

Syrie: Moscou en passe d'imposer ses vues à l'ONU

Kofi Annan, dont le plan politique a été rejeté par Damas, lance une mission « exploratoire » soutenue par la Russie

Après un an de tuerie en Syrie, et alors que les Occidentaux craignent de plus en plus une explosion régionale au Moyen-Orient dont la fuite en avant sanguinaire du régime de Damas et les engrais géostratégiques pourraient former le point de départ, l'idée russe de placer la Syrie sous la surveillance d'observateurs internationaux semble faire son chemin.

Lors d'un briefing à huis clos, réalisé vendredi 16 mars par vidéoconférence depuis Genève, l'ambassadeur de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe pour la Syrie, Kofi Annan, a confié au Conseil de sécurité l'envoi dans les prochains jours d'une mission à Damas pour discuter de cette éventualité. L'objectif: définir les modalités d'un mécanisme d'observation dans la perspective d'un accord de cessez-le-feu.

« J'espère qu'il y aura accès à tout ce qu'ils demandent », a déclaré l'ancien secrétaire général de l'ONU, qui se plait à dire avoir obtenu

de Damas que des « réponses décevantes jusqu'ici ». De source diplomatique européenne, le commentaire est plus lapidaire: « Bachar Al-Assad a envoyé une lettre à Kofi Annan ». La rebuffade a été telle que le diplomate ghanéen a attendu plusieurs jours avant de rendre compte devant l'ONU de sa mission à Damas, où il n'a pas réussi à faire valider un plan prévoyant un arrêt des violences, un accès humanitaire et l'ouverture de négociations politiques. Faute de mieux, Kofi Annan s'apprête-t-il à remettre de facto les clés du dossier à la Russie?

Celle-ci a fait de son opposition à toute politique extérieure de changement de régime à Damas une ligne rouge absolue. Les troupes russes peuvent se résumer ainsi: les armes cesseront de parler en Syrie si le monde extérieur renonce à demander le départ de son allié Bachar Al-Assad. Dire que le président syrien est illégitime, c'est

« contre-productif », a insisté l'ambassadeur russe pour le Proche-Orient, dans ce contexte, « au moins », inscrivit-il dans le mandat même de Kofi Annan, qui découle d'une résolution de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU faisant référence à un plan de la Ligue arabe daté du 22 janvier. Selon ce texte, le président syrien doit « accorder à son premier adjoint l'autorité et le pouvoir coopérer avec un gouvernement d'union

saire russe pour le Proche-Orient, Mikhaïl Bogdanov. Dans ce contexte, l'idée d'une mission exploratoire pour un mécanisme d'observation - qui semble avoir été agréée par le pouvoir de Damas tout en y posant des conditions - servira-t-elle de diversion pendant que se poursuivent les massacres, de ville en ville? Bref, un jeu de « dupes » comme s'en moque Alain Juppé, le chef de la diplomatie française, dans un entretien accordé au Monde?

La France a fait savoir qu'elle ne renoncera pas à l'exigence d'un processus de transition politique à Damas, considérant que c'est le « minimum », inscrivit-il dans le mandat même de Kofi Annan, qui découle d'une résolution de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU faisant référence à un plan de la Ligue arabe daté du 22 janvier. Selon ce texte, le président syrien doit « accorder à son premier adjoint l'autorité et le pouvoir coopérer avec un gouvernement d'union

« préparé dans ce sens. Les Etats-Unis semblent aussi tentés. Le président Barack Obama qui redoute tout scénario de bouffier régional a récemment souligné, devant la presse, qu'il fallait traiter la question syrienne avec prudence, « en évaluant bien les conséquences avant d'agir ». Il a assuré: « Assad va partir. La seule question est de savoir quand ».

Vendredi, Kofi Annan a assorti son appel à l'unité du Conseil de sécurité d'un rappel des pertes au Proche-Orient. Si cette crise n'est pas gérée de manière appropriée, « elle peut avoir des conséquences dans toute la région au-delà de la Syrie », a-t-il dit. Il a appelé comment, en 2005, un vote unanime du Conseil avait convaincu la Syrie de retirer ses forces du Liban. Russes et Chinois ne se sont pas opposés au principe d'un « message uni » pour appuyer la mission de M. Annan. Britaniques, Américains et Français tentent vendredide s'accorder sur le type de

Mikhaïl Bogdanov
diplomate russe

dont la Russie se est vite emparée. Mais pas seulement elle, semble-t-il. A l'ONU, les Britanniques qui président ce mois-ci le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU aiment se prévaloir d'un succès et pour les mois de blocage russe et chinois - quitte à accepter certains accords-modements. Ban Ki-moon, le secrétaire général des Nations unies a

le: une résolution à valeur contraignante mais sans référence explicite au plan de paix de la Ligue arabe prévoyant un transfert des pouvoirs de Bachar Al-Assad, ou une détermination présidentielle, qu'un moindre impact politique.

La Syrie pose déjà des conditions: la mission d'évaluation doit se limiter à un soutien technique et Damas doit la conduire... Bachar Al-Assad, tout en se déclarant « ouvert au dialogue », a dit à M. Annan à quel point il était déterminé à combattre les « terroristes » - terme qu'il use pour l'opposition. Appuyé par Moscou, il refuse de donner, le premier, l'ordre à ses forces armées de cesser le feu. Dans ce marasme diplomatique, la Turquie, qui prépare une prochaine réunion du Groupe des amis de la Syrie, a recommencé à parler vendredi, de « zone tampon » en Syrie pour protéger des civils. ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE
(NEW YORK, NATION SUN DAY)
MATHIEU NOUGA YRÈBE

Le Monde (France)

La petite cour des Assad révélée par ses courriels

PENDANT LE MASSACRE, le shopping continue. Des quelque 3 000 courriels, échangés de juin 2011 à février 2012 par le couple présidentiel syrien et une partie de son entourage, piratés par des opposants et révélés par le quotidien britannique *The Guardian*, la presse a surtout retenu la frénésie d'achats en ligne d'Asma Al-Assad. Elle commande de coûteux escarpins, un nécessaire à fondue au chocolat et fait venir via Dubaï pour 35 000 euros de bougeoirs, chandeliers et lustres. Bachar Al-Assad, pour sa part, télécharge de la pop mièvre et commande le DVD de *Harry Potter 7*.

Mais le plus intéressant est ce que ces courriels révèlent de la gestion médiatique de la crise par le pouvoir. On y apprend que l'ambassade d'Iran est consultée. Mais il n'y a aucune allusion aux questions sécuritaires, probablement traitées oralement ou dans d'autres cercles.

L'équipe de conseil de Bachar Al-Assad semble essentiellement féminine, jeune, et inexpérimentée. Trois femmes prévalent. Luna Chebel, une ancienne présentatrice d'Al-Jazira et l'épouse du journaliste vedette Sami Kleib, qui travaille actuellement à un projet de télévision pro-syrienne à Beyrouth, est la plus sérieuse et la plus engagée. Elle lui transmet des retours sur la situation, notamment le chaos sécuritaire à Alep, et lui donne des conseils sur la façon de museler la presse.

Le duo formé par Sheherazad Jaafari et Hadeel Al-Ali est plus intrigant. Agées de moins de 25 ans, elles sont des groupies. La première, qui est passée par une firme new-yorkaise de relations publiques, est la fille de l'ambassadeur syrien à l'ONU. Depuis la révélation de ses conseils maladroits avant une interview avec la chaîne américaine ABC, il y a un mois, elle est tombée en disgrâce.

La deuxième, jeune et pulpeuse Alaouite de Qardaha, le village des Assad, a été formée à l'université du Montana. Omniprésente, Hadeel Al-Ali épluche la presse pour Bachar Al-Assad. Elle fait aussi le lien avec Hussein Mortada, le dirigeant de la chaîne irannienne en arabe Al-Alam. Elle parseme ses courriels au président de smileys et de compliments. Est-elle la correspondante anonyme ayant ouvert, fin 2011, une adresse via laquelle Bachar Al-Assad reçoit des chansons, un « *je t'aime* » laconique et la photo d'une belle brune de dos, quasi nue ? Est-ce elle qui le surnomme

« *mon canard* » ? Est-ce à elle qu'il pense en téléchargeant *Bizarre Love Triangle*, de New Order ?

Khaled Ahmed semble également jouer un rôle important, notamment à Homs, où il signale au président la présence de journalistes occidentaux. « *Tout cela donne une impression d'improvisation et de grande désorganisation*, explique un bon connaisseur du clan présidentiel. *Chacun a son idée sur ce qu'il faut faire. Chacun veut se faire bien voir et rejette les échecs sur les autres.* »

C'est aussi le cas de Fawaz Al-Akhras, cardiologue à Londres et père d'Asma. Le fondateur de la British Syrian Society, originaire d'Homs, semble mal à l'aise, il demande à Bachar Al-Assad de réagir aux accusations de torture. Un de ses amis proches, le milliardaire Wafic Saïd, qui vit entre Londres et Paris, lui fait comprendre qu'il ne peut pas continuer à présider la Syria Heritage Foundation, une institution rattachée à Asma Al-Assad, mais qu'il ne dira rien publiquement. « *Combien d'autres défections silencieuses y a-t-il ?*, s'interroge le proche du palais. *Probablement beaucoup.* »

Vêtements contre les balles

Asma Al-Assad n'apparaît ni prisonnière du clan présidentiel ni de sa fonction, mais comme une Marie-Antoinette orientale, soucieuse de récupérer l'argent de la détaxe à l'exportation des produits qu'elle achète et agacée de recevoir deux tables de nuit dépareillées. Sa seule allusion à la situation remonte au 30 décembre 2011, lorsqu'elle fait suivre à son mari les liens de sites de vêtements de ville renforcés contre les balles. A la même période, elle lui écrit : « *Si nous sommes forts ensemble, nous surmonterons cela... Je t'aime...* » Lorsque son amie, la princesse qatarienne Mayassa Al-Thani, l'adjure de choisir l'exil, elle cesse de répondre.

Bachar est prudent. Contrairement à sa femme, il efface ses mails aussitôt lus. Lorsqu'elle lui annonce qu'elle rentre tôt à la maison, il a ce cri du cœur : « *C'est la meilleure réforme dont un pays pouvait rêver, nous allons l'adopter à la place de ces lois pourries sur les élections (...)* » Il affiche le même mépris pour les observateurs de la Ligue arabe, dupés par son armée. Ainsi qu'un goût pour l'humour mortifère, lorsqu'il fait suivre la vidéo d'un illusionniste américain reconstituant le corps d'un homme prétendument coupé en deux à la tronçonneuse. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Le Journal du dimanche (France)

Syrie Bassma Kodmani, responsable des relations extérieures du Conseil national syrien, appelle la Russie à faire pression sur le régime de Damas

« On veut une aide militaire »

Interview

Garance Le Calsne
et François Clemenceau

Selon vous, qui a commis l'attentat hier à Damas ?

Les jeunes de la révolution accusent le régime d'avoir organisé ces attentats pour détourner l'attention. Selon moi, cela vient effectivement de l'intérieur du pouvoir, mais la signification est autre. Les immeubles visés sont des forteresses. Ces attentats ne peuvent être commis sans de très fortes complicités directes à l'intérieur des services de renseignements. Beaucoup de gens dans l'appareil de sécurité souhaitent faire défection mais ne le font pas pour continuer à fournir des informations à la révolution. Il y a des dissensions au sein de l'armée. D'ailleurs, certaines de ses unités ne sont plus sollicitées pour les tâches les plus criminelles par crainte de défections massives. Pour ces tâches, le pouvoir ne peut plus compter que sur les unités les plus loyales : la 4^e division et la garde républicaine. Et les Chabihis, ses milices.

Des experts affirment que le régime est condamné à terme. Paradoxalement, le temps ne joue-t-il pas contre vous ?

Oui. La militarisation de notre mouvement a d'abord permis à la révolution de continuer. Les combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre forment une ceinture autour des villes, des villages, qui permet aux habitants de continuer à vivre, manger et manifester pacifiquement. À l'extérieur se trouve un deuxième cercle, avec les forces de sécurité. C'est là qu'elles s'affrontent avec l'Armée syrienne libre. Face aux chars du pouvoir, les militants veulent maintenant s'équiper d'armes plus lourdes. On entre dans un engrenage dangereux. Il n'est pas dans l'intérêt des révolutionnaires que la situation se prolonge, mais la révolution ne va pas s'arrêter. Le régime ne va pas se stabiliser et reprendre le contrôle de la situation.

Pourtant, il a repris Homs, Zabadani, Idlib...



Pas d'illusions pour le cessez-le-feu

La France « condamne avec fermeté » les deux attentats d'hier à Damas, des actes de « terrorisme » injustifiables. Cette attaque fragilise davantage encore la très difficile tentative de l'émissaire des Nations unies, Kofi Annan, d'obtenir un cessez-le-feu en Syrie. Damas exige toujours que les insurgés déposent les armes en premier. Kofi Annan aurait proposé, lui, de faire taire en priorité les armes lourdes, autrement dit, celles de l'armée syrienne, les plus dévastatrices. Au

Il va les perdre à nouveau. Nous sommes dans un schéma classique d'une armée conventionnelle face à un mouvement qui s'organise comme une guérilla urbaine. L'appeler « guérilla urbaine » dénature le mouvement, mais le modèle est celui-là. Les combattants se déplacent tout le temps. L'erreur de se concentrer dans un seul endroit, comme à Baba Amro, ne sera plus commise. Dans la campagne de Damas, ils ne se feront jamais prendre. Ce sont des petites unités très légères qui se déplacent tout le temps.

Votre bureau militaire de liaison a-t-il commencé à travailler ?

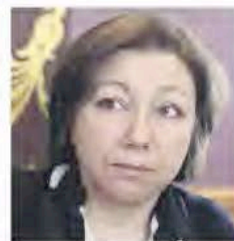
Le Conseil national syrien (CNS) essaye d'organiser le contact entre les unités sur le terrain et le bureau militaire, installé en Turquie. L'objectif est l'unification des rangs pour les amener à un commandement intégré. C'est ambitieux, cela prendra du temps mais c'est nécessaire, sinon on va se retrouver avec des milices qui feront ce qu'elles veulent sur le terrain.

Peut-on vous faire confiance ? Le CNS est très critiqué...

Conseil de sécurité, le scepticisme est de rigueur après son annonce de l'envoi d'une mission d'experts à Damas. « Nous ne nous faisons pas d'illusions, déclare un diplomate, le régime syrien tient et veut régler l'affaire militairement. » Quant au Conseil national syrien, qui représente l'opposition à l'extérieur du pays, ses divisions internes se sont amplifiées cette semaine avec la démission de trois de ses membres influents.

F.C. avec Alexandra Geneste à New York

On a beaucoup misé sur la communauté internationale, qui nous a déçus. La rue en Syrie nous demande : « Qu'avez-vous obtenu ? Cela fait quatre mois que vous utilisez tout votre temps à discuter avec la communauté internationale au lieu de nous parler. » Que voulez-vous qu'on leur dise ? On n'a rien obtenu. La communauté internationale demande sans cesse au CNS de s'élargir, d'intégrer davantage de monde pour être plus représentatif des minorités ethniques et religieuses. Ensuite, elle s'étonne qu'on n'ait pas de discours cohérent et qu'on soit



Bassma Kodmani, Eric Dessons/ID0

L'attentat commis hier à Damas a fait 27 morts et 140 blessés. Reuters

divisés. Tout cela nous a conduits dans une situation de creux dont nous sommes, en partie seulement, responsables.

Que demandez-vous aujourd'hui ?

Nous souhaitons une intervention militaire. Nous discutons au sein du conseil sur la forme qu'elle doit prendre. On veut d'abord la création de zones tampons à la frontière turque et à la frontière jordanienne, pour y mettre des hôpitaux, pour y installer l'opposition politique, pour qu'on ne fasse pas de camps d'entraînement...

Le régime de Bachar ne coopérera jamais. La seule lueur d'espoir, c'est que la Russie change de position, qu'elle prenne conscience que ce pouvoir ne pourra survivre et qu'elle fasse pression sur Damas. Il faut organiser le changement du régime au lieu de l'arracher par la force, comme cela a été le cas en Libye. Mais on refuse de dialoguer. La seule négociation doit concerner les modalités de son départ.

Et si les Russes ne veulent pas ?

L'Armée syrienne libre va continuer de s'armer. On va entrer dans un scénario de guerre prolongée avec tous les dangers que cela représente pour tout le monde. C'est la Syrie qui est menacée. Pas la Syrie démocratique ou autoritaire, la Syrie elle-même dans son intégrité physique. ●

Libero (Italie / Italy)

Il colpo di Anonymus

Le scappatelle di Assad mentre massacra i siriani

Scoperto tra le sue mail un carteggio con una donna misteriosa. La moglie Asma descritta come un'oca

CARLO PANELLA

■ Vera o falsa che sia, la notizia di una sorta di bunga-bunga via Internet tra il sanguinario presidente siriano Bashar al Assad e una misteriosa donna discinta, con tanto di frasi alla linceale e smack sullo schermo è di quelle che intrigano. Tra i tremila messaggi mail del presidente siriano e di sua moglie Asma intercettati dalla rete internazionale di Hacker Anonymus e poi girati all'opposizione siriana e al Guardian e al Daily Telegraph, si troverebbe anche una piccante corrispondenza con una misteriosa e conturbante signora che ha inviato ad al Assad una foto in cui

è ripresa di spalle, il busto seminudo, le braccia alzate contro una parete, addosso solo un reggiseno bianco e i vestiti ammoniti a terra. La foto è stata inviata ad Assad l'11 dicembre scorso da una donna che non è sua moglie: l'email non contiene alcun testo non è chiaro chi sia il mittente del messaggio. Secondo i membri dell'opposizione siriana, la donna potrebbe anche utilizzare un altro indirizzo email per mandare ad Assad messaggi ancora più intimi. Questo account è stato creato il 1 dicembre scorso, quando venne inviata una mail ad Assad con scritto solo «ciao». Mail galeotta a cui lui rispose. Con il passare del tempo, il tono dello scambio diventa più romantico, i due si passano anche musica di una popolare cantante libanese, Fairuz, e lui ad un certo punto lui sembra mandarle il certificato di un regalo. Il 17 gennaio, Assad riceve una e mail dal secondo account con un singolo, unico carattere in arabo che significa «Ti amo» e il 25 un altro, che contiene solo una «x», il segno universalmente usato per indicare il bacio. Naturalmente è tutto piuttosto confuso, il tradimento ai danni della moglie Asma è tutt'altro che provato e ci si potrebbe semplicemente trovare davanti ad una classica opera di disinformazione da parte dell'opposizione siriana. Ma quello che è certo è comunque sconvolgente. Negli stessi giorni, nelle stesse ore in cui il presidente siriano macella il suo popolo nelle strade fieri è stata conquistata Idlib, nei giorni scorsi era stata sconfitta Homs, con centinaia di vittime, tra cui molte donne e bambini, chiuso nel suo Palazzo presidenziale il



SESSO E GENERALI

La misteriosa donna della fotografia inviata per email al presidente aguzzino Assad. A questa sono seguite altre mail con complimenti e regali (Ap)

ditatore si diletta in scambi mail dal tenore adolescenziale con apparenti sconosciute. Da parte sua, la moglie Asma traspare da centinaia di mail come una sciocchina vizziata che, incurante dei quasi diecimila morti mietuti nelle strade dalla IV divisione di suo cognato Maher al Assad, si occupa essenzialmente di shopping, e dei più costosi. In alcune mail inviate alla sua ex amica, la figlia dell'emiro del Qatar Hamid bin Khalifa al Thani, Asma parla infatti del suo acquisto di candelabri e tavoli da Parigi per la bella cifra di 10.000 dollari (l'amicizia con la quattorata cessa quando questa consiglia ad Asma di convincere il marito a scappare in esi-



lio a Doha). Il tre febbraio scorso, mentre infuriava la battaglia dentro la città martire di Homs, la bella oca Asma Assad si rivela impegnata nell'acquisto e addirittura di un paio di scarpe, dello stilista Christian Louboutin, dal tacco di cristallo alto 16 centimetri comprate a Parigi per ben 6.400 dollari. Naturalmente, tra le mail di Bashar al Assad si trovano anche consigli dei suoi corrispondenti

libanesi come il milionario Hussein Mortada, vicino a Hezbollah che gli suggerisce di cessare i suoi continui riferimenti ad al Qaeda giudicati un errore tattico, o come Khaled Ahmed, che lo avvisa della presenza di giornalisti stranieri a Homs e gli suggerisce di intervenire (la postazione dei giornalisti fu bombardata e vennero uccisi una reporter inglese e un inviato francese). Nel complesso, l'im-

agine che emerge da questo intenso epistolario è sconcertante: il presidente e sua moglie vi appaiono per quello che sono: una coppia di mediocri, viziate da immense ricchezze e potere, totalmente insensibili alla tragedia del loro paese, probabilmente manovrati con determinazione e ferocia dal quartier generale delle Forze Armate, vero baricentro del potere del partito Baath.

Piazza contro EuroVegas «Porta solo corruzione»

Centinaia di manifestanti in piazza a Madrid contro il progetto "EuroVegas" del miliardario Usa Shelton Adelson, una sorta di cittadella del gioco da realizzare alla periferia della capitale spagnola. Tra i manifestanti Maria Fernandez, portavoce della piattaforma "EuroVegas No" secondo la quale il progetto è un «ricatto al lavoro» e potrebbe portare «corruzione», «mafia internazionale», «riciclaggio del denaro sporco» e «prostituzione». Per il miliardario Usa porterà lavoro.

La Germania torna a pensare al kaiser

L'instabilità al vertice della Repubblica fa crescere la nostalgia della monarchia in Germania. Lo ha sottolineato Phillip Kirl di Prussia, nipote dell'ultimo Kaiser Guglielmo II esiliato nel 1918 alla caduta della monarchia. Il principe ha fatto notare che il prossimo presidente della Repubblica Federale di Germania sarà il terzo nell'arco di appena 21 mesi. Una larga maggioranza trasversale eleggerà oggi il pastore protestante Joachim Gauck capo dello Stato come successore del dimissionario presidente "sacro" Christian Wulff inquisito dalla magistratura per peculato. Da un sondaggio della rivista Focus risulta che un tedesco su dieci «avrebbe volentieri in Germania un re sul modello britannico».

Morto il papa copto Aveva 88 anni

È morto a 88 anni il capo della Chiesa Copta d'Egitto, Papa Shenuda III. Era malato da molto tempo e l'anno scorso era stato anche alcuni mesi negli Stati Uniti per una terapia. Appena si è sparsa la notizia, un gran numero di cristiani egiziani, ma anche di musulmani, si è raccolta alla cattedrale di Abbaseya, presso la quale risiedeva papa Shenuda e dove è morto oggi pomeriggio. I funerali si terranno martedì.

IN ARRIVO ARMI DALL'IRAN

Due autobombe fanno 27 morti a Damasco, l'ombra di Al Qaeda

Non bastano i combattimenti fra esercito e ribelli in varie città della Siria. La capitale Damasco è stata squassata ieri mattina da ben tre esplosioni che secondo un primo bilancio hanno ucciso oltre 27 persone, in massima parte civili, ferendone 97. Per la verità, ancora in serata, i media di regime confermavano solo i primi due attentati, causati da autobombe collocate, una presso la sede della polizia penale vicino a piazza Umayyad, teatro di recenti cortei a so-

stegno di Assad, l'altra vicino al quartier generale dell'intelligence aerea. La Tv siriana ha mostrato corpi bruciati e maciullati, ma non ha citato una terza esplosione su di un autobus situato in un campo dell'Esercito di liberazione della Palestina, ospitato da Assad. I media hanno parlato di "terroristi", dando a intendere un legame con ribelli fomentati dall'estero. Di certo, da dicembre a oggi vi sono stati altri tre attentati simili a Damasco e Aleppo. Le

stragi arrivano peraltro nelle stesse ore in cui emergono sospetti di interferenze esterne incrociate nella crisi siriana. Gli Usa, per bocca del Dipartimento di Stato, temono che i molti aerei cargo segnalati in arrivo in Siria dall'Iran portino armi al regime, alleato di Teheran, mentre da fonti diplomatiche trapela che l'Arabia Saudita starebbe fornendo a sua volta armi ai rivoltosi.

MI.MOLT.

El Mundo (Espagne / Spain)

La acción terrorista deja 27 muertos

El atentado en Damasco sirve de excusa a Asad

LA INSOSTENIBLE situación que vive Siria se agravó aún más ayer tras el doble atentado que dejó 27 muertos y 140 heridos en Damasco. Hartos de la pasividad de la comunidad internacional ante la masacre perpetrada por el régimen sirio, los opositores han emprendido el camino de las acciones terroristas, una lamentable decisión que deslegitima su causa y puede servir para que Asad, invocando la radicalización de los disidentes y la amenaza de Al Qaeda, justifique más fácilmente su brutal campaña de represión, que suma ya más de 9.000 víctimas. La hipótesis de la creciente influencia del fundamentalismo en la revuelta siria ganó peso ayer, cuando Arabia Saudí anunció que estaba enviando armamento a los rebeldes a través de Jordania, una información que sin embargo este último país negó de inmediato. La batalla de propaganda y desmentidos amplía la brecha entre los bandos y evidencia el fracaso de Occidente a la hora de atajar un conflicto enquistado que ha alcanzado el punto de no retorno. Pero las particulares condiciones del caso sirio han impedido a la ONU una intervención como la que se llevó a cabo en Libia, que propició el final de Gadafi.

El yihadismo se infiltra en la revolución

● Un doble atentado aumenta el temor a que Siria se convierta en imán para el integrismo

Viene de **primera página**
Las imágenes de cuerpos reducidos a despojos y vehículos calcinados dibujaban un paisaje que recordaba al que dominó antaño la guerra de la vecina Irak.

Es la cuarta ocasión en poco más de tres meses en la que el escenario sirio se ve sacudido por estos atentados, que antes habían ocurrido tanto en la capital siria como en Alepo y refuerzan la hipótesis de que yihadistas radicales estén aprovechando la revuelta popular dirigida contra el régimen de Bashar Asad para promover su agenda fundamentalista.

La primera deflagración tuvo como objetivo la sede de la Inteligencia aérea, en el norte de urbe, mientras que la segunda se registró minutos después frente a un edificio de la Seguridad Criminal, en el oeste de la ciudad.

El Gobierno sirio no sólo achacó el suceso a quienes definió como «terroristas», sino que lo vinculó a los recientes llamamientos de países como Qatar y Arabia Saudí para apoyar con armas a la insurgencia que lucha contra Asad.

El pasado mes de enero un nuevo grupo que se autodenominó Jabhat al Nusra Li-Ahla Al-Sham (El Frente para la Defensa de Levante) anunció su creación en los foros yihadistas de internet bajo el liderazgo de un «emir» llamado Abu Mo'hamed al Julani. Un mes

más tarde, esa misma formación reclamó la autoría de los ataques contra las fuerzas de seguridad que se registraron en el barrio de Al Midán en Damasco el 6 de enero, y el devastador atentado de Aleppo del 10 de febrero, que dejó decenas de muertos. El vídeo donde reivindicaban esta última acción

los años de la ocupación norteamericana, comenzó a tomar forma a finales del año pasado cuando varios clérigos de notoria influencia en estos círculos radicales apoyaron la lucha contra la dictadura de Asad y alcanzó su clímax con el llamamiento que hizo en febrero en el mismo sentido el máxi-

religioso) instando a sus seguidores a unirse a la revuelta sin e intentando lidiar con los numerosos interrogantes que se han generado en las webs que frecuentan estos extremistas, repletos de dudas sobre la necesidad de apoyar una insurrección que pretendía instaurar un sistema democrático que para

La tesis de una creciente influencia de los fundamentalistas en la revuelta siria se inscribe en una dinámica repetida mil veces en otros conflictos similares, como por ejemplo el del Bosnia en la década de los 90, donde una población laica, devota del alcohol y hasta de los productos derivados del cerdo, llegó a aceptar la ayuda de milicianos árabes *wahabíes* en su combate contra el ejército serbio ante la escaso apoyo de la comunidad internacional.

Desde el inicio de las protestas, cuando éstas eran pacíficas y enfrentaban a la sangrienta represión del régimen, Damasco utilizó siempre la carta islamista como elemento para definir a la mayor parte de los oponentes a los que no cesa de calificar de «terroristas».

Hace sólo días, el viceministro de Asuntos Exteriores, Faisal al Mokdad, aseguró que lo que ocurre en su país sólo tiene por objetivo «conseguir que los radicales islamistas accedan al poder».

Pero expertos como Peter Harling del International Crisis Group, consideran que todavía los voluntarios yihadistas «no son muchos», si bien admite que «en un país dominado por el caos se crea un espacio para los voluntarios extranjeros, pero su número seguirá siendo pequeño a menos que los combatientes sirios descubran que tienen cierto valor».

Los pilares árabes de los rebeldes

> La inacción internacional ante la violencia apadrinada por el régimen de Bashar Asad ha promovido el papel de países como Arabia Saudí, promotores de la citada ideología wahabí, que ya han anunciado su intención de armar a los rebeldes sirios.

> Un diplomático árabe indicó en la jornada de ayer que los saudíes habían comenzado a enviar parafernalia bélica a los alzados a través de Jordania, lo que desmintió por su parte Amán.

> El ministro saudí de Asuntos Exteriores declaró hace unos días que la oposición siria tenía todo «el derecho» a armarse «con el fin de defenderse» de los que «apuntan con armas hacia sus hogares».

> Junto a Arabia Saudí, Qatar es el otro país árabe que más crítico se ha mostrado con el régimen sirio y que también está dispuesta a dar su apoyo al Ejército Libre de Siria y a armar a los rebeldes.

incluía el testamento del suicida que la llevó a cabo e imágenes del ataque, algo que recuerda al estilo que ya usó Al Qaeda en Irak.

La posibilidad de que Siria se convierta en un imán para los yihadistas musulmanes, como lo fue en su momento Irak durante

ellos es anatema. A principios de este mes el jeque Abu Mundhir al Shinqiti pidió a sus simpatizantes que se unieran a las filas de Jabhat, que parece haberse convertido en el principal referente de los radicales, que se oponen al régimen de Asad, y ahora pelean en Siria.

mo dirigente de Al Qaeda, el egipcio Ayman al Zawahiri. Otro de los promotores más activos de esta opción, el jeque Abu Mundhir al Shinqiti -vinculado al influyente ideólogo salafista jordano Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi- ha difundido varias fatwas (edictos



EL MUNDO.

ABC (Espagne / Spain)

Un doble atentado terrorista en Damasco causa 27 muertos

► Dos coches bomba estallan junto a la sede a los servicios de inteligencia del régimen y al lado de una comisaría

DANIEL IRIARTE
CORRESPONSAL EN ESTAMBUL

El terrorismo golpea de nuevo a Damasco en plena revuelta y represión. Ayer, dos coches bomba contra edificios de la seguridad mataron a veintisiete personas e hirieron a casi cien. El primero destruyó la fachada de un edificio de la temida inteligencia, en tanto que la segunda explosión se produjo junto a una comisaría de policía. Según la agencia oficial Sana, hubo un tercer atentado en un campo de refugiados palestinos en el extrarradio de Damasco, pero las únicas víctimas fueron los propios autores.

Por ahora nadie ha reivindicado la autoría de los atentados, aunque el régimen los atribuye a «grupos terroristas que operan en el país». Por su parte, Basma Kodmani, miembro de la oposición organizada en el Consejo Nacional Sirio, aseguró que los atentados fueron orquestados por las autoridades sirias para culpar a los rebeldes: «No creo que ninguna de las fuerzas de oposición o el Ejército Sirio Libre tenga la capacidad de llevar a cabo una operación contra esos edificios, que son como fortalezas. No hay forma de que nadie penetre en

ellos sin cómplices dentro del aparato de seguridad», afirmó.

Presencia de Al Qaida

Son los mismos argumentos que se han utilizado en algunos de los atentados anteriores para poner en duda la versión oficial del régimen. Aunque lo cierto es que el terrorismo se ha cebado con la vecina Irak, y no se descarta que desde aquí se traslade a Siria. Los servicios de inteligencia de EE.UU. y el Reino Unido creen que hay miembros de Al Qaida operando en el país. Y ya el mes pasado, el nuevo líder de la organización terrorista, Ayman Al Zawahiri, emitió un comunicado en vídeo en el que pedía a los musulmanes de toda la región que ayudasen a derrocar el «régimen cancerígeno» de Bashar al Assad.

Aunque también el Gobierno de Damasco recurre a medios no siempre limpios para atribuir el terroris-

Internacionalización
Fuentes diplomáticas aseguran que Arabia Saudí ha enviado armas a la oposición siria

mo a la oposición. En diciembre, horas después de que otros dos coches bomba estallasen en el interior de sendos edificios de la Seguridad, una página web atribuida a los Hermanos Musulmanes de Siria los celebraba y reivindicaba. Pero la Hermandad se apresuró a denunciar la falsedad de dicha página, cuya autenticidad también fue rápidamente puesta en duda por expertos antiterroristas.

Lo que sí se teme es que, ante el aumento de la represión, algunos países del Golfo hayan comenzado a armar a la insurgencia. Según un diplomático árabe entrevistado por la agencia Afp, «material militar saudí está en ruta hacia Jordania para equipar al Ejército Sirio Libre». Un extremo que ha sido desmentido «categóricamente» por el portavoz del Gobierno jordano, Rakan Mayali. «Jordania ni ha discutido ni ha sacado a relucir esta cuestión», aseguró.

Asimismo, la ONU enviará hoy un equipo a Damasco para iniciar negociaciones con el Gobierno sirio. «El primer objetivo de todos nosotros es terminar con la violencia y los abusos de derechos humanos, y lograr acceso humanitario sin restricciones para los necesitados», declaró el enviado de las Naciones Unidas, Kofi Annan, desde Ginebra. No obstante, el régimen ha enviado una carta en la que exige «garantías de que los grupos armados cesen toda agresión y abandonen las armas a cambio de una amnistía total».

Publico (Portugal)

Regime “lutará contra terroristas” após atentados

Síria

Maria João Guimarães

O Governo de Bashar al-Assad responsabilizou islamistas pelos dois ataques suicidas de ontem em Damasco

A crise na Síria teve ontem mais um desenvolvimento, com um novo atentado suicida – na verdade dois, em Damasco – a sublinharem as preocupações de escalada para uma guerra civil total.

O regime do Presidente Bashar al-Assad reagiu depressa apontando o dedo a terroristas islamistas pelo atentado, que deixou uma fila de carros calcinados e restos de roupas e membros de corpos. Um porta-voz do Ministério do Interior disse que morreram 27 pessoas e que 140 ficaram feridos.

O atentado, que atingiu os serviços secretos da Força Aérea, tidos como os mais temidos e odiados, e o departamento de segurança criminal, não foi reivindicado. Mas a oposição tem desconfiado que estes atentados bombistas na capital e em Aleppo (justamente os bastiões de apoio a Assad, embora cada vez menos) são encenados pelo regime para justificar a repressão violenta que está a levar a cabo.

No caso da acção de ontem, o alvo estava numa zona cristã: esta seria uma maneira de assustar mais os cristãos e levá-los a apoiar Assad, dizem activistas.

De facto, uma onda de atentados suicidas como no vizinho Iraque é uma possibilidade que preocupa, cada vez mais, muitos sírios. E a

eventualidade de uma guerra civil que incendeie a região é outra das preocupações, esta sublinhada por Kofi Annan no Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas, onde pediu unidade no apoio à sua iniciativa de paz na Síria.

Mas este apoio no Conselho de Segurança continua a esbarrar na Rússia e China, que se mantém pró-Assad. Annan, que tinha estado em Damasco há uma semana, descreveu a resposta que recebeu de Assad às suas propostas como “um desapontamento”.

Armas da Arábia Saudita

O atentado coincidiu com o dia em que deveria começar a missão de avaliação das necessidades humanitárias no país, diz a agência Reuters. No entanto, não era claro quando é que os elementos da missão que junta elementos do Governo sírio, da Organização de Cooperação Islâmica e das Nações Unidas se deslocariam para as cidades mais afectadas pelas operações do Exército com os seus cercos, cortes de energia, comunicações, e bombardeamentos, como Homs ou Deraa.

Na intensificação do conflito, um diplomata disse, sob anonimato, à agência francesa AFP que a Arábia Saudita está a enviar “material militar” aos desertores que formam o Exército Livre que está a combater as tropas leais a Bashar al-Assad. O material chegaria atravessando a Jordânia, acrescentou o diplomata. Amã apressou-se, no entanto, a “desmentir categoricamente” a alegação.

A Arábia Saudita e o Qatar têm defendido que sejam dadas armas aos rebeldes, uma ideia que enfrenta muita oposição por medo do modo como pudessem ser usadas.

Sunday Express (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Assad father-in-law defends death toll

WHEN I WROTE a story two weeks ago about **Dr Fawaz Akhras**, the father-in-law of President Assad, pressing the Syrian tyrant to make democratic changes to the country "before it's too late", it resulted in a legal letter from the London-based cardiologist.

Dr Akhras, who works as a consultant in Harley Street, protested that he was "a medical practitioner, not a politician and had decided to keep his own views to himself and to no one else".

How intriguing then to see the comments he made publicly three days ago when he compared the Syrian uprising to London's riots and questioned why David Cameron had not deployed troops, as Assad has.

He said that the figure of 8,000 dead in Syria was "much better" than the toll in Libya, where a Western-supported military intervention and civil war caused many more deaths.

This response came after the release of emails obtained by the al-Arabiya satellite channel, which appear to show another side to Dr Akhras, suggesting that he was deeply worried about Syria's bloodshed and urged his son-in-law to respond to reports of atrocities.

Despite his protestations to this newspaper that he was not involved politically and had "not authorised anyone to speak on his behalf,"



CONCERN: Dr Fawaz Akhras is said to fear for the safety of daughter Asma

these emails, purportedly from the doctor, now reveal his role in advising Assad in how to mitigate negative media coverage of the president's crackdown. The Syrian-born doctor

would be naive to think that his sensitive position has not been discussed with his supporters in the British Syrian Society (which he founded to foster good relations between the two countries). One said that Akhras was in an "impossible position" caught between family loyalty and worldwide condemnation at the brutality of Assad's regime.

It has also now been disclosed that his position as the Society's founder saw Dr Akhras invited to Buckingham Palace for a state banquet given by the Queen in honour of the Emir of Qatar in 2010, just a few months before his son-in-law launched his slaughter of dissidents.

There is also no question that Dr Akhras and his wife Sahar are fearful for Assad's wife, their daughter Asma, 36, who went to a primary school in Ealing, where she was known as Emma. Their worst worry is that if, or when, the regime falls, the president will either be executed or forced into exile and that Asma may be harmed.

A neighbour in the same road as the Akhras's terrace house close to the A40 in Acton said they had not been seen there for more than a month and that Dr Akhras had felt worried ever since a group of angry pro-democratic protestors in the area, which is popular with expat Syrians, had pushed down the wall of their front garden.

The Independent on Sunday (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

A tyrant's wife is guilty too, as her emails show



Joan Smith

If a novelist were trying to imagine the internal world of a brutal dictator, it seems likely that extravagance, sentimentality and self-pity would emerge as themes. Only last year, the fall of Muammar Gaddafi offered an insight into the wastrel habits of his adult children, while the colonel's evident surprise moments before his lynching suggested someone who hadn't spent too much time worrying about his

victims: "What did I do to you?" he asked. Gaddafi's final words came into my head last week as I read leaked emails received and sent by another dictator, Syria's Bashar al-Assad, and his wife, Asma.

In February, as his forces massacred civilians in Homs, Assad was feeling so sorry for himself that he sent his wife a song by the US country singer Blake Shelton, who sings: "I've been a walking heartache/I've made a mess of me/The person that I've been lately/ Ain't who I wanna be." Assad's introspection, and his wife's restless quest for diamonds and bespoke furniture, is so close to the stereotypical dictator's family life that I couldn't help wondering whether the emails were genuine. What is one to make of a woman whose mind is exercised not by the

fire-blackened ruins in her family's home city, Homs, but the necessity of obtaining a chocolate fondue set?

Several days after it was published in *The Guardian*, there seems to be agreement that the correspondence is authentic. I've often thought that dictators are just extremely wealthy people with armies, and their bad taste is both expected and a symptom of wider isolation; I don't suppose advisors were lining up to tell Colonel Gaddafi how many people hated him, and until recently foreigners were falling over themselves to tell Asma al-Assad how fabulous she was. Who could forget *Vogue's* fawning profile, published last year under the headline "A Rose in the Desert" and describing her as "a thin, long-limbed beauty with a trained analytic mind"? Also last year, Harvard's

Arab Alumni Association announced an event in Damascus with the president's wife - "a thought-provoking, inspiring and tireless leader and advocate" - as its keynote speaker.

I've lost count of the times I've had conversations with people who thought that because Asma grew up in London, she must be a civilising influence on her horrible husband. But I've never believed it's possible to marry into such a notorious family without knowing what you're doing. Now we've seen emails assumed to be from her father, a Harley Street cardiologist, advising his son-in-law how to respond to what appear to be graphic images of the torture of children by Syrian armed forces. The Assads' modernity consists of surface things: listening to New Order, getting a Harry

Potter DVD, discussing US TV shows, judging by their emails. Asma al-Assad is a significant factor in strengthening her husband's determination to stay in power. By maintaining a semblance of normality, she makes it easier for him to live with the terrible crimes he has committed. "If we are strong together, we will overcome this together... I love you ..." she assured him in December. A few weeks later, she broke off a correspondence with a daughter of the Emir of Qatar, who had gently suggested that the couple might consider going into exile. Syria has been ruled by the Assads for more than 40 years, and this lawless gangster family has closed ranks.

www.politicalblonde.com
[twitter.com/@polblonde](https://twitter.com/polblonde)

The Sunday Herald (Royaume-UNi / United Kingdom)

Bomb massacre in Damascus as UN monitors wait in wings

State TV blames 'terrorists' as 27 people are killed by two car bombs on a day of ongoing bloodshed across the country. By Dominic Evans in Beirut

TWO explosions struck the heart of Damascus yesterday, killing at least 27 people in an attack on security installations that state television blamed on "terrorists" seeking to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Cars packed with explosives targeted a police headquarters and an air-security intelligence centre at 7.30am, television said, shredding the facade of one building and sending debris flying through the streets.

Gruesome images from the sites showed what appeared to be smouldering bodies in two separate vehicles, a wrecked mini-van smeared with blood, and severed limbs collected in sacks.

At least 27 people were killed and 140 wounded, an interior ministry statement said.

"We heard a huge explosion. At that moment the doors in our house were blown out ... even though we were some distance from the blast," said one elderly man, his head wrapped in a bandage.

No-one claimed responsibility for the explosions, which followed a series of suicide attacks in

Damascus and Syria's second city Aleppo in the past three months.

The blasts came two days after the first anniversary of the uprising, in which more than 8000 people have been killed and about 230,000 forced to flee their homes.

They also coincided with a joint mission by the Syrian government, the UN and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation that was due to start assessing humanitarian needs.

One source involved in the mission said team members were still gathering in Syria and it was not yet clear if they would begin their work this weekend as previously planned.

Violence was also reported elsewhere in Syria yesterday.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a network of contacts in Syria, said the body of an old man was found a day after he was arrested in the northern Jabal al-Zawiyah region.

It added that five more died in the eastern town of Raqqa. One person was shot dead by security forces during the funeral of two people killed on Friday.

The Avaaz campaign group said it had evidence of 32 children being tortured last week in the central

city of Homs, posting footage on the Internet of the infants in hospital. It said some had broken bones, badly cut fingers and gunshot wounds.

Syria denies accusations of brutality and says it is battling a foreign-backed insurgency. Reports cannot be independently verified as authorities have barred outside rights groups and journalists.

The UN-Arab League envoy for Syria, Kofi Annan, warned on Friday that the crisis could spill over into neighbouring countries and urged world powers to lay aside their differences and back his peace initiative.

While the West and much of the Arab world have lined up to demand Assad steps down, his allies Russia, China and Iran have cautioned against outside interference.

"The stronger and more unified your message, the better chance we have of shifting the dynamics of the conflict," an envoy said, summarising Annan's remarks to a closed meeting of the 15-nation Security Council.

Turkey has said it might set up a "buffer zone" inside Syria to protect fleeing refugees, while Annan will send a team to Damascus next week to discuss a proposal to deploy international monitors in the country.



At least 27 people were reported killed yesterday in suicide bomb attacks at two bases of the secret police in Damascus. Below: Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, and his wife, Asma

Strikes at heart of Assad regime

NICK MEAD
SUICIDE BOMBERS attacked two bases of the secret police in Damascus yesterday, killing 27 people and wounding 100, according to Syrian government sources.
The bombings appeared to mark a dangerous escalation in Syria's crisis, just weeks after the regime crushed a rebel stronghold in the city of Homs. Government spokesmen blamed Islamist terrorists for the attacks, which they said killed and injured mainly civilians. Many anti-regime activists believe that similar bombings since January have been staged to give the government an excuse to crack down on its opponents.
The explosions hit the aviation intelligence department - the most feared branch of Syria's police state - and the criminal security department, at around 7.30am.
State television showed the aftermath - pools of blood, body parts strewn across streets, and wrecked cars and vehicles - in grainy, black and white footage.
"We heard a huge explosion. At that moment the doors in our house were blown out even though we were some distance from the blast," one elderly man, with a bandage wrapped round his head, told Syria television, which also showed what it said was the charred corpse of a terrorist in a laundrette vehicle. There were reports

of a third bomb attack targeting a cultural hub in Damascus. Nobody claimed responsibility for the attacks, which Syrians fear may be the first of a prolonged suicide bombing campaign against the regime.
Hours earlier, Kofi Annan had warned that the crisis could soon spread to neighbouring countries. The former head of the United Nations has been the latest international figure to attempt a peace mission to Damascus, yet President Bashar al-Assad appears to be increasingly immune to international pressure.
His hard core of supporters has rallied, his army has inflicted setbacks on rebels in Homs and Latakia, and the outside world seems powerless to influence events.
"We are winning on the battlefield, and winning the battle on television," Mr Assad told supporters last week, apparently unfazed by international calls for him to face war crimes charges.
He appears confident that, of all the options shown by the spring, the one that will survive is the one he is the one who will survive.
But as the violence worsens, predictions are being made that Syria will be engulfed by a religious insurgency.
"Opponents of the regime are beginning to realise there will be no Tahrir Square moment," said Joshua Landis, a Syria scholar at Oklahoma University. "They are

going to have to fight a long battle against a regime that is not going to crumble. They will move to an insurgency of hit-and-run attacks and assassination. It will be more and more Islamised, with people ready to sacrifice themselves."
Hard-line preachers in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia are trying to raise money for the rebels, and have so far been their only real source of substantial foreign support.
Such preachers are bogged down by international calls for them to face war crimes charges.
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strongest display of support for the regime for months.
"These crowds want to get a message across to the whole world that the Syrian people will remain united as ever in combating terrorism," said Mouaz Mohamad, one of the demonstrators.
Only a few weeks ago, Mr Assad, who styled himself as a reformer, had looked doomed to shove the fate of the Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who was killed by rebels last October.
But then, urged on by his family and advisers, he decided to crush a revolt. He was following the example of his father, President Hafez Assad, who in 1982 smashed a Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the city of Hama, killing 25,000 people. The massacre meant there was no serious opposition to the regime for nearly 30 years.
At least a quarter of Syria's population still backs Mr Assad, according to one senior diplomat. In an interview, the regime says it will defend its rule to the bitter end.
"The military forces of any independent state has the right to catch and punish its enemies," he added.
Both the Christian and Alawite minorities fear that if Mr Assad falls, a Sunni Muslim government would take over - Sunnis make up 70 per cent of the population - and Syrian ambassadors to European capitals are

believed to have been recalled last week, to guarantee their loyalty.
"The hard core think they are in a fight to the death now," said one former senior Western diplomat. "They think there is no way they can surrender. They also think they are winning."
A minority of Syrians believe the regime's crude propaganda about a conspiracy led by America and Israel, with al-Qaeda and armed drug-dealers doing the fighting.
"The situation became worse in the past four or five months, but now everything will be OK," said Shadi, a business student from Damascus in his twenties, in an interview with the Independent. Although he says the regime will still defend its rule to the bitter end, he added that the military forces of any independent state has the right to catch and punish its enemies.
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Richard Ottaway MP, the chairman of the foreign affairs select committee, said: "As long as Russia and China are behind Assad, I think he will last a long time. Options for the outside world are very limited, although we are turning the screw on sanctions."
Military intervention seems out of the question. Unlike Libya, Syria has a huge, modern army and foreign allies. Russia is still selling weapons to the regime, and few in the West are keen to arm the rebels, who remain an unknown quantity.
Some Syrians will be pleased that the secret police of Damascus have been bombed. However, the state news agency, which crossed the border into Jordan, said it would choose to give more months needed for international sympathy for the regime.
"These two criminal acts are an attack on international human rights," a spokesman said. "It is terrorism similar to the attack in the USA on September 11."
Additional reporting by Michael Gwynn in Cairo

ist when he took power a decade ago, had looked doomed to shove the fate of the Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who was killed by rebels last October.
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The Observer (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Never confuse a love of Louboutins with western values

Asma Assad's modern style led people to think she was not a typical dictator's wife. How wrong they were

Catherine Bennett



Can Louboutins be recycled? And if so, via which bin? Not long ago, of course, any charity shop would have fallen upon them. But what woman, however desperate for chic, would now want to advertise, along with Louboutin's ever more vulgar red soles, a shared, "as worn by" aesthetic with Asma al-Assad, wife of the Syrian ophthalmologist-turned-assassin? The leaked emails detailing Mrs Assad's recent online shopping have reaffirmed, indelibly, the close style affinity between Christian Louboutin and Mrs Assad, whose many on-trend accessories have long been associated, by those in the know, with a vibrant, modern political message of some description. Basically: how could someone this fash forward ever be mean? It's as if Wallis Simpson never happened.

Even before *Vogue's* Joan Juliet Buck, in her unforgettable 2011 tribute to Asma, the "freshest and most magnetic of first ladies", discerned the philanthropic intent underpinning Asma's embellished heels, the *Huff Post* also detected something impressive in "her love for Christian Louboutin platforms". *Paris Match* called her a "ray of light in a country full of shadows" and, when reminded of Bashar al-Assad's brutality, Nicholas Sarkozy protested, with the authority of a lifetime steeped in bling: "With a wife as modern as his, he can't be completely bad". Asma's only rival, in on-trend politics, has been fellow autocrat's wife Queen Rania of Jordan, of whom her friend Wendi Murdoch said, in another *Vogue* profile: "She's modern; she thinks being queen is a job". But that much could have been guessed, surely, from her shoes.

For the brands favoured by the dictators' wives, the bonuses – until recently – went beyond regular name-checks. While Mrs Assad hinted at a democratic passion simply by wearing the same platforms as Victoria Beckham, Angelina Jolie

and Carla Bruni, Mr Louboutin responded with sympathy for Syrian materials and culture. Asma was spotted with "a Syrian silk Louboutin tote". Louboutin went one better with a Syrian house, in Aleppo. "Darling," he told a US interviewer, "I am totally broke, but it was love at first sight".

Happily for Mr Louboutin's post-Arab Spring weekend breaks, the town is reported to be so loyal to the Assads that rebels in Damascus have reportedly held up signs reading: "Aleppo wouldn't rise even if it took Viagra."

But how helpful to Louboutin, outside Aleppo, is continuing endorsement by the Syrian ray of light also known (by the *Sun*) as "Sexy Brit bringing Syria in from cold"? Her loyalty at a time of national crisis cannot be faulted. One notable email, dated early February, around the time her family's home town of Homs was being smashed to pieces, finds Mrs Assad still determined to share her love for some all-crystal Louboutin heels for £3,795.

"Does anything catch your eye?" she emails a friend, adding: "these pieces are not made for the general public." Her correspondent – maybe more pragmatic, maybe slower on six-inch heels – says she loves them but no, thank you: "They're not going 2 b useful any time soon unfortunately".

Though it's possible Louboutin executives are celebrating this uncovenanted global publicity, so recent that the relevant trotters must still be in stock, it is easier to imagine them scouring the literature on brand damage limitation for appropriate strategies when a *luxé* name becomes aspirational only to would-be torturers.

What did Burberry do, way back, after its hideous checks were appropriated by proletarians? But that level of brand nuisance is probably as instructive to Louboutin as Abercrombie & Fitch's offer of a cash bribe to the makers of the reality TV show *Jersey Shore*, whose cast have been draped in their shirts, to stop "distressing" A&F core customers – who are commonly, to judge from my part of north London, aged between 11 and 16, and dividing their time between school and the nearest off-licence.

Mercifully for most of the named suppliers to Assad HQ, their speciality is what *How to Spend It* (a magazine aimed at people Goldman Sachs has identified as "muppets") would celebrate as "under the radar" or, better still, "bespoke".



Asma Assad at an art exhibition in Damascus. Corbis

Something bespoke is, necessarily, unaffordable by most non-muppets, and, at the same time, capable of being made yet more exclusive via the introduction of more exotic materials, eg beaten gold, refinements that may also be portrayed as creative. Minus her associations with bloodshed, torture, and tyranny, Asma is patently its ideal reader. So much so that her name was dropped, by way of a powerful muppet attraction, in a recent *How To Spend It* piece about "a niche brand" and "insider's choice" jeweller she had patronised: "Syria's first lady has been snapped wearing its Sabbia earrings," breathed the author.

Maybe, inhabiting this world, Asma commissioned her console table, a classic of shiny bespokeness, after reading about insider's choice, Adam Williams, in last October's *How to Spend It*. "Most people choose patinated bronze," Williams said, "although gold leaf is also popular."

And that seems to be just about all Mrs Assad has in common with the familiar, dictator's style codified by Peter York in his 2005 classic about 16 despots' interiors, "each with their own uniquely frightful chic". What may have confused *Vogue*, Sarkozy and a host of Asma's

Vogue's faith in designer dresses as a signifier of inner worth does seem to be widely shared

admirers into thinking her a reformer is her defiance of York's thesis, to the effect that dictators have comically bad taste, which they share with "everyday rich folk in petro-dollar world". Helpfully – if *How to Spend It* does not routinely prove the point – her shopping lists indicate that evil does not, invariably, announce itself in quantities of marble, chandeliers and animal print, in a dictator's fat, gold-smear'd bergère and his fat, matching wife.

Equally – the Assads' emails astonishingly confirm – fash-forwardness and style do not invariably attest to sincere, progressive values. If they did, the stylish Mrs Cameron, the patron saint of minimalist kitchens, would support a mansion tax, and Anna Wintour, chiest of them all, would be crushing the right, instead of using her magazine to sanitise a tyrant by depicting his wife as a reformer. Admittedly, to judge by last week's obsession with the great premiers' wives' fash-off, *Vogue's* faith in designer dresses, belts and shoes as crucial signifiers of inner worth is already widely shared. Mrs Cameron's pink top was taken, for instance, to be a triumph of tactful diplomacy, while her black mac was declared creditably iconic, if a little black.

Appearing – in Chanel – at last-week's White House banquet, Wintour also upheld fashion's values, consigning the al-Assad embarrassment to history, along with *Vogue's* equally incautious outburst of admiration for another allegedly modernising beauty, Queen Rania of Jordan: "Whether at a UN delegation or on YouTube, Queen Rania's persuasive style is changing attitudes," *Vogue* announced. She definitely changed a few last year when, following a spectacular party for 600 in which the number 40 was projected on to rocky outcrops, Bedouin tribesmen accused her of corruption and extravagance.

Mercifully for the Louboutin brand when it reaches the desert, they probably have no idea where she buys her shoes.

The Washington Post (USA)

Car bombs in Syrian capital kill at least 27

In letter to U.N. envoy,
regime insists that
rebels stop fighting first

BY ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY
AND EDITH M. LEDERER

BEIRUT — Twin suicide car bombs struck intelligence and security buildings in the Syrian capital Saturday, killing at least 27 people and wounding 140, according to state media.

State TV aired gruesome images of the scene, with mangled and charred corpses, bloodstained streets and twisted steel.

“All our windows and doors are blown out,” said Majed Seibiyah, 29, who lives in the area of one of the blasts. “I was sleeping when I heard a sound like an earthquake. I didn’t grasp what was happening until I heard screaming in the street.”

A third blast was also reported, this one at a refugee camp housing thousands of Palestinians in Damascus, but the two bombers were the only casualties, according to SANA, Syria’s official news agency.

The explosions were the latest in a string of mysterious, large-scale attacks since December that have targeted the Syrian government’s military and security installations as a bloody crackdown continues on the year-old uprising against President Bashar al-Assad. Previous blasts, also suicide bombings, killed dozens of people.

The government has blamed the explosions on the “terrorists” it says are behind the revolt. The opposition has denied any role, saying they believe forces loyal to the government are behind the bombings to tarnish the uprising.

But top U.S. intelligence officials also have pointed to al-Qaeda in Iraq as probably responsible for the previous bombings, raising the possibility that its fighters are infiltrating the country to take advantage of the turmoil there.

Al-Qaeda’s leader called for Assad’s ouster in February.

Also Saturday, the Associated Press obtained a letter from Syria to the joint U.N.-Arab League envoy, Kofi Annan, in which Syria says it is “keen to end violence” but insists that armed opposition groups give up their weapons first.

The Syrian response, first reported by Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar, falls far short of U.S.

Chicago Tribune (USA)

Syrian Christians fearing the worst

If Assad is ousted, they worry they'll become targets

By ALEXANDRA ZAVIS
Tribune Newspapers

DAMASCUS, Syria — For 40 years, Um Michael has found comfort and serenity amid the soaring pillars and ancient icons of St. Mary's Greek Orthodox cathedral.

But as a priest offered up a prayer for peace one recent Sunday, the 70-year-old widow dabbed tears from her eyes.

"I was wishing that life would go back to the way it used to be," she said.

Like many Christians here, she wonders whether Syria's increasingly bloody, nearly yearlong uprising could shatter the veneer of security provided by President Bashar Assad's autocratic but secular government.

Assad has portrayed himself as the defender of the nation's religious minorities, including Christians and his Alawite Muslim sect, against foreign-backed Islamic extremists. Opposition activists scoff at that notion, saying he has deliberately exploited sectarian fear to stay in power.

But warnings of a bloodbath if Assad leaves office resonate with Christians, who have seen their brethren driven away by sectarian violence since the overthrow of longtime strongmen in Iraq and in Egypt, and before that by a 15-year civil war in neighboring Lebanon.

Many fear revenge attacks against minorities and the emergence of what they describe as a new dictatorship by the Sunni Muslim majority.

"If the regime goes, you can forget about Christians in Syria," said George, a 37-year-old dentist who, like others interviewed, asked to be identified by either a first name or a nickname. "Look what happened to the Christians of Iraq. They had to flee everywhere, while most of the churches were attacked and bombed."

Although not all of Syria's Christians back Assad, their fear helps explain the significant support he still draws despite the ferocious crackdown on what began as mostly peaceful protests and his government's increasing international isolation.

Worried Christians have only to look to the strife-torn city of Homs to see what a civil war might look like. There, residents say, Sunnis, Christians and the Alawite community, a small offshoot of Shiite Islam, have fallen victim to gruesome kidnappings and killings.

The rise of Islamist parties in post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia has added to the feeling among Syria's Christians that they are under siege.

Some find affirmation of their fear in the demonstrations that take place every week after Muslims' Friday prayers, when anti-government protesters spill out of mosques nationwide, chanting religious and political slogans.

"Of course the Arab Spring is an Islamist movement," George said angrily. "It's full of extremists. They want to destroy our country, and they call it a revolution."

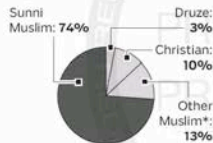
Syria's Christians, who represent about 10 percent of the country's 22 million people, trace their origins two millenniums to the beginnings of the faith.

The apostle Paul is said to have converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus, from which he went on to spread the religion across the Roman Empire.



Greek Orthodox priests pray during a Mass in January in Damascus for a Christian boy who was killed in the fighting in the Syrian city of Homs.

Syria's religions



*Includes Alawites, Ismailis and Shites
SOURCE: U.S. State Department

TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

scribed Syria as an oasis of religious tolerance where Christians can worship freely, build sanctuaries and run schools, activities that are restricted by varying degrees in a number of Middle Eastern countries.

Christian clerics are frequently shown on television taking part in joint prayer services with their Muslim counterparts. The defense minister is a Christian, as are other senior members of the government and security forces.

"Wherever you go, you find Christians and Muslims," said the patriarch, who has a photograph of himself with Assad displayed on his office wall. "There is no distinction."

Although there are dissenting voices, few dare to speak publicly, said a priest who did not want his name published for fear of retribution.

In January, a fellow cleric was shot and killed while trying to help an injured parishioner in the city of Hama, a center of the uprising. Each side blamed the other for his death.

"In my opinion, (Assad) did not protect minorities, he protected himself," the priest said. "It's a regime of family, friends and corruption. And corruption does not have a religion."

When he heard that demonstrators were being shot and killed, Louay, 26, a recent university graduate, worried that the government "was going overboard with its repression." But now, he said, he is just as repelled by the main opposition leaders.

"They are acting like the regime in some ways, not caring about



SANA PHOTO

Firefighters extinguish flames outside a Damascus building destroyed Saturday in a bombing.

Twin blasts rock capital

At least 27 die in Damascus; regime blames 'terrorists'

By PATRICK J. McDONNELL
Tribune Newspapers

BEIRUT — Syrians weary of a year of conflict woke up Saturday to more bloody news as a pair of bombs stunned the capital, the latest in a series of such attacks in Damascus and other cities, state-run media reported.

The government news service said "scores" were killed, while news agencies monitoring Syrian television reported that authorities said at least 27 had died and about 100 others had been injured.

Syrian television broadcast gruesome scenes of destruction, including blood-spattered streets and multistory buildings blown apart. Distraught resi-

for the series of bombings, which have reminded Syrians of the wave of car bombs that helped destabilize neighboring Iraq after the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

Opposition forces have denied being behind the bombings, saying that government operatives are trying to smear the uprising as a terrorist movement.

U.S. intelligence officials have said the bombs may indicate that al-Qaida has joined opposition forces seeking to overthrow Assad's government. But no specific forensic evidence has emerged linking the bombings to any group or faction.

Starting in late December, a string of what authorities call suicide bombs have killed scores in Damascus and Aleppo, Syria's two major cities. Both are considered strongholds for the Assad regime.

The explosions come as a special peace envoy, former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, was scheduled to send a team into Damascus to help craft a cease-fire in the bloody rebellion that began with street protests a year ago.

Reports from the United Nations indicate that Annan's cease-fire plan has foundered on a key question: Who should stop fighting first? Assad is said to want the rebels to stand down first, while Washington and its allies, along with the opposition, insist that the government pull back its forces first. Moscow, meanwhile, is seeking a simultaneous cease-fire.

Saturday's attacks also follow government offensives that have managed to scatter armed rebels from several rebellious provinces and the cities of Homs in central Syria, Daraa in the south and Idlib in the northwest. At

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Saudis move to provide rebels with military gear

BUT JORDAN FIRMLY DENIES REPORT ON ARMING SYRIAN OPPOSITION

Gulf News Report

Dubai Saudi Arabia, which publicly backed efforts to arm the Syrian opposition, is delivering military equipment to rebels in an effort to stop bloodshed by President Bashar Al Assad's regime.

"Saudi military equipment is on its way to Jordan to arm the Free Syrian Army," a diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity. "This is a Saudi initiative to stop the massacres in Syria," he added.

There was no official reaction to the statement from the Saudi capital, but Jordan flatly rejected the report. "Jordan categorically denies the report," government spokesman and information minister Rakan Majali told AFP.

"This is completely baseless. Jordan has not discussed this issue with any parties or brought it up at all," he said.

Iraq yesterday informed Iran that it will not permit arms shipments to Syria to pass through or over its territory, government spokesman Ali Al Dabbagh said.

The reports came as two huge bomb blasts killed at least 27 people in the heart of Syria's capital, sparking anger at Riyadh and Doha. Commentators on state television blamed Qatar and Saudi Arabia for the explosions.

See also Pages 12 & 13



Reuters

Damascus bombings kill 27

Security officials inspect the site of an explosion in Damascus yesterday. Two explosions struck at 7.30am, killing at least 27 people and wounding 140 others in an attack on security installations that state television blamed on 'terrorists' seeking to oust President Bashar Al Assad.

Assad thugs blamed for twin blasts

Damascus: Arab News

Syria's opposition accused the regime of having stage-managed the two huge bomb blasts that killed at least 27 people in Syria's capital yesterday.

Special envoy Kofi Annan warned of regional fallout from the year-long bloodshed.

State television said the early morning "terrorist" attacks, apparently car bombings timed minutes apart, had targeted police headquarters in the Duwar Al-Jamarek area and air force intelligence offices in Al-Qasaa district.

The explosions killed 27 people, mainly civilians, and wounded 140 civilians and security personnel.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Mohammed Kamel Amr affirmed Cairo's "fixed position against ter-

rorism in any form, regardless of the reasons behind it."

The continuing bloodshed confirmed the need to start implementing the Arab League initiative, he added.

Iraq, another neighbor of Syria, has informed Tehran it will not allow arms shipments to the country to pass through or over its territory.

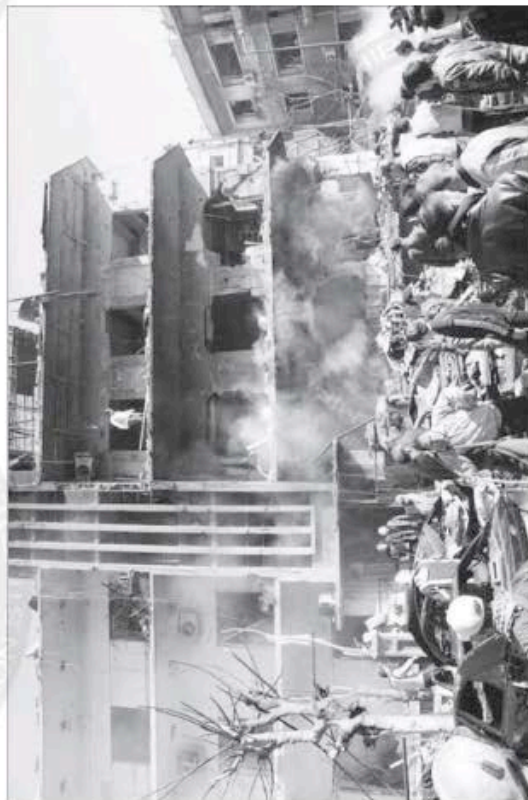
The United States has said it was concerned that Iranian cargo flights over Iraq to Syria could be carrying arms to help Damascus crush protests.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday he had spoken to Annan shortly after his talks with Assad and had been told that the strongman's resignation was not under discussion.

Please read full story on Page 7

Rebellion strikes heart of Damascus

● Dozens killed in multiple explosions ● Annan calls for unity in UN Security Council



Security officials inspect a damaged building near the intelligence building after an explosion in Damascus on Saturday. (Reuters)



Syrians in Lebanon wave the revolutionary flag and shout slogans against President Bashar Assad during an anti-regime protest at the Martyrs square in Beirut on Saturday. (AP)

attacks targeting the Syrian regime's military and security installations. The previous blasts, all outside bombings, killed dozens of people since December, even as the regime wages a bloody crackdown against the year-old uprising against President Bashar Assad.

The government has blamed the explosions on the "terrorists" that it claims are behind the revolt. The opposition has denied any role, saying they believe forces loyal to the government are behind the bombings to tarnish the uprising.

But top US intelligence officials also have pointed to Al-Qaeda in Iraq as the likely culprit behind the previous bombings, raising

the possibility its fighters are infiltrating across the border to take advantage of the turmoil, Al-Qaeda's leader called for Assad's ouster in February.

Bassma Kodmani, a member of the opposition Syrian National Council, said she doubted armed groups trying to bring Assad down by force, such as the rebel Free Syrian Army, have the capacity to carry out such attacks on security institutions in the capital.

"I don't think any of the opposition forces or the free Syrian army has the capacity to do such an operation to target these buildings because they are fortresses," she said by telephone.

"They are very well guarded. There is no way anyone can penetrate them without having strong support and complexity inside the security apparatus," according to SAM, preliminary information indicated two blasts were caused by car

bombs that hit the aviation intelligence department and the criminal security department at 7:30 a.m. local time.

Shooting broke out soon after the blast and sent residents and others who had gathered in the area fleeing, an Associated Press reporter at the scene said.

A Syrian official also said there were reports of a third blast Saturday targeting a military bus at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, but there were no details. He asked that his name not be used because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

The Syrian government denies there is a popular will behind the uprising, saying foreign extremists and gangs are trying to

destroy the country. But his opponents deny that and say an increasingly active rebel force has been driven to take up arms because the government used tanks, snipers and machine guns to crush peaceful protests.

In recent weeks, Syrian forces have waged a series of heavy offensives against the main strongholds of the opposition — Homs in central Syria, Idlib in the north and Daraa in the south.

Diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis have so far brought no result. But UN envoy Kofi Annan told the Security Council in a briefing Friday that he would return to Damascus even though his recent talks with Assad saw no progress in attempts to cobble

together peace negotiations between the two sides.

After the confidential briefing via videolink, Annan told reporters in Geneva that he urged the coalition "to speak with one voice as we try to resolve the crisis in Syria." Russia and China have blocked UN action against Assad's regime.

"The first objective is for all of us to end the violence and human rights abuses and the killings and get unimpeded access for humanitarian access to the needy, and of course the all-important issue of political process that will lead to a democratic Syria," Annan said.

Both Assad and much of the opposition spurned Annan's appeal for talks.

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FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

Syrian revolt simmers outside Damascus

BEIRUT — Syrian rebels have ignited a new front outside the capital, Damascus, in the first significant fighting there since regime forces swept over the suburbs weeks ago. The clashes highlight the shifting nature of Syria's conflict, with rebels lying in wait to rise up when the regime turns its guns elsewhere.

The return of violence to the Damascus suburbs on Friday raises questions about how long troops can control areas before they re-erupt. Though government forces have shown they can crush armed fighters, the regime has appeared unable to conduct major offensives in more than one place at once.

That points to the likelihood that a conflict that is now a year old and is estimated to have killed more than 8,000 could grind on as it slides closer to a civil war.

Diplomatic efforts have so far brought no result, but UN envoy Kofi Annan told the Security Council

in a briefing Friday that he was determined to continue his mission and would return to Damascus. Talks last week between Annan and Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus saw no progress in attempts to cobble together peace talks between the two sides.

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