

L'OTAN se heurte à la Russie et à la Chine

REVUE DE PRESSE SYRIE #42

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Les Occidentaux et les monarches du Golfe sont choqués par la rebuffade que leur ont infligée la Russie et la Chine au Conseil de sécurité. Cette amertume prend deux formes : d'une part, les médias déplorent que les grandes puissances se divisent alors que « les massacres continuent » ; d'autre part, ils accusent Moscou de privilégier ses intérêts stratégiques et commerciaux par rapport aux droits humains. Tous font l'impasse sur la position de Pékin, pourtant tout aussi claire que celle de Moscou, mais qu'ils ne parviennent pas à relier à des intérêts directs.

Certains commentateurs développent des arguments pour convaincre la Russie et la Chine de changer de position. Cependant, ces éditoriaux semblent plus destinés à montrer aux lecteurs occidentaux que l'on a tout tenté en vain. En effet, les arguments choisis ne peuvent qu'être mal ressentis par leurs destinataires : ces commentateurs leur reprochent de manquer de principes, alors que c'est précisément au nom de leurs principes que Russes et Chinois ont posé leur veto.

En définitive, tout laisse à penser qu'après avoir envisagé ces derniers jours de déchaîner les foudres de l'OTAN, les Occidentaux ne souhaitent pas risquer un conflit mondial et préfèrent clore le dossier. Si cette interprétation devait se confirmer, il leur resterait à mettre en scène cette sortie de crise pour éviter qu'elle n'apparaisse comme une reculade, illustrant la fin de leur domination unipolaire.

- Dans *Le Monde*, Christophe Ayad prend au pied de la lettre les confessions vidéos des cinq ingénieurs iraniens détenus par l'Armée syrienne libre, ce qu'il refuserait de faire pour autre otage détenu dans le monde. Il s'agirait donc de Gardiens de la révolution agissant sous couverture, ce que confirmerait leur tenue vestimentaire et la présence sur la vidéo d'un fusil de sniper. Au passage l'auteur informe ses lecteurs avec quelques semaines de retard de la parution de la « preuve de vie » des otages dans un reportage de *Paris-Match* (voir notre enquête : « Le fiasco des barbouzes français à Homs », par Boris V.). Christophe Ayad admet que les ingénieurs étaient alors vêtus en civils. Il s'ensuit que leurs vêtements dans la vidéo sont une mise en scène. L'auteur ne relève pas qu'il en est de même pour le fusil Dragonov. En effet, dans le même reportage de *Paris-Match*, ce fusil est utilisé par des membres de la brigade qui a enlevé les Iraniens.

- Toujours dans *Le Monde*, Peter Harling de l'International Crisis Group (ICG) observe qu'il est impossible de dire comment évolueront les révolutions arabes. Pour éviter le pire, il convient avant tout, poursuit-il, de diminuer la tension. Par conséquent, ce n'est pas le moment d'attaquer la Syrie. Après celle de Gareth Evans, cette tribune libre est la seconde en trois jours écrite par l'ICG et diffusée par Project

Syndicate (deux organisations de George Soros) pour remettre la guerre de Syrie à plus tard.

- La *Tribune de Genève* assure qu'il faut laisser le temps aux Russes pour qu'ils acceptent un compromis. Une fois l'élection présidentielle passée, Poutine pourrait lâcher el-Assad. Il est donc urgent d'attendre.

- Dans le *Diario de Noticias*, Lumena Raposo, reprend les imputations d'*El Pais* : la Syrie aurait libéré un théoricien d'Al-Qaida, Mustafa Setmariam Nasr al-Suri, pour irriter les Etats-Unis.

- L'éditorial du *National Post* met en garde contre l'engrenage que représenterait une guerre contre la Syrie et préconise d'attendre que le régime tombe de lui-même, ce qui ne saurait tarder. Le quotidien néo-conservateur canadien publie également une lettre d'un président d'université assurant que Bachar el-Assad n'est pas un tyran, mais un réformiste captif de ses généraux. Il serait donc contre-productif de demander sa démission.

- Mona Amami rapporte dans *USA Today* que le soutien du Hezbollah à l'administration el-Assad est susceptible de lui aliéner une partie de l'opinion publique arabe. La conclusion induite est toujours la même : les Etats-Unis n'ont pas intérêt à renverser tout de suite le régime syrien.

- Le responsable de la rubrique Iran dans le *New York Times*, Rick Gladstone, imagine qu'un renversement du président el-Assad aurait de lourdes conséquences pour l'Iran. A la condition que ce changement de régime vienne de l'intérieur.

- De nombreux médias, dont *L'Orient-Le Jour*, reprennent à leur compte des citations extraites du rapport des observateurs de Ligue arabe, sorties de leur contexte. Ils en concluent que les observateurs étaient incompetents et sans moyens de travail et font l'impasse sur le fond de leur travail.

- Dans une déclaration à *L'Orient-Le Jour*, le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, invite les chrétiens de Syrie à se désolidariser d'un régime qui n'a pas d'avenir. Il y a une certaine maladresse à menacer une communauté confessionnelle en lui offrant de sauver ses intérêts matériels si elle renie ses principes.

- Michael Young s'interroge dans le *Daily Star* : pour faire usage de leur veto, les Russes regardent-ils les mêmes télévisions que nous ? La réponse qui ne lui vient pas à l'esprit est évidemment, les Russes ont d'autres sources d'information et par conséquent une autre vision des événements.

- La presse chinoise consacre de gros titres au veto, soulignant que Beijing défend des principes fondamentaux (souveraineté des peuples, non-ingérence dans les affaires intérieures) selon l'esprit et la lettre de la Charte des Nations-Unies dont les Occidentaux font peu de cas.

L'opposition syrienne accuse l'Iran de fournir des hommes de main à Damas

L'Armée syrienne libre affirme détenir sept soldats iraniens à la solde de Bachar Al-Assad

Depuis des mois, les manifestations assument que des soldats iraniens participent à la répression en Syrie. Mais les preuves de cette implication sont rares voire inexistantes. Depuis vendredi 27 janvier, des soldats déserteurs de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) rapportent à la brigade Al-Farouk d'affirmer détenir sept iraniens, cinq militaires et deux civils. Dans un communiqué, l'ASL demande en échange de leur libération, l'arrêt des attaques à Homs et la libération du lieutenant-colonel Hussein Harouche, premier officier supérieur syrien à avoir déserté avant d'être enlevé en Turquie et de disparaître à Damas. Ce dernier aurait été exécuté lundi, selon des informations non confirmées.

Dans une vidéo mise en ligne par les insurgés syriens, les iraniens à l'air inquiet et abattu se présentent, avant que le « chef », Sajjad Aminian, non fessé et entré en Syrie le 16 octobre 2011. « Nous avons tué de nombreux civils dans la ville d'Homs, dont beaucoup de femmes et d'enfants. Nous avons refusé ordres d'arrêter les services de renseignement (...), expliquent-ils. Les insurgés exhibent des passeports et des documents présentés comme des papiers militaires. Il s'agit en fait de certificats de décharge du service militaire. Les hommes sont présentés en chemise noire, la tenue des Gardiens de la révolution (pasdaran), et avec un fusil Dragunov, l'arme de prédilection des snipers.

En fait, l'agence iranienne Mehr révèle à elle-même que les cinq « soldats » iraniens n'étaient pas d'autres que les ingénieurs kidnapés le 24 décembre à la centrale de Homs. Quatre noms sont identifiés et la photo des hommes, en civil, diffusée par Mehr, laisse peu de place au doute. Les deux civils supplémentaires seraient des émissaires venus négocier la libération des otages.

Tout début janvier, Paris-Match avait publié un reportage à Homs, dans lequel les iraniens apparaissent : capturés en Homs de tra-

voilà, ils sont soupçonnés par l'ASL d'être des tireurs d'élite envoyés par Téhéran pour prêter main-forte à Bachar Al-Assad. A la même date, un groupe inconnu, le Mouvement contre l'expansion chite en Syrie, avait revendiqué l'enlèvement de cinq iraniens. Vrais ingénieurs ou snipers en mission, qui sont vraiment les otages iraniens d'Homs? Le mystère reste entier.

Vrais ingénieurs ou snipers en mission, qui sont vraiment les otages iraniens d'Homs ?

En revanche le communiqué de l'ASL est clair. Il demande au guide suprême de la révolution islamique, Ali Khamenei, de reconnaître officiellement la présence en Syrie de membres des Gardiens de la révolution dans le but d'aider le régime d'Assad à opprimer le peuple syrien et l'empêchement de se retirer immédiatement du territoire syrien avant samedi midi. « Nous sommes les amis du peuple irakien, nous ne sommes pas ses frères ennemis », précise le communiqué. La veille, le 26 janvier, il pérorait, les iraniens avaient été enlevés entre Alep et Damas. Les navigateurs avertis ont laissé repartir le bus avec les femmes.

Pour Téhéran, cette mise en demeure est d'autant plus inquiétante que le Conseil national syrien (CNS), principal plateau d'opposition, reprend à son compte les accusations de l'ASL de « parti double » et de « régime iranien au massacre des Syriens ». En décembre, Bush et Ghalioun, président du CNS, avait déclaré que le nouveau pouvoir syrien rompt la « relation privilégiée » avec Téhéran.

Au moment où l'Iran se trouve sous une pression sans précédent à cause de son programme nucléaire controversé, la possible chute du régime Assad est une mauvaise

nouvelle. Elle la priverait de son principal et plus riche allié arabe et isolerait le Hezbollah libanais, son bras armé au nord d'Israël. Il est donc essentiel de soutenir Damas. D'autant qu'à l'ostilité croissante des Syriens à l'Iran fait écho la sympathie, sur le Web, des opposants iraniens pour cette révolution qu'ils envient : en décembre, le fils de Bachar Al-Assad débattait dans un stade du nord de Homs.

La nature du soutien iranien fait débat. Il est politique : des missiles iraniens auraient tenté de convaincre les Frères musulmans syriens de diriger le gouvernement à condition de ne plus remettre le départ de Bachar Al-Assad. Au pal militaire Paris et Washington ont dénoncé des livraisons d'armes – ce qui constituait une violation de la résolution 1747 du Conseil de sécurité instaurant un embargo des exportations d'armes iraniennes. Les douanes turques ont intercepté à plusieurs reprises, des « cartons suspects

de Paris à Téhéran ».

Sur Lemonde.fr
Lire le blog « Nouvelles d'Irak » de P. F. al-Khatib



L'am bassadeur d e Syrie à l'ONU, Bachar Al-Jaafari, et les dirigeants de la Ligue arabe, au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, à New York, le 31 janvier. (AP/WIDEWORLD)

Le Qatar appelle l'ONU à stopper la « machine à tuer »

New York (Nations unies) - Correspondance

Près d'un an de silence et d'inaction plus tard, le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU vient d'être mis face à ses responsabilités sur le dossier syrien. Au vu et au su de tous, « Nous venons devant votre Conseil pour vous demander de prendre vos responsabilités (et) de traiter la tragédie humaine qui se déroule en Syrie », a supplié, mardi 31 janvier, face aux 15 pays membres, le premier ministre du Qatar, Hamad ben Jasssem Al-Thani.

Venu exposer le plan de sortie de crise adopté par l'organisation panarabe, le président du Comité de la Ligue arabe sur la Syrie est allé jusqu'à exhorter les diplomates et ministres des affaires étrangères qui avaient fait le déplacement à stopper la « machine à tuer » du

régime syrien. La Ligue arabe a élu son secrétaire général à Nabl al-Jarbi, soulaillé que le Conseil « soutienne notre initiative, puisqu'il s'agit de notre place. (...) Nous essayons d'éviter tout événement étranger et particulièrement une intervention militaire », en Syrie.

« Espoir » d'un accord

Des déclarations qui résonnent comme autant de mises en point à l'attention de la Russie, de la Chine, de l'Inde, de l'Afrique du Sud et du Pakistan, opposés à l'adoption de tout texte susceptible de valider le régime à la force. Les chefs de la diplomatie française, américaine et britannique, venus à New York pour faire pression en faveur d'un projet de résolution européen reprenant le plan de la Ligue arabe, ont à leur tour et à l'unisson, cherché à venir à bout

de la résistance de ses détracteurs. « Nous nous réunissons pour que cesse le silence scandaleux de ce Conseil », a martelé Alain Huppé, avant d'insister : « Cela nous évitent par conséquent de nous occuper de ce conflit en Libye (...). C'est une chose (...). Ce projet est pas plus que sous chapitre VII. Nous ne préparons pas d'opération militaire. » L'argument libyen est « un élément de manœuvre par ceux qui n'ont pas d'opinion sur le texte qui nous iniquité l'opération en Libye », indiquera plus tard le ministre français à des journalistes. « Nous avons le choix, à savoir Hillary Clinton, soutenir le peuple de Syrie ou devenir complice de la poursuite de la violence ». A ceux qui s'inquiètent du risque d'une autre Libye, le secrétaire d'Etat répondit : « C'est une mauvaise comparaison. C'est un homologue britannique, William Hague, a lui, assure que « l'action

militaire ne serait pas une réponse adéquate à la situation complexe en Syrie ». Autant de perches tendues à Moscou qui n'auront pas été vaines. L'ambassadeur russe Vitali Tchoukline qui la veille encore brandissait l'annonce d'un veto, a relevé que la dernière moture du texte sur open comportait des éléments « dominants l'espoir » d'un accord possible.

Les négociations sur le texte qui soulignent désormais la nécessité de résoudre la crise « de manière pacifique » et condamnent tout « acte de violence » ont été « évidentes » dès le début de la conférence de presse. L'ambassadeur russe Vitali Tchoukline, le 1^{er} février, « Si la position russe évolue, a relevé Alain Huppé, le régime de Damas sera obligé d'en tenir compte. Cela changera la donne. »

ALAN DE GAULIERE

Le Monde (France)



Le Monde (France)

Le monde arabe est-il vraiment en « hiver » ? Gardons-nous d'être pessimistes trop tôt

Peter Harling

*Directeur des activités
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en Egypte, en Syrie et au Liban*

Si le « printemps arabe » suscitait l'enthousiasme aux beaux jours, le pessimisme est désormais de saison. Dans les médias, un glissement sémantique s'est opéré du thème révolutionnaire vers un registre à connotations négatives, où le triomphe des islamistes, les dynamiques de guerre civile, la désillusion et l'impuissance figurent en bonne place. Aussi les commentaires

« Les Etats-Unis soutiennent Israël plus que jamais, font monter la pression sur l'Iran, voient dans le renversement du régime syrien l'occasion d'affaiblir le Hezbollah »

font-ils la part belle aux clivages identitaires, au retour en force des réactionnaires, aux ingérences étrangères jugées nécessaires ou désastreuses, ou à des processus de réforme en trompe-l'œil.

Il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce que le moment fulgurant des révolutions éclairs, en Tunisie et en Egypte, cède le pas à une grande confusion. Ce qui est frappant n'est pas tant le désordre qu'un désir de le clarifier. Un an après la fuite du président tunisien Ben Ali, beaucoup aimeraient que l'heure des bilans ait déjà sonné. Le véritable point d'interrogation porte sur l'apparition de systèmes politiques accordant une importance centrale à la légitimité populaire, dans une région qui en a jusqu'à présent été dépourvue.

Dans l'ère postcoloniale, les pouvoirs en place dans le monde arabe ont mobilisé trois formes de légitimité, à savoir stratégique, clientéliste et autoritaire. Dans un cas comme dans l'autre, de cette posture dérivait des ressources (alliances politiques, soutien financier, fournitures d'armes) indispensables à la perpétuation des régimes. Ensuite, ils ont assuré une meilleure répartition des ressources disponibles au sein de leurs sociétés, après des siècles de concentration des richesses entre les mains d'une élite circonscrite et de pillage par des puissances extérieures.

Enfin, et dans le prolongement d'une tradition coloniale bien ancrée, tous ont justifié l'autoritarisme comme le seul ciment de sociétés fragiles, menacées de régression et d'éclatement par des forces obscurantistes, de l'islamisme au tribalisme en passant par les clivages communautaires.

Ce n'est donc pas un hasard si les questions identitaires – notamment les relations intercommunautaires, les particularismes régionaux et le rôle de l'islam dans l'Etat – sont déterminantes dans les transformations enclenchées à travers la région, qu'il s'agisse de révolutions ou de réformes. Car ces tensions, les régimes les exacerbent, les manipulent et les maîtrisaient tout à la fois.

Aujourd'hui au moins, une chance se dessine de voir émerger des systèmes politiques n'excluant pas tout sentiment de citoyenneté. Déjà, un foisonnement d'initiatives citoyennes fourmille dans toute la région. C'est le versant caché de l'histoire, occulté par la violence de la répression, le triomphe électoral des islamistes et les grands enjeux stratégiques. Pour l'heure, les sociétés se trouvent mises à nu, transparentes à elles-mêmes et au reste du monde, et pour la première fois contraintes de faire face à leurs propres démons. Les lignes de faille des sociétés arabes sont désormais béantes et manifestes.

En Occident, l'obsession de l'islamisme continue à orienter les perceptions de ces changements pourtant complexes. Le succès de tout processus de démocratisation reposera pourtant sur sa capacité à produire une image relativement fidèle et nuancée de la société. Accepter le produit de décennies d'islamisation insidieuse des sociétés arabes, encouragée par la fermeture des systèmes politiques et exploitée comme justification du statu quo, en fera partie, à moins de précipiter des conflits qui se feront au détriment de toute démocratie.

Dans la recherche d'une représentation plus juste des sociétés, il est absurde de se référer à la seule aune de l'islam. De graves déséquilibres géographiques (entre la côte et l'arrière-pays tunisien par exemple) pourraient être réparés. Par endroits, la résurgence des élites urbaines (en Libye et en Syrie notamment) s'articule avec la réaffirmation des masses populaires, dans une région où leurs relations ont généralement été antagoniques. Et le rapport des diasporas à leurs pays d'origine, longtemps dominé par l'exode économique et l'exil politique, voit naître un sentiment nouveau de fierté et de destinée partagée.

Ces processus de renégociation profonde du pacte social ont la particularité d'être profondément intuitifs. Bien qu'ils subissent un lourd héritage du passé, ils se distinguent par une étonnante absence de modèle à suivre pour tracer l'avenir.

Or, sans grande vision à offrir, point de figures populistes de leadership, d'intellectuels chargés d'élucider le monde, ou de médias se contentant de propager le dogme. Les positionnements individuels tendent à se nourrir de multiples influences, dans un foisonnement dont on n'a aucune idée, au fond, de ce qu'il produira à terme.

Sur la scène régionale, les principaux acteurs des grands conflits stratégiques, après une forme de trêve liée à leur confusion initiale, ont progressivement durci leurs positions.

Aujourd'hui, les Etats-Unis soutiennent Israël plus aveuglement que jamais, font monter la pression sur l'Iran, voient dans le renversement du régime syrien l'occasion d'affaiblir le Hezbollah, et font mine de rien lorsque leurs alliés du Golfe répriment toute dissension. Les ennemis de Washington ne se privent pas, naturellement, de lui donner le change. Sous une forme ou sous une autre, les perspectives de guerre, en Iran, en Syrie, au Liban ou à Gaza hantent de nouveau la région.

Ces tensions vont probablement peser de plus en plus lourd sur le cours des événements. Elles pourraient constituer une source de régression possible, en détournant l'attention ou en influençant l'issue des conflits domestiques qui perdurent.

Mais dans une période de recompositions sociales et politiques de grande amplitude, le plus sûr est d'admettre que nous n'en savons rien. La conduite la plus rationnelle, face à un niveau d'incertitude déroutant pour une zone si explosive, serait de calmer le jeu, en essayant de dissocier autant que possible les crises nationales des grands enjeux stratégiques.

Mais celles-ci reviennent en force, pour le meilleur et pour le pire, dans une gigantesque aventure où tout ce que l'on croyait connaître de la région pourrait être remis en question. ■

Sur Lemonde.fr
L'intégralité de cette tribune

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L'ONU peine à former un front commun face à la Syrie

La Russie rechigne toujours à se rallier au plan de la Ligue arabe, mais les Occidentaux espèrent obtenir sa neutralité.

ALAIN BARLUIET

PROCHE-ORIENT La fenêtre est plus qu'étroite mais elle existe, veut croire Alain Juppé. Mardi, le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, au siège des Nations unies, New York, a dénoncé le « couchemur syrien » dans un vibrant discours devant le Conseil de sécurité. Auparavant, il s'était réuni en « P3 », avec ses homologues américain et britannique, Hillary Clinton et William Hague. Unaniment, ces chefs de la diplomatie ont appuyé le plan de la Ligue arabe, repris dans un projet de résolution marocain qui prévoit le transfert du pouvoir de Bachar el-Assad à son vice-président et un processus de transition politique en Syrie.

Mardi, le verrou russe n'a pas cédé. Pour Vitali Tchourkine, le plan de la Ligue arabe reste « inacceptable ». Mais l'ambassadeur russe à l'ONU n'a pas totalement fermé la porte. Et c'est dans cet entrebâillement que les diplomates occidentaux et arabes vont tenter de glisser le pied.

Deux points, sur lesquels Moscou s'arc-boute en dépit des assurances qui lui ont été réitérées mardi, vont être sur la sellette. Primo, la Russie, dont l'allié syrien est le principal tremplin stratégique au Proche-Orient, croit, ou feint de croire, qu'une résolution onusienne pourrait ouvrir la voie au chapitre VII, c'est-à-dire à une intervention armée. L'exemple libyen constitue pour Moscou un repoussoir d'autant plus comique que les déclarations de certains pays arabes, comme le Qatar, ont pu laisser planer le doute. Tous les efforts

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères français, Alain Juppé, au siège des Nations unies, mardi à New York. M. ALTAFFER/AP



6 000 morts

C'est le bilan de la répression en Syrie selon Alain Juppé.

diplomatiques vont s'attacher à faire valoir que la Syrie n'est pas la Libye et qu'une opération militaire contre Damas serait irréalisable.

Secundo, l'autre volet crucial concerne la transition politique en Syrie. Moscou invoque son opposition à un « changement de régime » à Damas pour freiner des quatre fers une résolution à l'ONU. Il répliquera aux diplomates occidentaux et arabes de faire accepter aux Russes l'idée que le plan de la Ligue arabe n'évoque cette perspective que par un processus démocratique ultérieur.

Lignes rouges

Si la pédagogie peut produire ses effets, espèrent les diplomates, les rapports de force seront déterminants. Comme l'a souligné Alain Juppé mardi à New York, « on ne peut pas avoir raison contre tous ». Cela vaut pour le régime de Damas comme pour la Russie. Le seul espoir

de faire cesser les massacres réside dans la mise en place d'un front commun à l'ONU face à la Syrie. La voie étroite d'un ralliement de Moscou à cette condition diplomatique passe par l'amplification de l'isolement russe.

Dix pays membres du Conseil de sécurité (sur 15) seraient d'ores et déjà acquis au vote d'une résolution. La Chine, traditionnellement systématique à l'égard de la Russie, est restée plutôt discrète. Aux diplomates russes, leurs homologues occidentaux et arabes font valoir qu'un soutien irrefragable à un régime syrien condamné à terme serait contraire aux intérêts de Moscou.

Certes, la « pontification », traduisant le raidissement, de la diplomatie russe, est sensible à l'ONU, n'incite guère à l'optimisme. Mais le pari consiste à espérer que, pour ses intérêts bien compris, et face à la menace d'une déstabilisation sanglante en Syrie, la Russie consente au moins à s'abstenir lors du vote de la résolution.



Nouvel appel à manifester

L'OPPOSITION syrienne a appelé à manifester massivement aujourd'hui et demain dans l'ensemble du pays pour marquer le 30^e anniversaire du massacre de Hama (Centre) commis par le régime en 1982 et qui avait fait des dizaines de milliers de morts. « Nous appelons à manifester dans toute la Syrie les 2 et 3 février pour (...) marquer notre solidarité avec les victimes de cette tuerie posée sous silence durant trente ans, et pour réaffirmer notre volonté de renverser le régime actuel », affirme dans un communiqué plusieurs instances de l'opposition, dont le Conseil national syrien. Huit civils ont été tués hier par les forces de sécurité à Homs, alors que 15 soldats sont morts dans des affrontements avec des deserteurs dans cette ville du centre de la Syrie, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme. (AFP)

LOU REED

11 JUN 2012 à l'OLYMPIA

Reservez dès maintenant sur www.gdp.fr

Die Zeit (Allemagne / Germany)

»Assad hält nicht mehr lange durch«

Der Abgeordnete Imad Ghaliun flüchtete aus seiner Heimat. Er fordert die UN auf, eine Eingreiftruppe nach Syrien zu schicken VON WOLFGANG BAUER

Istanbul. Imad Ghaliun faltet die Hände, er löst sie ruhelos wieder, faltet sie, weiß nicht, was mit ihnen tun. Nervös sitzt er an einem Restauranttisch in Istanbul, fern der Heimat, und wägt seine Worte. »Ich habe gehofft, das Regime von innen heraus zu verändern. Ich musste einsehen, dass ich es nicht kann.« Der 54-jährige Sunnit ist Abgeordneter des syrischen Nationalparlaments. Als Ver-

treter des Distriktes Homs hatte er vor vier Jahren sein Mandat angetreten. Er ist im Januar ins Ausland geflohen, als erster von 250 Parlamentariern. Mit Frau und drei Kindern hat er sich abgesetzt. »Die Kleinste hat am Flughafen die ganze Zeit geweint«, erzählt Ghaliun, »sie hat gemerkt, wie angespannt ich war.«

Die Flucht des Finanzexperten war von langer Hand geplant. Schon Wochen zuvor hatte er Telefonate ins Ausland geführt, in denen er sein Kommen ankündigte, bei denen er laut in den Hörer sagte, wie er sich freue. »Ein neuer Job!« Ghaliun wusste, der syrische Geheimdienst hört mit, und Ghaliun wollte, dass er mithört. Freunde in Kairo hatten zum Schein eine Baufirma gegründet, sie beim Registergericht angemeldet, eigens für diesen Zweck. Sie offerierte ihm eine Stelle als Chefindgenieur, ein großartiges Gehalt, zu verlockend, um sie ablehnen zu können. Es wurden Arbeitsverträge hin- und hergefickt, alles nur, um die syrischen Sicherheitsbehörden zu überzeugen: Lasst Ghaliun gehen.

Seine Flucht nach Ägypten trifft das Regime an einer empfindlichen Stelle. Einen Tag nach Ghaliuns Abflug erlässt das Assad-Regime ein generelles Ausreiseverbot für alle syrischen Amtsträger.

»Es geschieht Unglaubliches in meiner Heimat«, sagt er auf Durchreise in Istanbul,

wo er die Spitzen der syrischen Opposition trifft. »Die Regierung führt regelrecht Krieg gegen meine Stadt.« Ghaliun ist Mitglied des zehnköpfigen Vorstandes der sozialdemokratischen Al-Ahed-Al-Watani-Partei, die meisten seiner Kollegen, sagt er, lehnten wie er das Assad-Regime ab. Doch niemand traue sich, das offen auszusprechen. Niemand im Vorstand habe ihn unterstützt, als er vorschlug, die Regierung aufzufordern, die Forderungen der Demonstranten zu prüfen.

Ghaliun nahm mit seinen Kindern an den Protesten teil, er lief vor den Schüssen des Militärs weg, er sah, sagt er, wie Menschen starben. Die Ansichten des Abgeordneten blieben dem Sicherheitsapparat nicht verborgen. Zweimal stürmten sie sein Büro in Homs, verbrannten Unterlagen und beschlagnahmten Computer. Seine Frau traute sich drei Monate lang nicht aus der Wohnung. Nachdem der Vorsitzende der Baath-Partei in Homs, der sich der Revolution angeschlossen hatte, von Regierungstruppen getötet wurde, entschieden sich die Ghaliuns zur Flucht. Von Kairo aus will er die Arbeit der Opposition in seiner Heimat unterstützen.

»Er hält nicht mehr lange durch«, sagt er über den Diktator Baschar al-Assad. Die Steuereinnahmen Syriens seien von 340 Milliarden im Jahr 2010 auf nur noch fünf Milliarden gesunken. Die Wirtschaft sei nahezu komplett gelähmt. Es setzten sich immer mehr Soldaten ab, vergangene Woche seien allein in Homs zwei Kompanien mit 700 Mann zu den Rebellen übergelaufen. Die Free Syrian Army (FSA) erweitere ständig das von ihr kontrollierte Terrain.

Das wird auch von westlichen Journalisten bestätigt, die sich in den vergangenen Tagen in die Stadt schmuggeln ließen. Die Rebellentruppe hat seit Anfang des Jahres durch übergelaufene Soldaten massiv Verstärkung erfahren. Sie sind mittlerweile besser organisiert und ausgerüstet. Freunde von Ghaliun besorgen Waffen, darunter auch die Anti-Panzer-Waffe Milan, die in Libyen an vielen Orten den Bürgerkrieg gewendet hat. In den Bergen hinter Homs spielt der Winter den Rebellen offenbar in die Hände. Immer häufiger ist die Armee in schwierigem Gelände gezwungen, ihre Offensiven abzubrechen und Waffenstillstände anzubieten.

Ghaliun will eine militärische Intervention, entlang der türkischen und irakischen Grenze sollten Pufferzonen geschaffen werden.

Die UN sollten eine Eingreiftruppe zusammensetzen. »Das syrische Volk wird jeden begrüßen, der das Blutvergießen stoppt.«



www.zeit.de/audio

Ghaliun sah, wie Soldaten auf Demonstranten feuerten

KAMPF UM SYRIEN

Die Empörung über das Vorgehen des syrischen Präsidenten Baschar al-Assad gegen die Aufständischen wächst. Im Sicherheitsrat halten Russland und China noch ihre schützende Hand über das Regime. Militärisch entgleitet diesem vielerorts die Kontrolle



In Vielder der Rebellien. Ein Panzerfahrzeug mit syrischen Truppen patrouilliert in dem Ort Dair Balaha bei Homs

Flickenteppich der Freiheit

In Syrien wächst die Zahl der dem Regime entrisenen Orte. Einige Stadtviertel geben Assads Streitkräfte sogar freiwillig auf

Michael Feet und Abigail Fiedling-Smith, London

Syrische Soldaten sind nach Angaben von Aktivisten gestern mit Panzern in einige Vororte der Hauptstadt Damaskus eingerückt und haben die Häuser nach Deserteuren durchsucht. Mindestens 20 Menschen seien getötet worden, unter ihnen sechs flüchtende Soldaten. Seit fünf Tagen kämpfen die Streitkräfte, um von den Rebellen die Vorherrschaft über diese Viertel zurückzugewinnen.

Die Gefechte machen deutlich, in welchem Ausmaß sich die Sicherheitslage in Syrien ständig wandelt. Die bedrängten Soldaten des Regimes von Präsident Baschar al-Assad sind inzwischen gezwungen, Gebiete regelrecht zu besetzen, um dort nicht die Oberhand zu verlieren.

Seit die Rebellion in Syrien im März vergangenen Jahres ausbrach, hat Assads Regierung mehrfach erklärt, die Krise sei beigelegt. Doch immer wieder hat sie dann ihre Streitkräfte und regierungsstreue Milizen losschicken müssen, um lokale Aufstände niederschlagen. Ein knappes

Jahr dauert die inzwischen längste und auch komplexeste Rebellion des Arabischen Frühlings schon, und zunehmend wird Syrien von einem militanzisierten Konflikt ergriffen, der mehr und mehr wie ein Bürgerkrieg aussieht.

Noch sind die Streitkräfte des Regimes ihrem Gegner eindrücklich überlegen. Die Freie Syrische Armee besteht aus meist schlecht ausgerüsteten Deserteuren und Zivilisten. Aber das Regime hat wiederholt über einzelne Gebiete oder Stadtteile die Kontrolle verloren – oder sich strategisch aus ihnen zurückgezogen. So sind mehrfach für kurze Zeit befreite Zonen entstanden, in denen die Aufständischen das Sagen haben. Anders als in Libyen sind diese dem Regime entrisenen Gebiete über das gesamte Land verstreut – bisweilen geht es nur um ein oder zwei Stadtviertel in einem Ort.

In der Stadt Homs mit ihren unterschiedlichen Bevölkerungsgruppen wurde die Religionszugehörigkeit zum Kriterium, auf welcher Seite die Einwohner stehen. Das Regime, das von Alewiten getragen wird – einer dem Schiiten zugerechneten Richtung

in einem Land mit sunnitischer Mehrheit –, kontrolliert die mehrheitlich alewitischen Stadtteile, während die Opposition vor allem in den sunnitischen Bezirken stark ist. In anderen Regionen, darunter auch in der süd-syrischen Stadt Daraa, wo der Aufstand begann, sowie in der traditionell rebellischen Stadt Hama können Soldaten und Milizen des Regimes die Kontrolle nur durch eine faktische militärische Okkupation aufrechterhalten.

In der Provinz Idlib an der Grenze zur Türkei gerieten die Regierungstruppen mittlerweile häufig unter Beschuss. Ein Diplomat, der den Konflikt



genau beobachtet, sagt, die Armee könne sich dort aus Selbstschutz nur in großen Verbänden bewegen. Die Rebellen genießen dadurch große Bewegungsfreiheit, besonders in der Nacht. „Die Sicherheitskräfte können bei Bedarf jede Region zurückerobern, aber ich glaube nicht, dass sie alle Gebiete gleichzeitig kontrollieren können“, sagte der Diplomat.

Das Regime scheint davon auszugehen, dass es die Krise überleben kann, solange es nicht die Kontrolle in Damaskus und der Wirtschaftsmetropole Aleppo verliert. Aber nun wird auch in den Vororten der syrischen Hauptstadt der Ruf nach dem Sturz Assads immer lauter, was den Kampf gefährlich nahe an die verbliebenen Machtbasen des Regimes herandrücken lässt. Auch in Aleppo vorort Mardscha wurde am vergangenen Freitag heftig gekämpft, einige Zivilisten wurden von Milizionären erschossen. Die Armee zog schließlich ab und kehrte erst am folgenden Morgen zurück.

Peter Harling von der Expertengruppe International Crisis Group sagt, die Armee beschreibe sich in einigen Vierteln darauf, einen Ring

von Checkpoints einzurichten, verzichte aber auf Versuche, die direkte Kontrolle über das Straßennetz zurückzugewinnen. „Sie versuchen die Widerstandsnester voneinander zu isolieren. Was in den Vierteln geschieht, ist ihnen gleichgültig – und dort wird die Lage zunehmend chaotischer“, sagt Harling.

Armee und Milizen verfügen auch langfristig über hohe Schlagkraft. Auch wenn die Kämpfe seit vergangener Woche mehr als 200 Menschenleben forderten, so hat das Regime sich wahrscheinlich noch zurückgehalten. Dafür war die nun unterbrochene Beobachtermission der Arabischen Liga verantwortlich, aber auch die Furcht, mit verstärkter Gewalt auch das Tempo der Desertionen zu beschleunigen.

„Es scheint, dass das Regime sehr bewusst auswählt, wo es zuschlägt“, sagte Amr Nerguizian vom außenpolitischen Thinktank CSIS in Washington. Damit ist vorerst nicht abzusehen, ob das Patt zwischen Regimekräften und der syrischen Opposition in absehbarer Zeit aufgelöst wird.

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Uno ringt um Resolution

Einlenken Moskaus nicht ausgeschlossen // Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz mögliche Bühne

Joachim Zepelin, Berlin

Im Uno-Sicherheitsrat in New York hat nach dem Bericht der Arabischen Liga vom Dienstagabend ein altes diplomatisches Ringen um eine Syrien-Resolution eingesetzt. Gestern Nachmittag (Ortszeit) begannen die Uno-Botschafter der 15 Ratsmitglieder über einen Text zu verhandeln, der von Marokko und EU-Mitgliedern eingebracht worden ist. Die Veto-Mächte Russland und China sperren sich bislang gegen eine Verurteilung des syrischen Regimes für sein brutales Vorgehen gegen Demonstrationen.

Russland, das eine Militärbasis in Syrien unterhält und größter Waffenlieferant des Landes ist, gerät mit seiner Haltung zunehmend in die Isolation. Durch die Bitte der Arabischen Liga um Unterstützung für ihr Vorgehen gegen den syrischen Machthaber Baschar al-Assad fällt es Moskau immer schwerer, seine Ablehnung einer Resolution zu begründen. Frankreich

Außenminister Alain Juppé wollte das gestern nicht ausschließen, dass es noch zu einem Einlenken kommt.

Schwer zu deuten ist das Verhalten des russischen Außenministers Sergej Lawrow, der sich zu einem Besuch in Australien aufblät. Wie eine Sprecherin des US-Außenministeriums erklärte, hat Außenministerin Hillary Clinton 24 Stunden lang vergeblich versucht, Lawrow zu erreichen, um über Syrien zu sprechen. Lawrow sagte, er befinde sich auf dem Höhepunkt seiner Gespräche in Australien und „es zählt nicht zu unserer diplomatischen Tradition, unsere Gesprächspartner zu kränken“. Derbart ist auch,

dass Lawrow nicht mit Clinton sprechen wollte, weil entweder zum Thema Syrien für ihn alles gesagt ist oder weil Russland sich eine neue Position erarbeiten will, die Moskau noch nicht gefunden hat.

Am Wochenende wird Lawrow Clinton nicht mehr ausweichen können. Beide werden in München auf der Sicherheitskonferenz zusammentreffen, zu der auch Bundesaußenminister Guido Westerwelle anreist. Sollte bis dahin kein Kompromiss gefunden sein, könnte Syrien zum wichtigsten Thema der Konferenz werden.

Moskau lehnt Sanktionen gegen Damaskus ebenso ab wie ein Waffenembargo. Außerdem müsse in einer Resolution klar ausgeschlossen werden, dass es zu einer Intervention von außen komme, um einen Regierungswechsel herbeizuführen. Die Arabische Liga und der Westen fordern dagegen einen Abtritt Assads. Beide Seiten müssten sich also noch bewegen, wenn der Sicherheitsrat handlungsfähig erscheinen will.

„Es zählt nicht zu unserer Tradition, unsere Gesprächspartner zu kränken“

SERGEJ LAWROW, Außenminister

Sturm auf den Damaszener Goldbasar

Syrer verlieren den Glauben an ihr Pfund. Sie kaufen Sachwerte

Michael Feet, Damaskus

Die junge Syrerin Rascha ist seit sechs Monaten verheiratet. Mit ihrem Mann lebt sie derzeit von dessen Ersparnissen. Ihren Lohn als Buchhalterin investiert sie vollständig in Gold. Das Edelmetall erscheint ihnen angesichts des um sich greifenden Aufstands und des Verfalls der syrischen Währung als sicherste Vermögensanlage. Zur Hochzeit hatte sie eine größere Summe – umgerechnet 800 Euro – in bar geschenkt bekommen. Sie überlegt nun, davon einen Goldbarren zu kaufen. „Ich rate Ihnen, ihr Geld zu retten und Gold zu kaufen, sie werden darüber noch froh sein“, sagt sie.

Im Schmuckbasar von Damaskus liegen in immer mehr Schaufenstern neben Ringen und Halsketten Schalen voller kleiner Goldplättchen – ein Zeichen, dass Rascha nicht die einzige Kundin ist, die eine sichere Veran-

lage sucht. Die eine Unze schweren Barren kommen aus der Schweiz, die einzige Verzierung ist ein granierter Frauentanz. Seit Beginn der Unruhen habe sich die Nachfrage verdreifacht, sagt ein Goldhändler, der Abu Sami genannt werden will. „Kunden kaufen Gold in Unzen, Pfunden, ganzen Barren“, sagt er.

Das Wunderlächeln nicht in einem Land, in dem sichtbare Symbole für Wohlstand traditionell begehrt sind und in dem das Vertrauen in die lokale Währung immer wieder durch politische Ereignisse erschüttert wurde. Genau das passiert auch seit Beginn des Aufstands – der Wechselkurs des syrischen Pfunds sank von 45 Pfund pro Dollar am Schwarzmarkt auf heute 70 Pfund pro Dollar.

Syrische Wirtschaftsminister räumt ein, dass Gold derzeit bei seinen Landsleuten sehr gefragt ist, aber er warnt: „Es macht doch Angst, denn die Inflation für Gold sind sehr instabil.“

Tageszeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

Die Syrien-Resolution liegt weiter auf Eis

UNO Im Sicherheitsrat in New York scheitert ein Entwurf an Russland und China. Beide Staaten bleiben bei ihrer Androhung eines Vetos. Die Europäer und die Arabische Liga wollen aber nicht aufgeben

GENF taz | Der UNO-Sicherheitsrat in New York hat sich in seiner Sondersitzung zu Syrien in der Nacht zum Mittwoch nicht auf eine Resolution geeinigt. Nach Vorstellung seiner westlichen und arabischen Mitgliedsstaaten soll sich das Gremium spätestens am Wochenende erneut mit dem Thema befassen. Bis dahin wollen die Regierungen dieser Staaten die beiden ständigen, vetoberechtigten Ratsmächte Russland und China überzeugen, zumindest durch ihre Enthaltung die Verabschiedung einer Resolution zu ermöglichen. Moskaus Vizeaußenminister Gennadi Gatielow schloss „eine Abstimmung in den nächsten Tagen“ aber aus.

Bei der Sitzung hatten Moskau und Peking ihr Veto gegen einen von Marokko eingebrachten Resolutionentwurf angekündigt, obwohl der Generalsekretär der Arabischen Liga, Nabil al-Arabi,

zuvor eindringlich zur Verabschiedung des Textes aufgefordert hatte. Die übrigen Ratsmitglieder verzichteten daraufhin auf ein formales Votum.

Der Entwurf wurde gemeinsam von der Arabischen Liga und den vier EU-Staaten im Sicher-

Moskau: Der Rat soll Gebot der Nichteinmischung beachten

heitsrat (Großbritannien, Frankreich, Deutschland und Portugal) erarbeitet. Präsident Baschar al-Assad wird darin aufgefordert, die Gewalt im Land zu beenden und die Macht an seinen Stellvertreter abzugeben. Sollte Assad dies nicht innerhalb von 15 Tagen tun, werde der Sicherheitsrat „weitere Maßnahmen“ einleiten.

Doch Russland lehnt eine „einseitige Verurteilung“ der Gewalttaten nur des Assad-Regimes ebenso ab wie Wirtschaftsanktionen, einen Waffenboykott, eine Militärintervention oder einen Regimewechsel in Damaskus.

„Es ist nicht Sache der UNO, über Regierungen zu entscheiden“, erklärte Moskaus UN-Botschafter Witali Tschurkin in New York. Zu befürchten sei, dass wie im Fall der im Frühjahr 2011 bei Enthaltung Russlands und Chinas vom Sicherheitsrat verabschiedeten Resolutionen gegen Libyen auch im Fall Syrien militärische Operationen gegen das Land folgen würden. Zwar könne „der UNO-Sicherheitsrat in dem Konflikt eine konstruktive Rolle spielen“, erklärte Tschurkin. Aber der Rat solle „das Gebot der Nichteinmischung beachten“.

Russlands EU-Botschafter Wladimir Tschischow machte

am Mittwoch zur Bedingung, dass in einer Syrien-Resolution des Sicherheitsrat eine militärische Intervention „explizit“ ausgeschlossen wird. Russlands Haltung wird unterstützt von China. Pekings UNO-Botschafter Li Baodong forderte Syrien aber auf, „Reformen einzuleiten und die Bedürfnisse des Volkes zu beachten, das Töten unschuldiger Menschen zu stoppen und einen Dialog einzuleiten“.

Die Hoffnung westlicher Diplomaten auf die baldige Verabschiedung einer Syrien-Resolution gründet sich auch auf die seit 1. Januar veränderte Zusammensetzung des Rates: Marokko löste Libanon ab, das wegen seiner Abhängigkeit von Damaskus handlungsunfähig war. Brasilien und Nigeria, die in der Libyen-Debatte westliche Positionen ablehnten, wurden durch Guatemala und Togo ersetzt. **ANDREAS ZUMACH**

Russland blockiert wie im Kalten Krieg

Im Syrien-Streit verhindert Moskau trotz des Blutvergießens eine UNO-Resolution.

MOSKAU. Im UNO-Sicherheitsrat ist die Stimmung unter dem Gefrierpunkt. Eisern blockiert Russland ein schärferes internationales Vorgehen im Syrien-Konflikt. Außenminister Sergej Lawrow verspricht sogar eine „Garantie“, dass die Vetomacht im Weltsicherheitsrat westliche Militärgewalt wie zuletzt in Libyen verhindern werde. Mit dem „Njet“ zur europäisch-arabischen Resolution bringt Moskau den Westen gegen sich auf. Beobachter sprechen von einer Konfrontation wie zu Zeiten des Kalten Krieges.

Russland will in einer Syrien-Resolution allenfalls einen Appell zulassen, auf Gewalt zu verzichten und den Dialog für Reformen zu beginnen. Dazu bietet sich Moskau als Gastgeber an – unter Beteiligung der Arabischen Liga. Doch die syrische Opposition lehnt solche Gespräche ab, solange Präsident Bashar al-Assad im Amt ist.

Zwar steht Russland international zunehmend in der Kritik, dem Regime nur deshalb die Treue zu halten, weil Syrien ein guter Waffenkunde in einem wichtigen Milliardenmarkt sei. Doch es gehöre zu den Grundsätzen der russischen Außen-

politik, auf Nichteinmischung zu bestehen, sagte der Außenpolitiker Konstantin Kossatschow in der Staatsduma.

Traditionell kritisiert Russland insbesondere die USA, sich als „Weltpolizei“ aufzuspielen. Zwar hatte Russland im Fall von Libyen letztlich durch eine Enthaltung im Weltsicherheitsrat den Weg für den Militäreinsatz frei gemacht. Allerdings bedauert der Kreml die Entscheidung längst. Besonders der nun wieder ins Präsidentenamt strebende Regierungschef Wladimir Putin hatte die Bombardierungen in Libyen scharf kritisiert. Putin bediente russische Urängste, wonach die Gier des Westens nach Öl und Gas über allem stehe.

Hinzu kommt im Fall Syriens, dass Russland dort einen Militärstützpunkt unterhält und nun um diesen strategischen Vorteil fürchtet. Auch Moskaus Rüstungslobbyisten und das Militär haben mehrfach eingeräumt, Syrien als Verbündeten in der arabischen Region nicht verlieren zu wollen. Zudem kommt Putin die Konfrontation mit dem Westen im laufenden Wahlkampf nicht ungelegen.

ULF MAUDER, MOSKAU

Tribune de Genève (Suisse / Switzerland)

Moscou pourrait lâcher le clan Assad

En contrepartie, la Russie jouerait les intermédiaires. Un scénario qui risque de prendre du temps

A New York, Alain Juppé a évoqué une «possible évolution de la position russe». A Moscou, des diplomates européens affirment percevoir «un frémissement». Alors que les chancelleries occidentales espèrent que le Kremlin lâche Bachar El-Assad, son grand allié arabe, pour permettre l'adoption d'une résolution aux Nations Unies, le ministre russe des Affaires étrangères s'est pourtant montré hier intransigeant. «C'est aux Syriens de décider eux-mêmes, sans aucune ingérence extérieure», a de nouveau prévenu Sergéï Lavrov. «Les changements de régime, ce n'est pas notre travail. Certains autres pays...» a-t-il même ironisé.

Pourtant, cette fois-ci, les propos de Sergéï Lavrov n'ont pas provoqué l'exaspération des Occidentaux. Les diplomates européens semblent même convaincus que le Kremlin finira par accepter de pousser Bachar El-Assad à transférer son autorité à son vice-président. Avec, pour cadrer la transition démocratique, de possibles négociations entre les deux parties à Moscou,



Sergéï Lavrov, ministre russe des Affaires étrangères. AFP

comme l'a déjà proposé la Russie. Soigneusement orchestré, ce scénario permettrait aux Occidentaux d'obtenir le départ du leader syrien et aux Russes de sauver la face.

Mais cette sortie de crise nécessitera du temps. D'où la déclaration vague, hier, du vice-ministre russe des Affaires étrangères Guennadi Gatilov: «On entreprend des efforts pour trouver un texte acceptable pour tout le monde, qui contribuerait à un règlement politique en Syrie. C'est pourquoi il n'y aura aucun vote dans les jours qui viennent.» Une position nettement plus ouverte que sa déclaration de la veille, lorsqu'il accusait à nouveau le projet occidental de résolution d'«ouvrir la voie à une guerre civile».

Bref, le fait que les discussions se poursuivent est en soi un progrès, l'un des signaux confirmant un «frémissement» russe. A terme, Moscou pourrait adopter la même position que sur la Libye l'an passé: en n'opposant pas son veto à la résolution du Conseil de sécurité contre le régime de Kadhafi, elle avait rendu possible l'intervention occidentale. Mais la suite des événements a rendu furieux le Kremlin. Cette fois, il pose une condition: la garantie d'une non-intervention militaire.

Un tel compromis serait une victoire de la ligne «ouverte» du président Dmitri Medvedev face à la ligne «dure» du premier ministre Vladimir Poutine. Paradoxalement, c'est ce dernier qui s'apprête à revenir au Kremlin après la présidentielle du 4 mars. Mais, à l'approche de l'élection, un complexe jeu de pouvoirs au sommet pourrait favoriser un compromis: alors que les médias occidentaux se braquent sur les manifestations dénonçant les irrégularités du scrutin, Vladimir Poutine pourrait faire un geste d'ouverture diplomatique sur la Syrie pour changer sa réputation à l'Ouest. D'autant plus qu'en coulisses, la diplomatie russe reconnaîtrait que, de toute façon, la chute de Bachar El-Assad est devenue inévitable. **Nikita Robert** Moscou

L'Unita (Italie / Italy)

UMBERTO DE GIOVANNANGELI

Intervista a Burhan Ghalioun

«Damasco non sarà una nuova Tripoli Ma Assad se ne vada»

«Nessun intervento militare esterno, ma il presidente-criminale lasci: sono le linee guida del negoziato in corso al Palazzo di vetro di New York»

Nessun dialogo è possibile con un dittatore che ha dichiarato guerra al suo popolo. Nessun dialogo è praticabile con chi si è macchiato di crimini contro l'umanità. Ogni ritardo nell'isolamento di un regime sanguinario significa esserne complici». A parlare è Burhan Ghalioun, presidente del Consiglio nazionale siriano, il più importante gruppo dell'opposizione al regime di Bashar al-Assad. «La sua uscita di scena – afferma Ghalioun in questa intervista esclusiva a *L'Unità* – è un passaggio ineliminabile per voltare pagina e avviare un processo democratico e di dialogo nazionale. Una cosa è certa: non parteciperemo ad alcun negoziato con il regime prima che Assad abbandoni il potere».

Ghalioun segue in prima persona, da New York, l'estenuante maratona diplomatica in atto al Consiglio di Sicurezza dell'Onu per giungere ad una risoluzione sulla Siria

che non si infranga sul diritto di veto minacciato dalla Russia: «Il punto cruciale – spiega il leader del Cns – non è l'intervento militare esterno. Non invociamo un intervento "modello Libia". Ciò che ci interessa è

l'isolamento politico, diplomatico, economico del regime. Una pressione che convinca Assad a lasciare il campo». Il leader del Cns esalta il sacrificio dei soldati disertori e lancia un appello ai militari che servono nel-

le file dell'esercito fedele a Bashar al-Assad a unirsi ai "liberi" e a proteggere i civili. «Non basterà giustificarsi dicendo che eseguite gli ordini (sparando sui civili ndr)», dice Ghalioun riferendosi ai lealisti.

Tutti abbiamo una scelta: stare dalla parte del popolo siriano e della regione oppure diventare complici delle violenze, ha detto Hillary Clinton all'Onu mentre si discuteva la risoluzione basata sul piano di pace stilato dalla Lega Araba.

«Sono affermazioni importanti che corrispondono alla verità dei fatti. La

Chi è

Il leader dell'opposizione siriana in esilio



BURHAN GHALIOUN
LEADER OPPOSIZIONE SIRIANA
67 ANNI

Docente di sociologia politica all'Università di Parigi III, autore di numerosi saggi sull'Islam politico, dall'agosto del 2011 è presidente del Cns, Consiglio nazionale siriano, il più rappresentativo raggruppamento dell'opposizione al regime di Bashar al-Assad. Vive esule fuori dal suo Paese per dare voce agli oppositori interni.

Comunità internazionale è chiamata a una scelta non più rinviabile: o con il popolo siriano o con un Presidente che al suo popolo ha dichiarato guerra».

Mosca ha ribadito il suo Niet ad una risoluzione che contempra l'intervento armato, modello Libia.

«Non è questo il punto cruciale per noi. Siamo i primi ad affermare che non vogliamo che si ripeta in Siria lo scenario libico. Il punto è un altro e questo si dirimente: operare con tutti i mezzi, politici, diplomatici, economici, a disposizione per isolare il regime e far sì che Assad accetti di farsi da parte. È ciò che ci aspettiamo dal Consiglio di Sicurezza. Una presa di posizione politica, non militare, ma una posizione inequivocabile».

Lei non si schiera per un intervento militare, ma in una recente intervista alla Bbc ha chiesto l'intervento della comunità internazionale per imporre nel Paese una parziale No-fly zone, con l'obiettivo di creare una zona sicura per rifugiati e disertori. Non è in contraddizione con quanto affermato in precedenza?

«No, perché il riferimento alla No-fly zone serviva per segnalare la necessità di agire fattivamente per evitare che migliaia di civili in fuga da città trasformate in campi di battaglia dalle armate del regime, restassero senza protezione. Questa necessità permane. Escludere uno scenario libico non significa chiudere gli occhi o alzare le mani di fronte alla guerra che il regime di Bashar al-Assad ha scatenato contro il popolo siriano. Non dobbiamo dimenticare neanche per un attimo che mentre all'Onu si discute, mentre io sto parlando con lei, nel mio Paese la gente continua a morire, ad essere arrestata, torturata, ogni giorno da dieci mesi...Le vittime sono oltre 6mila, la maggioranza civili, e tra questi centinaia di donne e bambini».

Il governo russo si è detto pronto a ospitare un negoziato tra l'opposizione e il regime di Damasco. Qual è la vostra risposta?

«Un negoziato è possibile solo dopo l'uscita di scena di Bashar al-Assad. Chiediamo a Mosca, visti i legami storici con il popolo siriano, di non permettere che il regime di Assad sfrutti il suo sostegno per continuare ad opprimere il popolo siriano. Minacciare in continuazione il diritto di veto è una licenza di uccidere concessa ai carnefici. L'ho ribadito anche in queste ore cruciali negli incontri avuti al Palazzo di Vetro: le dimissioni di Assad sono una condizione per qualsiasi negoziato sulla transizione verso un governo democratico in Siria».

Un esponente dell'opposizione ha affermato pubblicamente che Assad farà la fine di Gheddafi.

«Non è questo il nostro obiettivo. Vogliamo giustizia, non vendetta».

Lei ha manifestato sin dal primo momento un forte scetticismo sulla missione degli osservatori della Lega Araba. I fatti mi hanno dato ragione. Abbiamo accettato il monitoraggio solo perché credevamo che avrebbe smascherato il regime, ma non ci siamo

mai illusi che sarebbe finito lo spargimento di sangue. Se avessero potuto trasmettere solo un piccolo brandello di ciò che sta accadendo, sarebbe stato più che sufficiente per condannare il regime, e dimostrare che sono state dette bugie fin dall'inizio».

Gli scontri armati investono da giorni anche la capitale siriana. Anche oggi (ieri, ndr) si registrano morti e feriti nei sobborghi di Damasco. Cosa significa?

«Significa che anche Damasco è perduta per il regime. Gli uomini d'affari cominciano a dissociarsi. Anche le minoranze che a volte si preoccupano per i cambiamenti di regime, come gli alauiti, i drusi e i cristiani, capiscono che non è più loro interesse allinearsi sulle posizioni di Bashar. Mi creda: il regime non ha più un seguito tra popolazione, resta in piedi con la forza delle armi e del terrore. Quello di Bashar è terrorismo di Stato».

C'è chi sostiene che l'obiettivo dell'opposizione sia quello di passare da un regime ad un altro, altri sostengono che siete etero diretti...

«È la propaganda del regime, cattiva propaganda. Nel Cns esistono e convivono componenti islamiche con quelle laiche e progressiste. A unirci non è solo la determinazione a lottare contro il regime di Bashar al-Assad ma anche la volontà di dar vita a una Siria democratica, secolare e aperta a tutte le componenti della società». ♦

ABC (Espagne / Spain)

Los rebeldes sirios no pueden enterrar a sus muertos

► Los vecinos amontonan a los caídos en patios traseros, sótanos y huertos. «Nos matan si intentamos enterrarlos», dicen

MIKEL AYESTARAN
ENVIADO ESPECIAL A DAMASCO



«No hay heridos, sólo muertos». Las calles de Saqba muestran las cicatrices de la batalla de los últimos cuatro días y Ali, nombre ficticio de nuestro interlocutor, enseña los impactos de los disparos de tanques contra bloques de viviendas, tiendas de alimentación y mezquitas. La plaza de la municipalidad donde el viernes pasado miles de vecinos se congregaron para celebrar funerales por los mártires de la revuelta es ahora un lugar muerto, con postes de luz en el suelo, y las marcas negras de las barricadas de fuego en el asfalto. Las trincheras de sacos terreros abandonadas son la única huella que queda de la presencia de los milicianos del Ejército Libre Sirio (ELS). Nada más. «Si quieres ver lo que queda de ellos acompañame», comenta Ali mientras comienza a caminar a paso ligero por estrechos callejones que recorren la parte trasera de las viviendas, siempre evitando las arterias principales.

Tras cuatro días de combates ya no se escuchan disparos ni explosiones. El Ejército regular controla los accesos y las fuerzas paramilitares patrullan las calles de la mano de agentes antidisturbios. Circulan en vehículos blindados y con los cañones de las armas sobresaliendo de las ventanas. Hoy todas las fuerzas de Al-Assad llevan un lazo amarillo al hombro, una señal para evitar confusión debido al creciente número de desertores en sus filas.

«¡Vamos, vamos!», apura nuestro improvisado guía hasta llegar a un gran portalón metálico que da acceso al patio de un colegio. Otros tres hombres con la cara tapada por pañuelos esperan dentro. Custodian una especie de montículo de plásticos, mantas y tierra, cercado por ladrillos. Cierren la puerta y comienzan a remover el montículo para dejar a la luz el cuerpo de seis milicianos —aseguran que hay un séptimo— que perdieron la vida en los combates del fin de semana.

«No los podemos enterrar, ni se los podemos entregar a sus familias porque nos matarían a todos si nos sor-

prenden», lamenta Ali. Dos de los cuerpos presentan muestras de malos tratos. Uno maniatado y sin los dos ojos. Otro con la cara quemada y una gran herida en el cuello. «No hubo piedad», recuerda Ali antes de volver a cubrir los cadáveres e informar que hay «fosas» comunes como esta por todos los barrios del este. Los vecinos entierran a los caídos en patios traseros, sótanos, huertos... Tan solo en este barrio Ali asegura que hay más de una veintena de muertos. Esta es la otra tragedia del conflicto. Los rebeldes de Damasco no pueden enterrar a sus muertos, por temor a que el Ejército regular dispare directamente contra quienes lo intenten.

El alto precio de la libertad

En el camino de regreso a la plaza se ha corrido la voz sobre la presencia de prensa en la zona. Ali y sus amigos se estufan, desaparecen entre las calles. Un joven llamado Karim Mohamed quiere hablar, pero pide hacerlo a solas. Está muy confuso. Maldice y agradece a la vez la existencia de los rebeldes del ESL: «Todo esto es culpa de ellos. El precio por la libertad es muy alto, pero dijeron que nos protegerían y ahora han desaparecido, apenas tenían armas, ¿qué pensaban? El Ejército y la seguridad del régimen vuelven a estar en Saqba. ¿qué será de nosotros?», se pregunta en voz alta.

No tiene miedo a la hora de dar su nombre, pero pide hablar a solas «porque aquí tampoco hay libertad para decir que no están de acuerdo con el ESL». Atrapado entre dos fuegos, como la silenciosa mayoría del país, Karim repasa con la vista el estado de un barrio devastado por los combates. En la Siria actual se pasa de un sofisticado restaurante en el centro de la capital a una zona de guerra en apenas unos minutos de taxi. Llega el camión del pan. Desde el inicio de las protestas en la capital las panaderías de Damasco registran colas larguísimas cada día.

La mayor parte de las panificado-



Cuerpos de tres rebeldes, guardados entre escombros en un patio trasero



Miedo
Después de que se haya aplastado la revuelta de Damasco, los vecinos temen duras represalias

ras están en los barrios del este —zona humilde de la que sale gran parte de la mano de obra que hace funcionar la capital— y permanecen cerradas. En Saqba no hay que esperar. Apenas un par de niños se atreven a comprar unos panes antes de volver con rapidez a sus casas.

«Tenemos terror. Lo que vimos aquí fueron unidades de Hizbolá (libaneses chifés. Los reconocimos por su acento)», asegura un anciano que espera el inicio del rezo bajo el minarete de una mezquita que presenta un gran boquete en su parte central. Al argumento que usa el Gobierno a la hora de hablar de «agentes extranjeros entrenados por Israel» en las filas rebeldes, los medios de la oposición responden con la presencia de «agentes de las fuerzas Quds (brazo internacional de la Guardia Revolucionaria de Irán) y miembros de Hizbolá» reforzando a las fuerzas leales a Al-Assad.

Aunque los muertos en los dos bandos los ponen los sirios. Ayer se celebraron los funerales de otros ocho soldados y el goteo de bajas en el Ejército también es incesante.

Llamada a la oración. Poco a poco algunos hombres se acercan al templo. «Estamos al cien por cien contra el Gobierno, aquí no hay divisiones y no hay vuelta atrás», asegura uno de ellos. «En el momento en que se va-



M. AYESTARAN

yan volveremos a echarnos a las calles», afirma otro.

Frente a la mezquita las pintadas contra el régimen han sido tachadas, la pintura negra sobre las letras rojas que se perciben en el fondo está aún fresca. Como las operaciones militares, el borrado de los grafitis sirve para apagar los incendios revolucionarios de manera temporal. «el problema es que cada vez hay más incendios y más intensos. Sus fuerzas de seguridad no están preparadas para aguantarlo mucho tiempo más», comentan algunos diplomáticos occidentales consultados en los últimos días.

Qatar y Arabia Saudí

Los soldados que custodian la zona registran cada vehículo que entra y sale de la zona de operaciones, pero sin demasiado interés. Al ver un coche con prensa extranjera lo detienen y, sin necesidad de pedir la identificación, repiten las palabras del presidente. «La culpa de todo es de Qatar y Arabia Saudí, quieren destrozarnos Siria, pero no podrán con nosotros. Por favor, contad la verdad, lo que veis con vuestros ojos, no lo que dictan nuestros enemigos», señala en voz alta un militar en el penúltimo punto de control antes de acceder a la autopista que lleva al centro de Damasco, ciudad sitiada por la tragedia.

Síria terá soltado líder da Al-Qaeda para irritar EUA

Damasco. Confrontos já fizeram seis mil vítimas enquanto ONU ainda debate resolução

LUMENA RAPOSO

Mustafá Setmariam Nasr al-Suri, o escritor e teórico da Al-Qaeda que tem dupla nacionalidade – síria e espanhola –, terá sido libertado nos finais de dezembro da prisão de Aleppo. A notícia veiculada por *sízes* da oposição ao regime de Bashar al-Assad, que citam fontes jihadistas, avança que, com Setmariam, também Abu Khalid, outro operacional da rede terrorista, deixou a prisão síria.

A revelação destas libertações chega aos media internacionais quando o Conselho de Segurança da ONU continua a negociar um projeto de resolução e, no terreno, o número das vítimas aumenta para seis mil, na sua maioria civis.

As razões da libertação dos homens da Al-Qaeda não deixam de levantar questões. O diário espa-

nhol *El País*, citando dois *sízes* da oposição síria – Sooryoon.net e McTransparent –, avança que Assad terá decidido fazê-lo para sinalizar a Washington o seu descontentamento face à política de sanções dos EUA e, como tal, dá por finda a cooperação antiterrorista entre os dois países. É que Setmariam, capturado no Paquistão em 2005, foi entregue à CIA que, informalmente, o terá entregue a Damasco no âmbito da “cooperação de segurança” entre os serviços secretos da Síria e dos EUA.

O McTransparent revela que as fontes jihadistas consideram que, mesmo em liberdade, Setmariam deve continuar “sob controlo estrito dos serviços secretos sírios”, até porque Damasco “não se pode dar ao luxo de deixar escapar uma moeda de troca tão preciosa”. Há ainda quem avance a hipótese de Setmariam ter sido libertado para



Setmariam, num vídeo no Aleganistão, em 2000

PERFIL

MUSTAFA SETMARIAM

- > Teórico, escritor e estratega da Al-Qaeda, em cuja liderança ocupa o quarto lugar
- > Tem 53 anos
- > Estudou Engenharia Mecânica na Universidade de Aleppo (Síria)
- > Em 1982 e no rescaldo da repressão do regime contra os islamitas em Hama, Setmariam fugiu para França e Espanha, onde casou com uma espanhola que lhe deu quatro filhos e a nacionalidade. Em 1987 rumou ao Aleganistão, onde conhece Avdallah Azzam, o padrinho do movimento árabo-afegão.

que este consiga informação dos grupos rebeldes armados.

Ligado a vários atentados terroristas – como o de 1985 num restaurante de Madrid, que matou 18 pessoas, e os de Mocha em 2004, que fez 192 mortos –, Setmariam é procurado pela justiça espanhola que pediu a sua extradição a Damasco, pedido nunca respondido.

O diário libanês *The Daily Star* afirmou, na sua edição de ontem, que a eventual libertação do homem que geriu campos de treino no Aleganistão e foi um próximo aliado de Ben Laden “pode incómodar” os EUA, mas “fragiliza as afirmações de Damasco, que ga-

rançar o consenso sobre um projeto de resolução passível de ser votado. Apresentado por Marrocos, com o apoio da França, Reino Unido, EUA, Portugal, Alemanha, Colômbia e Togo, o texto retoma as grandes linhas do plano da Liga Árabe que insta Assad a passar poderes para o seu vice.

Paulo Portas, chefe da diplomacia de Lisboa, manifestou em Nova Iorque o seu apoio ao plano árabe, mas em campo oposto mantém-se a Rússia, cujo representante na ONU já considerou o texto “inaceitável” e anunciou que, a

manter-se assim, não hesitará em vetá-lo.

Publico (Portugal)

Entre 23 e 40 mil membros do Exército já desertaram para a oposição



Combatentes da oposição síria decididos a avançar até Damasco

São poucos, têm menos armas, apoio internacional é uma miragem, mas avanços no terreno e num enclave perto do Líbano elevaram o moral

Maria João Guimarães

Os rebeldes sírios avançam e recuam, aproximando-se cada vez mais de Damasco. São forçados a retroceder pelas tropas leais a Bashar al-Assad em combates numa série de cidades nas montanhas com vista para a capital, ou fazem uma retirada estratégica. Temem avançar de mais e cair numa emboscada do regime. No resto do país, tentam não ser encurralados: encontram-se sobretudo junto à fronteira com o Líbano, junto à fronteira com a Turquia. Mas, apesar dos avanços e recuos, o tom é de optimismo.

A Reuters falou com vários opositores que pegaram em armas, desde comandantes revoltosos a soldados, através de chamadas telefónicas periclitantes e ligações de Internet aos soluços, e constatou um entusiasmo crescente. Isto, mesmo que uma intervenção internacional, que nunca foi esperada, esteja a ser vista como cada vez mais improvável. Os combates, porém, dão mais argumentos ao regime de Bashar al-Assad para reprimi-

mir o que começaram por ser, há 11 meses, protestos pacíficos.

Um avanço em Damasco, cidade onde a oposição tem tido dificuldade de mobilização, foi determinante para o optimismo. "Quem ganhar Damasco ganha a Síria", disse taxativamente Fabrice Blanche, da Universidade Lyon 2, em declarações à AFP.

Mas muito importante também foi a conquista, mais cedo, de Zabadani, um enclave estratégico perto da fronteira com o Líbano. Há outras zonas perto da fronteira com a Turquia que estão a ser controladas pelos rebeldes, e a razão é simples: os combatentes temem que o regime os esteja a deixar avançar para melhor os apanhar depois. "Temos de ter as costas protegidas", sublinhava o responsável pela logística do Exército Livre, Abu Taher, à Reuters. Os grupos que estão perto da Turquia gozam de mais segurança (apesar de tudo, o Líbano é o país do Hezbollah) mas menos armas: ali, Ancara não deixa que cheguem com a mesma facilidade que a outros locais.

Os revoltosos estão cada vez mais

descrentes na ajuda internacional. "Se Deus quiser, iremos libertar mais território, porque a comunidade internacional demora e só ofereceu promessas vazias", afirmou à Reuters um combatente na casa dos 20 anos. Um tenente coronel corroborou: "Temos de fazer isto sozinhos."

A caminho do caos

"A oposição apercebe-se lentamente que para vencer é preciso destruir o Exército", resume Joshua Landis, especialista do centro de estudos para o Médio Oriente da Universidade de Oklahoma à AFP. "Ninguém virá em seu socorro, nem os árabes, nem o Ocidente."

Mas ainda assim muitos sonham com uma Bengasi síria. É o caso de um antigo tenente-coronel do Exército de Assad que se juntou à oposição (grande parte dos combatentes revoltosos são desertores), que defende: "Se houvesse uma zona tampão, ou de exclusão aérea, haveria uma onda de deserções no Exército. A mudança seria de 180 graus."

A situação no terreno é já descrita

como "um conflito armado generalizado, e está a caminhar para um verdadeiro caos", diz Landis.

Uma deriva que "dá ao regime argumentos para reprimir mais e argumentar que a violência é obra de grupos salafistas que vêm do exterior", observa, por seu lado, a especialista em Síria Agnes Levallois. No entanto, "o regime diz que se a Síria continuar no caminho da guerra civil poderá agitar o fantasma libanês e iraquiano", mas esta tática poderá virar-se contra o regime, argumenta Fabrice Blanche, porque há um risco de degeneração e de uma consequente perda de controlo.

A conclusão de todos os analistas parece ser a de uma queda inexorável de Assad, ainda que sublinhem a fragilidade das tropas da oposição (uma relação de dez militares do Exército sírio para cada combatente da oposição; falta de armas, por exemplo). "Bashar poderá manter-se militarmente, mas não economicamente nem politicamente", afirma Blanche. "E aí acabará por ter de partir."

Condições

França espera abertura russa, Moscovo parece implacável

A Rússia promete vetar, no Conselho de Segurança, qualquer resolução que considere "inaceitável" sobre a Síria, incluindo um texto que contemple sanções, mas a França disse ter notado sinais de abertura de Moscovo e espera chegar a um compromisso na próxima semana.

O ministro francês dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Alain Juppé, sublinhou que uma resolução não implicaria uma acção militar. E a secretária de Estado dos EUA, Hillary Clinton, declarou: "Sei que alguns membros podem estar preocupados com a possibilidade de o Conselho de Segurança se estar a aproximar de uma nova Líbia. Essa é uma falsa analogia."

Analistas explicam que a resistência da Rússia e da China pode dever-se aos dois países se terem sentido enganados no caso da Líbia, em que autorizaram uma operação limitada para depois verem acções alargadas que contribuíram para a queda do regime.

Por outro lado, a posição de força de Moscovo tem a ver com o facto de a Síria ser o último bastião de influência russa no mundo árabe.

Ontem, o enviado da Rússia à União Europeia, Vitali Churkin, deu o sinal mais forte de um veto a um texto, se este não incluir uma clara exclusão de uma possibilidade de intervenção militar. "Se o texto for inaceitável para nós, iremos votar contra" garantiu Churkin. "Se for um texto que consideremos errado, que leve a um piorar da crise, não permitiremos que passe."

A Rússia, acrescentou, vai lutar para uma alteração ao projecto de resolução que para já prevê uma passagem de poder de Assad para o seu vice-presidente e a formação de um governo de unidade antes de serem realizadas eleições. A proposta a circular prevê "medidas adicionais" para forçar o regime a aceitar mudanças, e Moscovo opõe-se a estas medidas, não só por abrirem espaço à interpretação de que seria possível uma acção militar, como por poderem incluir sanções, às quais a Rússia também se opõe.

Mas em contraponto com o tom público, a França nota sinais de abertura da Rússia. "Pela primeira vez, e sem querer ser excessivamente optimista, a atitude da Rússia vem a ser menos negativa", disse Juppé, garantindo que "se abriu uma janela de esperança".

A resolução, dizem diplomatas citados pelas agências, deverá ser votada apenas na próxima semana. Um escritor sírio que assina sob pseudónimo para o diário britânico *The Guardian*, disse esperar a aprovação de um texto, "mesmo que fortemente suavizado", porque seria "ainda assim um golpe significativo na cadeia diplomática de Assad".

The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

UN must stay out of Syria, Russia insists

By Richard Spencer, Rosa Prince and Damien McElroy

RUSSIA yesterday demanded that the United Nations pledge never to approve foreign intervention in Syria in return for not blocking a resolution calling on President Bashar al-Assad to step down.

The promise is one of five changes Moscow has requested to a draft resolution drawn up by the Arab League which calls on Mr Assad to delegate powers to his deputy, form a unity government and hold free elections.

Britain, the United States and other Western powers have agreed to include a statement that the resolution may not be used to justify military intervention.

A source close to the negotiations said there were problems with the Russians' demand that this clause cover all future resolutions as well.

"We can say we don't want war until we're blue in the face," the source said. "But the fact is that one UN resolution cannot bind future resolutions."

As officials sat down to intensive negotiations over the draft at the UN in New York, Vladimir Chizhov, the Russian ambassador to the European Union, said it was still "missing the most important thing: a clear clause ruling out the possibility that the resolution could be used to justify military intervention in Syrian affairs from outside".

The timetable for putting to the vote what would be the first UN Security Council resolution on the Syrian crisis has been put back, possibly to early next week. This is regarded as a sign that diplomats believe an accord allowing Russia and China to abstain rather than veto the resolution can be reached.

Sources said Pakistan and India appeared to be coming around to the resolution, putting further pressure on Russia not to wield its veto, although China and South Africa were less warm.

The United States, Britain and France want to back the Arab League's proposal urging Mr Assad to step aside.

William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, who urged the UN Security Council on Monday to approve the resolution, denied it would worsen the situation in Syria.

"We have people dying every day," he said. "We have between 30 and 100 people being killed violently every day. We have the torture and abuse of huge numbers of people, including children. What the Arab League is putting forward is a plan for a peaceful resolution."

Meanwhile, the bloodshed continued, with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claiming that 59 people, mostly civilians, were killed.

The British-based monitoring group said at least eight civilians died during shelling by regime forces in the restive central city of Homs while 24 were killed in fighting in the Damascus region.

AFP PHOTO/ SAIED KHAN

Financial Times Europe (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Russia queries Syria resolution

Moscow signals it may veto UN move

Assad launches fresh offensive

By Geoff Dyer in Washington, Abigail Fielding-Smith in Beirut and Charles Clover in Moscow

Russia yesterday called for substantial changes to a UN resolution that demands a political transition in Syria, as diplomats in New York started what could be several days of intense negotiations.

At a UN Security Council session on Tuesday, Arab and western governments joined forces to urge the body to condemn the violent suppression of protests in Syria and to endorse a plan for President Bashar al-Assad to step aside.

However, Russia's ambassador to the UN said yesterday that Moscow would veto any resolution that it considers "unacceptable".

"If it is a text that we consider erroneous, that will lead to a worsening of the crisis, we will not allow it to be passed. That is unequivocal," said Vitaly Churkin. Russian officials have argued that the current text could be used to justify military intervention in Syria.

Yesterday's backroom talks in New York were taking place as Syrian troops attacked the Damascus suburb of Wadi Barada, according to activists, who said that the regime's six-day operation to regain control of the areas around the capital from armed opponents had claimed at least another 24 lives.

Activists also called yesterday for two days of demonstrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the regime's attack on the central city of Hama. An estimated ten thousand people – and possibly many more – were killed during the assault in 1982, when Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, was president.

"It's a symbolic gesture," Ausama Monajed of the Syrian National Council, the main opposition umbrella group, said of the planned rally. "It's to unify the country."



Fierce clashes: Syrian rebels open fire during a battle with government forces in the central Homs province on Tuesday

AP

Unpicking the deadlock

'If it is a text that we consider erroneous... we will not allow it to be passed. That is unequivocal'

Vitaly Churkin (right)

'We have until today been blocked at the Security Council by Russia's veto threat'

Alain Juppé



'There is hope that a consensus can be achieved. There's room for optimism'

British diplomat

'There is a feeling the Arab League has been hijacked by the monarchies of the Arab Gulf'

Alexei Pushkov

Fighting was also reported in the central city of Homs, the north-western province of Idlib and the southern province of Deraa. The Local Coordination Committees, an activist network, said at least 63 people had been killed.

Russia, which has been the strongest supporter of the Assad regime, has sent mixed signals in recent days as diplomatic pressure has mounted on Moscow to support an Arab League plan for stopping the violence in Syria.

Diplomats at the UN say

they have been surprised by the relative mildness of some of Moscow's recent statements on Syria. However, this has led to some divisions among Arab and western governments over how to proceed.

Some governments think Russia wishes to avoid a direct confrontation with the Arab League but will eventually veto any tough resolution. Other diplomats believe it might be possible to reach a robust consensus at the UN, with a possible vote taking place on Friday.

Alain Juppé, the French

foreign minister, said yesterday that for the first time Russia and China were "less negative" in their approach to the Syria debate. "We have unfortunately until today been blocked at the Security Council by Russia's veto threat," Mr Juppé said.

A British diplomat said: "There is a sense that the Russians were more mild than we had expected on Tuesday and there is hope that a consensus can be achieved."

Russia has been put on the defensive by the strong

stance of the Arab League, which has demanded action on Syria. Moscow's diplomats are likely to probe for divisions among Arab ranks.

"There is a feeling that the Arab League has been hijacked by the monarchies of the Arab Gulf," said Alexei Pushkov, chairman of the committee on international relations in the State Duma, or lower house of parliament, speaking in Moscow.

He noted that the league had been selective in where it demanded action and that

it ignored, for example, the crisis in the Gulf state of Bahrain.

"The double standard is very much felt. It is not about principles, it is about geopolitics," Mr Pushkov said.

Russia wants to avoid a repeat of the situation last year in Libya, when the initial UN resolution calling for a no-fly zone became the basis for much larger Nato military intervention.

Additional reporting by James Blütz in London

www.ft.com/world

The National Post (Canada)

Let Syria fall apart on its own

With Syrian rebels now gathered at the gates of Damascus, Russia has emerged as Bashar Assad's noisiest and most influential defender. In particular, Moscow is deeply suspicious of a Security Council resolution, backed by Western powers and Arab nations alike, that calls for the hated Syrian dictator to give up power. "The Russian policy is not about asking someone to step down; regime change is not our profession," explained Russian foreign minister Sergey V. Lavrov. "The decision should be made by ... the Syrians themselves."

Russia's motives are, of course, deeply cynical. Syria is a Russian client state, providing both a market for Russian weaponry and a Mediterranean port for its warships. But — even if it's for all the wrong reasons — the Russians are correct to urge caution. Syria is about to fall apart, no matter what the rest of the world does. Do we really want it to fall apart under the auspices of a Western-backed regime-change plan? "You break it, you own it," is the operating principle of nation-building, and Syria is not a nation that anyone should want to own.

The obvious counter-argument is the humanitarian one — that Western action is neces-

system behind them? The path from well-intentioned UN resolutions to war is a short one.

Sometimes, Western nations invoke the break-and-own principle because it is the best of bad options. This was the case in Afghanistan, where the only other choice was permitting the continued existence of a de facto sovereign Islamic Republic of al-Qaeda in the heart of Central Asia, and in Iraq, which the West (falsely) believed was on the cusp of fielding apocalyptic weapons of mass destruction. But there are no similar considerations at play in Syria. The country is Iraq without the oil — a warmongering Baathist powder keg with a restive Kurdish minority, ruled by a minority Islamic sect. It is theoretically possible that this country could transition to democracy after Assad falls — but don't bet on it. With its long-repressed Sunni majority, it might easily become one giant Anbar.

The violent status quo in Damascus, horrible as it is for Syrians themselves, actually has proven a strategic boon to the West. Because Hamas refuses to support the Assad regime, the group's leaders have been kicked out of Damascus, and are now effectively homeless. Iran's continued support for Assad has cast Tehran into moral disgrace throughout the Arab world — and has made an absolute mockery of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's claim to speak moral Islamic truth to Western neo-colonial power. The same is true of Iran's Lebanese client Hezbollah, which has taken sides with the Assads. For once, mobilized Arab activists in the Levant are more interested in taming one of their own than with flinging blood libels at Jews or Israel or America. If Western powers were to take the same cynically self-interested approach as the Russians, they would encourage Syria's civil war (for that is what it already has become) to linger for months, and even years.

That won't happen, because Syrian lives have meaning to Western leaders — even if they don't to Mr. Assad himself. Even so, Syria is not a mess that Barack Obama or anyone else should want to make their own. And any UN Security Council resolution passed on the matter should reflect that reality.

With its
long-repressed
Sunni majority,
the country might
easily become
one giant Anbar

sary to end the bloodshed that Assad's "iron fist" has let loose upon the residents of Homs and other rebellion flashpoints. But if on-the-ground Arab monitors didn't discourage Assad from massacring his own people, why would we expect better from a UN resolution? Assad will go on killing Syrians — but this time the stakes would be higher, because he would be doing so in defiance of the UN Security Council, just as Saddam Hussein did in the 1990s. And we know how that unfolded, and is still unfolding, car bomb by car bomb.

Even if military intervention against Syria isn't on the table, the Russians aren't wrong to suspect that it may come to that: No one ever thought Western planes would be dropping bombs on Libya and Serbia, either. But humanitarian demands emanating from NATO and the UN tend to find their own momentum. Demands for a ceasefire inevitably lead to demands for a no-fly zone. And what good is a no-fly zone unless you enforce it? And how can you enforce it unless you first destroy a target nation's anti-aircraft capabilities ... not to mention the command-and-control

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See Page A2

The National Post (Canada)



MIGUEL MEDINA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Bashar al-Assad and his wife Asma were once keen to modernize Syria, our letter writer recalls.

Bashar al-Assad: 'As much a captive as master'

Re: The Assad Delusion, Hind Aboud Kabawat, Jan. 31.

I read Hind Aboud Kabawat's article with more than a passing interest. Almost exactly two years ago, I spent a few wonderful hours with Hind and her friends over lunch in her house in the old part of Damascus. I was then president of a private university in England, and was in Syria to forge links with Syrian universities. At lunch, we talked about the changes in Syria, about the promising young Assad and his wife Asma, the latter of whom we had met with for an hour in the palace to discuss educational reforms as a road to modernity, and about Hind's group of interfaith friends who longed for change.

But there was already at that time a storm cloud; a conference on interfaith and intercultural dialogue had been cancelled, and the question in the room was why. Looking back, it seems obvious that the Assads' desire for change was already being stifled by the old Alawite supporters who feared for their posts. University authorities too wanted change, but they were being stifled by an old guard frightened of change.

Sadly, Bashar al-Assad has chosen to support his Alawite tribe and placemen, perhaps because they would murder him if he refused to do their bidding. In that sense, he is as much captive as master.

Ian Newbould, Toronto.

USA Today

Hezbollah's stance on Syria divides Arabs

Muted response to violence has some souring on uprising, future

By Mona Alami
Special for USA TODAY

BAALBECK, Lebanon — The dark shadows of Mount Lebanon run along the asphalt road as the car heads to the ancient city of Baalbeck, where the exquisitely carved ruins of Roman temples still stand.

The car slows in a traffic jam at one of the main intersections, not far from Roman columns that were once the entrance to the temple of Jupiter. Men from the drug squad, armed with machine guns and faces hidden by masks, search every car for caches of the marijuana, hashish and opium that have grown in this fertile valley for centuries.

Baalbeck is a city known for lawlessness. It is also known as a stronghold of Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite Muslim militant organization supported by Syria and Iran that has carried out terror attacks against U.S. targets and wars with Israel.

Portrayed by its leaders as the protector of ordinary Muslims, that image is contradicted by its standing by mutely as its patron Syria kills fellow Muslims to preserve a dictatorship, critics say.

"Hezbollah has taken sides in the conflict," says Sheik Sobhi Toufayli, who headed Hezbollah in the 1990s.

When the Arab pro-democracy protests erupted last February in Egypt, Hezbollah applauded them. Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah said his organization was in "solidarity with the Egyptian and Tunisian people and youth."

"This revolution is the product of the people's will and determination," he said. "We are witnessing a complete revolution of the poor, the free, the students."

Nasrallah also praised the Arab Spring democracy movements in Bahrain, Yemen and Libya. But he has no apparent enthusiasm for the uprising in



Arab Spring withers: Lebanese Hezbollah supporters march on Ashura, a holy day, in Beirut's suburbs in December. The group's leader is enthusiastic for the pro-democracy movement — except in Syria.

Syria, where tens of thousands of Muslims are demanding democratic changes and the ouster of dictator Bashar Assad. Nasrallah even has overseen measures to help Assad crush the demonstrators.

"Hezbollah is in a difficult situation," says Talal Atrissi, professor of sociology at Lebanese University. "The party supported other Arab revolutions because they shared their resistance ideology that inadvertently put an end to regimes known for their pro-American and Israeli sympathies. In Syria, however, the situation is different."

Syria for years has allowed weapons from Iran bound for Hezbollah in south Lebanon, on the border with Israel, to transit through its country. Thousands of missiles have made it to Hezbollah this way.

Hezbollah had taken advantage of the upheaval in Syria to obtain advanced weapons systems, such as long-range rockets and Russian-made air-defense systems, according to reports in *The Jerusalem Post*, quoting Western intelligence assessments.

Hezbollah's support for the



By Mona Alami for USA TODAY

Assad regime has not gone unnoticed by Syrian protesters. Recent images from demonstrations show people burning the yellow Hezbollah flag. The Syrian Revolution Coordination Committee has accused Hezbollah of firing Katyusha rockets from Lebanon into the al-Zabadani region of Syria where anti-Assad protests are taking place.

Hezbollah calls the accusations "false rumors," and Ibrahim Moussawi, editor of Hezbollah's magazine *al-Intikad*, declined to comment. But Shiites here appear to be divided over the matter.

Sitting in his vegetable store close to the opulent Beirut Central District, Mohamad Zaheridine reads a copy of the Quran while watching al-Manar TV, the Hezbollah-run station.

"People in Syria and Tunisia are just the same, fighting against tyrants. Syria's anti-Israeli policies do not make its crackdown on protesters legitimate," he says.

Electrician Abu Mazen agrees. "The (Assad) regime does not have the right to quell the protest movement in blood," he says.

However, Ismail Zeaiter, a



Regime moves to crush protests: A man holds a poster of Syrian President Bashar Assad, right, and Lebanon's Hezbollah chief, Hassan Nasrallah, during a pro-regime rally in Damascus on Jan. 11.



By Janet Lorchke, USA TODAY

says Ahmad Dakroub, a Hezbollah supporter in Watwat, a Beirut neighborhood.

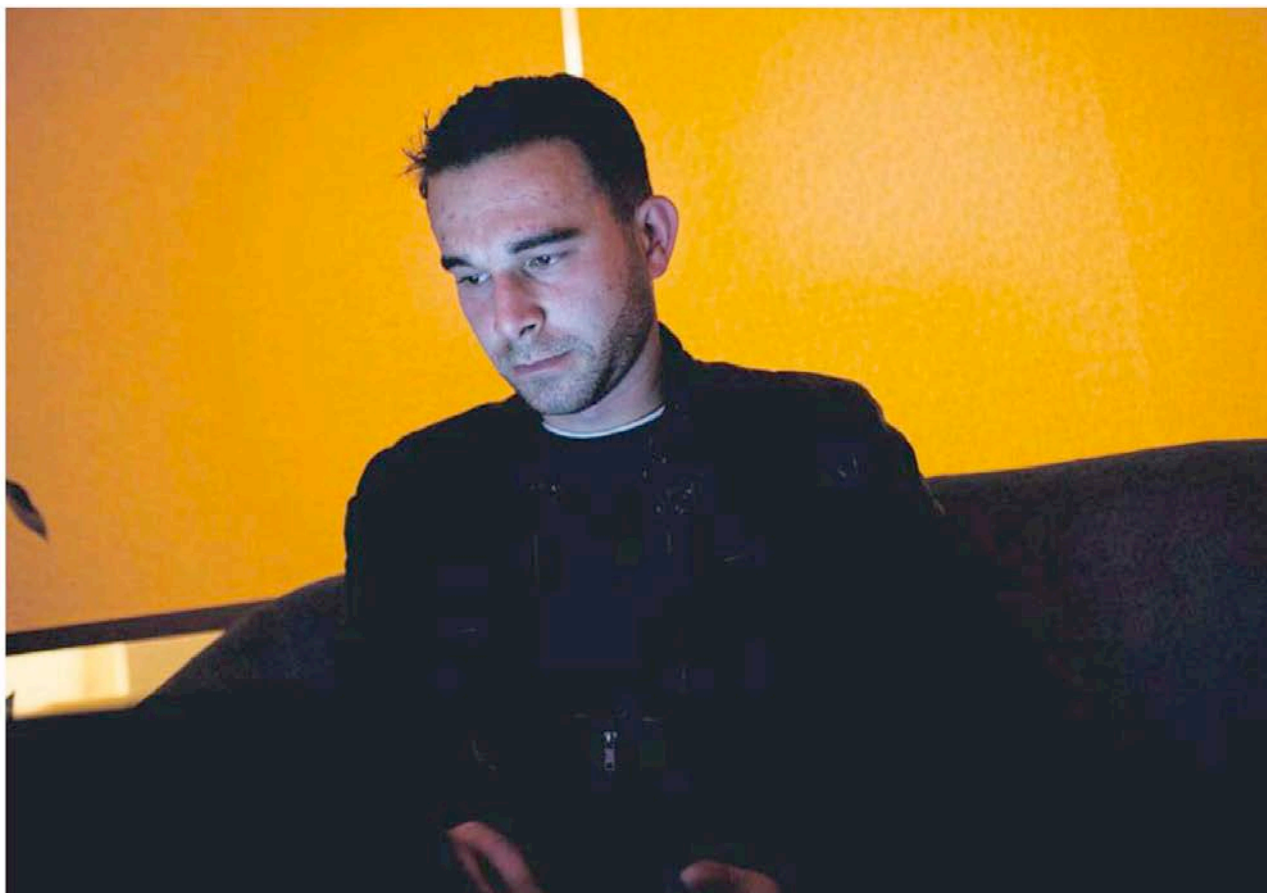
Dakroub doubts that the downfall of Assad in Syria would make a difference because of what happened in Lebanon when Hezbollah took charge of the government in June.

"Now that we (Hezbollah) are in power, nothing has changed. We still work day and night for a mere pittance. No matter who is in power, politics stays the same," he says.

Sheik Toufayli, however, warns that Hezbollah must avoid stirring up divisions between the Sunni Muslims leading the uprising in Syria, who are the majority, and the Shiite Muslim sect known as Alawite that dominates the government. Violence between Sunnis and Shiites has been tearing apart many Arab nations — Iraq and Bahrain among them.

Lebanon itself went through a brutal civil war from the 1970s to the 1990s in which hundreds of thousands of Lebanese were killed or driven into exile. Toufayli says Hezbollah is drawing Lebanon into a conflict that could prompt a return of civil war here.

"I call on Hezbollah to reconsider its approach and unite Sunnis and Shiites. The solution resides in building a true democracy in Syria. Any other approach will only serve enemy interests," he says.



DANIEL LETTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ammar Cheikh Omar, who grew up in Germany, said he was proud at first to be a Syrian soldier, but decided to defect after being ordered to shoot at people protesting the Assad regime.

Syria ‘intent on killing its own’

HATAY, TURKEY

Rebel who left recounts scenes of torture and orders to shoot protesters

BY DAN BILEFSKY

Ammar Cheikh Omar recalled the first time he was ordered to shoot into a crowd of protesters in Syria. He aimed his AK-47 just above their heads, prayed to God not to make him a killer and pulled the trigger.

Mr. Omar, 29, the soft-spoken and wiry son of Syrian parents who had emigrated to Germany in the 1950s, grew up in Rheda-Wiedenbrück, a prosperous village of half-timbered 16th-century houses, where he listened to Mariah Carey and daydreamed about one day returning to Syria.

Today, he is still trying to make sense of his unlikely transformation from a dutiful German student to a killer for the brutal Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad and, ultimately, a defector.

“I was proud to be Syrian, but instead became a soldier for a regime that was intent on killing its own people,” Mr. Omar said recently, chain-smoking at a cafe in this Turkish border town. “I thank God every day that I am still alive.”

Human rights groups and Syrian activists said he was one of thousands of Syrians who had inadvertently found themselves deployed as foot soldiers for a regime that the United Nations estimates has killed more than 5,000 people since the crackdown on demonstrators began in March.

Soldiers are typically conscripted at age 18, with members of Syria’s Sunni majority making up the bulk of the army ranks and minority Alawites, who come from the same religious group as Mr. As-

sad, often serving as high-ranking officers or in the state security apparatus. Mr. Omar, a highly educated Sunni with flawless Arabic, gained entry to a security unit attached to the Interior Ministry.

Human rights groups estimate that there are at least 5,000 defectors; an exact number is difficult to confirm because many remain in hiding. “Mr. Omar’s harrowing tale fits an all-too-familiar pattern in which soldiers are deployed away from their hometowns to help ensure that they will be less likely to refuse an order to kill,” said Ole Solvang, a researcher at Human Rights Watch who has interviewed dozens of Syrian defectors, including Mr. Omar. “He was one of the lucky ones, as he managed to escape.”

There is no way to corroborate much

PRESSURE ON SYRIA BEING FELT IN IRAN

The upheaval in Syria could deprive Iran of its most important partner in projecting its regional power. PAGE 4

of Mr. Omar’s account of his journey to becoming an enforcer for the Assad regime. Though human rights groups and activists operating in Syria say it fits the pattern of hundreds of defectors who have fled the country, it is simply one man’s tale. It began in 2004 when he left Germany for Aleppo, with the aim of getting in touch with his roots, studying law, improving his Arabic and finding a wife.

He managed to do all of that, entering law school, marrying a doctor and, eventually, fathering a child. His parents, meanwhile, had moved back to Aleppo because his father wanted to spend his final years in the old country.

In late 2010, Mr. Omar was conscripted into the Syrian military, just weeks before a Tunisian fruit seller set himself on fire, inspiring the wave of regional protests that eventually buffeted Syria, whose authoritarian president is deter-

DEFECTOR, PAGE 4

Russia warns it would veto 'erroneous' text on Syria

MOSCOW
U.N. resolution faces rejection over possible military intervention

Russia said Wednesday that it would veto any U.N. resolution on Syria that it finds unacceptable, after demanding that any measure rule out military intervention against President Bashar al-Assad.

Political violence in Syria has killed at least 5,000 people in the past 10 months, according to U.N. officials, who have stopped counting. Anti-Assad activists say his forces have stepped up operations this week on opposition strongholds, from the Damascus suburbs to the cities of Hama and Homs and the border provinces of Dara'a and Latakia.

Arab and Western states urged the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday to act swiftly on a resolution calling for Mr. Assad to hand over powers to his deputy.

"If the text will be unacceptable for us we will vote against it, of course," Russian U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, told reporters in Moscow via a videotape from New York. "If it is a text that we consider erroneous, that will lead to a worsening of the crisis, we will not allow it to be passed. That is unequivocal."

But Foreign Minister Alan Juppé of France said a "window of hope" had opened. "We will work furiously in the next few days to try and get a resolution that will allow the Arab League to force ahead in finding a solution," he told Parliament in Paris.

Russia and China, both of which hold a veto in the Security Council, have resisted a Western push for a resolution condemning the Syrian government's crackdown on unrest.

"China is firmly opposed to the use of force to solve the Syrian problem and resolutely opposes pushing for forced regime change in Syria, as it violates the United Nations Charter and the basic norms guiding the practice of international relations," China's news agency, Xinhua, quoted its ambassador to the U.N., Li Baoding, as telling the Security Council.

Syria's U.N. ambassador, Bashar Ja'afari, rejected the suggestion that his government was responsible for the crisis and accused Western powers of dreaming of "the return of colonialism and hegemony" in the Middle East.

The prime minister of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, who has led the Arab League's efforts to tackle the Syrian crisis, attempted to ally the objections from Moscow and Beijing.

"We are not calling for foreign intervention," he said. "We are advocating the exertion of concrete economic pressure so that the Syrian regime might realize that it is imperative to meet the demands of its people."

He told the 15-member Security Council that Syria's "killing machine is still at work."

An activist group said Syrian troops had killed eight people in Hama and that 15 government soldiers had been killed in a clash with a unit of the rebel Free Syrian Army.

Syrian insurgents said Mr. Assad's troops extended a military sweep overnight to counter a rebel threat that had reached the gates of the city, sending armor into eastern and northern suburbs that pro-Assad forces took over this week. An activist group said at least 25 people had been killed in that sweep.

In Wadi Barada on the edge of the capital, four people were killed in a tank bombardment on Wednesday to flush out rebel Free Syrian Army units, activists said. A rebel spokesman put the death toll at 15.

Syria's state news agency, SANA, said a general, Rajeh Mahmoud, was killed along with three soldiers on the outskirts of Damascus on Wednesday. It said that Syrian troops had killed 11 members of an "armed terrorist group" outside the city of Dara'a.

It was not possible to verify the reports, as Syria restricts access for independent media.

CORRECTION
An article in the Jan. 14th edition about U.S. moves to restore full diplomatic relations with Myanmar misstated the circumstances surrounding the departure of the last U.S. ambassador there after the military government refused to recognize an opposition party's victory in the May 1990 election.

The ambassador, Burton Levin, retired in September 1990 and was not replaced; he was not withdrawn.

DEATH NOTICE
It is with great sadness that the children, grand-children and her family announce the death of

DOLORES GUINNESS, born Countess von Fürstenberg which occurred on 20th of January 2012, at the age of 76.

The funeral service took place in the privacy of her family



A supporter held a portrait of President Bashar al-Assad outside the Syrian Embassy in Moscow on Wednesday. The Syria-Iran axis is seen as being weaker than it was a year ago.

Pressure on Assad is also squeezing Iran

BY RICK GLADSTONE

As anti-government forces in Syria's violent uprising have increased the pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to step down, Iran, his main Middle East supporter, also finds itself under a siege that is undermining a once-powerful partnership.

The position is unusual for Iran, and NEWS ANALYSIS

its vulnerability in Syria has not been lost on the United States, which has been imposing stiff economic sanctions on both countries.

The departure of Mr. Assad, as Iran, and in the calculus of predicting the political outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings, some U.S. officials see the possible downfall of Mr. Assad as an event that could further weaken Iran as its economy reels under the sanctions imposed to get Tehran to end its pursuit of providing nuclear weapons.

"It would completely change the dynamic in the region," one Obama administration official said.

The departure of Mr. Assad, the thinking goes, not only would threaten to sever Syria from Iran, which has long been a close ally of the United States and its Arab allies, but also could deprive Iran of its main means of projecting power in the Middle East. If Mr. Assad were to fall, Tehran would lose its conduit for providing military, financial and logistical support to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Both groups oppose Israel and are considered terrorist organizations by the U.S. government.

Moreover, the sanctions on Iran have severely impeded its ability to provide financial aid to Mr. Assad (let alone Hamas and Hezbollah), whose treasury has been depleted by the uprising and sanctions on Syria. Another senior ad-

ministration official said Iran had nevertheless tried its best to prep up Mr. Assad, adding that "you would see Assad fall faster if they weren't there."

Alli Bahamazi, a political science professor at Boston College and a co-director of its Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program, said, "To put it bluntly, if Iran is a threat, then one way to weaken that threat would be to weaken Syria and to help the anti-Assad movement in Syria."

The weakness of the Syria-Iran axis represents a stark turnaround from a year ago, when Mr. Assad's grip on power seemed assured and Iran was describing itself as the impetus for the ouster of Arab Spring uprisings. Iran even sent two naval vessels through the Suez Canal to Syria last February — for the first time in more than 30 years — in what the Iranians called a message of peace and friendship.

The uprising in Syria, now in its 11th month, has caused extreme discontent to Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist organization that has been based in Damascus for years. Last Friday, Khaled Meshaal, leader of Hamas, left Damascus with no plans to return. Earlier in January, Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's prime minister in Gaza, visited Turkey, a former Assad ally that is now perhaps his most powerful regional crony.

It is by no means a certainty that Mr. Assad, who has repeatedly rejected calls for his resignation, will depart soon, despite the increased pressure on him on the streets of Syria and at the U.N. Security Council, where an effort by Western powers and the Arab League to force him aside has begun.

As signs of Mr. Assad's unpopularity have spread in Syria and his list of supporters declines, Iran has been one of the few conspicuous allies that has not abandoned him — possibly because it

has no alternative. Except for Mr. Assad's minority Alawite sect, other components of Syria's fractured sectarian mosaic have no affinity for Iran. Many Syrians now view Iran as siding with their oppressor.

There have been at least three instances in recent weeks of abductions of Iranians in Syria by anti-Assad forces. The most notable was the seizure last month of five Iranians, whom Iran's state-run press called engineers but anti-Assad groups said were military advisers.

In a video posted online by a unit of the insurgent Free Syrian Army, which claimed to hold the Iranians, one of the men identified as a hostage said the five had been "involved in suppressing and shooting ordinary Syrians" and urged

"To put it bluntly, if Iran is a threat, then one way to weaken that threat would be to weaken Syria."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, "to order the Iranian military personnel who suppress the Syrians to be repatriated from Syria, so we can also return home."

While the authenticity of that video has not been confirmed, it suggested a level of resentment in Syria toward Iran that had not been seen before.

Iran has continued to publicly renege on Mr. Assad's version of the uprising — that it is terrorism financed by foreign powers hostile to Syria. Ayatollah Khamenei added his voice on Tuesday, denouncing what he called "the interference of America and its allies in Syrian domestic issues."

At the same time, U.S. officials said

there was growing evidence that Iran was helping train and equip Syrian security forces.

"Our concerns include the fact that some of the tactics being used by the Syrian regime mirror tactics used in Iran against their own population and about increasing evidence of numbers of Iranians in and around Syria," said the U.S. State Department spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland.

In early January, the commander of the Quds Force in Iran, Qasim Soleimani, visited Damascus, raising suspicions that the Quds Force was advising Mr. Assad on how to quash the uprising.

The Quds Force conducts special operations outside Iran.

Still, Iranian officials have also urged Mr. Assad to show more flexibility toward his adversaries, advice he has basically ignored.

Andrew J. Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a specialist on Syria, said the Assad government was caught up in its own constraints that prevented reform. "Assad would have to undermine the very people he has to maintain order," he said. "I don't expect it's going to change now. I think the Iranians know that."

At the same time, Mr. Tabler said, Mr. Assad's control has been weakened by U.S. and other sanctions. Given Iran's own economic troubles, the leaders in Tehran are unlikely to provide significant financial aid to Mr. Assad.

"Some time in the middle of the year Syria is going to run out of cash, and it will be interesting to see what happens," Mr. Tabler said.

Mr. Tabler said Mr. Assad's demise, he said, "would be the biggest blow to Iran's influence in the region in decades."

Mark Landler and Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Washington.

Skepticism by NATO on claims of Taliban gains

KABUL
Official says assertions of cooperation with Afghanistan are spurious

BY ROD NORDLAND AND DECLAN WALSH

A spokesman for the NATO-led coalition on Wednesday confirmed the existence of a report that summarizes the views of Taliban detainees who claim they are winning the war thanks to cooperation from some Afghan government officials and soldiers who say their movement is controlled by Pakistan's intelligence service.

But the official, Lt. Col. Jamie E. Cummings of the International Security Assistance Force, disputed accounts of the NATO report that suggested the allegations late Tuesday. The BBC said it was based on accounts from the Taliban views as valid.

"This document aggregates the comments of Taliban detainees in a captive environment without considering the validity of or motivation behind their reflections," Colonel Cummings said in an unusually detailed rebuttal of accounts of the classified report's contents. "Any conclusions drawn from this would be questionable at best."

The report was apparently leaked a day before a visit here by Hina Rabbani Khar, the Pakistani foreign minister, the highest-ranking Pakistani official to visit since September, after months of strained relations.

On Wednesday, Ms. Khar dismissed initial news reports about the report. "For me, this is old wine in an even older bottle," she said. "I don't think these things are new. These things have been heard for many, many years."

The report, called "The State of the Taliban," was obtained by the BBC and the Times of London, which published accounts late Tuesday. The BBC said it was based on 27,000 interrogations of 4,900 Taliban prisoners.

NATO at first refused to comment, saying it never responded to leaks of classified information. Later, however, Colonel Cummings issued a lengthy rebuttal of news reports about the report.

The claims about support for the Taliban from the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or I.S.I., Pakistan's spy agency, are not new, although the BBC said the report claimed the insurgents' leaders had met regularly with Pakistani agents to discuss their strategy and are under their control.

NATO's response indicated that it was more concerned at suggestions that Afghan officials and soldiers were demoralized and expected a Taliban victory once coalition troops pulled out than about the claims of Pakistani collaboration.

"It is important not to draw conclusions based on Taliban comments or merely 'cited' sources. Taliban officers and soldiers are unlikely to provide significant financial aid to Mr. Assad."

"Some time in the middle of the year Syria is going to run out of cash, and it will be interesting to see what happens," Mr. Tabler said.

Mr. Tabler said Mr. Assad's demise, he said, "would be the biggest blow to Iran's influence in the region in decades."

Claims in the report that the I.S.I. in effect helps to direct and run the war in Afghanistan were met with skepticism in Pakistan.

Shaokhat Qadir, a retired Pakistani brigadier and military analyst, said the days when Pakistan's military planned Taliban operations had "long passed."

"The I.S.I. keeps contact with the Taliban, to be sure," he said. "It's mutually beneficial. But if the I.S.I. tried to interfere or tell them what to do, they'd probably get a slap in the face."

"This is not the Taliban of old that needed our help," Mr. Qadir added. "These days they don't need our weapons, our money or our advice."

In particular, the report states that the Nasrullah Haqqani, a senior member of the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network, "maintains residences in the immediate vicinity of I.S.I. headquarters in Islamabad." The Haqqani network has been responsible for some of the most spectacular insurgent attacks of the past year.

Even non-NATO analysts cautioned against relying on detainee interrogations.

"Detainees are liable to exaggerate things, either to reduce their own culpability or play up the Taliban's strength," said Alex Strick van Neschen, a researcher based in Kandahar and co-author of "An Enemy We Created," a new book about the Taliban.

In a separate development Wednesday, the Taliban issued a statement by e-mail denying there were any plans for its representatives to meet with officials of President Hamid Karzai in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the Taliban statement explicitly confirmed that talks were under way with the United States.

Declan Walsh reported from Islamabad. Ibrahim Mamon contributed reports from Islamabad, and Sharifullah Sahab

Syrian defector says regime 'intent on killing its own'

DEFECTOR, FROM PAGE 1

miner to keep his family's grip on power.

At first, said Mr. Omar, who had always felt like an outsider in Germany, he was proud to be serving the government. Soldiers were initially told that their main task was to defend the country against Israel, he said. But when demonstrations erupted, they were told that the protesters were "terrorists" or "armed gangs" sponsored by foreign forces. Access to cellphones, independent television or the Internet was strictly prohibited; breaching that rule was punishable by up to two months in jail.

Mr. Omar's first deployment was in the southern city of Dara'a, near Jordan, where, he said, his 250-member unit was dispatched in March to help crack down on intensifying demonstrations. He said he had been ordered to arrest and shoot at dozens of protesters, including many young students, who had scrawled antigovernment graffiti on the walls of the town.

"The army needed everyone. It was very brutal," he said. "But if there's an officer of the Mikhabarat next to you," he added, referring to the country's feared security services, "you don't have a choice but to shoot."

Every soldier was armed with 60 bullets and given new ammunition each night. Mr. Omar said he had watched with incredulity, he said, as security forces fired live rounds at protesters assembling near the central Omar Mosque, killing at least six people and injuring dozens more. He said his unit

roof overlooking the mosque. A fellow soldier began to scream uncontrollably when he realized that his 18-year-old brother, demonstrating below on the street, had been shot. The soldier buried the brother two days later.

Shaken by what he had seen, Mr. Omar said, he was determined to defect. But before he could act, he was sent to Duma, northeast of Damascus, the capital, to work in a security unit interrogating detainees.

Mr. Omar said he had been asked to take notes during the interrogation of prisoners, some as young as 15. He said demonstrators had been blindfolded and forced to strip to their underwear before their hands were tied behind their backs. Interrogations were

"I could not live with myself if I had remained."

conducted by four or five soldiers and officers in a dark, windowless room. He said the interrogating officer had ordered him to write down confessions naming "protest leaders, confessions that detainees were threatened to finger stamp rather than sign, since their hands were bound."

To force confessions, Mr. Omar said, the soldiers tortured the detainees with electrified cattle prods, beat them or urinated on them. Some passed out. Others died heavily. Many disappeared.

"The soldiers demanded to know why they had gone to the streets and who had paid them," he recalled. "It was painful to watch. At the beginning I

used to it. But I could not live with myself if I had remained."

As the protests gathered pace over the summer, Mr. Omar was sent to Hama, where he was relieved of his AK-47 and instead given a shield and a stun gun, he said. With tens of thousands of people on the streets in Hama, he said, he hoped he could disappear into the crowd. At noon on July 26, he said, he and two fellow officers decided to defect from their army base, changing into civilian clothes and jumping over a wall.

They found refuge in the homes of people opposed to the regime, Mr. Omar said, and wrapped scarves around their heads to conceal their faces. Fearing that he would be kidnapped or "disappeared" in Syria under some false pretext, Mr. Omar made a video, which he posted on YouTube, to establish that he had defected.

The defectors were driven toward the Turkish border in broad daylight, eventually abandoning the car and walking through woods to avoid detection. At 7 a.m. on July 30, he said, they crossed illegally into Hatay, where they met up with members of the rebel Free Syrian Army, setting in a refugee camp.

At the camp, a gaunt and pale Mr. Omar produced another video to post on YouTube, in which he said he was ashamed that he had been part of Mr. Assad's forces. "I will never forget the dead bodies of young and old men, but also women and children on the streets," he said in the video, dressed in a uniform of the Free Syrian Army and appearing with a Syrian flag.

Appealing directly to Germany, he



Ammar Cheikh Omar, center, with Syrian refugees in Hatay Province in Turkey.

awoke in Syria." Germany eventually helped get him out of the camp so he could get a stamp in his passport to remain in Turkey.

Mr. Omar joined the rebel army, a scruffy group that numbers as many as 10,000 soldiers and whose mandate is to protect civilians from the regime. He is now helping to smuggle wounded rebels into Turkey, some of whom he houses in his apartment in Antakya. He said he supported the political demonstrations against the government but warned, "We cannot afford to meet guns with only talk and slogans."

He fears for his family, including his wife, their year-old daughter and his parents. After his escape, he said, his brother-in-law was fired from his architecture job, and the family's house in Aleppo was vandalized.

But he said he had no regrets. "My family knows I made the right choice."

Wall Street Journal (USA)

Syria Fight Widens as U.N. Talks Persist

By NOUR MALAS
AND JOE LAURIA

Syrian troops on Wednesday continued to push back dissident soldiers in the Damascus suburbs, while Russia hardened its stance against a United Nations Security Council resolution that seeks to ease President Bashar al-Assad out of power and condemn the regime for its violence against protesters.

Government forces battled defeated soldiers from the Free Syrian Army and the armed opposition fighters backing them in the hills around the capital and the adjacent Wadi Barada valley. Activists said residents reported shelling and heavy shooting for most of the day.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a U.K.-based group, reported 24 people killed in neighboring towns, including at least six army defectors. Closer to Damascus, security forces conducted home raids in the suburb of Moadamiya, in some cases coming in with lists of wanted activists, other activist groups said.

The Local Coordination Committees, a grass-roots activist network, said it had recorded 7,100 deaths since the uprising started in March, including 461 children. Of the total, 2,454 were in the besieged city of Homs, an opposition stronghold that has come under renewed military attack in the past two weeks.

Heavy casualties were also reported in Hama, "which continues to pay the price for its dignity since 1982," the group said. That year, the country's former president—Mr. Assad's father—led a military campaign against an Islamist insurgency that culminated in an attack on the city of Hama that left between 10,000 and 40,000 people dead, Syrian and international rights groups estimate.

Protests appeared larger and en-



Syrian rebel forces took positions behind a wall while firing at government troops in Homs province on Tuesday.

proposed resolution, "if it is a text that we consider erroneous, that will lead to a worsening of the crisis, we will not allow it to be passed. That is unequivocal," Reuters reported. "If the text will be unacceptable for us, we will vote against it, of course."

His comments came a day after he seemed to create an opening to find a way for a deal at the Security Council that would endorse the Arab League plan to remove Mr. Assad from power in favor of a government of national unity leading to democratic elections, saying the current draft incorporates elements of a Russian resolution proposed in December.

"This gives rise for hope," Mr. Churkin told the council on Tuesday. "We hope that the council will come to consensus on the Syrian issue, as is not only possible but also necessary."

Vladimir Chizhov, Russia's ambassador to the European Union, on Wednesday said Moscow would reject the resolution unless it clearly rules out the use of force, Reuters reported. The draft resolution now refers to "the need to resolve the current crisis in Syria peacefully." Provisional language in the text also stresses that "nothing in this resolution compels states to resort to the use of force or the threat of force."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Wednesday in Jerusalem said: "We cannot wait any longer until the political process is finished while many people are being killed. First, all violence must stop, and I sincerely hope this will lead to a political solution. That is what I am urging to the international community."

Syria was long a foothold for Soviet influence in the Middle East. It is a major arms buyer from Russia, which maintains a naval base in Tartous on the Syrian coast.

direction," he said.

The SNC leadership has been in talks with Arab, Western and Russian diplomats at the U.N. this week.

The group's president, Burhan Ghalioun, has assured Russian diplomats in private meetings that Russian interests in Syria won't be harmed under a new leadership, council members said.

"Our general impression is that the Russians are negotiating," Mr. Sibai said. "They are trying to secure guarantees for the no-veto that their interests in the country will be not compromised."

On Wednesday, Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, said of the

"We gave up on the international community a long time ago," a dissident commander with the FSA said by telephone on Wednesday.

Others were more hopeful that the renewed vigor over Syria at the U.N. meant the diplomatic path wasn't totally blocked.

"We have come a long way, with Syria seriously on the international agenda," said Moaz al-Sibai, a Saudi Arabia-based member of the Syrian National Council, a leading opposition group. "The presence of the U.S., U.K. and French foreign ministers at the Security Council...was positive and important. It gives us a sense things are going in the right

ergized on Wednesday as activists prepared to mark the 30th anniversary of what they call "the Hama massacre" starting Thursday. They planned protests and sit-ins in Hama, with nationwide protests called in solidarity with the city, where government troops have repeatedly cracked down on swelling protests.

But activists also said they were largely disappointed with Tuesday's Security Council session, where they said Syrian ally Russia didn't appear to ease its objections to any U.N. action that would condemn or censure the regime, despite meetings with Russian diplomats.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Russia says it will veto any 'unacceptable' UN Syria resolution

Damascus denounces 'return of colonialism' in Middle East

• By STEVE GUTTERMAN

MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russia said Wednesday it would veto any UN resolution on Syria that it finds unacceptable, after demanding any measure rule out military intervention to halt the bloodshed touched off by protests against President Bashar Assad's rule.

The political violence in Syria has killed at least 5,000 people in the past 10 months and activists say Assad's forces have stepped up operations this week on opposition strongholds, from Damascus suburbs to the cities of Hama, Homs and the border provinces of Deraa and Idlib.

Arab and Western states urged the UN Security Council on Tuesday to act swiftly on a resolution calling for Assad to hand over powers to his deputy and defuse the 11-month-old uprising against his family's dynastic rule.

"If the text will be unacceptable for us we will vote against it, of course," Russian UN envoy Vitaly Churkin told reporters in Moscow via a videolink from New York. "If it is a text that we consider erroneous, that will lead to a worsening of the crisis, we will not allow it to be passed. That is unequivocal."

His remarks came hours after Russia's envoy to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, said there was no chance the Western-Arab draft text could be accepted unless it expressly rejected armed intervention.

Russia and China, both veto-wielding Security Council members, have resisted a Western push for a resolution condemning the Syrian government's



ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTERS wave flags and carry coffins Tuesday during the funeral of two protesters killed in Homs. (Reuters)

crackdown on unrest.

Despite the Russian comments, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said a "window of hope" had opened. "We will work furiously in the next few days to try and get a resolution that will allow the Arab League to forge ahead in finding a solution," he told parliament in Paris.

Russia says the West exploited fuzzy wording in a March 2011 UN Security Council resolution on Libya to turn a mandate to protect civilians in the North African country's uprising into a push to remove the government, backed by NATO air strikes, that led to the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

Russia has also expressed concern that the draft's threat of further measures against Syria could lead to sanctions, which it opposes. Its diplomats also

want to remove the draft's support for the Arab League's plan for Assad to cede power.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al Thani, who has led the Arab League's efforts to tackle the Syrian crisis, attempted to allay Moscow and Beijing's objections, saying it was trying to avoid a Libyan-style foreign role.

"We are not calling for foreign intervention," he said. "We are advocating the exertion of concrete economic pressure so that the Syrian regime might realize that it is imperative to meet the demands of its people."

He told the 15-member Security Council that Syria's "killing machine is still at work."

An activist group said Syrian troops killed eight people in the central city of Homs and that 15 government soldiers

were killed in a clash with a defector unit. Syria's state news agency SANA said a general, Rajeh Mahmoud, was killed along with three soldiers on the outskirts of Damascus on Wednesday.

Syrian insurgents said Assad's forces extended a military sweep overnight to counter a rebel threat that had reached the gates of the capital, sending armor into eastern and northern suburbs that Assad's forces took over this week. An activist group said at least 25 people had been killed in that sweep.

It was not possible to verify the reports as Syria restricts access for independent media.

Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby called on the UN Security Council to take "rapid and decisive action" by approving the resolution.

"Do not let the Syrian people down in its plight," he said.

The United States strongly endorsed the appeal from the Arab League and Qatar for "rapid and decisive action," but China reiterated its reservations.

"China is firmly opposed to the use of force to solve the Syrian problem and resolutely opposes pushing for forced regime change in Syria, as it violates the United Nations Charter and the basic norms guiding the practice of international relations," Xinhua news agency quoted Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Li Baodong as telling the Security Council.

Syrian UN Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari rejected the suggestion his government was responsible for the crisis and accused Western powers of dreaming of "the return of colonialism and hegemony" in the Middle East.

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Moscou reste inflexible sur la question syrienne

Révolte Nouvelles tractations diplomatiques ; Haniyyé défend le « peuple de Syrie » ; au moins 70 morts hier.

La Russie a prévenu hier qu'elle opposerait son veto à une résolution de l'ONU exhortant le président syrien Bachar el-Assad à démissionner si le texte n'était pas assorti d'un rejet explicite d'une intervention militaire dans le pays. « Nous n'autoriserons aucun texte que nous considérerons comme erroné et qui conduirait à une aggravation du conflit. Nous ne permettrons pas son adoption », a ainsi martelé l'ambassadeur russe à l'ONU, Vitali Tchourkine.

La Chine a pour sa part réitéré son opposition au recours à la force pour résoudre la crise, estimant que cela violerait « l'objet et les principes de la Charte des Nations unies ».

Face au risque de veto, une réunion des ministres des Affaires étrangères de la Ligue arabe initialement prévue dimanche a été repoussée d'une semaine, a-t-on appris auprès d'un responsable de l'organisation panarabe. Un diplomate de la Ligue a estimé que le report de la réunion au 11 février visait « à donner plus de temps au Nations unies pour prendre une décision et voir quelle est la réaction du gouvernement syrien ».

Le Premier ministre qatari Hamad ben Jasssem a de son côté tenté d'apaiser les inquiétudes de Moscou et Pékin tout en soulignant que « la machine à tuer est toujours à l'œuvre » en Syrie. « Nous ne préconisons pas une intervention militaire », a-t-il déclaré, disant vouloir éviter un scénario à la libyenne. Le Maroc est « engagé à travailler avec tous ses partenaires pour parvenir à un consensus » autour du projet de résolution, a affirmé pour sa part le ministre délégué auprès du ministre des Affaires étrangères marocain Youssef Amrani.

La secrétaire d'État américaine Hillary Clinton a appelé quant à elle « chaque membre du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU à choisir son camp » en Syrie, entre celui du « peuple syrien » et celui « d'une dictature brutale ». Catherine Ashton, la chef de la diplomatie de l'UE, a exhorté les membres du Conseil à « agir sans plus tarder » pour mettre fin aux violences, affirmant

dans un communiqué qu'elle est « horrifiée par la situation en Syrie, où le régime poursuit son impitoyable et scandaleuse campagne de répression contre le peuple syrien ». Même le chef du gouvernement du Hamas Ismaïl Haniyyé y a été de son couplet, assurant qu'il est « du droit du peuple syrien de jouir de la liberté, des réformes et de la démocratie ».

En attendant, les ambassadeurs des pays membres du Conseil de sécurité se sont réunis hier à New York pour poursuivre leurs difficiles tractations, selon des diplomates. Le représentant syrien au Palais de Verre Bachar Jaafari a quant à lui réitéré que son gouvernement n'était pas responsable de la crise, accusant les États-Unis et leurs alliés européens de chercher à contrôler de nouveaux territoires au Proche-Orient.

Impatience et répression

Du côté des militants, la frustration se fait de plus en plus sentir. « Depuis des mois, le peuple syrien fait face pacifiquement à un régime des plus violents dans la région, et jusqu'à ce jour le monde arabe et les Occidentaux sont incapables de prendre une décision qui contribue à faire cesser la spirale de violence », ont ainsi écrit les Comités locaux de coordination (LCC) qui organisent la mobilisation.

Sur le terrain, les affrontements entre les forces syriennes et l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) se sont rapprochées de Damas. D'après les militants, la campagne de répression est la plus violente depuis le début de la révolte en mars 2011. Au moins 70 personnes sont mortes hier, selon al-Jazira. Le bilan le plus lourd a été établi dans la province de Damas, avec 24 civils tués, dont un enfant de trois ans, par des tirs des forces de l'ordre. D'après les insurgés, l'armée a lancé une offensive dans la nuit de mardi à mercredi pour contrer la menace des forces rebelles. Dans le nord de Damas, les soldats ont pris le contrôle de Rankous et l'ont étendu aux alentours, bombardant notamment le village de Telfita. Dans la zone de Wadi Barada, qua-



À Homs, une scène quasi quotidienne, des funérailles d'opposants se transforment en manifestation antirégime. Photo Reuters

tre personnes ont en outre été tuées dans un bombardement visant l'ASL opérant près de la capitale, d'après des militants de l'opposition.

Selon un groupe d'opposants, huit personnes ont également été tuées à Homs par les forces de sécurité et 15 soldats ont été tués lors d'un accrochage avec une unité de rebelles. Selon l'agence de presse officielle SANA, le général Rajeh Mahmoud a été tué avec deux autres soldats dans la banlieue de Damas. L'agence de presse fait également état de 11 soldats tués par un « groupe terroriste armé » près de Deraa. Les combats entre l'armée et les dissidents ont également fait rage dans la province d'Idleb.

L'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) a fait par ailleurs état d'une cinquantaine de défections pour la

seule journée d'hier.

Hama et... Khaddam

Face à cette répression qui s'intensifie, l'opposition a appelé à manifester massivement les deux prochains jours dans l'ensemble du pays pour marquer le 30e anniversaire du massacre de Hama commis par le régime en 1982 et qui avait fait des dizaines de milliers de morts. Nous souhaitons « marquer notre solidarité avec les victimes de cette tuerie qui a été passée sous silence et pour réaffirmer notre volonté de renverser le régime actuel », affirmant dans un communiqué plusieurs instances de l'opposition, dont le Conseil national syrien. « Le silence arabe et international face aux crimes de Hafez el-Assad et sa clique il y a 30 ans est en grande partie responsable de la poursuite de ces crimes et des

atrocités quotidiennes commises par Bachar au vu et au su » du monde entier, ajoute le texte.

Quant à l'ancien vice-président syrien Abdel-Halim Khaddam, il a relevé que Bachar el-Assad « conduit la Syrie vers une guerre civile qui va embraser toute la région ».

Par ailleurs, onze nouveaux pèlerins iraniens ont été enlevés à Hama, a rapporté l'agence de presse officielle iranienne IRNA, en précisant que ce rapt portait à 29 le nombre d'Iraniens kidnappés dans ce pays depuis décembre.

Signalons finalement que la Norvège a réduit le personnel de son ambassade à Damas pour des raisons de sécurité, a annoncé le chef de la diplomatie norvégienne.

(Sources : agences et rédaction)

Nasrallah sera tenu responsable de ses actes « devant les tribunaux révolutionnaires » syriens, avertit l'ASL

Le porte-parole de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), le colonel Ammar el-Wawi, actuellement en Turquie, a appelé hier, dans le cadre d'une interview au quotidien panarabe al-Charq al-Awsat, le secrétaire général du Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah à « arrêter de tuer le peuple syrien qui avait précédemment accueilli à bras ouverts les Libanais durant la guerre de 2006 en leur ouvrant les portes de leurs maisons ». Le colonel

a également prévenu que M. Nasrallah sera tenu responsable de ses actes « devant les tribunaux révolutionnaires après la victoire de la révolution syrienne ». Le leader du parti chiite avait, lors d'une intervention télévisée en décembre dernier, déclaré son soutien sans équivoque au régime de Bachar el-Assad, qu'il avait qualifié alors de « régime de la résistance » contre Israël. Il avait également

critiqué le chef de l'opposition syrienne, Burhan Ghalioun, qui avait déclaré qu'en cas de chute du régime d'Assad, le nouveau pouvoir syrien verrait drastiquement ses relations avec l'Iran et le Hezbollah. « Le soi-disant Conseil national syrien, formé à Istanbul, et son leader Burhan Ghalioun (...) se font concurrence pour présenter leurs lettres de créance aux États-Unis et à Israël », avait alors lancé M. Nasrallah.

« Certains observateurs ont pensé que leur visite était un voyage d'agrément »

Le magazine américain *Foreign Policy* a publié hier une copie du rapport produit le 18 janvier dernier par le chef de la mission arabe en Syrie, le général soudanais Mohammad Ahmad Moustapha al-Dabi. Un rapport qui contient certains éléments plutôt édifiants.

« Ceci est regrettable, mais certains observateurs ont pensé que leur visite en Syrie était un voyage d'agrément », écrit ainsi le général Dabi, dont *Foreign Policy* indique qu'il a signé le rapport. « Dans certains cas, les experts n'étaient pas qualifiés pour le travail, n'avaient pas d'expérience antérieure et n'étaient pas capables d'assumer leurs responsabilités », peut-on lire dans le document.

Il a en outre été noté que « certains observateurs n'étaient pas capables de faire face et de gérer des situations compliquées, ce qui pourtant relève de leur responsabilité. Certains observateurs sont vieux et d'autres souffrent de problèmes de santé qui les empêchent de remplir leur mission ».

Le document fait par ailleurs état de requêtes financières pour le moins incongrues : « Certains observateurs sur le terrain, hors de la capitale, ont demandé un hébergement comparable à celui dont bénéficiaient leurs collègues à Damas ou un dédommagement financier équivalent à la différence de prix entre les tarifs hôteliers pratiqués à Damas et

ceux pratiqués par l'hôtel les hébergeant. » Le rapport du chef de la mission arabe relève également les problèmes d'ordre logistique dont ont souffert les observateurs. L'on apprend ainsi que certains manquaient de gilets pare-balles et de véhicules blindés. La mission a également été confrontée à un manque de chauffeurs. Les agences de location de voitures refusaient également de leur louer des véhicules.

Le rapport dénonce aussi les entraves posées par le régime syrien à la mission arabe. Le matériel de communication a ainsi été confisqué dès l'arrivée de la mission à la frontière jordanienne. Les observa-

teurs n'ont dès lors eu à leur disposition que dix téléphones satellitaires et ont été contraints de recourir aux lignes fixes syriennes pour communiquer. Dans son rapport, le général Dabi recommandait par ailleurs que la mission soit renforcée de 100 observateurs supplémentaires (« de préférence jeunes et avec une expérience militaire »), de trente véhicules blindés, de gilets pare-balles, de caméras montées sur les véhicules et de jumelles à vision nocturne. En ce qui concerne le fond de la mission, le rapport note que les observateurs ont senti le stress sévère, l'injustice et l'oppression endurés par les citoyens syriens. « À Homs, la mission a visité des quartiers résidentiels sans

escorte. Elle a rencontré des citoyens de l'opposition qui ont évoqué l'horreur, le siège et les actes de violence qu'ils endurent de la part des forces gouvernementales », ajoute le rapport. Le rapport dénonce également les dérapages de l'opposition, à Homs et Deraa des groupes armés « utilisent des bombes thermiques et des missiles antiblindage » contre les forces gouvernementales. Le document insiste sur le fait que « plusieurs parties diffusent des déclarations infondées rapportant des bombardements ou des actes de violence dans certains endroits » et « des exagérations dans les médias sur la nature d'incidents et le nombre de tués ou de blessés ».

Alain Juppé à « L'OLJ » : Les chrétiens de Syrie collent totalement à un régime qui n'a pas d'avenir

NEW YORK, de notre correspondante aux Nations unies, Sylviane ZEHIL

Le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, qui est arrivé à New York pour prendre part à la réunion ministérielle du Conseil de sécurité consacrée à la Syrie, a indiqué hier à *L'Orient-Le Jour* que la France, l'Union européenne et les missions parlementaires restaient « attentives à la protection des minorités chrétiennes et des minorités religieuses en général. Nous sommes très vigilants en Égypte, en Irak – malheureu-

sement ils ont fini par fuir –, naturellement au Liban et en Syrie », a-t-il insisté. Il n'a pas manqué de rappeler que le « message » sur ce plan-là est « tout à fait fort », qu'il en a fait une « des lignes rouges vis-à-vis de ces régimes ». Le ministre français en a profité pour lancer, par le biais de *L'OLJ*, un message en direction de « nos amis chrétiens de Syrie en particulier. Ce qui m'inquiète un petit peu, c'est la façon dont ils collent totalement au régime », les invitant à « réfléchir bien à l'avenir, car ce régime n'a pas d'avenir ».

Pour bien marquer cette vo-

lonté de respecter les droits des minorités, Alain Juppé a laissé entendre que « c'est aussi pour cette raison que la demande a été faite à l'opposition syrienne d'inclure des représentants des communautés chrétiennes ». Il a affirmé que la situation en Syrie est une menace pour la stabilité de la région « parce que l'on voit bien ses conséquences au Liban et en Turquie avec des milliers de réfugiés et aussi sur les relations avec l'Iran. C'est pour cela que le Conseil de sécurité est dans son rôle en se saisissant de la question », a-t-il dit.

Nécessité d'aller vite

Le ministre français, qui s'est rendu au siège des Nations unies pour « tenter de convaincre » le Conseil de sécurité de prendre toutes ses responsabilités « pour arrêter le massacre », a mis en garde contre « le risque très fort de déclenchement d'une guerre civile en Syrie ». Il y a toutefois l'espérance d'une « possibilité de sortie de crise ». Dans les prochains jours, il existe une chance « d'arriver à rapprocher les points de vue », a-t-il déclaré lors d'une conférence de

presse tenue à la Mission de la France en présence d'un petit noyau de journalistes français et francophones.

Alain Juppé a reconnu que le discours du représentant russe auprès de l'ONU, Vitaly Churkin, « n'a pas fermé complètement la possibilité d'une discussion ». La résolution marocaine comporte des « éléments intéressants et la Russie était prête à en discuter », a-t-il dit. Dévoilant la feuille de route pour les prochains jours, M. Juppé a assuré que « nos représentants permanents allaient se remettre au travail d'arrache-pied pour voir si l'on peut arriver à un texte consensuel ». « Il y a actuellement dix voix peut-être plus pour appuyer cette résolution. Mais il faudra éviter le veto russe et les oppositions qu'il entraîne », a-t-il indiqué.

Par ailleurs, Alain Juppé a rappelé que la situation en Libye était différente de celle de la Syrie. « En Libye, il y a une société civile plus homogène, constituée pour l'immense majorité de sunnites malékites ; en Syrie, il y a une forte minorité alaouite, une forte mi-

norité chrétienne, des sunnites, des chiïtes, donc une société profondément divisée et le risque d'affrontement est évident. D'où la nécessité d'aller très vite, avec un grand thème : le changement de régime », a-t-il laissé entendre.

Prié par *L'OLJ* de dire si le Conseil national syrien reste crédible et si l'opposition syrienne avec une personnalité intellectuelle telle que Burhan Ghalioun ferait un bon leader pour l'après-Bachar el-Assad, Alain Juppé a indiqué que cette même question avait été soulevée pour la Libye. « Le CNS n'a pas encore fait ses preuves », a-t-il dit. Et d'ajouter avec espoir qu'« aujourd'hui, il est vrai que l'unification, l'organisation de l'opposition est difficile. Elle a des tendances différentes. Il y a l'intérieur et il y a l'extérieur. Nous les appelons à se regrouper, à faire place aux différentes communautés, en particulier les chrétiens, les alaouites. Quant au choix de leurs dirigeants, il y aura des élections bientôt. C'est aux membres de ce conseil et aux Syriens eux-mêmes de prendre des décisions ».



From Russia, for Bashar's eyes only

You know something is not right in Russia when the foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, sounds increasingly like Andrei Gromyko, his hermetic predecessor under the onetime communist regime.

This week, Russia declared that it would oppose a United Nations Security Council draft resolution calling for Syrian President Bashar Assad to step down. The draft, introduced by Morocco, reiterates the aims of an Arab League plan for Assad to hand over power to a vice president and allow the formation of a national unity government. This government would work to end the violence in Syria by pulling the army and security forces out of cities and releasing prisoners.

The Russians may sense that they're backing a lame horse in Assad, and an indication of this was Lavrov's statement in Australia this week. He noted, "We are not friends or allies of President Assad. We never said that Assad remaining in power is a precondition for regulating the situation. We said something else – we said that the decision should be made by Syrians, by the Syrians themselves."

Lavrov's caveat notwithstanding, you would have thought that the Syrians, or a substantial number of them, who have braved bullets and cannonfire for 10 months had already made their choice. Then again, the foreign minister's remarks jar with what the Syrians and their allies in Beirut are saying. For them, Russia has indeed made Assad's political survival a precondition for a deal over Syria. This seemed apparent when Moscow offered earlier this week to host a dialogue between the Syrian opposition and regime.

Where is the truth? Perhaps in the rather straightforward reality that no leader who massacres thousands of his own people, whose army is falling apart through proliferating desertions, who has been asked to step down by the Arab states, reflecting an unprecedented consensus – that no such leader can hope to regain his legitimacy and remain in power for any significant length of time. This is so evident as to not merit repetition, and it's astonishing that the Russians, whatever their national interests, have refused to adapt to the shifting mood on Assad inside Syria, in the Arab world and internationally.

The argument that Russia hopes to protect its stake in a future Syria is unconvincing. By holding on to Bashar Assad so stubbornly, despite the killing, the Russians are ensuring that a post-Assad government will impose



Are the Russians watching the same channel as the rest of us?

retribution. Nor does there appear to be bargaining yet between the Russian government and the Syrian opposition that would persuade Russia to drop Assad if it gained satisfaction.

Then there is the Libyan argument. Russia will not make the same mistake in Syria that it did in Libya, where it agreed to U.N. action leading to regime change in Tripoli, though the resolution authorizing force was intended solely to protect civilians. Perhaps, but to believe that version one must assume the Russians are boy scouts. From the moment NATO warplanes were permitted to bomb Moammar Gadhafi's forces, the only plausible outcome of the campaign was some version of regime change. Yet Moscow did not wield its veto.

This week Lavrov also remarked, "The Russian policy is not about asking someone to step down; regime change is not our profession." What an odd thing to say. It's not as if Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, Yemenis and Syrians sought Russian acquiescence before overthrowing their dicta-

tors. Russia may have obstruction power, but regime change during the past year in the Arab world has been the consequence of internal discontent. For Russia to hinder the process is an example of the domineering tendencies it has denounced in the West.

Yet another Russian argument against approving the Arab plan to remove Assad from office is that this might provoke a Syrian civil war. Are the Russians watching the same channel as the rest of us? Syria, precisely because of the homicidal policies of its leader, is heading inexorably toward civil war. The single way to derail such an outcome – and the opportunities are diminishing daily – is to make it apparent to Assad and his acolytes that there is Arab and international unanimity, Russia included, behind their departure.

Only a Security Council resolution affirming this will shake the will of the Alawite security elite bolstering Assad's rule, forcing it to consider alternative options. Lavrov knows very well that one of the last threads sustaining the Syrian regime's confidence is Russian assistance and Russian arms. That Moscow refuses to use that thread as leverage is not making it more relevant; it is guaranteeing that Russia will gradually become less relevant to a solution in Syria.

A more nuanced perspective is that Russia is using the Syrian card to negotiate with the West on other vital regional issues, for instance Iran, where

Moscow opposes new sanctions and military action. That may be true, but if so it may not lead very far. For the West, sanctions preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons are a way of averting a military solution. No one, least of all the United States, wants a war with the Iranians. If Russia aspires to defend its conditions in Iran, it seems strange to do so at the expense of its welfare in Syria.

The philosophical argument may be the most persuasive. Russia inherently opposes bringing foreign leaders down, because it doesn't want that principle to be used against its own leaders – above all Vladimir Putin, who is facing opposition in his renewed bid for the presidency. But even there you have to wonder. If Assad is all but destined to fall, isn't Putin better off embracing the winning side, to better bolster his "democratic" bona fides at home?

It could be that we're missing something much more obvious. Russia has a devouring need to affirm itself in a world where its power is dwindling. Flexibility means marginalization, in Russian eyes. Maybe, but inflexibility is frequently a surer ticket to the margins, and that's a price the Gromyko generation is still paying.

Michael Young is opinion editor of THE DAILY STAR and author of "The Ghosts of Martyrs Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle" (Simon & Schuster). He tweets @BeirutCalling.



Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)



Rebels take their position behind a wall as they fire their guns during a battle with Syrian forces.

Russia says UN must rule out intervention in Syria, fighting rages

▶ Russia signaled on Wednesday it would veto a draft UN resolution calling on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down unless it explicitly ruled out military intervention in the bloodshed touched off by protests against his rule.

Meanwhile, activists said Syrian troops are battling army dissidents in an area near the border with Lebanon and that several people have been killed. The Local Coordination Committees group said 12 people died in the fighting in Wadi Barada, an area near the mountain resort town of Zabadani. It said those killed include five rebels from the group known as the Free Syrian Army.

Escalating violence in Syria has killed thousands of people and activists say Assad's forces have stepped up operations against opposition strongholds across the country this week, from the Damascus suburbs to the cities of Hama and Homs and the border provinces of Deraa and Idlib.

Arab and Western states urged the UN Security Council on Tuesday to act swiftly on a resolution calling for Assad to delegate powers to his deputy and defuse the 11-month-old uprising against his family's dynastic rule.

But Moscow's envoy to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, said there was no chance the Western-Arab draft text could be accepted unless it precisely rejected armed intervention. The draft "is missing the most important thing: a clear clause ruling out the possibility that the resolution could be used to justify military intervention in Syrian affairs from outside. For this reason I see no chance this draft could be adopted," said Chizhov, Russia's envoy to the European Union. Russia and China, both veto-wielding Security Council members, have resisted a Western push for a resolution condemning the Syrian government's crackdown on unrest.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the resolution could not be used to authorize military intervention and his French counterpart Alain Juppe said such an idea was a myth.

But Chizhov's remarks suggested Moscow, a close strategic ally and important arms supplier to Syria during its 42 years in the grip of the Assad family, would not accept such assurances. Russia says the West exploited fuzzy wording in a March 2011 UN Security Council resolution on Libya to turn a mandate to protect civilians in the North African country's popular uprising into a push for regime change - backed by NATO air strikes -- that led to the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

'Concrete economic pressure'

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, who has led the Arab League's efforts to tackle the Syrian crisis, attempted to allay Moscow and Beijing's objections, saying it was trying to avoid a Libyan-style foreign role. "We are not calling for foreign intervention," he said. "We are advocating the exertion of concrete economic pressure so that the Syrian regime might realize that it is imperative to meet the demands of its people".

But he also warned the 15-member Security Council that Syria's "killing machine is still at work."

Syrian insurgents said Assad's forces extended a military sweep overnight around Damascus to counter a rebel threat that had reached the gates of the sprawling capital. **Moscow** Reuters/AP

Al Assad not a good bet for Russia

Moscow's long-term interests in the Arab world will be served by supporting people power, not brutal regimes

By JOSEPH A. KECHICHIAN
Special to Gulf News

When president Anwar Sadat kicked the Soviets out of Egypt in 1972, Moscow was shocked, assuming that a heretofore reliable ally would never turn against it. At the time, Andrei Gromyko, an astute foreign minister who could teach his current successor a thing or two, drew the correct lesson: the USSR's popular rhetoric stood as a blatant contradiction to Moscow's geo-strategic interests. Are we witnessing a repeat of the 1972 'catastrophe' in Syria and is the Russian posture at the Security Council the last leftover battle from the Cold War?

There are several issues at stake in the Russian attitude towards the Damascus regime but none as important as the decision reached by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to stand up to the West in Syria. In the aftermath of the remarkably successful Nato air campaign in Libya, the equally problematic loss of Yemen, and increasingly fragile conditions stretching from Algeria to Iran, Russian power in the Arab world is literally on the wane. Hardly anyone outside die-hard Baathists in Syria look up to Russia, and while Moscow's envoy to the UN believes that his country harbours stronger allegiances than western powers, few are betting on Vitaly I. Churkin's intran-

sigence, aware that the Security Council is where deals are routinely made.

Notwithstanding his exuberance, Churkin's insistence that Moscow would not abandon its last Arab ally — and last naval base in the Eastern Mediterranean — was akin to gambling on a regime rather than a nation.

In fact, Moscow's inherent weakness in Syria is its exclusive focus on the government rather than the great Syrian nation, whose current sacrifices will require serious atonement after the Baath party is ousted.

Cold War oratory

One would assume that Burhan Galioun, the chairman of the Syrian National Council since August 2011, raised this sensitive question with Russian officials during repeated visits to Moscow, even if the responses he heard were colourful. Cold War geo-strategic oratory. At one point in the not too distant future, Putin may have to confront the stark fact that the vast majority of Syrians will translate his obduracy into abhorrence, perhaps even hatred.

Indeed, young men and women who are confronting the Syrian army on a daily basis, are aware that fresh consignments

of arms and ammunition that are used against them are sent by Russia in support of the Bashar Al Assad government. Photographs and video clips of a Russian cargo ship laden with ammunition circulated widely after it sought refuge a few weeks ago from a particularly violent sea-storm in Limassol, Cyprus.

This was just one episode among many that disturbed opposition forces whose leaders understood that a significant portion of Russia's global arms sales in 2011 went to Syria. Estimates varied, but perhaps 10 per cent of current Russian contracts worth at least \$1.5 billion (Dh5.50 billion) were destined for Damascus.

At the height of the ongoing urban warfare, which sees many of Syria's 8,000-plus tanks destroying the country instead of liberating Palestine, Damascus sought and miraculously received approval to purchase an undetermined number of Yak-130 military training aircrafts that can also be substituted as light attack fighter planes.

At a time when western powers led by the US secured billions of dollars of new sales in Asia and the Middle East, Russia,



By J.A. SHAMS (@GulfNews)

the world's second largest arms exporter that lost the Libyan cash-cow, desperately looked elsewhere to compensate.

At this point, Moscow ought to reassess its long-term geo-strategic interests in the Arab world, betting on people rather than air defence systems, anti-tank weapons, or light attack aircraft. In fact, if the Syrian opposition would like to gain Russia's support against Al Assad, it may have no choice but "to reassure the Russians that once Al Assad falls, Moscow will continue to enjoy access to the Tartus base," so that Russia "can continue to sail in warm waters."

The Cold War is over and no power, not even Russia, can successfully espouse diplomatic strategy that ignores popular uprisings. To be sure, veto-wielding countries can exercise that privilege at the Security Council, although a felicitous settlement — for Syria as well as Russia — can only be reached when the will of a nation is respected.

Dr Joseph A. Kechichian is a commentator and author of several books on Gulf affairs.

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The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Syrians face state crackdown with creativity and humour

Uprising has given place to a burst of blunt irreverence and intense satire

BEIRUT — Throughout 40 years of Assad family dictatorship, one thing united Syrians — the culture of self-censorship, fear and paranoia.

But the uprising against President Bashar Assad has unleashed a burst of blunt irreverence and black humour that would have been unthinkable before, when any satire had to be indirect or hidden.

"The type of expression has now shifted, the subtlety has gone," said Rime Allaf, associate fellow at London's Chatham House. "Today, for the first time in recent Syrian history, people are able to get out and say it openly."

Opposition Syrians are pouring contempt on Assad using whatever medium they can, with a humour that also helps them get through the death and destruction in a crackdown that has killed more than 5,400, according to the UN. The Internet provides a layer of anonymity, which is vital when retribution is a real danger, but the creativity has also spilled into the streets in the banners, signs and songs of the protesters.

"Top Goon: Diaries of a Little Dictator" is one of several new online shows. It was created by 10 young professional artists inside Syria. It uses finger puppets that impersonate Bashar Assad — nicknamed Beeshu in the series — and his inner circle.

In one episode, Beeshu competes against Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi on "Who wants to Kill a Million," a play on the game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." His final question: Will you be able to crush the protests? He answers yes. When he's told that's the wrong answer, he flies into a petty rage, wrecking the set.

In another, he consults with two devils about how to deal with the uprising. They suggest he kill a single protester to scare the others.



Protesters hold a caricature which shows Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin aiding his Syrian ally President Assad during a demonstration at kfarnebel town in Idlib province, Syria. — AFP file

He proclaims he will kill 30 protesters a day, torture children and shell cities.

"You are completely insane," the devils shriek, running away. "I want to get the hell out of here."

The director of the series, who goes by the online name of Jameel, says the idea is to "break down the wall of fear." "When you see the shabih (pro-government militiaman) or the president as puppets, you can't take them seriously anymore," he said, asking that his name and location not be used to protect him from retaliation.

More simply, it "elicits a little laugh" from people who are suffering from the crackdown, he said.

Even in the darkest places, Syrians seem to try to extract some

fun. The central city of Homs has been one of the worst hit by the regime's crackdown. But as in many rallies, giant protests there often saw crowds dancing, linking arm in arm and doing a sort of joyous simultaneous hop, along with circles of the traditional "debke" dance.

The song "Yalla Irhal, ya Bashar!" — a simple yet powerful rendition which translates into "Come on, Bashar, leave" — is often heard shouted by exultant protesters to the beat of a drum. It's the most popular, but an entire catalogue of protest songs has arisen, full of puns and references to members of Assad's inner circle.

"We are discovering ourselves for the first time," said a 28-year-

old Syrian who goes by the name of Samer Lathkani, from the coastal town of Latakia.

"The uprising has awakened patriotic sentiments among young people, now every protest is a thrill." Kfarnebel, a rebellious village in northern Syria, has become famous for coming up with colorful, amusing banners.

"Aleppo will not rise even if it took Viagra," said one recent banner, criticising Syria's second largest city, where anti-government protests have yet to take hold.

Some have paid the price for taking it too far.

In August, Syria's renowned political cartoonist Ali Ferzat, 60, was beaten by gunmen who broke his fingers and dumped him on a

road outside Damascus after he posted cartoons satirising Assad on his website.

Ibrahim Qashoush, a Syrian firefighter who wrote the "Come on, Leave, Bashar" song, was murdered in July, his vocal cords cut out and his body dumped in the river in the city of Hama.

Syria had a flourishing theater and comedy scene in the 1970s and 1980s, despite the autocratic regime of strongman Hafez Assad, which his son Bashar inherited in 2000. Syrian productions were popular around the Arab world for their black, satirical humor.

But it had to be indirect and confined to certain limits.

In one of the 1970s' most famous Syrian political plays, "Kasak ya Watan," or "Toast to the Homeland," the country's top comedian Dureid Lahham kept his satire broad.

His character, swigging from a liquor bottle, has a dialogue with his dead father who chides him over the failures of his Arab generation, particularly the failure to free Palestine.

They get into a debate over which is better, Heaven or Earth, and Lahham argues, "We don't lack a thing here ... Just a little bit of dignity." It's a far cry from a blunt banner at one recent protest: Assad's face plastered on a pack of Marlboros, reading "the Syrian regime is a main source of cancer and heart and lung disease."

Donatella Della Ratta, a PhD fellow at Copenhagen University and the Danish Institute in Damascus, said the uprising has changed Syria dramatically.

"The sacredness of the leader has been broken. Even widely considered taboo topics such as the Hama massacre of 1982 are openly mentioned and desecralised using dark humour," said Della Ratta, who is focusing her research on the Syrian TV industry. — AP

Russia: UN must rule out Syria intervention

MOSCOW — Russia signalled yesterday it would veto a draft UN resolution calling on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down unless it explicitly ruled out military intervention to halt the bloodshed touched off by protests against his rule.

Arab and Western states urged the UN Security Council on Tuesday to act swiftly on a resolution calling for Assad to delegate powers to his deputy and defuse the 11-month-old uprising against his family's dynastic rule.

But Moscow's envoy to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, said there was no chance the Western-Arab draft text could be accepted unless it precisely rejected armed intervention.

The draft "is missing the most important thing: a clear clause ruling out the possibility that the resolution could be used to justify military intervention in Syrian affairs from outside.

"For this reason I see no chance this draft could be adopted," Chizhov said.

Russia and China, both veto-wielding Security Council members, have resisted a Western push for a resolution condemning the Syrian government's crackdown on unrest.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the resolution could not be used to authorise military intervention and his French counterpart Alain Juppe said such an idea was a myth.

But Chizhov's remarks suggested Moscow would not accept such assurances.

Russia says the West exploited Security Council resolution on Libya to turn a mandate to protect civilians in the North African country's popular uprising into a push for regime change, backed by Nato air strikes, that led to the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

Russia has also expressed concern that the draft's threat of "further measures" against Syria could lead to sanctions, which it opposes. Its diplomats also want to remove the draft's support for the Arab League's plan for Assad to cede power.

Qatari Prime Minister Shaikh Hamad bin Jassim al Thani, who has led the Arab League's efforts to tackle the Syrian crisis, attempted to allay Moscow and Beijing's objections, saying it was trying to avoid a Libya-style foreign role.

"We are not calling for foreign intervention," he said. "We are advocating the exertion of concrete economic pressure so that the Syrian government might realise that it is imperative to meet the demands of its people"

He told the 15-member Security Council that Syria's "killing machine is still at work."

Syrian insurgents said Assad's forces extended a military sweep

overnight around Damascus to counter a dissident threat that had reached the gates of the sprawling capital.

A statement by a local dissident group in Damascus province said more troops and armour were moving into eastern suburbs and in the mountains Qalamoun area north of Damascus, which Assad's forces took over this week.

There were army snipers in the suburb of Misraba, which has had no electricity or water for a week. Activists reported shops closed, a lack of basic supplies and tanks in the streets.

North of Damascus, armoured troops controlled the town of Rankous and began extending their control into farmland surrounding it, bombarding the village of Telfin overnight, according to opposition activists.

In the Wadi Barada area on the edge of the capital, four people were killed in a tank bombardment yesterday.

day to flush out dissident Free Syrian Army (FSA) units operating near the capital, activists said.

Syria's state news agency said troops killed 11 members of an "armed terrorist group" outside the southern city of Daraa, and that government forces discovered bomb factories and field hospitals in a raid on armed cells in Irbid and Sabqa, Damascus suburbs where insurgents had appeared recently.

"The Free Syrian Army has withdrawn but will be back," said Fawaz Tello, a Syrian opposition figure who left for Cairo a few days ago.

"The crackdown will only swell its ranks of professional soldiers (and) conscripts."

Arab League Secretary-General Nabil al Araby called on the UN Security Council to take "rapid and decisive action" by approving the resolution.

"Do not let the Syrian people down in its plight," he said. — Reuters

Arab News (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

Russia firm to oppose UN resolution

Deaths mount as 23 more killed in fierce clashes in flashpoint city of Homs

AGENCIES

BEIRUT/MOSCOW: At least eight civilians and 15 soldiers were killed on Wednesday during fierce clashes in the central Syrian city of Homs, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"At least eight civilians were killed by Syrian armed forces in several neighborhoods of Homs," the Britain-based monitoring group said. It added that the soldiers were killed in fighting with rebel troops in the Bustan Al-Diwan sector of the city.

The Observatory said three civilians, including a woman and a child, were also killed by security forces in the Damascus region, while sniper fire gunned down a man overnight in Idlib, northwest Syria.

Homs has become a flashpoint of the 10-month revolt against the regime of President Bashar Assad, whose fierce crackdown has left more than 5,000 people dead, the United Nations says.

Norway Wednesday said it was cutting back diplomatic staff in Syria because of the security concerns brought on by growing clashes between government forces and the opposition. "What we have decided now is to withdraw all non-essential personnel, that is to say those who are not necessary to keeping the embassy open," Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said.

However, Russia signaled on Wednesday it would veto a draft UN resolution calling on Assad to step down unless it explicitly ruled out military intervention to halt the



Anti-Syrian regime protesters hold a caricature placard showing Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin aiding his Syrian ally President Bashar Assad during a demonstration at Kfarnebel town in Idlib province, Syria. (AP)

bloodshed touched off by protests against his rule.

Escalating violence in Syria has killed thousands of people and activists say Assad's forces have stepped up operations this week against opposition strongholds, from the Damascus suburbs to the cities of Hama and Homs and the border provinces of Deraa and Idlib.

Arab and Western states urged the UN Security Council on

Tuesday to act swiftly on a resolution calling for Assad to delegate powers to his deputy and defuse the 11-month-old uprising against his family's dynastic rule. But Moscow's envoy to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, said there was no chance the Western-Arab draft text could be accepted unless it precisely rejected armed intervention.

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"We are not calling for foreign intervention," he said. "We are advocating the exertion of concrete economic pressure so that the Syrian regime might realize that it is imperative to meet the demands of its people."

He told the 15-member Security Council that Syria's "killing machine is still at work."

Russia: Will veto UN resolution on Syria

Moscow: Russia said on Wednesday it would veto any UN resolution on Syria that it finds unacceptable, after demanding any measure to rule out military intervention to halt bloodshed touched off by protests against president Assad's rule.

The violence in Syria has killed at least 5,000 people in the past 10 months and activists say Assad's forces have stepped up operations this week on opposition, from Damascus suburbs to Hama, Homs and border provinces of Deraa and Idlib.

Arab and Western states urged the UN Security Council on Tuesday to act swiftly

on a resolution calling for Assad to hand over powers to his deputy and defuse the 11-month-old uprising against his family's dynastic rule.

"If the text will be unacceptable for us we will vote against it, of course," Russian UN envoy Vitaly Churkin said. "If it is a text that we consider erroneous, that will lead to a worsening of the crisis, we will not allow it to be passed. That's unequivocal."

His remarks came hours after Russia's envoy to EU, said there was no chance the Western-Arab draft text could be accepted unless it expressly rejected armed intervention. REUTERS

Russia, China oppose West-backed resolution on Syria

Atul Arora

DUBAI: Amid high drama at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Russia and China have spiritedly opposed a European-Arab draft that seeks to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as the first step towards the establishment of democracy in the troubled Arab nation.

Citing the principle of sovereignty and advocating a peaceful internal dialogue,

Russian Ambassador to the U.N. Vitaly Churkin said during an animated debate on Tuesday that there were alternative ways to end the bloodshed in Syria other than by the eviction of Mr. Assad by foreign powers through the U.N. route.

Questioning the legality of the proposed resolution, Mr. Churkin said the UNSC did not have the mandate to interfere in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state. "The

Council cannot prescribe ready recipes for the outcome of domestic political processes. It is not in the [U.N.] Charter", Mr. Churkin warned that the U.N.'s intrusion into the internal affairs of a country would set a dangerous precedent. "Then you will start telling what king needs to resign and what Prime Minister needs to step down. This is not the business of the Security Council."

Observers say the Russians are apprehensive that if validated, the principle of U.N. interventionism in internal conflicts can be used to target them if the domestic situation in Russia deteriorates for some reason.

Nations Charter and the basic norms guiding the practice of international relations," Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Li Baodong said. China's state-run news agency Xinhua reported.

Backing the Russian position, China said the Security Council was overstepping its mandated boundaries in the case of Syria. "China... resolutely opposes pushing for forced regime change in Syria, as it violates the United

failed to comply to the main demands of the resolution — by the President to his deputy, leading to the formation of an interim national unity government — within 15 days.

The Russians also questioned the Western assumption that President Assad alone was responsible for the growing violence in Syria. Speaking separately, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: "Yes, we condemn

strongly the use of force by (Syrian) government forces against civilians. But we condemn in the same strong way the activities of the armed extremist groups who attack government positions."

On the contrary, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Mr. Assad a "dictator" and urged "the international community to put aside our own differences and send a clear message of support to the people of Syria."

Moscow Times

\$6Bln in Weapons Sales a Factor in Syria

REUTERS

Russia is counting on President Bashar Assad to keep his grip on power to see through potential arms contracts worth up to \$6 billion and help Moscow reach a record defense export year, according to the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, or CAST.

Moscow has been Assad's main defender as Western and Arab countries push for a UN Security Council resolution that would call for Assad to step down.

A veto-wielding permanent member, Russia has already criticized the resolution saying it will lead to civil war.

Having lost tens of billions of dollars in arms contracts with Libya after leader Moammar Gadhafi was ousted last year, Moscow is looking to Damascus to maintain a foothold, both politically and economically, in the region.

At stake for Russia — the world's No. 2 arms exporter — is billions of dollars in potential and current arms contracts with ally Syria, including deliveries on an order of 24 MiG-29M2 fighter jets signed in 2007.

Syria, where Russia maintains a naval base, is also the only ally Russia has left in the Middle East. "[If Assad goes] Russia will lose everything," CAST director Ruslan Pukhov said.

"Syria is one of Russia's top five clients. Russia already concluded with Syria contracts for \$4 billion and has \$2 billion more in potential contracts on the way," Pukhov said.

Tests for the jet fighters began in December of last year, CAST said in a report obtained by Reuters before its publication. Damascus was also likely to receive deliveries of Buk anti-aircraft missiles this year, it said.



Syrian rebels are trying to overthrow a regime that is among the best customers of the Russian arms industry. AP

Russia exported a record \$12 billion in weapons to customers around the world in 2011, CAST said in an annual report released before official data, boosted by sales to embattled Arab leaders and Asian countries eyeing China's rising military might.

Pukhov said the funds are crucial for Russia's defense industry, which Putin built up during his 2000-08 presidency and lacks enough domestic orders to keep it profitable, but they have little bearing on Russia's \$1.85 trillion economy.

CAST said Damascus received 8 percent of Russia's 2011 deliveries or nearly

\$960 million in jet fighter upgrades and anti-ship missile systems.

Western UN envoys, who support the plan calling for Assad's removal, have already condemned arms sales to Damascus, where the United Nations says more than 5,000 civilians have been killed in a 10-month-old crackdown on opposition to Assad's rule.

In addition to upgrades and repairs to Syria's MiG-23 and MiG-29 fighter jets last year, it also received three different missile systems, including Bastion anti-ship missile units and another anti-aircraft missile system.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has

said Moscow's arms exports to Syria need no explanation. While European Union and U.S. embargoes prevent selling arms to Assad's government, no international treaty with Russia is in place.

■ Russia said it will use its veto in the UN Security Council to block any resolution on Syria it considers unacceptable and would not abstain from a vote.

The remarks by Moscow's UN envoy, Vitaly Churkin, are the clearest threat yet of a Russian veto on a Western-Arab draft resolution calling for Assad to step down.

"We will not allow it to be passed," he said. "That is unequivocal."

China Daily

Beijing against sanctions

Forcing regime change in Syria
violates charter, UN envoy says

By ZHANG YUWEI
AND LI LIANXING
CHINA DAILY

UNITED NATIONS / DAMASCUS — China expressed its opposition to military intervention, or the introduction of new sanctions, to resolve the situation in Syria as Beijing issued a travel alert and reminded its citizens already in the country to step up security measures.

“We firmly oppose forcefully pushing for ‘regime change’, which violates the purpose and principles of the UN Charter and the basic norms governing international relations,” Li Baodong, China’s ambassador to the United Nations, said during a Security Council debate on Syria on Tuesday.

The council was debating an Arab League plan calling for an end to violence and for the Syrian president to step down.

Both China and Russia said that this resembled forced regime change.

Li said that “sanctions, rather than help resolve an issue, often lead to further complications”. He also said China supports Russia regarding the situation in Syria.

In the first complete expression of China’s position on the Syrian issue, Li’s remarks showed that China does not want a rerun of events in Libya, Chinese experts said.

The Security Council adopted a resolution last year to authorize “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians. NATO military action followed.

Yin Gang, an expert on Middle East studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that both China and Russia do not want the Security Council to be used as an excuse for military intervention.

“The political system in Syria may need to be improved, but the change should be made through non-violent means,” Yin added.

SEE “SYRIA” PAGE 2

Li said on Tuesday that the Syrian people will find a way out of the crisis. “Syria and its people are sufficiently able and resourceful to find a political system and mode of economic growth suited to Syria’s national conditions.”

Moscow’s ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, argued in Tuesday’s debate that Syria should “be able to decide for itself”, reiterating Russia’s opposition to sanctions or the deployment of troops.

Arab states, the United States and European nations, however, are pushing the council to adopt a draft resolution to demand what they called “political transition” in Syria and endorse an Arab plan for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down.

Jihad Makdissi, spokesman for the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said on Wednesday that the current crisis is complicated and not a simple “black or white” issue.

“Syria is responding to dialogue and the government is saying yes to any constructive, not destructive, initiative,” Makdissi told China Daily.

Ye Hailin, a researcher on the Middle East at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said he thought that the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council would play a key part in any resolution.

Safety caution

The Ministry of Commerce on Wednesday urged Chinese citizens and companies in Syria to exercise caution.

The ministry warned citizens to avoid traveling to Syria and urged Chinese companies to enhance security procedures.

*Wang Chenyan in Beijing
contributed to this story.*

Global Times (Chine / China)

► China opposed to use of force to end crisis

Russia sees no chance for Syria resolution

A senior Russian diplomat said yesterday there was no chance a Western-Arab draft UN Security Council resolution could pass without language clearly ruling out potential military intervention, the Interfax News Agency reported.

Vladimir Chizhov's remarks provided a further hint that Russia would veto the resolution, which supports an Arab League plan calling for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to cede power, if it is not changed to take Moscow's concerns into account.

The draft "is missing the most important thing: a clear clause ruling out the possibility that the resolution could be used to justify military intervention in Syrian affairs from outside. For this reason I see no chance this draft could be adopted," said Chizhov, Russia's envoy to the European Union.

Russia's deputy foreign minister pressed the point.

"We reject ... any attempts to use the Security Council to foster conflict and justify eventual foreign military intervention," Deputy Foreign Minister Genady Gatilov said, according to Interfax.

China on Tuesday voiced its firm opposition to the use of force to resolve the Syrian issue.

Li Baodong, the Chinese permanent representative to the United Nations, said, "We firmly oppose the use of force to resolve the Syrian issue, firmly oppose practices such as pushing through 'regime change,' which violates the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the basic norms governing international relations," the Xinhua News Agency reported.

The Arab League head called on Tues-



A demonstrator wears a green ribbon with a portrait of ousted and killed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi during a picket to support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad outside the Syrian embassy in Moscow yesterday. Photo: AFP

day for "rapid and decisive action" and Western states spoke of a potential vote this week. But Russia warned that rushing the resolution through would doom it to failure.

Gatilov said the search for consensus would take time and "no vote will be held in the coming days," Interfax reported.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague told the council on Tuesday that the resolution "does not call for military

action and could not be used to authorize it." French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe described the idea of such intervention as a myth.

The comments by Russian diplomats suggest Moscow would not settle for such assurances and would lobby for clear language on the matter.

"As of today the content of the (Western-Arab) draft resolution is not acceptable to us because it continues to include

clauses that contain the introduction of sanctions against Syria and also clauses that can be interpreted as an opportunity to use force," Gatilov said.

Russian diplomats have also suggested Moscow could use its veto if the expression of support for the Arab League plan that calls for Assad to cede power is not removed from the draft.

Reuters - Xinhua