

Überhandnehmen der Beschuldigungen gegen Syrien

REVUE DE PRESSE SYRIE #12

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Die atlantische und die Golf-Presse nimmt die Behauptung des OSDH (Londoner Büro der syrischen Muslimbrüderschaft) wieder auf, nach der die syrische Armee ca. hundert Leute in Kafrueid, Provinz Idleb, massakriert hätte.

Obwohl diese Bezeichnung nicht bestätigt wurde, haben Frankreich und die USA lebhaft reagiert. Der Quai d'Orsay spricht von „beispiellosem Blutbad“, während das Weiße Haus versichert, dass „Assad nicht mehr würdig ist, Syrien zu leiten“.

- Die internationale Presse klammert das Thema aus, dass fünf iranische Ingenieure in Homs entführt wurden. Diese Tat ereignete sich im Zug der Pipeline-Sabotage der elektrischen Zentrale und des Abzugs von Petro-Canada. Das Ziel ist die Stromversorgung von Homs abzuschneiden.
- *Jane's Defence Weekly* vermerkt, dass die Syrische Freie Armee, selbst mit ihren angeblichen 20 000 Mann keine Chance hat, erfolgreich zu sein. Tatsächlich erfährt sie kaum Abfall, was Kampftruppen und Generäle betrifft. Sie ist als Deckung für eine internationale Operation bestimmt.
- Der *Jerusalem Post* war der erste, von dem offenen Brief an Präsident Obama der 55 *Foreign Policy Initiative* Mitglieder zu sprechen (Seiten 45-46), der neuen US-Falken-Gesellschaft, die sich klar in der Weiterführung des *Projekts für ein Neues Amerikanisches Jahrhundert* (PNAC) befindet.

Der Brief war in Zusammenarbeit mit der *Foundation for the Defense of Democracies* geschrieben worden, welche eine Verlängerung der israelischen Regierung ist.

Die Unterzeichner bedrängen Präsident Obama, damit er die Sanktionen verstärkt, offizielle Kontakte mit der zivilen und militärischen Opposition aufnimmt, und damit er der Türkei die Bildung einer neutralen Zone auf syrischem Boden überlässt.

- In der Wochenzeitung *Le Point* beschreibt Edward Luttwak, der offizielle Historiker der israelischen Armee, die Unruhen in Syrien als ein Mittel, den iranischen Einfluss zu brechen, indem man die *fitna* anfacht.

Le Monde (France)

Syrie

L'armée syrienne accusée de massacre dans le village de Kafroueid

NICOSIE. Cent onze civils ont été tués mardi 20 décembre, par les forces de sécurité syriennes dans le village de Kafroueid, dans la région d'Idleb (nord-ouest), selon un bilan donné mercredi par l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Mardi, cette association basée au Royaume-Uni avait dit craindre un « *massacre* » dans ce village, où « *des dizaines de civils* » étaient encerclés par l'armée. L'OSDH a indiqué que ces 111 civils et des militants avaient été tués alors qu'ils tentaient de fuir le village, situé dans la région de Jabal Al-Zaouia, où sont cachés de nombreux déserteurs membres de l'Armée syrienne libre, à plus de 330 km au nord de Damas. Jusqu'à présent, 52 des 111 victimes ont pu être identifiées. Ce nouveau bilan porte à 123 le nombre de civils tués pour la journée de mardi, 12 autres ayant péri sous les balles des forces de sécurité à Homs (centre), selon l'OSDH. – (AFP.) ■

Le Figaro (France)

« Une tuerie sans précédent » en Syrie

La répression a fait plus d'une centaine de morts civils et militaires en quelques jours.

PIERRE PRIER

PROCHE-ORIENT En Syrie, les combats opposent de plus en plus des militaires : armée régulière contre déserteurs. Dernière réussite en date des dissidents en uniforme, selon l'Observatoire syrien pour les droits de l'homme : la destruction de 17 véhicules militaires dans la province d'Idlib, proche de la frontière turque, et l'élimination de 14 membres des forces de sécurité dans une embuscade près de Deraa, dans le Sud.

Mais les déserteurs paient le prix de leur témérité. Depuis lundi, une centaine d'entre eux ont été tués par les forces du régime, toujours dans la province d'Idlib. Les rebelles avaient commis une erreur fatale. Ils avaient enregistré une vidéo revendiquant leur rébellion, sans s'apercevoir que le décor révélait l'endroit où ils se trouvaient, affirme un

« Assad ne mérite pas de diriger la Syrie »

LA MAISON-BLANCHE

membre du Conseil national de soutien à la révolution syrienne (CNSRS) le mouvement fondé par l'ancien vice-président Abdelhalim Khaddam, en exil depuis 2005.

Ces déserteurs n'auraient pas rejoint l'Armée syrienne libre, l'organisation basée en Turquie, et auraient formé plusieurs groupes distincts. Ils manquent cruellement d'armes, leur équipement se limitant au kalachnikov et à quelques RPG (lance-roquettes). Jusqu'ici, les rebelles n'ont pas les moyens de détruire les chars lourds, encore moins d'abattre les avions de combat qui seraient entrés en action hier, selon plusieurs témoignages. Les armes n'arrivent pas par la Turquie. Terre d'ac-

cueil de l'ASL, elle ne souhaite toutefois pas l'aider à devenir une véritable armée, ce qui reviendrait pour Ankara à déclarer la guerre à la Syrie. Quant aux quelques armes qui transitent par le Liban, la demande a multiplié leurs prix par trois ou quatre. L'encadrement, lui aussi, fait défaut.

Un haut responsable assassiné

Les gradés tentés par l'aventure ont reçu un message sans ambiguïté. Les 23 officiers récemment arrêtés, et dont les noms ont été publiés par le CNSRS, ont probablement été exécutés, estime le mouvement.

Un haut responsable aurait été, lui aussi, assassiné, affirme le site All4syria de l'ex-conseiller présidentiel Ayman Abdelnour. Le général Ali Habib, ministre de la Défense limogé en août dernier, aurait été éliminé à cause de ses velléités supposées de dissidence. Selon les déserteurs, cependant, de nombreux officiers, y compris dans les divisions blindées, seraient prêts à faire défection avec leurs engins mais hésitent par peur des représailles contre leur famille.

En Syrie, il n'y a pas que les militaires qui meurent. La France a dénoncé hier une « tuerie d'ampleur sans précédent » après les 120 morts de mardi. Paris a demandé à la Russie, alliée de Damas « d'accélérer le rythme des négociations au Conseil de sécurité sur son projet de résolution ».

Les États-Unis ont, eux aussi, augmenté la pression en avertissant que la communauté internationale pourrait « prendre des mesures supplémentaires » en cas d'échec de l'initiative de paix de la Ligue arabe. Hier, l'enlèvement de cinq techniciens iraniens à Homs, par des inconnus, pourrait renforcer encore la répression devant cet affront au principal allié de Damas. ■

Libération (France)

En Syrie, «une tuerie sans précédent»

VIOLENCES Paris et Washington menacent le régime qui élimine les déserteurs, de plus en plus nombreux.

Près de 120 morts en une seule journée. Juste avant l'arrivée des premiers observateurs de la Ligue arabe, la Syrie a connu mardi l'une de ses journées les plus meurtrières, le Quai d'Orsay dénonçant une «tuerie d'une ampleur sans précédent». Le massacre s'est produit sur le plateau de la région montagneuse de Djebel al-Zawiya (nord du pays) lorsque des opposants civils et des déserteurs se sont trouvés encerclés par les forces du régime, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. Les violences se sont poursuivies hier. Cette fois, 22 personnes, dont 6 déserteurs et 15 membres des forces armées, ont trouvé la mort lors d'affrontements à la mitrailleuse lourde dans la ville de Dael, près de Daraa (sud).

«Spirale». «Tout doit être mis en œuvre pour faire cesser cette spirale meurtrière dans laquelle Bachar al-Assad entraîne chaque jour davantage son peuple», a déclaré hier le porte-parole français, Ber-

nard Valéro. Condamnation sèbre aussi de la Maison Blanche, qui a parlé hier d'«actes révoltants et déplorables» commis contre les populations civiles. Washington a mis aussi en garde le régime syrien contre de «nouvelles mesures» internationales s'il persistait à «violenter la population» le protocole pour la protection des civils, proposé par la Ligue arabe et signé lundi au Caire par le vice-ministre syrien des Affaires étrangères, Fayçal al-Maqdad.

«Nous demandons à la Russie d'accéder le système des négociations au Conseil de sécurité sur son projet de résolution», insiste-t-on du côté français. Un projet qui ne devrait guère avoir d'influence sur la situation tant Moscou s'emploie à préserver le régime syrien et qui prévoit, en conséquence, de condamner les violences «commises par toutes les parties».

La résolution, si elle était adoptée sous cette forme, ne ferait donc aucune différence entre les forces répressives du régime et les manifestants.

D'où les pressions de Paris et des capitales européennes pour que Moscou durcisse son texte. «Il est urgent que le Conseil de sécurité se prononce par une résolution ferme qui exige la fin de l'impunité», a rappelé Bernard Valéro.

Chaos. Au fur et à mesure que la répression s'intensifie, c'est un nombre sans cesse croissant de soldats qui désertent. Le quotidien israélien Haaretz, qui cite des sources anonymes au sein des services de renseignements occidentaux, les estime à 10000, ajoutant que la moitié des appelés ne rejoignent plus leur lieu d'affectation. Même si les deux principales villes syriennes, Damas et Alep, ne sont toujours pas vraiment gagnées à la contestation et si d'autres ont été reprises par l'armée syrienne, le chaos commence à s'installer dans des régions entières. Hier, Téhéran a annoncé que cinq Iraniens travaillant à un projet de centrale électrique avaient été enlevés mardi à Homs (centre).

JEAN-PIERRE FERRIN

Le Point (hebdomadaire / weekly) (France)

Le vrai enjeu de l'insurrection syrienne

par Edward Luttwak

L'Invasion américaine de l'Irak, en 2003, a eu l'effet prévisible de renforcer l'influence de l'Iran. Pas seulement celle de la théocratie au pouvoir dans ce pays, mais celle de la puissance chiite dans l'ensemble du monde arabo-musulman, jusqu'alors dominé par les sunnites.

En Irak, les chiïtes, plus nombreux que les sunnites, avaient été mis au pas par les empereurs sunnites de l'Empire ottoman, auxquels ont succédé des régimes arabes de même obédience, jusques et y compris celui de Saddam Hussein. Le régime démocratique importé et imposé par les Américains a au contraire assuré une prééminence au pouvoir chiïte. Lequel manifeste évidemment des affinités pour l'Iran.

Au Liban également, les chiïtes, plus nombreux que les chrétiens maronites ou les sunnites qui se partageaient le pouvoir, acceptaient d'être plus ignorés que brimés. Aujourd'hui, les chiïtes du parti Hezbollah, qui se sont modestement baptisés le « parti de Dieu », sont devenus l'élément le plus puissant du gouvernement et leur milice est plus forte que l'armée nationale libanaise.

Mais l'élément récent transformant une poussée religieuse en avantage stratégique en faveur de l'Iran, c'est l'empressement des dirigeants syriens à agir comme s'ils étaient apparentés aux chiïtes. D'où le sentiment qu'il existait désormais un croissant chiïte reliant l'Iran, l'Irak, le Sud-Liban et la Syrie. C'est assez paradoxal, parce que la famille Assad et ceux qui la suivent sont des nusayris, rebaptisés en 1920 « alaouites » (les fidèles d'Allah), qui en Iran seraient poursuivis pour hérésie.

Pour la puissante Arabie saoudite, tout comme pour ses voisins du Koweït, de Bahreïn, du Qatar, ou des Emirats arabes unis, cette poussée chiïte est une mauvaise nouvelle. Les différences doctrinales entre les deux courants de l'islam n'ont cessé de s'aggraver. La dévotion des Iraniens pour l'imam caché, le rôle secondaire laissé à Mahomet, les pèlerinages aux mausolées de Hassan et de Hussein, qui concurrencent le grand pèlerinage de La Mecque, sont autant de manifestations considérées comme inacceptables par les sunnites. Plus significatif pour l'impression laissée est le dégoût éprouvé par les sunnites devant les pratiques chiïtes, telles les processions accompagnées de flagellations jusqu'au sang, ou l'habitude prise par les mères d'entailler au rasoir le front de leurs bébés en souvenir du martyr de Hassan et de Hussein. Et que dire de cette pratique douteuse du mariage à l'essai, inventée par les ayatollahs pour donner une justification religieuse à leur débauche!

Mais, au-delà de ces jugements moraux ou religieux, ce que l'Arabie saoudite et ses voisins considèrent comme une vraie menace stratégique, ce sont les velléités du croissant chiïte d'étendre

son emprise vers le sud. Les chiïtes revendiquent ouvertement une prédominance démographique à Bahreïn, au Koweït (en partie parce que des gouvernants à courte vue ont expulsé un demi-million de Palestiniens sunnites en 1991), et même dans la province d'el-Haza, en Arabie saoudite, d'où provient l'essentiel des ressources pétrolières du royaume.

Or, pour les Saoudiens, le dommage causé par les Américains en 2003 lorsqu'ils ont détruit les capacités militaires de Saddam Hussein a été aggravé huit ans plus tard par le lâchage par les Occidentaux du régime de Moubarak. Le principal avantage du président égyptien, c'est d'avoir constitué un rempart contre l'Iran et l'influence chiïte dans la région. Certes, l'Égypte est un pays sunnite et il y a peu de chances que ses nouveaux gouvernants épousent les thèses de l'Iran ou de ses alliés, mais il n'y a pas non plus d'assurance qu'ils poursuivront la politique anti-iranienne de Moubarak, renforcée par une coopération très pragmatique avec Israël.



Edward Luttwak
Conseiller des présidents Reagan et Bush, l'Américain Edward Luttwak, 69 ans, est historien, spécialiste de géostratégie.

Etrangement, voilà qu'après avoir gravement affaibli le front anti-iranien

en balayant Moubarak le printemps arabe est en train de le renforcer en s'attaquant au régime du Syrien Assad. Cela n'a au demeurant pas l'air de troubler les gouvernants du Qatar et d'Arabie saoudite, qui ne sont pas à une contradiction près. Ainsi soutiennent-ils l'émir de Bahreïn lorsqu'il contient

brutalement ses manifestants (chiïtes), mais ils condamnent le Syrien Assad lorsqu'il réprime des manifestants (sunnites). Les dirigeants du Qatar, comme de l'Arabie saoudite, ont d'ailleurs longtemps attendu avant de demander, par l'entremise de la Ligue arabe, qu'Assad arrête la répression.

C'était un piège tendu au dirigeant syrien, qui n'avait comme alternative que baisser les armes, perdre le contrôle du pays et s'enfuir, ou continuer à tirer sur sa population, avec le risque de nouvelles sanctions. C'est la voie choisie par Assad. Ce qui a incité les régimes arabes à apporter leur soutien financier aux forces syriennes libres.

Au milieu de cette succession de bouleversements, le dessein de l'Arabie saoudite et de ses alliés est triple aujourd'hui: aider à renverser Assad pour couper le Hezbollah libanais de ses bases syriennes – ce qui peut permettre aux sunnites du Liban de regagner le pouvoir avec l'appui des chrétiens maronites. Ensuite, constituer une région de repli pour les sunnites d'Irak brimés par les chiïtes, qui ont pris le pouvoir à Bagdad. Enfin, dénier à l'Iran la possibilité de se prévaloir d'un allié arabe grâce à sa proximité avec Damas. De quoi affaiblir la position de Téhéran dans le monde arabo-musulman. Et compenser les revers subis par les sunnites depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein et le renversement de Moubarak ■

BASSO CAN NARSA/OPALE

Der Standard (Belgique)

„Beispielloses Blutbad“ in Syrien

Präsident Assad veranlasst eine Offensive gegen die Opposition: In den vergangenen Tagen sind hunderte Menschen umgekommen, der syrische Nationalrat forderte ein Eingreifen der internationalen Gemeinschaft.

Damaskus - Nach bevor die Arabische Liga eine Verbot ihrer zuletzt beschlossenen Beobachtermission nach Syrien schicken konnte, versuchte das Regime von Präsident Bashar al-Assad die Opposition im Land mit einem Großangriff entscheidend zu schwächen. Menschenrechtsgruppen berichteten am Mittwoch von weit über 200 Toten allein in den vorangegangenen zwei Tagen.

Rami Abdulrahman vom Syrian Observatory for Human Rights sagte, 111 Zivilisten und Aktivisten seien umgekommen und dazu in der an die Türkei angrenzenden Idlib-Provinz über 100 Deserteure, die zur Opposition gegen das Assad-Regime überlaufen wollten. Abdulrahman: „Der vergangene Dienstag war der blutigste Tag in der syrischen Revolution.“ Auch ein Sprecher des französisch-

schien Außenamtes erklärte: „Das war ein beispielloses Blutbad. Der UN-Sicherheitsrat ist dringlich aufgefordert, endlich eine scharfe Resolution zu beschließen, die das Ende der Repression in Syrien fordert.“ Die deutsche Bundesregierung verurteilte ebenso „direktive Gewaltanwendung durch das syrische Regime aufs Schärfe.“ Damaskus müsse die Gewalt gegen Deserteure und Demonstranten „umgehend einstellen“.

Der oppositionelle syrische Nationalrat forderte einmal mehr eine internationale Intervention zum Schutz der Zivilbevölkerung und sprach von 250 Toten am Montag und Dienstag. Der Nationalrat verlangte zudem Schutzzonen für die Zivilisten unter internationaler Bewachung. Eine unabhängige Verifikation der Zahlen ist äußerst schwierig, weil in Sy-

rien keine ausländischen Reporter recherchieren dürfen. Die Uno hatte zuletzt festgestellt, dass seit Beginn des Aufstandes im März mehr als 5000 Menschen ums Leben gekommen sind.

Auch die Arabische Liga forderte die syrische Führung auf, sofort alle Militäreinsätze gegen Oppositionelle zu beenden. Der Generalsekretär der Liga, Nabil al-Arabi, sagte am Mittwoch in Kairo, die jüngsten Berichte über eine Zunahme der Gewalt in Syrien hätten ihn sehr beunruhigt. Assad und die Regierung müssten für eine Situation sorgen, in der es den arabischen Beobachtern möglich sei, ihre Aufgabe zu erfüllen, fügte er hinzu.

14 Diplomaten auf dem Weg

Die Liga will heute, Donnerstag, ein Voraus-Team von 14 Diplomaten und Experten nach Damaskus schicken. Diese sollen die Beobachtermission der Liga in den Krisengebieten des Landes vorbereiten, die Ende des Monats beginnen soll. Al-Arabi betonte, eine Beendigung der Gewalt sei eben-

so Teil der Vereinbarung zwischen Syrien und der Liga wie der Abzug des Militärs aus dem Städtchen und die Freilassung aller inhaftierten Demonstranten. Die syrische Opposition ist skeptisch, dass sich Assad an die Vereinbarungen mit der Liga halten wird.

Syrische Armenianöver

In der Tat ließ der seit elf Jahren regierende Baschar al-Assad die syrische Armee zuletzt mit Manövern die Landesverteidigung üben, um gegen mögliche militärische Interventionen im Konflikt mit der Opposition im Land gewappnet zu sein. Die Luft- und Seestreitkräfte erprobten ihre Kampfkraft, um sich „jeder Aggression“ entgegenstellen zu können, meldete die amtliche syrische Nachrichtenagentur Sana. Bei den Übungen der Luftwaffe und der Luftabwehr zur Verteidigung des syrischen Luftraums komme scharfe Munition zum Einsatz. Bereits Anfang des Monats hatte die syrische Armee Großübungen abgehalten. (red)

➔ derstandard.at/Syrien

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

Berlin: Arabische Liga aufwerten

Westerwelle lobt Rolle der Organisation im Fall Syrien

sat. BERLIN, 21. Dezember. Das Auswärtige Amt beabsichtigt, die Beziehungen Deutschlands zur Arabischen Liga aufzuwerten, um deren konstruktive Rolle seit Beginn des arabischen Frühlings zu würdigen. „Mit ihrem klaren Kurs gegen die Gewalt des Assad-Regimes und als Repräsentant der Nachbarstaaten hat die Arabische Liga eine unverzichtbare Schlüsselrolle für eine mögliche Lösung der Krise in Syrien“, sagte Außenminister Westerwelle am Mittwoch dieser Zeitung. Auch deshalb beabsichtige er, die Zusammenarbeit mit der Arabischen Liga zu verstärken, „ohne dabei unser besonderes Verhältnis zu Israel zu vernachlässigen“, sagte er weiter. Im Auswärtigen Amt hieß es, konkret sei es vorstellbar, den deutschen Botschafter in Kairo auch bei der Arabischen Liga zu akkreditieren und das Büro der Organisation in Berlin zu einer „Mission“ mit „mehr diplomatischen Vorrechten“ aufzuwerten. Zudem könne die inhaltliche Zusammenarbeit etwa in Fragen der Menschenrechte und bei der Anwendung von Sanktionen ausgebaut werden. Berlin wolle sich dafür einsetzen, auf der EU-Ebene einen politischen Dialog mit der Liga zu institutionalisieren.

Die Bundesregierung erkennt den Bedeutungszuwachs der Organisation seit Beginn der Umbrüche in der arabischen Welt an. Das habe schon der Fall Libyen gezeigt, als sich die Arabische Liga für die Durchsetzung einer Flugverbotszone zum Schutz der Zivilbevölkerung aussprach. Im Fall Syrien scheute die Liga zwar vor einem solchen Schritt zurück, weil sie fürchtete, wie in Libyen könne ein solcher Schritt von der Nato zum Anlass für eine Militärintervention genommen werden, doch rang sie Damaskus das Zugeständnis ab, eine Beobachtermission ins Land zu lassen. Der Bedeutungszuwachs der Arabischen Liga wird auch ihrem derzeitigen Generalsekretär, dem früheren ägyptischen Außenminister Nabil al Arabi, zugeschrieben. In der Vergangenheit spielte die Arabische Liga keine große Rolle in der Region, da sie faktisch nur im Konsens der 22 Mitgliedstaaten handeln konnte und sich einseitig auf den Nahost-Konflikt ausgerichtet hatte. Gegen Syrien verhängte sie nun Sanktionen gegen den Widerstand einzelner Staaten. Al Arabi hatte nach Amtsantritt angekündigt, die Liga institutionell reformieren zu wollen.

„Wenn Assad geht, kommt alles noch schlimmer“ Altgediente syrische Oppositionelle kritisieren die Brutalität des Regimes – fürchten zugleich aber dessen Sturz

Von Thomas Avenarius

Damaskus – Adal Naissa ist verbittert, aber nicht gebrochen. Der „Nelson Mandela Syriens“ saß 25 Jahre im Gefängnis. Ohne Gerichtsurl. 1979 hatte der Damaszener Diktator Hafis al-Assad gepöbelt, seinen politischen Weggefährten in den Kerker werfen lassen. So wie alle anderen, aus deren Kritiker oder Konkurrenten hätten werden können. Naissa verbrachte zwei Jahre in Einzelhaft: keine Sonne, kein Kontakt, nichts. Auch wenn sein Leben später leichter wurde, blieb er in der Zelle. Als der Baath-Politiker Mitte der neunziger Jahre freikam, zürte ihm der Vater des heutigen Staatschefs Baschary al-Assad zu sich: „Hafis behandelte mich nie. Wo sind deine Haare? Du hast ja eine Glatze.“

Es war immer gefährlich, in Syrien Oppositioneller zu sein. Heute ist es noch schlimmer. Nach zehn Monaten Rebellion zählen die UN 5000 Tote, das Regime begehrt dem Aufstand mit Armee und Milizen. Ergeben hat sich ein blutiges Patt: Die Opposition auf der Straße ist zu schwach, Assad zu stürzen. Aber das Regime in Damaskus kann die Demonstrationen trotz aller Brutalität auch nicht beenden. Der Aufstand ist eine soziale Revolution – getragen von Jugendlichen, Arbeitlosen und Enttäuschten in den Städten, aus vernachlässigten Provinzen. Dadurch kommen die Jahrzehntelange blutigen Kämpfe der Islamisten. Vom Regime kurztot als „ausländische Terroristen“ gebrauchend, verschaffen sie dem Widerstand gegen den Staat angeblich ein gewisses religiös-ideologisches Konsett. In der komplexen syrischen Gesellschaft mit ihren Minderheiten, Religions-

gruppen und ihren säkularen Elementen lassen sich politische Gemeindefaktionen, die über den Protest hinaus tragen, schwer organisieren. „Reformen können in Syrien nur von oben kommen“, sagt Ali Haidar. Er führt die Syrische Sozialistische Nationalpartei (SSNP), die als Oppositionspartei vom Regime akzeptiert wird. „Wir nehmen nur an friedlichen Protesten teil. Vor allem aber bemühen wir uns um einen echten Dialog mit dem Regime.“ Haidar klingt stauntragend, so wie Adal Naissa. Beide gehören zur „Vorkfront für Wandel und Freiheit“, einem regimenaheben Oppositionsbündnis.

Die Opposition fürchtet um die säkulare Tradition, wenn Islamisten das Sagen hätten.

das sich als „Brücke zwischen Regierung und Straße“ versteht. Die Argumente unterscheiden sich kaum von denen des Regimes: Syrien sei „in einer schweren Krise. Was hier geschieht, ist aber keine Revolution.“ Dem Sozialisten Haidar fehlen „politische Führung durch eine Elite, klare Forderungen, ein Programm“. Der Volksaufstand sei längst „von Militanten und von ausländischen Kräften gekidnappt worden: Amerikaner und Europäer mischen sich ein, die Saudis finanzieren das Ganze“.

Haidars Vorwürfe an die Assad-Adressen sind bei all dem unmissverständlich: Der Präsident habe mit unmäßiger Gewalt auf den Aufstand reagiert. Im Falle der Entschlossenheit, gegen die Korruption vorzugehen, „für die einige breiten bekannte große Familien verant-

wortlich sind“. Der Staatschef pläne seine Reformen und die neue Verfassung zudem unter Ausschluss der Öffentlichkeit. „Da gehört die gesamte Opposition mit an den Tisch.“

Oppositionelle wie Naissa und Haidar mögen staunhaft sein. Aber auch sie respektieren einen Teil der syrischen Gesellschaft. Sie sehen das Land mit seinem nationalen Mix aus religiösen und ethnischen Minderheiten an der „Arabellion“ zerbrechen. „Wir müssen den Staat erhalten, seine Institutionen schützen.“ Sie sagen, seine Institutionen zwischen den Volksgruppen vorwärts, denken an den libanesischen Bürgerkrieg. Die Oppositionellen fürchten um Syriens säkulare Tradition und um den Schutz der religiösen Minderheiten, wenn Islamisten das Sagen hätten. „Am Ende haben wir Verhältnisse wie in Irak oder in Afghanistan“, sagt Haidar.

Für Politiker wie Haidar ist Präsident Assad „trotz seiner sinkenden Popularität“ noch immer in der Lage, das Land zusammenzuhalten und Reformen umzusetzen. „Teile der Bevölkerung würden seinen Rücktritt gar nicht akzeptieren. Wenn er geht, unter dem Eindruck der Gewalt, kommt alles nur noch schlimmer.“

Syrien hat jenseits der neuen Aufständischen auch eine altgediente Opposition: Namen wie Riad Seif, Flächhalm Maleh, Anwar al-Bunni oder Michel Kilo stehen seit Jahren in allen Menschenrechtsberichten. Diese Regimegegner wurden hart verfolgt, konnten aber dann auch immer wieder auftreten. Meist sektoral ausgerichtet, kritisieren auch sie die Menschenrechtsverletzungen und die Brutalität des Regimes im Umgang mit

der Rebellion. Zum Aufstand selbst halten diese Oppositionellen aber Abstand. Die neue syrische Opposition ist ihnen zu diffus. In den umkämpften Städten spielen Islamisten unbestreitbar eine Rolle, wachtet die Militäre: Eine kleine Zahl an Fahnenflüchtigen aus den Streitkräften hat sich zur „Freien Syrischen Armee“ erklärt, kämpft gegen Assads Truppen. Und in Istanbul bemüht sich der Syrische Nationalrat (SNC) um internationale Anerkennung als Exilregierung. Bis hier vergebens: Dem Gremium unter Vorsitz des Soziologen Barhan Chalhoum wird vorgeworfen, die syrische Gesellschaft nicht zu repräsentieren: Die ist in mehr als drei Dutzend Religionsgruppen und Ethnien zersplittert.

Vertreter aus dem Untergrund haben eine eigene Sicht. Für sie stehen die sozialen Ursachen der Revolte im Vordergrund. Da sind die hohe Geburtenzahl, die Arbeitslosenzahlen und Perspektivlosigkeit der jungen Generation, die Brutalität des Regimes im Umgang mit dem Protest. Dabei würden an den Demonstrationen ebenso Angehörige der nicht-sunnitischen Minderheiten teilnehmen: Christen, Drusen, Ismailiten. Auch Alawiten, also Angehörige der Volksgruppe der Assad-Familie, seien zu finden. Dass islamische Elemente eine Rolle spielen bei der Mobilisierung des Protests, bestreiten sie nicht: „Das ist nicht verwunderlich. Das Land hat eine islamische traditionelle Rolle, keine politische. Diese Vertreter der Opposition bestreiten die Behauptung des Regimes, dass militante Islamisten aus dem Ausland den Kern des Widerstands gegen Assad bilden.“ Die Protestierenden sind Syrer.

Tageszeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

Ansturm der Armee

SYRIEN In der nördlichen Provinz eskalieren die Gefechte zwischen Armee und Deserteuren. Mindestens 200 Tote

VON GABRIELA KELLER

Die Gewalt in Syrien gerät zusehends außer Kontrolle. Vorallem in der nördlichen Provinz Idlib, wo seit Montag schwere Gefechte zwischen desertierten und regimetreuen Soldaten toben, trage der Konflikt mittlerweile deutliche Züge eines Bürgerkriegs. Allein am Dienstag sollen mindestens 200 Menschen in dieser Gegend ums Leben gekommen sein.

Allerdings widersprechen sich die Angaben unterschiedlicher Quellen: Das Aktivisten-Netzwerk Avaaz hat den Tod von 163 bewaffneten Rebellen und von 9 Zivilisten registriert. Die Syrische Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte in London da-

gegen meldet 111 Todesopfer in der Zivilbevölkerung, zusätzlich zu mehreren Dutzend erschossenen Überläufern. Außerdem sollen bei den Kämpfen fast hundert Regierungssoldaten getötet worden sein. „Genaue Zahlen gibt es bisher noch nicht“, sagt der syrische Menschenrechtler Wissam Tarif, der mit Avaaz zusammenarbeitet. „Wir waren nicht in der Lage, die gesamte Region abzudecken. Wir haben es

Das Regime will die Lage im Norden in den Griff kriegen, bevor heute die Beobachtermission eintrifft

nicht geschafft, in allen Dörfern jemanden zu erreichen.“

Die Intensität der Kämpfe in dieser Woche illustriert die zunehmende Stärke der Deserteure. Bis zu 3.000 Kämpfer der Freien Armee Syriens sollen sich in den vergangenen Wochen nach Idlib zurückgezogen haben. Etwa 75 Dörfer liegen in der Region direkt an der türkischen Grenze verstreut; 34 davon haben nach Angaben von Aktivisten zuletzt unter Kontrolle der Freien Armee Syriens gestanden. Auch libysche Kämpfer sollen sich in Idlib aufhalten. „Ich habe mit dreien telefoniert“, sagt Tarif. „Sie haben sich aus der Türkei über die Grenze schleusen lassen. Sie sagen, sie seien dort, um zu helfen.“

Anfang der Woche begann die syrische Armee eine groß angelegte Offensive, um das verlorene Gebiet zurückzuerobern. Am Montag soll das Militär regelrecht Jagd auf die Deserteure gemacht haben. Etwa 70 Überläufer sollen dabei erschossen worden sein. Gleichzeitig, heißt es, haben die Rebellen mehrfach militärische Stützpunkte und Waffenlager überfallen. Damit setzte wurde eine Spirale aus Angriffen und Vergeltungsangriffen in Gang gesetzt, die am Mittwoch andauerten. Die Operation ist auf Dschabal al-Sawija konzentriert, eine Gegend rund 40 Kilometer westlich der Stadt Idlib. „Es ist wie im Krieg. Die Armee schießt mit Panzern auf die Dörfer, Flugzeuge kreisen am

Himmel. Ich höre alle zehn Minuten laute Explosionen“, sagt Nour Abdu, ein Aktivist aus Dschabal al-Sawija. Er ist, wie viele andere Anwohner, in die nahe gelegenen Berge geflohen. „Vergeltete liegen auf den Straßen. Die Soldaten haben die Toten in eine Moschee gebracht. Wir können sie nicht beerdigen, wir wissen nicht einmal, wie viele genau es sind!“

Die Deserteure hätten versucht, sich den Streitkräften entgegenzustellen, sagt Nour Abdu. Doch die zahlenmäßig und militärisch weit unterlegenen Überläufer könnten dem Ansturm der Armee nicht lange standhalten. Mittlerweile hätten die Regimetreuppen das Gebiet wieder unter ihre Kontrolle gebracht. Die Deserteure seien entweder geflohen oder getötet worden.

Idlib ist wegen der Nähe zur Türkei von erheblicher strategischer Bedeutung: Die Opposition könnte die Provinz zu einer Art Korridor ausbauen, den die Kämpfer für ihre Operationen und Zivilisten zur Flucht über die Grenze nutzen. Die Führung in Damaskus hatte sich am Montag bereit erklärt, eine Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga ins Land zu lassen. Es ist davon auszugehen, dass das Regime die Lage im Norden in den Griff kriegen will, bevor am Donnerstag ein Vorauskommando eintrifft. Inzwischen hat der Syrische Nationalrat die Einrichtung einer international geschützten „sicheren Zone“ in den Provinzen Idlib und Homs gefordert. Damit hat sich der Nationalrat, eine Art Keimzelle einer Übergangsregierung, erstmals offen hinter die Freie Armee Syriens gestellt. Bislang hatte die Gruppe den bewaffneten Aufstand stets abgelehnt. Doch allmählich glaubt niemand mehr, dass das Assad-Regime mit friedlichen Mitteln besiegt werden kann.



Während der Oberkommandierende der Streitkräfte in Damaskus bejubelt wird, tötet die Armee im Norden Deserteure und Zivilisten Foto: alp

THEMA
DES SYRIENS

Kampf unter Kameraden

Gnadenloses Vorgehen gegen Deserteure in Syrien / Auch Jordanien öffnet Grenze für Abtrünnige / Opposition fordert Schutzzonen

VON MARTIN GEHLEN, KAIRO

Die jungen Soldaten wollten nur noch weg. Eine ganze Kompanie Wehrpflichtiger, die in einem Armeecamp zwischen den Dörfern Kafr Oued und Al Fatira in der Provinz Idlib stationiert waren, rannte davon, um sich auf türkisches Gebiet durchzuschlagen. Offenbar wurde ihr Plan verraten, befehlstreue Kameraden nahmen die Flüchtenden mit Maschinengewehren unter Feuer. Anschließend durchkämmten sie die umliegenden Felder und Obstpläne, spürten jeden Überlebenden einzeln auf und massakrierten ihn. Stundenlang waren die Schusswechsel zu hören zwischen den sich verzweifelt wehrenden Abtrünnigen und ihren regimetreuen Häschern.

Nahezu 300 Menschen sind in den vergangenen beiden Tagen bei Kämpfen in Syrien ums Leben gekommen, neben den 80 Deserteuren aus Idlib auch mehr als Hundert Zivilisten sowie bewaffnete Rebellen. Frankreichs Regierung spricht von einem „Massaker beispiellosen Ausmaßes“.

Angeblich starben 300 in den vergangenen zwei Tagen

Aus der Stadt Homs wurden ebenfalls schwere Kämpfe und Artilleriebeschuss gemeldet, am Mittwochmorgen wurden fünf iranische Ingenieure gekidnappt. Gleichzeitig stiegen die Verluste bei der regulären Armee. Allein in den vergangenen drei Tagen sollen Bewaffnete rund zwanzig Militärfahrzeuge angegriffen und zerstört haben, mehrere Dutzend Soldaten verloren dabei ihr Leben. Insgesamt starben seit Beginn der Unruhen im März bereits mehr als 5000 Menschen, darunter nach Angaben des Regimes 1100 Sicherheitskräfte.

Alle ausländischen Beobachter und Aktivistenorganisationen sind sich einig, dass die Gewalt im Land dramatisch zunimmt. Im Norden Syriens, in der gebirgigen Provinz Idlib nahe der türkischen Grenze sowie in der Stadt Homs, haben die Kämpfe inzwischen Züge eines regelrechten Krieges“, urteilt der bekannte, in Beirut ansässige Aktivist Wissam Tarif. Die Zahl der desertierten Soldaten wird auf mehr als 10000 geschätzt. Allein in der nördlichen Unruheprovinz operieren 2000 bis 3000 Kämpfer der „Freien Syrischen Armee“. Sie bewegen sich meist auf Motorrädern, verfügen jedoch nur über leichte Waffen wie Kalaschnikows und Pistolen. Wie das Aktivistennetzwerk Avaaz mitteilte, sind inzwischen auch erste Rebellen aus Libyen in der Region eingetroffen, um an der Seite der Regimegegner mitzukämpfen.

Die syrische Opposition fordert die Einrichtung einer „sicheren Zone“ in den Provinzen Idlib und Homs. Diese Zone sollte international geschützt werden, hieß es in einer am Mittwoch veröffentlichten Erklärung des Syrischen Nationalrats. Gleichzeitig forderte der Rat, der viele Oppositionsgruppen repräsentiert, der UN-Sicherheitsrat solle das Regime zwingen, seine Truppen aus den belagerten Gebieten abzuziehen. Die Arabische Liga, die Beobachter nach Syrien schicken will, wurde aufgefordert, gemeinsam mit den Vereinten Nationen Maßnahmen zum Schutz der Zivilbevölkerung zu ergreifen.



Erkennungszeichen Motorrad. Kämpfer der Freien Syrischen Armee im Dorf Jabal Zawiya nahe bei Kfar Nabul, wo in den vergangenen Tagen Dutzende Deserteure erschossen worden sein sollen. Sie bewegen sich auf Motorrädern, verfügen aber nur über leichte Waffen wie Pistolen und Kalaschnikows. Foto: Javier Espinosa/Avast

Während hohe Offiziere und Eliteeinheiten nach wie vor eisern zu Präsident Baschar al Assad und seinem Regime stehen, fliehen Wehrpflichtige und Unteroffiziere offenbar in Scharen. Bisweilen machen sich ganze Einheiten aus dem Staub. Bei den letzten drei Einberufungen haben sich nach Angaben des Syrischen Nationalrates nur noch 50 Prozent aller neuen Wehrpflichtigen gemeldet.

Nur noch die Hälfte der Rekruten kommt zur Einberufung

Neuankömmlinge aus denselben Dörfern werden in den Kasernen systematisch getrennt, alle Mobiltelefone konfisziert. Gespräche in Gruppen sind auf dem Gelände verboten. Die Arabische Liga rief kürzlich alle syrischen Soldaten auf, Schießbefehle auf Zivilisten zu verweigern. Inzwischen hat auch Jordanien, nach der Türkei, seine Grenzen für abtrünnige syrische Uniformierte geöffnet.

Am Donnerstag sollen nun die ersten internationalen Beobachter der Arabischen Liga im Land eintreffen, nachdem Damaskus Anfang der Woche nach vier

Wochen Hinhaltetaktik dem internationalen Druck schließlich nachgegeben hat. Ende Dezember folgen insgesamt 500 Experten, um sich unter der Leitung des sudanesischen Generals Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al Dabi erstmals seit neun Monaten ein unabhängiges Bild von der Lage in Syrien zu machen.

Die Gesandten wollen überprüfen, ob das Regime die Zusage umsetzt, die Gewalt gegen seine Bürger zu beenden, alle verhafteten Demonstranten freizulassen, mit der Opposition zu verhandeln und seine Armeeeinheiten aus den Wohngebieten zurückzuziehen. Bisher hat das Regime von Präsident Assad noch keine der angekündigten politischen Reformen ernsthaft in Angriff genommen. Und sollten Panzer und Artillerie tatsächlich aus allen Städten und Dörfern abrücken, wie die Arabische Liga verlangt, könnten dem Regime große Teile des Staatsgebiets bald entgleiten.

Noch am Dienstag hatte der Golf-Kooperationsrat, ein Zusammenschluss der reichen Ölstaaten, Syrien in einer ungewöhnlich scharfen Stellungnahme aufgefordert, seine „Tötungsmaschine“ zu stoppen und das Blutvergießen zu beenden. Das syrische Regime dagegen be-

hauptet weiter unverdrossen, die Unruhen seien durch „bewaffnete terroristische Gruppen“ verursacht, die mit Rückendeckung ausländischer Mächte Syrien destabilisieren wollten.

Nach Angaben der syrischen Nachrichtenagentur Sana begannen Luftwaffe und Luftabwehr am Dienstag mit fünf-tägiger Manövern, um „jede Aggression“ zurückzuschlagen.

EUROPÄISCHE UNION

„Bald wird es eine UN-Resolution geben“

Der EU Sonderbeauftragte für das südliche Mittelmeer, der Spanier Bernardino Leon, ist sich sicher, dass es bald eine Resolution des UN-Sicherheitsrates zu Syrien geben wird. Bisher wurde dies von den syrischen Verbündeten China und Russland verhindert. „Es ist sehr positiv, dass Länder, die bisher eine Resolution blockiert haben, sich jetzt bewegen“, sagte Leon im Gespräch in Berlin mit Hinblick darauf, dass Moskau diese Woche einen eigen-



Bernardino Leon

„hoffnungslos“ sei. Nützlich sei nun stärkere Unterstützung aus der arabischen Welt. Die Initiative der Arabischen Liga, die im Rahmen eines „Friedensplans“ am Donnerstag die ersten Beobachter nach Syrien schicken will, begrüßte Leon. Die syrische Auslandsoption kritisierte dies als Manöver Assads, um Zeit zu gewinnen. Leon erinnert daran, dass es auch im Falle Libyens gedauert habe, bis ein internationaler Konsens gefunden worden sei. an

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Nueue Zuercher Zeitung (Suisse / Switzerland)

Jagd auf Deserteure

Gewalteskalation vor Beobachtermission in Syrien

Im Norden Syriens sollen bei der Jagd von Regierungstruppen auf Deserteure über 200 Personen getötet worden sein. Die Opposition hat die Uno zum Einschreiten aufgerufen.

Jürg Bischoff, Beirut

Vor dem Eintreffen der ersten Beobachter der Arabischen Liga ist in Syrien die Gewalt in grossem Ausmass eskaliert. Laut oppositionellen Gruppen sind seit Montag über 250 Personen getötet worden, unter ihnen Dutzende von Soldaten. Der oppositionelle Syrische Nationalrat hat am Mittwoch die Arabische Liga und den Uno-Sicherheitsrat aufgerufen, angesichts des «schrecklichen Massakers» die von der Gewalt betroffenen Gebiete zu Schutzzonen zu erklären.

Kampf gegen Rebellen

Besonders betroffen ist ein Berggebiet in der nördlichen Provinz Idlib, Jabal az-Zawiyeh. Dort scheinen Hunderte von Soldaten zusammengeströmt zu sein, die aus der Armee desertiert sind, um nicht an der Repression gegen die Bevölkerung teilzunehmen. Das unwegsame Gelände, die Nähe zur türkischen Grenze und eine sympathisierende Bevölkerung machen das Gebiet zu einem idealen Ort, um aus den Deserteuren eine Rebellentruppe zu formen. Am

Montag und Dienstag sind regierungstreue Einheiten offenbar unter massivem Waffeneinsatz eingeschritten, um die Gegend unter Kontrolle zu bringen. Unklar ist, wie viele unter den Opfern Regierungssoldaten, Deserteure oder Zivilisten sind.

Oppositionelle Quellen meldeten auch Gewalteinsetze gegen Demonstranten im Midan-Viertel von Damaskus und Razzien mit zahlreichen Festnahmen in der Peripherie der Hauptstadt sowie in zwei Orten der südlichen Provinz Daraa. Dort sollen am Dienstag 14 regierungstreue Soldaten bei einem Überfall von Rebellen ums Leben gekommen sein. Die offiziellen Medien meldeten den Tod von 10 Soldaten in Idlib und Homs und die Entführung von 8 ausländischen Technikern, die in einem Kraftwerk bei Homs arbeiten. Laut iranischen Medien sind 5 von ihnen Iraner.

Sudanesischer Chefbeobachter

Der Gedanke liegt nahe, dass die Sicherheitskräfte in einer letzten Offensive vor dem Eintreffen der Beobachter der Arabischen Liga die Aufständischen so weit wie möglich zurückzudrängen versuchen. Eine Vorbereitungsgruppe der Liga soll am Donnerstag in Damaskus eintreffen, bis Ende Jahr sollen 500 Beobachter vor Ort sein. Zum Chef der Beobachtermission wurde der sudanesische General Mohammed Ahmed ad-Dabi ernannt, was die Opposition wegen der guten Beziehungen des Sudans zum Asad-Regime kritisierte.

Libero (Italie / Italy)

Colpo di mano degli oppositori di Assad Stavolta gli ostaggi sono iraniani: 5 rapiti in Siria

■ ■ ■ SIMONA VERRAZZO

■ ■ ■ In Siria la situazione è talmente caotica da non essere più sicura neppure per gli iraniani, sebbene il regime di Teheran sia da sempre il miglior alleato del tiranno Bashar al-Assad. Ieri otto tecnici che lavoravano a una centrale elettrica, tra cui cinque ingegneri iraniani, sono stati rapiti da un gruppo di uomini armati nella città di Homs, uno dei centri della protesta anti-Assad. La notizia è stata confermata dall'ambasciata di Teheran a Damasco. Il loro sequestro potrebbe essere usato dai movimenti dell'opposi-

zione per fare pressione sulla Repubblica degli ayatollah per convincere il regime siriano a fermare le stragi di civili.

Negli ultimi due giorni ci sono stati oltre 250 morti. Oggi sono attesi gli ispettori della Lega Araba e ieri il portavoce della Casa Bianca, Jay Carney, ha minacciato nuove sanzioni se non verrà rispettata la road map dell'organizzazione panaraba.

E mentre la diplomazia arranca (la Francia sta facendo pressioni sulla Russia perché non ostacoli una risoluzione al Consiglio di sicurezza dell'Onu), il Consiglio nazionale siriano (Cns), che

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad abbraccia Assad

raggruppa ad Ankara i principali movimenti impegnati nella lotta contro Assad, chiede alle Nazioni Unite di creare delle «zone sicure sotto la protezione internazionale».

Intanto si allargano le file dei disertori che stanno facendo perdere il controllo delle Forze armate al raïs di Damasco. Secondo diverse fonti di intelligence occidentali citate dal quotidiano israeliano *Haaretz*, sarebbero circa 10.000 i soldati che hanno abbandonato le file dell'eser-

El Mundo (Espagne / Spain)

Siria masacra el 'territorio liberado'

- Asad ataca los dos principales bastiones del Ejército Libre de Siria en la zona rebelde
- Más de 100 muertos en un día en una de las peores ofensivas desde el inicio de la revuelta



las víctimas nunca habían expreso- do la desera.

Sin embargo, la última ofensiva contra esta región noroeste que volvió recientemente más periódica podría haberse convertido en uno de los operativos más arcañados del ejército oficialista, según denuncian ayer los opositores sirios, que hablan de más de 200 muertos desde el lunes.

Los ataques de Jabal Zawiyá se justifican de ser los primeros que hablan establecido un territorio liberado donde no existe presencia alguna de los uniformados leales a Asad. Sin embargo, su control sobre la zona era más virtual que real, dada su carencia de armamento, algo que ha quedado reflejado en sus últimos objetivos.

Según Wafaa Tarif, un conocido portavoz de la oposición siria que reside en el Líbano, un año el martes murieron 163 disidentes y 97 integrantes del ejército oficialista, además de nueve civiles, en lo que podría considerarse uno de los emboscamientos más sangrientos en la revuelta que se inició en marzo.

Tarif contó que en Jabal Zawiyá se podían haber concentrado cerca de 3.000 combatientes opositores al régimen, aunque los propios responsables del FLS exigieron a su jefe diario que sus fuerzas no superaran los 1.500.

El relato de los activistas indica que los principales emboscamientos se registraron en las localidades de Khar Ubeidi y Karam Salira, precisamente los dos principales bastiones del FLS en la zona rebelde. Allí se concentraban decenas de hombres y la segunda aldea oficialista como su capital de facto.

El Observatorio Sirio para los Derechos Humanos (OSDH) aseguró que junto a los emboscamientos también fueron atacados 111 civiles, muchos de ellos en un único incidente en el que decenas de ellos quedaron atrapados en una mansión cercana a Khar Ubeidi y fueron atacados con artillería y todo clase de armamento pesado. «Por una masacre organizada. Las tropas rodearon a la gente y después los mataron», aseguró Rami Abdel-Rahman, del OSDH.

Preparado por Al Yusra, uno de los escuadras, Alaa al Din al Yusuf, explicó que los cadáveres quedaron tirados en la calles y en las plazas. Y añadió: «No nos dejaron entrar a ninguno. Algunos quedaron irremediables, fueron quemados y otros decapitados con los mismos ataques. Tenemos mucho miedo porque la zona puede ser atacada de nuevo».



Leales al tirano. Píctica del presidente sirio, Bashar Asad, volvieron a salir ayer a las calles de Damasco para mostrarle su apoyo. Hombres, mujeres y también niños como el de la fotografía, que hace un gesto de saludo militar delante de una estatua de un soldado en la plaza Umayyad de la capital.

Como en el Consejo Nacional Sirio exigieron una reunión de urgencia del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU mientras que los rebeldes revolucionarios de Homs, una ciudad sometida a un continuo asedio, rechazaban que desde que Siria abrió

la iniciativa árabe [el lunes], el régimen asadita de Asad ha cometido las peores masacras.

Damasco, sin embargo, ha replicado acusando a la oposición de querer abusar la misión de observadores de la Liga Árabe y de presionar

para que se organice una intervención militar extranjera al estilo libanés, en palabras del portavoz arabe del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Most Madhat: «No dejem de buscar una intervención extranjera en vez de aceptar la petición de diálogo».

FRANCIA CONDENA

«la matanza»

Los ministros de Exteriores olvidarán la última vez que el ejército sirio entró en Jabal Zawiyá en septiembre. Yusuf afirma que su hermano Mohamed al Harasi, un simple profesor, fue ejecutado y su cadáver fue hallado tirado en un callejón con los brazos atados a la espalda.

Mohamed Khaddi asegura que a uno de los víctimas, Saïd Dachsenti, le colocaron en un cajón de madera y le prendieron fuego. «No murió de las quemaduras, así que lo remataron», explica. A un sirio, el hermano de Saïd, lo sacaron a un vehículo y lo asesinaron por el villorio hasta desollarlo vivo. «La madre de ambos se pasó dos días llorando frente a las rampas y después se murió de un ataque al corazón», añade Khaddi.

Desde que en junio el Ejército Libre de Siria (ELS) se hizo con el

Francia condena «la matanza»

Ya ideó la lucha contra la represión en Libia a manos del depuesto conde Gadafi y ahora vuelve a alzar la voz contra la violencia conquistada por el presidente Bashar Asad en Siria. París calificó ayer de «matanza sin precedentes» la masacre de más de un centenar de civiles en la provincia de Idlib, al norte del país, a cargo de las fuerzas leales a Damasco. El portavoz de Asad en Damasco, Bassem Yalmon, explicó el fin de «la espiral de masetas» en el país y criticó la pasividad de la comunidad internacional. «La situación es muy grave y hay que responder», añadió Yalmon. En este sentido, el diplomático pidió a Rusia que acelere las negociaciones para que el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU apruebe una resolución que exija el fin de la represión. La semana pasada Moscú, que se negó a apoyar la condena, presentó una iniciativa en la que pedía a Damasco el cese de la violencia, aun que ésta fue calificada de ineficaz por la ONU / RAQUEL VILLALBA

control del área montañosa localizada en las tres localidades de la ciudad de Idlib -no lejos de la frontera con Turquía-, las fuerzas leales al presidente Bashar Asad con año habían realizado incursiones puntuales de dos o tres jornadas y

El País (Espagne / Spain)

El régimen sirio mata a 200 opositores en apenas dos días

Los observadores de la Liga Árabe se disponen a iniciar su misión

ENRIC GONZÁLEZ
Jerusalén

Bachar el Asad parece haber decidido eliminar al mayor número posible de opositores antes de la llegada a Siria, hoy o mañana, de los primeros observadores de la Liga Árabe.

La violencia gubernamental ha alcanzado el máximo nivel desde el inicio de la revuelta, en marzo, y los portavoces de la oposición al régimen aseguran que en las últimas 48 horas se han registrado matanzas en varios puntos del país, con el resultado de unas 200 personas muertas, entre ellas unos 60 desertores y 14 soldados del Ejército víctimas de una emboscada cerca de Homs.

El plan de pacificación propuesto por la Liga Árabe y oficialmente aceptado, tras muchas dudas, por el Gobierno sirio incluye, además de la presencia de observadores, el regreso de las tropas a sus cuarteles y el inicio de un proceso de diálogo entre la dictadura y sus enemigos.

Burhan Ghalioun, presidente del Consejo Nacional de Transición que aglutina a las fuerzas opositoras, afirma que Bachar el Asad está lanzando las operaciones represivas más duras hasta la fecha. Ghalioun duda de que el régimen tenga realmente la intención de aplicar el plan de pacificación, porque una retirada de las tropas supondría de forma casi automática dejar gran parte del país bajo control de la oposición.

El Ejército sirio se emplea con especial dureza en la región noroccidental de Idlib. Fuentes de la oposición aseguran que al menos 60 desertores integrados en el llamado Ejército de la Siria Libre fue-

ron abatidos el lunes por fuego de ametralladora en Rafr Oued, donde prosiguen los combates.

El Gobierno de Bachar el Asad impide que la prensa extranjera trabaje en el país, por lo que resulta imposible verificar esas informaciones. La oposición dice también que el Ejército ha irrumpido en numerosos hospitales para secuestrar a activistas heridos y trasladarlos a bases militares, con el fin de que no puedan testificar ante los observadores de la Liga Árabe.

Los servicios de espionaje israelíes, viejos enemigos de Bachar el Asad, estiman que unos 10.000 soldados han desertado ya del Ejército para sumarse a la oposición, aunque la cúpula militar y los oficiales de alta graduación se mantienen fieles al régimen. El Gobierno sirio asegura que se limita a combatir a bandas armadas financiadas desde el exterior y ha aprobado una ley

El Ejército se cuestra a activistas para evitar que hablen, según la oposición

que impone la pena de muerte sobre cualquier persona que participe, de forma directa o indirecta, en el tráfico clandestino de armas.

La agencia oficial de noticias Sana ha informado de que las fuerzas navales y aéreas sirias desarrollan maniobras con fuego real, mientras las tropas de tierra combaten contra la oposición en todo el país, para poder hacer frente "a cualquier agresión contra la patria".

LA REPRESIÓN EN SIRIA: A LA ESPERA DE LA RESPUESTA INTERNACIONAL



Opiniones
siria, acusam
de Damasco al
quien se de un
proprietario

París denuncia una matanza «sin precedentes»

La Razon

Desde París, el Ministerio francés de Exteriores denunció ayer que el martes tuvo lugar en Siria un atentado de una amplitud sin precedentes, que causó más de cien muertos, y urges a Rusia a que soclore el rimo de las negociaciones en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU. Debe prometerse todo en marcha para cesar esta espiral de muerte que Assad aplica cada día sobre su pueblo, dijo un portavoz de ese departamento, según el cual, en este contexto, el ministro francés llama a que se incrementen todavía más la movilización de la comunidad internacional. Para París, es imprescindible que Damasco acepte el despliegue inmediato de observadores, de



También el embajador de Alemania ante la ONU, Peter Wittig, pidió ayer a Assad que, como país con la presidencia de turno del Consejo de Seguridad y redactor del último proyecto de resolución sobre Siria, acelere las negociaciones. «Tenemos que ser muy claros, la situación es dramática y el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU no tiene tiempo que perder», aseguró el embajador alemán.

Por su parte, Washington insistió en que Bashar Al Assad debe abjurar el poder, ya que sus Fuerzas de Seguridad han seguido matando a civiles pese al acuerdo firmado esta semana con la Liga Árabe, si bien insistió a todas las partes a que pongan fin a la violencia, reconociendo que también han muerto efectivos de las fuerzas del orden. «El Líbano sigue creyendo que el único camino para llevar el cambio que el pueblo sirio merece es que Assad deje el poder», señaló el portavoz de la Casa Blanca, Jay Carney, en un comunicado, subrayando que las políticas de régimen ano tienen credibilidad, puesto que a ellos suceden atrocidades deplorables.

La oposición pide ayuda urgente

El Observatorio Sirio exige protección para la población civil

Colita Maza

Los asesinatos de los últimos días, considera que la misión «carece de recursos» y que tan sólo se va a ver «la punta del iceberg». «Simplemente se van a reunir unos cuantos para analizar qué es lo que se va a hacer el domingo, cuando llegue el resto del equipo de 30 personas». «Realmente intentan cambiar así las cosas? Hay más de 14.000 pueblos que están sufriendo, 30 personas es una cifra ridícula», asegura Mouad Azzawi a LA RAZÓN. El activista, especializado en patología, considera que la comunidad internacional se ha centrado únicamente en Líbano y ha dejado a Damasco completamente olvidada.

Por otra parte, Assad podría estar negociando una salida al

EL DITO

20 observadores

de la Liga Árabe llegan hoy a Damasco para supervisar la situación.

Según el Observatorio Sirio, el dirigente del Consejo Nacional Sirio, principal organismo opositor, dijo países europeos estarían interviniendo en las gestiones. De momento, son rumores. Mientras, en las calles sólo se ven ríos de sangre. «Hay dos puntos básicos para empezar a actuar: Primero, se tiene que abandonar de comida y medicamentos a todos los pueblos que están muriendo como consecuencia

de los ataques. Segundo, hay que crear una franja en la frontera con Turquía que garantice la seguridad de la población civil. Hay muchos niños y mujeres inocentes que están muriendo y hay que hacer lo mismo que se hizo en Libia», matiza. «En Libia, la comunidad internacional actuó rápidamente. Siria lleva padeciendo este inferno ya nueve meses», recalca.

Según los Comités de Coordinación Local, al menos 15 personas murieron ayer en distintas provincias del país como Homs e Idlib, principales bastiones de la oposición. El martes, otros 111 civiles perdieron la vida en la localidad de Kafr Bida, en Idlib, durante los bombardeos.

ABC (Espagne / Spain)

El régimen sirio niega asistencia a los heridos en las manifestaciones y asesina a los doctores que se la prestan

La guerra de Assad contra los médicos

DANIEL IRIARTE
ANTAKYA (FRONTERA TURCO-SIRIA)

«Todos me llaman "doctor", pero en realidad no soy médico», pero en nuestro interlocutor. «Pero como no tenemos doctores suficientes, soy el que se encarga de los heridos en combate, «explica quien en realidad es un oficial de rango intermedio en la guerrilla del Ejército Sirio Libre.

La ausencia de cuidados médicos es uno de los problemas más graves que afrontan los opositores. Amnistía Internacional y otras organizaciones de derechos humanos han documentado la denegación de auxilio a heridos —en hospitales y en sus propias casas— y las torturas a pacientes. Y los manifestantes cuentan historias aún más siniestras, según las cuales las fuerzas de seguridad han obligado a los médicos a inyectar aire a algunos heridos para provocarles la muerte.

Cada día llega con nuevas bajas, y los opositores, por pura necesidad, han establecido su propia red de hospitales clandestinos. «Los hay en todas las ciudades donde hay protestas», asegura a ABC el falso doctor. En Yebel Zawi solo queda uno, que no se nos ha permitido visitar, por motivos de seguridad. El otro, nos cuentan, fue arrasado por el «Amin Dawla» (la Seguridad del Estado).

Tiroteado

Porque estas prácticas son combatidas a sangre y fuego por el régimen. Hace pocos días, la Policía secreta identificó al joven doctor Brahim Osman como uno de los que trabajaban en un hospital secreto de Damasco. Osman intentó escapar a Turquía. El «Amin Dawla» le siguió el rastro por medio país, hasta que hace cuatro días lo abatieron a tiros cuando intentaba cruzar la frontera. Apenas había cumplido la treintena.

En la zona rebelde existe un único hospital «oficial», en la localidad de Kan Safra, que no ha dejado de funcionar a pesar de la situación. Las carencias de materiales son evidentes. Cuando es posible, los heridos más graves son evacuados a Turquía, en furgonetas que hacen las veces de ambulancias. Los conductores van armados, y en la parte trasera hay siempre al menos un rebelde con una ametralladora, como ha podido constatar ABC.

«Cuando quieren evacuar un heri-

do nos llaman, y enviamos una ambulancia hasta la frontera para traerlos a los hospitales», explica un activista en la ciudad turca de Antakya. Allí, Abu Abdu se recupera de un disparo en la espina dorsal. «Estaba en una manifestación en Hama, llevando una pancarta, y de repente la "shabbiha" (las milicias armadas leales a Assad) nos ametrallaron», nos cuenta. «Me llevaron a un hospital clandestino, pero no pudieron extraer la bala que tenía en la columna. Cuando me desperté estaba aquí, en Turquía. Sé que me trajeron los del Ejército Sirio Libre, pero no tengo ni idea de cómo lo hicieron», asegura.

Abu Abdu ha comenzado a recuperar la movilidad en ambas piernas.



Un opositor sirio es tratado en un hospital turco

DANIEL IRIARTE

Pero lo peor, dice, es que no ha podido contactar con su familia. «Mis parientes no saben que me evacuaron y que estoy vivo», explica, angustiado.

Pero el ejército sirio se esfuerza en cerrar la ruta de escape. «Una vez el ejército interceptó una evacuación, y

el herido intentó cruzar solo. Le oímos gritar al otro lado, pero no podíamos hacer nada», nos dice el activista, afectado por el recuerdo: «Estuvimos así varias horas, oyendo sus gritos en la oscuridad. Luego, al rato, la voz se apagó».

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Matanza en el bastión rebelde

D. IRIARTE

Los bastiones rebeldes de Yebel Zawi volvieron a ser castigados ayer por el ejército sirio, que provocó una nueva matanza en la aldea de Kfar Uuaid, establecida como línea del frente.

De acuerdo con algunos testigos, las fuerzas armadas sirias rodearon la localidad y la bombardearon con tanques, artillería y fuego de ametralladoras durante varias horas, matando a todos aquellos habitantes que no habían conseguido escapar del cerco previamente.

«Ha sido una masacre organizada», aseguró Rami Abdul Rahman, del Observatorio Sirio de Derechos Humanos, que afirma que el número de víctimas asciende a ciento diez. Cientos de civiles se han desplazado al valle de Budnaya, donde se encuentran rodeados por el Ejército.

Al menos otra veintena de personas (seis desertores, un civil y quince soldados regulares) murieron en la ciudad sureña de Deraa, mientras que otras quince fueron abatidas en Hama, Homs e Idlib.

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)

El ejército sirio asesina a 110 civiles desarmados y dispara la violencia

BEIRUT Agencias

El ejército sirio es el gran baluarte del presidente Bashar el Assad y anteayer volvió a demostrarlo en un pueblo del norte del país donde sometió a una emboscada y ametralló a más de cien personas indefensas. El balance de muertos desde el lunes en todo el país supera los 200. El Consejo Nacional Sirio (CNS), que reúne a los principales grupos que luchan contra Bashar, habla de "masacres brutales y genocidio".

"Fue una masacre organizada", señaló Rami Abdul Rahman, del Observatorio Sirio de Derechos Humanos desde Londres. "El ejército rodeó a la gente y luego la mató. Se trató de un crimen

contra la humanidad". Ocurrió el martes por la mañana en el valle de Budnaya, cerca del pueblo de Kafruaid, a 45 kilómetros de la frontera turca, en la provincia de Idlib, una zona montañosa donde los rebeldes habían logrado establecer varias posiciones. El valle fue una ratonera que el ejército machacó con artillería pesada y ametralladoras. Los supervivientes contaron 110 cadáveres. Ninguno de estos muertos, según los rebeldes, estaba armado. Todos eran civiles. Los militares desertores -fuentes opositoras en Beirut aseguran que hay más de 10.000 en toda Siria- habían huido a las montañas Zauyi. La zona estaba anoche desconectada del exterior, sin luz, ni teléfonos

ni conexiones a internet, presuntamente sometida a la represión de los militares.

La masacre ha precedido la llegada, prevista para hoy, de los primeros observadores de la Liga Árabe, que han de verificar si, como se acordó, el ejército se ha retirado a sus cuarteles, la violencia ha cesado y los presos políticos han sido liberados. Aunque Damasco ha aceptado estas condiciones, está claro que no ha cumplido con ninguna, como tampoco ha establecido un diálogo con la oposición ni ha abierto las fronteras a las ONGs y la prensa internacional.

Es muy posible, aun así, que los observadores vean un país normal. En teoría, podrían mover-

Diário de Noticias (Portugal)

Assad “não merece dirigir a Síria”

REPRESSÃO EUA acusam o regime de Bashar al-Assad de continuar a violência sobre civis e ameaçam aplicar mais sanções ao país

O porta-voz da Casa Branca, Jay Carney, classificou ontem como “actos revoltantes e deploráveis” as acções levadas a cabo pelo regime sírio com o objectivo de reprimir a revolta popular contra Bashar al-Assad acrescentando que este “não merece dirigir a Síria”. Em comunicado, Carney criticou a postura da Síria após a assinatura do acordo da Liga Árabe para o fim da violência, o qual foi gravemente violado. Os EUA dizem-se “profundamente perturbados” com as informações que vão no sentido de o regime continuar a “matar inúmeros civis e desertores do Exército”. O porta-voz da

Casa Branca exortou à aplicação imediata da totalidade do plano árabe alegando que “é hora de acabar com o sofrimento e a morte”. Os Estados que ainda apoiam a Síria foram também visados nas declarações de Carney, tendo sido incentivados a alertar Damasco, que caso não cumpra o plano Árabe verá a comunidade internacional tomar medidas adicionais para pressionar o regime. O Conselho Nacional Sírio, órgão que congrega a maior parte da oposição, pediu ontem a realização de reuniões de urgência do Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas e da Liga Árabe. Jihad Makdissi, porta-voz do ministro sírio dos Negócios Estrangeiros, afirmou que “desde que a Síria assinou o protocolo está plenamente empenhada em facilitar a missão da Liga Árabe para vir e ver a realidade da crise”. Desde o início dos confrontos, em meados de Março, mais de cinco mil pessoas morreram.



REUTERS

Publico (Portugal)

Oposição síria denuncia massacres e pede “protecção para os civis”

Mundo está preparado para “tomar medidas adicionais” contra o regime, avisam os Estados Unidos. Mais de 200 pessoas foram mortas em 48 horas

Sofia Lorenna

Em Novembro, quando a Liga Árabe propôs pela primeira vez à Síria uma iniciativa de paz com o envio de observadores e o regime sugeriu que poderia aceitar esse plano, os opositores avisaram que Damasco só estava a ganhar tempo. Agora que a Síria assinou mesmo o acordo, na segunda-feira, a violência ainda não parou de aumentar: as forças de segurança podem estar a “despachar assuntos inabitados”, diz o correspondente da BBC em Beirute, Jim Muir.

O principal alvo tem sido a província de Idlib, no Noroeste do país, onde de segundo diferentes grupos de activistas mais de 200 pessoas, incluindo muitos civis, foram mortas entre terça e quarta-feira. A ofensiva do regime na região começou ainda na segunda-feira, dia em que as autoridades marcharam pelo menos 60 desertores do primeiro grupo de observadores, liderado por Samir Seif al-Yazal, adjunto do secretário-geral da Liga Árabe.

No acordo que assinou no Cairo, o

regime sírio comprometeu-se formalmente a receber observadores no âmbito de um protocolo de “protecção dos civis”, pôr fim a todas as formas de violência, retirar as tropas das ruas e libertar os detidos - dezenas de milhares presos ao longo de nove meses de repressão que, segundo a ONU, já tinham ultrapassado as 5000 vítimas mortais no início de Dezembro.

Para a oposição, é tarde para qualquer acordo que envolva o regime. Depois dos últimos “massacres terríveis” conduzidos pelas forças de segurança, o Conselho Nacional Sírio pede uma “acção imediata” da Liga Árabe e do Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas. O CNS quer a “condenação firme” do regime, mas também um debate urgente sobre a criação de “zonas de segurança” que devem ser colocadas sob protecção internacional.

Idlib, Homs e Jabal al-Zawiyah devem ser declaradas de imediato áreas de desastre, de forma a garantir-se o acesso do Comité Internacional da Cruz Vermelha e de outras organizações de assistência às populações, defende ainda o grupo que reúne

diferentes sensibilidades de opositores a Bashar al-Assad. Muitas das cidades e vilas nestas regiões estão sem electricidade, sem água e sem comunicações.

Rami Jarrah, um opositor que fugiu de Damasco para o Cairo em Outubro, nunca acreditou que o regime tentasse “tirar as tropas da rua” - o fez, diz Jarrah e outros activistas, arrisca-se a perder o controlo de províncias inteiras.

Deserção em massa

“O que eles vão tentar fazer é limpar determinadas áreas, onde levarão os observadores, ao mesmo tempo que se mantêm noutras”, defende ao PÚBLICO, Jarrah considera que o regime vai cair quando for concretizada uma “deserção em massa” do Exército. Sempre que essa possibilidade se antecipa, pela saída de algum oficial influente ou por uma deserção em grupo, o regime tenta de imediato estancar uma eventual vaga. Matando dezenas de desertores, como fez em Idlib.

Os opositores não são os únicos a

desconhar das intenções de Damasco. “Há meses que assistimos a como Assad não cumpre os compromissos que assume perante o seu povo e só aumenta os esforços para ganhar tempo diante da comunidade internacional”, disse o porta-voz do Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros francês, Bernard Valero.

Os Estados Unidos disseram-se oprimidos “profundamente perturbados” com os relatos de assassinatos indiscriminados. O porta-voz da Casa Branca, Jay Carney, falou em violação do compromisso com a Liga e pediu “aos países apodantes que restam à Síria para avisarem Damasco que, se a iniciativa da Liga Árabe não for completamente concretizada, a comunidade internacional vai tomar medidas adicionais para pressionar o regime a pôr fim à campanha de violência”.

“O objectivo do acordo era travar imediatamente o banho de sangue”, afirmou o chefe da diplomacia turca, Ahmet Davutoglu. “Mas mesmo depois de a Síria ter assinado o protocolo com a Liga Árabe muitas pessoas foram mortas. É inaceitável”.

On the edge of Damascus, Syria

Only a few miles from the city centre, a town under siege defies the regime's brutality

By Christian Starvo in Damascus

MR. STARVO reached out of the hood of his dark, empty street. The electricity was out, the phone signals cut and several streetlights had stopped working. He was in a town on the edge of Damascus, a town that has been under siege since the regime's brutal crackdown on the protests.

The town is in the hills, an outcrop of limestone that has been under siege since the regime's brutal crackdown on the protests. The town is in the hills, an outcrop of limestone that has been under siege since the regime's brutal crackdown on the protests.

At the bottom of the street, there had been a few people, but they had all fled. The town is in the hills, an outcrop of limestone that has been under siege since the regime's brutal crackdown on the protests.

The military was on edge, preparing for a possible assault. The town is in the hills, an outcrop of limestone that has been under siege since the regime's brutal crackdown on the protests.

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Protesters in Damascus, Syria, demand the end of the Assad regime's rule.



A young man in a military uniform, likely a member of the Syrian army, is seen in a close-up shot.

The soldiers broke down the door. My wife was screaming. They probably don't care if you're dead.

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Jane's Defence Weekly (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Assad's enemy: the FSA in profile

MOHAMMED NAJIB *JDW Correspondent*
Ramallah

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels, established on 29 July from defecting units from the Syrian armed forces to fight the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, now consists of 20,000 personnel organised into 23 light battalions, *Jane's* has learnt.

The FSA was merged with the Syrian Free Officers Movement on 23 September, forming the largest military opposition the Assad regime has faced.

According to Mustafa Alani, a military analyst at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai, the Syrian military and security forces can be classified into two categories: "ones that are tasked with protecting the regime and which depend on loyalists more than professionals, such as the Republican Guards and some special battalions built on factional, political and regional loyalties, and which so far have not witnessed any defections; and the poorly funded armed forces tasked with defending the country, which is where the defections are taking place".

Speaking to *Jane's* on 8 December, Alani said he believes the formation of the FSA aims to encourage defection within both of these categories.

The FSA, Alani noted, is in need of a safe haven to build up its arms inventory and training capabilities, yet there is no sign that this could take place soon unless Turkey creates a buffer zone alongside its border with Syria.

The FSA has recently formed an interim military council headed by the dissident Colonel Riad al-Assad and comprising another nine colonels. Meanwhile, the 23 battalions are still incomplete in terms of personnel, except in the city of Aleppo, where the FSA has managed to form a brigade consisting of eight battalions. In other cities some battalions have 500 personnel, while others are just 50 strong, an Arab security source told *Jane's*.

The FSA still has its headquarters in a camp in southern Turkey near the Syrian border, while a field command operates inside Syria

- The Free Syrian Army, now 20,000 strong, is the most significant opposition the Assad regime has confronted
- The FSA rebels have called for a no-fly zone and two buffer zones to help facilitate their fight against Assad's loyalists, but these seem unlikely at least over the short term

headed by Colonel Ahmed Hijazi, who is considered the chief of staff, and Colonel Malik al-Kurdi, the deputy head of the interim military council. Inside Syria the FSA is adopting hit-and-run tactics, carrying out actions such as ambushes, limited clashes with Assad regime forces, assassinations and raids on pro-Assad security facilities and convoys.

"The FSA cannot achieve significant progress without the imposition of a no-fly zone as happened in Libya; such operations could weaken Assad's forces' C4I capabilities," the Arab security source told *Jane's*.

Meanwhile, the hosting of FSA personnel by the Syrian people is seen as a sign of the growing backing for this army among the population and support for future operations in terms of logistics, communications and shelter.

A major general with the Palestinian Authority (PA) told *Jane's* that "right now there has been no significant defection among the Syrian armed forces such as a tank battalion, infantry brigade, special forces unit, or even a senior commander above the rank of colonel".

He believes the FSA will be used as an umbrella organisation by the international community if a buffer zone is created in Syria where external fighters could join to the struggle against Assad loyalists.

"As long as the international punitive measures against Syria continue slowly and cautiously, then the FSA's chance to achieve a quick, significant result will be limited and questionable," said the PA general.

The FSA, which has adopted the motto 'We will vanquish or die', called for a no-fly zone and two internationally supported buffer zones in mid-November: one in the south alongside the Jordanian border and another in northern Syria along its border with Turkey.

"The participation of the FSA in the mass demonstrations against the Syrian regime could pull pro-Assad armed forces into killing more civilians, which could be enough to speed up the toppling of Assad's regime, and its presence will be an encouraging element for the creation of a no-fly zone in Syria," a senior Palestinian military intelligence officer told *Jane's* on 11 December.

However, there remains little Western appetite to become embroiled in another Middle Eastern conflict, especially one in such a politically complicated region where the fallout from any intervention could be significant and unpredictable: a situation that Assad seems happy to exploit.

Meanwhile, the Arab League has been more proactive than ever before in suspending Syria and approving sanctions, but it is unlikely to orchestrate military action. ■



Syrian Army officers carry the coffins of 17 personnel, reportedly killed in an ambush on 24 November, during their funeral procession in Homs province, Syria. The FSA's tactics up to now have largely been 'hit and run'.

PA Photos: 1441041

The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)

US warns Syria violence must end as France condemns 'massacre'

IRAN SAID yesterday that five of its technicians had been kidnapped in the Syrian city of Homs, according to the semi-official Mehr news agency.

"The five were kidnapped on Wednesday at 6.30am while heading to their work place," Mehr reported, quoting a statement from the Iranian embassy in Damascus. "We demand their immediate release," the embassy said.

Syria's state news agency, SANA, reported that eight engineers "of different nationalities" had disappeared after travelling by bus to work at a power plant in Homs province.

The Syrian government is under mounting international pressure to end its crackdown on a nine-month protest movement that has turned violent.

Kidnappings and killings based on religious identity are increasingly common in flashpoints such as Homs, sparking international and regional concern over sustained sectarian bloodshed in Syria.

Meanwhile Rami Abdulrahman

of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights put at 111 the number of civilians and activists killed on Tuesday. Syrian government forces surrounded them in the foothills of the Jabal al-Zawiyah region in Idlib province and unleashed two hours of bombardment and heavy gunfire.

Another 100 army deserters were either wounded or killed, making it the "bloodiest day of the Syrian revolution", Mr Abdulrahman said.

"There was a massacre of unprecedented scale in Syria on Tuesday," said French foreign ministry spokesman Bernard Valero. "It is urgent that the UN Security Council issues a firm resolution that calls for an end to the repression."

The US said it was deeply disturbed by reports of indiscriminate killing and warned Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, the violence must stop. Britain said it was shocked by the reports and urged Syria to "end immediately its brutal violence against civilians".



Violence must end, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad told

Events in Syria are hard to verify because authorities, who say they are fighting terrorists who have killed more than 1,100 soldiers and police, have banned most independent reporting. Tuesday's bloodshed brought the death toll reported by activists in the last 48 hours to more than 200.

The main opposition, the Syrian National Council, said "gruesome murders" were carried out, including the beheading of a local imam.

Réduire l'échelle du document

It demanded international to protect civilians.

The escalating death toll months of popular unrest led the spectre of civil war with the country's president trying to stamp out protesting troops and tanks, despite national sanctions imposed on him onto a reform path.

Idlib, a northwestern province bordering Turkey, has been a hotbed of protest during the revolt, inspired by uprisings across the Arab world this year, and has also seen increasing attacks by armed insurgents.

The Syrian Observatory said rebels had damaged or destroyed 17 military vehicles in Idlib since Sunday, while in the southern province of Deraa violence continued on Wednesday.

Tanks entered the town of Dael, the British-based group said, leading to clashes in which 15 security force members were killed. Six army defectors and a civilian also died and dozens of civilians were wounded, it said. - (Reuters)

New York Times / International Herald Tribune (USA)

A new spasm of killing by Syrian forces reported

CAIRO

BY KAREEM FAHIM

Syrian rights activists and opposition groups said Wednesday that forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad had killed more than 100 military defectors, civilians and anti-government activists over the past three days in northwestern Syria. If confirmed, the killings would constitute one of the worst spasms of violence in the nine-month-old uprising.

Word of the killings, which the activists and opposition groups said had taken place near the city of Idlib, close to the Turkish border, was reported a day before observers from the Arab League are to visit Syria for the first time to monitor pledges by Mr. Assad's government to withdraw its troops from besieged areas.

The Syrian government has not responded to reports of the killings, and it was impossible to corroborate them independently because of restrictions on for-

The killings near Idlib, reported by anti-government activists, opposition groups overseas and human rights groups, were based on telephone contacts with networks of informants inside Syria. Some were reached on satellite phones or Turkish cellphones.

The killings were said to have started Monday, when 60 to 70 soldiers who were trying to defect were gunned down by government troops outside a military barracks in the Jebel Zawiya area. On Tuesday, more than a hundred people were killed near the village of Kafr Oweid, according to an anti-government activist in Idlib.

On Wednesday, an unspecified number of civilians were killed or wounded in the village of Khan Sheikhoun, according to a 40-year-old anti-government activist in Idlib who gave his name as Abu Omar. "The army should kill all of us to stop the anti-Assad uprising," he said.

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Beirut, a New York Times employee from Damascus and Rick Gladstone from New York.



A funeral in Damascus on Wednesday for those reportedly killed by security forces.

eign press access in Syria, where, according to an estimate by the United Nations, more than 5,000 people have been killed since March. But in a statement, the secretary general of the Arab League, Nabil al-Araby, suggested the latest reports were credible by expressing concern about them and urging the Syrian government to "protect civilians."

The Obama administration, which has become increasingly critical of Mr. Assad and has urged him to leave power, also gave credence to the new reports of killings. In a statement, the White House said it was "deeply disturbed" by those reports. "While Syrian security forces have also taken casualties, the overwhelming majority of the violence and loss of life in Syria stems from the actions of the Assad regime, and we call on all parties to put an end to violence," the statement said.

Activists said the Syrian military forces, using helicopters, tanks and artillery, were continuing their assaults on Wednesday.

Egypt responds to Clinton

Egypt said Wednesday that it would not accept any interference in its internal affairs after Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton criticized the way Egyptian security forces dealt with female protesters, Reuters reported from Cairo.

In a speech in Washington on Monday, Mrs. Clinton said actions by Egyptian security forces showed "systematic degradation" of women that "disgraces the state," some of the strongest U.S. language directed at Egypt's new rulers.

Footage showed Egyptian soldiers beating protesters with clubs, often after they had fallen to the ground, in what activists described as a forcible attempt to clear a sit-in demanding a swifter transfer to civilian rule. Five days of clashes since Friday have left at least 13 dead and hundreds wounded.

"Egypt does not accept any interference in its internal affairs," the Egyptian foreign minister, Mohamed Kamel Amr, was quoted as saying by the state news agency.

Amr Rushdi, a spokesman for the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, said Egypt held frequent talks with other countries about its transition from military to civilian rule, "to clarify the reality on the ground and the obstacles facing the country during this transitional phase."

A video of Egyptian soldiers dragging a female protester on the ground by her black full-body veil, exposing her bra, then clubbing and kicking her, has provoked outrage. Thousands marched on Tahrir Square on Tuesday to condemn the attacks.

The Washington Post (USA)

100 Syrians killed, activists say

Heavily armed troops surrounded civilians in crackdown on uprising

BY BASSEM MROUE

HEBROT — As government troops advanced on a village in northwestern Syria, activists say the terrified residents fled into a valley for fear of being arrested or worse. What happened next, one of the activists said, was “an organized massacre.”

The troops surrounded the valley and unleashed a barrage of rockets, tank shells, bombs and gunfire in an hours-long assault, according to a human rights group and a witness, killing more than 100 people and leaving no survivors in one of the bloodiest days of a crackdown by President Bashar al-Assad’s government against a nine-month popular uprising.

The White House said it was “deeply disturbed” by Tuesday’s attack, France called it a “murderous spiral,” and the Arab League reminded the Assad regime of its responsibilities to protect civilians.

Members of Syria’s opposition said the bloodshed outside the village of Kfar Owaid, about 50 miles from the northern border with Turkey in Idlib province, showed Assad’s intent to intensify the crackdown on the uprising before Arab League observers arrive in the country Thursday. The death toll from two days of violence this week topped 100, including up to 70 army defectors killed near the city of Idlib, the activists said.

“It was an organized massacre,” said Rami Abdul-Rahman, head of the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. “The troops surrounded people, then killed them.”

Kfar Owaid is part of the rugged mountainous region of Jabal al-Zawiya, the scene of clashes between troops and army defectors, as well as weeks of anti-government protests.

One Kfar Owaid villager and activist said by telephone that scores of residents and activists had fled to the nearby Budaya Valley ahead of the advancing troops. He said the security forces had lists of names of those who organized massive protests recently in the village.



MEHMET ULGEN/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

A Syrian soldier flashes a victory sign during a rally Wednesday in Damascus, Syria. Arab League observers are to arrive Thursday.

Those who fled were surrounded by troops, said the activist, who identified himself only as Abu Rabihi for fear of government reprisal. The troops then opened fire with tanks, rockets, heavy machine guns and nail-filled bombs, he said.

He said 100 people were killed in the assault. Abdul-Rahman corroborated his account.

All of those in the valley were unarmed civilians and activists, with no armed military defectors among them, the Observatory said.

Syrian officials have not commented on the allegations, which could not be independently confirmed because Syria has banned most foreign journalists and places heavy restrictions on the work of local reporters.

The Obama administration re-

acted to the latest reports by renewing its call for Assad to step down, saying he “does not deserve to rule Syria.”

“The United States is deeply disturbed by credible reports that the Assad regime continues to indiscriminately kill scores of civilians and army defectors, while destroying homes and shops and arresting protesters without due process,” the White House said in a statement read by spokesman Jay Carney, warning that the international community could take more steps against Syria.

Despite the new violence, the Arab League appeared to be going ahead with its plans to send in its first delegation of monitors Thursday.

— Associated Press

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

Hundreds Are Killed As Syria Raids North

BY NOUR MALAS

Syrian military forces have killed hundreds of people in two days of tank and mortar shelling in northern Turkey, antigovernment activists reported, reversing dissident soldiers' recent bid to carve out a safe zone in towns near the border with Turkey.

Tanks sprayed anti-aircraft rounds through neighborhoods while machine gun-wielding troops stormed homes looking for activists, sending residents of at least three towns fleeing to orchards in Jabal Zawiya, a vast northwestern region in Syria's Idlib province, according to one resident who fled the area.

The commander of the Free Syrian Army, the largest grouping of defected Syrian soldiers, said he ordered his dissident troops to withdraw under what he called the worst crackdown in Syria's nine-month uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

Word of the attacks—described by residents of the area, activist groups and dissident soldiers—emerged in trickles, amid a communications blackout in the area that appeared to be Syria's worst since the government cut the Internet as protests peaked in the summer.

Activist reports of the death toll ranged from nearly 100 to 250 people killed over 48 hours through Wednesday, the harshest fighting in what residents called four days of attacks. France's government on Wednesday denounced an "unprecedented massacre" of 120 people on Tuesday alone.

The White House renewed calls for President Assad to leave power, saying his regime has "flagrantly violated" its commitment to end violence.

In a statement, White House press secretary Jay Carney urged Syria's "few remaining supporters" abroad to warn Damascus to implement the Arab League's plan to end the violence, or else "the international community will take addi-



tional steps to pressure the Assad regime to stop its crackdown."

An Arab League advance group is due in Syria by Thursday, to prepare for a monitoring mission that Syria's government has agreed to allow to inspect the country's violent zones and supervise steps to end the crackdown, including a withdrawal of military from cities and the release of political prisoners.

Jabal Zawiya, a stretch of land along the border with Turkey, has turned in recent weeks into a hotbed of fighting. Last week, dissident soldiers had seized control of a handful of towns in the area, according to Col. Riad As'ad, the commander of the largest dissident-soldier group, the Free Syrian Army.

The loosely organized group of defectors has mounted increasingly effective attacks in the past week, killing dozens of government soldiers, dissident soldiers say.

But Col. As'ad said the soldiers had since been driven out of the towns. On Wednesday, he said he had ordered the troops he commands to pull out that day from Jabal Zawiya under "the worst, harsh-

est, most inhumane attack" yet on his soldiers.

"We have never seen this scale of atrocity. It has been three days of massacres," Col. As'ad said by telephone from the Turkish border, where he is based.

"We are unable to fight. We cannot face these tanks," Col. As'ad said, sounding a much less confident tone than in previous weeks.

Dissident troops—which claim to defend civilians and protesters under attack, rather than launch offensive operations—have previously described their light weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades, as fairly effective in destroying tanks and allowing them to fight the army.

Information on the clashes inside Syria can't be independently verified. Most foreign media are still barred from the country. What accounts emerge are provided by witnesses and video footage.

These were scarce Wednesday, with only two videos from Jabal Zawiya posted online, compared to a daily average of dozens of videos from trouble spots. The first shows a crying baby and a young girl with bloodied faces appearing to be treated in a room. Another video tours a bare house piled with debris and soil, as the person shooting the footage says activists' homes are being "burned down."

"We are getting little information from these areas mainly because most communications are cut," an administrator for one of the Syrian uprising Facebook pages said. "It seems they are trying to track anyone who uses a cell phone."

Nouriddin al-Abdo, an activist who said he fled Jabal Zawiya on Monday, said electricity has been cut in most areas in Idlib province.

"The military, security forces, and [thugs] raided most of the villages and towns of Jabal Zawiya using dozens of heavy weapons like tanks and military trucks," the 22-year-old said over a satellite Internet connection.

The Washington Times (USA)

Syrian forces reportedly kill more than 200 in west

Deaths include women and children

By Anne Marie Sza
The Washington Times

Syrian security forces this week killed more than 200 people on the eve of a visit by international observers monitoring Syria's compliance with an Arab League peace plan, according to eyewitnesses, activists and opposition sources.

Most of the deaths, which included women and children, occurred in the western province of Hama, and the cities of Hama in the northwest and Idlib Zawiyeh near the border with Turkey, the various sources said Wednesday in phone and video-confirmed interviews.

Syrian troops rounded up and shot civilians, and looted and destroyed homes, in an apparent hunt for army defectors, the sources told The Washington Times.

"We are facing a death machine," said Abu Bara, a resident of Hama. "This regime is showing an mercy toward us."

He said Syrian troops had killed dozens of deserters. At least 30 people have been killed in Hama.

The latest bloodshed would make this week the deadliest in an uprising that the United Nations estimates has claimed more than 3,000 lives since it erupted in March.

The opposition Syrian National Council said the massacre included the beheading of a Muslim cleric in the village of Kafar Awad.

"What is happening in Idlib Zawiyeh is a genocide," Mustafa Azzam, chief coordinator with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said in a phone interview from London.

The Syrian government has imposed restrictions on journalists that make it difficult to independently verify eyewitness accounts.

However, in a sharply worded statement Wednesday, the White House said the reports of violence are credible.

Troops loyal to President Bashar Assad prevented ambulances from carrying the wounded to hospitals, and in the city of Aleppo, those who made it to hospitals had been arrested, the various sources said.

The crackdown was carried out on the eve of a visit by Arab League monitors to Syria on Thursday to ensure the regime's implementation of its peace plan.

Activists said that sending monitors now would be an exercise in futility.

"Ten or 20 observers will not stop the killing. They must not waste time with these humanitarian exercises and instead say to the regime: 'Stop this

ARAB PROTESTS AT A GLANCE

A summary of political unrest Wednesday in the Arab world.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| Syria Government forces arrested 111 students of a rebel group and 100 from 100-200 towns - more than 100 people - in a roundup of rebels and fighters that ended the U.S. protest to address | Egypt The Muslim Brotherhood leading 100 protesters in a rally in central Cairo. A 411-war activists' group, the Egyptian Islamic Front, said it was ready to join the protest to address | Yemen Heavy 200 troops arrested 111 protesters, took them to a detention center and put the army in control of the town. A 411-war activists' group, the Egyptian Islamic Front, said it was ready to join the protest to address | Libya The U.S. State Dept. said it had received reports of a one-time hit against a rebel leader in a day town. A 411-war activists' group, the Egyptian Islamic Front, said it was ready to join the protest to address | Bahrain The U.S. State Dept. said it had received reports of a one-time hit against a rebel leader in a day town. A 411-war activists' group, the Egyptian Islamic Front, said it was ready to join the protest to address |
|---|---|---|--|--|



Soldiers move down a street in Damascus, Syria, in this video scene shown on the Internet. A similar video arranged Monday from Syria that purported to show ongoing violence in the country. Sources could not be independently verified as showing the Syrian government brutalizing its people.

crackdown. Residents are facing an acute shortage of fuel, heating oil and medical supplies critical during the bitter winter months.

"The regime is applying collective punishment," said Mr. Azzam. The White House said in a statement that it is deeply disturbed by the reports of violence and added that the Assad regime "does not deserve to rule Syria."

Army deserters have taken shelter in Hama and Idlib Zawiyeh, where pro-Assad forces have used air power to strike targets. However, residents say they have not supplied arms to the men, who are carrying their own light weapons and are no match for the pro-Assad army. The defectors have formed a Free Syria Army, but so far it has largely been involved in protecting unarmed protesters from the government

killing now," said Mr. Azzam. The Syrian National Council called for emergency meetings of the Arab League to condemn the massacre and the U.S. Security Council to declare areas under attack as "safe zones."

The Syrian government published a new law this week that mandates the death penalty for anyone distributing weapons for the purpose of committing terrorist acts, according to the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency.

Turning the screw



Russia's was the final twist that compelled Bashar Al-Assad to sign the Arab League peace plan, writes **Graham Usher** at the United Nations

An image taken from amateur video shows men retrieving a body in a rubbish strewn street in Homs, last week (photo: AP)

On 19 December the Syrian government finally signed a protocol allowing observers to monitor an Arab League peace plan intended to end nine months of violence. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallim said the signature became possible after the League had agreed to "70 per cent" of the changes sought by Damascus to the plan.

It's not clear what these changes are. The observers — including governmental, non-governmental, media and security representatives — are free to visit protest hubs and flashpoints, though not "sensitive" military sites. They will have "security escorts" from the Syrian Interior Ministry but no other restrictions, said Al-Muallim.

And asked whether the signing meant Arab League sanctions on Syria would be lifted, League Secretary-General Nabil El-Arabi was succinct: "No," he said, because that would "require another meeting" of Arab League Ministers, and none was scheduled.

Though the deal remains murky, it seems Damascus ceded more ground than it gained — and for two reasons. One was an increasing shilliness by Arab Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia over Syria's stalling on a plan it had agreed to as far back as 2 November.

Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim warned that unless Syria allowed in the observers by 21 December he would ask the League to vote on referring the initiative to the Security Council. For Damascus — and that could be the first step on a long descent to an internationalisation of the crisis.

Second, Syria understood that, should the initiative reach the Council, it could no longer rely on a Russian veto. "Russia's position is clear. They advised us to sign the protocol and we implemented that," said Al-Muallim.

Moscow's position has been becoming clearer by the hour. On 15 December it submitted a draft Security Council resolution on the Syrian crisis. While riling out foreign intervention and noting a degree of equivalence between the violence of the regime and that of the opposition — the text evinced some of the harshest language yet used by Russia against its Arab ally.

It condemned "the disproportionate use of force by the Syrian authorities", and called on them to end the "suppression of those exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association". Above all, it called for implementation of the Arab League initiative, urging in particular Syrian compliance with the observer mission.

Russia's move surprised everyone, especially the European Union states on the Council. In October — with China — it had vetoed an EU resolution on the Council for using language hardly less harsh. And as recently as last week Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denounced the "West" as "immoral" for backing "armed groups" in Syria whose "goal is to instigate a humanitarian catastrophe and so to obtain a pretext for foreign intervention".

Why the move? Russia watchers suggest two reasons. First, Moscow was apparently stung by a briefing given to the Council

on 12 December by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navin Pillay. (It was based on a report which also inspired a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Syria on 19 December, and passed by 133 member states to 11 with 43 abstentions.)

Pillay said the Syrian regime was likely guilty of crimes against humanity through its brutal suppression of largely peaceful protesters that had not only left 5,000 people dead but evinced widespread and systematic abuse, including the murder, torture, rape and imprisonment of children. "Inaction by the international community", she noted, had "emboldened the Syrian authorities" by ensuring that the abusers went "unpunished": a clear swipe at the Russian and Chinese veto.

Second, the more Russia remained Syria's lonely protector at the UN, the more it saw its influence wane in the region. On 27 November the Arab League sanctioned and suspended Damascus for its refusal to abide by the peace plan, penalties Russia criticised. And Moscow could only watch passively as Turkey played host to the various Syrian opposition groups, and threatened intervention should the crisis in Syria degenerate into a full-blown civil war.

By drafting its own text Russia moved from spoiler to mediator while preventing the crisis in Syria degenerating into a full-blown civil war.

By drafting its own text Russia moved from spoiler to mediator becoming part of any new Council resolution. It was Moscow's "last chance to stake out some influence", said one analyst. "But influence means aligning with the Arab League and turn-

ing the screw on Damascus. On 16 December Syrian Vice President Farouk Al-Sharaa was called to Moscow "for a serious conversation", said a Kremlin source quoted by Russian news agencies. And "anyone who dares we are going to praise the vice-president or put him on the head is wrong."

That was 24 hours after Russia had circulated its draft resolution at the UN, and 24 hours before the Al-Assad regime signed a protocol it had spent the past six weeks filibustering.

The Arab League initiative not only requires 100 or so observers to enter most parts of Syria, including those like Deir al-Zour and Hama under de facto rebel control. It should also mean investigation of alleged massacres by Syrian forces, such as the killing of 70 army defectors in Idlib province on 19 December. And it is supposed to observe the immediate end to violence, the withdrawal of the Syrian army from towns and villages, the release of political prisoners, accelerated political reform, and national dialogue with the opposition.

Should Bashar Al-Assad's regime agree to any one of those pledges, the crisis may come again before the Security Council. And should action there become the Arab consensus, the Syrian dictator may learn what friends have learned before him: that while Russia may have permanent interests in Syria, it no longer has permanent friends.

Last chance for Syria?

After weeks of prevarication and delay, the Syrian government has agreed to Arab monitors verifying the Arab League initiative, writes **Bassel Oudat** in Damascus

Since the beginning of the uprising against the rule of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad nine months ago, Arab states and the international community have given the Syrian regime many opportunities to end the bloodshed and seek a political resolution to the crisis.

The first such initiative was sponsored by Turkey, which previously had strong ties with Syria, the Turkish government suggesting a number of means to end the crisis in the weeks after the uprising broke out, including through political and economic reforms.

However, the Turkish effort failed, and Syria asked its northern neighbour not to interfere in its domestic affairs. Ankara responded that Syrian affairs were also Turkish affairs, given the possibility of instability or violence spilling over the border into Turkey. The Syrian leadership's criticisms of the Ankara government damaged relations between the two countries, eventually leading to all-out hostility between them.

Qatar was the next country to enter the fray, with the country's Emir sending delegations for talks with the Syrian president. Once again, Syria responded with anger at what it called Qatar's interference, accusing the Gulf Arab state of being part of a conspiracy against the Syrian regime and encouraging the uprising in the country.

Meanwhile, the Syrian regime continued its security actions against the demonstrators in the country, ignoring Arab mediation efforts. As a result, the Syrian opposition stepped up appeals to the Arab League, asking the regional organisation to take action to end the attacks on civilians.

On 14 June, the Arab League condemned the crackdowns in Syria, calling on the Syrian regime to stop the violence and implement reforms corresponding to the demands of the demonstrators.

However, this call did not lead to action by the regime, and at the end of October Arab foreign ministers meeting under the auspices of the Arab League launched a further initiative to end the bloodshed in Syria.

This proposal called for the withdrawal of military and security forces from all Syrian cities and the release of tens of thousands of political detainees and of those arrested during the demonstrations. It also called for the launch of dialogue with the country's opposition.

The Syrian regime responded by saying that the Arab League proposals "are not worth the paper they are written on."

In mid-November, the Arab League suspended Syria's membership of the organisation, citing the country's failure to implement the Arab League initiative. The League threatened to impose sanctions on Syria if it did not sign up to

the agreement and to the deployment of Arab monitors.

In response, Damascus proposed amendments to the initiative, eventually demanding five extensions to the original schedule in order to consider it. At the end of November, the Arab League implemented the threatened economic and political sanctions against Syria.

Arab diplomatic sources emphasised throughout that the League had done everything possible to accommodate Syria and that it had agreed to 16 amendments proposed by Syria regarding the deployment of Arab monitors.

Meanwhile, Russia, a powerful ally of Syria since the Soviet era, has twice blocked UN Security Council resolutions condemning the Syrian regime. However, it seems that Russia too has been running out of patience with Damascus, since it proposed a draft resolution to the Security Council earlier this month that was initially welcomed by the European states.

The resolution was later described as a "manoeuvre" by France and the US because of its "unbalanced and hollow language" that condemned the violence by all sides and did not specifically pick out the violence used by the Syrian regime.

Following Syria's announcement that it would agree to Arab monitors being deployed in the country, diplomatic sources say that Damascus asked that the five members of the committee dealing with the initiative within the Arab League should "end anti-Syrian campaigns in the media."

On Monday, Syria's foreign minister said that Damascus had agreed to the provisions of the Arab League initiative after advice by Russia to do so. He added that Syria welcomed the Arab monitors mentioned in the initiative, which also calls for the withdrawal of military and security forces from Syrian towns and cities and the release of political prisoners.

On the same day that Syria announced it had signed the initiative, three civilians were killed, including one child, in the Al-Maydan district of Damascus by security forces who fired on tens of thousands of protesters taking part in the funeral of a seven-year-old girl.

The girl had been shot dead a day earlier in front of her school by the security forces as she and fellow students participated in an anti-regime protest. At the same time, a hospital in the town of Idlib in central Syria was destroyed with protesters and doctors still inside, and Al-Zawiya was shelled with heavy artillery.

For its part, the Syrian opposition doubts the sincerity of the regime's pretensions of reform,

with Borhan Ghalioun, chair of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), describing Syria's signing of the Arab League initiative as "another manoeuvre."

"They are lying to themselves and to the people," Ghalioun said, adding that the Arab League plan simply gave the Syrian regime "another opportunity to scheme and procrastinate."

The fact that Syria has signed the initiative is not important, the opposition says. Far more important is its willingness to implement it, opposition groups saying that the regime is simply playing for time and that it has no intention of implementing the agreement.

According to the protocol signed by the Syrian regime, the Arab League committee responsible will choose monitors to send to the country, and the names of these will be forwarded to the Syrian government, which will have the right to accept or object to them.

Following this, Arab monitors will finally begin to arrive in Syria, in other words a month at least after the agreement was signed.

According to the Syrian opposition, the regime realises that as soon as it withdraws its security forces from the country's towns and cities and ends the killings and arrests, millions of people will take to the streets in demonstrations calling for its fall.

Accordingly, it intends to stall as much as possible, while making occasional noises accepting the need for reform.

Radwan Ziyada, director of the Damascus Centre for Human Rights Studies, commented that the Syrian regime would not comply with the Arab League initiative even though it had signed it. "The steps taken by the Arab League are important in terms of suspending Syria's membership and the economic boycott, but the League cannot ensure the safety of civilians, and we will continue to seek to refer the issue to the Security Council."

Ziyada said that there was a "need to hold the regime accountable and ensure the safety of civilians, either by creating secure zones or partial no-fly zones in the country, or by allowing monitors inside the country."

If Syria does not implement the initiative or obstructs the work of the Arab monitors, the Syrian issue will find its way to the Security Council, which may then take action to end the bloodshed.

According to the UN, the crisis in Syria has now affected nearly 1.5 million people, and conditions continue to deteriorate. Should the Arab League fail to end the crisis, this may trigger international action to overthrow the regime.

A joyless Christmas in Damascus

Leaders of Christian groups in northern Syria have announced that all Christmas and New Year's celebrations will be cancelled among their communities this year, the only events being those held in sympathy with the victims of the ongoing security crackdown in the country, **Bassel Oudat** reports.

They said the decision had been triggered by the current conditions in Syria and in sympathy with the families of the martyrs of the uprising against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. It was well received in Christian circles across Syria, with various Christian groups calling on all Syrian churches to take up a similar position, and it was also well received among members of Syria's majority Muslim population.

The call by Christian leaders to cancel Christmas celebrations has been interpreted as a position of solidarity with the uprising and its goals, as well as a way of expressing the community's sympathy with demands for peaceful change in the country.

It may also be a way for Syrian Christians to identify themselves with the popular uprising and distance themselves from the al-Assad regime.

"Syria's Christians are an integral and inseparable part of the nation and its history," a Suleiman Youssef, an Assyrian activist and researcher, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "They are also a fundamental part of the popular movement seeking to end the tyranny. Their decision to cancel Christmas celebrations expresses their desire for a plural, civic and democratic state."

The statement by the Christian leaders is meant as a response to those who have accused Syria's Christians of supporting the Al-Assad regime. It is a response to statements by other Christian clerics who have declared their support for the Syrian regime and a message to their partners in the homeland, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, that Christians share the same circumstances with them and the same past and future.

There are around two million Christians in Syria, some 80 per cent of the population, who come from a variety of ethnic origins, including Assyrian, Chaldean, Armenian, Kurdish, as well as Arab. Syria's Christians are divided into 12 denominations, and since

Syria's Christians have cancelled Christmas celebrations this year, only marking the occasion with services for the victims of the security crackdown in the country

the Christian community in Syria is diverse and not politically homogeneous, it is not possible to specify a single Christian position on the Syrian crisis.

Nevertheless, some commentators say that the country's Christian community, though sympathetic to the ongoing uprising, may also be wary of it even if this does not extend to wishing to see the al-Assad regime remain in power. What the Christian communities would most like to see, such commentators say, is reassurance from the majority Muslim population about their role in any post-Assad political system.

The campaign scaring the Christians about the future has not been able to match the facts on the ground," said Fayez Sara, a member of the opposition. "Christians in Syria are integrated into society, and they have long played a pivotal role on the path to national and liberation."

"Some of them are participating in the movement for change, while reaffirming their Syrian identity. They share the opposition's vision of a civic and democratic state in Syria that would guarantee equality and participation for all citizens, whatever their religious identity, under the rule of law."

At the beginning of the uprising, only a handful of Christians took part in the protests, though their position changed as the regime stepped up the violence against the protesters.

"At first, our participation was limited because of fears of a backlash against the Syrian Christian community," said a spokesman for the Assyrian youth groups in Syria in an interview with the *Weekly*.

"This was accompanied by fear-mongering in the state media about minorities in Syria sharing the same fate as the Christians in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. However, later the barrier of fear came down, and we, as Christians, are willing to fight to achieve freedom in Syria and the creation of a secular, plural and democratic state."

As far as the majority Muslim population is concerned, most Muslims in Syria say that the regime's attempts to use the fear factor in dividing them from their Christian compatriots will fail, since both communities are integral parts of a common homeland.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

At least 111 killed in Syria's 'bloodiest day'



ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILE launchers take part in a live-fire drill in an undisclosed location in Syria on Tuesday, October 11, 2011.

Syria tests missiles bought from Russia

IAF chief: Keep an open eye on neighbor

By YUVAKESH KAPOOR

The situation in Syria is volatile and the IAF needs to keep a vigilant eye on daily developments along the southern front, Israel Air Force head Maj-Gen. Miv Scheinowitz said on Wednesday.

"We are following events in Syria all the time, because what happens there could impact the region," Scheinowitz said during a briefing at the Palmdale Air Force Base south of Redwood City.

On Wednesday, the Syrian military held exercises, which included a number of missile tests. During the maneuvers, Syria revealed, for the first time, the 7-000 supersonic Yakhont anti-ship missile, which it bought from Russia last year.

Israel had killed 111 Syrians in the week-long conflict in Syria, but Moscow would abstain with the UN Security Council. Syria officials have said that missile tests would pose a serious threat to the Palmdale Air Force Base.

SEE STORY PAGE 18

Western powers deny 'unprecedented massacre'

Iran says 5 of its engineers kidnapped in Homs

By GREG BRADLEY and Reuters

Security forces in Syria killed 137 people ahead of the arrival of opposition to overthrow the government of an Arab League peace plan, activists said on Wednesday.

France joined the US and UK in denouncing an "unprecedented massacre."

The main opposition Syrian National Council said "gross human rights violations" were carried out, including the kidnapping of a local imam, and destruction of international activists' properties.

"There was a massacre of unprecedented scale in Syria on Tuesday," French Foreign Minister Spolanski told Reuters. "It is urgent that the UN Security Council reach a firm resolution that calls for an end to the repression."

The US said it was "deeply disturbed" by reports of indiscriminate killing and warned Assad the violence must stop.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said earlier Tuesday that Congress plans to end the US embargo on Syria to end the violence. "Additional steps" will be taken.

SEE STORY PAGE 18



SYRIANS IN Zabadani, near Damascus, attend the funeral yesterday of protesters killed in clashes with regime forces. (Reuters)

50 US experts pen open letter imploring Obama to press Syria harder

By MICHAEL COVATTA

Around 50 US-based experts on Middle East policy and strategy signed an open letter to President Barack Obama this week imploring him to demonstrate greater leadership on the Syria crisis.

The letter calls for tougher action to help bring an end to the "brutality" the regime of President Bashar Assad has inflicted on its people.

First, it appeals to the White House to support "credible" actions on Damascus proposed by Senators Kerry, Gillibrand, Mark Udall and Joe Lieberman, and representatives Ben Rayburn-Lewis and Eliot Engel.

Next, it recommends the formation of a coalition group of international allies to coordinate cultural security efforts. Eliot Engel, Sen. Paul

SEE LETTER PAGE 18

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Un journaliste d'« as-Safir » arrêté à Damas

Un journaliste syrien travaillant à Damas pour le corps du quotidien *as-Safir* a été arrêté mardi dans la capitale syrienne lors d'une manifestation hostile au régime, a affirmé hier à l'AFP un responsable de la rédaction du journal.

Mohammad Dahmouh « a été arrêté », a indiqué ce responsable sous le couvert de l'anonymat. « Nous avons perdu contact avec notre correspondant hier (mardi) durant une manifestation sur la place Mithqal dans la capitale syrienne », a-t-il indiqué.

« Des témoins ont affirmé avoir vu les forces de sécurité l'emporter loin de la foule », a ajouté le responsable, précisant que M. Dahmouh était « sans doute » en train de couvrir la manifestation organisée contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad.

M. Dahmouh écrit depuis cinq ans pour le supplément jeunesse d'*as-Safir*, mais il a commencé à couvrir les événements en Syrie depuis le début du mouvement de contestation à la mi-mars.

Le quotidien *as-Safir*, qui est réputé pour ses positions pacifistes, a publié à plusieurs reprises des éditoriaux critiques à l'égard du régime syrien et a accordé une bonne place dans ses pages aux informations fournies par les opposants.

Depuis juillet, il est interdit de distribuer en Syrie, à l'instar d'*al-Akbar*, journal réputé également pacifiste.

« Après dix mois de troubles sanglants qui ont emporté des milliers de victimes (...), les communiqués officiels et laconiques sur les "bandes armées" ne suffisent plus pour expliquer ce qui se passe en Syrie », écrit le 12 décembre le propriétaire et éditeur du quotidien, Taha Selman, qualifiant la version officielle du régime



La terre de Damas refuse le régime du tyran, peut-on lire sur ce collier.

d'histoires incroyables et illogiques ».

M. Selman avait appelé le président syrien à suivre l'exemple de Gamal Abdel Nasser, l'ancien président égyptien qui avait annoncé sa démission après la défaite de son pays face à Israël lors de la guerre des Six-Jours.

L'Association des prisonniers libanais dans les geôles syriennes

À Beyrouth, le président de l'Association des prisonniers libanais dans les geôles syriennes, Ali Abou Deha, qui avait lui-même passé trois ans dans les prisons du régime de Damas, a appelé

hier les observateurs de la Ligue arabe qui devraient se rendre en Syrie à inclure dans le programme de leur visite les Libanais qui se trouvent toujours dans les prisons syriennes.

À Tripoli, plusieurs centaines d'étudiants de l'Université libanaise ont manifesté pour soutenir le peuple syrien. La manifestation a été organisée à l'appel de la Ligue des étudiants musulmans

du Liban-Nord et les manifestants ont silencieusement brandi des drapeaux anti-Assad.

De son côté, l'ambassadeur de Syrie au Liban, Ali Abdelkadir Ali, a souligné à l'issue d'une visite qu'il a effectuée au profit de la République, Mohammad Rachid Kabbara, qu'avec « la signature du protocole stipulant l'envoi d'une délégation d'observateurs arabes à Damas, c'est la

paix civile en Syrie qui sera gagnante ». « La Syrie va bien et le président effectue en permanence des réformes, et il a également critiqué un dialogue qui consolidera l'unité nationale », a-t-il dit.

Pour sa part, le député PSNS Assad Hardane a affirmé que « le complot contre les pays arabes est tombé et que la Syrie demeurera la bastion de la résistance contre Israël ».



L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebaon)

Le CNS dénonce des « massacres » en Syrie, la veille de l'arrivée des observateurs

Révolte L'opposition évoque 250 morts en 48 heures, dont 123 pour la seule journée de mardi.

L'opposition syrienne a appelé à une réunion d'urgence de la Ligue arabe et du Conseil de sécurité faisant état de « massacres » qui auraient perpétrés le régime, à la veille du début de la mission d'observateurs arabes, entraînés mardi en aux violences.

Dans un communiqué, le Conseil national syrien (CNS) demande aussi au Conseil de sécurité de déclarer les villes attaquées « zones de sécurité » afin qu'elles bénéficient d'une protection internationale et d'obligent les forces du régime à se retirer de ces zones. Le CNS parle en outre d'un « génocide à grande échelle », en particulier dans les montagnes de Zawiya, à Latakia et à Hama, et exhorte les agences humanitaires à intervenir en urgence.

Le CNS a également appelé les Syriens à l'étranger, « leurs frères scélérats et tous les défenseurs de la liberté à organiser des manifestations massives » devant les représentations diplomatiques syriennes dans le monde.

Damas a aussi accusé l'opposition de vouloir saboter la mission d'observation de la Ligue arabe qui doit débuter aujourd'hui. Rappeler que le n° 2 de la Ligue arabe, Ahmad ben Hellal, avait annoncé mardi qu'une équipe d'observateurs dirigée par Samir Safir de Yaouq, assistant du secrétaire général, se rendrait à Damas aujourd'hui. Ces observateurs doivent suivre l'application d'un plan de sortie de crise qui prévoit l'arrêt de

la Ligue arabe, a indiqué son porte-parole.

Sur le terrain hier, des dizaines de chars ont pris d'assaut Dael dans la province de Deraa pour briser la grève en cours depuis plus d'une semaine, a indiqué l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), faisant état de « fins tourter et d'un grand nombre de blessés ». Vingt-deux personnes, dont six militaires civils, un civil et 15 membres des forces gouvernementales, ont péri dans cette région, beaucoup de la révolte populaire. Selon des militaires et la chaîne al-Jazeera, le bilan était hier de 38 morts.

De son côté, l'agence de presse officielle SANA a fait état de deux tués et sept blessés, dont un civil, dans des attaques hier à Hama. Selon SANA, un passager a été tué et six autres ont été blessés dans l'attaque de trois bus par « un groupe terroriste armé » à l'entrée de Hama alors que le chauffeur d'un bus de l'armée a été tué « par un groupe armé » alors qu'il allait chercher des employés. En outre, un colonel a été amputé des deux jambes par le tir d'une roquette RUV contre son véhicule.

Par ailleurs, les Comités locaux de coordination (LCC) ont annoncé hier à la chaîne d'Arabia l'arrivée en Turquie d'un groupe de réfugiés de l'ouest de la Syrie et après sa fuite de Syrie. Avec 250 morts en 48 heures - 123 tués mardi pour la



Des funérailles d'un militaire tué plus tôt dans la journée ont tourné à la manifestation à Zabadani hier. (Sources : agences et rédaction)

Cinq ingénieurs iraniens enlevés à Homs

Cinq ingénieurs iraniens travaillant pour un projet de centrale électrique à Homs en Syrie ont été enlevés mardi par un groupe de personnes non identifiées, a indiqué hier l'ambassade d'Irak à Damas dans un communiqué, après avoir qu'une enquête était en cours et que la libération des ingénieurs avait été immédiatement demandée. La région de Homs est devenue un lieu de la contestation mouvement de contestation irakienne sera, prévalent dans le pays.

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Ankara juge « inacceptables » les nouvelles violences en Syrie ; Hariri ne voit aucune mesure positive

Le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ahmet Davutoglu, a estimé hier que les nouvelles violences meurtrières survenues en Syrie en dépit de la signature par Damas d'un protocole pour la protection des civils étaient « inacceptables », a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

« En dépit de la signature du protocole, de nombreuses personnes ont été tuées en Syrie, c'est inacceptable », a-t-il ainsi déclaré, cité par Anatolie, en réponse aux questions de journalistes après un entretien à Ankara avec l'ancien Premier ministre Saad Hariri.

« Le principal objectif était de faire cesser immédiatement les effusions de sang. Mais malgré la signature (du protocole), les gens continuent d'être tués. Nous suivons la situation de près. (...) Nous continuerons de soutenir la Ligue arabe. Nous espérons que ce massacre va s'arrêter », a poursuivi le ministre.

Saad Hariri a été reçu hier par le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan et le ministre des Affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu, à Ankara. Les entretiens ont porté sur les développements dans la région, notamment la crise syrienne après la signature du protocole de la Ligue arabe, l'Irak et, naturellement, la situation au Liban. Le président de la commission d'amitié parlementaire turco-libanaise, le député Nouhad Machnouk, l'ancien député Bassam Sabeh, Nader Hariri et Mohammad Chatah ont assisté à une partie des pourparlers.

Le chef de la diplomatie turque avait commencé le point presse par un petit bilan de la situation régionale, qui « connaît des changements très importants et c'est pourquoi nous avons besoin de nous concerter. Il y a des changements historiques dans la région, en harmonie avec les aspirations des peuples. En Afrique du Nord et en Tunisie, des élections ont eu lieu, et en Li-



La poignée de main hier à Ankara entre Saad Hariri et Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Rohan Ozar / AFP

by le processus de changement se poursuit, ainsi qu'en Egypte. C'est maintenant le bon moment pour le peuple syrien d'atteindre ses objectifs de démocratie et de transparence », a-t-il ainsi affirmé.

Rappelant le soutien d'Ankara à l'initiative arabe, M. Davutoglu a précisé qu'il y a « un mécanisme de consultation entre la Turquie et la Ligue arabe. Le protocole en lui-même a plusieurs dimensions importantes, y compris l'envoi d'observateurs et la libération des prisonniers et nous espérons que cette initiative va réussir. En réalité, elle est aussi la nôtre et nous allons la défendre et surveiller sa mise en œuvre », a-t-il assuré. « Mais malheureusement, même après la signature du protocole, des centaines de Syriens ont été

tués et cela est inacceptable. La signature du protocole signifie la disposition à coopérer avec la Ligue arabe, dont la mission est de mettre un terme à l'effusion de sang. Cela est urgent », a insisté le ministre turc des AE.

Quant à Saad Hariri, il a tenu à relever qu'après la signature du protocole de la Ligue arabe, « la machine à tuer » est accélérée. Accepter cette initiative signifie appliquer toutes ses clauses, notamment celles liées à l'arrêt du massacre et à la libération de tous les détenus. C'est alors seulement qu'il y aura effectivement des mesures positives, mais nous n'en voyons aucune », a-t-il affirmé.

Interrogé sur un semblant de consensus visant à considérer cette étape comme positive, l'ancien

Premier ministre a soutenu que « le problème est que certains, comme le ministre (syrien des AE) Walid Moallem, ont répété que la signature ne concerne que la clause liée aux observateurs. Mais qu'est-ce que les observateurs voient et peuvent observer à part la fin des massacres et de la violence, et la libération des détenus ? » a-t-il fait remarquer.

Concernant les derniers développements sur la scène libanaise et notamment le débat sur la loi électorale, Saad Hariri s'est contenté d'indiquer que le courant du Futur allait « discuter » de la question avec ses alliés avant d'avoir « une position claire à ce sujet ». Pressé de dire quels résultats on pouvait attendre de ces élections en présence d'un parti qui contrôle le pouvoir au Liban

par la force des armes, il a répondu : « Ma position est claire et sincère à ce niveau. D'aucuns (ndlr : les députés haïriens de la capitale) appellent aujourd'hui à un Beyrouth sans armes, moi je dis que tout le Liban doit être sous le contrôle de l'État et de l'armée, en coopération avec tous les partis politiques. Chacun devrait savoir que ce pays est à tout le monde et que personne ne peut intimider ou supprimer les autres. Nous sommes tous libanais et nous devons tous vivre ensemble et j'espère que cet objectif sera atteint », a-t-il rappelé.

Ne pensez-vous pas que cela nécessite un dialogue ? « Cela nécessite l'application de l'accord de Taëf », a affirmé, en conclusion, Saad Hariri.

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Ersal et le 14 Mars s'en prennent à Ghosn, qui veut « sanctionner le village pour avoir abrité des réfugiés syriens »

En réponse au ministre de la Défense Fayez Ghosn, qui a fait état d'une infiltration au Liban de membres présumés d'el-Qaïda à travers le village de Ersal (à la frontière est du Liban), le comité de coordination du courant du Futur de la région Ersal-Hermel a affirmé que « Ersal reste le premier village de résistance nationale (...) et de défense des institutions ». Le communiqué a souligné le fait que « nombreux fils de Ersal appartiennent à l'Instituton militaire ». De plus, les habitants ont eux-mêmes dénoncé les déclarations du ministre Ghosn, insistant sur le fait que « Ersal n'abrite ni des terroristes ni des salafites, mais des citoyens avant lui les événements en Syrie ». Et d'ajouter : « Les salafites sont détestés chez nous ».

Pour sa part, le président du conseil municipal de Ersal, Ali Mohammad Hojjeiry, a affirmé que « les habitants

du village sont pacifistes et ne détiennent pas d'armes, et si ce que prétend le ministre de la Défense est vrai, qu'il vienne (sur le terrain) et assume la responsabilité de ses propos ». De même, les moudjahidés ainsi que l'ensemble du conseil municipal de Ersal ont insisté sur leur refus des déclarations du ministre de la Défense, notamment au sujet d'informations qu'il affirme obtenir concernant des opérations de transfert d'armes illégales à travers le village. Parallèlement, les habitants devraient constituer « un motif pour déployer l'armée aux frontières libano-syriennes, dans la région de Ersal, afin d'empêcher les violations systématiques de la souveraineté nationale et contre ainsi à la fois le trafic d'armes et les fausses allégations ». Les notables de cette localité à majorité sunnite, frontalière de Homs, ont appelé enfin le Premier ministre Nagib

Mikati à prendre en charge toute cette affaire, dont l'objectif est d'« établir un siège sécuritaire et météorologique de Ersal ».

C'est dans ce sens d'ailleurs que le député du bloc du Futur Jamal Jarrah a estimé que « quelque chose semble se préparer pour Ersal, dans le but de sanctionner le village pour avoir abrité des Syriens fuyant la répression ». Il a en outre mis en garde contre une « tentative de placer l'armée au centre de ces histoires ». Et d'ajouter : « Attendons voir si le ministre de la Défense exposera, dans la même logique, en Conseil des ministres les violations répétées des frontières ainsi que l'assassinat de Fliti (Khaled Fliti, tué par les tir d'une tourelle syrienne mercredi dans les alentours de Ersal), sauf si soude ataque mirade par un frère est dans ce cas permis ». De son côté, le membre du bureau politique du courant du Futur, l'ancien

député Moustapha Alouch, a estimé que les autorités officielles « jouent les faux témoins dans le meurtre en cours des Syriens », soulignant que « l'explosion des crimes de terrorisme et d'el-Qaïda est le prépe des régimes dictatoriaux de la région, surtout le régime syrien ».

Geogea pour une intervention de l'armée

Pour le chef des Forces libanaises Samir Geogea, toute cette affaire « relève des compétences et de la responsabilité de l'armée et de l'Etat, et si des terroristes se sont infiltrés à l'intérieur, pour quoi n'ont-ils pas été arrêtés ? Sinon, pourquoi attirer la crainte des gens et émettre des thèses non réalisées ? ». M. Geogea a appelé dans ce cadre à « envoyer l'armée vers les régions frontalières où plane le doute sur de possibles infiltrations d'unités terroristes (...) ». Il a enfin mis en garde contre l'exploit-

tation de fausses allégations « sans fondement à la seule fin d'imposer des restrictions aux réfugiés syriens venus au Liban pour des raisons humanitaires (...) », surtout que le Liban ne peut se permettre de déroger aux décisions internationales ».

Les autorités enquêtent

En attendant que se clarifie la situation aux frontières, un responsable gouvernemental a affirmé hier à l'AFP que les autorités libanaises enquêtent sur les informations selon lesquelles des activistes d'el-Qaïda se seraient infiltrés en Syrie à travers Ersal. Lors d'une réunion avec le Premier ministre il y a quelques semaines, les services de sécurité ont remis des informations sur l'infiltration vers ce village d'éléments syriens d'el-Qaïda, prétendant être des membres de l'opposition syrienne, a indiqué ce responsable sous le couvert de l'anonymat.

Daily Star (Lebanon / Liban)

West demands action after reports of fresh Syria 'massacres'

IRAN SAYS 5 NATIONALS KIDNAPPED IN SYRIA

TEHRAN, Iran said Wednesday five of its technicians had been kidnapped in the Syrian city of Homs, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

"The five were kidnapped Wednesday at 6.30 a.m. while heading to their workplace ... We demand their immediate release," Mehr quoted a statement issued by the Iranian Embassy in Damascus as saying.

Syria's state news agency SANA reported that eight engineers "of different nationalities" had disappeared after heading by bus to their work at a power plant in Homs.

The Syrian government is under mounting international pressure to end its crackdown on a nine-month protest movement that has turned violent.

Kidnappings and killings based on religious identity are increasingly common in protest flashpoints such as Homs, sparking international and regional concerns that they could lead to sustained sectarian bloodshed.

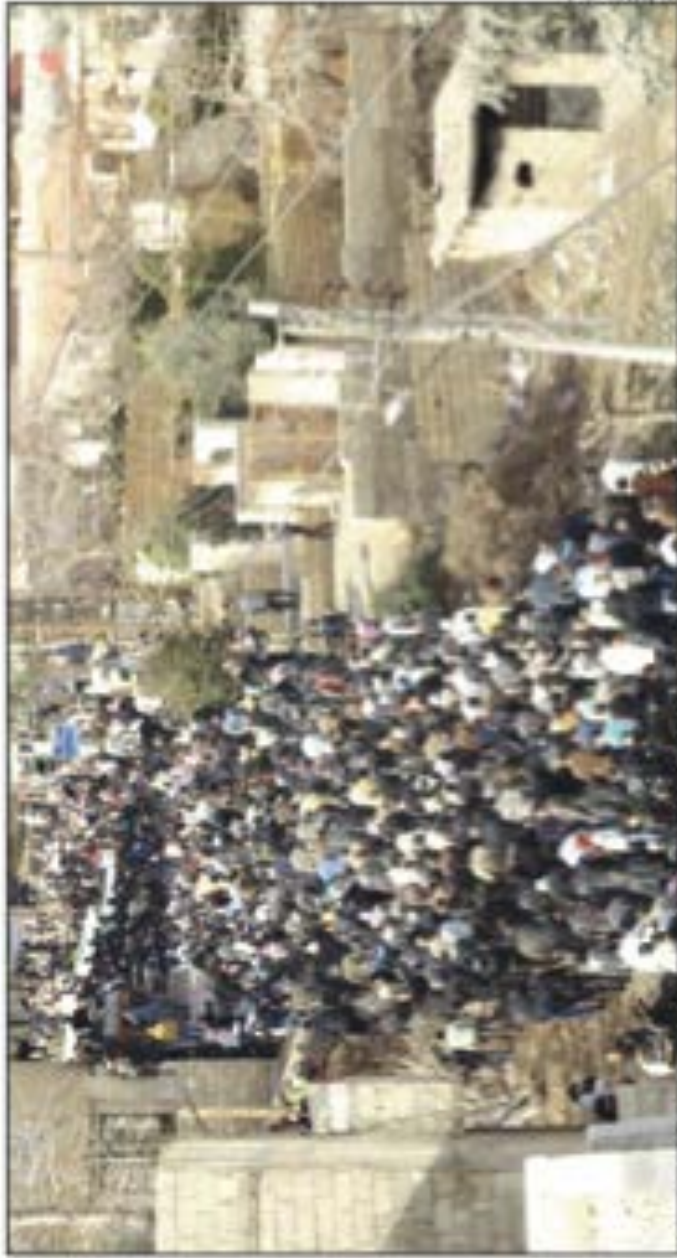
Iran, Syria's closest regional ally, has welcomed Syria's agreement this week to submit Arab League monitors to oversee its implementation of a plan aimed at ending unrest. — Reuters

BEIRUT: Western powers ramped up criticism of the Syrian government Wednesday, after reports of "massacres" in the Zawiya mountain, Idlib and Homs areas just days ahead of an advance peace monitoring mission to the country.

The Obama administration accused Syria of continuing to "mow down" its citizens despite promises to halt a brutal crackdown on reformers.

Syria's main opposition group called for urged the U.N. Security Council and Arab League to hold emergency

TURN TO PAGE 10



Anti-government protesters attend the funeral of combatants killed in earlier clashes in Damascus.

Daily Star (Lebanon / Liban)

Hariri calls on Syria to comply with Arab League protocol

BEIRUT: Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri called on the Syrian government to fully comply with its recent agreement with the Arab League, after holding talks Wednesday with Turkey's top officials in Ankara.

Hariri met with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu Wednesday morning, and the two discussed regional and international issues, focusing on developments in Syria, a statement from Hariri's office said.

Speaking after his meeting with Davutoglu, Hariri said the Syrian government's signing of the Arab League protocol to send observers into the country came at the same time as the crackdown on protesters escalated.

"The signing of the Arab League protocol coincided with the escalation of the killing machine," the former prime minister said.

Agreeing with Davutoglu, Hariri said that the signing of the protocol must be followed by complete compliance with all its conditions.

"Signing the initiative means signing all its clauses, including those related to stopping the killing and releasing all detainees," he said, adding that he had not seen evidence of any such measures being taken.

According to Hariri, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mouallem thinks that the protocol is only an agreement for sending observers into Syria and nothing else. "What will the observers monitor? The killing and violence against prisoners?" Hariri said.

"I think Syria should stop this killing machine," he added.

For his part, Davutoglu compared the events in Syria to regime changes in other countries in the region.

"In North Africa and Tunisia, elections were held, and in Libya the process of change continues, as well as in Egypt," Davutoglu said.

"Now is the right time for the Syrians to achieve their goals of democracy and transparency."

"Tomorrow, the first group of observers will head to Syria, and Turkey will be at the disposal of the Arab League, to satisfy any request, and we will work together, and we hope that these massacres will stop, not as quickly as possible but immediately," he added.

In answer to a question on the election law in Lebanon, Hariri said that he will hold discussions with his allies on the matter before taking a position.

The former prime minister also said that arms in the country should be completely under the control of the army.

"Everyone should know that this country is for all of us and no party can intimidate or cancel the others. We are all Lebanese and we all have to live together," said Hariri.

The head of the Turkish-Lebanese Friendship Parliamentary Committee MP Nihad Mashrouq, former MP Bassem Sabas Nader Hariri, the former prime minister's aide and Mohammad Shatah, an adviser, also attended part of the talks.



Hariri shakes hands with Erdogan.

Following the discussions, Hariri, along with Future Movement and Turkish officials, was invited to lunch at Davutoglu's residence.

Hariri met with Turkey's Prime

Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Turkish capital later in the day.

The Turkish government and the March 14 coalition, the Lebanese opposition bloc headed by Hariri, is staunch-

ly critical of President Bashar Assad's government and has called on the embattled president to step down following Damascus' violent crackdown against the uprising. - The Daily Star

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)



Syrian missile launchers are deployed during a live ammunition exercise in an undisclosed location.

Activists say 211 killed by Syrian forces in two days of brutal massacre

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Idlib, a northwestern province bordering Turkey, has been a hotbed of protest during the revolt, inspired by uprisings across the Arab world this year, and has also seen escalating attacks by armed insurgents against his forces.

The Observatory said rebels had damaged or destroyed 17 military vehicles in Idlib since Sunday and killed 14 members of the security forces on Tuesday in an ambush in the southern province of Deraa, where anti-Assad protests began in March. Events in Syria are hard to verify because authorities have banned most independent reporting. But Tuesday's bloodshed brought the death toll reported by activists in the last 48 hours to over 200.

Arab peace monitors

The main opposition Syrian National Council said 250 people had been killed on Monday and Tuesday in "bloody massacres," and that the Arab League and United Nations must protect civilians. It demanded "an emergency UN Security Council session to discuss the (Assad) regime's massacres in Jabal al-Zawiyah, Idlib and Homs, in particular" and called for "safe zones" to be set up under international protection.

It also said those regions should be declared disaster areas and urged the International Red Crescent and other relief organizations to provide humanitarian aid. Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby said on Tuesday that an advance observer team would go to Syria on Thursday to prepare the way for 150 monitors due to arrive by end-December.

Syria stalled for weeks before signing a protocol on Monday to admit the monitors, who will check its compliance with the plan mandating an end to violence, withdrawal of troops from the streets, release of prisoners and dialogue with the opposition. "In a week's time, from the start of the operation, we will know [if Syria is complying]," Elaraby said.

Syrian pro-democracy activists are deeply skeptical about Assad's commitment to the plan, which, if implemented, could embolden demonstrators demanding an end to his 11-year rule, which followed three decades of domination by his father. Assad is from Syria's minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and Alawites hold many senior posts in the army which he has deployed to crush the mainly Sunni Muslim protests. In recent months, peaceful protests have increasingly given way to armed confrontations, often led by army deserters.

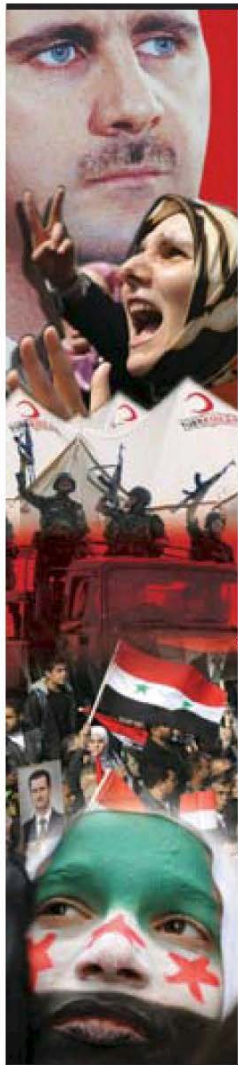
Some opposition leaders have called for foreign military intervention to protect civilians from Assad's forces. In a show of military power, state television broadcast footage of live-fire exercises held by the navy and air force, which it said aimed at deterring any attack on Syria.

UN toll

The United Nations has said more than 5,000 people have been killed in Syria since anti-Assad protests broke out in March, encouraged by other street uprisings in the Arab world that have overthrown dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya to date. Several weeks ago Damascus said 1,100 members of the security forces had been killed by "armed terrorist gangs." The armed insurrection against Assad has gathered pace since then. **Beirut Reuters/AP**

Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

Opposition in Syria alleges massacre, urges UN action



| Key dates in Syrian uprising | |
|------------------------------|--|
| MAR | Mar 2011: Police open fire on demonstrators in southern city of Deraa as authorities move to quash protests in five cities calling for release of political prisoners and increased freedom |
| APR | Mar-Apr: <i>President Bashar al-Assad</i> dismisses government, orders release of political prisoners, and lifts emergency rule – in place for 48 years |
| MAY | May: Army tanks enter Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus to crush protests |
| JUN | U.S. and EU tighten sanctions in response to bloody crackdown on anti-regime protests |
| JUN | Jun: Troops besiege town of Jisr al-Shughour after government says 120 security personnel have been killed by “armed gangs”. More than 10,000 people flee across border to Turkey |
| JUL | Jul: Assad sacks governor of northern Hama province after mass demonstration, later sends in troops to restore order – scores killed |
| AUG | Aug: U.S. calls on Assad to step down. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait recall ambassadors from Syria |
| SEP | Sep: <i>Syrian National Council</i> – unified body of internal and exiled opposition activists – formed to provide alternative to government |
| OCT | Oct: Russia and China veto UN resolution condemning Syria |
| OCT | Nov: <i>Arab League</i> suspends Syria, accusing Damascus of failing to implement Arab peace plan. League later votes to impose sanctions |
| NOV | Army defectors attack military base near Damascus in <i>Free Syrian Army's</i> most high-profile attack |
| NOV | Dec 13: UN reports death toll in nine months of unrest has risen to over 5,000 |
| DEC | Dec 19: Syria agrees to let in monitors to oversee Arab League peace plan. Over 100 people – including many army defectors – reportedly killed on one of deadliest days of uprising |

Pictures: Getty Images © GRAPHIC NEWS

DAMASCUS — The Syrian National Council Wednesday urged the UN Security Council and Arab League to hold emergency meetings after regime forces “massacred” more than 200 people in two days.

Authorities, meanwhile, accused the opposition of pushing for foreign intervention and trying to sabotage an Arab-brokered deal allowing observers on the ground, while ignoring calls for dialogue.

Reacting to reports this week of the killing of hundreds of civilians, the SNC called for an “emergency UN Security Council session to discuss the regime’s massacres in Zawiya mountain, Idlib, and Homs, in particular”. It also appealed for an “emergency meeting of the Arab League to condemn the bloody massacres... and cooperate with the UN in taking the necessary measures to protect Syrian civilians”.

The SNC, a principle umbrella group of factions opposed to President Bashar Al-Assad, reported “250 fallen heroes during a 48-hour period.”

The strongly-worded statement came after a rights group said that forces loyal to Assad carried out a “massacre” by killing 111 civilians in Kafrawed town Tuesday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights had warned earlier that “dozens of civilians” were surrounded by the army in the town in the region of Jabal Al-Zawiyah, more than 300 km north of Damascus. The revised toll brings to 123 the number of civilian deaths across Syria for that day, the majority of them in Idlib province and 12 in the flashpoint central city of Homs.

In addition, at least 100 army deserters were killed or wounded in Idlib on Tuesday, the Observatory said, adding 14 security force members were killed in southern Daraa province, cradle of the nine-month uprising against Assad.

The latest violence comes ahead of the scheduled arrival of an advance Arab League team which is due in Damascus Thursday to pave the way for some 500 observers. “Since Syria signed the protocol, it has been fully committed to facilitating the mission of the Arab League which will come to see the reality of the crisis,” a Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

“Unfortunately, the Syrian opposition is trying to sabotage the protocol and is seeking to push for foreign intervention rather than accept the call to dialogue,” he added. — AFP

HRC seeks to help Saudis in Syria

By Nawaf Afit
Okaz/Saudi Gazette

JEDDAH – The Human Rights Commission (HRC) is trying to help Saudi citizens stranded in Syria to return home, said Dr. Saleh Al-Khathlan, Deputy Chairman of the HRC.

He said the HRC has already made contact with a number of government bodies in the Kingdom to alleviate the suffering of Saudis in Syria.

He said the HRC has received complaints from Saudis about their situation in Syria. He said every citizen has the right to assistance anywhere in the world.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

SYRIAN REGIME MUST GET OFF ITS HIGH HORSE

Al Assad will plunge the country into chaos if he continues to ignore voice of change

The focus should never steer away from what is needed to be done in Syria. It is obvious what the direction needs to be as far as the future of the country is concerned. All the current steps therefore should facilitate a transition that would ensure stability, rule of law and wider public participation.

Syria's agreement with the mandate of the Arab League, which allows observers into the country, is a small but important step. It was necessary to avoid a tragic escalation of what is taking place in the country at present. An advance team will be in Syria today — it will be responsible for ensuring the regime's compliance with the League's plan to end political violence threatening the country's stability. The 12-member team will include legal, administrative, financial and human rights experts.

Yet putting matters into perspective, the arrival of the team is not an end in itself. Rather it is one step towards a whole series of measures that need to be adopted and followed by the government. As a matter of fact, the regime has to take realistic steps — ones that will convince all the concerned parties that it is indeed changing its line of thought and policy approach with regards to the protesters.

The state of dissent in the country cannot continue for long as there is a limit to what people can tolerate when their basic human rights are under attack. Hence, it is critical for the regime to realise that if matters are not addressed now, the turn of events could prove to be fatal and chaotic for the entire country.

Having said that, the Syrian people have voiced their demands to be part of the process for change. Hence, there is no option but to listen and accommodate the voice for change.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Lebanese reporter believed detained in Damascus

Journalist was covering protest, his editor says

Beirut (AFP) A Syria correspondent for Lebanese daily *As-Safir* was detained at a rally against President Bashar Al Assad in Damascus, an editor at the newspaper said yesterday.

"We lost contact with our correspondent Mohammad Dahnoun yesterday [Tuesday] during a protest at Midan Square in the Syrian capital and believe he has been detained," the editor said, requesting anonymity.

"Eyewitnesses say they saw security forces drag him away from the crowd," he said, adding that Dahnoun had likely been covering rather than participating in the protest.

A Facebook page has been set up demanding the release of Dahnoun, who is 30 years old and hails from the northwestern Syrian city of Idlib, according to the page.

Dahnoun has been writing for *As-Safir's* youth supplement for nearly five years and in recent months has written on the crisis in Syria. *As-Safir* is considered supportive of Syria and its ally, Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah.

Anti-Al Assad protests

Since the outbreak of anti-regime demonstrations in March, however, the paper has published editorials critical of Al Assad's crackdown on the rallies. Damascus in July banned *As-Safir* over its coverage of the anti-Al Assad protests.

In a column last week, owner Talal Salman hinted

“ We lost contact with our correspondent Mohammad Dahnoun yesterday [Tuesday] during a protest at Midan Square in the Syrian capital and believe he has been detained.”

Editor
As-Safir

that Al Assad should step down, slamming the regime's accusations that terrorist gangs were behind the revolt as "unacceptable by any standards of logic".

"Will he learn from Gamal Abdul Nasser after the defeat of 1967 and save his country?" Salmang wrote, referring to the popular pan-Arab Egyptian leader who stepped down after the Six Day War between Israel and Egypt.

"Bashar Al Assad alone holds the answer."

Forces loyal to Al Assad have cracked down brutally on the uprising, killing more than 5,000 people, according to UN estimates. Thousands others, including bloggers, journalists and activists, are believed to have been detained.

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Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Opposition calls for UN action to halt 'massacres'

VIOLENCE FLARES AHEAD OF ARAB LEAGUE TEAM'S VISIT

Damascus (AFP) The opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) urged the UN Security Council and the Arab League yesterday to hold emergency meetings claiming regime forces had "massacred" more than 200 people in two days.

Syria, which held war games on Tuesday to test preparedness against an invasion, accused the opposition of pushing for foreign intervention and of trying to sabotage an Arab-brokered deal that allows observers on the ground, but ignoring calls for dialogue.

Reacting to reports of hundreds of civilians being killed, the SNC called for an "emergency UN Security

STATE BROADCAST 5 IRANIANS TAKEN HOSTAGE

Five Iranian technicians working in Syria have been kidnapped by unknown gunmen in the city of Homs, Iran's English-language Press TV reported yesterday. It did not give a source for the information nor say when the kidnapping took place.

"Eight technicians, including five Iranians, have been reportedly kidnapped by unknown gunmen in the restive Syrian city of Homs," Press TV reported. Syria's state news agency Sana reported that eight engineers "of different nationalities" disappeared after heading by bus to their work at a power plant in Homs province.

— Reuters

Council session to discuss the regime's massacres in Zawiyah mountain, Idlib, and Homs, in particular."

It also appealed for an "emergency meeting for

the Arab League to condemn the bloody massacres... and cooperate with the United Nations in taking the necessary measures to protect Syrian civilians".

The SNC, a major umbrella group of factions opposed to President Bashar Al Assad, reported "250 fallen heroes during a 48-hour period".

'Safe zones' request

It urged the Security Council to declare the cities and towns under attack "'safe zones' that enjoy international protection; and force the regime's forces to withdraw from said areas".

France denounced what it said was the "unprecedented massacre" and urged Russia to accelerate talks for a UN Security Council resolution on the crisis.

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said: "Everything must be put in motion to end this murderous spiral into which Bashar Al Assad is dragging his people, deeper each day."

Russia has proposed a Security Council resolution that would denounce violence from both sides. France has called this "unacceptable", seeking instead a resolution that would directly pin the blame for the violence on the regime and threaten strong international sanctions on Damascus.

The SNC's strongly worded statement came after a rights group said Al Assad's forces carried out a "massacre" by killing 111 civilians in the northwestern town of Kafruwed on Tuesday. The revised toll brings to 123 the number of civilian deaths across Syria

for Tuesday, the majority in Idlib province and 12 in the central city of Homs.

In addition, at least 100 army deserters were killed or wounded in Idlib on Tuesday, the Observatory said, adding that 14 security force members were killed in southern Daraa province, cradle of the nine-month uprising against al Assad.

More than 100 deserters and civilians were also reported to have been killed on Monday.

The United Nations estimates more than 5,000 people have been killed in the crackdown since mid-March. The latest wave of violence comes as an advance Arab League team prepares to head to Damascus today to pave the way for some 500 observers.

"Since Syria signed the protocol, it has been fully committed to facilitating the mission of the Arab League which will come to see the reality of the crisis," Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi told AFP.

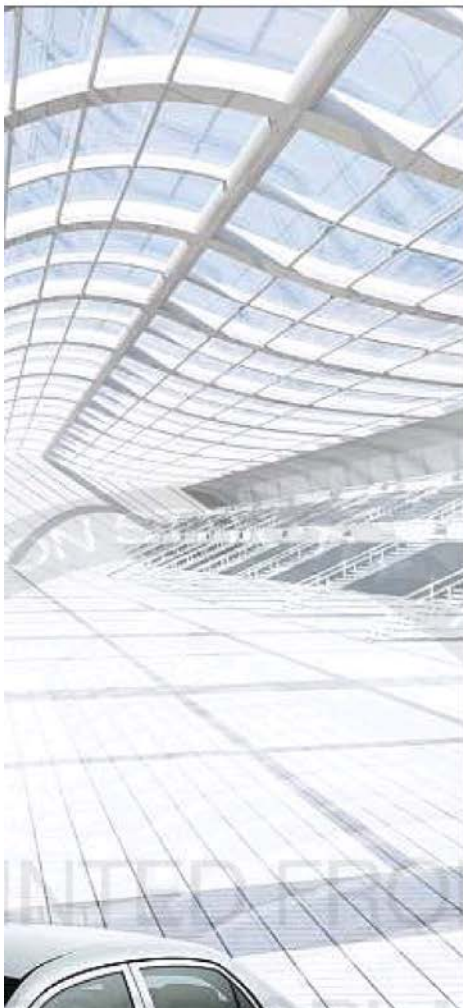
"Unfortunately, the Syrian opposition is trying to sabotage the protocol and is seeking to push for foreign intervention rather than accept the call to dialogue," he added.

Halt to violence

The observer mission is part of an Arab peace plan endorsed by Syria on November 2, which also calls for withdrawal of the military from towns and residential districts, a halt to violence and the release of detainees.

Syria has failed to convince either the opposition or Western governments pushing for tough UN action that it is willing to follow up its words with deeds.

On Tuesday, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said "a signature on a piece of paper from a regime like this, that has broken promise after promise after promise, means relatively little to us."



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Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Wounded Syrians recount tales of horrific ordeal

MANY UNDERGOING TREATMENT AT LEBANESE HOSPITAL

By NICHOLAS BLANFORD

Tripoli, Lebanon A small charity-run medical centre in this northern Lebanese city is quietly providing health care to a rising number of Syrians, civilians and combatants alike, who have been wounded in the nine-month confrontation against Syrian President Bashar Al Assad's regime.

Many of those recovering in here are from Qusayr, a town of some 44,000 residents lying five miles north of Lebanon and close to the flashpoint city of Homs. Their accounts paint a grim portrait of a town under siege by Syrian security forces with no electricity, no telephone communications, and dwindling food supplies – illustrating the perils that many Syrians face as the Al Assad regime cracks down on an increasingly violent uprising.

Abu Ahmad, an engineer's assistant, was hit in both legs by machine gun bullets when leaving a mosque after prayers to join in a demonstration. "They shot at us as we were coming out of the mosque. I was hit by three bullets in the legs," the thickly bearded man says, lying in his hospital bed. "We were only asking for our freedom, but they consider us terrorists."

Border crossing

Bystanders attempted to give him medical assistance but he had to wait for four hours until it grew dark before he could risk the journey to the Lebanese border. The bullets had shattered a knee cap and a bone.

"They gave me painkillers and wrapped me in a blanket and placed me in the back of a truck. We moved from village to village in the darkness and then crossed the border where the Red Crescent was waiting for me," he says.



Up in arms

Injured Syrian refugees take part in a protest, organised by Lebanese and Syrians in solidarity with Syria's anti-government protesters, in the port city of Tripoli, northern Lebanon, last Friday. The placard reads: "The people want to declare Al Jihad".

“They shot at us as we were coming out of the mosque. I was hit by three bullets in the legs. We were only asking for our freedom, but they consider us terrorists.”

Abu Ahmad
Injured Syrian protester

A floor of the Tripoli hospital has been turned over to Syrian casualties who are forced to undertake the hazardous journey across the border with Lebanon that is patrolled by army troops and laced with land mines.

"We are receiving a lot of people. The rate of casualties is increasing," says Abu Bashir, a volunteer who helps coordinate the treatment of casualties and, like others interviewed for this article, used a pseudonym due to the sensitive nature of the centre's work.

Indeed, the refugees are not guaranteed safety even once they cross the border.

Syria exerts a pervasive influence in Lebanon through a network of Damascus-backed allies and a sympathetic government in Beirut.

Several Syrians have been abducted in Lebanon since the uprising began in mid-March, and anti-Assad regime activists are forced to live in hiding, moving from one safe house to another.

Lack of assistance

Some 5,000 Syrian refugees are scattered across northern Lebanon, many forced to rent accommodation or stay with friends and relatives given the lack of assistance from the Lebanese

state. Turkey, in contrast, has established a number of camps along its southern border with Syria – where as many as 12,000 Syrian refugees have crossed – and is catering to the needs of those in the country.

Most of the casualties being treated at the medical centre are from Syrian towns and villages close to the Lebanon-Syria border.

Authorities at the medical centre say they expect to receive many more casualties from Syria in the coming days and weeks and have drawn up plans for temporary extra accommodation on the roof.

But they worry that the Lebanese authorities could place pressure on the hospital management to stop receiving Syrian casualties. The chief doctor said that Lebanese military intelligence had wanted to establish an office in the centre, but the hospital refused.

— *Christian Science Monitor*

Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Massacre in Syria

Oppn seeks UN intervention as world slams organised killings

Bassem Mroue

BEIRUT — Government forces surrounded residents of a restive Syrian village in a valley and killed all those trapped inside — more than 100 people — in a barrage of rockets, tank shells, bombs and gunfire that lasted for hours, a witness and two activist groups said on Wednesday.

The attack on Tuesday pushed the death toll for two days of violence across Syria to more than 200, and was one of the deadliest single events of the entire nine-month uprising against President Bashar Al Assad's authoritarian rule.

The opposition Syrian National Council urged the UN Security Council and Arab League on Wednesday to hold emergency meetings, as the White House said President Assad did not deserve to rule.

The offensive targeted the village of Kfar Owaid, about 30km from the northern border with Turkey.

"It was an organised massacre," said Rami Abdul-Rahman, head of the British-based activist group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. "The troops surrounded people then killed them."

Reacting to reports of hundreds of civilians being killed, the SNC called for an "emergency UN Security Council session to discuss the massacres in Zawiya mountain, Idlib, and Homs in particular."

The White House said Assad's regime has no credibility and has "flagrantly violated" its commitment to end violence. The statement said the Obama administration is deeply disturbed by continued reports of government-backed violence against the Syrian people.

One anti-government activist



Mourners carry coffins of anti-government protesters killed in Damascus on Wednesday. — Reuters

said by telephone that scores of residents and activists fled on Tuesday morning to the nearby Budnaya Valley, where they were completely surrounded by troops.

The forces bombarded them with tank shells, rockets and heavy machine gun fire. The man, who identified himself only as Abu Rabih for fear of government reprisal, said troops also used bombs filled with nails to increase the number of casualties.

"What happened yesterday was a crime against humanity," Abu

Rabih said. He said 110 people were killed in the attack.

In Cairo, Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby expressed deep concern about reports of an escalation of violence, especially in the provinces of Idlib, Homs, Daraa and Deir El Zour.

The White House warned Damascus that additional steps will be taken to pressure Assad's regime if Arab League initiatives are not fully implemented.

In Paris, French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said

"everything must be done to stop this murderous spiral into which Bashar Assad is leading his people more every day".

The German government's human rights commissioner, Markus Loening, called for an immediate end to the violence.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said "it is unacceptable" that so many people were killed even after Assad's regime agreed to an Arab League plan. — AP

› SEE ALSO PAGE 8

The National (EAU / UAE)

Syrian opposition's plea after more than 200 die

Appeal for UN and Arab League to hold emergency meetings

The National staff

DAMASCUS // The opposition Syrian National Council urged the UN Security Council and Arab League yesterday to hold emergency meetings after regime forces "massacred" more than 200 people in two days.

Syria, which held war games on Tuesday to test preparedness against any invasion, accused the opposition of pushing for foreign intervention and trying to sabotage an Arab-brokered deal for observers, but ignoring calls for talks.

Reacting to reports of hundreds of civilians being killed this week,

the Syrian National Council (SNC) called for an "emergency UN Security Council session to discuss the regime's massacres in Zawiya mountain, Idlib, and Homs, in particular".

The council also appealed for an "emergency meeting for the Arab League to condemn the bloody massacres ... and cooperate with the United Nations in taking the necessary measures to protect Syrian civilians".

The SNC, a major umbrella group of factions opposed to President Bashar Al Assad, reported "250 fallen heroes during a 48-hour period".

It urged the Security Council to declare the cities and towns under attack "safe zones that enjoy international protection; and force the regime's forces to withdraw from said areas".

Syria, continued on **a10** →

US threatens further pressure on Syria

→ Syria, from page 41

France denounced what it said was the "unprecedented massacre" and urged Russia to accelerate talks for a UN Security Council resolution on the crisis.

Russia has proposed a Security Council resolution that would denounce violence from both sides.

France called this "unacceptable", seeking instead a resolution that would directly pin the blame for the violence on the regime and threaten strong international sanctions on Damascus.

The US warned of international measures to pressure Syria to halt its bloody crackdown and said Mr Al Assad did "not deserve to rule".

The White House said that if Damascus did not fully implement an Arab League plan to contain the violence, "the international community will take additional steps to pressure the Assad regime to stop its crackdown".

The SNC's strongly worded statement came after the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Mr Assad's forces carried out a "massacre" when they surrounded residents of the town of Kafrawed

on Tuesday and killed all those trapped inside - more than 100 people - in a barrage of rockets, tank shells, bombs and gunfire that lasted for hours.

"It was an organised massacre," said Rami Abdul-Rahman, the head of the British-based activist group.

The revised toll brings the number of civilian deaths across Syria for Tuesday to 123, most in Idlib province and 12 in Homs.

At least 22 people were killed yesterday in clashes in the province of Daraa, where the protests erupted in March, the rights group said.

At least 100 army deserters were also killed or wounded in Idlib on Tuesday, the Observatory said.

More than 100 deserters and civilians were also reported to have been killed on Monday.

The UN estimates that more than 5,000 people have been killed in the crackdown in Syria since March.

Amid the violence, Syria's ally, Iran, said that five engineers working at a power plant project in Homs were abducted on Tuesday.

It demanded their "immediate release" and called on the Syrian government to take serious and urgent steps to identify the kidnappers and free the hostages.

The Syrian foreign ministry would only say that "an investigation is underway".

Syrian opposition figures have accused Tehran of aiding Mr Al Assad's regime in its crackdown.

The latest violence comes as an advance Arab League team prepares to head to Damascus today to pave the way for 500 observers.

"Since Syria signed the protocol, it has been fully committed to facilitating the mission of the Arab League, which will come to see the reality of the crisis," said the foreign ministry spokesman, Jihad Makdissi. "Unfortunately, the Syrian opposition is trying to sabotage the protocol and is seeking to push for foreign intervention rather than accept the call to dialogue."

The observer mission is part of an Arab peace plan endorsed by Syria on November 2, which also calls for withdrawal of the military from towns and residential districts, a halt to violence and the release of detainees.

Syria has failed to convince either the opposition or western governments pushing for tough UN action that it is willing to follow up its

words with deeds.

On Tuesday, a US state department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, said: "A signature on a piece of paper from a regime like this, that has broken promise after promise after promise, means relatively little to us."

Syria blames the unrest on "armed terrorist groups", not peaceful protesters as maintained by western powers and rights groups.

The foreign minister, Walid Mualllem, said he expected the observers to vindicate Damascus' claims.

Meanwhile, the state news agency, Sana, said on Tuesday that "the air force and air defences conducted manoeuvres with live ammunition - with a view to testing the combat capabilities of the air forces and to test their readiness to respond to any aggression." Naval forces were said to have staged similar exercises.

After manoeuvres early this month, one analyst said they aimed to deter "any [western] impulse to intervene militarily in Syria by showing that it is prepared to declare a regional war".

★ Agence France-Presse, with additional reports from Reuters

Tehran Times (Iran)

5 Iranian engineers, technicians abducted in Syria

TEHRAN TIMES Political Desk TEHRAN — The Iranian embassy in Damascus, in a statement released on Wednesday, confirmed news reports saying that five Iranian engineers and technicians have been kidnapped in Syria and called on the kidnappers to immediately release the Iranian nationals.

According to the statement, unidentified armed gunmen abducted five Iranian engineers and technicians, who were on the way to their work, on Wednesday at 6:30 local time in the restive Syrian city of Homs.

The statement also said that the Iranian embassy has been making every effort to obtain information about the fate of the Iranian nationals and called on the Syrian government to take the measures necessary to identify the kidnappers and release the Iranian nationals.

The Iranian engineers and technicians had been working on the construction project of a power plant in Homs.

■ **Kidnappers seeking to pressure Iran to withdraw support for Syrian government**

Iranian Ambassador to Syria Mohammadreza Sheibani said the kidnappers are seeking to pressure the Islamic Republic to shift policy toward political developments in Syria using "levers of intimidation and terror."



December 19, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. President:

The situation in Syria is rapidly deteriorating. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that over 5,000 Syrian civilians have been killed, and 14,000 more detained, since President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown against anti-regime protestors began in March 2011. Cities such as Homs are under siege, with the Syrian military's tanks and armored vehicles firing indiscriminately into residential areas, and regime forces going house-to-house to arrest or murder the regime's opponents. The conflict is quickly escalating towards civil war.

We are glad that, in the time since your call for President Assad to step down on August 18, 2011, the United States, European Union, and regional powers have increased the breadth and strength of sanctions imposed against the Assad regime. However, it is increasingly clear that more assertive American leadership and international action are required to ensure that the Syrian people have the opportunity to enjoy a post-Assad future as soon as possible.

America's interests in Syria are clear. The Syrian government, which has been on the State Department's State Sponsors of Terror list since 1979, maintains a strategic partnership with Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah. For years, the Assad regime also assisted the transit of foreign fighters who were responsible for killing numerous American troops in Iraq. And for years, the Syrian government secretly pursued a nuclear program with North Korean assistance. The emergence of a representative Syrian government that protects the rights of all of its citizens and opposes violent extremism in all forms would therefore be a significant blow to Tehran and dramatically improve regional security and stability.

Members of your administration, however, have made statements against the militarization of the uprising, even warning that such a turn could threaten international support for their cause. Such a position is counterproductive, especially since the protesters themselves are calling for international protection from the Assad regime's forces. As of now, this protection is coming only from defectors from the Syrian military, who are fighting in support of the revolution. U.S. condemnation of their armed resistance undercuts them, and could have the effect of discouraging further Syrian military defections.

As was the case in Libya, the situation in Syria is one in which our interests and our values converge. We therefore urge you to take the following immediate actions to bring an end to Assad's brutality:

- Show leadership on sanctions by immediately supporting legislation originally proposed by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand, Mark Kirk, and Joseph Lieberman, and Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Eliot Engel, and working with allies to impose other crippling multilaterally-based sanctions on the Syrian government.
- Form a contact group of like-minded international partners to coordinate national strategies to further increase pressure on the Assad regime.
- Establish direct contact with various anti-regime Syrian groups, especially the Syrian National Council, as well as those who have defected from the Syrian military, and evaluate their leadership and membership with the aim of increasing the capabilities of those groups whose political goals accord with U.S. national security interests.
- Work with Turkey and other partners to establish safe havens in Syria, as well as no-go zones for the Assad regime's security forces to protect civilians.

In the absence of American leadership, other countries that do not necessarily share our goals and values are stepping in to fill the void in Syria. Given the stakes, it is important that the United States lead on this issue. The Syrian people are calling for protection from the Assad regime. It is our moral obligation and in our interest to assist them.

As you said in the case of Libya, it is now time "to live the values we hold so dear."

Sincerely,

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Khairi Abaza | James S. Denton | Sirwan Kajjo | Kori Schake |
| Ammar Abdulhamid | Thomas M. Donnelly | Rachel Kleinfeld | Randy Scheunemann |
| Mouhanad Abdulhamid | Mark Dubowitz | William Kristol | Gary J. Schmitt |
| Oula Abdulhamid | Eric S. Edelman | Robert J. Lieber | Daniel S. Senor |
| Hussain Abdul-Hussain | Douglas J. Feith | Tod Lindberg | Lee Smith |
| Elliott Abrams | Jamie M. Fly | Bashar Lufti | Henry D. Sokolski |
| Tony Badran | Reuel Marc Gerecht | Lila Lufti | Kurt Volker |
| Bassam Bitar | Abe Greenwald | Thomas G. Mahnken | Kenneth R. Weinstein |
| Max Boot | John P. Hannah | Michael Makovsky | Pete Wehner |
| Ellen Bork | William Inboden | Ann Marlowe | Leon Wieseltier |
| L. Paul Bremer | Bruce Pitcairn Jackson | Clifford D. May | R. James Woolsey |
| Matthew R. J. Brodsky | Ash Jain | Joshua Muravchik | Khawla Yusuf |
| Seth Cropsey | Allison Johnson | Andrew S. Natsios | Robert Zarate |
| Toby Dershowitz | Robert Kagan | Martin Peretz | |