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TABLES



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Quo Vadis? **Regional Perspectives on the Syrian Crisis**

 SETA























Ankara Round Tables No: 1

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Ankara Round Tables

Quo Vadis?: Regional Perspectives on the Syrian Crisis

April 3rd, 2012, Ankara



SETA

SIYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
مركز الدراسات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية

A pro-Assad demonstration in Damascus



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A massive explosion in Damascus



Summary

The demonstrations which broke out in Tunisia in December 2010 turned into a wave of popular uprisings. These uprisings spread from one country to the next, unseating the decades-old regimes of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and placing many others in jeopardy. The Syrian regime of Bashar Assad was the latest flashpoint of the Arab uprisings, and the first in Turkey's immediate neighborhood. Many of the conference participants agreed that the end of minority rule in the Middle East is fast approaching. It would be incorrect to view changes in the Arab World as isolated developments; rather, they are interrelated, triggering one another. Still, the speed with which the revolutions reached Syria surprised many scholars.

As the Syrian opposition still struggles to oust the regime, there is widespread agreement that the issue is no longer exclusively a domestic one. With the involvement of various regional and international actors, the crisis has become international in scope. Two factors were responsible for this evolution. First, major human rights violations and Assad regime brutality shifted the debate toward international humanitarian intervention. Second, the strategic importance of Syria to many parties has turned the conflict into a proxy-war between regional and international actors, with many countries looking to protect their own interests.

The Syrian opposition's difficulty in overcoming internal divisions has complicated resolution of the Syrian crisis. Though the Syrian National Council (SNC) managed to unify the Syrian opposition for the Friends of Syria conference on April 1st in Istanbul, the SNC has not succeeded in bringing the Syrian armed opposition under its full control. Moreover, Kurdish groups remain outside the common vision proposed by the SNC in Istanbul meeting. Despite

the SNC's progress, the appearance of fragmentation discourages support from the international community.

With Iran and Russia lending their full support to the Assad regime, and with the West immersed in domestic issues and upcoming elections, the Syrian people have been abandoned. The Annan Plan has done little to raise hopes that the crisis may be resolved through intra-Syrian dialogue. Despite the fact that most conference participants stressed the need to support the Annan Plan, the common view is that the Annan Plan is subject to interpretation. The SNC stresses the full implementation of the plan's first stages (the cessation of the killings, the withdrawal of military and security forces, the release of prisoners, humanitarian aid, the right to demonstrate) before proceeding with the political process. That dialogue can only begin after Assad transfers his power to the vice president. However, the Assad regime denies the SNC's legitimacy as a dialogue partner. Thus, the likelihood that the Annan Plan succeeds is small.

Discussion focused on what might happen if the Annan Plan failed. Many of the participants supported regionally-focused solutions, and also stated that Turkey's role is—and will continue to be—vital.



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From Tunis to Damascus: The Road to the Syrian Uprising





“What is at stake in Syria and in the Middle East?”

“The events have not only demonstrated the cruelty of the regime in Syria but also proved to be a political litmus test both regionally and globally.”

Taha Özhan

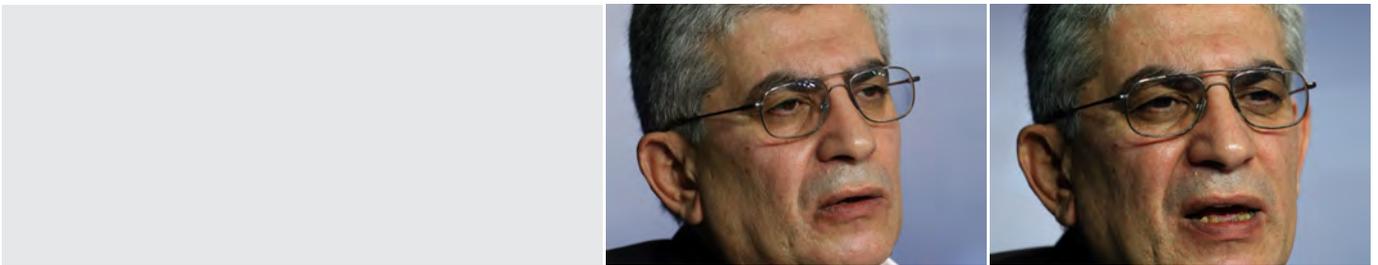
Taha Özhan: I want to have a short introduction regarding this topic. I think everything started, if we just do not go in deep, on January 14th 2011, when Ben Ali fled Tunisia after 23 years of dynasty signaling the end of the disordered regional order in the Middle East and North Africa. Demonstrations which broke out after a 26 year old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire turned into a wave of change spreading from Yemen to Syria—and Syria is the last stop, and we are still dealing with it. It will be misleading to interpret changes in the Arab World as a single isolated development taking place in each and every country.

What is at stake in the region, where the defining futures of regional countries from their names to their borders were determined mainly by Western powers after the First World War? The regional order established following bloody interventions has been in place since then. And it has been a year since uprisings broke out against Baathist regime in Syria. The events have not only demonstrated the cruelty of the regime in Syria but also proved to be a political litmus test both regionally and globally. In this way, the uprisings have pitted geopolitics against morality, geostrategy against principles. Syria is no longer just a political issue in the context of Arab uprising—revolutions. It has become a test and history will record those who either passed or failed the exam.

The domestic political agendas of all powers who are actual or possible actors in the Syrian issue will also see a lot of action this year. United States and France will be having their elections. Russia has just completed its transition. Iran had, lets say, a mini-election and issue of nuclear program is on the agenda. China is preparing for transition. So the world is quite busy. The Bashar Assad regime is accurately recognizing the political illusion this paradox creates. The regime perceived the world created by actual or potential actors as opportunity to intensify massacres. The regime aims to suppress the uprising in 2012 with this bloody method. This is nothing but another manifestation of a dead end—enforcing boundaries at a dead end. What the Syrian regime fails to see is that, geopolitical balances can remain quiet only so far in the face bloody massacres in 2012.

Furthermore, all the actors of the post-Camp David order are voicing their discomfort about Syria and are openly supporting the uprising. The U.S. is making effort to avoid a directly oppositional stand in its relationship with the new actors, the faces of new wave of transformation sweeping through the region. Unfortunately, it seems like the weeks and months to come will bring more bloodshed and tears as we expected earlier. The Syrian army will continue to dissolve—the dissolving army will be filled by police, intelligence agencies and the Shabbiha—and this will translate into more massacres. Iran is also facing the possibility of becoming the target in the election campaign in the U.S. This will strengthen Iran’s hand in its attempt to maintain tension by proxy in Syria. The picture drawn in any case is pointing to a vicious cycle for the Baathist regime and today I hope we are going to debate that vicious cycle.

Basheer Nafi: I believe there was a greater chance in the beginning of the Syrian revolution that the situation in Syria, that political change could have been achieved in Syria in a very short period of time and without a great deal of losses. Something



perhaps not as short a period of change as was achieved in Tunisia and Egypt. But maybe it will have taken like 2-3 months to bring about a rational political transformation of the country. However, this did not happen. We know now it will not happen perhaps the Syrian crisis will take some time to be resolved, and the consequences will most likely be extremely drastic for the Syrian people, for the Arab and Muslim people in the region, and perhaps for the whole international situation.

What is happening is that the Syrian revolution gradually being transformed from a domestic issue into a regional issue, and eventually into an international crisis. The main reason behind pro-engagement of the Syrian crisis and this huge transformation of the domestic issue into an international question, I think, is four main elements. The first one, of course, is the element of so called Sunni Arab revival and the fear which Sunni Arab revival is creating within Syria and outside Syria. The second is the Russian factor. The third is the Iranian factor, and the fourth one is the lack of an overall strategy on the part of all involved including the National Council, Turkey and the Arab League, Saudi Arabia and Gulf States.

Let me make a few comments on each element. I believe that the present political system in the Middle East, of course as we all know, came into existence after WWI. Since WWI, the Arab countries in particular were being ruled by minorities. Not in sectarian sense only, but in the political sense and in the social sense. In the interwar period, the ruling elites came from within the second, third generation of former Ottoman notable families, intelligentsia, sons of big families—urban families—who received modern education played very important role in relationship between the state and the centralist Arab provinces. And gradually they came to play very important role during the colonial period—during the imperialist domination of the Middle East period—and emerged to control the independent states for a while. Then we have the minority governments which came from within the military, socialist military elements, Arab nationalist military elements, and even sometimes fascist military element. We have monarchic minority ruling group as well. We have also causes of sectarian war. There is no doubt—although I tend to believe that sectarian regimes which are usually identified as sectarian, for example like Syrian regime, like the emergent Iraqi regime—They do not really represent the sects. They tend to use the sects from which they emerge, rather than representing them in a democratic fashion. So what really happened during the last 10-15 years is that minority rule in the Middle East is exacerbating.

For the first time in the last hundred years, the ruling elites are not satisfied by only controlling the power of the state and creating a kind of total identification between the states and the ruling regime, but also they are controlling the wealth of the country. The same people who are in charge of the intelligence, the businesses, the ministries—they are at the same time—I mean, for example, the last government of Hosni Mubarak had about 16 very big names of the Egyptian business elite. The president's son, Gamal Mubarak, he was very much connected with the business group in the country. People who control major companies—major sectors of the Egyptian economy—were at the same time minister of economy, minister of finance and minister of transport. We know very small group in Syria dominating the major

“Domestic vs. Internal Dynamics of the Syrian Crisis”

“What is happening is that Syrian revolution gradually being transformed from a domestic issue into regional issue, and eventually into international crisis.”

Basheer Nafi



“Is the end of minority rules coming?”

“We are coming to the end of the role of minority rule which control the political, social, sectarian—minorities which dominated and controlled the governments and the states in the Middle East.”

Basheer Nafi

economic and business sectors within Syria. This situation I believe is the main reason behind the so called Arab Spring, and huge wave of Arab revolutions.

We are coming to the end of the role of minority rule which dominated and controlled the governments and the states in the Middle East. Of course, Turkey managed to put an end to the minority rule in 1950 but Turkish democracy has been struggling for the last half of the century until the coming of the AK Party into power. It will take Arab government some time until the rule of majority has been asserted. Arab Sunnis are the majority bloc in this region. When you speak about the coming of the majority rule, you are talking about the coming of the Arab Sunnis. We will have, perhaps, to take into consideration that, first, the Sunnis have very old embracing view of Islam. And secondly political Islam—which Mr. Popov has highlighted the issue—political Islam in terms of the relationship within the country and the relationship between the Arab region and the West.

I think political Islam is a very changing phenomena. Political Islam in the 1970s is not political Islam in 1980s and political Islam which is coming to power in some countries. As we saw for example in Tunisia or in Egypt or perhaps if situation changes in Syria we will have some elements of political Islam within the government. These are not the same people. Muslim Brothers are not the Muslim Brothers of 1950s-60s. They are becoming democratic forces to a great extent, and they are learning from becoming involved in the real political world. However, this so-called—when you talk about Sunni revival, you include Turkey in it; when you talk about Arab Sunni revival, you talk exclusively about the Arab world. Whatever we think of this phenomenon, whatever we academically explain it, it is creating a fear among Muslim minority groups—among the Allawis, perhaps in a smaller extent among the Druze, among the Shia, among the Christian minorities in Greater Syria, in Lebanon, in Jordan, in Syria itself and perhaps also in Egypt.

Cengiz Çandar: I myself became aware of the Arab Revolution—not the Arab Spring, but the Arab Revolution—when it reached to Egypt. When it was only in Tunisia, I was not aware that would be an Arab Revolution, but in Egypt when it came to the huge mass demonstrations in Tahrir Square, I had no qualms saying we have an Arab Revolution. I have to admit that I would not expect that Arab revolution to reach Syria, and it reached Syria much quicker than many could have predicted. But whenever it reached, in the first week of demonstrations in Daraa, I was pretty sure that it is the end for the long-lasting Assad dynasty in Syria. I was sure of the outcome; I hailed it as one of the forerunners in this country—in Turkey—saluting the would-be victory of the Syrian people against the dynasty. But I have never told that it will be easy—it will take a very long time and a very painful time. It would be very important in defining how our region will look like not only in the near future but in the midterm future—and longer ahead even. And again, I do not belong to those schools of thoughts that think there is a new Sykes-Picot underway—that the region will be further divided into sectarian and ethnic bases going further than the Sykes-Picot, and this is the making of Western imperialism. But I at least—on my behalf, if I should say so—I am sure that I am not alone in thinking as such. What is taking place in Syria will be—most probably in the historical sense—the inauguration of undoing the Sykes-Picot and will create the



ground for a further reunification of the region within new frameworks. As we all know it will be quite painful, unfortunately—bloody and long.

Veniamin Popov: From our point of view the common situation in the Middle East is very transitional and very complicated. The region of Middle East is beginning to liberate itself from the domination of the West. The complex process of returning to the roots and identity will lead to the increasing influence of local regional political process. It is a complicated process and there will be some turns and so on. The Syrian knot is extremely complicated—confusing. And many threats are not visible or deliberately are hidden. The process of solving this problem certainly will take some time.

Meanwhile, we see that some Western countries, Western powers are clearly trying to implement a doctrine known as “divide and rule.” Take for example Egypt. It is well known that there the government has closed a number of governmental organizations and the American employees were expelled. Why? It was a scandal in Egypt because they found in one of these organizations—it is Republican International Institute, if I am not mistaken—the plans for the partition of Egypt into four countries, four separate states. They are already two states in Sudan and they do not get along with each other. In this regard I would like to remind the American plan known as the idea of the Greater Middle East—or New Middle East. For the first time the term was used by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in June 2006 during a regional tour, citing the need for reconstruction of the region. After the American press published the so-called map of Ralph Peters, reflecting the attitudes that are believed to be close to the neo-conservative wing of the American expert community, and it provided a radical redrawing of the Greater Middle East map in accordance with the areas of traditional ethnic and religious settlement. It particularly provided for the establishment of Kurdish state at the expense of Iraq, Turkey and Iran. I think we are witnessing some movement in this direction. And as well it provided for a greater Armenia with annexation of part of Turkish territory. The redrawing of Saudi Arabia in which seized states had to arise, etc. The publication in spite of its informal nature caused an acute backlash in the region, especially in Turkey, where some parallels between the plans of the partition of the Ottoman Empire after World War I had been mentioned. We know that in U.S. Congress it is debated the idea of creating of a new state of Balujistan on the territory of three countries: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. I can give you a lot of examples or references on this matter.

Obviously the current rise of political Islam frightens Western countries. It leads to deepening of the civilization rupture between the West and the Islamic East. The manifestation of this phenomenon is becoming more frequent. We saw it in the example in the last days of the so called Toulouse shooter, as well as many others that indicate the intensification of Islamophobia. Hence, it appeared all the ideas of some political analysts who argued that the redrawing of the boundaries of the Middle East will help the West to keep its influence while maintaining a certain level of tension. This certain level of tension will make a possible to keep a lead on the ruling elites of these states.

“Is Syria crisis:
a foreign
conspiracy?”

“Western powers are clearly
trying to implement a doctrine
known as divide and rule.”

Veniamin Popov



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The Syrian Crisis: Its Nature, and Domestic and Regional Implications





“Negotiations are a must”

“There is no solution by force to the ethnic, national, or religious problems in our century.”

Veniamin Popov

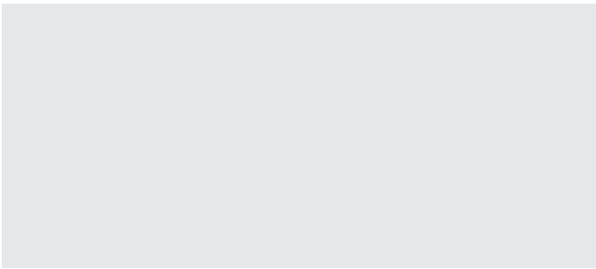
Kayhan Barzegar: I think that the Syrian crisis has two dimensions. One dimension is human rights and political reform aspect and the second dimension is its strategic and regional aspect. We cannot underestimate the strategic and regional aspects of the Syrian crisis. And I think the Western analysis of the Syrian crisis has not yet considered this aspect very seriously. I think there are human forces, youth elements, virtual media, Islamic brotherhood forces that are shaping the Syrian crisis and plus the traditional role of the states in the region. And I think that if the Syrian crisis is going to be solved, there should be a combination of all aspects here.

Veniamin Popov: My personal view, you know that the situation in Syria is really complicated. We must estimate it objectively. And objective it means that we have two parties in this conflict. You [SNC] certainly represent one party, so we must take into considerations the interest and the ideas and the approach of the other party. The Syrian government was actually elected by the people. They made a referendum 60 percent on the constitution, 60 percent participated and 90 percent supported this new constitution. We should as well estimate an interest and the position of the other side. And we are trying to do it. We think that the best way out is for the Syrian people to decide—they can only decide—not the other forces, not who wants the assistance of foreign intervention. That is the main point and we think that now it is real opportunity to start negotiations at intra-Syrian dialogue—it is through Annan mission. We are not defending Syrian government. We are against the killing. We always say our Syrian colleagues that it is not the way to solve the problems. I mentioned it. There is no solution by force to the ethnic, national, or religious problems in our century. It is quite clear. But you know that they say that there are military groups who want to kill the soldiers. It is their logic. We must take it as well to the consideration, and I can tell you that if you are guided only by Al Jazeera, or Al Arabiya, you should say that there is something awful happening really in Damascus, for example. They have showed you. But we had a lot of delegations in Damascus. They are returning from Damascus, they say there is no shooting there.

Najib Ghadban: To our colleagues from Russia and Iran. It seems that one common thread between the two presentations is the emphasis on conspiracy. Is that what is happening in Syria—Western conspiracy?

Kayhan Barzegar: No, I do not believe that this is the work of the West. But I have the experience—I come from the region. Iran-Iraq war show that how that war influenced the whole region's relations. That was unnecessary war that happened and for a long—eight years—many were killed, and a lot of damage and regional tension came to the sub-system of the region.

Basheer Nafi: I do not like to talk about this moral thing. International politics has no morality. Thus forget about this hypocritical principle. Everybody is speaking about human rights, and what is happening in Syria? Because of Iran and Russia, the situation in Syria is becoming more complicated. Both Iranian interest and Russian interest could have been safeguarded—to a certain extent of course—things are not going to be exactly as it were. But even to a large extent, Russian and Iranian interests



will have been safeguarded in Syria if both of them did not take the side of the regime that long. If they did negotiate very seriously with the opposition—say, from the summer of the last year or the fall of the last year—and accepted a peaceful and rational transformation of power in Syria. They did not follow that path, and I think things got extremely complicated and both Iran and Russia are losing big time the Arab world. You have to see this reality. I never have seen the Russian image that bad in the Arab street as I have seen it in the last months, travelling throughout the area. And of course the situation of Iran is even worse.

Civil war is one of the least defined terms in political history. One can say we are already in civil war in Syria. There is the regime with some social forces supporting it—certain sects of Syrian society support the regime—and on the other side, there is opposition and the Free Syrian Army. But can this relationship be described as civil war? However, if you speak about civil war developing in Syria similar to what we have witnessed in Iraq between 2005 and 2007—and what Lebanon experienced during the 1970s and 80s—I do not think there is a civil war in Syria in that sense. Civil war erupts usually when there are two forces within the society—or two ethnic or sectarian groups—there is some parallel between them in terms of power, social support, and so on. If term of civil war is used here implicitly—say, for example, between the Allawites and Sunnis—I do not think there is civil war. Civil war does not happen between 10 percent of the population and 85 percent of the population. The violence in Syria will bear some consequences for the region, for other Arab countries. Syria is a key state within in the Middle East. What happens in Syria will most likely affect the whole region.

Fyodor Lukyanov: There is quite an interesting debate even here whether we have civil war in Syria or not. I think it is very confusing. What just Basheer Nafi said about there cannot be a civil war in Syria in a traditional sense strikes me of course. Syria, in my understanding, is unfortunately ideally situated for a full scale civil war with involvement of many other parties with different agendas. It is like Bosnia or Lebanon. Which stage are we at now? We say there is a danger of civil war.

Muhammed Walid: I am pessimistic about the Annan initiative, because the regime is always devastating such opportunities and almost certain that opportunity will be in vain as previous opportunities came. Therefore, maybe the civil war in the conventional sense—as our colleague said—it is not practical in Syria. But we should not forget that proxy wars can happen in Syria and so many parties are interested to fight their own interest on the Syrian ground. Therefore the civil war—the ugly civil war with all that consequences—will not be away from Syria, and the suffering Syrians and the whole region unless there should be a peaceful settlement. Unfortunately, such a peaceful settlement with such a regime cannot reform itself. It seems to be real deadlock. And I was talking to a friend yesterday and he said the civil war is a bad scenario. But maybe the worst scenario will be such a regime remains in Syria in full dictatorship and authoritarian rule the way he is.

Taha Özhan: In terms of the actors involved in the Syrian crisis, we are having a very interesting case here. As you know, the Israeli issue in this region is very interesting

“Is Syria in a civil war?”

“International politics has no morality.”

Basheer Nafi

“I want to remind everybody, including our Russian friends, that it did not start as a proxy war in here.”

Basheer Nafi



“A proxy war in Syria?”

and you can talk about Israel in hundreds of different styles—you can just pick it up, and it can continue for hours. But there is a triangle regarding Israel. At the center, there is Israel. There is a European Union support—in a shy way—sometimes reluctant, and blunt and full support of the United States. Looks like, Syria is turning itself into Israel already. Russia is a reluctant—sometimes shy, sometimes fully supportive. And Iran is like the US. And this position is every week getting bolder and bolder. Iranian involvement both ideological and technical—on the field—is getting bolder. Russia is—there are some elements that opposition and the rest of the world thinks Russia may reconsider, as they did in 2010 regarding Iranian nuclear issue. We have been debating the Iranian nuclear issue for 10 months. At the end, in the UN Security Council, Turkey was alone saying no, and Russia was there saying nothing. And Russia was supposed to be giving full support of Iranian nuclear issue at least in the international stage. The moment they got what they needed through IAEA, their position changed.

Basheer Nafi: There is no doubt now it is becoming international—it is becoming an international crisis. It is obvious—it is not an Arabic crisis anymore. It is not a Syrian crisis anymore. It is a regional and international crisis and eventually—I do not think the Russian position will change—I mean, there is a lot of spinning now, every time the Russian foreign minister comes out and says a few words, we hear people—columnists, and journalists, and opposition figures, and all kind of people—trying to see if there is any small shift in the Russian position. I do not think there has been any change in the Russian position since the beginning of the revolution. And this is why it is international: I think that eventually, it will have to have a kind of American-Russian deal, for the Russian position to change. Not an understanding between the national council in Syria or opposition groups. It will have to be a sort of American-Russian deal for the Russian position to change. Now, I want to remind everybody, including our Russian friends, that it did not start as a proxy war in here. It was not from the very beginning. And not, perhaps, until the end of the summer did we have this position evolving. For example, Saudi Arabia, I remember, in May gave—because of previous commitments—Syrian regime \$350 million to establish an electrical station somewhere in Syria. Qatari officials were—in public and in secret—visiting Damascus well until the end of the summertime, and begging Bashar Assad to make some changes and even promising him huge amount of investments and money to change the situation.





Syrian Opposition vs. the Assad Regime





“What has the Friends of Syria meeting achieved?”

“What we will seek in the coming period will be the policy of zero enemies that Turkey has followed. Because the regime has led, frankly, to zero friends for our country today.”

Bassma Kodmani

Bassma Kodmani: I want to begin by saying a few words about the meeting held in Istanbul on Sunday, and say what our expectations were and what we believe has been achieved. It is true that of course you will hear about internal issue concerning the opposition, as well as what the conference and participants brought to the cause of Syrian revolution. We worked closely with the number of countries to prepare for this meeting. One particular country really stood out as being not just host of this meeting but as the most caring for the success of what the Syrian revolution seeks to achieve, and this is Turkey. I think the preparation for the Istanbul Conference was held in the two or three weeks before that in supporting the unification of bringing together the opposition groups and in encouraging and creating an environment for the opposition to meet and produce a joint vision, a unified vision for the future of Syria. This vision is a very important milestone on the way to achieving the objective of the revolution, for several reasons. One is, it states what a new Syria should look like, and I think we all agreed what the new Syria should look like—for a normal leader, it is general principles. They all sound positive, but basically predictable from our perspective when you see the signatory to this vision—a really very diverse group with different political and ideological backgrounds. It is very significant that we came up with a joint vision. It therefore went beyond any ideological differences and beyond any of the small divergences that you may hear from different figures in the opposition.

The second dimension of this vision is just as important. It sets the terms of the relations that the new Syria will seek to maintain with its regional environment. I think what it basically said is that Syria does not seek to be a partner—a privileged partner or the special partner—of any particular group of countries. And I think this we have made clear every time the Friends of Syria countries meet such as in Tunis and Istanbul. The message is always, the Syrian people, of course, are extremely grateful to those countries gathering here. But there is no message here in proclaiming the revolution seeks to pro-Western or pro-something else. This is a revolution for democratic values. And the objective is that Syria will return to maintaining balanced relations across the region. We have been very keen to say—and we have been saying to those countries that have been reluctant vis a vis the revolution—that Syria has always sought to keep relations with various countries to maintain its independence, and it has in the last decades unfortunately fallen to some deviation from what it has tried to build in the past. And what we will seek in the coming period will be the policy of zero enemies that Turkey has followed. Because the regime has led, frankly, to zero friends for our country today.

We build on this joint vision for the opposition, I think, some new dynamics—positive dynamics—for reaching now a unification of the opposition. Politically, I think the message is very strong. There are no differences between these groups. The vision is common. In terms of organization—yes we do have an organizational challenge. What is a structure that can absorb maybe 500 people, and can organize itself in a way to be effective, to be democratic, and to be participatory with all sorts of different groups with different political cultures? We have no political experience



together—limited experience inside or outside Syria as small groups that have been persecuted and under surveillance. Therefore, five months after founding a young political organization I suppose is normal, but the pressure on us to produce a unified organization structure is very strong, because the situation is moving very fast on the ground and we need to deliver on all these fronts. It is fortunate that we have to do that quickly. We do not want to take a lot of time to organize a structure. For the opposition sitting outside, we would like to see this happen quickly on the ground in Syria; therefore, working now, very intensively, on the organizational structure is the current process underway.

The Istanbul Conference achieved some important steps for us. I must say the recognition of the Syrian National Council is certainly a strong message to the regime inside Syria. That it was recognized as the umbrella organization for all political opposition groups; that it was recognized as the interlocutor for the international community. These are important steps that have taken us forward and one very interesting indication for us—the clear indication of an achievement is when the regime is upset. We know that after the recognition, the top leadership of the Assad regime held a six hour meeting to discuss the recognition of the SNC. So for us, I think this is a sign that this is not just symbolic recognition; it carries a lot of weight. And the regime understands that it is a very serious step forward.

I want to end on a note of optimism to say that we have messages from all the communities in Syria—those who are silent, those who still fear the unknown are just telling us, “tell us exactly what your plans are. What is your vision? How you will control chaos? How you will maintain stability? How you will ensure there will be no revenge? If you have such a plan, we know that this regime has no capacity to regain control. We have lost total hope in it. But we are looking to see what you present as a credible scenario for the vision of the future of Syria.” These groups are in quiet discussions and dialogues, and I think this is very promising for a peaceful way out of this current situation, which is deadlocked on the ground.

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On the Kurdish issue, we have an important challenge with the Kurdish issue. We need to give it its full recognition so that the Kurdish community in Syria feels perfectly comfortable in its equal citizenship. So when we state “equal citizenship,” we state a very strong principle of course. But the Kurdish community in Syria has special needs—needs for recognition of its sufferings, of its displacement, of its loss of citizenship in a certain stage, and some forms of discrimination and persecution. All of these are wounds that we need to heal. And the principle in this post-Assad society is to heal wounds. For those who have been compromised and pushed to commit crimes, we also look with the principle of healing wounds not revenge. The same spirit needs to be used in looking at the need of the Kurdish community. When we state all the rights of the Kurds, we should be saying currently that all of these rights—and some public policies that state and govern issues of minority and diversity of society—is a number one priority for a future democratic Syria. That

“What does the recognition of the SNC mean?”

“We need to give it its full recognition so that the Kurdish community in Syria feels perfectly comfortable in its equal citizenship.”

Bassma Kodmani

“Syrian Kurds and the SNC”

“The military option remains not our preferred option.”

Bassma Kodmani

requires a lot of language that really indicates that this is the vision—this is the intention of all groups who are part of building this new Syria. So this is why we want constitutional guarantees— we provide for constitutional guarantees for the Kurds.

Let me just say this: that there will always be in every community radical demands— unrealistic demands—but they do not represent the majority. The role of a responsible government is to bring the largest mainstream groups into the national fold. If there remain radical groups out there who are still calling for self-determination and other options which cannot be implemented in Syria, because of the geographic distribution of the Kurdish population, these groups will be marginalized. The Kurds know that there is a lot to win in a democratic Syria if they are concerned—our responsibility as the majority is to reassure them. I am of those who believe that the minorities in Syria—whether they are religious or national or otherwise, all of the communities in Syria—represent a very rich diversity, and they are a guarantee that we will remain a democracy if we respect the rights of minorities. It is the responsibility of the majority to reassure all these minorities. And I think enough of us within the opposition are conscious of this issue. But to tell you that we do not discuss it very intensely—yes we discuss it. Not whether there should be discrimination or not—we are beyond that. But how much do we need to take affirmative action, encouraging policies, enabling measures for the groups who feel vulnerable to feel completely comfortable.

Just to say the Kurdish National Council has remained outside the agreement—has not signed so far with the Syrian National Council the agreement that has been proposed—we have been very close to signing a document. Inside the Council they have many differences—divisions—so they may come at some point, but they do not seem to be ready to join. However inside the Council, we have a strong component of Kurdish communities and parties. They have been brought to the document that was drafted to recognize their full rights is given full strength at the same level as the national covenant. This is the latest development of the Kurdish issue that all of these rights that were recognized in a detailed document are recognized as being an integral part of the National Council.

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Ultimately, our objective is to bring all oppositional groups under some form of integrated structure of command. As you know, the Free Syrian Army based here in Turkey is of course part of that and is the address that for the label for all groups use but for the moment its not yet a coordinated or integrated structure. We again say arms emerges in self defense, and these groups of course carry some—represent—a risk if they were to operate on their own; therefore, we have higher responsibility in integrating them today. The military option remains not our preferred option. We do believe that it carries very high risks of drawing the country into a protracted civil conflict. The regime has encouraged, and continues to encourage—not only encourage, but really incite—to incite sectarian tension between communities. It works actively to tear apart social fabric, and when we speak about crimes against



humanity, we speak of individuals being tortured—massacred. And I think we can also speak of a crime against society, because this is what the regime has been seeking to do actively by dividing people along sectarian lines. The militarization carries the risk that this scenario of sectarian strife becomes more intense on the ground. There are incidents—small incidents—that occurred apart from what the regime does—not a lot. And we have just as many examples of different communities helping each other in face of the regime as we have of incidents that relate to us some incidents between sectarian communities. Nevertheless, the militarization is encouraging that. The sense of abandonment is pushing toward a more radical approaches to politics, and that carries risks for the future, for a democratic state.

Question: I would like to ask about the Syrian National Council's relations with Israel. How does Israel approach the Syrian revolution?

Bassma Kodmani: Contradictory signs come out of Israel. I think some people believe it is the big source of threat, to have a democratic Syria, because this regime is a very comfortable enemy. We, for the moment, have no priority of discussing anything with Israel; our priority is to build a democratic Syria. The policies will be defined, by the people and there is one major consideration that is there in the covenant. The Palestinian issue is central to the Syrian people, has always been and will always be associated with any approach of the Israeli question.

Question: I was just wondering whether the international recognition of the National Council has a meaning in terms of international law. I mean, does this give you a kind of legal status and responsibility under international law?

Bassma Kodmani: Recognition of the SNC is political, not yet legal, and it involves—it implies—others measures that are not immediately coming. Even discussion with the regime needs to have some legal existence of the regime. So I think it makes it a little bit complicated if there is legal recognition. But the political recognition is there.

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Under the issue of human rights, I think the message is very clear. The regime should know that the files and the documentation of the human rights violations and crimes against humanity are completely gathered. They exist, and we have everything to proceed with indictment—with going to the International Criminal Court. If that does not happen, it is a political decision for the moment. That can not go on very long. The regime should get the message these files are ready. We will go to the International Criminal Court.

Compromise, realpolitik—all of these can come in to play. But there is no possibility of saying these two parties should make concessions to each others in a compromise agreement. We seek—very clearly—we seek an end to this regime—a peaceful end for this regime. Negotiations are about the end of this regime and to move towards democratic regime. When Russia says we hear the aspirations of the people—the aspirations of the people are for regime change. I just want to end on one point.

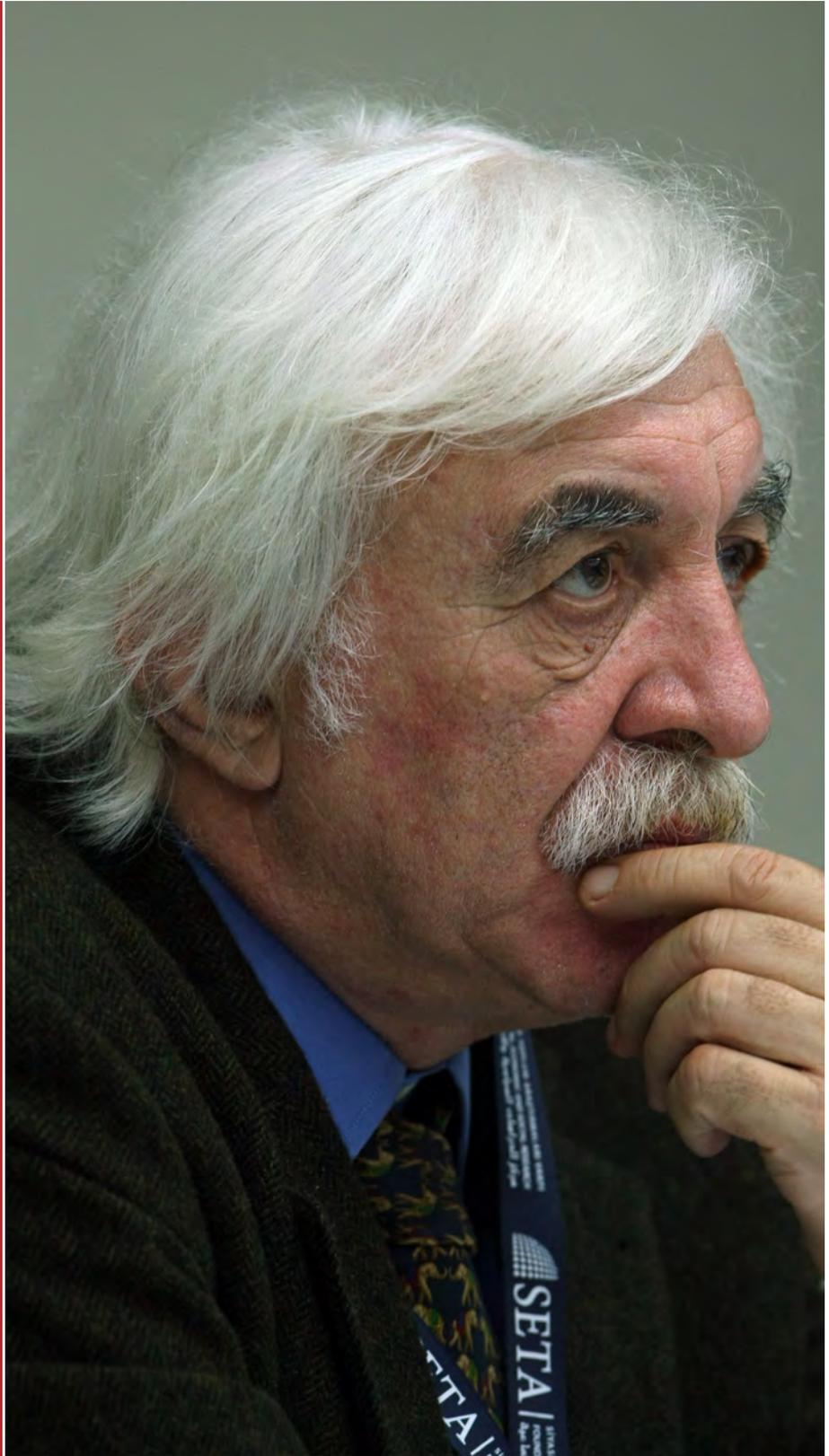
“Syrian National Council’s relations with Israel”

“Negotiations are about the end of this regime and to move towards democratic regime.”

Bassma Kodmani

“The Annan plan does not serve other than assisting the regime for its main purpose, which is its own survival.”

Cengiz Çandar



“Does Syria still exist as a state?”

We have no business with Sunni-Shia differences. This is not our battle in any way. Finally on opposition, I think the regime has tried for over a year to speak to opposition from inside that it feels it comfortable with. The point is not who it feels the comfortable with. It is who can raise the will of the people and who can express these demands.

Cengiz Çandar: The Annan Plan brings a proposal to defuse the situation and resolve the conflict ultimately. The question I want to bring up on the floor here is that I am afraid Syria does not exist anymore as a state in the sense that we attribute the meaning to what a state is. It does not exist anymore, in the sense that it has no purpose and direction which makes a state a state. What for does the state of Syria—meaning the current regime of Bashar Assad—exist other than maintaining its survival? So in this respect, the Annan plan—in its spirit and format—acts at equidistance to the regime in Syria and to the opposition—as if they are equal partners to the conflict—and then proceeds and makes proposals to overcome the existing situation. If I perceive the situation of the country truly, there is no state to be left with any purpose or direction other than maintaining its survival. Therefore, ironically, the Annan plan does not serve other than assisting the regime for its main purpose, which is its own survival.

That very survival is rejected by the opposition, and some moments ago we heard from Najib Ghadbian—referring to what Bassma Kodmani said this morning—that the Syrian opposition will not accept Bashar Assad and the people around him as acceptable partners for negotiations because of the atrocities they committed. The Istanbul resolutions of the Friends of Syria group, in its phrases, speaks about fully supporting the Annan plan, but within the framework of mentioning other relevant resolutions concerning Syria—UN General Assembly resolution which was supported by 137 countries, along with the Arab League resolutions that the regime did not comply with. So, in this picture, what are the parameters of the Annan plan that we can stick if there is any hope to proceed with it for conflict resolution in Syria? Or shall we see Annan’s plan deadline on next week April 10th—if the regime does not comply—should we be in preparation for burying the Annan plan and look for another international undertaking which may come up?

Veniamin Popov: Our first speaker has mentioned a very good idea: it should be intra-Syrian dialogue headed by the Vice President of Syria—I think it is a good idea. If it is acceptable for the opposition, it is a way out leading us to constructive solution. Otherwise we have no alternative. I am very concerned if this Annan plan fails—we must support it by all means—then we will see escalation of the civil war which will be devastating not only for Syria but also for the whole region. First of all, there should be a voice of reason. We should not try to find the most responsible party. It is counter-productive. We should instead concentrate all our efforts on finding the peaceful and acceptable solution for all parties. This will be in the interest of whole international community.

Muhammed Walid: If we consider that a civil war is the worst scenario, of course, we have to look for other alternatives as our friends in Russia and Iran talk about a



“How does Assad view the opposition?”

“When the revolution erupted in Daraa, Daraa had been a main supplier of civilian and military personnel of this regime.”

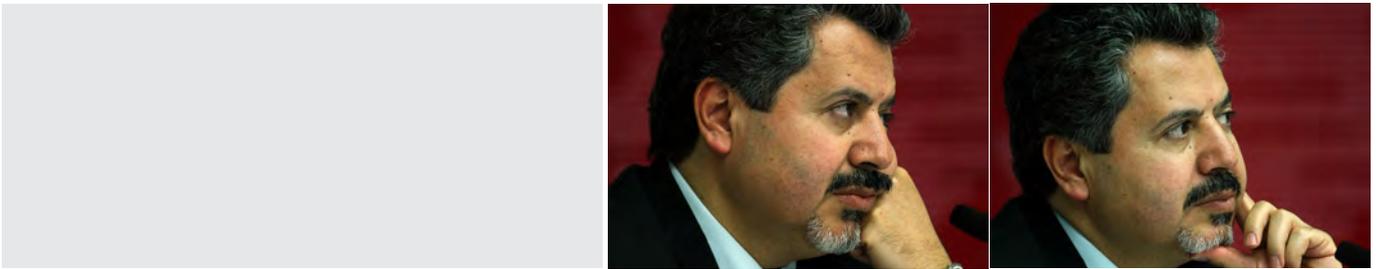
Obeida Nahas

negotiated settlement between the opposition and the government. That is a nice way to put it. But we have to realize the Syrian regime does not recognize the opposition as a partner. He says he only deals with arm gangs slaughtering people in streets. All the opposition—which we know—the opposition is varied on the ground and outside and recognized by the regime as a partner to deal with. He is very comfortable with few people who can listen to him and who can support his plans. Therefore, I think if our friends in Russia and Iran will do anything good for the Syrian people—is to convince the president this cannot continue. Slaughtering people in the streets like that, bombarding with heavy guns, bombarding the cities, the homes of people is not the way to solve this problem. They have to tell him he cannot go on—advise him to go to reality and recognize what can be done. I agree that the initiative is a golden opportunity—fair enough.

Obeida Nahas: Well I think we have to look at Syrian revolution from another perspective here I mean this revolution was not started by the opposition that the regime is blaming—let us be clear about that. This revolution was started by people who were classified in Syria as the backbone of this regime. When the revolution erupted in Daraa, Daraa had been a main supplier of civilian and military personnel of this regime. This is still known. I mean the wise president was took from Daraa, and of course there are too many people of this regime from Daraa. Now the regime reached the point when it started eating its own children. And that is exactly when this revolution—that was the point the revolution was started. So the revolution has not yet reached some of the historical places that were against the regime in the past.

So it is very important to recognize that we are not talking about the opposition; we are talking about Syrian people, which the Syrian president does not see at all. In many occasions, Bashar Assad was talking to the people who visit him—at some point he receives delegations from different provinces from Syria. And he was talking about silly things—like his aunt was a little upset he dismissed his cousins who killed the children Daraa. So all he cares about is his aunt is upset. And of course his cousin is still sitting at home in Damascus. He is still getting his salary for what he did in Daraa. In fact, Bashar Assad does not see the opposition as Dr. Walid said. He does not see his population. He does not see there is a Syrian people. So that is the main thing, let us starting to recognize. First of all, that we have the problem here. This man does not see his own people.

Now as for the opposition, the traditional opposition was very careful when the revolution started. I still remember the politicians did not call this a revolution until it passed the fourth month. After five months—four months—I still remember we started to talk about a revolution in Syria back in August. That was after the regime committed massacres at the end of July. If you remember, the 31st of July, it killed more than hundred persons in one day. That was the point at which the Syrians decided that there is no go back. Syrians still have in mind a previous example where Russian back them—Soviet officers were in Damascus in 1980. They helped



intelligence, they helped planning and that repeated now. The Syrians after the 1980s confrontations, although they were very minimal, the whole society was punished. Syrians had to queue for days to get some food. For the whole of the 1980s. That was a punishment from the regime to the Syrians. How many people do we have missing since 1982? We had 30,000 people massacred in one city in 1982. Now the Syrians still have this in their mind. Look at the slogans they raise—all they used over the past year. They have been remembering, and they know that no go back home and they will go through same process. Because this man managed to kill 10,000 people in one year. And he is still doing that.

When the regime started talking about dialogue back in June and July, politicians in opposition were not against this. In fact we discussed it. And we even said openly in the media that we would go to the dialog. I still remember, I was on Al Arabiya talking in July after this first round of dialogue in Damascus that took place that nobody from the opposition was invited. The regime was only having dialogue with itself. But I was still asked, if you were invited to Damascus what would you do? We would go there. And of course we have to go there with victims' families and get permission to go and negotiate in their behalf. Because of course if we do not represent the people, then who are we?

Now Syrians perceive what we called Syrian solution for 10 months. We only went to Arab League in November. It took us a long time to go to the Arab League. So we tried to solve it within Syria even we did not go to the Arab League. Until it was we could not bear any more. So we went to the Arab League, and we reached the UN in January this year. So when we went to the UN, I was there with Dr. Bassma and other colleague. And basically the Russian ambassador said it very bluntly to us. He said you have to go to Moscow and talk. And Dr. Burhan Ghalioun said, we will come to Moscow, that was not the problem. It is just—do not say you have to have dialogue without preconditions. That was a precondition. So basically we wanted to know—we talk about dialogue—what are we aiming at exactly? Are we aiming at reproducing that regime? Because this seems to be the goal of what we are hearing.

Fyodor Lukyanov: When Ms. Kodmani's initial introduction referred to the people of Syria—yes, but if I may ask, what part of the people do you represent? Who can claim that he or she talks on behalf of people of Syria? I am afraid no one, and this is the problem of any kind of plans like Kofi Annan. There is a question of legitimacy—legitimacy of the actors. I can imagine—and I can agree that Bashar Assad lost legitimacy when started to use heavy armaments against people. But it does not mean, for example, Syrian National Council gained this legitimacy. Who gave this legitimacy to you? So I think the main problem—strangely enough for me to say, as Russian representative—but main problem today is absence of unifying consolidated Syrian opposition. Even in form of National Council which also was very strange but still manage to organize themselves. So I think we unfortunately cannot expect any success for Annan plan.

“Dialogue with the regime: Is it doable?”

“The regime is only having dialogue with itself.”

Obeida Nahas



“Who does the SNC represent?”

“What we sought to do when developing the Syrian National Council was to take the closest mechanism or closest formula possible to a representation of the population in all its diversity, in all regions and all political groups.”

Bassma Kodmani

Bassma Kodmani: A point of clarification on the representativeness of the Syrian National Council. We have no elections in Syria, neither on the government side nor in the opposition itself. There is no possibility of doing so. What we sought to do when developing the Syrian National Council was to take the closest mechanism or closest formula possible to a representation of the population in all its diversity, in all regions and all political groups. The criteria number one is that we are building a political coalition. Not a multiethnic social picture, if you like. So we started with all the political groups that existed. Small, tiny, bigger, old, recent—all of these. The moving underground was our number one another group what we wanted to be represented. People on the street they were calling for certain things and they were calling for fall of the regime as you know. So it was the movement on the ground. The traditional political groups—and in addition to that we want to make sure that we were not leaving out any component of the Syrian society. That is, we look at various religious and ethnic communities. We may choose representing different regions—we had big maps, names—we worked for several weeks on those maps. From there we developed some representatives from Syrian society. Now with that we needed to talk to political groups. This is the process which we began to develop on 1st of September up to beginning of October, when the Council was created, and that process was ongoing. With this I think we became as close as we could. Something that could represent people without elections.

Many of us are independent people, not belonging to a group—to a political group—not belonging to the movement underground or to representing a particular community. But we also had criteria—people who could contribute something to organization development—to carrying the message over to writing, analyzing, presenting the cause. All of these were criteria which brought 300 people to the Council. And there is always the possibility of improvement to continue to do so. This is why constantly people are saying, “I am not in there, I am still out—this is not representing.” Yes, some people can think they should be represented. We are still working on groups—different sectors of society now. I think the expansion that has taken place represents most significant sectors of society. We have doctors who are serving the cause in a fantastic way. We have businessmen—a huge community now has developed, and they are coming out publicly now—those who can. And those who cannot will come under some cover, but will state they have joined the revolution—they have actually joined it silently a long time ago. We have lawyers, artists, intellectuals, civil society, women’s organizations, youth organizations—all of these are coming now into the council. When we speak of expansion, there are a few names you know, but there are a lot of people you do not know—but these are real forces on the ground.

So this has been the work of the SNC—it is an ongoing process of improvement and expansion. The rule is inclusion; the challenge is effectiveness—how do you work with such a growing body constantly growing and make sure you can still make decisions and still have functioning mechanisms for decision-making. This is the history of the SNC. That is I think as close as we could come to producing a

coalition—and again, we are building a political society. We are not building a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian, Lebanese-type—or Iraqi type model. We seek to build a political society.

Youssef Yaghmour: My colleagues at the SNC have been highlighting some of the negative aspects of the Russian position. I would like, for a change, to highlight some of the positive ones. There seems to be some contradiction between the Russians' request of SNC to accept unequivocally Annan's plan, and at the same time denying them the fact that they actually represent the Syrian people. So how do we resolve this dilemma? The second point is, if Russia does not recognize that there is a party among the Syrian people that can be part of a true negotiation that really leads to an acceptable resolution to the current crisis, then who is the other party that basically are going to actually talk to. Where do we start from here? We seem to be in the middle of a vicious circuit and we really would like to see the Russian position put in some positive gestures to recognize actually that there are some representatives of the Syrian people that can come forward and actually negotiate a plan. Everything we have heard so far is that "we do not recognize," and that "you have to accept unequivocally the Annan initiative."

Najib Ghadban: I start with the point of legitimacy, who represents what, etc. By most analysts, the Assad regime is a narrowly-based regime. By definition, being a dictator, it did not establish whatever legitimacy it had on the consent of the Syrian people, but it did have a base, and I think that we, in the opposition, must address that and acknowledge that. And I tell you, yes, this base is there, I see it eroding—which is good—because more of them are accepting that there is going to be change. My colleague Obeida mentioned Daraa as a place where it used to be part of the Syrian regime's constituency, and now it is no longer there. But there are two communities in Syria that we must work to address their fears. One of them is the Allawite community and the Christian community. I think the Christian community is mostly fearful of the change, especially of what they witnessed in places like Iraq and elsewhere, where there were backlashes against Christian communities. And I think their silence can be interpreted as positive not necessarily so negative. And again, it is part of the SNC effort to reach out to those. And for the Allawite community, I think we do understand the real fear that exists in that community. And that is why it is extremely significant when we say that we have a few individuals that are not acceptable as a negotiating partner, as a political legitimate player in the future of Syria. But what we are saying, the rest are acceptable.

This is why we are going to go as far as, we understand, in the mid-term—and this maybe could address some of the fears of our Iranian friends—we do expect that if we want to maintain some of the institutions of the state and not to go into a failed state as the Chairman in fact was expressing some fear—we do have to have Allawite control over the armed forces. This might be their way of feeling secure. So, I think the difference between us and the regime is that we are looking at the whole country, we are looking at all of the components of the Syrian society as

“Legitimacy wars: How legitimate is the Assad regime?”

“I think the difference between us and the regime is that we are looking at the whole country, we are looking at all of the components of the Syrian society as citizens—we want to empower them and shift them from being subjects to being citizens.”

Najib Ghadban

"Syrians are deal-makers."

Obeida Nahas



“Where does the SNC stand internationally?”

citizens—we want to empower them and shift them from being subjects to being citizens—actual participants in the future of Syria. I think in the morning, when our colleague mentioned majority rule and how the whole process of correcting minority rules—there was an emphasis on minority rights. And I think we should start with that in a country like Syria, which is a diverse country and includes all these various communities. So I think we are working very, very hard to assure these fears. That is my first point. And that is why I think as part of the SNC vision, we are trying to present a whole detailed program which would address questions like transitional justice, maintaining law and order the day after, providing urgent humanitarian assistance, having a clear process of transition, and in terms of drafting constitution, elections laws and so on and so forth.

Ufuk Ulutaş: We always talk about international support for the Syrian regime; we barely discuss the internal support for the regime. We talked about the power bases of Syrian regime that come from sectarian lines, there is still considerable business community supporting Assad; some minorities scared of post-Assad scenarios support the regime. Syrian regime has its armed forces—they have the upper hand against the Free Syrian Army. Under these circumstances it is almost impossible for the FSA to tackle with the armed forces of Syria. Meanwhile, legitimacy of the Free Syrian Army is increasing among the Syrian opposition—though when I talk about Free Syrian Army I am not talking about a unified army. They are calling any armed group that is protecting civilians in Syria as Free Syrian Army.

Obeida Nahas: Syrian society in general is a very pragmatic society. If you look at how Syrians used to handle their own business in general they are not like Iraqis, they are not like many other nations. I still remember some analyst in a closed session like this saying that Iraqis would go right to the end when they have an internal crisis while the Syrian will trade-off. That was about seven—six—years back. Yes, Syrians are deal-makers. In fact the opposition failed to deliver for 40 years. They promised the society to deliver a change, but they never managed to do so. There were two reasons.

First, the opposition was not strong enough, but also the society used to view the opposition as clean, nice guys—they used to sympathize with them. But they used to think these guys are too romantic and utopian; the reality is that this regime is here to stay and we have to make a deal with it. This is exactly how Bashar Assad managed to rule Syria for 10 years. Now it is turning the other way round, the political opposition was very careful at the beginning. Until now, the political leadership is much more pragmatic than the people on the streets. This is exactly what we are witnessing. The people are becoming much more radicalized—people are calling for the FSA to be the address of the Syrian people, not the SNC. That is because the window for political solutions is closing. We still have this pragmatic leadership.

We have been accused of being closer to the United States. That is not true, because the United States has not really given us anything. We have seen some political

“The SNC and the minorities in Syria”

statements—that is all. U.S. position was playing down things in the Friends of Syria conference. Of course, you have to think of it this way: the political elite in Syria—especially in the opposition—sare still very much in support of a non-alliance policy—and I think that is very good when it comes to countries like Russia and Iran. Syrians are also very sensitive to foreign intervention regardless of where it comes. This has been always the case. If you look at what Dr. Burhan Ghalioun said in the first Friends of Syria conference he said we are not here to switch from one camp to another. After the conference, one diplomat said you are going to pay a price for this because there is also another camp that tries to get Syria on board. I think Russia has to engage Syrian opposition in a serious dialogue—it has done some dialogues so far—it is not as comprehensive and sophisticated as it should be. Some trust needs to be built.

Ufuk Ulutaş: What has the Council done so far in terms of creating confidence building measures that aimed at minorities other than public declarations on the ground? Have you tried to reach out to minority members?

Bassma Kodmani: I wanted to answer the question related to messages to minorities. Three examples of concrete moves we have made at the Council. One is—and that shows you the internal and regional dynamics and how they interact—concerning the Kurdish issue for example, we have been in constant discussions with the Kurds in Iraq, in particular, as well as some discussions here in Turkey. But mostly with the Iraqi leadership of the Kurdish community, Massoud Barzani, and these have been ongoing discussions, in order to really define what the model of the Kurdish—or the answer to the Kurdish issue in Syria should be, and the positive influence that can be exerted by the Iraqi leadership on the Kurds in Syria.

The second is, a statement by the Shia of Lebanon, who consider that Hezbollah does not represent them, that they wish to support the Syrian revolution, and there was a discussion and meetings with the Shia religious leaders, with the members of the Syrian National Council, and that statement was produced by a group which represents a minority in Lebanon—perhaps there is a silent majority among Shia—but at least we know that this is one other component. And this message is obviously aimed at reassuring that there is no—that is not our problem. The conflict is not with the Shia, it is an issue of taking position in support of the regime. And when Hezbollah does that, it is not possible to consider normal relations with Hezbollah at this stage at least. Again, this does not say that the future lies exactly in that direction.

And finally concerning the Allawite community of Syria, there have been early on attempts by religious leaders and then by the SNC, quiet discussions—some of that comes out publicly, there was a statement put out by 200 individuals—public figures—from the Allawite community about a month and a half ago that came out in support for the revolution saying, we have no business in supporting the Assad family, we are on the side of the people, we are part of society, and our future lies in a democratic society. And that was the result of quiet discussions by some of the

“The conflict is not with the Shia, it is an issue of taking position in support of the regime.”

Bassma Kodmani



Allawite members—not of the Allawite members of the Council, but really friends who are concerned and related to the revolutions and happen to be Allawite so have connections in the community, we have used those. This is what comes out. In terms of what is more discreet, obviously there is a lot going on in that sense. But probably more needs to go on. And every phase of the revolution requires different messages. Early on was different from what we produced two months ago—and probably now—is different.

I want to also indicate that reassuring communities is not just religious communities—and sorry, of course, the Christian community visits to the Vatican, to the Orthodox patriarch, a lot has been done also with the religious leaders of the Christian communities. Finally, I was going to say, that reassuring communities is not only about communities, it is also about groups. We know also that a lot of the employees of the public sector in Syria are extremely concerned about their future because they believe that the future regime is going to be a market economy with no concern for social guarantees or social security and therefore will privatize all the public sector and will lay off employees, and they feel that this is a threat to them, so it is clear that we also need to address them.

“The Christian and Allawite community in Syria”

“There was a statement put out by 200 individuals from the Allawite community that came out in support for the revolution saying, we have no business in supporting the Assad family.”

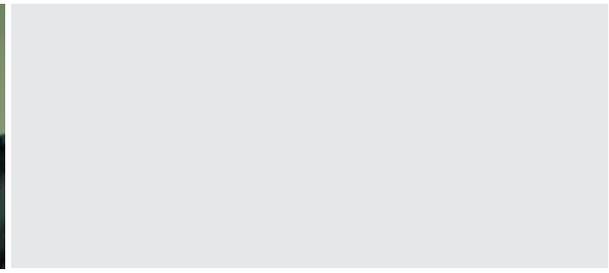
Bassma Kodmani





What is at stake? Regional and Global Positions on Syria





“Iranian position on Syria”

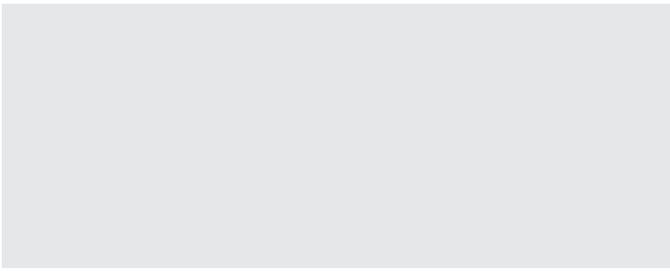
Kayhan Barzegar: First of all, the Iranian look to the Syrian crisis. I think Iran saw the Arab revolutions as an opportunity for two matters. First, coming out of its geostrategic isolations at the relations—at the level of the states, with the new friends and the revolutionary Islamic nationalistic states in the region—Iran hoped that it can establish a coalition with good friendship with these states. And the second matter was the fact that Iran wanted to see that the traditional concepts of Iranophobia came out of the region. We know that some regional regimes like the Mubarak regime in Egypt for several years tried to put this Iranophobia and Iran as the main source of the threat. So Iran hoped that these two aspects can be removed and Iran can have good relations and close and friendly relations with the regional states with new friends—regional parliaments that are based on nationalistic and Islamic views, here. But the Syrian crisis went in different way in Iran’s interest. First of all, the Syrian crisis put the entire characteristic of the regional politics in a different way that was that friendly regime in Syria was going to be removed and Iran’s main challenge was that how to deal with the new regime in Syria and the future of change in Syria.

The second element was the fact that the Iranophobia came back through Syria. Here I think it was a mistake that the opposition groups in Syria undeliberately tried to connect the collapse of the Syrian regime with the collapse of Iran. And I think the Western element has tried to stress this fact because, in this way, Iran was introduced as the main obstacle for the Syrian changes and political reform. I think it was wrong. By that, I think Iranian rivals like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel and America put the issue in the balance of power issue, and America came to the scene and tried to connect the collapse or the removal of the Syrian regime to the removal of the Iranian regime and even to some more extent on the Iranian nuclear issue. That was in my belief a mistake. Therefore we are seeing that an internal matter which relates to the changes in Syria suddenly goes to a regional matter, and I think here there was this wrong perspective and underestimation of how the regional role can play and change and shape different things. We had this experience in Iraq also. When America actually connected the collapse of Saddam Hussein with the collapse or change of regime in Iran—that was a mistake again. Therefore, America and the Western context avoided to understand how the regional politics can evolve and shape the regional issues.

“I think Iranian rivals like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel and America put the issue in the balance of power issue.”

Kayhan Barzegar

Here I would like to mention the second aspect of the crisis and that is the Iranian interest in Syrian crisis. I think beyond the fact that Iran is trying to balance its relations in the changes in Syria with the issue of Hezbollah and the resistant movement in the region, Iran has another interest as well. That is how to strengthen the regional perspective comparing with the Western perspective here. Again, I think this is important that how the Syrian crisis put Iran in the opposite position. And I remember that Iran wanted changes in Syria and still wants to see some changes in Syria. But how this change is going to take place—like Russia, like China and other regional states, even like Turkey—I think at this moment the main question is how the Western line should go in the regional affairs and how we can stop the Western perspective in comparing with the regional perspective. Here, I think this is the second aspect to Iranian interest in the region.



Traditionally, Iran is against any Western intervention in the regional affairs and is trying to solve the regional issues with regional solutions; and that is something I think is very much important when goes to the Syrian crisis. Here we have this experience of the Western solutions for the regional affairs that ended in disasters. Like in the Iraqi crisis, the Western solution tried to solve the Iraqi crisis, and that was battling the sacred war against terrorism, and we see that the Iraqi crisis is ending somehow to domestic divisions amongst the Iraqi politics. In Afghanistan crisis, again the Western solution for ending the Afghan crisis ended up with a lot of tensions in Afghanistan. And one of them was that the justification of the Taliban regime to continue the war in the pretext of sacred war against the Western aggression here.

Now I think Iran's main concern is that the Syrian crisis can also end up in very complicated regional issues. And I think here the Western countries, America and other countries are not ready to pay the prices to how far to go. And I think the Syrian crisis shows what are the lines of interest of America and Western countries, and I think here the security of Israel will say the first word again. As far as this stays here, I do not see that the Western intervention would go towards solving the issues. That will complicate the issues. Again I am saying that Iran's interest is how to solve the regional issues in the context of regional solution. Here, regional solution by my definition is not just giving the regional countries upper hand. I think regional solution means that how we can solve the regional issues according to political security reality of the region and not with the glass of international solution; rather, with the glass of regional countries' interests. And how to combine regional interest and international interest is something that I call regional solution.

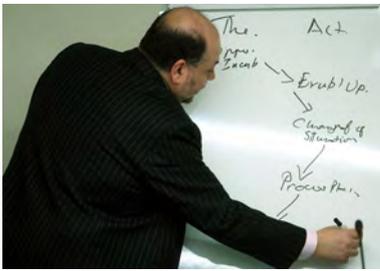
But a few words about Turkey-Iran relations in the Syrian crisis. We have that Turkey-Iran relations in Syrian crisis to some extent deteriorated. But I think there is an opportunity came out of these relations and that is that the two sides can cooperate more realistic at the moment. I think Iran's increased relations with Turkey will be beneficial for solving the Syrian crisis. Now, the two sides get to this conclusion that if they withdraw from the regional solutions they will lose their interest in regional peace and security. And that is not good for the peace and security in the region. Now Iran knows Turkey's limit and potential in solving the regional issues and now Turkey knows what are Iran's sensitivity and red lines in terms of regional interest. And I think the two sides' cooperation can help to solve the Syrian crisis—it is a very important element here. Turkey's role in the context of Western solution might be an opportunity for the West but at the same time can bring a lot of reactions from Russia, China and Iran because they are in the context of solving of the problem in regional aspect.

Let me conclude. I think changes in Syria are inevitable, and it is part of the Arab world revolutions, and it cannot come back to the first place. Finding a solution, I think, finding a combination of all elements should be considered at the same time. Here, underestimating the regional role, and the role of traditional states and players in the region, is a mistake to not consider. And I think the Middle East is an

“How can Turkey-Iran work together for Syria?”

“I think Iran's increased relations with Turkey will be beneficial for solving the Syrian crisis.”

Kayhan Barzegar



“Turkey can be a bridge...”

“Underestimating the regional role, and the role of traditional states and players in the region, is a mistake to not consider.”

Kayhan Barzegar

ideological and a strategic region and there are a lot of countries and actors that are playing the role here, including Turkey. And these countries’ interests to some extent should be converged here, and there are of course the domestic dynamics of different countries here. A good solution should be how these elements can combine together.

Here I think Turkey can play a great role by bridging the two blocs Iran, Russia, China on the one hand and America, Arab conservative regimes, the EU and Israel on the other hand. It is a mistake if Turkey takes a side here. I think that Turkey’s role should be mediatory to bridge the two sides. Turkey’s role value is that it can bridge between different elements here. And I believe that Turkey is doing a good job in terms of helping the regional solution come out. Now Iran and other sides can take a step forward to try to bring some meaningful changes in Syria and Turkey, and the other side can take a step backward trying to show that there would be no military solution to this—as we said, this lead to civil war. Civil war would be the red line for all regional actors, including Iran. I think if you focus on the Kofi Annan solution and giving some time to it, this can go towards finding a solution that can be acceptable for all elements I just mentioned.

Muhittin Ataman: I wonder whether Iranophobia is a reason or a result of Iranian foreign policy toward Arab countries.

Basheer Nafi: The second factor is the Russian factor. Of course there are overlapping dimensions between the Russian position and the Iranian position. The Russian spoke about the international law—took position against the Western and the Arab proposals in the United Nations Security Council. I tend to believe that the great powers do not really abide by international law, they use the international laws. International law is of course like the other sort of laws—they are open to interpretation. When the interpretation serves the interests of certain powers, it is respected. When it is not, it will be overlooked. The Georgian crisis, of course, a few years ago is very major example of this. I think the main reason behind the Russian position of Syria is that Russia has lost leveraging power in the world. A lot of people are talking about—the Russians are talking about, the Americans—of the issues of conflict and interest in Georgia about the anti-ballistic missile defense system in Europe.

Perhaps these issues are involved, but the main reason is, Syria has been like a gift from heaven for Russia to reassert itself in the international scene. It is again to reaffirm Russian role in the international relations system. If someone in certain circles of Russia, wants to make out of Syria like a kind of a small Cold War, the problem is the Syrian issue is not like the invasion of Cuba in the 1960s or even the invasion of Iraq in 2003. We all know what really happened in Syria. The Syrian people thought that Syria can also change in the way Egypt has changed, or the way in Tunisia has changed. Most of the regional and Arab interested parties did not really formulate a very clear position in Syria until much later. We know for example that the Turkish position did not change until demanding a total transformation in Syria until perhaps after Turkish Foreign Minister visit to Damascus in mid-August.

...

“Iranian support for the Syrian regime”

The Iranian element is very similar to the Russian factor. Iran played an important role against the Israeli expansion and against the Western influence in the region. But I believe there is also a kind of sectarian element in the Iranian position towards Syria which will have to be taken into consideration we do not like it, but it is a real fact. What is seemed to appear is that Iran has put its trust in the Syrian regime not the Syrian people. Iran seems to forget that the Syrian people played very important role in the Palestinian question from the 1920 onward. It is like the Russian seemed to forget that it was the Shukru Quwwatli government of the 1950s—so called liberal government—which started relations with Soviet Union and since then the relations between Russia and Syria did not fundamentally change. Syria always had a different view from other countries in the region. I believe that even if Bassma Kodmani, Burhan Ghalioun, Najib Ghadbian, or others come to power, I do not think that there will change very much. Of course, in small scale, there will be small changes in terms of relationships between new Syria and Western countries, but not fundamental. Syria needs to have relationships with various powers to fulfill its aspiration of playing a kind of a role in the region.

...

The fourth element is the lack of an overall strategy. We all know, of course, that revolutionary movements are unpredictable. Sometimes we seem to forget that the dynamics of the revolutions are unpredictable. In the beginning most of the forces involved believed that a kind of rational peaceful transformation—some Turkish pressure, Saudi and Qatari pressure, will eventually bring about the change in Syria. That of course did not happen. And not the Americans, not the French, not the Turks, not the Saudis, not the Arab League had any strategic view of the situation—how to deal with very complex evolving situation in Syria. Perhaps we are now beginning to see something over and over strategy where Syria is going to go from here. I think this is time that the romantic view of our revolution is coming to an end. All the Syrians know very well that revolutions are very messy affairs, and sometimes are extremely bloody affairs. The situation in Syria will be chaotic for a while—a bit messy—maybe we will see quite a bit of bloodshed. The situation in the region would be fluid for a while, maybe it would take about four to five—six—years until we can see a new system emerging in the region.

Kayhan Barzegar: I am afraid to say that choosing between values and interest, American foreign policy shows that they always take the interest. And that is something that we should be very careful of. Bringing foreign elements in the regional affairs will complicate the issues and that will do in the expense of regional nations. This is one thing that I am trying to say.

I give you another example. And that is that the Americans gave a weapon to al-Qaeda to battle with Soviets in that time. Twenty years after that, we see the Afghan crisis—roots of the crisis—right now because of that American decision. In Iraq, we see that a lot of regional tensions that coming up between Iran and Iraq—even in Afghanistan, we do not have any problem with Iraqi friends. The Americans always say that if we go out of Iraq, Iran will fill the power vacuum—no, it is not like that.

“Syria needs to have relationships with various powers to fulfill its aspiration of playing a kind of a role in the region.”

Basheer Nafi



“Turkish position on Syria”

“What we were trying to do was to transform this country through engagement.”

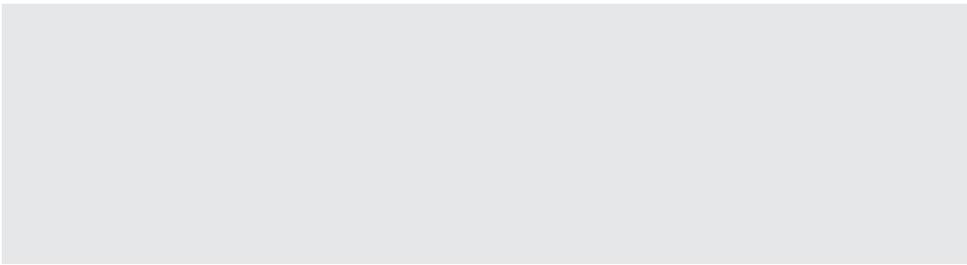
Sedat Önal

Iran is more relaxed, the two sides have good relations—a lot of economic exchanges. It is not the issue of just implying Iran—

Sedat Önal: I would like to express the main tenets of the Turkish foreign policy to Syria. First, our approach to Syria is based on our overall stance toward this phenomenon, the so called Arab Spring. We think that the situation in Syria cannot be thought about in isolation from what is going on in the larger region regarding the legitimate aspirations of the people for freedom, for democracy, and for dignity. This is very same thing that is happening in Syria. This is something that is coming from within, something indigenous. We have not created this stream; this is part of the history. Something historic is happening and we need to understand it and react accordingly. But at the same time, we should also see that in each and every country undergoing transition, greater rights are happening—each and every country has its own characteristics. We should take into considerations these characteristics while we try to address situation in each and every country.

As for Syria, this is a special case for us—very important. Because for Turkey, Syria was a number one political investment for the last 10-15 years. And we have worked a lot to put in place a functional relationship. We had established a high level strategic cooperation council with this country. We have signed in just two days time 52 agreements. And these were not just on paper; we have worked a lot to follow them up. This was the situation one year ago. But this was not in its essence different from our current position. Because what we were trying to do was to transform this country through engagement. We did know, back then, there were lots of serious deficiencies in terms of democracy and human rights, etc. But through engagement, we have targeted to change this country through a process of evolution. But the people themselves rose up against the regime and they demanded their rights. Actually we have seen this before it came to Syria. And we tried to explain the situation and encourage the regime to take steps. We have given the very clear message that, in order not to be swept by this tide of history which they cannot resist, they should take the initiative and try to change the country themselves. Open up the country to pluralistic democracy, human rights, etc. But in our own experience, we saw it clearly that this regime is unable and lacks the intention to do so.

At a certain moment, we had to make the choice either to support the people or to stand by the regime, and of course we have chosen the people. Now what we are doing is in solidarity with the international community. To first stop the violence—bloodshed—on the ground immediately, and try to facilitate political transition—peaceful political transition. This is what we are trying to do. In terms of political transition we have supported the Arab plan on a regional basis, but for this or that reason it did not work—but still it is on the table. At a certain moment we needed the involvement of the UN Security Council, but for reasons known to all of you it did not work. And we need to find an alternative international initiative to increase pressure on the regime and those supporting it. Because we think that we cannot stay indifferent to what goes on the ground. Because every day, first tens of people were dying and now it has become hundreds of people each day. In the final analysis, what we would like to see is Syria stop being a country that is generating instability—for its



people and for the region, for its neighbors—and become one who produces stability and prosperity for everybody.

Ufuk Ulutaş: Since we are dealing with the question how to solve the Syrian crisis, there is a basic question here. Can the Syrian regime survive without direct aid of Iran and Russia? Iran is supporting the Syrian regime with weapons like with military aid. This was rumors months ago, but it is no more rumors at this moment. Russia is the biggest arms supplier to the Syrian regime. Can solution to the Syrian problem be possible without Russian and Iranian direct military support to Syrian regime? I think we should start from this question. Because especially what I see from our Iranian and Russian colleagues is that they are talking about the arming of the opposition, etc. But on the other side of the picture, there is a kind of unstoppable flow of weapons to the Syrian regime by the Russians and by the Iranians. So I would really appreciate if my Russian and Iranian colleagues can touch upon this point. I mean a solution to the Syrian problem without Iran and Russia sending direct military support to Syrian regime.

Veniamin Popov: I heard a mantra saying that Syrian regime exists because of the Russian and Iranian armed support. I can assure you that it is not true. Syrian regime has enough weapons to deal with any situation without delivery of our weapons. The idea that the regime exists because of our support is a great mistake. It is a wrong conclusion.

Najib Ghadban: The point about Russian support of Syrian regime is not just about weapons. Any time there is a political position that Russia or Iran takes there is a massacre on the ground. There are implications of that political position as well. It is not just a military side. Our friend from Iran said in the morning he wanted a regional solution, the Arab league is regional. I do not know if the US is part of the Arab league. Turkey is regional. If you want to be constructive there are ways. First is the ending of the support to Assad's killing machine.

Basheer Nafi: There is one side that is being very active: Russian-Iranian side. It is ridiculous for anyone of us to say that these are Arab league reports and so on. There are hundreds of reports about Iranian and Russian involvement. This is mainly political support. Regimes do not survive only on arms which have been supplied to the regime by Russia and Iran. But there is also political, economic and moral support. This Iranian and Russian support has been vital for the continuation of the crisis and for the exacerbation of the situation in Syria.

Fyodor Lukyanov: The whole discourse around Syrian crisis is extremely strange and confusing. There are roughly two aspects of the situation which are even not contradictory to each other. They are complementary. Strangely enough each side tries to emphasize one and ignore the other. I agree with ambassador Popov and with others who say that Russian and Iranian direct military support to the Syrian government is not a key factor. It would be oversimplified reason behind Assad's ability to resist the protests. As I understand, Russia does not supply new arms; there are no new agreements. These are old ones that would be fulfilled. I agree with Mr. Nafi that there is no morality in big politics. So of course, Russian arms sales to

“Can the Syrian regime survive without direct aid of Iran and Russia?”

“Syrian regime has enough weapons to deal with any situation without delivery of our weapons.”

Veniamin Popov

“The problem is—or the question is—why are both Russia and Iran investing in Bashar Assad junk bonds—it is like the 2007 US subprime credit crisis.”

Taha Özhan



Assad has nothing to do with morality. We cannot deny that there are other arm sales and financial support to the opposition from other countries. It is part of the game obviously.

We have very heavy international involvement in this crisis. It does not mean that some popular uprising against a dictatorial regime is wrong. That was right, but from the beginning it was actively used by outside forces—mainly regional outside forces, not by big powers like Russia, America, or Europe, but by regional countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Each has their agenda in this crisis. Since we have this situation, it cannot be discussed only in the framework of Al Jazeera about peaceful democracy-loving people against dictatorial regime. It is much more complicated.

Obeida Nahas: I still have one little question to our Russian and Iranian friends. What happens if the balance on ground changes? You see what is happening right now. We believe that, yes there is a proxy war taking place in Syria. And the Russians and Iranians are trying to settle some point with others in our home country. And of course there will be regional case to do the same now. Because everyone is looking after their own interest. But we look after our people's interest. And question would be what if the balance changes and Bashar Assad and his guys leave Damascus and go hiding into some mountain?

If the support remains for them, this will be for rebels. I assume they will still be supported. Because it is not about supporting a legitimate government, and it has not been like that from beginning. It is about supporting people who have been partners and allies in different situation over the years. That is not politics. Not talking about legitimacy here. Of course Bashar Assad is still somehow holds the constitutional legitimacy. But we all know that there were many countries that had constitutional legitimacy including Georgia for example, and other countries. Yes, legitimacy is there but again people have the right to change their government. People have the right, and what happened to Syria in March was a Syrian revolution—for the first month we were gaining a lot. And that was very peaceful until the Iranian technical support started coming in. I still remember after April the number of detainees rose from 5000 to 35,000 in few weeks. And the first generation of the activists on the ground has almost been wiped. We do not have these people anymore. They have been killed. So I think that question remains, is Bashar Assad going to be supported to the end?

Taha Özhan: So the problem is—or the question is—why are both Russia and Iran investing in Bashar Assad junk bonds—it is like the 2007 US subprime credit crisis. And those actors, who somehow created that credit crisis, are very rational actors. I mean, Morgan Stanley, big banks—so they were supposed to know how to invest, and they were supposed to be experts on this issue, but they kept investing in junk bonds. In the end we had a financial bubble and crisis. So the question should be, what if Russians and Iranians were not supporting the Assad regime in the Middle East, what they were going to get. I think the answer is quite positive for both of them. Since Iran has already declared after Mubarak's removal that it is an Islamic awakening, and they show their support—they were supporting Bahrainian revolution—so why not Syria. And this was the second test of Islamic revolution, since in 1982 they already

“Will Russia support the regime till the end?”

“The Russians and Iranians are trying to settle some point with others in our home country.”

Obeida Nahas



“What are the rational elements of Russia and Iran supporting Assad regime?”

“The Iranians have started to think that the future government of Syria will be anti-Iranian.”

Kayhan Barzegar

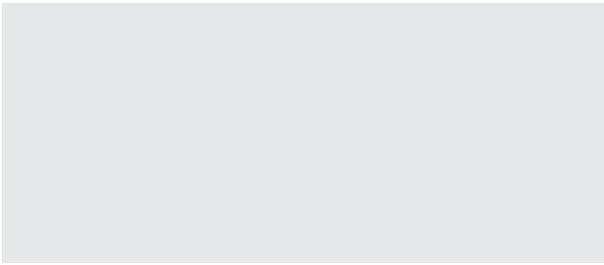
failed in the first Hama test, and this is the second test for them and their position is this one. My question is very rational: what are the rational elements of Russia and Iran supporting Assad regime or investing in this al-Assad junk bond?

Cengiz Çandar: In this part of the world, we are not very much used to Iranian passivity, do you want to jump in?

Kayhan Barzegar: I do not represent the Iranian government, so please don't always say “Iranians say, Iranians say”—I am an academic, but I mentioned one point when we were going to lunch, I think it is misleading to think that the Iranians do not want changes happening in Syria. The main point is, I remember that at the beginning of the crisis the Iranians were positive about changing things in Syria, but then when the opposition party has started to put it as an anti-Iranian matter, then the Iranians have started to think that the future government of Syria will be anti-Iranian—that then Iran will lose a friend in the region; then, they started to see the issue as a zero-sum game.

I believe at the beginning the Iranians were somehow positive about the changes and - wanted to find a middle way, and I think still there are ways that can convince the Iranians to come up. I am just carefully listening to my friends from Syria, because I have some thoughts that I would bring them up in the second session, but I think that it is not that the Iranians see things black and white right now. They see—because I follow the debates inside Iran—there are some debates inside Iran which are very strong at least at the intellectual level—of course they are not dominant view right now—that how Iran can establish relations with the future regime of Syria even without Assad. And they are balancing how they can do that. That was why I mentioned this morning there should be a compromise where Iran takes one step further, the other side takes one step backward, trying to come to a middle way solution. With Assad or without Assad, the future government of Syria is important for Iran because Iranians see Syria as a strategic ally in the region—they are laying gas pipeline, they are doing a lot of investment, culturally they are close, they are close to Lebanon—if you put it in an ideological way, they are close to Hezbollah.

Therefore, the Iranian interest should be balanced somehow. The question remains how the Iranians can be convinced that the future government of Syria is not anti-Iranian. That was why I mentioned this morning that it was a mistake just ignoring Iran's role, at the beginning. And I think that was the mistake of the Western perspective. And you mentioned that the regional approach already exists but the Iranians do not believe because they think that it is not the pure regional approach, because this is Saudi Arabia is there—Saudi Arabia is intervening in the crisis, Qatar is there—these are Iranian rivals in the region. On top, the United States and Israel. And when we put all of these together, that will go toward the balance of power issues, and that makes sure Iran—it is not just a matter of just government interest—I can assure you—it is a matter of Iranian state interests, and how the Iranians think about the issue from a geopolitical interest. So I will wait, and I will bring up some points later.



“Russian limitations in the Syrian imbroglio”

“Russia wants to be treated as Soviet Union still.”

Cengiz Çandar

Cengiz Çandar: I am happy that you have stepped in and I have brought you in, because I think that was a very interesting and important contribution to the debate. What he has said might be a question—though we will be closing in 10 or 15 minutes for this debate—in terms of Russia. So we all are aware that this is larger than Syria. This crisis has become not a domestic crisis only; it has attained the magnitude of being a regional crisis and even international. So does Russia fit into the regional framework or the international framework? If it is the international framework, it seems—we remember the remarks this morning about Russia’s opportunity to step in into the international equation. He did not say it, but maybe I go further to interpret—if I would not be wrong—Russia still wants to be treated as Soviet Union. And it made the Syrian crisis a good pretext to get into the international equation in order to be treated as Soviet Union—once treated by the other Superpower once upon a time.

But, I am afraid that there are limitations of Russian power in this Syrian imbroglio in the sense that, Balkans were much more of a near abroad for Russia compared to Syria—and they were sidelined. At a certain point, when it was in Bosnia, or in Kosovo, even without the UN Security Council resolution, the international undertaking that had taken place in Bosnia and in Kosovo to a certain extent sidelined the Russians—so it might repeat again here. In that sense, the question if—let us assume that the SNC commits itself to safeguarding Russian strategic interests in using the Tartus port, after a regime change in Syria. Would the Russian comply in a way that our Iranian friend interpreted what might be the Iranian modus operandi in the near future. So this is a question I leave on the floor.

Najib Ghadban: Last point about Iran. The question I think again, it would be better if we move away from, “you know you expressed anti-Iranian sentiment so this is why we are reacting to you.” From the Syrian point of view—especially activists on the ground—they see logistical support coming to the regime, they know the source, they have this anti-Iranian sentiment. But if we want to speak politically, I think—and again this extends to the Russians—we are in the SNC, in terms of foreign policy, the reorientation of Syria—we are not going to have drastic reorientation of foreign policy. Even under Assad the father—and we are no fans of him, many of us here suffered under him—but we honestly believe that his foreign policy, if you look at it, was balanced a lot of interests and pursued the national interest of Syria. So, a new Syria is not necessarily going to be necessarily anti-Iranian, is not going to be anti-Russian, is not going to be pro-American—even though some of us live in the West. And I think those kind of message could be helpful in engaging in strategic dialogue with these countries, instead of trying to go into the blame game and say, “oh we hear voices here and there, our foreign policy.”

Basheer Nafi: I am a frequent visitor to this country [*Turkey*], and I have been following the Turkish policy in Syria throughout the year, and I did not see, I did not hear, I did not read, that the AK Party is thinking about regime change in Syria until the end of August, which is about more than 5-6 months after the outbreak of demonstrations in Syria. So it did not start as a proxy war, it did not start as an

“Dimensions of Iranian support for the Syrian regime.”

“I do believe, that the sectarian dimension is only one dimension of many, but there are different geopolitical considerations.”

Basheer Nafi

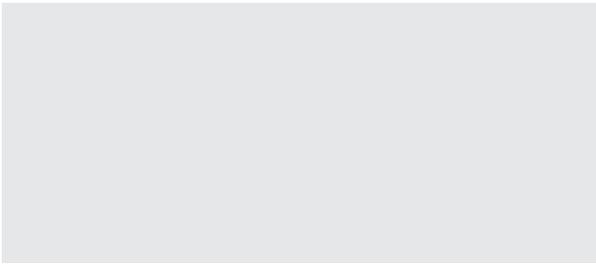
international crisis, it became so later on. And fundamentally, because, I believe, of the Russian and Iranian position—it was the Russian and Iranian support of this regime which prolonged the timespan of the revolution and which complicated the situation in Syria.

I think the Iranian position—and the change in the Iranian position—is much more essential for the future of this region than the change in the Russian—of course, Russia is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Russia can exert much more influence than Iran, has much more resources than Iran—however, for the future of the region, for the future of the people of the region, the Iranian position is much more important to change than the Russian position. It is the specter of further sectarian division in the region, the shaping of politics in sectarian terms, which is going to be extremely dangerous for the future of Arab-Iranian relations, and for the future of the Arab themselves—and for the future of all countries of the Middle East. We have seen a lot of tension rising from the Iranian position on the situation in Iraq, during the invasion or afterwards with the civil war in 2006 to 2008, and the coming back of Maliki to power, and the Iranian insistence on the coming back of Maliki to power.

And now we have the Syrian crisis, and so many people are saying there is no logic in the Iranian position on Syria unless you take into consideration the sectarian dimension of it, I mean I do believe, that the sectarian dimension is only one dimension of many, but there are different geopolitical considerations. There is a history of alliance between the two countries, there is now of course economic and energy questions, and there is the question of Hezbollah and the situation in Lebanon, all of these perhaps shaping the Iranian position in Syria. However, for Iran to make a much more rational approach to the Syrian crisis, it is extremely important for the future—Iran is not going to become a South African country, or part of Northern Europe. Iran has been there for the last 500 years, and is going to be here in the region for hundreds of years to come. And this is extremely important for all of us to reset politics and the political discourse in the region in political terms, and not in sectarian and ethnic terms

Margarete Klein: I will give you an outsider perspective on what I see is the Russian position and what are the opportunities to engage Russia more constructively. Russia is a key external player in the Syria crisis due to its veto power in the UN Security Council, due to its leverage bilaterally on the Assad regime. And thirdly, I think we would agree it is not Russia that is the decisive fact why Assad is still in power; nevertheless, if Russia stopped supporting the Assad regime, that could start a process of eroding the power bases within Syria. So we never know exactly what would be the amount of people within the elite that have to be dissatisfied and which have to feel that the support of the protector is withdraw. But maybe ten percent would be enough and so withdrawing the support of Assad could be a decisive factor in eroding the regime from within.

Moscow claims that it is not pro-Assad—taking no side—but nevertheless de facto it acted as a protector for the Syrian regime. However acting as a de facto protector



for Assad became increasingly risky for Russia, in my point of view, because it began to undermine the long-term interests of Russia. Firstly, this implies to the international level. By blocking the UN Security Council, Russia risks undermining its most important instrument of influence on the international level. Because as a consequence, the search for alternative solutions will mainly take place outside of this instrument—like the Friends of Syria. Secondly, on the regional level Moscow is threatened with isolating itself because all the major actors with the exception or Iran press for more pressure on Assad. And by that, Moscow risks undermining the foundations of its Middle East policy—namely to establish good working relations with all the actors in the region. And thirdly, in regard of the development in Syria, Moscow also risks to be heading to a dead end, because Moscow refused to condemn Assad when the massacres in Homs took place—it was losing a great deal of credibility in regard to the Syrian opposition.

In my point of view, the Russian leadership seems to be realizing the increasing costs of supporting Assad, and since February, is trying to conduct a policy of damage limitation. We can see that when Russia approved the presidential declaration in the UN Security Council. So Russia's policy got more flexible to some degree. And this is in my point of view a window of opportunity to engage Russia more constructively. But how far-reaching is the shift in Moscow's policy and where are the limits of Russia's more flexible stance? In order to answer these questions let us take a look at the interests that guide Russia's policy. I think here one would be the economic side of the interests—that is of course the weapons deals. When it comes to identifying the weapons deliveries, according to a Moscow defense brief, Syria was in second place with an amount of 15 percent. And the Syrian arms market got more important for Russia when Russia risked and lost the Libyan arms market.

However the decisive factors for Moscow's protector role in my point of view are of geopolitical importance and a question of prestige. In the Middle East from the former Soviet allies, only Damascus remains as one of Moscow's major partners. And I think what you have mentioned, Mr. Popov, the international norms and legal norms play an additional role, but I think Russia's position towards these norms have been quite ambivalent in the past. So I would say it is not a causal role but more it is an additional role. So the red lines for Russia are quite clear: no weapons embargo and no military intervention from outside. But below these red lines that seems to be a window of opportunity. The first would be about what to do is to get those windows of opportunity open much more.

Firstly, I think a close cooperation between the Western states and regional partners is of crucial importance. Only then Russia will constantly realize the danger of self-isolation. But at the same time it is exactly this scenario that has to be avoided, because in its own logic, the scenario of isolation bears the question that Russia would not have another alternative than to approve Assad. So it is exactly that which we should avoid. Secondly, do not push for a military solution—do not rule it out, but give diplomatic solutions a chance. And that would be quite interesting if Russia is in a face saving role. I think that is not an easy task, because it was Moscow

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**“Russia is quite interested
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Margarete Klein



“A Yemeni solution for Syria?”

itself to a large degree that minimized its chances to play a face saving role in the Syrian conflict. At the beginning, Moscow might have had the chance to act as an intermediary between the opposition and the government but that chance missed Russia.

Nevertheless, Russia could play a crucial role in the so called Yemenite solution by offering exile for the Syrian leadership. However, it is doubtful whether Russia's influence on Assad is significant enough—and whether Russia is interested in offering exile for Assad. Thirdly, offer Russia a chance to compensate for the possible negative economic and political consequences of the fall of Assad. That will be a change to the cost-benefit analysis of the Russian power. Therefore, the Syrian opposition could declare that after a change of power, the existing contracts with Russian companies would be observed, and that there is an interest in expanding the political and military relations with Russia, so not to give a Libyan scenario a second chance. Fourthly, the Gulf States could offer Russia an economic carrot by offering to expand on political and economic cooperation, and most of all, give access to the lucrative arms market in the Gulf States. Russia is quite interested in gaining access, especially to the Saudi Arabian arms market. And the fifth point would be to try to relax the overarching geopolitical conflict between Russia and the Western states. As long as the Syrian conflict in Russia is seen through the lens of geopolitical competition, it will always be hard to reach a compromise. And therefore I think it is up to the Western states to come up with some possible proposals to Russia, maybe not under the Chicago Summit, but after. I do not argue that it is a clear tradeoff between Russia and Western states and regional actors, but it is more about creating a framework that is beneficial to Russia to being able to adopt a more flexible stance.

Emile Hokayem: I am going to give a perspective how the crisis is seen from the Gulf. I am going to start with some of the fantasies of the Gulf role in Syria so far. I heard a lot of assumptions about a massive Gulf role in Syria from the early days of the uprising. There is absolutely no evidence of that. No evidence of massive Gulf money going into Syria. It is a narrative that has been constructed. I have no reason to argue against it—I just look at the evidence. No better quality weaponry. Syrian commanders say, “We have never got anything from anyone, can someone help us.” In a way, if you were in the shoes of Syrian rebel commanders, it is the worst of all worlds. They are accused of working for a foreign agenda without getting anything. This is one assumption that we should put to rest for the moment. It may change—there is an opportunity for that. First let's understand the context of the Gulf interest in Syria.

1. There is a strategic opportunity for Gulf States to counter and reverse Iranian influence in the Levant.
2. There is an opportunity to reverse the perceived loss of Iraq.
3. There is an opportunity for a number of Gulf States—especially for Saudi Arabia—to assert itself as a leading Sunni Arab power, winning pretty huge victory.
4. It has also to do with punishing Assad for a perceived insult against Arab rulers in the past few years. The personal dimension of that issue should never



“Gulf interests in Syria”

“Gulf States do not know how to project power.”

Emile Hokayem

be underestimated. There is very floury language use about Bashar Assad in the Gulf, because of his own use of insult over the years. There is a personal dimension let's not deny it.

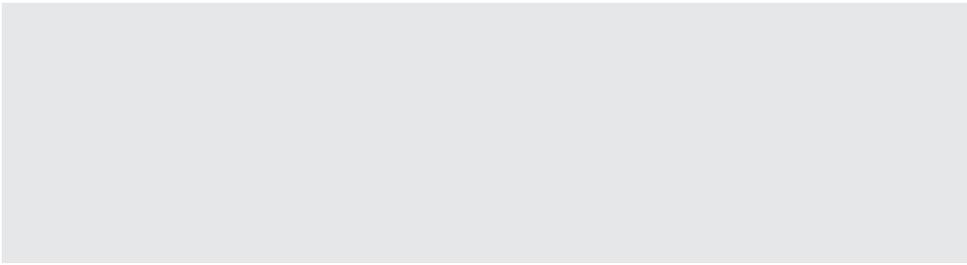
Are the Gulf States interested in democracy as such in Syria? Well, not really. They calculate that a more representative system will be a net gain for them just as Iranians calculate a more representative system in Iraq would be a net gain for them. This is why Iran was actually supportive of political changes in Iraq to a large extent. This is how Gulf States approach it.

There is also an undeniable sectarian dimension to Gulf interests in Syria. Sadly, the region is rife with sectarian passions at this point. Gulf States, in an attempt to mobilize support for uprising, have encouraged some of the most extremist voices. I would argue that there is a propaganda war that has very negative impacts and can actually have disastrous impact the day of the transition. Media helps people set narratives—make definitive judgment about new rulers and groups. I believe it is the very opposite. I welcomed the documents about inclusive representation; we shouldn't deny that dimension.

The day Syrian revolt broke out on March 15 was also the day when Saudi troops entered Bahrain. I was on the Pearl Roundabout on that day in Manama. Let's be honest that the fact that Syria did not condemn Saudi and Gulf intervention made Gulf officials very happy—as Syria did not say anything at the Arab League. Iran did condemn the GCC intervention. This changed because there was an effort from a number of Gulf States including Saudi Arabia to reach out to Assad. Saudis say, in the first months we were pushing hard, the Qataris tried, there were proposals on the table from what I understand. The very stubborn Bashar Assad response to that really scuttled any possibility for movement on this front.

Should we assume Gulf States are pouring money into the Syrian uprising? I think the likelihood of that has increased but I still think that they are reluctant for a number of reasons. First, they do not want to do this alone, they want to see others on board. Second, they do not know how to do that: Gulf States do not have experience and expertise to run complicated intelligence operations. When they have in the past, it was a fiasco—Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain were all fiascos. Gulf States do not know how to project power. They need sub-contractors like Jordan; they need a partner like Turkey. They have money but, they do not know how to sign the checks. Funding an uprising and understanding the complexity is beyond their talent and capabilities. We have to be careful not to assume just because Saudi Al Faisal made a big fuss in Tunisia and the day after, bank accounts were opened—I am very skeptical.

Also Gulf States' interlocutors in Syria are not the same. If you are in Saudi Arabia or United Arab Emirates today, you are still very suspicious of the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar, on the other hand, has a different kind of relationship. The Saudis, when I talked to them, they say, “Oh, we know the tribes because a number of tribes operate in this entire region—well Syria is an urbanized country, I am not sure arming tribes



is a game changer on its own. On the contrary, they can create a problem. Tribes are opportunistic—that is how they operate. They will not fight unless they have a clear sense of where all this is going. They are not crazy risk takers, they do not mobilize on the basis of ideology—they do it on the basis of kinship. You have to look at it in a more complex way. The various Gulf States have different entry points to Syria. If they do not work together, they can create a mess, and if they do not work with Turkey—which is Syria’s extremely powerful neighbor—they can also create a mess.

Let me end by saying a couple of words on the Gulf-Russian dimension. Simply put, Gulf States have very little leverage on Russia. Historically, they did not get along with Russia for a number of reasons. They were pro-West Sunni monarchies—I am not going to go into that. Today there are very weak economic relations between Gulf States and Russia. Russia exports energy and weapon. Gulf States do not import energy, and they are not going to buy Russian weaponry, because they have a pretty good relationship with Western suppliers. On top of that the West provides a security umbrella—Russia, not really. So there is no need for them to go there. The problem is that that relationship is empty. That explains why the king of Saudi Arabia can afford to say what he says about Saudi Arabia because it does not cost him that much. Perhaps one way to get Russia on board is to promote greater engagement at that level, but I am very skeptical—there is a lot of bad blood at this point. The language that is been used by both sides has not been very helpful.

Najib Ghadban: I want to go back a little bit to the Gulf countries’ position and connect it a little bit with Russia and Iran. I totally agree that from our point of view, in the SNC, and in Syria, we have not received any substantial support from the GCC. And in fact early on, early in the first two months of the revolution, we know that Qatar—the emir of Qatar is a personal friend of Bashar, so are the two spouses of the leaders—and it was actually Bashar’s intransigent policies and stupidity, if I may say, that lost him these friends, including Qatar. But it is taken a while that these countries are turning to the support of the opposition. Again, that is why it is not fair to compare the Iranian and the Russian support of the regime to the GCC, and even the US and other European countries. All of these countries have taken, more or less, principled position denouncing violence, and supporting the right of the Syrian people choosing their government. Like they did with the Arab countries that went through the Arab Spring. But we have not received any substantial support from any of these countries and my colleague talked about the US. Obama talked early on about “Bashar must go,” but we all know that the US has not done much—except political support I would say—now this is changing—this is changing right now.

Obeida Nahas: On Iran, Iran is not only losing Syria but losing many other Arab countries. The new Arab revolutions countries are closing doors with Iran now. I heard it myself from officials from Tunisia and Egypt. Tunisians said clearly to us, “we are not willing to have talks with Iranian representatives until we see the crisis in Syria gets resolved.” The way Syrian crisis gets resolved will affect Iran’s position in many of the Arab states. I think, when Iran and Russia contribute to the resolution, they will even gain more than what they gain right now. Let’s be frank: building

“Gulf -Russian dimension on the Syrian crisis”

“I totally agree that from our point of view, in the SNC, and in Syria, we have not received any substantial support from the GCC.”

Najib Ghadban



“Russian position on Syria?”

“So as for isolation of Russia I do not buy it at all, because Russia cannot be isolated, for good and for bad.”

Fyodor Lukyanov

relations with dictators is much easier. That is true. Democracy is coming—it is inevitable. This regime will not continue. It is wrong to bet on one man—build this relationship with a wider political elite. This would be more fruitful.

Fyodor Lukyanov: I am really surprised by this session—by the previous one and especially by this one. The initial—one of the initial—motives of the Russian position on Syria was as somebody mentioned before, about to show that Russia is an important player in world affairs still. Of course not as our colleague said in the previous session, that Russia wants to be treated as the Soviet Union. Of course not. Fortunately no one in Russia wants to pretend that Russia is still Soviet Union. Soviet Union has gone forever. And that is already almost accepted by everyone in Russia. But of course Russia wants to be treated as one of great powers. And when I hear what is under discussion here, I see that Russian policy was fantastically successful. So the only problem which we are discussing is Russian position—ok Iran as well, but mainly Russia. That is very strange to me because I see that Syria is an extremely complicated country with a lot of problems inside, with a lot of problems around. Russia, yes, Russia plays a role this time and I fully agree with the idea that the Syrian crisis gave Russia a fantastic opportunity to remind everybody that Russia matters very, very much and if you want to do something in world affairs—it does not mean Syria necessarily, it can be any other conflict—but you need to go there, you need to go to Moscow.

What were mentioned and numbered as risks for Russia, it might be seen as advantages as well because for example you said that if Russia continues with its current position, it will mean the devaluation of the UN Security Council and realpolitik will go beyond it. So far we see exactly the opposite situation. Russia foreign position which initially was criticized heavily and the Russia-bashing continued a couple of weeks. But then suddenly everybody changed minds and big powers and parts in the conflict started to come back and discuss with Russia. Yes, there is an option—always there is an option—to go beyond Security Council, to bypass SC, but it seems that no one wants to repeat Iraqi scenario, because that was a very, very bold lesson to everybody what does it mean. So as for isolation of Russia I do not buy it at all, because Russia cannot be isolated, for good and for bad. But it is just impossible, and Syria example shows that it is the case.

As for undermining future positions in the Middle East and the Arab World, it sounds convincing. But unfortunately we have Libyan experience, and Libyan experience shows that even if Russia plays very constructive role it doesn't matter much. And Muammar was overthrown and killed basically because Russia decided not to stop it initially—so Russian role was crucial. What the new rulers of Libya said, first of all, Russian and Chinese companies are not welcome in Libya after dictatorship. So, unfortunately, it shows that even if Russia—at least there is a widespread view in Moscow—even if Russia would turn sides now, it does not matter because new government in Syria will say “sorry, you were so close to dictatorship, we do not want you.” I believe that ideas expressed here that Syrian National Council should address—should approach—Russia and maybe confidentially, maybe informally, discuss future interests of Russia in Syria. It might make sense. And that this is important just to

address those cynical and mercantilist views. But those motivations did play a role initially in Russian position, but not anymore. Not so important.

I think the Russian position today is much more about principles. It might sound strange, but anyway. Because Russian position based on Libyan experience again is that to get involved in a civil war—ok we can discuss definitions, but what is happening in Syria is at least on the brinkmanship of a civil war. The international community has no right—and basically it is wrong—to get involved in a civil war on one of the sides. Why? We can argue about [Responsibility to Protect], and this is all those talks are very valuable but at the end, the R2P is a vague option; sovereignty might be awful but it is a very clear one. R2P, each time you interpret it in a different way, depending who is doing that. So I think that—and finally the combination—the idea here is that Russia and Iran—all the time, “Russian and Iran should do”—Russia and Iran are in a completely different situation vis-a-vis Syria—completely different. For Russia, it is much more about international politics, about principles, also about some practical interests, but that is not at all the main issue. For Iran, it is different—it is a regional issue, it is a security issue, an issue of religion, and so on.

Suat Kınıklıoğlu: I have few comments how Russia played out and what it means for the rest of the international community. Firstly, Russia is benefiting from the lack of political will and the lack of a common strategy in the rest of the international community, which believes Assad has to go. I think so far, Moscow thinks it played very well. But it eventually may come down to a compromise between Iran, Turkey, and Russia—not sure if Russia would be involved... Russia is only delaying the inevitable. The region is going to be democratized, there will be ups and downs, and it will probably be violent and uneven. But it will not be able to stop the historical process—it will only delay it. It only benefits from the indecision of international community; it is a disgrace on our part that no one wants to take the leadership. I would caution our Russian friends if Syrian situation is solved through a solution, it would involve Tehran, Ankara, Moscow, and Washington. Don't think this will be a validation of what you have been standing for in Syria. This is not over.

Let me say a few words on the Turkish position. We have been somewhat overwhelmed by the momentum that started in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt. Our political rhetoric on this side has been too ambitious and too early which has raised unnecessarily wrong expectations. U.S., Turkey, and other countries are looking at each other to find someone to lead the situation. I just came back from Washington. If any of the people in this room think that Americans will do anything for you—especially our Syrian friends—forget about it. They are not going to do anything for you—at least not before the elections. Obama has no appetite. He has pulled out of Iraq, he is on his way to pulling out of Afghanistan. The last thing he wants is putting his country in another war that 90% of Americans could not find on a map. Turkey will also not take the lead because the Turkish position is rightly in favor of coalition. The only way this would have worked is a coalition where the U.S. takes Turkey, Europeans, and regional actors in the form of Arab League together.

Mohamad Walid: Getting back to the Russian role, which is a key factor in any solution for the Syrian crisis. Definitely Russia is a global power and has got its own interests in the region which has to be kept in future Syria, because Syria cannot

“Russian principles in Syria”

“I think the Russian position today is much more about principles.”

Fyodor Lukyanov

“What does Russia want to achieve in Syria?”

“The reputation of Russia as upholding principles is not very convincing.”

Cengiz Çandar

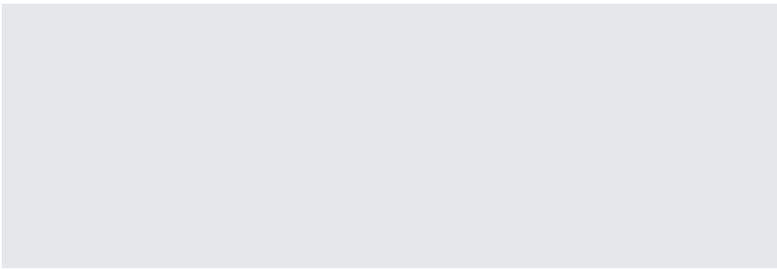
afford to be isolated in the region. All relations should be done with all major powers, regional and international, including Russia, of course. We know that the Syrian revolution is a homegrown revolution, not imported by anybody. It is the Syrian people who went against dictatorship. A couple of weeks ago, there was a very strange statement from the Russian foreign minister, saying that the events in Syria may lead to a Sunni government or Sunni rule, which is really a very, very strange statement. I mean, are the Russians concerned by the Sunni rule in Syria and they are not concerned by the Allawite rule that has been there for about 40 years?

For Russia to have a real influence on the Syrian people, it has to take equidistant from all parties. When they invite the Syrian people to have a dialogue with their government, they should have credibility, and such language of Syrian rule is very strange to the diplomatic quarter. Well what I think, is that in order to have a real positive solution to the Syrian crisis, and Russia is a key country to have such a role, then we have to have some clear ideas about such statements. I would like to hear from our Russian colleagues their comments about such a statement and what does it really mean.

Cengiz Çandar: It seems that it will be a follow up on the Russian issue. From where the importance of Russia comes, that occupies us so much in these sessions and elsewhere. There is no doubt that it is a great power, just looking at the map will attest to the fact that it is a great power. It is a Eurasian power stretching from Atlantic to Pacific. It is beyond a continent, the size of Russia. So it is obvious that it is a great power. Second, it is a UN Security Council member with the veto power. So to act as a great power having the status of being a UNSC member is twofold. Whether you are involved in an international game, in a constructive way—in cooperation. Or you can be a nuisance value, and you still become a great power, and make yourself to be addressed in every agenda—every issue of the international agenda—as a nuisance power. I feel that Russia, to Syria, is proving itself as more of a nuisance value for the international equation, rather than being more of a constructive and cooperative element.

The reputation of Russia as upholding principles is not very convincing. Russia has never had a reputation of being a power upholding principles. It is somewhere else. So now, overall, the general perception in the international arena and in the international public opinion that Russia is not only expressing solidarity with a brutal regime, but it is assisting to that regime to carry out its massacres and brutal stand. So it is bringing this reputation to Russia, and I do not feel that it will help Russia in a strategic sense. Because making use of being a member of United National Security Council, and vetoing a resolution—and we have to take note that it was 13-2 among 15, two being Russia and China, though we do not speak of China much, although it does have the veto power. We do speak of Russia not only because it has become a nuisance power, through exercise of its veto power, but because of its material assistance to the current regime in Syria which China does not do on the same par with Russia.

But this show of authority through the UN Security Council ended up in what? Ended up in establishment of Friends of Syria group—it did not exist before, Friends of Syria group. So exercising the veto, and supporting the regime, mobilized an international mechanism to come out, and it is getting institutionalized. In Istanbul, two days



ago, it was about 83 countries that met, and the resolutions—27 articles—that 28 countries, all members of the United Nations, are overruling practically, Russian veto. And as much as the Friends of Syria is born, with it, the Syrian National Council is empowered. Before Syrian National Council was not much heard, and it was even called ironically “Council of Istanbul” by some Syrians. Now the SNC, which was ironically called Istanbul Group, has become, with the consent of 83 countries of the United Nations, a legitimate representative of all Syrians, and the main interlocutor with the international community. So as much as it brings empowerment to Syrian National Council, it more and further delegitimizes the current Syrian regime with which Russia is in solidarity. So it is not very beneficial, neither tactically nor strategically, the stand Russia has.

So, the next step, if the things flow as much as we see at the moment, indicate to us that at a certain stage, not far from where we are, that the Syrian National Council will be recognized as the sole representative of the Syrian people. Then what would the position of Russia be? How, by further isolation of the regime in Syria, could preserve its stand on the side of the regime. So I am afraid that Russia is moving toward the losing side of the history. Because you cannot turn the tide back. The Arab revolution is under way. That Arab revolution has its extension in Syria called Syrian revolution—a subunit of the Arab revolution. And this is an unwinnable situation for anybody. And the question for this regime—for the existing regime—is not whether; it is when and how—that is it. So it is for Russia to decide to be either on the winning side of history or on the losing side of the history without resorting to the niceties of diplomatic parlance.

Obeida Nahas: Well, we are not talking—we are not asking Russia to let go of their case in the crisis. We are asking Russia to let go of Assad, and be proactive in reaching a solution. What happened in Libya was they let go of Qaddafi, but they did not participate in getting rid of him. Now maybe because there was a military campaign over there—there is no military campaign in Syria. It is basically just getting rid of Assad and his guys, as we have said earlier that army officers can remain in place—at least for some time—because we want to preserve state institutions and reform them—we want continuity. We want to see proactive—and we ask the same from our Iranian friends.

Unfortunately, it seems the Russians and Iranians right now are defending the status quo. They are not trying to help with what’s next. And is that a lack of vision of some sort, or is it something else. Now, comments like “Bashar al-Assad has won”—we hear that sometimes by some Russian diplomats—“Bashar al-Assad has won.” You know, that pushes the opposition into the direction of trying to change the balance on the ground, which means more support for the FSA, rather than pursuing a political solution because that means if we win, there will be a different situation. So no, we need to see a much more positive—and by the way, I mean, we read the statement of the foreign ministry in Syria two days ago. We read it positively. I mean, I know that when they were talking about the end of the era of trying to collapse the state—and by the way, we are not trying to collapse the state. We want the regime to collapse, not the state. And they hinted at something—some kind of political dialogue. And we assumed that might have come from our Russian friends, I am not sure. But in some

“What is the SNC demanding from Russia?”

“We want the regime to collapse, not the state.”

Obeida Nahas



“Will the Russian strategy on Syria work?”

brainstorming session, there was this idea. Some people said that it might be, and if that is the attitude that would be a good thing. But we want to see—we are not—we think that Russia is an important state—an important country. I was once talking to a senior American official and I said, when we talk to the United States, we are not asking you to invite us to the White House. This is something we ask Tunisia to do. The United States is not a country that only promotes us diplomatically if they want to help. And the same happens with Russia. It is not about inviting us to Moscow just to have some pictures. We have to reach a solution; otherwise, we cannot present anything to our people. And things are going into the radicalization part. Thank you.

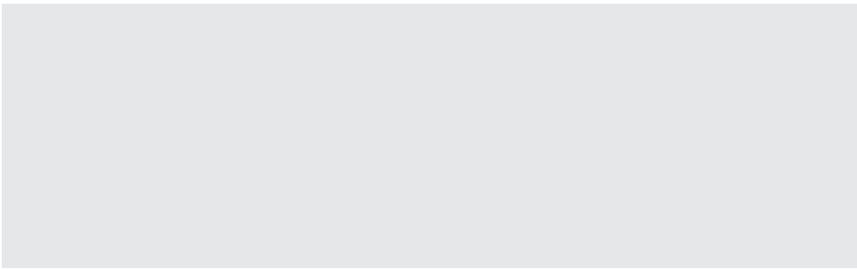
Emile Hokayem: You made the convincing case that Russia did what it did for geopolitical reasons. Which is actually why I question the competence of Russian strategists at that level. Because if you actually wanted to get on top of that, actually building a strong relationship with the Gulf states—that have a flourishing economy, that are playing a greater role, are part of the G-20 and so on—would have made more sense. I am not saying that the Gulf states would have been an ally to you the way Assad’s Syria today is. But what worries me is the perspective that Russia has used to look at the Middle East where you actually have new players with which you would have had a greater interaction for your own good. With Assad, look at all the heat you are getting for not that much in return in terms of trade. Yes, you are selling, what, \$5 billion worth of weaponry in the past—\$8 billion—in the past 5 years, and perhaps \$10 billion in the past 10 years. But I am just thinking, you want to play a role, you are actually a country with real economic issues, with real demographic issues—go to the new players. So for me, it is not an issue of where you necessarily stand in Syria, it is whether it actually made sense in terms of your long term interests.

Another point on the issue of Iran’s appeal in the region. I think it is ironic but very true that Iran’s allies and foes overestimate its influence and power. I think we have the wrong notion of Iranian power—I mean, look at Iran’s allies... “allies”—I am putting this in quotations: Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. So three countries in the middle of civil strife—of course, it varies—but in which half of the population—perhaps a bit less in some countries—is actually strongly opposed to Iran. So I mean I think we have reached the end of a decade of rising, growing Iranian power. And that was because Iran could surf very well on the regional fault lines, whether they were political, sectarian, or others. And I think it is extremely important for Iranian strategists to accept that. You know, it is not very comforting, because there is a lot of capital and resources that have been spent over the last three decades to build those alliances. But the reality is that Iran’s power, from now on, is going to shrink—to sink. Unless there is—and God help us then—if there is an Israeli or US strike on Iran, which I think would be a disaster on many levels, from human to strategic.

A final point here—two quick final points—something that struck me when we were in Istanbul was the low level of Gulf-Turkish cooperation on Syria. Yes, the Gulf faces an issue of capacity. If you look around this table, it is a non-Gulf guy who’s flying from Dubai—I think there is a couple of other people based in Saudi Arabia. The reality is that they are not fully engaged in the debate—they have problems on their side—but it is extremely important for you especially if, for Turkey, if it is going to become a key player in the future of Syria, that you build that relationship—and it

“I think it is ironic but very true that Iran’s allies and foes overestimate its influence and power.”

Emile Hokayem



is not there. There is a strong economic relationship—or a developing one—but the strategic one is still non-existent. And in the case of Syria, it shows. And my final point is, this is really the time—this is when we are going to test the SNC’s competence. This mechanism to fund the FSA and distribute salaries and so on. If they do not set the agenda for the Gulf states—for the countries that are going to disburse most of that money—than a huge opportunity will be lost. I actually have very little confidence that the Gulf states can do it the right way—or identify the right people for Syria’s own future—and so the role of the SNC here will be key. You have to be ahead of the curve in identifying the real players that you want to empower inside the country and not let the Gulf states do it for you. And I know that you have your contacts with the LCCs and the revolutionary councils and so on, but it should really be you going to those governments, their intel agencies, and so on, and say, “this guy not that guy.” If you do not do that, I am extremely concerned about the direction of this effort.

Fyodor Lukyanov: In the end, three cynical remarks. You say that it would be wiser for Russia to work with the Gulf states to work out another framework. But, if Russia would just follow the line, say, of Americans, who would care about Russia? Then it would be the same situation as was mentioned in the previous session about Balkans in 1990s—who cared about Russia then? Secondly, your question about what Russia would like to propose. Again, another cynical remark, do not overestimate the importance of Syria for Russian diplomacy and for Russian state. I mentioned before that for Russia, global dimension of this is much more important. And for right or wrong reasons, Russia believes that to create another precedent of outside intervention into another country’s domestic affairs would be bad for us. Because, yeah, there is a strong feeling in Russia that Russia, one day, might become a target for something similar. It is paranoia or not—I am not discussing that. But it is important. So what will happen in Syria at the end is not that important to Russia. Unfortunately, I must say this. And finally, you know, when I hear arguments about winning side of history and losing side of history— I am very sorry: but it is literature—it is journalism. It is not about solutions.

Veniamin Popov: I want to remind you that for Russia, it is a principle matter. Because when we used this veto with China, there was a resolution of our parliament including four main major factions. They agreed unanimously to approve the Russian stand on Syria. It is important because it was during the Presidential election campaign and there was fierce fighting between different political forces. But on this matter, there was consensus and unanimous approach. I think that, you know, it is a very constructive discussion. We have registered all the ideas and proposals of how to change the Russian position. I am not sure that all of these proposals will be acceptable for Russia, but nevertheless we think that we should listen to all the opinions. It is our principle. And this is the matter of great concern for us, because Syria is not far from Russian borders, and we are not interested in any big conflict. And I do not want to sound very pessimistic, but I just want to remind you that if there is no solution in the immediate future—and I think it could be on the basis of the Annan plan—so the situation will be much worse than that. And then, in some months, we will see all these repercussions and consequences. But, nevertheless, I very thankful for the Russian image. Because they are very good proposals.

“Russian stand on Syria”

“But, if Russia would just follow the line, say, of Americans, who would care about Russia?”

Fyodor Lukyanov



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The Moment of Truth: Proposals, Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Syria





“Armed component of the Syrian revolution”

“The people in Syria feel a very high sense of abandonment today.”

Bassma Kodmani

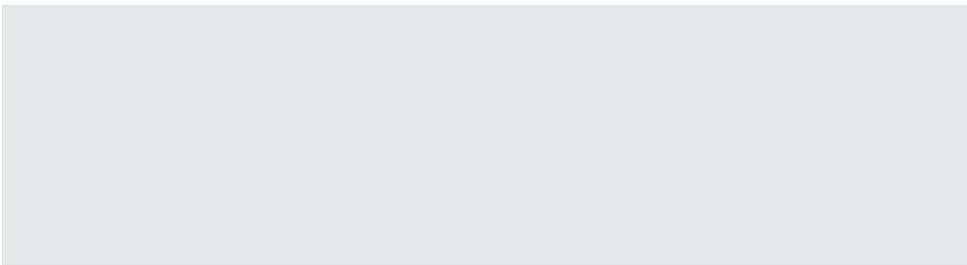
Bessma Kodmani: I have not spoken at length about the Annan Plan. I will only state what the position of the Council is on the plan—it is a position of supporting the Annan initiative. We have expressed our willingness to cooperate fully with the Annan team, and we have begun to do so. On different levels we need to have those discussion, and we need to see the fulfillment of the different items on that plan. Stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 come before stages 5 and 6. And the sequencing from our perspective is absolutely vital. That is full compliance and full implementation of item one, two and three: the cessation of the killings, the withdrawal of military and security forces, the liberation of prisoners, humanitarian aid, the right to demonstrate—these are the items that can then lead to a political process. And the political process will come when full compliance has been achieved on the previous items. I will end on that and I am sure we will have a discussion on it.

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What has also been discussed was the delivery of weapons or not—what kinds of material should be delivered. What kind of financial support should be provided how do we reach the population for humanitarian assistance. We have insisted in our discussions on a number of requests from the group of international group who gathered in Istanbul. One continues to be a very pressing demand and that is to provide access for humanitarian aid. We continue to hear of commitments—generous commitments—to provide financial supports. We still do not have an answer to the issue of access. And we believe that, here, maybe some efforts could have been made and some more creative ideas and more intense diplomatic contacts to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the population. This is not just a humanitarian issue. It is highly a political issue. The people in Syria feel a very high sense of abandonment today. And that is not a feeling that encourages the most moderate or democratic groups inside Syria. It does encourage the feeling that we can only rely on ourselves. We therefore need to resort to the arms. It is only with our own means and military, by building our military capacity that we can face that regime because the world is not coming to our rescue.

This is why I think we have been very insistent on the delivery of aid directly on the ground. Possibly, I think this could have been perhaps pushed further by asking Russia in particular to pressure the regime to agree to safe passage of humanitarian aid. That would have avoided us, or avoided the countries or providing aid any militarization of the humanitarian aid. And I think Russia could not have said no to humanitarian assistance, and by pressuring the regime had a good chance of achieving that. This did not happen. And until today, when we speak to governments, and we hear of their generous—their will to contribute financially—the means that I use continue to be informal, in bits and pieces, through different channels that are far from satisfying the needs that are rapidly growing—we are facing a humanitarian crisis in Syria. So for both humanitarian reasons—but as I said for political reasons as well—the minimum presence on the ground of humanitarian aid is something that has not been achieved so far and we believe it is really urgent to achieve that.

There was discussion of the provision of the means, too, for self defense to the Syrian population in order to resist in face of the killings of the security and military forces.



I think this remains a difficult decision that we have had to endorse to a large extent. The militarization on the ground is something that occurred in spite of everybody—this was no one’s decision. Nobody said its now time to switch to armed struggle. The appearance of light arms in self defense is something that grew on its own, out of a need for people protect themselves. For individuals to protect their families, to protect their property. Now once this happens, the role of political groups or political authorities—as the Syrian National Council is—is to try and organize and coordinate between the movements—the groups—that have emerged on the ground. And this is where the effort lies today. It is for the Syrian National Council to be in touch, to identify all groups on the ground, to be in touch with those groups, and to ensure that they have the means to communicate among themselves as well as providing financial means for them to survive. By building this link with the groups on the ground, I think the Syrian National Council can—it is not an easy task, it is a very difficult task—but, nevertheless, we need to work in that direction and we are working to build those connections between the different groups on the ground.

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We therefore see that in face of this phenomenon that we have not chosen to develop but that we now have to accompany, in order for it to be organized, we continue to believe that forms of intervention by the international community are safer for the future of Syria. We have called openly for safe zones. We are making the case for why it is more important—and a better scenario—to see some form of international limited presence on the ground in Syria or the demarcation of safe zones for the humanitarian purpose that I was indicating, and that could allow perhaps the creation of safe passages to reach the most affected areas. But also, these zones would allow to change the dynamics on the ground, allow the opposition the political authority of the Syrian National Council—the unified opposition all together—to form a transitional—or provisional—government in that area. And we know the signals from inside are that if such a zone were to be created—or such zones were to be created—the signal to the security and military forces would be a very powerful one and could cause Syria’s change—and rapid change—within their ranks.

Veniamin Popov: We are saying that the events of the last decades show that there is no solution by force to such problems as ethnic, national, or religious. It is not possible in the 21st century to solve these problems by force. For us, it is evident truth and we think that many events of the last years of this century confirm this conclusion. For example, the most powerful state in the world, the U.S., sought to impose the vision of democratic governments on Iraq and Afghanistan. We know the result. There were a lot of efforts, huge amounts of money, sacrifices; but they led only to sacrifices and tragedies. I think we must take a lesson. Israel has tried to use its modern military machine to strike two organizations—not states, organizations—to make them a decisive blow: Hezbollah in 2006 and Hamas in 2008. Israel was unable to cope with it and was forced to retreat. You may remember that some years ago there was an attempt of Georgia to resolve South Ossetian issue by military strike, and this as well led to very sad consequences for Georgia itself. We had a fresh example—it is Libya. NATO’s bombing to Libya to protect the civil population

“Syrian opposition and international intervention”

“The militarization on the ground is something that occurred in spite of everybody—this was no one’s decision.”

Bassma Kodmani

“Russia and the Annan Plan”

“The civil war, of course, will spill over the borders of Syria; it is in the heart of the Arab world.”

Veniamin Popov

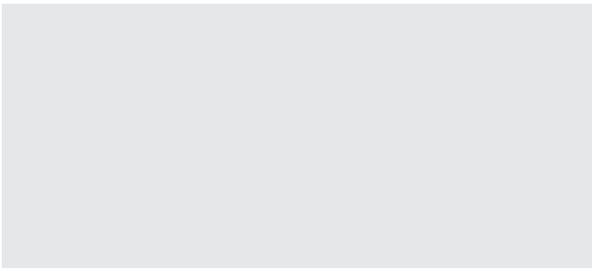
actually resulted in many casualties among these civilians. And this led, actually, to the disintegration of two countries: Libya and Mali.

Naturally, it is our position—we put high expectations with the practical implementation of the mission of the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. It is well known that the Syrian government—and I am not defending the Syrian government or Syrian regime; we are criticizing it and we know there are a lot of shortcomings in its practice—but we are defending first of all international law. The Syrian government has agreed with the proposals of the UN and the Arab League envoy. And it is now up to the opposition to decide. There was the last news that even set a date for this process—it is 10th of April—and then the parties have 48 hours to begin the implementation and put into practice this ceasefire. I think it is a golden opportunity for the resolution of the Syrian crisis, for the government and for the opposition. I think that if Turkey and the Western states support the leaders of the opposition the negotiations will be doomed to fail. If they support the realistic approach and push the leaders of the opposition to constructive answer, the context can lead to ceasefire and finally towards the normalization of the situation. Of course, in this way, all sides will face many difficulties. But if the Security Council—jointly, logically, and sensibly—on the assumptions of the interest of the peace and stability, the situation can be brought under control and will be able to achieve intra-Syrian dialogue. The implementation of major reforms and ultimately democratic elections under international supervision—I think it is the goal of the opposition as well. In this regard it will be natural for me to quote our president Damitri Medvedev who said that the mission of Kofi Annan is actually the last chance to keep the country from the escalation of civil war.

...

I am a career diplomat and I know how difficult—it is easy to unleash the war and to start a conflict, but it is very difficult to find a way to end the war and to solve the problems—very difficult. You need a lot of efforts, you need reasonable approach, you need some kind of compromise. There is no other solution. It is only compromise. It means that we should take into consideration the interests of both parties—or some parties—in conflict. I think it is the evident thing and there is no need to repeat it. But it seems to me—and I want to stress this point once more—the alternative way is tragic way. It will lead to the escalation of the civil war. If the efforts of Kofi Annan will not lead to the way out of bloody this crisis, the actual civil war may flare up in Syria. In this case, the number of casualties and revenges will be enormous. Many experts talk over the possibility of the collapse of the state into several states—some, several parts. The civil war, of course, will spill over the borders of Syria; it is in the heart of the Arab world. And we will have an adverse impact in all neighboring states without exceptions. This could be a prelude to Syria's explosion in the region. There is a lot of material here. This will be a truly devastating tragedy on the regional scape. Ignoring this conclusion is not destructive or counterproductive—it is very dangerous.

...



We live in global world where information technologies create unprecedented opportunities for closer relations between peoples. And this, we see the objective need, because our planet is facing a huge number of new challenges and threats. Solutions we can develop only together by means of the collective efforts. Moreover, the rate of current change is so rapid that very often unfortunately politicians—policy makers—do not have time to understand impending changes. In these circumstances, the role of scientific experts community is growing—and growing dramatically. Because it is able to generate meaningful realistic recommendations. I would like them to meet the meaning of a very wise statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Mr. Gromyko. He had made it on the occasion of the eighth year of the Iran-Iraqi war. He said that 10 years of negotiations are better than one day of war.

Bessma Kodmani: My message on the Annan Plan was very clear. When we said we support the plan and are willing to cooperate, that really means that if the regime indeed stops the repression, withdraws the tanks from the cities, and the military forces are out of the reach of the range of the population, you can expect the people will go down to the streets to test the end of repression and the regime's commitment to not to shoot at the people. This is not a tactical withdrawn on a military front. We are speaking of urban populated centers, with an army that is shooting at the people. Once they withdraw, we see no reason for the armed Syrians—the defecting army, the Free Syrian Army, and the elements on the ground—to maintain or pursue any use of their own arms. They took arms in self-defense; we expect that they will also commit to stop, because they have no reason to move to that. I was careful to say, we never decided that this revolution became an armed struggle. There is no decision to go for militarization of the revolution. The moment that the shooting stops on the side of the regime, peaceful means will return forcefully.

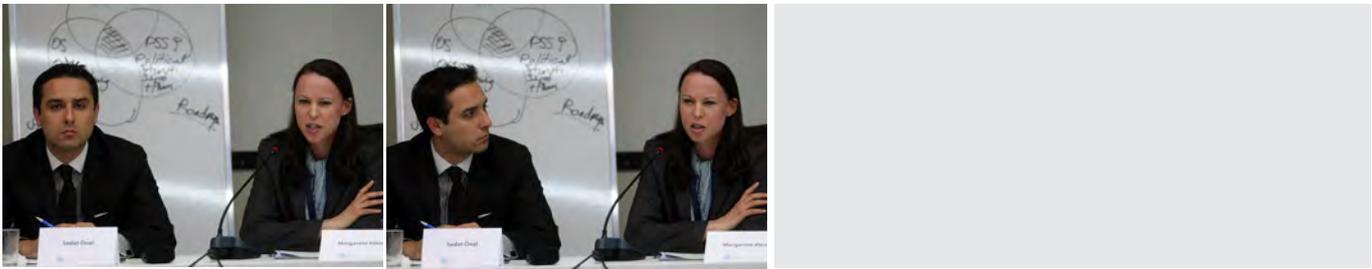
Veniamin Popov: We want objectivity. We want just and fair solution. We see that there is a real opportunity, real chance for this thing. If we continue to discuss who's responsibility, there are different arguments on both sides. We want to find the real solution which actually answers interests of Syrian people and there is an opportunity. If we want to deal with democratic Syria, so well it is a good opportunity to begin this dialogue. Maybe with international representation, maybe with international mediation. But it will be some kind of actual guarantee to achieve real results.

But if you want to continue this fighting up to the last Syrian citizen, you should put all the guilt on the Syrian government...But if you are really interested in the practical solutions you should use this opportunity of Kofi Annan's mission and start to achieve the ceasefire and then start intra-Syrian dialogue. Syria is very complicated country. There are different minorities: Kurds, Christian minority, Alawi minority, Druze, and the others. The continuation of this fighting will be great tragedy, first of all for the Syrian people. If you are interested in the faith of Syrian people so you should support now the efforts of this international mediation representing the United Nations and Arab League.

“Annan Plan:
The last
chance?”

“If you are interested in the
faith of Syrian people so you
should support now the efforts
of this international mediation
representing the United
Nations and Arab League.”

Veniamin Popov



“Future scenarios for Syria”

The last point, I would like to say that there is a trend and there are some experts who want to estimate this conflict under the option of the Sunni-Shia rival, to some extent. We are afraid that it can lead to serious consequences. There are different forces. And they want to fulfill their own goals, sometimes selfish. We are certainly guided, first of all by the interest of the Syrian people. We are going to accept the delegation from the Syrian opposition—from inside the country—and to speak to them as well, and we have good contacts with those people who are inside Syria. I think that it is now time for a real breakthrough, and if we continue to abuse each other, it will be counterproductive. We think that now it is really a chance. We should not lose this chance. That is my point.

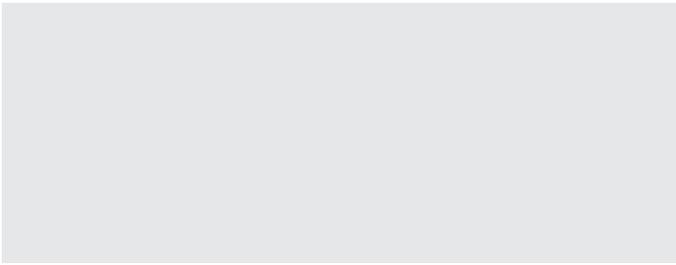
Kayhan Barzegar: I think one major question to me, and that was if a regional solution is possible. I think that it is possible. And I think ceasefire can immediately be achieved if all aspects will work towards a comprehensive solution. And I try to say that ignoring the role of the traditional actors—that is the states in the region—is a mistake. I think all aspects should be together, and there should be a regional conference—could be in Istanbul or Moscow—some place. The regional actors stay there and try to discuss the different views. Here again, I think that all dynamics of the Syrian crisis should be present here. Here I propose the Iranian-Turkey cooperation—the two sides can do a lot. I think the role of Saudi Arabia or Qatar or other countries to divide between Iran and Turkey is a mistake. And I think Iran and Turkey should cooperate and put it in a very realistic view, so that we can find a kind of solution for the Syrian crisis.

Najib Ghadban: On my eight minutes, I will go over maybe some possible scenarios for how this might be solved and again I will go in the order of the least desirable to the best scenario for Syria. But before—I think one such scenario which is no longer viable, it is important to state, is for Assad himself to initiate reform in light of all the Arab Spring, Arab countries. I mean he had basically about three months between end of December when Bouazizi set himself on fire until March 15th the day of the Syrian Revolution—and, I would say, even a couple of weeks after—to really take the leadership. And many of us during this time—and even starting with 2000 when he came to power—we always appealed to him to reform the country—take that gradual approach which would find a path to political and economic reform in Syria. The Turkish government—and I heard from Mr. Davutoğlu personally—invested so much in this process and tried to encourage Assad to do so, but to no avail. This is important in light of what we heard this morning from our Russian colleague who still believed in reform under Assad. I mean all those things we heard, yes it was one of the dimensions of the Syrian people to lift emergency laws, but the day after they did this, they killed 120 people in Syria. So these kinds of steps are meaningless. How could you have a referendum in a city like Homs when you are bombarding the city for 14 days? I mean what do you expect?

Second, going through the scenarios now, one of the scenarios that could be now something everybody is talking about—militarization of the revolution could lead to a civil war. And what I want to say here is that from our point of view, this is the

“How could you have a referendum in a city like Homs when you are bombarding the city for 14 days?”

Najib Ghadban



worst scenario for Syria. Syria had a mini-civil war back in late 70s and early 80s, and we believe that in civil wars there are no winners. As far as we are concerned we want to do everything to avoid this scenario. Taking the action of supporting the Free Syrian Army—again we are very careful about—we are very cautious, we are doing it in the context, again, of keeping the two dimensions. One is the continuation of the non-violent aspect of the revolution. Second one is pursuing political solution while this is going on.

That takes me to the second scenario and that is something that the Syrian people actually have demanded for a while now and that is to have some form of foreign intervention. And I must say that at the beginning of the revolution, by the time we formed the SNC, we articulated a few principle for the Syrian revolution, one of them was that it is a peaceful revolution. And one of the early slogans which emerged in Syria was “selmiya, selmiya”—that is, “peaceful, peaceful.” The second one was maintaining national unity and I think that this is extremely important. The third one was the rejection of foreign military intervention. And unfortunately as the regime continues to use violence, carry out massacres, repression at mass scales—we see some of those principles in fact have been now not achieved to the extent that we would like. So as far as the second option I think some of the ideas that have been embraced by the Syrian National Council are to call for some kind of safe zones or humanitarian corridors.

This kind of option will address two issues: the humanitarian need in areas like Idlib, Homs, elsewhere, and it will hasten the fall of the regime. Because then it will send that signal to those within the regime that they have no place to go—especially in the armed forces. The third option which I think we are in favor came, in fact, through the second initiative of the Arab League. And since we think in terms of models, you know we have the Tunisian model, Libyan model, Yemeni model, and Egyptian model. I think the Arab league offered us, I would say, a reasonable political way out and that is for Assad himself to authorize his vice-president who would initiate a process of forming a national unity government and that national unity government would lead a process leading to a constituent assembly drafting out the constitution and democratic elections.

The significance of the second Arab initiative is that it was again agreed unanimously by the Arab countries. We supported that, we supported taking it to Security Council, but it was unfortunate that Russia and China vetoed. And again it was embraced by 137 countries in the General Assembly. This is extremely significant, and out of the veto—the Chinese and Russian veto—came the formation of the group Friends of Syria. So again, we still believe we should pursue this option—we should keep some kind of an exit strategy for Assad—but I must say, this is becoming extremely pressing on us and political leadership. Because inside Syria, people are demanding justice, and for us, any negotiated settlement—as my colleague Bassma stressed this morning—would emphasize two elements. The first element is that Assad and the few around him who committed atrocities against the Syrian people are not acceptable negotiating partners. And second, any negotiation should lead to a clear time table to transition to valid partners.

“Is there a political way out for Syria?”

“The significance of the second Arab initiative is that it was again agreed unanimously by the Arab countries.”

Najib Ghadban



“The SNC and the Annan Plan”

“I think the main problem with the Annan plan is that Annan was appointed too late.”

Fyodor Lukyanov

Veniamin Popov: It seems to me that we should be guided by constructive idea. We have now at last a very good instrument for resolution: it is the Annan Plan. It does not mean that we are all happy with all the points raised in the Annan Plan, but it is really some kind of compromise. We understand that it is a severe necessity; it is not a free choice. We have worked a lot with Syrian government to convince the Syrians to accept this plan. We think it is a great step forward. It is also very essential to get the same answer from the opposition. Actually I haven't heard this answer yet. There is always “yes, but.” If we are really interested in the solution, we must use this last chance to get the settlement.

Najib Ghadban: First let me second my colleague's points about the destructive role of some external forces in continuing to send weapons and intelligence to the repressive apparatus of the Assad regime. I want to be very constructive. Yes we support the Annan initiative unequivocally—that is first. Second, we will be glad to work with Annan on the implementation of this, but Annan is not just about six points. It has the frame of reference and the frame of reference is all of the resolutions including two Arab initiatives. The first one is calling for ceasefire, pulling out of troops and releasing political prisoners, allowing demonstrations and then political framework presented in the second initiative talks about Assad authorizing his power to vice president and political process. Within that understanding we support it. On the day Bashar was meeting Annan there was a massacre in Deir ez-Zor where 26 children, 23 women and 6 men were killed.

Basheer Nafi: I am a bit skeptical about the Annan plan. I hope that he'll succeed, but there is a fundamental problem regarding the Annan initiative. It is an open-ended initiative. Is he free to go on as long as it takes? How much time does it give: four, five, or six months? I think this is the Russian position. Or, there is a time table with limitations. There should be a point where the international community should decide that the Annan plan has failed. People of Syria, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya have been encouraged to stage revolution against their own governments. This is the main reason why the Assad regime is unable to press the revolution. These are popular movements. The opposition, because of the nature of state in Syria, is unable to bring the regime down and the regime is unable to surpass the revolution.

Fyodor Lukyanov: I think the main problem with the Annan plan is that Annan was appointed too late. He should have been appointed a year ago. Then his plans would have been successful. Now it is too late. The problem with the current plan is that we have one side, we have government. Good government, bad government, awful government but it is a government. Who is on the other side? Who should be an actor on the side of the opposition?

Cengiz Çandar: When it comes to make reference to former Secretary General Kofi Annan, I just wanted to remind the floor that in terms of resolving conflicts with massacres, he has not a very good record. He apologized by the neglect that he performed while he was Secretary General of the UN during the Rwanda massacre—despite being an African statesman himself. But most importantly, what I want to

“Turkey and the Annan Plan”

bring to your notice that he was the UN representative for humanitarian efforts in Bosnia. He is the one that removed Srebrenica’s status as a safe zone and right after he initiating removing Srebrenica’s status, that famous massacre of Srebrenica was committed. So I am not sure whether Mr. Kofi Annan has a good track record in terms of massacres that he apologized later on.

Obeida Nahas: Now the Annan solution—yes we support that. But this means stop the killing and start the political process, as Najib mentioned. Of course that solution means that this regime has to fall at the end. I do not know what can possibly happen to a country if only three people are excluded from national dialogue meetings?: Bashar Assad, Mahir Assad and Asef Shawkat. Plus another thirty officers who supervised killing of civilians for a whole year. I mean, we have 23 million people in Syria and we had one of the great democracies in Arab world. So what kind of country cannot survive dialogue that does not include a bunch of guys like this.

Sedat Önal: Although it was already referred to, I would like to put our vision about what the Annan plan is. We see Annan plan not as a well-developed political solution to the crisis on the ground. This is actually the contours of a solution. So, there are elements—six points—each is inter-related, and if not put into implementation in its entirety, it means a lot of different things. So in the final communiqué, the chairman’s conclusions of the Istanbul meeting—if you look at the wording carefully, the support is to Annan Plan’s full implementation. So it means that there are certain points. First, it talks about a ceasefire. It can differ from which angle you look at the ceasefire. From one angle, it looks like it is equating two sides—that there are two sides to the conflict, that they are both going to ceasefire, and then other things will follow. And how this ceasefire is going to be effectively implemented.

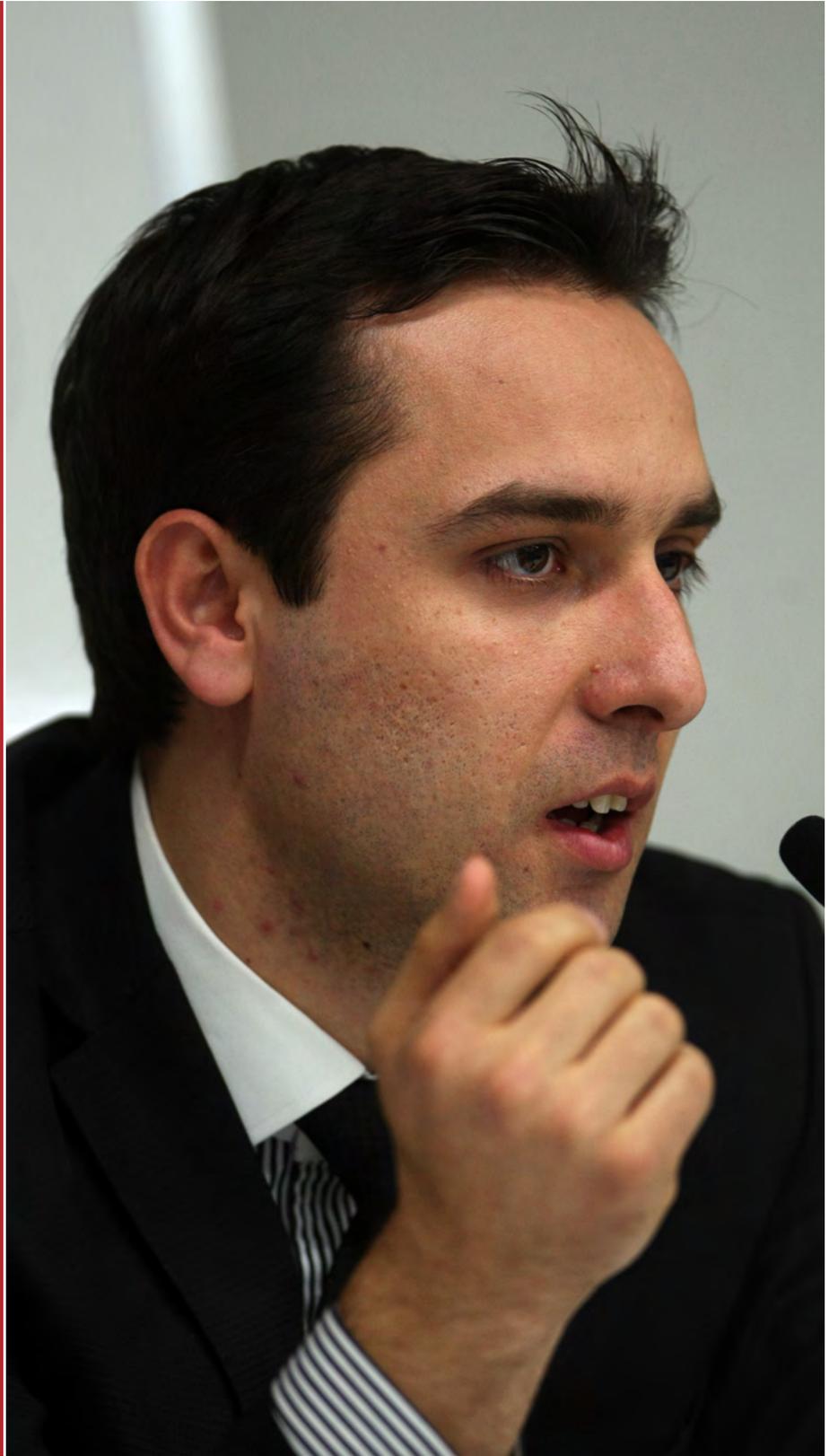
Then there is this idea of a monitoring mission. It was considered in the Arab League plan and it did not work. Now, this time, if this is going to be valid, you need to have an effective mechanism, which can only be done under UN umbrella. So then Russia’s position will again be important, because it cannot be done without a Security Council resolution. This is the first step you need to think about. So there are other things. If such a plan cannot be affiliated, connected to a credible political transition with a calendar, then again, it would not be much. It could only give more time to the Syrian regime. So there are lots of things in this plan that need to be worked out, and all relevant parties’ main actors’ positions, will be important, and each and every side would need to interpret these points. So we are not in the beginning of it. As such, this is not contradictory to the Friends of Syria group movement. Because this group of friends of nations would like to see an immediate political transition in which the people will be able to choose their own rulers through democratic means. This is the ultimate end. If this plan is going to help this objective, then everybody is supporting this. But it can be interpreted from different ways, different manners, and what we are saying is, this should be synchronized and harmonized with the Friends movement, rather than be interpreted as something that can prevent the momentum that is being created.

“Now the Annan solution—yes we support that. But this means stop the killing and start the political process.”

Sedat Önal

“The Syrian regime tries to control the articles of the Annan plan by putting preconditions to the implementation of the plan.”

Ufuk Ulutaş



“Russia and the Annan Plan”

Veniamin Popov: I am lecturing in the Institute of International Relations. When I deliver lectures to the students, I always say if you are interested in finding some solution, you must behave properly. If you are interested in promoting your interests, you can use many bad words for the opponents, and so on, but it will not be a constructive approach. So I would like to emphasize this: we should be guided, first of all, by this constructive approach. So I think it is the main idea to find or to search for some constructive exit from this deadlock. Actually it is a deadlock. Deadlock because the opposition could not move the regime of Bashar Assad, and Bashar Assad up until now could not put an end to the uprising. But it seems to be that situation is now continuing a very long time—more than one year. When we first face the first revolutions, actually, it was a clear picture in Tunisia and Egypt. Now the situation is much more complicated. It seems to be that we are losing time—losing very precious time.

You know that even the Arab summit has supported Kofi Annan plan. The same declaration was made by the BRICS countries—BRICS is five countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. And that is why I think that it is better to concentrate and to use our brains in order to find the real, realistic, practical, pragmatic way out from this impasse. And it seems to be that we should, as well, support the Kofi Annan plan and to mobilize our efforts in this direction. And as well to discuss the idea put forward by our Iranian colleague about maybe increasing role of Turkish-Iranian tandem—some kind of supervision of this crisis. Because they are close to this area and they are more interested than the others. As far as Russia is concerned, I want to repeat that we are not defending the Assad regime. We are only supporting the international law. And we are ready to discuss different opinions, and it seems to be that we should concentrate on this constructive search of solution.

Ufuk Ulutaş: If you are not favoring military option what options do we have? We talk about the Annan plan. My understanding of Syrian regime’s understanding of Annan plan is unfortunately not that positive. They view it as a kind of victory for Syria and Russia; no article in the Annan plan says that Assad should leave. The Syrian regime tries to control the articles of the Annan plan by putting conditions to the implementation of the plan. Most probably, the Annan plan will fail. Russia has invested a lot in the Annan plan; they say this is the last chance of Syrian regime. I would like to ask what Russia will do if the Annan plan fails because there is no ceasefire. This is probably the first thing the Annan plan was asking for. If Annan plan fails, and if that causes Russia to change its position towards the Syrian regime—it is fine. But what if Russia continues to support the Syrian regime, what are the alternatives we can talk about?

•••

If you ask average people in streets of Syria who are fighting against the Assad regime how the Syrian crisis could be solved—what are the alternatives that we have—all of them say there is only one way—I have been to the refugee camps—political solution is not possible at this moment—we talk about armed clash. It can vary from basic humanitarian intervention to a full-fledged international intervention. There are



“Can the international community deliver peace in Syria?”

“My proposal would be, that maybe, it would be worth to come to some classical example of diplomacy, and to discuss in a big international conference which should deal with Syrian situation.”

Fyodor Lukyanov

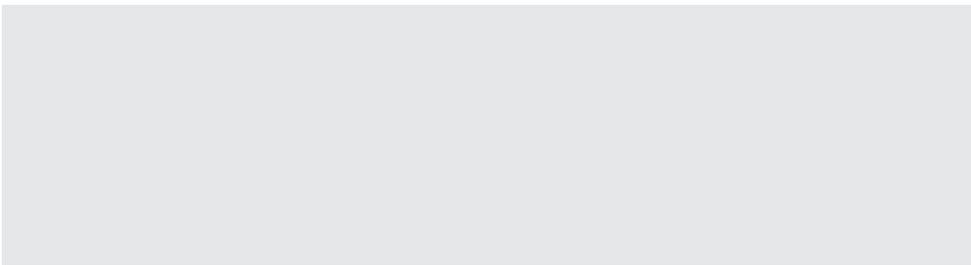
three things they ask from the international community. Without the international community’s help, they are not able to overthrow the Syrian regime.

1. They are asking for a buffer zone that is protected by the regional forces, mainly by Turkey.
2. They are asking for a no-fly zone.
3. They are asking for arming of the Free Syrian Army.

Fyodor Lukyanov: My proposal would be, that maybe, it would be worth to come to some classical example of diplomacy, and to discuss in a big international conference which should deal with Syrian situation—as has happened in Bosnia for example before and some other places. And parts of solutions—participation should be regional. Not only Arab league—yes this is a regional actor—but this is a regional actor with some limitations. It should be Arab countries, Iran, Turkey, all countries involved, all neighbors of Syria, and big powers: US, Russia, France—not EU—but France, Britain maybe, China—they should be supervisors; it should be under auspices of them. It is a much more classical approach to diplomacy, but I think that in this particular case it will work much better because what we have in Syria it is really almost a civil war with heavy international intervention—a proxy war by different neighboring countries, and big powers—partly coinciding partly not coinciding—with those regional countries. So I think this two floors approach would be a better and then we can address much better this whole situation which is completely confusing.

Najib Ghadban: Regarding the weaknesses of this international response, as we talk about the regional and international perspective, there is a lack of leadership on the part of the international community. You need one country—and the Obama administration is not taking up that role for domestic reasons, obvious reasons right now—and that is why I think the alternative to the lack of one global leadership taking—maybe going through a negotiated settlement in Syria is to have a collective leadership. Maybe the emergence of the Saudi and the Qatar on the Arab side, Turkey at the regional side, some EU countries, as well as the US, and really coming to provide serious support. The idea of the R2P clearly, again, takes precedence over sovereignty—we still talk about sovereignty in this day and age? God I cannot believe that—or legitimacy of regimes like the Assad regime—which was never legitimate. You know it killed 12,000 of its people, and we still say legitimate.

So I think, again, you could act outside, the Security Council, and that is why my final point to Russia—our friends in Russia, are taking a big risk in Syria. You know, I take different lessons from Libya for Russia by the way. You know, you are saying, “oh we let it pass and we lost.” But in this case, your loss is definite as you continue to support the Assad regime to the very last minute. I think the reluctance to take active role in Libya was a mistake! You could have taken a more positive role. I mean at the point when Qaddafi threatened to kill thousands in Benghazi, you know, what do you expect? People—countries—have to take a position. I mean it was interesting, in



the US we had a debate—it was a group of Arab American and American scholars. Most of the Americans were opposed to military intervention—to Security Council voting for that. It was the *Arab Americans* who were saying, “No, we want a vote.” An American colleague said, “I would have never dreamed of a day when Arabs were calling for foreign intervention in Libya to save people’s lives.” So, we are approaching that point in Syria, and I think it is going to change the balance of power.

Muhittin Ataman: My second remark is that the change of regime is only possible when international powers compromise on Syria. Without cooperation, for now, it is very difficult for any regime change in Syria. But, internal stability is only possible when domestic groups compromise. That means, whether they are secular, Islamists, Allawis, Sunnis, Kurds—any groups—without compromise between these groups, it is very difficult to achieve internal stability and peace.

Youssef Yaghmour: Many seem to be concerned about the success or have doubts about the success of the Annan plan. And I think the main reason for that is the skeptical point of view that the killing will stop in Syria before the positive climate for negotiation and political solution can actually be set forth so that people can actually sit and negotiate. That is the main concern. I think, that should the killing be stopped, that will create a positive atmosphere around the plan and give it more chances for success. Short of that, at least those three key elements of it: stopping the killing, releasing the prisoners, and allowing peaceful demonstrations to happen—those three steps being taken will definitely create a positive climate for negotiation and for political settlement. Everything can be thrown on the table, everything can be negotiated, and hopefully a political solution might be reached.

The second point is the idea of a coalition of stakeholders and effective powers is a great idea. But again we go back to the first point, if the killing continues, what do you think the reaction of the Syrian people is going to be? They have been slaughtered for more than a year, and basically everybody is watching, and I do not think the continuation of that is going to allow or give a chance for any political solution to happen. So the key to all of that—for that to be successful—is actually stopping the killing, releasing the prisoners, and allowing peaceful demonstrations. On the issue of minorities, I believe my colleagues have addressed that issue on a number of occasions. It is very valid and justified to actually be concerned about minorities. But is it also not justified to be concerned about the majority just once? For us, for people on the ground, for the Syrian people, and for SNC, it is not about majority and minority. It is about a repressive regime that is killing its people. That is how we look at it. It is not a majority-minority war. That is not the case. We would like for everybody within Syria to look at the country as their country—they are equal patriots and citizens of it. So we really do not feel comfortable bringing this issue to us, because we are not thinking majority-minority. We are thinking these are Syrian people being oppressed and killed by their regime. That is the key issue.

“International compromise vs. internal stability...”

“I think, should the killing be stopped, that will create a positive atmosphere around the plan and give it more chances for success.”

Youssef Yaghmour





The Syrian Crisis: An Official Perspective from Turkey





“How does Turkey read the Syrian crisis?”

“If you are not proactive in bringing peace, then you will submit yourself to the wars of others.”

Ömer Çelik

Ömer Çelik: One of the leading questions raised on the Syrian issue is why the AK Party now opposes the Assad regime whereas it previously held talks with Bashar Assad and had close relations with him. The answer is obvious. Since 2003, our government has never adopted a policy of isolation in the region. Turkey has never remained disinterested in regional events. If you are not proactive in bringing peace, then you will submit yourself to the wars of others.

Turkey adopted a four-stage plan regarding Syria. In the first stage, Turkey developed a national initiative when it realized that Syrian regime could pose a threat to regional peace. Turkey called on the Syrian regime to put an end to the Baath monopoly, to lift the emergency law, to release political prisoners and to carry out democratic reforms. Bashar Assad stated that he would take the necessary steps to meet these demands. When Hamas came to power in 2005, the calls for Bashar Assad to democratize increased. Turkey has always adopted a positive attitude towards Syria. When Assad asked for technical assistance, Turkey provided it.

However Bashar Assad gave up his interest in the reform process and took up arms like his father. After Assad took up arms, Turkey sided with the Syrian people for moral, political, religious and fraternal reasons, as expected. Then it proceeded to warn the Assad regime.

In this second stage, Turkey shifted toward a regional perspective and supported the Arab League initiative. What was this initiative? To convince Assad to both end the massacre of the Syrian people and carry out reforms in Syria. The Arab League has always welcomed Turkey’s Syrian policy. As it realized that the Arab League’s efforts were producing no results, Turkey proceeded to the third stage—the global initiative.

Turkey worked to gain an endorsement for the Arab League plan at the United Nations Security Council. At the UN, 137 member countries condemned Syria; however, China and Russia vetoed the resolution, rendering these efforts fruitless. Consequently, our government made the following statement: “We insist on our Syrian policy, and the United Nations is not the one and only platform in which to carry it out.”

Then Turkey proceeded to the initiative called “Friends of Syria.” The initiative’s second meeting was held in Istanbul. The participants drafted a statement sending a clear message to Assad regime, and the Syrian National Council was recognized for the first time as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

In the next stage, Turkey backed the Annan Plan. Russia and China also agreed to the Annan Plan, and all members of the United Nations Security Council urged Syria to lay down its arms in keeping with the plan. As of today, Syria has not given up arms, but Turkey still supports the initiative.

The massacre in Syria is not two-sided; this massacre is perpetrated by the regime—which acts like a gang. Assad and Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Walid Muallem have claimed there is a bilateral conflict in Syria, and it is not the Syrian regime,



but al-Qaeda, who commits these massacres. Neither the Arab countries nor the members of the Security Council argue that al-Qaeda or any other terrorist organization is in a civil conflict with the Syrian regime. If the Syrian regime had really been sincere, then it would have given up arms, declared elections. Why doesn't it have the courage for that?

Those accusing Turkey of being a puppet should bear in mind the following: today, Western and imperialist powers do not want to end the Assad regime. Do you know why? Because they believe a weakened Assad will maintain the Camp David order. Today, those accusing Turkey of being a puppet try to legitimize the Assad regime. Turkey strives for the unity and liberty of the Syrian people; certain groups in the West try to create micro-states in the region and to provoke ethnic and sectarian conflict among the people.

No one designs the Middle East today. It is an insult to say the Middle East is designed by foreign powers. People in the region determine their own destiny. Foreign powers cannot design ninety percent of a nation. If 50, 60 or 70 percent of a nation risks its life to resist a regime's brutal crackdown, then resistance is legitimate. It is claimed that Turkey first set up camps then Syrian people were transferred to these camps. This is untrue. This claim belongs to Walid Muallem. Our Syrian brothers and sisters sought refuge in our state. They are more than welcome.

We do not treat Syria as an enemy. We treat the Syrian people like brothers and sisters. That's why we oppose the Syrian regime. I am sure that there are those in our group—and other groups as well—who have relatives in Latakia. They can call their relatives and ask them what is going on in Latakia. What kind of a regime bombs Latakia with war ships?

There have been some allegations on the Kurdish Issue. Kurdish people in Syria do not have an identity. They have, up until now, been persecuted. Yet, a Kurdish group in Syria supports the Baath regime today and pulls guns on the Syrian people as a paid soldiers of the Baath regime. The PKK's cooperation with Assad provoked serious reactions in Syria as well.

Turkey acts together with the international community. Turkey develops initiatives for its Syrian brothers and sisters in conjunction with the Arab League, the UN Security Council and member countries of the United Nations. Turkey does not want to witness a war in the region. Turkey wants stability and welfare in the region, in Mesopotamia and in all its neighboring countries. Turkey put an end to the era of gaining power through weakening, impoverishing, and destabilizing one's neighbors. Here is Turkey's vision for the new Middle East: our neighbors will be powerful, as will Turkey.

“Who wants the Syrian regime in power?”

“No one designs the Middle East today. It is an insult to say the Middle East is designed by foreign powers.”

Ömer Çelik

SURİYE HALKININ DOSTLARI İKİNCİ KONFERANSI 1 NİSAN 2012 / İSTANBUL



Turkish Prime Minister Recep
Tayyip Erdoğan at the Second
Conference on the Group of Friends
of the Syrian People in İstanbul

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TIMELINE OF THE 2011-2012 SYRIAN UPRISING



May 1-2 The Syrian military shells homes in **Daraa** with tanks. 4,000 people cross the border into Lebanon.

May 24 Human rights groups say the civilian death toll has reached over **1,100.**



July 14 The Syrian Navy fires on Latakia with gunboats off the Mediterranean coast, killing at least 28.

July 18 US urges Assad to quit and freezes all Syrian government assets in the U.S. and targeting the country's lucrative energy sector.

September 9 Large protests called "Friday for International Protection" held in cities including **Qamishli** in the northeast, **Homs** and **Hama** in the center of the country, and **Deir ez-Zor** in the east.



November 16 Free Syrian Army attacks a **Damascus** military base.

December 22 Arab League delegates arrive in Syria in the midst of a new international uproar. The United Nations estimates more than 5,000 people have been killed since the beginning of the uprising.



February 4 China and Russia veto a UN Security Council resolution on Syria for the second time in four months.

February 10 Twin car bombs in **Aleppo** kill 28.

March 1 Regime forces seize **Homs' Baba Amr district** after a 27-day assault and kills hundreds.

March 10 Former U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan visits Syria as part of a high-profile international attempt to find a solution to the worsening conflict.

March 14 Syrian Army seizes **Idlib** city after a four-day assault. A major pro-Assad demonstration is held in **Damascus**.

April 1 Second Friends of Syria meeting is held in Istanbul, warning Assad not to delay adopting the peace plan.



April 5 The Security Council formally backs an April 10 deadline of the Annan Plan.

May 3 Syrian security forces storm dormitories at **Aleppo University** to break up anti-government protests, killing at least four students and wounding several others.

May 10 Two strong explosions rip through the Syrian capital, killing more than 40 people.

May 25 Syrian army raids **Houla** and kills more than 100 civilians, many of them are women and children.

MARCH 2011 APRIL 2011 MAY 2011 JUNE 2011 JULY 2011 AUGUST 2011 SEPTEMBER 2011 OCTOBER 2011 NOVEMBER 2011 DECEMBER 2011 JANUARY 2012 FEBRUARY 2012 MARCH 2012 APRIL 2012 MAY 2012

March 15 First demonstrations are held after a call for a "Day of Dignity."

March 18-27 Regime crackdowns in **Damascus, Banias, Latakia** and **Daraa**.

March 23 Around 100 are reportedly killed in **Daraa**.

March 29 Syrian cabinet resigns.

April 1-30 Protests spread and strengthen, with calls for the regime's fall.

April 19 Assad announces that Syria is ending the 50 year long emergency rule.



June 22 Police raids the Aleppo University campus and arrests dozens.

June 25 Armed forces take control of Jisr al-Shughour as thousands of residents flee to Turkey. More than 12,000 people flee to neighbouring Turkey in the following week.



July 15 Thousands protest, notably in **Hama** and **Deir ez-Zor**.

July 31 Syrian tanks storm **Hama**, residents say, after a month-long siege. At least 80 people are killed.

August 9 Turkish FM Ahmet Davutoglu holds six hours of talks with Assad in Damascus and calls for reform.



September 15 Syrian opposition activists announce a Syrian National Council to provide an alternative to government.

October 4 Russia and China join forces and veto a European-drafted UN Security Council resolution condemning Syria.

October 7 Kurdish opposition leader Mishaal Tammo was assassinated.



November 12 Arab League suspends Syria's membership and threatens economic sanctions if the regime continues to violate an Arab-brokered peace plan.

November 21 The UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee condemns Syria for the crackdown, with 122 votes in favour, 13 against and 41 abstentions.

December 23 Twin bombs in **Damascus** kill **44.**



January 6 **Damascus** car bomb kills 26.

February 12 The Arab League says it will begin contacts with the opposition, offering political and financial support. In January it offers a power transfer plan.

February 22 Two western journalists are killed as Syrian gunners shelled an opposition stronghold in **Homs**.

February 23 Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is appointed U.N.-Arab League envoy to Syria.

February 24 European, Arab and North American officials meet in a major international "Friends of Syria" conference in Tunisia.

March 17 Two bombs in **Damascus** kill 27.

March 21 The Security Council demands Syria immediately implement international envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan, and urges Assad to work towards a ceasefire and democratic transition.



March 27 Syria accepts the U.N.-sponsored peace plan.

April 9 Surge in violence kills at least **105 people**. Shots fired across the border wound six in Turkey and kill a cameraman in Lebanon.

April 10 The UN Security Council calls on Damascus to keep a Thursday 0300 GMT deadline for a complete ceasefire.

April 12 Annan-brokered ceasefire comes into effect.

April 14 The UN approves an observer mission to oversee the Syrian ceasefire.

May 27 U.N. Security Council unanimously condemns the killings in **Houla**, confirmed by United Nations observers.

May 29 The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria expels Syrian diplomats.

May 30 Turkey expels all Syrian diplomatic personnel based in Turkey.

May 30 The Syrian Network for Human Rights announces that confirmed death toll in Syria has reached to

14,093.

Quo Vadis?

Regional Perspectives on the Syrian Crisis

What are the internal and external dynamics of the conflict in Syria? What are the capabilities and limits of the Syrian opposition? Has the international community met its responsibilities regarding Syria? What is the human cost of the crisis in Syria? What options are left for Syria? Participants from Syria, Turkey, Russia, Iran, the United States, Bahrain, Germany, and the United Kingdom discussed the ongoing stalemate in Syria at the SETA Round Table on April 3rd, 2012 in Ankara.

Held in the immediate aftermath of the Friends of Syria Conference in Istanbul, the SETA Round Table brought regional perspectives and facilitated a timely and scholarly discussion on the Syrian crisis. Many of the participants stated that the crisis in Syria ceased to be a domestic issue and became a regional and even an international crisis. Members of the Syrian National Council put forward capabilities and limits of the council, and urged the international community to take bolder steps, not necessarily militaristic, against the Assad regime. Although participants uttered their pessimism about the Annan Plan, they also agreed cautiously that one should still give it a chance. The round table underlined the significance of Russia and Iran in the Syrian crisis, while highlighting the inefficiency of regional and international organizations.



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