

Impossible accord entre opposition islamiste et séculière

REVUE DE PRESSE SYRIE #24

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La presse internationale consacre aujourd'hui peu d'espace à la Syrie. Cette baisse de tension laisse entrevoir un possible reflux des ambitions de l'OTAN dans le pays.

Au demeurant, la nouvelle principale est l'annulation de l'accord survenu au Caire entre les factions islamiste et séculière de l'opposition pro-occidentale, le Conseil national syrien (vitrine des Frères musulmans) et le Comité des Forces pour le changement démocratique. La presse affirme que cette désunion porte sur le recours à une intervention étrangère. Cependant des sources proches du Comité assurent que l'accord a été rejeté par le Conseil parce qu'il comprenait l'expression « Droits de l'homme » que les islamistes se refusent à employer.

- Le *Washington Times* révèle que, selon Mohammed Farouk Tayfour, leader des Frères musulmans syriens, le Guide suprême de la Révolution iranienne Ali Khamenei aurait envoyé en octobre trois émissaires négocier avec la Confrérie à Istanbul. Trois réunions auraient eu lieu en présence d'un négociateur turc indépendant du gouvernement. L'Iran aurait proposé de convaincre le président el-Assad de partager le pouvoir et d'accorder 4 importants portefeuilles ministériels en échange de leur soutien au régime. La Confrérie aurait refusé.
- Le *Jerusalem Post* rapporte que le président de l'Internationale libérale, Hans van Baalen, a longuement rencontré le Premier ministre israélien Benjamin Netanyahu pour le convaincre de nouer des liens avec les rebelles syriens.
- La presse philippine consacre de gros titres à la conférence de presse de son ministre des Affaires étrangères, Albert del Rosario. Malgré tous les efforts de son ministère, les 17 000 travailleurs philippins ayant émigré en Syrie refusent de rentrer à la maison. Le ministre évoque l'attrait des emplois à l'étranger en dépit de la situation sécuritaire.

Le Figaro (France)

La guerre est déclarée

DOMINIQUE EDDÉ Dans une famille syrienne, un neveu combat son oncle. Allégorie d'un Moyen-Orient débousolé et fratricide.

MOHAMMED AÏSSAOUI

CE N'EST pas un livre qu'à écrit Dominique Eddé, mais un film. Tout y est. Le Moyen-Orient compliqué sert de décor. Le scénario est digne du *Spy Game* de Tony Scott. Les dialogues sont au cordeau – fins, spirituels, avec une forte teneur géopolitique. On parle souvent le français, l'anglais, l'arabe – parfois en même temps... Et surtout, il y a cette forêt de personnages à la psychologie torturée comme la famille Jann.

Au fond, avec cette histoire, la romancière Dominique Eddé revient aux fondamentaux : la tragédie. D'abord, le rôle principal qui donne d'ailleurs le titre au roman : Kamal

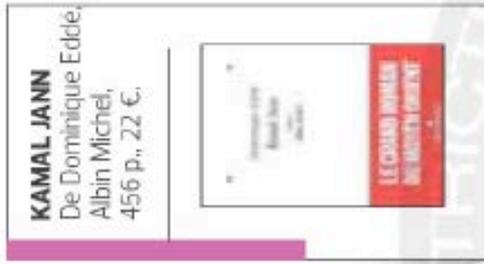
Jann. Il est syrien, mais c'est à Manhattan que sa carrière d'avocat d'affaires a pris son envol. Ce quadra dynamique possède tous les signes de la réussite : une vie bien remplie, un appartement à Spring Street, au dernier étage qui domine le fleuve. Son oncle Sayf Eddine Jann est le chef des services secrets syriens.

« **Le serpent sans visage** »

Cet homme a fait assassiner les parents de Kamal, l'enfant avait alors quinze ans, et se remémore encore la scène : « De retour de l'école, il découvrit, au milieu du salon, deux corps jetés l'un sur l'autre dans une mare de sang. » Son père et sa mère. Bien que Sayf Eddine Jann soit un homme cruel – on le surnomme « le serpent

sans visage » –, c'est à lui que Kamal doit sa réussite puisqu'il a financé toutes ses coûteuses études américaines. Un jour, Kamal est informé que son frère, qui, lui, a pris le mauvais chemin, prépare un attentat sur le sol français. C'est la CIA qui l'a informé et Kamal décide alors de rejoindre les services secrets occidentaux pour faire tomber le gouvernement syrien...

Passé la présentation de cette famille aux longues ramifications, on suit alors une incroyable histoire de manipulations, de trahisons. Une guerre fratricide. À un moment, l'un des convives d'un dîner – une superbe scène – dit « cette soirée est un mensonge » : c'est bien résumé. Dominique Eddé a réussi un grand film d'espionnage. ■



KAMAL JANN
De Dominique Eddé,
Albin Michel,
456 p., 22 €.

Valeurs actuelles (hebdomadaire / weekly) France

Avec les résistants syriens au Nord-Liban

Proche-Orient

Réfugiés dans les pays voisins, les opposants au régime d'Assad s'organisent. Ils profitent de la contrebande frontalière. Les trafics prolifèrent. Reportage dans la région de Tripoli.

Rendez-vous à Hamra dans trente minutes. Mohammed ne communique que par SMS ou par Skype. « C'est plus sûr, assure-t-il. Le téléphone, on a appris à s'en méfier, on ne sait jamais qui peut écouter... » Veste en jean, baskets et barbe de trois jours, il ressemble à n'importe quel étudiant libanais sauf qu'il est très méfiant. Il ne quitte pas sa casquette ni ses lunettes noires. Il change souvent d'adresse et de numéro de téléphone, et ne se déplace qu'en transport public. En général, il évite Hamra : « L'ambassade syrienne est à deux pas, le siège du Parti socialiste national syrien aussi. C'est le

hammad Malas, ont préféré quitter le Liban pour s'installer en Égypte ou en Turquie. Mohammed tient à rester à Beyrouth, à deux heures de route de Damas, qu'il a quitté il y a sept mois. Poète et journaliste sur le Web, il écrivait sous un pseudonyme contre la politique sécuritaire du régime, l'absence de liberté d'expression, la corruption rampante. « En Syrie, tu peux enfreindre n'importe quelle loi, du moment que tu as assez d'argent. Avec deux amis, on s'est mis en tête d'informer les gens, les journalistes. On a créé un compte Facebook. Les premiers jours, en mars, toute l'information venait de nous. »

Ils ont été très vite débusqués : « On a eu cette idée stupide de fuir à Beyrouth pour continuer à nourrir le flot d'informations, mais ici j'ai eu un choc. Les Libanais ont plus peur de la police syrienne que les Syriens eux-mêmes. » Mohammed tente de poursuivre le combat comme il peut : « J'ai commencé par aider à faire passer des choses en Syrie, portables, téléphones satellite, caméras, pour couvrir les manifestations. On passe aussi des médicaments ou des gens. »

Plusieurs centaines de dissidents syriens sont réfugiés à Beyrouth et à Tripoli, la deuxième ville du pays, en majorité sunnite, bastion de la Jamaa Islamiya, proche des Frères musulmans, et du Courant du futur de Saad Hariri, deux partis opposés au régime syrien. Place de la Lumière, en centre-ville de Tripoli, Mohammed se détend : « Ici, on respire mieux. On se sent plus en sécurité, plus libre de ses mouvements. »

Rendez-vous dans un appartement meublé qui sert de cache à d'autres cybermilitants. Abdelhakim, Khalil et Muhannad ont entre 24 et 28 ans. Ils vivent au milieu de la panoplie des révolutionnaires des printemps arabes : téléphones cellulaires, ordinateurs portables, casques pour Skype. Al-Jazira diffuse en boucle des vidéos amateur des manifestations en Syrie : « On est en

contact permanent avec une quinzaine de personnes dans la région de Homs. On communique avec des portables libanais et des téléphones Thuraya », explique Abdelhakim, originaire de la région de Homs, épicerie de la contestation, soumise à la répression des forces syriennes.

En mai, Abdelhakim y filmait les défilés pour poster ses vidéos sur YouTube. Il a été arrêté chez lui par l'armée et les chabiha, les milices du régime. Emprisonné à Homs puis à Damas, au quartier général des services secrets à Kafar Sousseh, il dit avoir été battu et torturé plusieurs fois à l'électricité. « Je me souviens d'une phrase qu'ils martelaient : "Ce sera Bachar al-Assad ou rien." » Libéré après vingt jours de détention, ce jeune commerçant dit avoir continué à militer pendant encore deux mois avant de s'enfuir au Liban. « Quatorze de mes amis ont été tués à Homs. »

L'aide décisive des ONG humanitaires sunnites

Tous de confession sunnite, ces jeunes activistes rejettent les accusations de sectarisme religieux portées par Damas. « Dans les manifestations, il y a aussi des chrétiens et des alaouites », assurent-ils. À l'image de l'opposition syrienne, ils restent divisés sur la marche à suivre pour renverser Assad. Pour Abdelhakim, la révolution réussira « grâce au peuple syrien » et « par les armes ». Khalil rêve d'une intervention de l'Otan, « comme en Libye ». Muhannad appelle à une zone d'interdiction de vol pour aider la résistance à s'organiser : « On est en contact avec des officiers de l'armée. Ils sont prêts à désertir si la no fly zone existe. »

En attendant, ils passent leurs journées devant leurs écrans, en contact permanent avec les comités locaux de coordination au pays. Ils survivent grâce à la charité des associations locales, dont Al-Bachaer, une ONG sunnite ouvertement opposée au régime syrien. Avec l'aide d'une vingtaine d'autres organisations islamiques, Al-Bachaer soutient les familles syriennes réfugiées à Tripoli, 2 549 personnes au

La lutte politique fait maintenant place à la guérilla, facilitée par les trafics d'armes dans la région.

quartier des moukhabarat, les membres des services secrets. »

Tous les opposants syriens réfugiés au Liban vivent dans l'angoisse des enlèvements. Une vingtaine d'entre eux en auraient été victimes. On parle aussi de « disparitions » inexplicables. Certains, comme les comédiens Ahmad et Mo-



dernier décompte, dit le responsable Wassim Bachir. Al-Bachaer offre des vêtements, des médicaments, de l'argent, voire des logements. « La question syrienne nous concerne, nous avons autant souffert de ce régime », confie Bachir.

C'est également Al-Bachaer qui s'occupe des blessés évacués clandestinement par la frontière libano-syrienne, à raison d'une à deux arrivées par jour. Certains, comme Abdelkader, sont de véritables miraculés. Soigné dans un hôpital privé de Tripoli, ce jeune homme de 25 ans a été blessé d'une balle à la tête lors d'une vague d'arrestations à Homs il y a un mois. Transporté en cachette, il a atteint la frontière au terme d'une fuite de cinq heures, à moitié dans le coma. Pris en charge par la Croix-Rouge, opéré en urgence, il n'a pas encore retrouvé l'usage complet de ses membres.

Interrogé sur ses activités à Homs, Abdelkader affirme qu'il était étudiant mais "recherché". Il n'en dit pas plus. Autour de son lit, ses proches l'écoutent. Parmi eux, un militant islamiste. Lorsqu'il quitte la chambre, le cousin du blessé s'enhardit : « On vit une révolution et tout le monde sait que c'est une dictature qui massacre les gens. Que fait l'Occident ? Ils attendent qu'Al-Qaïda et des terroristes prennent le



contrôle du pays ? Parce qu'on n'en veut pas. On a peur de subir le même sort que les autres, de voir notre révolution prise en otage par les extrémistes... » Ici comme ailleurs, dans les rangs de l'opposition expatriée, on semble redouter la montée en puissance du radicalisme religieux, comme la militarisation du conflit.

De Wadi Khaled, un village libanais niché dans les collines à cinq kilomètres de la Syrie, on voit briller les lumières de Homs. La bourgade vit d'agriculture et de contrebande. D'habitude, on passe de l'essence, du gazole et des produits alimentaires, moins chers du côté syrien. Depuis mars, les cargaisons ont changé. Des réfugiés et des blessés arrivent de Syrie, des médicaments, du matériel et des armes partent du Liban. Le prix des armes (kalachnikovs et fusils de chasse) a explosé. Poussés par l'appât du gain,

Manifestation de Libanais contre le régime syrien. Ci-contre, un groupe de déserteurs armés. Leur nombre est incertain mais la répression contre eux est brutale.

des trafiquants libanais vendent aux plus offrants. Damas a renforcé la frontière avec des mines et des troupes supplémentaires, mais la ligne est poreuse. Le trafic a ralenti mais il continue. Il relève d'initiatives individuelles, mais la crise se poursuit et la tentation de prendre les armes ne cesse de croître. Déjà, dans la région de Homs, la guerre civile a commencé. Arrivée à Wadi Khaled il y a dix jours, Imane décrit une cité en état de siège avec des barrages et des snipers partout : « Ils ont divisé Homs en deux zones – sunnites et alaouites –, avec des chars qui pointent leur canon vers la partie sunnite. »

Des ambulances traversent le village en trombe. Un rassemblement de réfugiés côté libanais, face au poste-frontière syrien, vient de dégénérer. Les manifestants dénonçaient les bombardements à Tall Kalakh. Les soldats ont ouvert le feu. Bilan : une Syrienne et deux Libanais blessés. À Wadi Khaled, ces derniers temps, on n'est plus tout à fait au Liban.

Du nord du Liban,
KARINE BARZEGAR

Der Standard (Allemagne / Germany)

Systemwechsel – ohne Militärintervention

Syrien: Zweideutige Hinweise aus den USA und Frankreich verwirren die Opposition

Tarafa Baghajati

Wer gegen sein Volk schießen lässt, verliert jede Legitimität. Alle Hoffnungen, die auf Syriens anfangs durchaus populären Präsidenten Bashar al-Assad lagen, sind zunichte. Wie aber ein möglichst friedlicher Macht- und Systemwechsel zu bewerkstelligen wäre – darüber rätselt die Welt.

In drei Punkten herrschte bis vor kurzem bei den revolutionären und oppositionellen Kräften Syriens Konsens. Erstens: Absage an eine Militärintervention. Zweitens: Gewaltfreiheit und Ablehnung des Waffengebrauchs seitens der Revolution. Drittens: Nein zur Konfessionalisierung beziehungsweise Ethnisierung des Konfliktes. Der Systemwechsel soll in gleichberechtigter Weise von allen Bevölkerungsgruppen getragen sein – Sunniten, Alawiten, Christen, Drusen, Kurden, Assyrern und anderen.

Gefährlich ist, dass zuletzt Stimmen aufkommen, die doch eine Außenintervention rechtfertigen, ja sogar verlangen. Auch die Gewaltlosigkeit gerät ins Wanken, insbesondere nachdem sich Deserteure, jetzt Teil der „Syrischen Freien Armee“, zu Angriffen auf die syrische Armee bekennen, die nicht unbedingt dem Schutz der Bevölkerung dienen.

Zudem gibt es Stimmen, die Hass zwischen Schiiten und Sunniten schüren und die primär nicht eine syrische, sondern eine antiiranische Agenda haben.

Eine Herausforderung besteht weiters darin, dass sich die sogenannte schweigende Mehrheit, insbesondere in Damaskus und Aleppo, noch nicht der Protestbewegung angeschlossen hat. Der Hauptgrund liegt darin, dass die Opposition unter fehlenden Führungsfiguren und Kommunikatoren leidet, die in Syrien ihre Wurzeln haben, international agieren können und gesellschaftspolitische Visionen samt gangbaren Wegen zu deren Verwirklichung formulieren.



Tarafa Baghajati: Russland soll sich einbringen.

Foto: privat

Ob der in Istanbul gegründete Nationalrat diese Lücke schließen kann, ist mehr als fraglich. Dazu kommt, dass das Regime noch immer über eine Mobilisierungskraft und nicht zu unterschätzende Anhängerschaft verfügt.

Das Wichtigste, was die Weltgemeinschaft zurzeit machen kann und muss, ist der syrischen Opposition klar und deutlich zu sagen, dass es einen Natoangriff auf Syrien nicht geben wird. Zweideutige Formulierungen aus den USA oder aus Frankreich bringen die syrischen Kräfte durcheinander. Schon jetzt reden einige Oppositionelle im Ausland so, als ob die

Nato nur noch auf ihren Befehl warten würde, um einzugreifen.

Hinfällig ist die Frage, ob das Regime überhaupt abdanken müsse. Heute geht es nur mehr um das Wie und Wann – und um die Sorge, wie viele Menschen noch ihr Leben lassen müssen.

Das Regime redet von einem notwendigen „nationalen Dialog“; die Opposition will nur über „Verhandlungen“ diskutieren. Wie immer man es nennen will: Gründliche Reformen bedeuten das Ende der Ära der Personen- und Familienmacht der Assads. Russland könnte hier international positiv wirken, wenn es die Einleitung einer Übergangsphase zum Beispiel unter Farouk al-Sharaa, dem jetzigen Vizepräsidenten, unterstützen würde.

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Gerfried Sperls

PHOENIX

Zeitschrift über religiöse Anekdota und ihre Folgen

GLOBALISIERTER PROTEST

Jetzt im Handel

Ein Volk beobachtet seine Beobachter

Die Beobachtermission spaltet die öffentliche Meinung in Syrien

Eine Farce? Ein seräisches Druckmittel? Eine ausländische Verschwörung? So vielfältig wie die Fragen, die sich die syrische Bevölkerung über die von der Arabischen Liga initiierte Beobachtermission stellt, so vielschichtig fallen die Antworten aus.

Hubertus Ecker

Angespannt klickt Nabil durch sein digitales Archiv. Nahezu alle Videos, die syrische Aktivisten bisher von der Beobachtermission filmten, sind darin aufgelistet. Nabil ist im lokalen Koordinationskomitee von Damaskus. «Schnen Sie hier», empört sich der 24-Jährige angesichts eines Videos vom 3. Januar. Ein mit orangefarbener Weste ausgewiesener Beobachter der Arabischen Liga filmt darin einen verummantelten Demonstranten in Daraa, der ihm die humanitäre Lage schildert. Hinter dem Beobachter steht ein Mann und filmt, was der Beobachter filmt. «Das ist ein Shabblh», ruft Nabil aus. «Die Schergen des Regimes beobachten die Inspektoren und registrieren dabei gleich noch die Protestierenden. Unsso bequemer können sie sich, kaum dass die Inspektoren weg sind, ihre Opfer vorknöpfen.»

Ruf nach Schutz

Zum Beweis öffnet Nabil das nächste Video: Aktivisten interviewen am 31. Dezember einen Verletzten in einem Ambulanzwagen in Deir Baulbe bei Homs. Dieser erklärt, Heckenschützen seien hinter einem Checkpoint aufgetaucht und hätten gefeuert, kurz nachdem die Inspektoren die friedliche Demonstration verlassen hätten. «Hohn, blanker Hohn», zischt Nabil. Das einzig Angemessene sei die Initiative von Ali Salem al-Dekhassi. Der Sprecher des Arabischen Parlamentes (ein Beratungskomitee der Arabischen Liga) verglich die Präsenz der Beobachter mit einem Deckmantel, den die Liga dem mordenden Regime biete, und forderte ihren Abzug. Auch Nabil wünscht diesen – und den Einzug internationaler Schutztruppen. «Sag mal, warum gibst du nicht endlich zu, dass es dir nur auf diese internationalen Truppen ankommt?»



Beobachter der Arabischen Liga inspizieren die Lage in der syrischen Stadt Daraa.

Moschee gebetet. Er kommt also nach Syrien, um hier zu beten?» Abu George blickt vielsagend. Im Kassa, wo er Obst verkauft, kaufen vorwiegend Christen westliche Mode ein. Viele von ihnen fürchten um ihr unbehelligtes Leben im Falle eines Umsturzes.

Hoffnung auf Widersprüche

Auch Abu George hält die Beobachtermission für sinnlos. Zwar gebe es aufrechte Inspektoren. Etwa den sudanesischen Generaloberst Mohammed Ahmad Mustafa ad-Dabi, der die Mission leitet. «Er wollte die Welt wissen lassen, dass sich unsere Staatssicherheit korrekt benimmt. Prompt fällt die Welt über ihn her. Also, wozu das Ganze?»

Abu George und Nabil trennen Welten. Nabil und Ziad indes allmählich auch. Der blasse Maschinenbau-Student Ziad hält am Sinn der Beobachtermission fest, gleichgültig, welche Unsinnigkeiten sie bisher hervorgebracht hat. Auch sei ja bisher nur ein Bruchteil der erwarteten 150 bis 200 Entsandten vor Ort. «22 kommen demnächst aus dem Irak, dessen Regierung mit dem Regime koalitiert. Und 25 aus den Staaten des Golfkooperationsrats, dessen Regierungen gegen das Regime opponieren.» Dass die Inspektoren beider Blöcke sich womöglich vor aller Welt widersprechen, sei kaum im Interesse der Arabischen Liga. Ebenso wenig könne sie es sich leisten, weiterhin den Eindruck zu vermitteln, sie werde von Damaskus gegängelt oder stünde gar in dessen Diensten. Also könne man doch mit einem druckvolleren Auftritt als dem bis dato gelieferten rechnen?

Für Ziad bedeutet dies eine grosse Chance. Er ist sich ganz sicher: Die Syrer können sich alleine ihres Tyrannen entledigen. Sie brauchten einzig etwas Ermüdung, damit die Lawine wachse. Seit die Inspektoren anwesend seien, sei dies geschehen. Am 2. Januar sei ein abendlicher Protestzug gar über den Shahbandar-Platz gezogen. «Wissen Sie, wo der liegt? Im Herzen der Hauptstadt Damaskus!», jubelt Ziad.

Nabil hebt seinem Freund längst nicht mehr zu. Auf seinem Computer treffen neue Videos ein. Unter anderem von Heckenschützen, die am 3. Januar in Hama eine Trauerfeier beschossen haben sollen.

Aus dem Hintergrund meldet sich plötzlich Ziad – Nabils Freund aus Kindheitstagen, der momentan allerdings wenig freundschaftlich klingt. «Vor der Ankunft der Beobachter hast du prophezeit, sie würden bald erschossen. Ergo benötige man internationalen Schutz für sie. Jetzt überwacht die Sicherheitspolizei sie – und wieder schreist du nach sofortigem internationalem Schutz!»

Nabil überhört die Spitzen. 390 Tote hätten Syriens lokale Koordinationskomitees seit der Ankunft der Beobachter am 23. Dezember verzeichnet, führt er in seiner Lageschilderung fort. Die Erklärung, welche die Union der lokalen Koordinationskomitees am 1. Januar veröffentlichte, sei also überfällig. Offiziell fordere man nun den Schutz der Zivilisten, die Errichtung von Pufferzonen sowie eine Flugverbotszone.

«Das libysche Szenario? Nur viel schlimmer?» Ziad braust auf. Libyen,

holt er aus, habe 6 Millionen Einwohner. Syrien 23 Millionen. In Libyen seien die Ortschaften mit Rebellen und diejenigen mit Nicht-Rebellen sauber voneinander getrennt gewesen. In Syrien hingegen lebten Gegner und Befürworter des Regimes nebeneinander auf dichtbesiedeltem Raum. «Wenn die Luftangriffe uns nicht scharenweise umbringen, tun wir es selbst – durch einen Bürgerkrieg. Das ist doch Wahnsinn», stöhnt Ziad.

Beide schweigen. Tatsächlich hatten Teile der syrischen Gesellschaft dem Regime die Treue – auch in Homs. Nabils Archiv weist auch hierfür Belege auf. Etwa jenes Video vom 28. Dezember, in dem eine Mutter zwei Mitglieder der Beobachterdelegation schildert, wie ihr Sohn von Terroristen getötet worden sei. Ein Verwandter schürt den Inspektoren zudem ein, keinesfalls den Berichten internationaler Medien

zu glauben – alles sei gefälscht, das Werk von Verschwörern. Von al-Kaida und den USA.

«Und von Saudiarabien», ergänzt Abu George. Der Obstverkäufer im Damaszener Viertel al-Kassa macht aus seiner Position kein Hehl – biegt sich sein Kiosk doch geradezu unter den Porträts des syrischen Staatspräsidenten. Seit je habe Saudiarabien Iran regional isolieren wollen, nun sehe es eine Chance in der Schwächung Syriens. «Haben Sie von diesem Khaled ar-Rabian, diesem saudischen Inspektor, gehört? Ohne Wissen der Staatssicherheit hat er sich in Damaszener Vororte eingeschlichen. Weshalb wohl? Er wollte dort bewaffnete Aufstände lancieren!», erklärt Abu George entschieden, senkt dann aber seine Stimme. «Wissen Sie, wie extrem konservativ die Bewohner in den Damaszener Vororten sind? Es heisst, der Saudi habe mit ihnen in der

El Mundo (Espagne / Spain)

> ORIENTE PRÓXIMO

Siria acusa a EEUU de instigar la violencia

DAMASCO.- El régimen sirio acusó ayer a Estados Unidos de interferir en la misión de observadores de la Liga Árabe desplegada en el país y de instigar la violencia. En un comunicado, el portavoz del Ministerio de Exteriores sirio, Yihad Maqdesi, afirmó que las recientes declaraciones de responsables estadounidenses sobre que Damasco no cumple con el protocolo de la Liga Árabe son «una injerencia en el trabajo» de la delegación árabe. Maqdesi aludió a las acusaciones efectuadas ayer por la portavoz del Departamento de Estado de EEUU, Victoria Nuland, sobre que el régimen sirio está «lejos de satisfacer los estándares a los que se comprometió», ya que la violencia por parte del Gobierno continúa. / EFE

La Vanguardia (Espagne / Spain)

Damasco acusa a EE.UU. de “injerencia flagrante” en la misión de la Liga Árabe

SIRIA ► El régimen sirio acusó ayer a EE.UU. de “injerencia flagrante” en la misión de observadores de la Liga Árabe, desplegada en el país. “Siria no tiene que rendir cuentas a EE.UU. sobre su el cumplimiento del protocolo árabe”, aseguró un portavoz del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, quien subrayó que esto son “intentos de instigar a la violencia”. Desde el pasado marzo, más de 5.000 personas han muerto por la represión del régimen sirio. / Agencias

The Washington Post (USA)

Activists accuse Syria of working to trick monitors

ARAB LEAGUE: MISSION WILL CONTINUE

Misleading tours, false testimonials alleged

BY BASSEM MROUE
AND ELIZABETH KENNEDY

BEIRUT — Activists accused the Syrian government Wednesday of misleading Arab League observers by taking them to areas loyal to the government, changing street signs to confuse them and sending supporters into rebellious neighborhoods to give false testimony.

The month-long observer mission, which started Dec. 27, offers a rare glimpse into a country where a government crackdown on a nine-month-old uprising has killed more than 5,000 people. But fears persist that loyalists of President Bashar al-Assad have corrupted the observer process beyond repair.

The Arab League had no immediate comment, but Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi denied the allegations.

"We don't interfere in the mission's job," Makdissi said, adding that government escorts are necessary to protect the observers.

Activists said government loyalists are painting military vehicles blue to make them look like police vehicles, allowing the government to claim it has pulled the army out of heavily populated areas in accordance with an Arab League plan.

The plan requires the government to remove security forces and heavy weapons from city streets, start talks with opposition leaders and free political prisoners. Syria agreed to it on Dec. 19, clearing the way for the

observers to enter.

But the Arab League has acknowledged that killings have continued. Activists put the death toll at more than 400 people since Dec. 21.

As the observers continued their work Wednesday, security forces and pro-government gunmen shot dead at least 12 people, nine of them in central Homs province, activist groups said.

The secretary general of the Arab League, Nabil Elaraby, told reporters in Cairo that the league will not cut short the observers' mission in Syria. An Arab diplomat had said Tuesday that the league would consider pulling out because of the continued killing.

"Our mission is important, and we made a commitment before the Syrian regime" to carry it out, Elaraby said.

Interviews with activists and eyewitnesses over the past week indicate clear signs of interference with the mission.

"The observers are going to areas known to be loyal to the regime," said Rami Abdulrahman, head of the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

A resident of Homs, one of the centers of opposition, said buses carrying dozens of government supporters arrived in his neighborhood of Khaldiyyeh last week shortly before the observers arrived. The crowds pretended they lived there and gave testimonials to the observers, the resident said.

— Associated Press

The Washington Times (USA)

Brotherhood refused offer from Iran to back Assad

Says deal meant posts in Syrian government

By **BEN BIRNBAUM**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ISTANBUL, TURKEY | A leader of Syria's Muslim Brotherhood says Iran has sought to coax the Islamist group into supporting President Bashar Assad in exchange for four high-ranking positions in the Syrian government.

Mohammed Farouk Tayfour, the top political leader in Syria's Muslim Brotherhood, told The Washington Times that Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sent three emissaries to Istanbul in late October to try to broker the deal.

"We refused to meet with them," said Mr. Tayfour, one of nine members of the Syrian National Council's executive committee, which is leading the opposition to the Assad regime. "We told them [through a Turkish mediator] that Iran has been taking sides against the Syrian people.

"When Iran takes the side of the Syrian people, then we are willing to meet with the envoys and talk with them," he said at the council's office in Istanbul on Tuesday. "Otherwise, there is no way we can meet with the Iranians when they are assisting in the killing of our people."

Mr. Tayfour said the Turkish mediator was a personal acquaintance, not a government official, and that Ankara had no involvement in the overture.

He said the mediator reached out to him three times in one week in an attempt to set up a face-to-face meeting with the emissaries, who were then staying at an Istanbul hotel.

The Muslim Brotherhood, one of the largest and most influential Islamist groups in the Middle East, is banned in Syria, which is engaged in a months-long deadly crackdown on dissent and has long enjoyed support from Iran's Shiite theocracy.

The United Nations has estimated that more than 5,000 Syrians have been killed in the crackdown since it began in March.

Syrian and Iranian officials did not reply to emails seeking comment.

Mr. Tayfour's revelation underscores the lengths to which the Iranian regime has gone to preserve its Arab ally's grip on power. The U.S. has accused Iran of supporting Mr. Assad's crackdown, though it has provided few specifics.

In the interview, Mr. Tayfour said Iran and its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, were sending snipers and other operatives into Syria to help the regime quell the nearly 10-month-old uprising.

The Arab League has called on the Assad regime to remove snipers as part of a peace plan that Syria has agreed to, and last week the league sent about 100 monitors to Syria to observe the regime's implementation of the plan.

Mr. Tayfour said the league's role in the process "has run out," noting that Syrian forces have continued killing citizens despite the presence of the monitors in the country.

"Our choice is to stop the killing of civilians, to protect civilians, and if there is no other choice than foreign military intervention like that which happened in Libya, then we have to accept it," he said.

The Syrian opposition leader said there is "almost a consensus" among his colleagues on seeking international military action, echoing comments of another executive board member.

Before the ink was dry

News of an agreement between the Syrian opposition inside and outside the country has been premature, with the opposition abroad pulling out of the deal

Following more than two months of negotiations among the Syrian opposition, including the Coordination Committee of the Forces for Democratic Change (CCFDC) that includes the majority of the opposition inside the country and the Syrian National Council (SNC) that represents the opposition abroad, an agreement sponsored by the Arab League was announced last Friday that was intended to unite the various groups' efforts to find a common position on the ongoing crisis in Syria, reports **Bassel Oudat**.

However, only hours after the agreement was signed disputes broke out within the SNC, with some members of the Council denouncing it as the personal initiative of SNC chairman Borhan Ghalioun and threatening to resign if it was not abrogated.

The deal, signed in Cairo, rejected any possible foreign military intervention in Syria that would undermine the sovereignty and independence of the country, adding that Arab intervention was not to be considered as "foreign".

The agreement also stressed the need to protect civilians by all legitimate means in Syria and highlighted the need to maintain and strengthen national unity, reject sectarianism, and condemn sectarian military action. It commended the positions of Syrian soldiers who had refused to obey the orders of the Al-Assad regime to kill peaceful demonstrators.

One of the key articles in the agreement stated the need for an Arab League-sponsored conference to set up a "joint committee for national action to coordinate the positions of the opposition and unite their political, human rights, media, diplomatic and relief activities, as well as respect decisions made by participating opposition parties."

However, dissenting members of the SNC said that the agreement did not include a clear enough statement condemning the Syrian regime and the crimes it had committed against the Syrian people. One opposition group, the Public Committee for the Syrian Revolution, said that the text of the agreement belittled the achievements of the Free Syrian Army, made up of defecting soldiers from the Syrian armed forces.

Dissenting members of the Council said that they could not support the agreement's rejection of foreign intervention, while the Kurdish bloc within the Council said that it could not support the agreement on political and procedural grounds.

After the objections within the Council were aired, chairman Borhan Ghalioun issued a statement saying that the agreement was nothing more than a "draft" that would be presented to the Council's secretariat before it was finalised.

The deal was intended as a framework for negotiations at the

Arab League-sponsored Syrian opposition conference that is expected to take place in Cairo if the first and second stages of the present Arab peace initiative are successful, he said.

However, Haitham Mamma, leader of the Coordination Committee that signed the agreement, said that the document was intended as the real agreement and not just a draft. It contained the foundations for democratic politics in Syria, the coming phase in the country's transition to democracy, and the fundamental constitutional principles that should be adopted in the country, he said.

"The Coordination Committee, which includes 15 Syrian opposition parties and national opposition figures, approved the agreement in its entirety," Hassan Abdel-Azim, general coordinator of the CCFDC, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"We confirm that there is agreement among the Committee's members regarding the deal. As for the opposition abroad, represented by the SNC, we feel that they have been taking up contradictory views. The Council should resolve these differences, because if the Arab League opposition conference takes place, it will be an opportunity for everyone to express their aspirations for the future of Syria."

For the time being, the opposition inside and outside the country does not see eye-to-eye on at least three main issues. First, the opposition abroad does not object to foreign intervention as a means of protecting civilians in Syria, and neither does it object to the imposition of no-fly zones and the establishment of safe zones in the country.

The opposition inside rejects any such intervention, while arguing that peaceful protest alone will be able to topple the regime.

Second, the Free Syria Army is viewed by the opposition abroad as a partner in deciding Syria's future, while the opposition inside has refused to give it a political role, saying that it fears the potential transfer of power from one military regime to another.

Third, the opposition inside Syria wants to create a unified body that will represent the whole opposition across the political spectrum, while the opposition abroad believes that such a body is not necessary and coordination is all that is required.

Observers say that decades of repression under the Al-Assad regime have caused the opposition to be fragmented and to act against its own best interests, with personal interests sometimes coming into play.

This has been the case despite demands from the Syrian population for the country's opposition to put differences aside and to close ranks in order to overthrow the present regime.

Jerusalem Post (Palestine occupée / Occupied Palestine)

Liberal International president tells PM to build ties with Syrian rebels Influential EU parliament member says Europe should back Israel

• by GIL HORDMAN

Israel should start building ties behind the scenes with Syrian opposition factions, Liberal International president Hans van Baalen told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week.

Van Baalen, a Dutch member of the European Parliament in Brussels, heads the London-based Liberal International (LI), a federation of dozens of liberal political parties and organizations around the world. He came to Israel to deliver an address in Tel Aviv this Thursday, sponsored by

the Israeli Liberal Group—a remnant of the old Liberal Party that merged with the Likud in 1973.

In a meeting with Netanyahu at the Knesset on Monday that lasted an hour and a half, van Baalen discussed what the West could do to better support Israel, including inten-

sifying military, intelligence, economic and technological cooperation. He told Netanyahu that he supported granting Israel observer status in NATO and an upgrade in relations with the EU.

In an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* on Tuesday, van Baalen said that

while Netanyahu was very critical of many of the changes taking place in the region, he was open to increasing contacts with members of parliament in the Arab world. Van Baalen said the EU, the Netherlands and LI,



HANS VAN BAALEN (OWASPEDIA)

See REBELS, Page 10

REBELS

Continued from Page 1

which has member parties in Egypt, could assist with this.

"I told the prime minister to develop relations with the opposition in the resistance council in Syria," he said. "There has to be some linkage. If you don't have any contacts, it will be difficult to come to an understanding."

He expressed optimism that whoever takes power after Bashar Assad in Syria will realize that it is in his country's interests to have diplomatic relations with Israel, or at least not to be in a state of war.

"If there's a new regime in Syria, they will have to have economic development, and if they are at war with Israel, they won't have this," he said.

The LI president describes himself as an admirer of Israel who has been to the country five times in the past 12 years. His bond with Israel was strengthened by relatives who made aliya after their Jewish father was murdered in the Holocaust.

"Like the Dutch built a country out of water, it always appealed to me that you [Israelis] built a country out of the desert after the Holocaust," he said. "It's not just a country. It's a Jewish state, and that's an ideal."

He described the EU parliament as one-third pro-Israel, one-third anti-Israel, and one-third undecided and uninformed. He said more needed to be done to reach out to the undecided third.

"The EU parliament has a majority against upgrading cooperation with Israel, and I'm fighting against it," he said. "Whatever your reason, from an economic point of view, there is not a reason not to upgrade the relationship. Preventing importing Israeli medicine to the EU is crazy, and it won't help a single Palestinian. Only a strong and vibrant Israel will be able to make peace." •

Damas accuse les États-Unis de vouloir internationaliser la crise syrienne

Révolte L'opposition reste divisée, alors que 23 personnes ont trouvé la mort hier.

Le régime du président Bachar el-Assad a accusé hier les États-Unis de s'ingérer dans la mission des observateurs arabes chargés de rendre compte de la situation en Syrie en proie depuis plus de neuf mois à une révolte populaire réprimée dans le sang.

« Les déclarations américaines (...) sont une ingérence flagrante dans la (mission) de la Ligue arabe, et une tentative injustifiée pour internationaliser » la crise, a affirmé le porte-parole du ministère syrien des Affaires étrangères Jihad Makdissi dans un communiqué. « La Syrie ne va pas rendre compte aux États-Unis du niveau de son engagement dans le protocole de la Ligue arabe », a répliqué M. Makdissi accusant Washington d'« artiser la violence », avant la présentation samedi à la Ligue arabe des résultats de la mission des observateurs, que le ministre français des Affaires étrangères Alain Juppé a mis en garde hier contre des « manipulations » du régime.

Les États-Unis avaient estimé mardi que la Syrie n'avait pas respecté ses engagements vis-à-vis de la Ligue arabe et qu'il était « largement temps » pour le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU d'agir pour « soutenir les aspirations légitimes des Syriens ». Notons que le sous-secrétaire d'État aux Affaires du Proche-Orient, Jeffrey Feltman, se trouvait hier au Caire pour des entretiens à la Ligue arabe sur le dossier

syrien, selon le département d'État.

Sur le plan politique, l'opposition peine à s'entendre pour constituer un front uni contre le régime du président Bachar el-Assad. Mardi, le Conseil national syrien (CNS), qui regroupe la majorité des courants de l'opposition, a ainsi décliné avoir conclu un accord avec le Comité national pour le changement démocratique (CNCD), un autre groupe de l'opposition. Ce de maier avait pourtant annoncé samedi dans un communiqué la signature d'un accord politique « définissant les principes de la lutte démocratique » en la période de transition » en Syrie.

Selon des analystes, les principaux points de désaccord entre ces deux formations portent sur une éventuelle intervention militaire étrangère en Syrie et sur le soutien à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) composée de militaires dissidents. Le CNS est une coalition des plus importants partis de l'opposition dont des partis idéalistes, notamment des membres des Frères musulmans, libéraux et nationalistes. Le CNCD, dirigé par Hassan Abdel Azim, regroupe des partis « nationalistes arabes », kurdés, socialistes et marxistes.

Une personnalité de l'opposition a donc déploré hier « les divisions » au sein de l'opposition. « Il faut du temps avant de voir l'oppo-

sition s'unir. Si elle l'était, le régime serait tombé l'été dernier », a-t-il affirmé sous le couvert de l'anonymat. « Nous sommes condamnés à nous entendre tôt ou tard car la situation dans le pays ne supporte point l'absence d'une stratégie et d'une vision communes de l'opposition syrienne », a indiqué pour sa part Haytham Mannan, responsable du CNCD à l'étranger et qui était coorganisateur de l'accord contesté.

Sur le terrain, au moins cinq civils ont été tués hier par les tirs des forces de sécurité et quatre autres blessés à Homs, haut lieu de la contestation contre le régime, où le corps de six personnes ont par ailleurs été remis à leurs proches, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Un civil aurait aussi été tué à Hama. Cependant, des militants ont affirmé à la chaîne télévisée al-Jazira que 23 personnes auraient trouvé la mort hier.

Couronnant les observateurs de la Ligue arabe, ces derniers se sont rendus hier dans ces deux villes dans le cadre de leur mission. Ils se trouvaient également à Dael et à Hama, près de Damas, selon la télévision publique. Des militants pro-démocratie les ont également appelés sur leur page Facebook à se rendre sur la place Sabaa Bahrat, au cœur de Damas, où ils avaient prévu de manifester contre le régime.

Mais ce sont des centaines



Cette photo reçue hier illustre le jeu du chat et de la souris entre les manifestants et les forces de sécurité syriennes sous le nez des observateurs arabes. Photo: Reuters/Mass/eur

de partisans du régime qui se sont rassemblés sur cette place, arborant des drapeaux syriens et scandant des slogans pro-Assad, selon plusieurs témoins et les médias locaux. « Toutes les rues conduisant à Sabaa Bahrat ont été fermées et les services de sécurité contrôlaient les voitures », selon les Comités locaux de coordination (LCC) qui organisent les manifestations sur le terrain. Cette manifestation « soutient les réformes

et rejette le terrorisme », a indiqué quant à elle la télévision publique. Les autorités, rappelson-le, imputent à des groupes « terroristes » les violences qui ensangantaient le pays.

De même, des véhicules blindés stationnent toujours dans les rues de plusieurs villes de Syrie, prêts à intervenir contre les manifestants, affirmait hier l'opposition syrienne, démentant tout retrait des forces de sécurité. Le secrétaire

(Sources : agences et rédaction)

League observers who see no evil

Playing down the violence in Syria will only damage the credibility of the Arab fact-finding mission internationally

By JOSEPH A. KECHICHIAN
Special to Gulf News

In his courageous column in *Al Hayat* last Monday, Dawood Al Shirian asserted that Damascus handpicked the Sudanese General Mohammad Mustafa Al Dabi to lead the Arab League's fact-finding mission in Syria.

Mishari Al Zaidi, for his part, wrote in *Al Sharq Al Awsat* that Sudan's President Omar Al Bashir nominated Al Dabi to League officials, as the latter secured Syrian approval that saw the former head of Sudan's military intelligence agency entrusted with the critical mission.

Beyond the League's poor choice, Al Dabi's ill-advised public pronouncements a few hours after his arrival in Syria — when he declared that the situation on the ground seemed "to be reassuring" while killings continued all around him — guaranteed additional international opprobrium.

Still, and irrespective of Al Dabi's hasty accommodation, some observers took their work seriously. One in particular reportedly accused Syrian authorities of posting snipers on rooftops and demanded they be removed although the good general quickly silenced him.

The incident occurred in Daraa, a historic city that was at the heart of the Arab Revolt nearly a 100 years ago and where the 2011 uprising started, when the

League monitor shouted into news cameras: "There are snipers; we have seen them with our own eyes. We ask the authorities to remove them immediately, if they don't remove them within 24 hours, there will be other measures."

Astonishingly, this eyewitness observations were played down, with Al Dabi maintaining that the official made "a hypothetical remark", though few asked him why the head of the mission was denigrating one of his lieutenants in public.

Even worse, why was Al Dabi, whose checked background in the amply documented Darfur massacres entrusted such an important task, and which aimed to verify and document alleged Syrian atrocities?

Cognisant that such dangerous developments may well affect the League's reputation, the speaker of the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union, Salim Al Diqbas from Kuwait, urged the League Secretary-General Nabeel Al Arabi, to "immediately pull out the Arab observers".

Although the 88-member Arab Parliament was no more than an advisory committee made up of four lawmakers from each of the League's 22 member

states, it represented public opinion with several outspoken parliamentarians frequently voicing minority views.

Al Diqbas may not be ideally placed to voice such criticisms, but in the spirit of democratisation, he asserted that Damascus' actions were "a clear violation of the Arab League protocol which was to protect the Syrian people".

Pictures seldom lie and the whole world is confronted with blatant and ugly images that illustrate the violence. Indeed, the numbers of Syrians murdered by secret service operatives, Shabih black-shirts, and soldiers sworn to protect the people, are growing on a daily basis. Criticising League observers so early in their tasks is probably unjustified, but Al Dabi set the tone when he spouted the kind of nonsense that comforted notorious criminals.

To be sure, the first 60 or so monitors were too few to see all that occurred. In fact, the month-long mission that kicked off on December 26, 2011, will have its full complement of 500 observers by mid-month.

Beyond the Al Dabi scandal, it is fair to ask why the League empowered con-

fused men like him to address the demands of a new generation which is no longer willing to live under dictatorship. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental reasons why heroic Arabs from Tunisia to Yemen, and especially in Syria, are determined to force political change, no matter the time and the sacrifices.

Although few expect the Syrian regime to change its behaviour, as it continues to claim that the hundreds of thousands demonstrating on a nightly basis are "terrorists" or members of the fictitious Al Qaida organisation, the League must not sugar coat or distort facts on the ground, no matter the consequences.

In 2012, it is vital for the League not to deceive itself, nor allow its monitors to be manipulated since the whole world is watching. If Arabs want to be taken seriously, and young people will see to it that the international community does, then they must rise to the occasion. Without Al Dabi and men of his ilk.

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

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PHOTO: HEREDIA/GETTY IMAGES

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Syrian opposition struggles for unity as crackdown continues

DEATH TOLL RISES DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF ARAB LEAGUE MONITORS IN COUNTRY

Damascus (AFP) Syria's opposition was in disarray yesterday, struggling to present a united front in the face of a protest crackdown whose death toll rose again despite the presence of Arab League monitors.

Western powers have repeatedly called on the Syrian opposition to put aside differences and join forces in their bid to depose President Bashar Al Assad and his autocratic regime after more than nine months of bloody violence.

Stepping up its involvement, the United States sent Jeffrey Feltman, the assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, to Cairo late on Tuesday for

REGIME ACCUSED

OBSERVERS BEING MISLED

Syrian activists are accusing President Bashar Al Assad's regime of misleading Arab League observers who are monitoring the government's compliance with a plan to end the country's bloodshed.

They say authorities are changing neighbourhood signs to confuse the monitors, taking them to areas loyal to the regime and painting army vehicles to look like those of the police — in order to claim the army has pulled out of flashpoint regions. The accusations came yesterday from Rami Abdul Rahman of the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Syrian activist Mustafa Osso.

—AP

main opposition factions — the Syrian National Council (SNC) and National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria (NCB) — agreed last week now appears to be in tatters.

Transitional period

The political agreement signed on Friday in Cairo had outlined a "transitional period" should Al Assad's regime be toppled by a pro-democracy uprising that erupted in March.

However, in a Facebook posting, the Syrian National Council said late on Tuesday the "document conflicts with the SNC's political programme and

with the demands of the Syrian revolution".

Widely regarded as the most inclusive of Syria's opposition alliances, with representation from both the Muslim Brotherhood and parties drawn from the Christian and Kurdish minorities, the SNC has been at odds with some activists over the extent of foreign intervention required to bring change.

There was still no response to the statement from the NCB, an umbrella group of Arab nationalists, socialists, independents and Marxists which also comprises Kurds and is staunchly opposed to any foreign military intervention.

Gulf News (EAU / UAE)

Iran demands release of its seven nationals

They were abducted last month in restive Syria

Tehran (AFP) Iran has demanded the release of seven of its nationals who were abducted last month in restive Syria, media reported yesterday.

"According to the last information we have, they are in good health and we are trying to obtain their release," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast was quoted as saying.

The seven are said to be engineers or technicians working on an electricity power plant in Jandar, close to the city of Homs, which has become one of the flashpoints in the Syrian uprising against the regime of President Bashar Al Assad.

An unknown group calling itself the "Movement Against the Expansion of Shiism in Syria" on Monday claimed responsibility for their abduction in a statement received by AFP in Nicosia.

The group said it had sent demands to the Iranian embassy in Damascus last week that have to be met for the hostages to be released.

It said it was opposed to Iran's support of the Syrian government and of the Hezbollah militia in neighbouring Lebanon.

Iran, a predominantly Shiite country, is the main ally of Syria, whose regime is controlled by the Shiite minority Alawite branch while most of the country is Sunni. Iranian officials have not spoken of the abductors.

INTERFERENCE ROLE OF US CRITICISED

Damascus yesterday accused Washington of interfering in the work of the Arab League, after a US official travelled to Cairo for talks with the bloc about a protest crackdown in Syria.

"The United States is one of the parties which is seeking to rekindle violence by its mobilisation and incitement [to violence]," foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Makdisi said in a statement.

"The US... statements are a gross interference in the work of the Arab League, and an unjustified attempt to internationalise" the issue of Syria, he said.

— AFP

The kidnapped Iranians' employer, the Iran Power Plant Projects Management Company, or Mapna, on Tuesday said the families and colleagues of the men were worried.

Its public relations director, Behnam Haghighi, called on "international bodies" to help with the men's release, according to the official news agency Irna.

Five of Mapna's employees were initially abducted. The other two were taken when they went to investigate their colleagues' disappearance.

The Khaleej Times (EAU / UAE)

Syria oppn seeks to stay united

Two of main opposition factions appear to be divided over extent of foreign intervention

DAMASCUS — Syria's opposition was in disarray on Wednesday, struggling to present a united front in the face of a protest crackdown whose death toll rose again despite the presence of Arab League monitors.

Western powers have repeatedly called for the Syrian opposition to put aside differences and join forces in their bid to oust President Bashar Al Assad and his autocratic regime after more than nine months of bloody violence.

Stepping up its involvement, the United States sent Jeffrey Feltman, the assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, to Cairo overnight for consultations with the Arab League about Syria.

Democracy activists have denounced the 22-member Arab bloc over the "unprofessional-

ism" of a team of peace observers whose presence in Syria since last week has failed to stem the bloodshed.

Making matters worse, a pact that two of Syria's main opposition factions — the Syrian National Council (SNC) and National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria (NCB) — agreed last week now appears to be in tatters.

The political agreement signed Friday in Cairo had outlined a "transitional period" should Assad's regime be toppled by a pro-democracy uprising that erupted in March.

However, in a posting on its Facebook page, the Syrian National Council said late Tuesday that the "document conflicts with the SNC's political programme and with the demands of the Syrian

390 people killed since observers began mission

forces and rejects the formation of a committee to lead the common work of the different opposition groups", he added in remarks published Tuesday in France's L'Humanite newspaper.

The disagreement within the opposition comes despite unrelenting violence in Syria, with an activist group reporting that re-

gime loyalists killed at least five civilians on Tuesday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the security forces killed three civilians in the central city of Homs, even as state television reported Arab League observers were in the Homs region.

The Arab mission has been mired in controversy since the first observers arrived on December 26, with activists accusing Syria's regime of keeping the monitors on a short leash as it presses on with its lethal crackdown on dissent.

Arab League chief Nabil Al Arabi admitted "there are still snipers and gunfire" even as he defended the mission, saying it had secured the release of political prisoners and the withdrawal of tanks from cities. The Local Co-

ordination Committees, which organise the protests, denounced the Arab League over the mission's failings.

"We want to tell Nabil Al Arabi that the lack of professionalism of the observers and non-compliance with their arrival times in specific places have left many people killed," they said in a statement.

It further claimed the observers were being hampered by the regime. "Soldiers wear police uniforms, drive repainted military vehicles and change the names of places, but this does not mean the army withdrew from cities and streets, or that the regime is applying the provisions of the Arab protocol." The LCC estimate at least 390 people have been killed since the observers began their mission. — AFP

Syria opposition fails to present united front

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inclusive of Syria's opposition alliances, with representation from both the Muslim Brotherhood and parties drawn from the Christian and Kurdish minorities, the SNC has been at odds with some activists over the extent of foreign intervention required to bring change.

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Most of OFWs won't leave Syria

By Tina G. Santos and Jerry E. Esplanada

MOST of the 17,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in war-torn Syria are refusing to come home despite the mounting violence because of the lack of job opportunities in the Philippines, according to Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario.

"Apparently, the OFWs feel safe" in the troubled Middle East country despite reports that more than 5,000 people have been killed by Syrian security forces during the nine-month uprising, Del Rosario, who has just returned from an official trip to Damascus, told a press conference yesterday.

The foreign secretary said he had "talked to about 25 leaders of the Filipino community [in Syria] and not a single one of them wanted to be repatriated."

Del Rosario flew to Syria last Saturday to personally oversee the operations to evacuate Filipino nationals there.

Crises alert level

Three weeks ago, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) raised the crisis alert level in Syria from 3 to 4 because of the escalating violence in the country. Crisis alert level 4 calls for the mandatory evacuation of distressed OFWs from a particular country at government expense.

However, majority of the OFWs in Syria have ignored the government offer. According to Del Rosario, the reason given was that there were no economic opportunities in the Philippines, the same one given by the thousands of OFWs in Libya who opted to remain in the North African nation dur-



FOREIGN SECRETARY Albert del Rosario explains that DFA's difficulty in repatriating OFWs from Syria as DFA's spokesperson Raul Hernandez looks on.

ing the eight-month-long uprising against the late Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi last year.

"Notwithstanding the fact that there's possible harm that may come to them, they choose to stay in Syria because of the economic opportunities offered there," Del Rosario said.

The OFWs "feel if they have good employers, these employers would protect them. They don't particularly feel threatened, none of them were anxious to be repatriated," he explained.

'Happy where they are'

"I think the people who opted to stay are happy where they are. The people who are coming home are generally unhappy with their employers," Del Rosario said.

Army sergeant cited for bravery

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

AN AWARD for bravery in combat awaits an Army sergeant who led 16 militiamen in repulsing a communist rebel attack on a military detachment in a far-flung area in Agusan del Norte shortly after the holiday truce ended.

Sgt. Sixto Dujayan was commander of the San Antonio Patrol Base in Barangay San Antonio in the municipality of Remedios T. Romualdez when it came under heavy attack by New People's Army (NPA) rebels at around 4:30 a.m. on Wednesday.

The ceasefire had just ended that midnight for both government troops and communist rebels. The government had declared an 18-day cease-fire while the NPA declared a six-day truce.

After a nearly five hours of gun battle, the estimated 50 to 60 insurgents were forced to withdraw, dragging with them their wounded or killed comrades, as reinforcements from the 3rd Special Forces Battalion arrived.

One killed rebel was left behind.

One militiaman identified as Christopher Rara was also killed. Two others were wounded

lantry in action and stability under pressure," he said.

Felix said the award would go beyond his level as division commander.

He said they have warned military detachments to brace for attacks after top NPA leader in Mindanao, Jorge Mordos (who uses the alias Ka Oris) vowed to stage more offensives despite the government's attempt to restart the peace negotiations.

"We should be prepared for any of their offensive moves. They have already made a statement and I think we should take it seriously," he said.

"I think Oris made a very categorical statement that they are going to hit some specific mining firms and we have strengthened the security posture in these areas," Felix added.

Rebel threats

He said some of these firms have asked the military to establish special civilian active auxiliaries (SCAA) detachments in their area since they have received threats from the communist rebels.

"Yes they did (get threats) openly from Ka Oris," Felix said.

Last Oct. 3, in one of the most

human waste above for the NPA

► Damascus accuses Washington of interfering in Arab affairs

Rebel leader threatens to escalate attacks

The commander of Syria's armed rebels has threatened to step up attacks on President Bashar al-Assad's forces, saying he was frustrated with the Arab League monitors' lack of progress in ending a government crackdown on protests.

"If we feel they (the monitors) are still not serious in a few days, or at most within a week, we will take a decision which will surprise the regime and the whole world," the head of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Colonel Riad al-Asaad, told Reuters in an interview.

The Arab League said on Monday its monitors were helping to stem bloodshed, 10 months into a popular uprising against Syria's ruling family, and asked for more time to do their job.

Asaad, whose FSA is an umbrella

group of armed factions, said he was waiting for the League's report on its first week before deciding whether to make a "transformative shift" that he said would mark a major escalation against the security forces.

A committee of Arab ministers will discuss the monitors' preliminary report on Saturday, Arab League sources said.

"Since they (the monitors) entered, we had many more martyrs," Asaad said, speaking by telephone from his safe haven in southern Turkey. "Is it in the Syrian people's interest to allow the massacre to continue?"

However, AFP reported yesterday that Syria's opposition was in disarray, struggling to present a united front in their bid to oust Assad.

A pact that two of Syria's main op-

position factions – the Syrian National Council (SNC) and National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria (NCB) – agreed last week now appears to be in tatters, AFP said.

The political agreement signed Friday in Cairo had outlined a "transitional period" should Assad's regime be toppled.

However, in a Facebook posting, the Syrian National Council said late Tuesday the "document conflicts with the SNC's political program and with the demands of the Syrian revolution."

Widely regarded as the most inclusive of Syria's opposition alliances, with representation from both the Muslim Brotherhood and parties drawn from the Christian and Kurdish minorities, the SNC has been at odds with some activists over the extent of foreign interven-

tion required to bring change.

There was still no response to the statement from the NCB, an umbrella group of Arab nationalists, socialists, independents and Marxists which also comprises Kurds and is staunchly opposed to any foreign military intervention.

The Syrian government yesterday accused of interfering in Arab League affairs, as a US envoy travelled to Cairo for talks with the bloc about ending the violence in Syria.

"The US is one of the parties which is seeking to rekindle violence by its mobilisation and incitement (to violence)," foreign ministry spokesman Jihad Maki said in a statement.

Reuters – AFP