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## Transcript

# Envisioning Syria's Political Future - Obstacles and Options

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**Nadim Shehadi:**

Everybody, we have a session today on envisioning Syria's political future: obstacles and options. We have three speakers. I'm going to introduce them very shortly. Before I do that, I'd like to remind you all to switch off your mobile phones. The last time a mobile phone came out, rang in this room, we didn't find out what happened to the person because we couldn't find him. This meeting is on the record so it's being recorded and it's going to be transcribed and put on the website. So the transcriber will not be able to hear if the mobile phones come up.

Our three speakers today are Dr Najib Ghadbian who is professor of political science and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Arkansas and Mr Ausama Monajed who is director of communications for the National Initiative for Change which is based in Syria, and Dr Radwan Ziadeh who is in his old house here because he was a fellow at Chatham House two years ago and it's wonderful to have you back with us. He's at the Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard University. So I'm going to start with Dr Ghadbian.

**Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

Thank you, Nadim, and thank you for Chatham House for this opportunity. Maybe I will take ten minutes to introduce some remarks that hopefully will generate a discussion about the topic. I want to focus on two aspects in my unprepared kind of remarks. The first one may be to talk a little bit about the Syrian regime, its structure, its strategy in dealing with the Syrian opposition and then talk about the other side, the evolving Syrian opposition.

As far as the structure of the Syrian regime and its strategy, the way many of us see this regime is that it has two kinds of structures or two layers. One is the outer structure which looks very much like many authoritarian, one-party rule in the sense of having a, you know, different kind of institution including one ruling party – the Ba'ath Party – which came to power in 1963, but evolved eventually to become less significant in the decision making process. It has a semi-quasi parliament called People's Council and they do hold elections every four years, despite again the kind of fairness and the questions about this whole body, not just actually the process of electing, selecting members. And then a cabinet. I think you will find some of these institutions more representative of the Syrian society. So this is the outer structure.

The inner structure is made mostly of the president and we are talking about a highly centralized political structure. The president holds all of the kind of

elements of power in the system. Early on, when Bashar al-Assad took on the presidency, there were questions whether in fact he is fully in charge or not. We've heard the discussion about the hardliners versus the reformers and he wants considered to be a leading figure in the reformer's hand. One reason why he could not introduce reforms is because the hardliners were basically the main obstacle towards that. So the president is the key figure in this structure, assisted by advisors, assistants who are the chief of the security apparatus and heads of the armed forces. Many of them come the same background. I think its significant to give this background right now to understand the nature of the repression that's taking place in Syria today. This process and the kind of crackdown on the peaceful movement in Syria is being carried out by one particular section of the armed forces called the Fourth Division, headed by the President's brother Maher Al-Assad, and there's another element called the Republican Guards and, in addition to that, we have the various security agencies, you know, the most important ones – you have seven of these agencies.

Now, we should distinguish this from the regular army which is again, because of the army recruits from all backgrounds so it's more representative of the Syrian society, still in the army there is an overrepresentation of officers from an Alawite background. Very briefly again, the structure in terms of this regime strategy dealing with the opposition, Starting in 2000, Bashar gave the very infamous inaugural speech in which he raised expectations. People reacted in the society. They were hopeful that, you know, this was a new era, that there could be gradual reform.

But that so-called Damascus Spring lasted a couple of months, then it ended and the regime immediately used the external challenges to crack down on that movement. We went through another maybe spring in 2005 with the rise of a group called the Damascus Declaration which became the consensus of all political forces and individuals in Syria. It just talked about a simple vision of a Syria that is going to have a democracy polity which represents all political forces in the country. By 2006, there was again another attempt by civil society to correct the relations with Lebanon and there were a few Syrian intellectuals who signed something called Damascus-Beirut Declaration to correct that relationship and they ended up in prison. What I'm trying to say here is throughout these initiatives by society, they were turned down. They were kind of not met by any positive attitude. To the contrary, those people have been arrested. Damascus Declaration activists met. They had an election and it was very impressive for 163 of them to do that. Two weeks

later, they were arrested, tried and 24 of them were sentenced to one and a half years in prison.

We come to the current situation in Syria, and I'm moving quickly to finish within the time. No one of the traditional political forces predicated what happened in Syria, but it's definitely what's happening is a continuation of the Arab Spring. The movements that's happening in Syria now, it's mostly a youth movement. It's not politicized. Nobody could claim to really have control over it. It doesn't have any clear ideology, but some of its strengths are precisely these points I'm mentioning. In addition to that, the youth of Syria have watched the various revolutions from Tunisian to Egypt to Yemen to Libya and they opted for the Tunisian and Egyptian model. So, from day one, they were very conscious of emphasizing the peaceful nature of this movement.

The second point which again makes it very, very significant is the emphasis on national unity in a diverse country like Syria and the efforts of the regime of trying to divide the population along sectarian lines. The response came by emphasizing that element. The third strength, I think, of this movement is the fact that it's basically widely spread throughout the country. Again, this morning, we had discussions about whether in fact it's been as extensive in some places like Damascus and Aleppo, but it's everywhere. Last Friday, some of us were able to count demonstrations in 138 cities and towns throughout Syria.

Let me end with maybe how the regime is dealing with this and going back to some of those elements. I apologize for the lack of coherence in my presentation. The major response has been by the regime has been what's called the security option. That is it has not really offered any meaningful political initiative to deal with this. Just let me remind everyone, many of you read this interview of Bashar al-Assad in the Wall Street Journal early on, right after the Tunisian revolution, halfway into the Egyptian revolution. I think, by then, Mubarak actually left the scene. He set the limit of what's kind of expected. He said, in Syria, we can reform the media law, we can increase the transparency of local elections, we can talk about some NGOs to exist, and that's it. That's the maximum vision presented by the President. It was extremely, extremely frustrating for the youth of Syria, for everybody in Syria. He said the kind of changes we've seen in Tunisia and Egypt, it's likely to take a decade in Syria. So it was no surprise that, again, people took it to the street and they decided to pursue their goal, basically by pressuring the regime through peaceful means. We've seen again another performance by the President in the so-called People's Council. You've seen it everyone so

I'm not going to comment on that, but we've seen clearly the use of repression which started basically by opening fire at peaceful demonstrators through the use of snipers. That's been one major factor which, in fact, in many cases could count as crimes against humanity and lately we've seen the kind of collective punishment that's been used in places like Daraa and Homs and Baniyas and now in Jisr al-Shughour. My time is over. Can I have one minute?

So basically, we believe strongly – and I think this is the message that we need to make especially for those activists inside – we do believe the regime has lost its legitimacy. The regime has no vision to get the country out of the situation that is deteriorating now. Therefore, you see the consensus about overthrowing the regime and by that we mean specifically the Assad family. This is why those of us actors in the opposition – my colleague Radwan can elaborate on that – we see a role for certain institutions in the country, including the army. All other institutions, anyone who has not committed crimes against humanity, against the Syrian people has a place in the future of Syria and we are very positive that this is going to reach its natural end like Tunisia, Egypt, everywhere else. And I'll stop here. Thank you very much.

#### **Nadim Shehadi:**

Dr Najib Ghadbian: Thank you, Dr. Ghadbian. Now, Ausama Monajed is going to talk about and discuss what we expect from the international community.

#### **Ausama Monajed:**

Thank you, Nadim. Thank you, Chatham House. Guests. We've all been following and seeing what is the international community's reaction to what's happening in Syria. Most of the op-eds in the past 24 to 48 hours are addressing the issue of why there is not enough or a tough response so far on Syria. I'd like to talk about different tracks. Number one is the economy track. We'd like to see more names added on the sanctions list. Not names of the army officers or army generals who we would hope to defect at a certain stage, but whoever is involved in the security forces and helping and aiding in the crackdown and the killing of protestors. Also, we'd like to see more entities and companies being added to the list of sanctions.

The number two important thing that the international community can do in the economic track is the drying of the hard currency or foreign currency sources for Syria. The main source of foreign currency for the Syrian national budget is tourism about 24-26 percent and this is now zero. Next one is the

revenues of oil sales, \$7-8 million per day because of the certain crude oil that they sell. If there is a European boycott of oil says particularly in Europe, this will significantly affect them dramatically, especially because the revenues of oil do not go to the Ministry of Oil in Syria. It goes to the Prime Minister's office and it's less bureaucracy and far easier for them to direct it to fund the military and security operation.

Also in terms of the economy track, there is pressuring the GCC and the Gulf countries and specifically the United Arab Emirates not to aid the regime financially, not to bail them out. We know the Kuwaitis were considering paying perhaps a lump sum of money to help. Some of the GCC countries had investments. They stopped it like Qatar – \$2 billion of FDI – for a power plant project stopped. And also what the international community can do is help with the relief efforts in terms of financial, medical and humanitarian efforts. We have more than 6,000 or 7,000 registered by the Turkish Red Crescent on the Turkish border. Our estimate is there are more than 50,000 Syrians who crossed, but did not register as refugees. They crossed with passports to the Turkish side. The Turkish authorities are anticipating and expecting and preparing for about a million Syrian refugees influx. This all needs obviously help and support with.

The second track that the international community can help with is a political track where if they can help with building consensus in the region, with the Qataris, with the Turks, with the GCC and with the Arab League. This will result in an easier Security Council debate or [inaudible], especially with the Russians or the Chinese. When we talk with policymakers in the world, they say well what are you doing on that track. Of course, the UK, the Brussels, the Washington, they have leverage on the GCC, on the Gulf countries, and they can use that to pressure to have at least some form of coverage from the Arab League for a security council resolution. Qatar, in particular here, is of high significance in the Gulf States. Saudi Arabia is a force of very high significance in play when it comes to the Arab League.

We need pressure on Russia and China. The Russians showed interest in meeting with the opposition lately and there will a delegation meeting with the Russians, but again the rest of the Security Council members who would love to see pressure [inaudible] to make sure that the security council resolution will pass, not only condemnation resolution at this stage because the debate on a condemnation revolution did not pass the incidence on the ground and the escalation is now way ahead. We need help also passing on with the International Criminal Court case – the ICC.

And also in the political track, we need to see tougher language. Remarks that include the word 'reform' are very damaging. People on the ground feel the frustration and anger when they hear this word. What does reform mean? Reform means Maher Assad being put in prison? Does it mean chiefs of security being tried in military court or any kind of court? Does that mean that Rami Makhlouf will be tried also in court because of the corruption and all of the disasters that he caused to the economy? So we need to understand why any western government mentioned or used the word reform, what is it they mean by reform? Does it mean just keep the status quo? This is what people are asking. So tougher language needs to be used here and to avoid problematic terms. I refer here to President Obama's speech when he said Assad either has to lead a transition – not lead reform – or step down. This is the kind of language we would love to see and hear from also European capitals. The French went forward with this and said that Assad has lost his legitimacy to rule. We understand the sensitivity of these terms if it is used by world leaders so perhaps they can say he is losing his legitimacy to rule. That's one way out of it.

Also in future, we need the international communities help on the future of Syria, post-Assad. Where the senior position in the country, perhaps not the activists on the ground, those who are a bit senior, they are looking on post-Assad Syria on constitutional reform, on judicial reform, how would a Syrian human rights law would look like, what would we do about the business law reform and all these areas. We are also concerned about foreign direct investment. Syria needs about 340,000 jobs after Assad straight away first year to be created and that translates into 11 to 12 billion dollars of foreign direct investment. And we need that money urgently. We are not worried about first elections where everybody is excited and happy. We are worried about second elections where people say you did not deliver. We want certainly to deliver and the economic development and job creation is our main concern after Assad and also the technical help when it comes to the implementation of our transitional period reforms and the legal frameworks, benefitting here from the Eastern European countries and the [inaudible] Russian experiences and not to fall in the same traps, but to use the skills and also knowledge gained from these experiences. I hope I'm on time with this. It was very precise and short and we'll open the forum to discussion afterwards. Thank you.

**Dr Radwan Ziadeh:**

Thank you, Chatham house. Three years ago my project was here about the democratic change in Syria. I never expected that one day we would be started on this long road to democracy. I actually try to answer two questions: where is Syria heading right now, what the scenarios will be and actually about the role of the opposition and how the opposition will see the post-Assad era. First of all, I think it's now we have three scenarios.

The first one it's the regime survives which actually now the Assad regime is trying to repeat what the Iranians did in 2009 and what the military government in [inaudible] did in 2007 which is crack down the whole movement, by any means, even that the number of the killed people does not care since the international community, as Bouthain Shabaan, the presidential advisor, said to the *New York Times*, everything will be manageable after that. But this is actually, this scenario, is unlikely because the number who have been killed in Iran, for example, in 2009 is 79, but now the number in Syria exceeds 1,500. Now every house, every apartment in Daraa, as an example, has a martyr and those people it is clear will not give up at least.

The whole uprising spread up to all other cities. It's only actually now three cities has much more calm regarding the number of the demonstrations, but all other cities they reach the massive mobile. It's of course everyone question why we don't have like the Egyptian or Tahrir Square model. Because actually the security and the checkpoints in a city like Daraa, with only 200,000 population, they have more than 36 troops, 36 tanks on every city, and 64 snipers in all governmental buildings. They have instructions to shoot anyone who shows up on the street and this is why we unlikely to have such kind of Tahrir Square. But at the same time, it's clear even that, the government used the high level, they develop more troops and, for the first time, in [inaudible] and Jisr al-Shughour, they used the military helicopter. But the same time, the response was more people on the street and the size of the demonstrations became much, much bigger.

The second scenario is actually the protest continue and the killings continue and it has to be peaceful. Until now, there is no indication for the demonstration that they use guns anyway. What have seen in Jisr al-Shughour is only some defection amongst the army. This is, then, the later on actually the army have to decide to break through with the regime. We know that actually it's the generals or the big generals in the army to break through with the regime is not an easy answer. Look to the soldiers who have been

actually defected because everyone have only two options – have to kill his fellow Syrians or be killed. This is why it is not an easy answer for any military soldiers or any military general to defect, but if the protests continue and to be peaceful, this actually will convince more generals to defect and to protect the country and to break through the regime. We do believe that scenario will be the most likely one and we work on that. We focus on that because that will save the country with the same time will bring democracy as our hope in the near future.

The third scenario actually if the protests continue with — this is very much we have right no — and the killings continue. The quota of the killings, they have from 20 to 25. Some Fridays, they exceed the quota with 70 which make in last Friday in Hama, but the quota to kill 20 to 25 every Friday. But I mean that the anger among the Syrians became much bigger and the people they start talking about how can the international community will help. This is why if the army does not break through with the regime and they have more defection among the army, but it is not like in the high ranking levels. This will open up of course for the international intervention will be much more complicated and much more and, in any means, will not good for the country because any of the Syrians would like to have like the Libyan model even that the regime is much clear that it's headed in this direction.

This is why actually in the opposition from the Thursday we trying to put a scenario for what's called a national initiative for change which actually proposed by the Syrian opposition figures inside the country and outside the country. It tried actually to have four things. Everyone believe that the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad lost his legitimacy in the eyes of the Syrian. All of the Syrians, in every city, are calling for step down Bashar al-Assad and nobody will accept less than that, less than what the Egyptian and Tunisian achieved.

This is why the only institution can rely on is the Syrian army. We know that the Syrian army is a professional one. It's not like Egypt, but also it's not like Libya. It's something between. And the Syrian army should play an important role. We know the Syrian army has an important role in the heart of the Syrians. The Syrian national anthem start off the guardian of the country and this is why we named one the Fridays on the name of the Syrian army to encourage the army to play the role to protect the protestors with the same time to break through the regime. We know that dependence on the army is not the ideal solution since when the army intervene in the Syrian politics in 1949 for the first military coup in the Middle East, it was negative implication on the democratic constitutions in the 1950s, on the Syrian history. But right

now, we know that the army, it's only the institution can play an important role, can protect the people and can stop the killing machine of the security apparatus, the military security and air force security which, actually, the only strategy for them, to kill more people because they thought that discourage more people to go to street.

This is why we put four aspects of the post-Assad era. First of all, how the political change will be. It is clear among a consensus among the Syrians that we'll have civilian, secure state and all the parties will representative. We'll have presidential elections and parliamentary elections. Of course, we'll have a national council, will have rewrite new constitution. The second thing which is the most important also is the economic aspect. Syria, it is a country run out of sources, but still is very rich in the human sources. This is why which we need heavily depends on, is Syria is need actually \$86 billion for the infrastructure and the US sanctions that were imposed in 2005 was very much effected the foreign investment in the country. This is why it's one of the top priority for any government after Assad will be actually with the economy and economic development.

The third aspect about the foreign policy. We know Syria is not like Libya. Syria has many active foreign policy in the last 40 years. This is why there is a lot of concern about the change in Syria – in Lebanon, in Iraq, in Israel and even that in the west – the United States and Europe. This is why we do believe that having the foreign policy should be in coordination with the interests of the Syrian people. The relationship with Lebanon, the relationship with Iraq: it's important to have good and normal relations. Actually, any implication of the foreign policy will have impact on the domestic policies because as Americans saying, every politics is local and we believe in that because now Syria pays a very heavy price regarding its foreign policy to be negative, to be trouble makers in the region.

The fourth actually is the role of the army. We do believe that the army even that will, like in Egypt, play an important role in stabilizing the after-Assad era, but at the same time we should actually modernizing the army. The Syrian army is back to the 1970s in its tools etcetera etcetera. But this is why we depends on one of the instructions and the initiatives that the Minister of Defence should be civilian, all of this issues. With the same time, the initiative talks about the role of the security forces. The security forces, how restructure the security forces depends on the reconciliation among the Syrians. None of the Syrians want actually to see any bloodshed in the country. It's what we have, none of the Syrians is happy with everyday news about the massacres or the mass graves. This is not the Syria we like to see. This is why we put as

our priority to have more reconciliation among the Syrians. We need to see the Syrians as the vanguard of the change. Syria in the 1950s was among the first Arabic countries who gave the women the right to vote, have very progressive institution. We need Syria to back to that days.

The last thing what we call the role of the media and the Ba'ath Party. We talked about de-Ba'athification, but not like on the Iraqi model other than we do believe that the Ba'ath Party, it has a historical role in the Syrian history. This is why the Ba'ath Party still have the right to exist. It has to participate in the election, but at the same time, any Ba'ath Party members who committed crimes or human rights abuse should be punished by that. This is, of course, the Eastern Europe model is the great example for how for how to reconcile between [inaudible] because to put on the current constitution the Article Eight which says the Ba'ath Party is the leader of the society and the state like the Czechoslovak Constitution in the 1950s. This is actually it's something that gives the Ba'ath Party the role which it should be taken by the election or by ballot box only. This is why we are talking about the de-Ba'athification which should be, it's a part of any Ba'ath member have the right to participate and the Ba'ath party himself has to exist and practice his role.

The last thing is about the role of the media. Unfortunately now, the state media playing very negative role. Not only actually hiding the truth on the Syrian people, but also playing the role of propaganda, much more encouraging the killings of many Syrians, if you go to the commentators on the Syrian TV where they describe all the demonstrators as agents or as traitors. We do believe that the media, it has an important role. We know [inaudible] the question now on Egypt or Tunisia – how the media right now it played an important role. It is now, of course, one of the tactics of the Syrian regime right now is not to allow for any media presence because they saw that will escalate the situation and encourage more people to go to street. The second to involve the army from the first day and they succeed to do that, but the same time the social media played an important role in passing the information.

If the Egyptian revolution is the Facebook revolution, the Syrian one is the YouTube revolution. YouTube became the main source of information, but even what missing in the YouTube actually is the personal stories which is very important right now and this is why the social media cannot actually pass this information. Unfortunately, this is why we are still calling every day for the Syrian regime to allow for the media – the international media – to cover what's going on in the country because what we get actually outside, only five

to seven percent of the real picture on the ground. Let's finish right now and open the questions. Thank you very much.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

Now we will start the discussion and I want to launch it by asking the speakers about how sure they are of the post... I mean, it sounds like we are taking about Syria after Assad already and you're worried about the second election even and not the first one.

**Audience Member:**

Could you repeat the introduction about the speakers? Who do they represent and what they are?

**Nadim Shehadi:**

Ah, well sure. I mean, I did introduce ... Well, would you like to introduce yourselves in two minutes?

**Ausama Monajed:**

My name is Ausama Monajed. I am from Damascus originally. I've been living in the UK and Europe for a few years now. I have a degree in economics. I have a Masters in politics and management. I worked at the UNDP and then I worked in the European Commission. Then afterwards as a communication consultant.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

This sounds like an interrogation? Do you want the fingerprints as well? Can I introduce the others? Dr Radwan Ziadeh is a dentist. When I first met him, I had read so many of his books that I thought he was 75 years old.

**Dr Radwan Ziadeh:**

By the way, all the Syrian problems is by the doctor who engage in the politics. In 1976 to 1970, the President Nurreddin al-Atassi was a doctor. The

Prime Minister Ibrahim Makhous was a doctor. And the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a doctor. And always Abdul Nassar accusing the Syrian regime that the regime has three doctors so always has some problems.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

Professor Ghadbian is an academic at Arkansas University and he's a specialist...I mean, the book I know is about Islamic movements.

**Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

Democracy and Islam. And a political activist.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

Could you introduce yourself very quickly?

**Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

Yes, Syrian academic and activist. You could call me a troublemaker for the Assad regime.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

All that remains is to know who asks this question because this is when I remind people that when they ask a question, they have to give their name and affiliation. Yes sir?

**Audience Member:**

I'd like to ask a question ...

**Nadim Shehadi:**

No, no no ... I'd like you to tell us who you are ...

**Audience Member:**

My name is Samir [inaudible]. I am a political analyst on Middle East.

**Nadim Shehadi:** Thank you. This is all we want to know. Because you've asked a question, you've already asked a question. So I'll open the questions to the floor now.

**Question One:**

Thank you very much for all of your presentations. Looking at the title 'Envisaging Syria's Future: Obstacles and Options', I find it sad that in the presentations, we haven't found any solutions. Whether we like it or not, President Assad and his ruling group are there. Is there no way of seeking some kind of compromise with them? Because I don't see them just disappearing into the sunlight and this being a very happy ended story. Is there any possibility of third parties who are – even Turkey, hosting a small conference with the leaders and the opposition groups? There needs to be talk, not conflict.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

If I reformulate this, how are you sure? Because you have mentioned, the three of you, that the point of no return has been reached because this is a key point ...

**Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

For 11 years, we've been appealing to Bashar al-Assad to act on his image as an in-closet reformer. In 2000, he promised that he would introduce a party law to allow the possibility of other political parties. Two weeks ago, he instructed the prime minister to form a committee to form a new law regarding political parties. As I said over and over, they turned down every positive initiative coming from society, coming from activists, from inside, outside to engage seriously and lead a process of reform. I think we reached the conclusion of no return and we talk about Bashar losing credibility and legitimacy after the mass killing.

Up to maybe the first week of April, we still would consider Bashar to be a likely player that we could engage with. We believe that most of the killing has been carried out by Maher al-Assad, his troops, and with the basically the complexity of Bashar himself. He's been absent. We haven't heard from him in a long time. And so, outside that circle, we are willing to engage in a dialogue with everyone from within the regime whether the military or the

Ba'athist government, People's Council – any political players. And we welcome any initiative on the condition that it would lead to the end of the one-party rule and it would lead to a democratic, pluralistic, political system.

### **Ausama Monajed:**

Can I just add something here? Turkey has tried, I mean, they tried their best. They sent their military intelligence chief. They sent delegations, one after the other, time after time, trying to tell us that this end – that this cannot carry on like this and you have to change course. The response we've seen in every case is killing. They have been accusing opposition of being foreign traitors and agents of the west and international powers for 47, 48 years and only a few days they recognized there is an opposition in the country. Voila. And they want to sit on the table and talk to them. How can the opposition sit and talk when they keep financing and participating in killing people? You cannot sit on the table with someone holding a gun pointed at your head.

They are asking us to stop the demonstrations so they can just start some formal process. We are asking them to stop the killing one day, a few hours, to have some form of trust or at least a minimum trust possible. We cannot sit on a table with no trust at all. Turkey tried, others tried and it looks like when they mobilized the army, they kind of made up their decision.

### **Nadim Shehadi:**

Dr Radwan, is there an interlocutor to talk to? Is there an opposition that you can talk to?

### **Dr Radwan Ziadeh:**

It's actually very much appreciated the role of the Arab League. Unfortunately, the Arab League was silent on what's going on in Syria. It was very helpful on Libya and this is look to the Security Council adopt the Resolution 1970 after 11 days of Libya on crimes against the humanity where the number of the killed people in Libya less than the number of the people killed in Syria and until now actually the Security Council hasn't adopted the condemnation resolution. This is because of the role of the Arab League and we do believe that, unfortunately, the Syrian regime does not have the feeling that he need to talk to anybody. He's still feeling that he has the upper hand

and Rami Makhoul and Bouthaina Shabaan repeated that many times, that the crisis over and we overcome and everything manageable.

We do believe that the best solution to be on the Arab League [inaudible]. Of course, it has to be supported by the international community, by the international actors. But it depends on the Syrian regime who has feeling that he has to talk to others and he's not the only player. The situation like this cannot continue because if the regime continue and the killing machines of course has two scenarios. Either the Syria goes to the civil war or the Syria it will be opened up to international intervention. This is why many Syrians inside and outside, they need to avoid that. But this is why Turkey, it's an important role, it's original. Turkey is the only country who has leverage. We ask always the United States and the European Union to coordinate with Turkey regarding that.

By the way, also that the Syrian army has the only military cooperation with the Turkish army. This is maybe why the Turkish army has more leverage on the Syrian army. This is why they encourage more defection among the Syrian army. We do believe that Turkey should be encouraged by the international community and it's from the comments that Erdogan did, it's clear that they do believe that the instability in Syria will reflect on the instability in Turkey. This is why Turkey now much more likely has to act very quickly.

### **Question Two:**

You're talking with a lot of hope about post-Syria, but the reality on the ground is that this regime still has the upper hand. IT is still going from one city to another, clamping down on protestors. As you said, for three months, we haven't seen international action except some condemnation and the Arab League hasn't done anything where, as you say, within 11 days the Arab League and the GCC met on Libya. So how can you be sure that there is an end in sight and there is just not another 1982? Nobody's moving so far and the opposition is not united at the same time.

### **Dr Radwan Ziadeh:**

Because the Syrian people, you have demonstrations last Friday, in 138 sites and towns and villages. It's clear that the Syria will no give up and look to the situation in Hama after the on the Friday before this Friday where the Syrian regime killed 70 protestors in Hama. Next day, on Saturday, they have

100,000 on the street. It's clear the size of the demonstration became much bigger. Much bigger. This is, of course, will keep the pressure on the Syrian regime because the Syrian regime will reach a point where he have to talk to change the course. And with the international pressure continue from outside and domestic pressure, the regime will reach this point in a way or not.

Regarding the opposition, we had a very successful conference in Antalya, in Turkey, with more than 300 participants and, by the way, 70 percent of the participants, they engaged in politics for the first time. This is the moment of opportunity for the Syrians to have a different and better future for the Syrians. We bring all of the others from different ideologies, different political parties. The largest portions are individuals and independent intellectuals. And they succeed to have a committee of 31 consultative council and this one will elect 11 members and those will in everyday coordination with the opposition inside Syria. We do believe that, in the final communiqué, a lot of discussion before that but all of them agreed about how the transition will be in Syria and agreed about there is no dialogue with Bashar al-Assad. And Bashar al-Assad has to step down. It is clear that the opposition, it's much likely to have one united voice.

### **Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

Can I just follow up to that? Yes, I think it's unfair to expect a strong Syrian opposition under 40-some years of ruthless dictatorship and massacres and all of that. It's not Syria. It's universal law. But despite that as I think I tried to kind of explain, the vision of the opposition survived, the Assad father and son and everybody in the opposition in Syria believes there can be a better political structure. Everybody believes that the alternative is a democratic political system. I think what we see now inside Syria, again, it's as I said a youth movement in that it's really trying to produce its own leadership. There are those of us outside trying to help with the process to the extent we can.

Outside we had two conferences. We see a new spirit among Syrian communities abroad. We see thousands of thousands of people approaching us, saying how can we help? The same spirit we see it inside Syria. This sense of optimism actually that we are trying to convey to you, it's even stronger with every contact we have inside Syria from these young people. Every time you have crack down, you see more of a sense of empowerment among the youth. So what we are likely to see again is a local leadership emerging out of the protest movement in addition to the activists in the

Damascus Spring, forming some kind of a structure with the outside. You will have very soon a more representative leadership of the opposition.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

OK, I'm going to take three last questions.

**Question Three:**

My question is with the Halab and Damascus scenes being comparatively quiet. Doesn't this mean that the Syrian middle class isn't democratically oriented as expected of the middle classes generally?

**Question Four:**

We have already partly answered the question that's been put to you which was precisely about the unity of the movement in exile. Just how far is this meeting in Antalya really going to carry you forward. Secondly, it's all very well to say that you are building up links to and so on, but sooner or later, I think the outside world will want to see emerging inside Syria people of leadership quality because you cannot expect exiles abroad just to go back and take over the country. The Iraq experience has showed us how difficult that is. So I just wonder how you really see this whole issue of developing leadership inside the country?

**Question Five:**

I'd be very interested to hear whether any of the speakers have a clear picture of what's happening within the army. What sort of power struggle is going on that Assad has been unable to control because he said very clearly in the beginning of all of this in April that he wished to lift the emergency [inaudible] and he wished to the police to protect demonstrators. He clearly wasn't able to deliver, but what's actually going on? Because it's very difficult for us to tell because there is no journalism from within Syria. We're dependent on foreigners reporting from outside. Can any of you give us any indication?

**Nadim Shehadi:**

OK, yes, I want to add to that just because it's the last question here. We heard the mantras in this whole revolution is Syria is not Egypt, is not Tunis

and then you have the international community being afraid that Syria is Iraq and Syria is Libya. So added to that question, is there a sectarian element in the split in the army and the revolution?

**Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

OK, I'm going to address the question of the long leadership inside Syria. That's actually our vision, that the young generation of Syria is the future leadership of the country and that's emerging. That's what I was actually referring to. Out of the demonstrators, out of the activists, they are now we see some local leaders. Now, a lot of these leaders are university students who are in touch with other activists inside Syria and with the outside. We feel that we complement each other. We feel that we have something to offer, but definitely the leadership of this movement comes from within.

In addition to that, we believe that, again, as we said some forces within the regime could have a role in the transitional period, but the whole idea, the whole project. I mean, you ask what is the alternative in Syria? The alternative is to have a political system in which political players compete over people's voices. And that's the vision. That's what we are trying to get to. And so at that point, it's going to be again the young people of Syria having the opportunity finally to elect their leaders instead of transforming the country into a hereditary republic which is a contradiction in terms. But we see that again, what happened in Egypt, what happened in Tunisia, and what's happening in Syria is a continuation. It was actually a corrective kind of a movement into the process of making these countries a sort of pawn for these royal family who not only decided to continue and serve for life, but to pass on power to their sons and to own everything. This is really what's pushing people in Syria. It's not just the lack of economic opportunities, but the search for freedom, the search for dignity.

By the way, one of the names of this revolution, we would like to use the Jasmine Revolution because Damascus is known for jasmine, but that was taken by the Tunisian. So they are using the Dignity Revolution. So a lot of it is correcting what was going wrong in the Arab world in terms again of transforming these state into fiefdoms basically and I think that's what the people of Syria deserve. We will not accept any less. So going back to the point, yes, it is going to be the indigenous, young Syrians who are going to be the future leaders.

**Ausama Monajed:**

Just like to address the question of Damascus and Aleppo. Certainly, early days or weeks of the revolution, you cannot expect the middle class to have much to lose and much to risk to join in mass numbers. This has certainly changed. Every day there are demonstrations in Damascus and Damascus suburbs. Not only in Damascus suburbs, in the heart of Damascus – in Shaalan, in Midan, within those Damascus areas. We need to know that even the economic openness in the past couple of years, who benefitted from these mainly in terms of regions? It was Aleppo and Damascus who benefitted and the middle class there. And we need to know that there is no tribal influence, there is no tribal society in these two cities where, unlike Deraa or other towns in the country where there are a few people killed and you have the whole tribe is marching the next day.

Despite this fact, this revolution started March 15 from the Hamadiyyah Market in the heart of Damascus. That was the official date of the revolution and where a few young, brave men and women marched in the markets. It's good to know that. And we are certain that things will be again [inaudible] in the heart of Damascus, in Aleppo...with time passing, let alone with a security presence in these cities, it's far more heavier than it is elsewhere. They used live bullets and live ammunition for the first time in Damascus last Friday. They were avoiding using live ammunition in Damascus because of the diplomats and embassies there and foreign commissions. So that was the first time they used it.

So it is going to that direction, but it's the nightmare of the regime. That's why they tried their best to ... the police, they don't even issue any parking tickets. You can do whatever you want to do. There are no fines. It's a chaotic situation, even in these two cities because they don't want to create any kind of tension whatsoever and give a free hand to everyone to do whatever they want, but not to protest.

**Audience member:**

[inaudible]

**Ausama Monajed:**

It's minus three percent now. It was two percent, the economic growth. Now minus three percent. Economists predict within six months, we will have major collapse especially because the main contributor to the economy – tourism – is now zero.

### **Audience Member:**

[inaudible]

### **Ausama Monajed:**

There are analyses and studies. I mean, we can share the info.

### **Dr Radwan Ziadeh:**

Just to be clear that the uprising in Syria cross the sects. Four Christian have been killed actually the first martyrs been killed in Baniyas – [inaudible] – is a Christian. And three Christian have been killed in Deraa also. It's clear that across the sect... and seven Alawite have been killed by security apparatus. This is why the main slogan, why the Syrian one, one, one. The Syrian people are one. And this is clear by even that the regime trying to play on the sectarian violence every day, day by day, but it's clear that the Syrian people will not fall in this trap because this actually will end up the country in a civil war.

Just to add here because a lot of questions about the role of the Christian. The Christian in Syria is not like the Copts in Egypt as example because all the Christian in Syria actually belong to the middle and upper class, the most in urban areas, and became active in the Syrian politics in the 1950s. In 1951, the Prime Minister of Syria for two terms, Faris Al-Khoury, he is a Protestant and the majority of Christian in Syria are orthodox. He's a minority of minorities. Even that, he became Prime Minister. Then, he speaker of the house and this is why the Christians cannot be excluded by the political process after the collapse of the Syrian regime, just to be clear on that. And many activists right now are Christian activists. Nobody would like to represent himself as Christian activists or as a Sunni activists, but unfortunately, this is the language have been used by the western media.

The second thing – and Ausama mentioned about Damascus and Aleppo – they have demonstration in everyday in Damascus which is clear that the demonstration in Damascus start from Al Rafa'i Mosque. Rafa'i and Midan, this is the business and middle and upper class. In Al Rafa'i Mosque, as an example, in the 1980s when the Muslim Brothers have a strike on Hama in the 1980s, Rafa'i Mosque have a movement their called Zaid Movement. This Zaid Movement stand against the Muslim Brothers which actually made a good benefit for Assad regime at that time to survive. But right now, the demonstrations started from this mosque exactly. This is a way to give you a sense about the middle class in Damascus and the upper class, they have benefit from changing the regime.

What's actually changing in the social contract in Syria, under Hafez al-Assad and under Bashar al-Assad, the emerging of Rami Makhlouf and others because used to, in the 1980s, the Assad regime give the business for the Sunni community and will manage the security and the army. But when the emergence of Rami Makhlouf and Bahjat Suleiman and [inaudible] Duba and others who became as a businessman and trying actually to control every business in Damascus and Aleppo which make the picture more complicated and allow for the business community to join. The Antalya conference funded by the Syrian businessman and all actually the tools have been used by the activists in Syria funded by businessman in Damascus and Aleppo.

The last thing about the army. As I said before, the army is made by the people. Every Syrian has to serve in the army for two years. Now, one year and nine months. This is why [inaudible] the army, it has to [inaudible] some time, especially for the big generals to calculate how much power they have on the ground if they defect or breakthrough the regime. Because what's happening in Jisr al-Shughour is an example when actually 50 soldiers and some low ranking officers, to defect from the regime, they send actually 63 tanks from the Fourth Division and they attack them by the military helicopters because the regime expected that Jisr al-Shughour would be second Benghazi. And this is why it's clear that the generals, if they want to defect, they need to calculate how much power they have the ground, but at the end, actually, the army will have the last answer. Thank you.

Just regarding the opposition in exile, none of the Syria opposition in exile have a dream to back or take over in the power in Syria. We do believe that the opposition right now, even that is the transitional opposition has a minor role. This revolution done by the youth and should be actually ... and the youth will decide at the end that will after free and fair elections ...

**Dr Najib Ghadbian:**

They might have dreams but ...

**Dr Radwan Ziadeh:**

And this is why we have to be clear that the Iraqi model is not in mind of any of the opposition figures.

**Nadim Shehadi:**

OK, thank you very much. I'm afraid that we have run out of time. All that remains is to thank the speakers. There are so many more questions and so many more things to say, but I'd like to thank them. Please.