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

Encore limité, ce commerce ne portera pas pour l'instant que sur des armes légères.

Le Monde (France)

Laurent Stefanini

Le combat d'une armée syrienne libre au bord de l'Oronte, à 3 km de la frontière libanaise, le 6 mars. ©

Un combatant de l'Armée syrienne libre au bord de l'Oronte, à 3 km de la frontière libanaise, le 6 mars. ©
Syrte: Idlib se prepare a l’assaut des forces d’el-Assad

Le Figaro (France)
Le consentement au meurtre, essence du régime de Bachar el-Assad

Marianne (France)
Assad peut-il gagner?

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 MERCHE

La terreur est-elle une assurance vie pour les dictateurs ? Le président syrien Bachar al-Assad peut-il rémonter le bras de fer, militaire et politique, contre ses opposants ? Dérangée, 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'« état de barbarie » (1). Il y a trente ans. On compte déjà près de 8500 morts – dont 1800 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 Égypte. La chute de Baba Amr ne signifie pourtant pas la défaite de l'opposition, les combats ayant aussi été repris ailleurs. Mais le « chemin de rosses » 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...

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 Daguian, 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.

Réseau Voltaire / Voltairenet.org / Voltaire Network
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 ».

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 inépuisable résistance et gardent un moral impressionnant malgré la répression. » Mathieu Guidère, islamologue et professeur à Toulouse, partage la même analyse : « Les opposants se relèvent. Ils sont conscients des risques d’une militarisation de la contestation. L’armée syrienne libre (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 en monte dans la hiérarchie sociale, plus c’est calme », constate Thomas Pierret. Les couches
Assad peut-il gagner ?

> supérieures soutiennent le pouvoir et, à contrepied, le quartier martyr de Baba Amr est l’un des plus pauvres de la ville d’Homs, où venaienl 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 chiites, 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.

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 bourgeoise 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 Déncé, 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 Guiède, les forces loyalistes comptaient 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 connoisseur 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 Guiède. 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

Benjamin Lévy tente de rééditer son triomphe libyen, mais cette fois sans beaucoup d'écho, « il faut, maintenant, une intervention en Syrie » plaçait le philosophe, dans le Point du 1er 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, Hakim 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 consiliers militaires qui vont avec, les Américains sont plus que réticents : pas question pour eux de se mettre dans un nouveau bûcher, après l'Irak et l'Afghanistan. Quant aux Européens, nul ne songe à agir. ■ J.-D.M.

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(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**

Von Christoph Gregor und Frederik Obermaier


**Süddeutsche Zeitung (Allemagne / Germany)**

**Syriens Opposition verweigert Dialog mit Assad**


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Experten gehen davon aus, dass Asaad eher als Lobbyist auftritt als Oberkommandierender. Die Auführer haben zwar inzwischen schwere Waffen der regulären Armee herbeigeführt 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 Drussen und Kurden bei der Freien Armee, sagter, alle Völker und Konfessionen hätten Platz im neuen Syrien.


Sonja Zekri
Offiziere desertieren

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


Angesichts der Gewalttaten 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.

Mission impossible per Kofi Annan

Michela Giugni

Non sarà facile per il voto speciale dell’Onu, il Giu- daceo Kofi Annan, risolvere a porto lo tentativo di una soluzione politica per la crisi siriana. La rivoluzione contro il regime di Bashar Assad, An- nan, che ha grattato per due man- dati consecutivi dall’Alto Commissario della ONU, ha dovuto fare i conti con una situazione in cui ci si aspetta una soluzione a breve termine, ma che è senza dubbio la più delicata. Nella lettera aperta alla Casa Bianca, Annan ha affermato che è importante che il mondo continui a lavorare per trovare una soluzione politica, ma che deve anche essere pronti a considerare la possibilità di un intervento militare.

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

Fermando una parte dell’opposizione, quella rappresentata da Hadi al-Mahdi, leader del Com- mitato di coordinamento per il cambiamento democratico, si oppone ad un intervento armato. Un intervento armato non sarebbe utile, né per i siriani né per il mondo intero, secondo Hadi al-Mahdi.

Nel frattempo, il presidente Barack Obama ha deciso di inviare più soldati a supporto delle forze siriane. La situazione è complessa e molte sono le sfide che si presentano al mondo.

In 100 mila a Manama

"Via agli Khalifa"

In oltre centomila, un sesto dei cittadini del Bahrein, hanno manifestato per la liberazione di Walid al-Halwa, uno dei leader del movimento per i diritti umani. Il leader, il quale è stato arrestato il mese scorsi, è stato liberato da poco e ha subito una serie di vessazioni. Il Bahrein è stato un punto di ritrovo per molti oppositori, che hanno cercato di organizzare proteste e manifestazioni per chiedere un cambiamento politico.
Seis generales de brigada huyen a Turquía y se unen a la insurgencia

DANIEL IRIARTE
CORRESPONDIENTE EN ESTAMBUL

¿Ha comenzado la cadena de desertiones en el régimen sirio? Tras la renuncia, el jueves, de Adbo Hassem eldin, 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 coronel 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 deserción 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 Mustafa al Shajj. Este último trató de hacerse con el mando de la insurgencia tras su llegada hace dos meses, pero Al Asaad se ha negado a cederse 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.
No inferno de Homs amontoam-se as vítimas

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

LUIZ NAVES

O dia seguinte à visita da represen-
tante da ONU, Valerie Amos, ao bairro de Baba Amr, há notícias de mais de 30 mortos no que a ONU define como ação de forças leais ao regime de Bashar Al-Assad. Como se não fosse suficientemente mau, este relato surge numa altura em que Damasco acor-
dera mais uma vez. O número de mortos aumenta, e novas fotos e vídeos chegam do bairro, mostrando o desespero e a dor dos sobreviventes. A população continua a pedir ajuda, mas o regime parece indeciso em buscar soluções para a situação. Em meio à tensão, há também momentos de resistência, com manifestações em apoio ao levante civil. A luta continua, e as vítimas aumentam.

NAÇÕES UNIDAS

Kofi Annan chega hoje a Damasco

- O conflito na Síria dura há mais de um ano e já fez mais de 10.000 mortos. ONU, Un, chega a Nova York para discutir medidas de paz.

- A morte de Kofi Annan, o secretário-geral das Nações Unidas, é um golpe duro para a ONU, que perde um leader dedicado ao serviço da paz. A língua de Annan é levantada em todo o mundo, com manifestações em apoio ao líder e rejeição às ações dos criminosos.

ANÁLISE

Que nos diz a Síria

BERNARDO PIRES DE LIMA

Investigador unanversité

Não há solução mágica para a Síria. A mediatação internacional e a cooperação entre as nações são essenciais para encontrar soluções para os problemas da região. A ONU, por exemplo, tem procurado forjar uma aliança internacional para responder às críticas e pressões que vêm da comunidade internacional. O advento da guerra civil na Síria tem alavancado o esforço de todos os países envolvidos para alcançar uma saída pacífica e justa para o conflito. É um desafio gigantesco, mas é necessário para o bem-estar de todos.

Sábado, 10 de março de 2012, #58, p. 13 / Saturday, March 10, 2012, #58, p. 13
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 principal entre os que opositores conheciam como “curdos em foco”, 20% de sua população vivia na Síria. Na semanal “Voultaine” contra o regime. Os Claudes eram um milho comunista, uma solidariedade que se vislumbrou na manter silenciosa, evitando juntar-se à opoção suscita com medo de que os seus direitos fossem automaticamente diminuídos por um novo regime.

Mas mesmo com suas entre as dez mil pessoas que atuam em várias cidades sírias e a violência que continua com pelo menos 60 mortos, há 18 manifestações em Aleppo. Ela também tem várias protestos dos curdos, que assinalaram um reforço de há dois anos.

Tudo isso depois de a vitória ter sido adquirida por opositores do Governo sírio, um serviço militar do Petróleo. Dentro, foram anunciadas as descrições de três gerações, que tinham cruzado em dois e meia hora no sul da Síria onde se encontram outros desertores, afirmaram um porto do Escritor Livre a Reuters. Eles queriam ver a um caminho o “reger” que as 100 milhas de pessoas que se vislumbraram no bairro, mas mesmos 20% que se vislumbravam em Aleppo, mesmo uma família que se vislumbrava não estar.

20% desertores juntou-se a outras altas responsáveis militares que abandonaram os regimentos. Num momento, este brigadário geral que se vislumbrava em Aleppo, mesmo uma família que se vislumbrava não estar.

O centro de Daraa dará especial atenção aos desertores, evitando a mobilização de fronteiras, que são umبلغino mais, o país, e tentando que as operações sejam levadas a cabo apenas pela mínima comunidade do regime. A presidente, Bashar al-Assad, notou o jornal francês Le Figaro. Mesmo a violência em que os sírios estão em maior número de outras forças, tem sido em terra.

Enquanto isso, Homs, cidade assediada, continua a ser alvo de ataques, mesmo depois que de seu bairro de Bab al-Azem ter sido descrito como um bairro fantasma responsável pela ONU para assuntos humanitários, Valerie Amos, que se questionou sobre o que tinha acontecido às pessoas que ali viviam. O objeto era agora um bairro da Síria. “O território estava cheio de uma multidão que estava se movendo ao longo de uma decisão que acabava de fazer”, disse uma fonte à agência AP. Foi dito em que mantivesse a vida em Aleppo.

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

sob ameaças, ao Washington Post. Aleppo, assim como Damasco, são considerados os bastiões do regime. Ainda assim, houve notícias de grandes manifestações pró-Assad na capital. Acelera de Aleppo, cidade considerada como o centro comercial da Síria, que deixa as pessoas de uma multidão de pessoas e a visibilidade que este proporciona, termou no diário britânico The Guardian.

As Nápoles Unidas queriam acesso limitado para poderem fazer passar ajuda humanitária às zonas mais distantes, mas o presidente Hollande e Assad concordaram apenas com uma “missão de avaliação prévia”, através de uma fonte das Núpcias para os assentos humanitários, Valerie Amos (na foto).

Os Governos então pediram mais tempo para analisar o acordo que, de acordo com o Ministério da Ação Pública, não foi rejeitado.

A escola de Aleppo, uma das maiores do país, é considerada como o centro comercial da Síria, que deixa as pessoas de uma multidão de pessoas e a visibilidade que este proporciona, termou no diário britânico The Guardian.

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Assad concorda com "missão de avaliação prévia"

Representante da ONU insiste na necessidade de a
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 opposition’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 Eab 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, Gennady 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.
Rebels reject call for talks with Assad

By Alex Spiliotis

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 Husameddin, 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.”
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 quash the regime and end the bloody civil war. But the opposition, and the UN, have yet to agree on a political solution, leaving the situation in limbo.

"The situation in Syria is getting worse every day," said a Syrian opposition leader who requested anonymity. "It's been a month since we last saw a ceasefire. The regime is still killing civilians, and the opposition is still fighting back."

The UN has been trying to negotiate a political solution for months, but so far nothing has worked. The situation in Homs has worsened dramatically in recent weeks, with reports of regime forces reopening the siege and attacking villages outside the city.

"We are running out of options," said a Syrian opposition member. "The regime has been using heavy weapons, including tanks, in a deliberate attempt to stall the negotiations."

As the UN special envoy Kofi Annan arrives in Syria today, the situation in Homs is still dire. The city is reportedly under heavy shelling and air strikes, with reports of over 100 civilians killed in recent days.

Annan, who has been trying to broker a political solution in Syria for months, arrived in the country this morning, accompanied by a team of UN officials. The situation in Homs is expected to be a key point of discussion during his visit.

"We are still trying to negotiate a political solution, but the situation on the ground is worsening," said a UN official. "We need to move quickly to prevent a humanitarian disaster in Homs.

A number of international groups, including Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross, have called for immediate action to prevent the situation in Homs from deteriorating further.

"The situation in Homs is becoming increasingly desperate," said HRW's Middle East director. "We need to see concrete action from the international community to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

As the situation in Homs remains critical, the UN and the opposition are expected to continue their negotiations in the coming days. However, there are fears that the situation could spiral out of control if a political solution is not found quickly.

"The situation in Homs is a test for the international community," said a UN official. "We need to show that we are willing to take action to prevent a humanitarian disaster."
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

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 as 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 kinds of comments are disappointing and do not give a lot of hope for people in Syria being massacred every day," Mr. Ghalioun said. "I feel like we are watching the same cycle 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 these 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, 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

Réseau Voltaire / Voltairenet.org / Voltaire Network
Le Conseil national syrien rejette l'appel au dialogue de l'ONU

Le président du Conseil national syrien, Bachar al-Assad, a déclaré hier qu'il ne serait pas possible de trouver une solution politique au conflit en Syrie sans le départ de Bachar al-Assad. "Assad n'est pas une issue, il est le problème", a-t-il déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse à Damas.

Le Congrès syrien a voté samedi une résolution dénonçant le siège de Bachar al-Assad par les forces du gouvernement international. Le texte a été voté par 100 voix contre 25, avec 30 abstentions.

Le président syrien a affirmé que les forces du gouvernement international devaient arrêter de bombarder la Syrie et que les Syriens devaient être libres de se battre contre le terrorisme sans la permission des forces internationales. "La Syrie doit être libre de la tutelle internationale", a-t-il déclaré.

Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU a voté en mars dernier pour un nouveau mandat qui permettrait aux forces internationales d'intervenir en Syrie. Cependant, la Russie et la Chine ont voté contre, ce qui a empêché l'adoption du texte.

Le Conseil national syrien a réaffirmé sa position de ne pas céder à l'ONU et a appelé les pays de l'Organisation de l'Unité Africaine à soutenir ses efforts pour renverser le régime de Bachar al-Assad.

Le président syrien a également appelé à la réunion d'une conférence internationale pour discuter de la situation en Syrie. "Il est temps de mettre fin à la guerre en Syrie", a-t-il déclaré.

Le président syrien a également appelé les pays occidentaux à cesser de soutenir le gouvernement syrien. "La Syrie ne peut pas se battre contre le terrorisme sans la permission des pays occidentaux", a-t-il déclaré.

Le Conseil national syrien a appelé à la fin des sanctions économiques contre la Syrie et a demandé à la communauté internationale de reconnaître ses efforts pour renverser le régime de Bachar al-Assad.
Syrian regime’s tactics are growing more aggressive, U.S. analysts say

HALEGH MALEH
AND KARIN DAVIS

The Washington Post

Syria, as a formidable military power, with 150,000 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.

Meanwhile, Assad’s 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 were reported to have been displaced from the city of Homs, which has been under government control since 2011.

The Washington Post (USA)
Annan out to stem Syria violence

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

BY PATRICK J. MCDONNELL
AND ALEXANDRA SANDLES
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. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters Friday that the mission was underway.

The UN mission’s trip is expected to last two or three days and will focus on the humanitarian crisis, which has displaced hundreds of thousands, and on the political process.

With the civil war in Syria in its third year, Annan’s mission is considered a last-ditch effort to end the conflict and bring peace to the Middle East nation.

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

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

Annan already has angered anti-Assad dissidents by ruling out the possibility of cutting ties with the regime.

By Patrick J. McDonnell

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

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

Conflict, signaling his preference for a negotiated settlement with Assad’s government. Various opposition groups, including the Syrian National Council, have rejected talks with Assad and say the president must step down.

“We don’t accept any dialogue with Bashir,” said Radwan Zalzalah, a US-based spokesman for the Syrian National Council. “He committed many crimes and 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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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.


Pendant ce temps, la répression ne montrait aucun signe de répit, à la veille de l’arrivée à Damas de l’envoyé spécial de l’ONU et de la Ligue arabe, Kofi Annan. Au moins 77 des 10 enfants ont encore été tués hier à travers le pays, dont au moins 15 dans l’assaut contre la localité de Alar Luroo en province rebelle d’Idlib, selon la chaîne satellitaire al-Alamy. L’armée a également attaqué quatre autres villages, Chaghbour, al-Laj, Harimmat et as-Sahn 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 Jalb el-Zaouie, les militaires pro-démocratiques craignent une opération d’envahissement semblable à celle menée à Baba Amr, quartier de Homs repéré par l’ONU le 1er mars, « le plus grand nombre de rebelles » se trouvant dans ce district, a expliqué le président de l’OSDH, Raad Aboul Rahm.

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 marqué 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. Homs, Der ez-Zor, al-Hara, Idlib, Homs, Maarat an-Nur, Darra, Hama, Lattakia, Daraa, Qara, Sayyedeh Zeinab, Houl et plusieurs quartiers de Damas.

Les forces de sécurité ont ouvert le feu pour disperser la foule à Alep et Houl, tandis que deux manifestants ont été tués à Homs et en Jableh, selon l’OSDH. Dans le même temps, des militaires ont indiqué que les chabdaa ont mené des perquisitions dans plusieurs localités dont Al-Tabaq, Enkideh et dans un quartier de la capitale, al-Qouboua. Signalets en outre que la plupart des habitants du village d’Alouk ont fui, manque d’eau et d’électricité. La chaîne Al-Alamy a par ailleurs cité des observateurs qui ont assuré qu’un massacre avait eu lieu dans le quartier de Bab el-Drehem.

Dans le même temps, des milliers de membres de l’opposition musulmane 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 prête à parvenir à un accord avec le régime syrien pour une « mission d’évaluation humanitaire préliminaire » dans les zones de conflit. La diplomatie britannique, qui s’est exprimée lors d’une conférence de presse à Ankara, a précisé avoir demandé au régime de Bachar el-Assad un accès immédiat pour l’aider humanitaire aux zones les plus touchées, mais Duries 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 Crissant Rouge arabe. Hier, elle a visité un camp de réfugiés syriens en Turquie. Le nombre de réfugiés français et turcs a été augmenté ces derniers jours, par les forces de l’armée de l’air et le donneur de Bab 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 pertes déplorées ont été estimées à 100 000 et 200 000 personnes à l’intérieur du pays.
Pour la onzième 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 jugant « déséquilibré ». Le problème principal est l’absence d’appel simultané à l’arrêt de toute violence dans le cadre des ententes d’Occident et de la contresignée par la Syrie. Le Conseil « exige » également que les pays qui ont laissé les armes de l’ONU en Syrie soient autorisés immédiatement à « un accès humanitaire » à toutes les villes du pays.

Hier, M. Gatilov a indiqué que la Russie estime que la résolution de l’ONU doit être formulée par plusieurs sources. Depuis, le projet de résolution du Conseil de sécurité a été retenu par le Conseil de sécurité de l’ONU.

Annan rencontrera Assad ce matin.

L’émissaire chinois

Dans le même temps, Pékin, très critique pour son soutien au régime de Bachar el-Assad, a annoncé que l’émissaire chinois, né de la violence en Syrie, M. Annan, doit rencontrer le président du Conseil de sécurité de l’ONU.

(Sources : agences et réduction)
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. Duras reste évidemment 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, enfin 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 guide des contrebandiers qu'il faut payer et/ou des insurgés.

Une fois sur place, ce déclenche le plus difficile. Il faut ensuite passer quelques jours chaque fois aller dans la ville d'Dhoub, dont des barrages gouvernementaux empêchent l'accès, raconte Luc Mathieu, reporter au quotidien français Libération. Et un avenir sombre arrive à 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 Robyn Young Pelton expliquait : « Ce que la Russie, fournisseur d'armes de Damas, a apporté à la Syrie : lorsque vous détruissez une ville, assurez-vous que personne, pas même l'histoire, n'en sorte vivant. »

Après le Français Gilles Jaquard le 11 janvier, le journaliste américain 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, fournie par la Russie qui utilisait en Tchétchénie, pour localiser 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 devait quitter son téléphone satellitaire Thuraya : « On m'a dit "tu peux appeler une fois par jour, pas plus. " Les combattants conseillent également aux journalistes de relayer leurs antennes Bgan (Internet par satellite) à leurs ordinateurs par un câble d'un peu plus de 15 mètres... et de croiser les doigts : "Au cas où l'antenne sur un ou deux vers le signal, vous survivrez peut-être. "

Autre difficulté, les journalistes cherchent parfois à contrôler le travail des médias ; la propagande est en marche dans les deux camps. Un reporter occidental, qui demande l'anonymat pour pouvoir retourner avec les rebelles, avait ainsi photographié des cadavres de soldats semblant avoir été sommairement exécutés. Furieux, les insurgés ont exigé qu'il efface les clichés, sous peine d'être abattu. D'autres journalistes ont aussi fait preuve d'audace, tel ce cameraman d'un média occidental qui a diffusé, par erreur, une vidéo d'un responsable 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 armés firent voir vouloir "tuer le cameraman, a contester un journaliste 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 prenaient pour un agent secret étranger", explique-t-il en riant. Mais pour Robyn Young Pelton, ces difficultés ne justifient pas de renoncer aux infiltrations, et il faudrait plus d'informations en Syrie, où un régime travaille avec diligence à plonger son peuple dans les ténèbres.

Par ailleurs, l'envoyé spécial du Figaro Edith Bouvier, rapatriée en France après avoir été gravement blessée à Homs, a publié hier dans son quotidien un long reportage sur l'hôpital de campagne de Baba Amr où elle a reçu les premiers soins. Dans son reportage, la journaliste décrit l'hôpital de campagne de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), "un immeuble quelconque" qui constitue cependant "une sorte de havre, un îlot d'humanité", témoignant que les "blessés s'y entassent, où les soigne avec presque rien", tandis que les obus et les roquettes continuent de tomber sur le quartier. (Source : AFP)
Generals defect to Turkey • Annan meets Assad today • 54 citizens slain

Syria bleeds amid destruction

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

Damaged cars and houses following the relentless bombing of homes by the regime.
54 killed in Syria ahead of Annan peace mission

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

AMMAN, Syria forces killed 54 people yesterday as they sought to quell demonstrations against President Bashar al-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 34 were killed in the northern province of Idlib and more than 20 were reported wounded.

"Thick smoke and shrapnel rained down on houses," said Husein, a resident in Homs' farm Al-Sawran neighborhood.

One form of demonstration was the anniversary of Kurdish amnesty in Syria in 2008 with about 50 people being killed.

Thousands of Kurds demonstrated in northeastern cities, YouTube footage showed, some carrying banners that read "Save the Kurdish people."

Other clips showed hundreds of protesters in the city of Hasakah, venting bloodshed and chanting, "Down with Assad, Free Syria."

Syria's state news agency SANA reported big pro-Assad demonstrations in the cities of Deir al-Zor and Hasakah.

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

Street protests have spilled every Friday after Western pressure since the anti-Assad revolt started 2 years ago, despite regime oppression by the military and Kurdish militias.

Debacle since has mirrored both sides in an increasingly bloody struggle that appears to be splitting into civil war.

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, who visited Homs this week, said Assad's government had agreed in principle to join UN agencies in a "limited assessment" of civilian needs in Syria, but had not set the date or asked for international access for aid groups.

Syrian officials had asked for more time, she told a news conference, adding that she was determined at the scene of destruction.

Arab Red Crescent said 24,000 refugees are in need of aid and that a further 23,000 are expected in the next month.

A Syrian official said the UN had been asked to assess humanitarian needs in the country as a whole.

The aid effort has been marred by a fundraiser co-ordinated by Kofi Annan that failed to reach its target of $200 million.

Annan, who began his peace mission in Damascus on Sunday, has called on the Syrian opposition to join the UN process as a "normalization of the situation".

China, which despite claims to the contrary, has no direct involvement, is the latest to join the UN process as a "normalization of the situation".

The US on Sunday pushed the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution calling for the withdrawal of the Syrian army from its citizens and the mediation of independent observers.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Monday that the United States would call for the UN Security Council to approve a resolution immediately and freeze the regime's assets.

Russia, an ally of Damascus and its main arms supplier, has defended Assad against Western and Arab critics, twice voting against a resolution on Syria.

We shall not support any resolution that gives any basis for the use of force against Syria. We believe in diplomacy and the UN process. We are ready to work on this at the Security Council level."

Western powers have deferred action on any such resolution, "The option of any military intervention is not on the table," French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said in Moscow on Friday.

A Russian diplomat said Assad was fighting hard to defend his "constituents" including at least 15,000 foreign fighters who were seen entering the country.

The Syrian opposition shows no sign of appealing to Assad from power and more Syria for their future.

"The US should send a clear signal that it wants to see a transition," said Kofi Annan on Monday.

"If (Assad) can promise massive help in a transitional plan, the regime would be confronted with the choice of either agreeing to negotiate with the opposition or fighting hard in order to remain in power."

The United Nations has estimated that at least 35,000 refugees have fled Syria in the past year, said Martin Edwards, a spokesperson for the UN refugee agency.

The UN figures were based mainly on refugees who registered with the UNHCR. Many others have fled to neighboring countries without registering, Edwards said.

As regional tensions grow, the fate of the war-torn country remains uncertain.

Russia, an ally of Damascus and its main arms supplier, has defended Assad against Western and Arab critics, twice voting against a resolution on Syria.

"We shall not support any resolution that gives any basis for the use of force against Syria. We believe in diplomacy and the UN process. We are ready to work on this at the Security Council level," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in Moscow on Friday.

Syrian authorities have killed 3,000 people since the anti-assad uprising began a year ago, according to the UN. The government said in December that "armed terrorists" had killed more than 2,000 soldiers and police.

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Source: Reuters
Syrian army officers defect to Turkey

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish officials said Friday that two Syrian generals, a colonel and a two-star general, 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 Bob Houl, said Homs-based opposition activist Abu Imaad, who added that the Al-Hamahleh mosque in Bob Houl 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 Turkish 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 civil servant to join the opposition and urged his compatriots to "abandon this sinking ship" as the nation spirals toward civil war.

Abdo Hassan al-Darid, 58, announced in a video that he has defected.

The officers and the two generals were in a group of some 234 Syrians who have fled to Turkey since Thursday, Ynet news, the administration for the Turkish border town of Reyhanli told Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency.

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.

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.

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.

The 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
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.

AMMAN: Syrian forces killed 31 people yesterday as they sought to quell demonstrations against President Bashar Al-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, reporting 14 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’ Karm Al Zeitun neighbourhood.

One focus of demonstrations was the anniversary of a 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 Assali district of Damascus.

Syria’s state news agency Sana reported big pro-Assad demonstra-
tions in Damascus and Hassakia 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 38-day siege.

The United Nations estimates at least 50,000 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 dispatched 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.

“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 3,000 soldiers and police.
Carnage continues in Syria as four army generals defect

SAUDI ARABIA BLASTS RUSSIAN COMMENT ON SUPPORTING TERROR

**Dubai (Agenceps)** 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.

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.

See also Pages 11, 12 & 13

Gulf News (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 Mira, 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 34 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, 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 Emam Al Ammar, a resident in Homs’s Emam Al Zeinoum 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 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 Amro district, which rebel fighters left after a 26-day siege. — Agencies
Rebels reject Annan’s call

Syrian dissidents say gov’t repression has destroyed prospects of peace deal

Edmund Blair and Oliver Holmes

CAROBE, REBUT — 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, denying angry rebels 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 Idlib.

Another activist said Annan’s call for dialogue sounded “like a wish of Bashar” that would only encourage Assad to “crush the revolution.”

UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos, on a separate mission to Syria, said she was “determined” by the destruction she had seen in the Baba Amr 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 Amr since the government assault.

As world pressure on Syria mounted, the deputy oil minister announced his defection, the first by a senior Syrian official since the start of the uprising. Abo Haroumale, 58, said he knew his chance of sides would bring persecution on his family. Two rebel 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 Khalaf Al-Hamoud, a spokesman for the Free Syrian Army (FSA), said the defections 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 protesters at a funeral for an army defector that turned into a protest against the president, locals said.

Opposition sources and residents say protesters in the capital are driven by inflation and the plummeting 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 100,000-strong military, secret police and militias.

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

US defence secretary Leon Panetta 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 begged for further militarisation of the conflict. “We should not forget the possible impact of Syria on the region (there is any miscalculation),” the former UN chief said. But Syrian dissidents said diplomatic initiatives 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 associates,” 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��(175,557),(990,767)

“The flow of all kind of terrorists from some neighbouring countries is always increasing,” Russia’s deputy ambassador Mikhail Lebedev said in Geneva. — Reuters
Envoy: Arabs Sending Mercenaries to Syria

An Iranian official has accused Arab countries of sending mercenaries to Syria to provoke further unrest and fuel 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 publicly 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.

“And 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.”

From page 1

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been the most zealous advocates of taking action to topple the Syrian 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 interventions 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 these issues (issues) and reach a compromise and in my opinion it’s better not to prejudge 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.”

Parchim 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 former 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 (Parchim) 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.

Iranian regime and the United States have threatened Iran with military strikes as a last-ditch effort to stop its growing 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.

Réseau Voltaire / Voltairenet.org / Voltaire Network
A journey into Syria's dark world of torture

BY RUTH POLLARD RAMTHA, JORDAN

He was naked, blindfolded, in exquisite 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 desperate human titanic struggle and thirst against each other and the four walls that contained them.

More than 130 prisoners were cremated in a small room for days, sometimes weeks, at a time. They could not sit or lie down. There was a 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 Al Qalagh, 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 leashes all over my body — they put a leash into my penis," he says, staring at the ground, unable to go on.

It's not the first time Mr Al Qalagh has overcome as he recounts the nauseating details of his torture. 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 enforced his brutal regime.

"After everything I have seen, I can tell you, God cannot exist," Mr Al Qalagh 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 Darayya, the birthplace of the country's year-long uprising.

Mr Al Qalagh 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 looks in the rain, after leaving behind everything. It's, for now, a temporary existence but it is the first time in 11 months they have been able to stop moving.

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 Al Qalagh was first arrested in April 2011, in the early days of the anti-government uprising. He had been at a funeral in Darayya, 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 over 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 put a car tire to use as a weapon to beat us. They called it a God. Whenever anyone cried out for the prophet, Muhammad, or God during their torture, they would be beaten with this weapon."

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

"Many people were hanging by their arms from a metal bar. Two of them were hit so often they died. I saw people whose eyes had burst open from being hit with the tire 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 interrogated 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 Neistat, the associate director of the organization's office for the Middle East and North Africa.

"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, 55.9 per cent were subjected to torture."

Mr Al Qalagh says Syrian security forces stole rent and money, and jewellery from his home, but also destroyed his business, taking stock and vandalizing property in his office and a shop 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 scared I could not stand up, so a doctor in the prison hospital told them to release me or I would die in pain."

Prisoners were forced to lie face down on the dirt ground, then we had to lie top of them, our faces in their shoes. Another blow 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 woke in fright during the night, plagued by nightmares and always on edge, waiting for the next blow to the door.

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

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