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# Un trafic d'armes au profit des insurgés syriens se développe dans le nord du Liban

Encore limité, ce commerce ne porterait pour l'instant que sur des armes légères

**Beyrouth**  
Correspondance

Quand on l'interroge sur l'origine des armes dans les mains des insurgés syriens, Abou Hussein, un membre de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), présent au Liban, se veut catégorique. « L'essentiel provient d'attaques contre les troupes régulières en Syrie », assure-t-il. Alors que le soulèvement se militarise de plus en plus et que les monarchies du Golfe comme le Qatar et l'Arabie saoudite envisagent d'armer l'opposition syrienne, celle-ci dément l'existence de tout trafic organisé.

Cette version « officielle » est tempérée par le constat des marchands d'armes libanais depuis le printemps 2011, peu après le début du soulèvement en Syrie : le prix des munitions, kalachnikovs, M16 ou grenades n'a cessé d'augmenter. « Il y a un petit flot d'armes légères du Liban vers la Syrie », confirme un observateur. Cet approvisionnement gagne Homs, située à quelques dizaines de kilomètres du Liban, mais aussi Idlib (nord-ouest de la Syrie), le long d'un couloir stratégique passant par Hama, contre lequel l'armée syrienne multiplie les offensives.

L'acheminement d'armes du Liban vers la Syrie est facilité par deux facteurs : l'absence de démarcations frontalières entre les deux pays, d'abord, à l'exception des postes officiels. « Vous voyez ces montagnes frontalières ? Vous voyez les dizaines de petites routes ? », indique une source sécuritaire en pointant une carte de la région de Qaa (Bekaa, frontière orientale avec la Syrie). Pour surveiller toute la zone, l'armée libanaise aurait besoin d'au moins 2 000 hommes supplémentaires. L'existence, ensuite, de réseaux anciens de passeurs, principalement pour la contrebande, mais qui ont pu également être utilisés dans les années 2000 afin de faire pénétrer des combattants en Syrie, lorsque Damas favorisait le transit pour le djihad en Irak.

L'une des régions principales de ce trafic est l'Ouadi Khaled, dans le nord du Liban. Une région frontalière pauvre, à majorité sunnite, favorable à l'insurrection. Les

bourgades y sont étirées, le paysage se prête à la « discrétion », selon les mots d'un wassit (« intermédiaire ») dans le commerce d'armes, qui affirme que « beaucoup d'argent circule pour l'achat d'armes ». L'armée libanaise a renforcé sa présence dans l'Ouadi Khaled depuis le mois de février. Ses services font aussi régulièrement état d'interpellations dans les zones frontalières : début février, deux personnes, accusées de trafic d'armes via

« Les armes affluent de l'Irak en Syrie en bien plus grande quantité »

« Fouad »

marchand d'armes à Tripoli

la région d'Ersal (Bekaa) et à destination de la Syrie, ont été arrêtées.

Un escalier jonché de débris mène au domicile de « Fouad » (pseudonyme), un marchand d'armes, dans un quartier populaire de la périphérie de Tripoli (nord du Liban), résolument anti-Assad. Derrière un rideau, il cache une kalachnikov et un M16, « pour usage personnel, comme dans toutes les maisons libanaises », soutient-

il. « Certains Libanais du nord, au début de la révolte, ont donné leurs armes aux Syriens. Donné, pas vendu. Moi, je ne peux pas. A Tripoli, la présence du bastion alaouite [pro-Assad] de Djabal Mohsen fait peser une menace continue d'affrontements », explique Fouad. Selon lui, les armes circulant sur le marché libanais viennent principalement d'Irak ou d'Iran.

Ce trafiquant a été approché par des intermédiaires pour répondre aux demandes de clients syriens : « Mais je n'ai pas ce qu'ils veulent. Ce qu'ils demandent, depuis plusieurs mois, ce sont des armes de gros calibre. » C'est aussi l'avis de cet observateur : « L'armement qui transite aujourd'hui au Liban ne changera pas la donne sur le terrain. Les rebelles ont assez de munitions et d'armes légères. Ils cherchent des armes lourdes ou de précision. Ces dernières, ils ne peuvent pas les trouver au Liban. Acquérir des armes antichar ou conçues pour le tir embusqué leur permettrait de sanctuariser » les endroits où l'ASL est présente.

De l'avis d'Ali et Abbas, deux jeunes vendeurs d'armes de la banlieue sud de Beyrouth (fief du Hezbollah chiite, allié de Damas), « la vente s'effectue partout, dans tou-

tes les zones où il y a potentiellement des armes, banlieue sud et Bekaa [autre bastion du Hezbollah] comprise ». « Ce qui compte, c'est l'argent. L'identité de nos clients ne nous intéresse pas. »

Selon « Fouad », le Liban n'est toutefois qu'un « petit réservoir » pour les insurgés, malgré les surenchères politiques à ce sujet. « Les armes affluent de l'Irak en Syrie en bien plus grande quantité, croit-il. En Irak, il y a en plus Al-Qaïda. » Le chef de l'organisation terroriste, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, a apporté son soutien à la contestation en Syrie, dans une vidéo diffusée le 11 février.

Ce ne sont pas seulement les armes légères qui entreraient depuis le Liban. A Ersal, une localité sunnite de la Bekaa entourée de bourgades chiites, les rumeurs vont croissant sur des enterrements nocturnes de combattants du Hezbollah tués en Syrie après avoir servi auprès des forces pro-Assad. Du côté de la rébellion, une source avisée fait état d'arrivées, encore limitées, de salafistes étrangers, ayant combattu en Irak, en Afghanistan ou au Pakistan, dans le nord du Liban. Ceux-ci ne seraient pas pour l'instant entrés en Syrie. ■

LAURE STEPHAN



Un combattant de l'Armée syrienne libre au bord de l'Oronte, à 3 km de la frontière libanaise, le 6 mars. AFP

Le Figaro (France)



# Syrie: Idlib se prépare à l'assaut des forces d'el-Assad

## L'armée syrienne resserre son étai sur ce bastion rebelle proche de la Turquie.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

**MOYEN-ORIENT** Les troupes de Bachar el-Assad ont commencé vendredi à arri-  
vées et les zones agricoles de la région d'Idlib, acquise à l'insurrection, à la frontière avec la Turquie. Tandis que des chars étaient massés dans plusieurs villages du secteur, au moins 20 civils ont été tués dans l'assaut de la localité d'Aïn Larose, dans le djebel Zawiya.

« Nous craignons une opération d'envergure semblable à celle menée contre Baba Amir à Homs », affirme Rami Abdel Rahmane, de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, basé à Londres. Un grand nombre de déserteurs ont rejoint cette région du nord-ouest de la Syrie, théâtre en juin dernier des premières attaques contre les soldats loyaux à Bachar el-Assad.

Mais la bataille d'Idlib ne ressemblera pas à celle de Homs. « Ce sera plus difficile de déloger les rebelles, prévient un observateur libanais, familier du secteur. La région abrite en effet de nombreux villages éparpillés à travers la montagne. Le terrain se prête à la guérilla et les opposants à Assad pourront monter des embuscades, avant de se replier en Turquie », distille de quelques kilomètres seulement. D'où la tactique



A Idlib, des combattants de l'Armée libre syrienne jurent sur le Coran de continuer le combat contre le régime. (RODRIGO ABU/AP)

qu'ils leurs casernes à Damas, Homs et Lattaquié.

Alleurs dans le pays, la violence s'est poursuivie. A Homs, les chars ont bombardé les quartiers de Karm al-Zeitoun et de Khalidiya, toujours tenus par les rebelles, faisant au moins dix-sept morts, selon des activistes sur place. A Damas, deux habitants ont également été tués dans le quartier de Kfar Soussah, où les forces de sécurité se sont déployées pour reprendre un acte de désobéissance civile. Enfin, dans la province de Hama, la répression a tué quatre autres person-

nes, dont trois civils, dans un assaut de l'armée dans la localité d'al-Traïmeh. C'est dans ce contexte de violence persistante que Kofi Annan, l'émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, arrive ce samedi à Damas, où il doit rencontrer le président Assad.

L'appel de Kofi Annan au dialogue entre l'opposition et le régime a été rejeté vendredi par le président du Conseil national syrien (opposition) Borhan Ghalioun, qui craint de voir l'émissaire de l'ONU « perdre un ou deux mois dans des efforts de médiation sans intérêt ». ■

### À New York, Juppé remonte au front... russe

**PERSEVERANT**, mais sans illusions et éprouvé, Alain Juppé concède que la situation « s'aggrave » en Syrie l'empêche de dormir. Il repart à New York pour retrouver lundi à l'ONU ses homologues américain et russe, Hillary Clinton et Sergueï Lavrov. *En haut: L. Abou/Anadolu*

# Le consentement au meurtre, essence du régime de Bachar el-Assad

Marc Crépon\*

Le directeur du département de philosophie de l'École normale supérieure analyse la mécanique de la terreur des dictatures.

Parmi les multiples responsabilités qu'on est en droit d'attendre des dirigeants politiques et qu'ils se reconnaissent en cas de catastrophe, il faut compter celle du soin, du secours et de l'attention qu'appellent la vulnérabilité et la mortalité de leurs concitoyens. Venir au chevet des blessés, consoler les familles endeuillées peut être une opération de communication bien venue, mais c'est aussi toujours davantage : la promesse renouvelée que la sécurité de la vie reste la première justification de la politique.

Cette responsabilité fonde la relation qui lie la population à ses dirigeants, quelles que soient leurs opinions. Même quand ces liens sont fragilisés ou compromis par des mesures avec lesquelles telle ou telle partie de la population est en désaccord, elle constitue le socle sur lequel repose ce minimum de confiance, sans lequel il n'y a de place que pour la tyrannie. Car, voilà ce que nous rappelle chaque jour le martyr qui vitent les habitants de Homs : les tyrans, à l'inverse, n'ont que faire d'une telle confiance, pas plus qu'ils n'ont cure de la sécurité de la vie. Loin de prendre soin des populations et de secourir

ceux qui en ont besoin, ils fragilisent l'existence de leurs concitoyens, l'exposant à la menace incessante d'une mort violente. Ainsi la tyrannie renverse-t-elle d'un coup tout ce qui est installé dans le consentement à la violence, qu'il n'y ait aucune limite aux massacres auxquels ce dernier soit prêt à consentir et qu'il soit prêt à ordonner, dès lors que sa sécurité lui semble menacée. Rien des souffrances qu'il inflige à son peuple ne peut déranter sa conscience, dès lors qu'il les estime nécessaires à la sauvegarde de son pouvoir et aux privilèges qu'il lui procure. Depuis toujours,

C'est pourquoi, l'essence du pouvoir, auquel les tyrans se cramponnent est un consentement meurtrier permanent. S'il on désigne

leur pouvoir, leurs complices de tout ordre le savent bien : leur propre survie en dépend. Ainsi en va-t-il de la Syrie de Bachar el-Assad, aujourd'hui comme hier. Sa tyrannie s'est tellement installée dans le consentement à la violence, qu'il n'y a aucune limite aux massacres auxquels ce dernier soit prêt à consentir et qu'il soit prêt à ordonner, dès lors que sa sécurité lui semble menacée. Rien des souffrances qu'il inflige à son peuple ne peut déranter sa conscience, dès lors qu'il les estime nécessaires à la sauvegarde de son pouvoir et aux privilèges qu'il lui procure. Depuis toujours,

Les tyrans aiment se raconter des histoires, comme ils en racontent au peuple : il leur faut toujours trouver des justifications au meurtre de masse qu'ils n'hésitent pas à commettre, au vu et au su de tous

sous ce nom, l'éclipse totale d'un souci partagé de la vulnérabilité et de la mortalité d'autrui, tout dans la politique de terreur des dictatures contribue à son entretien : les arrestations arbitraires, la torture, les disparitions, les exécutions sommaires. Il n'y a qu'une seule « sécurité » qui compte, du premier au dernier jour d'un tel régime : celle du tyran lui-même et, le cas échéant, de sa famille. Leurs plus zélés collaborateurs, les thuriferaires de

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leur opposent une résistance, sans construire de ces opposants une image négative. Il n'y a pas de consentement meurtrier qui ne suppose quelque travestissement de la vérité : l'orchestration d'un mensonge d'État.

Deux opérations alors sont toujours de mise : d'une part, la désignation et la nomination des victimes de la terreur comme des ennemis, des agents de l'étranger, des terroristes ; d'autre part, une narration partielle et partielle des événements qui nie l'horreur du bombardement des villes et du massacre des populations civiles. C'est pourquoi la tyrannie cible toujours les journalistes dès que son essence meurtrière se révèle au grand jour. Rien ne lui est plus insupportable que de voir invalidés par leur travail les noms et les récits qui constituent l'arsenal rhétorique de sa justification de la violence. S'il est vrai, plus généralement, que le consentement au meurtre est l'essence du régime de Bachar el-Assad, la cruauté extrême dont il fait preuve aujourd'hui exemplifie à contrario les quatre alternatives à ce consentement qui sont insupportables à tout dictateur : la révolte qui le menace, la bonté qui lui est étrangère, la critique qu'il redoute et la honte qu'il est incapable d'éprouver.

\* Auteur du « Consentement meurtrier », Corf, 2012





# Assad peut-il gagner ?

**L**a terreur est-elle une assurance vie pour les dictateurs ? Le président syrien Bachar al-Assad peut-il remporter le bras de fer, militaire et politique, contre ses opposants ? Dérangante, la question divise les experts, au-delà des condamnations morales d'un pouvoir qui n'hésite pas à utiliser l'artillerie lourde contre son propre peuple. Un régime qui n'a jamais reculé devant les massacres et que le sociologue Michel Seurat, otage assassiné au Liban en 1985 par le Jihad islamique, qualifiait déjà d'« *Etat de barbarie* » (1), il y a trente ans. On compte déjà près de 8 500 morts – dont 1 800 dans les troupes d'Assad, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme.

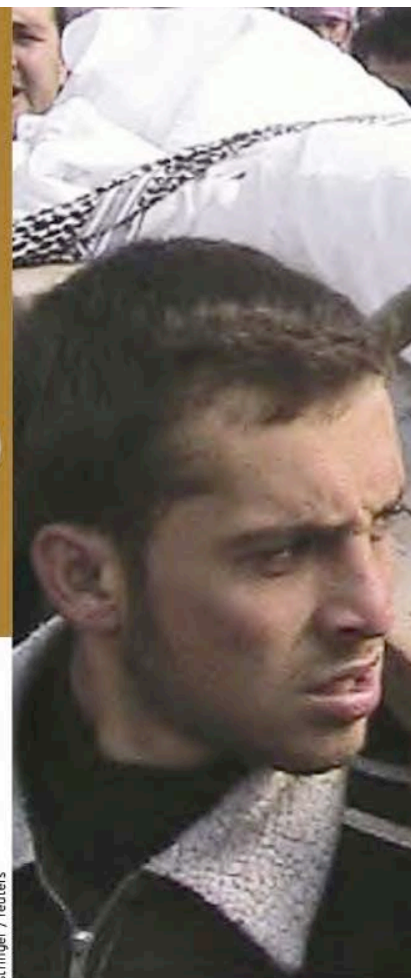
La reconquête par les forces loyalistes du quartier rebelle de Baba Amr à Homs, début mars, est un symbole. Celui d'un régime qui se bat jusqu'au bout, contrairement à ce que l'on avait vu en Tunisie et en Egypte. La chute de Baba Amr ne signifie pourtant pas la défaite de l'opposition, les combats ayant aussitôt repris ailleurs. Mais le « chemin de roses » d'une révolution pacifique et démocratique, telle qu'elle avait débuté au printemps 2011, se transforme au fil des mois en une guerre civile sanglante. C'est,

**La guerre sanglante que livre le dictateur syrien aux rebelles risque de durer. Les atouts d'Assad : une partie de la population qui le soutient, une opposition divisée ainsi que la Russie et la Chine, qui ne le laissent pas tomber.**

**PAR JEAN-DOMINIQUE MERCHET**

paradoxalement, la grande victoire du régime qui n'entendait pas céder le pouvoir de manière pacifique, préférant plonger son pays dans la violence plutôt que de négocier une transition politique. Jour après jour, la logique de guerre l'emporte.

« *Les deux camps s'installent dans la durée. C'est une guerre d'usure. Le pouvoir veut démontrer sa capacité à survivre et les insurgés celle de tenir. Cela peut durer longtemps...* »



estime Jean-François Daguzan, directeur de la revue *Maghreb-Machrek*. « *Assad bénéficie du soutien, actif ou passif, d'environ 40 % de la population qui craint avant tout l'islamisme, assure Gérard Chaliand, spécialiste des conflits. Il va donc pouvoir tenir encore un bon moment. Il finira sans doute par être battu, au terme de plusieurs mois d'une guerre civile dont les victimes seront nombreuses.* » Pour le jeune chercheur belge Thomas Pierret, spécialiste de la Syrie et auteur de *Baas et islam en Syrie* (PUF, 2011), « *on ne peut même pas exclure complètement qu'Assad parvienne à gagner* ». Il compare la situation actuelle avec la reprise en main de l'Irak par Saddam Hussein, au lendemain de la première guerre du Golfe (1991) : le régime avait massacré la rébellion chiite dans le Sud.





Hazzano, dans la province d'Idlib, le 3 mars dernier. Les funérailles d'un rebelle de l'Armée syrienne libre qui a succombé à une attaque des forces armées gouvernementales.

**« Al Assad pense qu'après un bain de sang les choses rentreront dans l'ordre pour longtemps. Il est dans une logique de guerre. »**

Autre exemple : celui de la Tchétchénie, où les Russes sont parvenus à écraser les indépendantistes.

Bachar al-Assad veut-il rééditer l'« exploit » de son père, Hafez, qui en février 1982, avait massacré des milliers d'habitants de la ville d'Hama, tombée sous la coupe des islamistes ? C'est sa stratégie, mais, « aujourd'hui, la situation est plus sérieuse

qu'alors, prévient Thomas Pierret. La rébellion est beaucoup moins localisée : ce sont les campagnes, les petites villes et les banlieues qui se soulèvent alors qu'à l'époque c'était plutôt un mouvement dans les grandes villes ».

répression. » Mathieu Guidère, islamologue et professeur à Toulouse, partage la même analyse : « Les opposants se retiennent. Ils sont conscients des risques d'une militarisation de la contestation. L'armée syrienne libre

Jean-Pierre Filiu, auteur de *La Révolution arabe* (Fayard, 2011), estime aussi que le précédent de Hama inspire Al-Assad : « Il pense qu'après un grand bain de sang les choses rentreront dans l'ordre pour longtemps, il est, lui, dans une logique de guerre civile, mais ce n'est pas le cas des révolutionnaires, qui font preuve d'une incroyable résilience et gardent un moral impressionnant malgré la

(ASL) ne se livre pas à des massacres systématiques contre les alaouites ou d'autres groupes soutenant le régime. C'est pour cela que l'on ne peut parler, ou pas encore, d'une guerre civile telle qu'on l'a connue en Irak. »

### Peur des islamistes sunnites

Bachar al-Assad conserve trois atouts dans son jeu : une base sociale, un appareil de répression et des soutiens internationaux. Certes, depuis 1982, le régime a changé de base sociale : alors que, à l'origine, ce pouvoir progressiste s'appuyait plutôt sur les couches populaires des régions périphériques contre la bourgeoisie pieuse des grandes villes, aujourd'hui, « plus on monte dans la hiérarchie sociale, plus c'est calme », constate Thomas Pierret. Les couches >



## Assad peut-il gagner ?

> supérieures soutiennent le pouvoir et, *a contrario*, le quartier martyr de Baba Amr est l'un des plus pauvres de la ville d'Homs, où venaient s'entasser les migrants de la campagne. Ce qui, en revanche, n'a pas changé, c'est la question des minorités. Si la population est majoritairement sunnite, le pouvoir est, depuis deux générations, entre les mains de la minorité alaouite, une branche dissidente du chiisme qui représente 10 % de la population. Ajoutez des chrétiens, des druzes, des chiïtes, des ismaéliens : tous craignent pour leur avenir dans un pays aux mains des islamistes sunnites. Sous la dictature d'Al-Assad, la Syrie reste quand même l'un des rares pays de la région où les religions et les groupes ethniques coexistent pacifiquement. Le contre-modèle absolu de l'Irak voisin, plongé par l'intervention américaine dans la guerre civile. Le contre-modèle aussi de l'Arabie saoudite, où seul le sunnisme wahhabite le plus dur a droit de cité.

**« Plutôt Bachar que le chaos ! C'est ce que pense une partie de la population. »**  
**Eric Dénécé,**  
directeur du  
Centre français  
de recherche sur  
le renseignement



Bachar al-Assad compte bien se battre jusqu'au bout. La révolution démocratique qu'on prédisait a tourné au fil des mois à la guerre civile sanglante. Rien ne laisse présager un terme prochain.

### Des alliés solides

Même minoritaire, Al-Assad peut donc s'appuyer sur nombre de groupes religieux et sociaux, y compris sunnites (comme les tribus bédouines ou une partie de la bourgeoisie d'affaires) relativement importants – et surtout terrorisés par la perspective d'une défaite. Une situation qui n'incite pas à la modération et à la discussion. « *Plutôt Bachar que le chaos ! C'est ce que pense encore une partie de la population* », assure Eric Dénécé, directeur du Centre français de recherche sur le renseignement, qui s'est rendu récemment à Damas. Comme tous les observateurs, il a pu constater que le pouvoir disposait toujours d'une force militaire considérable. Selon Mathieu Guidère, les forces loyalistes compteraient 100 000 hommes dans leurs rangs, encadrés par des officiers fidèles. « *L'armée n'a pas tourné casaque* », ajoute Alain Chouet, un ancien de la DGSE, excellent connaisseur du pays (2). En face, les rebelles de l'ASL seraient environ 30 000. Ce n'est pas négligeable : « *Un rapport d'un à trois, c'est très difficile, mais militairement, c'est tenable* », avance Mathieu Guidère. De son côté, Thomas Pierret scrute avec attention l'évolution de la tactique militaire du régime, dont, dit-il, « *le principal atout est son armée, ses chars et son*

### Le regard d'Israël

**A**voir à nos frontières le meilleur allié de l'Iran n'était déjà pas drôle, mais son éventuel remplacement par des salafistes ne serait pas mieux... » Les Israéliens surveillent avec angoisse les chemins de Damas. Redoutable, disent-ils, ce dernier épisode d'un printemps arabe qui prend l'Etat hébreu en tenaille. D'un côté, une Egypte révolutionnaire où les Frères musulmans veulent déchirer le traité de paix signé par Begin et Sadate en 1979, de l'autre une Syrie où les tueries perpétrées par Bachar augurent mal d'une transition démocratique. « *Ceux qui auraient pu, même avec de grandes difficultés, être nos interlocuteurs, les intellectuels de l'opposition laïque, sont complètement*

dépassés par l'insurrection populaire à base religieuse et la guerre civile en gestation », résume un spécialiste israélien de la Syrie. L'émergence d'un sunnisme influencé par le salafisme, vecteur de la haine d'Israël, créerait en effet une instabilité majeure sur la ligne de cessez-le-feu du Golan, paradoxalement très calme depuis trente ans. Ce qui n'empêche pas l'opinion israélienne de dire sa solidarité avec les civils syriens massacrés : le ministre des Affaires étrangères Avigdor Lieberman a même proposé une assistance humanitaire d'urgence. Une façon de ménager les lendemains qui seront peut-être ceux de l'Armée syrienne libre ? ■ **Martine Gozlan**



artillerie ». « Jusqu'à la fin janvier, l'armée faisait preuve d'une certaine retenue dans l'emploi de ses matériels, précise-t-il. Certes, elle tirait sur la foule, mais avec des armes dont le calibre ne dépassait pas celui du canon antiaérien Shilka (23 mm). A partir du moment où le régime a compris qu'il n'y aurait pas d'intervention militaire extérieure, il s'est lâché. Comme on l'a vu à Homs, il utilise ses chars T-72 et son artillerie lourde, jusqu'à des mortiers de 240 mm ! » En face, l'ASL ne dispose que d'un armement léger. Et les armes ne font pas tout : il faut aussi savoir les utiliser de manière coordonnée – ce qui nécessite une chaîne de commandement et des transmissions.

Dernier atout du régime, et non des moindres, le soutien déterminé de ses alliés. Ils sont peu nombreux, mais solides : la Russie, l'Iran et le Hezbollah libanais. La Russie fournit des armes, brandit – avec l'appui de la Chine – son veto aux Nations unies et n'a pas hésité à déployer un porte-avions devant les côtes syriennes. Les Occidentaux ont compris le message. « La Russie se sent historiquement investie de la mission de protéger les chrétiens d'Orient, qui sont majoritairement orthodoxes », explique Alain Chouet. Même solidarité religieuse avec l'Iran chiite. La République islamique verse beaucoup

## Peu de volontaires pour une intervention

**B**ernard-Henri Lévy tente de rééditer son triomphe libyen, mais cette fois sans beaucoup d'écho. « Il faut, maintenant, une intervention en Syrie » plaidait le philosophe, dans le Point du 1<sup>er</sup> mars. Aucune réaction, ni d'intellectuels ni de politiques. En pleine campagne présidentielle, les candidats se gardent bien de sortir du bois sur cette question très sensible. Car tout le monde a bien compris que le contexte international empêchait une nouvelle intervention militaire occidentale. D'autant que l'opposition syrienne est, elle-même, très divisée

sur le sujet. Ainsi, Hakil Hachem, le principal conseiller militaire du Conseil national syrien (CNS) – qui regroupe une partie des opposants –, vient de démissionner après le refus du CNS d'appeler à une action militaire internationale contre le régime. Si le Qatar et l'Arabie saoudite, voire la Turquie, sont prêts à fournir des armes, et les conseillers militaires qui vont avec, les Américains sont plus que réticents : pas question pour eux de se mettre dans un nouveau bourbier, après l'Irak et l'Afghanistan. Quant aux Européens, nul ne songe à agir. ■ **J.-D.M.**

d'argent, envoie des armes et vraisemblablement des hommes issus des Gardiens de la révolution. Quant au Hezbollah libanais, son soutien est total. En face ? Beaucoup de monde, mais beaucoup moins de détermination. Sauf chez les islamistes sunnites, frères musulmans ou salafistes, qui soutiennent la rébellion. Avec l'appui de la puissante chaîne

de télévision qatarie Al-Jazira. « Autour de la Syrie, constate Mathieu Guidère, nous assistons à la renaissance d'une petite guerre froide. » Al-Assad espère que cela lui laissera les mains libres pour en finir avec ses opposants, toujours désunis. ■ **J.-D.M.**

(1) Le livre va être réédité en mai aux éditions du Seuil.

(2) Auteur d'« Au cœur des services spéciaux », La Découverte, 2011.

Süddeutsche Zeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

## Furcht vor Ansteckung

Chinas Syrien-Politik zeigt die Unsicherheit der Volksrepublik – Peking schützt aus eigenem Interesse das autoritäre Regime

Von Christoph Giesen  
und Frederik Obermaier

**München** – Seit China am 5. Februar gemeinsam mit Russland gegen eine verschärfte Syrien-Resolution gestimmt hat, ist die globale Entrüstung groß. Großbritanniens Außenminister William Hague bezeichnete Pekings und Moskaus Abstimmungsverhalten als unverantwortlich, gar als „einen Verrat an der syrischen Bevölkerung“.

Offiziell wieselt Chinas Führung jede Kritik ab. „Das Schicksal Syriens muss das syrische Volk ganz alleine bestimmen“, sagt Premier Wen Jiabao. Und auch die Zeitungen drucken Rechtfertigungen für das chinesische Veto. Die Resolution „schürt die Gefahr für einen Bürgerkrieg in Syrien“, warnt die amtliche Nachrichtengeneratur Xinhua. Die Volkszeitung, das Sprachrohr der Partei, sekundiert: „Kommt es zum Bürgerkrieg, wird sich eine Intervention ausländischer Truppen nicht vermeiden lassen.“

Ganz spurlos ist die westliche Kritik an China jedoch nicht vorübergegangen. Seit vier Wochen versucht sich China in

**Außenpolitisch gilt die Devise, auf internationaler Bühne „wenig Profil“ zu zeigen.**

der Rolle des Vermittlers. Vor wenigen Tagen reiste ein ranghoher Vertreter nach Damaskus. Nun hat das Außenministerium angekündigt, einen Gesandten nach Saudi Arabien, Ägypten und Frankreich zu schicken. Im Gepäck: ein chinesischer Plan für einen Waffenstillstand.

Chinas Syrien-Politik zeigt die internationale Unsicherheit der Pekinger Kader. Sollen sie sich einmischen und auftreten wie die zweitgrößte Volkswirtschaft der Welt oder sich weiter in Zurückhaltung üben? Chinas wichtigste außenpolitische Doktrin ist die Politik der Nichteinmischung. Entwickelt wurde sie in den fünfziger Jahren. Der damalige Premierminister Zhou Enlai formulierte das Prinzip erstmalig 1953 in der Präambel eines Vertrages zwischen China und Indien, in dem die Tibetfrage geregelt ist. 1955 wertete es Zhou auf der Konferenz von Bandung zum außenpolitischen Grundsatz auf. Bis heute hat die Doktrin ihre Gültigkeit behalten, im aktuellen Weißbuch zu Chinas „friedlicher Entwicklung“ (Stand September 2011) betont die Pekinger Führung sie. Über die Jahre wurde der Ansatz lediglich sprachlich modifiziert. Seit Deng Xiaoping lautet die Devise, auf internationaler Bühne möglichst „wenig Profil“ zu zeigen.

Acht Mal hat die Pekinger Führung gegen eine Resolution gestimmt, seit die Volksrepublik 1971 den Sitz Taiwans im UN-Sicherheitsrat übernommen hat. Nur wenn Chinas Interessen fundamental berührt werden, wagt sich die Volksre-



Ein Junge trauert im Norden Syriens um seinen Vater, der von der Armee getötet wurde.

Foto: Rodrigo Abd/AP

### Syriens Opposition verweigert Dialog mit Assad

Die syrische Armee hat am Freitag offenbar ihre Offensive gegen die Opposition fortgesetzt. Soldaten von Staatschef Baschar al-Assad stürmten mehrere Dörfer im Nordwesten des Landes. Nach Angaben der Syrischen Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte durchsuchten die Sicherheitskräfte Häuser und Bauernhöfe in der Region nahe der türkischen Grenze. In der Protesthochburg Dschabal al-Sawija wurden der syrischen Opposition zufolge zwei Männer in ihren Häusern erschossen. Nach Angaben der Aktivisten wurden am Freitag landesweit mindestens 26 Menschen getötet. Angesichts

der weiteren Eskalation der Gewalt wies der oppositionelle Syrische Nationalrat (SNC) am Freitag die Forderung des früheren UN-Generalsekretärs Kofi Annan nach einem Dialog mit der Regierung in Damaskus zurück. Dergleichen sei sinnlos und unrealistisch, sagte der SNC-Vorsitzende Burhan Ghaliun.

Nach dem stellvertretenden Öminister Abdu Hossam al-Din sind laut einem türkischen Fernsehbericht zwei syrische Generäle sowie ein Oberst desertiert. Die drei früheren Offiziere seien mit einer größeren Gruppe von Flüchtlingen in die Türkei gekommen, berichtete der Sen-

der TRT. Derzeit würden etwa 12 000 Syrer in Auffanglagern an der türkisch-syrischen Grenze beherbergt, hieß es am Freitag. Um auf einen weiter ansteigenden Flüchtlingsstrom vorbereitet zu sein, baut die Türkei derzeit eine neue Container-Siedlung. Die Türkei bleibe bei ihrer „Politik der offenen Tür“, betonte ein Diplomat. „Wir werden so viele Flüchtlinge aufnehmen, wie wir können.“

Das syrische Justizministerium forderte unterdessen die Behörden des Nachbarlandes Libanon auf, bewaffnete Syrer, die zusammen mit Zivilisten in die Bekaa-Ebene geflohen waren, auszuliefern. SZ

publik aus der Deckung. Das erste Mal votierte der Vertreter Pekings 1972 gegen die Aufnahme Bangladeschs in die Vereinten Nationen. Bangladesch hatte sich gerade von Pakistan abgespalten und Islamabad war damals einer der wenigen Verbündeten Pekings.

Vergangenes Jahr verhinderte China mit einem Veto ein Waffenembargo gegen Syrien. Neben Russland gilt China als größter Waffenlieferant des Assad-Regimes. Ein Drittel aller Waffen, die Syrien vor Ausbruch des Aufstands einkaufte, stammen aus China und Nordkorea, sagt Mahmud Suleiman Hadsch Hamad. Er war Chef-Gutachter des syrischen Verteidigungsministeriums, bevor er sich im Januar von Präsident Baschar al-Assad lossagte. Erklären Chinas Waffenlieferungen die erneute Unterstützung für das Assad-Regime? Im Gegensatz zu Russland, wo die Waffenschmieden eine Schlüsselindustrie sind, fallen die Exporte für China wirtschaftlich kaum ins Ge-

**Die Zugeständnisse in Libyen haben kaum Anerkennung gebracht.**

wicht. Viel eher lässt sich die chinesische Vorsicht in Syrien mit den Entwicklungen in Nordafrika erklären. Außerdem steht im Oktober ein Machtwechsel in Peking an, der nicht gefährdet werden soll.

Die ersten ägyptischen Demonstrationen ließ die chinesische Propaganda als Aufrührer in den heimischen Medien zeigen. Erst als Ägyptens langjähriger Machthaber Hosni Mubarak im Gefängnis saß, erkannte Peking die neue Führung in Kairo diplomatisch an. Als im Frühjahr 2011 die ersten Demonstrationen auftraten, ließ die Behörden vor dem Sammelpunkt der Demonstranten in der Pekinger Innenstadt über Nacht eine Baustelle errichten. Erst als die Revolution auf Libyen übergriff, maßigte China seine Position. Peking stimmte erst Sanktionen zu und legte dann kein Veto gegen die Luftunterstützung der Nato ein. Im Westen wurde der Positionswechsel mit der Verantwortung für die mehr als 35 000 chinesischen Gastarbeitern in Libyen erklärt. Rückblickend sei das ein Fehler gewesen, sagen viele chinesische Akademiker. Die außenpolitischen Zugeständnisse haben China kaum Anerkennung gebracht und wirtschaftlich sogar geschadet. Mit Gaddafis Regime hatten Chinas Staatskonzerne Bauaufträge in Höhe von 18 Milliarden Dollar ausgehandelt, seit dem Machtwechsel sind die Projekte Makulatur.

Wirtschaftlich ist Syrien im Vergleich zu Libyen für China relativ unbedeutend. Chinas Syrien-Politik ist also eine Rückkehr zur klassischen chinesischen Außenpolitik. Wenn nur die Kritik aus dem Westen nicht so laut wäre.



## PROFIL

Er muss Humor haben, trotz der Lage. Anders lässt sich ein Link auf dem Twitter-Account von Oberst Riad al-Asaad, Chef der oppositionellen Freien Syrischen Armee, nicht erklären. Der Pfad führt zu einem Youtube-Clip, der dauert vier Minuten und beweist anhand einer neu synchronisierten Szene von Bruno Ganz in „Der Untergang“ Unglaubliches: Hitler wollte Syrien angreifen. In größter Verzweiflung ist die Groteske oft nah, und Syriens Lage ist verzweifelt, auch wenn sie es nach Ansicht von Riad al-Asaad nicht sein müsste: Würde die Welt seinen Männern anständige Waffen geben, Präsident Baschar al-Assad – fast ein Namensvetter – wäre in einem Monat erledigt. Ohne Hilfe dauere es drei Monate, meint Asaad. Bald werde er erst einmal eine Schutzzone einrichten. Große Worte.

Riad al-Asaad – geboren 1961, Sunnit, mehr als 30 Jahre lang Luftwaffeningenieur der syrischen Armee – gehört unter allen Unbekanntesten im Kampf um Syrien zu den am schwersten durchschaubaren: Wie groß ist sein Einfluss auf die Kämpfer wirklich? Wie steht er zum oppositionellen Syrischen Nationalrat, der sich als politische Vertretung der Assad-Gegner etablieren will? Und ist er nicht überhaupt eine Marionette der Türkei, deren Außenminister jedes Interview genehmigt, seit Asaad in die Türkei flüchtete? Die Welt horchte auf, als Asaad im Au-



Foto: NYTNS/af

### Riad al-Asaad Chef der Freien Armee aus syrischen Deserteuren

gust aus einem Flüchtlingslager im türkischen Hatay die Gründung der Freien Syrischen Armee (FSA) bekanntgab. Schon damals sprach er von 15 000 Mann in seinen Reihen. Inzwischen will er dank eines steten Stroms von Deserteuren, die vor Schieß- und Folterbefehlen flüchten, 50 000 Kämpfer unter Waffen haben – Behauptungen, die nicht zu überprüfen sind. Bestätigt ist, dass gerade erst zwei Generäle und ein Oberst in die Türkei zur FSA flüchteten, die höchstrangigen

Deserteure bislang. Viele der Aufständischen setzen Hoffnungen in die Freie Armee, die Baba Amr in Homs über Wochen halten konnte – auch wenn nach ihrem Rückzug die Vergeltung der Regierung entsetzlich war.

Experten gehen davon aus, dass Asaad eher als Lobbyist auftritt denn als Oberkommandierender. Die Auführer haben zwar inzwischen schwerere Waffen der regulären Armee erbeutet oder aus dem Libanon und aus Irak eingeschmuggelt, aber sie operieren meist als eigenständige Einheiten, oft unter islamischen Namen, und ihre Reihen füllen inzwischen auch Zivilisten. Nein, er bekomme kein Geld von den Muslimbrüdern, sagt Asaad, und er lehne eine Militärintervention wie in Irak ebenso ab wie einen Dialog mit der Regierung. Es gebe auch Drusen und Kurden bei der Freien Armee, sagt er, alle Völker und Konfessionen hätten Platz im neuen Syrien.

Dabei kommen nicht einmal Freie Armee und Nationalrat gut miteinander zu recht. Unlängst gründete der Nationalrat – lange ein Gegner des bewaffneten Aufstandes – ein militärisches Büro. Und Asaad mäkelte, der Rat bleibe hinter den Erwartungen zurück. Syrien, sagt Asaad, werde eine Demokratie werden, und seine Kämpfer würden sich aus der Politik zurückziehen. Man lauscht nach Libyen, nach Ägypten – da klang es einmal so ähnlich.

Sonja Zekri



# Offiziere desertieren

**SYRIEN** Erneut Demonstrationen in allen Städten.  
Opposition ohne Hoffnung in Mission von Annan

BEIRUT *dpa/rtr/taz* | An den Protesten gegen den syrischen Präsidenten Baschar al-Assad haben sich am Freitag landesweit zehntausende Menschen beteiligt. In der Stadt Aleppo im Norden sei es die größte Mobilisierung seit dem Beginn der Proteste vor einem Jahr gewesen, teilte die Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte in London mit. Die Sicherheitskräfte hätten in Aleppo auf die demonstrierende Menge geschossen, sagte der Oppositionelle Mohammed Halabi. Die Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte in London sprach am Mittag von mindestens 19 getöteten Zivilisten am Freitag. Darunter seien 8 Tote in der Stadt Homs, die seit Wochen von den syrischen Streitkräften bombardiert wird.

Die syrische Armee hat am Freitag zudem vier Dörfer in der Provinz Idlib im Nordwesten des Landes gestürmt. Wie die Syrische Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte mitteilte, durchsuchten die Sicherheitskräfte auf der Fahndung nach Deserteuren Häuser und Bauernhöfe in der Region an der türkischen Grenze. Die Opposition

fürchte einen Großangriff wie in Baba Amr, sagte der Leiter der Beobachtungsstelle, Rami Abdel Rahman. Das lange von Rebellen gehaltene Stadtviertel von Homs war vor einer Woche nach wochenlangem Beschuss von der Armee eingenommen worden.

Angesichts der Gewaltorgien verweigern immer mehr Soldaten dem Regime die Gefolgschaft. Am Donnerstag hatten sich drei ranghohe Offiziere in die Türkei abgesetzt. Die Deserteure – zwei Generäle und ein Oberst – seien über die Grenze in die Provinz Hatay gekommen, berichtete der türkische Nachrichtensender TRT.

Unterdessen hat der Vorsitzende des Syrischen Nationalrats, Burhan Ghaliun, die Aufforderung des früheren UN-Generalsekretärs Kofi Annan zum Dialog zwischen der Regierung in Damaskus und der Opposition als unrealistisch zurückgewiesen. Annan hatte die Opposition aufgefordert, mit der Regierung zusammenzutreffen, um eine politische Lösung des Konflikts zu finden. Hierzu würde er „realistische“ Vorschläge liefern, hatte Annan weiter gesagt. **GB**



Il Manifesto (Italie / Italy)

L'EX SEGRETARIO ONU • L'invio speciale per la crisi siriana arriva oggi a Damasco cercando una soluzione «politica»

## Mission impossible per Kofi Annan

Michele Giorgio

**N**on sarà facile per l'invio speciale dell'Onu, il ghanese Kofi Annan riuscire a porre le basi di una soluzione politica per la crisi siriana.

Al suo arrivo oggi a Damasco, Annan, che ha guidato per due mandati consecutivi da segretario generale le Nazioni unite, troverà un regime che da un lato lo accoglierà con calore (gli ha già dato ufficialmente «il benvenuto») e dall'altro resisterà all'idea di accelerare una transizione, ormai inevitabile, che porti a riforme concrete e alla fine del dominio politico del partito Baath del presidente Bashar Assad.

Più di tutto l'invio dell'Onu dovrà fare i conti con quella parte dell'opposizione, in particolare il Consiglio nazionale siriano (Cns), che non crede più in soluzioni politiche e chiede con insistenza un intervento militare contro Damasco, simile a quello della Nato contro la Libia di Muammar Gheddafi. Giovedì Annan aveva invitato l'opposizione a collaborare per trovare una soluzione che risponda alle aspirazioni del popolo siriano» e avvertito che una maggiore militarizzazione del conflitto aggraverebbe ulteriormente la situazione. «Chiederò al governo e alle opposizioni di lavorare insieme a noi per una soluzione che rifletta le aspirazioni del popolo siriano», aveva detto Annan, riflettendo l'opinione di tanti, specialmente in Siria, che guardano ad una via d'uscita politica.

### Rabbia dei settori dell'opposizione che chiedono un intervento armato modello Libia

Peraltro una parte dell'opposizione, quella rappresentata da Haytham al Manna, leader del Comitato di coordinamento per il cambiamento democratico, si oppone ad un intervento armato internazionale e pur condannando Assad e il suo regime, è favorevole allo sbocco politico.

Le parole di Annan sono accolte con rabbia dai disertori dell'«Esercito libero siriano» (Els) che combattono contro l'esercito regolare e dal leader del Cns Burhan Ghalioun. Cns e l'Els ieri hanno esortato la popolazione a protestare contro Annan. «Come si può avviare il dialogo con un regime che uccide le no-



HOMS DOPO LA BATTAGLIA FRA GOVERNATIVI E RIBELLI/FOTO REUTERS

stre donne e i nostri bambini?», ha detto Omar Homs, un attivista di Homs citato dalle agenzie di stampa. I Comitati di coordinamento locale (Ccl), vicini al Cns e all'Els, ieri hanno riferito di un'altra quarantina di morti, tra i quali quattro bambini e due donne. Morti che, sottolineano i Ccl, si aggiungono agli oltre settemila vittime della repressione del regime nel corso dell'anno di durata (finora) della rivolta. Il governo invece parla di almeno duemila soldati e poliziotti uccisi da «terroristi». Bilanci di morti e feriti, riferiti da opposizione e regime, che però non sono verificabili attraverso fonti indipendenti.

Nel frattempo viene minimizzato l'impatto che ha nella crisi siriana la militarizzazione della sollevazione contro il regime di Assad in atto in alcune aree del paese. Il quotidiano saudita, *al Sharq al Awsat*, vicino, come la monarchia di Riyadh, ai disertori dell'Esl, ieri ha riferito che non meglio identificate tribù siriane hanno formato 24 brigate armate per combattere l'esercito regolare. Secondo un portavoce delle tribù, Khaled al-Khalaf, ogni brigata conta tra i 700 e i 1.500 combattenti e si coordina con l'Esl. Khalaf ha aggiunto che le brigate si stanno dispiegando nelle regioni di Damasco, Deir Ezzor, Homs, Abu Kamal, Hama, Deraa e Idlib, grazie

anche al sostegno economico della gente di quelle zone. Ma è probabile che ricevano armi e finanziamenti dall'estero. E' noto il sostegno dei sunniti libanesi alla rivolta contro il regime alawita di Assad e dei Fratelli musulmani giordani ai loro compagni in Siria. Mentre Qatar e Arabia Saudita sono apertamente a favore dei rifornimenti di armi per l'Esl.

Intanto le autorità siriane, forse come gesto distensivo prima dell'arrivo di Kofi Annan, hanno dato un via libera preliminare all'avvio di una missione congiunta di valutazione con le Nazioni Unite per garantire aiuti umanitari alla popolazione civile. «Siamo giunti ad un accordo per una missione congiunta di valutazione nelle zone in cui la popolazione ha bisogno di aiuti urgenti», ha annunciato ieri la responsabile delle operazioni umanitarie dell'Onu, Valerie Amos, in una conferenza stampa tenuta ad Ankara, di ritorno dalla sua prima visita in Siria (visita in un primo tempo rifiutata dal regime che non le concedeva il visto d'entrata). L'iniziativa costituirà un «primo passo», ha proseguito Amos sottolineando la necessità di mettere in atto «un piano robusto e regolare per permettere alle organizzazioni umanitarie di accedere» a tutte le zone interessate dai combattimenti.

### BAHRAIN / LA PRIMAVERA DI CUI NON SI PARLA

## In 100 mila a Manama «Via gli al Khalifa»

In oltre centomila, un sesto dei cittadini del Bahrain, hanno marciato ieri lungo l'autostrada Budaiya che porta alla capitale Manama.

Un fiume umano che ha voluto chiarire alla dinastia sunnita degli al Khalifa, che regna con potere assoluto da duecento anni, che il movimento per le riforme e la democrazia, partito un anno fa, non si arrende. Lungo tutto il percorso i manifestanti hanno scandito «Via, via al Khalifa», in riferimento a re Hamad, sostenuto dall'Arabia Saudita e dagli Stati Uniti che in Bahrain hanno la base della Quinta flotta.

Un sesto della popolazione del paese in marcia verso la Piazza della Perla per chiedere riforme

La reazione della polizia non si è fatta attendere. Gli agenti hanno sparato proiettili di gomma e lacrimogeni quando i manifestanti hanno provato a dirigersi verso Piazza della Perla, che l'anno scorso fu sede di un accampamento di tende simile a quello di Piazza Tahrir al Cairo. Accampamento spazzato via brutalmente dalle forze di sicurezza, con l'aiuto delle truppe saudite arrivate in soccorso del re.

Ieri non si sono registrate vittime ma la situazione rimane tesa nell'isola, dove il principale gruppo scista di opposizione 'al-Wefaq' ha indetto il 3 marzo una settimana di proteste per chiedere alla famiglia reale una svolta democratica.



ABC (Espagne / Spain)

## Seis generales de brigada huyen a Turquía y se unen a la insurgencia

**DANIEL IRIARTE**  
CORRESPONSAL EN ESTAMBUL

¿Ha comenzado la cadena de desertiones en el régimen sirio? Tras la renuncia, el jueves, de Adbo Husameldin, viceministro del Petróleo, ayer se hizo público que quince mandos y oficiales han desertado a Turquía en las últimas horas, entre ellos seis generales de brigada, cuatro coroneles y una teniente. Es más: los portavoces del Ejército Sirio Libre aseguran que al menos cincuenta oficiales se han pasado a sus filas durante la pasada semana. «La situación ha cambiado muy rápido en Siria. Todo el mundo teme por su vida, incluyendo a los altos generales», declaró el coronel Aref Hamud al diario estadounidense «Wall Street Journal».

La mayoría han huido de las posiciones que ocupaban en la región norte, donde existe una importante presencia rebelde. El número de desertores desde el inicio de las protestas supera los cuarenta mil, según diplomáticos turcos.

La desertión de estos altos oficiales promete acrecentar el problema de liderazgo ya existente en el seno del Ejército Sirio Libre, donde ya existe un enfrentamiento entre el coronel Riad al Asaad, el fundador de la guerrilla, y el general de brigada Mustafá al Shaij. Este último trató de hacerse con el mando de la insurgencia tras su llegada hace dos meses, pero Al Asaad se ha negado a cedérselo el mando.

Los insurgentes mantienen los nombres de muchos de estos desertores en secreto, para evitar represalias contra sus parientes.

Mientras tanto y solo en la jornada de ayer, 82 civiles —entre ellos diez niños— murieron víctimas de la represión por parte del régimen,





Ferida numa perna, Edith Bouvier foi levada para França no dia 2, tendo sido operada na quinta-feira

## No inferno de Homs amontoam-se as vítimas

**Síria.** Histórias da vida na cidade cercada, de onde chegam informações sobre mais violência

LUÍS NAVES

No dia seguinte à visita da representante da ONU, Valerie Amos, ao bairro de Baba Amr, há notícias de mais de 30 mortos numa outra ofensiva militar contra os rebeldes, em Idleb, mas também informações difíceis de confirmar sobre a continuação das represálias contra a população civil de Homs. Esta cidade esteve sob bombardeamento sistemático durante quase um mês e ontem foi publicado em França o relato da enviada especial do *Le Figaro*, Edith Bouvier, cujo testemunho mostra um cenário de pesadelo.

A jornalista francesa ficou ferida a 22 de fevereiro, numa explosão que matou dois repórteres ocidentais, e só foi repatriada a 2 de março. Nos dias mais complicados do cerco a Homs, esteve num hospital onde faltava tudo. Este é o tema da sua reportagem, cujas primeiras linhas mostram a extensão da violência:

"À volta, é o caos e guerra. Ruas esventradas, bombardeamentos incessantes. Mas o hospital de campanha dos insurgentes sírios é uma espécie de porto de abrigo, uma ilha de humanidade. Os feridos

amontoam-se e são tratados com quase nada. Uma luta contra a morte."

No seu texto, Bouvier explica que os bombardeamentos começavam exatamente às 06.30, todos os dias, e só a pausa do meio-dia permitia à população respirar um pouco. Os céus eram controlados por um *drone* (avião não tripulado) das forças leais ao regime de Bachar al-Assad.

Como se não fosse suficientemente mau, este relato surge numa altura em que Damasco accele-

ra a repressão. Ontem, uma coluna militar começou a atacar zonas de Idleb controladas pelos rebeldes. Teme-se uma operação semelhante à que destruiu zonas habitacionais de Homs onde, segundo fontes credíveis, terão morrido mais de 700 pessoas.

Entretanto, há informações de que as represálias naquela cidade continuam a produzir vítimas. Segundo os comités de coordenação local, citados pela BBC, dezenas de pessoas foram mortas ontem, horas depois da visita da responsável pe-

las operações humanitárias da ONU, que esteve no local apenas 45 minutos, sem conseguir acesso às zonas mais atingidas. A mesma fonte afirma que as forças de segurança mataram civis na zona de Jobar, no mesmo bairro de Homs. Uma única família contou 20 mortos, outra 16, não havendo qualquer hipótese de confirmação. A parte indesejável é que destruição ocorreu em larga escala. Amos disse à Reuters estar "preocupada com o que aconteceu às pessoas que viviam naquela parte da cidade".

### NAÇÕES UNIDAS

#### Kofi Annan chega hoje a Damasco

O conflito na Síria dura há um ano e já fez mais de 8400 mortos. Ontem, houve notícias de mais manifestações em todo o país e da deserção de vários oficiais de alta patente, incluindo quatro generais. O futuro desta verdadeira guerra civil dependerá das negociações diplomáticas e, neste domínio, a maior novidade foi o anúncio de que o enviado especial da ONU e da Liga Árabe, Kofi Annan (na

imagem), irá aos campos de refugiados na Turquia, onde estão 12 mil pessoas. Annan chega hoje a Damasco, para uma primeira visita. As Nações Unidas estão entretanto a preparar uma operação humanitária em larga escala, reunindo *stocks* alimentares para 1,5 milhões de pessoas. A oposição síria no exterior recusou o diálogo com o regime de Assad, cada vez mais isolado.



### ANÁLISE

#### Que nos diz a Síria



**BERNARDO PIRES DE LIMA**  
Investigador universitário

Não há solução mágica para a Síria. Uma intervenção externa esbarra na falta de consenso no Conselho de Segurança e nos conditionalismos políticos dos EUA e Europa. Na verdade, não existe neste momento uma vontade euro-atlântica em forjar uma ação militar fora do quadro da ONU. O mesmo já não se passa com a Arábia Saudita ou o Qatar, que muito têm insistido nessa solução. Sem o uso da força externo — que, muito provavelmente, traria mais problemas regionais do que soluções sírias — o regime de Assad tem aproveitado para dizimar as oposições (pouco coesas e sem organização político-militar capaz) e legitimar-se politicamente através de uma pseudo-reforma constitucional. As sanções económicas não têm feito a mossa esperada e a brutalidade das forças de segurança tem aumentado à medida que cresce o cerco internacional: os últimos três meses foram os mais sangrentos neste ano de revoltas. Ou seja, à incapacidade da "comunidade internacional" interessada na Síria junta-se a inoperância da ONU e a recuperação do arco de poder de Assad. Este quadro significa que o problema humanitário em que a Síria se tornou não tem uma solução à vista com impulso ocidental. A China, percebendo o hiato, acaba de enviar um diplomata a Riade, Cairo e Paris propondo roteiro humanitário com a ONU, a Liga Árabe e apelando ao cessar-fogo imediato. O interesse de Pequim na Síria é menor que o de Moscovo, o que lhe permite assumir uma iniciativa deste género, ter sucesso e salvar a face das críticas à cumplicidade com a matança de Assad. À medida que as potências euro-atlânticas baixam a intensidade das acções e exigências com Assad, este ganha tanto espaço de manobra como Pequim e Moscovo. Tudo isto revela dois grandes detalhes: uma ausência de músculo diplomático ocidental e o esvaziamento da função humanitária da ONU através de impulso próprio. A Síria, como aqui tenho dito, é muito mais do que a queda de um ditador.



Publico (Portugal)

# A voz dos curdos já se faz ouvir e cresce a revolta nos bastiões de Assad

Os protestos multiplicaram-se em várias cidades sírias, incluindo Aleppo. As forças de segurança dispararam, e a oposição diz que morreram 62 pessoas por todo o país

**Síria**  
Maria João Guimarães

Aleppo era o local em que a oposição síria brincava que haveria protestos "em 2050", ou cuja população "nem com Viagra se levantaria" contra o regime. Os curdos eram a minoria que se vinha a manter silenciosa, evitando juntar-se à oposição sunita com medo de que os seus direitos fossem ainda mais diminuídos num novo regime.

Mas ontem, quando dezenas de milhares de pessoas saíram à rua em várias cidades sírias e a violência continuou com pelo menos 62 mortos, houve 15 manifestações em Aleppo. E houve também várias protestos entre os curdos, que assinalaram uma repressão de há oito anos.

Tudo isto depois de na véspera ter desertado o primeiro membro do Governo sírio, um vice-ministro do Petróleo. Ontem, foram anunciadas as deserções de quatro generais, que terão chegado a um campo no Sul da Turquia onde se encontram outros desertores, afirmou um porta-voz do Exército Livre à Reuters. Estes quatro desertores juntam-se a outros altos responsáveis militares que abandonaram o regime: são, neste momento, sete brigadeiros-generais que se viraram contra Assad, mesmo com risco de que as suas famílias sejam agora perseguidas.

O regime está a dar especial atenção aos militares, evitando a mobilização de sunitas, que são a maioria no país, e tentando que as operações sejam levadas a cabo apenas pela minoria alauita do regime do Presidente, Bashar al-Assad, nota o jornal francês *Le Figaro*. Mesmo a aviação, em que os sunitas estão em maior número do que nas outras forças, tem ficado em terra.

Enquanto isso, Homs, cidade arrasada, continuou a ser alvo de ataques, mesmo depois de o seu bairro de Bab al-Amr ter sido descrito como um bairro-fantasma pela responsável da ONU para assuntos humanitários, Valerie Amos, que se questionou sobre o que teria aconte-

cido às pessoas que ali viviam. O alvo era agora o bairro de Karm al-Zeitun. "Trinta tanques entraram no meu bairro às sete da manhã. Eles estão a usar canhões para disparar contra as casas", contou um habitante, num telefonema à agência Reuters.

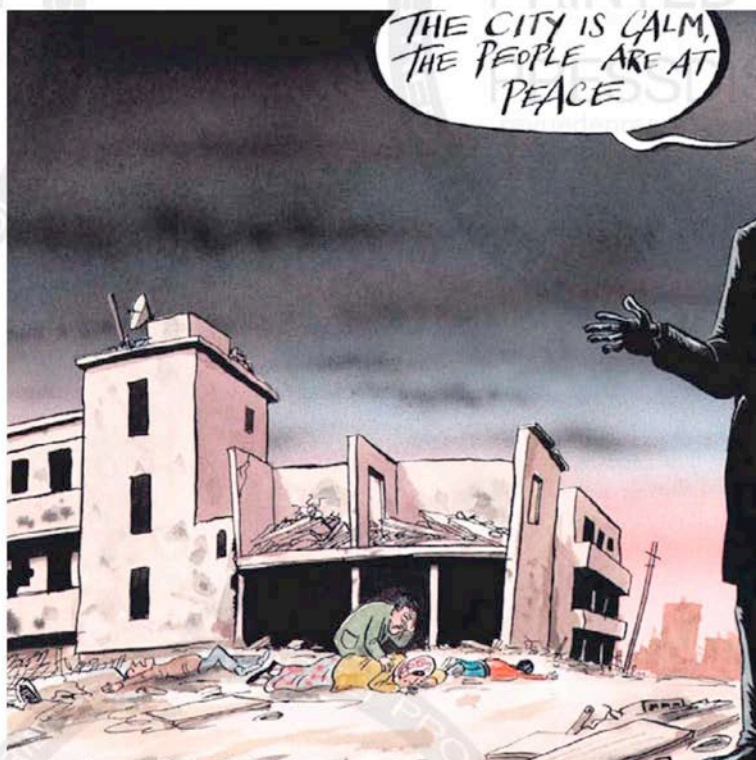
O número de mortos na repressão das manifestações de ontem - sexta-feira, a seguir às orações, é uma altura-chave dos protestos - ia aumentando a cada hora. Primeiro falava-se de 19 mortos (AFP), depois de 31 (Reuters) e ao final da tarde já de 62 (*Guardian*). Todos estes números são obtidos com base nos relatos dos grupos de oposição, e é difícil confirmar exactamente o que se passa no terreno. A violência ocorre quando se espera hoje a chegada do enviado da ONU Kofi Annan a Damasco. Annan fez uma proposta de negociações que já foi rejeitada pelos opositores.

## Idlib, a nova Homs?

Mais a noroeste, perto da fronteira com a Turquia, Idlib preparava-se para enfrentar uma acção militar semelhante à que arrasou Homs. Habitantes descrevem a chegada de 140 autocarros cheios de soldados e 42 tanques aos arredores da cidade, de cerca de cem mil habitantes. A zona de Jabal al-Zauia, em Idlib, tem recebido um grande número de desertores, disse o Observatório Sírio de Direitos Humanos (oposição) - é aí que os opositores pensam que as forças de Assad se irão focar.

Noutras cidades do Nordeste, muitos milhares de pessoas manifestaram-se assinalando a repressão aos curdos que deixou 30 mortos em 2004. Os curdos são a maior minoria da Síria, e têm começado, aos poucos, a juntar-se aos protestos: o *New York Times* dizia que a minoria "tem o potencial de mudar a maré contra o Presidente Assad justamente na altura em que as forças militares deste estão em vantagem".

"Se e quando os curdos decidirem envolver-se em grande, poderá cusar ao regime o controlo físico de uma região inteira e poderá provocar uma revolta em Damasco e Aleppo", declarou um diplomata ocidental,



Assad em Homs: "A cidade está calma. As pessoas estão em paz"

sob anonimato, ao *Washington Post*.

Aleppo, assim como Damasco, são considerados os bastiões do regime. Ainda ontem, houve notícias de grandes manifestações pró-Assad na capital. As elites de Aleppo, a cidade considerada como o centro comercial da Síria, sentem que são prósperas graças ao regime e à estabilidade que este proporciona, lembra o diário britânico *Telegraph*.

Mas nas paredes de alguns bairros da cidade já há slogans contra Assad, às sextas-feiras já há manifestações. Aleppo está em alerta máximo, com uma forte presença militar, sacos de areia empilhados para proteger edifícios públicos, sentinelas armadas a observar as ruas. Ontem, "as forças de segurança dispararam para dispersar as multidões na maioria das manifestações", disse um activista à agência AFP. Foi o dia em que mais gente saiu à rua em Aleppo.

## Assad concorda com "missão de avaliação pr

Representante da ONU insiste na necessidade de a

As Nações Unidas querem acesso ilimitado para poderem fazer passar ajuda humanitária às zonas afectadas pelo conflito na Síria, mas o regime do Presidente Bashar al-Assad concordou apenas com uma "missão de avaliação preliminar", anunciou a responsável da ONU para os assuntos humanitários, Valerie Amos (na foto).

"O Governo sírio pediu mais tempo para analisar o acordo que lhes foi proposto", disse Amos numa conferência de imprensa na Turquia, depois



da visita à Síria, onde ficou "destroçada" pelo que viu no bairro de Bab al-Amr, vazio depois de ter sido bombardeado e ocupado pelas forças de Assad. Uma porta-voz do gabinete para os assuntos



The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)

# Syrian National Council rejects Annan's call for peace dialogue

**MICHAEL JANSEN**

THE CHAIRMAN of the Syrian National Council, the western-backed group of exiled opponents of the Damascus regime, yesterday rejected a call by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan for the Syrian crisis to be resolved peacefully through dialogue.

Paris-based Burhan Ghalioun deemed Mr Annan's stance "disappointing" at a time Syrians were being "massacred every day". Dr Ghalioun observed there can be no political solution unless "accompanied by military pressure on the regime". He told al-Arabiya satellite television channel the council is receiving funds and arms from "Arab and non-Arab countries" and that it seeks "quality weapons" to defeat the regime.

Last month, the council established a military committee with the aim of uniting the disparate rebel forces in Syria under a single command structure, a move dismissed founder of the "Syrian Free Army" by Col Riad al-Asa and other local militia leaders.

France and Morocco have said they "reject any military intervention in Syria" and observed the league "has always favoured a political solution", giving a boost to Mr Annan's mission. He said he will submit "realistic" proposals to resolve the crisis when he reaches Damascus today.

By adopting a combative line, the council clearly seeks to torpedo Mr Annan's effort before he arrives in Damascus. He has rejected both "militarisation" by arming rebels and foreign military intervention.

US risk-analysis firm Stratfor argues that Washington, in particular, is reluctant to intervene militarily in Syria because of its "formidable air defence systems" and the failure of rebels to gain "control of large areas of territory". Washington may also be concerned about the council's viability.

In an earlier commentary, Stratfor said, "Most of the opposition's more serious claims have turned out to be grossly exaggerated or simply untrue, thereby revealing more about the opposi-

tion's weaknesses than the level of instability inside the Syrian regime."

Opposition Local Co-Ordination Committees reported 62 dead in fighting between government and rebel forces in Rastan, north of Bab Amr, and Qusair, near the Lebanese border; shelling of three dissident quarters of Homs; and clashes in Idlib and Deir al-Zor.

Two Syrian brigadier generals and a colonel were said to have defected to Turkey, raising to a total of seven officers of field rank who deserted in recent weeks.

China has dispatched deputy foreign minister Zhang Ming to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and France to explain its opposition to external intervention in the Syrian crisis.

His Russian counterpart, Genady Gatilov, said the draft resolution being circulated by the US at the UN lacks "a simultaneous call on all sides to take practical steps" towards ceasefire. France has rejected the Russian stance, saying there is no equivalence between violence perpetrated by government and rebels.



The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

# Rebels reject call for talks with Assad

By Alex Spillius

THE Syrian opposition reacted angrily yesterday to calls by Kofi Annan, the former UN secretary-general, for dialogue with President Bashar al-Assad's government, saying he was "living on Mars".

On the eve of Mr Annan's arrival in Damascus today, where he is due to meet Mr Assad, activists reported a further 26 deaths across the country, including eight people killed by mortars fired by the army at protesters in Homs.

The deaths occurred less than 24 hours after Baroness Amos, the UN's chief humanitarian officer, was taken on a tour of the central city by officials that included Baba Amr, the rebel stronghold bombarded for 26 consecutive days.

Speaking in Turkey yesterday, Lady Amos said she had demanded unhindered access for humanitarian aid, but the Syrians granted permission for only a "limited assessment exercise by UN agencies and the Syrian authorities".

The Syrian regime was stung yesterday by the defection of two Syrian generals, a colonel and two sergeants who fled to Turkey, a day after the deputy oil minister Abdo Hussameddin also deserted.

Mr Annan, who has been appointed joint UN-Arab League envoy to Syria, shocked regime opponents by suggesting they should seek a political settlement and speaking strongly against outside military assistance.

Burhan Ghalioun, president of the Syrian National Council, the main exiled opposition group, said: "These comments do not give a lot of hope for people in Syria being massacred every day."

Activists inside Syria also rejected Mr Annan's call for dialogue. "It seems he lives on Mars," said Mohammad Saeed, from the Damascus suburb of Douma. "We can't hear each other even if we wanted to."



The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

# Annan flies in – but still Homs feels Assad’s rage

As the UN special envoy arrives in Syria, with dozens still being killed every day, activists dismiss plan for political settlement

By JUSTIN VELA

Kofi Annan arrives in Syria today on a mission to push the regime to end its bloody crackdown on dissent and hold talks with the opposition, but before the former UN secretary-general had even touched down in Damascus, activists rejected his call for dialogue with President Bashar al-Assad.

Opposition leaders described Mr Annan’s plan for a political solution to the conflict as “disappointing” after the year-long military crackdown that has killed at least 7,500 people. The rejection of negotiations dealt a blow to efforts that might have saved Syria from a full-blown civil war, but the opposition was adamant that the time for talks was over and military might was the only way to force Assad from power.

“These kind of comments are disappointing and do not give a lot of hope for people in Syria being massacred every day,” said Burhan Ghalioun, leader of the Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella group of opposition activists, referring to Mr Annan’s plan for a negotiated peace.

“It feels like we are watching the same movie being repeated over and over again. Any political solution will not succeed if it is not accompanied by military pressure on the regime.”

The Syrian opposition wants foreign governments to provide military support for the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a loosely defined force fighting the regime, and the establishment of no-fly zones backed by the West. They describe Mr Annan’s mission as a distraction from efforts that might actually stand a chance of toppling the regime.

A special envoy for the UN and Arab League, Mr Annan is due to travel to Damascus today and meet with Mr Assad. He has warned against arming the Syrian opposition and advocates

trying to end the violence through diplomatic measures. “I hope that no one is thinking very seriously of using force in this situation,” Mr Annan said from Cairo on Thursday. “I believe any further militarisation would make the situation worse. Ultimately the solution lies in a political settlement.”

Ahead of Mr Annan’s visit, at least 62 people were killed yesterday around Syria, according to the Local Co-ordination Committees. There has been a relative calm in the besieged city of Homs in the past few days, following an intense month-long bombardment that had forced FSA fighters to retreat from their stronghold in the Baba Amr district. However, Syrian military forces

**“Any militarisation would make the situation worse. Ultimately the solution lies in a political settlement”**

loyal to the regime launched new attacks yesterday, using tanks and mortars to shell the city.

Abo Emad, an opposition activist in Homs, told *The Independent* that mortars hit groups of men leaving mosques after Friday prayers. He said Syrians did not believe Mr Annan had any chance of ending the conflict through negotiation.

“They are just giving the regime more chances to kill more people. Even the UN and the Arab League, they think they are helping us, but it is not the truth,” he said. The only way the world could help the Syrian people, he added, was to support the FSA.

With the prospects for diplomacy faltering, more regime members appear to be switching sides. Turkish media reported that two Syrian generals, a colonel and two sergeants had yesterday defected and travelled to Turkey, a day after Syria’s deputy oil minister deserted Assad’s regime.



Clockwise from top: destroyed cars in Homs; landmines planted in the village of Heet, near the northern Lebanese border, are seen after being dug out by activists; tanks on the streets of Yabrud; damaged houses in Homs





The Globe and Mail (Canada)

# As defections mount, rebels reject talks

Government troops pound Homs as anti-Assad protests flare on eve of arrival of UN special envoy Kofi Annan

KAREEM FAHIM BEIRUT  
ALAN COWELL PARIS

An international diplomatic effort to nudge Syria's President toward peace talks ran into difficulties Friday even before it got under way when the leader of the main exile opposition group rejected the initiative and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad were reported to have intensified an assault on their adversaries.

At the same time, rebels reported that four high-ranking officers had defected over the past three days to a camp for Syrian army deserters in Turkey, Reuters said, bringing to seven the number of military officers with the rank of brigadier-general to have switched sides.

But the trickle of defections did not appear to have hampered the Syrian army's ability to confront protest.

The Local Co-ordination Committees, an activist group that has sought to document civilian casualties in the conflict, was quoted as saying government forces used tanks to pound opponents in parts of the restive central city of Homs on Friday, killing nine.

Other accounts spoke of mortar fire raining down on parts of the city. Up until last week, residents, armed rebels and army defectors had been holed up in the Baba Amr neighbourhood of Homs facing a month-long siege by government forces that finally drove them out, heralding a short period of relative calm.

As anti-government demonstrations were reported flaring in several parts of the country Friday, however, activists said 12 people were killed in areas including the capital, Damascus.

The renewed violence came on the eve of the scheduled arrival in Syria of Kofi Annan, a former UN secretary-general who was recently appointed special envoy on Syria representing the United Nations and the Arab League. Mr. Annan told reporters in Cairo on Thursday that he would urge Mr. al-Assad and his opponents to stop fighting and seek a political solution.

But, in a telephone interview with The Associated Press on Friday, Burhan Ghalioun, the head of the opposition Syrian National



Free Syrian Army fighters gather after swearing on the Koran to fight government troops to the death in Idlib, Syria, on Thursday. RODRIGO ABD/AP

“**My fear is that, like other international envoys before him, the aim is to waste a month or two of pointless mediation efforts.**”

**Burhan Ghalioun**  
Head of the opposition Syrian National Council based in Paris on the mission of UN envoy Kofi Annan

Council who is based in Paris, was quoted as saying he rejected the call for dialogue at a time when government forces were pursuing military operations against civilians.

“These kind of comments are disappointing and do not give a lot of hope for people in Syria being massacred every day,” Mr. Ghalioun said. “It feels like we are watching the same movie being repeated over and over again.”

“My fear is that, like other international envoys before him, the aim is to waste a month or two of pointless mediation efforts,” he added.

The Syrian National Council has called for outside military intervention, a position that has been rejected by other prominent dissidents among Syria's fractured opposition. Mr. Annan,

speaking in Cairo on Friday, again appealed for a peaceful settlement avoiding further military escalation or outside intervention.

“I hope that no one is thinking very seriously of using force in this situation,” Mr. Annan said, promising to make “realistic” proposals to solve the crisis. “I believe any further militarization would make the situation worse.”

The representatives of the Syrian National Council in Paris did not immediately return calls seeking clarification of their position on the Annan initiative, which came as other diplomatic efforts focused mainly on how to provide emergency relief to civilians in Homs and other cities that have endured a year of violence in what has become the bloodiest of Arab revolts against entrenched leaders. Several parts

of Syria are bereft of food, water and medical supplies, activists said.

Valerie Amos, the top UN relief official, who was in Syria on Wednesday to assess those needs, said she was overwhelmed by the destruction she saw from a month-long military assault on Homs. She said she saw very few residents, particularly in the ravaged neighbourhood of Baba Amr, and she wondered where they had gone.

On Friday, at a news conference in Ankara, Turkey, she said that the Syrian government would participate in a “limited assessment” of humanitarian needs, but had said it would need more time to respond to her request for unfettered access by relief agencies.

The New York Times News Service



## Le Conseil national syrien rejette l'appel au dialogue de l'ONU

BEYROUTH — Le président du Conseil national syrien, Burhan Ghalioun, a rejeté hier l'appel au dialogue avec le gouvernement syrien lancé par l'émis-saire de l'ONU Kofi Annan, estimant que des pourparlers n'avaient pas de sens tant que Damas poursui-vait sa répression sanglante.

Appeler au dialogue alors que le président Bachar el-Assad massacre son peuple est « déce- vant », a déploré M. Ghalioun, lors d'une entrevue téléphoni- que avec l'Associated Press.

Kofi Annan a souligné que sa

mission était de trouver une solution politique au conflit, sans recours à la force. Il doit se rendre ce week-end en Syrie pour rencontrer Bachar el-Assad.

« Ce genre de commentaires est décevant et ne donne pas beau- coup d'espoir au peuple en Syrie qui est massacré chaque jour », a déclaré Burhan Ghalioun de Paris, où il réside. « C'est comme si nous regardions le même film diffusé en boucle. »

Au moins 54 personnes ont été tuées à travers le pays hier,

selon des militants. Près de la moitié d'entre elles ont été abat- tues lors de raids des forces gouvernementales contre trois villages de la province d'Idlib, dans le nord du pays, selon l'Ob- servatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH).

Des tirs de mortier et d'armes à feu ont également fait dix morts à Homs, et les forces de sécurité ont tué d'autres per- sonnes lors de manifestations ailleurs dans le pays, selon la même source.



L'ancien dirigeant de l'ONU, Kofi Annan (sur la photo), s'est dit déçu de la réaction du président du Conseil national syrien.

Associated Press



The Washington Post (USA)

## Assad 'very much in charge,' U.S. analysts say

BY GREG MILLER  
AND KAREN DEYOUNG

A year into the uprising in Syria, senior U.S. intelligence officials described the nation's president, Bashar al-Assad, on Friday as firmly in control and increasingly willing to unleash one of the region's most potent militaries on badly overmatched opposition groups.

The officials, also said Assad's inner circle is "remaining steadfast," with little indication that senior figures in the regime are inclined to peel off, despite efforts by the Obama administration and its allies to use sanctions and other measures to create a wave of defections that would undermine Assad.

Assad "is very much in charge," said a senior U.S. intelligence official responsible for tracking the conflict, adding that Assad and his inner circle seem con-

SYRIA CONTINUED ON A9

# Syrian regime's tactics are growing more aggressive, U.S. analysts say

SYRIA FROM A1

vinced that the rebellion is being driven by external foes and that they are equipped to withstand all but a large-scale military intervention.

"That leadership is going to fight very hard," the official said. Over the long term, "the odds are against them," he said, "but they are going to fight very hard."

The comments, provided by three intelligence officials on the condition of anonymity to share candid assessments, were the most detailed to date by U.S. analysts on the status of the uprising, which began last March.

The officials said the regime's tactics have taken a more aggressive turn, and newly declassified satellite images released Friday show what officials described as "indiscriminate" artillery damage to schools, mosques and other facilities in the beleaguered city of Homs in recent weeks.

Overall, they described Syria as a formidable military power, with 330,000 active-duty soldiers, surveillance drones supplied by Iran and a dense network of air defense installations that would make it difficult for the United States or other powers to establish a no-fly zone.

"This is an army that was built for a land war with the Israelis," said a second senior U.S. intelligence official. After the regime hesitated to attack civilian population centers earlier in the conflict, its "restraint ... has been lifted," the official said.

Syrian forces continued their month-long shelling of the opposition stronghold of Homs, in the west-central part of the country, on Friday, according to news reports. Thousands demonstrated in other parts of the country in

anticipation of the scheduled arrival of Kofi Annan, the special envoy of the United Nations and Arab League, in Damascus on Saturday. He is expected to meet with Assad.

U.N. humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, who visited Homs this week, said she was "devastated" by what she saw in the ravaged city. "There are no people left," she said.

Amos, speaking in Turkey after visiting refugee camps along the Syrian border, said the Assad government had agreed to a "limited assessment" of humanitarian needs but had refused "unhindered" access for aid organizations and "asked for more time" to consider U.N. proposals for extended assistance for civilians.

In Washington, the intelligence officials cited a number of factors protecting the regime from collapse. Not least among them is the level of motivation in an inner circle convinced that yielding power will mean death or life imprisonment.

U.S. intelligence has also detected an escalation in lethal support from Syria's closest ally, Iran. Officials said that Iran had previously been supplying mainly training and equipment to suppress opposition forces but has recently begun sending small arms and sophisticated equipment for monitoring and penetrating rebel groups.

Iran has shared equipment and expertise developed during its efforts to put down its own internal rebellion in 2009. Syria also has a small fleet of unarmed drones that appear to have been supplied by Iran before the uprising began, the officials said.

They portrayed the political opposition to Assad as disorganized and hobbled by a lack of experienced leadership. The offi-

washingtonpost.com

See a photo gallery of the continuing unrest in Syria and a timeline of major events at [washingtonpost.com/world](http://washingtonpost.com/world).

cialists described efforts to unify and attract a broader following among Syria's minority groups — another objective of U.S. policy — as having limited success. The Syrian National Council, dominated by exiles who are mainly Sunni Muslims, has been trying to attract Christians, Druze and Kurds away from Assad.

Fears that the opposition will oppress minorities or worse have been regularly stoked by the regime, which is dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

The intelligence officials also echoed concerns expressed by U.S. military leaders in congressional testimony this week about providing weapons to the armed elements of the opposition. They are equipped mainly with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades, giving them little firepower compared with Assad's formidable forces.

An estimated 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers have defected and form the bulk of the Free Syrian Army. It is organized loosely, without effective command and control, and it has few links to the political opposition, according to U.S. intelligence accounts.

Protecting those forces would be a daunting task. One of the officials said that Syria's air defenses include hundreds of surface-to-air missile sites and thousands of antiaircraft artillery installations.

Describing the dimensions of the challenge, this official said that Syria, barely one-tenth the size of Libya, has an army four times as big with five times the

air defense assets, most of it supplied by Russia.

So far, the officials said, the bloodiest attacks against the regime appear to have been carried out by al-Qaeda elements seeking to slip unannounced into opposition groups that do not seem eager to have any affiliation with the terrorist network.

The U.S. officials said that al-Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq has reversed the flow of a pipeline that once carried fighters and weapons through Syria to battle U.S. forces at the height of the Iraq war.

"That network is still there," said the first U.S. intelligence official, who acknowledged that the size and composition of the al-Qaeda presence in Syria is unclear. Some al-Qaeda members may be Syrian, others Iraqis.

The officials said their judgment that AQI — as the Iraq affiliate is known — was behind vehicle bombings that killed dozens of people in Damascus and Aleppo in December and January is based more on the nature of the attacks than independent evidence of al-Qaeda involvement.

The greatest damage done so far to Assad's regime has been economic, intelligence officials said. Sanctions imposed by the United States and the Arab League, as well as European curbs on importation of oil, have caused spikes in unemployment, fuel prices and budget deficits in Damascus.

Over the long term, the officials said, economic hardships may be the most effective tool for unseating Assad. Still, the first U.S. intelligence official said, "to this point, we have not seen that having an effect on the regime's ability to prosecute the war."

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Chicago Tribune (USA)

# Annan out to stem Syria violence

In visit, former U.N. chief seeks 'political settlement'

BY PATRICK J. McDONNELL AND ALEXANDRA SANDELS  
Tribune Newspapers

BEIRUT — Former United Nations chief Kofi Annan is scheduled to be in Syria on Saturday on a special peace mission, but the veteran diplomat faces daunting obstacles in trying to craft a cease-fire in the almost yearlong conflict that has cost thousands of lives.

Annan, a joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, will meet Saturday in Damascus, the Syrian capital, with President Bashar Assad, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters Friday.

On the eve of Annan's trip, opposition activists reported scores more killed across Syria, as Friday protests took place in many parts of the country.

Annan's trip to Damascus comes as the crisis in Syria appears to have reached an impasse amid fears that it could disintegrate into a full-fledged civil war in the heart of the Middle East, with broad geopolitical implica-



Damaged cars are shown in the Inshaat neighborhood of Homs in this photo provided to Reuters. Opposition groups reported at least 82 more deaths Friday as protests took place across the country.

tions. Annan must walk a diplomatic tightrope, balancing the demands of some nations — including the U.S. — that Assad must go against the wishes other countries — notably Russia, China and Iran — that seek a negotiated settlement while Assad retains power.

Annan already has angered anti-Assad dissidents by ruling out further "militarization" of the

should be held responsible for that. We are open to dialogue with other government members, but not with Assad himself,"

The Syrian government has said it is committed to dialogue with the opposition, but its definition of the opposition seems to exclude those groups and individuals seeking Assad's ouster. Damascus depicts the almost yearlong rebellion as the work of foreign-backed "terrorists" and Islamic militants.

Groups seeking to oust Assad have called on the international community for various forms of military assistance, including arming Syria's rebels or instituting a "no-fly" zone over parts of Syria, as a Western-led alliance did last year in Libya, contributing to the downfall of Moammar Gadhafi. Syrian insurgents complain that their weapons are no match for the government's firepower, including tanks and artillery.

Another suggestion backed by some opposition groups is for the international community to open up humanitarian corridors or "safe zones" inside Syria, allowing civilians and dissidents to assemble, shielded from government attack. Any such proposal would likely require some kind of

foreign military protection. But Annan, in remarks Thursday in Cairo, said he sought a "political settlement" that was "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned," clearly rebuffing any plan to introduce more arms or foreign troops into the region.

Al-Jazeera, the pan-Arab satellite station, quoted Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., as saying the former U.N. chief's comments made him "wonder what planet Mr. Kofi Annan is on."

The Arizona senator has called for the arming of Syria's rebels, a step the Obama administration says is premature. The White House also is looking for a "political solution" to the crisis, though the president has called for Assad to step down.

Annan is widely respected, but many experts say it is unlikely he can persuade Assad to cede power.

On the ground in Syria, the Local Coordination Committees, an opposition network, reported at least 82 more deaths on Friday. The numbers could not be independently verified as access to Syria by international journalists is limited.

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L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / lebanon)

# Défection simultanée de treize haut gradés syriens

**Révolte** Des dizaines de milliers de personnes dans les rues ; plus grande mobilisation en un an à Alep ; au moins 77 morts hier.

Au lendemain de la démission du vice-ministre syrien du Pétrole, une dizaine d'officiers de haut rang de l'armée régulière ont fait défection et sont arrivés hier en Turquie, selon l'agence officielle turque Anatolie et l'opposition syrienne. Ces militaires se trouvaient à Damas, Homs et Lattaquié, a précisé l'agence, citant des sources locales en Turquie où 12 100 Syriens, selon un dernier bilan obtenu de source officielle, ont trouvé refuge depuis le début en mars 2011 de la révolte. Au total, « six généraux de brigade,

quatre colonels, un lieutenant-colonel, un commandant et une femme lieutenant (première femme à quitter les rangs de l'armée régulière) ont fait défection ces dernières 48 heures », a précisé un responsable de l'opposition syrienne à Paris, Fahd el-Masri, indiquant qu'ils allaient « se rallier » à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) du colonel Riad el-Assaad et au Conseil militaire révolutionnaire supérieur créé par le général déserteur Moustapha el-Cheikh.

Pendant ce temps, la répression ne montrait aucun signe

de répit, à la veille de l'arrivée à Damas de l'émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe, Kofi Annan. Au moins 77 civils dont 10 enfants ont encore été tués hier à travers le pays, dont au moins 13 dans l'assaut contre la localité de Aïn Larose dans la province rebelle d'Idleb, selon la chaîne satellitaire al-Arabiya. L'armée a également attaqué quatre autres villages, Chaghourit, al-Laj, Hamimat et as-Sahh dans cette province, a précisé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Alors qu'un nombre important de chars et

de soldats se sont rassemblés dans le district de Jabal el-Zaouia, les militants prodémocratie craignaient une opération d'envergure semblable à celle menée à Baba Amr, quartier de Homs repris par l'armée le 1er mars, « le plus grand nombre de rebelles » se trouvant dans ce district, a expliqué le président de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane.

Parallèlement, comme tous les vendredis depuis mars 2011, des dizaines de milliers de Syriens sont descendus dans les rues pour dénoncer le régime de Bachar el-Assad et en hommage à la communauté kurde dont le soulèvement il y a huit ans à Qamichli avait été maté dans le sang. Les rassemblements ont eu lieu notamment à Alep qui a connu sa plus grande mobilisation depuis un an, ont rapporté des militants et l'OSDH, Hama, Der ez-Zor, al-Hara, Idleb, Homs, Maarat an-Naaman, Deraa, Hassaka, Lattaquié, Daraya, Qara, Sayyedah Zeinab, Houla et plusieurs quartiers de Damas.

Les forces de sécurité ont ouvert le feu pour disperser la foule à Alep et Houla, tandis que deux manifestants ont été tués à Homs et un à Jarablos, selon l'OSDH. Dans le même temps, des militants ont indiqué que les chabbih ont mené des perquisitions dans plusieurs localités dont al-Tabaqa, Enkhel et dans un quartier de la capitale, al-Qaboun. Signalons en outre que la plupart des habitants du village d'Akou ont fui, manque d'eau et d'électricité. La chaîne al-Arabiya a par ailleurs cité des opposants qui ont assuré qu'un massacre avait eu lieu dans le

quartier de Bab el-Dreeb.

Dans le même temps, des milliers de membres de l'opposition islamiste en Jordanie ont manifesté à Amman en soutien à la révolte syrienne.

**« Mission préliminaire »**

Sur le plan humanitaire, la responsable des opérations de l'ONU, Valerie Amos, a déclaré être parvenue à un accord avec le régime syrien pour une « mission d'évaluation humanitaire préliminaire » dans les zones de conflits. La diplomate britannique, qui s'exprimait lors d'une conférence de presse à Ankara, a précisé avoir demandé au régime de Bachar el-Assad un accès illimité pour l'aide humanitaire aux zones les plus touchées, mais Damas a demandé un délai avant de donner une réponse.

Rappelons que Mme Amos s'est rendue cette semaine en Syrie, où elle a notamment pu se rendre compte de la situation à Homs et rencontrer des représentants du pouvoir syrien et du Croissant-Rouge arabe syrien. Hier, elle a visité un camp de réfugiés syriens en Turquie. Le nombre de réfugiés franchissant la frontière turque a augmenté ces derniers jours, depuis que les insurgés ont fui le quartier de Baba Amr.

L'ONU a précisé que quelque 1,5 million de personnes avaient besoin d'une aide alimentaire. Selon l'organisation, plus de 25 000 réfugiés sont recensés dans les pays voisins de la Syrie, et les violences ont déplacé entre 100 000 et 200 000 personnes à l'intérieur du pays.

(Sources : agences et rédaction)



Une scène devenue quotidienne en Syrie, des opposants assistent aux funérailles de Ammar el-Assaad, tué par des tirs des forces de sécurité à Khaldieh, près de Homs.

Photo Reuters



# Pour la énième fois, Moscou contre la nouvelle résolution proposée à l'ONU

## Diplomatie Annan rencontrera Assad ce matin.

La Russie, alliée de longue date du régime de Bachar el-Assad, a annoncé hier qu'elle était opposée au nouveau projet de résolution du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur la Syrie, le jugeant « déséquilibré ». « Le problème principal est l'absence d'appel simultané à toutes les parties (rebelles et forces gouvernementales) afin de prendre des mesures pratiques dans le contexte d'un cessez-le-feu », a précisé le vice-ministre des Affaires étrangères Guennadi Gatilov, cité par l'agence Interfax.

Rappelons que la Russie, membre permanent du Conseil de sécurité, avait déjà bloqué deux résolutions des Occidentaux condamnant la répression du régime Assad. Les cinq membres permanents du Conseil se sont à nouveau réunis pour discuter d'un nouveau projet de résolution américain exigeant du gouvernement syrien qu'il mette un terme à la répression sanglante de la contestation populaire. Le texte, écrit sous l'égide des Américains, « exige » que le gouvernement syrien arrête « immédiatement » toutes les violences, retire ses forces ar-

mées des villes contestataires et libère les manifestants, selon une copie que l'AFP a pu consulter. Il « appelle » ensuite l'opposition syrienne à « s'abstenir de toute violence » dans le cas où le gouvernement syrien se plierait aux premières exigences de cette résolution.

Le Conseil « exige » également que « les autorités syennes autorisent immédiatement un accès humanitaire » à toutes les villes du pays.

Hier, M. Gatilov a indiqué que la Russie avait été informée par plusieurs sources que le Conseil avait l'intention de soumettre cette résolution au vote lors d'une réunion lundi. « C'est inacceptable de donner une échéance à l'adoption du texte. Le facteur temporel n'est pas pour nous le plus important », a-t-il expliqué, soulignant que « le plus important est de trouver un texte qui soit réaliste, non ambigu, et dont le but est de régler de manière stable la situation ». Mais il a ajouté que la Russie s'opposerait à toute résolution « contenant un quelconque prétexte pour l'utilisation de la force »

de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe pour la Syrie, Kofi Annan, devait s'entretenir au Caire avec le ministre russe des Affaires étrangères Sergueï Lavrov, selon le porte-parole de l'ONU Martin Nesirky. M. Annan devait aussi rencontrer les chefs de la diplomatie de plusieurs pays arabes. Il a déjà rencontré le ministre des Affaires étrangères koweïtien et doit rencontrer celui du Qatar, de l'Arabie saoudite et d'Oman, a précisé M. Nesirky.

L'émissaire spécial « rencontrera ce matin le président Assad à Damas », a précisé le secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon, ajoutant que M. Annan « quitterait Damas dimanche » après des rencontres avec des responsables gouvernementaux et de la « société civile » syrienne, et se rendrait ensuite dans des pays de la région non précisés. Il rencontrera également « des dirigeants de l'opposition (syrienne) en dehors de Syrie », a-t-il ajouté. M. Annan doit d'ailleurs visiter prochainement en Turquie des camps de réfugiés de Syriens ayant fui les violences dans leur pays et s'entretenir avec les responsables turcs, a-t-on appris

de source turque.

### L'émissaire chinois

Dans le même temps, Pékin, très critique pour son soutien au régime de Damas, a annoncé hier l'envoi en Arabie saoudite, en Égypte et en France d'un nouvel émissaire chargé d'expliquer la position chinoise sur la Syrie. Liu Weimin, porte-parole du ministère chinois des Affaires étrangères, a assuré hier que Pékin « soutenait le rôle constructif » de Kofi Annan. La France a de son côté accueilli fraîchement l'annonce de Pékin. « Nous l'écouterons et puis nous appellerons si cela est encore nécessaire notre analyse de la situation et l'importance et l'intérêt qui s'attachent à ce que la Chine évolue sur sa position au Conseil de sécurité », a affirmé à la presse le porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères, Bernard Valéro.

Enfin, la Suisse a ajouté sept ministres sur la liste des personnes en Syrie faisant l'objet de restrictions de déplacement, qui compte désormais 115 noms, selon un communiqué publié vendredi à Berne.

(Sources : agences et rédaction)



## Éclairage Couvrir la Syrie, un casse-tête logistique et sécuritaire pour les médias

Couvrir la Syrie est un casse-tête logistique et sécuritaire pour les journalistes, dont certains y ont déjà laissé la vie. Damas restreint drastiquement les mouvements de la presse dans le pays, et qui veut accéder aux rebelles n'a qu'une solution : s'infiltrer clandestinement, en général à partir du Liban ou de la Turquie. Le voyage, entrepris récemment par des journalistes de l'AFP, est long et épique : en voiture, à moto et à pied sur des chemins boueux avec sac et gilet pare-balles, avec pour guides des contrebandiers qu'il faut payer et/ou des insurgés.

Une fois entré, « se déplacer reste le plus difficile. Je suis resté bloqué quatre jours car je voulais aller dans la ville d'Idleb », dont des barjags gouvernementaux coupent l'accès, raconte Luc Mathieu, reporter au quotidien français *Libération*. Et un ave-nir sombre attend a priori tout journaliste infiltré arrêté par des

forces loyalistes qui torturent, mitraillent et bombardent sans discernement. Dans un article publié récemment par *Foreign Policy*, le journaliste de guerre Robert Young Pelton expliquait « ce que la Russie », fournisseur d'armes de Damas, « a appris à la Syrie : lorsque vous détruisez une ville, assurez-vous que personne, pas même l'histoire, n'en sorte vivant ».

Après le Français Gilles Jacquier le 11 janvier, la journaliste américaine Marie Colvin et le photographe français Rémi Ochlik ont péri le 22 février dans un bombardement à Homs. Selon des techniciens travaillant avec les rebelles, des services de renseignements occidentaux et M. Pelton, les forces du président Bachar el-Assad possèdent la technologie, four-nie par la Russie qui l'utilisait en Tchétchénie, pour géolocaliser les émissions satellitaires, en particulier via des drones.

Un journaliste de l'AFP en a vu un survoler la région de Homs. Comme l'AFP, Luc Mathieu a vu les rebelles devenir nerveux dès qu'il dégainait son téléphone satellite Thuraya : « On m'a dit "tu peux appeler une minute par jour, pas plus". » Les combattants conseillent également aux journalistes de relier leurs antennes Bigan (Intem et par satellite) à leurs ordinateurs par un câble d'au moins 15 mètres... et de croiser les doigts : « Au cas où l'armée tire un obus vers le signal, vous survivrez peut-être. »

Autre difficulté, les opposants cherchent parfois à contrôler le travail des médias : la propagande est en marche dans les deux camps. Un reporter occidental, qui demande l'anon-ymat pour « pouvoir retourner avec les rebelles », avait ainsi photographié des cadavres de soldats semblant avoir été som-mairement exécutés. Furieux,

les insurgés ont exigé qu'il effa-ce les clichés, sous peine d'être abattu. D'autres journalistes ont aussi fait prave d'inattention, tel ce cameraman d'un média occidental qui avait diffusé, par erreur, une vidéo d'un respon-sable rebelle qui ne voulait pas, comme beaucoup d'autres, que son visage soit montré, par peur de représailles contre lui-même ou sa famille. Des hommes ar-més furieux ont voulu « tuer » le cameraman, a constaté un jour-naliste de l'AFP. Discussion, négociations : ils sont repartis avec la promesse que la vidéo serait retirée rapidement.

La mission terminée, il faut encore quitter le pays. Luc Mathieu a traversé une rivière à gué, de l'eau glacée jusqu'à la taille, pour finir chez la police turque. « J'ai passé 18 heures en garde à vue, ils me pranaient pour un agent secret étranger », explique-t-il en riant. Mais pour Robert Young Pelton, ces

difficultés ne justifient pas de renoncer aux infiltrations, et il faudrait « plus de journalistes » en Syrie, « où un régime tra-vaillé avec diligence à plonger son peuple dans les ténèbres ».

Par ailleurs, l'envoyée spéciale du *Figaro* Edith Bouvier, rapa-triée en France après avoir été grièvement blessée à Homs, a publié hier dans son quotidien un long reportage sur l'hôpi-tal de campagne de Baba Amir où elle a reçu les premiers soins. Dans son reportage, la journa-lise décrit l'hôpital de cam-pagne de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), « un immeuble quel-conque » qui constitue cepen-dant « une sorte de havre, un îlot d'humanité », témoignant que les « blessés s'y entassent, on les soigne avec presque rien », tandis que les obus et les roquettes continuent de tomber sur le quartier.

(Source : AFP)



# Syria bleeds amid destruction

● Generals defect to Turkey ● Annan meets Assad today ● 54 citizens slain



Damaged cars and houses following the relentless bombing of Homs by the regime. (Reuters)

**Amman: Arab News**  
crashed into opposition districts in the rebellious central city of Homs, killing 17 people and causing heavy destruction, activists said, while 24 were killed in Idlib and more deaths were reported elsewhere.

"Thirty tanks entered my neighborhood at seven this morning and they are using their cannons to fire Syrian forces killed at least 54 people yesterday as they sought to quell demonstrations against President Bashar Assad before a peace mission by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, opposition activists said. Tank rounds and mortar bombs



A woman weeps as she prays during an anti-government protest in Idlib on Friday. (AP)

said. Ban said in New York that regime massacres its own people. Annan also plans to meet with the Syrian opposition before leaving the country tomorrow.

The leader of Syria's main opposition group rejected calls yesterday by Annan for dialogue with the government, saying they were pointless and unrealistic as the

been stationed in Damascus, Homs and Latakia, had crossed the border into Turkey's southern province of Hatay to join the Syrian rebels.

US hopes for a UN Security Council resolution demanding an end to violence dimmed as Russia continued to object to language. Please read full story on Page 7



# 54 killed in Syria ahead of Annan peace mission

## ● Anti-Assad demonstrations across Syria ● China, Russia lead opposition to outside intervention

AMMAN: Syrian forces killed 54 people yesterday as they sought to quell demonstrations against President Bashar Assad before a peace mission by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, opposition activists said.

Tank rounds and mortar bombs crashed into opposition districts in the rebellious central city of Homs, killing 17 people, activists said, while 24 were killed in the northern province of Idlib and more deaths were reported elsewhere.

"Thirty tanks entered my neighborhood at seven this morning and they are using their cannons to fire on homes," said Karam Abu Raheem, a resident in Homs's Karm Al-Zeinoun neighborhood.

One focus of demonstrations was the anniversary of Kurdish unrest in Syria in 2004 when about 30 people were killed.

Many thousands of Kurds demonstrated in northeastern cities, YouTube footage showed, some carrying banners that read "Save the Syrian people." Other clips showed hundreds of protesters in the Assadi district of Damascus, burning posters of Assad's father Hafez Assad and chanting "God damn your soul, Hafez."

Syria's state news agency SANA reported big pro-Assad demonstrations in Damascus and Hama in the northeast.

Tight media restrictions imposed by the authorities make it hard to assess conflicting accounts of events on the ground.

Street protests have swelled



Damaged cars are seen at the Inshaat district of Homs in this handout picture received on Friday. (Reuters)

that gives any basis for the use of force against Syria," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gantlov tweeted late on Thursday.

Western powers have shied away from any such action. "The option of any military intervention is not on the table," French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said in Morocco on Friday.

A Russian diplomat said Assad was battling Al-Qaeda-backed "terrorists," including at least 15,000 foreign fighters who would seize cities if government troops withdrew.

The Syrian opposition denies any Al-Qaeda role in a popular uprising against nearly five decades of Baathist rule.

Moscow could play a vital role in any diplomatic effort to ease Assad from power and spare Syria further bloodletting.

"If (Annan) can persuade Russia to back a transitional plan, the regime would be confronted with the choice of either agreeing to negotiate in good faith or facing near-total isolation through loss of a key ally," the Brussels-based International Crisis Group said in a paper this week.

Syrian security forces have killed well over 7,500 people since the anti-Assad uprising began a year ago, according to a UN estimate. The government said in December that "armed terrorists" had killed more than 2,000 soldiers and police.

FROM REUTERS

Annan, who begins his peace mission in Damascus on Saturday, has called for a negotiated political solution, but diplomats say there is no room for dialogue amid Assad's crackdown.

Rifts among big powers have blocked any UN action to resolve the crisis, with China and Russia firmly opposing any measure that might lead to Libya-style military intervention.

China, which despatched an envoy to Syria this week, said on Friday it would send an assistant foreign minister to the Middle East and to France to discuss a way forward.

Being urged Annan to "push for all sides in Syria to end their violence and start the process of peace talks."

Russia, an old ally of Damascus and its main arms supplier, has defended Assad against his Western and Arab critics, twice joining China in vetoing UN resolutions on Syria.

"We shall not support any reso-



The Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

# Syrian army officers defect to Turkey

■ Opposition chief rejects talks ■ Annan to visit refugee camps in Turkey ■ 31 killed

**ANKARA, Turkey** — Turkish officials said Friday that two Syrian generals, a colonel and two sergeants have defected from the Syrian army and crossed into Turkey, a day after Syria's deputy oil minister also deserted President Bashar Assad's regime.

The defections come amid reports of Syrian army assaults on the northern Syrian province of Idlib, which borders Turkey, and as UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos toured Syrian refugee camps along the Turkish-Syrian border before talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

The officers' defections are significant because most army defectors so far have been low-level conscripts.

Assad's regime has suffered a steady stream of low-level army defectors, who have joined a group of dissidents known as the Free Syrian Army, now numbering in the thousands.

Syrian government forces killed 31 people around the country Friday, including 10 demonstrators hit by mortar rounds in Homs, a centre of opposition to President Bashar Al-Assad's rule, activists said.

Mortar rounds hit a demonstration in the district of Bab Houd, said Homs-based opposition activist Abu Imad, who added that the Al-Hanableh mosque in Bab Dreih had also been hit as worshippers were leaving after Friday Muslim prayers.

UN-Arab League envoy to Syria Kofi Annan is to visit Syrian refugee camps in Turkey after travelling to Syria over the weekend, a diplomat told AFP on Friday.

"Kofi Annan has expressed his wish to come soon to Turkey and we gave our consent," the diplomat said, on condition of anonymity.

The former UN chief will be visiting refugee camps in Hatay, the Turkish border province which houses almost 12,000 Syrian refugees, he noted.

Annan will also visit the Turk-



Syrian refugees and local residents take part in a demonstration against Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad after Friday prayers outside the Syrian embassy in Amman, Friday — Reuters

ish capital to meet with senior officials, said another source close to the government, while private NTV news channel said the visit was to take place on March 12.

On Thursday, Syria's deputy oil minister became the highest-ranking civilian official to join the opposition and urged his countrymen to "abandon this sinking ship" as the nation spirals toward civil war. Abdo Husameddine, 58, announced in a video that he has defected.

The officers and the two ser-

geants were in a group of some 234 Syrians who have fled to Turkey since Thursday, Yusuf Guler, the administrator for the Turkish border town of Reyhanli told Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency, without providing any information on their identities.

Brig. Gen. Mostafa Ahmad Al-Sheikh, who fled to Turkey in January, was the highest ranking officer to bolt. In late August, Adnan Bakour, the attorney general of the central city of Hama, appeared in a

## 25,000

The United Nations estimates at least 25,000 refugees have fled the fighting in Syria since the start of the conflict a year ago, a spokesman for the UN refugee agency, Adrian Edwards, told Reuters Friday. Some 12,000 Syrians are registered at several camps set up in Turkey's southern province of Hatay. In Lebanon, there are 4,000-5,000 Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley. In Jordan, about 4,500 Syrians have been registered over the last year. — Reuters

video announcing he had defected. Authorities reported he had been kidnapped and said he was being kept against his will by gunmen. He has not been heard from since.

The leader of Syria's main opposition group rejected calls Friday by UN envoy Kofi Annan for dialogue with President Bashar Assad's government, saying they were pointless and unrealistic as the regime massacres its own people.

In comments made in Cairo on Thursday after talks with Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby, Annan warned against further militarization of the Syrian conflict and urged the opposition to come together with the government to find a political solution. — Agencies



Times of Oman

# Syria kills 31 ahead of Annan's peace mission

Tank rounds and mortar bombs **crashed into the city of Homs**, killing 17 people, activists said, reporting 14 deaths elsewhere in Syria

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Other clips showed hundreds of protestors in the Assali district of Damascus.

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## *Russia opposes UN draft*

**MOSCOW:** Russia said yesterday it opposed an "unbalanced" Washington-backed UN draft resolution on Syria because it failed to call for a simultaneous halt in violence by the government and rebels.

The warning came amid tense consultations over a draft resolution aimed at showing the Damascus regime that world opinion had turned against it after nearly a year of violence which, according to the opposition, has claimed nearly 8,500 lives.

Russia and China had previously blocked two UN initia-

tives because they singled out President Assad for blame and world powers have been under pressure by Moscow to tone down their condemnation of the regime.

### **Unbalanced**

Russia's deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said the text under discussion today was still "unbalanced".

"Its main problem is the absence of a simultaneous call on all sides to take practical steps in the context of ceasing fire," Gatilov told the Interfax news agency. — **AFP**

tions in Damascus and Hassaka in the northeast.

Tight media restrictions imposed by the authorities make it hard to assess conflicting accounts of events on the ground.

Street protests have swelled every Friday after mid-day prayers since the anti-Assad revolt erupted a year ago, despite violent repression by the military and loyalist militias.

Decisive victory has eluded both sides in an increasingly bloody struggle that appears to be sliding into civil war.

### **Aid access**

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, who visited Homs this week, said Assad's government had agreed to join UN agencies in a "limited assessment" of civilian needs in Syria, but had not met her request for

unhindered access for aid groups.

Syrian officials had asked for more time, she told a news conference in Ankara after visiting Syrian refugees arriving in growing numbers in border camps in Turkey.

Amos said she was "devastated" at the scenes of destruction she saw in Homs and that she wanted to know the fate of civilians who had lived in the city's Baba Amr district, which rebel fighters left on March 1 after a 26-day siege.

The United Nations estimates at least 25,000 refugees have fled Syria in the past year, said Adrian Edwards, a spokesman for the UN refugee agency.

The UN figures were based mainly on refugees who have registered with the UNHCR.

Many others have fled to neighbouring countries without registering.

Edwards said significant numbers of Syrians are also thought to be displaced within the country.

Annan, who begins his peace mission in Damascus on Saturday, has called for a negotiated political solution, but dissidents say there is no room for dialogue amid Assad's crackdown.

Rifts among big powers have blocked any UN action to resolve the crisis, with China and Russia firmly opposing any measure that might lead to Libya-style military intervention.

China, which despatched an envoy to Syria this week, said on Friday it would send an assistant foreign minister to the Middle East and to France to discuss a way forward.

### **Push for all sides**

Beijing urged Annan to "push for all sides in Syria to end their violence and start the process of peace talks".

The Syrian opposition denies any Al Qaeda role in a popular uprising against nearly five decades of Baathist rule.

Moscow could play a vital role in any diplomatic effort to ease Assad from power and spare Syria further bloodletting.

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Syrian security forces have killed well over 7,500 people since the anti-Assad uprising began a year ago, according to a UN estimate.

The government said in December that "armed terrorists" had killed more than 2,000 soldiers and police. — **Reuters**



Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

# Carnage continues in Syria as four army generals defect

SAUDI ARABIA BLASTS RUSSIAN COMMENT ON SUPPORTING TERROR

**Dubai (Agencies)** At least 55 people were killed by Syrian forces yesterday as they sought to quell demonstrations against President Bashar Al Assad on the eve of a peace mission by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan.

Annan will meet Al Assad today, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in New York. Annan also plans to meet with the Syrian opposition before leaving the country tomorrow.

The leader of Syria's main opposition group, Burhan Ghalioun, rejected calls by Annan for dialogue with the government, saying such talks are pointless and unrealistic as long as the regime is massacring its people.

Shells and mortar bombs crashed into opposition districts in the volatile city of Homs, killing more than 17 people and at least 13 were killed in Idlib province.

Four Syrian generals and two colonels fled to refugee camps in Turkey after defecting from Al Assad's military. The six were among some 12 high-ranking army officers stationed in cities including Damascus, Homs and Latakia, who crossed the border into Turkey's southern province of Hatay to join the Syrian rebels.



## Overwhelmed with grief

Ahmad (centre) mourns his father Abdul Aziz Abu Ahmad Khner, who was killed by a Syrian army sniper, during his funeral in Idlib, north Syria.

Also in Turkey, UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said she had demanded unhindered access for humanitarian aid to victims of the turmoil.

In Brussels, EU foreign ministers warned against

the temptation of military intervention despite growing human suffering, saying boots on the ground could ignite "a large-scale fire".

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, condemned a Russian statement accusing it

of supporting terrorism in Syria.

"Such irresponsible statements are mistaking the reality of the kingdom's keenness to deal with the Syrian crisis according to the rules of international

legitimacy, and through the [UN] Security Council which is concerned with preserving the international peace and security," a Saudi foreign ministry statement said.

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The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

# Generals flee Syria

Bombs rain on Homs ahead of Kofi Annan's peace mission

ANKARA — Four generals who had defected from the Syrian army arrived in Turkey on Friday as tank rounds and mortar bombs crashed into opposition districts in the rebellious central city of Homs.

The four generals were among some 10 high-ranking army officers stationed in cities including Damascus, Homs and Latakia, who crossed the border into Turkey's southern province of Hatay to join the Syrian rebels, Turkey's state-run Anatolia agency said.

Fahd Al Masri, an adviser for Syrian opposition group the Higher Revolutionary Council, said six brigadier-generals had defected in the last 48 hours along with four colonels, a lieutenant colonel, a major and a female lieutenant.

He said they were from the province of Idlib near the Turkish border, where Syrian troops have been massing this week, ahead of an expected large-scale offensive.

The military buildup has prompted concerns that Idlib could suffer the same fate as the Baba Amro neighbourhood of Homs, which was stormed by government troops on March 1 after a month of shelling.

Opposition activists said Syrian forces killed 31 people on Friday as they sought to quell demonstrations against President Bashar Al Assad before a peace mission by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan.

The leader of Syria's main opposition group rejected calls by Annan for dialogue with President Assad's government, saying such talks are pointless and unrealistic as long as the regime massacres its own people.

Tank rounds and mortar bombs crashed into opposition districts in the rebellious central city of Homs, killing 17 people, activists said,



**A relative of a Syrian killed by an army sniper cries during his funeral in Idlib, north Syria. — AP**

reporting 24 deaths elsewhere in Syria. "Thirty tanks entered my neighbourhood at seven this morning and they are using their cannons to fire on houses," said Karam Abu Rabea, a resident in Homs's Karm Al Zeitoun neighbourhood.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, who visited Homs this week,

said Assad's government had agreed to join UN agencies in a "limited assessment" of civilian needs in Syria, but had not met her request for unhindered access for aid groups.

Syrian officials had asked for more time, she told a news conference in Ankara after visiting Syrian refugees arriving in growing num-

bers in border camps in Turkey. Amos said she was "devastated" at the scenes of destruction she saw in Homs and that she wanted to know the fate of civilians who had lived in the city's Baba Amro district, which rebel fighters left after a 26-day siege. — Agencies

**> SEE ALSO PAGE 8 & EDIT**



The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

# Rebels reject Annan's call

Syrian dissidents say govt repression has destroyed prospects of peace deal

Edmund Blair and  
Oliver Holmes

CAIRO/BEIRUT — Kofi Annan, the UN-Arab League envoy to Syria, said he would urge President Bashar Al Assad and his foes to stop fighting and seek a political solution, drawing angry rebukes from dissidents.

"The killing has to stop and we need to find a way of putting in the appropriate reforms and moving forward," Annan said on Thursday in Cairo ahead of his trip to Damascus on Saturday.

Syrian dissidents reacted with dismay and said government repression had destroyed prospects of a negotiated deal. More than 7,500 people have been killed in a year-long crackdown on an uprising against Assad, according to the United Nations.

"We reject any dialogue while tanks shell our towns, snipers shoot our women and children and many areas are cut off from the world by the government without electricity, communications or water," said Hadi Abdullah, contacted in the city of Homs.

Another activist said Annan's call for dialogue sounded "like a wink at Bashar" that would only encourage Assad to "crush the revolution".

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, on a separate mission to Syria, said she was "devastated" by the destruction she had seen in the Baba Amro district of Homs city, and wanted to know what had happened to its residents, who endured a 26-day military siege before rebel fighters withdrew a week ago.

Amos is the first senior foreign official to visit Baba Amro since the government assault.

As world pressure on Syria mounted, the deputy oil minister announced his defection, the first by a senior civilian official since the start of the uprising. Abdo Hussameidin, 58, said he knew his change of sides would bring persecution on his family. Two rebel



Ahmed mourns the death of his father Abdulaziz Abu Ahmed Khrrer, who was killed by an army sniper, during his funeral in Idlib. — AP

groups later said four more high-ranking military officers had defected over the past three days to a camp for Syrian army deserters in southern Turkey.

Lieutenant Khaled Al Hamoud, a spokesman for the Free Syrian Army (FSA), said the desertions brought to seven the number of brigadier generals who had defected.

In Damascus, the authorities continued to crack down on government opponents, with security forces shooting and wounding three mourners at a funeral for an army defector that turned into a protest

against the president, locals said.

Opposition sources and residents say protests in the capital are driven by inflation and the plunging value of the Syrian pound.

The world has failed to stop an unequal struggle pitting demonstrators and lightly armed rebels against the might of Assad's 300,000-strong military, secret police and militiamen.

Western powers have shied away from Libya-style military intervention in Syria, which sits at the heart of a conflict-prone Middle East.

US defence secretary Leon Pa-

netta on Wednesday defended US caution about military involvement, especially without international consensus on Syria, but said the Pentagon had reviewed US military options.

Tunisia and Turkey have also declared their opposition to intervention by any force from outside the region, and Annan argued against further militarisation of the conflict. "We should not forget the possible impact of Syria on the region if there is any miscalculation," the former UN chief said. But Syrian dissidents said diplomatic ini-

tiatives had proved fruitless in the past. "When they fail no action is taken against the regime and that's why the opposition has to arm itself against its executioner," said one rebel army officer.

Russia said Assad was battling Al Qaeda-backed terrorists including at least 15,000 foreign fighters who it said would seize towns if Assad troops withdraw.

"The flow of all kind of terrorists from some neighbouring countries is always increasing," Russia's deputy ambassador Mikhail Lebedev said in Geneva. — Reuters



Iran Daily

## Envoy: Arabs Sending Mercenaries to Syria

An Iranian official has accused Arab countries of sending mercenaries to Syria to provoke further unrest and foil any chance of a negotiated settlement to end the ongoing unrest in the country.

Ali Ahani, Iran's ambassador to France told Reuters on Thursday that Arab countries have sent weapons and fighters to Syria with help and financing from the US and Israel.

"We have information about money, weapons and mercenaries that are being sent there to disrupt things," the former deputy foreign minister said, adding, "There is information that certain Arab countries have sent them (mercenaries) and been financed by the United States and even Israel."

He would not specify which Arab countries were involved.

Iran is a close ally of Syrian government, but has lightly questioned the handling of the rebellion.

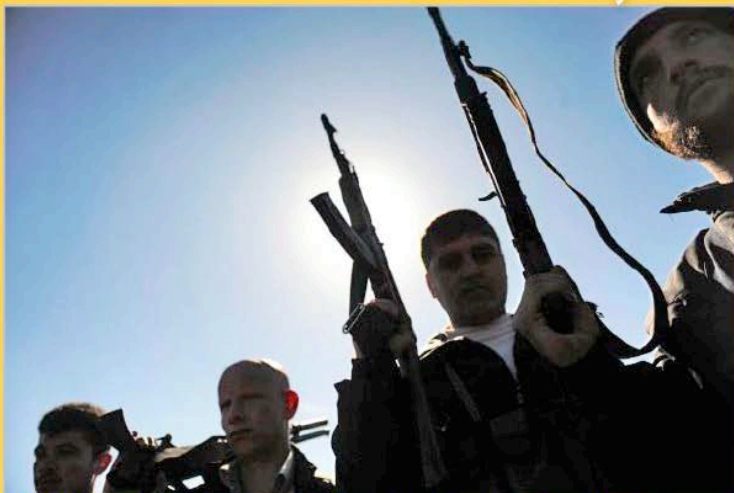
"The narrow relationship we have with Syria is clear and well diversified, but that doesn't mean that all the decisions of the Syrian government are rubber-stamped or not by Iran," Ahani said.

"We can't impose a solution from overseas to resolve the internal problems of Syria," he said.

"The opposition and government must be encouraged to try and resolve themselves the problem. There are demands of the Syrian people that have to be respected and that's what we said to the Syrian government."

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# Envoy: Arabs Sending Mercenaries to Syria



Ali Ahani, Iran's ambassador to France told Reuters on Thursday that Arab countries have sent weapons and fighters to Syria with help and financing from the US and Israel.

### From page 1

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been the most zealous advocates of taking action to topple the Syria government, even publicly calling for arming the rebel fighters. Kuwait has joined those calls.

The Obama administration has retreated from its initial refusal to stay out of the conflict in Syria by agreeing this week to provide direct humanitarian and communications assistance to the Syrian opposition. Many in Washington are calling for all out war and regime change in Syria, although no evidence of substantial military intervention by the Obama administration has surfaced.

According to confidential emails from the private intelligence firm Stratfor that were released by WikiLeaks, Western forces have been inside Syria for months performing covert reconnaissance work. No officials have commented on the information, but more and more allegations of current or planned military intervention have come up in recent weeks, leading to increased suspicion of Washington's official line.

### > Iran's Nuclear Talks

The Iranian envoy went on to say that Tehran was optimistic about new talks with world powers on its peaceful nuclear program but Iran would not negotiate on its right to enrich uranium.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who would lead future talks with Iran on behalf of six powers, said on Tuesday there would be an attempt to revive the talks -- stalled for more than a year -- aimed at breaking the impasse over the Islamic Republic's nuclear issue.

"We have to try through dialogue to resolve them (issues) and reach a compromise and in my opinion it's better not to prejudice these negotiations in advance," Ali Ahani said.

Ahani said all parties must be realistic in their approach to talks and that the powers should not be worried by Iran's nuclear activities.

"In this sense recognizing Iran as responsible

and a signatory to the non-nuclear proliferation treaty that insists on using these technologies purely for peaceful and civilian means and to continue its enrichment for civilian purposes can help get out of the current situation," Ahani said.

When asked if discussions on reducing or even cutting uranium enrichment were possible, the former deputy foreign minister replied, "No."

### > Parchin Inspection

The six world powers - the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany and Britain - called on Iran on Thursday to let international inspectors visit a military site where the UN nuclear agency claims development work relevant to nuclear weapons may have taken place.

Ahani, a fluent French speaker who studied in the northern French city of Lille, said Tehran was ready to allow international inspectors access to the site and was working on a text with the IAEA to define the modalities of the visit.

"The decision has already been taken to allow access to this site (Parchin) and others," he said.

Ahani said the site had already been visited twice before by inspectors and they had okayed it, but that the United States had pressured the watchdog to demand new checks.

Israeli regime and the United States have threatened Iran with military strikes as a last-ditch effort to stop it getting nuclear technology.

Ahani said he did not think Israel would launch air strikes against the Islamic Republic due to the unforeseeable consequences they may have regionally and globally.

"We don't believe them at all even if we have prepared all scenarios to defend ourselves," the 59-year old said.

"We don't think that the Zionist regime (Israel) will take this direction because there will be worse consequences not just for that regime, region, but the world. This sort of military action could have unpredictable and catastrophic consequences," he said.



The Age (Australie)

# A journey into Syria's dark world of torture

BY RUTH POLLARD RAMTHA, JORDAN

**HE WAS naked. Blindfolded. In agonising pain and scared for his life. It was his third period in detention and he would have four more to endure after that.**

In his dark world people died on their feet, slipping slowly to the ground as a desperate human tide ebbed and flowed against each other and the four walls that contained them.

More than 150 prisoners were crammed into a small room for days, sometimes weeks, at a time. They could not sit or lie down. There was so little space they were often forced to stand on one leg. There was no light. The claustrophobia was unbearable.

For 38-year-old Ibrahim Ahmad Aloglah, there was worse to come. He was tortured, repeatedly, with electricity and other weapons, during the weeks and months he was held by Syrian security forces.

"They took me down to the electrical room and they put leads all over my body — they put a lead into my penis," he says, staring at the ground, unable to go on.

It is not the first time Mr Aloglah is overcome as he recounts the gruesome details of his detention. His emotions are mostly sadness and grief, but escalate quickly to rage when he speaks about Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the men who enforce his brutal regime.

"After everything I have seen, I can tell you, God cannot exist," Mr Aloglah says. "How can God allow a man like Assad to walk on this Earth?"

He is speaking to *The Saturday Age* in the Jordanian border town of Ramtha — seven kilometres from the Syrian city of Daraa, the birthplace of the country's year-long uprising.

Mr Aloglah left Syria 10 days ago with his wife, his six-year-old son and three-year-old daughter. They have temporarily settled in a small, two-room flat that leaks in the rain, after leaving behind everything. It is, for now, a miserable existence but it is the first time in 11 months they have been able to stop running.

His family is just one of the thousands who have fled Syria into Jordan, many of them still terrified that they will be found by the feared security forces and sent back to an uncertain fate in Syria. Mr Aloglah was

first arrested in April 2011, in the early days of the anti-Assad uprising. He had been at a funeral in Daraa, attended the demonstration afterwards and was arrested soon after.

In the first eight days he was in detention, he says he was beaten so badly most of his body was black with bruising, the colour staining his skin two weeks after he was released.

He pulls his jumper to one side to reveal a long scar on his shoulder — the result of a knife wound.

"They hurt me day and night," he says. "They would ask, 'Do you want [US President Barack] Obama to rule you? Do you want [French President Nicolas] Sarkozy to rule you?'"

"They cut up a car tyre to use as a weapon to beat us. They called it God. Whenever anyone cried out for [the prophet] Muhammad or God during their torture, they would be beaten with this weapon."



**I saw people whose eyes had burst open from being hit . . . They kept me for 20 days — in this time, about 60 people died. ¶**

IBRAHIM AHMAD ALOGLAH

After working for 10 years in the United Arab Emirates, Mr Aloglah had considerable assets to trade for his freedom: a house, a water purification business, a car hire company. He paid just over a million Syrian pounds (\$A16,000) to escape his first imprisonment.

Later he discovered why he had been arrested. "I had been talking with friends about the lack of safety in Syria — I said Bashar [al-Assad] had done nothing to keep his people safe, Hafez [al-Assad, the president's father and predecessor] did nothing, they did nothing for this country."

Someone in his group had recorded his statements on a mobile phone. They are words that will haunt him forever, but not once does he back down from those sentiments.

It was not long before he

was arrested again and taken to a different underground detention facility.

"Many people were hanging by their arms from a metal board. Two of them were hit so often they died. . . I saw people whose eyes had burst open from being hit with the tyre cable. They kept me for 20 days — in this time about 60 people died. The numbers of dead — do not believe them. It is much worse than what has been reported."

His experience is consistent with the findings of Human Rights Watch, whose researchers have interviewed hundreds of victims of torture in Syria since the uprising began.

"We found the use of torture was both widespread and systematic — there was a huge variety of sexual torture and the use of electric cattle prods and wires," said Anna Neisat, the associate director of the programs and emergencies division at Human Rights Watch.

"His description of this is close to the accounts we have

been hearing — the scale of torture in Syria is just absolutely mind-boggling, and there have been tens of thousands of people who have been processed through this system. Of those we interviewed, 99.9 per cent were subjected to torture."

Mr Aloglah says Syrian security forces stole not just money and jewellery from his home, but also destroyed his business, taking stock and vandalising property in his office and a factory he owns. He signed over the deeds to his house to a Syrian intelligence official to buy his freedom.

The next period of incarceration lasted two months.

"I had to lie down on the ground, face down, and they tied my legs together to a stick. They hit me 400, 500 times with a thick cable. I was so sick I could not stand. . . a doctor in the prison hospital told them to release me or I would die in jail."

"Prisoners were forced to lie face down on the wet ground, and then we had to lie on top of them, our faces in their arses."

Another bribe was followed by another moment of relief as he again tasted freedom, only to be arrested just days later in a cycle of torture and imprisonment that only stopped when he fled into Jordan.

Now his children wake in fright during the night, plagued by nightmares and always on edge, waiting for the next knock at the door.