

Die atlantischen Medien verurteilen die Beobachter der Liga ohne sie anzuhören

PRESSESCHAU SYRIEN #19
30. Dezember 2011

Die internationale und die Golf Presse berichten von der Mission der Beobachter der arabischen Liga, einzig auf die Beschuldigungen des syrischen Observatoriums der Menschenrechte (Londoner Büro der Muslimbrüder) gestützt. Die Armee würde friedliche Demonstranten töten und würde weiterhin es so machen trotz der Gegenwart der Beobachter.

Im Vorhersehen ihrer möglichen Verweigerung des Abschlussaktes verfolgen gewisse Medien die Kampagne gegen den Direktor der arabischen Liga.

Kein Medium hat den Beobachtern auf Ort gefolgt, noch sie befragt. Keines spricht von Kämpfen zwischen der regulären Armee und den Terror Gruppen, von der derzeitigen Geiselnahme, und auch nicht von der Vermittlung der Beobachter.

- Die *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Schweiz) bemerkt die Verdächtigung der deutschen Regierung gegenüber dem syrischen Botschafter in Berlin. Er steht unter Anklage, in seiner Wohnung einen grünen gewählten Offiziellen zusammengeschlagen zu haben, der Mitglied des syrischen National Rates ist.
- Jay Bushinsky bemerkt im *Jerusalem Post*, dass es für Israel schwierig wäre zu verweigern, den Golan einer neuen syrischen, mit einem Nimbus umgebenen Regierung, die Bachar el-Assad gestürzt hat, zurückzugeben. Tel Aviv enthält sich also die laufende Revolution zu unterstützen, selbst wenn das israelische Volk sie mit Sympathie betrachtet.

Le Figaro (France)

Syrie : le lourd passé du chef des enquêteurs

Le général soudanais Mohammed al-Dabi, qui dirige la mission de la Ligue arabe, aurait créé des milices au Darfour.

PIERRE PRIER

PROCHE-ORIENT Comment la Ligue arabe a-t-elle pu nommer un tel chef à la tête de ses observateurs en Syrie ? Au bout de seulement trois jours, le général soudanais Mohammed al-Dabi concerne les critiques des ONG et des gouvernements occidentaux. Mercredi, au lendemain d'une visite éclair de quelques heures à Homs, au cœur de la répression du régime, le général était rentré satisfait : « La situation n'a rien d'effrayant », avait-il déclaré, précisant tout de même : « là où nous étions ». Précaution de langage indispensable : les forces de sécurité avaient tiré non loin de la sur des manifestants.

« La Chine se félicite des enquêtes objectives de la Ligue arabe en Syrie »

UN PORTE-PAROLE DU GOUVERNEMENT

Les félicitations de Pékin, principal allié du gouvernement syrien, ne vont pas faire remonter la crédibilité de la Ligue arabe. « La Chine se félicite des enquêtes objectives de la Ligue arabe en Syrie », a déclaré hier un porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères.

Le général n'est pas un inconnu pour le gouvernement chinois, qui soutient

aussi Khartoum. Nommé chef des services de renseignement le jour du coup d'État de 1989, il fut dès lors en première ligne de la lutte contre l'opposition interne, sous l'influence de l'idéologue islamiste Hassan al-Tourabi. C'est l'époque des prisons secrètes, des lieux de détention non répertoriés où les opposants sont torturés.

Mohammed al-Dabi occupera ensuite plusieurs fonctions, dont l'une au Darfour, la province rebelle, théâtre d'une guerre ethnique qui a valu au président soudanais Omar el-Béchir, toujours en fonction, des inculpations de la Cour pénale internationale (CPI) pour crimes de guerre, crimes contre l'humanité et génocide.

Des villages pillés

Le général al-Dabi n'est pas inculpé par la CPI. En ce qui concerne le Darfour, il est surtout connu pour son rôle de négociateur avec les principaux groupes rebelles ces dernières années. Mais il avait déjà été en poste dans la région rebelle, et dans un tout autre rôle, écrivent les spécialistes du Soudan Julie Flint et Alex De Waal dans leur livre *Darfur : a New History of a Long War*. Selon eux, Mohammed al-Dabi a été l'un des créateurs des Janjawids, ces milices composées d'Arabes ou d'Africains formées par le gouvernement soudanais pour lutter contre les tribus révoltées. En février 1999, quatre ans avant que les



Des manifestants brandissent une caricature montrant le chef de la mission de la Ligue arabe, le Soudanais Mohammed al-Dabi, serrant la main de Bachar el-Assad lors d'une manifestation contre le régime, le 25 décembre, à Kafranbel. REUTERS

troubles endémiques ne dégénèrent en guerre civile, Mohammed al-Dabi débarque à Al-Guenina, capitale de la province du Soudan-Ouest, « avec 120 hommes et deux hélicoptères de combat », écrivent les auteurs, citant le gouverneur local. Le général distribue de l'argent à des chefs locaux qui se mettent à ravager les villages de Masalit, la principale ethnie de la région, dans le sillage de l'armée : « Les militaires déساient les villages, et deux jours après les Janjawids pillent. »

Le général a nié, tout en admettant auprès des auteurs qu'il avait employé la manière forte pour encourager les Masalit à rentrer dans le rang : « Quand ils traînaient les pieds, je les menaçais d'employer les armes. » La nomination à la tête de la mission d'observation en Syrie d'un Soudanais, et plus particulièrement de Mohammed al-Dabi, est d'autant plus dommageable pour la Ligue arabe qu'il s'agit pour elle d'une première, née des « printemps arabes ». Jamais l'organisation n'avait été mandatée pour vérifier si l'un de ses membres réprimait son peuple.

La Ligue n'avait pas de marge de manœuvre, plaide un diplomate : « Il fallait un militaire expérimenté, qui ne vienne pas d'un pays proche, ni d'un État ayant un contentieux avec la Syrie. » Hier, onze civils ont été tués, dont six dans deux villes visitées par les enquêteurs arabes, Douma et Hama. ■

Le livre du jour

Le jeu de l'élite religieuse

Quarante années de régime autoritaire ont jeté sur la société syrienne un voile opaque. Parce qu'une insurrection islamiste armée a été écrasée dans le sang en 1982 par le père du président syrien Bachar Al-Assad, Hafez, la question de l'islam politique a longtemps compté parmi les plus grands tabous du pays, alimentant les fantasmes. L'intérêt de l'ouvrage consacré par l'universitaire Thomas Pierret à la relation complexe entretenue par la dynastie Assad avec les oulémas syriens n'en est que plus grand.

**Baas et Islam en Syrie,
la dynastie Assad face
aux oulémas**
Thomas Pierret
PUF, 330 pages, 29 €

Rien ne prédisposait un pouvoir fondé sur une minorité religieuse (alaouite) et rurale à s'entendre avec une élite sunnite, majoritaire et urbaine. Mais, comme le montre l'ambivalence d'un pouvoir en apparence laïque mais soucieux en réalité du pouvoir symbolique détenu par le « clergé syrien », à rebours de la vision récurrente d'un islam dépourvu de hiérarchies, les oulémas ont toujours constitué pour lui un véritable enjeu. Comme le montre l'ouvrage, les connivences entretenues avec des figures aussi centrales que le cheik Saïd Ramadan Al-Bouti ou le mufti Salah Ed-Din Kaftaro en témoignent.

Ce pouvoir religieux est loin d'être uniforme et encore moins résumé à la confrérie des Frères musulmans, défait dans le sang il y a trente ans et chassée hors de Syrie au grand profit de l'islam officiel. Ce pouvoir se subdivise au contraire entre écoles juridiques classiques, entre traditions soufies et « réveil »

salafiste, entre prédicateurs bien en cour et imprécateurs poussés à l'exil. Cette multiplicité explique les batailles fratricides qui ont été livrées par le passé par les hommes de foi, et le régime baasiste en a joué en virtuose. Il a desserré sa férule lorsqu'il était en situation difficile, comme entre 2004 et 2005, pour mieux affirmer un contrôle strict sur ce contre-pouvoir potentiel une fois tiré d'embarras.

L'une des leçons tirées de son enquête minutieuse par Thomas Pierret conduit à relativiser la dose de terreur utilisée par ce régime pour imposer son ordre à des savants professant le conservatisme. Il montre en effet combien l'obsession de défendre des intérêts catégoriels a pu conduire certains de ces oulémas à négocier avec le pouvoir afin de maintenir leur pré carré.

Le parcours historique érudit auquel nous invite l'auteur instille une dose raisonnable de complexité dans l'équation de la crise qui traverse le régime et qui explique que certaines mosquées soient devenues des relais de la contestation, à Deraa, voire à Damas, alors que d'autres sont restées fidèles au pouvoir. Cette division a valeur d'enseignement. Alors que le régime ne cesse de réduire le soulèvement aux agissements de salafistes manipulés par des ennemis du régime (l'Arabie saoudite), la part de l'islamisme politique dans la contestation du régime reste difficile à évaluer mais demeure modeste. Entre caution et dénonciation du régime, la palette des attitudes adoptées par les oulémas répond à celle de la société syrienne tout entière, qui est dans l'attente de l'instant fatidique qui la fera définitivement basculer dans l'un ou l'autre camp. ■

GILLES PARIS

De Morgen (Belgique / Belgium)

Syrische oppositie telt tientallen doden, waarnemersmissie ziet 'geruststellende situatie'

BRUSSEL • Terwijl de waarnemersmissie in Syrië verschillende steden bezocht om te controleren of het vredesakkoord wordt nageleefd, gaat het geweld onverminderd door. Activisten stellen dat er gisteren zeker 29 doden zijn gevallen.

In elk van die steden was volgens de oppositie sprake van doden en geweld. Het Syrische Observatorium voor de Mensenrechten zei dat zeker drie mensen zijn gedood toen regeringstroepen het vuur openden op demonstranten bij een moskee in Damascus. Ook in voorsteden van de hoofdstad zouden mensen zijn doodgeschoten. Er zijn vrijwel geen buitenlandse journalisten aanwezig in Syrië waardoor het moeilijk is de informatie te controleren.

Activisten noemden de missie van de Arabische Liga een farce en beschuldigden Assad ervan ze te gebruiken om tijd te rekken en verdere internationale kritiek te voorkomen. Ze zeggen dat de waarnemers slechts beperkt toegang krijgen en niet te zien krijgen wat er echt aan de hand is. Ook is er steeds meer kritiek op de leider Homs reisden de waarnemers gisteren naar Idlib, Deraa, Hama en hoofdstad Damascus.

generaal Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi. In Soedan was hij hoofd van de militaire inlichtingendiensten en hij staat bekend als vertrouweling van de Soedanese dictator Omar al-Bashir. "We hebben niets angstaanjagends gezien. Voorlopig is de situatie geruststellend", zei Dabi over de situatie in Homs, de stad waar de afgelopen maanden de meeste doden zijn gevallen.

Met deze uitspraken heeft hij het wantrouwen jegens de waarnemersmissie verder aangewakkerd. "Wat verwacht je ook van iemand die in eigen land beschuldigd wordt van genocide", zei Ausama Monajed van de Nationaal Syrische Raad (SNC) tegen persbureau AP. "Zijn militaire achtergrond ondermijnt zijn geloofwaardigheid. Waarom hebben ze niet iemand genomen met een juridische achtergrond?" De SNC eist dat Dabi onmiddellijk wordt vervangen. (vK)

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

Tote in Syrien trotz Beobachtern

Opposition: Wo sind sie? / Delegationschef bittet um Zeit

cheh. FRANKFURT, 29. Dezember. In Syrien setzt das Regime trotz der Anwesenheit von Beobachtern der Arabischen Liga die blutige Niederschlagung der Proteste fort. Nach Angaben von Oppositionsaktivisten wurden dabei mehr als 20 Personen getötet, vor allem in Regionen, die von den Beobachtern besucht wurden, darunter ein Vorort der Hauptstadt Damaskus. Dort eröffneten Soldaten am Donnerstag das Feuer auf Zehntausende Demonstranten. Dabei wurden nach Angaben von Oppositionsaktivisten mindestens vier Personen getötet. Ganz in der Nähe hätten Mitglieder der Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga ein städtisches Gebäude besucht, sagte Rami Abd al Rahman von der in London ansässigen Syrischen Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte.

Die syrische Opposition kritisierte den sudanesischen Leiter der Beobachtermision. General Muhammad al Dabbi habe dem repressiven Regime des sudanesischen Präsidenten Omar al Baschir gedient. Gegen Baschir liegt ein Haftbefehl des Internationalen Strafgerichtshofs in Den Haag wegen Völkermordes und Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit in Darfur vor. Al Dabbi ist ein Vertrauter Baschirs und leitete einst den sudanesischen Geheimdienst. Vor allem Bemerkungen Dabbis über die Lage in der Stadt Homs, die seit zwei Wochen von der Armee beschossen wird, hatten Empörung unter den Regimegegnern hervorgerufen. Der sudanesische General war nach einem Besuch in der Stadt mit der Aussage zitiert worden, dass er dort nichts „Beängstigendes“ gesehen habe. Sheikh Anas Airut

vom Nationalrat der syrischen Opposition sagte der Deutschen Presse-Agentur am Telefon, diese Einschätzung sei „sehr enttäuschend“. Das Assad-Regime spiele allen etwas vor. „Das ist eine Tragödie.“

Dabbi wiederum bat die Oppositionsaktivisten um mehr Zeit, bevor die Arbeit der Beobachter kritisiert werde, wie die Deutsche Presse-Agentur aus dem Umfeld der Delegation erfuhr. Die arabi-

Muhammad al Dabbi im Porträt,
Zeitgeschehen, Seite 10

schen Beobachter wollten im Laufe des Tages noch Hama sowie die ebenfalls umkämpften Provinzen Daraa und Idlib besuchen.

In Hama versuchten Menschen nach Angaben von Oppositionellen in direkten Kontakt mit der Delegation zu treten. „Die Menschen hoffen wirklich darauf, mit ihnen zu sprechen“, sagte ein Aktivist nach einem Bericht der Nachrichtenagentur Reuters. Am Donnerstag wurden dort kurz vor Ankunft der Beobachter vier Personen getötet. Auch in Idlib, wo die Beobachter nach Angaben des Staatsfernsehens später eintreffen sollten, wurden zwei Demonstranten durch Schüsse der Sicherheitskräfte getötet. Hier zeigten sich Bewohner enttäuscht, dass sie nicht mit den Beobachtern zusammentreffen konnten. „Wo sind sie? Wir haben uns gut vorbereitet und Zeugenaussagen, dokumentierte Todesfälle und Schauplätze von Granatbeschuss, die wir zeigen können. Aber die Beobachter fehlen“, sagte ein Aktivist.



Muhammad AL DABBI Foto AFP

Umstritten

In Homs sah man, wie ihn oppositionelle Demonstranten mit ihren Klagen über das Vorgehen der syrischen Armee so sehr bedrängten, dass es dem General alles andere als recht zu sein schien. Sein über den Fernsehschirm verbreiteter unwirscher Gesichtsausdruck zeigte es. Nun muss man allerdings zugeben, dass er für eine Mission verantwortlich zeichnet, die man nicht gerade als Traumjob charakterisieren kann: Muhammad Ahmad Mustafa al Dabbi leitet jene Beobachterkommission, die im Auftrag der Arabischen Liga dazu beitragen soll, das in einen ausgewachsenen Bürgerkrieg hineinschlitternde Syrien „zu befrieden“. Augenblicklich befinden sich 60 Beobachter im Land, insgesamt sollen es 150 werden. Ursprünglich hatte die Arabische Liga sogar an 500 gedacht, worauf sich Präsident Baschar al Assad jedoch nicht einlassen wollte. Es ist schwer denkbar, dass sich so wenige Beobachter in einem Land wie Syrien, das immerhin mehr als 20 Millionen Einwohner hat, einen umfassenden und zutreffenden Eindruck von den Verhältnissen machen können.

Nabil al Arabi, der Generalsekretär der Liga, hat General Dabbi indes gelobt: Er habe so viel militärische Erfahrung, dass er „der rechte Mann am rechten Platz“ sei. Die Menschenrechtsorganisation Human Rights Watch sieht das völlig anders: Die „Erfahrung“ al Dabbis bestehe unter anderem in seiner Rolle in der südwestsudanesischen Unruheprovinz Darfur, wo in den vergangenen Jahren etwa 300 000 Menschen Opfer genozidartiger Gewalt geworden seien. Für die Menschenrechtsorganisation hat man da den Bock zum Gärtner gemacht.

Tatsächlich gilt al Dabbi als ein alter Vertrauter von Omar al Baschir, dem sudanesischen Staatschef, dem man in Den Haag Völkermord vorwirft und deshalb einen Haftbefehl gegen ihn ausgestellt hat. Seit der Etablierung des islamistischen Regimes Baschir in Khartum im Jahre 1989 war General al Dabbi als Chef des militärischen Geheimdienstes tätig, zwischen 1996 und 1999 dann als Generalstabschef, bevor man ihn bis zum Jahre 2004 als Botschafter in das Emirat Qatar entsandte. Jetzt ist er 63 Jahre alt. Den bisher in Syrien eingetroffenen Beobachtern traut die syrische Opposition nicht über den Weg; und auch dem General nicht. Das alles sei ein Spiel mit dem Ziel, die Öffentlichkeit zu täuschen.

In Washington mahnt man zu Geduld. Man solle erst einmal abwarten, wie die Mission insgesamt verlaufe, nicht vorschnell urteilen, hieß es. General al Dabbi soll erreichen, dass die Gewalt gegen Zivilisten eingestellt wird, dass sich die syrische Armee aus den Städten zurückzieht und dass die politischen Gefangenen freigelassen werden. In Homs, der drittgrößten Stadt des Landes, einem Zentrum des Widerstandes, konnte der General erleben, dass Zigtausende sofort auf die Straße gingen und gegen Baschar al Assad demonstrierten, kaum dass die Panzer sich zurückgezogen hatten. Anderorts werden die Beobachter auf Gegendemonstranten stoßen; die Sorge, dass der Mission al Dabbis nicht genügend Spielraum eingeräumt werden könnte, ist berechtigt.

WOLFGANG GÜNTHER LERCH

Beobachter können Gewalt nicht stoppen

SYRIEN Sicherheitskräfte töten 11 Personen. Delegation der Arabischen Liga besucht weitere Städte. Die USA fordern freien Zugang zu allem Gebieten, während China die Untersuchung der Mission lobt

DAMASKUS afp | Ungeachtet der Präsenz von Beobachtern der Arabischen Liga gehen die syrischen Sicherheitskräfte nach Angaben von Menschenrechtsaktivisten weiter mit Gewalt gegen die Protestbewegung vor. Demnach wurden am Donnerstag mindestens 11 Menschen getötet, sechs von ihnen in Städten, indem sich Beobachter befanden.

Drei Personen seien in Duma nahe der Hauptstadt Damaskus getötet und mehr als 20 weitere verletzt worden, als Sicherheitskräfte auf eine Demonstration mit Zehntausenden Teilnehmern geschossen hätten, erklärte die in London ansässige Syrische Beobachtungsstelle für

Menschenrechte. Zu dem Zeitpunkt seien Mitglieder der Beobachtermission im Rathaus von Duma eingetroffen.

Im rund 210 Kilometer nördlich von Damaskus gelegenen Hama, wo ebenfalls Beobachter eingetroffen seien, hätten Sicherheitskräfte mindestens drei Menschen getötet, erklärte die Beobachtungsstelle. Zudem sei in einem Privatkrankenhaus Verletzte festgenommen worden. Drei weitere Menschen seien in zwei Orten in der Provinz Damaskus getötet worden, in der nordwestlichen Provinz Idlib seien zwei auf einem Motorrad fahrende Zivilisten nahe einer Straßensperre erschossen worden.

Die Beobachter der Arabischen Liga waren am Montagabend in Syrien eingetroffen. Ihre Entsendung ist Teil eines Plans der Liga zur Beendigung der Gewalt, bei der seit März nach UN-Angaben mehr als 5.000 Menschen getötet worden sind. Am Dienstag und Mittwoch hatten die Beobachter die umkämpfte Protesthochburg Homs besucht. Nach Angabe des regierungsnahen syrischen Privatsenders Duna trafen Mitglieder der Beobachtungsmission am Donnerstag in der südlichen Provinz Daraa, in Hara statt in der Provinz Damaskus und in Hama ein.

Ein Sprecher des US-Außenministeriums sagte, es sei wich-

tig für die Mission, dass die Beobachter „zu allen Gebieten Zugang haben, um eine vollständige Untersuchung vorzunehmen.“ China lobte hingegen die „objektive“ Untersuchung“ der Beobachtermission.

Der Leiter der Syrischen Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte, Rami Abdel Rahman, sagte, die Beobachtermission sei „das einzige Licht in dieser dunklen Nacht.“ So habe die Anwesenheit der Beobachter in Homs die „Angstbarriere“ durchbrochen. Während des Besuchs der Beobachter waren dort rund 70.000 Menschen gegen Präsident Bashar al-Assad auf die Straße gegangen.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Suisse / Switzerland)

Beobachter in Syrien erproben ihre Mission

Besuch neuer Unruhegebiete am Donnerstag

Die arabischen Beobachter haben am Donnerstag Hama, Daraa und die Peripherie von Damaskus aufgesucht. Sie haben grosse Erwartungen geweckt.

Jürg Bischoff, Beirut

Nach Homs haben die Beobachter der Arabischen Liga am dritten Tag ihrer Mission zur Durchsetzung eines Friedensplans in Syrien weitere Hochburgen des Aufstands gegen das Asad-Regime besucht. Bei ihren Nachforschungen in Homs wurden die Beobachter von Einwohnern bestürmt, die ihnen ihre verzweifelte Lage schildern wollten. Angesichts ihrer geringen Zahl und der Ausdehnung der aufständischen Gebiete dürften die Beobachter nur langsam ein realistisches Bild der Verhältnisse in Syrien gewinnen.

Belagerte Beobachter

Der Chef der Beobachtermision, der Sudanese Mohammed Dabi, hatte am Mittwochmorgen den Zorn der Opposition mit dem Kommentar geweckt, die Lage am ersten Tag ihres Besuchs sei ruhig gewesen und es habe keine Zusammenstöße gegeben. Das traf wahrscheinlich für das Stadtzentrum zu, wo die Delegation Gespräche mit Behörden führte. Viele Syrien-Reisende erzählen von Städten, Quartieren und Gebieten, in denen nichts vom Aufstand zu bemerken ist, auch wenn Videobilder von anderen, oft nicht weit entfernten Orten von Demonstrationen, Zusammenstössen und Gewalt zeugen.

Videos, die oppositionelle Aktivisten auf Youtube veröffentlichten, zeigen aber, dass die Beobachter am Mittwoch mehrere Quartiere von Homs besucht haben, die unter der Gewalt gelitten hatten. Ganze Strassenzüge sind von Häusern gesäumt, die von Maschinengewehr- und Granatenbeschuss schwer beschädigt sind. Aus einigen Aufnahmen geht hervor, dass während des Besuchs der Delegationen Schüsse ertönen. Beobachtern wurde auch die Leiche eines Kindes gezeigt, das angeblich kurz zuvor erschossen worden war.

Oft wurden die Delegationen von Menschen belagert, die ihre Not und ihr

Leid schildern wollten und die auch angehört wurden. Ein Video zeigt einen Aktivisten, der sich bei einem der Beobachter beklagt, dass deren Anwesenheit die Einwohner von Homs nicht vor der Gewalt der Sicherheitskräfte schütze. Der Angesprochene erklärt, sie seien erst drei Tage im Land, bittet den Kritiker um Geduld und versichert, sie würden jeden Zwischenfall registrieren.

Aufständische mobilisiert

Die arabische Beobachtermision hat bei den Einwohnern der aufständischen Gebiete wohl übertriebene Hoffnungen geweckt. Die Opferzahlen, die von den lokalen Koordinationskomitees des Aufstands in den vergangenen Tagen mit täglich mehreren Dutzend angegeben wurden, sind am Mittwoch auf 14 gefallen, erreichten am Donnerstag aber wieder über 30. Eine Beruhigung der Lage kann die Mission nur erreichen, wenn ihre Beobachter in den Brennpunkten dauernd anwesend sind und zwischen den beiden Seiten vermitteln.

Die Anwesenheit der Beobachter scheint auch eine Mobilisierung der Aufständischen zu bewirken, wie grosse Demonstrationen in Homs und Hama am Dienstag zeigten. Am Donnerstag versammelten sich Tausende von Demonstranten im Zentrum von Duma, einer Stadt nahe bei Damaskus, um auf die arabischen Beobachter zu warten. Sicherheitskräfte schossen auf die Menge und töteten laut der in London ansässigen syrischen Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte sieben Personen. Weitere Delegationen der Mission sollten Hama und Daraa besuchen.

Überfall auf Armeekonvoi

Die staatliche Nachrichtenagentur Sana meldete den Überfall einer Gruppe Bewaffneten auf ein Dorf der Provinz Hama, bei dem acht Familienmitglieder getötet und fünf entführt worden seien, sowie den Tod von zehn Polizisten und Soldaten in Homs, in den Außenbezirken von Damaskus und in der Provinz Daraa. Am Mittwoch wurde ein Video auf Youtube veröffentlicht, das einen Angriff von Rebellen auf einen Armeekonvoi in Daraa zeigt, bei dem vier Soldaten getötet worden sein sollen.

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Erhöhte Spannung zwischen Berlin und Damaskus

Einberufung des Botschafters nach dem nächtlichen Überfall auf einen politisch aktiven Exilzyrer

Nach dem Überfall auf einen bei den Berliner Grünen aktiven Lokalpolitiker kurdischer syrischer Herkunft haben sich weitere Schatten auf das Verhältnis zwischen Deutschland und Syrien gelegt.

Ulrich Schmid, Berlin

ausgegeben hatten, flohen nach etwa fünf Minuten, als ein alarmierter Nachbar seine Wohnungstür öffnete.

Der Grünen-Politiker verübtigte syrische Agenten der Tat; das offizielle Berlin scheint diesen Verdacht zu teilen. Außenminister Westerwelle bestellte am Mittwoch den syrischen Botschafter ins Auswärtige Amt und machte klar, dass Einschlechterungsversuche gegen Oppositionelle nicht geduldet würden.

Laut dem Bericht des deutschen Verfassungsschutzes für das Jahr 2010 befindet sich in der Berliner Botschaft Syriens ein Knotenpunkt des syrischen Nachrichtendienstes, über den ein rechtes Agentennetz gesteuert wird. Ahma, der 1996 als gefährdeter Menschenrechtsaktivist mit syrisch-kurdischen Wurzeln Asyl erhielt, fürchtet um die Sicherheit seiner Familie in Syrien.

Unterdessen laufen die Ermittlungen, seit Ausbruch der politischen Unruhen in Syrien bereits strapaziert, haben sich über die Weihnachtsfeiertage weiter verschlechtert. Anlass ist der nächtliche Überfall zweier Unbekannter auf den grünen Lokalpolitiker Ferhad Ahma.

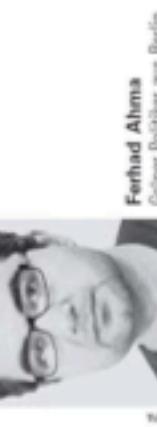
Sippenhaftung

Ahma, seit 2004 deutscher Staatsbürger, war nach eigenen Angaben am frühen Dienstagmorgen in seiner Wohnung im Stadtteil Wedding von zwei Männern mit Schlagstöcken verprügelt worden. Eine 26-jährige Freundin Ahmas wurde Zeugin des Angriffs. Die Täter, die sich zunächst als Polizisten

ben, und laut Angaben des Magazins «Der Spiegel» versucht er durch sein Engagement im Projekt «Adopt a Revolution» eine Art Patenschaften für die lokalen Bürgerkomitees zu vermitteln, die die Proteste in Syrien organisierten. Die Komitees versuchen, Verwundete medizinisch zu betreuen und die Gewalttaten des Regimes zu dokumentieren.

Tummelplatz der Agenten

Dass Dissidenten von Schergen autoritäter Regime in Deutschland verfolgt werden, ist keine Seltenheit. Die Regierung in Berlin warnt Exilirane regelmäßig vor Agenten des Regimes in Teheran. Türkische Geheimdienstler tauchen an kurdischen Protestveranstaltungen auf, zwischen nationalistischen Türken, türkischen Kommunisten, Islamisten und kurdischen Separatisten kommt es zu gewaltsumen Auseinandersetzungen. Die Chinesen betreiben intensive Wirtschaftsspionage, russische Agenten behalten die rund 1500 in Berlin lebenden Tschetschenen im Auge, und im August wurde ein mongolischer Agent wegen der Verschleppung eines Landsmannes angeklagt.



Ferhad Ahma
Gärtner Politiker aus Berlin

den ist. Ahma selber gibt an, die beiden Schläger hätten nahezu tödlich ausgesehen. Vermutlich hütten sie ihm zu Tode prügeln wollen. Selbst wenn sie keine Agenten gewesen seien, glaubte er doch,

.....

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)

Más muertos en Siria ante los ojos de la Liga Árabe

■ Al menos 21 personas murieron ayer en Siria, tiroteadas por la policía y el ejército en ciudades que estaban siendo visitadas por los observadores de la Liga Árabe. Decenas de miles de personas salieron a la calle en Hama y Duma para recibir a los observadores, pero fueron dispersadas por los tiradores de élite apostados en las azoteas. Seis murieron en Hama y cuatro en Duma, un suburbio de Damasco, donde la población, según el Observatorio Sirio de los Derechos Humanos (OSDH), ha ocupado la gran plaza de la Mezquita. A los observadores también se les esperaba en Idlib, donde murieron cinco personas, pero no se dejaron ver, según relataron varios vecinos. El despliegue de las fuerzas de seguridad sirias es masivo allí donde van los observadores, que no pueden mantener ningún contacto con la población. Un grupo de opositores en Idlib había preparado, según el OSDH, un informe sobre las víctimas y los bombardeos, pero no encontraron a ningún enviado de la Liga Árabe a quien hacérselo llegar. La misión evidencia sus grandes limitaciones.

Publico (Portugal)

Exército de Bashar al-Assad mata 21 pessoas apesar da presença dos observadores na Síria

Ana Gomes Ferreira

O que estão os delegados a ver e o que vão fazer com a informação? A oposição e os analistas dizem que a missão fracassou e que a Liga Árabe deve passar o testemunho

● As forças de segurança sírias mataram ontem 21 pessoas, anunciou o Observatório Sírio dos Direitos Humanos. A continuação da violência, enquanto no terreno estão observadores da Liga Árabe, levou os comentadores a considerarem que a missão já é um fracasso.

De manhã, os observadores partiram para três cidades – Hama (seis mortos e vários feridos que foram detidos no hospital), Deraa e Idlib (cinco mortos). O seu objectivo é verificar, no terreno, se a repressão contra os manifestantes anti-regime acabou e se as armas e os soldados estão a ser retirados das cidades, como prometeu o Presidente, Bashar al-Assad.

Desde que a missão chegou ao país, na terça-feira, mais de 50 pessoas morreram na Síria – ao todo, já morreram mais de cinco mil pessoas na repressão do regime contra os manifestantes e nos confrontos entre as forças da ordem e os grupos armados de oposição. Pelo que a pergunta é: o



Protestos contra Assad e a missão da Liga Árabe

que estão os delegados da Liga Árabe a ver? Os governos dos Estados Unidos e de França disseram recear que os observadores não tenham liberdade de movimentos.

"As pessoas esperavam chegar a eles, mas não temos acesso à equipa", disse à Reuters um activista de Hama, Abu Hisham. Segundo a Reuters, a partir de informações recolhidas nesta cidade, os delegados árabes chegaram a Hama rodeados de um grande aparato de segurança, tendo os homens de Assad disparado para

dispersar milhares de manifestantes.

Tudo indica que as forças do Governo de Damasco tentaram evitar uma repetição do que aconteceu, na quarta-feira, em Homs. Aqui, a multidão conseguiu rodear os observadores; um homem chegou-se a eles com uma criança morta nos braços. O *New York Times* reuniu alguns dos vídeos desse momento debaixo de um título: "Observadores confrontados com raiva, tiroteios e uma criança morta." São difíceis de ver: <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/28/observers-confronted-with-anger-gunsshots-and-a-dead-child-in-syria/>

confronted-with-anger-gunsshots-and-a-dead-child-in-syria/

"A missão não tem qualquer mandato, autoridade ou garra", disse Au-sama Monajed, do Conselho Nacional Sírio. É o maior grupo de oposição e defendeu ontem a criação de uma zona de exclusão aérea sobre a Síria que proteja os manifestantes e uma missão das Nações Unidas no terreno.

Na terça-feira, o chefe da missão árabe, o general sudanês Mustafa al-Dabi – que apoiou a chegada ao poder do Presidente sudanês, Omar Bashir, acusado de genocídio em Darfur; o general é considerado um dos responsáveis pela morte de 300 mil pessoas nesta região –, disse não ter visto "situações preocupantes".

A frase, dita ao fim de quatro horas no terreno, motivou os analistas a considerarem a missão morta à nascente – ou porque não tem condições para realizar a tarefa, ou porque não a quer desempenhar devidamente.

Alguns dizem mesmo que o falso lanço da Liga Árabe na Síria expõe a fraqueza desta organização. E que a sua incapacidade para levar Assad a mudar de rumo será responsável pela internacionalização do conflito, ou seja, abrirá o caminho para uma ação ocidental. "Que missão é esta que expõe a fraqueza da Liga e a sua falta de substância?", questionou o jornal *Al-Siyassah* (Kuwait).

The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)



Killings reported amid visits by Arab League mission

Monitors' presence may put protesters at risk

MICHAEL JANSSEN

A NUMBER of people were reportedly to have been killed yesterday by Syrian security forces, the majority in locations where Arab League monitors were seeking to bring an end to some months of violence.

The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights put the figure at 16, while the local co-ordination committee operating on the ground in Syria said the toll was 28.

The observatory said four people were killed when government forces opened fire at a crowd outside a mosque in the Damascus suburb of Douma as monitors arrived at the nearby town hall.

Al Jazeera satellite television channel broadcast video footage, said to be taken there, of monitors in orange vests taking cover. Analysts suggest that the presence of monitors may be putting at risk people who seek to speak to them or to mount large protests to put forward their demands. Some activists have complained that access to the teams is difficult, while others say they have had no problems.

Teams of 10 monitors each fanned out across the country, visited border with Turkey, where there are frequent clashes between deserters and government troops. After a meeting in Cairo with the league's secretary general, Nabil al-Arabi, the council's head Paris-based Burhan Ghazouani said the monitors' mission was not simply to observe but to stop the killing.

He claimed that the government was holding more than 100,000 detainees, "some of them

in military barracks and aboard ships off the coast". The number he gave is far greater than the estimate of 14,000 cited by the US and activists resident in Syria.

The opposition has stepped up pressure on the league to remove the head of the monitoring team, Lt Gen Mustafa Dabi, a former head of Sudanese military intelligence.

Their presence seriously complicates the mission of the monitors who are meant to bring an end to violence from all sides and secure the withdrawal of troops and weaponry from urban areas.

The league peace plan also calls for the release of political prisoners, free access to media and dialogue between the regime and the opposition.

The observatory said the effort was the "only ray of light" and encouraged protesters to go out on to the streets. "The presence of the observers in Homs, the organisation said, "brake the barrier of fear."

However, Radwan Ziadeh, a member of the external opposition Syrian National Council, said the mission did not have the "capacity or experience" to halt the crackdown. He called for "international intervention" and the creation of a buffer zone along the northern

border with Turkey, where there are frequent clashes between deserters and government troops. After a meeting in Cairo with the league's secretary general, Nabil al-Arabi, the council's head Paris-based Burhan Ghazouani said the monitors' mission was not simply to observe but to stop the killing.

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So far the league has stood behind him. Amnesty International has accused the general of being responsible for human rights abuses in Sudan during the early 1990s.

Regime opponents using Face-

book and Twitter have called for

A poster of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad (right) shaking hands with Sudanese Gen Mustafa al-Dabi, leader of an Arab League mission to Syria, during an anti-Assad protest in Kafranbel, Syria. The sign reads: "Be careful military gangs," ١٥/١٢

The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Syrian protesters die as Arab group tours cities

By MATTHEW KALMAN
in Jerusalem

Syrian opposition activists have called for the removal of the head of the Arab League monitoring team, just two days after the monitors started their mission to gauge if the regime of President Bashar al-Assad was complying with a peace plan which it signed.

Syrian forces opened fire again yesterday, killing more than 30 people, despite the presence of the 60 monitors who spread out between several of the flashpoint cities in the nine-month uprising against the al-Assad government.

As monitors arrived in the Damascus suburb of Douma, troops opened fire, killing 13 people, according to the Local Co-ordination Committees, an opposition group. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said people were killed when soldiers shot at protesters gathering near the Grand Mosque in Douma as the observers were arriving at city hall. More deaths were reported in Hama, Homs and Idlib, despite the presence of the observers in all those cities.

Opponents of the Syrian regime say the arrival of the Arab League team led by General Mustafa al-Dabi of



Sudan has done nothing to quell the violence. General Dabi was head of military intelligence and then external security in the regime of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, now under an international arrest warrant on charges of committing genocide in Darfur. His appointment has also been criticised by independent human rights observers.

Omar Idilbi, an activist with the Local Co-ordination Committees, said Dabi was a "senior officer with an oppressive regime that is known to repress opposition". Haytham Manna, a prominent Paris-based dissident, also urged the Arab League to replace General al-Dabi or reduce his authority.

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

'Anyone moves, they shoot at them'

Syrian troops open fire on protesters as peace visit brings thousands to streets

By Richard Spencer
Middle East Correspondent

SYRIAN security forces shot dead dozens of protesters yesterday, including at least 11 in the capital Damascus, as the presence of Arab League peace monitors encouraged hundreds of thousands to take to the streets against President Bashar al-Assad's rule.

As many as 100 demonstrators were said to have been killed after the Arab League observers fanned out across four restive cities on the third day of their mission to enforce a peace deal.

In Damascus, troops opened fire on a crowd of more than 20,000 people as they assailed the army's headquarters and marched outside a mosque in the suburbs of Douma. Soldiers also fired on civilians in the suburbs of Asarin and Madamiga.

"They used tanks, they used machine-guns," Omar al-Khoni, an activist in Damascus, told *The Daily Telegraph* last night. "They started shooting everywhere."

"We are now in a very bad situation. We can't bring the injured outside the city; we can't bring them to hospitals, we can't move." Anyone who moves, they shoot at them."

Douma, which has seen repeated protests, rang to the sound of machinegun fire. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, three people died instantly and more later, with many more critically injured.

One video posted online last night showed a protester being bundled into the back of a police van, his face bloodied. It then showed a soldier pointing his gun through a slot in the side, while others ran at the van at the back before a shot is heard. Mr Khoni said the man's body was found several minutes later.

Other protesters died in cities that were being visited by monitors, including Idlib in the north and Homs. There were clashes between the army and protesters in Deraa, where a number of soldiers have been killed in rebel ambushes this week. One group said 40 people had been killed yesterday.

The unrelenting violence suggests that the Assad regime is growing concerned at the effect of the Arab League's monitoring mission.

Although the opposition movement has been scathing of the mission's credibility, especially since the peace deal it is supposed to be monitoring has long since fallen apart, it has been heartened by the sight of thousands of demonstrators taking to the streets. Many recognise that it is their best chance of alerting the world to their plight.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, members of the delegation leading its work, Lt Gen Mohammed Ahmed Mustapha al-Dabb, visited Homs and were forced to witness what would have been humiliating scenes for Mr Assad.

One delegate was led to the blood-stained spot where the son of his guide, a local woman, was shot. On Wednesday,



A security officer takes aim at a boy in Deraa, in a video uploaded to YouTube, top. Other footage taken in Duma, a suburb of the capital Damascus, showed a protester being bundled into the back of a van, right, and apparently murdered by troops



The Telegraph
Watch the videos of attacks on protesters
telegraph.co.uk/world

the body of a five-year-old boy who had been shot dead by troops was taken to a morgue and shown to the monitors.

As the demonstrations grow, the regime has been faced with the choice of whether to allow them to get out of hand or to try to subdue them, proving the demonstrators' claims that they are facing brutal repression.

"The Arab League's initiative is the only ray of light that we now see," said

Rami Abdel Rahman, the Observatory's spokesman. "The presence of the observers because they are international gives us hope."

Mr Khoni said the mission should inform activists of where they were going in advance. Protesters were coming out on the basis of where visits were rumoured to be taking place, thinking they would be safe from retribution, but finding only soldiers.

"In Maydan in the centre of Damascus

there are 400 people hiding in a mosque and refusing to come out without the observers because they are international," he said. He said activists were "angry and disappointed" at the mission's failure to provide protection.

The mission is supposed to be overseeing a deal to withdraw troops from the streets, release political prisoners, open negotiations between the opposition and the government and allow in independ-

ent journalists. Arab commentators are questioning the role of the mission and Lt Gen Dabb. "We are seeing one side, and the Syrian people, whereas our media repeats the expression 'a delegation of Arab monitors,'" wrote Tariq al-Homayed, editor of *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, a Saudi-backed paper. "This is nothing more than a delegation of Arab spectators."

Editorial Comment: Page 21

Amnesty attacks general who leads Arab League ceasefire mission

By David Blair

THE Arab League has risked the "reputation" of its observers in Syria by choosing a Sudanese general with a record of presiding over human rights abuses to lead the mission, Amnesty International said yesterday.

Lt Gen Mohammed Ahmed Mustapha al-Dabb, a former head of military intelligence in Sudan, has visited the centres of Syria's uprising, notably the city of Homs.

His observer mission is supposed to oversee a ceasefire by the regime's security forces and rebel groups. It will start on January 1, 2012, when the UN estimates that 5,000 people have been killed this year, largely by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

The Syrian regime was deeply reluctant to admit the observers and human rights groups and opposition activists demanded their immediate over the choice of Lt Gen Dabb.

The 63-year-old is a pillar of Sudan's regime. He became head of military intelligence in 1989, straight after President Omar al-Bashir seized power in a military coup. For nearly six years Lt Gen Dabb was responsible for guaranteeing the army's loyalty to the regime. He helped to thwart an attempted coup in 1990, during which 28 officers were tried and executed.

Human rights groups said: "During the early 1990s, the military intelligence in Sudan was responsible for the arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance and torture or other ill-treatment of numerous people in Sudan."

The Arab League has decided to appoint as the head of the observer mission a Sudanese general on whose watch severe human rights violations were committed risks undermining the league's efforts so far and seriously call into question the mission's credibility.

Lt Gen Dabb was appointed to become head of the foreign branch of Sudan's intelligence agency in 1995. He served in the post for less than a year before becoming the army's deputy chief of staff. Mr Bashir was waging war against rebels in the south, and tens of thousands of people were driven from their homes. Sudan's armed forces used militias to attack civilians in the south and armed and trained the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.

Lt Gen Dabb was transferred to Darfur in 1999. A massive civil war broke out in this region soon after he became ambassador to Qatar in 2003. The general is not among those accused by human rights groups of alleged war crimes, but Mr Bashir has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

The Syrian National Council, the opposition alliance, said Lt Gen Dabb's membership of an "oppressive regime" should have disqualified him from leading the mission.

La Presse (Canada)



PHOTO ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cette image, fournie par les forces d'opposition en Syrie, montre des rebelles tirant sur un convoi du gouvernement à Daraa. Des combats meurtriers continuent d'opposer les deux côtés.

Tuerie à deux pas des observateurs arabes

Le régime Syrien ouvre le feu sur des civils

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEYROUTH — Les forces de sécurité syriennes ont ouvert le feu, hier, sur des milliers de manifestants rassemblés devant une mosquée de Douma, dans la banlieue de Damas, à proximité d'un bâtiment municipal que des observateurs de la Ligue arabe étaient en train de visiter. Selon des militants, au moins quatre personnes ont été tuées dans cet incident.

La poursuite des violences, ainsi que les critiques sur le passé du chef des observateurs, viennent soutenir l'opinion de l'opposition selon laquelle la coopération limitée de la Syrie avec les observateurs n'est rien de plus qu'une tactique du régime du président Bachar al-Assad, pour gagner du temps et éviter de nouvelles sanctions de la communauté internationale.

D'après le directeur de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, Rami Abdul-Rahman, environ 20 000 personnes manifestaient devant la grande mosquée de Douma quand des soldats ont ouvert le feu sur la foule. Des observateurs de la Ligue arabe se trouvaient alors dans un bâtiment municipal proche de la mosquée, a-t-il déclaré.

Selon l'Observatoire, au moins 21 personnes ont été abattues par les forces de sécurité à travers le pays hier, la plupart dans les banlieues de Damas. Les Comités locaux de

coopération, un autre mouvement de militants, ont avancé pour leur part un bilan de 35 morts.

Un chef soudanais contesté

Des responsables de l'opposition syrienne ont demandé à la Ligue arabe de démettre de ses fonctions le chef des observateurs envoyés sur place, le général soudanais Mohammed Ahmed Moustapha al-Dabi, parce que selon eux, il a été un fidèle du « régime oppressif » d'Omar el-Béchir. La Cour pénale internationale (CPI) a lancé un mandat d'arrêt international contre le président soudanais, accusé d'avoir orchestré un génocide au Darfour.

D'après Amnistie internationale, sous le commandement de Mohammed Ahmed Moustapha al-Dabi, le service de renseignement de l'armée soudanaise « a été responsable d'arrestations et de détentions arbitraires, de tortures et d'autres mauvais traitements à l'encontre de nombreuses personnes au Soudan » au début des années 1990.

Une soixantaine d'observateurs de la Ligue arabe ont entamé mardi leur mission d'un mois en Syrie. Il s'agit des premiers observateurs étrangers autorisés à entrer dans le pays depuis le début du soulèvement. Ils sont censés vérifier que le régime syrien respecte bien l'accord signé le 19 décembre visant à mettre fin à la répression sanglante qui a fait plus de 5 000 morts depuis la mi-mars.

Le Journal de Québec (Canada)

Les observateurs ne peuvent empêcher la répression

DAMAS : (AFP) Les forces de sécurité ont tué hier au moins 21 personnes en Syrie, y compris dans des villes où les observateurs de la Ligue arabe étaient en mission pour surveiller la situation dans ce pays secoué par une révolte populaire.

Après Homs, haut-lieu de la contestation, où ils se trouvaient mardi et mercredi, des observateurs se sont rendus dans d'autres foyers de la révolte: Deraa, Hama, Idleb et près de Damas.

A Douma, à 20 km au nord de Damas, quatre civils ont été tués et plusieurs autres blessés, dont certains grièvement, par les forces de sécurité qui ont tiré sur des dizaines de milliers de manifestants rassemblés sur la place de la Grande Mosquée, a rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

L'OSDH a précisé que ces tirs avaient eu lieu au moment où un groupe d'observateurs arabes arrivaient à la mairie de Douma. Il a ajouté que les forces de l'ordre avaient encerclé la mosquée dans laquelle se trouvaient des femmes.

Des tirs nourris étaient également entendus dans le quartier al-Hajarié de cette ville.

A Hama (210 km au nord de Damas) où est également arrivé un groupe d'observateurs, des manifestations « massives » ont eu lieu hier, et six civils ont été tués par les forces de sécurité, qui ont en outre arrêté des blessés soignés dans un hôpital privé, ont indiqué l'OSDH et des militants sur place.

Deux civils ont été tués à Homs, et cinq autres dans le nord-ouest du pays, dans la province d'Idleb, selon l'OSDH.

Dans la province de Damas, quatre civils ont péri sous les balles de la sécurité, à Irbine et à Kessoué.

La mission des observateurs vise à rendre compte de la situation sur le terrain. L'opposition et les pays occidentaux accusent le régime de réprimer dans le sang les manifestations alors que les autorités syriennes imputent les troubles à des groupes « terroristes ».

Selon l'ONU, plus de 5000 personnes ont été tuées depuis le début de la révolte, à la mi-mars.

La mission des observateurs fait partie d'un plan de sortie de crise qui prévoit également l'arrêt des violences, la libération des détenus, le retrait de l'armée des villes et la libre circulation dans le pays pour les observateurs arabes et la presse.



La tuerie se poursuit sous les yeux des observateurs

Agence France-Presse

DAMAS — Les forces de sécurité ont tué hier au moins 25 personnes en Syrie, y compris dans des villes où les observateurs de la Ligue arabe étaient en mission pour surveiller la situation dans ce pays secoué par une révolte populaire, alors que de nouvelles manifestations sont prévues aujourd'hui.

Des observateurs se sont rendus dans des foyers de la révolte : Deraa, Hama, Idleb et près de Damas, les autorités syriennes étant sous pression pour accorder libre accès à cette mission.

L'opposition et les pays occidentaux accusent le régime de réprimer dans le sang les manifestations, alors que les autorités syriennes imputent les troubles à des groupes «terroristes». Selon l'ONU, plus de 5000 personnes ont

été tuées depuis le début de la révolte, à la mi-mars. Cette mission fait partie d'un plan de sortie de crise qui prévoit également l'arrêt des violences, la libération des détenus, le retrait de l'armée des villes et la libre circulation dans le pays pour les observateurs arabes et la presse.

En dépit de la difficulté de leur tâche, le président de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme, Rami Abdel Rahmane, a jugé que la mission des observateurs arabes était «la seule lumière dans cette nuit sombre». «La présence des observateurs à Homs a brisé la barrière de la peur», a-t-il dit, tout en précisant ne pas vouloir «exprimer de jugement avant que les observateurs terminent leur mission».

La présence des observateurs aide les opposants, même si elle n'a pas permis de faire cesser la

répression, a estimé de son côté la diplomatie américaine. En revanche, doutant de l'efficacité de la mission arabe, le Conseil national syrien, principal mouvement d'opposition, a demandé à l'ONU d'envoyer ses propres observateurs.

La Chine, alliée de Damas, s'est félicitée, elle, de la mission «objectif» de la Ligue arabe.

Des militants ont appelé sur Internet à de nouvelles manifestations aujourd'hui contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad. Les Syriens sont invités à «marcher vers les places de la liberté» ont indiqué les militants sur leur page Facebook.

Par ailleurs, l'envoyé de la Syrie

au Liban a appelé le gouvernement

libanais à prendre des mesures

draconiennes contre le trafic

d'armes à la frontière entre les

deux pays, «complémentaire du

terrorisme», selon lui.

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

Syrian Forces Open Fire on Protesters

Associated Press

BEIRUT—Syrian security forces opened fire Thursday on tens of thousands of protesters outside a mosque in a Damascus suburb, close to a municipal building that members of the Arab League monitoring mission were visiting. Activists said at least four people were killed in the shooting.

The continuing violence, and new questions about the human-rights record of the head of the Arab League monitors, are reinforcing the opposition's view that Syria's limited cooperation with the observers is nothing more than a farce for President Bashar Assad's regime to buy time and forestall more international condemnation and sanctions.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, head of the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said about 20,000 people were protesting outside the Grand Mosque in the Damascus suburb of Douma when troops opened fire. Some Arab League monitors were visiting a municipal building close to the mosque, he said.

The Observatory said a total of 16 people had been shot by security forces and killed Thursday, most of them in several suburbs of Damascus. The Local Coordination Committees, another activist group, said 28 people were killed. The differing death tolls couldn't be immediately reconciled as Syria bans most foreign journalists and keeps tight restrictions on the local media.

Leading opposition members have called on the Cairo-based Arab League to remove the Sudanese head of the monitoring mission to Syria because he was a senior official in the "oppressive regime" of



An image from a social-media website shows a soldier kicking a man in Douma.

President Omar al-Bashir, who is under an international arrest warrant on charges of committing genocide in Darfur.

The 60 Arab League monitors who began work Tuesday are the first Syria has allowed in during the nine-month antigovernment uprising. They are supposed to be ensuring the regime is complying with terms of the Arab League plan to end a crackdown the United Nations says has killed more than 5,000 people since March.

Syria has allowed the monitors in, released about 800 prisoners and pulled some of its tanks from the city of Homs. But it has continued to shoot and kill unarmed protesters and hasn't lived up to any other terms of the agreement.

The plan, which Syria agreed to on Dec. 19, demands that the government remove its security forces and heavy weapons from cities, start talks with the opposition and allow human-rights workers and journalists into the country.

The plan also calls for the re-

lease of all political prisoners.

As word spread Thursday morning that the observers would be visiting Douma, which saw an intense government crackdown in the early days of the uprising—thousands of people began gathering outside the Grand Mosque, calling for Mr. Assad's downfall and for international protection for civilians.

Amateur videos posted on the Internet showed protesters in Douma facing off with Syrian soldiers, shouting "Freedom, Freedom!" Troops then opened fire to disperse the protesters, whose numbers had swelled to around 20,000.

"It came like rain, they used heavy machine guns, Kalashnikovs, everything," said Yahya Abdel-Bari, an activist in the Damascus suburb of Douma.

The head of the Arab League mission, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, is a longtime loyalist of Mr. Bashir and once served as his head of Sudanese military intelligence.

Amnesty International said un-

der Gen. Dabi's command, military intelligence in the early 1990s "was responsible for the arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, and torture or other ill-treatment of numerous people in Sudan."

Haytham Manna, a prominent Paris-based dissident, urged the Arab League to replace Gen. Dabi or reduce his authority because "we know his history and his shallow experience in the area."

Omar Idlibi of the Local Coordination Committees described Gen. Dabi as a "senior officer with an oppressive regime that is known to repress opposition" and said there are fears he might not be neutral.

"What do you expect from the head of a monitoring mission who is accused of genocide in his own country," asked Ausama Monajed, a member of the Syrian National Council, the main opposition group.

"SNC is deeply concerned about having Mr. al-Dabi as head of the monitoring mission given the accusations around him," Mr. Monajed said.

An Arab League official defended the choice of Mr. Dabi, saying he enjoyed the support of all 22 members.

The monitors' mandate was to observe and report to the league, and not to intervene, according to the official.

Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle demanded "unhindered access" for the Arab League observers to all key points in Syria, his ministry said Thursday.

That includes not just cities such as Homs, but "also the possibility to speak unhindered with representatives of the opposition, civil society and with prisoners of the regime," a ministry statement said.

The Washington Times (USA)

Syrian forces fire on activists near monitors from the Arab League

At least 21 killed throughout country

By ALBERT ASI AND BASSEM MIROU

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOMS, SYRIA | Syrian security forces opened fire Thursday on tens of thousands protesting outside a mosque in a Damascus suburb, close to a municipal building that members of the Arab League monitoring mission were believed to be visiting.

Activists said at least four people were killed.

Troops also fired live ammunition and tear gas to disperse large protests in several other areas of the country, including central Damascus, killing at least 21 people nationwide, activists said.

The ongoing violence, and new questions about the human rights record of the head of the Arab League monitors, are reinforcing the opposition's view that Syria's limited cooperation with the observers is nothing more than a farce for President Bashar Assad's regime to buy time and forestall more international sanctions.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, head of the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said about 20,000 people were protesting outside the Grand Mosque in the Damascus suburb of Douma when troops opened fire. Cars belonging to the Arab League monitors were seen in front of a municipal building close to the mosque, he said.

Mr. Abdul-Rahman and other activists said the monitors were barred by security officials from entering Douma following the killings, after the situation deteriorated.

A witness said angry citizens closed off streets with rocks and garbage containers and thousands of people returned to the area around the Grand

Mosque to stage a sit-in.

Troops also surrounded a mosque in Damascus' central neighborhood of Midan and tossed tear gas canisters at hundreds of people who were calling for the downfall of the regime.

The 60 Arab League monitors, who began work Tuesday, are the first Syria has allowed in during the nine-month anti-government uprising. They are supposed to ensure the regime complies with terms of the Arab League plan to end Mr. Assad's nine-month crackdown on dissent.

The U.N. says more than 5,000 people have died in the uprising since March.

The plan, which Syria agreed to Dec. 19, demands that the government remove its security forces and heavy weapons from cities, start talks with the opposition, and allow human rights workers and journalists into the country. It also calls for the release of all political prisoners.

Syria has allowed the monitors in, released about 800 prisoners and pulled some of its tanks from the city of Homs. But it has continued to shoot and kill unarmed protesters and has not lived up to any other terms of the agreement.

Leading opposition members, meanwhile, are calling on the Arab League to remove the Sudanese head of the monitoring mission because he was a senior official in the "oppressive regime" of President Omar al-Bashir, who is under an arrest warrant on charges of committing genocide in Darfur.

The head of the mission, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, is a longtime loyalist of the Sudanese president and once served as his head of military intelligence.

ARAB PROTESTS AT A GLANCE

A summary of political unrest Thursday in the Arab world:

Egypt

Soldiers and police detained officials of nongovernmental organizations throughout the country, banning their activities from leasing while they interrogated them and searched their vehicles.

Yemen

The army killed 12 suspected al Qaeda militants in Sana'a, Khamer and other areas of their southern and eastern southern city of Zinjibar.

Bahrain

Authorities announced the trial next month of five police officers accused of torturing to death two detainees last year to protests against the regime.



The Washington Post (USA)

Syrians fire on protest near Arab monitors

7 DEMONSTRATORS
KILLED OUTSIDE MOSQUE

Up to 38 reported dead
in rallies nationwide

BY ALBERT AJI
AND BASSEM MROUE

HOMS, SYRIA — Syrian security forces opened fire Thursday on tens of thousands protesting outside a mosque in a Damascus suburb, close to a municipal building that members of the Arab League monitoring mission were thought to be visiting. Activists said at least seven people were killed.

Troops also fired live ammunition and tear gas to disperse large protests in several other areas of the country, including central Damascus, killing as many as 38 people nationwide, activists said.

The ongoing violence and new questions about the human rights record of the head of the Arab League monitors appear to be reinforcing the opposition's view that Syria's limited cooperation with the observers is merely a ploy for President Bashar al-Assad's government to buy time and forestall more international condemnation and sanctions.

Rami Abdulrahman, head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said about 20,000 people were protesting outside the Grand Mosque in the Damascus suburb of Douma when troops opened fire. Cars belonging to the Arab League monitors were seen in front of a municipal building close to the mosque, he said.

The 60 Arab League monitors, who began work Tuesday, are the first Syria has allowed in during the anti-government uprising. They are supposed to ensure the government complies with the terms of the Arab League plan to end Assad's nine-month-old crackdown on dissent.

Syria has released about 800 prisoners and pulled some of its tanks from the city of Homs. But it has continued to shoot and kill unarmed protesters and has not lived up to any other terms of the agreement.

State-run TV said monitors also visited the Damascus suburb of Harasta, the central city of Hama and the southern province of Daraa, where the uprising against Assad began in March.

The observatory said 26 people were shot by security forces and killed Thursday, most of them in several suburbs of Damascus. The Local Coordination Committees, another activist group, said 38 people were killed. The differing death tolls could not be immediately reconciled as Syria bans most foreign journalists and tightly restricts the local news media.

Also Thursday, Syria's opposition called for the removal of Lt. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dabi, the Sudanese general heading the Arab League mission, because he held key security positions in the government of Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who is wanted on international charges of committing genocide in the Darfur region.

— Associated Press

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

The less Israel says about Syria, the better...

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
• BY JAY BUSHLINSKY



The Syrian armed forces' brutal attempt to crush the popular uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime - which has reportedly claimed over 6,000 lives - has evoked widespread but silent sympathy in Israel. However, there has been no public disclosure of emergency medical aid or any other form of humanitarian assistance, and rightly so. Any step that might imply support for either side in the yearlong conflict could be misconstrued as evidence of active involvement.

If Israel were to help the Free Syrian Army or its civilian supporters in the hope that they might opt for peace if they were to overthrow the Damascus regime, Syrian propagandists could charge that the Israelis were behind the uprising.

On the other hand, if Israel were to back Assad because he has abided by the ceasefire agreement instituted under the aegis of the UN after the Six Day War 44 years ago, his political legitimacy might be rendered that much shadier.

All that the Israelis can do at this stage is to keep abreast of developments across their northeastern border. This indeed is being done day in and day out in the local press and on TV and radio.

The biggest danger is that Assad could find a pretext for a military assault against Israel, in a desperate attempt to shift the rebellious public's attention away from its criticism of his leadership to the historical enmity against the Jewish state.

If Assad were covenanted or fed Syria with his irremovable family there are several political scenarios that could come into play.

First, this could be followed by a nationwide purge of Assad's supporters, especially those who belong to his minority Alawite Islamic sect. That prospect affirms the resistance to the political opposition. The pro-Assad establishment and the component remnants of the once-pervasive Ba'ath party also have a vested interest in preserving the regime.

Iran is another factor in Assad's favor. The Islamic Republic does want to lose its closest Middle Eastern ally. Assad's downfall might have dangerous repercussions inside Iran and therefore could undermine the existence of the Teheran regime.

Russia's extensive military support of Syria and its political influence over its leadership also generate backing for Assad in the international arena. His removal and a potential Syrian alliance with France and the US would deprive Moscow of its last stronghold in the Arab world.

Assad's fall also would be a major setback to such militant Islamic organizations as Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Gaza Strip's Hamas and other extremist Palestinian groups. This is because Syria has been a major conduit for Iran's arms shipments to its Lebanese allies. Such a change would end the use of Damascus as the headquarters of Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Hezbollah, which has tens of thousands of surface-to-surface missiles that were afflited to Syria and transferred to southern Lebanon for deployment just across Israel's northern border, would lose this major supply conduit.

In the meantime, there has been serious concern that Hezbollah agents would seize much of Syria's arsenal in the event that Assad's regime were to collapse. Hezbollah could go on to provoke a new military showdown with



PEOPLE PROTEST against Syrian President Bashar Assad in Armade, in northeastern Syria, this week. (Photo)

Israel regional normalization and stability.

All of these considerations explain why Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refrained from public comment about the violence raging in Syria and why he has been able to convince the members of his cabinet and other coalition allies to keep quiet about the Syrian crisis. Israel would have too much to lose if ill-considered comments were to tilt Syria's volatile situation in the wrong direction in terms of this country's security interests.

Therefore, the wisest course is just to continue reporting the tragic toll in dead and wounded, and the failure of the international community to intervene in a concerted and honest effort to stop the bloodshed. That is as far as Israel should go for the time being.

The writer is a former foreign correspondent.

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

En quête de crédibilité, la Ligue arabe poursuit sa mission en Syrie

Révolution Malgré la présence des observateurs, la répression ne faiblit pas, faisant au moins 41 civils tués hier.

La présence des observateurs de la Ligue arabe n'a pas enrayer la spirale de la répression en Syrie, où les forces de sécurité ont tué au moins 41 manifestants hier, selon des militants et la chaîne de télévision al-Arabiya, mettant à mal la promesse du gouvernement d'engager un processus pacifique. Pour leur part, après Homs, haut lieu de la contestation où ils se trouvaient mardi et mercredi, les observateurs se sont rendus dans d'autres foyers de la révolution : Deraa, Hama, Idlib et près de Damas.

A Douma, quatre civils ont été tués et plusieurs autres blessés, dont certains grièvement, par les forces de sécurité qui ont tiré sur des dizaines de milliers de manifestants rassemblés sur la place de la Grande Mosquée, a rapporté l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). L'OSDH a précisé que ces tirs avaient eu lieu au moment où un groupe d'observateurs arabes arrivaient à la mairie de Douma. Elle a ajouté que les forces de l'ordre avaient encerclé la mosquée dans laquelle se trouvaient des femmes. Des tirs nourris étaient également entendus dans le quartier al-Hajarié de cette ville. « Les militants ont appelé à une désobéissance civile complète. Les rues ont été bloquées, les magasins ont été fermés et la ville est paralysée », a encore rapporté l'OSDH. À Hama, des manifestations « massives » ont eu lieu et six civils ont été tués



Une image tirée de YouTube montre les forces de sécurité syriennes arrêtant et brutalisant un manifestant à Douma, près de Damas, hier.

ments pris pour entamer un processus de paix. De leur côté, les autorités syriennes ont affirmé fournir tous les moyens nécessaires pour que la mission puisse évaluer les efforts visant à mettre fin à neuf mois de violences.

En dépit de la difficulté de la tâche des observateurs arabes, le président de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane, a jugé que leur mission était « la seule lumière dans cette nuit sombre ». « La présence des observateurs à Homs a brisé la barrière de la peur », a-t-il dit, tout en précisant ne pas vouloir « exprimer de jugement avant que les observateurs terminent leur mission ». Mais, de son côté, doutant de l'efficacité de la mission arabe, le Conseil national syrien, principal mouvement d'opposition au président Assad, a en revanche demandé à l'ONU d'envoyer ses propres observateurs. Son dirigeant, Burhan Ghalioun, a rencontré hier au Caire M. al-Arabi, a rapporté l'agence égyptienne MENA. Ils ont discuté de la conférence nationale sur la Syrie qui doit accueillir la Ligue arabe début janvier au Caire. Quant au niveau international, la Chine s'est félicitée, elle, de la mission « objective » de la Ligue arabe, prenant le contre-pied des Etats-Unis et de la France qui ont redouté que les observateurs ne puissent pleinement rendre compte de la situation par manque de temps ou de liberté de mouvement.

(Source : agences et rédaction)

par les forces de sécurité, qui ont en outre arrêté des blessés soignés dans un hôpital privé, ont indiqué l'OSDH et des militants sur place. Deux civils ont été tués à Homs, et cinq autres dans le nord-ouest du pays, dans la province d'Idlib, toujours selon l'OSDH. Dans la province de Damas, quatre civils ont péri sous les balles des forces de sécurité, à Irbine et à Kessoué.

À Damas même, des agents

de la sécurité étaient déployés en masse près du quartier historique de Midane, fermé en raison d'une manifestation, selon l'OSDH et des habitants. D'après al-Arabiya, les agents ont encerclé la mosquée al-Daqqaq – située dans le quartier – dans le but évident de donner l'assaut à l'édifice. Toujours dans la capitale, cinq personnes ont été blessées dans le quartier de Kafar Soussé lorsque les

agents de sécurité ont tiré sur des manifestants. Par ailleurs, intensifiant leur lutte, des militants ont appelé sur Internet à de nouvelles manifestations aujourd'hui. Les Syriens sont invités à « marcher vers les places de la liberté », ont indiqué les militants sur leur page Facebook « Syrian Revolution 2011 ».

Plus le temps passe et plus la mission arabe peine à assurer sa crédibilité au troi-

sième jour de sa présence sur le terrain. La Ligue arabe, qui tente d'asseoir grâce à cette initiative son rôle de médiateur dans la région, sait que tous les regards sont tournés sur cette mission. Son secrétaire général Nabil al-Arabi a reconnu que la délégation avançait dans l'inconnu, mais il a toutefois estimé que dans un délai d'une semaine elle serait en mesure de savoir si la Syrie respecte les engage-

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Émile Lahoud : L'agression armée contre la Syrie a échoué



Le président Lahoud recevant l'ambassadeur de Syrie.

Photo Dalati et Nahra

L'ancien président de la République, Émile Lahoud, a reçu hier l'ambassadeur de Syrie, Ali Abdel Karim Ali, à son bureau pour discuter des derniers développements en Syrie.

À l'issue de la réunion, un communiqué a été publié par le bureau de communication du président Lahoud. Le texte estime que « jour après jour, il devient plus évident que ce qui se passe en Syrie est rien moins qu'une agression armée contre ce pays, afin de le déstabiliser et d'affaiblir sa politique de résistance ». « Toutefois, il

devient de plus en plus clair que cette agression armée a échoué, poursuit le texte. Le président Bachar el-Assad poursuit les réformes qu'il avait entamées juste après avoir levé l'état d'urgence dans le pays. De plus, les pays arabes qui avaient tenté d'internationaliser la crise en Syrie ou de la livrer à la Turquie ont eux aussi échoué. Ces échecs et les derniers attentats terroristes contre des institutions sécuritaires à Damas sont la preuve du désespoir qui atteint ceux qui misent sur la chute de la Syrie. »

Par ailleurs, l'ambassadeur Ali a reçu hier la visite d'une délégation du comité de coordination du Rassemblement des partis et forces politiques nationaux libanais. Le communiqué de ces partis a réitéré son « soutien à la Syrie face au complot qui vise sa sécurité, sa stabilité et son identité ». Le comité a demandé au gouvernement libanais de « prendre les mesures sécuritaires qui s'imposent pour empêcher les violations sur les frontières nord et est avec la Syrie, afin de préserver la stabilité et la sécurité des deux pays frères ».

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

SYRIAN OPPPOSITION BLASTS HEAD OF ARAB MISSION, 8 KILLED

In the two days since the Arab monitors arrived, activists said troops have killed at least 39 people. Comments by an Arab League official praising Syria's cooperation have fueled concerns by the Syrian opposition that the Arab mission is a farce

PHOTO © REUTERS



A mass protest against Assad in Arabe. The picture below shows demonstrators holding a poster of Bassel (R) shaking hands with Sudanese Gen. al-Dabi.

Syrian opposition activists are criticizing the Sudanese head of the Arab League monitoring mission to Syria for serving as a senior official with the "oppressive regime" of President Bashar al-Assad, who is under an international arrest warrant on charges of committing genocide in Darfur. Lt. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Muntasir al-Dabi, is a longtime loyalist of al-Assad and once served as his head of Sudanese military intelligence.

The Arab League monitors were gathering accounts about the Syrian government's crackdown on dissent in the central city of Hama as fresh violence flared just hours of their arrival. Activists said troops opened fire on thousands of unarmed protesters, killing at least eight. Though Assad's regime has made concessions to the observers, including the release of nearly 800 prisoners, the military was pressing ahead with a campaign to put down mostly peaceful protests. In the two days since the Arab monitors arrived, activists said troops have killed at least 39 people, including the eight shot in the central city of Hama on Wednesday. The concession — and condemned by an Arab League official praising Syria's cooperation — have fueled concerns by the Syrian opposition that the Arab mission is a farce and a distraction from the ongoing killings. The opposition suspects Assad is only trying to buy time and forestall more international sanctions and condemnation. "This mission has absolutely no mandate, no authority, no teeth," said Assaad Mousaed, a member of the Syrian National Council, the main opposition group. "The regime does not feel obliged to even bring down the number of casualties a day."

The 60 monitors — the first Syria has al-



16/5

and a large sign overhead reads: "All the doors are closed except your door, God."

There are also photos of wounded children lying on a floor in pools of blood, and being treated with crude medical equipment. Another shows an alienation with blood smeared on a wall and pooled on the ground.

At a Dec. 21 protest, a banner reads: "To the Arab League Your initiative cannot protect us from death." Young girls with headbands that read "Liberate" and "sabres" calling for the "execution of Bashar" protest under banners with "Freedom and Dignity."

Opposition to Assad's regime

The images show the intensity of the opposition against Assad's regime, which brought on the rebellion against Hama that began on Friday and lasted until activists arrived Tuesday to start their one-month mission with a visit to the city. Several from the team of 12 stayed in Hama overnight and they continued to work there Wednesday. There was no word on whether other teams went to different cities.

According to officials and activists, the monitors went to several districts of Hama, including trouble spots in Baba Amr, Bab Shua and Imlaat. Amateur video posted on the Internet showed the head of the team, Sudanese Lt. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Muntasir al-Dabi, walking in Baba Amr and stopping to talk to people. In one video, he is seen talking to a man who accuses the regime of killing his 64-year-old brother, a former official of Assad's ruling Baath party, and his wife, and then blaming it on armed gangs. "Your excellency, they are killing innocent people to draw a violent reaction from peo-

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Civilian death toll continues to climb

At least 68 people killed since Monday

Damascus (AFP) Arab League monitors were due to spread out to more Syrian protest hubs yesterday even as human rights activists reported new civilian deaths in a regime crackdown on dissent.

At least 68 civilians have been killed by security forces since a first group of monitors arrived Monday for a month-long renewable mission amid international fears authorities will hinder their work.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that 14 civilians were killed on Wednesday by regime forces in several flashpoint areas, including a five-year-old boy who died in the restive city of Homs.

Activists emboldened by the presence of the monitors have meanwhile called for massive anti-regime rallies across the country today. "On Friday we will march to the squares of freedom, bare-chested," Facebook activists said in a statement online.

Emboldened

"We will march as we did in Homs and Hama where we carried olive branches only to be confronted by [Al] Bashar's gangs who struck us with artillery and machine gun fire," said the Syria Revolution 2011 activists.

France, the US and Human Rights Watch have warned the Syrian regime against trying to hide the facts from the monitors and Paris charged the team was not being allowed to see what was happening in Homs.

Those concerns were

highlighted when Baba Amro residents on Wednesday refused to allow in observers in because they were accompanied by a Syrian army officer. But the standoff ended when the officer withdrew.

On Tuesday, some 70,000 people flooded the streets of Homs as observers entered parts of the restive city, activists said, adding that Syrian forces used tear gas and live ammunition to disperse the protesters.

Ray of light

The rallies took place a day after 34 civilians were killed by security forces in the Bab Amr neighbourhood, said activists, who also reported 20 civilians deaths on Tuesday in various parts of Syria.

"The Arab League's initiative is the only ray of light that we now see," the Observatory's chief Rami Abdul Rahman said yesterday.

"The presence of the observers in Homs broke the barrier of fear," he added.

Yesterday monitors were to tour the northern provinces of Idlib and Hama as well as Daraa further south, where unprecedented pro-reform protests erupted in mid-March, the head of the mission said.

They were also due to visit a flashpoint district around Damascus, General Mohammad Ahmad Mustafa Al Dabi, a veteran Sudanese military intelligence officer, said on Wednesday.

The French foreign ministry on Wednesday said the observers' visit to Homs had been too brief.

SYRIA

Removal of chief League monitor urged

Gulf News Report

Dubai Syrian opposition activists yesterday called for the removal of Lieutenant General Mohammad Ahmad Al Dabi, Sudanese head of the Arab League monitoring mission, for serving under the "oppressive regime" of Omar Al Bashir, the Sudanese president.

Haitham Manna, a prominent Paris-based dissident, urged the Arab League to replace Al Dabi or reduce his authority. "We know his history and his shallow experience in the area," he said.

Omar Idilbi of the Local Coordination Committees described Al Dabi as a "senior officer with an oppressive regime that is known to repress opposition" and said there are fears he might not be neutral. Meanwhile, security forces shot dead at least 25 people in Syria yesterday, many of them in cities that an Arab League delegation will tour to check compliance with a plan to end a crackdown on an anti-government uprising.

The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Syria forces kill 13 as observers fan out

DAMASCUS— Regime forces fired on protesters at a protest hub near Damascus and killed at least 13 people around Syria on Thursday, even as peace monitors spread out across the country, activists said.

At least four demonstrators were killed and more than 20 others wounded in Douma, the protest centre just north of the capital, when security forces sprayed protesters with bullets outside a mosque, a rights group said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the shooting broke out as Arab League observers arrived at Douma's city hall, on the third day of a mission designed to halt a lethal government crackdown on dissent.

The monitors were due on Thursday to visit flashpoints around Damascus, as well as the northern and central cities of Idlib and Hama and southern Daraa province. Daraa is the cradle of an unprecedented nine-month protest movement against President Bashar Al Assad's regime, which has ruled Syria with an iron fist for 11 years.

Activists say that more than 70 civilians have been killed by security forces since a first group of monitors arrived on Monday in Syria on a month-long renewable mission to implement an Arab

League peace plan. "A fourth civilian wounded by gunfire from the security forces has died of his injuries and there are many injured people in critical condition" in Douma, said the Britain-based group.

Gunfire rattled in Douma where "tens of thousands" of protesters rallied outside the Grand Mosque and regime forces opened fire on the demonstrators "as Arab observers arrived at the city hall," it said.

The Observatory also reported that security forces shot dead three people in the Damascus suburbs of Aarbin and Kiswah, and two more people further north in Idlib province, while four others died in the central city of Hama. "Security forces are raiding a private hospital in Hama and are arresting the wounded," it said. "Huge protests" also took place in Hama's Hamidiyah and Bab Qubli neighbourhoods, said the watchdog.

Meanwhile, Syrian opposition activists are calling for the removal of the Sudanese head of the Arab League monitoring mission for serving as a senior official in the "oppressive regime" of Omar Al Bashir, the Sudanese president.
— AFP, AP

» SEE ALSO PAGE 7

The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)



A demonstrator holds a sign reading 'Have mercy on your people, God's mercy on you' during a protest against Syrian President Bashar Al Assad in Ma'arrat Al Numan near Adlib. — Reuters

Syria asks Lebanon to end arms smuggling

Tripoli offers to tighten security on the border

BEIRUT — Syria's envoy to Beirut has urged the Lebanese government to prevent cross-border arms smuggling, saying the alleged trafficking was "complementary to terrorism".

In an interview with the Hezbollah-run website Al-Intiqad, Ali Abdolkarim Ali called on Lebanon to take "serious, strict measures to end arms smuggling from Lebanon into Syria and... not give in to international pressure."

Ali, the first Syrian ambassador to Lebanon, linked the issue of suspected arms smuggling to claims that Al-Qaeda was operating along the Lebanese-Syrian border, made earlier this month by Lebanon's pro-Syrian defence minister.

"Defence Minister Fayed Ghosn's exposure of Al-Qaeda members who are infiltrating Syria via the Lebanese border village of Aarsal is an issue that must be dealt responsibly and seriously,"

Ali was quoted as saying. "Arms smuggling and terrorism are complementary, and measures to put an end to this matter must be clear and decisive." Syrian- and Iranian-backed Shia group Hezbollah dominates the government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati and is a staunch ally of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, who blames the violence in his country on "armed terrorist" groups.

Lebanon's Western-backed opposition, which supports Syrian democracy protesters, has for its part slammed Ghosn as a "minister for the defence of the Assad regime" over his statements.

Lebanon's defence council meanwhile met to discuss escalating tension at the border, which has witnessed deadly shootings in recent weeks as Syrian troops crack down on suspected army defectors and refugees. "The council emphasised the need to control the secu-

rity situation in border villages and prevent arms smuggling to and from Lebanon," read a statement issued after Wednesday's meeting attended by the president, premier and army chief. Lebanon's government has said it is investigating Ghosn's claims a terrorist group was smuggling weapons into Syria through Aarsal, which borders the Syrian protest hub of Homs.

Aarsal, considered a stronghold of opposition leader Saad Hariri, has in recent months witnessed a string of deadly incursions by the Syrian army in a bid to crack down on arms smuggling.

Wounded Syrian protesters have crossed the border into Aarsal to seek medical care in Lebanon as violence escalates in Homs. The United Nations estimate earlier this month that more than 5,000 people have been killed in the crackdown since protests against the Assad regime began in mid-March. — AFP

The Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

Syria violence rages as observers fan out

BEIRUT — Syrian security forces shot dead 25 people on Thursday, including in cities being visited by Arab League monitors to check whether President Bashar Al-Assad is keeping a pledge to end a crackdown on popular unrest.

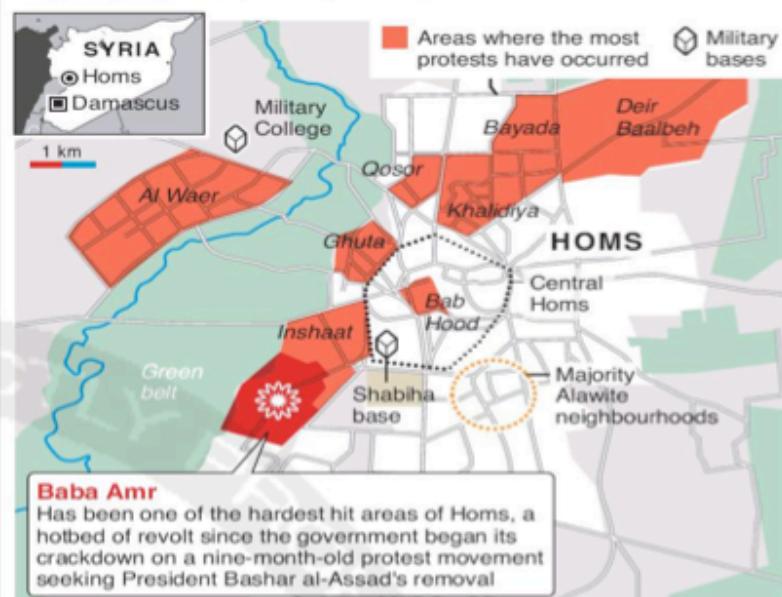
The Arab League hopes its deal with Assad can stop nine months of bloodshed. More than 5,000 people have been killed, by a United Nations count, provoking international sanctions against Damascus and stoking fears of civil war.

Anti-Assad activists have said the monitoring mission is too small and easily restricted by state security escorts that many protesters are afraid to approach.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Assad's security forces opened fire on protests in cities around the country, wounding around 100 people. Six died in Hama, a major hotbed of unrest, around the time monitors were entering the city for a first look.

The British-based Observatory said security forces fired at a street rally in Douma, a Damascus suburb, killing four people. Enraged residents launched a civil disobedience campaign and thousands reportedly flooded the main square for a sit-in. — Reuters

HOMS CRACKDOWNS



CITY PROFILE

- ▶ Third-largest Syrian city with a population of 1.5 million
- ▶ Population represents a microcosm of Syria's religious diversity
- ▶ Large sustained protests
- ▶ More than 1,500 people reported killed in the past nine months

PREVIOUS CRACKDOWNS IN HOMS

- April Security forces move in on Clock Tower square, where demonstrations inspired by the uprising in Cairo's Tahrir Square are being held
- July Security forces begin crackdown on city, moving tanks and soldiers into neighbourhoods
- November Shelling of city begins a day after Damascus agrees to a peace plan brokered by the Arab League the previous week

Sources: Syriamap.wordpress.com, news reports

REUTERS

Syrian bloggers defect in disgust

By Elias Muhanna
The New York Times

THE images out of Syria this month are gut-wrenching. Two suicide bombers killed dozens of people in Damascus on Friday, an alarming ratcheting-up of the violence in a conflict that some fear is starting to look more like a civil war by the day.

Within hours of the attacks, Twitter, Facebook and the Arab blogosphere were boiling over with claims and counterclaims. Some accepted the Syrian government's statement that Friday's bombers were affiliated with Al Qaeda; others, who are sympathetic to the opposition, want to see President Bashar Al-Assad fall.

Thus highly polarized response is symptomatic of a broader culture war that has recently emerged among Syria watchers. For the first decade of Assad's presidency, most Syrian blogs I read were fairly supportive of the regime because of its commitment to the Palestinian cause and its opposition to the United States and Israel. But this year has changed everything. Over the past six months, many Syrian intellectuals, journalists and ordinary citizens have steadily migrated from the pro- to the anti-government camp. Several bloggers have defected from the regime's side in disgust, and a number of them have written compelling mea culpas.

Even Syria Comment — whose author Joshua Landis is often accused of pro-regime sympathies — has cast doubt on Assad's ability to survive this revolt. Absent any kind of reliable polling, there is no way to assess how much popular support the Syrian opposition really enjoys. But as the blogosphere's reaction to last week's violence demonstrates, Assad has lost his legitimacy among many opinion makers and liberals, and surprisingly quickly.

Global Times (Chine / China)

Arab observers visit more Syrian protest hubs as violence continues

Arab observers headed to more protest hubs in Syria yesterday as part of a mission to end a military crackdown, while more bloodshed was reported with 14 civilians killed on Wednesday.

The monitoring team visited three more Syrian cities yesterday to check whether government forces have halted violence against protesters, namely Daraa, Hama and Idlib that lie along a 450-kilometer arc of revolt, according to Reuters. The Arab mission is the first significant international effort to solve the conflict.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that 14 civilians were killed on Wednesday by regime forces in several flashpoint areas, including a five-year-old boy who died in the restive city of Homs, AFP reported.

Addressing the rising death toll since the delegation entered the country, the observers' leader, Sudanese General Mustafa al-Dabi, said the mission was still in its early days.

"We have 20 people who will be there in Homs for a long time," he said.

However, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) told the Global Times yesterday that some aspects clearly marked the failure of the mission of the Arab League observers in Syria.

"Some reports saying the government kills unarmed civilians in Syria are literally inconceivable since we saw armed opposition fight government forces with heavy weapons in Homs."

A Global Times source who entered Homs last week said yesterday that bloodshed in the city was ongoing and that many specific issues could not be monitored by the delegation.

However, the facts could not be hidden indefinitely since more observers are due to spread out to more protest hubs, the source added, saying that reports claiming the mission had already failed were unreasonable.

Meanwhile, world powers urged Syria to give the monitoring team full access, as US State Department spokesman Mark Toner said that "we need to let this mission get up and running, let them do their job and then let them give their judgment," Reuters reported.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also emphasized that "we constantly work with the Syrian leadership calling on it to fully cooperate with observers from the Arab League and to create work conditions that are as comfortable and free as possible," AFP said.

Chen Shuangqing, a professor of Syrian studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, told the Global Times that the delegation would help ease Syria's crisis and play the role of a mediator.

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