

Syria: The point of no return

Monday 13 February 2012, by [UDRY Charles-André](#) (Date first published: 4 February 2012).

On February 1, 2012, Robert Fisk ended his article in the British daily newspaper "The Independent" as follows: "But there is one unasked question. Just suppose the regime [of Bashar al-Assad] did survive. Over what kind of Syria would it rule?" In other words, the revolt has reached a point of no return.

The recording, under all forms, by police and military forces, of tens of thousands of demonstrators and oppositionists — every week, every day — in the various towns and villages of the country will lead to supplementary deaths, tortures and imprisonments if the combat were to stop tomorrow. And if the regime of the Assad clique remains in place. The terrible human price of this popular struggle is in accordance with the odious and implacable nature of the regime, with which no negotiation is possible and acceptable for the anti-dictatorial fighters.

On February 4, 2012, Khaled al-Arabi, a member of the Arab Human Rights Organisation, said: "The Syrian army bombards with rockets and missiles. It is now perpetrating a bloodbath of a horror never seen until now in the city of Homs..." Radio France Internationale (RFI), said on the same date: "In Homs, nearly 300 people were killed on one day yesterday, Friday February 3, 2012, according to the Syrian National Council (SNC). Even if it is difficult to know with precision what is happening in this country closed to the press and subject to a strict control, the images broadcast by the Arab television chains and the eyewitness statements evoke a growing and blind violence. The witnesses describe a pitiless bombardment, a city transformed into a warzone. No person or neighbourhood has been spared and a veritable bloodbath has been described".

Two elements emerge from the various sources. First the revolt against the dictatorial regime has grown since November 2011. It has reached the most significant urban zones. Then a movement from the periphery towards the centre has emerged and strengthened in recent months. At the social level, the layers who are participating in the mobilisation against the dictatorship — the term revolution should be grasped in this sense — have also broadened. Only the existence of such a "social front" allows understanding of the maintenance and strengthening of an organisation which assures the successive days of mobilisation, the slogans which give their meaning to each "Friday" of struggle against the regime of the Assad clan; the size of the funerals, often placed under the guard of soldiers who have defected, the care administered to hundreds and hundreds of wounded who cannot be cared for in hospitals, since the so called security forces would kidnap, torture and kill them, the establishment of transport and communications networks in a war context. It is on this social basis that the activities of the local coordination committees rest. The people in revolt receive help from the Syrian Diaspora which disposes of material resources. But the fact that it does not depend on a "foreign" force has strengthened the feeling that it should count on its own forces. Which helps drive the multiple forms of mutual aid and self organisation?

The massacres, tortures of children, rapes, and murders have led, inevitably, to the appearance of forms of self defence. The defections multiply: from the regime's army, those who refuse to be the murderous arm of Assad; those of youths who reject conscription. These soldiers in revolt — known as the Free Syrian Army — dispose of light arms. In this sense, there is not a real militarisation of the anti-dictatorial struggle, even if direct confrontations, relatively limited, have happened and could spread following the massacre committed at Homs. These defections illustrate the failures of the

regime. More exactly, faced with the extension and length of the revolt, such a regime cannot avoid the processes of relative autonomisation of its various centres of power; all the more so when it is more than 40 years old. Analogous episodes of struggle in history show that – the more the mobilisation lasts and strengthens and does not fall back – the processes of decision taking become more difficult. This reflects the hesitations of the sectors which are not in the closed circle of the few “families” who monopolise power and all the corrupting privileges which flow from it. An erratic dynamic settles then in the management even of repressive and political operations. And the uncertainties on their economic future worry the layers of traders, retailers, importers and exporters, as well as the milieus linked to tourism. The sanctions increase dependence on Iran; which is not considered as an attractive solution by various fractions of the middle bourgeoisie.

Certainly, the Republican Guard and the Fourth Division of Maher el-Assad (Bashar’s brother) are the instruments of terror in the hands of the regime. But why should the regime commit so much to monitoring and threatening with the Christian and Alawite milieus which constituted (and constitute still) its “official” base? To take the confessional minorities hostage is part of the regime’s policy. It does not cease to brandish the threat of a vast settling of accounts — of which the “Sunni” would be the “future masters” — in the event of the fall of the regime and the Assad clan will do all it can — and already has done — so that confessional and community confrontations will happen. That is why it is important for the various forces in this titanic anti-dictatorial struggle to send a message: despite the suffering and humiliations endured, acts of indiscriminate vengeance are excluded from all the options of the forces struggling for the overthrow of the tyrant. It is one of the dimensions of an orientation seeking to broaden the social and political front, to neutralise certain sectors and to weaken the increasingly fragile base of the regime.

The cynicism of the so-called international community is without limits. The media speak constantly of the UN Security Council draft resolutions. Numerous governments cry crocodile tears about the “poor Syrian people” and denounce the “cruel despot” Assad, after having received him in great pomp or appreciated his role in the region, at least as a lesser evil.

The place of Assad’s Syria in the “regional arrangement” poses a different problem from that of Gaddafi’s Libya. A great part of the diplomatic coming and going hides the difficulty for the various regional and international “actors” — in the current context of socio-economic crisis and globalised disorder specific to a system of political hegemony whose flaws are visible — to define “roads of change” which do not end in a loss of control and centrifugal processes in such a strategic region.

The US is seemingly decided. Seemingly. In fact the irresolution on the written and rewritten resolutions to be presented to the Security Council does not worry them too much. To gain time and give “humanitarian” press conferences suits the Obama administration perfectly. The fall of Mubarak and the present situation in Egypt have modified the game constructed by the US and Israel, since 1979 at least. The relations between the Lebanon of Hezbollah and Israel are not tranquil, which made Assad’s Syria a more “secure” border than that of any new regime. The tensions with Iran are another factor in favour of sticking with the gangster you know — Assad — or better, a revised version of his political-security machine. Which requires time for manoeuvre. Because it should be carried out jointly with various governments which are new actors in this regional area. Qatar can certainly finance the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia and in Egypt; to now add Syria to the list is an extremely delicate political task, even with external supports.

All the more so since Turkey wants its share of the cake and is capable of obtaining it. The Russian regime wants to be sure of keeping its positions (port installations among others), but cannot play an offensive card.

The complex game of interference — which has formed a great part of the history of this region — is

today then carried out in a context where the shape of the old jigsaw puzzle is partially being erased, whereas the contours of the new are not yet defined. Hence the importance of contributing political support to the struggle of this people in revolt counting on its own forces as well as on solidarity; and also to oppose all foreign military intervention.

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P.S.

* Translation International Viewpoint <http://internationalviewpoint.org/>

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