

Admite Washington que Bachar al-Assad no será derrocado

REVISTA DE PRENSA SOBRE SIRIA #53

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Después de oír el aterrador informe de la Alta Comisaria para los Derechos Humanos, la Asamblea General de la ONU aprobó una resolución de condena contra la represión en Siria (137 votos a favor, 12 en contra y 17 abstenciones).

Después de recuperar Homs y Hama, el ejército nacional sirio retoma el control de Deraa. Los sobrevivientes de la Legión Wahhabita se reagrupan en el norte del país. No es posible saber, por el momento, si huirán hacia Turquía o si piensan librar una última batalla en Idlib.

El director de la Inteligencia Nacional estadounidense, James Clapper, atribuyó a Al-Qaeda los atentados perpetrados en Damasco y Alepo. Por su parte, el director de la Defense Intelligence Agency (la agencia de inteligencia del Departamento de Defensa), Ronald Burgess, declaró que el régimen de al-Assad no caerá porque es coherente y ha logrado retomar el control de las grandes ciudades que había perdido anteriormente, mientras que la oposición está desunida y carece de estrategia.

El viceministro chino de Relaciones Exteriores, Zhai Jun, tiene intenciones de proseguir sus gestiones como mediador. Después de invitar a los opositores a viajar a Pekín, llegó a Damasco para reunirse con el presidente al-Assad.

- El diario francés *Le Monde* publica una tribuna de los periodistas suizos Patrick Vallélian y Sid Ahmed Hammouche, quienes acompañaban al francés Gilles Jacquier cuando este resultó muerto. Ambos autores reactivan la teoría del complot, ya abandonada por los funcionarios franceses. Se trata, esencialmente, de lanzar una nueva provocación.

La Red Voltaire aparece mencionada en esa misma tribuna. Los autores atribuyen al profesor Boris Dolgov, académico ruso especializado en temas sirios a quien la Red Voltaire recibió en Damasco y cuyos trabajos –en ruso y en inglés– se publicaron en Voltairenet.org, una serie de afirmaciones que el profesor nunca hizo. Lo más interesante es que los autores fingen no conocer al profesor Dolgov, a pesar de que se reunieron con él en dos ocasiones durante su estancia en Damasco, donde incluso conversaron durante largo rato con este académico ruso.

- En el *Irish Times*, Michael Jansen prosigue su descripción del impacto del conflicto en la población siria. Hoy demuestra que son los pobres quienes más sufren por causa de las «sanciones» occidentales, que supuestamente deberían ayudarlos.

- Anne-Marie Slaughter, ex directora de planificación política del Departamento de Estado estadounidense, publica una tribuna en el diario *The Australian*. En ella

observa que Turquía ha ganado en influencia, desde el incidente de Davos y el de la Flotilla de la Libertad, y afirma que ese país debe pasar ahora de la palabra a la acción: Ankara debe apoyar a los rebeldes e incluso atacar al régimen de Damasco con ayuda de la OTAN.

La foto del día



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Un joven opositor ante un oleoducto en llamas. El joven es Khaled Abu Salah, un opositor residente en Homs que se ha dado a conocer por sus videos. La semana pasada, nos lo presentaban como herido e incluso agonizante. Según las autoridades sirias, el oleoducto fue sabotado por los «terroristas», mientras que la oficina londinense de la Hermandad Musulmana afirma que fue bombardeado por el «régimen».

La primera reacción de cualquiera es preguntarse por qué razón las autoridades sirias destruirían su propio oleoducto, acción que sólo puede agravar los efectos del embargo occidental contra Siria.

La segunda reacción normal sería tratar de entender por qué un opositor que atribuye al gobierno la responsabilidad de este sabotaje posa tan orgullosamente ante el incendio así provocado.

Las caricaturas del día



© The Saudi Gazette

The Saudi Gazette publica una caricatura de clásica propaganda para demonizar a Bachar al-Assad.



© Mana Neyestani, Le Monde

El diario francés *Le Monde* representa a Bashar al-Assad con un rostro de ultratumba y preparándose una bebida con la sangre de los condenados, a pesar de que en estos 10 meses de agitación armada el gobierno sirio no ha ahorcado a ningún opositor.

Es interesante observar que la representación de dirigentes bajo los rasgos de un vampiro que se alimenta con la sangre de sus víctimas se considera como un clásico del antisemitismo. En este caso, *Le Monde* no aplica ese cliché a un líder judío sino a un dirigente árabe y por ende también miembro de un pueblo semita.

Le pouvoir syrien est menacé d'effritement

Incapable jusqu'à présent d'écraser le soulèvement, le régime de Bachar Al-Assad mise sur ses soutiens extérieurs

La scène est rapportée par un bon connaissance de la Syrie, qui s'y rend encore régulièrement. Le 7 février, afin d'accueillir dignement à Damas Sergueï Lavrov, le chef de la diplomatie russe, les fonctionnaires avaient été « invités » à manifester pour souhaiter la bienvenue au représentant d'un pays qui, par son veto au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, trois jours plus tôt, avait sauvé la mise au régime du président Bachar Al-Assad.

Mais comme les fonctionnaires syriens semblent de moins en moins enclins à se déplacer pour participer aux manifestations pro-régime, les services chargés de la propagande avaient été obligés de faire le tour des bureaux pour être sûrs de pouvoir remplir des bus à destination de l'aéroport.

C'est une anecdote et un indice de plus de l'effritement d'un régime qui multiplie les annonces abusives. Ainsi la tenue, le 26 février, d'un référendum sur une nouvelle Constitution consacrant le pluralisme, la fin de la suprématie du parti Baas et autorisant que deux mandats successifs au président de la République - M. Assad a déjà été élu à deux reprises par référendum depuis 2000. Dans le même temps, une répression meurtrière se poursuit dans le pays.

Malgré les apparences, le bombardement quotidien des quartiers insurgés de Homs et, depuis mercredi, de Hama, ne se traduit par aucun gain de territoire, comme l'expliquait déjà au *Monde*, le 13 février, le photojournaliste Mani, qui a séjourné près d'un mois à Homs, aux côtés des insurgés. Ils s'apparentent plus à des opérations puritaines.

Selon un expert occidental, « l'armée syrienne est actuellement au maximum de sa capacité ». Elle peut concentrer ses efforts sur une zone, mais ne peut pas traiter plusieurs points chauds à la fois. Elle ne peut entrer dans un village ou un quartier, même à Damas, mais n'arrive pas à le tenir de manière prolongée face au harcèlement des



Des Syriens pro-Assad manifestent devant l'ambassade de Russie à Damas pour remercier Moscou de son soutien, mercredi 15 février. M. HEDMAN/AP

que la communauté internationale le reste paralysée et l'opposition extérieure faible et divisée. Le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principal porte-parole d'opposition, a en effet reconquis sa tête, mercredi à Doha, au Qatar. L'universitaire Burhan Ghalioun pour trois mois - faute de s'entendre sur un autre candidat. Quant à l'ASL, du colonel Riad Al-Asaad, réfugié en Turquie, elle est concurrencée par une structure militaire dissidente dirigée par le général Moustapha Al-Qheikh, en Turquie lui aussi.

Bachar Al-Assad semble comploter sur une répétition de l'épisode de 2005-2007. Mis au ban de la communauté internationale

« Damas bascule dans la contestation, même si les manifestations sont sporadiques et de très courte durée »

Un expert occidental

après l'assassinat de l'ancien premier ministre libanais Rafic Hariri à Beyrouth, le 14 février 2005 puis forcé de s'enfuir du Liban, le président syrien avait jugé une contestation à l'origine d'un projet de réforme. L'échec de la guerre menée par Israël contre le Hezbollah au Liban, en 2006, puis le départ du pouvoir de Jacques Chirac en 2007 et de George Bush en 2008 - deux adversaires renommés par des siècles d'histoires - à s'engager de nouveau avec Damas - avaient contribué à le remettre en selle.

Rivé à son alliance avec l'Iran, M. Assad espère beaucoup de la fin de la présidence qatarienne de la Ligue arabe, qui sera dirigée, à partir d'avril, par l'Irak, nettement plus favorable à Damas. Ce calcul revient à croire que le salut du régime viendra de l'extérieur, alors qu'il est confronté à un mouvement de contestation intérieur sans précédent dans l'histoire de la Syrie moderne. ■

CHRISTOPHE A. YAD ET GILLES PARIS

de commutation. Sa force est d'être complètement en osmose avec une partie importante de la société, qui l'héberge, la nourrit, la protège, faisant de l'armée régulière une quasi-force d'occupation. Le bouclage et le rattrassage du quartier de Barzeh, dans la banlieue de Damas, mercredi 15 février au matin, en sont une illustration.

L'armement de l'ASL est certes largement insuffisant face à la puissance de feu de l'armée régulière, mais les saisies d'armes dans les casernes, la contrebande depuis l'étranger et la revente par des officiers de l'armée régulière sont en pleine expansion. Surtout, les pays du Golfe, Qatar et Arabie saoudite en tête, semblent désorientés à l'ambassade pour eux

ment de s'acheter des armes au profit de l'ASL. Enfin, d'après des sources gouvernementales irakiennes, des djihadistes venus d'Irak se portent au secours de leurs frères sunnites. Ceux-ci ont même le régime syrien avait armés et hébergés pour faire pièce à l'occupation américaine de l'Irak.

Le régime s'est longtemps prévalu du calme d'Alep et de Damas, les principales villes du pays, dont les agglomérations regroupent un tiers de la population syrienne, pour expliquer que la majorité du pays lui restait acquise. « Mais de fait, Damas bascule également dans la contestation, même si les manifestations sont sporadiques et de très courte durée », assure l'ex-

pert. Quant à la fameuse bourgeoisie

combattants insurgés. Les hommes sont usés, fatigués. Les officiers ne comprennent pas où va le régime. Les militaires n'ont pas de politique pour ne pas avoir à annoncer de mauvaises nouvelles et les politiques les croient pour éviter de se poser des questions.

En face, l'armée syrienne libre (ASL), qui est plus un label qu'une véritable force organisée, a le vert en poche. Au fil des mois, cette guérilla, formée de déserteurs mais aussi de beaucoup de civils en armes, est passée d'actions de défense des manifestants visés par les tireurs embusqués et les chabha (militiens civils protégés) à des embuscades et, depuis peu, au contrôle territorial de quartiers entiers, de villages et de axes

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Dans un petit centre de santé clandestin du quartier de Karam al-Zaitoun, à Homs, le 26 janvier. Faute de pouvoir être correctement soigné, cet homme, atteint par une balle de sniper, mourra dans l'heure qui suit.

MANI PHOTO / LE MONDE

Entrées de façon clandestine en Syrie en janvier, l'écrivain Jonathan Littell et le photographe Mani se sont rendus pour « Le Monde » à Homs, cœur du soulèvement contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad.

Médecin, victime, bourreau

Le régime est sans pitié envers toute personne apportant une aide médicale aux blessés. A l'hôpital militaire, les soignants sont parfois des tortionnaires

TEXTE : JONATHAN LITTELL
PHOTO : MANI

Dans la Syrie en révolte de Bachar Al-Assad, il n'est pas seulement interdit de parler, de manifester, de contester - il est aussi interdit de soigner, et de se faire soigner. Depuis le début des événements, le régime mène une guerre sans pitié contre toute personne ou structure susceptibles d'apporter des soins aux victimes de la répression (*Le Monde* date 9 février). « C est très dangereux d'être médecin ou pharmacien », nous dira un jour un pharmacien de Baba Amro.

Le personnel médical est emprisonné, comme cet infirmier d'Al-Qusayr, arrêté le lendemain du jour où il nous a fait visiter son centre clandestin de première urgence, aux tapis recouverts de bâches en plastique pour protéger du sang, ou bien tué, comme Abdur Rahim Amir, l'unique médecin du même centre, froidement abattu en novembre 2011 par la sécurité militaire alors qu'il tentait de porter secours à des civils blessés lors d'une offensive de l'armée régulière à Rastan. Ou encore torturé. A Baba Amro, un infirmier de l'hôpital national d'Homs, incarcéré en septembre, me décrit en les mimant les sévices auxquels il a été soumis : battu à coups de bâton, les yeux bandés, fouetté électrocuté, enfin suspendu au mur par un poignet, sur la pointe des pieds, durant quatre ou cinq heures, une pratique courante qui porte un nom, *ash-shabbah*, « l'ai eu droit à un traitement de faveur, insiste-t-il. On ne m'a pas brisé les os ». Parfois, les forces du régime se contentent de les insulter. Une infirmière du Croissant-Rouge se trouvait dans une ambulance, bloquée à un barrage : « Nous, on leur tire dessus, et vous vous les sautez ! », entourageait les soldats.

Les deux hôpitaux de la ville, le civil (appelé « national ») et le militaire, sont sous la coupe réglée des forces de sécurité, et leurs caves et certaines de leurs cham-

bres ont été transformées en salles de torture. J'y reviendrai, témoignages à l'appui. Les cliniques privées, seul recours des blessés de l'insurrection, sont soumises à un assaut permanent. Dans l'une d'elles, au cœur de la vieille ville, deux infirmières me montrent les impacts de balles dans les fenêtres, les murs et les lits, tirées depuis la citadelle toute proche. A part elles, la clinique est vide. « Nous n'acceptons que les urgences, et ne gardons personne plus de quelques heures. Les forces de sécurité entrent régulièrement et arrêtent tous ceux qu'ils trouvent. Les médecins ont été contraints de signer une promesse de ne plus soigner de manifestants ».

Pendant qu'elles parlent, une balle claque dans une salle à côté. Tout le monde rit. « Depuis que l'ASL [Armée syrienne libre] a une présence dans le quartier, continue l'une des deux, on peut amener des blessés ici ». L'armée rebelle convoie aussi des médecins pour les opérations, quand c'est possible. Cinq jours plus tôt, la clinique a reçu un homme avec le ventre ouvert : un premier chirurgien a réussi à l'opérer, mais il fallait un spécialiste pour compléter l'intervention, or, le quartier était bouclé, impossible de le faire venir, impossible aussi de transférer le patient dans un autre hôpital. « Finalement, il est mort », conclut l'infirmière.

« J'ai eu droit à un traitement de faveur. On ne m'a pas brisé les os » un infirmier de l'hôpital national d'Homs

Abu Hamzeh, un chirurgien de haut niveau, tente de soigner les blessés qui arrivent quotidiennement dans un point de première urgence du quartier d'Al-Bayarda. Il est tellement désespéré par le manque de moyens - son centre ne dispose ni d'anesthésiques, ni de drains, ni d'appareil de radiographie, il ne peut opérer

personne, tout juste poser des pansements et des perfusions - qu'il veut abandonner la médecine pour prendre les armes. « Je ne sers à rien, ici, grince-t-il amèrement devant un homme à l'abdomen perforé par une balle de sniper, absolument à rien ».

Au début des événements, Abu Hamzeh travaillait à l'hôpital militaire d'Homs, où il a été témoin des tortures infligées aux manifestants blessés, parfois même par des infirmiers ou des médecins, dont il a soigneusement noté les noms. Lorsque le médecin-chef de l'hôpital, un alaouite, a tenté d'interdire ces pratiques, elles se sont juste faites plus discrètes. « Un jour, j'ai soigné un homme en urgence. Le lendemain, je l'ai revu en radiologie, avec un traumatisme crânien qu'il n'avait pas la veille. C'est comme ça que j'ai découvert qu'il était battu la nuit. Il en est mort deux jours plus tard, alors que ses blessures initiales n'étaient pas mortelles ».

Horriété. Abu Hamzeh a réussi à se procurer une caméra-stylo à Beyrouth, et a secrètement réalisé quatre petits films dans une salle de soins postopératoires, avec la complicité d'une infirmière. Il les commente pour moi. Sur ces images, souvent voilées quand sa blouse cache le stylo placé dans la poche de sa veste, on distingue cinq patients, nus ou presque sous leurs draps, les yeux bandés, une cheville enchaînée à leurs lits. La main du médecin découvre les corps : sur les torses de deux d'entre eux, de grandes marques rouges toutes fraîches, des coups de châtie. Sur un meuble, posés en évidence, les instruments de torture : deux foudres souples, des lanières de caoutchouc découpées dans des pneus puis renforcées avec de la bande adhésive, et un câble électrique avec une prise secteur à un bout et un clip à l'autre, pour le fixer aux doigts, aux pieds ou au pénis. Un des blessés gémit sans discontinuer : « On leur avait bloqué les cathéters », s'indigne Abu Hamzeh. Quand je suis entré, ils suppliaient qu'on leur donne à boire. J'ai

ouvert les cathéters et changé les sacs d'urine qui étaient pleins, mais deux des patients ont fini dans le coma à cause de lésions aux reins. Quand j'ai changé les pansements, j'ai remarqué de la gangrène sur un des patients, je l'ai signalé au département orthopédique, mais n'ai pas pu faire le suivi. Trois jours plus tard, j'ai entendu qu'on lui avait coupé la jambe au-dessus du genou ».

Abu Hamzeh, qui a récemment démissionné pour rejoindre l'opposition, a rapidement été mis à l'écart. Mais les pratiques qu'il décrit n'ont fait que s'intensifier avec la montée de la contestation. A Baba Amro, on nous présente, un blessé amputé d'une jambe, relâché de l'hôpital militaire une semaine auparavant. Fin décembre, un obus était tombé dans sa rue, tuant cinq de ses voisins et parents. Dans la vidéo qu'on nous montre, on voit R., la jambe à demi arrachée retenue par une écharpe, chargé en catastrophe dans un véhicule. Le premier hôpital privé où on l'a amené, débordé ce jour-là, a tenté de le transférer dans un autre, avec son neveu de 28 ans dont le bras gauche ne tenait plus que par quelques lambeaux de chair. Mais l'ambulance qui les transportait a été interceptée à un barrage des forces de sécurité, où les deux blessés ont été arrêtés, placés dans un blindé et envoyés à l'hôpital militaire. Là, privés de soins, menottés à leurs lits avec les yeux bandés, ils ont été torturés durant huit heures. « On me frappait avec des plâtres à nu sur la nuque, sur la tête et le corps. On a attaché des cordes à ma jambe blessée et on la traitait dans tous les sens. Il y a beaucoup d'autres choses qu'ils m'ont faites, mais je ne m'en souviens pas ».

Les hommes qui le torturaient ne cherchaient même pas des informations, ils se contentaient d'insulter leurs victimes : « Ah, tu veux la liberté, la voix, ta liberté ! » son neveu est mort sous les coups, enfin, R. a été transféré au bloc opératoire pour subir une intervention chirurgicale. Après, il a été emprisonné, sans suivi postopéra-

toire : sa jambe s'est infectée et, six jours plus tard, a été amputée d'office par un médecin militaire. On me montre une photo de lui à sa sortie : la peau jaune, les traits tirés, cadavérique, mais doucement heureux d'être vivant. « Ils m'ont tué, là-bas, achève-t-il avec des yeux brillants, j'aurais dû y rester ».

Ces pratiques ne représentent pas des cas isolés, des initiatives individuelles menées par sadisme ou excès de zèle, hors de tout contrôle. Au contraire, elles sont codifiées et font l'objet d'un règlement antérieur à la révolte actuelle, comme en témoigne Abu Salim, un médecin militaire qui a servi deux ans dans les *mokhabarat*, les services de sécurité de l'armée, avant de rejoindre le camp de la révolution pour diriger une clinique de fortune dans un quartier d'Homs.

« Quelle est la mission d'un médecin au sein des *mokhabarat* ? », commence-t-il calmement. Je vais vous l'expliquer. Premièrement : maintenir en vie les personnes soumises à la torture pour qu'elles puissent être interrogées le plus longtemps possible. Deuxièmement : dans le cas où la personne interrogée perd conscience, lui apporter les premiers soins pour que l'interrogatoire puisse continuer. Troisièmement : superviser l'utilisation des produits psychotropes durant l'interrogatoire. Nous utilisons la chlorpromazine (un anti-psychotique prescrit, d'habitude, pour soigner les schizophrènes), le Valium, et l'alcool à 90°, par exemple, en en versant un litre dans le nez, ou bien en injection sous-cutanée. Quatrièmement : si la personne torturée a dépassé son seuil de résistance et se trouve en danger de mort, le médecin peut demander son hospitalisation. Ce n'est pas lui qui prend la décision : il écrit un rapport, et le responsable de l'interrogatoire décide d'accorder le transfert. Avant la révolution, presque tout le monde et tout transfère, maintenant, ce sont seulement les détenus importants. Les autres, on les laisse mourir. »

Prochain article : Punition collective

Le Monde (France)

Syrie : qui a tué Gilles Jacquier ? Ceux qui l'accompagnaient témoignent

Patrick Vallélian

Grand reporter, « L'Hebdo », Lausanne (Suisse)

Sid Ahmed Hammouche

Grand reporter, « La Liberté », Fribourg (Suisse)

Qui a tiré les munitions qui ont fauché Gilles Jacquier, grand reporter de France 2, le 11 janvier à Homs ? Qui sont les civils du quartier de New Akrama qui l'ont poussé – et nous avec lui – vers le danger ? Le régime du président Bachar Al-Assad prétend qu'il s'agit d'une bavure de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). Nous avons plutôt, pour notre part, l'impression d'être tombés dans un piège.

L'enquête, confiée au juge d'instruction Quentin Dandoy, va devoir répondre à une longue série de questions, des questions que nous nous posons aussi, nous qui étions ce mercredi funeste aux côtés de Gilles Jacquier, de son épouse, la photographe Caroline Poiron, ainsi que de Christophe Kenck, cameraman de France 2.

1. Pourquoi notre escorte de sécurité a-t-elle disparu ? L'attitude de la vingtaine d'hommes armés qui nous escortait, en treillis militaires et en civil, est une énigme. La plupart nous abandonnent à la première explosion, à 15 h 20. Seuls deux seront à nos côtés lorsque nous nous faisons souffler par la seconde, à 15 h 23. Ils disparaîtront lors de la troisième (15 h 25) et de la dernière (15 h 26). Leur nonchalance et leurs rires moqueurs sont étranges. Durant l'attaque, ils ne ripostent pas et ne se mettent pas à l'abri. A aucun moment ils ne nous incitent à nous cacher. Ils nous poussent plutôt vers les lieux des impacts en nous affirmant qu'il s'agit de « bombes sonores ». Après la quatrième explosion, ils quittent les lieux, sans se presser, et nous prient de nous rendre au dispensaire tout proche pour filmer les « victimes des bombes de la liberté ». La circulation, bloquée de 15 h 20 à 15 h 26, reprend alors. Comme si de rien n'était. Après la mort de Gilles, nous ne reverrons plus ces hommes.

2. Un quartier dangereux ? En rentrant en France, vendredi 13 janvier, nous apprenons que Mère Agnès, la religieuse chrétienne qui nous a facilité l'entrée en Syrie et qui ne cache pas sa sympathie pour le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, nous aurait avertis qu'à partir de 15 heures, tous les jours, les insurgés – des « terroristes », pour elle – bombardent New Akrama. Elle prétend également nous avoir conseillé de nous munir de gilets pare-balles et de casques. Elle n'a jamais rien dit de tel. Surtout, nous n'avons constaté aucune destruction dans ce quartier. Quand nous arrivons à proximité du parc d'attractions, vers 15 h 10, nous y voyons des enfants qui jouent, des familles qui se promènent. De nombreux commerces sont ouverts. Cela ne ressemble pas à un quartier visé tous les jours.

3. Qui sont les pro-Bachar qui participent à la manifestation qu'on nous invite à couvrir ? Des habitants du quartier, mais surtout des agents de sécurité en civil, des *chabiha*. Après la première explosion, ils accourent vers notre véhicule, ouvrent les portes et nous poussent vers le lieu d'où s'échappe un nuage de fumée. En revoyant nos images, nous nous rendons compte que certains vont rester à nos côtés

tout au long de l'attaque et qu'ils reçoivent des ordres de deux militaires qui leur chuchotent à l'oreille. Comment expliquer cette proximité alors que, au pays de Bachar, tout civil est considéré par un soldat comme un danger potentiel ?

4. Gilles Jacquier était-il visé personnellement ? C'est une piste. Notre confrère avait pris des contacts à haut niveau au sein du régime : il peut avoir été victime de la guerre fratricide qui s'y joue. Il voulait également suivre les troupes de Maher Al-Assad, le frère du président. Au moment où nous sommes arrivés à l'Hôtel Al-Safir, un militaire syrien s'est approché de nous pour savoir où se trouvait l'équipe de France Télévisions. Encore plus troublant : un journaliste d'*Al-Watan* croisé à l'hôtel Dedeman de Damas a conseillé à Gilles, et à Gilles seul, d'être très prudent. Etranges aussi, les accusations d'un docteur russe nommé Boris V. Dolgov : dans un article publié par le Réseau Voltaire, il qualifie notre confrère d'agent secret français en mission à Homs. A noter enfin que son sac à dos a disparu lors de son transfert à l'hôpital ; il contenait son iPad et tous ses contacts en Syrie.

« Selon les premiers résultats de l'enquête, le grand reporter a été touché au niveau des poumons et du cœur par trois éclats de projectile »

5. Quelle arme ? Quatre explosions puis plus rien... Aucune autre détonation ne retentit cette nuit-là dans le quartier alors que le corps de Gilles repose dans une chambre du dispensaire Al-Nahda et qu'avec Caroline et Christophe nous en refusons l'accès aux autorités syriennes. Nous ne voulons pas que les médias officiels du régime instrumentalisent la mort du premier journaliste étranger depuis le début de la contestation en Syrie. Or, en voyant les blessures de Gilles, nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de nous demander ce qui a pu le tuer. Un obus de mortier ? Une grenade ? Un tir de sniper ? Plusieurs armes à la fois ? Selon les premiers résultats de l'enquête, le grand reporter a été touché au niveau des poumons et du cœur par trois éclats de projectile. Probablement un obus de mortier d'origine russe.

6. Quel est le rôle de Mère Agnès ? Peu de portes officielles résistent à cette religieuse qui s'est donné pour mission de défendre les chrétiens de Syrie mais qui fait d'étranges déclarations. Elle affirme par exemple que nous avons refusé de prendre le bus officiel du ministère de l'information qui était à Homs le même jour que nous avec des équipes de la BBC et de CNN. Il est arrivé le matin à 9 h 30 avant de devoir quitter la ville précipitamment vers 14 h 45 pour des raisons de sécurité. Or nous n'avons jamais entendu parler de cette proposition. La religieuse oublie également de dire qu'elle nous a fait chanter sur la prolongation de nos visas de quatre jours, qu'elle nous a menacés d'expulsion si nous ne suivions pas son programme, qu'elle a eu un clash violent avec Gilles qui ne voulait pas se rendre à Homs, et qu'elle a piqué une grosse colère quand elle a compris que notre confrère avait des contacts avec l'opposition. Mère Agnès a-t-elle été utilisée par l'un des multiples services de renseignement syrien pour nous piéger ? Etait-elle au courant ? Comment a-t-elle pu annoncer dès 15 h 19 la mort de Gilles, alors que celle-ci ne surviendra que quelques minutes plus tard ? Espérons que la justice française l'entendra. ■

Gilles Jacquier, grand reporter à France 2, a été tué, mercredi 11 janvier, dans un quartier d'Homs, en Syrie

éditorial

par **Pierre Rousselin**
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Syrie : un conflit qui va durer



En Syrie, la violence redouble. Le régime est embarqué dans une opération de reconquête des zones dont le contrôle lui échappait. Tous les moyens sont bons. À l'abri du protecteur russe, Bachar el-Assad n'a rien à craindre. Les bilans sanglants vont se succéder et l'opposition devra survivre en attendant des jours meilleurs.

L'impuissance occidentale est manifeste. Devant l'ampleur du carnage, une réponse devrait s'imposer, ne serait-ce que pour des raisons humanitaires, les hôpitaux n'étant même plus accessibles aux victimes de la répression. Mais la voie du Conseil de sécurité est fermée et il n'y aura donc ni Casques bleus, ni couloirs humanitaires, ni zones protégées.

À ce compte-là, le pouvoir peut reprendre la main. Il le fera d'autant plus que les défections sont restées limitées et que la cohésion de l'appareil sécuritaire est loin d'être atteinte. Les ressources de sa sauvagerie sont sans limites.

À plus longue échéance, les choses se présentent autrement. La rébellion dure depuis trop longtemps, a subi trop de pertes et suscité trop de solidarités pour être écrasée par les chars. Avec le temps, l'opposition se militarise et se radicalise. Cela n'a pas échappé à al-Qaïda. Son chef Ayman al-Zawahiri avait à peine appelé au djihad en Syrie que des attentats étaient attribués à l'organisation terroriste qui cherche à profiter de la déstabilisation du pays.

Isolé dans le monde arabe, fragilisé par les sanctions internationales, le régime de Bachar el-Assad est, à terme, condamné. Son sort ne dépend pas seulement du rapport de forces dans le pays mais s'inscrit dans le « grand jeu » qui traverse la région. Dans un monde arabe en effervescence, les puissances sunnites, soutenues par les capitales occidentales, cherchent à faire reculer l'Iran chiite. En raison de sa situation géographique, la Syrie est une pièce maîtresse dans un conflit aux enjeux multiples. Cela n'annonce pas une issue rapide ■

Moscou demeure inflexible sur la Syrie

Alain Juppé a défendu jeudi son projet de « couloir humanitaire ». Sans succès.

ALAIN BARLUT
ENVOI SPÉCIAL À VIENNE

PROCHE-ORIENT « Un constat de désaccord » : Alain Juppé et son homologue russe, Sergueï Lavrov, ont eu, jeudi à Vienne, une explication « robuste » sur la Syrie. Leur précédente rencontre, en juillet dernier, à Moscou, n'avait rien donné. Celle-ci, en marge d'une conférence internationale contre le trafic de drogue en Afghanistan, n'a guère été plus fructueuse. La Russie persiste à refuser le moindre geste à l'encontre de Damas pour mettre un terme aux bombardements des villes syriennes et améliorer les conditions humanitaires dramatiques.

Alain Juppé a fait valoir la gravité de cette situation à son interlocuteur. Il s'agissait de « tester » le projet de « couloir » ou d'« accès » humanitaires évoqué par Paris ces derniers jours. « Si vous voulez une résolution au Conseil de sécurité sous chapitre VII [c'est-à-dire ne comportant pas de mesures contraignantes, NDLR], Damas ne l'acceptera pas. Si c'est sous chapitre VII [pourrait être imposée, y compris par la force, NDLR], c'est nous qui ne l'accepterons pas », a dit en substance Sergueï Lavrov, qui a de nouveau mis sur le tapis le précédent libyen.

Résolution de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU

« Ce n'est pas en cherchant à apitoyer la Russie sur le sort des victimes que l'on arrive à quelque chose », analysait-on, côté français, avant la rencontre. De fait, Alain Juppé s'est attaché à faire valoir au chef de la diplomatie russe que son engagement risquait de conduire à un « décrochage » de Moscou au Moyen-Orient et à son affaiblissement aux Nations unies. « Vous êtes sur le mauvais chemin », a lancé le ministre à Sergueï Lavrov, en lui

réaffirmant que « Bachar est condamné » et que toutes les manœuvres dilatoires « ne sont pas du temps gagné mais des vies perdues ». Des mots qui, à l'évidence, n'ont pas ébranlé le ministre russe. Côté français, on comptait beaucoup sur la résolution adoptée jeudi à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU par 137 voix pour, 12 contre (dont la Russie et la Chine) et 17 abstentions. Ce texte condamne la répression, reprend le plan de la Ligue arabe et recommande la nomination d'un envoyé spécial des Nations unies en Syrie. Ce vote n'a « certes pas de valeur contraignante mais revêt un poids politique et symbolique fort », estime-t-on à Paris. Sans attendre l'avancée espérée à l'ONU sur le terrain humanitaire, le Quai d'Orsay a annoncé mercredi la création d'un fonds d'un million d'euros.

Autre élément de la pression sur la Russie et sur Damas : la réunion, le 24 février, à Tunis, du « groupe des amis de la Syrie ». Mercredi à Strasbourg, Alain Juppé a battu le rappel des Européens dans la perspective de ce rendez-vous. Par ailleurs, le 27 février, les Vingt-Sept devraient renforcer leurs sanctions contre Damas avec des mesures frappant la Banque centrale syrienne, les transactions sur l'or et les exportations de phosphate. On mise aussi, dans les rangs occidentaux, sur la venue à Tunis de grands émergents, comme l'Inde et l'Afrique du Sud, pour créer un effet de masse qui marginaliserait encore davantage la Russie.

Le contexte électoral russe n'offre toutefois guère de perspective d'évolution. Avec un Dmitri Medvedev en fin de course et un Vladimir Poutine soucieux de ne rien faire qui apparaisse comme une concession, la fenêtre apparaît des plus réduites à court terme. « Nous allons poursuivre nos efforts et nous finirons bien par y arriver. Mais après combien de morts ? », estimait-on dans l'entourage du chef du Quai d'Orsay. ■



Sergueï Lavrov, ministre russe des Affaires étrangères (à gauche), et Alain Juppé (à droite), autour du secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, lors d'une réunion, jeudi à Vienne, contre le trafic de drogue en Afghanistan. SAMUEL KUBANI/AFP

en bref

Perpétuée pour l'auteur de l'attentat rate de Noël 2009
Le jeune Nigérien qui a tenté de faire sauter le vol Amsterdam-Detroit en cachant des explosifs dans son slip le jour de Noël 2009, a été condamné jeudi à la prison perpétuelle par une juge américaine à Detroit (Michigan).

Sénégal : l'opposition appelle à manifester pour la présidentielle
L'opposition sénégalaise a appelé à de nouveaux rassemblements vendredi et samedi dans le centre de Dakar malgré l'interdiction.

22 morts à Homs, Deraa et Hama

LA RÉPRESSION du mouvement de contestation en Syrie n'a pas faibli hier. Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, l'armée a poursuivi son pillage de Homs, assiégée et bombardée depuis le 4 février, attaqué Hama à la roquette et renforcé sa présence à Deraa. Ces violences ont fait au moins 22 morts. La situation ne cesse de se détériorer à Deraa ou, selon un habitant, Mohammed, les forces du régime « attaquent la province village par village, c'est très méthodique ». Dans la ville même, l'Armée syrienne libre, formée de déserteurs, cherchait

à repousser les troupes de Damas mais, faute d'équipements, elle est « obligée de se replier et les forces du régime se vengent alors contre les habitants ». Dans la capitale, quatorze personnes, dont le directeur du Centre syrien pour les médias et la liberté d'expression, Mazen Darwish, et la blogueuse Razan Ghazzawi, officielle Sana, un imam syrien a été abattu mercredi soir par un « groupe terroriste armé ». Il s'agit de l'un des rares religieux à être assassiné depuis le début de la révolte. A l'heure, 19 personnes auraient été tuées, hier, par les forces syriennes. (AFP)

Libération (France)



Pilonnée depuis quinze jours, la «capitale» de la révolution syrienne agonise et manque de vivres. Deux rescapés racontent.

Sous les bombes, le cri de Homs

Par **JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN**
Envoyé spécial dans la banlieue de Homs

Visible à des kilomètres à la ronde, une immense colonne de fumée grise témoigne de la punition infligée à Homs par l'armée de Bachar al-Assad. Si les routes qui conduisent à cette grande ville – la troisième de Syrie avec plus d'un million d'habitants – restent sous le contrôle des forces de sécurité, nombre de bourgades agricoles qui l'entourent sont entre les mains de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). C'est dans l'une d'elles, qui ne peut être citée pour des raisons de sécurité, que se réfugient quelques habitants ayant réussi à quitter la ville encerclée. Tous viennent du quartier le plus rebelle de Homs, Bab Amro, châté sans répit depuis treize jours par des bombardements incessants. Deux ha-

REPÈRES

LES FAITS DU JOUR

► **Les forces syriennes ont continué hier à attaquer plusieurs bastions** de la révolte et à bombarder à l'artillerie lourde Homs et Hama. Au moins 22 personnes sont mortes au cours de ces attaques, tandis que l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) a exprimé des craintes quant au

sort de dizaines de personnes qui auraient été massacrées, mercredi, dans la région de Deera.

► **La répression touche également le nord-ouest du pays.** Un massacre des forces de sécurité aurait coûté la vie à 19 personnes, dont 11 d'une même famille élargie, dans une vallée de la province d'Iklib, selon Rami Abdel Rahmane, le chef de l'OSDH.

► **L'imam d'une mosquée de Damas a été abattu à bord de sa voiture, mercredi soir,** par un «groupe terroriste» alors qu'il rentrait chez lui, a indiqué l'agence officielle Sana.

► **Ces violences surviennent après l'annonce, mercredi, d'un référendum,** fixé par le régime au 26 février et rejeté par l'opposition, sur un projet de nouvelle Constitution.

Libération (France)

L'ESSENTIEL

LE CONTEXTE

Une résolution condamnant la Syrie devait être votée hier soir par l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies.

L'ENJEU

«Libération» a rencontré des soldats de l'armée rebelle et des rescapés des massacres de Homs.

bitants qui ont réussi à s'échapper de ce qu'ils appellent l'enfer témoignent.

Mariam 32 ans

Epouse d'un informaticien, elle a terminé son récit en sanglotant.

«Nous vivions dans le sous-sol de la maison, sans électricité ni téléphone avec onze autres personnes, dont trois enfants âgés de 10 et 12 ans et de 18 mois. A Homs, les bombardements commencent au lever du soleil, et s'achèvent à son coucher. Nous n'avions rien d'autre à faire qu'attendre et prier. Dans certaines rues, il y avait tellement d'éclats d'obus et de débris que l'on ne pouvait même plus passer. Ici et là, on entendait des appels à l'aide des familles qui n'avaient plus rien à manger mais n'osaient pas sortir à cause des snipers. «C'est l'Armée syrienne libre qui aide les gens, et la grande peur de la population c'est que l'ASL quitte la ville. Ce qui m'a décidé à fuir, c'est que j'ai appris l'assassinat par des soldats de trois familles que je connaissais, dans le quartier voisin d'Inshaat. Ce sont les familles Al-Dalati, Al-Moemin et Al-Turquoui. Maris, épouses et enfants ont tous été égorgés. Les femmes ont d'abord été violées sous les yeux de leurs époux. D'une façon générale, les femmes ont très peur des viols. Tous les gens sont dans une véritable détresse psychologique. A cause des obus et du manque de nourriture. Certaines femmes sont devenues hystériques. Pour pouvoir quitter Bab Amro, j'ai dû donner ma bague de mariage aux soldats. Aussi incroyable que cela puisse paraître, ils criaient sur mon passage: "Vive Bachar, mort au peuple syrien." Le long d'une avenue, on marchait sur des restes humains. Et vingt minutes plus tard, des roquettes se sont abattues à côté de nous. C'est mon plus terrible souvenir. A côté de nous, il y avait une famille avec deux adolescents paralysés en fauteuils roulants et trois enfants, dont un de 15 jours. C'était tellement terrifiant à voir, que je ne peux le raconter.»

Ahmed 20 ans

Cet étudiant, qui n'a pu s'inscrire à l'université en raison de la situation, vient de rejoindre le village, après avoir fui Bab Amro à pied. Le re-



gard absent, épuisé, il est encore très marqué par le siège de Homs.

«Chaque jour, les chars, les roquettes et l'artillerie détruisent une partie de Bab Amro. Ils le font méthodiquement. Les habitants doivent changer de maison au fur et à mesure que les obus se rapprochent. L'endroit où j'habite s'appelle Al-Tahour. Il a été bombardé pendant quatre jours. Il fallait à tout prix que je m'en aille. La seule solution, c'était de payer les soldats. Ils n'ont rien à manger et sont prêts à vous laisser passer contre de l'argent. Je leur ai donné 500 livres syriennes [moins de 7 euros, ndr], deux boîtes de maté et un paquet de cigarettes. Après, ils ont fait semblant de me tirer dessus, comme si je m'enfuyais. J'avais très peur, mais c'était la seule solution. Tous les soldats ne sont pas méchants, certains veulent désertir, mais ne peuvent pas.

«Les bombardements étaient vraiment terribles. Une fois j'ai compté 26 obus en trente-

cinq minutes. Il n'y a pas que cela. Il y a également les snipers qui déciment des familles lorsqu'elles sortent chercher de la nourriture. L'Armée syrienne libre s'occupe surtout de faire des tâches humanitaires et de protéger les gens contre les *chabbha* [milices de voyous aux ordres du pouvoir]. Dans le quartier voisin de Inshaat, les soldats du régime ont tout volé. «J'ai moi-même été arrêté pendant huit jours, il y a quelques mois, pour avoir manifesté. J'ai été torturé tous les jours à l'électricité et frappé à coup de bâton. Ils m'ont mis dans une cellule d'isolement où nous étions huit à nous partager un mètre carré, puis dans une pièce de 3 mètres sur 2, où nous étions 36. Nous devions nous allonger à tour de rôle, il n'y avait pas une seule fenêtre, et l'unique ouverture était dans la porte. Ils la fermaient chaque fois qu'ils nous entendaient parler. J'ai un message à adresser au monde: si les bombardements ne s'arrêtent pas de suite, il ne restera plus rien.»

L'Assemblée générale devait voter hier une résolution contre Damas. Un texte non contraignant.

L'ONU condamnée à dénoncer dans le vide

Il y a les bombardements qui continuent sur Homs et Hama, les villes phares de la révolte, mais aussi à Deraa (Sud), où tout commença, ou à Idlib (Nord). Il y a les arrestations d'opposants, tels la blogueuse Razan Ghazzawi et le journaliste Mazen Darwich. Cet alaouite, qui anime le Centre syrien pour les médias et la liberté d'expression, est l'un des symboles de la contestation non violente contre le régime. Lui et l'Américaino-Syrienne, surnommée «la blogueuse courage», avaient déjà été arrêtés au début du mouvement, puis relâchés. Ils repartent à nouveau en prison. «Cela montre que les annonces faites par le pouvoir en faveur de l'ouverture et du dialogue sont mensongères», souligne l'avocat et opposant Anouar al-Bouni, en référence à l'annonce par Bachar al-Assad d'un référendum sur une nouvelle Constitution mettant fin au règne absolu du parti Baas.

Alors que le régime syrien mise sur une stratégie de terreur pour reprendre le contrôle des zones rebelles et écraser toute forme d'opposition, même pacifique, la communauté internationale tatonne. Hier soir, l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies devait voter à une large majorité un projet de résolution condamnant la répression, qui a fait au moins 6 000 morts depuis le début de la révolte en mars 2011, selon les décomptes de l'ONU. Le texte s'appuie sur le projet présenté par la Ligue arabe proposant notamment l'envoi d'une force conjointe de cette organisation et des Nations unies pour veiller à l'instauration d'un cessez-le-feu et assurer la sécurité de couloirs humanitaires. Mais le vote des Etats membres de l'ONU, aussi massif soit-il,

n'a pas de valeur contraignante. Seule une résolution du Conseil de sécurité permettrait d'instaurer des couloirs pour acheminer les aides humanitaires ou de créer des zones de protection. Membres permanents du Conseil, la Russie et la Chine avaient déjà, il y a quinze jours, opposé leur veto à un texte de résolution pourtant bien timide. Malgré la pression des opinions publiques et l'isolement crois-

Seule une résolution du Conseil de sécurité permettrait de créer des zones de protection ou d'instaurer des couloirs humanitaires pour acheminer les aides à la population.

sant de Damas, ils campent sur leur position. «C'est un texte inéquitable», assène Moscou, qui s'oppose à toute évocation d'un départ de Bachar al-Assad et exige que la résolution reconnaisse aussi la responsabilité de l'opposition dans les violences.

Or, sur le terrain, le temps presse. Le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, a rencontré hier à Vienne son homologue russe, Sergueï Lavrov, qui a refusé de se prononcer sur la proposition française de «couloirs humanitaires». Mais il se dit ouvert au dialogue. «Nous pourrions peut-être arriver à un compromis sur un objectif à court terme qui est d'arrêter les massacres», a déclaré le ministre français. Le vote de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU n'est qu'un premier pas. Le secrétaire général des Nations unies, Ban Ki-moon, le rappelait hier: «Plus longtemps nous débattons, d'autant plus de gens trouveront la mort.»

MARC SEMO

«Il faut tout faire pour que la violence cesse et qu'une aide humanitaire importante soit apportée à la population syrienne, qui est dans une situation épouvantable.»

Alain Juppé hier à Vienne

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civils au moins, dont 29 enfants, ont été tués à Homs depuis le 4 février, selon les données réunies par Amnesty International.

ÉDITORIAL

Par VINCENT GIRET

Sauvetage

L'insurrection d'un peuple, le courage inouï d'une armée révolutionnaire engagée dans un long et inégal combat, la barbarie de la répression... Les deux envoyés spéciaux de Libération, entrés clandestinement en Syrie – l'un dans les villages montagneux du Nord, l'autre dans les faubourgs de la ville martyr de Homs –, livrent des témoignages uniques et importants. La résistance, la souffrance et l'héroïsme ont désormais des visages, des prénoms, des voix. Tout a été écrit sur la Syrie. Sur les contradictions internes d'une dictature héréditaire, corrompue, clientéliste, excluant la majorité sunnite de toutes les sphères du pouvoir; sur les enjeux spécifiques au monde arabe où se joue en Syrie une guerre encore froide entre l'Iran chiite et l'Arabie Saoudite sunnite; sur la menace imminente, enfin, d'une «libanisation» et d'un effet domino dans une région prête à se consumer. Tout a été dit. Reste l'accablement de l'impuissance. On ne peut que saluer les efforts d'Alain Juppé qui, à l'inverse de son patron, préfère aux effets de manche les vertus de l'endurance. Chacun a gardé en mémoire ce qu'a coûté en Irak de se soustraire à la légitimité internationale. Mais on pourrait aussi rêver qu'à l'instar de ce que l'Europe fit au Kosovo, la Ligue arabe prenne ses responsabilités en initiant non une croisade mais une intervention humanitaire pour arrêter les massacres. Le monde arabe prenant à bras-le-corps le sauvetage d'un peuple «frère» martyrisé par un dictateur; voilà qui permettrait de parler à nouveau d'un Printemps arabe.

Libération (France)



Des rebelles de l'Armée syrienne libre devant un mur à l'entrée de la ville de Binnish, mercredi. PHOTOS AFP



Les insurgés se replient régulièrement en Turquie, où ils peuvent

«On ne peut pas battre des

Réfugiés dans les montagnes du nord-ouest du pays, les résistants de l'Armée syrienne libre, sunnite, comptent leurs munitions dans la crainte d'un assaut de villageois alaouites, armés par le régime.

Les trois kalachnikovs passent de main en main. Dix hommes les manipulent, enlèvent et remettent les chargeurs, déplient les crosses en métal ou tentent de déchiffrer les inscriptions gravées sur les canons. «On vient de les recevoir en provenance d'Irak. On les a payés 1100 dollars pièce», explique Abou Rachid (1), un enseignant. A côté de lui, un jeune homme montre un vieux revolver gris, usé par les années. Deux autres sortent leur pistolet automatique Makarov. Près d'un an après le début du soulèvement, les révolutionnaires des montagnes qui bordent Lattaquié commencent à s'armer. Ils n'ont pas de matériel lourd (aucun canon, lance-roquettes ou mortier), mais des fusils d'assaut et quelques grenades. Les munitions sont comptées; ils se les répartissent dans

des sacs plastique qui n'en contiennent qu'une quinzaine. «Nous sommes obligés de nous armer, nous devons nous défendre. La police s'apprête à fouiller nos maisons, comme elle l'a fait ailleurs, à Homs, Deraa et Hama. A chaque fois, les policiers pillent tout ce qu'ils peuvent et détruisent le reste. Ils jettent même la nourriture par terre et la mélange pour qu'elle ne soit plus consommable. On ne peut pas les laisser faire», affirme Fatima, une jeune fonctionnaire. Ces derniers jours, les opposants sunnites du nord-ouest syrien s'inquiètent d'une autre rumeur, insistante, qui circule de maison en maison. Le régime aurait commencé à armer les villages alaouites, la branche du chiïsme à laquelle appartient le président Al-Assad. «Il n'y a aucun doute, ils vont nous attaquer. C'est une question de jours, d'une ou deux semaines au grand maximum», estime Abou Rachid. Les opposants sont d'autant plus fébriles que les alaouites représentent environ 30% de la population dans la région, contre 10% à l'échelle nationale. Leurs villages s'intercalent entre ceux des sunnites. Sur la route qui part de Lattaquié et s'enfonce dans les montagnes, les localités pro-régime ne sont pas difficiles à reconnaître. Les portraits de Bachar al-Assad sont partout, accrochés à des poteaux électriques ou posés au bord de la chaussée. Il y a ceux qui représentent

REPORTAGE



un président mobilisateur, qui harangue des soldats. Il y a ceux où Al-Assad sourit, acclamé par la foule. Et il y a ceux, plus nombreux, qui le montrent de profil, inexpressif, comme s'il avait été moulé dans la cire.

«Même avant la révolution, nous n'avions que très peu de contacts avec les alaouites, [qui] ont toujours été favorisés par le régime.»

Fatima une fonctionnaire sunnite qui a rejoint l'Armée syrienne libre

Les relations entre les villages des deux communautés semblent elles aussi comme figées, entre méfiance et jalousie. «Même avant la révolution, nous n'avions que très peu de contacts, expli-

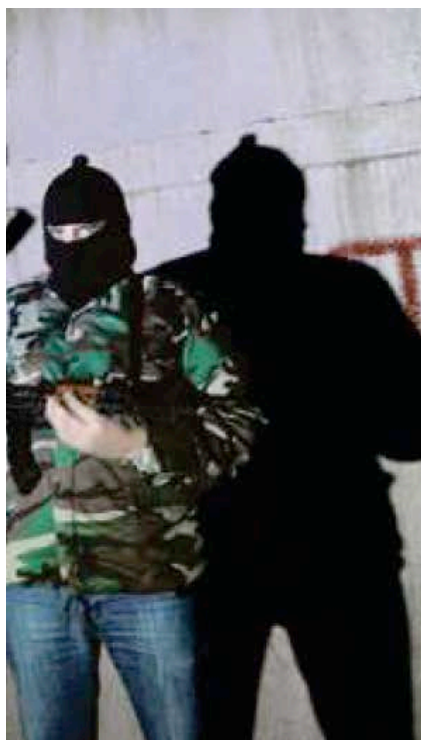
que Fatima. Il y avait bien, de temps à autre, des mariages mixtes, mais les femmes alaouites n'ont jamais été acceptées dans les familles sunnites. Les alaouites ont toujours été favorisés par le régime. Si un sunnite postule pour un emploi dans l'administration ou une grande entreprise, en ayant le diplôme requis, il ne sera pas embauché si un alaouite, même sans qualification, se présente. Ils ne connaissent pas le chômage, alors que nous nous devons nous battre pour faire vivre des familles de dix personnes avec un ou deux salaires.»

«Bulldozers». Abou Moura avait, jusqu'à la fin de l'année dernière, un emploi garanti et bien payé : officier dans l'armée syrienne. C'est aujourd'hui un déserteur, qui a rejoint un village des montagnes. «J'étais en poste à Homs. J'ai décidé de partir quand j'ai vu des soldats tirer sur la foule au printemps der-

nier. Les protestataires étaient désarmés, ils n'avaient même pas de couteau. Ils chantaient qu'ils voulaient la liberté et le départ de Bachar al-Assad. Ils ont été tués par dizaines, il a fallu ramasser les corps avec un bulldozer», affirme-t-il.

Abou Moura a profité d'une permission pour s'échapper, emportant sa kalachnikov, son pistolet et 200 cartouches. «J'ai parlé à beaucoup de soldats et d'officiers sunnites qui voulaient désert. Mais ils ont peur que leur famille

Libération (France)



compter sur la bienveillance d'Ankara.



Mal équipés, les soldats de l'ASL espèrent une intervention étrangère ou, au moins, un approvisionnement en armes lourdes.

chars avec nos armes»»

soit arrêtée par les mukhabarat», les services de sécurité syriens. Il a réussi à faire croire à ses supérieurs qu'il avait été kidnappé et sa famille est persuadée qu'il est en Turquie.

Depuis qu'il a quitté l'armée, Abou Moura assure, avec d'autres volontaires, la surveillance des routes de montagne durant la nuit. Ils observent les déplacements de la police et de l'armée pour donner aux révolutionnaires qui circulent dans la région les emplacements des barrages, sans cesse mouvants. Le groupe d'une trentaine de personnes, informel jusqu'à aujourd'hui, devrait bientôt passer sous le giron de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), surtout composée de déserteurs. «Nous ne pouvons plus nous organiser seuls, de notre côté. Nous devons nous structurer pour être prêt en cas d'attaque. S'ils portent la guerre chez nous, alors on l'amènera chez eux», affirme-t-il.

A flanc de montagne. Les révolutionnaires de la région de Lattaquié restent toutefois largement isolés. Ils n'ont pas fait la jonction avec ceux d'Idlib, plus à l'est, où l'ASL mène régulièrement des attaques. Ils n'ont pas de territoire de repli, où ils pourraient s'organiser, se ravitailler et transporter les blessés. Les responsables de l'opposition ne quittent que très rarement leur village, évitant de dormir au même endroit plus de quelques jours. Ils ne parlent que par code au téléphone et n'utilisent pas In-

ternet, à l'exception du logiciel de téléphonie Skype.

Le seul atout de l'opposition est la proximité avec la Turquie. Les révolutionnaires s'y rendent régulièrement pour tenter de se coordonner avec les officiers de l'ASL basés dans la région d'Antioche. Le trajet dure environ cinq heures et n'est pas sans danger. Abou Rachid a conservé sur son téléphone portable la photo du cadavre de l'un de ses amis, un Ingénieur, arrêté et tué en janvier par les forces de sécurité alors qu'il revenait de Turquie. Le côté gauche du crâne est enfoncé, comme s'il avait été écrasé par une masse.

Le trajet pour rejoindre la Turquie nécessite, côté syrien, de changer plusieurs fois de voiture ou de moto pour ne pas se faire repérer sur les routes de montagne. Des véhicules sont envoyés en éclaireurs et préviennent les suivants en cas de patrouille des forces de sécurité. Il faut alors changer d'itinéraire ou attendre, parfois pendant des heures. Le passage de la frontière se fait à pied. D'abord en traversant des champs d'oliviers, puis en s'enfonçant dans des bois de sapins à flanc de montagne. Au bout d'une heure, la Turquie apparaît, de l'autre côté d'une rivière aux eaux tumultueuses. Un tronçonneuse arraché fait office de pont. Passé un rouleau de fils de fer

barbelé qui marque la frontière, il faut encore deux heures de marche pour atteindre les premiers villages. De toute évidence, Ankara fait preuve de bienveillance envers les opposants syriens. Les sentiers, côté Turquie, sont à découvert. Ils serpentent en contrebas de plusieurs miradors et d'une caserne de l'armée turque. «Les militaires et les policiers nous laissent tranquilles, à condition que l'on ne transporte pas d'armes.

Les révolutionnaires de la région de Lattaquié sont très isolés. Ils n'ont pas fait la jonction avec ceux d'Idlib, et n'ont pas de territoire de repli où ils pourraient s'organiser, se ravitailler et transporter les blessés.

Et encore ça date de quelques mois tout au plus. Avant, ils n'y voyaient pas d'inconvénient», explique un passeur.


Dans leurs montagnes des environs de Lattaquié, les opposants à Bachar al-Assad rêvent d'une «zone de sécurité» qui irait jusqu'à la frontière turque. Ils n'espèrent pas l'obtenir sans une aide étrangère. Mais leurs opinions divergent sur la nature et l'étendue de l'intervention. «L'Armée syrienne libre est encore faible, elle ne peut pas s'opposer efficacement aux soldats du régime. Il faut qu'une armée étrangère l'aide, avec une zone d'exclusion aérienne et des routes sécurisées, que Damas ne pourra à pas vi-

ser. Un peu comme l'avaient fait les Casques bleus en Bosnie», dit un médecin. «Nous n'avons pas besoin de soldats étrangers ici, rétorque Fatima. Les hommes savent se battre, ils ont tous fait leur service militaire. Mais il nous faut des armes.» C'est également l'avis d'Abou Moura, le déserteur: «Nous manquons surtout de lance-roquettes et de mortiers qui nous permettraient de tirer de loin. On ne peut pas battre des chars avec des kalachnikovs.»

Falaise. Les révolutionnaires des montagnes du nord-ouest discutent sans cesse depuis près d'un an. La plupart ne travaillant plus, ils se retrouvent chez les uns et les autres, de 10 heures du matin jusqu'à tard dans la nuit. L'après-midi, quelques-uns se rejoignent en haut d'une falaise, qui plonge à pic dans une rivière, et boivent du thé en mangeant des graines de tournesol. Ils écoutent des slogans enregistrés lors de manifestations dans leur village ou à Lattaquié. Ils aiment particulièrement une chanson devenue hymne de soutien à la ville de Homs, pilonnée par l'armée syrienne depuis quinze jours: «Homs! Homs! Bachar, tu es un âne, Bachar va-t'en!» Ils la reprennent en chœur, assis sur des rochers. Un vieil homme se lève et s'essaye à quelques pas de danse maladroit. Il est au bord du précipice.

Envoyé spécial en Syrie LUC MATHIEU
(1) Les prénoms ont été modifiés.

VSD (France)



Époque **Monde**

L'ami Poutine. À un mois de l'élection présidentielle, le Premier ministre russe compte montrer à ses électeurs qu'il n'entend pas plier face aux Occidentaux.

SYRIE

POURQUOI POUTINE SOUTIENT DAMAS

Alors que l'ONU cherche à sanctionner le régime d'el-Assad, la Russie oppose son veto à toute résolution.
Pour cinq raisons principales.

PAR CHRISTOPHE GAUTIER

VSD (France)

POUR LE KREMLIN, UN ENJEU STRATÉGIQUE MAJEUR QU'AUCUNE ASPIRATION DÉMOCRATIQUE NE SAURAIT REMETTRE EN CAUSE

Au risque de durablement crispier les chancelleries occidentales, Dmitri Medvedev et Vladimir Poutine continuent indéfectiblement de soutenir le régime despotique et désormais sanguinaire de Bachar el-Assad. En réalité, sur ce dossier comme sur beaucoup d'autres d'ailleurs, les points de vue russes et euro-américains semblent quasiment inconciliables. Cynique réminiscence de la guerre froide : au Kremlin comme à la Maison-Blanche, la Syrie et le pantin qui la gouverne ne constituent qu'un levier géostratégique qui contrôle un mécanisme complexe entraînant dans ses rouages l'Iran, la Turquie, le Liban, donc Israël et par conséquent les États-Unis. Chacun en fonction de ses intérêts – le plus souvent bien pragmatiques et très éloignés des valeurs véhiculées par la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme – avance et pousse ses pions dans ce petit pays du Levant (22 millions d'habitants, 185 000 km²). Depuis plus de cinquante ans, les maîtres du Kremlin voient au moins cinq bonnes raisons de ne rien céder en Syrie.

1/UN BON CLIENT

Comme son père autrefois, Bachar el-Assad apprécie le matériel russe : robuste, fiable, efficace et pas très cher. Chaque année, Damas passe à Moscou commande d'équipements militaires divers : blindés, hélicoptères, canons, avions... Depuis 2009, le président syrien a ainsi acheté à Moscou pour 3 milliards de dollars d'armement, ce qui représente tout de même près de 10% du total des ventes d'armes russes à l'étranger. On comprend mieux pourquoi la Russie opposera toujours un veto systématique à toute résolution des Nations unies évoquant, même du bout des lèvres, un éventuel embargo sur les armes à destination de la Syrie. Pendant la guerre civile, les Russes poursuivent même leur lucratif commerce : mi-janvier, un cargo a livré 63 tonnes d'armes légères (fusils d'assaut, mortiers, lance-roquettes) et de munitions. Bachar el-Assad vient de confirmer, le 23 janvier, la commande ferme de trente-six Yak-130, un avion de chasse léger, maniable et puissamment armé. Montant du contrat : 550 millions de dollars.

2/UN PORT EN MÉDITERRANÉE

Au début des années soixante-dix, pour combler la « désertion » annoncée d'Anouar el-Sadate qui, après le panarabisme de Nasser, rapproche, inexorablement, l'Égypte du bloc occidental, les Soviétiques décident de tout miser sur le parti Baas, qui consolide son pouvoir à Damas. Il le confisque toujours aujourd'hui. À l'époque, la Syrie concède donc aux marins de l'armée Rouge la petite base navale de Tartous, à l'ouest de Homs. L'état-major soviétique concrétise ce jour-là le rêve ancestral de tous les amiraux de la marine impériale : disposer d'un port dans un mer chaude. Le port de Tartous permet en plus de s'affranchir des deux détroits (Bosphore et Dardanelles) qui cadent l'entrée et la sortie de la mer Noire et sont contrôlés par la



Homs assiégé Début février, la ville rebelle a été pilonnée sans relâche par l'armée syrienne. En cinq jours, plus d'une centaine de personnes y auraient été tuées.

Turquie, membre de l'Otan. Délaissé, presque abandonné après la chute de l'URSS en 1991, Tartous passionne de nouveau les dirigeants russes depuis quelques années. En 2008, Moscou a entrepris de gigantesques travaux de réhabilitation : rénovation des trois quais existants, construction de deux quais flottants (pour accueillir les porte-avions), d'une caserne et de différents bâtiments logistiques. Pour le Kremlin, Tartous constitue un enjeu stratégique majeur qu'aucune aspiration démocratique ne saurait remettre en cause.

3/LA LEÇON LIBYENNE

Les Russes comme les Chinois ont le désagréable sentiment de s'être fait berner, en mars 2011, lorsqu'ils ont été associés à la résolution 1973 des Nations unies. Le texte évoquait « la responsabilité de protéger » des populations (celle de Cyrénaïque), alors mises en danger par les assauts des troupes de Tripoli. Côté russe, cette phrase impliquait un arrêt des hostilités avant l'ouverture de négociations avec le colonel Kadhafi. Côté Otan, elle s'est traduite par l'instauration d'une « zone d'exclusion aérienne » synonyme de facto d'une alliance avec les insurgés de Benghazi. À aucun moment, ni les Russes ni les Chinois n'ont donné leur aval au renversement du turbulent colonel, par ailleurs lui aussi amateur d'armement russe et fidèle allié du Kremlin depuis un demi-siècle. Par étourderie, Poutine a sacrifié sa marionnette de Tripoli ; il cajole celle de Damas.

4/L'ARTICLE 2

Ce principe est gravé dans la charte de l'ONU : « [...] Aucune disposition de la présente Charte n'autorise les Nations unies à intervenir dans des affaires qui relèvent essentiellement de la compétence nationale d'un État [...] ». Traduction idéaliste : chaque peuple dispose du droit de choisir sa forme de gouvernement hors de toute influence étrangère. Traduction totalitaire : je fais ce que je veux chez moi. Considérant la crise syrienne comme une affaire strictement interne, Moscou, échaudé par la Libye, brandit désormais systématiquement l'article 2, ce

qui ne l'a pas empêché autrefois d'envahir la Hongrie, la Tchécoslovaquie et l'Afghanistan. L'article 2 justifie bien des boucheries depuis 1945...

5/LA THÉORIE DES DOMINOS

Les stratèges russes en sont convaincus : si la révolte populaire chassait Bachar el-Assad du pouvoir, comme elle l'a fait en Tunisie, en Égypte, en Libye, au Yémen, alors le vent du printemps arabe soufflerait sur le Caucase, puis sur le Xinjiang et pourquoi pas sur le Tibet ? Pékin, confronté depuis plusieurs mois à l'insubordination sourde d'une partie grandissante de ses internautes, et Moscou, défié par une opposition qui descend désormais dans la rue, redoutent que la contagion contestataire ne réveille les espoirs et les revendications de leurs oppositions intérieures. Medvedev, Poutine et Hu Jintao sont tombés d'accord : la défaite de Bachar el-Assad constituerait un bien mauvais présage. Mieux vaut, dès lors, l'aider à écrabouiller la rébellion. ■

Diplomatie

Damas contre Téhéran

Les États-Unis calment le jeu en Syrie, afin de mieux préparer leurs attaques en Iran.

Dans ce poker menteur que constitue la crise syrienne, les États-Unis font monter les enchères. Damas contre Téhéran : les gradés du Pentagone ont mis le deal sur la table. Contre la sauvegarde de ses intérêts en Syrie, Moscou lâche du lest dans le dossier du nucléaire iranien. Comme la perspective de voir Ahmadinejad se doter de l'arme atomique ne réjouit pas plus la Maison-Blanche que le Kremlin ou le Comité central chinois, les trois puissances peuvent s'entendre. Grâce au soutien militaire des alliés, Bachar el-Assad anéantit la révolte. Quitte à rayer Homs de la carte ; l'Occident ne sera pas trop regardant. En échange, Moscou et Pékin détourneront le regard lorsque l'aviation israélienne, avec la bénédiction de Washington, ira « préventivement » frapper le territoire iranien. Depuis plusieurs semaines, le général israélien Aviv

Il ne s'agit plus de savoir si l'Iran sera bombardé, mais quand...

Kovachi, patron du renseignement militaire, explique aux généraux américains qu'« une action militaire contre l'Iran devient urgente ». Les analystes estiment que d'ici à la fin de l'année, l'Iran possèdera l'arme nucléaire. Même si, officiellement, Barack Obama hésite encore, Leon Panetta, son ministre de la Défense, a dépêché, la semaine dernière au siège de l'Otan, à Bruxelles, deux émissaires chargés de porter le message : « Les Israéliens vont bombarder l'Iran entre avril et juin. » Un militaire français qui assistait à cette réunion le confirme à VSD : « Il va falloir s'y faire, la question n'est plus de savoir si l'Iran sera bombardé, mais quand. » Un document circule déjà recensant les actions de représailles que pourrait lancer Téhéran contre les États-Unis et ses alliés : attentats, sabotage des circuits d'approvisionnement

Assads Truppen greifen Daraa an

Ban: Fast Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit

cheh./rüb. FRANKFURT/WASHINGTON, 16. Februar. Die Truppen des syrischen Machthabers Baschar al Assad sind am Donnerstag in die Stadt Daraa eingerückt. Nach Berichten von Nachrichtenagenturen und ausländischen Fernsehsendern, die sich auf Angaben von Einwohnern und Aktivisten beriefen, kam es dabei zu Feuergefechten und Razzien. Es habe Tote gegen, hieß es. Demnach hatten in Daraa, wo die Proteste gegen das Regime im vergangenen März begonnen hatten, zuletzt Kämpfer der oppositionellen Freien Syrischen Armee Demonstrationen geschützt.

Die Angriffe in Daraa folgten Offensiven der Armee in Hama und der Protesthochburg Homs, die seit knapp zwei Wochen belagert und täglich mit Artillerie beschossen wird. Hunderte Menschen wurden nach Oppositionsangaben dabei getötet. Am Dienstag hatten die Truppen Assads ihren Angriff auf Hama und die umliegenden Regionen begonnen. In der Nähe der Stadt Hama wurden am Donnerstag nach Angaben von Regierungsgegnern mindestens 14 Personen getötet. Im Internet verbreitete Videoaufnahmen zeigten mindestens acht Leichen, die meisten von ihnen ohne Beine. Sie lagen offenbar in einem Krankenhaus. Berichte über Todesopfer können nicht überprüft werden, weil das Regime Journalisten den Zugang zu den umkämpften Regionen verwehrt.

UN-Generalsekretär Ban Ki-moon sprach am Donnerstag in Zusammenhang mit den Geschehnissen in Syrien von Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit. Wenn „Wohngebiete willkürlich beschossen, Krankenhäuser als Folterzentren genutzt und Kinder, zum Teil nur zehn Jahre alt, angekettet und misshandelt werden“, dann liege „fast sicher“ der Tatbestand von Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit vor, sagte Ban in Wien. Für die Verfolgung solcher Verbrechen ist der Internationale Strafgerichtshof in Den Haag zuständig. In New York wollte am Donnerstagabend die UN-Vollversammlung über eine nicht bindende Resolution abstimmen, in der die Gewalttaten des Regimes unter Präsident Baschar al Assad verurteilt werden. Im Gegensatz zum UN-Sicherheitsrat, wo Russland und China bei zwei Gelegenheiten mit ihrem Veto eine Verurteilung des Assad-Regimes verhindert haben, kann die Vollversammlung keine Sanktionen verhängen.

Die Türkei forderte die Einrichtung eines humanitären Hilfskorridors durch die Vereinten Nationen, was auch Frankreich verlangt. Nach türkischen Zeitungsberichten will die Regierung in Ankara allerdings nicht, dass dieser durch das türkisch-syrische Grenzgebiet führt, sondern favorisiert eine Verbindung zu einer britischen Militärbasis in Zypern. Die Türkei wolle eine mögliche militärische Intervention zur Durchsetzung der Hilfskorridore vermeiden, schrieb die der Regierungspartei AKP nahestehende Zeitung „Zaman“. Das Europäische Parlament forderte am Donnerstag sichere Korridore für Dissidenten und Deserteure. Es forderte Assad abermals zum Rücktritt auf und verlangte ein Ende der Waffenlieferungen an das Regime in Damaskus.

Derweil riefen syrische Oppositionsgruppen zum Boykott des von Assad dekretierten Verfassungsreferendums auf. Der Entwurf zur neuen Verfassung, der wichtige Machtbefugnisse wie die Ernennung des Regierungschefs beim Präsidenten belässt, atme denselben „Geist“ wie der bisherige Text, teilten die lokalen Koordinierungskomitees am Donnerstag mit, die das Assad-Regime als „barbarisch“ bezeichneten. Vor dem Ende der Gewalt sei eine Teilnahme an dem Referendum nicht möglich. Ein Vertreter der syrischen Muslimbruderschaft und des oppositionellen Syrischen Nationalrats sagte der Nachrichtenagentur Reuters, Assad habe seine Legitimität verloren. „Wir sind nicht an seiner faulen Verfassung interessiert, egal ob alt oder neu.“ Der Nationalrat wählte am Donnerstag in der qatarischen Hauptstadt Doha Burhan Ghalioun abermals zum Vorsitzenden.

Während Moskau den Vorstoß Assads gelobt hatte, bezeichnete das Weiße Haus das für den 26. Februar angekündigte Referendum als „lächerlich“. Präsidentensprecher Jay Carney sprach von einer „Verhöhnung der syrischen Revolution“ durch das Assad-Regime. Er bekräftigte die Haltung, wonach Assads Tage gezählt seien. Längst gehe es nicht mehr um die Frage, ob Assad stürzen werde, sondern um die Frage, wann, sagte der Präsidentensprecher.

China will unterdessen einen ranghohen Gesandten nach Syrien schicken. Außenamtssprecher Liu Weimin sagte am Donnerstag, der stellvertretende Außenminister Zhai Jun werde an diesem Freitag und Samstag in Syrien sein.

Junge Welt (Allemagne / Germany)

Jede Gewalt verurteilen

Syrien wirft UN-Hochkommissarin Einseitigkeit vor. Chinas Vizeaußenminister kommt nach Damaskus. Berichte über Dschihadisten und Söldner unter Aufständischen. **Von Karin Leukefeld, Damaskus**

Scharf hat das syrische Außenministerium auf die jüngste Stellungnahme von Navi Pillay reagiert. Die UN-Hochkommissarin für Menschenrechte forderte in dieser Woche vor der Generalversammlung der Vereinten Nationen in New York »jedes Mitglied der internationalen Gemeinschaft« nachdrücklich auf, »jetzt zu handeln, um die Bevölkerung Syriens zu schützen. Der Regierung in Damaskus wurf sie erneut vor, »das eigene Volk nicht zu schützen«, sondern in Homs gezielt Menschen zu töten. Die UN-Generalversammlung wollte nach mehrstündiger Debatte am Donnerstag (nach *JW*-Redaktionschluss) über eine von Saudi-Arabien und Katar vorgelegte Resolution abstimmen, die Berichten zufolge der kürzlich mit einem Veto Russlands und Chinas im Sicherheitsrat gestoppten entspricht.

Das syrische Außenamt wirft Pillay vor, von Anfang an in dem inneren Konflikt voreingenommen gewesen zu sein. Sie habe sich »zum Werkzeug der Staaten machen lassen, die Syrien angreifen wollen«. Die UN-Hochkommissarin habe die Tatsache ignoriert, daß »bewaffnete Gruppen terroristische Verbrechen« in Syrien verübten, obwohl das Land den Vereinten Nationen alle vorhandenen Informationen darüber zur Verfügung gestellt habe. Wider besseres Wissen verbreite sie Opferzahlen, die ihr von »Gruppen zur Verfügung gestellt werden, die gegen Syrien eingestellt sind«. Aufgabe der Menschenrechtskommissarin sei es, objektiv zu sein, Terrorismus zu verurteilen und das Wort für Dialog und Reformen zu ergreifen. Bis dato habe Pillay die zwei Terroranschläge in Aleppo vom 10. Februar ebensowenig verurteilt wie Anschläge auf Zivilisten, Sicherheitskräfte und auf die zivile Infrastruktur.

Der russische Außenminister Sergej Lawrow begrüßte derweil die Ankündigung von Präsident Baschar Al-Assad, am 26. Februar ein landesweites Referendum über eine neue Verfas-



Assad-Gegner Khaled Abu-Salah am Mittwoch vor der in Brand gesetzten Ölpipeline in Homs

sung durchzuführen. Der vorgelegte Entwurf sei »ein Schritt nach vorn«. Es sei wichtig, politische Pluralität in Syrien einzuführen und bald Parlamentswahlen abzuhalten. Gefragt, ob Rußland in der UN-Vollversammlung dem vorgelegten Resolutionsentwurf zustimme, sagte Lawrow: »Wenn die Resolution einseitig ist und die Opfer ignoriert, die von bewaffneten Gruppen zu verantworten sind, werden wir sie auf keinen Fall unterstützen.«

Am Wochenende wird der stellvertretende Außenminister Chinas, Zhai Jun, in Damaskus erwartet. China wolle mit der syrischen Regierung nach einer »angemessenen und friedlichen Lösung der Krise« suchen, sagte ein Sprecher des Außenministeriums in Peking. Vertreter innersyrischer Oppositionsgruppen waren kürzlich in der Volksrepublik, um Möglichkeiten eines Dialogs mit den Chinesen zu dis-

kutieren. Auf der Internetseite des Außenministeriums hieß es, China lehne jede bewaffnete Intervention in Syrien und einen sogenannten Regimewechsel ab. Gleichzeitig müsse die syrische Regierung die »legitimen Wünsche der Bevölkerung nach Reformen« respektieren. Gewalt gegen Zivilisten sei nicht hinnehmbar.

Die syrische Regierung betont weiterhin, daß staatliche Sicherheitskräfte nicht gegen friedliche Demonstrationen, sondern ausschließlich gegen bewaffnete Kräfte eingesetzt werden. Nabeed Al-Hussaini von der Lobbyorganisation Arabisch-Amerikanischer Kongreß erklärte gegenüber *junge Welt* in Damaskus, Dschihadisten und bewaffnete Söldner vieler Nationalitäten kämpften inzwischen in Syrien. Erstere kämen »aus Jordanien, Libyen und Irak, Söldner unter anderem aus Afghanistan, Tschetschenien und Pa-

kistan. Bezahlt werden sie von Katar und Saudi-Arabien, logistisch werden sie von der Türkei versorgt.« Meldungen der vergangenen Tage aus unterschiedlichen Quellen bestätigten das. So warnte der irakische Geheimdienst davor, daß »Al-Qaida im Irak« Kämpfer und Waffen nach Syrien geschickt habe. Die jordanische Muslimbruderschaft rief auf, die »bedrängten Brüder in Syrien in ihrem Kampf zu unterstützen«. Libyen gab kürzlich die Namen von drei in Syrien getöteten libyschen Kämpfern bekannt. Jordanische Sicherheitskräfte verhafteten am Mittwoch sieben Männer arabischer Herkunft, die versucht hatten, von Al-Ramtha über die nahe gelegene Grenze nach Syrien zu gelangen. Sie waren mit automatischen Waffen (AK 47) ausgerüstet. Unmittelbar jenseits des Grenzübergangs liegt die Stadt Daraa.

HINTERGRUND Verfassung und Referendum

Nach vier Monaten Diskussion liegt nun der Entwurf einer neuen Verfassung für Syrien vor. Präsident Baschar Al-Assad ordnete per Dekret (Nr. 85/2012) ein landesweites Referendum darüber an. Es soll am 26. Februar stattfinden. Eine neue Verfassung wurde bereits unmittelbar nach Assads Amtsantritt im Jahr 2000 gefordert, die Diskussionen darüber, zu denen er selber ermuntert hatte, wurden 2002 jedoch von Seiten der Sicherheitskräfte unterbunden. Viele Oppositionelle, die sich aktiv an der öffentlichen Debatte beteiligt hatten, wurden inhaftiert. Die kurze Phase eines demokratischen Aufbruchs wurde bekannt als »Damaszener Frühling«.

Der nun vorgelegte Entwurf wurde von einem Komitee ausgearbeitet, dessen Mitglieder vom Präsidenten damit beauftragt worden waren. Das System soll zukünftig auf politischem Pluralismus basieren, die politische Macht wird durch freie, faire Wahlen bestimmt. Die »führende Rolle« der regierenden Baath-Partei ist im Text gestrichen. Neue Parteien dürfen weiterhin nicht auf religiöser, regionaler oder ethnischer Grundlage gegründet werden. Das Parlament wird alle vier Jahre gewählt, die Amtszeit des Präsidenten beträgt sieben Jahre, er kann einmal wiedergewählt werden. Die neue Regelung beginnt 2014 mit dem Ende der Amtszeit des jetzigen Präsidenten.

In ersten Reaktionen zeigten Syrer sich zurückhaltend über Verfassung und Referendum. Bei einer – nicht repräsentativen – Umfrage im populären Radio »Cham FM« sagten 528 Personen, sie würden mit »Nein« stimmen, 380 mit »Ja«. Kritisiert wurde die Entstehung des Verfassungsentwurfs. Er müsse von einem neu gewählten Parlament ausgearbeitet werden. Andere Stimmen wiesen auf die anhaltende Gewalt im Land hin. Einwohner von Daraa, Homs, Hama und Idlib würden vermutlich nicht an dem Referendum teilnehmen, entweder weil sie es ablehnten, oder weil sie aufgrund von Kämpfen ihre Häuser nicht verlassen könnten. (H)

◆ Siehe Kommentar Seite 8

VERHANDELN STATT KÄMPFEN – ECKPUNKTE DER LINKEN ZUR SYRIEN-POLITIK

◆ **Der Arbeitskreis »Internationale Politik« der Fraktion Die Linke im Deutschen Bundestag hat am 14. Februar (mit acht Ja-Stimmen, ohne Gegenstimme und mit einer Enthaltung) Eckpunkte zur Syrien-Politik formuliert, die *JW* auszugsweise dokumentiert:**

Demokratischer Wandel: Die syrische Revolution begann im März 2011 als Teil des arabischen Frühlings. Die Linke begrüßt es, wenn in den arabischen Ländern Diktatoren durch Bewegungen von innen gestürzt werden. Die Linke ist solidarisch mit den Kritikern des demokratischen Wandels in Syrien.

Das Morden und Töten muß ein Ende nehmen. Die Bürgerinnen und Bürger Syriens müssen die Chance bekommen, in einem gewaltfreien Umfeld über die politische und soziale Entwicklung des Landes selbst zu bestimmen. Das schließt die Möglichkeit ein, über die Wege des Wandels, also Wege zur Überwindung des derzeitigen Repressionsapparates, friedlich bestimmen zu können. Dabei

unterstützt Die Linke das Selbstbestimmungsrecht von ethnischen und religiösen Minderheiten innerhalb der territorialen Integrität Syriens. Die Linke arbeitet mit linken syrischen Oppositionsgruppen, mit Demokratinnen und Demokraten in Syrien zusammen.

Die Regierung des Präsidenten Assad muß das Blutvergießen und insbesondere die Gewalt gegen Zivilisten unverzüglich beenden. Ein Ende der Gewalt – diese Forderung richtet sich zuerst an die Regierung Syriens. (...)

Die syrischen Aufständischen müssen ihre militärischen Aktionen und Angriffe auf Zivilisten, welche die Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga vom 24.12.2011 bis zum 18.01.2012 in ihrem Abschlussbericht festgestellt hat, einstellen und gewaltfrei für den Wandel kämpfen. Syrien darf nicht weiter in den Bürgerkrieg abgleiten. Darum müssen sämtliche Waffenlieferungen sowohl an die syrische Regierung als auch an die Opposition sofort und vollständig eingestellt werden.

Um weitere Gewalt zu verhindern,

muß verhandelt werden, müssen Gespräche stattfinden. Präsident Assad genießt angesichts seines Agierens gegen die eigene Bevölkerung in den vergangenen Monaten und vor dem Hintergrund der tief enttäuschten Erwartungen auf Reformen nach seinem Amtsantritt bei der Linken keine Sympathie. Die Linke versteht angesichts der massiven Staatsgewalt einschließlich Panzereinsatz gegen Zivilisten und Artilleriebeschuß auf Wohnviertel, daß es für viele Menschen in Syrien nicht einfach ist, mit Vertretern des Regimes Assad zu verhandeln, aber durch Verhandlungen – auch über Dritte – könnten weitere Tote vermieden werden. Das ist es, was Die Linke will.

Der Welticherheitsrat muß sich angesichts der Eskalation von Gewalt und der regionalen Auswirkungen mit der Lage in Syrien befassen. Heute bereits hat der Konflikt stabilisierende Wirkungen auf die Nachbarländer, insbesondere den Libanon. (...) Der Charakter der von der Arabischen Liga vorgeschlagenen Blauhelmission ist unklar. Ein Einsatz nach Kapi-

tel VI der Charta der Vereinten Nationen ist nicht ausdrücklich formuliert. Zudem setzt ein Einsatz nach Kapitel VI der Charta die Zustimmung aller relevanten Konfliktparteien voraus. Eine solche Zustimmung liegt nicht vor. Die Linke lehnt diesen Vorschlag, der konfliktverschärfend sein kann, ab. (...)

Aus Sicht der Linken müßten in einer Resolution des Welticherheitsrates Regelungen getroffen werden, die eine Entwaffnung aller Zivilpersonen und den Rückzug der Armee in die Kasernen möglich machen und die jegliche Waffenlieferungen nach Syrien unterbinden. Das fordert Die Linke von Rußland und fordert es auch von der Türkei, den USA, Katar und allen anderen, die offensichtlich syrische Aufständische mit Waffen versorgen. Es müssen Rückkehrmöglichkeiten für Flüchtlinge geschaffen und die Versorgung der Bevölkerung mit Medikamenten und ärztliche Versorgung gesichert werden. (...)

Nach den Erfahrungen der Weltgemeinschaft mit den Resolutionen des Welticherheitsrates zum Libyen-Kon-

flikt muß jegliche UN-Resolution klar und eindeutig gewaltsame äußere Einmischung sowie die Androhung von Gewalt ausschließen. Dieser Grundsatz darf nicht im Verlauf des weiteren Verfahrens mit UN-Entscheidungen konterkariert werden. Alle Staaten müssen aufgefordert werden, keinerlei Waffen und andere Rüstungsgüter nach Syrien und in die Region zu liefern. Die Waffenlieferungen an Syrien einzufrieren, hat die Linke auch von Rußland gefordert. Deutschland sollte durch ein Verbot von Rüstungsexporten in den Nahen Osten vorgehen. Sanktionen sind auf ein Waffenembargo und auf das Einfrieren von Geldern der syrischen Führungsschicht zu beschränken, um nicht die Bevölkerung zu treffen. Sanktionen sind sinnvoll, wenn sie gezielt und ausschließlich die Fähigkeit zur Gewaltausübung beschneiden. (...) Die Forderungen einer weiteren Isolierung Syriens durch den Abzug von diplomatischem Personal, Schließung von Botschaften sind kontraproduktiv.

◆ www.dielinke-nrw.de
(Suchbegriffe: Eckpunkte Syrien)

Der Tagesspiegel (Allemagne / Germany)

UN verurteilen Assad-Regime

Überwältigende Mehrheit für Resolution in der Vollversammlung Syrische Opposition lehnt Verfassungsreferendum mitten in Kämpfen ab

NEW YORK/WIEN/STRASSBURG. – Mit großer Mehrheit haben die Vereinten Nationen die Gewalt des syrischen Regimes verurteilt. Ein entsprechender Resolutionsentwurf Saudi-Arabiens wurde am Donnerstag in der UN-Vollversammlung von nur wenigen Nationen abgelehnt, unter anderem von Russland, Nordkorea und Venezuela. Die Verurteilung hat rein appellativen Charakter, Sanktionen können nur im UN-Sicherheitsrat verhängt werden.

Ungeachtet des wachsenden diplomatischen Drucks hat die syrische Regierung die Geburtsstätte der elfmonatigen Revolte ins Visier genommen. Soldaten des autokratischen Staatschefs Baschar al Assad griffen am Donnerstag Stellung der Rebellen in Deraa nahe der Grenze zu Jordanien an. Nahe Hama töteten sie der Opposition zufolge mindestens 14 Menschen. UN-Generalsekretär Ban Ki Moon hatte bereits vor der Abstimmung in der UN-Generalversammlung seine Kritik am gewaltsamen Vorgehen der Führung in Damaskus verschärft und sprach von Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit. Wohngebieten würden willkürlich mit Granaten beschossen, Krankenhäuser als Folter-Zentren dienen, zehnjährige Kinder getötet und missbraucht. „Ziemlich sicher“ seien das Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit, sagte Ban in Wien.

Nach dem Scheitern einer Syrien-Resolution im Sicherheitsrat könnte mit der verschärften Rhetorik Bans die Grundlage gelegt werden, um die syrische Führung vor dem Internationalen Strafge-

richtshof zu belangen. Dessen Zuständigkeit umfasst Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit.

Unterdessen hat Präsident Assad einen Termin für das angekündigte Verfassungsreferendum verkündet: Am 26. Februar soll über die neue Konstitution abgestimmt werden, welche angeblich die Alleinherrschaft von Syriens Baath-Partei beenden soll. Der im Auftrag von Präsi-

nach behält er das Recht zur Ernennung des Regierungschefs. Die Opposition fordert aber, dass die Mehrheit im Parlament den Ministerpräsidenten stellt. UN-Generalsekretär Ban Ki Moon misst der syrischen Ankündigung eines Verfassungsreferendums geringe Bedeutung bei. Die Regierung von Präsident Assad müsse „zuerst die Gewalt beenden“, sagte Ban.

Unterdessen hat das EU-Parlament Russland zu einem sofortigen Stopp seiner Waffenlieferungen nach Syrien aufgefordert. Die Abgeordneten forderten in ihrer Entschliessung am Donnerstag außerdem die EU dazu auf, eine schwarze Liste von Unternehmen aufzustellen, die Waffen an das Assad-Regime liefern. Das Europaparlament zeigte sich alarmiert über das brutale Vorgehen der syrischen Führung gegen Kinder. Seit Beginn der gewaltsamen Auseinandersetzungen im März 2011 seien in Syrien fast 400 Kinder getötet worden, stellte das EU-Parlament am Donnerstag in einer Entschliessung fest. Rund 380 Heranwachsende, darunter unter 14-Jährige, seien willkürlich festgenommen und in der Haft Folter und sexueller Gewalt ausgesetzt worden.

In Doha ist der Soziologie-Professor Burhan Ghaliun als Präsident des oppositionellen Syrischen Nationalrats (SNC) bestätigt worden. Die Mitglieder des Oppositionsbündnisses hätten Ghaliuns Amtszeit bei ihrem Treffen in Doha am Mittwoch um weitere drei Monate verlängert, sagte die SNC-Sprecherin Basma Kodmani.

Syriens

Präsident will die Bürger am 26. Februar abstimmen lassen



dent Assad ausgearbeitete Verfassungsentwurf erwählt die Baath-Partei nicht mehr und erlaubt erstmals die Gründung neuer Parteien. Die bisherige Verfassung gab seit 1971 der Partei eine Führungsrolle in Staat und Gesellschaft.

Syrische Oppositionsgruppen haben zum Boykott des Verfassungsreferendums aufgerufen. Der Entwurf zur neuen Verfassung trage denselben „Geist“ wie der bisherige Text, erklärten die Örtlichen Koordinierungskomitees (LCC) am Donnerstag. Dem Entwurf gemäß soll der Präsident direkt vom Volk für maximal zwei Mandate gewählt werden. Dem-

AFP/dpa/tr

Bientôt des armes lourdes pour les rebelles syriens?

La résolution soumise au vote à l'ONU pourrait servir de justification aux émirats du Golfe pour soutenir les insurgés. Coup de bluff?

N'est-elle pas curieuse, l'insistance avec laquelle l'Arabie saoudite et le Qatar ont manœuvré pour soumettre à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU le vote d'une résolution condamnant la répression en Syrie? Car enfin, tout le monde sait que les décisions prises dans cette enceinte ont surtout une portée morale. C'est au Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies que se décident les sanctions contre des gouvernements et les interventions dans des pays en crise. Mais voilà: sur le dossier syrien, Moscou et Pékin ont fait échouer toutes les tentatives.

Il s'agit donc d'avancer par la bande. Proposée par deux pays leaders de la Ligue arabe, une telle résolution apporte *de facto* un soutien moral au plan proposé à la Syrie par cet organe panarabe. Un plan qui prévoit clairement l'arrêt des violences, le départ de Bachar el-Assad et le début d'une période de transition. Une fin de règne que le régime à Damas a bien sûr refusé tout net, provoquant l'ire du roi saoudien et de l'émir du Qatar.

Or, dimanche, ceux-ci viennent d'obtenir de la Ligue arabe qu'elle appelle ses membres à rompre toute relation diplomatique avec le régime de Bachar el-Assad, à ouvrir des canaux de communication avec l'opposition syrienne et à lui «fournir toute forme de soutien

politique et matériel». Une formule vague, qui laisse la place à toutes les interprétations. Des diplomates arabes ont affirmé mardi à l'agence Reuters qu'il s'agira bien de livrer des armes «si les tueries du régime continuent». Ajoutant que «la résolution ouvre aux Etats arabes toutes les options pour protéger le peuple syrien».

Bref, les monarques sunnites se posent en grands défenseurs d'un soulèvement démocratique en Syrie, qui priverait l'Iran chiite d'un allié crucial et diminuerait sa capacité de nuisance à travers le Hezbollah libanais et le Hamas palestinien. Inquiets de voir bientôt leur voisin perse se transformer en puissance nucléaire, ils ne veulent pas manquer une opportunité de changer la donne régionale.

«En réalité, des armes entrent déjà en Syrie par le Liban et l'Irak, mais ce sont des armes légères, qui ne peuvent pas changer l'équilibre des forces entre la rébellion et l'armée loyaliste, note Jean René Belliard, auteur de *Beyrouth, l'enfer des espions*. Bien sûr, il y a chaque jour de nouveaux déserteurs. Hier, on apprenait que le général Fayez Omar, chef de l'Académie de l'armée de l'air d'Alep et originaire de Homs, vient de faire défection. Mais la rébellion est en péril tant qu'elle n'aura pas du matériel lourd, comme des missiles sol-air, des armes antichars ou encore des mortiers. Si les pays du Golfe se décidaient à les leur livrer, en passant par les réseaux jordaniens par exemple, cela changerait tout.»

A.A.

Il francese Juppé ottimista su un accordo con Mosca

Retata di dissidenti a Damasco

L'Assemblea dell'Onu vota

“Basta sangue, Assad se ne vada”

AUK VAN BUREN

AL TELEFONO di Nazem Darwish, fondatore del Centro per la libertà d'espressione a Damasco, risponde un amico: «Nazem è stato arrestato, lui, lamoglie Yara e altri 11. No, non so dove li abbiano portati, què se sia il capo d'imputazione, né quando e se li rilasceranno». Questa non è la prima volta di Nazem: 36 anni, l'erema sigaretta incollata alle labbra, il giornalista si batte da anni in Siria per i diritti umani. Già due volte era stato fermato nel 2011: una per avere partecpatocome osservatore all'aperta dimostrazione del "risveglio siriano". Assieme a Suhair al-Ahmed, discendente di uno storico lignaggio di democratici siriani, chiedeva la liberazione dei prigionieri politici. La seconda per avere «diffuso notizie false ed esagerate» da Dara'a, l'epicentro della rivolta. Di nuovo libero, al Café Brésil, ritrovo di intellettuali dissidenti, confidava a *Repubblica* gli interrogativi riguardo al "arresto del dialogo" cui egli era stato convocato dal regime assieme ad altri oppositori: «Dobbiamo accelerare la transizione pacifica verso la democrazia», insisteva. Però la via rimasta a Damasco a condurre la sua lotta, nonviolenta.

Con Marzen è stata arrestata la blogger americana siniana Razan Ghazzawi, nota su Twitter col nome di @Raz Ghazzan. I giorni



Il ministro degli Esteri francese Alain Juppé

Tra gli arrestati anche il giornalista Nazem Darwish e la blogger Razan Ghazzawi

scorsi aveva ingaggiato un lungo altribridisangue—ienarrivano notizie di scomiti a Homs, Hama e Dara'a — a Vienna si incontrano Juppé, ministro degli Esteri francese, e il suo omologo russo Lavrov. Juppé è ottimista nel prospettare un compromesso su un obiettivo a breve scadenza: la fine



del massacro» e «l'invio di aiuti umanitari al popolo siriano».

All'indomani del pressingsaudita, l'Assemblea generale vota a stragrande maggioranza (137 a 12) la risoluzione di condanna del governo siriano, e il sostegno al piano arabo che chiede un cambiamento di regime. Ban Ki-

moon dice che «quasi certamente sono stati commessi crimini contro l'umanità: quartieri bombardati indiscriminatamente, ospedali usati come centri per torture, bambini incarcerati vittime di abusi».

La Cina intanto invia un rappresentante a Damasco e avverte

L'accordo

Israele compra dall'Italia jet da addestramento, Roma importa droni

ROMA — Israele e acquisterà aerei da addestramento dell'italiana Alenia Aermacchi, del gruppo Finmeccanica, per il valore di un miliardo di dollari. Si tratta di circa trenta jet M346 tecnologicamente avanzati per le esercitazioni di combattimento che andranno a sostituire le flotte dei vecchi SkyHawks. Il governo italiano comprerà a sua volta prodotti dell'industria della difesa israeliana per un pari valore, tra cui droni da rilevazione e da combattimento che verranno costruiti in collaborazione con Finmeccanica. Inoltre, gli israeliani hanno già deciso di entrare nel progetto del caccia F35, per cui compreranno

dalla Lockheed Martin macchine assemblate nella nuova fabbrica di Cameri.

L'accordo oportuna le relazioni tra Israele e Italia «a un nuovo livello», ha commentato l'ambasciatore israeliano a Roma, Naor Gilon. L'intesa preliminare è arrivata alla fine di un lungo braccio di ferro tra Italia e Corea del Sud per aggiudicarsi la commessa israeliana. La firma del contratto è prevista nei prossimi mesi, le consegne nel 2014. Dopo Israele, l'M346 potrebbe diventare l'addestratore delle aeronautiche europee e degli stessi Stati Uniti.

La Cina invia il ministro degli Esteri e ribadisce la sua contrarietà a un intervento

L'assenza di un'opposizione unita può creare un vuoto di potere colmato dagli estremisti. Gli fa eco Dempsey, capo dello Stato maggiore: «Coloro che vogliono fomentare uno scontro fra sunniti e sciiti - e voi sapete chi sono - stanno tutti intervenendo in Siria».

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La Stampa (Italie / Italy)

MENTRE A HOMS CONTINUA IL BOMBARDAMENTO DELLE ZONE DOVE COMBATTONO GLI OPPOSITORI

L'assemblea Onu contro Damasco

Votata a grande maggioranza una risoluzione di condanna al regime

PAOLO MASTROLUCCI
INVIATO A NEW YORK

L'Assemblea Generale dell'Onu ha condannato ieri a grande maggioranza il regime di Assad, approvando la risoluzione della Lega Araba che chiede le dimissioni del presidente siriano. Sul terreno, però, continua la repressione. Le forze fedeli al governo hanno bombardato Homs e altre città, mentre la polizia ha arrestato il blogger Razan Ghazzawi, diventata una delle icone della protesta. Il segretario generale dell'Onu Ban Ki-moon ha accusato Damasco di commettere crimini contro l'umanità.

Il testo che riprende la bozza della Lega Araba bocciata da cinesi e russi non è vincolante

La risoluzione è stata approvata con 137 voti favorevoli, 17 astenuti e solo 12 contrari, tra cui Russia, Cina, Corea del Nord, Iran, Cuba e Venezuela. Il testo riprende il documento bocciato il 4 febbraio scorso dal Consiglio di Sicurezza a causa del veto di Mosca e Pechino. Appoggia il piano della Lega Araba per risolvere la crisi, chiede la fine delle violenze, domanda l'avvio di una transizione democratica del potere da Assad ad un governo di unità nazionale. A questo scopo, sollecita Ban a nominare un inviato per la Si-

Russia, nuova impresa del candidato alla presidenza
Il macho Putin si lancia nella discesa sul bob: «È grandioso»



«È grandioso, ve lo raccomando»: parola di Vladimir Putin, che ieri ha aggiunto la discesa in bob agli altri suoi hobby andrenalini, che vanno dallo judo allo sci al pilotaggio di aerei militari. Nonostante esperti intorno a lui avessero ten-

tato di dissuaderlo, il premier è candidato alla presidenza alle elezioni del 4 marzo prossimo ha voluto provare la discesa in un slittino a due posti, in un impianto vicino a Mosca, insieme a un membro della nazionale russa.

La risoluzione dell'Assemblea Generale non ha il potere coercitivo di quelle del Consiglio di Sicurezza, ma sul piano politico il messaggio è netto: senza veti, la comunità internazionale è compatta nel condannare il regime di Assad. Se il Consiglio non ha approvato il testo del 4 febbraio, ciò è suc-

cesso solo per la resistenza della Russia, che ha grandi interessi strategici in Siria dove vende armi per una cifra tra 2 e 3 miliardi di dollari, e l'opposizione della Cina, preoccupata dal fatto che simili provvedimenti possano essere adottati contro di lei per il trattamento delle sue minoranze. La risoluzione del-

l'Assemblea, quindi, raggiunge il risultato di dimostrare la mancanza di consenso internazionale, isolando tanto la Siria, quanto i suoi protettori. Il problema ora è come procedere.

Nei giorni scorsi la Lega Araba aveva chiesto l'invio di caschi blu dell'Onu, ma per avviare una missione del genere è

necessaria l'approvazione del Consiglio di Sicurezza e il consenso di Damasco. La Francia invece sta lavorando ad una risoluzione che consenta l'apertura di un corridoio umanitario, ma anche questa ipotesi richiederebbe l'uso della forza e i russi sono contrari. Parigi e Mosca stanno ancora discutendo, nella speranza di trovare l'accordo su una formula accettabile per tutti, mentre all'Onu gira la voce che il Qatar abbia offerto al Cremlino di investire in Russia un terzo del proprio bilancio dedicato agli armamenti, circa 100 miliardi di dollari, per convincerlo a cambiare posizione.

A Tunisi il gruppo «Amici della Siria» valuterà il sostegno ai combattenti ribelli

La Siria accusa i Paesi del Golfo di armare i ribelli, perché hanno interesse a colpire l'Iran favorendo la caduta di Assad, ma questo significa prendere una linea che è stata incoraggiata anche da Al Qaeda. Il dipartimento di Stato, però, ha risposto accusando ancora ieri la Russia e l'Iran di fornire armi ad Assad.

In attesa di sbloccare lo stallo, il 24 febbraio a Tunisi ci sarà la prima riunione degli Amici della Siria. Questa coalizione di Paesi contrari al regime di Assad potrebbe valutare nuove sanzioni, e un sostegno politico, economico e forse anche militare all'opposizione in esilio.

Voto contro la repressione in Siria

L'Assemblea Onu censura Assad ma è una condanna simbolica



PRESIDENTE Bashar al-Assad

New York In Siria si muore, all'Onu si vota una risoluzione di condanna, ma ci sono ben pochi motivi di parlare di svolta nell'atteggiamento passivo da parte del «governo mondiale» nei confronti della sanguinosa crisi di Damasco.

Il documento approvato ieri sera 137 voti a favore, 12 contrari e 17 astenuti, dall'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite è una risoluzione

di condanna della repressione messa in atto dal regime di Bashar al Assad. E il testo ricalca più o meno fedelmente quello bloccato il 4 febbraio al Consiglio di Sicurezza dal veto di Russia e Cina (che già una volta si erano messi di traverso). E nonostante questa «prova di forza» gestita soprattutto dai Paesi arabi, la risoluzione per il momento non ha alcun effetto pratico.

I rappresentanti di Russia e Cina anche ieri nell'Assemblea hanno votato contro, ma senza il potere di veto sono finiti in minoranza, rispetto al fronte capitanato dall'Egitto in rappresentanza dei Paesi arabi e di altri settanta «co-sponsor». Pollice verso anche da parte di Nord Corea, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba e, ovviamente, Siria. Il fatto è che la risoluzione approvata dall'Assemblea Generale non ha potere vincolante come i documenti varati dal Consiglio di Sicurezza. Ma - spiegano fonti diplomatiche - ha un grande valore simbolico e rappresenta una decisione molto forte di pressione politica sul governo di Damasco.

Vaglielo a spiegare a chi sta morendo a Homs, sotto le cannonate delle truppe del regime, il valore simbolico. Per il momento la partita con Damasco è ancora tutta sbilanciata a favore di Assad.

Publico (Portugal)

Jornalistas presos em Damasco, receio de massacre em Deraa

Sofia Lorena

Ban Ki-moon acusa regime de possíveis crimes contra a humanidade. Assembleia Geral da ONU debate conflito

● As forças de Bashar al-Assad atacaram ontem Deraa, a cidade onde a revolta contra o regime começou quase há um ano, “semeando o terror entre a população”. Enquanto a Assembleia Geral da ONU se preparava para votar um texto a condenar a violência – depois do veto russo e chinês ter impedido a aprovação de uma resolução no Conselho de Segurança –, o secretário-geral, Ban Ki-moon, falou dos “bairros bombardeados de forma indiscriminada, hospitais usados como centros de tortura e crianças de dez anos presas e alvo de abusos” como “quase certos crimes contra a humanidade”.

Segundo o Observatório Sírio dos Direitos Humanos, “as forças sírias tomaram de assalto Sahn al-Jolan”, localidade na região de Deraa, “perseguiu os habitantes e cercandos”. Depois “massacraram dezenas a sangue frio”, descreveu a organização com sede em Londres e que conta com uma rede de activistas que reúnem informação no terreno. Por todo o país, 40 pessoas foram ontem mortas.

O regresso da violência a Deraa, no Sul, segue-se a duas semanas de bombardeamentos em Homs e a vários ataques contra Hama. Nas contas da Amnistia Internacional, pelo menos 377 civis, incluindo 29 crianças, foram mortas desde 4 de Fevereiro em Homs, onde centenas de feridos graves estão bloqueados e privados dos cuidados de que necessitam.

Em Damasco, 14 pessoas foram presas, incluindo o jornalista Mazen Darwich e a *blogger* Razzan Ghazzawi, um dos símbolos da contestação. As detenções aconteceram no Centro dos *Media* e Liberdade de Expressão. Tanto Darwich como Ghazzawi já foram presos nos últimos 11 meses e posteriormente libertados.

“Estas detenções reflectem a vontade de sufocar todas as vozes que defendem a liberdade de expressão”, disse à AFP o opositor Anwar al-Bounni. Para este advogado, as prisões mostram ainda que “os anúncios feitos em defesa do diálogo são mentira”.
Ao mesmo tempo que bombardeava



O secretário-geral da ONU

rece como “dirigente do Estado e da sociedade” e se estabelece um limite de dois mandatos presidenciais.

Numa tentativa pouco produtiva de aproximar posições, o ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros francês encontrou-se com o seu homólogo russo. “Podemos talvez chegar a acordo sobre um objectivo de muito curto prazo, parar os massacres”, afirmou Alain Juppé, explicando que quer trabalhar numa nova resolução que tenha o apoio de Moscovo. “Não posso dar a minha opinião sobre a proposta francesa porque não recebi nenhuma”, disse Serguei Lavrov. A China, que se pôs ao lado da Rússia no Conselho de Segurança, enviou um diplomata a Damasco.

“Na mesma moeda”

Ontem estava ainda prevista a votação de uma resolução na Assembleia Geral – para onde transitou o debate depois do veto no Conselho de Segurança. Sabe-se que os países da Liga Árabe rejeitaram propostas de modificação russas, mas o texto já tinha 60 co-signatários e não há veto na Assembleia, pelo que a aprovação estava garantida. As decisões aqui também não são vinculativas, limitando-se a enviar uma mensagem sobre as posições de uma maioria dos 193 membros.

Para hoje, a oposição síria apela a manifestações num dia de “Resistência popular, começo de uma nova etapa”. “Não ficaremos mais de braços cruzados face aos ataques de gangues [milícias do regime]. A partir de hoje vamos responder na mesma moeda”, anuncia a página de Facebook Revolução Síria. Num conflito com cada vez mais características de guerra civil

Financial Times Europe (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Syria rebels reappoint leader

By Michael Peel in Abu Dhabi and Abigail Fielding-Smith in Beirut

Syria's main opposition group renewed its leader's mandate for just two months, as President Bashar al-Assad's forces extended their assault on rebellious areas and international diplomacy reached another crunch point.

The Syrian National Council's reappointment of Burhan Ghalioun, a Paris-based academic, came after a gathering in Qatar that was aimed at hammering out a united front for an organisation that has struggled to impose authority on the fragmented anti-regime struggle.

The council, which is supposed to have a rotating presidency, is trying to boost its credibility and minimise divisions. It will meet in Tunis next week with the so-called Friends of Syria, a group set up by countries opposed to Mr Assad's regime after Russia and China vetoed UN Security Council action.

The SNC used its meeting in Qatar to try to broaden its representation to reflect Syria's religious diversity by inviting an Arab Christian and a member of the Alawite community, the

minority offshoot sect of Shia Islam of which Mr Assad and much of the ruling elite are members.

As the council met, Syrian forces continued a near two-week assault on the city of Homs and attacked high-profile opposition areas such as Hama, Dera'a and the Damascus suburb of Qaboun, activists said.

The government widened its arrest campaign, said activists, detaining high-profile human rights advocates.

As the UN General Assembly prepared to vote on a resolution condemning Mr Assad's government, Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary-general, told Syrian authorities to stop killing civilians and said it was possible that crimes against humanity were being committed. "We see neighbourhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as torture centres, children as young as 10 years old killed and abused," he said.

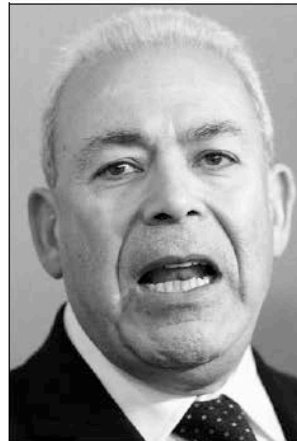
The SNC's endorsement of Mr Ghalioun came after a debate over whether to replace him after less than six months in the job, opposition activists said, reflecting questions about his performance and internal rivalries.

The statement announc-

ing his re-election said that while the SNC's executive committee would normally appoint one of its members for a three-month term as president, Mr Ghalioun had been given two – suggesting that the result was a hard-fought compromise.

"This is the Syrian National Council making clear that we bring the opposition together," insisted Yaser Tabbara, an adviser to the SNC's secretary-general.

"We are the brokers the international community needs to deal with in terms of offering the Syrian people the help that they desperately need."



Burhan Ghalioun: mandate renewed for just two months

The council faces a challenge in trying to impose itself as the voice of the opposition. Groups of dissidents with no association to the SNC continue to spring up and some prominent activists remain outside the organisation and are firmly opposed to its strategy of supporting the Free Syrian Army, the armed opposition comprising mostly army defectors.

The SNC has also struggled with divisions that are both personality-driven and political, people familiar with it say, and grassroots activists are said to feel disappointed with the council, which is supposed to represent them.

The SNC will now take its pitch to Tunis, where Najib Ghadbian, a member of the council's general secretariat, said the organisation would be "moving to seriously pursue the question of recognition by both Arab countries and the international community".

Recognition would be a big fillip to the SNC – as it was to the ruling Libyan rebel council that oversaw the toppling of Muammer Gaddafi. It could also be attractive to anti-Assad countries who feel impotent after their UN Security Council resolution failed.

He was given a choice. Shoot the Sunni Muslims in front of you, or be killed yourself



Richard Spencer in Homs

FOR much of last year, Karam, a member of Bashar al-Assad's military intelligence unit, faced a brutish choice. "Imagine if you were a Christian Musliming a checkpoint and there was a Christian in front of you. Behind you was a Muslim who gave you a choice to shoot them or he would shoot you. What would you do?"

"This was exactly what happened to me, except with Sunni Muslim people standing in front of me." Fouad is now

meaning a Free Syrian Army outpost down the road to the town of Hama province. Set in a villa amid apricot and apple orchards and lines of regular trees, it is an idyllic spot on a sunny spring morning, but, by night, when gunfire bursts out from nearby villages and cars screech up the criss-cross of roads outside, it is deeply threatening.

But Fouad is happier here than he was in his seven years' service in the Mukhabarat, an organisation whose name is a byword for fear in many Arab countries. Most particularly, as the protests against President Assad's rule were met with violence and finally war, he became alarmed at the growing psychopathy of those around him, including his friends, as they carried out

acts of terror. There was a friend called Zuhair al-Ramahi, he said, who regularly made telephone calls to a newspaper, looking on in civilian clothes. He knew he was a supporter of the Assads, Fouad said, and he also knew he took extra money from the secret police — yet another arm of the Assad security state.

But he began to notice, after the uprising started in March last year, how Zuhair began to abuse his position — how he became more aggressive and stole from shops they visited together.

"I began to think he was not a very nice person," he said. "Maybe he thought that, if he followed orders from Alawite bosses, he would get more privileges." Typically, they were ridding a Palestinian refugee camp in the town of

Lattakia, a stronghold of the Alawite religion, to which the Assad family belongs. The camp is also home to many ordinary Syrians who had joined anti-regime demonstrations. "We were in a checkpoint on the streets," he said. "These was a man and his wife passing down the street. This soldier, Zuhair, just shot and killed them." Others from the unit then went on a looting spree.

He tells a string of similar stories, such as the mission he was on to capture a group of men identified by an informer as helping defectors make it over the border to Turkey. He witnessed their leader being shot dead after being arrested and put in a police van. He also says he saw a group of Shiabaha — militia — shoot up the town of Banayras,

not far from Lattakia. He is lucky that, for the most part, the regime allowed Shiabaha to do its dirty work, enabling it to disclaim responsibility. But as he more regularly came under orders to fire on protesters — with the alternative of being shot by those behind him — he sought advice from an imam, who advised him to shoot, but only so as to do the minimum damage.

"I made sure I only hit their legs," he said, indicating from the knee down.

This went on until his wife gave birth and he was able to take leave and smuggle her and the baby into Lebanon. He never returned to his unit.

Commanders claim there are up to 3,000 members of the Free Syrian Army in the western part of Homs province, many of not most, defectors. But the FSA is still working hard to get organised. As the rebel forces advance, Homs are funnelled into submission, with Bab al-Ayn shelled for the 14th day in a row yesterday, the defectors knew they have put themselves on the receiving end of punishment they would once have doled out.

A lieutenant from the crack Fourth Division, led by Mr Assad's brother, Maher, turned himself in in front of *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday, saying he had refused to shoot at protesters in Hama. His identity card named him as Mohammed. "When they finish with Bab al-Ayn, they will start on us," he said. As a recent defector, he was a man who would know.

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Russia and China defy UN again over Syria

By Rosa Prince in New York

RUSSIA and China defied the international community last night by voting against a United Nations resolution condemning human rights violations in Syria.

The resolution, which also called for an end to violence in the country and the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, was passed at the UN General Assembly by 137 votes to 12.

Russia and China lined up with pariah states including North Korea and Venezuela, as well as Syria itself, in opposition. Another 17 countries abstained.

While the Arab-backed vote was non-binding, British diplomats said it added to international pressure on Syria to stop the brutal offensive that is estimated to have claimed up to 7,000 lives.

William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, said: "President Assad and the Syrian regime must heed the call of the international community and allow a peaceful political transition to resolve the crisis."

The negative votes by two permanent members of the UN Security Council cast doubt on claims by France that Russia was prepared to sign up to a fresh international drive to solve the crisis.

Vitaly Churkin, Russia's representative at the UN, told the gathering in New York that his country had been unable to back the General Assembly motion, which was co-sponsored by 72 nations, because it

did not require the Syrian opposition to cease violence.

"Under these circumstances, the Russian Federation had no other option but to vote against," he said.

China said it could not back the resolution because it effectively called for the departure of President Assad and therefore regime change. Bashar Ja'afari, Syria's representative to the UN, claimed the resolution would only lead to "more chaos and more crisis".

Earlier this month Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have required President Assad to hand over power to his deputy.

Speaking before yesterday's vote, Alain Juppé, the French foreign minister, held out hope that Russia would overcome its earlier objections. After meeting his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, Mr Juppé said: "We can possibly reach a compromise on a short-term objective which is to end the massacres."

Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, warned that crimes against humanity were taking place in Syria while diplomats continued to "debate".

In Syria, government forces continued to attack the rebel towns of Hama and Homs and extended their onslaught to Dera'a, on the Jordanian border. In the capital, Damascus, security forces arrested several prominent critics of the regime, including Razan Ghazzawi, a blogger, and Mazen Darwish, a rights activist.

The Scotsman (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

UN resolution condemns Syrian regime for human rights abuses

ELIZABETH KENNEDY AND
GEORGE JAHN IN BEIRUT

FOREIGN Secretary William Hague last night called on Syria's president Bashar Assad to allow a peaceful political transition in his country, following an overwhelming vote in the United Nations condemning human rights violations by his regime.

Some 137 countries backed a non-binding resolution at the UN general assembly in New York supporting an Arab League plan that calls for Mr Assad to step down and prepare the way for a new government in the Middle Eastern state.

Just 12 nations voted against the motion, but they included permanent UN Security Council members Russia and China, who have blocked proposals for a binding resolution in the 15-member council.

Mr Hague said the vote sent an

"The message is: the violence must stop immediately"

William Hague

"unambiguous" message to Damascus that the violence against protesters who have challenged the Assad regime must stop immediately.

He called on UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon to appoint a special representative to work alongside the new Friends of Syria group, which meets for the first time in Tunisia on 24 February.

"The resolution, which explicitly endorsed the Arab League plan of November 2 as well as its decisions on January 22 and February 12, was co-sponsored by 72 countries and supported by 137 members of the Assembly.

"It sent a clear signal of the international community's condemnation of the Syrian regime's

actions and intention to hold to account those responsible for the ongoing atrocities. The message is unambiguous. The violence must stop immediately."

Mr Hague added: "I look forward to discussing how we can support the Arab League further at the Friends of Syria meeting next week. I hope that the UN secretary general will swiftly appoint a special representative to work alongside them.

"President Assad and the Syrian regime must heed the call of the international community and allow a peaceful political transition to resolve the crisis. President Assad and those around him should be under no doubt that we will continue to support the Syrian people."

Meanwhile, Mr Ban had earlier accused the Syrian regime of committing "almost certain" crimes against humanity last night as activists reported fresh violence and the arrest of several prominent dissidents, including a US-born blogger.

He demanded the Syrian regime stop using indiscriminate force against civilians caught up in fighting between government troops and Mr Assad's opponents.

"We see neighbourhoods shelled indiscriminately," he told reporters in Vienna. "Hospitals used as torture centres. Children as young as ten years' old jailed and abused. We see almost certain crimes against humanity."

Syrian activists said government forces attacked Daraa yesterday, carrying out arrests and shooting randomly in the city where the uprising against Mr Assad erupted 11 months ago. They also reported intense clashes between army defectors and government troops in the central province of Hama.

China's foreign minister will arrive in the country for talks about how to end the violence today.

The Irish Times (Irlande / Irland)

In all the years I've been visiting, I have never seen such desperation



Sanctions touted as targeting the regime actually affect the poor, punish the middle class, and kill commerce, writes **Michael Jansen** in Damascus

SHOESHINE BOYS and girls line up with their simple kits along the pavement across from the luxury Cham Palace Hotel, which charges more than a poor man's monthly wage for a single night's stay.

Women holding bundles which may or may not be babies sit on the broad walkway in a colonnade. Grubby children peddling chewing gum and lottery tickets pursue pedestrians for blocks in the hope of receiving a coin or two. In all the years I have been visiting Syria, I have never seen such desperation.

Economic sanctions touted as targeting the regime actually affect the poor, punish the middle class, and destroy commerce.

of a liberalisation programme which transformed the country's command economy into a "social market" one, featuring a free market with guaranteed development for the poor.

Independent economic consultant Nabil Sukkar says oil exports have fallen but Damascus expects to make up some losses by increasing non-oil exports such as agricultural products (especially olive oil), pharmaceuticals and textiles.

Although Syria's imports are falling, the country could end up with a larger budget deficit. Syria's \$17 billion in reserves, reduced to \$14-15 billion, "are not being replenished as before by oil exports and tourism".

He points out that "sanctions have created bottlenecks and black markets. Smugglers benefit."

Unrest and sanctions have reversed the economic liberalisation programme which had opened Syria to foreign banks, external investment and tourism and led to economic ties with the EU. An association agreement was drafted but never signed.

Sukkar, a former World Bank regional specialist, believes the

government or its successor will pursue a policy of "economic self-sufficiency and protectionism".

Political commentators also suggest that Syria could turn away from the West, particularly Europe, because of sanctions.

A positive consequence of sanctions, Sukkar observes, was the abrogation of the free trade agreement with Turkey. This deal provided for a large flow of subsidised Turkish goods into Syria, undercutting the domestic textile industry and other manufacturers.

The economic damage inflicted by sanctions, disruption of internal communications, and cuts in commerce could have a more harmful and long-lasting impact on the economy than unrest. If Aleppo and Damascus, the country's economic hubs, are overwhelmed by the rebellion, the consequences for the economy could be massive.

Despite the unrest, the Syrian entrepreneurial spirit has not been crushed. Ahead of St Valentine's day, sweet shops displayed heart-shaped boxes of chocolates while boys sold red roses near St Thomas's Gate in the Old City.

National Post (Canada)

'SYRIA IS IN REVOLT'

Syrian troops on Thursday attacked rebel strongholds in Deraa – where the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad erupted nearly a year ago – as the government's military campaign accelerated.



'VILLAGE BY VILLAGE'

In Deraa, a city on the Jordanian border, the sound of explosions and machine-gun fire echoed through districts under attack by government troops, residents said. "The army bombardment started around dawn and after that exchanges of fire occurred," Hussam Izzedine, a member of the Syrian human rights organization Sawasiah, told Reuters from Deraa. An army offensive in April put

down large demonstrations, pictured above, in Deraa, which had been provoked by the arrest of several women activists and the detention of schoolboys who had written freedom slogans on walls, inspired by other Arab revolts. "It's very methodical," said Mohammed, a Deraa resident reached by telephone from Beirut. He said regime forces were attacking the province "village by village."

UN CONDEMS ASSAD

With 137 votes in favour, 12 against and 17 abstentions, the 193-member United Nations General Assembly approved a non-binding resolution that condemned Mr. Assad's human rights violations and endorsed an Arab League plan to end the almost year-long conflict. Those voting against included Russia,



China, North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela. Earlier, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, pictured, said, "We see neighbourhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as torture centres, children as young as 10 years old jailed and abused. We see almost certain crimes against humanity."

CHINESE ENVOY

China, which along with Russia blocked a draft resolution at the UN Security Council on Feb. 4 backing an Arab call for Mr. Assad to step down, said it was sending a senior envoy to Syria. "[China] does not approve of the use of force to interfere in Syria or the forceful pushing of a so-called regime change," said Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun. Mr. Zhai will visit Syria Friday.

VENEZUELAN FUEL

The government of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez is emerging as a rare supplier of diesel to Syria, potentially undermining Western sanctions and helping the Syrian government fuel its military. A cargo of diesel, which can be used to fuel army tanks or as heating fuel, was expected to arrive at Syria's Mediterranean port of Baniyas this week, according to two traders and shipping data.

MASSACRE FEARED

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said it feared security forces carried out a massacre in Deraa province, where dozens of civilians disappeared on Wednesday after being cornered in a valley. "There are fears regime forces carried out a massacre in Sahm al-Julan," the Britain-based group said in a statement. "Witnesses said security forces shot at the civilians and then piled them onto pickup trucks. Their fate is unknown," said the Observatory, which provided the names of 14 of those feared killed.

HAMA OFFENSIVE

After bombarding Homs for nearly two weeks, the Syrian military began a new offensive in Hama, a city with a bloody history of resistance to Mr. Assad's late father, Hafez al-Assad. Activists said at least 14 people were killed in bombardment of the nearby town of Kfar Nubouzeh on Thursday.



BLOGGER ARRESTED

Security forces on Thursday arrested blogger Razan Ghazzawi, pictured, symbol of the 11-month uprising in Syria, along with rights activist Mazen Darwish and 12

The Globe and Mail (Canada)

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Assad's fellow Alawites grow wary in Turkey

GRAEME SMITH ISTANBUL

As the conflict in Syria threatens to bring down the only regime in the world run by members of the Alawite religious sect, the uprising is beginning to stir resentment among the millions of Alawites who live next door in Turkey.

Fearing a massacre of their fellow Alawites if the regime in Damascus falls apart, the community here is starting to take sides in the conflict that puts it in opposition to the Turkish government's policy of calling for the resignation of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Turkish Alawites, who historically have kept a low profile, usually keep themselves separate from their brethren across the border in Syria. But the latest conflict appears to be bringing them together in support of Mr. al-Assad, a fellow Alawite.

"Even people who had little sympathy for Assad in the past, now they love him," said Miyase Ilknur, a veteran reporter at the Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet and Alawite whose reporting often focuses on her own community.

At least three street demonstrations in Istanbul have expressed support for Mr. Assad in recent months, and glossy Alawite magazines are circulating in Istanbul with messages in support of the Assad regime in Syria.

At a small community centre in Istanbul where about 250 Alawites gather regularly to drink tea and discuss politics, the talk has turned to dark scenarios of how the estimated two to three million Alawites in Syria could face obliteration.

"It will be a blood river," said Huzdat Hatay, 52, a teacher and Arabic-language tour guide in Istanbul who serves as a leading member of an Alawite group. "The Muslim Brotherhood will take control and start hunting us down."

Young men from the insular sect recently became so concerned about covert weapons shipments into Syria that they started hijacking ambulances in the eastern Turkish province of Hatay, searching the medical ve-



Sawssan Abdelwahab fled to Turkey from Syria. Alawite Turks fear their brethren, such as President Bashar al-Assad, will be persecuted by the Muslim Brotherhood if the uprising succeeds. ZOHRA BENSEMRA/REUTERS

“**Even people who had little sympathy for Assad in the past, now they love him.**”

Miyase Ilknur
Turkish reporter

hicles for arms caches, he added.

Alawites are stronger in numbers in Turkey than in Syria and are estimated to account for 15 million of the country's 75 million people. Their recent activism reflects a deep concern that Syria could be taken over by Sunni Muslims, who are the majority of the Syrian population, and in particular by the Muslim Brotherhood, which has branded their version of Islam as heretical.

Such concerns have a long history among the Alawites, which broke away from Shia Islam almost 1,000 years ago. Like their Shia ancestors, the Alawites revere Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, but they also are said to consider him divine. Their traditions also include an eclectic mix of influences.

Reports are also emerging of Alawites directly opposing the revolutionaries, beating up demonstrators and giving shelter to pro-government forces in their house-to-house battles against

rebels.

In many parts of Turkey and elsewhere in the region, the uprising in Syria is viewed through the lens of Sunni Muslim ambitions running up against the interests of the Shia and other minorities, according to Ms. Ilknur, the journalist.

She said she has not heard of any vigilante action by Turkish Alawites to help their Syrian neighbours, but other commentators in Turkey have speculated that Alawite resistance could become a brake on the momentum of the uprising.

One of the glossy Turkish-language magazines handed out by Mr. Hatay's Alawite community group in Istanbul, called Voice of the Asi River, warned readers not to trust the Western news organizations' reports from inside Syria, and it also spoke in ominous tones about a possible counter-uprising.

"Ordinary people will make the price high, for those who interfere with Syria," the magazine said.

The New York Times – International Herald Tribune (USA)

U.S. ties Iraqi Qaeda group to Syria blasts

WASHINGTON

FROM NEWS REPORTS

U.S. intelligence officials told Congress on Thursday that fighters linked to Al Qaeda's franchise in Iraq were probably behind a series of bombings against the Syrian regime in recent months.

One of the officials, James Clapper, director of national intelligence, said bombings against security and intelligence targets in Damascus and Aleppo bear "all the earmarks of an Al Qaeda-like attack," leading the U.S. intelligence community to believe the Iraqi militant branch was extending its reach across the border into Syria.

He added that Syrian opposition groups might have been infiltrated by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, most likely without their knowledge. Mr. Clapper said the lack of a unified opposition group could leave a power vacuum that extremists could fill if the Syrian government fell, a potential development he called "troubling," because Syria has an extensive network of chemical weapons sites.

The head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Ronald Burgess, added that it appeared that "the Al Qaeda-like attacks" were most likely caused by elements already inside the country and that the U.S. intelligence community had not yet detected "a clarion call to outsiders" to join the cause.

As the violence in Syria escalates, several analysts said, Al Qaeda is seeking to exploit the turmoil and reinvigorate its regional ambitions after being sidelined in the initial popular uprisings of the Arab Spring a year ago.

The precise Syrian role of the Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda is unclear. Some intelligence officials and diplomats in Washington, Baghdad and Beirut said the Qaeda franchise was responsible for the deadly bombings in Aleppo last week and in Damascus, the capital, on Dec. 23 and Jan. 6, which killed scores of people. But they acknowledged that they did not have the forensic or electronic intercept evidence to prove it.

Other officials said Sunni fighters loosely affiliated with Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia but not directly controlled by the terrorist group may also have been involved, operating in common cause with but independently of pro-democracy forces seeking to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

"It appears to be a very complicated mixture of networks that are fighting the Syrian government, including individuals associated with Al Qaeda in Iraq," said Seth G. Jones, a political science scholar at RAND Corp.

Other experts agreed, saying Sunni extremists — some of whom have returned from Iraq to fight in Syria — also have the expertise to carry out large-scale bombings.

"There are plenty of people with that kind of know-how in Syria," said Andrew J. Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The Assad regime helped invent the car bomb, and they have used it brilliantly to pursue their foreign policy goals. It could be Al Qaeda or simply those with a similar background carrying it out."

Or as Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, put it during Senate testimony in Washington on Tuesday, "Those who would like to foment a Sunni-Shia stand-off — and you know who they are — are all weighing in in Syria."

The Syrian government has always argued that it was fighting foreign terrorists, including some from Al Qaeda, a charge dismissed as propaganda by the Syrian activists leading the uprising.

But some U.S. officials now say Al Qaeda in Iraq, whose membership has declined substantially in recent years, is trying to take advantage of the violence in Syria and perhaps even hijack the popular uprising against the Syrian government.

Al Qaeda was caught off guard by the Arab Spring's largely nonviolent, secular revolutions fueled by social media. The killing of Osama bin Laden in May dealt the organization another major blow, and it has been seeking a foothold ever since.

Ayman al-Zawahri, who succeeded Bin Laden as the leader of Al Qaeda worldwide, issued a statement Saturday urging Muslims in the region — he specifically mentioned Iraq — to support the uprising, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadist communications.

The debate over Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia's role in Syria came as the U.S. government offered to help any post-Assad government secure Syria's stockpiles of chemical weapons and portable antiaircraft missiles.

With violence rising and the political outcome uncertain, U.S. officials acknowledged that the effort to secure Syria's unconventional weapons remained speculative.

The U.S. intelligence community is monitoring Syria's weapons stockpiles, officials said, even as it attempts to increase its efforts to gather information about and assessments of the organi-

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

In Lebanon, Signs of a Syria Proxy War

BY NOUR MALAS
AND CHARLES LEVINSON

TRIPOLI, Lebanon—Syria's bloody civil conflict is rapidly expanding into a regional proxy battle that threatens to cleave neighboring countries, including Lebanon, and Iraq, as their populations harden along sectarian lines.

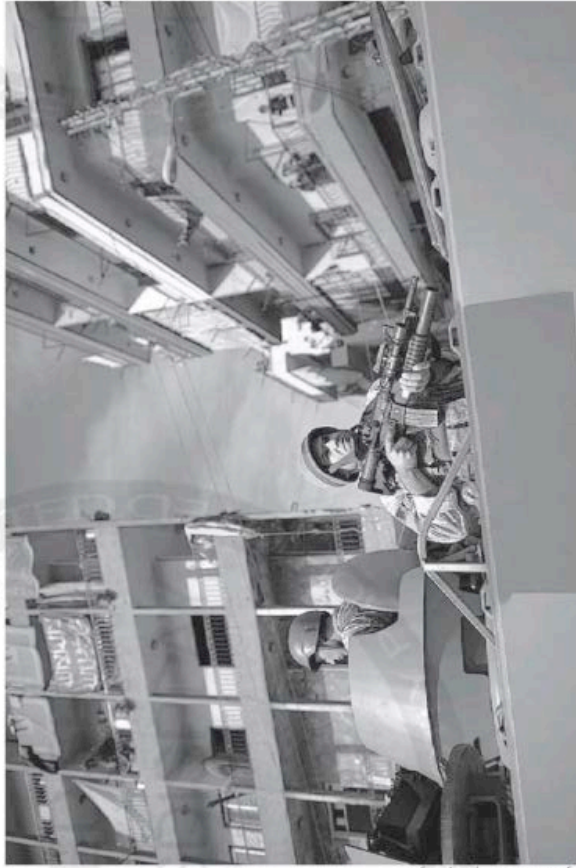
The battle lines extend from the top levels of the region's governments to the street in places like Tripoli, a conservative city in northern Lebanon close to the porous border with Syria.

Down the middle of this city runs Syria Street, a dividing line that extends from here, metaphorically, across the Middle East. In Tripoli, one camp has largely formed around Lebanese Alawites, long supporters of a ruling family dynasty in Syria from the same Shiite offshoot sect. They are allied with Hezbollah, the Shiite militant and political group that holds heavy sway in Lebanon's government.

On the other side are many Sunnis, the local majority population, who in recent years have increasingly opposed President Bashar al-Assad's minority regime in Sunni-majority Syria. Sunnis in Tripoli have mobilized to provide shelter to Syrian refugees and have organized hospitals for the wounded, say residents and Syrian refugees. Further north, close to the border with Syria, a vast valley region has become an operational base for Syrian rebel fighters and weapons smugglers, these residents say.

Tripoli's historic divide cracked open last weekend, when residents in the Sunni area unfurled a banner from a building that read "Assad the Butcher," say some of the people involved in the clashes. On Feb. 10, gunbattles broke out between pro- and anti-Assad factions, prompting the Lebanese army to intervene and claiming three lives. The army then pulled in to the streets of Tripoli to guard a cease fire, and along Syria's northeastern border, in what appeared to be the first such mobilization there in decades.

Residents say the moves are the manifestation of a much larger



Lebanese soldiers secure an area in Tripoli's Bab al-Tabbaneh neighborhood on Sunday following deadly sectarian clashes.

done so as well.

Arrayed against the Syrian leader are the region's Sunnis—including not only the kingdoms of the Gulf, backed by the U.S. and Europe, but also a longtime nemesis of these powers.

On Thursday, U.S. intelligence officials said they now believe al-Qaeda operatives are joining the battle against the Assad government. "We believe that al-Qaeda in Iraq is extending its reach into Syria," James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, said in a Senate hearing, the most direct confirmation yet drawn by U.S. officials between terrorist groups and the Syrian opposition. Recent explosions in Damascus and Aleppo, he said, "had all the earmarks of an al-Qaeda-like attack."

Iraqis, meanwhile, have allegedly been arming both sides of the Syrian conflict. Sunni leaders in Iraq have claimed to be arming the opposition to Mr. Assad. Syrian opposition members have accused Iraq's

Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of aiding Mr. Assad by turning a blind eye to the passage of Iraqi Shiite militiamen, as well as Iranian fighters and weapons transiting to Syria through Iraq, to assist Mr. Assad. Iraqi officials deny this.

In Lebanon, tensions have spiked in recent weeks as Syria's rebels have increasingly relied on Lebanese territory and sympathetic Lebanese factions for support.

Syrian Army defectors and refugees have carved out a swath of land in Wadi Khaled in the country's northeast, just across the border from the besieged Syrian city of Homs, according to residents. The United Nations Refugee Agency says 6,133 Syrians are registered in north Lebanon. But Syrian activists say the actual number is at least twice that and growing.

Some Lebanese officials fear this area could develop into a lawless enclave outside the central government's control, similar to the Palestinian refugee camps that sprang up

in the 1970s and 1980s. Back then, the influx of Palestinians, including scores of armed militants using Lebanon as a base for attacks against Israel, upended the country's delicate demographic balance, provoked a civil war and dragged Lebanon into war with Israel.

Western officials and opposition activists have also said Lebanon is one of the main sources for arms for Syria's rebels. On Feb. 10, the day the clashes broke out in Tripoli, an alleged illegal weapons storehouse exploded in a neighborhood of the town. It isn't certain whose weapons were being held there.

And with Lebanon's public hospitals reluctant to take wounded Syrians, opposition fighters and activists, according to members of the Syrian diaspora relief group, these workers say they have set up their own facilities in a private hospital, funded by the Syrian diaspora and Lebanese Islamic charities.

Officially, Lebanon's government has held to neutrality in the latest conflict. But different government institutions appear to be quietly working to help each side of the Syrian conflict.

In recent weeks, at least 12 wounded Syrian opposition activists bound for hospitals in Lebanon have been nabbed en route by the Hezbollah-dominated Lebanese military intelligence, said Abu Yasser, the Syrian medical relief worker in Lebanon, and others in his commission. Hezbollah officials have been restricted in speaking to the media, except through formal published statements. It didn't comment on the alleged kidnappings.

Lebanon's army, which is heavily dominated by the Shiite Hezbollah, has meanwhile deployed twice in a month near Tripoli in response to Syria-related tensions. On Feb. 4, the army deployed along Lebanon's northern border with Syria, in an area that Syrian opposition activists have made a rear support hub for residents and fighters in the besieged city of Homs.

Some Lebanese officials fear this area could develop into a lawless enclave outside the central government's control, similar to the Palestinian refugee camps that sprang up

—Sam Dagher in Baghdad and Stobhan Gorman and Julian E. Barnes in Washington contributed to this article.

The Washington Post (USA)

U.N. votes to condemn crackdown in Syria

BY COLUM LYNCH

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. General Assembly on Thursday overwhelmingly approved a resolution demanding that Syria end its brutal 11-month crackdown on protesters and endorsing an Arab League plan for a political transition that would require President Bashar al-Assad to yield some of his power.

The nonbinding resolution is largely symbolic and includes no enforcement provisions. But its approval, by a vote of 137 to 12, with 17 abstentions, highlights the growing isolation of Syria's closest protectors at the United Nations, particularly China and Russia, which voted against Thursday's resolution and vetoed a similar measure in the U.N. Security Council two weeks ago.

The new measure calls on U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to appoint a special envoy for Syria, where more than 6,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the uprising began. It also "strongly condemns" Syria's crackdown and urges the government to "immediately put an end to all human rights violations and attacks against civilians."

"Today the U.N. General Assembly sent a clear message to the people of Syria — the world is with you," Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said in a statement.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have been stalled since the Feb. 4 veto of the Security Council resolution, which would have called for the seating of a national unity government in Syria. The Arab League now hopes Thursday's vote will help reinforce that political plan.

In the meantime, there are still divisions among diplomats over the best course of action to prevent further bloodshed.

France and Turkey have pressed for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor to permit the distribution of assistance to Syrian civilians, a proposal Ban backed on Thursday in discussions with Russian officials.

Obama administration officials have been pressing for more clarity on the proposal. They have pointed out the complications of distributing aid throughout Syria and protecting such a corridor, as well as convincing Russia that it is not a stalking horse for the regime change

Moscow has already rejected.

On Thursday, Bashar al-Jaafari, Syria's U.N. ambassador, denounced the chief Arab and Western sponsors of the new resolution, saying they were "leading a political and media aggression against Syria" and providing logistical and military support for "armed terrorists" seeking to overthrow Assad's government.

He accused the sponsors of ignoring his country's offer to introduce political reforms and dismissing a series of Russian amendments aimed at calling on the opposition to dissociate itself with the country's armed resistance.

In Syria, security forces continued their assault aimed at suppressing the revolt, with attacks across the country killing 26 people, according to the human rights advocacy group Avaaz.

The veto of the Security Council resolution appears to have emboldened the Syrian government to crack down even more harshly against protesters, and the conflict has increasingly taken on the cast of an armed insurgency as frustrated protesters gather weapons and fight back.

In Washington, top U.S. intelligence officials said Thursday that they think members of al-Qaeda have infiltrated Syrian opposition groups, and probably executed recent bombings in the nation's capital and largest city.

Two bombings in Damascus in December, as well as deadly attacks on security and intelligence buildings in Aleppo last week, "had all the earmarks of an al-Qaeda-like attack," Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper said at a congressional hearing, adding that the network's affiliate in Iraq "is extending its reach into Syria."

But Clapper suggested that al-Qaeda has not sought to call attention to its presence, and that its operatives may have slipped into groups of fighters who oppose Assad.

Al-Qaeda extremists "have infiltrated" opposition groups that "in many cases may not be aware they are there," Clapper said in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

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Correspondent Liz Sly in Beirut and staff writers Greg Miller and Karen DeYoung in Washington contributed to this report.

The Washington Times (USA)

“We see neighborhoods shelled indiscriminately. Hospitals used as torture centers. Children as young as 10 years old jailed and abused. We see almost certain crimes against humanity.”

— Ban Ki-moon,
U.N. secretary-general



Government army soldiers on top of an armored personnel carrier patrol a street at the mountain resort town of Zabadani, Syria, near the Lebanese border. A human rights group said Syrian troops “committed a new massacre” near the northwestern town of Jisr al-Shughour, killing 19 people — 11 of them from the same family. The report was impossible to confirm.

SYRIA

U.N. demands end of attacks

Resolution calls for Assad to step down, condemns violations

By ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY AND GEORGE JAHN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIRUT | U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accused the Syrian regime of committing “almost certain” crimes against humanity Thursday, as activists reported fresh violence and the arrest of several prominent dissidents, including a U.S.-born blogger.

Speaking to reporters in Vienna, Mr. Ban demanded the Syrian regime stop using indiscriminate force against civilians caught up in fighting between government troops and President Bashar Assad’s opponents.

“We see neighborhoods shelled indiscriminately,” Mr. Ban told reporters in Vienna. “Hospitals used as torture centers. Children as young as 10 years old jailed and abused. We see almost certain crimes against humanity.”

At the United Nations in New York, the General Assembly approved a resolution Thursday backing an Arab League plan that calls for Mr. Assad to step down and strongly condemns human rights violations by his regime.

The vote was 137-12 with 17 abstentions.

Russia and China, which vetoed a similar resolution in the Security Council, voted against the resolution.

There are no vetoes in the General Assembly and while resolutions are not legally binding, they do reflect world opinion on major issues.

Syrian activists said government forces attacked Daraa on Thursday, carrying out arrests and shooting randomly in the city where the uprising against Mr. Assad erupted 11 months ago. They also reported intense clashes between army defectors and government troops in the central province of Hama.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Syrian troops “committed a new massacre” near the northwestern town of Jisr al-Shughour, killing 19 people — 11 of them from the same family. The report was impossible to



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Families at a shelter in the Baba Amr neighborhood of Homs hide from shelling by the Syrian government.

confirm.

The push into Daraa, located near the Jordanian border some 80 miles south of Damascus, followed sieges on the rebellious cities of Homs and Hama, and appears to be part of an effort by the regime to extinguish major pockets of dissent.

Also Thursday, the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), an umbrella group of activists, reported the arrest of a several activists, including Razan Ghazzawi, a U.S.-born blogger and press freedom campaigner.

Ms. Ghazzawi, who was born in Miami, was arrested early in the uprising and charged with

spreading false information, but she was released after about two weeks.

The LCC said security forces also arrested leading human rights activist Mazen Darwish and others during a raid on their Damascus office.

The reports could not be immediately confirmed.

The LCC said dozens of people were killed throughout the country Thursday.

The Observatory said security forces killed at least one civilian in Daraa, and that clashes between defectors and government troops there left at least three regime soldiers dead.

Chicago Tribune (USA)

U.N. condemns Syria as dozens more die

General Assembly's nonbinding vote cites rights breaches

BY PATRICK J. MCDONNELL
Tribune Newspapers

BEIRUT — Opposition activists reported dozens more people killed in Syria on Thursday as the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned the Syrian government's "systematic violations of human rights" and backed a plan calling for President Bashar Assad to relinquish power.

The vote by the 193-member body in New York provided a symbolic victory for the United States, Turkey, Arab nations and others calling for the ouster of the Syrian leader.

But the move seemed unlikely to make much difference on the ground in Syria, where the U.N. says more than 5,000 people have died in the conflict since anti-government protests erupted almost a year ago.

Opposition activists reported at least 63 people were killed Thursday, including 38 in Syria's rebellious northwestern province of Idlib, where the government is fighting to regain control of territory lost to armed rebels.

Casualty figures cannot be independently verified in much of Syria, where access by foreign media is limited.

As the nation veers toward civil war, a fresh government offensive also was reported Thursday in the southern province of Daraa, where the rebellion began in March.

The coalition seeking Assad's ouster had twice been thwarted in the U.N. Security Council, but it found a more receptive audience in a chamber that includes most of the world's governments.



A Local Coordination Committees blog photo downloaded Thursday purports to show Syrian tanks near Damascus.

Although the resolution approved Thursday is nonbinding, its supporters hope that it will increase pressure on Assad while bestowing additional political and moral authority on the international coalition pushing for him to step down.

"Today, the U.N. General Assembly sent a clear message to the people of Syria: The world is with you," said Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N.

Syria's U.N. ambassador, Bashar Ja'afari, denounced the vote as a "shameful" sellout by a "Trojan horse" Arab League to the West and Israel. He predicted that it would lead to "more chaos and more crisis."

Among other provisions, the U.N. resolution backs an Arab League plan calling for Assad to relinquish power as part of a transition to a more representative government in Syria, which has been ruled for more than 40 years by the Assad family.

Unlike votes in the Security Council, the resolution does not have the force of law. The General Assembly measure is similar to a Security Council resolution vetoed Feb. 4 by Russia and China. Russia and China also voted against Thursday's measure.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, lamented that the measure was designed to "isolate the

leadership" of Syria rather than promote dialogue.

His comments underscored the fundamental divide in the Syrian debate: The time for dialogue is over, according to the anti-Assad coalition that includes the U.S., most Arab nations, Turkey and Western Europe. All have called on Assad to step down. But Russia and China argue that dialogue still has a chance.

The Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, flew to Damascus, the capital, early this month and said Assad was open to negotiation with the opposition. A high-level Chinese delegation is expected in Damascus soon.

The anti-Assad coalition has formed a Friends of Syria alliance to assist the Syrian opposition. The Friends group is scheduled to meet in Tunisia on Feb. 24 and is expected to approve humanitarian and other aid for those seeking to oust Assad.

For his part, Assad has called for a referendum on a draft constitution to be held Feb. 26 despite the ongoing violence. The constitution would enshrine new freedoms and set a timetable for multiparty elections.

Special correspondent Rima Marrouch contributed.

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Al-Qaeda could fill power vacuum, officials say

WASHINGTON — Top U.S. intelligence officials pointed to al-Qaeda in Iraq on Thursday as the likely culprit behind recent bombings in Syria, the deadliest attacks against the Syrian government in the 11-month uprising.

Though the U.S. has called for Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down, his fall could lead to a power vacuum that al-Qaeda's largest regional affiliate or other extremist groups could fill. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told Congress. And that could allow such groups to help themselves to Syria's vast stockpiles of chemical weapons, he said.

At the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said the crisis in Syria has become "that much more serious" and worrisome to the United States because of indications that al-Qaeda has infiltrated the government's opposition.

"It does raise concerns for us that al-Qaeda is trying to assert

a presence there," he said. "As to just what their role is and how extensive their role is, I think that still remains to be seen."

The comments by Panetta and Clapper in Washington marked a odd moment of near-agreement between American officials and the Syrian leadership they have called on to step down, after the deaths of thousands of Syrians in the unrest that started during last year's Arab Spring.

Assad has long blamed terrorists for starting the uprising, which has pitted his military against a rag-tag group of angry Syrians, divided by religion and neighborhood.

Al-Qaeda's leader called for Assad's ouster last week. That endorsement has created new obstacles for the U.S., its Western allies and Arab states trying to figure out a way to help push Assad from power.

Clapper said bombings against Syrian security and intelligence targets in Damascus in December, and two more re-

cent bombings in the nation's largest city, Aleppo, bear "all the earmarks of an al-Qaeda-like attack."

He added that the mixture of Syrian opposition groups may have been infiltrated by such militants, probably without their knowledge.

"We've seen evidence of Sunni extremists," he said. "Can't label them specifically as al-Qaeda, but similar ilk who are infiltrating the oppositionist groups."

Clapper predicted continued stalemate in Syria, with the opposition too disorganized to present a formidable threat.

But he warned Assad's fall would be a boon to extremists.

"There is no identifiable group that would succeed him," Clapper said. "So there would be kind of a vacuum, I think, that would lend itself to extremists operating in Syria," who could potentially access the country's multiple chemical weapons sites.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq is best posi-

tioned to take advantage of that chaos, with its strong family and Sunni religious ties in Syria. The group has long used the country as a transit point to smuggle bombers and bomb-making material over Syria's long desert border with Iraq. During the U.S. war in Iraq, Syrian coordinators were able to smuggle fighters back and forth between the two countries.

Clapper said the Iraq-based group remains capable of "high-profile attacks" inside Iraq, and is likely to continue attacking U.S. interests there.

Toward that end, core al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a video calling on Muslims to support Syrian rebels over the weekend.

But there has been no discernible rush of would-be attackers to Syria from the outside, added the Defense Intelligence Agency chief, Lt. Gen. Ronald Burgess, at the same hearing.

Kimberly Dozier, The Associated Press



Bassem Tellaw/The Associated Press
Syrian workers clean up rubble from a car bomb in front of an intelligence building in Aleppo. U.S. officials have tied the recent bombings in Syria to al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Los Angeles Times (USA)

U.N. Assembly backs call for Assad's ouster

The nonbinding vote comes as the Syrian opposition reports dozens more killings.

PATRICK J. McDONNELL
REPORTING FROM BEIRUT

Opposition activists reported that dozens of people were killed in Syria on Thursday as the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned the Syrian government's "systematic violations of human rights" and backed a plan calling for President Bashar Assad to relinquish power. The vote by the 193-member body in New York was a symbolic victory for the United States, Turkey, Arab nations and others calling for the ouster of the Syrian leader.

But the move seemed unlikely to make much difference in Syria, where the U.N. says more than 5,000 people have died in the conflict since protests erupted almost a year ago.

Opposition activists reported at least 63 people killed Thursday, including 38 in the rebellious northwestern province of Idlib, where the government is fighting to regain control of territory lost to rebels.

Casualty figures cannot be independently verified in much of Syria, where journalists' access is limited.

As the nation veers toward civil war, a new government offensive also was reported Thursday in the southern province of Dara, where the rebellion began in March.

The coalition seeking Assad's ouster had twice been thwarted in the U.N. Security Council, but it found a more receptive audience in a chamber that includes nearly all the world's governments.

Although the resolution approved Thursday is nonbinding, its supporters hope it will increase pressure on Assad while bestowing additional political and moral authority on the international coalition pushing for him to step down.

"Today, the U.N. General Assembly sent a clear message to the people of Syria: The world is with you," said Susan Rice, the U.S. ambas-

Bashar Jaafari, denounced the vote as a "shameful" sell-out by a "Trojan horse" Arab League to the West and Israel. He predicted that it would lead to "more chaos and more crisis."

Among other provisions, the U.N. resolution backs an Arab League plan calling for Assad to relinquish power as part of a transition to a more representative government in Syria, which has been ruled for more than 40 years by the Assad family.

Unlike votes in the Security Council, however, the resolution does not have the force of law. The General Assembly measure is similar to a Security Council resolution vetoed Feb. 4 by Russia and China. Russia and China also voted against Thursday's measure.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, lamented that the measure was designed to "isolate the leadership" of Syria rather than promote dialogue.

His comments underscored the fundamental divide in the Syria debate: The time for dialogue is over, according to the anti-Assad coalition that includes the U.S., most Arab nations, Turkey and Western Europe. All have called on Assad to step down. But Russia and China argue that dialogue still has a chance.

The anti-Assad coalition has formed a "Friends of Syria" alliance to assist the Syrian opposition. The "friends" group is scheduled to meet in Tunisia on Feb. 24.

Assad has called for a referendum on a draft constitution to be held Feb. 26 despite the violence. The constitution would enshrine new freedoms, end the monopoly on power of Assad's Baath Party and set a timetable for multiparty elections.

The Russian government called the referendum a hopeful step. Jay Carney, the White House press secretary, labeled it "laughable."

On Thursday, opposition groups said the Syrian government raided a press-freedom advocacy center in Damascus, the capital, arresting rights activist Mazen Darwish and a dozen others, including Razan Ghazzawi, a U.S.-born blogger.

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New York Post (USA)

A CHAT WITH SYRIA'S RESISTANCE

THANKS to modern technology, resistance members in Syria last week had a secure conversation with some foreign-policy mavens in Washington. What they told us boils down to this: A revolution is under way. On one side is the dictator Bashar al-Assad, backed by Iran's rulers, Hezbollah and Russia. On the other are ordinary Syrians facing bombs and bullets with the kind of courage exhibited in Tiananmen Square. Meanwhile, those who should be their allies dither.

"Why is Syria not as important as Egypt and Libya?" asked "Muhammad," a resistance leader on the call connecting the Foundation for Defense of Democracies with an undisclosed location outside Damascus. "We are facing a killing machine."

The regime is estimated to have slaughtered more than 7,000 Syrian men, women and children to date. "We are not asking for any boots on the ground," he added. What do they want instead? Supplies, equipment, secure communications technology — and, yes, the means to defend themselves, their families and their communities.

Recent Mideast upheavals, mislabeled "the Arab Spring," have so far brought change only to countries in which those in power had been cooperating with America. By contrast, the 2009 uprising against Iran's anti-American theocrats was brutally suppressed while Western leaders said barely a word. If Assad remains in power, the lesson will be: It's less dangerous to be America's enemy than to be America's friend.

Muhammad called the diplomatic dialogue over Syria that has been taking place at the UN a "farce." Another resistance leader said that the Arab League also has proved useless and, besides, cannot be trusted. As for Turkey, Muhammad said it is "only capable of words, it seems."

America is seen as their last, best hope because, Muhammad said, Americans are "the only ones who protect democracy and human rights in the world."

These besieged revolutionaries may not appreciate how disillusioned many Americans have become. American power has

been deployed to defend Kuwaitis, Bosnians, Kosovars and, yes, Iraqis and Afghans. We did not necessarily expect deep affection in return, but we were hoping for better than the animus that is directed toward us by so many in the Islamic world.

All of which misses this point: Americans should assist the revolutionaries in Syria based on strategic self-interest as much as altruism. Assad is our enemy.

He facilitated the killing of hundreds of Americans in nations of pro-Western Lebanese leaders who dared defy Syrian domination.

He's the handmaiden of Iran, the most significant national-security threat facing us today. Perhaps soon to be armed with nuclear weapons, Iran's rulers intend to lead what they see not as an Arab Spring but as a global jihad against the West. But because they're Persian and Shia, they need a bridge into the Arab and Sunni worlds. Assad has been providing that bridge.

Assad's downfall would represent a major

strategic defeat for Tehran. It also would fan the suppressed flames of revolution in Iran where, thanks to increasingly tough sanctions, the economy is in steep decline. Iran's rulers get it. The head of Iran's elite Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, is reportedly in Syria with hundreds of Iranian storm troopers, training Assad's forces.

The day after our Internet conversation, at least 137 civilians, including 11 children, were killed by government forces. Hadi al-Abdullah of the Syrian General Revolutionary Council, based in Homs, told a reporter for Al Arabiya that missiles were being launched from a nearby military college and that helicopters were "targeting all those who are trying to help the wounded."

He asked: "Is this not a massacre?" Of course, it was. But the international community is selective about which massacres require action and which may be regretted and dismissed. Our friends in Syria are right: If Americans won't provide leadership, no one will.

Clifford D. May is president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

USA Today

U.S. ties al-Qaeda to Syria attacks

Iraqi offshoot could try to step in if Assad falls

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Top U.S. intelligence officials pointed to al-Qaeda in Iraq on Thursday as the likely culprit behind recent bombings in Syria, the deadliest attacks against the Syrian government in the 11-month uprising.

The United States has called for Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down, but his fall could lead to a power vacuum that al-Qaeda's largest regional affiliate or other extremist groups could fill, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told Congress. That could allow such groups to help themselves to Syria's vast stockpiles of chemical weapons, he said.

At the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said the cri-

sis in Syria has become "that much more serious" and worrisome to the United States as a result of indications that al-Qaeda has infiltrated the government's opposition.

"It does raise concerns for us that al-Qaeda is trying to assert a presence there," he said. "As to just what their role is and how extensive their role is, I think that still remains to be seen."

In New York City, the United Nations General Assembly approved a resolution backing an Arab League plan calling for Assad to step down and strongly condemning human rights violations it said his government had committed. The vote is not legally binding.

The comments by Panetta and Clapper marked a moment of near-agreement between U.S. officials and the Syrian leadership, which the U.S. called on to step down after the deaths of thousands of Syrians in unrest that started during last year's Arab Spring.

Assad has blamed terrorists for starting the uprising, which has pitted his military against a ragtag group of angry Syrians.

Al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, called for Assad's ouster last week. That stance has created obstacles for the United States, its Western allies and Arab states trying to figure out a way to push Assad from power.

Clapper said bombings against Syrian security and intelligence targets in Damascus in December and two more recent bombings in the nation's largest city, Aleppo, bear "all the earmarks of an al-Qaeda-like attack," leading the U.S. intelligence community to believe the Iraqi militant branch is extending its reach into Syria.

Clapper warned that Assad's fall would be a boon to extremists: "There is no identifiable group that would succeed him. So there would be kind of a vacuum, I think, that would lend itself to extremists operating in Syria."

Syrian troops attack Deraa, cradle of uprising

• By KHALED YACOB OWEIS

AMMAN (Reuters) – Syrian troops attacked rebel strongholds in Deraa on Thursday where the uprising against President Bashar Assad erupted nearly a year ago, as the UN chief said crimes against humanity may have been committed in Syria.

The assault on Deraa followed a push against rebels in the cities of Hama and Homs, which have faced nearly two weeks of bombardment from Assad's forces, in an apparent drive to crush the 11-month-old uprising against his rule.

Meanwhile, Syrian security forces arrested leading human rights activist Mazen Darwich and several other activists on Thursday after breaking into Darwich's office in central Damascus, opposition figure Louay Hussein said.

Hussein, an opponent of Assad, said that activist Yara Badr was also detained in the raid.

Darwich, head of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, has been active in documenting human rights violations committed by Syrian forces throughout the revolt. He was detained last year after taking part in a protest to demand the release of political prisoners.

Assad has intensified the crackdown on protesters and insurgents, while also setting a February 26 referendum on a draft constitution that would end the Ba'ath Party's monopoly on power, to be followed by a multi-party parliamentary election.

Syria's opposition and Western powers dismissed the promised reforms. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, speaking before a non-binding UN vote on a draft resolution aimed at increasing pressure on Assad, said potential crimes against humanity were being carried out in Syria.

"We see neighborhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as torture centers, children as young as 10 years old killed and abused. We see almost... certain crimes against humanity," he told reporters in Austria.

China, which along with Russia blocked a draft resolution at the UN Security Council backing an Arab call for Assad to step aside, said it was sending a senior envoy to Syria.

"[China] does not approve of the use of force to interfere in Syria or the forceful pushing of a so-called regime change," Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun said.

Zhai, who will travel to Syria on Friday and Saturday, said China believed that "sanctions or the threat of sanctions are not conducive to the appropriate resolution of this issue."

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bloodshed and instability in the region. (The commentary in the paper, the mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party, carried an author's pen name that is often used to state Beijing's foreign policy stance.)

World powers must handle Syria and tensions elsewhere in the Middle East with a sense of realism, the paper said, adding that the spread of conflict would be a "catastrophe" in a crucial phase of global economic recovery.

"The Middle East is the world's most important fuel depot. If gripped by chaos, oil prices would skyrocket, shocking the stock market, financial systems and economies," the paper said.

After bombarding Homs for nearly two weeks, the military has begun a new offensive in Hama, a city with a bloody history of resistance against Assad's late father Hafez al-Assad. Activists said at least 14 people were killed in bombardment of the nearby town of Kfar Nubouzeh on Thursday.

The state news agency said security forces "chased and fought an armed terrorist group in the Hamidia neighborhood of Hama that has been terrifying citizens" and arrested some of its members, who had assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

In Deraa, a city on the Jordanian border, the sound of explosions and machine gun fire echoed through districts under attack by government troops, residents said.

"The army bombardment started around dawn and after that exchanges of fire occurred," Hussam Izzedine, a member of the Syrian human rights organization Sawasiah, said from Deraa. He said the rebel Free Syrian Army had been providing security at protests in some parts of the city.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said three members of the security forces were killed in clashes with army deserters.

There was no immediate comment from Syrian authorities, who tightly restrict media access to the country.

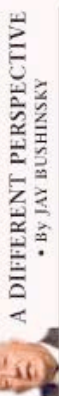
An army offensive in April put down large demonstrations in Deraa, which had been provoked by the arrest of several women activists and the detention of schoolboys who had written freedom slogans on walls, inspired by other Arab revolts.

Assad's offer of a referendum on a new constitution in two weeks' time, leading to multi-party elections within 90 days, drew scornful rejections from the opposition and the West.

The constitution would allow the president to be elected for two seven-year terms. Assad's father Hafez was president for 29 years and was succeeded by his son when he died in 2000.

Thousands of civilians have been killed since the uprising began in March. The government says more than 2,000 soldiers and police have been killed by foreign-backed "terrorists."

Bashar Assad is legitimizing mass murder



A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
• By JAY BUSHINSKY

Not long ago, the noted author Elie Wiesel reportedly was asked what he had to say about the Holocaust. Wiesel, who survived the Nazi genocide, replied "that you can get away with it!" Those words came to mind when Syrian President Bashar Assad ordered his armed forces to crush the revolt against his authoritarian regime that began early last year and still is under way. To date, the artillery bombardments, tank fire and attacks against homes in Hama, Hama, Daraa and other cities have killed an estimated 7,000 people.

Despite the large-scale defections of soldiers who refused to shoot at the citizens of their own country and the formation of the Free Syrian Army, military personnel loyal to Assad have kept the upper hand and seem determined to take as many lives as may be necessary to keep Assad in power.

The abortive attempt made by the US and its European allies to get the UN Security Council to end this near-on bloodbath failed due to the veto cast by Russia and China. Syria's value as a strategic asset was the highest priority for the policy-makers in Moscow and Beijing. They were backed by Iran, which regards Syria as its main regional ally.

Hundreds of the Islamic Republic's Revolutionary Guards have been rushed to Damascus to fight the rebels and intimidate their civilian supporters.

Assad studied medicine at Damascus University, served as an army doctor and qualified as an ophthalmologist in London. He is 46 years old.

Like his late father, Hafez Assad, who was Syria's president from 1971 to 2000, Bashar belongs to the minority



BASHAR ASSAD (Reuters)

Alawite sect. Its adherents dominate the Syrian military command and intelligence apparatus, to the chagrin of the country's Sunni majority.

Bashar Assad's relentless and uninhibited campaign against the predominantly Sunni rebels is modeled after his late father's onslaught against their predecessors. An estimated 20,000 of them and other unarmed civilians died when he crushed an uprising in Hama 20 years ago. The Muslim Brotherhood, a clericalist organization that has made impressive political gains in the Arab World since the so-called

Arab Spring began last year, was involved in that abortive uprising.

One reason for Bashar Assad's violent stand against those who seek to depose him is his fear of merciless retribution against the Alawites who would lose power along with him.

He undoubtedly realizes that he, personally, and his immediate family would be in grave danger if the rebellion succeeds.

The open-ended crisis in Syria has long-term implications for the rest of the world.

It has introduced a new form of political suppression: the use of unbridled military force against civilians who either seek sweeping reforms or oppose the existence of dictatorial regimes in their respective countries. In other words, the Syrian scenario may be repeated elsewhere in the Third World. This prospect is all the more depressing in the light of Wiesel's cynical remark about genocide: "Indeed, such regimes also would 'get away' with mass murder without any intervention by the international community."

It also proves that in today's world, national interests take precedence over moral principles, including the need to protect human life. The Obama administration surely could have tried by now to supply medical aid to the Syrian rebels, but it did not. The Syrian rebels have been appealing in vain for this, saying they lack the medicines and equipment necessary to treat those who have been wounded in the street warfare that has been raging in Syria's embattled cities.

Aid drops could have been initiated and overland transfers could have been implemented with the help of local personnel who know how to cross undetected from Lebanon, Turkey or Israel. It is very doubtful that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin would send his air force to sabotage such efforts or that pro-Assad agents of Lebanon's Hezbollah

guerrilla movement would interfere with them on the ground.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the situation in Syria is how it might affect Israel in the long run. There are no indications that the anti-Assad coalition might deviate from Damascus's longstanding hostility toward the Jewish state. Nor can Israelis expect to benefit politically if the Muslim Brotherhood, which has gained the ascendancy in Egypt, or a Syrian counterpart of Tunisia's Islamic-oriented ruling party that won the election that followed the overthrow of president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali were to win at the polls in Syria.

Fortunately, Israel has not been an issue in the Syrian uprising. Its only negative aspect from Israel's standpoint is that several rank-and-file protesters who condemned the conduct of Syria's troops were overheard saying that "even the Israelis did not behave in such a way!"

This does not inspire outside observers to assume that the tragedy being experienced by Syria's population might tempt it to change course — if only to demonstrate its national pride and concurrent contempt for the Arab countries' failure to come to the rescue.

There also is no basis to assume that Israel might be more forthcoming insofar as the status of the Golan Heights is concerned in the event of Assad's overthrow. Israel's policy-makers might deem it unwise to concede such a strategic area before the true character of Syria's future regime is tested by Middle Eastern reality. On the other hand, if a change of leadership brings an end to Syria's alliance with Iran, and the Islamic Republic therefore loses Damascus as the hub of its supply line to Lebanon's Hezbollah, and if the Palestinian extremists, including Hamas, are compelled to stay away from Damascus, flexibility by Israel on the Golan issue might pave the way to genuine peace with Syria.

Haaretz (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

U.S. intel head doesn't expect Assad to fall yet

*Contradicts Ehud Barak's view that
Syrian leader's days are numbered*

*By Amir Oren
and Shlomo Shamir*

Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, Director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, told a Senate panel yesterday that barring an unforeseen development like a coup, "Assad will continue to hang in there."

Burgess' assessment contradicts Defense Minister Ehud Barak's statement to his Japanese counterpart Naoki Tanaka to the effect that "Assad's family will fall in a matter of weeks."

"After 10 months of unrest the regime and opposition in Syria are in a stalemate; however, the regime is cohesive," Burgess said.

"The Syrian military, despite some desertions and defections to the armed opposition, on the whole remains a viable, cohesive and effective force. The military suppresses unrest throughout the country. The leading opposition umbrella organization, the Syrian National Council, has yet to emerge as a clear or united alternative to the Assad regime and it has not been able to unite Syrians on a strategy for ousting and replacing the regime," Burgess said.

"Syria is acquiring sophisticated weapons systems such as advanced surface-to-air and coastal defense missiles. In addition, Damascus is developing long-range rockets and short-range ballistic missiles with increased accuracy and extended range," he said.

Burgess added that "Syria is suspected of maintaining an active chemical warfare program, with a stockpile of chemical warfare agents which can be delivered by aircraft or ballistic missiles."

Barak's assessments of Syria's ties with Hezbollah were similar to those of Burgess. Barak told his hosts in Tokyo that Israel "is monitoring the transfer of advanced weapons systems to Lebanon, and takes a grim view of this possibility."

Burgess said "Damascus continues its strategic partnership with Hezbollah and perceives it as an extension of its defense against Israel. Syria's strategic partnership with Iran centers of shared regional objectives that include countering Israel by transferring increasingly sophisticated arms to Hezbollah," he said.

"Iran funds, instigates and coordinates most anti-Israeli activity in the region. Israel is concerned that Iran is giving increasingly sophisticated weapons to its enemies, including Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. These actions could offset Israel's traditional military superiority, erode its deterrent and lead to war," Burgess said.

Two weeks after the Russian-Chinese veto on Syria in the Security Council, France is proposing a compromise resolution against the Assad regime which it hopes will be acceptable to Moscow and Beijing. The French proposal does not mention Assad's future, due to Russia's objection to any attempt to replace the Syrian regime. Nor will the resolution refer to an arms embargo on Syria, according to the draft.

Sources in New York said the proposal will recommend sending an international peace force to Syria, a move Moscow would agree to under certain conditions.

L'Assemblée générale de l'ONU condamne symboliquement la répression en Syrie

Révolte L'appel à la manifestation d'aujourd'hui, une « nouvelle étape » selon l'opposition ; plus de 71 morts hier.

L'Assemblée générale de l'ONU a adopté hier à une large majorité, malgré l'opposition notable, entre autres, de la Chine et de la Russie, une résolution condamnant la répression en Syrie. La résolution, adoptée par 137 voix pour, 12 contre et 17 abstentions, exige du gouvernement syrien qu'il mette fin à ses attaques contre la population civile, soutient les efforts de la Ligue arabe pour assurer une transition démocratique à Damas et recommande la nomination d'un envoyé spécial de l'ONU pour la Syrie. Un texte qui n'aura qu'une portée essentiellement symbolique, l'Assemblée générale n'étant qu'un organe consultatif.

Plusieurs ambassadeurs se sont exprimés hier au Palais de Verre, notamment l'ambassadeur égyptien Maged Abdelaziz qui a demandé aux pays membres d'envoyer un message clair au peuple syrien en votant en faveur de cette résolution. L'ambassadeur syrien Bachar Jaafari a naturellement qualifié la résolution de « tendancieuse et déséquilibrée ». Il a ainsi demandé aux membres de l'Assemblée « d'encourager l'opposition syrienne à prendre part à ce dialogue et à se démarquer des groupes terroristes », terme utilisé par Damas pour désigner l'opposition armée.

Même au niveau européen, les divergences se faisaient aussi sentir.

Juppé vs Lavrov

Toujours sur le plan diplomatique, le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, a relevé hier à Vienne que l'arrêt des massacres en Syrie pourrait permettre à la communauté internationale de s'accorder, alors qu'une rencontre avec son homologue russe, Sergueï Lavrov, n'a pas apporté d'avancée. « Nous pouvons peut-être nous retrouver sur un objectif de très court terme, sur l'arrêt des massacres », a-t-il déclaré. Plus tôt dans la matinée, le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, également présent à Vienne, a lui aussi dénoncé les violences en Syrie, demandant à Damas d'« arrêter de tuer ses propres citoyens » et à l'opposition de « mettre un terme aux violences », pendant que Pékin annonçait l'envoi aujourd'hui en Syrie d'un vice-ministre des Affaires étrangères.

En attendant, la commis-



Mazen Darwiche et Razan Ghazzawi.

sion des Affaires étrangères du Sénat américain a adopté une résolution condamnant l'usage « brutal et injustifiable » de la force contre les civils par le régime syrien, demandant l'étude de tous les moyens légaux pour juger les responsables de ces actes et appelant la communauté internationale à « étudier les moyens légaux disponibles pour que les responsables du gouvernement syrien rendent des comptes pour les crimes contre l'humanité et les lourdes violations des droits de l'homme » perpétrés en Syrie. Quant à l'UE, elle pourrait aussi revoir à la baisse ses ambitions de durcir ses sanctions contre le régime syrien, certains pays ayant soulevé des réserves en rapport avec leurs intérêts commerciaux avec la Syrie, selon des sources diplomatiques. Enfin, l'Iran a encore une fois mis en garde contre « toute intervention militaire en Syrie, un danger pour la sécurité et la stabilité de la région ».

Darwiche et Ghazzawi arrêtés à Damas

Pendant ce temps, deux figures-clés de la révolte contre le régime d'Assad, le journaliste Mazen Darwiche et la

blogueuse Razan Ghazzawi, ont été arrêtées hier par les forces gouvernementales.

« Vers 14h00 heure locale, des membres des services de sécurité ont fait irruption dans le Centre syrien pour les médias et la liberté d'expression à Damas et arrêté Mazen Darwiche (directeur du centre), sa femme et un employé », a annoncé l'opposant Louai Hussein. Treize autres personnes qui se trouvaient dans les locaux de cette association ont été interpellées, dont Mme Ghazzawi, selon l'avocat Anouar el-Bounni. Razan Ghazzawi, une Américano-Syrienne de 31 ans qui anime un blog sous son vrai nom, avait déjà été incarcérée deux semaines en décembre. Reporters sans frontières a aussitôt demandé leur libération « immédiate », disant craindre « pour (leur) sort et (leur) intégrité physique ».

Rejet du projet de Constitution

Parallèlement, les militants prodémocratie ont appelé les Syriens à manifester en masse aujourd'hui, parlant d'une « nouvelle étape » face à la répression de la révolte contre le régime du président Bachar el-Assad, débutée en

mars 2011. « Nous ne resterons pas les bras croisés face aux attaques des gangs de la sécurité et des chabbiha (milices fidèles au régime). Dès aujourd'hui, nous allons leur rendre la pareille », ont-ils écrit sur leur page Facebook « Syrian Revolution 2011 ». En outre, les opposants syriens ont rejeté en bloc le projet de Constitution proposé par Bachar el-Assad, appelant à boycotter le référendum prévu le 26 février. Pour le Comité de coordination pour le changement national et démocratique (CCND) basé en Syrie, « il est absolument impossible que l'on participe à un référendum avant l'arrêt des violences et des assassinats ».

Homs et Hama : l'acharnement

Sur le terrain, les violences ont fait 41 morts hier, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), alors que la chaîne al-Jazeera parlait de 70 morts, citant des militants prodémocratie. La plupart sont morts lors d'un « massacre » qui a coûté la vie à 19 personnes, dont 11 membres d'une même famille élargie, dans un assaut des forces de sécurité sur la vallée de Sahl Errouj, dans la province

d'Idlib, a rapporté l'OSDH, une organisation basée au Royaume-Uni.

De même, les forces du régime ont continué de pilonner Homs, cible d'une offensive particulièrement violente depuis le 4 février. Elles ont aussi attaqué, selon l'OSDH, Hama à la roquette, où quatre civils et 10 militaires dissidents ont été tués dans un bombardement et quatre soldats ont péri dans une attaque d'insoumis. A Deraa, où l'armée a renforcé sa présence, un civil a trouvé la mort tandis que trois soldats ont été tués lors d'affrontements avec des militaires insoumis, selon la même source. Des militants ont en outre fait état d'un assaut de l'armée sur la ville de Deir ez-Zor, ainsi que de tirs nourris dans les rues de la ville.

Quant aux sept ingénieurs iraniens qui avaient été enlevés fin décembre près de Homs, dans le centre de la Syrie, et dont l'Iran avait annoncé la libération le 10 février, ils sont toujours détenus par des groupes armés en Syrie, selon le ministre iranien des Affaires étrangères. Les sept ingénieurs travaillaient dans la construction d'une centrale électrique à Jandar, près de la ville de Homs. Mais selon l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), ces Iraniens étaient en fait des militaires.

Enfin, le patron du renseignement américain, James Clapper, a déclaré que les récents attentats commis à Damas et Alep avaient vraisemblablement été commis par la branche irakienne d'el-Qaèda, qui a, selon lui, infiltré les forces de l'opposition.

(Sources : agences et rédaction)

Manifestation antirégime inédite près de l'ambassade d'Iran à Damas

Au moins une centaine de personnes hostiles au régime syrien ont participé hier après-midi à une manifestation inédite près de l'ambassade d'Iran à Damas, promettant de « se venger » du président Bachar el-Assad, selon une vidéo diffusée par des militants

sur Internet. La manifestation se déroulait dans le quartier de Mazzé, près « des agents de l'ambassade iranienne », commente la personne qui a filmé le rassemblement. Selon des militants, la manifestation a eu lieu après les funérailles d'un homme tué par des tirs des

forces de sécurité lors d'une manifestation dans la capitale. Damas est jusqu'à présent relativement épargnée par la contestation, et les manifestations qui se déroulent dans certains quartiers n'ont pas la même ampleur que dans les principales villes rebelles.

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

SYRIAN TROOPS ATTACK DERA'A, CRADLE OF UPRISING

Assad has intensified a crackdown on protesters and insurgents, while also setting a Feb. 26 referendum on a draft constitution that would end the Baath Party's monopoly on power, to be followed by a multi-party parliamentary election



Flames leap into the air from a car and building that was bombed by the Syrian government forces in the Baba Amr neighborhood in Homs province.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

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14 killed near Hama

After bombarding Homs for nearly two weeks, the military has begun a new offensive in Hama, a city with a bloody history of resistance to Assad's late father Hafez al-Assad. Activists said at least 14 people were killed in bombardment of the nearby town of Kfar Nubouzeh on Thursday.

The state news agency said security forces "chased and fought an armed terrorist group

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sees possible crimes against humanity in Syria

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on Syrian authorities to stop killing civilians and said potential crimes against humanity were taking place in the country.

"We see neighborhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as torture centers, children as young as 10 years old killed and abused. We see almost a certain crimes against humanity," he told reporters after meeting Austrian President Heinz Fischer on Thursday.

Ban said he had read of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's plan to hold a referendum that could lead to multi-party elections within 90 days but said the priority now had to be halting the bloodshed in an uprising against Assad's rule. "What is important at this time is that first Syrian authorities must stop killing their own people, must stop violence. This violence should stop

from all sides, whether by national security forces or by opposition forces," he said.

Ban, who opened an international conference on fighting the illicit drugs trade from Afghanistan, said he would meet the foreign ministers of Russia and France in Vienna on Thursday to discuss stalled UN Security Council action on Syria. He called it "regrettable" that the Council could not agree so far on a resolution, and said: "Now that is behind us. We have to look to the future."

Ban said thousands had died, 25,000 people had fled Syria, an estimated 70,000 had been displaced within the country and the numbers were rising by the day.

"Lack of agreement in the Security Council does not give the government license to continue its assault on its own people. The longer we debate the more people will die." **Vienna Reuters**

in the Hamidiya neighborhood of Hama that has been terrifying citizens" and arrested some of its members, who had assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

In Deraa, a city on the Jordanian border, the sound of explosions and machinegun fire echoed through districts under attack by government troops, residents said. "The army bombardment started around dawn and after that exchanges of fire occurred," Hussam Izzedine, a member of the Syrian human rights organization Sawasiah, told Reuters from Deraa. He said the rebel Free Syrian Army has been providing security for protests in some parts of the city.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said three members of the security forces were killed in clashes with army deserters.

There was no immediate comment from Syrian authorities, who tightly restrict media

access to the country. An army offensive in April put down large demonstrations in Deraa, which had been provoked by the arrest of several women activists and the detention of schoolboys who had written freedom slogans on walls, inspired by other Arab revolts.

Assad's offer of a referendum on a new constitution in two weeks' time, leading to multi-party elections within 90 days, drew scornful rejections from the opposition and the West.

The constitution would allow the president to be elected for two seven-year terms. Assad's father Hafez was president for 29 years and was succeeded by his son when he died in 2000.

Thousands of civilians have been killed since the uprising began in March. The government says more than 2,000 soldiers and police have been killed by foreign-backed "terrorists." **Amman Reuters/AP**



Farewell to a fighter

An image grab from a YouTube video shows a funeral in Duma, near Damascus, of a fighter named Omar Dallul, 55, who according to anti-government activists died in detention. UN chief Ban Ki-moon called for an end to the violence while urging the international community to find a common response to the unrest.

Syria expands offensive

COMPROMISE WITH RUSSIA POSSIBLE ON UN RESOLUTION TO END VIOLENCE, FRANCE SAYS

Gulf News Report

Dubai France said yesterday that compromise with Russia at the Security Council was possible to end the violence in Syria as more than 22 people were killed in crackdown on protest hubs ahead of a UN vote on the crisis.

The Syrian regime troops pummeled Homs for a 13th straight day, with 18 people killed in central Hama province and four others dying in the southern city of Daraa.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it fears security forces carried out a massacre in Sahn Al Julian, where dozens of civilians disappeared after being cornered in a valley.

"There are fears regime forces carried out a massacre in Sahn Al Julian," the Britain-based group was quoted as saying.

Speaking after a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Vienna, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said Paris would not accept the existing political status quo in Syria in the long run.

"We can possibly reach a compromise on a short-term objective which is to end the massacres," Juppe said.

"We must do everything so that the violence ends and that a lot of humanitarian aid is given to the Syrian people," he said.

The two countries were prepared to work on a new Security Council resolu-

UPRISING'S ICON BLOGGER ARRESTED

Security forces yesterday arrested blogger Razan Gazzawi, icon of the 11-month uprising in Syria, along with rights activist Mazen Darwish and 12 others, opposition figures said.

Human rights lawyer Anwar Bunni said Gazzawi was arrested in an early afternoon raid on the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, which is located in central Damascus and is headed by Darwish. "We at the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies condemn these arrests and call on Syrian authorities to immediately release them," Bunni said in a statement. Darwish, 38, has been detained a number of times, most recently last March, when he was held for one day after speaking out against the government crackdown on the southern province of Daraa.

— Agencies

tion despite Moscow vetoing a version based on an Arab League transition plan on February 4, Juppe said.

"We are ready to work in

New York on a draft resolution inspired by the Arab League to stop the violence and provide humanitarian aid," he said.

Lavrov told a separate

news conference that he had not yet heard enough details from Juppe about the plan.

"I cannot express my opinion on the French proposal because I received none. The minister told me they are thinking of a new resolution which will be intended to help delivery of humanitarian assistance ... with the consent of all those who have arms on the ground."

He added: "I expressed my readiness to take a look at this as soon as it is ready."

The UN General Assembly was to vote later yesterday on a measure condemning repression in Syria.

Meanwhile, China said it was sending an envoy to the

country to push for peace. Vice-Foreign Minister Zhai Jun, who will travel to Syria today, said China believed that "sanctions or the threat of sanctions are not conducive to the appropriate resolution of this issue".

See also Page 12

homes

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Test by fire for Daraa as UN chief hardens tone

BAN SPEAKS OF POTENTIAL CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AS PURGE CONTINUES

Amman (Reuters) Syrian troops attacked rebel strongholds in Daraa yesterday where the uprising against President Bashar Al Assad erupted nearly a year ago, and the UN chief said crimes against humanity may have been committed in Syria.

The assault on Daraa followed a push against rebels in the cities of Hama and Homs, which has faced nearly two weeks of bombardment from Al Assad's forces, in an apparent drive to crush the 11-month-old uprising against his rule.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, speaking before a non-binding vote at the United Nations on a draft resolution aimed at increasing pressure on Al Assad, said potential crimes against humanity were being carried out in Syria.

"We see neighbourhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as torture centres, children as young as 10 years old killed and abused. We see almost ... certain crimes against humanity," he said in Austria.

China sending envoy

China, which along with Russia blocked a draft resolution at the UN Security Council backing an Arab call for Al Assad to step aside, said it was sending a senior envoy to Syria.

"[China] does not approve of the use of force to interfere in Syria or the forceful pushing of a so-called regime change," vice-foreign minister Zhai Jun said. Zhai, who will be in Syria for two days starting today, said



Living in fear

Families gather at a shelter after fleeing bombardment by government forces in the Baba Amr neighbourhood of Homs.

China believed that "sanctions or the threat of sanctions are not conducive to the appropriate resolution of this issue".

An authoritative Chinese newspaper, apparently responding to criticism of the Chinese and Russian vetoes, said yesterday that meddling in Syria by foreign powers risked stirring up a hornets' nest of bloodshed and instability in the region.

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ple were killed in bombardment of the nearby town of Kfar Nubouzeh yesterday.

The state news agency said security forces "chased and fought an armed terrorist group in the Hamidiya neighbourhood of Hama that has been terrifying citizens" and claimed to have arrested members of the subversive group, recovering assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades from them.

In Daraa, a city on the Jordanian border, the sound of explosions and machinegun fire echoed through districts under attack by government troops, residents said.

"The army bombardment started around dawn and



Razzan Gazzawi

after that exchanges of fire occurred," Hussam Ezz Al Deen, a member of the Syrian human rights organisation Sawasiah, told Reuters from Daraa. He said the rebel Free Syrian Army has been providing security for protests in some parts of the city.

Activists arrested

Meanwhile, the authorities have arrested Razzan Gazzawi, a symbol of the 11-month uprising against Al Assad's regime, as well as prominent human rights activist Mazen Darwish, his wife and 11 others, a human rights lawyer said.

The lawyer, Anwar Bunni, said Gazzawi was arrested in an early afternoon raid on the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, which is located in central Damascus and is headed by Darwish.

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Syrian oppn slams referendum

US dismisses Assad's move as laughable; 22 killed in latest crackdown on protest hubs

DAMASCUS — Syrian armour moved on the main hubs of an 11-month uprising on Thursday, with at least 22 killed in clashes, monitors said, a day after President Bashar Al Assad set a vote for a new constitution.

Opposition groups rejected the newly proposed constitution and urged voters to boycott a referendum set for this month, and to step up their bid to oust Assad.

As troops pummeled the central city of Homs for a 13th straight day, 18 people were killed in central Hama province and four others died in the southern city of Daraa, monitors reported.

Mohammed, a resident of Daraa reached by telephone from Beirut, said regime forces were attacking the province "village by village".

"The (rebel) Free Syrian Army is trying to push them back but it is not equipped and is forced to retreat. Regime troops are taking revenge on residents."

Assad, whose government has vowed to crush dissent, on Wednesday decreed a vote for February 26 on a new charter that could end nearly 50 years of single-party rule.

The United States dismissed the move as "laughable," but Russia, a major weapons supplier to Damascus, welcomed it.

The Local Coordination Committees (LCC), a main opposition activist group, rejected the new charter and called for a vote boycott, as well as stepped up efforts to topple Assad.

"The draft constitution is no more than a political tool or a policy paper written by the barbaric regime," it said in an emailed statement. "We see no alternative but to topple the regime along with its symbols, representatives and foundational ideology."

"The LCC calls upon our people to reject and boycott the alleged referendum to confirm the lack of public support for this criminal regime."

The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, another opposition group, said it also planned to boycott the vote given the ongoing violence.

It is impossible for us to take part in this referendum before a change in the leadership of the head of the group, Hassan Abdul Akrim said.

"The problem is the continued shelling, destruction and assaults



In this citizen journalism image provided by the Local Coordination Committees in Syria, activist Khaled Abu Salah stands in front of flames and black smoke from a bombed oil pipeline, in Baba Amr neighbourhood in Homs province, central Syria. — AP

of the town," said the Britain-based Security Council resolution on Syria, which gave the 15-nation body a mandate to monitor. Elsewhere, a civilian and three soldiers were killed in the southern city of Daraa, after troops deployed heavily and clashed with army defectors.

Regime forces were also shelling Homs, which has been under a relentless assault that has killed nearly 400 people since February 4, according to international rights groups. In the town of Hama, 10 militants were killed in the shelling of the town of Hama, which includes the town of Hama, and most of its leadership

from running for office. The protesters were also killed in the shelling of Hama province. Four citizens were also killed in the shelling of Hama province. Four citizens were also killed in the shelling of Hama province. Four citizens were also killed in the shelling of Hama province.

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The National (EAU / UAE)

Guns turned on Deraa, birthplace of the uprising

Assad forces kill four in random attacks

In strongest criticism so far, United Nations chief says it is 'almost certain' Syrian regime is committing crimes against humanity

The National staff

The UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon accused the Syrian regime of "almost certain" crimes against humanity yesterday as activists reported new violence in Deraa, the city where the uprising began 11 months ago.

Mr Ban demanded that the regime of Bashar Al Assad stop using indiscriminate force against civilians caught up in fighting between government troops and the president's opponents.

"We see neighbourhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as torture centres, children as young as 10 years old chained and abused," Mr Ban said in Vienna. "We see almost a certain crime against humanity."

Syrian activists said regime forces attacked Deraa yesterday, killing four people, carrying out arrests and shooting randomly in the city seen as the birthplace of the uprising. Troops also pummelled Homs for a 13th day, and 18 people were killed in Hama province.

The push into Deraa, near the Jordanian border 130 kilometres south of Damascus, follows the sieges of Homs and Hama and appears to be part of an effort to extin-

guish major pockets of dissent.

The UN General Assembly scheduled a vote yesterday on an Arab-sponsored resolution strongly condemning human-rights violations by the Syrian regime and backing an Arab League plan aimed at ending the conflict.

UN diplomats said the resolution, which already has 60 co-sponsors, was certain to be approved.

On Wednesday, Mr Al Assad ordered a February 26 referendum on a new constitution that would create a multiparty system in Syria, which has been ruled by his family dynasty for 40 years.

The Local Coordination Committees, a Syrian opposition group, yesterday urged voters to boycott the referendum and to step up efforts to oust Mr Al Assad. The United States dismissed the referendum as an empty gesture.

In Damascus yesterday the rights activist Mazen Darwish, 38, head of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, and the prominent blogger Razan Ghazawi were both arrested.

★ Reporting by the Associated Press and Agence France-Presse

↳ US sees Al Qaeda's hand, a6

Iraqis gain from arms smuggling into Syria

Reversal of cross-border supply lines

Growing demand for weapons reflects transformation from peaceful protests to armed clashes as country slides towards war

Lara Jakes and Mazin Yahya

BAGHDAD // The rifles are first taken apart and hidden in cigarette cartons and kerosene tanks. Younis Al Lehaibi and his sons then put them in their lorries and head out to Iraq's vast, dusty border with Syria. Their objective: to smuggle weapons to Syrian rebels who seek the overthrow of President Bashar Al Assad.

It is a turnaround from the height of the Iraqi war six years ago, when weapons and fighters would cross from Syria to aid fellow Sunnis in Iraq.

Mindful of roaming border police, Mr Al Lehaibi ditches the lorries once in Syria and travels the rest of the way on donkey. The Kalashnikovs are put back together, cleaned and handed over to a boy who hands him cash and brings the weapons into a nearby village.

Mr Al Lehaibi, 46, examines his payment – usually 1,000 US dollars – to make sure the currency isn't counterfeit. And then he slips back into Iraq – eight hours after he left his home in the city of Mosul, 360 kilometres north-west of Baghdad.

Until a month ago, Mr Al Lehaibi said, it was not worth the effort. There wasn't much profit in smuggling Kalashnikov rifles. The Syrian rebels had all the weapons they needed.

The spike in demand probably reflects how Syria's uprising, as it approaches its first complete year, has transformed into a clash of forces as the opposition turns more to armed action. In another dangerous turn, more foreign fighters, possibly linked to Al Qaeda, are believed to be crossing from Iraq to join the uprising against Mr Al Assad.

As a result, business has never been better for Mr Al Lehaibi, a squat, pale man with reddish hair.

"It's about making a good, profitable business," Mr Al Lehaibi said, describing his weekly smuggling trips. He added: "It's also to help the Syrian people topple the tyrant who suppresses his nation."

A senior Iraqi security official in Baghdad said intelligence over the last four months has revealed a flow of Al Qaeda-linked fighters from Mosul into Syria, including two militants trained as suicide bombers. A

increase in gun smuggling to Syria but described it as limited.

This week, Al Qaeda's global leader Ayman Al Zawahiri called on Muslims from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to join the Syrian uprising, which began in March as a peaceful protest but has grown into a bloody insurgency.

Experts fear Syria will follow the same path Iraq charted just a few years ago: teetering on the edge of civil war, only to face an indefinite future of instability and, for many, despair. A Kalashnikov rifle, known as an AK-47, usually sells for no more than US\$200 (Dh734.6), Mr Al Lehaibi said. But their newfound demand has encouraged dealers to raise the wholesale price to about \$700. Mr Al Lehaibi acts as the middle man, making a tidy profit by charging \$1,000.

The prices jumped so much that even Al Qaeda leaders in Iraq chided dealers for price gouging in a statement on a militant website the day after Al Zawahiri's edict.

"The arms brokers have raised the prices very high for the Mujahedeen who are trying to transfer that to their fellow rebels in Syria," read the statement posted on the site associated with the Islamic State of Iraq, which is an Al Qaeda splinter group. "Unfortunately there are gangs that claim they affiliate with the jihadist, but they benefit from such trade. Please make a special effort in this period for the continued flow of arms."

Mr Al Lehaibi has been smuggling for more than 10 years. He began sneaking food rations into the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq in the 1990s while Saddam Hussein was in power. Later, he smuggled satellite receivers, cigarettes and kerosene between Syria and the Kurdish region.

Sometimes Mr Al Lehaibi trades his guns for sheep – which gives him a convenient cover as a sheep dealer in the rare times border police have accosted him.

"We do fear being caught, but a fundamental principle of our work is to put fear behind us," he said. "There are tighter security measures in Mosul, but there are dozens of smugglers who do this after years of relations and help from bordering villages who have these needs."

Arab News (Koweit / Kuwait)

Syrian Army intensifies attacks on rebel areas

● UN chief sees 'potential' crimes against humanity in Syria

KHALED YACOB OWEIS | REUTERS

AMMAN: Syrian troops attacked rebel strongholds in Daraa on Thursday where the uprising against President Bashar Assad erupted nearly a year ago, and the UN chief said crimes against humanity may have been committed in Syria.

The assault on Daraa followed a push against rebels in the cities of Hama and Homs, which has faced nearly two weeks of bombardment from Assad's forces, in an apparent drive to crush the 11-month-old uprising against his rule.

Assad has intensified a crackdown on protesters and insurgents, while also setting a Feb. 26 referendum on a draft constitution that would end the Baath Party's monopoly on power, to be followed by a multi-party parliamentary election.

Syria's opposition and Western powers dismissed the promised reforms and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, speaking before a non-binding vote at the United Nations on a draft resolution aimed at increasing pressure on Assad, said potential crimes against humanity were being carried out in Syria.

"We see neighborhoods shelled indiscriminately, hospitals used as



A masked member of the Free Syrian Army stands in front of the rebel-adopted, pre-Baath party flag in a deserted street at the entrance to the north Syrian city of Binnish on Wednesday. (AFP)

torture centers, children as young as 10 years old killed and abused. We see almost ... certain crimes against humanity," he told reporters in Austria.

China, which along with Russia blocked a draft resolution at the UN Security Council backing an

Arab call for Assad to step aside, said it was sending a senior envoy to Syria.

"(China) does not approve of the use of force to interfere in Syria or the forceful pushing of a so-called regime change," Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun said.

Zhai, who will travel to Syria on Friday and Saturday, said China believed that "sanctions or the threat of sanctions are not conducive to the appropriate resolution of this issue."

An authoritative Chinese newspaper, apparently responding to criticism of the Chinese and Russian vetoes, said on Thursday that meddling in Syria by foreign powers risked stirring up a hornets' nest of bloodshed and instability in the region.

The commentary in the People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party, carried an author's pen name that is often used to state Beijing's foreign policy stance.

After bombarding Homs for nearly two weeks, the military has begun a new offensive in Hama, a city with a bloody history of resistance to Assad's late father Hafez Assad. Activists said at least 14 people were killed in bombardment of the nearby town of Kfar Nubouzeh on Thursday.

The state news agency said security forces "chased and fought an armed terrorist group in the Hamidiya neighborhood of Hama that has been terrifying citizens" and arrested some of its members, who had assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

The Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudia Arabia)

Who's who in Syrian opposition



SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL
Main umbrella group in exile in Turkey includes democracy activists, Kurds, Islamists and tribal leaders. Formed Nov 2011, aims to support revolution and overthrow Assad



SNC leader Burhan Ghalioun rejects dialogue with Assad, urging international community to "protect Syrian people"




MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD
Exiled leader **Muhammad Riad Shaqta**, seeks non-violent democratic change to replace regime with plural system. Group does not want Islamic state in Syria



Armed uprising by Brotherhood in Hama put down by President Hafez al-Assad in 1982 – 20,000 killed



NATIONAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE
Formed September 2011, led by veteran opposition figure **Hussein Abdul Azim**. Made up of opposition blocs inside Syria itself, calls for peaceful change



FREE SYRIAN ARMY
Formed August 2011 by army defectors and led by former air force colonel **Riyad al-Asad**. Has launched increasingly audacious attacks on Syrian security forces



KURDISH PARTIES
Based in Turkey, **FSA faces challenge from Supreme Military Council**, new military body set up under most senior defecting officer, **General Mohammed al-Sheikh**



KURDISH PARTIES
Kurds, accounting for about 9% of Syria's population, have several rival parties, all of which are officially banned

Syrian Kurdish leaders in exile, including head of **Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, Abdul-Hakim Bashar**, want referendum after eventual fall of Assad to decide on their people's future as part of Syria

Pictures: Getty, AP, Foreign and Commonwealth Office © GRAPHIC NEWS

Speak with one voice on Syria, UN urges world

Potential crime against humanity taking place

VIENNA — UN chief Ban Ki-moon called on Thursday for all sides to end the deadly violence in Syria and urged the international community to find a common response to the 11-month-old crisis.

"What is important at this time is that first the Syrian authorities must stop killing their own people," Ban told journalists on a visit to Vienna. "And this violence should stop from all sides whether by national security forces or by opposition forces."

At least 22 people died on Thursday as Syrian armor moved on protest hubs, while prominent blogger Razan Ghazzawi and other top activists were arrested, monitors said ahead of a UN vote on the crisis.

President Bashar Al-Assad's troops pummelled the central city of Homs for a 13th straight day, with 18 people killed in central Hama province and four others dying in the southern city of Daraa, the monitors reported.

"It's very methodical," said Mohammed, a Daraa resident reached by telephone from Beirut. He said regime forces were attacking the province "village by village."

Ban also called for a united response from the international community to the violence.

"I urge the international community to speak in one voice: stop the violence. Stop the bloodshed," he said ahead of a UN General Assembly vote Thursday on a resolution calling on Assad to stop deadly attacks on civilians. "The longer we debate, the more people will die."

Moscow was reported on Thursday to oppose the General Assembly resolution, which is not binding.

The authorities arrested Ghazzawi, symbol of the 11-month uprising against Assad's regime, and prominent human rights activist Mazen Darwish, his wife and 11 others, a human rights lawyer said.

Anwar Bunni said Ghazzawi was arrested in a raid on the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, which is in central Damascus and headed by Darwish.

The latest crackdown came with the UN General Assembly set to vote later on Thursday on a measure condemning repression in Syria, just days after Russia and China jointly vetoed a similar text in the UN Security Council.

Earlier, the opposition rejected a newly drafted constitution that could end nearly five decades of single-party rule and urged voters to boycott a February 26 referendum on the charter. — Agencies

The Australian (USA)

True leaders need courage to act, not talk

WORLD COMMENTARY

Turkey must step up on Syria

ANNE-MARIE
SLAUGHTER

AS the world watches the obliteration of the Syrian city of Homs and the crisis spills into neighbouring Lebanon, it is time to ask what separates great powers from small powers.

Turkey's international star has risen steadily over the past few years, with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan being lionised in many Middle Eastern and North African countries, and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu travelling the world as the representative of an increasingly influential power.

Indeed, Turkey and Indonesia have joined the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) on the list of the most important rising global players. Now, in Syria's carnage, Turkey is facing a critical test of its regional and global aspirations. It is time for its leaders to stop talking and start acting.

Davutoglu first raised the idea of establishing a buffer zone for the Syrian opposition on the Syrian-Turkish border three months ago when the Syrian death toll was roughly half of what it is now.

By mid-November, Erdogan was the second regional leader (after Jordan's King Abdullah) to openly call for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down. At the end of November, Davutoglu again confirmed that the Turkish government was mooting various relief plans, including the possibility of a buffer zone.

Yet the only real action since then has come not from Turkey but from the Arab League, which sent in monitors and formulated a plan for a political transition in Syria. After Russia and China vetoed that plan at the UN, and with Syrian forces around Homs (and Zabadani) giving every indication that they intend to flatten everything in their path, Davutoglu proposed holding a conference "as soon as possible" to "promote international understanding with all countries concerned".

A conference? Turkey is essentially proposing more talk, again delaying doing something that would make a difference on the ground.

Killing is never to be undertaken lightly. The Turks have many reasons to worry about the consequences of sending their soldiers into Syria, even for the most demonstrable humanitarian purposes.

Turkey and Syria still have border disputes; for many Syrians, scenes of Turkish troops crossing the border, even behind lines of Syrian opposition fighters, would rally nationalist pride and strengthen Assad's narrative of foreign-inspired terrorism and insurgency.

Yet Turkey is in the best position by far to demonstrate to Assad that the international community is serious about stopping the killing.

Working closely with local co-ordinating committees, it should provide logistical, intelligence, weapons, training,

warning intelligence and anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons.

The FSA might then be able to isolate local Syrian army commanders and try to negotiate truces and defections, ultimately building a defensible chain of population centres.

If that strategy fails, Turkey and Arab League states would have to contemplate sending in ground troops, with extensive logistical and intelligence support from NATO.

Turkey is on the spot, but the larger lesson applies far beyond Syria and, indeed, the Middle East. Power stems not just from size, strategic location, a strong economy, able diplomacy and military capacity.

It also requires the will to act and the understanding that true leadership means the courage to take and implement decisions that are deeply unpopular in some quarters.

States eager to
enjoy the trappings
of great-power
status . . . must
accept the burdens
that go with it

The US has sometimes been too ready to turn to force. The invasion of Iraq, without compelling evidence of weapons of mass destruction, international legitimacy or sufficient preparation for the responsibilities that would follow, is a stark reminder of the human and material cost of plunging into war.

On the other hand, president Bill Clinton's decisive action with regard to Kosovo in 1999 saved a country, just as NATO's intervention in Bosnia four years earlier brought the parties to the table and stopped the killing.

Similarly, Britain's willingness to place troops off the shore of Sierra Leone in 1999 helped to end a horrific conflict within weeks, and France's intervention in Cote d'Ivoire last spring, under a UN mandate, stopped a post-election civil war that was rapidly spinning out of control.

Australia's willingness to send troops into Timor-Leste in 1999, again under a UN mandate, may have not only saved that country, but helped transform Indonesia as well. Indeed, one sign of Indonesia's rising influence is that its army, which had terrorised and massacred East Timorese, could be called upon today in the service of human rights in its region.

Likewise, Brazil's decision to send troops into Haiti in 2004 as part of a UN stabilisation force burnished the country's image as a responsible regional power.

Syria is a far more dangerous assignment than Haiti, to be sure. But if, say, the governments of Paraguay or Uruguay were brutalising their citizens on a mass scale, the world would rightly look to Brazil to lead a response. In Africa, Nigerian troops have often played a critical role under the mandate of either the African Union or the Economic Community of West African States.

States eager to enjoy the trappings of great-power status, the deference accorded their diplomats, high-level global parleys abroad and important diplomatic conferences at home, and the assumption that they must be consulted on major events or crises in their regions, must accept the burdens that go

China Daily

Deputy FM in Syria to urge end to violence

By ZHAO SHENGNAN
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING — Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhai Jun left for Syria on Thursday night as a special envoy for peace efforts in the Arabian country.

“We condemn all acts of violence against innocent civilians and urge the government and all political factions of Syria to immediately and fully end all violence, and quickly restore stability and the normal social order,” he said.

Zhai’s two-day visit came hours before a vote by the United Nations General Assembly on a resolution calling for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down. The measure cannot be vetoed in the assembly, but the resolution would be non-binding.

The Chinese government consistently pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and is committed to upholding regional and world peace and stability, Zhai said, adding that China has closely followed the developments of the situation

and is deeply worried about the escalating crisis that has caused civilian casualties and affected peace and stability in the region.

China wants to play a constructive role in mediating an end to months of bloodshed, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said at a news briefing on Thursday.

Zhai will exchange views with the Syrian government and relevant parties including leaders of the opposition and push for a peaceful and proper solution to the crisis.

“We call on the government of Syria to seriously heed the people’s legitimate desire for reform and development, and call on the various political factions to express their political aspirations non-violently under the rule of law,” Zhai said.

China calls for a referendum on the draft of a new constitution, a parliamentary election at an early date and the establishment of a national unity government, he said.



Zhai Jun, Chinese deputy foreign minister, is on a two-day trip to Syria.

China understands the concern of Arab countries and the Arab League on seeking a quick solution to the Syrian issue, and values the important role as well as the efforts of Arab countries and the league in

seeking a political solution to the issue, Zhai said.

“We hope the Syrian issue will be resolved within the framework of the league through political and peaceful means,” he added.

“We don’t believe that sanctions or the threat of sanctions are helpful to achieving an appropriate solution,” Zhai said, adding that the actions of the international community

and the UN on the Syria issue should be helpful to easing tensions, facilitating political dialogue and resolving differences instead of complicating the issue.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Thursday that he had read reports of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s plan to hold a referendum that could lead to multi-party elections within 90 days but said the priority now had to be halting the violence, according to Reuters.

China is not an irresponsible bystander but an active mediator of the Syrian issue, said Ruan Zongze, a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, adding that Zhai’s meetings with Syria’s authority and opposition will bring more opportunities for dialogue between the two sides.

“China will continue playing a constructive role in Syria, but the peaceful resolution of the problem also need strong supports from every relevant party,” he said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

► Opposition groups call for vote boycott

China sends special envoy to Syria

China opposes armed interference or forcefully pushing for a so-called regime change in Syria, Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun said in Beijing yesterday, a day before he was heading to Damascus to push for a peaceful and proper solution to the current crisis in the strife-ridden country.

"We don't believe that sanctions or the threat of sanctions are helpful to achieving an appropriate solution," said Zhai, who will be Beijing's first envoy to Syria since China and Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution urging Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to quit.

Beijing and Moscow fear the UN Security Council's resolution could be interpreted as a mandate for military intervention in Syria by some other countries.

"The demand of a regime

change is the direct way to even more deaths," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in Vienna on Wednesday, according to the Xinhua News Agency.

"That's the way to full civil war," Lavrov said.

"We condemn all acts of violence against innocent civilians and urge the government and all political factions of Syria to immediately and fully end all violence, and quickly restore stability and normal social order," Xinhua quoted Zhai as saying.

Assad, who is battling an 11-month-old uprising against his regime, on Wednesday called for a referendum on a new constitution draft on February 26.

However, Syrian opposition groups rejected Assad's initiative and called upon Syrian voters to boycott the referendum

to "confirm the lack of public support for this criminal regime," AFP reported yesterday, citing a statement by the Local Coordination Committees.

It added that Assad's regime had lost its constitutional and social legitimacy and there was no alternative but to topple it.

The White House on Wednesday dismissed Assad's proposal to hold a referendum on a new constitution as laughable. "It makes a mockery of the Syrian revolution," White House spokesman Jay Carney said, according to Reuters.

A senior diplomat in the Syrian embassy in Beijing had previously told the Global Times that Assad won't resign under any circumstance.

"Our president was elected by Syrian people, and he will never bow to the illegal requests by armed terrorists,"

the diplomat said, adding that Damascus wouldn't accept any foreign peacekeeping forces, but welcome an observer mission.

The Arab League suspended its monitoring mission in late January and had since then mulled sending international peacekeepers into Syria.

"The monitors have learned the truth, but they were never given a chance to speak it out loudly," the diplomat said.

The UN General Assembly set to vote late yesterday on a measure condemning repression in Syria.

Russia said it would not support the UN General Assembly draft resolution because it is "unbalanced," a source told the Interfax News Agency yesterday.

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Agencies – Global Times