians

whose lives have been upended by the repression. But officials said the administration was not considering armed assistance to the Syrian opposition.

"We never take anything off the table," said Victoria Nuland, a State Department spokeswoman. "We don't think more arms into Syria is the answer."

The violence in Syria has escalated since Saturday, when Russia, seconded by China, vetoed the resolution calling on Mr. Assad to give up some powers as part of a plan to defuse the crisis, which increasingly resembles a civil war.

Rebuffing harsh criticism from the resolution's sponsors and Western critics of Mr. Assad, the Russians insisted that the resolution amounted to outside interference in Syria's affairs.

Alan Cowell reported from London. Rick Gladstone contributed reporting from New York; Anthony Shadid, Nada Bakri and Hwaida Saad from Beirut; and an employee of The New York Times from Damascus.

New York Times - International Herald Tribune (USA)

Iran must also quit Syria

Efraim Halevy

JERUSALEM The public debate in America and Israel these days is focused obsessively on whether to attack Iran in order to halt its nuclear weapons ambitions; hardly any attention is being paid to how events in Syria could result in a strategic debacle for the Iranian government. Iran's foothold in Syria enables the mullahs in Tehran to pursue their reckless and violent regional policies — and its presence there must be ended.

Ensuring that Iran is evicted from its regional hub in Damascus would cut off Iran's access to its proxies (Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza) and visibly dent its domestic and international prestige, possibly forcing a hemorrhaging regime in Tehran to suspend its nuclear policies. This would be a safer and more rewarding option than the military one.

As President Bashar al-Assad's government falters, Syria is becoming Iran's Achilles' heel. Iran has poured a vast array of resources into the country. There are Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps encampments and Iranian weapons and advisers throughout Syria. And Iranian-controlled Hezbollah forces from Lebanon have joined in butchering the Syrians who have risen up against Assad.

Iran is intent on assuring its hold over the country regardless of what happens to Assad — and Israel and the West must prevent this at all costs.

Sadly, the opportunities presented by Syria's meltdown seem to be eluding Israeli leaders. Last week, Israel's military intelligence chief spoke of the 200,000 missiles and rockets in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria that could reach all of Israel's population centers. And there is a growing risk that advanced Syrian weapons might fall into the hands of terrorist groups. Iran's pres-

ence in Damascus is vital to maintaining these threats.

At this stage, there is no turning back; Assad must step down. For Israel, the crucial question is not whether he falls but whether the Iranian presence in Syria will outlive his government.

Getting Iran booted out of Syria is essential for Israel's security. And if Assad goes, Iranian hegemony over Syria must go with him. Anything less would

For Israel, the question is not whether Assad falls but whether the Iranian presence in Syria will outlive him.

rob Assad's departure of any significance.

But Israel should not be the lone or even the principal actor in speeding his exit. Any workable outcome in Syria will have to involve the United States, Russia and Arab countries. America must offer

Russia incentives to stop protecting the Assad regime, which will likely fall the moment Moscow withdraws its support. A force with a mandate from the Arab League should then ensure stability until a new Syrian government can take over.

The current standoff in Syria presents a rare chance to rid the world of the Iranian menace to international security and well-being. And ending Iran's presence there poses less of a risk to international commerce and security than harsher sanctions or war.

Russia and China, both of which vetoed a United Nations resolution last week calling on Assad to step down, should realize that his downfall could serve their interests, too. After all, Iranian interventionism could wreak havoc in Muslim-majority areas to Russia's south and China's west. And a nuclear-armed Iran would pose a serious potential threat on Russia's southern border.

Russia's interests in Syria are not synonymous with Iran's, and Moscow

can now prove this by withdrawing its unwavering support for Assad. Russia simply wishes to maintain its access to Syria's Mediterranean ports in Tartus and Latakia and to remain a major arms supplier to Damascus. If Washington is willing to allow that, and not to sideline Russia as it did before intervening in Libya, the convergence of American and Russian interests in Iran and Syria could pave the way for Assad's downfall.

Once this is achieved, the entire balance of forces in the region would undergo a sea change. Iranian-sponsored terrorism would be visibly contained; Hezbollah would lose its vital Syrian conduit to Iran and Lebanon could revert to long-forgotten normalcy; Hamas fighters in Gaza would have to contemplate a future without Iranian weaponry and training; and the Iranian people might once again rise up against the regime that has brought them such pain and suffering.

Those who see this scenario as a daydream should consider the alternative: a post-Assad government still wedded to Iran with its fingers on the buttons controlling long-range Syrian missiles with chemical warheads that can strike anywhere in Israel. This is a certain prescription for war, and Israel would have no choice but to prevent it.

Fortunately, Assad and his allies have unwittingly created an opportunity to defuse the Iranian threat. If the international community does not seize it and Iranian influence in Syria emerges intact, the world will face a choice between a military strike and even more crippling sanctions, which could cause oil prices to skyrocket and throw the world economy off balance. The United States and Russia should wish for neither.

Syria has created a third option. We do not have the luxury of ignoring it.

EFRAIM HALEVY, a former Israeli national security adviser and ambassador, was director of the Mossad from 1998 to 2002.

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

Turkey Seeks Group on Syria, As Homs Shelling Draws On

By JOE PARKINSON

ISTANBUL—Turkey said it would seek to form a group on Syria “as soon as possible” to coordinate policy between Middle East and world powers, as Western and Arab nations continued a diplomatic press on President Bashar al-Assad.

On Wednesday, Syrian troops besieged neighborhoods of the city of Homs for the fifth day with artillery, tank shells, rockets and mortars, in attacks that activist groups said left at least 50 dead.

“We will not leave Syria to its own destiny. People should know that,” Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in an interview with Turkish television channel NTV. He stressed that any new diplomatic coalition should meet promptly in Turkey or another country in the region to try to resolve the Syria conflict. “We are determined to form a platform for broad international consensus,” he said.

The Turkish move comes after Russia and China vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution that would have sought to pressure President Assad to step aside. On Sunday, the day after the veto, the U.S. raised a call for a “friends of democratic Syria” that would ramp up efforts to push President Assad from power.

Such a coalition could provide a platform outside the U.N. to boost diplomatic pressure on Damascus, analysts said. The U.N. stalemate came after efforts by the Arab League of nations also failed to bring a halt to violence in Syria, which began nearly a year ago with harsh government clampdowns on predominantly peaceful protests and has since brought the country to the edge of civil war.

Meanwhile, Syria gained new support from one of its few remaining regional allies. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, following a meeting Wednesday with Syria’s top cleric, said Iran will always support Syria. A top Iranian diplomat, meanwhile, met with Syria’s foreign minister in Damascus and bledged his

events,” according to Syria’s state-run Sana news agency.

The Turkish efforts to form an international platform to coordinate Syria policies are reminiscent of the Libya Contact Group—an informal group of countries that met several times, including in Istanbul, to harmonize policy during the Libyan uprising against Moammar Gadhafi. Mr. Davutoglu said that in recent days he had laid the groundwork for such a meeting, discussing Syria with his opposite members in Italy, Iran and Qatar.

Any Libya parallels are likely to be greeted coolly by Russia and China, which have characterized international efforts in Libya as cover for regime change. Mr. Davutoglu didn’t say whether Russia and China would take part but said Turkey wanted the group to be “as wide as possible.”

One video posted to YouTube appeared to show a resident standing by the corpse of a child, asking, ‘Are these animals that are dying?’

Later Wednesday, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to express regret at Moscow’s veto and to call for an immediate halt to the bloodshed.

“The prime minister said the Syrian regime has completely lost its legitimacy and credibility,” Mr. Erdogan’s office said in a statement. Mr. Medvedev countered that foreign interference is “not an option,” the Kremlin said. Mr. Medvedev instead said that a search to end bloodshed in Syria should continue, including at the U.N. Security Council, according to the Kremlin.

Mr. Davutoglu’s comments came ahead of his departure Wednesday for Washington for previously scheduled bilateral meetings with

conflict.

Meanwhile, Syrian forces continued their assault on Homs, a city north of Damascus that sits along the Lebanese border. The city, a melting pot of ethnicities that mirror Syria’s own ethnic and religious diversity, has been the heart of the 11-month uprising. It has also been a base for rebel fighters thanks in large part to the smuggling routes from Lebanon through which activists and locals say opposition fighters are obtaining weapons.

Amateur videos shot by Homs residents and posted to YouTube by opposition activists showed what were characterized as Wednesday attacks, with shells striking residential buildings and by pillars of smoke rising into the sky. One video appeared to show a resident standing by the corpse of a child, holding a piece of rocket shrapnel that he said had struck the child’s home. “What is the U.N. waiting for?” he said in the video. “Are these animals that are dying?”

Another showed a column of Syrian army trucks, including tanks and armored vehicles, rolling along an otherwise deserted road. Activists said the video was evidence of what appears to be the Syrian army’s growing buildup in and around the besieged city.

The images couldn’t be corroborated but broadly match with accounts from residents reached by telephone throughout the week. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a U.K.-based opposition group, said between 53 and 60 people died in Homs on Wednesday. The group and other activists said late Tuesday night members of a pro-Assad militia known as the Shabiha had murdered 20 members of three entire opposition families.

The regime has blamed terrorist gangs and criminals for the violence in Homs. The state-controlled Syrian news agency on Wednesday reported that rebel-fired mortars struck a nearby oil refinery in Homs, setting two oil storage tanks ablaze.

On Tuesday in Syria’s capital.

voy said the Syrian leader was readying plans to put a new constitution to a referendum, a step unlikely to assuage opponents who have called for nothing less than Mr. Assad’s ouster.

In the Washington meetings, Mr. Davutoglu and Mrs. Clinton are expected to explore ways to more quickly and effectively provide assistance to Syrian refugees who have sought safe haven in Turkey and other neighboring countries, according to U.S. officials. But they will also discuss the tricky question of potentially providing aid to the victims of violence inside Syria.

“There are simple things—like sending assistance with a revived monitoring regime and providing aid to refugees,” said a U.S. official briefed on the meeting. “And then there are more complicated things.”

The meetings are also expected to focus on Turkey’s ties with the Free Syrian Army, a loosely affiliated network of rebel fighting units and defected army regulars. Ibrahim Kalin, an adviser to Turkey’s Prime Minister, said in a column in pro-government daily Zaman on Wednesday that the “next stage in Syria will be to further empower the opposition.”

Turkey has quietly raised the idea of establishing a “buffer zone” inside Syria to protect civilians from Mr. Assad’s forces. But to do so, U.S. officials acknowledge, the international community would need to assemble some sort of outside military force to deter Syrian forces. They worry that without such fire power, Syrian forces could easily overwhelm any buffer zones or humanitarian corridors established inside the country and potentially turn international monitors into hostages.

Mr. Davutoglu declined to discuss whether the government was considering a military-backed humanitarian intervention to help quell the violence.

Turkey’s latest push places it at the center of Western and Arab efforts to quell Syria’s uprising, and spotlights the dramatic reversal of its alliance with Damascus and An-

USA Today

On Syria, EU pulls out stops; Russia steps in

The European Union will impose harsher sanctions on Syria, a senior EU official said Wednesday, as Russia tried to broker talks to calm violence. Activists reported at least 50 killed in the regime's siege of the restive city of Homs.

After blocking a Western and Arab attempt to bring United Nations pressure on President Bashar Assad to step down, Russia has launched a bid to show it can resolve the turmoil.

Moscow is calling for a combination of reforms by the regime and negotiations, without calling for Assad to go. The opposition dismisses promises of reform as empty gestures. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said outside forces should let Syrians settle their conflict "independently."

A senior EU official told the Associated Press the sanctions may include bans on the import of Syrian phosphates, on commercial flights between Syria and Europe, and on financial transactions with the country's central bank. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in keeping with EU rules.

Los Angeles Times (USA)

Cracks in a Syrian city long loyal to Assad

Aleppo, the nation's commercial hub, looks increasingly uncertain over which side to take in the uprising.

BY TIMES STAFF
REPORTING FROM
ALEPPO, SYRIA

In the apartment of an elderly Aleppo woman, the TV was tuned to the pro-government channel Al Dunya.

Patriotic music played over images of a happy and prosperous Syria. On her balcony, a small Syrian flag waved in the night chill.

"I told my cats that if they are with us then they can stay, but if they are against us I'll send them out into the streets," said the woman, a widow who is a staunch supporter of President Bashar Assad.

Her daughter, a teacher who still lives at home, leaned down toward a calico cat warming herself near the furnace. "Do you love Bashar?" she asked. The cat closed her eyes, and they took it as affirmation.

For 11 months, the rest of Syria has been asking the same question about Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city.

Often described as sitting on the sidelines of the bloody national uprising, Aleppo now appears to be wavering and uncertain. While Assad's security forces continue to crack down on the antigovernment movement across much of the country, Aleppo's populace seems unsure just where to stand.

"Are you with or against?" is a common question among friends and family. The answer leads to heated discussions.

The debate is of great consequence to the future of the nation. Like Damascus, Syria's capital, Aleppo has

[See Aleppo, A6]

[Aleppo, from Al] escaped much of the mayhem that has engulfed areas where wide-scale dissent has been violently stifled by government forces. A hundred miles to the south, Homs, Syria's third-largest city, is an opposition stronghold and a battleground.

No one is yet predicting such a turn of events in this longtime loyalist bastion, which serves as the nation's commercial hub. But the government is keeping a tight lid on both Aleppo and Damascus, mindful that major unrest in either could truly threaten Assad's rule.

Protests have broken out in the suburbs and surrounding provinces of Aleppo, but the city itself has so far been devoid of large demonstrations.

At the same time, more than a dozen residents of the impoverished neighborhood of Marje were reportedly shot and killed by government forces during Friday protests. In the last two weeks, Aleppo's streets are now nearly empty of once-ubiquitous images of Assad after a series of attacks on shop fronts and car windows in the last two months.

In the city's old, maze-like bazaar, where shoppers, donkeys and motorcycles



MUSTAFA OZER, AP/WIDEWORLD

A SUPPORTER OF Syrian President Bashar Assad holds a portrait of him near the Turkey-Syria border. Assad coexists on narrow cobblestone paths, merchants by and large continue to support Assad. In their shops, which offer goods varying from gold jewelry to spices, undershirts to wedding dresses, TVs are turned to Al Dunya or a government-run station. But it is no longer unusual to see people watching the Qatar-based Al Jazeera channel, itself a possible indication of where one

stands. Al Jazeera's reports have consistently played up Syrian government attacks on civilians, to the point that the official Syrian news agency now accuses foreign satellite networks of fomenting "sedition" against the government.

"Are you still watching Al Dunya?" asked a man who writes for an online newspaper, as he walked into a relative's home and glanced



Los Angeles Times

Source: ESRI

'We talk to those supporting the revolutionaries and what they are saying sounds right, and we talk to those who support the regime and what they are saying sounds right.'

— A college student

at the TV.

"Why are you watching Al Jazeera?" replied the woman with suspicion. "Our life is

Al Dunya."

If the future here is uncertain, one thing most people agree on is that Aleppo has fast become a city on edge.

In a place where people frequently dined late into the night at restaurants or impromptu sidewalk grills, they now exhibit fear of the dark as reports emerge of kidnappings, holdups and rapes.

People no longer argue with taxi drivers over fares; each worries that the other is carrying a gun.

When one boy, a scrawny high school student, recently discovered "Bashar fail" graffiti on an elevator door, he decided to remove it. Those around him debated whether the simple act would put him at risk, or who might think he had put it there himself or from opposition activists who might retaliate against him.

Billboards at most roundabouts and intersections have begun urging patriotism and order. "Freedom doesn't come with chains," one reads. On the side of an ice cream delivery truck is an enlarged photo of a frozen treat in the colors of the Syrian flag. The ads seem careful to avoid equating opposition to the uprising with loyalty to Assad.

Meanwhile, an economic slowdown is pinching wallets. Gas, diesel and heating fuel prices have risen dramatically as supplies have dwindled. There is also a bread shortage, and one breadresser noted an increase in short haircuts as women try to save on conditioners and longer showers.

On days when fuel trucks come to deliver gas, motorists wait in line for hours to fill up, and traffic is snarled citywide.

Government supporters blame the protesters and rebel fighters for the increasing economic chaos and a sense of lawlessness. Some say the opposition has created an atmosphere of anarchy where criminals see opportunity. Whatever the case, the loyalists say, the city's deteriorating conditions are a strong reason for Assad to remain in control.

More and more, however, it appears that those who have not yet taken a side are less sure what to think.

"We talk to those supporting the revolutionaries and what they are saying sounds right, and we talk to those who support the regime and what they are saying sounds right," said a college English major in her early 20s. "We don't know what's actually right."

Sanctions weigh on Lebanon-Syria banking ties

• BY DOMINIC EVANS

BEIRUT (Reuters) – Lebanese banks that worked for years to build up business in neighbouring Syria have been quietly implementing US and European Union sanctions against Damascus to avoid jeopardizing their international operations, according to bankers and economists.

This is despite close financial ties between the two countries, cemented by the opening of seven Lebanese banking affiliates in Syria after President Bashar Assad began liberalizing the economy when he came to power 12 years ago.

Lebanese bankers insist they are not legally bound to implement the Western sanctions, which ban business dealings with dozens of Syrian officials and companies in response to Assad's crackdown on pro-democracy protests. Lebanon has opposed an Arab League plan to slap sanctions on Damascus.

In practice, however, international pressure has been so heavy that Lebanese banks have not been able to ignore it. They risk damaging their ties with Western banks if they continue to do business with sanctions targets in Syria. And forced to choose, they appear – at least for now – to be sacrificing their Syrian links.

Riad Salameh, the governor of Lebanon's central bank, last month told a banking conference in Beirut no individual or institution on the US or EU sanctions lists could do business with Lebanese banks.

The banks "will not take any action in Lebanon or any of their branches abroad – especially in Syria – that could embarrass their correspondent banks abroad or put them in a posi-

tion where they have breached regulations in their countries," he said.

"Banks here are definitely abiding by those sanctions. Whoever has an account here [in the sanctions list], I'm sure they've been closed."

Many Syrians traditionally hold some of their money in Lebanon, and the unrest that hit Syria last March prompted local media reports – denied by bankers in Beirut – of billions of dollars flooding across the border into Lebanon.

Lebanon's financial community, already shaken by US government accusations last year that a Lebanese bank was linked to a money-laundering network operating on behalf of Lebanon's Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran and Syria, has been anxious to avoid any more unwelcome accusations.

Syrians seeking to open accounts or deposit money in Lebanon are now treated warily – "as if they have the plague," according to another Beirut banker.

REGIME'S ASSETS

The Lebanese banking sector, which includes regional players such as Akam, Audi and Byfles, is a crucial part of the country's services-led economy.

Most Syrian affiliates of Lebanese banks, which are 51 percent Syrian-owned and are governed by Syrian legislation, have seen sharp falls in their assets and deposit bases since the start of the uprising in March.

"Before the crisis, the banks' business plans included opening new branches, new clients, new projects and expanding their loan books," said one economist. "Since the crisis [began], they have



A STREET HOSTING BANKS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IS SEEN IN BEIRUT ON TUESDAY. LEBANESE BANKS RISK DAMAGING THEIR TIES WITH WESTERN BANKS IF THEY CONTINUE TO DO BUSINESS WITH SANCTION TARGETS IN SYRIA. (AP/WIDEWORLD)

bank, state-owned Commercial Bank of Syria; its main cellphone operator, Syriatel; the largest private company, Cham Holding; and the Adkavia TV channel.

The first Beirut banker said Lebanon's banking association had met several times to stress the importance of abiding by the sanctions, though he added that no one could be sure of 100% compliance by all banks.

"Do we know every account? No, but we are putting pressure on all banks to make sure they are abiding by this," he said. "Small banks I can't control much, but the big banks really realize" the need for compliance.

Lebanon's central bank responded that Lebanese Canadian Bank had complied with international anti-money-laundering standards. But within a month it announced the institution would be merged with the Lebanese subsidiary of France's Societe Generale.

As Western sanctions escalated against Damascus, a senior US Treasury official visited Beirut last November to stress "the need for authorities to protect the Lebanese financial sector from Syrian attempts to evade sanctions."

Diplomats briefed on the visit said Washington had not highlighted any single bank as of particular concern. But they also said it was unlikely that any bank could be sure depositors were not acting as a front for sanctioned individuals or companies.

They also said much of the money that left Syria for Lebanon since March might subsequently have been channeled to other countries.

"The increase in deposits [in Lebanon] has not been sizable compared to the extent of the Syrian deposit withdrawal," the senior banker said, adding that Syrian money might have ended up in Kuwait or Dubai.

Nonresident private-sector deposits at commercial banks in Lebanon climbed to \$21.3 billion last December from \$18.3b in March, according to central-bank data. The \$3b increase was almost twice as fast as the rise of \$1.6b over the previous nine months. Syria's foreign-exchange reserves are estimated to have shrunk by at least several billion dollars since last March as money has fled the country.

Davutoglu : Il est temps d'envoyer un message fort au peuple syrien

Faoc à la répression en Syrie de plus en plus meurtrière, la Turquie est sortie hier du relatif mutisme qui était le sien depuis quelques semaines.

Le ministre turc des Affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu a ainsi exposé la tenue d'une conférence internationale pour soutenir le peuple syrien, à Istanbul ou dans une autre ville de la région. Il a précisé qu'en cas d'échec du Conseil de sécurité à protéger les civils syriens, en particulier ceux de Homs, il interviendrait avec des forces combattant aux pays disposés à le faire de trouver un autre moyen de mettre fin à la répression contre les civils. « Il est temps d'envoyer un message fort au peuple syrien pour lui dire que nous sommes à ses côtés », a-t-il lancé juste avant de partir pour les États-Unis, estimant que la communauté internationale ne peut plus se contenter d'un rôle d'observateur. « Nous sommes prêts à les aider et à (envoyer) au régime syrien le message qu'il ne peut pas continuer ces méthodes d'oppression », a-t-il dit.

Interrogé sur la possibilité d'instaurer une zone tampon en Syrie ou sur l'ouverture d'un couloir humanitaire, M. Davutoglu a déclaré : « Nous sommes très inquiets. Malheureusement ce sont des centaines de personnes qui

sort tués chaque jour. Nous nous demandons ce qui va se passer la semaine prochaine, le mois prochain, et la Turquie est directement concernée », rappelle-t-il. « Il faut laisser la porte ouverte à ce que les 12 000 réfugiés syriens de leur sort », a-t-il insisté.

M. Lavrov a pour sa part indiqué que le sort de Bachar el-Assad devait être réglé par « les Syriens eux-mêmes » à l'issue de négociations entre le pouvoir et l'opposition. Il a également critiqué le rappel d'ambassadeurs arabes et occidentaux de Syrie, jugeant que cette mesure était « illogique ».

Dans la soirée, le président Dmitri Medvedev a appelé les partenaires de la Russie à « évaluer les mesures unilatérales précipitées » en vue de résoudre la crise, en particulier à l'ONU, lors d'un entretien téléphonique avec son homologue français, Nicolas Sarkozy. Ce dernier a demandé au chef de l'État russe son « plein soutien » au plan de la Ligue arabe, afin de convaincre M. Assad de quitter le pouvoir.

Poutine met en garde contre toute ingérence

Le Premier ministre Vladimir Poutine a de son côté martelé que la Russie n'accepterait aucune forme d'ingérence en Syrie. « Nous condamnons évidemment toute forme de violence

étrangère » dans les résultats à attendre de la visite de M. Lavrov, ajoutant que « la Russie doit effectuer un examen de conscience et réaliser ce qu'elle a fait » en opposant son veto. Il s'est de nouveau prononcé pour la mise sur pied d'une « alliance internationale la plus forte possible autour d'un groupe de contacts » incluant les factions de l'opposition en Syrie et à l'étranger du pays.

La Maison-Blanche a quant à elle écarté les appels de la Russie à un « dialogue » entre les forces en présence en Syrie et affirmé que M. Assad y avait renoncé en réprimant dans le sang la révolte contre son régime. « En ce qui concerne la visite de M. Lavrov, son but n'était pas clair. Ce qui est évident, c'est que la Russie n'a rien d'autre à gagner, en se rangeant au côté du régime Assad, que de s'aliéner les Syriens », a lancé le porte-parole de Barack Obama, Jay Carney.

Dans le même temps, le vice-président américain Joe Biden s'est entretenu au téléphone avec son homologue chinois Xi Jinping une semaine avant la visite de ce dernier à Washington. La Maison-Blanche n'a pas mentionné la Syrie dans son compte-rendu, mais a indiqué que M. Biden avait « insisté

estriné de son côté à Ottawa un des leaders de l'opposition russe. Reppérons que depuis la période soviétique, la Russie est un allié de la Syrie qui est le seul pays arabe à exclusivement acheter ses armes à Moscou.

Juppé et Cameron

De son côté, le chef de la diplomatie française Alain Juppé a souligné qu'il ne croyait « absolument pas » aux engagements pris sur la fin des violences par M. Assad après de M. Lavrov, les qualifiant de « manipulation ». Le ministre était interrogé sur les engagements pris mardi par M. Assad de mettre un terme aux violences. Interrogé sur ce qu'il souhaitait dire aux Russes, M. Juppé a déclaré : « Vous vous trompez complètement, vos arguments ne sont pas bons », ajoutant qu'il « s'est écrit noir sur blanc dans le projet de résolution contre lequel la Russie a mis son veto qu'il n'y aura pas d'opération militaire », rejetant comme un « prétexte totalement fallacieux » la référence au précédent libyen et à l'intervention militaire internationale après l'adoption d'une résolution de l'ONU.

Le Premier ministre britannique David Cameron a quant à lui déclaré avoir « une confiance

sur l'importance de bâtir une relation entre les États-Unis et la Chine qui réponde à des questions pratiques importantes pour les deux pays ».

Parallèlement, un porte-parole de la diplomatie chinoise a affirmé que les récits accablés sur les relations entre les nations britanniques selon lesquelles la Chine aurait « abandonné » le peuple syrien sont « irresponsables ». L'action de la Chine est juste et équilibrée, et toutes les tentatives pour instaurer des désaccords dans les relations sino-arabes seront vaines », a ainsi martelé Liu Weimin, porte-parole du ministère chinois des Affaires étrangères.

Signalons par ailleurs que les six monarchies arabes du Golfe ont reporté à dimanche au Caire leur réunion sur la crise syrienne, a-t-on appris de source officielle au lendemain de la décision de ces pays d'expulser les ambassadeurs de Syrie. À Doha, plus de 2 000 personnes ont manifesté pour dénoncer le régime de Bachar el-Assad et saluer l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL).

Entretiens syro-iraniens

Signalons finalement que le ministre syrien des Affaires étrangères Walid Moallem a reçu à Damas le vice-ministre iranien des Affaires étrangères

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

L'UE se prépare à une éventuelle évacuation de ses ressortissants

L'Union européenne est en train de se préparer, à titre de précaution, à l'éventuelle évacuation de ses ressortissants de Syrie. « Nous sommes face à un mur et il faut tenter de l'escalader », a résumé hier un de ces diplomates européens, redoutant que les violences contre la population civile syrienne ne perdurent. Le service diplomatique de l'UE a d'ailleurs dépêché au Liban et en Jordanie des équipes d'experts chargées de préparer le rapatriement dans ces pays des « quelques milliers » d'Européens résidant en Syrie, mais aussi de ressortissants de pays tiers, au cas où cela deviendrait nécessaire. Il s'agit d'un « scénario du pire ». En parallèle, les pays européens préparent un nouveau train de sanctions contre Damas, appelé à être approuvé à la fin

du mois. Parmi les idées sur la table, figure une suspension de tous les vols commerciaux avec la Syrie, option proposée par l'Allemagne. Mais « tous les États membres de l'Union européenne ne sont pas d'accord sur le sujet » car une telle interdiction pourrait justement entraver les efforts d'évacuation des étrangers de Syrie si la nécessité s'en fait sentir, souligne un des diplomates. Des discussions sur ce point vont se poursuivre entre experts à Bruxelles. Un accord se dessine déjà en revanche sur d'autres sanctions à l'étude : un gel des avoirs en Europe de la Banque centrale syrienne, ainsi qu'un embargo sur les exportations de phosphate de la Syrie, produit qui joue un rôle non négligeable dans l'économie du pays, selon ces sources.

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)



FM Davutoğlu (R) attended a meeting in Istanbul with PM Erdoğan (C) and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Salih al Muttak to discuss bilateral relations.

PHOTO © CIHAN

TURKEY SEEKS WAYS TO END KILLINGS IN SYRIA IF SECURITY COUNCIL FAILS TO ACT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We definitely want to have this meeting in our region showing concerns and the sensitivities and solidarity and regional ownership, maybe in Turkey, maybe in another country," Davutoğlu said in an interview shortly before he was due to leave for the United States for talks on Syria.

"It is not enough being an observer. It is time now to send a strong message to the Syrian people that we are with them," Davutoğlu said in the interview.

Officials from the Prime Ministry and the Foreign Ministry -- who declined to be named -- told Today's Zaman on Tuesday that Turkey does not want to let the continuing massacres in Syria be forgotten in the wake of the UN failure to adopt a resolution against Syria.

According to these officials, Turkey does not plan to take any steps to prepare for a military intervention in Syria. The initiative it wants to make is just in the preparation phase. Since countries such as France have made many proposals, Ankara wants to act with caution and hold talks about the format of its own initiative.

Turkey could host an international conference on Syria in the near future, and Turkey is ready to host such a conference, but it does not object to Arab states organizing such a conference.

As to which countries Turkey will cooperate with on the initiative, one diplomatic source said Turkey does not plan to cooperate with countries such as Russia, China and Iran, adding that the Arab League will certainly be included in the process.

Assad cannot use PKK terror as trump card against Turkey

In another interview with Turkey's NTV TV station, Davutoğlu said provoking terrorism and leveraging the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against Turkey is beyond the power of the Assad regime in Syria, which has severely strained its ties with Turkey after a violent crackdown on Syrian opposition forces.

He added that Turkey will not allow Syria to aggravate terrorism on Turkish soil. Referring to armed insurgent groups' recent seizure of the city of Zabadani, where there have been clashes with Assad's forces since January, he claimed that Damascus does not even have a monopoly on power in its own territories, let alone the ability to control cross-border attacks on Turkey.

Zabadani is a mountainous city near the Syrian capital of Damascus, where Syrian opposition forces, called the Free Syrian Army, have recently taken control. Insurgents heralded it as an unprecedented victory -- the first city where the government has been un-

able to take even partial control.

Davutoğlu avoided answering a question on whether Turkey will participate in an armed intervention in Syria, in the event that such an intervention happens. "We strongly hope that there will be no need for foreign intervention," he stated, asserting that an intervention would further the economic and social burdens of the Syrian people, in an already conflict-weary country.

Davutoğlu also reiterated the Turkish government's claims that the Assad regime lost all its credibility in the international arena and offers no hope that it will implement reforms, considering the atrocities it has conducted against its own people.

The violence of the Assad regime became even crueler with the Friday attacks in Homs, when 85 people were killed. Syrian forces have been bombarding Homs since Monday in a sustained assault on several districts in the city, which has become a center of armed opposition to the Assad regime.

"Assad has constantly promised to reform since the very start of clashes with opposition forces. But he is only trying to save time with these false promises in order to commit more atrocities," Davutoğlu stated. The foreign minister said he still anticipates Assad will finally realize Syria has become irreparably isolated under its authoritarian government and agree to resign.

Russia and China recently vetoed a UN resolution backing an Arab plan calling on President Assad to quit. Their vetoes blocked an attempt to end a nearly 11-month-long crackdown on protesters. The two countries' position has angered the United States, Europe and much of the Arab world, who fear the Syrian administration will take courage from this and continue its crackdown vis-à-vis support from Russia and China.

Mentioning an influx of Syrian immigrants into Turkey, which would greatly increase in the event of an outside intervention, Davutoğlu said, "Turkey's doors are open to those who flee from oppression."

Davutoğlu asserted that Turkey and other neighboring countries in the Middle East are the most negatively affected by the Syrian crisis and other conflicts in the region. Considering this, he claimed the Syrian crisis should be solved with direct initiatives from those countries.

Meanwhile the foreign minister arrived in the United States on Wednesday for a diplomatic visit to exchange views on bilateral and regional issues with US officials. Davutoğlu denied speculations that the talks will exclusively focus on the Syrian crisis and a possible foreign intervention in Syria. He will pay a seven-day visit to the US with an invitation from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, starting on Wednesday.

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

EU THREATENS NEW SANCTIONS ON SYRIA AS KILLINGS CONTINUE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Russia's approach does not call for Assad to step down, the opposition's chief demand, and Moscow is increasingly at odds with the Western efforts to end Assad's crackdown. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said outside forces should let Syrians settle their conflict "independently."

"We should not act like a bull in a china shop," Putin was quoted by the Itar Tass news agency as saying. "We have to give people a chance to make decisions about their destiny independently, to help, to give advice, to put limits somewhere so that the opposing sides would not have a chance to use arms, but not to interfere. Lavrov told reporters in Moscow that Assad has "delegated the responsibility of holding such a dialogue to Vice President [Farouk] al-Sharaa." He blamed both Assad's regime and opposition forces for instigating the violence that has killed thousands of people since March. "On both sides, there are people that aim at an armed confrontation, not a dialogue," Lavrov said. Military defectors are playing a bigger role in Syria's Arab-Spring inspired uprising, turning it into a more militarized conflict and hurtling the country ever more quickly toward a civil war.

Crackdown on dissent

The regime's crackdown on dissent has left it almost completely isolated internationally and facing growing sanctions. The US closed its embassy in Damascus on Monday and five European countries and six Arab Gulf nations have pulled their ambassadors out of Damascus over the past two days. Germany, whose envoy left Syria

this month, said he would not be replaced. Nevertheless, Assad was bolstered by Tuesday's visit from Lavrov and Russia's intelligence chief, Mikhail Fradkov. During the talks, the Russians pushed for a solution that would include reforms by the regime as well as the dialogue with the opposition.

Assad said Syria was determined to hold a national dialogue with the opposition and independent figures, and that his government was "ready to cooperate with any effort that boosts stability in Syria," according to state news agency SANA. The Syrian opposition rejects any talks with the regime and says they accept nothing less than Assad's departure.

In Brussels, a senior EU official said the bloc will soon impose harsher sanctions against Syria as it seeks to weaken Assad's regime. The official said the new measures may include bans on the import of Syrian phosphates, on commercial flights between Syria and Europe, and on financial transactions with the country's central bank. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in keeping with EU rules, said some measures would be adopted at the EU foreign ministers meeting on Feb. 27.

As Russia pressed its efforts to start a dialogue, Syrian troops bombed residential neighborhoods in the central city of Homs, the northern province of Idlib, southern region of Daraa and the mountain town of Zabadani, in what activists say is the regime's final push to retake areas controlled by the rebels. Activists said at least 50 people died in Wednesday's shelling of Homs, which has been under a relentless regime offensive for the past five days. Hundreds are believed to have been killed there since Saturday. **Beirut AP/Reuters**



UN rights chief says action on Syria urgent

The United Nations' top human rights official called on Wednesday for urgent international action to protect civilians in Syria, saying she was appalled by the Syrian government's military onslaught on the city of Homs. Nav Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, also implicitly criticized Russia and China for vetoing an Arab and Western move in the UN Security Council to get Syria's President Bashar al-Assad to quit. "I am appalled by the Syrian government's willful assault on the city of Homs, and its use of artillery and other heavy weaponry in what appear to be indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas in the city," Pillay said in a statement. Anti-Assad activists in Syria say that, after an overnight artillery bombardment, government forces are thrusting into rebel-held areas of Homs with tanks as troops fired rockets and mortars, leaving many dead. Pillay, a former South African high court judge said it was extremely urgent "for the international community to cut through the politics and take effective action to protect the civilian population." **Geneva Reuters**

Russia ties itself to Al Assad

Moscow's and Beijing's veto of UN resolution may lead to international action outside the body's supervision

By FRANCIS MATTHEW
Editor at Large

The situation in Syria is likely to attract some kind of international action outside the United Nations after Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution, even though it had been dramatically softened to try to meet their objections.

The resolution, which was put to vote last Saturday, called on President Bashar Al Assad to stop the violence and killing in Syria and to respond to calls trying to find a Syrian-led solution to the 11-month crisis. This was much watered down from an earlier version which called on Al Assad to step down from the presidency, and hand over power to his deputy, as a prelude to starting talks with the opposition about forming a transitional government.

The changes had met Russian objections by removing any reference to support for sanctions or an arms embargo, and also made clear that the resolution would not be used to authorise military intervention or regime change. That would have been vital since the Russians feel that they were deliberately fooled by Nato over the resolution on Libya, which on the face of it was to save civilian lives, but was then used as an excuse for full-scale intervention and support for regime change.

But all this work failed to meet Russian objections. The Russians want to remain loyal to their sole ally in the Arab world and to support the Al Assad regime. In addition, the Russian president and prime minister want to act tough in an election year, and such foreign drama adds to their profile at home, whatever misery it might cause in Syria.

But by doing this the Russians have boxed themselves into a very narrow range of options tied to the present Syrian establishment fighting to the last man as either civil war spreads, or the opposition gains in control. Obviously, the Russians are gambling on a third scenario in which the army retains control and outlasts the opposition, but that seems a very desperate gamble.

What next?

But now the resolution has failed, the question is what happens next. It is clear

that the regime will continue its fierce military suppression of the opposition, and many tens of and hundreds of Syrians will be killed on a weekly basis. This will outrage the regional and international community, and will lead to calls for intervention, and several countries have already spoken of this.

Legitimacy

The failure at the Security Council might suit those countries who want to take more determined action, since they can now point to the veto and say "we

tried, but now we have to move on". The ongoing massacre in Homs will only make this kind of thinking more urgent and give it increased legitimacy.

Turkey has floated the idea of humanitarian corridors, France and the UK have aired some thoughts, and the Arab League has offered a specific plan for Al Assad to step down in favour of his deputy while the country prepares for a transition to a new more inclusive government.

All these ideas need to be assembled in one place, so it is possible that

a 'Friends of Syria' committee will be formed, which could include both League members and other Arab states, as well as international players like the UK and France, along with others which might in the long term want to give aid, technical or economic support to a re-born Syria.

In such a group, the League could appoint a special envoy for Syria, and all the members would be able to co-ordinate their activities, even to the extent of keeping themselves aware of any emerging military option. Some states are probably already sending arms to Syrian opposition fighters, and others may be ready to offer practical support.

But support for the Syrian opposition forces is about as far as this kind of military action is likely to go. It is hard to see how an international force could meet domestic Syrian political objectives in this crisis, and despite growing fury at Al Assad's brutality, there is still a consensus that external military intervention will not be part of the answer.

Incentives

Most of the action will be around diplomatic moves and economic sanctions to increase the pressure on Damascus. But for these moves to succeed, the officers and senior officials of the Al Assad regime have to be offered some kind of incentive. They will have to want to take part in a transition to a more inclusive Syria, in which they will play a dramatically less significant role.

The officer corps in the army and security services, and the senior officials in government, are all from the same Alawite sect as Al Assad. In the present situation, they see themselves as embattled on all sides and they must feel that they are conducting a last stand in which they have little option other than to hang onto power as long as possible since their other option is disgrace, jail, or worse.

This is the political challenge that the opposition, and any of the 'Friends of Syria' will have to deal with when they look ahead to building a new Syria.



RAMACHANDRA BABU / Gulf News

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Can the Free Syrian Army succeed?

Rebel forces need brigade-sized defections, heavy weaponry and better coordination to defeat Al Assad's forces

By JOSEPH A. KECHICHIAN
Special to GulfNews

In the aftermath of the Russian and Chinese UN Security Council vetoes, which essentially called on Syria to adopt Arab League recommendations, Damascus and its handful of allies faced a truly existential moment: Will President Bashar Al Assad step down (or stand aside as Washington prefers that, it may be worth underlining, is not the same thing) in a 'peaceful' transition, especially in a Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov asks him to, or will this uprising transform itself into an all-out civil war?

Lavrov may prefer a diplomatic solution, but assuming that his mission fails, will we then see an escalation and, under the circumstances, can the Free Syrian Army swell its ranks with brigade-size defections?

Entertaining New York presentations and customary vetoes aside — as few honest commentators dared to compare nearly 100 US vetoes to buttress Israel and its shaky claims over the years — senior officials exchanged classic Cold War rhetoric from a bygone era.

For US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "what happened at the United Nations was a travesty," while her UN Ambassador Susan Rice used the word "dis-

by American and European leaders after the vote as "indecent and hysterical". Of course, these convoluted and rather mediocre diplomatic manoeuvres translated in an escalation of the fighting on the ground with an ever growing death toll. In fact, serious combats were under way not just in Homs but also in six of the country's 14 governorates.

Although loyal units in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) stood by the Baath regime, the SAA faced serious defections, estimated to hover between 4,000 and 7,000 by the pro-Israeli Washington Institute for Near East Policy to upwards of 40,000 by the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Desertions

Turkish diplomats at last weekend's 48th International Security Conference in Munich apparently confirmed the 40,000 figure, which would be significant if true, given that the SAA's strength stood at less than 270,000 men, only a third of whom were actual combat troops.

Even if Turkish and FSA claims were

protecting the latter from SAA units or Shabiba irregulars, Damascus may yet witness more significant desertions.

In fact, FSA forces lacked supplies, and relied on five sources to replenish themselves: 1) Arms from the regular Syrian Army itself, especially whatever can be carried away by defectors; 2) Weapons brought across the border from Turkey, which is hosting dozens of FSA officers who cross back and forth into Syria with relative ease; 3) Donations from Iraqi Sunni tribes in the Al Anbar Province to their kin; 4) Armaments from Iraqi Kurdistan to their Syrian brethren; and, 5) Hand-held guns in much smaller quantities through northern Lebanon.



DAHA A. SHAMS/SCOTT NORD

Despite the opposition to the fully equipped army, FSA challenges were non-negligible, including the ability to fight in a coordinated fashion, especially since Ankara imposed an iron-clad control over commanders in Turkey whose movements were carefully monitored.

Moreover, and until very recently, it

Russian veto highlighted the Al Assad regime's intrinsic value: the Tartus military port, major arms deals, and Cold War brinkmanship.

Lavrov explained that Moscow "never said that President [Al] Assad remaining in power [was] the solution to the crisis," although one wondered whether it looked upon Syria as a client state and wished to control it, which is what all major powers do whether clients have or not. Syria sorely needed natural resources or provide other useful services. Yet, and unlike Washington that earnestly invests in regime change to suit its own interests, Moscow pretends that regime change ought to be left to indigenous populations, without outside interference.

Still, and truth be told, Al Assad and the Baath party will only go when two conditions materialise on the ground: 1) The FSA can cajole a few brigade commanders to defect with several hundred tanks and, 2) An alternative western military strategy can be devised to create safe zones for civilian protesters along the Turkey-Syria border. Otherwise, everyone should hunker down for a long winter, and an even longer spring.

Dr Joseph A. Kechichian is a commentator and author of several

The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Threat of proxy war in Syria

Civil strife looks likely with Arabs, West on one side and Russia, Iran on the other

WASHINGTON — As the Obama administration weighs worst-case scenarios for Syria, one stands out: a civil war that develops into a proxy battle between Arabs and the West on one side, and Russia and Iran on the other.

US officials stress they do not want to play a military role in Syria, where President Bashar Al Assad's crackdown on protests has killed more than 5,000 people and raised fears of a protracted power struggle in a country at the heart of the Arab world.

But after US and Arab-led efforts to craft consensus in the UN Security Council on Syria's political transition were torpedoed by vetoes from Russia and China, some analysts say risks are growing that the international community will line up on opposite sides of a fratricidal war.

The volatile ingredients are already in place.

Resistance fighters known as the Free Syrian Army have pledged to liberate the country from Assad's rule. Activists call for armed support for rebels.

And Syrian security forces are ratcheting up the violence, vowing to fulfil their president's threat to strike with an "iron fist" against the government's opponents. "There is a risk of it could become a proxy conflict. It is already headed in that direction," said Andrew Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"I think you will see now different countries in the region betting on the Free Syrian Army. Already weapons have been coming in from Lebanon. You will now see more coming in from Jordan, from Turkey, from Iraq or from Russia. Everyone will start to operate in this environment."

US officials say their emphasis is on building support for Syria's beleaguered political opposition and possibly providing humanitarian relief for refugees as the fighting intensifies.

For their part, Russia and Iran say they are urging Damascus to make reforms. But they reject what they describe as a Western-engineered attempt to overthrow the government of one of their closest allies. Some in Washington worry the situation may eventually edge towards a Cold War-style proxy conflict.

"At the moment it is not something that is being discussed," one US official said on condition of anonymity. "That is not to say that at some point down the line it won't be." During the Cold War, Washington and Moscow fought proxy battles in Latin America, Africa, Afghanistan and elsewhere, arming allied governments or insurgents fighting against them.

US President Barack Obama,



Syrian President Bashar Al Assad shakes hands with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov after talks in Damascus, Syria. — AP

facing re-election in November, has steered away from deeper involvement in Syria, a complex and combustible political puzzle that is a potential threat to US allies including Israel, Turkey and Jordan. "It is very important for us to try to resolve this without recourse to outside military intervention. And I think that's possible," Obama told NBC this week, dismissing parallels with the international military effort that toppled Libya's Muammar Gaddafi last year.

But Damascus, facing its greatest crisis in four decades of the Assad family's dynastic rule, contends that it is already fighting an Islamic insurgency funded and directed by enemies in US-allied Gulf Arab states.

Turkey, which shares a long border with Syria, has expressed outrage at the violence and floated the idea of "humanitarian corridors" to stem the bloodshed.

Western powers including the United States and the European Union have imposed economic sanctions to pressure Assad and isolate his government. Obama has called on Assad to step down.

Russia, which sells Syria arms and maintains a military base on its

Mediterranean coast, has shown no sign of backing away from its Syrian alliance.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Damascus on Tuesday and emerged saying that Assad was committed to halting the violence and would soon roll out new political reforms, promises the Syrian leader has reneged on in the past.

Iran has also stood by Syria, which has long helped it support the militant anti-Israel Hezbollah faction in neighbouring Lebanon, and accused Washington of trying to destabilise the region.

"America's plans for Syria are evident and unfortunately some foreign and regional countries take part in America's plans," Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said late last month.

Washington's plan for Syria thus far appears limited. After Russia's and China's double veto in the UN Security Council, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Sunday suggested the United States would work with allies to tighten sanctions and support democratic change in Syria even without Security Council backing.

But many analysts say expand-

ing violence on the ground may eventually force Washington and its allies to consider additional steps - which would be fraught with political risk even if no foreign forces were directly involved.

"I think we should be helping them, and I think we should look at ways we can help them," Republican Senator John McCain said on Tuesday, suggesting that any new working group on Syria should consider all options including military assistance.

"I think everything should be on the table as to what would be the most effective in bringing this massacre to a halt."

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the United States did not believe arming the opposition was a solution.

"We don't think (sending) more arms into Syria is the answer," Nuland said. "The answer is to get to a national democratic dialogue for the violence to stop for the regime's tanks to come out of the cities, and then for monitors to be able to go back in."

Shadi Hamid, a Middle East expert at the Brookings Doha Center, said this might be wishful thinking. "I just don't see the Syrian

regime giving up here. I think they are going to fight this to the very last drop of blood, and that doesn't make me optimistic about a political solution," said Hamid, who argues that the international community should be more proactive about possible military intervention.

Not all experts are persuaded that a proxy conflict is the cards, pointing to the political risks for Obama and a US public weary of long conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

And US fears over a Syrian quagmire may find an echo in Moscow, where the immediate push to thwart US objectives at the United Nations may not translate into lasting support for Assad's government, according to Anthony Cordesman, a senior analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"There are Russian interests at stake, but not vital Russian interests," Cordesman said.

"Russia should certainly be trying to find a way to handle this issue which shows that Russia has the influence to be decisive. But they also want to see broad stability." — Reuters

The National (EAU / UAE)

Last-minute business for Syrians

Ambassador 'has not been told to leave'

Diplomatic missions from Damascus operate despite GCC announcement of expulsion

Ramona Ruiz, Haneen Dajani and Carol Huang

ABU DHABI // More than a hundred Syrians flocked to their country's embassy in the capital yesterday in a bid to get important paperwork completed before it is forced to close.

On Tuesday, GCC countries said they would recall their ambassadors from Damascus and expel Syrian envoys in response to the worsening violence there.

A UAE Government source said ambassadors were normally given 72 hours' notice when expelled.

And the prospect that the embassy could soon close led to more than 100 Syrian nationals visiting the consulate to get their paperwork done while they still had the chance, applying for military service deferral, new passports and to have documents attested.

"I was worried yesterday and wanted to check if the embassy was closed," said a Syrian-Palestinian, 28, who was born in the Emirates and works as a teller at a foreign-exchange house.

"There were more than 100 in the queue and everyone was very busy."

He was at the embassy for two hours to apply for the military service deferral that must be filled by Syrian men living and working overseas. After four years, he is required to pay a Dh18,300 "badal" fee to his government in lieu of military service.

About 160,000 Syrians live in the UAE. But the embassy had noticed

a drop in the numbers recently because no visas are being granted, a member of staff said.

A hotel employee who said he is originally from Al Hasaka in Syria, said he visited the embassy to renew his passport and saw no disruptions in the embassy's services.

"Everything was normal," he said. An office administrator, 31, from Nabak, said it was a quiet day at the embassy and the staff had been very accommodating.

"It only took me 20 minutes to renew my passport," he said. "I was very surprised."

Staff at the embassy said the ambassador, Dr Abdul Latif Al Dabagh, had yet to leave his post, as the embassy had not received an official letter from the UAE Government asking him to leave.

"I heard the news just like you and what was said on TV," a staff member said. "But we did not receive anything official."

Staff closed the embassy as normal at 3pm yesterday without receiving their marching orders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A security guard said that as far as he was aware, the embassy would open as usual at 8am today.

At the Syrian consulate in Dubai there were fears, even among those who wanted the ambassador to leave, that closure would mean months of inconvenience.

Many had hurried there in case the office shut. As in Abu Dhabi, there was a steady flow of people in and out of the side entrance in the morning, keen to get their pass-



The Syrian consulate in Dubai was open for business yesterday, despite the earlier announcement by GCC countries that foreign envoys would be expelled. Ali Haider / EPA

ports renewed, their new children registered and confirming their deferrals for military service.

"How would I go back to my country?" asked Firas Abdulkarim, 30, an account manager whose passport expires this month. "It would be wrong to close the consulate."



More than 100 Syrian nationals yesterday visited the consulate to get their paperwork done

Ahmed Marawi, 26, a sales manager, said he had welcomed the "good news" that Syrian ambassadors in the Gulf would have to leave.

Mr Marawi had rushed to the consulate so his friend could renew his passport before that happened.

"The head of the consulate, it's OK," he said.

"But the regular staff, they have to be here because too many people want to renew their passports, sign agreements, do too many things here."

Others were less mindful of such practicalities.

"It's not important," said Aber Amil, 38, there to register his newborn child. "They need to clear the entire building."

Some Syrians were holding their own diplomatic protest by refusing to buy products from Russia or Chi-

na, both of which vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution on Saturday that would have called on Bashar Al Assad, the president, to relinquish some powers.

Khalid, 45, said he knew people back home who were throwing away Chinese-made goods, even costly mobile phones.

"Even if we die we will not buy their products," Khalid said. "Everyone with the government must close."

But Anas Shiahneh 22, a glasses salesman, had mixed feelings about removal of the regime or its diplomats, for fear of what might follow.

"It's bad for Syria," Mr Shiahneh said.

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The National (EAU / UAE)

Syria veto is a sign that UNSC reforms overdue

Last December, in an interview with ABC's Barbara Walters, Bashar Al Assad suggested that politics at the United Nations was "a game" and the Security Council was irrelevant. In the end, this irrelevance worked in his favour.

Indeed, it was the inherent bureaucratic faults of the Security Council's current makeup that allowed the blood-stained leader to continue his assault on Syrian citizens. Russia and China, two veto-wielding permanent members of the council, stepped to his defence on Saturday, and once again, the world's most important body for peace and security failed in its very mission.

Unchanged since its inception in 1945, the permanent makeup of the security council today bears no relation to the world order as it stands, but instead is a model of Cold War-era hierarchy. India, Japan, Brazil and Germany, among others, have over the last few years pushed hard for an expanded council, offering their own ideas on how to re-balance power. US President Barack Obama has paid lip-service to expansion. Even Russia has lobbied for reform – as recently as last week – when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told a group of lawyers in Moscow council membership should expand to "comply with today's realities".

What type of expansion is a hotly debated question. Created from the ashes of the Second World War, five of the leading powers at the time – Russia, the US, the UK, China and France – were given permanent membership because of their ability to enforce the will of the world body. But today, there are more global economic and military powers than those known as the P5.

Despite the clear need for an overhaul, status quo states continue to block reform efforts. At stake is their veto, a privilege members have used to pursue their own interests far too often. This week's vote on Syria is one example, but there may be no nation more guilty of this than the

United States, which has used its veto to defend Israel more than three dozen times.

Security Council reform is a perennial political chestnut, and action will be slow in coming. But every time the council's members come up short the case for reform becomes stronger.

Last week, the United Nations Security Council failed, some would say even betrayed, the Syrian people. As long as the Security Council remains a closed shop with antiquated voting practices, it will not be the last time justice loses out to politics.



Even Russia has lobbied for council reform, as recently as last week,

Syria raises specter of proxy conflict for US and Russia

WASHINGTON— As the Obama administration weighs worst-case scenarios for Syria, one stands out: a civil war that develops into a proxy battle between Arabs and the West on one side, and Russia and Iran on the other.

US officials stress they do not want to play a military role in Syria, where President Bashar Al-Assad's crackdown on protests has killed more than 5,000 people and raised fears of a protracted power struggle in a country at the heart of the Arab world.

But after US and Arab-led efforts to craft consensus in the UN Security Council on Syria's political transition were torpedoed by vetoes from Russia and China, some analysts say risks are growing that the international community will line up on opposite sides of a fratricidal war.

The volatile ingredients are already in place.

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"There is a risk of it could be-

come a proxy conflict. It is already headed in that direction," said Andrew Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"I think you will see now different countries in the region betting on the Free Syrian Army. Already weapons have been coming in from Lebanon. You will now see more coming in from Jordan, from Turkey, from Iraq or from Russia. Everyone will start to operate in this environment."

US officials say their emphasis is on building support for Syria's beleaguered political opposition and possibly providing humanitarian relief for refugees as the fighting intensifies.

For their part, Russia and Iran say they are urging Damascus to make reforms. But they reject what they describe as a Western-engineered attempt to overthrow the government of one of their closest allies.

Some in Washington worry the situation may eventually edge toward a Cold War-style proxy conflict.

"At the moment it is not something that is being discussed," one U.S. official said on condition of anonymity. "That is not to say that at some point down the line it won't be." — Reuters

Tehran Times (Iran)

Syria death toll report not accurate: Iranian deputy FM

TEHRAN TIMES
Political Desk TEHRAN — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian arrived in the Syrian capital of Damascus on Tuesday.

He is scheduled to hold talks with Syrian officials during his two-day trip.

In an interview with the Persian service of Khabaronline news website on Tuesday, Amir-Abdollahian said that the death toll in Syria has not been reported accurately.

“A number of people have been

killed in clashes. But when we examine these reports, we see that the number of forces loyal to the government or police forces who have been killed are much more than civil forces. However, we have warned about any killing in Syria and regard it as a red line. And (we) believe that, not only in Syria, but in all regional countries, opportunities should be used and affairs should be handled by the people and governments in such a way that the people suffer the least,” he stated.

The Hindu (Inde / India)

Syrian Vice-President will lead talks: Russia

Pact must be acceptable to all citizens: Lavrov

Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has appointed his Vice-President to negotiate a political settlement with the opposition, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said.

The Syrian leader "confirmed that he had delegated to Vice-President Farouk al-Sharaa the authority of holding talks with all opposition groups and set up a national dialogue that would be inclusive and involve all Syrian political forces," Mr. Lavrov told reporters on Wednesday upon his return from Damascus.

Mr. Lavrov was responding to a question whether he had asked Mr. Assad to step down. When the reporter, unhappy with the answer, repeated his question, the Russian Foreign Minister angrily retorted: "I have answered your question, but you probably were not listening to what I said: Any outcome of national

- **All opposition groups will be on board**

- **Putin warns foreign powers against interference**

dialogue must be the result of agreement between the Syrians themselves and must be acceptable to all Syrians."

Mr. Lavrov rejected Western criticism that the U.N. Security Council missed a chance to stop bloodshed in Syria when Russia vetoed the Arab-European resolution last week and accused the West of trying to help armed opposition to take over Syrian cities.

"We have missed an opportunity to allow armed units which are fighting against government forces to take control of cities and villages... But if the authors of the resolution had this goal in mind,

then they should have directly said that they wanted the armed units to take control of cities in Syria," he said, referring to the resolution's demand that only government forces must be pulled out of the cities.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned foreign powers against "behaving like a bull in a China shop" in the Syrian crisis. "We of course condemn all violence regardless of its source, but one cannot act like an elephant in a china shop," Mr. Putin told Russian religious leaders on Wednesday.

"We need to allow people to decide their own fate," he said.

Mr. Putin said "terrible crimes are being committed" in Sirte and other pro-Qadhafi cities in Libya.

"These are appalling consequences of outside interference, first of all, armed interference," he said.

China cannot stay out of Syrian chaos

The West has sped up efforts against Syria after the double veto by China and Russia over the UN Security Council resolution. Russia has sent its envoy to the country. China cannot sit idly by as the situation moves away from its intentions.

Even it is not able to dictate the direction of the Syrian situation, China can at least cast its influence in three aspects.

It can facilitate communication between the Assad government and the opposition. The vetoes by China and Russia have deprived the West of a convenient excuse to launch direct military action, meaning the Syrian opposition will not receive overall support as given to the NTC in Benghazi during the Libyan civil war.

The tenacity of the Assad regime, including its military strength, differs from Gaddafi's, making it harder for the opposition to seize power. These lay out the possibility of channeling dialogue between the Assad regime and the opposition. China and Russia should help the country reform and avoid revolution. It is worth a try.

Second, China should persuade the Arab League, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt to mitigate their attitude toward the Assad government. Within the Arab League, the consensus toward Syria is weak. Plus, the antipathy to-

ward Assad is offset by the bloc being on alert to any external interference in an Arab country.

The Western alliance also has disagreements. Over the Libyan issue for example, Germany did not fully agree with the UK and France. China can stress diplomacy with Germany and France on the Syrian situation, urging them to change their stance.

Though China has a less direct stake in Syria than Russia, the collapse of Syria will result in the West further controlling the Middle East, and Iran taking direct strategic pressure from the

West. If war broke out in Iran, China would have to rely more on Russia for energy, bringing new uncertainty to the Sino-Russian strategic partnership.

China needs to put in more efforts to delay the Western advance in the Middle East. For now, it is wise to divert more efforts to Syria and Iran. China can leverage its good relationship with Arab League countries, and its large capital and market to deepen its influence in the region.

The political landscape in the Middle East is becoming unfavorable to China. Doing nothing is not an option. The Chinese Embassy in Libya has been hit by stones from protesters but how bad can the situation get? Active diplomacy may have its consequences, but these would be affordable.

The political landscape in the Middle East is becoming unfavorable to China. Doing nothing is not an option.