

## Border heats up as Syria slides toward civil war

By Antoine Ghattas Saab

Attention is once again on the border between Lebanon and Syria. A letter from Syrian's United Nations envoy Bashar Jaafari addressed to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accuses Lebanon of harboring terrorists from Al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood who are working to undermine Special Envoy Kofi Annan's plan and are transporting arms overland from ships docked in Lebanese ports to Syria. The letter also says that the commander of the Free Syrian Army, Col. Riyad Asaad, has visited Lebanon in order to prepare a buffer zone on Lebanese territory. Security sources at Western embassies in Lebanon, citing information from political groups, said the situation in Syria could deteriorate in coming weeks, bringing the country closer to civil war. If this takes place, it could force an international intervention in order to create humanitarian safe zones, as well as to hit at the interests of the regime and its military positions.

The sources added that it was necessary to pay attention to the dangerous direction of recent incidents and to be on alert to prevent repercussions, especially as some Lebanese areas are sympathetic to different sides of the Syrian conflict.

This view overlaps with information from an Arab official who said Syria was drawing closer to a civil war and that foreign military intervention would take place at an appropriate time once the international community reaches the decision that President Bashar Assad's regime must go, a decision that awaits a Russian-U.S. agreement under which Moscow's interests in the region are protected.

The official said the military solution chosen by the regime had failed; its soldiers and the opposition are now even living on the same streets, a sign that the regime has failed to expel rebel forces from towns and villages it occupies.

Other sources said a number of leaders of the Syrian opposition who had taken refuge in Lebanon had applied to Western embassies seeking asylum because of the danger of staying in Lebanon, whose authorities, according to the rebels, could not protect them from Syrian authorities and intelligence bodies.

In a meetings with diplomats, members of the Syrian opposition said they would not register their names in lists kept by the Lebanese security apparatus because they didn't trust the security bodies since they coordinate with Syrian bodies. They said they only trusted some members of the Future Movement who were trying to protect them from members of the Syrian regime

pursuing them.

Some rebels in Syria are speaking with Western embassies but are unable to leave Syria. One expressed sorrow that “the West has abandoned our cause and has only engaged in diplomatic, political and economic pressure.”

They said that the only thing that would be successful against the Assad regime was military operations and asked why the Syrian people did not have the same rights as the Libyan people.

They added that Salafist and extremist Islamist movements support the Free Syrian Army but there is no field coordination between the two. As for Al-Qaeda, the rebels say there is no link between them and it, and that individuals from different Arab states are being brought into Syria by Al-Qaeda to carry out attacks against the regime and to prevent any dialogue between the opposition and the regime.

While the rebels affirmed that they would not give up their struggle, those inside Syria applying for asylum know that the morale in the rebels’ ranks is not high given the military superiority of the regime and the reluctance of Western and Arab states to supply the needed support to the opposition to tip the balance.

As for the international observers, the rebels say they are coordinating with the regime every step they take.