

Foreign instructors leave, Al Qaeda arrives

SYRIA PRESS REVIEW #51

Monday & Tuesday, February 13 & 14, 2012

The new Western discourse coincides with the withdrawal of many foreign instructors, as witnessed in the field, and with the statements of Ayman al-Zawahiri (the Egyptian leader of Al-Qaeda since the official demise of Osama bin Laden) announcing the arrival of his fighters. In fact, Al-Qaeda is already on the ground inside Syria, where the Libyan Abdel Hakim Belhaj (the organization's number-two man) has been seen supervising the "Free" Syrian Army. This charade is intended to cloak NATO's strategy switch from a low intensity war to subcontracting terrorist actions as required.

The Arab League wants a United Nations peacekeeping force in Syria, without specifying between which factions they would be mediating and on what line of demarcation. Immediately rejected by Syria since encroaching on its sovereignty, the proposal provided Westerners with the awaited opportunity of harping on the impossibility of a military solution; a discourse in total contradiction with the one they held before the Russian and Chinese double veto of 4 February, when NATO was trying to assemble a coalition around Turkey and the GCC.

- To enhance the romantic imagery of events, several newspapers resort to commissioning reports or articles by talented writers. Thus, *Le Monde* has enlisted Jonathan Littell who entered Syria illegally to join the rebels at Homs. Or *La Vanguardia* which publishes a piece by Tahar Ben Jaloun fantasizing, in the manner of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, on what might be going on in tyrant Al-Assad's head.
- *Junge Welt* surveys half a century of plots against Syria at the hands of the US and British secret services. The former East German communist youth daily is the only one in Europe to have sided with Syria against imperialism.
- The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uri Rosenthal, gave an interview to the *Standard* (Austria). He excludes the military option, but pleads in favor of supporting the opposition politically and financially. However, he voices concern over the difficulties faced by the opposition to remain united. *Gulf News* publishes an op-ed by British Foreign Minister William Hague, announcing that his administration has begun to collect witness accounts of crimes by the Syrian regime in view of a possible trial against Bashar al-Assad before the ICC.
- *ABC* cautions that a civil war in Syria would put in jeopardy the Spanish Blue Helmets serving with the UN Peacekeeping Force in Lebanon.

- Richard Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph*, who saw the bodies of victims wearing handcuffs, does not believe they were killed by loyalists, but by the rebels. So he wonders whether the same ruthlessness is being exercised by both sides.
- Charlotte McDonald-Gibson of *The Independent* was taken aback when visiting a military hospital: All the wounded were convinced that the violence is perpetrated exclusively by the rebels.
- The *National Post* asked its readers what can be done for Syria. None of the published replies disputes the Atlanticist interpretation of events nor takes into account the Syrian perspective.
- Sami Mobayeb in *Gulf News* deplores that the draft of the new constitution is being submitted to the Syrian people only at this stage. In any case, he says, the new text does not change much, except to put an end to the political leadership of the Baath party. However, it is too late to avert the division of the country, he concludes.
- In response to the speech by King Abdullah, groups have "spontaneously" been created in Saudi Arabia to promote the boycott of Russian and Chinese products, reports the *Saudi Gazette*. The Jeddah Chamber of Commerce seized on the opportunity to inform the public of the poor quality of products from its Chinese competitor. However, canceling the oil contracts with the country's leading client was not considered as an option.
- UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed went to Moscow to vouch for the UAE's will to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, reports *The Khaleej Times*. He was not carrying a concrete proposal, hence his visit did not lead to anything concrete. It was mostly a way of showing that relations between the two countries are friendly notwithstanding the Wahhabi call for a boycott.

Headline of the day



The *Arab Times* is a daily newspaper published in Kuwait, a state that has sold a third of its territory to the United States and hosts the largest contingent of GIs outside US borders.

The above headline was featured on its edition of February 13, 2012.

Photo of the day



© Reuters

Each day we shall endeavor to present the press agency photo that was most widely disseminated worldwide.

Here, at a rally of about twenty people in Daria near Damascus, a small girl pleads for help against child-killing tyrant Al-Assad. The sign is in English and the dead children are represented by a doll wrapped in a shroud. While the picture calls forth emotion, it also illustrates the virtual nature of the accusation: there is nothing to substantiate the charge that the regime would have killed 400 children. And, so, we are left with a doll exhibit.

Cartoons of the day



© Gulf News

For Nino Jose Heredia the new constitution comes too late. It cannot bridge the gap created by the crisis, only patch up a hole in the wall.



© The National

According to Shadi Ghanim, the Syrians are no longer safe anywhere from the government's bombs.

Le Monde (France)

Ce que nous avons vu dans Homs, ville martyre

Le jour même où des avions de combat français empêchaient que des « rivières de sang » ne coulent dans les rues de Benghazi, bastion de l'insurrection libyenne, il y aura bientôt un an, la Syrie basculait à son tour dans la contestation.

Contre toute attente, le soulèvement syrien a résisté jusqu'à présent à la puissance de feu d'un régime connu pour sa brutalité et qui ne semble s'être donné comme seule perspective, de virtuelles promesses de réformes mises à part, que de bombarder ceux qui le défient.

Onze mois plus tard, des « rivières de sang » se répandent-elles dans la capitale du « printemps arabe » syrien, à Homs ? Pour le savoir, dans un pays où la presse est empêchée de travailler, *Le Monde*, privé de visa par les autorités en dépit de demandes

répétées, s'est décidé à dépêcher clandestinement sur place et dans des conditions difficiles deux témoins : le photojournaliste Mani, arabophone, bon connaisseur de la Syrie et d'Homs, où il s'était déjà rendu à l'automne 2011, et l'écrivain Jonathan Littell, familier des zones de guerre et des situations d'urgence humanitaire, du fait de son travail pour des organisations non gouvernementales dans le Caucase et en Afrique.

Editorial

Ils ont séjourné à Homs, troisième ville du pays, dans les quartiers tenus par les insurgés, du 17 janvier au 2 février. Resté sur place après cette date, Mani a quitté la Syrie le 11 février. L'emballage de la situation sur le terrain,

notamment le massacre d'une famille, le 26 janvier, et un bombardement meurtrier, le 3 février, nous a contraints, les jours précédents, à précipiter la publication de photos et d'informations, alors que nous avions décidé initialement d'attendre leur sortie d'Homs par souci de sécurité.

Nous commençons, dans ce numéro, la publication d'un récit en cinq épisodes qui dit la réalité d'une ville livrée à la guerre, une ville partagée par une ligne de front mouvante sur laquelle règnent les *snipers* loyalistes et dans laquelle la médecine a été transformée par les autorités en arme de guerre.

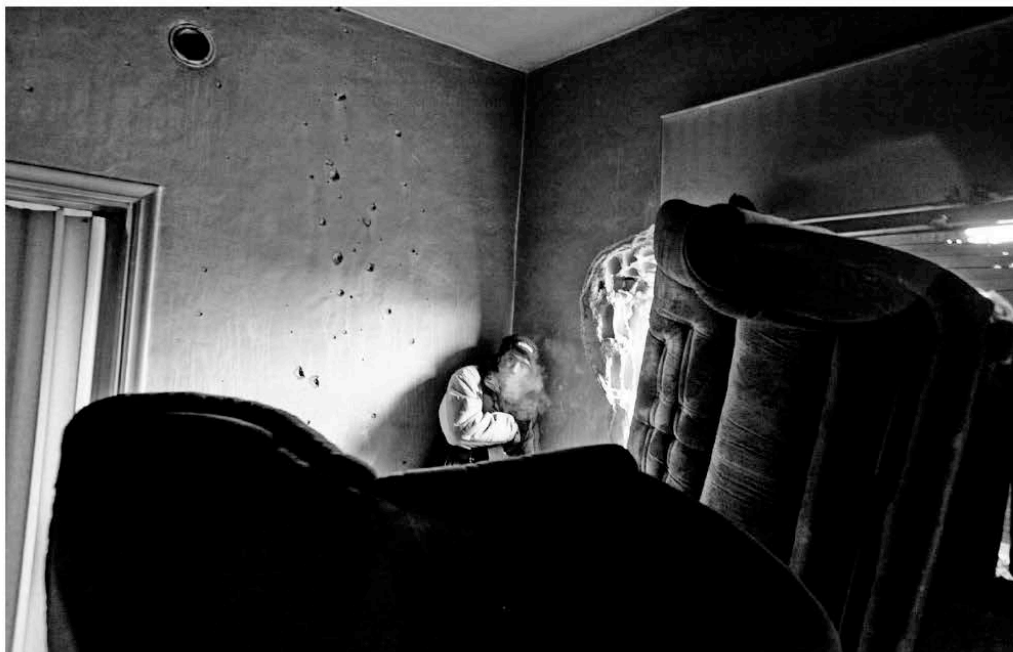
Par sa composition confessionnelle, Homs porte en elle toutes les peurs d'un basculement d'une révolte contre un pouvoir dictatorial en une guerre confessionnelle sur le mode irakien. C'est un argu-

ment que brandit le régime, fort de la protection que lui assure son parrain russe dont les veto à l'ONU tiennent à distance toute forme d'intervention internationale.

La complexité syrienne est entretenue par le grand jeu régional dans lequel Damas s'insère, notamment l'axe avec l'Iran, dont le programme nucléaire focalise l'attention occidentale.

Ce que les calculs diplomatiques finissent par masquer, c'est le sort des femmes et des hommes qui sont en première ligne à Homs comme ailleurs en Syrie, en quête d'une dignité qui, avant même les aspirations à la démocratie, constitue le tronc commun des révoltes arabes. C'est cette quête de dignité que le récit de Mani et de Jonathan Littell entend restituer. ■

Enquête page 17.
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Les soldats de l'Armée syrienne libre montent la garde dans tous les immeubles autour du quartier de Baba Amro pour prévenir les éventuelles incursions des forces gouvernementales.

MANI POUR « LE MONDE »

Entrés de façon clandestine en Syrie en janvier, l'écrivain Jonathan Littell, Prix Goncourt 2006, et le photographe Mani se sont rendus pour « Le Monde » à Homs, bastion du soulèvement contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad. Arabophone et bon connaisseur de la Syrie, Mani avait déjà effectué un reportage sur place, en octobre 2011, publié par « Le Monde ».

Passage clandestin

Le trajet du Liban à Homs se fait de village en village, de ruelle en ruelle. Toujours sous la menace des barrages volants de l'armée syrienne

TEXTE : JONATHAN LITTELL
PHOTO : MANI

Depuis le début, lance le passeur, sa grosse barbe fendue par un sourire malicieux, on m'appelle Al-Ghadab, "La Colère". Alors que je ris tout le temps ! Trappu, vêtu d'un training noir, deux portables à la main, La Colère se tient dans un appartement glacial de Tripoli, dans le nord du Liban. Deux hommes l'accompagnent, des Libanais, des contrebandiers, semble-t-il. Mais lui n'est pas un professionnel. « Quand ça a commencé, nous raconterait-il plus tard, j'étais sur le point de me marier. J'avais le choix : la révolution ou le mariage. » En juillet, quand les premières unités de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) se sont formées, il a commencé à faire la navette pour eux : transport de blessés, de matériel médical, de journalistes comme nous, d'autres choses encore. Sa famille est aisée : « Je ne fais pas ça pour l'argent », insiste-t-il.

Matin. La pluie tombe, drue. Un des deux Libanais, au volant d'un minivan, nous conduit. La Colère, le photographe Mani et moi-même, par les petites routes du mont Liban, évitant les postes de l'armée libanaise, jusqu'à une grande plaine caillouteuse. La Syrie est juste devant nous. Au détour d'une route, trois jeunes gens nous attendent avec des motos.eux non plus ne sont pas des professionnels, juste des cultivateurs du coin, aux mains rouges et calleuses. Ils nous emmènent par des chemins boueux entre des habitations et des champs, on croise des enfants morveux et mal vêtus, des ruches, quelques chevaux, jusqu'à une maison où des paysans souriants nous servent le café. Un appel radio : la voie est libre, on repart pour une autre maison, plus loin dans le village. A ce moment, un SMS du ministère du tourisme, en anglais, tombe sur le portable : « Bienvenue en Syrie. » Nous sommes passés de l'autre côté du bourg.

A la différence des villages un peu plus loin, ce village reste tranquille : « Ici, il n'y

a pas de manifestations, explique notre hôte. On ne veut pas attirer le moukhabarat et risquer de perturber le trafic. » Mais l'ASL n'est pas loin. La Colère revient avec un pick-up, nous entasse à l'avant, et on part. Champs, vergers, petites routes défoncées ; rapidement, on croise un officier ASL dans un véhicule, puis un barrage, sur un pont, tenu par des combattants qui contrôlent des norias de pick-up et de camions, des contrebandiers venant du Liban, transportant tout ce dont les gens manquent ici. Un drapeau flotte au-dessus du barrage, noir, blanc et vert, frappé de trois étoiles rouges, le drapeau de la révolution syrienne.

Le téléphone de La Colère sonne sans cesse ; l'ASL, a des observateurs partout, pour prévenir en cas de mouvement de troupes ou de mise en place de barrages volants, les plus dangereux. Le lendemain, d'ailleurs, un ami de La Colère, un déserteur de la sécurité d'Etat, sera tué devant un tel barrage, non loin d'ici, mitraillé alors qu'il tentait de fuir. La Colère, lui, garde une grenade à côté du volant : s'il est pris, ce ne sera pas vivant.

« Le peuple syrien a été élevé comme dans un poulailler : tu as le droit de manger, dormir, pondre, et c'est tout »,

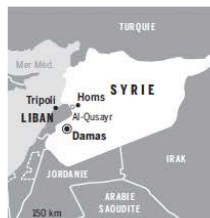
Abou Abdo
chauffeur

Sur la route, visible à quelques centaines de mètres, se dresse un des barrages fixes qui entourent la petite ville d'Al-Qusayr ; La Colère oblique sur un chemin de terre et le contourne par des terrains vagues où campent des familles bedouines. Puis c'est le bourg, où l'on navigue par les ruelles entre des immeubles de deux étages en béton effrité, mornes sous la pluie. Deux semaines plus tard, à Homs, un activiste civil m'affirmera : « L'ASL libé-

ra Homs avant Qusayr. Jamais le régime ne lâchera Qusayr. S'ils perdent Qusayr, ils perdent tout et la frontière. » Pourtant, l'armée syrienne ne semble déjà plus contrôler la ville. A part les barrages périphériques et des chars plus ou moins cachés en raison de l'accord avec la Ligue arabe, elle ne vient vraiment que des bâtiments de la mairie et de l'hôpital, au centre.

Je passerai plusieurs fois devant la mairie, un grand immeuble de quatre étages, de style soviétique, aux vitres fracassées, avec des sacs de sable sur le toit protégeant les nids des snipers. Jusqu'à peu, ces snipers tiraient régulièrement dans les rues, surtout le soir ; mais, après une attaque qui leur avait permis de pénétrer dans le bâtiment, l'ASL a passé un accord avec le commandant, et ses hommes se tiennent tranquilles. De fait, l'ASL circule librement en ville, parfois dans des pick-up armés d'une mitrailleuse lourde et arborant sur les portes l'insigne de la katiaba Al-Faruk, l'unité responsable de la zone. Chaque soir, quand les civils se réunissent dans une rue pour manifester contre le régime, des dizaines de soldats ASL, en armes se positionnent aux carrefours pour les protéger. « Nous intervenons rarement », explique un officier que je rencontre le lendemain, avec une quinzaine de ses hommes, dans une ferme en dehors du bourg. Les barrages restent retranchés et ne nous gênent pas. Nous n'attaquons que lorsque l'armée régulière tente une opération. »

Le voyage de Qusayr à Homs, une trentaine de kilomètres, se fera de la même manière : en passant d'une maison à une autre, d'un véhicule à un autre, d'une main à une autre. Un large réseau de civils aide l'ASL et la révolution. A chaque étape, un véhicule ou une moto part devant vérifier si la route est libre. Et, quand on bouge, il y a toujours des gens devant, autour, derrière ; les téléphones ne cessent de sonner pour transmettre les dernières informations. Tout se passe comme si, face au maillage policier et sécuritaire du parti baas et des moukhabarat, maillage qui



domine la vie du pays depuis des décennies et dans lequel toute la population, d'une manière ou d'une autre, s'est retrouvée prise, la société avait ces derniers mois mis en place un contre-maillage, presque aussi efficace, fait d'activistes civils, de notables, de figures religieuses et, de plus en plus, de soldats, les déserteurs qui forment l'ASL. Ce contre-maillage résiste à l'autre, le contourne, et même commence à l'absorber en partie. Quand on circule entre la frontière libanaise et Homs, il devient visible. Il y a toujours eu, bien entendu, une résistance passive au maillage du régime, mais maintenant ce second maillage s'est entièrement dégagé de ses liens avec le premier. Comme si la société syrienne, depuis le printemps, s'était dédoublée, et que deux sociétés parallèles coexistaient dans le pays, en conflit mortel.

Ce qui frappe aussi, c'est l'intelligence politique des Syriens ordinaires impliqués dans la révolte. Abou Abdo, un de nos chauffeurs, demandera : « Alors, vous avez vu des salafites ici, comme le dit Bachar ? »

« Ça dépend », répond Mani. Qu'est-ce que tu entends par salafite ?

« Justement. Ce mot veut dire deux choses. Les musulmans de Syrie suivent la voie de la modération, et pour bien vivre doi-

vent suivre l'exemple d'un ancêtre pieux. Ça, c'est le sens original du mot. L'autre, le courant takfiriste, djihadiste, terroriste, c'est une création des Américains et des Israéliens. Ça n'a rien à voir avec nous. » Plus tard, lors d'une longue pause dans une ferme, il se montrera très critique des partis d'opposition : « Aujourd'hui, à la différence d'Hama en 1982, c'est le peuple qui se soulève. Les Frères musulmans, les communistes, les salafites et les autres mouvements politiques courent pour le rat trapper et monter sur ses épaules. Mais la rue syrienne refuse la politisation du mouvement. Elle accepte de l'aide d'où qu'elle vienne, mais cette aide ne peut pas être conditionnée. La rue ne s'est pas révoltée pour revendiquer une option politique précise, mais en réaction à l'oppression et à l'humiliation. Le peuple syrien a été élevé comme dans un poulailler : tu as le droit de manger, dormir, pondre, et c'est tout. Il n'y a pas de place pour la pensée. C'est la Corée du Nord du Moyen-Orient. »

La conversation continuera une bonne partie du trajet. On continue une vaste usine chimique, d'où émane une odeur immonde ; plus loin s'étend le lac d'Homs, une fine langue bleue ; des nuages couvrent l'horizon, mais les étoiles brillent par en dessous, illuminant le paysage boueux, chaotique, dominé par ce dinosaure industriel avec ses immenses tas de poudre jaune. Devant nous se dresse déjà l'autoroute Damas-Homs, surélevée et parcourue par de nombreux véhicules, comme en temps normal. C'est le dernier obstacle à franchir, étroitement surveillé par l'armée régulière. Mais ici aussi l'ASL, à ses moyens, qu'il faut garder secrets. Derrière l'autoroute nous attend une autre voiture, avec deux jeunes combattants de l'ASL. On démarre vite. Le tissu urbain s'épaissit, c'est un premier faubourg de la ville. Un peu plus loin, au milieu d'une avenue assez large, un barrage de l'ASL contrôle un carrefour. Le quartier libéré de Baba Amro se trouve juste derrière. ■

Prochain article : « Baba Amro, bastion libéré »

Le Figaro (France)

Syrie: la Ligue arabe réclame une force d'interposition

Prenant acte de l'impasse diplomatique, l'organisation s'engage à fournir un soutien « politique et matériel » à l'opposition.

ARIELLE THEDREL

PROCHE-ORIENT Réunis dimanche au Caire, les pays de la Ligue arabe ont durci le ton pour tenter de juguler une violence qui ne connaît pas de répit en Syrie. Une colonne de blindés se dirigeait ainsi vers la ville rebelle de Homs, cible d'une violente offensive depuis plus d'une semaine. Une trentaine de roquettes se sont abattues dans la nuit sur le seul quartier de Baba Amr et 24 personnes au moins ont trouvé la mort dans l'ensemble du pays.

Jusqu'à présent incapables de faire pression sur le régime de Bachar el-Assad, les pays membres de l'organisation ont décidé dimanche de « mettre fin à la mission des observateurs de la Ligue arabe et d'inviter le Conseil de sécurité à adopter une résolution pour former une force de maintien de la paix arabo-onusienne conjointe ». Peu auparavant, la Ligue avait

annoncé la démission du chef de la mission des observateurs de la Ligue arabe en Syrie, le très controversé général soudanais Mohammed Ahmed Moustapha al-Dabi. L'organisation prévoit d'« ouvrir des canaux de communication avec l'opposition syrienne et de lui fournir toutes les formes de soutien politique et matériel ». La Ligue a aussi salué la proposition de la Tunisie d'organiser une « conférence des amis de la Syrie ». L'idée avait été lancée par Paris et Washington après le veto de Pékin et de Moscou à une résolution condamnant la répression. La réunion de ce groupe se tiendra le 24 février à Tunis.

Dans son communiqué final, la Ligue appelle enfin à rompre avec « toutes les formes de coopération diplomatique avec les représentants du régime syrien dans les Etats, les instances et les conférences ». Un durcissement face auquel le régime de Damas s'est montré inflexible, annonçant dimanche soir rejeter « catégoriquement » les décisions de la Ligue et dénonçant « l'hystérie » de certains pays arabes.

Blocage diplomatique

Ces dernières semaines, le blocage diplomatique après les veto russe et chinois à l'ONU ainsi que le refus occidental d'une intervention armée ont ouvert l'option d'une militarisation du mouvement de contestation. Le Conseil national syrien et l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL, force d'opposition armée fondée par un colonel déserteur qui revendique 40 000 combattants) ont appelé les pays arabes à « participer de manière directe et efficace au financement légitime des opérations d'autodéfense et de protection des zones civiles menées par l'ASL ».

Trois tués dans le nord du Liban

AU FUR et à mesure que la contestation pacifique du régime de Bachar el-Assad se transforme en confrontation armée et que le conflit prend une coloration confessionnelle, le Liban craint une contagion de la violence sur son territoire. Ce week-end, Tripoli, la principale ville du nord du pays, a été le théâtre d'accrochages entre partisans et opposants du président syrien qui ont fait trois morts et une vingtaine de



Les ministres des Affaires étrangères des pays membres de la Ligue arabe ont appelé hier au Caire à rompre avec « toutes les formes de coopération diplomatique avec les représentants du régime syrien ». MARCO LONGARI/APP

Certains rebelles réclament davantage, à savoir des armes. A Washington, le sénateur républicain John McCain s'y est dit favorable. Selon la chaîne de télévision CNN, le Pentagone et le commandement militaire américain chargé du Moyen-Orient et de l'Asie centrale, auraient également « passé en revue les capacités militaires américaines » pour parler à tout scénario, même si, souligne CNN, « des troupes militaires sont peu vraisemblables ». La perspective de livraisons d'armes à l'ASL est considérée cependant avec une extrême prudence par les Européens, car elle reviendrait, selon eux, à « nourrir la guerre civile ».

En réalité, selon le ministre irakien de l'Intérieur, Adnan al-Assad, des armes à destination de l'opposition syrienne passent déjà en contrebande via la frontière irako-syrienne, une région désertique

longue de 600 km. Le ministre affirme également qu'un certain nombre de djihadistes irakiens sont allés combattre en Syrie.

A l'instar des Frères musulmans de Jordanie, qui ont appelé à la guerre sainte contre le régime de Damas, le site fondamentaliste Ansar al-Moudjahidin ainsi que le numéro un d'al-Qaïda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, ont confirmé implicitement ces informations en indiquant que « l'Etat (islamique d'Irak, regroupement d'organisations affiliées à al-Qaïda) envoie les meilleurs de ses hommes » en Syrie tandis que dans une vidéo intitulée « En avant, les lions de Syrie, Ayman al-Zawahiri exhorte les musulmans à renverser le régime de Bachar el-Assad. Samedi, au lendemain d'une double attaque à la voiture piégée à Alep, qui a fait 25 morts, un général de l'armée syrienne a été abattu devant sa maison à Damas, officiellement par un « groupe terroriste ».

ZOOM

L'opposition tunisienne se rassemble

Cinq partis laïques de Tunisie, parmi lesquels le Parti démocratique progressiste (PDP), ont fusionné samedi dans l'espoir de peser plus lourd face au parti islamiste Ennahdha, vainqueur des élections d'octobre 2011. Si cette nouvelle alliance reste toujours loin d'Ennahdha en termes de sièges au sein de la Constituante, elle devrait cependant lui opposer une concurrence plus soutenue lors des législatives prévues en 2013.

Le Figaro (France)

Syrie : le casse-tête des Casques bleus

Paris appuie les efforts de la Ligue arabe et participera à la réunion du 24 février à Tunis.

ALAIN BARLUET

DIPLOMATIE Tandis que la litanie des massacres se poursuit à Homs et que la diplomatie est dans l'impasse, Paris ne veut rien faire qui « désespère » l'opposition syrienne. Alain Juppé a néanmoins clairement pris ses distances, lundi, avec la proposition, lancée la veille par la Ligue arabe, de déployer une force conjointe regroupant l'ONU et des pays arabes. « Toute intervention à caractère militaire extérieure ne ferait qu'aggraver la situation », a réagi le chef de la diplomatie française. Son homologue britannique, William Hague, s'est dit prêt, pour la forme, à discuter rapidement de cette option. L'UE, l'Allemagne et l'Italie ont exprimé la même urgence. « Si un tel concept pouvait être rendu viable, nous le soutiendrions de toutes les manières habituelles », a ajouté le patron du Foreign Office. Mais, sur le fond, les Européens sont, dans leur ensemble, peu enthousiastes. Il ne saurait en tout cas être question d'intervention au sol de troupes occidentales, a insisté le ministre britannique. À Paris comme à Londres, on exclut officiellement un appui militaire à l'opposition syrienne à laquelle la Ligue arabe a promis dimanche un « soutien politique et matériel ».

Faire pression sur Moscou

En revanche, les Occidentaux appuient à fond la mobilisation de la Ligue, saluée comme la véritable mutation d'une organisation longtemps considérée comme une coquille vide. À Paris, on se félicite tout particulièrement de la première réunion, le 24 février à Tunis, du « Groupe des amis du peuple syrien ». Un concept déjà éprouvé lors de la crise libyenne. La plupart des pays de la Ligue arabe, la France, la Grande-Bretagne et les États-Unis devraient notamment faire partie de ce groupe, sur lequel tous les espoirs se reportent maintenant pour faire pression sur le régime de Damas et aussi sur Moscou.

Réticente sur l'envoi de Casques bleus, la France, parmi d'autres, prend le risque de se voir accusée d'attentisme alors que la liste des victimes syriennes ne cesse de s'allonger. Des crimes contre l'humanité ont « vraisemblable-

ment été commis » par Damas, a dénoncé la haute-commissaire de l'ONU aux Droits de l'homme, Navi Pillay, qui a évoqué plus de trois cents morts à Homs sous les bombardements depuis dix jours. L'idée d'un recours à une force des Nations unies avait pourtant été caressée dans l'entourage de Nicolas Sarkozy, il y a plusieurs semaines, au moment où il devenait patent que les observateurs de la Ligue arabe avaient le plus grand mal à accomplir leur mission.

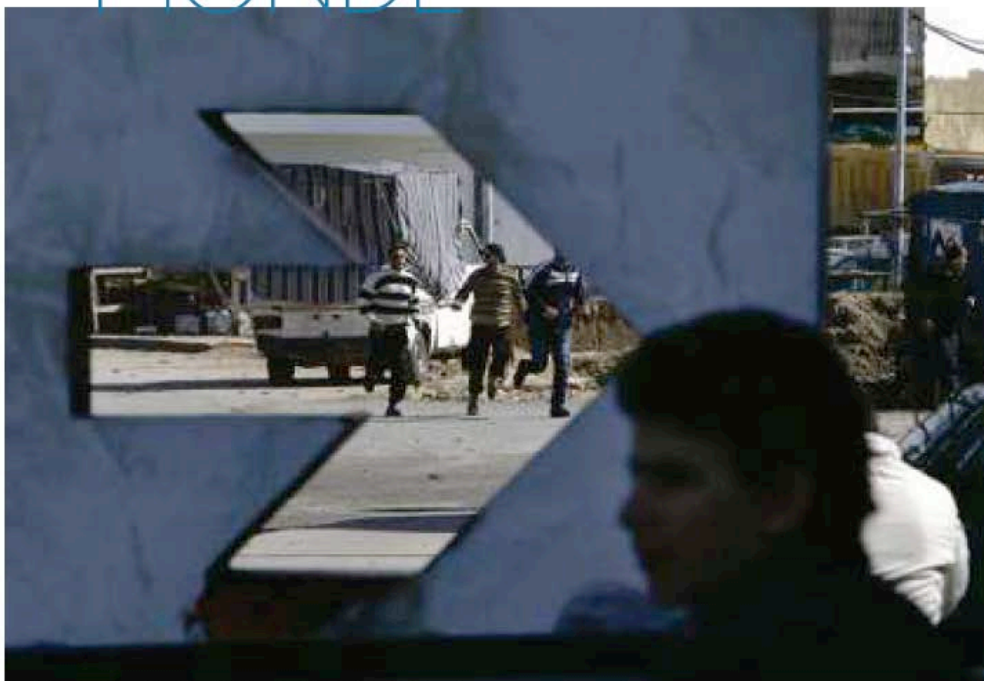
« La proposition de déployer une force conjointe ONU-Arabes en Syrie va au-delà de ce qui est réaliste », explique une source diplomatique. Obstacle majeur, le fait que le régime de Bachar el-Assad s'oppose à un tel déploiement. Faute d'un tel feu vert, l'envoi d'une force en Syrie nécessite une résolution dont l'adoption apparaît plus qu'improbable, compte tenu du récent veto russe à un texte pourtant très édulcoré. En virtuose de la temporisation, Moscou a dit lundi étudier la proposition de la Ligue arabe mais n'envisage pas sa mise en œuvre avant l'arrêt des combats... Autant dire qu'en l'état, le plan arabe risque fort de ne pas sortir de l'ornière. ■

zoom

Polémique britannique sur la libération d'Abou Qatada

Ancien proche de Ben Laden, l'extrémiste islamiste Abou Qatada devait être libéré hier de la prison britannique où il était détenu depuis six ans. Il sera assigné à résidence sous contrôle strict. Cette décision d'un juge embarrasse le gouvernement qui souhaite depuis des années extraditer vers la Jordanie le prêcheur, détenu en Grande-Bretagne sans inculpation. Mais la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme a empêché une telle expulsion vers Amman de l'homme, poursuivi pour terrorisme par la justice jordanienne, de peur qu'il n'y bénéficie pas d'un procès équitable.

Libération (France)



Des habitants du quartier Bab al-Tabbaneh, à Tripoli, fuient les tirs entre communautés, samedi. PHOTO JOSEPH EID AFP

Au Liban, l'engrenage syrien

A Tripoli, la deuxième ville du pays du cèdre, pro et anti-Bachar al-Assad se sont affrontés, vendredi et samedi, entre quartiers alaouites et sunnites.

Par **JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN**
Envoyé spécial à Tripoli (Liban)

A Tripoli, au Liban, le quartier sunnite de Bab al-Tabbaneh apparaît encore plus pauvre que les quartiers chiites de la banlieue de Beyrouth. Dans les rues, les voitures ont l'air d'avoir été dépeçées, les selles des motos déchirées par

« Chaque habitant de ce quartier a un membre de sa famille qui a été soit tué, soit arrêté par les Syriens. »

Cheikh Ayman Kharma un imam du quartier sunnite Bab al-Tabbaneh, à Tripoli

des chiens méchants et les magasins vendent davantage de l'occasion que du neuf. Au milieu de petites boutiques, qui offrent trois fois rien, et des immeubles lézardés et comme rongés à l'acide, une pâtisserie, propre, soignée, fait bonne figure. C'est là que cheikh Ayman Kharma, un imam de tendance plutôt salafiste, a donné rendez-vous. « Chaque habitant de ce quartier a un membre de sa famille qui a été soit tué, soit arrêté par les Syriens, sans compter ceux qui demeurent handicapés à cause des tortures

subies », lance d'emblée ce religieux, qui a lui-même connu les géolés syriennes.

FIDÉLITÉ. Pas besoin d'insister pour comprendre que ce qui se déroule en Syrie est vécu par les religieux sunnites de Tripoli comme le prolongement de ce qui s'est passé au Liban, quand les Syriens régnaient sur ce pays, jusqu'à ce que la révolution du cèdre les en chasse, en mars 2005. Aussi, les communautés libanaises considérées comme les alliées de la Syrie, soit les chiites et les alaouites – un autre rameau du chiisme dont est issue la famille de Bachar al-Assad –, sont-elles particulièrement vilipendées. Le cheikh Kharma ne s'en prive pas : « On essaye de ne pas avoir de problème avec les chiites et les alaouites, mais s'ils exécutent l'agenda syrien, des problèmes il y en aura. Nous avons des informations comme quoi les gens de Jabel Mohsen [le grand quartier alaouite de Tripoli, ndr] et le Hezbollah se battent au côté de Bachar al-Assad contre le peuple syrien. » Le quartier de Jabel Mohsen est

précisément à quelques ruelles de là. Entre cette zone, où les slogans peints sur les murs et les portraits du président syrien, témoignage de la fidélité des habitants, et celle de Bab al-Tabbaneh, où le leader alaouite est honni, il n'y a qu'une grande artère commerçante, qui sert de ligne de démarcation entre les deux communautés. Ironie du

sort, elle s'appelle rue de la Syrie. Jour et nuit, l'armée libanaise y campe, notamment avec des blindés, en particulier depuis juin, lorsque des affrontements armés entre les deux communautés avaient fait six morts. Vendredi et samedi, elle n'a pu cependant empêcher la violence de

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37%

C'est le pourcentage de chrétiens au Liban, contre 63% de musulmans, qui sont désormais majoritairement chiites.

Le Liban est une mosaïque ethnique et religieuse avec nombre de communautés différentes, dont 12 chrétiennes (maronites, grecs orthodoxes, grecs catholiques, etc.) et 5 musulmanes ou issues de l'islam (sunnites, chiites, alaouites, druzes).

« L'armée s'opposera à tous ceux qui portent atteinte à la stabilité, quelle que soit la partie à laquelle ils appartiennent. »

L'état-major de l'armée libanaise

reprendre, faisant cette fois 3 morts, dont une fille de 17 ans, et une vingtaine de blessés. Les incidents ont commencé après la prière du vendredi quand, sortant d'une mosquée de Bab al-Tabbaneh, quelque 700 personnes ont défilé pour demander la fin de la répression en Syrie.

C'est une banderole sur laquelle on pouvait lire « boucher » à l'intention du président syrien, qui, bien que brandie brièvement, a mis le feu aux poudres. Une grenade a été lancée rue de la Syrie, suivie par d'autres, entraînant le départ précipité des familles qui vivent à proximité de la « ligne de démarcation ». Quelques minutes plus tard, les deux quartiers se battaient à l'arme automatique et au lance-roquettes jusqu'en fin d'après-midi. On croyait les heurts terminés, mais ils ont repris de plus belle samedi, malgré l'engagement de l'armée qui a eu dix blessés, dont un sergent dans un état critique. C'est l'état-major qui a réussi à parrainer une trêve entre les chefs de clan sunnite et alaouite. « L'armée s'opposera à tous ceux qui portent atteinte à la stabilité, quelle que soit la partie à laquelle ils appartiennent », a-t-elle prévenu dans un communiqué, qui affirme aussi que des hommes armés ont été arrêtés. Les violences font redouter un débordement de la crise syrienne au Liban, d'autant plus que les dissensions politico-religieuses n'ont cessé de s'exacerber depuis l'assassinat en février 2005 de l'ex-Premier ministre Rafik Hariri. « Notre sort est lié à celui de la Syrie. Il dépendra de qui l'emportera, l'opposition ou le régime », redoute Nafez Warrak, un médecin (chrétien) de la région voisine du Akkar.

NEUTRE. Au-delà de Tripoli, le Liban compte une douzaine de villages alaouites, dont celui de Massoudya. Sur les murs, les slogans sont sans ambiguïté : « Dieu, Bachar et la Syrie », « longue vie à Bachar » ou encore « merci la Russie, merci la Chine ».

Là encore, l'armée veille et, selon le maire, « elle intervient au moindre signe de tension communautaire ». Même s'il gouverne grâce au soutien du Hezbollah et de personnalités pro-syriennes, le Premier ministre, Najib Mikati, un sunnite de Tripoli, s'efforce d'adopter une position neutre. « Nous devons prendre en compte les divisions du Liban. Nous croyons qu'il est préférable de nous tenir à distance de événements de Syrie », déclarait-il samedi de Paris, où il était en visite officielle. « Mikati joue un rôle pacifique. Il a accepté d'être Premier ministre pour éviter une guerre civile », reconnaît cheikh Ayman Kharma. Mais cette guerre civile, le religieux ne l'exclut pas pour autant : « Si le régime syrien tombe, on conseille au Hezbollah d'améliorer ses relations avec les sunnites. Sinon, il y aura une guerre confessionnelle – ce que nous ne souhaitons pas. Et comme rien ne va dans la région, elle peut devenir générale. »

Libération (France)

A Lattaquié, «tout ce qu'il faut faire, c'est tenir»

La ville syrienne, à la pointe du soulèvement il y a un an, a été écrasée par la répression. Notre reporter a rencontré les opposants terrés dans la cité.

Par **LUC MATHIEU**
Envoiyé spécial à Lattaquié (Syrie)

«**A**llah akbar!» Le cri, rageur, résonne chaque soir, vers minuit, dans le quartier Al-Solaieba de Lattaquié. Il se propage d'un appartement à l'autre, de ruelle en ruelle, de carrefour en carrefour. Il semble parfois s'éloigner, telle une rumeur, avant de retentir à nouveau. Au bout de trois quarts d'heure, il s'éteint, laissant le silence retomber sur la nuit.

«Ne vous méprenez pas, il ne s'agit pas d'une prière, prévient Abou Hamza (1), professeur d'arabe. C'est un cri de colère et de défi adressé au président Bachar al-Assad. Nous lui disons qu'il doit partir ou mourir.» Comme tous les soirs, Abou Hamza a rejoint ses amis dans un appartement d'Al-Solaieba. Ils sont cinq, tous musulmans sunnites. Ils appartiennent au Conseil national, une organisation qui tente de fédérer l'opposition au régime syrien depuis l'intérieur du pays. Ce jour-là, ils essaient de savoir combien de personnes ont été tuées dans la ville de Homs, bombardée depuis deux semaines par l'armée syrienne. Ils n'ont pas le temps de finir leurs calculs. Un homme d'une trentaine d'années fait irruption dans l'appartement. «Une dizaine de moukhabarat [les forces de sécurité du régime, ndr] patrouillent dans la rue. Il y en a quinze autres dans le square d'à côté. Ils ont été attirés par les cris», raconte-t-il. Abou Hamza soulève un pan du rideau, fermé jour et nuit, et observe de biais le trottoir en contrebas. «Ça va, ils sont passés sans s'arrêter. Nous ne risquons rien pour l'instant», lance-t-il.

«**TOUT-PUISSANTS**». Plus de onze mois après le début de la révolte contre Bachar al-Assad, Lattaquié n'a jamais été autant sous l'emprise de l'appareil sécuritaire syrien. Le début de l'avenue qui longe la Méditerranée en partant du port compte dix check-points de l'armée, un tous les 200 mètres environ. «Il n'y en avait que sept la semaine dernière», note Abou Saïd, ingénieur en mécanique. Les policiers, souvent habillés de cuir noir, sont omniprésents dans les ruelles du centre-ville. Ils circulent à pied ou en moto, arrêtent véhicules et piétons qui leur semblent suspects. Les moukhabarat, eux, ne sont pas toujours reconnaissables au premier regard. Si certains, kalachnikov en

bandoulière, portent des pantalons de treillis, d'autres sont habillés en civil. «Les moukhabarat sont les plus cruels. Ils peuvent arrêter quelqu'un et le faire disparaître sans que personne ne puisse rien y faire. On les repère à leur comportement, à leur façon de se déplacer, toujours sûrs d'eux. Ils sont tout-puissants», poursuit Abou Saïd.

Face à ce déploiement, les opposants au régime savent que le temps des manifestations massives est révolu. «Il y a eu trop de morts, trop de disparus», soupire Abou Mohammad. Cet entrepreneur en bâtiment tient, depuis le début du soulèvement, à la mi-mars 2011, une liste des protestataires tués lors de rassemblements à Lattaquié. Elle compte aujourd'hui plus de 1200 noms. 4000 personnes sont par ailleurs portées disparues.

Lattaquié a été la deuxième ville syrienne à se soulever, après Deraa (sud). Les premières manifestations y ont réuni jusqu'à 20000 personnes. L'ampleur de la révolte a surpris. Car, située à 250 kilomètres environ au sud de Damas, c'est une ville perçue comme plutôt favorable au régime: la cité portuaire compte environ 30% d'alouïtes, une branche dissidente du chiïsme à laquelle appartient Al-Assad, contre environ 10% au niveau national; le reste des 300000 habitants de Lattaquié se répartit entre 20% de chrétiens et 50% de musulmans sunnites. «Le Président estime que la région lui appartient»,

dit Fouad, avocat. Les opposants affirment qu'Al-Assad entend créer un «réduit alouïte» qui irait de Lattaquié à Tartous, à une centaine de kilomètres plus au sud. Selon eux, l'armée a commencé à transférer, depuis Damas, des armes lourdes dans la région. La répression des premières manifestations a donc été sauvage. Le 26 mars, 170 protestataires ont été portés disparus. Quatre jours plus tard, 13 manifestants étaient tués lorsque les forces de sécurité ouvraient le feu sur la foule. Les 14 et 15 août, des navires de guerre syriens ont tiré au canon sur le camp palestinien du quartier de Raml, tuant 26 personnes.

POINTE DES PIEDS. Abou al-Abed, un ingénieur en télécommunications de 31 ans, se dit, lui, «surpris d'être encore en vie» après avoir pris part aux premiers rassemblements et décidé de filmer les suivants pour des télévisions étrangères. Il a été arrêté le 3 mai par un groupe de moukhabarat. Accusé, entre autres, de «fabrication de fausses informations pour les médias ennemis» et de «complot contre l'armée», il est envoyé en prison, d'abord à Damas puis à Homs. Il passera le premier mois dans une cellule de 80 centimètres de large, 1,10 mètre de long et 2 de haut. Il est ensuite envoyé dans un hangar, avec 400 autres détenus. «Je ne sais pas combien il y avait de prisonniers au total. Il y avait beaucoup de hangars», explique-t-il. D'une voix calme, il raconte

comment il a été battu, poussé entre deux rangées de soldats armés de bâtons et de tuyaux en plastique. Il mime comment il a été menotté, mains dans les dos, et accroché au plafond, ne touchant plus le sol que par la pointe des pieds. «Je suis resté comme ça pendant trois jours. Ils ne me détachaient que deux fois par jour, pendant quinze minutes, le temps que je mange», témoigne-t-il. Durant ses neuf mois de détention, il sera témoin de la mort de 13 prisonniers. «La pire a été celle d'un homme à qui ils avaient noué le bout du sexe. Ils l'ont laissé comme ça, à l'isolement. Il est mort au bout d'une semaine», se souvient-il. Il sera libéré le 17 janvier, à la faveur d'une grâce collective décidée par Al-Assad: «Quand le directeur de la prison nous l'a annoncé, je n'y ai pas cru. J'étais persuadé que c'était un piège, que je resterais en prison et que j'y mourrais.» Un mois après sa libération, cet ingénieur compte reprendre ses tournages. «Ils m'ont traité comme un chien, je n'ai plus rien à perdre, je veux me venger», dit-il. Mais les rassemblements ne mobilisent plus que quelques centaines de personnes, au maximum. «La plupart se déroulent le vendredi, en début d'après-midi, après la prière. On se fixe rendez-vous par téléphone mobile. Seuls les jeunes en bonne forme, capables de courir et de se débattre s'ils sont arrêtés, y participent», explique Abou Shafiq, 28 ans, l'un des organisateurs des protestations à Lattaquié. Des slogans reviennent à chaque fois: «Allah! Syria! Freedom!» Les jeunes déploient des drapeaux verts, blancs et noirs, ornés de trois étoiles rouges, les couleurs de la révolution. Des pancartes sont créées selon les circonstances. Vendredi, elles disaient: «Russia kills syrian children» (La Russie tue des enfants syriens), en référence au veto de Moscou à une résolution du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU qui imposait de nouvelles sanctions contre le régime. La police arrive en général au bout d'une demi-heure, prévenue par des «espions» – commerçants, éboueurs, vendeurs ambulants. «Ils nous demandent de nous disperser. Si on n'obtempère pas, ils tirent», raconte Abou Shafiq. Le jeune ouvrier insiste sur le caractère pacifique des manifestations: «Nous n'avons pas d'armes. C'est le gouvernement qui provoque des bains de sang, pas nous.» A la différence de la province voisine d'Idleb, un peu plus au nord, l'Armée syrienne libre, composée de déserteurs, ne s'est pas implantée à Lattaquié.

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La population syrienne compte 90% de musulmans et 10% de chrétiens. Les musulmans se partagent entre une majorité sunnite et une minorité chiite, à laquelle appartiennent les alouïtes, une branche dissidente, dont est issu le président Bachar al-Assad, considérée comme loyale au régime.

«Je ne crois pas que faire venir des Occidentaux sur le terrain, même une force de maintien de la paix, soit une voie à suivre.»

William Hague ministre britannique des Affaires étrangères, hier



L'ARMÉE SYRIENNE LIBRE

Constituée de déserteurs qui se battent contre l'armée régulière, l'ASL s'est formée le 29 juillet 2011. Destinée à l'origine à protéger les manifestants, elle s'est peu à peu mue en force révolutionnaire et multiplie les opérations.

Libération (France)

«Le principal risque serait de provoquer une guerre civile entre alaouïtes et sunnites, explique un responsable du Conseil national syrien. C'est exactement ce que souhaite le gouvernement, nous ne devons pas tomber dans le piège. Nous n'avons rien contre les alaouïtes ou les chrétiens. Certains nous avaient d'ailleurs rejoints dans les premières manifestations.» Mais

«Seuls les jeunes en bonne forme, capables de courir et de se débattre s'ils sont arrêtés, participent aux manifestations.»

Abou Shafiq un organisateur des mobilisations

s'il n'y a pas d'assassinats ciblés ou d'enlèvements entre les deux communautés comme dans d'autres villes, des tensions se font désormais sentir. «J'avais beaucoup d'amis alaouïtes. Ils venaient chez moi, j'allais chez eux. Mais aujourd'hui, je ne les vois plus. Je n'ai pas confiance, même s'ils m'ont dit qu'ils soutenaient la révolution. Ce sont peut-être des traîtres», dit Abou Saïd.

Près d'un an après le début du soulèvement en Syrie, les révolutionnaires de Lattaquié paraissent résignés, persuadés que le régime s'apprête à commettre des massacres. Mais le paradoxe, c'est qu'ils ne semblent pas s'en inquiéter. «Plus Bachar al-Assad nous réprimera, plus nous résisterons. Il enverra des chars, nous créerons des unités de l'armée libre dans la ville, affirme Abou Yazan, médecin. Le régime tient grâce à ses soutiens étrangers. Mais avec le temps, l'Iran, la Russie et la Chine finiront par le laisser tomber. Même le Hezbollah arrêtera de lui envoyer des hommes depuis le Liban. La dictature commence à s'effriter. Tout ce que nous avons à faire, c'est tenir jusqu'à ce qu'elle s'effondre. Nous en sommes capables. A force de nous réprimer, Bachar al-Assad a réussi à tuer la peur qu'il nous inspirait. Il n'y a plus de retour en arrière possible.»

(1) Les noms utilisés sont des pseudonymes choisis par les personnes interviewées.

La Ligue arabe a proposé dimanche l'envoi d'une force conjointe avec les Nations unies.

Scepticisme sur une intervention en Syrie

L'annonce a une portée surtout symbolique, mais la proposition faite par la Ligue arabe, dimanche, d'envoyer une force de paix en commun avec les Nations unies accentue la pression sur le régime syrien, toujours plus isolé. La poursuite de la répression suscite une émotion croissante dans la communauté internationale. Hier, devant l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU, la haute-commissaire des Nations unies aux droits de l'homme, Navi Pillay, a dénoncé «les bombardements de quartiers de Homs densément peuplés au cours de ce qui apparaît comme une attaque sans discernement contre des zones civiles». Elle reprend à son compte le bilan de 300 morts en dix jours de pilonnage. De nombreuses capitales occidentales ont donc salué la proposition de l'organisation panarabe, désormais décidée à internationaliser cette crise, mais nul ne se fait trop d'illusions.

Musclé. Le déploiement de Casques bleus est difficilement réalisable, du moins pour le moment. Il impliquerait en effet un accord de Damas, ce qui semble peu crédible à un moment où le régime se sent encouragé dans sa stratégie de terreur après les veto russe et chinois qui ont à nouveau bloqué il y a une semaine un projet de résolution, pourtant bien timide, au Conseil de sécurité. Un texte plus musclé sur l'envoi d'une force de paix n'aurait aucune chance de passer. Le ministre des Affaires étrangères russe, Sergueï Lavrov, a certes annoncé, hier, «étudier cette proposition et attendre de nos amis des pays arabes certaines clarifications». Mais cela semble

surtout une manière de faire traîner les choses de la part d'un Poutine en pleine campagne électorale. A la vieille amitié avec Damas, s'ajoute la méfiance d'un pouvoir qui se sent lui aussi menacé par le mécontentement de sa population. **Contradictoire.** Les Européens, comme Washington, restent donc prudents. «Nous pensons qu'aujourd'hui toute intervention à caractère militaire extérieure ne ferait qu'aggraver la situation, d'autant qu'il n'y aura pas de décision du Conseil de sécurité», a rappelé hier le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé. Son homologue britannique, William Hague, affirme qu'une éventuelle force d'interposition devrait exclure tout contingent occidental. Les experts eux-mêmes restent sceptiques, soulignant, tel Yezid Sayigh de la fondation Carnegie de Beyrouth, cité par l'AFP, qu'il est contradictoire de demander, comme le fait la Ligue arabe, à la fois «le déploiement d'une force de paix, ce qui implique l'accord du pays hôte, et à rompre les contacts avec Damas». En cas d'accord, l'opération ne présenterait pas de difficultés majeures, car les zones de combat restent très limitées. Mais le régime, se sentant couvert par la Russie et la Chine, semble toujours plus enclin à miser sur la force. Les Occidentaux visent désormais un vote de l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU sans valeur contraignante, mais qui isolerait encore un peu plus Damas et ses deux grands parrains. Pour Moscou comme pour Pékin, l'intransigeance deviendrait de plus en plus difficilement tenable.

MARC SEMO

Junge Welt (Allemagne / Germany)

Besatzer nach Damaskus?

Arabische Liga will UN-Friedenstruppe. Syrischer Dichter Adonis warnt vor ausländischer Intervention. Kämpfe greifen auf Libanon über. **Von Karin Leukefeld, Damaskus**

Die Arabische Liga will möglicherweise beim UN-Sicherheitsrat die Entsendung einer »Friedenstruppe« der Vereinten Nationen nach Syrien beantragen. Das wurde am Sonntag in Kairo bekannt, wo die Außenminister der Mitgliedsstaaten zusammengekommen waren, um über das weitere Vorgehen nach dem Scheitern der Resolution im Sicherheitsrat zu beraten. Auch die Anerkennung des »Syrischen Nationalrates« der Auslandsopposition als offizieller Vertretung des Landes steht angeblich zur Debatte. Die Beobachtermission der Liga in Syrien soll hingegen einer Meldung des Fernsehsenders Al-Dschasira zufolge offiziell beendet werden. Die UN-Vollversammlung in New York berät am heutigen Montag über die Lage in Syrien. Saudi-Arabien hat dem Gremium dazu den im Sicherheitsrat abgeschmetterten Resolutionsentwurf zur Abstimmung vorgelegt.

Eine ausländische Intervention in seinem Heimatland lehnt der in Paris lebende, international bekannte syrische Dichter Adonis entschieden ab. Im Gespräch mit dem österreichischen Nachrichtenmagazin *Profil* distanzierte sich der 82jährige, der eigentlich Ali Ahmad Said heißt, auch von Teilen der syrischen Opposition. »Wie können die Fundamente eines Staates mit Hilfe derselben Leute gelegt werden, die vorher diese Länder kolonisiert haben,« fragte Adonis mit Blick auf die französische Kolonialherrschaft von 1920 bis 1946. Die nicht nur in Syrien aktive Muslimbruderschaft nannte er »pure Faschisten«. Eine echte Revolution in der arabischen Welt könne nur auf der Grundlage des Laizismus gelingen.



In Aleppo wurden am Sonntag die 28 Opfer der Bombenanschläge vom Freitag zu Grabe getragen

Zu den Spekulationen um die Position der Arabischen Liga sagte der stellvertretende syrische Außenminister Feisal Mekdad am Samstag gegenüber Journalisten in Damaskus, Syrien wisse auch nur, »was durch die Medien sickert«. Es gebe »keine Transparenz darüber, was geplant« sei. Syrien sei nicht einmal darüber informiert worden, »warum die Beobachtermission ausgesetzt und die Beobachter abgezogen« worden seien. Allerdings »dürfte allen Seiten klar sein, daß das bisherige Protokoll für die Mission nicht tragfähig« sei. Die Zahl der getöteten Soldaten und Sicherheitskräfte habe sich während der

Präsenz der Beobachter »um mehr als 130 Prozent erhöht«, sagte Mekdad. Dennoch habe Syrien der Fortsetzung der Mission zugestimmt. Immerhin habe der Bericht der Beobachtermission deutlich auf das Vorgehen bewaffneter Gruppen in Syrien hingewiesen, die der Westen bislang ignoriere, so Mekdad.

In Homs gingen am Wochenende die Kämpfe zwischen bewaffneten Aufständischen und syrischen Sicherheitskräften weiter. Unbestätigten Angaben zufolge sollen dabei mehr als 30 Menschen getötet worden sein. Auch in Daraa soll es Tote gegeben haben. In Damaskus wurde am Samstag erneut

ein Mediziner ermordet. Issa Al-Kholi, Brigadegeneral und Direktor des Militärkrankenhauses Hamisch, wurde vor seinem Haus erschossen. Seit Monaten werden in Syrien Wissenschaftler, Fachärzte, Professoren und Ingenieure ebenso gezielt ermordet wie hochrangige Militärs.

Unterdessen hat der Konflikt auf den Libanon übergegriffen. In der im Norden von Syriens Nachbarland gelegenen Stadt Tripoli hielten den zweiten Tag in Folge Kämpfe zwischen Anhängern und Gegnern des syrischen Regimes an. Bisher wurden dabei drei Menschen getötet und 23 verletzt.

♦ Siehe auch Seiten 3 und 8

Junge Welt (Allemagne / Germany)

Komplott gegen Syrien

Psychologische Kriegsführung und »praktische Aktionen«: Geheimdienste von USA und Großbritannien arbeiteten schon vor mehr als 50 Jahren an Umsturz in Damaskus. **Von Rainer Rupp**

Um die Wirkung freiheitlicher Kräfte zu befördern (...) sollten besondere Anstrengungen unternommen werden, um bestimmte Schlüsselpersonen bereits in der Anfangsphase des Aufstands und der Intervention zu eliminieren.« Das ist ein Auszug aus einem einst streng geheimen Dokument des US-Geheimdienstes CIA und des britischen SIS, Vorläufer des MI6, in dem minutiös ein Umsturz in Syrien geplant wurde. »Wenn erst einmal die politische Entscheidung für interne Unruhen in Syrien gefallen ist, dann stehen CIA und SIS bereit, kleinere Sabotageanschläge und andere hilfreiche Vorfälle in Syrien in Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Personen durchzuführen«, heißt es in dem über 50 Jahre alten, derzeit jedoch topaktuellen Dokument weiter, in dem die beiden führenden imperialistischen Staaten USA und Großbritannien seinerzeit gemeinsam die Übernahme Syriens planten. An anderer Stelle wird empfohlen, daß die Herbeiführung von »einem ausreichenden Grad von Verunsicherung und Angst«, z.B. durch »Vorfälle an der Grenze und inszenierte Zusammenstöße, den Vorwand für eine Intervention liefern könnte«, und zwar durch prowestliche, arabische Nachbarn Syriens. Deshalb sollten CIA und SIS (MI6) möglichst schnell »ihre Fähigkeiten sowohl in der psychologischen Kriegsführung als auch in »praktischen Aktionen« verbessern, um die Spannungen zu erhöhen«.

Das Umsturzpapier wurde erst im Jahr 2003 in britischen Regierungsarchiven von Matthew Jones, Professor für Internationale Geschichte am Londoner Royal Holloway College, bei Recherchen über die Hintergründe des damals gerade begonnenen US-amerikanisch-britischen Angriffskriegs gegen Syriens Nachbarn Irak entdeckt. Das »erschreckend freimütige« Dokument, so Jones, aus dem Jahr 1957 trägt die Unterschriften des damaligen US-Präsidenten Dwight Eisenhower und des britischen Premiers Harold Macmillan. Beide un-



Aufständische bei Idlib am Samstag

terstützen damit Geheimdienstpläne, Syrien mit Hilfe einer aufgestachelten Muslimbruderschaft zu destabilisieren, Unruhe zu säen und mit inszenierten Grenzverletzungen den prowestlichen Nachbarn Syriens den Vorwand für eine bewaffnete Intervention zu liefern.

2003, während der Überfall auf den Irak die Nachrichten bestimmte, fand Jones' Entdeckung nur wenig Beachtung. Der für London und Washington unangenehme Bericht verschwand schnell im medialen Gedächtnisloch, aus dem ihn erst jetzt wieder Felicity Arbuthnot mit ihrer Veröffentlichung auf der investigativen kanadischen Webseite »Global Research« ans Licht gebracht hat. Dagegen scheint das Eisenhower-Macmillan-Projekt in den geheimen Planungszentren von CIA und MI6 nie in Vergessenheit geraten zu sein. Zu auffällig sind die Parallelen mit den aktuellen Vorkommnissen in und um Syrien. Dazu gehört auch, daß

autokratische, besonders prowestliche, arabische Staaten wie Saudi-Arabien und Katar, eine militärische Intervention der Arabischen Liga fordern – zur Verteidigung von Demokratie und Menschenrechten in Syrien.

Teil des Plans von 1957 war auch die Ermordung von hochrangigen Persönlichkeiten aus Politik und Militär, die hinter dem damaligen syrischen Präsidenten Schukri Al-Quwatli standen. Auf der Mordliste notiert waren u.a. Abd Al-Hamid Sarraj, Chef des militärischen Nachrichtendienstes, Afif Al-Bisri, Chef des syrischen Generalstabs, und Khalid Bakdasch, Chef der Kommunistischen Partei Syriens. Mit der Ermordung eines Generals am Wochenende in Damaskus durch vom Westen gesponserte »Democracy«-Terroristen scheint auch dieser Teil des amerikanisch-britischen Geheimplans realisiert zu werden.

Im Dezember 2011 hat der exiloppositionelle »Syrischer Nationalrat«

nach einem Treffen mit US-Außenministerin Hillary Clinton verkündet, »das Land zu befreien«. Zugleich unterstützen die USA einen »Syrischen Revolutionsrat«. Auch der Eisenhower-Macmillan-Plan sah vor, einem »Freies Syrien Komitee« finanziell zu helfen und »politische Gruppen zu bewaffnen«. Der Unterschied zwischen damals und heute besteht lediglich darin, daß 1957 der Sturz der syrischen Regierung die anglo-amerikanische Kontrolle über das irakische Öl sichern sollte. Irak stand seinerzeit unter Mandat Ihrer Majestät in London, und Aufständische kämpften mit Unterstützung aus Syrien mit zunehmendem Erfolg gegen den britischen Würgegriff. Heute ist der energiereiche Iran Objekt der Begierde, wobei wiederum Syrien als Schlüssel zum Erfolg gesehen wird. Mit einer prowestlichen Regierung in Damaskus wäre Irans Position in der Region entscheidend geschwächt.

Tageszeitung (Allemagne / Germany)

Pläne für eine neue Mission

SYRIEN Die Arabische Liga berät in Kairo über ihr weiteres Vorgehen. Landesweit gehen die Kämpfe weiter. Die Offensive der Armee in der Stadt Homs forderte bisher 400 Tote

KAIRO/BEIRUT *dapd/rtr* | Die Arabische Liga hat am Sonntag über eine Wiederaufnahme der ausgesetzten Beobachtermission in Syrien diskutiert. Dabei könnten auch Beobachter aus nichtarabischen muslimischen Ländern und von den Vereinten Nationen miteinbezogen werden, erklärten Vertreter der Liga am Sonntag vor dem Beginn eines Treffens der sogenannten Syrien-Gruppe. Diese besteht aus sieben Ländern unter der Führung von Katar. Die Empfehlungen der Gruppe sollten dann noch am Sonntag dem Außenministertreffen der Arabischen Liga in Kairo vorgelegt werden.

Noch vor Beginn des Ministertreffens erklärte am Sonntag unterrichteten Kreisen zufolge der Leiter der Beobachtermission, der sudanesisch General Mohammed Ahmed al-Dabi, seinen Rücktritt. Liga-Chef Nabil Elarabi werde den ehemaligen jordanischen Außenminister Abdul Ilah al-Chatib als Gesandten nominieren. Al-Chatib war im vergangenen Jahr UN-Gesandter in Libyen.

Die Gewalt in Syrien dauerte unterdessen an. Staatlichen Medienberichten zufolge wurde erstmals seit Beginn des Aufstands gegen den syrischen Präsidenten Baschar al-Assad vor elf Monaten ein ranghoher Offizier getötet. Brigadegeneral Issa al-Chuli sei erschossen worden, als er am Morgen sein Haus im Stadtteil Rukn Eddine in Damaskus verlassen habe, meldete die staatliche Nachrichtenagentur Sana. Bei landesweiten Kämpfen kamen laut Aktivisten mindestens zehn Menschen ums Leben.



Syrische Rebellen bei einer Demonstration in der Stadt Idlib Foto: dapd

Syrische Regierungstruppen nahmen demnach am Samstag das Viertel Baba Amr in der Protesthochburg Homs unter Beschuss. Mindestens vier Menschen seien dabei getötet worden, teilte das Syrische Observatorium für Menschenrechte mit. Aktivisten der Örtlichen Koordinationskomitees berichteten sogar von 15 Toten. Die Offensive in Homs begann vor einer Woche. Seitdem sind nach Angaben von Aktivisten mehr als 400 Menschen getötet worden. Einige Familien aus den umkämpften Vierteln konnten allerdings am Sonntag die Stadt verlassen.

Auch in Duma bei Damaskus lieferten sich Regierungstrup-

Auch in der nordlibanesischen Stadt Tripoli kommt es zu Gefechten

pen und Rebellen am Samstag Gefechte, wie Aktivisten berichteten. Nach Angaben des im Exil lebenden syrischen Oppositionellen Kamal al-Labwani stimmte die Armee hingegen einem Waffenstillstand für Sabadani nahe der libanesischen Grenze zu. Die Rebellen könnten ihre Waffen abgeben und die Stadt verlassen, sagte Labwani.

Unterdessen forderte der Füh-

rer von al-Qaida die Muslime in der ganzen Welt zur Unterstützung der Rebellen auf. Diese dürften sich nicht allein auf die Hilfe des Westens verlassen, erklärte Aiman al-Sawahri in einer im Internet verbreiteten Videobotschaft. Aus irakischen Geheimdienstkreisen verlautete, Al-Qaida-Kämpfer aus dem Irak seien auf dem Weg nach Syrien.

In der nordlibanesischen Stadt Tripoli brachen am Wochenende Kämpfe zwischen Anhängern und Gegnern der syrischen Regierung aus. Dabei kamen zwei Menschen ums Leben; zwölf weitere wurden nach Angaben libanesischer Sicherheitskreise verwundet.

Tagesspiegel (Allemagne / Germany)

Al Qaida mischt sich in Syrien ein

Islamistische Kämpfer unterstützen die Opposition Wieder Tote bei Kämpfen in Homs

BAGDAD/DAMASKUS - Das Terrornetzwerk Al Qaida greift offenbar in den Konflikt in Syrien ein. Nach Angaben der Regierung im Irak sind Waffen und Kämpfer aus dem Irak nach Syrien „ingesickert“, wie der irakische Vize-Innenminister Adnan al Assadi sagte. Die Kämpfer unterstützen die Opposition gegen Staatschef Baschar al Assad. Die US-Zeitungsgruppe McClatchy berichtete unter Berufung auf nicht namentlich genannte US-Vertreter, der irakische Flügel des Terrornetzwerkes Al Qaida sei wahrscheinlich für die beiden Anschläge mit 28 Toten am Freitag im syrischen Aleppo sowie für zwei frühere blutige Bombenanschläge in Damaskus verantwortlich. Demnach erfolgten die Anschläge auf Anweisung von Al-Qaida-Chef Aiman al Sawahiri, der derzeit versuche, den Aufstand in Syrien für sich zu vereinnahmen. Al Sawahiri meldete sich in einem neuen Internetvideo selbst zu Wort. In dem Video rief er Türken, Jordanier und Libanesen auf, den Aufstand zum Sturz des „anti-islamischen Regimes“ in Damaskus zu unterstützen, wie das auf die Überwachung islamistischer Internetseiten spezialisierte US-Unternehmen Site mitteilte. Er forderte die Syrer auf, nicht dem Westen zu trauen.

Ein syrischer Armeevertreter sagte der regierungsnahen Zeitung „Al-Watan“, in der Protesthochburg Homs seien zahlreiche ausländische Kämpfer getötet oder gefangen genommen worden. Schon am Donnerstag hatte ein Militärangehöriger der Zeitung gesagt, bei Kämpfen im Viertel Baba Amr seien „libanesischen, libyschen und afghanischen“ Kämpfer mit Verbindung zu Al Qaida gefasst worden. Iraks Vize-Innenminister Al Assadi sagte, bei einigen der islamistischen Kämpfern handele es sich um Syrer, die zum Kämpfen in den Irak gekommen waren und nun wieder zurückkehrten. Bei anderen „Gottes-

kriegern“ handele es sich um Iraker. Der Minister warnte vor einem zunehmenden Waffenschmuggel. Vor allem in der nordirakischen Provinz Niniwe würden Familienclassen Waffen über die Grenze nach Syrien bringen und an syrische Aufständische verkaufen.

In Kairo sagten die Außenminister der Arabischen Liga der syrischen Opposition umfassende „politische und materielle“ Hilfe zu. Nach dem Scheitern ihrer eigenen Mission strebt die Liga nun eine gemeinsame Mission mit den UN an. Der umstrittene Leiter der bisherigen Beobachtermission, der sudanese General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al Dabi, reichte seinen Rücktritt ein. Als Nachfolger schlug der Generalsekretär der Arabischen Liga, Nabil al Arabi, den früheren jordanischen Außenminister Abdel Elah al Chatib vor. Wie das ägyptische Fernsehen am Sonntag unter Berufung auf Organisationskreise berichtete, müssen die Außenminister der Liga noch zustimmen.

Nach Angaben der Syrischen Beobachtungsstelle für Menschenrechte wurden in Syrien am Wochenende mehr als 40 Menschen getötet. In Homs, das seit Tagen von der Armee beschossen wird, seien mindestens 14 Zivilisten getötet worden. In der Region Daraa habe es neun und rund um Damaskus fünf zivile Opfer gegeben. Zudem seien zwölf Soldaten und zwei Deserteure ums Leben gekommen. Der türkische Außenminister Ahmet Davutoglu geht nach Medienberichten davon aus, dass 40 000 syrische Soldaten fahnenflüchtig sind. In Damaskus wurde ein General vor seinem Haus erschossen. Im Nachbarland Libanon wurden in der Hafenstadt Tripoli bei Gefechten zwischen Gegnern und Anhängern Assads drei Menschen getötet. *dpa/AFP*

— Meinungseite



Demonstranten gegen Assad hoffen auf Hilfe von außen

REUTERS

Veto-Macht Russland prüft UNO-Blauhelme für Syrien

Damaskus hatte bisher die Stationierung von UN-Truppen kategorisch abgelehnt.

MOSKAU, DAMASKUS. Die Arabische Liga, die mit ihrer Mission in Syrien gescheitert ist, hat gehofft, mit dem Vorschlag der Stationierung von Blauhelmen in dem umkämpften Land die Situation beruhigen zu können. Dies hatte die Regierung in Damaskus aber kategorisch als „feindlichen Akt“ abgelehnt.

Gestern ließ nun Russland mit demselben Vorschlag aufhören, was insofern interessant ist, als Russland bisher – zusammen mit China – alle UN-Sanktionen gegen das Regime Assad im UN-Sicherheitsrat blockiert hat. Für eine solche Mission, so betonte der russi-

sche Außenminister Sergej Lawrow, bedürfe es allerdings einer Zustimmung aus Damaskus. Zudem solle der Einsatz erst beginnen, wenn die Kämpfe zuvor beigelegt seien und Frieden herrsche. Während sich China vorsichtig zu dem Vorschlag von Friedenstruppen äußerte, begrüßte die EU die Forderung nach einer Friedensmission. „Das erste Ziel der EU ist ein sofortiges Ende der Tötungen“ in Syrien, erklärte der Sprecher der EU-Außenbeauftragten Catherine Ashton in Brüssel. „Und daher unterstützen wir alle Initiativen, die beim Erreichen dieses Ziels helfen.“

Der Standard (Autriche / Austria)

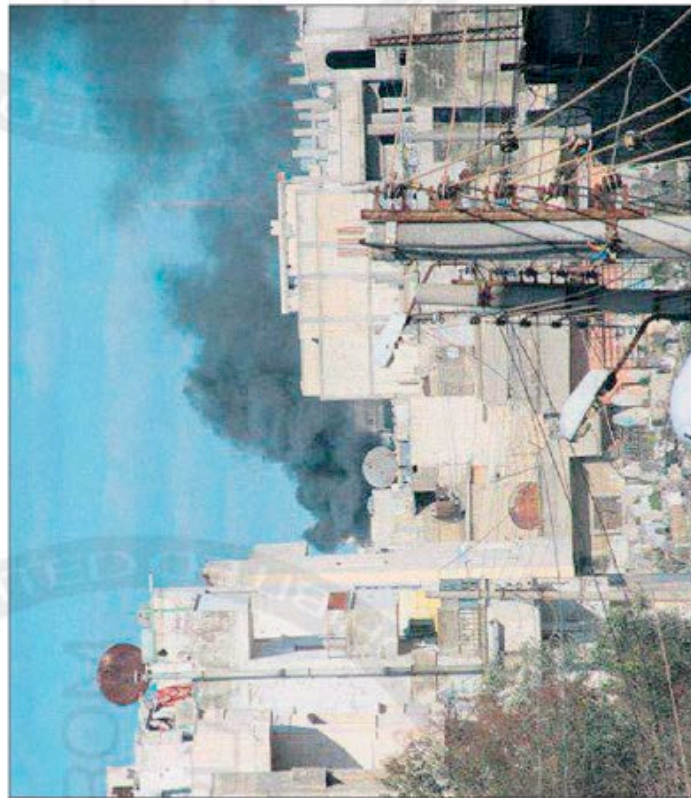
„Die syrische Opposition muss Einigkeit zeigen“

Für den niederländischen Außenminister **Uri Rosenthal** müssen die Vorschläge der Arabischen Liga sorgfältig bewertet werden. Eine Intervention wie in Libyen schließt er aus. Von **Christoph Prantner**.



Uri Rosenthal schließt auch eine Bewaffnung der Rebellen in Syrien aus. Im Bild rechts: schwerer Artilleriebeschuss in Baba Amr in der Provinz Homs.

Fotos: EPA, AP



Ägypten, dass das Land in die Hände der Radikaler fallen könnte.

Rosenthal: Libyen, Tunesien, Ägypten – wenn es um die Bewältigung von Umbrüchen geht, dann muss die Wirtschaft anspringen, es muss freie und faire Wahlen geben sowie Respekt für die Menschenrechte. Wenn gewalttätige Islamisten in diesen Gesellschaften übernehmen, dann ist es klar, dass wir mit ihnen keine Geschäfte machen oder Kontakte halten werden. Wenn islamistische Parteien an die Macht kommen, bewerten wir sie nach ihrem Respekt für die Menschenrechte. Bisher haben die Enahada und die Muslimbrüder zumindest erklärt, dass sie sich daran halten wollen. Das werden wir überprüfen. Sollten die Sunniten in Syrien bei freien und fairen Wahlen gewinnen, werden wir sie ebenso beurteilen.

STANDARD: Was halten Sie von den Gerüchten über einen bevorstehenden israelischen Angriff auf iranische Atomanlagen?

Rosenthal: Ich kommentiere keine Gerüchte. Die niederländische Position ist diese: Wir reden derzeit über Sanktionen. Die jüngsten werden am 1. Juli operativ. Wir sollten deren Effekt abwarten und nicht über andere Dinge spekulieren. Andererseits sagen wir weder, dass militärische Mittel nicht auf dem Tisch sind noch dass sie auf dem Tisch sind.

STANDARD: Im Iran wird gewählt, ändert sich die Lage dadurch?

Rosenthal: Wahlen sind nur dann Wahlen, wenn sie frei und fair sind.

URI ROSENTHAL (66) ist seit gut einem Jahr niederländischer Außenminister. Der Politologe und Uni-Professor war zuvor lange Jahre Fraktionschef der rechtliberalen VVD im Senat in Den Haag.

STANDARD: Gesetz den Fall, Assad gibt auf, welche Folgen würde ein Umbruch in Syrien auf die regionale Machtbalance haben?

Rosenthal: Wir müssen dann eine Roadmap entwerfen, mit der die sehr unterschiedlichen Kräfte in Syrien auf eine Versöhnungsstraße geführt werden. Es muss diese Versöhnung geben, wie schwierig sie auch sein mag. Alle Gruppen wissen: Sollten sie nach dem Fall Assads gegeneinander weiterkämpfen, wären ihre Opfer in diesen Tagen vergebens gewesen.

STANDARD: Viele Beobachter meinen, dass es in Syrien noch viel schlimmer kommen könnte als in

ternet aktiv sind. Was wir ausschließen, ist eine Bewaffnung der syrischen Opposition. Sicher, jedenfalls ist: Bashar al-Assad muss abtreten. Das ist keine Frage des Ob, sondern nur noch des Wann, wie es US-Präsident Barack Obama formuliert hat.

STANDARD: Wird es in Syrien jemals eine humanitäre Intervention nach dem Vorbild Libyens geben?

Rosenthal: Ich möchte nicht spekulieren. Die Situation in Syrien ist von jener in Libyen völlig verschieden – finanziell, mit Expertise und mit der Hilfe für syrische Oppositionelle, die im In-

wortung als einer der Schlüssel-spieler in der Region ernst nimmt. Wir müssen deren Vorschlag, der im Großen und Ganzen als in Ordnung erscheint, mit Sorgfalt bewerten. Aber daneben muss die syrische Opposition in den kommenden Tagen vor allem Einigkeit zeigen. Sie muss koordinierte Bemühungen sehen lassen, innerhalb und außerhalb Syriens. Die niederländische Regierung hat für ihren Teil beschlossen, die Opposition mit allen nötigen Mitteln zu unterstützen – finanziell, mit Expertise und mit der Hilfe für syrische Oppositionelle, die im In-

SCHWERPUNKT:
Widerstand in Syrien und dem Iran

STANDARD: Aber die wenigen Freunde sind mächtig genug, um UN-Resolutionen zu blockieren.

Rosenthal: Es ist schade, dass Russland und China den Resolutionsentwurf in New York zu Fall gebracht haben. Jetzt müssen wir hart daran arbeiten, die Russen und Chinesen wieder an Bord bekommen – in welchem Setting auch immer.

STANDARD: Welche Chancen hat der Vorschlag der Arabischen Liga im Sicherheitsrat über eine UN-Friedenstruppe?

Rosenthal: Es ist sehr wichtig, dass die Arabische Liga ihre Verant-

La Tribune de Genève (Suisse / Switzerland)

En Syrie, la Ligue arabe parfait sa métamorphose

L'organisation panarabe demande à l'ONU d'envoyer des Casques bleus. Du jamais-vu

Andrés Allemand

On se pince. Est-ce bien la Ligue arabe qui prend des décisions aussi volontaristes contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad? Réuni dimanche au Caire, cet ancien club de dictateurs opposés à toute espèce d'ingérence dans leurs affaires nationales n'a pas hésité à appeler l'ONU à envoyer des Casques bleus en Syrie. L'organisation va «demander au Conseil de sécurité d'adopter une résolution pour la formation d'une force de maintien de la paix arabo-onusienne conjointe», précise le communiqué final. Objectif: «superviser l'application du cessez-le-feu» convenu avec Damas en décembre.

Et ce n'est pas tout. Car cette résolution-là risque de buter contre les veto russe et chinois (*lire ci-contre*). Pays arabes et occidentaux veulent donc tenter cette semaine de faire condamner le régime syrien en soumettant un projet de résolution à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU, où il n'existe aucun droit de veto. Parallèlement, la Ligue arabe invite ses pays membres à rompre leurs relations diplomatiques avec Damas, à prendre contact avec l'opposition syrienne et fournir aux rebelles un soutien politique et matériel. Des armes et des finances, en somme. Comme en Libye, mais sans l'appui des frappes aériennes occidentales.

Méconnaissable

Oubliée la Mission d'observation arabe, censée apaiser les esprits de part et d'autre! Elle a été officiellement dissoute dimanche, juste après que son chef, le très controversé général soudanais Mohamed al-Dabi, a dû présenter sa démission.

Mais quelle mouche a donc piqué l'organisation panarabe? «C'est vrai que depuis un an, on a du mal à reconnaître la Ligue arabe», confirme Hasni Abidi, qui dirige à Genève le Centre d'études et de recherche sur le monde arabe et méditerranéen (Cermam). Le tournant s'est amorcé



Lors de la réunion de la Ligue arabe, dimanche au Caire, le siège de la Syrie est resté vide. N. NASSER/AP

«Les Etats du Golfe ne veulent pas qu'un «gendarme persan» fasse à nouveau sa loi dans la région»

Hasni Abidi

Centre d'études et de recherche sur le monde arabe à Genève

en février 2011, avec la suspension de la Libye. Du jamais-vu depuis celle de l'Egypte (entre 1979 et 1990) pour avoir signé l'accord de paix avec Israël. Puis la Ligue a réclamé à l'ONU une zone de couverture aérienne pour protéger les civils contre les forces de Kadhafi. Une première absolue.

«Cette métamorphose est le résultat direct des révoltes arabes, analyse le politologue genevois. L'affaiblissement de l'Egypte, en transition démocratique depuis la chute de Moubarak, a permis une poussée des Etats du Golfe (*ndlr: pro-occidentaux*), qui sont tombés d'accord avec le secrétaire général

L'embaras des Occidentaux

Qu'advient-il de ce nouveau plan arabe, dernier effort diplomatique pour mettre fin à onze mois de violences en Syrie qui auraient fait plus de 6000 morts? Si Damas a rejeté hier ce plan, son grand allié, Moscou, a assuré l'étudier, mais juge un cessez-le-feu nécessaire avant de déployer des Casques bleus (cela, alors que la ville rebelle de Homs est bombar-

dée sans répit depuis dix jours!). Pékin garde le silence. Quant aux Occidentaux, ils sont embarrassés. Si Berlin et Rome ont apporté leur soutien à la démarche arabe et réclamé une discussion rapide à l'ONU, Londres exclut l'envoi de troupes occidentales. A Paris, le chef de la diplomatie Alain Juppé a estimé qu'une intervention militaire aggraverait la situation. **A.A.**

Amr Moussa, très motivé pour faire un coup d'éclat final avant de rendre son tablier et briguer la présidence de l'Egypte.»

Tous contre l'Iran

Et pour la Syrie? «Là encore, il y a convergence d'intérêts. Emmenés par le Qatar, les Etats du Golfe cherchent à fragiliser le dernier allié de l'Iran au moment où ce dernier est sur le point de devenir une puissance nucléaire. Ils ne veulent pas d'un «gendarme persan» faisant à nouveau sa loi dans la région, comme au temps du shah. Si Damas tombe, c'est aussi l'influence de Téhéran au Liban

qui est affaiblie. La domination chiite serait ainsi contenue à l'Irak.»

Ainsi, paradoxalement, les monarchies de la péninsule Arabique ont tout intérêt à soutenir le soulèvement pour la démocratie (et les transitions difficiles qui s'ensuivent). En jouant les sauveurs humanitaires, ces émirats soignent leur popularité et légitiment leur propre pouvoir, qui tient d'abord grâce à la manne pétrolière. «Sur-tout, ajoute Hasni Abidi, ils s'assurent le soutien aveugle des puissances occidentales, avec lesquelles ils partagent un ennemi commun: l'Iran.»

Le Temps (Suisse / Switzerland)

Torturés par la Syrie, ils témoignent

> **Proche-Orient** Un dispensaire de MSF soigne les exilés syriens réfugiés à Amman

> **Sur la frontière jordano-syrienne, le commerce de la détresse prospère**

> **Les Frères musulmans de Jordanie en pointe pour une Syrie libérée de son tyran**

Serge Dumort AMMAN

Quelque part au milieu de Jebel Hussein, l'un des quartiers centraux d'Amman, Médecins sans frontières-France (MSF) entretient un étrange dispensaire. Une cour des miracles où se croisent des victimes de tous les soubresauts du Moyen-Orient. Des estropiés par balles des printemps égyptien et yéménite, des enfants irakiens défigurés par des attentats islamistes, et des Gazaouis éclopés dans le cadre d'échanges de tirs entre les milices palestiniennes et l'armée de l'État hébreu.

Personne n'est physiquement ni moralement intact dans cet immeuble où s'ajoutent désormais les Syriens fuyant la répression. Des hommes jeunes en convalescence après avoir subi une ou plusieurs opérations de chirurgie réparatrice que l'ONG pratique dans des salles louées aux hôpitaux locaux.

«Les soldats syriens m'ont écartelé pendant quatre jours afin de me chauffer pour le premier interrogatoire.»

«Chaque patient est traité de deux mois à deux ans», explique Antoine Foucher, responsable de cette antenne de 150 personnes dont le budget tourne autour des 10 millions d'euros par an. «Nous sommes un «hub» médical. Etant donné la dégradation de la situation syrienne, nous nous attendons d'ailleurs à voir débarquer un flot de nouveaux patients.»



Réfugié syrien en convalescence dans un hôpital d'Amman. Environ 3000 exilés sont recensés en Jordanie. Le monarque jordanien continue de traiter avec le régime syrien. AMMAN, 9 FÉVRIER 2012

Logés à trois ou quatre par chambre au quatrième étage de cet étrange hôtel, les Syriens passent leurs journées scotchés devant un poste de télévision branchés sur Al-Jazira pour suivre ce qui se passe de l'autre côté de la frontière. «Si je retournerai chez moi? Dès que possible car je veux participer à la chute de Bachar el-Assad», affirme Mourad, 33 ans, un commerçant de Deraa fauché le 23 mars dernier par une rafale de mitrailleuse alors qu'il manifestait pacifiquement.

Traité sommairement dans un hôpital clandestin de sa ville puis arrêté pendant un mois par «Al Amn», la Sécurité syrienne, cet homme bien bâti aux longs cheveux noirs raconte son calvaire sans acrimonie apparente mais en serrant très fort son briquet vert. «Les soldats m'ont d'abord battu pour le principe, puis ils m'ont écartelé pendant quatre jours afin

de me chauffer pour le premier interrogatoire», lâche-t-il. «Ils voulaient me faire avouer des activités politiques, mais je n'en avais jamais eu. Avec cinq ou six autres, ils m'ont alors obligé à m'étendre sur le carrelage mouillé d'une cellule où ils ont envoyé de l'électricité. Nous hurlions comme des déments en faisant nos besoins sur nous. On se tordait comme des vers de terre.»

Relâché sans raison, Mourad s'est aussitôt enfui en Jordanie en cachant sa blessure. Comme Omar, 17 ans, un ado à la voix éteinte et au regard perdu, qui raconte comment il risque de perdre définitivement l'usage de son bras touché par une balle il y a onze mois.

Fayez Kedah, 31 ans, un autre habitant de Deraa touché à la jambe et sous la hanche, a, lui, d'abord été soigné dans une mosquée avant d'être ballotté d'hôpi-

taux publics en cliniques privées pour échapper aux rafles des Renseignements militaires et des chabha, les sbires du régime. Terré chez ses proches pendant dix mois, il a été arrêté par des militaires qui perquisitionnaient toutes les maisons de son quartier.

Jihad a refusé d'embrasser la photo de Bachar el-Assad, il l'a déchirée. On lui a pulvérisé sa main «sacrilège»

«Après m'avoir traîné par terre, ils ont tapé avec une matraque en bois sur la broche extérieure que l'on m'avait greffée», se souvient-il. «Avant de perdre conscience, j'ai réussi à leur dire que mes blessu-

res avaient été provoquées par un accident de moto et ils m'ont cru. Bon nombre de mes connaissances et de mes voisins n'ont pas eu cette baraka.»

Lorsque les premiers exilés syriens ont débarqué, MSF les a traités dans la plus grande discrétion. Afin, semble-t-il, de ne pas embarrasser la Jordanie dont le monarque a certes appelé Bachar el-Assad à se retirer mais qui continue de traiter avec le régime de Damas. Pourtant, la semaine dernière, l'ONG a décidé de médiatiser son action en diffusant les témoignages de quatorze exilés.

Parmi ceux-ci, Jihad, 34 ans, a ému l'opinion internationale en racontant son histoire. Battu sur la plante des pieds avant d'être suspendu en l'air par ses mains menottées, cet indépendant grassouillet a aussi connu les passages à tabac et les interrogatoires à l'électricité.

Au bout d'un mois de tortures variées, il a refusé d'embrasser la photo de Bachar el-Assad que ses tortionnaires lui présentaient. Il l'a même déchirée. Pour punition, le commandant de la base des Renseignements militaires où il était détenu a ordonné qu'on lui pulvérisé sa main «sacrilège» en y faisant exploser un détonateur.

«J'étais tellement sonné que je n'ai pas eu mal», dit-il. «J'ai senti un liquide chaud qui coulait sur mon pied et je me suis rendu compte qu'il s'agissait de mon propre sang. Alors je me suis évanoui.» Jeté comme un chien dans le hall d'un hôpital public, Jihad s'en est sorti de justesse car sa blessure s'était infectée. A l'en croire, ceux qui l'ont mutilé étaient des Iraniens venus au secours du régime de Damas. «Contrairement aux Syriens, ils ne parlaient pas entre eux et leur physique était différent», affirme-t-il. «Allah leur fera payer leur cruauté.»

Il Manifesto (Italie / Italy)

SIRIA • Dopo il videomessaggio di al Zawahiri ci si chiede quale sia la reale presa qaedista sull'opposizione

Al Qaeda in tackle sulla rivolta anti-Assad

Una brutta entrata in tackle, quella di al Zawahiri, il successore di Bin Laden. Proprio mentre l'opposizione siriana cerca di sfondare presso i governi occidentali (quelli di Arabia Saudita e Qatar, guardando caso, li ha già al suo fianco) e le istituzioni internazionali, tipo Onu e Lega araba, il videomessaggio del capo di al Qaeda che incita i rivoltosi («Avanti, leoni della Siria») a disfarsi di Assad senza gettarsi nelle mani degli occidentali e degli arabi (nel senso evidentemente dei go venni arabi).

Ovviamente resta da vedere qual è la presa reale, al di là dei prodami propagandisti, di al Qaeda nell'opposizione siriana. Ma l'avanti qaedista ai leoni della Siria non suona bene, tanto più se si guarda a cosa sta succedendo nella «nuova» Libia. E, secondo aronime «fonti dell'intelligence Usa», dietro ai due sanguinosi attentati-kamikaze di Aleppo la settimana scorsa ci sarebbe la zampa di al Qaeda.

Ieri Damasco ha «respinto categoricamente» la risoluzione votata da mezza (con le riserve di Libano e Algeria) dalla Lega araba riunita al Cairo. Assad dovrà andarsene ma finora non può rinunciare «alla sua responsabilità di proteggere i cittadini siriani e salvaguardare la sicurezza e stabilità del suo popolo» dagli attacchi (nati altro che pacifici) di quelli che chiama «gruppi terroristi armati». I ministri degli esteri della Lega, usando parole durissime contro la Siria, liquidano la missione di osservatori inviata in dicembre (ma già «costosa» da gennaio) e invocano una «forza di pace» congiunta con l'Onu, quindi un ritorno inevitabile al Consiglio di sicurezza. Via libera anche alla proposta della Tunisia di ospitare il 24 febbraio una conferenza degli «amici della Siria», dove l'opposizione - che finora come accade in Libia resta una nebulosa difficile da decifrare - potrebbe essere riconosciuta come «unica legittima rappresentante» della Siria con annessi ricami finanziari e politici. Nella riunione precedente al summit della Lega, fra le 6 petro-monarchie del Golfo (le più assatanate), Arabia Saudita e Qatar volevano che domenica al Cairo si uscisse con il riconoscimento ufficiale del Consiglio nazionale siriano. Appuntamento rinviato al vertice degli «amici della Siria» fissato a Tunisi.

Dura la reazione siriana: il piano proposto/



TANK GOVERNATIVI A BAB AMRO, SOBBORGIO DI HOMS/FOTO REUTERS

imposto dalla Lega araba «riflette l'isteria del governo» che compongono la stessa Lega.

La palla torna di nuovo a New York, sia al Consiglio di sicurezza sia all'assemblea generale (dove si dovrebbe dibattere una risoluzione non cogente anti-Assad) con la consapevolezza che per trovare un'intesa occorre coinvolgere Russia e Cina che una settimana hanno bloccato con il veto la proposta arabo-occidentale che secondo Mosca e Pechino (e non solo) configurava un nuovo «regime change». Il piano della Lega araba ha trovato l'appoggio degli occidentali. Fra gli altri la Ue e l'Italia dei famismatici (chi?) lady Ashon, responsabile (si fa per dire) della politica estera del 27 dell'Unione, e Giulio Terzi di non so che cosa, responsabile (di fa per dire) della politica estera italiana. Gli europei (o occidentali, perché dietro c'è l'ombra di Obama, No bel per la pace) vorrebbero che fosse-

to gli arabi a mettere i piedi sul terreno siriano («boots on the ground»), gli arabi vorrebbero che fossero gli europei (o in senso lato gli occidentali) a «sporcarsi i piedi». Ma mettere i «boots» sul suolo siriano è un bad problema.

Mentre in Siria anche ieri venivano segnalati ammazzamenti da una parte e dall'altra, è evidente che la palla tornerà al Consiglio di sicurezza. Il quesito è se Russia e Cina manterranno la loro posizione. Ieri il ministro degli

esteri russo Sergei Lavrov ha detto che Mosca «sta studiando» la proposta di invio in Siria di peace-keeping, ammettendo però che prima ci dovrebbe essere «un cessate il fuoco» da entrambe le parti. Cosa non facile visto che, secondo Lavrov (e non solo), «i gruppi armati che stanno combattendo contro il regime siriano non rispondono a nessuno e non sono controllati da nessuno». A meno che non sia al Qaeda... s.d.g.

ISRAELE • Attentati contro diplomatici in India e Georgia

Il ministero degli esteri israeliano ha ordinato a tutti i suoi diplomatici all'estero di astenersi dall'usare le automobili fino a quando non verranno controllate. La misura dopo che un'esplosione ha danneggiato ieri un'auto dell'ambasciata israeliana a Nuova Delhi, ferendo la moglie dell'addetto militare d'Israele (e altre tre persone, indiane, a bordo dell'auto fra cui l'autista) e dopo che a Tbilisi è stata disinnescata un'altra bomba piazzata con dell'«adefesun» (e nutrita a fiamme dall'«ariefesun») contro l'auto dell'ambasciatore israeliano in Georgia. Vfrshak

L'Unita (Italie / Italy)



ite iraniano Mahmoud Ahmadinejad bruciate nel sobborbo di Khaldiye

«L'unica soluzione è il Libano, non la Libia»

Il movimento pacifista si interroga sulla crisi di Damasco
«Ma non si può passare dai massacri di Assad a una guerra»

L'intervento

FLAVIO LOTTI*

Ancora una volta siamo costretti ad assistere in diretta a un massacro e a sentirci impotenti. Quello che vediamo è terribile e quello che sentiamo è bruttissimo. Stragi, massacri, atrocità, torture, sangue, bombardamenti, violenza, morti, feriti.

Quello che sta accadendo da quasi un anno in Siria è insopportabile. Ma ancora più insopportabile è dover prendere atto dell'ipocrisia e del cinismo delle cosiddette «democrazie» occidentali. Niente di quello che si doveva fare per prevenire questo nuovo bagno di sangue è stato fatto. Parlano della «responsabilità di proteggere» ma poi non fanno nulla di quello che si dovrebbe fare. Nessuno sforzo, nessun tentativo, nessun progetto per dotare la comunità internazionale degli strumenti adeguati per agire responsabilmente. Non sono bastate le lezioni del Rwanda, del Kosovo, di Gaza,

della Libia. E non si tratta solo della Siria. Vogliamo parlare di Yemen, Bahrein, Palestina, Somalia, Sudan, Sud Sudan, Libia, Kosovo, Cecenia? Quello che va ripetuto, va ripetuto: fintanto che non si restituirà all'Onu la credibilità, il potere e le risorse per adempiere al mandato che sta iscritto nella sua Carta e nel diritto internazionale dei diritti umani l'umanità resterà prigioniera della legge della giungla e dei suoi aguzzini.

L'Onu va rafforzata e democratizzata (per esempio creando finalmente l'Assemblea parlamentare delle Nazioni Unite) perché a più potere deve corrispondere più democrazia. Prevenire guerre e genocidi, difendere i diritti umani è possibile ma serve una chiara volontà politica. Lo diciamo da più di vent'anni e lo torniamo a ribadire oggi. L'Italia, che secondo il presidente del Consiglio Monti vuole diventare un «attore globale per la pace», non ha solo il dovere ma anche l'interesse di porre questo progetto contro la barbarie tra i principali obiettivi di una rinnovata politica estera.

Sulla Siria. Il solo obiettivo realistico oggi è fermare la violenza e la sua

mostruosa spirale. È difficile ma non impossibile. E in ogni caso è la sola cosa che si possa fare se davvero vogliamo evitare il peggio. Che cos'è il peggio? Una lunghissima guerra civile che nessuno riesce a vincere ma che tutti finiscono per combattere. Noi compresi. Un nuovo e più grande Libano o se preferite un nuovo Afghanistan. Un disastro da far paura.

L'intero Medio Oriente è al centro di uno scontro planetario in cui la voglia di libertà e di giustizia per cui sono già morti tanti siriani si è già persa. A giocare con la vita e la morte dei siriani oggi ci sono tutte le potenze del Medio Oriente e i «grandi» della Terra. A loro non interessano i diritti umani. Per loro i diritti umani sono solo un'arma da scagliare contro qualcuno quando serve. Oggi si può gridare contro le stragi e domani se ne può provocare una anche peggiore. La posta in gioco è sempre un'altra: il potere, la supremazia, l'egemonia, il dominio.

In questo impressionante groviglio di interessi non è facile trovare la strada giusta. Ma se vogliamo tentare di scongiurare il peggio o, almeno, se non vogliamo essere complici di questa ennesima tragedia dobbiamo agire in ogni modo e in ogni sede per fermare la spirale della violenza. Non c'è un altro modo per difendere davvero i diritti umani. Il regime di Assad va condannato per tutte le atrocità commesse (lo abbiamo fatto e continueremo a fare) ma la sua condanna non può diventare pretesto per altri massacri. Per questo oggi non possiamo che lavorare per fermare gli scontri e le armi. Impedire che ai morti si aggiungano altri morti. Spegnerne l'incendio: non c'è un obiettivo più urgente.

I piani per sostenere l'opposizione armata o per intervenire militarmente al loro fianco sono una follia di cui non possiamo essere complici. Non risolvono alcun problema e ne creano uno immensamente più grande. Il modello, se mai un modello esiste, fatte le debite differenze, non può essere la Libia ma il Libano.

A questo punto, quello che si deve dire, si deve dire forte e chiaro: e' tempo che l'Italia (e l'Europa) si dia una politica (estera) degna di questo nome. Andare sempre a rimorchio delle scelte altrui, senza un'idea, una visione, una prospettiva, un'iniziativa non ci consente neanche di difendere i nostri interessi. Qualcuno dirà che è un'utopia, ma se non ci battiamo subito per fermare la violenza ne finiremo risucchiati.

*Coordinatore della Tavola della pace



Miles de sirios protestan contra el régimen de Bashar Assad alzando armas y banderas revolucionarias en la Plaza del Reloj de la localidad de Idlib. / EFE

Al Qaeda irrumpe en la guerra siria

- Su líder, Ayman al Zawahiri, pide el apoyo de sus militantes a la revolución
- Los Hermanos Musulmanes también lanzan la «guerra santa» contra Bashar Assad

JAVIER ESPINOSA / Beirut
Corresponsal

El principal líder de Al Qaeda, Ayman al Zawahiri, irrumpió ayer en la revuelta siria abogando por el derrocamiento del régimen de Bashar Assad y pidiendo el apoyo de sus seguidores a la sublevación.

El vídeo que difundió el extremista egipcio coincidió con la petición similar que lanzó la facción jordana de los Hermanos Musulmanes, un grupo islamista moderado que, sin embargo, requirió a sus simpatizantes que se unieran «a la guerra santa contra Assad», calificándola de «deber islámico». Llamamientos como el de Zawahiri o los Hermanos

Musulmanes amenazan con complicar aún más la sublevación siria, que se hunde poco a poco en una atroz guerra civil que comienza a recordar el espectro sectario que asoló Irak tras la invasión de Estados Unidos en 2003.

«No hay que depender de Occidente o Turquía, que mantuvieron acuerdos con este régimen durante décadas. Depended sólo de Alá y de vuestro sacrificio y resistencia», aseguró Zawahiri, al tiempo que pedía la afluencia de combatientes procedentes de Turquía, Líbano, Jordania e Irak hacia Siria.

Expertos como Salman Shaikh, del think tank Brookings Doha Cen-

ter, llevan alertando desde hace semanas de que «cuanto más dure» la sangría en Siria más crecerá la «desesperación del pueblo sirio» y con ella la «permissividad» hacia la posible asistencia de cualquier tipo de activistas, incluidos los extremistas de Al Qaeda.

El 21 de diciembre el ministro de Defensa libanés, Fayez Ghosn, generó una enorme polémica en este país al alertar de que células de radicales vinculados a la ideología de Al Qaeda se habían infiltrado ya en Siria a partir de la ciudad fronteriza de Arsal, un bastión suní del valle de la Bekaa. Aunque su afirmación fue desmentida incluso por el primer

ministro Najib Mikati, dos días más tarde las autoridades sirias vincularon el atentado que sacudió Damasco con dicho anuncio.

El ministro adjunto de Interior de Irak, Adnane al Asadi, se pronunció en términos parecidos el sábado al informar de que un número indeterminado de yihadistas de su país se habían unido a los sublevados sirios.

La llegada de los primeros voluntarios extranjeros a Siria que acuden para luchar junto al Ejército Libre de Siria –no necesariamente relacionados con los salafistas yihadistas– se confirmó a principios de este mes cuando las milicias de Misrata reconocieron que tres acti-

vistas de esa ciudad libia habían fallecido peleando en el territorio sirio.

«Dos hermanos y un amigo acudieron a luchar en Siria hace un mes. Hoy hemos recibido la noticia de su martirio. Que Dios tenga misericordia de nuestros valientes héroes libios», se leía en el anuncio que colgaron los combatientes libios en su página de Facebook.

El conocido foro Shumoukh al Islam, una dirección de internet frecuentada por los radicales, se ha convertido en los últimos meses en escenario de repetidos llamamientos de los extremistas a combatir a un régimen que consi-

Sigue en página 21

Los hijos de Bin Laden no ven el sol

FÁTIMA RUIZ

Parece que la guerra santa acabó minando al más entusiasta de sus generales. A Osama Bin Laden le cogió la melancolía a última hora, cuando pasaba las horas rebobinando sus años vividos peligrosamente gracias a la CNN. O eso cuenta Amal Sadah, una de las tres esposas que compartieron su último refugio en Abbottabad, terrenal urbanización paquistaní en las antipodas de las legendarias cuevas de Tora Bora. El terrorista devenido en amo de casa

«estaba lleno de arrepentimiento» sobre su destino, en palabras de la quinta señora Bin Laden que su hermano, Zakaria Sadah, ha repetido al británico *Sunday Times*. «Tenéis que estudiar», insistía Bin Laden a sus hijos, en una cantinela que llevaba la misma música que sonaba en las casas de muchos oficinistas de las Torres Gemelas. Más aún, el enemigo número uno de Occidente –que solía llamar a sus hijos «guerreros islámicos» y los animaba a tomarle el relevo– cambió de idea y les instaba a

acudir a una universidad europea o americana. Y a dejarse de guerra santa: «Vivid en paz y no hagáis lo que yo estoy haciendo ni lo que he hecho». Palabras misteriosas para los niños que le vieron morir, demasiado pequeños para entenderlas o descifrar la sangría que puso en escena ante sus ojos el comando estadounidense que en mayo irrumpió en su casa. Los hijos de Bin Laden –Husain, Zainab e Ibrahim– tenían tres, cinco y ocho años. Sus nietos Fatima y Hamza, cinco y siete. Ellos se

ahorraron la secuencia, aunque oyeron su estruendo en el piso de arriba. La Inteligencia paquistaní mantiene hoy prácticamente secuestrada a la prole del verdugo, de darse crédito a las palabras del tío Zakaria: «Son muy infelices. Nunca han tenido una vida normal. No saben lo que es ver el sol y correr por un jardín. Me rompe el corazón verdes», dice. «No quieren comer, están demasiado traumatizados. Necesitan un ambiente de cariño y no una prisión. Tienen calenta-





Viene de **página 20** **deran liderado por una secta de «infiel».** Un nuevo grupo yihadista destinado a combatir al régimen sirio que se autodenominó Frente para la Protección del Pueblo sirio anunció su formación en dicho espacio de internet a finales de enero. Los simpatizantes de este movimiento extremista advirtieron días más tarde de que entre sus planes figuraba organizar «batallones suicidas» destinados a atacar exclusivamente «objetivos alauíes».

Todas las reivindicaciones de los radicales han sido acogidas con ciertas suspicacias por los expertos ante la ambigua relación que ha mantenido Damasco con los yihadistas desde el inicio de la invasión iraquí que lideró

«No dependáis de Occidente, depended de Alá», dice el jefe de la red terrorista

Los expertos temen que los rebeldes acepten desesperados la ayuda radical

Mil millones de dólares de Irán

> Irán ayuda con una fuerte inyección económica al régimen sirio, según el diario israelí 'Haaretz'. Documentos secretos demuestran que Teherán quiere ayudar a la cúpula siria a través de encargos comerciales por un valor de 1.000 millones de dólares. Ello permitiría a Damasco sortear las sanciones.

> Los documentos se hallaron durante una acción del grupo Anonymous en el correo del servidor de la oficina de Asad.

> Los iraníes se manifestaron dispuestos a comprar 150.000 barriles de crudo diarios durante un año. A cambio Teherán recibe de Siria los recambios para su industria petrolera.

EEUU. Durante los años más turbulentos de la guerra de Irak, cientos de militantes atravesaron territorio sirio para unirse a Al Qaeda en el vecino país con la complacencia o aprobación tácita de las autoridades.

Posteriormente, otro gran número de activistas llegaron al Líbano desde Siria y fundaron en el campo de refugiados palestino de Nahar al Bared el grupo Fatah al Islam, que protagonizó una sangrienta batalla de tres meses con el ejército libanés en 2007. Para analistas como Andrew Tabler, un experto norteamericano que residió en Siria, «el régimen sirio es un maestro a la hora de usar a esos grupos de forma despiadada y cínica para justificar su poder». Aunque es cierto que entre 1976 y 1982, grupos islamistas como Talia Muqatila protagonizaron una sangrienta revuelta de tono sectario que incluyó varias masacres de alauíes y la réplica brutal de Hafez Asad, que asesinó a miles de suníes.

Un hombre lee un periódico que recoge la muerte de Bin Laden, en la ciudad de Karachi. / EFE

dores para combatir un frío helador y acceso restringido a los programas de televisión. No han visto casi el sol en nueve meses. Es como si gritaran en la oscuridad». La mayor de las hijas de Amal, Safiyah, de 12 años, «tiene heridas invisibles, pero muy profundas». Y el resto luce el aspecto cetrino de quien no patea mucho al aire libre. Pese a que Pakistán prometió libertad para la familia de Bin Laden –y en el caso de Amal, Yemen ha aprobado la emisión

La Liga Árabe propone enviar una fuerza de paz con la ONU

Liquida la misión de observadores y refuerza el aislamiento sirio

FRANCISCO CARRIÓN / El Cairo
Especial para EL MUNDO

En un íntimo reconocimiento de su propia debilidad, los ministros de Exteriores árabes liquidaron ayer la agonía de su fallida misión de observación y buscaron el paraguas de las Naciones Unidas para capear el interminable temporal sirio. La reunión extraordinaria, celebrada en la sede de la Liga Árabe en El Cairo, acabó al atardecer con una petición de ayuda dirigida al Consejo de Seguridad del organismo internacional en la que se aboga por establecer una misión de paz conjunta.

El secretario general de la organización panárabe, Nabil el Arabi, precisó que el envío de emisarios contaría con el plácet de Rusia, que junto a China vetó el pasado 4 de febrero un proyecto de resolución que instaba a Bashar Asad a abandonar el poder. Horas antes de la cita, se había consumado el fiasco de la misión de observadores árabes –en suspenso desde el 28 de enero– con la dimisión de su jefe, el general sudanés Ahmed Mustafa al Dabi, quien asumió la tarea de investigar los abusos de la dictadura siria entre duras críticas por su protagonismo en los crímenes de la región de Darfur.

Al compás marcado por los países del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo, el encuentro entonó una *mea culpa* por la reacción árabe en la crisis siria. «Hasta cuándo permaneceremos como espectadores de lo que le está sucediendo al pueblo hermano sirio y por cuánto tiempo vamos a conceder al régimen un período tras otro para que pueda seguir cometiendo masacres contra su pueblo?», interpelló a sus homólogos el titular de Exteriores saudí, Saud al Faisal.

La respuesta unánime a meses de «soluciones intermedias» apuesta por aumentar la asfixia en torno a Damasco a través de la cancelación de «todas las formas de colaboración diplomática con los representantes del régimen sirio en los distintos países, entidades y organismos internacionales» y el recrudescimiento de aquellas sanciones económicas y comerciales que no afectan directa-



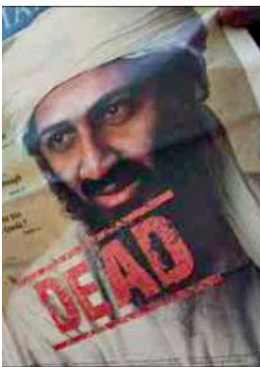
La silla vacía del representante de Siria, ayer, en la sede de la Liga Árabe. / AFP

mente a los ciudadanos. Sin embargo, la resolución no incluye –a falta del consenso necesario– una mención directa a la retirada de embajadores que ya acordaron el martes las monarquías del Golfo, centros de poder sumi inquietos con los lazos de Asad con el enemigo chií iraní.

La sentencia de ostracismo dictada al régimen sirio por sus vecinos viene acompañada de la determinación de «abrir canales de comunicación con la oposición y proporcionar todo el apoyo político y material». La única condición, puntualiza el pliego, es que el Consejo Nacional Sirio y el resto de la disidencia logre «unificar sus filas» y se convierta en el interlocutor de la conferencia internacional sobre Siria que, con el apoyo

de Francia y EEUU, se celebrará en Túnez el próximo 24 de febrero. Además, la Liga Árabe se compromete a cooperar con las organizaciones humanitarias internacionales para socorrer a la población civil.

La réplica del régimen de Asad a una reunión relativamente breve en un organismo acostumbrado a largas deliberaciones calificó la resolución de «acto hostil contra la seguridad y estabilidad» de su país. El embajador sirio en Egipto, Yusef Ahmad, denunció que la decisión «refleja el desatino que viven los gobiernos de algunos países árabes, como Catar y Arabia Saudí, tras su fracaso en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU para lograr la intervención extranjera en Siria».



Un hombre lee un periódico que recoge la muerte de Bin Laden, en la ciudad de Karachi. / EFE

dores para combatir un frío helador y acceso restringido a los programas de televisión. No han visto casi el sol en nueve meses. Es como si gritaran en la oscuridad». La mayor de las hijas de Amal, Safiyah, de 12 años, «tiene heridas invisibles, pero muy profundas». Y el resto luce el aspecto cetrino de quien no patea mucho al aire libre. Pese a que Pakistán prometió libertad para la familia de Bin Laden –y en el caso de Amal, Yemen ha aprobado la emisión

de pasaportes–, la familia del fundador de Al Qaeda continúa en habitaciones «parecidas a celdas». Algunos funcionarios de los temidos servicios secretos paquistaneses (ISI) temen que las tres esposas que le acompañaron hasta el final huya al extranjero llevándose consigo detalles de cómo se las arreglaron para vivir durante años a escasos metros de una academia militar. Más aún teniendo en cuenta el golpe al orgullo que la operación sorpresa estadounidense asestó a Pakistán. «Mi hermana y los niños no han hecho nada malo. Ella es la típica esposa yemení. No tomó parte en lo que hizo su marido y no debería ser castigada».

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 El Corte Inglés

ABC (Espagne / Spain)

La guerra civil de Siria ya amenaza a las tropas españolas en el Líbano

► Enfrentamientos entre detractores y partidarios de Al-Assad se están produciendo en el país del Cedro

ESTEBAN VILLAREJO
MADRID

«**A** las puertas del peor de los escenarios posibles». Este es, según una fuente militar española destacada en la misión de la ONU Unifil, la situación de seguridad que empieza a cuajar en el Líbano por la inestabilidad (ahora guerra civil de «facto») que vive desde hace nueve meses Siria, potencia árabe omnipresente en el «País del Cedro» donde la guerrilla chií de Hizbolá siempre ha contado con el apoyo explícito del régimen de Bashar al-Assad, de dinastía alauí, secta perteneciente al islam chií.

Los últimos enfrentamientos entre partidarios y detractores del dictador sirio en dos barrios de Trípoli —Bab al-Tabbaneh (suní) y Jabal Mohsen (alauí), con dos muertos y numerosos heridos— y la tensión que se vive en Sidón han puesto en alerta a los 1.073 militares españoles que forman parte del contingente de «Unifil» (12.488, con Francia a la cabeza) y que temen una escalada del conflicto en Líbano entre las dos principales comunidades musulmanas, suní y chií, que representan el 27% y 26% de la población respectivamente. Los cristianos son el 40%, mientras que los drusos son el 7%.

Las tropas españolas se encuentran destacadas en Marjayún y el cuartel general de Naqura, en el sur. Su despliegue responde al mandato de la ONU que tiene como objetivo reforzar la seguridad en la frontera sur y evitar un conflicto entre Hizbolá y el Ejército israelí, cuyas fuerzas protagonizaron una guerra el verano de 2006. Sin embargo, el conflicto de Siria



Militares españoles en el Líbano, país donde forman parte del contingente de la ONU desde 2006



LA MISIÓN EN LÍBANO

- » 1.073 soldados españoles
- » Costó 200 millones en 2011
- » La misión comenzó en 2006
- » No tiene fecha de cierre
- » 12.488 es el total de Unifil

amenaza con «barrer» los objetivos alcanzados con esta misión e «instalar un escenario volátil» con el que no contaban hace seis años las fuerzas españolas, reconocen a ABC las mismas fuentes. «Podemos vernos en medio de un conflicto no previsto en la misión».

El general de brigada Fernando Gutiérrez, jefe de la Brigada Multinacional al este del Líbano, ha argumentado en varias ocasiones que lo «inestable» de la situación en Siria es «una amenaza directa a la estabilidad de la región». Así se lo hizo llegar al ministro de Defensa español, Pedro Morenés, quien visitó Marjayún el mes de enero, interesándose expresamente sobre las consecuencias del conflicto en Siria para las tropas españolas.

Hace dos meses cinco militares franceses resultaron heridos tras sufrir un

atentado en el sur. París lo atribuyó al régimen sirio.

«Al-Assad podría utilizar a la guerrilla de Hizbolá en su conflicto interno o intentar castigar a las potencias occidentales en suelo libanés», aseguran desde la misión española. El próximo mes de marzo, el secretario general de la ONU, Ban Ki-moon, debería hacer público su nuevo informe sobre la situación de seguridad en el Líbano en cuanto al conflicto entre Hizbolá e Israel se refiere. Si fuera positivo, las tropas occidentales podrían iniciar un repliegue de un escenario que va camino de vivir su enésimo polvorín.

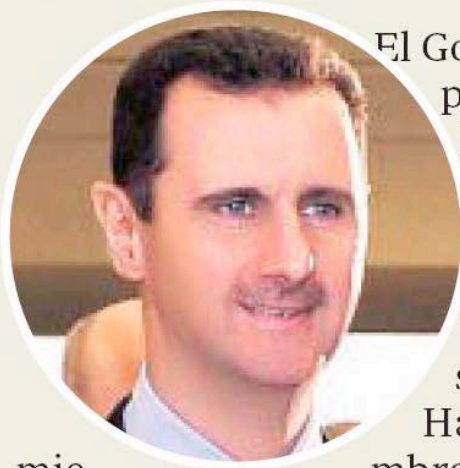
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El «polvorín» del Líbano

ABC (Espagne / Spain)

Rusia no descarta participar en la futura misión de paz de la ONU

ABC



El Gobierno ruso aseguró ayer que no descarta participar en la futura misión de paz de Naciones Unidas y la Liga Árabe que ha propuesto crear el organismo multilateral con sede en El Cairo, según informó el embajador especial ruso en Oriente Próximo, Mijail Bogdanov. «Para una misión así, se necesita el acuerdo con el Gobierno sirio. Habrá entonces que preguntar sobre los miembros, el mandato y la disposición de la misión», ha dicho Bogdanov, informa Ep. El régimen de Al Assad ya ha manifestado su rechazo a la resolución aprobada este fin de semana por los ministros de Exteriores de la Liga Árabe para promover el despliegue de «cascos azules» y poner fin a la violencia. Por otro lado, España formará parte del Grupo de Amigos para Siria, que se reunirá por vez primera el día 24 en Túnez.

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)

Tahar Ben Jelloun

En la cabeza de Bashar el Asad

He debido colarme de rondón en la cabeza del presidente sirio pues es una fortaleza inaccesible. Antes de llegar siquiera a aproximarse es menester superar al menos siete barreras. Alta seguridad. Miedo y desconfianza. Al igual que su padre, Hafiz, guarda las distancias. Se cuenta que Hafiz el Asad mandó fusilar a los siete soldados que habían de supervisar la entrada de las personas que tenían cita con él. A Hafez le gustaba jugar al ajedrez con un amigo de la infancia. Cada tarde, el amigo se hacía registrar siete veces antes de acceder al salón de juego. Un día, a fuerza de verle, le dejaron pasar sin realizar su tarea. Cuando se enteró Hafez, dio la orden de ejecutar a los desdichados guardias que no habían cumplido con su deber. El pequeño Bashar conoce el episodio, uno más entre tantos otros incidentes sanguinarios. También Bashar el Asad es un individuo inaccesible. Cuando se mata, se corre el riesgo de morir. Y se adoptan las precauciones necesarias, incluso más.

Su cabeza no es muy grande. Está llena de paja, agujas y hojas de afeitar. No sé por qué. Su cerebro está sereno y sosegado. Sin estrés, sin nerviosismo. Me he convertido en un hombrecillo diminuto y he aguzado el oído. Y la verdad es que a este muchacho no dejan de ocurrírsele ideas audaces. Veamos.

“Todo lo aprendí de mi padre. Un gran estadista, un hombre sensible, cultivado y gran estratega. Me acuerdo de que Henry Kissinger le tenía en gran aprecio. Mi padre me dijo también que apreciaba al secretario de Estado estadounidense, cuya inteligencia y realismo político admiraba.

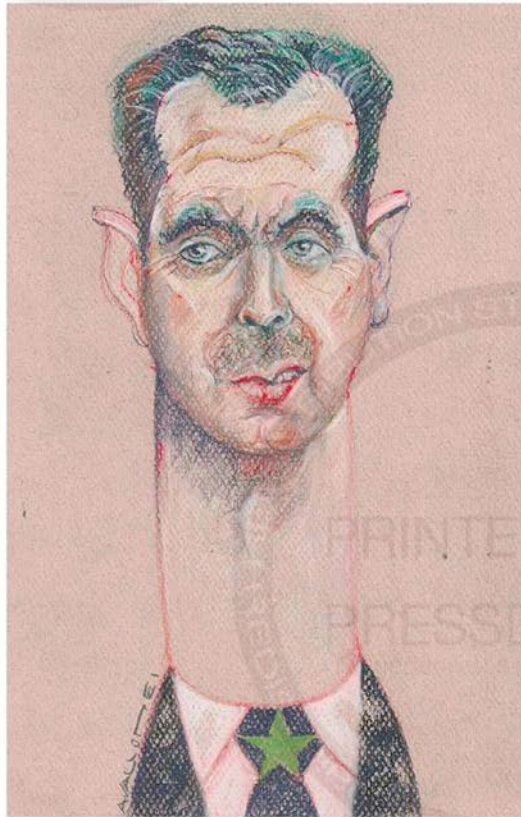
Últimamente entro en comunicación con mi padre. Es un hombre genial. Me indica lo que debo hacer. En primer lugar, no soy Sadam ni Gadafi. No me veréis ridiculizado por los estadounidenses o degollado por fanáticos. Soy de la familia El Asad, una familia y un clan unido y solidario.

Una gran familia dotada de tradición. No me dedico a hacer lo que primero que se me pueda ocurrir. Resisto contra un complot internacional. No tengo ningunas ganas de presenciar cómo mi país se convierte en una república islámica gobernada por analfabetos. Según me enseñó mi padre, en la política hay que tener un corazón de hierro. Ni sentimientos ni debilidad. Me juego mi cabeza y la de toda mi familia. Los alborotadores que arrasan Siria, simplemente, reciben su merecido. ¿Se habla de *primavera árabe*? ¿Qué es eso? ¿Por qué motivo la primavera ha de ser sinónimo de mi desaparición? No sólo no voy a morir, sino que antes mataré a todos. En el islam se dice que hay que

vacilar. Yo aplico esta ley tan antigua como los árabes. Quiero recordar en este punto que Siria es un país laico.

Por tanto, ¿qué se me reprocha? ¿Dar al ejército la orden de disparar contra los manifestantes? Si no lo hago, perderé mi cargo y no podré hacerme respetar. Observado en qué situación ha quedado mi amigo Mubarak tras ser expulsado de palacio. Le han faltado decisión y voluntad. Las fuerzas armadas le han traicionado.

“Mi ejército, básicamente, me es fiel; los desertores lo han pagado muy caro; no titubeo ni me pesa”



“Veinte mil muertos en Hama, apenas ocho mil entre Draa, Homs, Damasco y Hama. ¡Y todo este jaleo!”

Mi ejército, fundamentalmente, me es fiel. Los desertores lo han pagado muy caro. No titubeo ni me pesa. Me limito a defenderme, diría incluso que se trata de legítima defensa.

He adoptado la precaución de proteger a Asma, mi esposa, y a mis tres hijos, Hafiz, Zein y Karim. Es completamente

perdida. Se me ha dicho que hay niños muertos. No acabo de creerlo y, en todo caso, responsabilizo a sus padres de tal desgracia, pues no hay desgracia peor que perder a un hijo. Recuerdo la pena de mi padre el día en que mi hermano mayor, Basel, murió en un accidente automovilístico. Lloró. Sí, he visto a mi padre llorar ante la injusticia del destino que le arrebató a su hijo preferido.

Las Naciones Unidas han intentado manchar mi nombre y piden que me retire. ¿Marcharme? ¿Para ir adónde? ¿Me toman por un Ben Ali? ¿No voy a subir a un avión como él ni a mendigar asilo político por el mundo! Afortunadamente, la Rusia de mi amigo Putin y también China han opuesto su veto. Mi amigo Ahmadinejad también me acompaña. Hay, al menos, alguna clase de justicia. Los insurrectos son terroristas, agentes pagados por Europa e incluso algunos países árabes que tienen cuentas pendientes conmigo.

¿Se me habla de torturas! Es completamente normal torturar para impedir matanzas, para evitar que gente inocente caiga bajo las balas de malos sirios.

Yo sostengo el país, planto cara a quienes quieren instaurar otro régimen; deberían darme las gracias por ello y ayudarme a proteger a Siria del peligro islamista. Sé lo que harían los islamistas con mi tribu de los alaúites y con las minorías cristiana y armenia. En lugar de condenarme, el Vaticano debería acudir en mi ayuda. Por suerte no son más que palabras. Los europeos congelan mis bienes en su territorio e intentan asfixiar al pueblo impidiendo los intercambios comerciales. Es ruin e indecente.

Recuerdo que mi padre me dijo el día siguiente de la matanza de Hama, cuando yo tenía 17 años: ‘Ves, hijo mío, si no hubiera reaccionado con esta firmeza, esta noche no estaríamos aquí’. Tenía razón. Yo también, si no hubiera bombardeado Homs, sabría dónde dormiría: en el depósito de cadáveres! De modo

que hay de dejar de decir lo primero a que a uno se le ocurra. Veinte mil muertos en Hama (en aquel momento, nadie reaccionó), apenas ocho mil entre Draa, Homs, Damasco y Hama. ¡Y todo este jaleo!

¿Saben por qué Asma, mi querida esposa, se casó conmigo? Por los valores que encarno. Así lo declaró a *Paris Match* en la edición del pasado 10 de diciembre.

¿Saben por qué estudié oftalmología? Porque soy alérgico a la visión de la sangre”.

Al abandonar esta cabeza, he tropezado con unos cables eléctricos. Bashar está conectado al centro principal de tortura. Es quien para acunar el tiempo en

Diário de Notícias (Portugal)

Al-Qaeda declara apoio aos rebeldes na Síria

Caos. Ofensiva governamental continua em Homs, no dia em que a Liga Árabe pediu à ONU a criação de uma força de paz conjunta

SUSANA SALVADOR

Num vídeo intitulado "Em frente, leões da Síria", o líder da Al-Qaeda Ayman al-Zawahiri acusou o regime de Bashar al-Assad de crimes contra o povo sírio e louvou aqueles que se rebelaram contra ele. Além disso, pediu aos muçulmanos da Turquia, da Jordânia e do Líbano que apoiem a rebelião e ajudem a derrubar o Governo atual, que Al-Zawahiri qualifica de anti-islâmico.

O registo vídeo de oito minutos foi divulgado no sábado à noite nas páginas de Internet de grupos *jihadistas*, que indicam que vários combatentes estão a caminho da Síria. Tal poderá significar que os extremistas islâmicos estão a explorar a revolta do povo sírio, que começou pacificamente mas está a transformar o país num campo de batalha. O regime de Assad tem vindo a culpar os "terroristas" pela onda de violência e o apoio da Al-Qaeda pode dificultar a situação para os países ocidentais que têm defendido a saída do Presidente.

O vice-ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros sírio, Fayçal Mekdad, disse ontem que o regime vai apresentar provas do apoio dos países vizinhos – não especificou quais – aos "grupos terroristas" que operam na Síria. Segundo este responsável, está em causa "uma campanha de desinformação histórica" contra Damasco, a nível árabe e internacional.

Liga Árabe pede ajuda à ONU

"Até quando vamos continuar a ser espectadores do que está a acontecer aos nossos irmãos sírios?" A questão foi colocada pelo chefe da diplomacia saudita, Saud Al-Faisal, no início da reunião da Liga Árabe no Cairo. No final, o grupo aprovou uma resolução na qual anuncia o fim da sua missão de observação na Síria, o apoio po-

lítico e material à oposição de Damasco e pede ao Conselho de Segurança da ONU a formação de uma força de paz conjunta.

Minutos depois de ser conhecido o texto da resolução árabe, a embaixada da Síria no Cairo reagiu: "A República Árabe da Síria recusa categoricamente a decisão da Liga Árabe", dizia um comunicado assinado pelo embaixador sírio no Egito, Youssef Ahmad, que não participou no encontro. O delegado permanente de Damasco na Liga Árabe apontou o dedo à "histeria" de alguns países.

A iniciativa da Liga Árabe é a última numa série de medidas empreendidas pelos Governos regionais para garantir uma saída para a situação na Síria. Em dezembro, o Presidente Bashar al-Assad concordou com a presença no seu país de uma missão de observadores árabes. Contudo, o regime nunca aceitou totalmente os termos do acordo, continuando a repressão. Ontem, antes do início do encontro no Cairo, o general sudanês Mohammed al-Dabi, que liderava a missão (suspensa desde janeiro), apresentou a demissão.

Desde março que o regime de Bashar al-Assad tem visto aumentar a contestação nas ruas, respondendo com repressão. Segundo a oposição, mais de seis mil pessoas já terão morrido. Só ontem, pelo menos 24 pessoas terão morrido, a maioria na cidade de Homs – centro da revolta contra o regime e alvo de ofensiva governamental há mais de uma semana.

A resolução da Liga Árabe prevê ainda "a abertura de canais de comunicação com a oposição síria e o fornecimento de todas as formas de apoio político e material". Os ministros, reunidos no Cairo, saudaram ainda a proposta da Tunísia de organizar "uma conferência de amigos da Síria" a 24 de fevereiro. O grupo inclui também os EUA e os países europeus, que ficaram



1. Imagem do vídeo de oito minutos com o líder da Al-Qaeda Ayman al-Zawahiri a declarar o apoio à rebelião na Síria e insta os muçulmanos a ajudar à luta.
2. O lugar vazio do representante sírio na Liga Árabe, na reunião de ontem no Cairo.
3. Uma criança com o rosto pintado com as cores da bandeira da oposição síria participa numa manifestação de apoio no Líbano.
3. Outra manifestação contra o regime de Bashar al-Assad, no líbano

ANGELUS

Bento XVI lança apelo ao diálogo

O Papa Bento XVI pediu ontem a Damasco que aceite "dialogar" e que responda com urgência às "aspirações legítimas" do povo sírio e aos "desejos" da comunidade internacional. Diante de milhares de pessoas reunidas na Praça de São Pedro, para a missa do Angelus, o Papa apelou ainda ao fim da violência e do derramamento de sangue. "Convivo todo o mundo e desde logo as



autoridades políticas sírias a privilegiar a via do diálogo, da reconciliação e do compromisso a favor da paz", disse.

de mãos atadas com o veto russo e chinês à resolução do Conselho de Segurança, na semana passada.

Hoje, o alto comissário para os Direitos Humanos da ONU, Navi Pillay, vai informar a Assembleia Geral sobre a situação na Síria, uma iniciativa do presidente da assembleia, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, do Qatar. Este país, junto com a Arábia Saudita, prepara entretanto um projeto de resolução que exige o fim dos ataques do regime à população e apoia o plano árabe para a transição pacífica para a democracia. Este plano previa que Assad entregasse o poder ao seu vice-presidente.



The Srijeh market in an old quarter of Damascus offers an array of fine fruit and vegetables. However, produce has soared to become 25-40 per cent more expensive than 11 months ago when the troubles began. Potatoes and eggs have doubled in price. Daily protests against the government persist, as some shops stay shut and schoolchildren avoid class for fear of bombings. Photograph: Karin Leukefeld

Vibrant hues of Damascus market contrast with grim fight for change



Price rises at the local souq are one sign of the troubles, writes Michael Jansen in Maadamiya, Damascus

AT THE entrance to the market shops overflow with musty second hand clothing, piles of jumpers and battered shoes from Europe.

"Some people prefer these to new things made locally," observes W, but there are few shoppers picking over the stocks.

The primary colours of fruit and vegetables blossom on stalls like oil paint on palettes. Red tomatoes, carrots and beets; purple and white turnips; green custard apples, cucumbers, spinach and parsley; orange pumpkins and sweet potatoes. All fresh and, for foreigners with euro, cheap. But not for Syrians.

There is fresh chicken and mutton, frozen beef from India and fish from Vietnam and the Gulf. People queuing outside the tiny government bakery collect hot, flat rounds of bread and hang them over wooden rails fixed to the wall to let the bread cool before carrying it home.

A baker invites us in to see the Heath Robinson mechanised marvel that mixes huge basins of dough, fashions thousands of loaves, and bakes and conveys them to the window for sale at nine Syrian pounds, about six cent (in euro), a kilo.

W and his wife, I, pause to buy processed cheese, macaroni, fresh milk in plastic bags, onions, and other staples, 25-40 per cent more expensive than 11 months ago when the troubles began. Potatoes and eggs have doubled in price. "Food is fresher and cheaper here than in our village," I remark.

We lurch off plates of a sweet made of semolina and cheese and served warm with sugar syrup. Further along the souq is an Ottoman *hammam* (bath); at the end, a green-tiled minaret on a medieval mosque, its black and white horizontal striped exterior typical of Damascus.

We catch a minibus to the suburb of Maadamiya where W and I have dwelt for a dozen years. At the checkpoint at the entrance of Maadamiya, a police soldier checks the identity cards of men but not women and waves us through. We get out in the town centre, shops shuttered, streets empty, dusty, littered with stones and rubble, anti-regime slogans painted over.

A few women sit in the sun outside the doors of half-finished breeze-block buildings. "Welcome, welcome," they call, urging us to drink coffee. We thank them and walk on, toting our bags of shopping to the modest flat where W and I live. The neighbourhood is poor, the people friendly.

Working-class Maadamiya, inhabited by Sunnis and heterodox Shia Alawites, has seen "hundreds of demonstrations" against the government over the past 11 months observes W. "The army has come in three times to search for weapons and make arrests. . . . Some men have been held for a few days and freed, others remain in prison."

At first detainees were treated well, but not later on. Maadamiya has a longstanding grudge against the authorities

Women sit in the sun. "Welcome, welcome," they call, urging us to drink coffee

which 30 years ago expropriated land at a risible price to build a military base and housing for officers. The people have been in dispute with the government ever since; they want to be compensated at today's prices in millions of pounds while the government is offering five times the amount originally paid. On some occasions, 1,500 people protested during daylight hours, but currently 50-100, half of them children, turn up at two in the morning outside mosques. A man died of heart attack in custody and 5,000 attended his funeral.

Armed elements entered from the olive groves and poured petrol into the bases of a line of lamp posts and set the wiring alight, blowing the neighbourhood's electricity. "The streets had to be dug up to lay new wiring," remarks W.

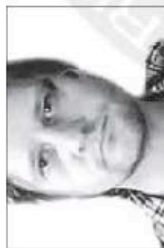
When ultra-orthodox Salafis, women completely covered and men with heavy beards, parade, others stay in their homes even though the Salafis do not challenge anyone, W says.

Two women wearing coats and headscarves stop to chat and soon launch a tirade against the government. "We are not afraid to speak . . . We want freedom, we want democracy, we want this regime to go," states the younger. "My nephew is in prison . . . every time we deal with the government, we face corruption."

Children play among the few remaining olive trees. Few attend school because of rumours about bombs. Some shops have shut because their owners are in prison, others open for a few hours a day. "People are leaving, or want to leave, but they own their houses and cannot afford rents elsewhere," W says as we catch a minibus back to the broad boulevards, glittering fountains and chic boutiques of Damascus.

The Irish Times (Irlande / Ireland)

Time to end abuse of veto by big powers at UN



AIDAN HEHIR

OPINION

Russia and China are to be deplored for their stances on Syria. But they are not alone in political self-interest

THE DOUBLE veto cast by Russia and China blocking the draft UN Security Council resolution on Syria 10 days ago has provoked a chorus of international outrage. UK foreign secretary William Hague decried them as "cold-blooded cynicism", while US secretary of state Hillary Clinton declared that "To block this resolution is to bear responsibility for the horrors that are occurring on the ground in Syria."

While the use of the veto in this instance certainly constitutes archetypal "realpolitik", this failure to respond to the escalating crisis in Syria highlights more than Russian and Chinese mendacity. The fact that Russia and China are responsible for the most recent triumph of national interests over humanitarian need should not obscure the fact that the veto is a profound legal and political corruption at the heart of the UN system, and one that has been routinely exploited by all the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (P5).

The council was primarily designed to prevent, and if necessary halt, interstate war, especially between the major powers. The veto was envisaged as a means to ensure that

the sanctioning of force would be severely proscribed and only ever a function of the collective judgment of the council. As the rivalry between East and West accelerated during the cold war, the veto quickly became a political tool and its use, and the threat of its use, rendered the security council largely impotent.

In the post-cold war era, the council has certainly increased its involvement in intrastate crises and sanctioned an unprecedented number of resolutions under its chapter VII powers – those related to the collective use of force – but the council's record has still been erratic and buffeted by fluctuations in national interests and the relative distribution of power.

Indicatively, in 1994, the security council passed resolution 940 mandating the collective use of force to depose the military junta in Haiti, yet, in the same year the council spectacularly failed to act in a comparably swift and robust manner in response to the genocide in Rwanda. While certain crises have benefited from security council unanimity, many – such as Rwanda, Kosovo and Darfur – have become unwitting victims of the rampant power politics in evidence in New York.

Under articles 24.1 and 24.2 of the charter, the security council is charged with acting on behalf of the member states of the UN and in accordance with the purposes and principles of the charter. This responsibility has rarely interfered, however, with the decisions made by the P5. The problem is compounded by the fact that there is no provision for juridical review of the decisions taken by the security council, and thus committing to "act in conformity with the charter" is highly subjective.

In the post-cold war era, the P5 have creatively interpreted the powers afforded to them under chapter VII and thus significantly broadened their reach. This has meant the council today routinely involves itself in issues considered beyond its jurisdiction 20 years ago, and yet there has been no concomitant strengthening of the means by which the P5's decisions are regulated. The P5, therefore, has negligible obligations but enormous discretion as to how it responds to situations – including when and where it will use force.

“The veto is a profound legal and political corruption at the heart of the UN system. It has been exploited by all five permanent members

International Criminal Court. The US admitted it was in favour of the extension of the Bosnian mandates but nonetheless bullied the council into submitting to its demands on a largely unrelated issue.

Ten days ago, Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN, condemned Russia and China for their "outrageous" behaviour, yet just over a year ago, on February 18th, she vetoed a resolution condemning illegal Israeli settlements. In that instance, the US stood alone against the other four permanent members and all 10 non-permanent members of the security council.

The Russian and Chinese vetoes on Syria certainly constitute evidence of hypocrisy and cynicism, but not just on the part of Moscow and Beijing. While the US, UK and France are currently lamenting the use of the veto, they have shown no interest in scrapping or even amending it. The permanent members of the security council have, in fact, collectively and steadfastly refused to countenance any reform of the voting system precisely because, though occasionally inconvenient, the veto imbues each with privileges too great to rescind regardless of the detrimental effect the veto has on the UN's efficiency or the consequences for innocents caught up in mass atrocities.

Given this constitutional curiosity, we cannot reasonably be surprised that the UN's response to humanitarian crises has historically been unedifying, even since the end of the cold war.

The Syria vetoes are the latest evidence that the security council is prey to an anachronistic voting system and is desperately in need of profound reform. States evidencing a comparable degree of political interference in domestic law enforcement are rightly described as "failed" and "corrupt".

The people suffering in Homs, and throughout Syria, are just the most recent in a long list of victims sacrificed to self-interest and cynicism at the security council. So long as the veto remains a sword that can be wielded at will by the great powers, they will not be the last.

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The Daily Telegraph (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Bodies in rubbish pit suggest little mercy on either side of civil war



Richard Spencer

Near Homs

FROM the one body that was completely exposed, the men in the rubbish-strewn pit had obviously been executed. His face was skeletal from decomposition, but the ropes around his feet still seemed as fresh as when they were tied several weeks ago.

His arms, too, were bound behind his back. In an unpleasant additional humiliation, his bare blackened buttocks faced the sky, his trousers forced down to his knees.

The other corpses were still half buried, apart from the pelvis and femurs and tibias of one that had been dragged away and picked clean by animals.

There were at least four in all, and they had not died an honourable death. "They were killed by Assad regime soldiers," our guides told us. "Probably soldiers trying to defect."

There was no reason to doubt their belief in this assertion, because many Syrian men have certainly suffered this fate in the past year, but there was plenty to doubt this particular story, of which the guides were not certain.

The bodies were not in military clothing for a start. Yet if they were civilians from this rebel-held area near Homs, it was surprising that no one had come to take them away and give them a martyr's funeral. They had been there for some time.

The reaction of Free Syrian Army soldiers nearby to the presence of journalists was unusually angry. They demanded that our photographs be deleted, and our guides were told to take us back to the town of Qusayr nearby. They had another argument there.

The insurrection against the Assad regime is already a civil war, and already vicious. It is impossible to say for sure who the four men in the pit were, or who had lined them up and shot them.

They looked like other victims of this dictatorship – or of Col Muammar Gaddafi's in Libya beforehand – but

there is also little sign of mercy on either side.

On Saturday night rebels near here ambushed an army convoy and knocked out a tank, with unknown casualties. On Thursday, a van was shredded and a barracks overwhelmed, with at least 18 deaths in the two attacks.

The rebels give little apparent thought to their enemies, even though they were most likely comrades until recently, since many of the Free Syrian Army men are defectors.

There have been stories of the rebels, who are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, killing Alawites, the minority to which the Assad family and most of the highest ranks of the army belong.

There is no doubt though that the crimes, if any are proved, of the rebels are outweighed by the almost incomprehensibly violent response, often nakedly sectarian, of the regime forces.

Three sons of a Qusayr elder, Abu Kasem, were helping out on their father's farm when the army made its first attack on the town last September, suddenly opening fire from the outskirts in response to nothing more than a series of demonstrations.

The first clue as to what happened to Yathreb, Ashraf and Gharidan came when one of their sisters rang Ashraf's phone a short time later.

The phone was opened, but no one spoke. Instead, she heard voices, one saying "this one is wounded", and another saying "kill him".

Then came three shots, and the phone went dead.

Abu Kasem said that when he was told that Yathreb and Ashraf's bodies had been found in the military hospital, he said "praise be to Allah" that they had been martyred for a cause. Even when he went to retrieve them, and the officer on duty asked him if he had "come to fetch his dogs", he said he had no feelings of revenge.

But he broke down when Gharidan was released from prison four months later. From a prison van Gharidan had been a witness to Ashraf's last moments. Yathreb, he said, was already dead by this time.

"He saw that Ashraf had a problem with his leg, and he saw the soldiers beating him with the butts of their

Hague rules out Syria role for British troops

By Damien McElroy
Foreign Affairs Correspondent

BRITAIN would provide funding and support for a joint United Nations-Arab League peacekeeping mission in Syria but could not go as far as contributing troops on the ground, William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, suggested yesterday.

Spending a day after proposals for an international peacekeeping force were agreed at an Arab League meeting in Cairo, Mr Hague welcomed the initiative but said it was important to all those that it would be a vehicle for Western intervention. The Syrian regime of Presi-

dent Bashar al-Assad has already rebuffed the Arab League's plan as unwarranted outside meddling, saying it was determined to restore security through its assault on rebellious towns and cities.

Russia and China, which both vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Syrian regime, also refused to endorse the plan yesterday. Russia demanded a "ceasefire" before any peacekeeping force was deployed, while China said it still wanted a political solution to the crisis.

During a visit to South Africa, Mr Hague said the peacekeeping plan would be discussed urgently with the "Friends

of Syria" groups, which is due to meet for the first time in Tunis in next week.

"Such a mission could have a very important role to play in saving lives, provided of course there was an end to violence against civilians, forces were withdrawn from towns and cities and a credible ceasefire was established so that monitors and peacekeepers could then play a useful role," Mr Hague said.

Of Britain's support for such a mission he added: "I don't see the way forward in Syria as being Western boots on the ground, in any form, including in peacekeeping form. I think they would need to come from other countries, rather than

Western nations. But of course if such a concept could be made viable we will be supporting it in all the usual ways."

The Foreign Office said Britain would offer extensive support for any forces that could be put between the Syrian army and its opponents.

Damascus remained defiant yesterday, launching attacks on Homs and Deraa, his cost more than 6,000 lives.

The state news agency said: "Syria rejects decisions that are a flagrant interference in the country's internal affairs and a violation of its national sovereignty. This decision will not prevent the Syrian

government from fulfilling its responsibilities in protecting its citizens and restoring security and stability."

The Arab League toughened its challenge to the Syrian regime at the Cairo meeting by proposing talks with the UN on peacekeeping and agreeing to open talks with the Syrian National Council, an opposition group for opposition activists.

The EU said it would move to rally support for Arab League efforts.

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, said any peacekeeping mission would have to be approved by the Assad regime.

"In order to deploy a peacekeeping mission, you need the agreement of the

receiving side," he said. "You need to agree something resembling a ceasefire."

Last night, Kofi Annan, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the UN General Assembly that the Security Council's failure to pass a resolution on Syria had "emboldened" the regime "to launch an almost unrelenting effort to crush dissent".

Crises against humanity were likely to have been committed, she said.

She thanked Lyell Grant, the UK's ambassador to the UN, for his visit on the occasion of a visit war. He said Syria had the long term. Assad's strategy will fail. His credibility will simply need the cycle of violence."

A new terror threatens Syria

Al-Qaeda is attempting to muscle in on the revolt against Assad's regime. Will it work, ask David Blair and Richard Spencer

More than four decades ago, al-Qaeda's new leader began his career in global jihad by preaching rebellion against Egypt's secular regime. With that long pedigree as a street fighter and revolutionary, Ayman al-Zawahiri will know that it's bad form to be late to an insurrection. At first glance, the spectacle of al-Qaeda issuing a message of support for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad of Syria – thereby placing itself on the same side as the West – might appear puzzling, and even unsettling. “Onwards, lions of Syria,” Zawahiri told Assad's enemies in his second public address since taking over from Osama bin Laden in June. The professionally produced video showed him clad in white robes before a dark and neatly drawn curtain. Wagging his right index finger for emphasis, he praised the “proud ones, the honourable free ones” who have taken up arms in Syria, adding: “You are standing with your bare chests before the shells of tanks, artillery and helicopters.”

For all the rhetorical bravado, the message was as much a sign of weakness as of strength. Zawahiri knows that Syrians have defied their leader's fury without any help from al-Qaeda. Since the revolt began almost a year ago, perhaps 6,000 people have been killed – all without a whisper of support from him or his late predecessor. Similarly, Zawahiri's speech had nothing but a passing reference to the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, each of which succeeded in destroying an authoritarian regime while leaving al-Qaeda an impotent spectator.

All of this matters greatly, because the terrorist movement's founding purpose was not simply to strike at America and the West. On the contrary, when Zawahiri and bin Laden created it back in 1988, they chose to divide the globe into “near” and “far” enemies. The former included all the regimes of the Middle East, who had to be deposed to make way for an Islamic Caliphate, governed by sharia, which would embrace the entire Muslim world.

Al-Qaeda's problem is that its enemies have indeed been falling like dominoes – but their demise has had nothing whatever to do with Zawahiri or his followers. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was a particularly bitter enemy, especially for Zawahiri: he spent four years in the dictator's jails in Cairo and was tortured by his security service. Being unable to claim credit for Mubarak's downfall last year must have been deeply humiliating for the old jihadist. And while missing one revolution might be considered a misfortune, to be caught napping through four would look like carelessness. Or, rather, it would show that popular support for al-Qaeda was minimal and falling.

Having sat out three successful revolts in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, Zawahiri is now jumping aboard the Syrian bandwagon. “Al-Qaeda is definitely on the ropes. The tide is going out, so this is an obvious gambit,” says Sir David Omand, now visiting professor of war studies at King's College London, but formerly head of intelligence and security at the Cabinet Office. “Zawahiri would be only too well aware that Libya demonstrated that a revolution can come about with the support



A Syrian opposition protest in Masyad. Left: al-Zawahiri praises the 'lions of Syria'



of the West, and not through his route.”

The al-Qaeda leader has probably calculated that Western military intervention in Syria is highly unlikely. Even if many more Syrians die at the hands of Assad's forces, the leading powers will probably refrain from mounting a Libya-style operation. The practical difficulties – combined with the problem of winning United Nations support in the face of Russian and Chinese opposition – are probably insurmountable. Nor is there

any guarantee that intervention would diminish the bloodshed.

This prospect of Western hand-wringing in the face of Muslim suffering creates a slender opening for Zawahiri. “It's like Hungary in 1956: the cause is just but there is not a lot you can do about it without making things worse,” adds Sir David. “So here is his opportunity to pump in and say ‘You can't rely on America and the West, but you can rely on me and my jihadists.’”

Zawahiri's threats cannot be completely ignored, for al-Qaeda still has a structure in neighbouring Iraq. At the peak of the violence, foreign fighters would travel into Iraq through Syrian territory. This established “synergy” could now be exploited for volunteers to travel in the opposite direction, notes Nigel Inkster, former director of operations at MI6 and now head of transnational threats at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

There are already suggestions that “al-Qaeda in Iraq” (known to counter-terrorism experts as “AQI”) was responsible for last week's bombings in Aleppo, which claimed 28 lives. The attacks in Syria's commercial capital, targeting a police station and the local military intelligence headquarters, bore some of al-Qaeda's hallmarks: at least one was a suicide attack, and the assaults were carried out almost simultaneously. They were certainly a departure from the usual modus

operandi of Syria's armed opposition. “I have no idea who was responsible, but it's not unimaginable that AQI might have done something like that,” says Mr Inkster.

But even if al-Qaeda does carry out strikes in Syria, it might have exactly the opposite effect to the one desired. Assad has always argued that his opponents are “armed terrorist gangs” and radical Islamic extremists. By appearing to vindicate this claim, Zawahiri might end up strengthening Syria's leader.

“In and of itself, what Zawahiri says is unlikely to have any impact,” says Mr Inkster. “But it plays into Bashar al-Assad's strategic narrative: he's been saying all along that the violence he's been facing has been organised by terrorist groups.”

On the ground in Syria, however, there is no overt sign of international jihadists. Members of the Free Syrian Army introduced to *The Daily Telegraph* near the city of Homs have all been local men. Those who defected from the regime's forces say they did so because of the cruelty they were forced to witness or assist.

Jalal 20, who had been doing his national service in the army, said he could no longer stomach the killing of women and children. “I saw what happened in Homs, and I saw what happened in Damascus,” he said. “I couldn't stay like this any more.” He claimed that a double bombing in

Damascus that the regime blamed on al-Qaeda had been an “inside job”, with soldiers knowing in advance that it would take place. “We were told not to go to that area as there was going to be a bomb attack,” he said.

One possible clink of light for the jihadists – and a cause for wider concern for those hoping to avoid communal civil war – is that all the fighters that *The Daily Telegraph* has met have been Sunni Muslims, like Zawahiri and bin Laden. This highlights the sectarian nature of the struggle against Mr Assad's regime, which is dominated by members of the Alawite sect of Shia Islam. Near Homs, there is a small Christian community, some of whom have joined the rebels. But most have stayed neutral. Local Shias, meanwhile, are viewed with great distrust and the rebels stay out of their areas.

The sectarianism beneath the surface often leaks out. One man, who had been jailed twice and badly beaten, called Assad an “infidel dog” who “worshipped” Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of Iran's Shia revolution. As for why this enmity exists, one man simply retold the story of the 7th century, when Hussein, the Prophet Mohammed's grandson, and Ali, his son-in-law, were both killed by Sunni Caliphs. Shia Muslims had never forgiven Sunnis for these deaths, he added. “They think we killed Hussein and Ali, and they are still angry with us.”

The Herald (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Syria peacekeepers 'should not be Western'

DAMASCUS

FOREIGN Secretary William Hague has said any peacekeeping troops in Syria should come from non-Western countries.

"I don't see the way forward in Syria as being Western boots on the ground in any form, including in any peacekeeping form. I think they would need to come from other countries, rather than Western nations," he told reporters during a visit to Cape Town.

"Of course, if such a concept can be made viable, we will be



WILLIAM HAGUE: Said troops would need to come from other countries.

supporting it in all the usual ways," he said.

Meanwhile, Syrian forces bombarded districts of Homs and attacked other cities after Arab

states pledged support for the opposition battling President Bashar al Assad and called for international peacekeepers to be sent to the country.

Tank fire was concentrated on two Sunni Muslim neighbourhoods that have been at the forefront of an 11-month-old uprising against Mr Assad, activists said.

The renewed barrages served as an emphatic response to Arab League moves to boost the opposition campaign against Mr Assad, who is resisting calls to step down after 11 years of

authoritarian rule. Meeting in Cairo on Sunday, Arab League ministers proposed a joint United Nations-Arab peacekeeping force for Syria and pledged to provide political and material aid to the opposition.

However, the plan faces all kinds of obstacles. World powers are divided over how to resolve the crisis and Russia and China, who vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on Syria on February 4, are unlikely to welcome foreign intervention.

The Syrian uprising, in which

more than 5000 people have been killed, has become one of the bloodiest of the Arab Spring revolts sweeping the region since the end of 2010.

Analysts have said that while Syria is slipping towards a civil war whose sectarian dimensions could inflame the wider region, Mr Assad's downfall is far from imminent. The unremitting assaults on opposition strongholds show the president's determination to crush his opponents and resist reforms other than on his own terms, they said.

The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Homs bloodshed spills over into Lebanon

The Syrian war cost the life of Mohamed Bathish and he was buried amid volleys of gunfire yesterday in the city where he died – in northern Lebanon.

For the siege of Homs – scarcely 40 miles over the mountains from the fine old Lebanese city of Tripoli – smoulders beneath the land here, Lebanese Alawites on the hilltop of Jebel Mohsen, Sunni Muslims spread out across Bab el-Tebbaneh, and it was here that Bathish was killed, shot in the head by a sniper in the longest gun battle Tripoli has witnessed in years. Bathish was a Sunni; and 10 per cent of the Sunnis of Tripoli have relatives in Homs.

Amid the bullet-smashed apartment blocks on the hill, the Lebanese army now prowls. There are tanks and armoured personnel carriers and gloomy, empty streets and a dark feeling that Syria's horrors are closer than we feared. Five Lebanese soldiers were wounded – one received a bullet in the chest and is not expected to recover – along with six others wounded, including a 17-year-old girl. To find Tripoli's "front line", you just have to follow the trail of hundreds of green-white-and-black "Free Syria Army" posters. "God-only-Syria", they say on the top. But it was something far more provocative that started this gun and rocket battle.

A large group of Sunni civilians of Tripoli had gathered opposite Jebel Mohsen to protest against the Syrian regime's onslaught on its opponents

The siege of the beleaguered city was spark that blew across the border, reports Robert Fisk from Tripoli



in Homs. They raised a massive sheet on ropes over the main road; it depicted President Bashar al-Assad of Syria as a giant pig. This, the most awful of animals in Muslim eyes, did not, needless to say, commend itself to the Shia Alawis of Tripoli.

Outnumbered they may be – there are perhaps 40,000 of them in this, the third city of Lebanon – but well armed they are. After plastering their balconies with pictures of Assad (as a man, not a pig), volleys of rifle and then rocket fire echoed across the Abu Ali River. The Lebanese army managed to tear down the "pig" but it was too late. So serious did the sectarian fighting become that a frightened Najib Mikati, the Lebanese Prime Minister and a Tripolitanian himself, had to telephone the army commander, General Jean Kahwagi, from Paris, where he is on an official visit to President Sarkozy. Smother the fighting, he said. It took a while. When the Syrian cities of Daraa and Idlib were under regime attack, it mattered less; Homs was the spark that blew across the Syrian-Lebanese border. And it landed amid the tinderwood of Jebel Mohsen where one pro-Syrian poster depicts Assad's portrait

er of Saad Hariri and his 14th March party – ferocious critics of Syria who still believe that Damascus ordered the 2005 assassination of Saad's ex-Prime Minister father, Rafiq – Alloush was able to demonstrate his ability at karate on a pro-Syrian politician on Lebanese television just a few days ago. His own mother is an Alawite.

"The tension here just built up over the last four months," he said yesterday. "The background of the Syrian revolution put everything on edge in Tripoli. Homs is so close, although most of the Alawis here come from Lattakia."

Lattakia is on the Syrian coast to the north, originally a Sunni city; thus do the sliding patterns of demography burn themselves back and forth across the border. In the 1930s, Alawites moved into the centre of Damascus, Sunnis to the suburbs, many of them with extended families inside Lebanon.

Normally a rather docile man as well as a much respected doctor, most of Alloush's family are on the Syrian side of the border.

"Some of my family are the children of landlords and one of them – a bitter critic of Assad – was talking to me the other day. He is desperately afraid of what is going to happen in the future between Alawis and Sunnis.

He said to me: 'There will be revenge. And when they come for me, do you think they are going to ask me if I am pro- or anti-regime?'"



The Independent (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Syria's wounded lay blame on Mossad or MI6 – but never Assad

By CHARLOTTE McDONALD-GIBSON in Damascus

The Syrian soldiers lying wounded in their hospital beds at the Tishreen military hospital on the outskirts of Damascus know exactly who to blame for their often horrific injuries: Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United States, MI6, Afghanistan, Jihadis. Any one, it seems, except their own government.

The word that passes almost everyone's lips when asked who they think shot them or why they took up arms is "conspiracy". Like the state television reports beamed into Syrian homes, the soldiers tell of fighters from Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan trying to foment an Islamist uprising, or

agents from other Arab or Western states – or indeed the old foe Israel – bent on sowing chaos in Syria. "Most of these jihadis are linked to the British intelligence and the CIA and Mossad," says Ghassan, a 48-year-old colonel, who refuses to give his second name. "The rest is media fabrication." Pressed on the exact identity of his attackers, he says: "There are some Syrians, but they are criminals, drugs men."

Ghassan was shot in the chest in the eastern suburbs of Damascus. He unzips his

At no point will these soldiers concede their government is even remotely at fault

blue tracksuit top, slowly as he grimaces with pain, to show a tapestry of stitches. Then he pulls up his trouser leg and proudly displays two other bullet wounds sustained earlier in the conflict. He says he has killed opposition members, too, but adds: "I have not shot anyone unless I was shot at."

At no point will these men concede that their government is even remotely at fault. This is not the case throughout the country. Opposition groups say many soldiers have put down their weapons and defected, appalled at abuses they were asked to commit against the Syrian people. They now form the basis of the Free Syrian Army – the regime's "terrorists".

But so far no senior military figures or principal units have switched allegiances. Their ranks are stuffed with members of the same minority Alawite community as the ruling family and they remain fiercely loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. The young men at Tishreen appear utterly indoctrinated.

And despite the far-fetched nature of some of the claims, there are signs they could be partly right. A leader of al-Qa'ida, Ayman al-Zawahri, on Saturday called on Muslims from other countries to go to Syria to help overthrow the President. Iraqi officials have also said that fighters are travelling from the north into Syria.

For most of the opposition, this is disastrous news: they are desperate for their "revolution" to be secular and fear Mr Zawahri's statement plays directly into Mr Assad's narrative of a brave Syria fending off foreign invaders.

They also do not consider his foot soldiers the enemy. Their vitriol is reserved for the Assad family and their powerful backers, who they say are ready to use all the firepower at their fingertips.

"There is an equation that has not been stated in a clear way. If you are not with us,



President Bashar al-Assad visiting wounded soldiers in hospital; other Syrian soldiers, below, have defected. EPA/SANA/REUTERS

we are ready to destroy this country over our heads – it's either me, or chaos," says one middle-aged professional who refuses to give his name. "They want to destroy the country and they have the means to do so."

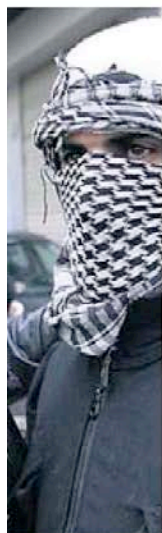
There is no doubt that regime soldiers – from the young conscripts to seasoned officers – are suffering a heavy toll from the unrest.

Although the armed opposition is outgunned by the Syrian military, attacks against security checkpoints and military stations have increased and anyone there appears to be considered a legitimate target.

A man who looks so much younger than his 20 years lies in bed covered by a sheet. The nurse says he was shot in the back on the outskirts of Homs on 1 February while manning a security checkpoint. "He is just



A black and white advertisement. The top part features the text "£400 off any of our boilers" in large, bold, white font. Below this, there is a white rectangular box with the word "SALE" written in large, bold, black letters. The background of the ad is dark.



one soldier, what is his sin?" asks his father, Assad Asini, as he holds vigil by his only son's bedside. "Now he will not walk again for the rest of his life."

In a nearby room, a 23-year-old man lies still on the bed, his head twisted to one side as he stares blankly at the door. He was shot in the neck, his friends say, and is now a quadriplegic. The nurse urges him to say something. He tries, but cannot form the words.

Next door is another soldier, the nurses whisper conspiratorially, shot by what they say is an Israeli-made bullet with an unknown poison that renders people unable to walk. Rumours and far-fetched conspiracy theories are in abundance at the military hospital. But so is a genuine sense of suffering, grief and fear for Syria's future.

The Scotsman (Royaume-Uni / United Kingdom)

Latest victim of Syrian troops is a seven-year-old protester

YASMINE SALEH IN CAIRO
AND OUR CORRESPONDENT IN
DAMASCUS

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Julnar Nakeshbandi was shouting messages of solidarity for civilians in the war-torn Syrian city of Homs from her bedroom window when the sniper shot her. Hit twice in the stomach she died later that day, just before dawn prayers.

As Syrian troops unleashed the first wave of the week-long onslaught on Homs, mosques had broadcast a defiant and rare night-time call to prayer.

"Julnar heard the mosque's call, so she started to wake me up. She wanted to join in," said her mother in an interview this weekend. "I put a chair at her bedroom window for her to stand on and I started chanting 'Allah Akhbar' with my daughter."

Suddenly gun shots rang out, and the little girl fell to the ground with two bullet wounds in her stomach. Panicked, her mother rushed her to a neighbour's apartment. From outside came the constant rattle of gunfire as government troops sought to silence the protest.

"I knelt quietly next to my dying daughter on the floor. I held her hand, I whispered with her verses that Muslims must say before they die," said her mother. "Around me everyone was weeping and screaming. Somebody massaged her chest."

Frightened of the incendiary reaction that might come from the little girl's death, the funeral was a rushed and controlled affair. Security forces prevented the attendance of men at her funeral. Only her father and two brothers were allowed to go.

"In the Muslim world it is the men who go to the funeral. They dig the grave, they conduct the ceremony," said Julnar's mother. "But only we, the women of the family were allowed to go. It was us who dug my daughter's grave."

Julnar's father was made to sign a paper confirming that his daughter was killed by a stray



A child with her face painted in the colours of the Syrian flag at a rally in the southern Lebanese city of Sidon yesterday

Picture: AFP

bullet. But, defiant, her mother is certain it was a targeted killing, but that the bullet was intended for her.

A prominent activist involved in the organisation of anti-regime demonstrations, she is known for her hatred of president Bashar al-Assad. Living in a Homs community that is mixed between Sunni Muslims and the ruling minority Alawite sect, it is a stance that is much opposed by some.

"I am not sure who shot my daughter, but I am sure it was an Alawite," she spat, her sadness suddenly subsiding to flaring rage.

As the violence in Syria shows little sign of abating, the Arab League called yesterday for the UN Security Council to send a joint UN-Arab peacekeeping mission to Syria and decided to



Julnar Nakeshbandi: Hit twice by government troops' bullets

scrap its own monitoring team.

Arab ministers met in Cairo to revive diplomatic efforts after Russia and China vetoed a UN resolution that called for Mr Assad to step aside. That resolution was based on an Arab peace plan and had Western backing.

The Arab League also called

for "opening communication channels with the Syrian opposition and providing all forms of political and material support to it". It also urged the opposition to unify its ranks.

The League said yesterday that the Arabs would scrap their monitoring mission which had been sent to Syria in late December but which was criticised by Syria's opposition as ineffective from the outset. It also faced internal dissent and logistical problems.

The Sudanese general leading the observers quit yesterday.

"I won't work one more time in the framework of the Arab League," General Mohammed al-Dabi, whose appointment had been criticised because of Sudan's own rights record, said.

"I performed my job with full integrity and transparency but

I won't work here again as the situation is skewed," he added.

In place of the Arab team, the League called for the UN Security Council to issue a resolution setting up a joint UN-Arab peacekeeping mission to go to Syria.

The League said violence against civilians in Syria had violated international law and "perpetrators deserve punishment". It also reaffirmed a call for Arabs to implement economic sanctions on Syria and decided on ending diplomatic co-operation with Damascus.

"How long will we stay as on-lookers to what is happening to the brotherly Syrian people, and how much longer will we grant the Syrian regime one period after another so it can commit more massacres?" Saudi foreign minister Saud al-Faisal asked ministers at the League session.

La Ligue arabe réclame la création d'une force de maintien de la paix

LE CAIRE ÉGYPTE — Essayant une nouvelle fois de faire cesser les violences, la Ligue arabe a décidé hier, lors d'une réunion au Caire, de demander au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU de créer une force de maintien de la paix pour la Syrie. Il est toutefois improbable que Damas accepte sur son territoire le déploiement d'une telle force qui serait constituée par l'ONU et la Ligue arabe.

Dans un projet de résolution, les 22 ministres des Affaires étrangères de la Ligue arabe appellent aussi à un cessez-le-feu immédiat en Syrie et demandent la levée du siège de certains quartiers et villages imposé par les forces du régime alaouite, ainsi que le retour des soldats dans leurs casernes.

Le chef de la diplomatie saoudienne, le prince Saoud al-Fayçal,

a déclaré qu'il n'était plus approuvé pour la Ligue arabe de rester passif devant le bain de sang en Syrie. «Jusqu'à quand resterons-nous spectateurs? C'est une honte en tant que musulmans et arabes d'accepter» ce carnage, a-t-il dit.

Dans leur projet de résolution, les ministres appellent aussi les mouvements de l'opposition syrienne à s'unir avant la réunion, le 24 février prochain en Tunisie, des «Amis de la Syrie», qui rassemblent les États-Unis, leurs alliés européens et des pays arabes essayant de mettre fin à 11 mois de conflit en Syrie. La Ligue arabe veut aussi fournir aux mouvements de l'opposition un soutien politique et matériel. Elle appelle à l'arrêt de tout contact diplomatique avec Damas et à faire traduire les dirigeants responsables de cri-

mes contre le peuple syrien devant des tribunaux internationaux. Elle exhorte à un durcissement des sanctions économiques déjà adoptées par la Ligue arabe, mais pas totalement mises en oeuvre.

Appui d'Al-Qaïda

Par ailleurs, le chef d'Al-Qaïda, Ayman al-Zawahri, a appelé les musulmans à soutenir le soulèvement en Syrie, affirmant que les rebelles ne pouvaient pas dépendre de l'Occident pour obtenir de l'aide. Dans un enregistrement vidéo diffusé samedi soir, il a appelé les musulmans en Irak, en Jordanie, au Liban et en Turquie à se joindre à l'insurrection contre «le régime pervers, cancéreux» de Bachar el-Assad.

Associated Press

The Globe and Mail (Canada)

The shadow of al-Qaeda looms over Syria's killing grounds

PATRICK MARTIN JERUSALEM

The flames of Syria's mounting violence and civil strife are being fanned by a sinister new player: al-Qaeda.

After a pair of suicide car bombings that killed 28 people at state security facilities in Aleppo, the leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, publicly threw his terrorist organization's weight behind the Syrian opposition.

The ability of the fugitive al-Qaeda leader to directly influence or organize the spiralling violence across Syria may be limited. But the Aleppo bombings, like those in Damascus in late December and early January, bore the hallmarks of operations carried out in Iraq by the al-Qaeda-linked faction there.

U.S. officials told American reporters on the weekend they "would not be surprised" if it was al-Qaeda that carried out Friday's bombings as well as the earlier attacks in Damascus.

The message from Mr. al-Zawahiri, calling on Muslim fighters from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to go to Syria and join a war of jihad against Bashar al-Assad's "pernicious, cancerous regime," was the last thing the Syrian opposition wanted to hear.



Destroyed armoured vehicles and riot gear are shown on a government-organized tour in Aleppo. BASSEM TELLA/W/AP

"Al-Qaeda has no sympathizers among the protesters," said

Ammar Abdulhamid, a Syrian activist and fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington.

"The protesters' goal remains the establishment of a democratic civil state," he said, and "they all understand that al-Qaeda in-

volvement would ultimately undermine this goal."

The disparate opposition groups fighting to oust the powerful al-Assad forces have struggled to gain international support for their cause, in part by framing it as the aspiration of all Syrians regardless of their sectarian or religious bent. They worry that al-

Qaeda could undermine that goal as well, although some experts say their worry is misplaced.

"It may be the last thing they want to hear, but it's not likely to make any practical difference," said Barry Rubin, author of *The Truth About Syria*, referring to the call to arms from Mr. al-Zawahiri.

Syria, Page 9

to Bashar al-Assad's brutal repression



the Obama administration greased the skids for his departure. The U.S. President said publicly that it was time for him to step down. More importantly, a chorus of quiet calls from thousands of U.S. military officers who had trained and served with their Egyptian counterparts urged the army to back the pro-democracy uprising.

The Egyptian drama is still unfolding. But for now at least, the Obama administration has succeeded in safeguarding U.S. interests and retaining Egypt as an ally even as it dumped Mr. Mubarak.

Russia has similar leverage. For generations, Syrian fighter pilots have flown MiG warplanes, armoured-corps commanders have fought in Russian tanks and most of the senior military – including Hafez al-Assad, the current president's father who seized power in 1971

– honed their skills alongside Russians. At the United Nations, the General Assembly will this week consider a non-binding resolution condemning Syria. Unlike the Security Council, where any of the five permanent members – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States – can block a resolution, no nation holds a veto in the 193-nation General Assembly.

An overwhelming majority vote, moreover, would put intense pressure on Russia and the other major powers to intervene, or at least jointly condemn the Syrian brutality.

"What is happening in Syria leaves no doubt that it is not ethnic or sectarian war or urban warfare," said Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal. "It is a campaign of mass cleansing to punish the Syrian people and enforce the regime's authority."

Mr. al-Assad may not fancy exile in the Crimea but his chances of crushing the uprising are becoming increasingly remote. Nor do the alternatives imposed on other toppled rulers offer much appeal. Mr. Mubarak is on trial for his life in Cairo. Colonel Moammar Gadhafi was killed after being beaten and humiliated, Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh is in forced exile, being treated for burns after narrowly surviving a rocket-propelled grenade attack.

It is not yet clear that Moscow has decided that Mr. al-Assad must go. Unlike the very public calls made by Mr. Obama that doomed Mr. Mubarak, any Russian-orchestrated exit for the Syrian dictator would likely be more clandestine.

In the meantime, the risks of even greater catastrophe grow, including, perhaps, a full-blown civil war in strategically located

Syria, surrounded by Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. A Syrian civil war could quickly evolve into a grim sectarian conflict, pitting Kurds and Sunni Arabs against each other and Mr. al-Assad's ruling Alawite minority.

Moscow says it will consider the call by the 22-nation Arab League for a joint Arab-UN peacekeeping force but insists there must be "peace" first.

Any call for an international peacekeeping force seems unlikely to attract much support among Western nations, however.

The prospect of sending troops into another violence-racked Muslim nation – even if armed only with a peacekeeping mandate – will be unwelcome in most Western capitals where governments are busy trying to extricate their soldiers from Afghanistan.

Syrian representative Bashar Ja'afari raises an objection as the United Nations General Assembly discusses the situation in Syria on Monday. JASON DECKROW/AP



Faisal Alazem, who with a network of fellow activists is helping to raise awareness in any way he can – through rallies outside embassies, information booths on campuses and even public boycotts of business owners thought to be cozy with the al-Assad regime.

The challenge, Mr. Alazem said, is ensuring the money pouring in meets its target. Some Montreal-based fundraisers have set up a network of bank deposits accessible to activists in Syria.

For months, Osama Kadi, president of the Syrian Canadian Council, has lived in a state of dread as he tries to keep tabs on his family in Aleppo. While much of the violence has targeted the

bombings on opposition "terrorists," Mr. Kadi isn't so sure.

What weighs on him, however, is the memory of a close childhood friend – a doctor and physician who disappeared last April.

"He was interrogated on Wednesday; on Thursday, they told his family he will be back. ... On Friday, they found his body. His body was smashed, his eyes pulled out. It's something beyond, beyond, beyond any imagination," Mr. Kadi said.

"We cannot really wait forever. They need some type of help."

For the past few months, Ottawa has been vocal in its condemnation of the al-Assad government. But the federal government has resisted pressure

way in applying pressure on the Assad regime with some of the toughest sanctions in the world. Minister Baird raised this issue with his counterpart in Beijing and will continue to stand up for Canadian values like respect for human rights and respect for the rule of law.

And while Ottawa resident and Syrian National Council member Hisham Marwah appreciates the support, he's hoping for something a little more concrete.

"I don't want Harper to do something against his plan. Syria is Syria and Canada is Canada. But for us, as Syrian-Canadians, we really would like our Prime Minister to do what he can for us," Mr. Marwah said in a tele-

“
Syria is Syria and Canada is Canada. But for us, as Syrian-Canadians, we really would like our Prime Minister to do what he can for us.

Hisham Marwah
Ottawa resident and member of the Syrian National Council

National Post (Canada)

What does the West do about Syria?

For the last few issues, a note on the bottom of the Letters page has asked readers: "What do we do about Syria." In 75 words or less, here are the solutions presented by readers.

Launch a flotilla

Dispatch a flotilla with blowhards David Heap, Kevin Neish, Sandra Ruch, Ehab Latouf (and certain members of our many universities' "social justice" departments) to act as human shields and thus prove that they are motivated by a concern for human rights and not merely actors in a narcissistic anti-Israel pantomime that is high profile, low risk and plays neatly to an easily amused and singularly unsophisticated leftist constituency.

Michael Ross, Victoria.

To really get the world's attention the blame needs to be laid squarely on Israel's Knesset. Once done, the UN will speak with one voice and condemn Israel for fomenting strife in Syria for its own demonic purposes. This fail-safe option will only be objected to by Canada and everyone will be appeased. Then flotillas of aid can be sent to help the starving people of Palestine. Syria? Too dangerous to go there of course!

Jerome Henen, North Vancouver, B.C.

Let Syrians settle their own affairs

My local bar is owned by a Chinese couple from Newfoundland. On any given night there will be Muslim guys, Jamaican guys, Eastern Europeans, South Americans, Brits and Canucks having a beer and watching the hockey game. We support people fighting for freedom but don't want any more of our boys dying in far away places. Let the regional powers take care of it. We have better things to do.

David J. Baugha, Toronto.

I have not read that Syria is of strategic importance to the West. As it is a sovereign nation, I would suggest we let Syrians settle their own civil wars. The West might intervene if we could have a guarantee that overthrowing the current government would ensure the installation of a true democratic government. But we all know how the intervention in Egypt turned out.

Iran is the real problem. And the sooner we knock out its nuclear threat, the better. I can't imagine a worse case scenario than allowing the believer in the 12th Imam to proceed with his plans.

Norman Vinet, Port Coquitlam, B.C.

After the West's disastrous forays in Libya, Kosovo and Iraq, what should be done about Syria is clearer: Intervention in the form of extreme sanctions or military intervention will be anything but humanitarian and will roll international politics, perhaps to the breaking point. If humanitarian appeals and diplomacy don't work, we may be sure nothing else will either. In any case, could we be spared the inevitable illogical and hypocritical homilies like: "We did our part and it's up to them to stop killing each other."

Doris Wrench Eisler, St. Albert, Alta.

What the West must do is let the Syria crisis be solved by the Syrians. Besides Russia, China and Iran, the Assad regime has other helpful neighbours: Lebanon and Iraq. To spare more bloodshed, Turkey has offered sanctuary to the Assad family and retinue, but I doubt it will be a haven: Russia would be safer. Fortunately for the West, the Iranian President is now called on the carpet by his superiors. Interesting timing.

Olga Pitcairn, New Hope, Penn.

The outcome of any intervention in another country's affairs in recent times has ranged from disappointing to disastrous. So the short answer is, do absolutely nothing.

Alex Taylor, Toronto.

We should try to impede the flow of



A young Syrian refugee who fled the violence in Homs flashes the V for victory sign on Friday.

\$14-billion investment in Syria is not to be threatened by attacks similar to the Libyan campaign. To underscore the reality of Russian geopolitical hegemony, a nuclear naval flotilla led by the aircraft carrier Kuznetsov is en route to its refurbished, permanent Mediterranean base in the Syrian port city of Tartus.

Short of a military campaign that would initiate a Middle Eastern conflagration, the most the West can do, then, is to actively encourage Russia to use its considerable political, military and economic sway to end hostilities in its client state as quickly and peacefully as possible.

Mark S. Rash, Winnipeg.

Because the Russian Orthodox Church is a religious arm of the foreign policy of Russia, the 10,000 members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, that are in "church union" (canonicity) with the Russian Orthodox Church under the mantle of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Bartholomew), should petition their Metropolitan, Yuriy of Winnipeg, to write a letter of protest to Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, encouraging the two regimes (Syria, Russia) to stop the massacres.

Oleg Litvinov, Vancouver.

The West should stop buying Chinese products and postpone travel to China as long as the Chinese government continues to sell arms to the brutal Syrian regime, led by Assad. Russian products should not be boycotted for now because at least the Russians sent their foreign minister, Lavrov, to Damascus to try and mitigate the situation. But clearly, Russia should and could do more.

Andrew Johnston, Orillia, Ont.

Benevolent dictator wanted

Syria has no history of democracy, but one of Islamic acceptance of subjugation to Allah. That concept migrated to their politics. They want more freedom under a strong ruler, not democracy. The experiences of the Arab Spring in other Arab countries leads us to no other conclusion. The choice is not democracy but dictatorship or Islamism in the form of a Muslim Brotherhood or Taliban type of government. I would appoint a secular benevolent dictator.

Jonathan Usher, Toronto.

More diplomacy

The cold-blooded murders by the Syrian regime of its own citizens are enabled by support from brutal and repressive regimes such as Iran and its terrorist acolytes, Russia and China. Short of outright war, the West must do whatever is necessary to implement policies that will have significant negative diplomatic and economic effects not only for Syria but for all regimes which in anyway support terrorism and have no regard for human rights.

Harvey Kaplan, Thornhill, Ont.

The Syrian people, the people of the Middle East, the people of the entire world, are not the people of their own nations. Cultural, linguistic and social barriers separate us all. How can you even consider finding a solution when you don't understand the problem? They need to understand the people and the problem. Think, listen, understand and then talk. The path to liberty is not paved by bombs.

Harith Chaudhary, Vaughan, Ont.

Start praying

We have to start by asking ourselves a simple question: If two million peace-loving Christians in that Muslim country are against this uprising and intensely afraid of what it may produce, according to Der Spiegel, who then is exactly behind it? In fact I just got this urgent plea from a Syrian pastor: "The armed Islamist opposition in Syria has murdered two hundred Christians in the city of Homs, including entire families with young children. Please pray for us."

Reverend Christo Heisberg, Toronto.

weapons to Syria and little else. A bloody sectarian conflict like we saw in Iraq has already started. If we sent in troops they would get caught in it costing us blood and treasure. We could do little from the air and we don't have sufficient interests to justify the costs associated with ground troops. This time, they will have to hate us for not helping.

Bruce Haddad, Winnipeg.

In a word, "dialogue." No invasions, no rhetoric. President Assad has to be made to see that there is no option but to step down and introduce reforms. Diplomatic pressure and sanctions are good if it does not hurt those who it is trying to save. You have to treat Assad like the leader he is, respectfully. Point out how history has shown that the leader who initiates change will be remembered well, vis-à-vis De Klerk of South Africa.

Anthony Barter, Burlington, Ont.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Syria is undergoing a Muslim family feud. It behooves Canadians to mind their own business. The surrounding Muslim states are quite capable of coming to terms with the problem and solving it.

Goeff Lester, Edmonton.

It's time for tough love

Bomb Syrian troop barracks at night with cruise missiles when they are full (Nuremberg gives us the right, if not duty, to do so, when troops are attacking their civilians), all known arsenals and weapons sites (no arms, no way to attack civilians) and any known Assad assets. When being an unarmed Syrian warrior is life-threatening and Mr. Assad has nothing of value, see how many supporters hang around.

Roger Love, Victoria.

Syria is on the verge of a full-scale civil war, so there not much the West can do. Ironically, an early opportunity was missed. If the Arab League had the cajones to ask; Israel could have taken care of Syria's military capabilities, and rather quickly, from the air. This could have been done legally on "humanitarian grounds," shortly after provocative incursions by Syria began on their border in the early stages

of this so-called franchised Arab Spring in Syria.

David Honigsberg, Toronto.

Bribe Assad to go

Problem: Bashar is trapped like a rat; he must continue slaughtering the Syrians into submission. His ally Iran won't provide refuge; the fall of the Syrian leadership could provoke an uprising in Iran. Solution: Induce Turkey (preferably), to provide refuge for Bashar et al. Extend amnesty exclusively within Turkey. If necessary, fund luxurious lifestyles. Turkey, an ex-ally with strong leadership and military, should define and enforce strict limits for these murderous kleptocrats.

Kay Pancharatia, Toronto.

Provide weapons to Syrian rebels

We should be doing two things. One, provide the Syrians all kinds of tactical support to stop this butcher called Assad. Two, show some degree of moral integrity and leadership by shunning this gutless wooing of China. I am appalled at the timing of Stephen Harper's trip; he should have called it off.

Cyril Abraham, Whitby, Ont.

There is a definite opportunity here to break the Syria-Iran alliance, by supporting rebel factions hostile to Iran and friendly toward the West. It would isolate Iran and hamstring Hezbollah in Lebanon. A wonderful chance for the Arab league to diminish Iran's rapid growing and aggressive profile in the region. Interference by the West should only be an option if it serves our interests in that region. Lead from behind, but keep control who gets the support.

Hendrik Kilham, Edmonton.

Build up anti-Assad communications (radio, video, Internet) to keep up revolutionary morale inside of Syria. Undertake both non-lethal and small-arms shipments to the Free

Syrian Army inside of Syria and assist the build-up of logistical staging areas outside of Syria.

David Murrell, Fredericton.

The butchery and ruthlessness of the Syrian regime is horrific. The UN "responsibility to protect" is meaningless. First, enforce ultimate sanctions against Iran, Syria's key ally. Second, arm the opposition so they can defend a civilian population. Third, recognize the Syrian National Council. Fourth, follow the Serbian precedent if required. The NATO air campaign against Serb troops and positions in 1999, without security council approval, saved hundreds of thousands of Albanians from ethnic cleansing.

Martin Gladstone, Toronto.

UN holds the key

If the West truly wants to be taken seriously, it should withdraw all personnel and funding from the UN and all its committees and organizations. The organization, and its building, would be bereft and bankrupt. Yup, time to start over.

Lorne Paasland, Victoria.

There should be more concerted diplomatic pressure at the UN. Remove veto power of the Security Council. Increase sanctions and embargo of all military equipment into Syria. Declare safe zones in Syria. Send UN peacekeepers to enforce safe zones. Yet, there must not be military intervention. War must not be an option. Syria's own people will topple the regime. The world just needs to keep its citizens alive long enough for their destiny to manifest.

Hung Nguyen, Vancouver.

Ignore or scrap altogether the obsolete and moronic UN, let a coalition of the willing decide when intervening actions are necessary and justified. At the very least, eliminate veto power on UN Security Council and let a simple majority rule. Then, and only then, common sense will prevail and crises such as Syria is experiencing can be solved, peacefully or not.

Vittorino Dal Cengio, Surrey, B.C.

Ask Russia, or China, to fix it

Away from the UN Security Council cameras' glare, Russia has made it clear to the Western powers that its



The Wall Street Journal (USA)

Arab League Seeks U.N. Peace Force for Syria

BY MATT BRADLEY

CAIRO—The Arab League called on Arab states to step up financial and material aid to Syria's opposition and to cut diplomatic relations with the country, and also asked the United Nations to approve a joint U.N.-Arab peacekeeping force for the country.

The 22-member league said it would provide material support for opposition forces within the country but defied expectations that it might recognize the opposition Syrian National Council as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

The league's latest resolution lays bare the diminished options in the pan-Arab

body's diplomatic arsenal following the defeat by Russia and China of a U.N. Security Council resolution to force Mr. Assad to step aside. It also again places the onus for resolving the conflict on a Security Council that remains reluctant to intervene.

But as hopes for international action to halt the 11-month conflict fade, the opposition movement to Mr. Assad's regime has taken on the trappings of just the kind of armed uprising that Mr. Assad has long claimed to be fighting.

Defected Syrian soldiers have joined forces with armed civilian regime opponents in recent months to launch attacks on military installations

and government troops.

The regime has touted successive suicide bombings against military targets in the past two months as proof that the protesters are little more than Islamist terrorists. The Assad regime blamed the assassination of a top Syrian general on Saturday on an "armed terrorist group."

As if to affirm Mr. Assad's contention, Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri claimed common cause with the anti-Assad uprising in an Internet video late on Saturday.

"The resistance of our people in Syria is escalating and growing despite all the pains, sacrifices and blood," said Mr. Zawahiri, who called

Please turn to page 9

Arab League Backs Syria Activists, Seeks U.N. Peace Force

Continued from first page
Mr. Assad's government a "cancerous regime" in the eight-minute video.

Mr. Zawahiri's endorsement could further undermine Western and Arab-backed diplomacy calling on Mr. Assad to step aside.

China and Russia, who both have economic and strategic interests in Syria, have led efforts to block U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at punishing Mr. Assad and his regime with economic sanctions.

Both countries vetoed a Security Council resolution on Feb. 4 that called on Mr. Assad to step aside, and they are almost certain to block the Arab League's proposals for a joint U.N.-Arab League peacekeeping mission.

But even without the vetoes, the Arab League proposal is unlikely to materialize. U.N. peacekeeping missions are ill-equipped to intervene in armed conflicts and Mr. Assad is unlikely to accept foreign peacekeepers. The U.N. deploys such mis-

sions to maintain peace once the belligerent parties have already agreed to a ceasefire.

"It's a pretty desperate act," said Salman Shaikh, the director of the Brookings Doha Center, the Qatar office of the Washington-based Brookings Institution. "In the absence of a calm environment, I don't see how you can implement something like this and I don't see how there can be agreement anyway."

Syria's state news agency said the Assad regime rejected the Arab League call, which was taken without a Syrian representative present.

Faced with frustration in the Security Council, Arab governments on Sunday were turning to the U.N.'s General Assembly. Saudi Arabia's U.N. ambassador is drafting a resolution nearly identical to the one China and Russia have already rejected in the Security Council.

"The time has come for a decisive action to stop the bloodshed suffered by the Syrian people since the start of last year," Arab League



President Assad, left, gets the draft constitution from Mazhar al Anbari.

chief Nabil Elaraby told the Arab foreign ministers. "We must move quickly in all directions...to end or break the ongoing cycle of violence in Syria."

The joint mission proposed by the Arab League on Sunday will not

figure into the General Assembly resolution.

The league's proposal would replace a now-defunct Arab League observer team, whose presence on the ground since December has failed to halt Mr. Assad's brutal crackdown on regime opponents that has claimed more than 6,000 lives, according to the United Nations.

The league's secretary general accepted the resignation of the Sudanese general who led the observer mission on Sunday.

Meanwhile, in Washington, President Barack Obama's chief of staff told "Fox News Sunday" that Mr. Assad's government will ultimately collapse due to "serious financial pressure" the administration and its allies have brought on it, reported the Associated Press. "There is no question that this regime will come to an end," said Jacob Lew. "The only question is when."

—Joe Lauria at the United Nations contributed to this article.

The Wall Street Journal (USA)

Syria Peace Force Fails to Gain Traction

By JOE LAURIA

UNITED NATIONS—Britain and Russia dismissed the Arab League's call for a peacekeeping force in Syria, as the United Nations accused the Assad regime of escalating the crisis, with thousands dead and tens of thousands arrested, fleeing the country and displaced internally.

William Hague, the British foreign secretary, told reporters in South Africa, "I don't see the way forward in Syria as being Western boots on the ground in any form, including in any peacekeeping form. I think they would need to come from other countries rather than Western nations."

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, said he supported an unarmed, joint-observer mission but said hostilities must end before peacekeepers could be deployed.

On Sunday, the 22-member Arab League called on the U.N. to help it create a peacekeeping force and asked Arab states to boost support of the opposition while cutting dip-

lomatic ties to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

In an address to the General Assembly, Navi Pillay, the U.N.'s human rights chief, said her office could no longer count the dead beyond 5,400, but she was certain the death toll from the Assad regime's crackdown was far higher. Ms. Pillay said 25,000 Syrians have fled the country and more than 70,000 are internally displaced.

"Tens of thousands, including children, have been arrested, with more than 18,000 reportedly still arbitrarily held in detention," she said, renewing a call for Syria's leaders to be tried at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. "Thousands more are reported missing."

She singled out the government's continuing onslaught in Homs, where she said 300 people have been killed from shelling, at least three makeshift medical clinics have been hit, hospitals have been used as torture facilities, including against doctors, and ambulances

have been fired upon. Ms. Pillay said the injured have avoided public hospitals for fear of being tortured, seeking instead to be treated at underground facilities in farms, apartments and private homes.

"Due to heavy shelling, residents have been effectively trapped in areas under attack," Ms. Pillay said, causing a "deplorable" humanitarian situation in Homs. The U.N.'s human rights chief blamed the "complicity of the authorities at the highest level" for the brutality, including a "shoot-to-kill policy" against peaceful protesters.

Speaking immediately after Ms. Pillay, Bashar Ja'afari, the Syrian ambassador to the U.N., said Ms. Pillay ignored suicide bombings claimed by al Qaeda inside Syria, which he blamed on Qatar and Saudi Arabia and the toll international sanctions are having on the Syrian population.

"The high commissioner spoke of the tragic conditions the Syrian people are living in," Mr. Ja'afari said. "This is true. However she neglected

to say what are the genuine reasons...it is as if she had not heard of these sanctions."

He said armed groups are daily assassinating academics and intellectuals to undermine the government, sow chaos, and draw in the international community.

Mr. Ja'afari said five corpses of al Qaeda militants were found in Homs, one from the United Arab Emirates, one from Saudi Arabia and three from Libya.

"Doha, the capital of Qatar, is playing host to armed opposition groups that refuse national dialogue...and are fundamentally responsible for shedding Syrian blood," he said. "I call on all those who host and support armed terrorist groups to cease forthwith."

Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, a Qatari who is president of the General Assembly, rebuked Mr. Ja'afari from the rostrum. "In defense of freedom of speech a wide latitude is allowed to delegates, however a line must be drawn to keep the dignity and decorum of this body," he said.

The Washington Times (USA)



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Syrian flag and a sign in Arabic that reads "the Syrian Arab Republic" mark the empty chair of the Syrian representative during the Arab League Syria Group and foreign ministers meeting Sunday in Cairo. The group is seeking to halt the bloodshed in the rebellion against President Bashar Assad.

SYRIA

Arab League seeks U.N. monitor

By HAMZA HENDAWI

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO | The Arab League called Sunday for the U.N. Security Council to create a joint peacekeeping force for Syria, the latest effort by the regional group to end the 11-month-old crisis that has killed more than 5,000 people.

The new effort was spelled out in a resolution adopted by league foreign ministers meeting in Cairo. Syria immediately rejected the idea.

Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal conveyed the league's deep frustration with Syria by telling delegates at the start of the meeting that it was no longer appropriate for the 22-member group to stand by and watch the bloodshed in Syria.

"Until when will we remain spectators?" he said. "It is a disgrace for us as Muslims and Arabs to accept" the bloodshed in Syria, he said.

Syria's state news agency said the regime rejected the Arab League decisions, which were made without a Syrian represen-

Syria rejects call to put joint peacekeeping force on its soil

tative present.

Syrian Ambassador to the Arab League and to Egypt Ahmed Youssef was quoted as saying that Qatar and Saudi Arabia were "living in a state of hysteria after their last failure at the U.N. Security Council to call for outside interference in Syria's affairs and to impose sanctions on the Syrian people."

The Arab League has been at the forefront of regional efforts to end 11 months of bloodshed in Syria.

The group put forward a plan that President Bashar Assad agreed to in December, then sent in monitors to check whether the Syrian regime was complying. The league withdrew its observers last month, after Mr. Assad's regime flouted the terms of the agreement and the killing continued.

"The time has come for a decisive action to stop the blood-

shed suffered by the Syrian people since the start of last year," Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby told the Arab foreign ministers.

"We must move quickly in all directions to end or break the ongoing cycle of violence in Syria."

The league called for the U.N. Security Council to adopt its own resolution that provides for an immediate cease-fire in Syria, the protection of civilians and a humanitarian effort for victims of the violence. It demanded that the regime lift its siege on neighborhoods and villages and pull troops and heavy weapons back to their barracks.

It urged Syrian opposition groups to unite ahead of a Feb. 24 meeting in Tunisia of the Friends of Syria group, which includes the United States, its European allies and Arab nations working to end the uprising against Mr. Assad's authoritarian rule.

The creation of the group came

after Russia and China last week vetoed a draft U.N. Security Council resolution that would have pressured Mr. Assad to step down.

That resolution also would have demanded that he halt the crackdown on dissent and implement the Arab League peace plan that calls for him to hand over power to his vice president and allow creation of a unity government to clear the way for elections.

Mr. Elaraby said at the Cairo meeting that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov wrote him a letter Saturday that conveyed what he called a partial change in Moscow's stand on the Syrian crisis. He quoted Mr. Lavrov as saying Russia would agree to a joint U.N.-Arab League peacekeeping force.

The league also said it wants to provide the opposition groups with political and material support. It called for halting all diplomatic contacts with Syria and for referring officials deemed responsible for crimes against the Syrian people to international criminal tribunals.

Chicago Tribune (USA)

Arab League calls for U.N. to halt Syria violence

Al-Qaida leader: Muslims must support rebel effort

BY PATRICK J. MCDONNELL AND RIMA MARROUCH
Tribune Newspapers

BEIRUT — Arab leaders meeting Sunday in Cairo called for a renewed United Nations attempt to help halt violence in Syria, asking the Security Council to create a joint Arab-U.N. peacekeeping force to oversee implementation of a prospective cease-fire.

The Arab League request comes eight days after a league initiative that called for Syrian President Bashar Assad to cede power was rejected by Russia and China in the Security Council. Whether the latest Arab League measure would win their approval was unclear.

The Syrian government, a Russian ally, rejected the latest proposal as a "hostile act" and a blueprint for "foreign intervention in Syrian affairs," the official Syrian Arab News Agency reported.

The Arab League move came as Syrian rebels picked up an incendiary new supporter: al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who, in a video posted on the Internet, called on Mus-



Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby, left, and Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim, right, attend a meeting Sunday with Arab foreign ministers in Cairo.

KHALED DESOUKI/GETTY-APP PHOTO

The Arab League also vowed "political and financial support" for the Syrian opposition.

with Assad's government and vowed "political and financial support" for the Syrian opposition.

The Arab League resolution also called on the Security Council to pass a resolution calling for an end to the violence in Syria and demanding access for humanitarian groups, including the Red Cross. The United Nations is expected to consider the proposals this week.

Meanwhile, opposition activists said fighting continued in various parts of Syria, including the embattled central city of Homs, where five were reported killed, according to the Local Coordination Committees, an opposition network. Nationwide, the group said, 23 people were killed. There was no way to verify the casualty figures because media access is limited.

An amateur video posted online indicated that some residents of Homs, where entire neighborhoods have reportedly been under siege for more than a week, lined up for a bread-distribution truck. The city has been short on food, water and electricity as government forces attacked opposition strongholds, the opposition says.

Moscow has indicated its enthusiasm for an expanded deployment of unarmed observers in Syria. But on Sunday, the Arab League formally ended its observer mission. The Arab League also called on countries to cut diplomatic ties

mission of unarmed observers. There was no immediate reaction from Moscow, but it seemed improbable that Russia would embrace a call for the deployment of international peacekeepers, who would presumably be armed, though the Arab League plan does not specify that.

It was also unclear from the Arab League plan how a cease-fire would be imposed in an almost yearlong conflict involving a bloody government crackdown on protesters and an armed insurgency against security forces.

Moscow has indicated its enthusiasm for an expanded deployment of unarmed observers in Syria. But on Sunday, the Arab League formally ended its observer mission. The Arab League also called on countries to cut diplomatic ties

armed insurgency. The prospect of Islamic zealots seizing power terrifies many Syrians, especially minority groups such as Christians and members of Assad's Alawite sect, who fear sectarian bloodletting.

Sunday's Arab League request for international peacekeepers appeared much broader than what many observers had expected. Officials had previously indicated that Arab League leaders would seek a joint Arab League-U.N.

pmcdonnell@tribune.com

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Peres: Assad a 'murderer,' world can't stand idly by

Diplomatic officials: Jordan unlikely to return envoy to Israel anytime soon

• By HERB KEINON

President Bashar Assad is a "murderer" without a future, President Shimon Peres said on Monday in the harshest public statement yet by an Israeli leader about the situation in Syria.

Assad is killing men, women and children, and "it is forbidden for the citizens for the world to stand to the side," Peres said before a meeting with visiting Croatian President Ivo Josipovic.

Peres praised the Syrians taking to the streets daily against Assad and showing "courage under fire."

"I must say that the fact that the Arab League turned to the UN for the first time with a request to send military forces to save the citizens and children of Syria is very important in the struggle for freedom,

democracy and preserving the dignity of man and the Syrian people," he said.

Peres's comments came amid a perception among some in the Arab world that Israel – out of a preference for "the devil it knows" – is interested in seeing Assad remain in power. In an apparent effort to dispel this thinking, Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said in an Army Radio interview last week that any alternative to Assad would be better for Israel.

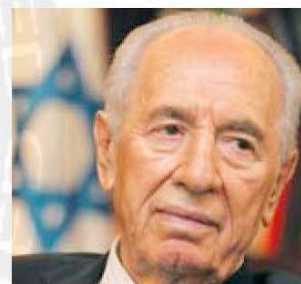
Israel, according to diplomatic sources, is walking a delicate balancing act, not wanting to be perceived as intervening in Syrian affairs, and concerned that anything it says will be turned against it. The officials said that the opposing forces in Syria are busy casting aspersions upon each other by saying that the other side either supports or is being aided by

Israel.

Peres also told his Croatian counterpart that it was very important for Israel to maintain its peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt during this period of regional instability.

One diplomatic official said that while Israel would like to see Jordan return its ambassador to Israel, this is unlikely now because of Amman's concern that this could complicate matters domestically for King Abdullah II.

The Jordanian Embassy in Tel Aviv has been without an ambassador for nearly two years, since Abdullah appointed Ali Al Ayed, the former envoy, as Jordan's minister of media affairs and communications in July 2010. Amman did not name a replacement. While Israel would like to see the return of an envoy, it understands the constraints



SHIMON PERES
(Marc Israel Sellem)

that Abdullah is working under, the official said.

Diplomatic officials have characterized the coordination between Amman and Jerusalem as "very close," something apparent in Jordan's decision last month to host low-level talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, the coordination is at the governmental level, with a high-degree of anti-normalization feeling toward Israel among large segments of the population, similar to what exists in Egypt.

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Les ulémas du Nord réclament la protection des habitants de Tripoli contre « l'agression armée »

Sécurité Un calme relatif prévaut dans la capitale du Nord ; les habitants hantés par le retour de la guerre civile...

Les derniers développements sécuritaires survenus à Tripoli ainsi que les événements en Syrie ont été au centre de la réunion que les ulémas de Tripoli et du Liban-Nord ont tenue hier à l'initiative du mufti du Nord, cheikh Malek Chaar.

Le communiqué publié à l'issue de la réunion stigmatise les incidents qui ont éclaté à la fin de la semaine écoulée à Tripoli. Les ulémas ont mis l'accent à ce propos sur la nécessité d'« imposer l'autorité de l'État et de protéger les citoyens de l'agression armée » dont ils sont la cible. Le communiqué invite à cet égard « toutes les parties politiques à lever la couverture (politique) dont pourraient bénéficier ceux qui portent atteinte à la sécurité et la stabilité ». « Les habitants de Tripoli, toutes communautés confondues, forment un seul et unique tissu social et ils devraient se comporter sur cette base », ajoute le communiqué.

Les ulémas ont rendu hommage dans ce contexte à « l'initiative rapide prise par le président de la République, le chef du gouvernement et le commandant de l'armée afin de rétablir le calme et la stabilité dans la ville ».

Le communiqué stigmatise en outre « la campagne menée contre le Premier ministre », soulignant que « le Conseil des ministres devrait pouvoir assumer ses responsabilités sur les plans social, sécuritaire et politique ». Rendant hommage « aux positions nationales du Premier ministre », le communiqué met l'accent sur l'importance de « respecter les prérogatives des trois présidences ».

La crise syrienne

En ce qui concerne la situation en Syrie, les ulémas du Nord ont vivement condamné

« la campagne sauvage menée contre le peuple syrien pacifique dans sa lutte pour sa liberté et sa dignité ». Le communiqué appuie notamment la prise de position adoptée par un rassemblement d'ulémas syriens qui ont proclamé leur soutien à la lutte du peuple syrien. Le communiqué invite sur ce plan tous les ulémas

Walid Bathich, originaire de Bab el-Tebbaneh et âgé de 20 ans, ont fait un instant craindre le pire.

Quant aux habitants, filmés par la chaîne de télévision MTV, ils ont fait état de dégâts matériels « importants », évoquant notamment leurs domiciles « privés d'électricité » et qu'ils ont dû « quitter

porte ironiquement le nom de « rue de la Syrie » – les nerfs sont à fleur de peau après des violences qui ont fait deux morts et une trentaine de blessés depuis vendredi.

« Je paye le prix d'une guerre qui n'est pas la mienne », affirme Zeinab Yaghi, une sunnite de Tripoli âgée de 55 ans. « Je ne m'y connais pas

choses commencent à prendre une tournure confessionnelle », assure Khaled el-Ali, un chauffeur de taxi alaouite de 35 ans. Chaque partie accuse l'autre de provocation. « Depuis le début de la crise en Syrie, on est traité comme des étrangers, ils nous provoquent jour et nuit en faisant des défilés antialaouites », souligne-t-il. « Les imams des mosquées haranguent les sunnites contre nous, nous recevons des menaces nuit et jour pour nous dire que nous allons être expulsés de Tripoli si le régime tombe en Syrie », s'indigne-t-il.

Mais pour un résident sunnite s'exprimant sous le couvert de l'anonymat, la réalité est bien différente. « Ils nous provoquent tout le temps en montrant des portraits de Bachar el-Assad », affirme-t-il, assurant n'être pas contre ses compatriotes « parce qu'ils sont alaouites ». « Ils ne sont pas seulement partisans du régime syrien, ils participent également à la répression avec les chabbiha en Syrie, où ils tuent femmes et enfants », dit-il. « Ils se détruisent eux-mêmes car ce régime va disparaître. »

Et c'est bien le spectre de la guerre qui vient hanter ces quartiers populaires de misère. « Depuis hier, mes enfants sont dans un état d'hystérie », affirme Adel Sbeih, un sunnite de 50 ans dont la femme et les trois enfants ont échappé « par miracle » à la mort lorsque deux roquettes ont dévasté leur appartement. « À chaque fois, nous quittons nos maisons en raison de ces règlements de comptes politiques », se lamente Mohamad Khaldiye, un alaouite de 40 ans. « Je me fiche de ce qui se passe en Syrie, je veux vivre en paix avec mes voisins, dans ma ville », dit-il.

(Source : rédaction et AFP)



L'armée s'est déployée en force ce week-end à Tripoli.

Photo Reuters

des communautés arabe et musulmane dans le monde à se solidariser avec les citoyens syriens.

En conclusion, les ulémas du Nord ont demandé à l'État d'assurer « la protection et le soutien nécessaire » aux réfugiés syriens qui ont trouvé refuge au Liban pour fuir la répression dans leur pays.

Calme relatif

En attendant, un calme relatif prévalait hier dans la capitale du Nord, en particulier dans les quartiers de Bab el-Tebbaneh et de Jabal Mohsen, où l'on notait un déploiement assez remarquable de la troupe et de ses véhicules. Seuls les tirs qui ont accompagné les funérailles du jeune

momentanément ».

Signalons que le ministre de la Défense Fayez Ghosn a reçu hier le coordinateur des comités populaires du Liban-Nord Fayçal Dernaika, qui a insisté sur la « nécessité » pour l'armée d'« assumer entièrement ses responsabilités » et de « faire face à toute tentative de déstabilisation de Tripoli ».

Le spectre

En attendant, beaucoup craignent que Tripoli ne serve d'arène à des règlements de comptes qui rappelleraient à tous les années noires de la guerre civile. Et aux abords de la rue séparant les sunnites de Bab el-Tebbaneh des alaouites de Jabal Mohsen – qui

en politique, mais les partisans de Damas au Liban veulent soulager le régime syrien, c'est pour cela qu'ils créent des problèmes ici », affirme-t-elle, après avoir été obligée de quitter avec ses cinq enfants sa maison touchée par les tirs.

Dans ces quartiers sensibles d'une ville à majorité sunnite, les violences sont fréquentes entre sunnites hostiles au régime syrien et alaouites loyaux à la famille Assad et au Hezbollah. Mais la révolte entamée il y a près de 11 mois contre le régime du président syrien a nettement ravivé les tensions.

« Récemment, on commence à craindre pour nos vies, d'autant plus que les

L'Orient-Le Jour (Liban / Lebanon)

Saoud el-Fayçal se déchaîne devant ses pairs contre le régime d'Assad

Révolte La Ligue demande une force ONU-Arabs et la rupture de « toute forme » de relations ; Bagdad dit oui, Beyrouth et Alger s'abstiennent ; Damas parle d'« hystérie » et accuse Riyad et Doha.

C'est un Saoud el-Fayçal très peu diplomate et d'une très grande fermeté qui s'est exprimé hier au cours de la réunion des ministres arabes des Affaires étrangères au Caire qui a décidé de recourir à l'ONU en ce qui concerne la Syrie.

« C'est comme si nous restons sourds aux voix des mères et des enfants qui demandent : "Qu'avez-vous fait après que le nombre de victimes ait dépassé les 6 000 et le nombre de blessés les dizaines de milliers ? Qu'avez-vous fait lorsque le nombre de personnes arrêtées a dépassé 70 000 ? Et qu'avez-vous fait pour notre cause après que des quartiers entiers aient été détruits à Hama et Homs, notamment Bab Amro, et que les enfants ont faim et froid ? », s'est demandé le chef de la diplomatie saoudienne. « La Syrie avait deux choix : la voie de la sagesse, ou la pente glissante et dangereuse de la violence, et avec le temps il est devenu clair que le régime a choisi la violence meurtrière afin de maintenir le pouvoir en place, menant une campagne d'abus et d'épuration contre son peuple », a-t-il asséné, se demandant si « le maintien de la sécurité implique la destruction de quartiers entiers. Est-ce que le bon sens permet de croire que des "terroristes", comme l'affirme le régime, possèdent de quoi bombarder villes et quartiers ? » s'est-il encore interrogé, estimant que seul un compromis politique pourrait ramener la Syrie « à la stabilité ».

Saoud el-Fayçal a également jugé que « des décisions fermes doivent être prises concernant le gouvernement syrien, et non pas des demi-mesures », ajoutant que la Ligue arabe va « ouvrir des canaux de communication avec l'opposition syrienne et lui fournir toutes les formes de soutien politique, humanitaire et matériel ». Il a conclu son allocution en assurant refuser « toute intervention militaire en Syrie, malgré le refus syrien de coopération avec la communauté internationale », et proposant de tenir une conférence sur la situation syrienne.

En attendant, la Ligue arabe a déclaré vouloir demander au Conseil de sécurité la formation d'une force conjointe ONU-Arabs, selon le communiqué final de la réunion. Dans le même temps, elle a mis « fin à la mission des observateurs de la Ligue arabe » en Syrie, demandant aux pays membres de rompre « toutes les formes de coopération diplomatique avec les représentants du régime syrien dans les États, les instances et les conférences internatio-

nales ». La Ligue a également rappelé qu'elle maintient ses sanctions économiques contre Damas, dont « l'arrêt des relations commerciales avec le régime à l'exception de celles qui touchent directement les citoyens syriens ». Les ministres ont enfin salué la proposition de la Tunisie d'organiser sur son sol « une conférence des amis de la Syrie » le 24 février. Précisons aussi que l'ambassadeur de Syrie en Arabie saoudite a quitté le royaume hier sur demande expresse des autorités wahabites, selon la chaîne el-Jazeera.

Signalons que ce texte a été voté à l'unanimité, dont l'Irak, avec l'abstention et les réserves notables du Liban et de l'Algérie.

L'énigme « nlet » de Damas

Sans surprise, Damas a « catégoriquement » refusé ces décisions, après avoir, avant même le début des réunions, accusé les pays arabes d'être à la solde de l'Occident. Youssef Ahmad, le délégué permanent de la Syrie à la Ligue arabe, a ainsi estimé que les décisions de l'organisation panarabe ne font que refléter « l'hystérie » de certains de ses pays. Il a également jugé « que les décisions de la Ligue arabe ont été phagocytées par le Qatar et l'Arabie saoudite : nous les refusons en gros et en détail », a-t-il dit.

Burhan Ghalioun, le chef du Conseil national syrien (CNS), principale coalition de l'opposition, a déclaré sur el-Jazeera voir dans ces décisions « les premiers pas » vers la chute du régime, les jugeant « plus durs que les précédentes » et estimant qu'elles allaient faire « regretter au régime syrien de ne pas avoir accepté les propositions préliminaires ». Porte-parole du CNS, Basma Kadmani a jugé que le « nlet » asséné par Damas aux décisions de la Ligue « prouve à quel point le régime s'est bunkerisé ». Quant au porte-parole du Conseil révolutionnaire de Homs, il a jugé que les résolutions de la Ligue « montrent pertinemment que les Arabes ont pris conscience de la barbarie du régime Assad », appelant aussi à la reconnaissance du CNS « comme seul représentant légal et légitime du peuple syrien ».

Dans ce contexte, le pape Benoît XVI a lancé hier un « appel pressant pour que soit mis fin à la violence et au sang versé » en Syrie et pour que les « autorités politiques privilégiées » de la Syrie « ouvrent la voie du dialogue et de la paix ».

Toujours sur le plan diplo-



Les victimes des attentats d'Alep vendredi et qui avaient fait au moins 28 morts et plus de 230 blessés ont été enterrées hier.

George Orfanou/Reuters

matique, le président tunisien Mohammed Moncef Marzouki a souhaité hier à Alger une solution politique en Syrie « à peu près comme celle qui a été trouvée au Yémen » pour permettre au président Bachar el-Assad de quitter le pays.

En attendant, ce dernier a reçu de la commission syrienne chargée d'élaborer la nouvelle Constitution le projet qui doit être soumis à référendum début mars, a indiqué l'agence officielle SANA.

Dabi jette l'éponge ; 39 tués hier

L'autre (mini-)événement de ce dimanche a été la démission du chef de la mission arabe en Syrie, le général soudanais Mohammed Ahmad Moustapha el-Dabi. Cette démission, pour des raisons encore inconnues, intervient deux semaines après la suspension par la Ligue de sa mission d'observation en Syrie.

Sur le terrain, au moins 39 personnes, en majorité des civils, ont été tuées hier, notamment dans la ville de Homs toujours pilonnée par les forces

du régime mais avec une moindre intensité que les jours précédents. Selon Rami Abdel Rahmane, le chef de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), « au moins 14 personnes ont été tuées à Homs, dont 13 à Bab Amro », l'un des quartiers les plus visés par l'assaut mené par le régime depuis le 4 février. « Il y a pénurie de pain dans certains quartiers », notamment ceux bombardés, a-t-il précisé.

Ailleurs dans le pays, une femme a été tuée par une roquette qui s'est abattue sur sa maison à Rastane, dans la province de Homs, et un enfant a été fauché par des tirs de snipers dans la ville Deraa alors qu'il participait aux funérailles d'une fillette tuée la veille, toujours selon l'OSDH. La chaîne el-Arabiya faisait également état de tirs intenses toujours à Deraa, ainsi que d'une forte explosion à Nawa, dans la même région. Dans la province de Hama, huit soldats de l'armée régulière ont été tués lors d'affrontements avec des groupes de militaires dissidents

près de la localité de Kalaat el-Madik, d'après la même source. A l'entrée nord de Rastane, des combats similaires ont éclaté avant que les déserteurs ne se replient.

Pendant ce temps, à Gaza, des dizaines de Palestiniens ont manifesté hier « en soutien à la révolution syrienne, et contre la répression du régime de Bachar el-Assad ». En Jordanie, les Frères musulmans ont appelé au « jihad » contre le régime Assad, estimant qu'il s'agissait d'un « devoir islamique », quelques heures après que le chef d'el-Qaèda, Ayman el-Zawahiri, eut demandé dans une vidéo aux musulmans de Turquie, de Jordanie et du Liban de soutenir la rébellion.

Ce qui a fait bondir le vice-ministre syrien des Affaires étrangères Fayçal Mekdad, qui a affirmé hier que la Syrie allait présenter des preuves du soutien de pays voisins, qu'il n'a pas nommés, aux « groupes terroristes » opérant dans le pays, a rapporté SANA.

(Sources : agences et rédaction)

P-O : pays arabes et Palestiniens pour une conférence de paix internationale

Les ministres arabes des Affaires étrangères ont soutenu hier l'idée d'une conférence de paix internationale sur le Proche-Orient proposée par les Palestiniens, lors de la réunion au Caire. La Ligue arabe a souligné dans un communiqué « l'importance (...) de la tenue d'une conférence internationale sur la

question palestinienne visant à mettre fin à l'occupation des territoires palestiniens et à parvenir à un règlement définitif et global du contentieux des frontières, de la sécurité, de Jérusalem et des réfugiés ».

L'organisation panarabe a également appelé ses membres à soutenir l'Autorité

palestinienne financièrement à hauteur de 100 millions de dollars par mois. Ces fonds sont nécessaires « en raison des pressions financières auxquelles font face la direction et la population palestiniennes », car « Israël ne transfère pas les fonds revenant à l'Autorité palestinienne », selon la Ligue.

L'ONU évoque des crimes contre l'humanité en Syrie

Révolte Damas ignore les demandes de la Ligue arabe ; au moins 37 tués hier.

La haut-commissaire de l'ONU aux Droits de l'homme Navij Pillay a estimé hier devant l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU que les forces syriennes avaient « vraisemblablement » commis des crimes contre l'humanité dans leur campagne de répression.

« Des informations indépendantes, crédibles et corroborées indiquent que ces exactions font partie d'une campagne large et systématique d'agression contre les civils », a-t-elle ajouté. Elle s'est aussi déclarée « particulièrement consternée » par les violences à Homs. Citant des « informations crédibles », elle a estimé que plus de 300 personnes sont mortes dans cette ville au cours de bombardements aveugles de zones résidentielles ces dix derniers jours.

Tout en réaffirmant que l'ONU était désormais incapable de fournir un bilan précis des victimes faute de pouvoir recueillir sur place des informations fiables, elle a estimé le nombre de morts à « beaucoup plus de 5 400 ». Le dernier bilan donné par l'ONU. « Des dizaines de milliers de personnes, dont des enfants, ont été arrêtés, dont plus de 18 000 sont toujours détenus arbitrairement », a encore indiqué Mme Pillay. Avec cette répression accrue, « le risque d'une crise humanitaire dans l'ensemble de la Syrie augmente » ainsi que la menace d'une guerre civile, a conclu la haut-commissaire.

La communication internationale le partageé
Déjà profondément divisée

sur la crise syrienne, la communauté internationale semble s'être encore plus sur la proposition d'une force de paix avancée hier par la Ligue arabe.

Hier, Damas a toutefois répondit que les demandes de la Ligue n'empêcheraient pas le gouvernement « d'assumer ses responsabilités » dans « le rétablissement de la sécurité et de la stabilité », a rapporté l'agence officielle SANA, laissant entendre que l'offensive allait se poursuivre dans les villes « rebelles ». « Les Arabes n'ont rien apporté de nouveau, à part leur appel à l'occupation de la Syrie par des troupes étrangères », notait encore le journal *al-Mizan*, proche du pouvoir.

L'idée d'une mission de paix ne fait toutefois pas l'unanimité : « fortement » soutenue par l'Union européenne, Londres veut en « discuter de manière urgente » avec la Ligue et ses partenaires internationaux, précisait cependant que les Occidentaux ne devaient pas y participer si elle devait avoir lieu, mais la France a lancé une mise en garde. « Nous pensons qu'aujourd'hui toute intervention à caractère militaire extérieure ne ferait qu'aggraver la situation », a ainsi affirmé le chef de la diplomatie française Alain Juppé. Moscou a dit étudier la proposition, tout en jugeant qu'un cessez-le-feu était nécessaire au préalable, et Pékin s'est gardé de se prononcer sur cette mission.

Toujours sur le plan diplomatique, le secrétaire général de la Ligue arabe Nabil el-Arabi a dit rencontrer aujourd'hui en



Le quartier de Bab Amro à Homs continuait d'être pilonné hier par les forces du régime. **Reza AP**

soldats, selon l'Observatoire. Mais ces violences ne découragent pas les manifestants à travers le pays. « La révolution continue tant qu'il y a un nourrisson vivant parmi nous »,

« Bachar, on a encore des comp-tes à régler, ton dernier jour est arrivé », scandaient de leur côté des dizaines de personnes dans la province de Idlib. (Sources : agences et rédaction)

Des militants syriens rejettent l'ingérence d'el-Qaëda dans leur révolte

La Commission générale de la révolution syrienne, l'une des composantes de l'opposition au régime de Bachar el-Assad, a rejeté hier le soutien du chef d'el-Qaëda à leur révolte, qu'ils ont qualifié « d'ingérence » sur leur page Facebook. Ayman el-Zawahiri avait manifesté son soutien à la contestation en Syrie dans un enregistrement vidéo mis en ligne sur des forums jihadistes, comme l'avait rapporté dimanche le centre américain de surveillance des sites islamistes, SITE. Dans la vidéo intitulée « En avant, les lions de Syrie », el-Zawahiri accuse le régime syrien de crimes contre ses citoyens et demande aux musulmans de Turquie, de Jordanie et du Liban de soutenir la rébellion, qualifiant le régime d'anti-islamiste.

The Daily Star (Liban / Lebanon)

China's support for Assad's repression is folly

In vetoing the United Nations Security Council's draft resolution on Syria, China claims that it has acted in the interests of the Syrian people, a position articulated in the People's Daily, the newspaper of the Communist Party's Central Committee, in a commentary appearing under the pen name Zhong Sheng. The characters for "Zhong Sheng" mean the sound of a bell, but they are phonetically the same as "the voice of China." The word play was no accident: The voice of China on this issue is as clear as a bell.

The commentary's main points are that it is wrong for the great powers to use the U.N. as an instrument of regime change in Syria, and it is better for the country's multifaceted and highly complex problems to be resolved by political means and internal negotiations. If China (and Russia) had not used their veto, a rerun of Libya would have occurred, with European powers, supported by the United States, going beyond the U.N. mandate and using local "rebels" to oust Syria's government.

What is important about China's move in the Security Council is that vital Chinese national interests were not at stake, at least not directly or immediately. This marks a departure from its past use of its U.N. veto. The commentary in the People's Daily also reflects that new sense of confidence. The Chinese government now wants the rest of the world to know why it has used its veto – and expects its decision to be respected.

The problem with China's position is that the U.N. resolution was aimed at ensuring precisely the outcome that Chinese leaders claim to seek. With Syrian government forces killing civilians indiscriminately and in increasing numbers under orders from President Bashar Assad, the resolution sought to restrain Assad from using force to "resolve" the country's political problems.

China insists that its goal is for the people of Syria to escape violence, conflict and the flames of war. However, its veto will do just the opposite. The world has already seen the use of even greater and more wanton force against civilians in the city of Homs following China's veto in the Security Council.

By using its veto power, the Chinese government has effectively ensured that atrocities in Syria will continue and increase in intensity. Contrary to what its leaders expect, China's standing among most people in the Middle East – and its ambition to project soft power globally – will be gravely damaged.

If China were genuinely eager to see Syria's people determine their own political future without Assad's forced removal, it should have pressed for a modification of the resolution, calling for a cease-fire and the start of a political process that worked toward a settlement and Assad's eventual departure from power. Would the United States, the United Kingdom, or France have vetoed such a resolution?

Why, then, did China force a showdown in the Security Council? China's rise, coming at a time of self-doubt and apparent decline in Europe and North America, has given its leaders confidence that they no longer need to tolerate the post-Cold War international order.

China's communist rulers have always resented the advent of "humanitarian intervention." After all, if the Western powers can impose regime change on authoritarian states on humanitarian grounds, why would this stop at China's borders? But, until now, there was little that China's leaders could do about it. Now, with the costs of the West's misad-

The Chinese government has ensured that the atrocities will continue and increase in intensity

ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan (and, to a lesser extent, in Libya) compounded by its major economies' weakness, China's leaders appear to see an opportunity to push back.

With Russia on its side, the Chinese government can take a stand without appearing isolated. And, while a long-term strategic alliance between Russia and China may not be in the offing, tactical cooperation to stop the West from imposing its values on the global community is likely to persist, so long as Vladimir Putin retains power in Russia.

A rising great power like China taking on a proactive global role is, in principle, a positive development. But the world will not be a better place if China's newfound assertiveness is focused – or, just as importantly, is perceived to be focused – almost exclusively on helping autocrats to stay in power through brutal repression of their citizens.

Steve Tsang is director of the China Policy Institute and a professor of contemporary Chinese studies at the University of Nottingham. THE DAILY STAR publishes this commentary in collaboration with Project Syndicate © (www.project-syndicate.org).

Today's Zaman (Turquie / Turkey)

TURKEY LAUDS ARAB LEAGUE CALL FOR UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN SYRIA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Arab League has been at the forefront of regional efforts to end President Bashar al-Assad violent crackdown on the opposition in Syria. Foreign ministers of Arab League member states in Cairo on Sunday called on the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution that provides an immediate ceasefire in Syria and protects civilians. "Turkey and the Arab League are working in close coordination to develop a regional initiative to solve the Syrian crisis," said Veysel Ayhan, an expert on the Middle East from the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) and an academic at Abant İzzet Baysal University. He said it was important for the Arab League to have Turkish support behind initiatives developed by the league.

The league also announced that an international conference will be hosted in Tunisia on Feb. 24 that will be attended by interested parties such as the US, the EU, Turkey and Arab League members. The conference will be the first meeting of the "Friends of Syria" group, created after a UN attempt to make Bashar al-Assad step down was blocked by Russia and China on Feb. 4 at the Security Council.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu conveyed his appreciation of the conference during a telephone conversation on Sunday with his Tunisian counterpart, Rafik Abdessalem, and reiterated his support for regional initiatives concerning the Syrian crisis.

The growing instability in its southern neighbor has made Turkey increasingly worried, and it will be forced at the coming meeting to navigate between "extreme caution" and "assertive proposals" for the Syria crisis, Oytun Orhan, a Syria expert at ORSAM told Today's Zaman. "Even sanctions can, despite Turkish hesitation, be put on the table given the current crisis."

Orhan ruled out the possibility that Turkey will discuss any formal plans to unilaterally intervene in Syria or impose a buffer zone to protect civilians and rebel forces, and also emphasized that Turkey will "not discuss arming rebel groups" in the near future. "Nobody knows what will happen if we start giving weapons to these people," he stated.

Nonetheless, he stated that Turkey will seek to gain support for providing the Syrian



PHOTO □ BFA

The foreign ministers of several Arab countries met on Sunday to discuss a proposal for a joint observer mission with the United Nations to Syria.

National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) arms or other military assistance.

Gökhan Back, director of the Middle East Research Center at Zirve University, is cautious, however, about the Arab League's call, saying that this should not be perceived as an active initiative by regional countries. "By calling on the UN to conduct a military operation, Arab League countries may have tried to shift responsibility over Syria to the UN," Back told Today's Zaman.

Back noted that a viable solution in Syria is impossible without persuading Russia to get on board with the Western and Gulf countries. "Calling a UN mission to play a role in Syria depends on the approval of the Security Council,

namely Russia," he warned, recalling that previous UN attempts had been blocked by Russian and Chinese vetoes at the Security Council.

Moscow is maintaining old economic, strategic and political ties with the Syrian regime, which has purchased significant amounts of arms from Russia. Syria has also provided Russia with a naval base at the port of Tartus, which offered Russia the opportunity to have more of a say in the eastern Mediterranean, particularly in relation to the US and its allies. Furthermore, the Assad-led Baathist regime in Syria has participated for decades in political alliances with Soviet Russian and Chinese regimes.

In the meantime, Davutoglu, currently on a diplomatic visit to the United States, has been

continuing intensive diplomatic meetings since last week to shore up support for a Turkish regional initiative for Syria.

Davutoglu on Sunday spoke on the phone with Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber bin Muhammad Al Thani, prime minister of Qatar, which holds the rotating presidency of the Arab League. Both reportedly exchanged their views on the crisis in Syria and discussed what steps need to be taken to solve the Syrian crisis. On the same day, Davutoglu also had talks with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in which he discussed the same subject. On Saturday, Davutoglu had a phone conversation with Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Araby as well.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

It's time for Al Assad to step aside

Those ordering the siege of Homs, shelling of Idlib and the torture of Syrian children need to be put on notice that they will be held to account

BY WILLIAM HAGUE

Britain's Foreign Secretary



The Syrian people's terrible ordeal shows no sign of ending. On February 4, Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution supported by all 13 other members of the council. They chose division when the international community should have shown unity.

But Syrian President Bashar Al Assad should not think he is off the hook. The UK will use every peaceful means possible to tighten the diplomatic and economic stranglehold on this vicious regime. In Parliament last week I set out our seven-point plan to step up the diplomatic pressure. The Arab League initiative remains the best chance for peace in Syria and it should be implemented. Arab foreign ministers will be meeting to consider the options. The UK is working with them to set up a coalition of nations to bring the widest possible political, economic and diplomatic weight to bear on Al Assad's regime.

The UK is working to ensure that later this month the EU will adopt new sanctions against Al Assad's regime to help choke off the regime's sources of revenue. At the same time the UK will not be deterred from seeking UN condemnation of the violence and backing for the Arab League plan, either through the UN General Assembly or the

Security Council. We will urge Russia and China to support this. In order to help people in Syria affected by the violence and those trying to develop a peaceful alternative to the regime, we have intensified our contact with members of the Syrian political opposition and we are calling for free and unimpeded access for humanitarian agencies to deliver life-saving support to the Syrian people.

Collecting evidence

Some 6,000 people have already been sacrificed to the regime's brutal determination to cling to power. Those ordering the siege of Homs, the shelling of Idlib and the torture of Syrian children need to be put on notice that their crimes will come to light, and that they should stop these actions now. Part of this must be to record the testimony and evidence of those who are fleeing Syria or suffering on the ground.

The UK will be sending British experts to the region in the coming days and weeks to help gather evidence and document human rights violations, working with NGOs already carrying out such work. We must help to ensure that atrocities in Syria are documented to an international evidential standard suitable for local and international courts. In conflicts of the past there

was no systematic collection of evidence against those who committed heinous crimes. This has made prosecutions harder to mount, and longer and more costly when they take place.

Often witnesses are required to testify many years after the event. Our work will be designed to support that process now. In the past few months, Britain has commissioned experts to travel to the Syrian refugee camps in the region to document the evidence of crimes committed by the Syrian regime. We will step up these efforts. We are also providing funding to help human rights organisations in the region gather evidence against the perpetrators of crimes. Already, the organisations we are working with have spoken to hundreds of Syrian activists, refugees and army defectors who have fled their homeland since the start of the uprising. They have collected hundreds of interviews, testimonies and eye-witness accounts.

This is only a start. I will be asking other nations to take similar action to ensure that ordinary Syrians have access to the justice they deserve. Foreign Office officials will work with our partners to set up a Syria-wide human rights abuse documentation hub to collate the mounting evidence

of crime that exists. The UK will help ensure that it is preserved and safeguarded, in the interests of justice and of the Syrian people.

I have also instructed our ambassadors in Lebanon and Turkey to report back to me on the situation on the border and among Syrian refugees, and to assess what other support Britain can offer. At the same time, we will return to the UN Human Rights Council to push for an extension of the mandate of the Syria Commission of Inquiry, with a new focus on ensuring accountability in Syria. The world must send a clear message to the Syrian regime that those who commit atrocities will be held to account, and those taking part in them now should urgently reconsider their actions.

There is a chance of saving Homs and its people from the fate endured by cities like Sarajevo in the 1990s. It requires Al Assad to step aside to permit a new political process. It also lies in the hands of individual Syrians to refuse to participate in the regime's campaign of terror and murder. So while we step up the diplomatic and economic pressure on the regime, we will also strive to ensure that the fate of its victims is not forgotten and the extent of its crimes cannot be hidden.

— The Telegraph Group Limited,
London 2012

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

A Syrian constitution that's coming 11 months too late

It will not solve the current problems but it will lay the groundwork for a democratic platform for upcoming polls

BY SAMI MOUBAYED
Special to Gulf News

Syria is getting a new constitution this week, 11 months after it was promised to angry demonstrators by officialdom. Such a demand, of course, is not new, having been sought by the Syrian opposition long before the uprising began in mid-March 2011. Previously, the Baathists had refused such a change, satisfied with the 1973 Charter that had been penned under former president Hafez Al Assad, because it gave them an absolute monopoly over power.

The main problem with that constitution was Article 8, which designated the Baath Party as "leader of state and society". There were 12 clauses related to a socialist state that were as bad as Article 8. Let's look at some of the pros and cons of Syria's new constitution, authored by a 29-member Constitutional Committee. To start with, that committee was appointed by the president last November, rather than elected by the people. All of Syria's constitutions since 1920 had been written by an elected assembly — except for this one, and that of 1973.

The most positive element of the 2012 Charter is that it omits any reference to Baathism. Article 8 is gone, and so is an article that ordains a president while being sworn into office to pledge to uphold the party's trinity of "unity, freedom and socialism". Articles that mention a socialist economy, education, army, culture and society are all gone.

Apart from that, however, the new constitution has several flaws that independents in the Constitutional Committee were unable to correct. Prime among them is Article 3, which specifies Islam as the religion of the president of the republic. In today's world, it is politically incorrect to prevent a Syrian Christian from running for the presidency. He/she would be unlikely to win, since Christians only make up 12 per cent of Syria's population, and it is unlikely that the majority of Muslim voters would vote for a Christian.

Red flags can also be raised about Article 85, which sets the presidential tenure



NINO JOSE HEREDIA/CGulf News

at seven years. Prior to Hafez's rise to power in 1970, the presidential tenure had been five years, renewable only once. The new constitution, very regrettably, keeps the tenure at seven years, although no other country has a long presidential tenure, not even France, on which the Syrian model was originally based.

The president cannot be above the law, yet this article has been retained in the 2012 Constitution. The Baath Party's nomination of a presidential candidate has been eliminated, and so have the famous plebiscites with only one person running for office, common under military rule from 1949 to 1954, and ever since 1970. What eventually saw the light was a clause that said, "Any presidential candi-

date needs nomination of 25 per cent of parliament [meaning 50 out of 250 MPs]." This meant that if the Baath Party secured 50 seats in parliament, it could still nominate a candidate for the presidency. No election would take place, it added, unless two or more candidates are running for presidential office.

Sticking points

Another stumbling block, which will arouse plenty of controversy when put to a national referendum, is Article 95 which gives the president the right to name a prime minister, rather than keeping this right vested exclusively in the chamber of deputies. It also gives him the right to dismiss a prime minister at

will, without resorting to parliament. A new prime minister would have to be named by parliament, rather than the president, and can only be removed by a vote of no-confidence by parliament.

And finally, among the sticking points is Article 111, which gives the president legislative powers "when parliament is not in session". Again, the president cannot stand in for the legislative branch, no matter what happens. He needs to be subordinate to the legislature and the judiciary, and not the other way round.

Like everything else in Syria, however, the changes are coming as too little, too late. With the horrific death toll in Homs, continued military operations in rural Damascus, a stagnating economy holding people by the throat, immense lay-offs in the private sector, crippling inflation, all topped with a recent double veto at the UN by China and Russia, nobody in Syria is even looking at a new constitution. The mood is very different now from what it was in March 2011, when a new constitution might have soothed public anger — if it had been followed by real political and economic changes. Today, however, angry demonstrators are demanding nothing less than regime change in Syria.

The new constitution will not solve the country's political, security and economic problems. It won't end the military operations, bring about cheaper heating fuel and, certainly, will not offer a life jacket for the Syrian regime. It does, however, lay the groundwork for a democratic platform that can be used to stage upcoming parliamentary elections — and possibly — early presidential ones as well, which can achieve "all of the above", including perhaps authoring a new constitution entirely, which would make this one, an interim charter.

Sami Moubayed is editor-in-chief of Forward Magazine in Damascus, Syria.

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The Khaleej Times (EAU / UEA)

Lebanon feels the heat as neighbouring Syria burns

Tempers explode after sectarian tension in Lebanese city

Zeina Karam

BEIRUT — The tensions between the two neighbourhoods were building for days in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. On one side live Sunnis who hate the Syrian regime. On the hill above are members of the Alawite sect, Bashar Assad's strongest backers.

Overnight, the tempers exploded. For hours, gunmen in the two districts traded automatic weapons fire and volleys of rocket-propelled grenades across the avenue that divides them, ironically named Syria Street.

By the time a shaky truce was reached on Saturday, two people were dead — one from each side — and 12 people wounded, half of them soldiers trying to stop the clashes.

The fighting underscored how the bloodshed in Syria, where Assad's regime is cracking down on an 11-month-old uprising against his rule, is enflaming emotions in its tiny neighbour Lebanon. The already deep divisions between Lebanese

are being strained, and many fear Syria's chaos will bleed over across the border.

Lebanon is sharply split along sectarian lines, with 18 religious sects. But it also has a fragile political fault-line precisely over the issue of Syria.

There is an array of diehard pro-Syrian Lebanese parties and politicians, as well as support for the regime on the street level. There is an equally deep hatred of Assad among other Lebanese who fear Damascus is still calling the shots here. The two sides are the legacy of, and backlash against, Syria's virtual rule over Lebanon from 1976 to 2005 and its continued influence since.

Tempers between the two sides are high enough. But Syria opponents worry the regime may intentionally cause trouble.

"The Syrian regime holds a lot of cards in Lebanon, and the biggest fear is that as the Assad regime gets more desperate, it would decide to use them to create regional chaos," anti-Syrian politician Mustafa Al-loush said. Among those cards is Hezbollah, the Syrian and Iranian-backed Shiite militant group with an

arsenal of weapons more powerful than that of the Lebanese army. Already, any talk about Syria is potential cause for a fight.

On a political talk show on Al-Jazeera TV earlier this month, Lebanese writer and Syria supporter Joseph Abu Fadel flew into a rage over taunts from the other guest, a Syrian opposition member.

Abu Fadel leaped from his chair and changed around the table, fists clenched — and though the host got between them, he managed to land a slap on his rival's face.

An earlier show on Lebanese television turned into a brawl when Al-loush called Syria's president a liar. His rival guest, Faysal Shukur, the head of the Lebanese branch of Syria's ruling party, hurled a glass of water in his face.

Northern Lebanon, in particular, is a potential powder keg.

It has a strong Sunni population, sympathetic to its sectarian brethren who have been the backbone of the Syrian uprising. But it also has pockets of Alawites, the Shia offshoot that makes up the majority of the Syrian regime's leadership and

to which Assad himself belongs. The Friday-Saturday night clashes were between the mainly Sunni Bab Tabbaneh neighbourhood and the adjacent, Alawite-majority Jabal Mohsen, on a hill overlooking its rival.

Short bouts of gunfire or grenade-throwing between them has been going on for years because of the sectarian tensions. But the violence has become more frequent as Syria worsens. Sunnis in Bab Tabbaneh resent their Alawite neighbours' backing of Assad, while Jabal Mohsen residents accuse their rivals of giving aid to the uprising.

In Beirut last week, hundreds of Lebanese demonstrators faced off outside the Russian Embassy after Russia and China vetoed a Western- and Arab-backed resolution at the UN Security Council aimed at pressing Assad to step down. An army coroner separated the anti-Assad crowd from the president's supporters to prevent clashes.

"Bashar, we are your men!" supporters shouted unanimously. "Come on, Bashar, leave!" opponents chanted back. — AP

The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Abdullah upbeat on finding solution to Syrian impasse

Russia studying Arab League new initiative for Syria: Lavrov

MOSCOW — UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan expressed hope on Monday to reach a political and diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis and said that this could be achieved only through a unified voice and full-fledged international cooperation and concerted effort.

He said that the decisions taken by the Council of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on the situation in Syria took a lot of effort and came after substantial amount of time since the unfortunate events in Syria started.

“We are approaching the end of an year within one month from today” after they began, said Shaikh Abdullah.

Addressing a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov after their meeting today in Moscow, Shaikh Abdullah said: “Any victim who lost life in these events is an innocent victim without doubt. We condemn the killing of any person in Syria. But we see that there is a responsibility on any regime or government in any country to maintain stability”.

“There is also the responsibility to save those lives and protect their safety. Similarly, the UN Security Council also has a duty to maintain international peace and security”, stressed Shaikh Abdullah.

He also said that the Security Council does not listen clearly to the position of the Arab League, which is closer than any other party in feelings, geography and access to information on what is happening in Syria. Shaikh Abdullah stressed the need to stop the kill-



UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov during a meeting in Moscow on Monday. — AFP

ings in Syria, emphasising at the same time that a military solution is not what is needed as it is a wrong solution, and since the last eleven months people are dying without reaching any result.

Speaking at the Press conference Sergei Lavrov said: “We need wide inter-Syrian dialogue and co-operation to find a solution or decisions which will meet the interest of all Syrians and which will rule out in-

terference from outside”. “We have joint efforts to support the [Syrian] people and its aspiration and hopes for a better life, democratic development, joint effort for this aspiration to stop this bloodshed”, Lavrov said.

He said on that a ceasefire was needed in Syria before the United Nations could deploy UN-Arab peacekeepers to the violence-racked nation under a plan pro-

posed by Arab states. Lavrov said Russia was studying a new Arab League initiative for the body to form a joint peacekeeping force with the United Nations, adding that Moscow had questions about certain points.

“We are studying this initiative and expect our friends from the Arab states to provide us with a clarification of certain points,” Lavrov said. — Wam, AFP

The National (EAU / UAE)

Aleppo betrayed by attacks that are foreign to its nature

analysis
Charles Glass

Aleppo is a town of eminent consequence, and in all ages its fame has flown high. The kings who have sought its hand in marriage are many, and its place in our soul is dear.

— Ibn Jubayr, Arab-Andalusian traveller, June 1184

Last week's suicide bombings that killed at least 28 people in Aleppo are drawing Syria's second city into a conflict that it had struggled to avoid for the past year. President Bashar Al Assad blamed Al Qaeda terrorists, while the Syrian opposition accused the regime. American officials, despite Washington's hostility to Mr Al Assad and the recent closure of the US embassy in Damascus, told McClatchey Newspapers correspondent Jonathan Landay they thought Mr Al Assad was right.

Landay, one of the best reporters in a usually supine Washington press corps, reported on Friday: "The officials cited US intelligence reports on the incidents, which appear to verify Syrian President Bashar Assad's charges of Al Qaeda involvement in the 11-month uprising." Officials blamed Al Qaeda for the Aleppo explosions targeting security service buildings as well as bombings of government offices in Damascus in December and January.

As if on cue, Al Zawahiri popped up in a video recording on Sunday to declare his support for the Syrian rebellion with a call for each Muslim to help "his brothers in Syria with all that he can, with his life, money, opinion, as well as information". Despite the rejection by many opposition secularists of Al Zawahiri's moral and military support, Al Qaeda has inserted itself into the Syrian conflict. In Iraq, its targets rapidly turned from American occupation forces to Shiites, Kurds, secularists and democrats. Its suicide bombings hastened the flight of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds from once-mixed neighbourhoods into walled urban ghettos (or out of Iraq altogether). One can only fear for Syria's Christians, Alawites, Druze, Kurds and those Sunnis whose interpretation of Islam fails to meet Al Zawahiri's exacting standards.

No city in Syria is more mixed, more diverse, than Aleppo. Until now, Aleppo has stood for just about everything Al Qaeda of Iraq opposes. Toleration has been its hallmark since Ottoman times. It invited foreigners to trade within its walls in centuries when the Sunni patricians of Hama and Damascus would not so much as shake the hand of an infidel. When the Turks massacred Armenians in the First World War, Aleppo opened its doors. A flourishing Armenian community lives in Aleppo even now, alongside Arab Christians and Muslims. It is not uncommon for Christians to be

and few in Aleppo would choose to forfeit that in a conflagration like Lebanon's or Iraq's.

Aleppo is a trading entrepôt, once on the Silk Route, in the northern plain whose pistachio groves and cotton fields have formed the basis of its economic prosperity. Its citizens, in common with most other Syrians, have their criticisms of a regime that has been brutal and allowed corruption to flourish. But Aleppins I know cannot embrace either a past marked by the almost annual military putsches of the 1950s and 1960s or a future defined by religious bigots who will destroy the enlightened basis of their prosperity. Yet someone is bringing the fight to Aleppo, as well as in the past week to Tripoli in Lebanon. It will undoubtedly spread further and take many more lives as long as outside powers prefer stoking the fires to putting them out.

If, as his sources told Landay, Al Qaeda is seeking to exploit the turmoil in Syria, it is not alone. Russia, China and Iran have not asked Syrians what they want, any more than the United States, the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council have. Yet they have lined up with the opposing sides in a conflict that needs conciliation rather than confrontation. Outsiders are sending weapons to both sides, which can only escalate the killing. The western world demands that Mr Al Assad resign before negotiations begin, although that prejudices the outcome. The regime wants the opposition to disarm, although they

than taking hard-line positions on behalf of one side or the other, they would listen to Syrians. December's YouGov-Siraj poll for the Doha Debate indicated that 55 per cent of Syrians do not want Mr Al Assad to step down. Syrians appear to prefer negotiations leading to authentic elections in which they can determine their own fate. This may include their right to vote for (or against) Mr Al Assad and the Baath Party. Why can't the United States and Russia, the two most powerful backers of the opposing factions, sponsor a conference that both sides must attend?

One of the most authoritative historians of modern Syria, Patrick Seale, wrote recently: "There is a hint in the air of a revived cold war." Syria did not do well out of the last one, when the Soviet Union and the United States sponsored one violent coup after another. Today, Syria is becoming a battlefield for the US versus Russia, Israel versus Iran and Saudi Arabia versus the "Shiite Crescent" it envisages from Iran to Lebanon.

Aleppo until now had not changed since the English traveller William Eton described it in his 1789 *A Survey of the Turkish Empire*: "Aleppo (Haleb) is the best built city in the Turkish dominions, and the people are reputed the most polite." Their courtesy and hospitality, of which I have on many occasions been the happy recipient, may yet succumb to the violence that is engulfing Syria.

Charles Glass is the author of sev-

The National (EAU / UAE)

Turkey spy linked to abduction of Syrians

Two kidnapped and one said to be dead

Turkish court accuses group of kidnapping two high-profile refugees of the Syrian regime and returning them for a reward

Thomas Seibert
Foreign Correspondent

ISTANBUL // Five people, including a former member of Turkey's main intelligence service, have been detained for allegedly abducting a former Syrian military officer from a refugee camp in southern Turkey and sending him back to Syria, where he was reportedly executed last month.

A high criminal court in the southern Turkish city of Adana placed the former agent of the National Intelligence organisation (MIT) and four other suspects into custody on Sunday, a spokeswoman of the special prosecutor's office in Adana said by telephone yesterday.

Special prosecutors, tasked with investigating cases of terrorism and organised crime, were working on an indictment, which would be presented to the court, she said. If the court accepts the indictment, a date for a trial will be set.

The case is a potential embarrassment for the Turkish government, which has stated repeatedly that it is ready to welcome all Syrians who want to flee the Syrian president Bashar Al Assad's regime.

Citing the necessity to protect around 7,500 Syrians who have fled to Turkey, Ankara has restricted access to refugee camps set up to house the refugees. More than 6,000 people have died in Syria since last March as the Assad government tries to quell a popular uprising.

The former MIT agent, who was identified by the initials OS in Turkish news reports, is accused of abducting Colonel Hussein Harmush and Major Mustafa Kassum from a refugee camp in Hatay province, which borders Adana province, on August 29 last year.

Col Harmush gained prominence after he fled from Syria to Turkey in June and used media interviews to accuse the Assad regime of killing civilians.

Col Harmush also played a role in organizing anti-Assad troops. The colonel founded the Brigade of Free Officers, a group that later joined the Free Syrian Army (FSA), headed by Col Riyadh Al Asaad. The FSA has taken up arms against government troops in Syria.

News reports said the Syrian government put a bounty of \$100,000 (Dh 367,300) on Col

Harmush to remove Col Harmush from the camp, news reports said.

He later reportedly handed the Syrian colonel over to accomplices who brought the officer to Syria by boat.

Last September, Col Harmush's "confessions" were aired on Syrian national television, according to Agence-France Presse.

On January 30, the Syrian League for Human Rights, a non-governmental group, said that Col Harmush had been executed.

Turkey's *Hurriyet* newspaper reported that Maj Kassum was abducted together with Col Harmush and handed over to the Syrians as well. His fate is currently unknown.

OS was arrested by police after he returned from Syria on February 3, news reports said. A large amount of US dollars were found in the trunk of his car, the reports said. OS was fired by the MIT after police presented evidence, including records of wiretapped telephone conversations, showing OS's involvement in the abduction of intelligence officials, the reports said.

It remained unclear what triggered the investigation by the police and prosecutor's office in Adana against OS and the other suspects. Some Turkish news reports said Ibrahim Harmush, a brother of Col Harmush who had also fled to Turkey, wrote to Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, in September to tell him about the suspected abduction of his brother. Shortly afterwards, the prosecutor in Adana began with the probe, the reports said.

News of the former MIT agent's detention followed a standoff between the government and the judiciary over the role of the spy agency last week.

Prosecutors in Istanbul called in high-ranking MIT officials, including Hakan Fidan, the MIT chief, to be questioned over contacts between the intelligence service and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a rebel group fighting Ankara since 1984. According to news reports, MIT informers in the militant Kurdish scene are suspected of having committed crimes.

The government refused to have Mr Fidan and the other officials questioned despite arrest warrants being issued for some of them.

Last Saturday, one of the pros-

The Saudi Gazette (Arabie saoudite / Saudi Arabia)

‘BOYCOTT’

Campaigners call it a religious duty to shun products from Russia, China

By Omar Elmershed
Saudi Gazette

JEDDAH — Various groups in the Kingdom have intensified their campaign to boycott Russian and Chinese products after the two countries vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning President Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria.

Launched soon after King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, pronounced this week that the world confidence in the UN as a conflict-resolving institution was completely shaken, the campaign initiated by over 30 groups has gathered pace.

The groups leading the boycott campaign are composed of teachers, students, housewives and pro-

fessionals from almost all walks of life.

Five students and a mother, members of one of the groups, Sunday began a Jeddah-wide campaign to boycott Chinese and Russian products.

Sami Qudus, his sister Alia, and their mother Aysha Qurban, Hamdan Al-Osaimi, Fahad Al-Rougie and Abdul-Rahaman Al-Nafaie

told the Saudi Gazette that they have begun a school-to-school and an SMS campaign to gather support for a nationwide effort to boycott Chinese and Russian products.

Talking about the campaign, Aysha Qurban said: "For us this is no less important than the campaign we initiated against Danish products when a newspaper from

■ Continued on P3

that country published cartoons defaming Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). We are talking here about innocent blood being shed 24/7 for a year now (in Syria). This has to end! We are not politicians, we are Muslims.”

The group views its efforts as more than a civic duty. So far it has contacted more than 400 people and the response has been overwhelming. “In my school, when some girls found that some pencils they were using were made in China, they threw them in the trash bins. I placed five calls to distributors of school supplies telling them we are not buying from them if we find Chinese or Russian products in their stores. This is going to be massive...not only are we not buying Chinese products, we are boycotting the outlets (selling the products) as well.”

Al-Nafaie and Al-Rougie beat a different drum. “Chinese products are not the best quality-wise. During the last two years, the Saudi Standards, Metrology and Quality Organization (SASO) has warned against more than 15 Chinese products such as toys and cosmetics that are not safe. Barely a month goes by without an injury resulting from some kind of Chinese product. Our merchants are responsible for the low-quality stuff the Chinese dump into our markets,” said Al-Nafaie armed with a pile of leaflets concerning the safety of Chinese products issued by the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Recent data from the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (47th annual report; 1432H/2011) shows trade with China has reached about four billion Saudi riyals and more than half a billion riyals with Russia.

Meanwhile, Saudi oil sales to China surged above a million barrels a day last year, nearly doubling from the previous year. The Kingdom now accounts for a quarter of Chinese oil imports. Saudi Aramco recently inaugurated a huge refinery in the Fujian province, on the southeast coast of China, which is projected to receive 200,000 barrels a day of Saudi crude, and is looking at a second project in the northeast city of Qingdao.

Moscow Times (Russie / Russia)

Ryabkov: It's the West's Fault

REUTERS

Russia said Friday that the West is stoking the conflict in Syria by sending weapons to opponents of President Bashar Assad.

In an attempt to deflect criticism of Russia for blocking a UN Security Council resolution urging Assad to give up power, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Western states were stirring up trouble in Syria, where Assad has pursued a violent crackdown since March on protests against his 11-year rule.

“Western states inciting Syrian opposition to uncompromising actions, as well as those sending arms to them, giving them advice and direction, are participating in the process of fomenting the crisis,” Itar-Tass quoted Ryabkov as saying.

He did not specify which nations

were arming Syrian rebels.

On Feb. 5, Russia and China vetoed a Western-Arab draft UN resolution that called on Assad to quit. That drew U.S. and European criticism, which Russia dismissed as hysterical.

Ryabkov, speaking on a visit to Colombia, said Russia would take “drastic measures” if the West kept trying to intervene in Syria’s internal affairs through the Security Council.

“The UN council is not a tool for intervention in internal affairs and is not the agency to decide which government is to be next in one country or another,” Ryabkov said.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who is almost certain to win the presidential election in March, warned the West not to meddle in the affairs of Syria or those of Russia.

Russia to Keep Supporting Syria at UN

COMBINED REPORTS

Syrian forces bombarded Homs on Saturday in a campaign to crush a revolt against President Bashar Assad, whose ally Russia said it would not support an Arab peace plan circulating at the United Nations.

Activists said seven people were killed in the latest attacks in a weeklong government siege of Homs, which has been at the heart of the uprising that broke out 11 months ago.

The bloodshed followed Friday's violence, when bombings targeting security bases killed at least 28 people in Aleppo and rebel fighters battled troops in a Damascus suburb after dark.

Assad has ignored repeated international appeals, the latest from the European Union, to halt his crackdown.

"I condemn in the strongest terms these acts perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its own civilians," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said.

However, the world is deeply divided over how to end the conflict. A week ago, Russia and China vetoed a draft Security Council resolution sponsored by Western and Arab states that backed an Arab League call for Assad to step down.

With Syria in worsening turmoil, Saudi Arabia has circulated a new draft for the General Assembly similar to the earlier one.

But Deputy Foreign Minister Genady Gatilov said Saturday that Russia could not support a move at the General Assembly resting on "the same unbalanced draft resolution text."

Arab Gulf states, the United States, Europe and Turkey hope diplomacy can force Assad out and have ruled out military action of the kind that helped oust Libya's Moammar Gadhafi last year.



GUSTAU NACARIBO / REUTERS

Anti-Assad protesters in Spain carrying Russian flags with slogans "Russia is killing us" and "Putin murderer."

The General Assembly is due to discuss Syria on Monday and vote later in the week on the draft resolution, which "fully supports" an Arab League plan floated last month.

Syria is Russia's last remaining ally in the Middle East, and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Friday that his government will thwart any attempts by the West and major Arab powers to oust Assad by using a UN resolution.

"If our foreign partners don't understand that, we will have to use strong means again and again to call them back

to reality," he said, Iyar-Tass reported. On Friday, Russian lawmakers also supported shielding Assad's regime from international sanctions.

The State Duma unanimously passed a statement warning against foreign military intervention in Syria and accusing the West and Arab nations of planning regime change there.

Alexei Pushkov, head of the Duma's Committee on Foreign Affairs, said Russia strongly opposes what he called a military "operation to promote democracy."

Just before the Duma session began,

he said: "We are against using humanitarian reasons to change the regime."

The Duma's statement emphasized that the Security Council must not side with the opposition in Syria's internal conflict by demanding that Assad's regime step down.

The Arab League will meet in Cairo on Sunday to discuss the idea of a joint Arab-UN monitoring mission for Syria.

Ayham Kamel, a Eurasia Group analyst, said the previous Russian and Chinese vetoes showed that change in Syria is not imminent. (Reuters, AP)

China Daily

Dialogue key to solving unrest in Syria: FM

By CUI HAIPEI
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING—China urges and supports the Arab League to continue its political mediation efforts over the unrest in Syria, experts said.

Syria's stability is important for the peace and security of the Middle East, and China hopes the 22-nation league will play a positive and constructive role in peacefully and properly resolving the crisis, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said on Monday at a daily news briefing.

"China hopes all relevant parties can proceed from the overall situation of peace and stability in Syria and the Middle East, and keep the dialogue (going) to play a positive and constructive role in politically resolving the Syrian issue and easing the country's tension," Liu said in response to a ques-

tion about a request to establish a joint UN-Arab League peacekeeping force.

The league said on Sunday that it would open contact with Syria's opposition and offer full financial support. It also called for a joint UN-Arab League peacekeeping force to monitor the situation while ending its own observer mission.

The UN should provide constructive help based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the basic norms guiding international relations for the peaceful and proper resolution of the Syrian issue, Liu said.

Liu said UN actions should be conducive to easing tension, pushing political dialogue, resolving differences and maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, rather than complicating the issue.

Zhang Xiaodong, secretary-

general of the China Association for Middle-Eastern Studies, said the league's determination to oust Assad is very firm, and there is no going back since the league's watchdog group has made no essential progress and some gulf states have recalled their ambassadors to Syria.

The request to establish a joint UN-Arab League peacekeeping force also represents a global trend over the crisis, Zhang said.

"The most likely result is that the league carries out military operations with countries of similar purposes," he said. "These operations may not be dominated by the US... and the military task should be completed by European countries by establishing no-fly zones and carrying out bombings, since the league does not have the strength" to do it.

Zhang said the United States

is being very cautious and is in no hurry to launch a military strike because international pressure can still be used against Syria.

China cannot block the league if it uses force against Assad's rule, Zhang Xiaodong said. But the statement was just an excuse because the peacekeeping force, which would separate governmental forces and the opposition, might objectively protect Assad, and the US would not accept it.

Ye Hailin, a professor in international relations at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, agreed with Zhang, saying that the US strategically gains less than the league on the issue of toppling the Syrian regime.

It was also a difficult decision for the league to make because there have been differences in opinion among member states over the unrest in Syria, Ye said.

► Powers divided over Arab peacekeeping mission proposal

Syria determined to 'restore security'

By Hao Zhou

Syria vowed to "restore security" yesterday as the Arab League proposed its latest initiatives to end an 11-month-old uprising in the country.

Meeting in Cairo on Sunday, Arab League foreign ministers proposed a joint UN-Arab peacekeeping force for Syria and pledged to provide political and material aid to the opposition.

The Arab League's decision "again revealed the conspiratorial scheme initiated by some Gulf countries, who are allied with the Western countries, to internationalize Syria's domestic problem and bring in foreign interference," a senior diplomat at the Syrian embassy in Beijing told the Global Times.

An unnamed Syrian government offi-

cial told the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency that such a decision "will not dissuade the Syrian government from shouldering its responsibilities in protecting its citizens and restoring the security and stability of its people."

"Syria's stability is important for the peace and security of the Middle East," said Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin, the Xinhua News Agency reported yesterday.

"China hopes all relevant parties can proceed from the overall situation of peace and stability in Syria and the Middle East," Liu said. "And keep dialogue and communication open to play a positive and constructive role in pushing political resolution to the Syrian issue and ease the country's tension."

The EU said yesterday that it backed

the Arab League call for a UN peacekeeping mission in Syria to achieve "an immediate cessation of killings."

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who held a meeting with embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus a week ago, stressed yesterday a peacekeeping mission needs approval from the Syrian authority.

"The host country has to first approve a peacekeeping mission," Lavrov said.

"In other words, it is necessary to agree to something like a ceasefire, but the tragedy is that the armed groups that are confronting the forces of the regime are not subordinate to anyone and are not under control," Lavrov said.

"Russia is not stubbornly supporting the Assad regime, but a stable Syrian country," Aleksei Podcerob, a former

Russian diplomat and senior researcher at the Arab Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, told the Global Times. "We can't predict when or how a civil war breaks out in Syria, but it is certain that the consequences will be catastrophic."

"A foreign military intervention in Syria is already inevitable, then Russia's \$14 billion arms contracts with the Syrian regime will be at stake," said Vladimir Akhmedov, another researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences. "Moscow must realize that the Syrian National Council will play an important role in Syria's future authority, and we should start contact with them now," he told the Global Times.

Agencies contributed to this story