

# The Syrian Dialogue Project

---

## FOR A UNITED, DEMOCRATIC AND SECULAR SYRIA

The Syrian Dialogue project is an initiative by a group of Syrians from inside and outside Syria that aims to provide a platform for sharing and debating the views of “the silent majority” in Syria

Most of the politically active Syrians speak or act on behalf of two extreme sides of the Syrian crisis, driven by their emotional systems where fear, ambitions or anger determine personal or collective group choices and actions. The center, on the other hand, is generally more flexible, prudent, realistic and pragmatic. It is also, we believe, probably the largest segment of the Syrian people. Therefore it is crucial that this group of Syrians is empowered with a platform to help it participate in the shaping of the narrative of the crisis and in helping present moderate proposals for ending the complex crisis. In phase one of the project, we follow a complex methodology to try to answer a basic, yet unanswered, question:

*What is on the minds of the Syrian people? What are their worries? What are their aspirations? And what are their priorities?*

To answer the above question we invited ten Syrians who actively called for cautious, evolutionary reforms (Group1) and ten other Syrians who are opposed to the current system of government and are in favor of faster and more far reaching changes to take place (Group2). Members of each group answered the question from their different perspectives. Members of a third, center, group then tried to produce a list of answers to the question by voting on each of the 74 answers provided by the two other groups, then sorting those answers according to the highest votes. All answers were edited and combined in a comprehensive top 20 list that the center team is proposing as the project's answer to the important question.

## 1. Survival (Staying Alive)

Syrian citizens' daily activities, throughout the developments of the current crisis, can be summarized into the words "ways of survival". The militancy did not only shatter security but it is now randomly threatening people's survival as people themselves have now become targets, regardless of their position or political stance. Towards this end, many considerations and demands that people regarded as fundamental at the onset of this conflict have now receded, so much so that the economic burden has surpassed the general consensus that was prevalent before 2011, and has taken a special position in the citizen's search for basic survival means.

While the security concern is the most present today, the livelihood concern goes in parallel, as the stability of the economy reflects a normalization of the political regime in any country. It is a given that the earliest casualties of a political conflict is the economy. That's what was expected for Syria and that's what happened. However, the economy did not fall as a secondary victim to the violence in Syria, but it became a target of its own. For whether it was the opposition forces that targeted the economy to fight against the normalization that the regime is trying to impose over the conflict, or the regime that used the collapse of the economy as a scare tactic to reinforce its loyalty, the Syrian economy did in fact collapse.

This collapse is not a temporary or superficial one that could be reversed easily. A large proportion of the economic infrastructure has been destroyed, major private capital fled the country, people's savings have been drawn from market circulation, and public investments, which are usually a major engine of the economy, were stopped by the government.

In addition, violence and militancy have resulted in many Syrians families fleeing their homes, thus separating them from their jobs and sources of income. Syrians refugees (both inside and outside Syria) account for more than 2.5 million human beings. The result is that more than half of the Syrian workforce have now become out of work, while the income of the remainder has drastically reduced, and people started consuming their savings. While many Syrians lived near the poverty line prior to the crises, many have now fallen into absolute poverty and haven't got the minimum resources to maintain basic nutrition so as to stay alive.

The official social organizations did not deal with the crisis in a serious and competent way. In addition, non-governmental organizations (NGO) were afraid to get involved fearing retaliation from either side of the conflict, who considered that all humanitarian assistance activities must go through its own channels and did not start working effectively until a late stage of the crisis.

The civil social capital endured the larger part of the basic assistance that is necessary for survival (shelter with relatives, sharing resources with neighbours, etc.) Moreover, the host society resources started to dry up, so did the ability, and even the desire, of the rich classes to support the classes that do not have enough reserves to go on. As the crisis went on, everyone started calculating their own ability to continue to give without an income, after fear for survival prevailed, even among middle and rich classes.

Taking into consideration the challenge of survival, part of Syrians turned into crime and illegal work. Many combatants on both sides of the struggle tried to benefit from the chaos in order to increase their financial gain. All this has entered us into what is known as the war economy, which in turn lead to an increase in the collapse rate of the peace economy and the fleeing of many capitalists outside the country, along with whom were the investments that employ the remaining Syrians. Syria became entangled in a vicious circle of lack of security that leads to economic collapse, which in turn leads to more violence. Under the war economy, monopolies are formed, prices go up and getting the basics of livelihood becomes marred with danger.

Within this context, survival and getting food become the biggest worry and the preoccupation of the majority of citizens in Syria. And while the biggest part of Syrians are still ethically deterred from committing crimes for mere survival, fear and hunger would create larger pressures on social ties, and might take a large proportion of people into routs that has no ethical or categorical ceiling. This, in turn, would form a future obstacle against any serious attempt to rebuild a fit economy.

Nonetheless, the economic future, let alone the political one, is now the last thing on people's mind. Therefore, talking about political reform, the form of the state, the constitution or democratic institutions has now become quite far and unrealistic. In fact, this is now considered as an insult for many who are of the view that the priority of work today should be to stop violence and to bring humanitarian aid for those who are in need, and that any other talk is no less a crime than violence that harvests all Syrians. The insistence of the struggling parties on marginalising this issue and not giving the problem of survival a priority over military and political work has pushed a large segment of Syrians to reject the ethical position of all struggling parties, and increased the appeal of any solution for the crisis that would stop violence and guarantees people a safe livelihood.

## **2. Fate of activists from both sides arrested, kidnapped or fearing punishment**

The issue of those wanted and the detainees has become more complex, for whereas it was only linked to the security apparatus of the authorities, the issue of those who were abducted by the militant opposition, which took a shape that is similar to detention in some of its aspects, appeared during an advanced phase of the crisis. All in all, however, the "detention" remained linked to an old dossier that is specific to the political regime.

With the start of the Syrian troubles, the numbers of detainees and those wanted for security reasons increased, before the objections develop into an "armed struggle". Throughout months of the crisis, the issue became more complicated and what can be called as "The chaos of detention" appeared, which coincided with the "Chaos of releasing detainees", which is a process that takes place under the loose banner of (Those whose hands were not stained with blood), in a way that allows for mixing criteria and, as some say, increases the relation of antagonism and denial between citizens and their state.

The abolishment of the state of emergency did not affect all details of the detention issue and, as a segment of the society believes, people remain fearful of being reprimanded or unlawfully involved in this or that case, later on. This would require institutionalising this issue under stipulations that are transparent and clear for everyone, and on judicial basis.

Some Syrian tendencies find that the entrance of discussing the fate of the detainees is through national reconciliation that has been ignored since the struggle with the Muslim brotherhood at the start of the Eighties. Those who believe as such appreciate reconciliation in preserving the Syrian identity amongst a multi ethnic and multi religious Arabic and Islamic surrounding, which is the identity that would allow any Syrian to feel dignity in his country. The reconciliation, however, does not have a unified concept among all Syrian parties, as some understand it as a procedure after achieving victory while other only see it as meaning the achievement of all their objectives that they could not achieve by arms. This calls for discussing a unified understanding of the national reconciliation issues.

On the other hand, the ending of the detainees issue, controlling detention issues and achieving reconciliation are all linked to a basic procedural state that is related to the "militants". And the authorities, which issued a repeated amnesty for those who carried weapons and "Whose hands were

not stained with blood”, are dealing with the militancy phenomenon and not the “militants” as groups who have their various references. From this angle, some of the opposition movements find it necessary to “involve the militants in the security set-up” as per their areas. This approach carries a confirmation of creating trans-authority mechanisms with regards to appointments in the security administration and in the army, in order to guarantee no overturning any formula for a solution, and guarantee no chaos of arms and militants, should they exit the solution formula.

Some of those who adopt this approach view the need to distinguish between armed groups before taking any measure because some groups, which are strongly present today, belong to Salafi groups and a number of their elements are non-Syrian. At the same time, we cannot wait until the end of the crisis in order to find a solution, for one of the reasons of the continuation of violence is the militants’ fear for their destiny should the violence ends, at the time that a large segment that is dubbed as loyal to the regime (Regime Shabiha) fear for reprisal that the opposition is threatening with, should they win.

### **3. Managing the change process of Syria’s political system**

Waiting for a new political environment that summarises almost two years of the Syrian crisis, which started with a social movement and ended up with a violent armed struggle, searching for politics amid the developments of the situation on the ground forms the pivot point for the post crisis phase, or even for the mechanisms of exiting it. The developments showed a number of tendencies that surfaced over the political life, as we find:

- The main concern results from the nature of the crisis and the increase in extremism, for there is fear that this would lead to a shrinkage in political life space, which is what is really happening. On another side, there are fears from experiences that emerged in the regional surrounding, like Iraq, Libya and Yemen, which materialised in imposing a state of political change by military force and various pressures.
- Non-clarity with regards to political future, because both conflicting parties confirm the certainty of their victory, with each side having its visible capability on the ground, and its strong allies. There is a part of Syrians who cannot foresee the political future of the country, because of the tight media polarisation in this issue.
- On another note, there is a worry of the political transition process, especially if it is left suspended and available to be kidnapped by any of the parties, in the future. Syria needs a formula for solution in the near future and another for governance on the long term that guarantees a balance between the parties, in addition to redrawing the roles of those institutions that enjoyed a large space within the political decision arena, historically, like the army.
- The shape of the transitional process may not appeal to all parties but, in the end, none of the parties is able to impose its opinion by force and there must be a negotiated exit. The political form must be consensual, with international guarantees, and not international with local guarantees. This means that we need to study the most appropriate sequence of the political transition process in order to guarantee the best change towards democracy and not the best way of change so that we enable the militarily winning party of justifying their future tyranny.
- The transitional process itself is in need, according to some Syrian opinions, to look into the political regime, as “the regime puts barriers before individuals” to guarantee the safety of the society from “individual excesses”. Therefore, individual grievances do not form a criterion for determining how bad or good the regime is. Moreover, the political system should be viewed through the judicial system and how it would achieve public and national interests. As a result, the relation of that interest with citizenship is a sensitive issue, and there is a need for a precise definition of citizenship. In national states, individual rights should not contradict with the upper

national interest. However, being strict about the public interest is faced by obsessions about the question of liberties, for some ideas lean towards the need to separate the concept of individual freedoms from political struggles, so that those concepts wouldn't threaten each political milestone with regards to power devolution or elections.

- Some ideas lean towards a “flexible state” in contrast with the “totalitarian – central state” that has prevailed throughout the previous decades. The “flexible state” would be able to absorb ethnic, religious and sectarian variety in Syria, as it would be closer to “Federalism”. This concept is being faced, however, with the need of non-centralism and not federalism – as each area would be given the right to administer its affairs according to criteria and bases that are nationally agreed upon. This opinion believes that the local administration law is a most important democracy pillars, should it be properly organised.
- Despite the size and complexities of the Syrian political dossier, no new political currents has emerged, in the objective sense. Political plurality that formed a principle demand since the start of the crisis took a shape that does not coincide with the livelihood of the Syrian reality, and remained within the framework of the old political fabrication.
- Some opinions view future Syria through a civil and democratic state that bypasses the religious and sectarian form, as a contrast with the theological state, and in which the separation of authorities and the principle of peaceful power devolution are clear cut. Despite the fact that this view prevails over what is called “the interior opposition”, the details of the civil state remain suspended in the wait for political agendas and dialogue between all parties.

On the other hand, a sizeable proportion of the political opposition held the political regime responsible for all the repercussions of the crisis, regarding it as part and parcel of the problem, and that most developments are linked to its positions and actions, whereas some parties, especially those who try to play mediatory political roles between the two parts of the struggle, that this opinion is an excuse for the opposition not to present a clear vision. Many of its parties emerged with a range of demands, but without a clear intellectual approach, and their actions remained elitist as they had no popular dimension, which some blame on the regime practices for over four decades, whereas the opposition outside Syria has been subject to foreign pressures and formed, as some say, an international strategic tool that targets Syria.

#### **4. Fate of refugees and emigrants**

The problem of displacement in Syria only became clearer with the consequences that resulted from the militarization of the mobility. The armed clash pushed increasing numbers of Syrians to leave their homes; some were moved to safer areas within Syria, while others fled to neighboring countries, and another segment migrated to establish business in some world capitals. Along with the increasing military actions this problem emerged into three directions:

- The first one is associated with the displaced within the safe cities, where providing shelter and fulfilling the basic needs became increasingly difficult, especially with the long period of the displacement. This necessitated that “the displaced” adjust with the new circumstances, which led to economic difficulties in most Syrian cities.
- The second is related to the situation of the refugees outside Syria. The available information from some places of displacement, like Jordan, describes the size of the human suffering, in addition to the process of exploitation that has emerged by media through minors’ marriage. Moreover, in other refugee camps, such as the Turkish ones, there are problems, in addition to the human suffering, that are imposed by being near the fighting places.

- The migration of expertise, capital and segments of some religious communities. With regards to capital, it seems very difficult on the medium term to resettle migrating capital because it is engaged in external projects, and this requires a contingency plan at the entire Syria level to discuss this matter. The migration of expertise seems less complicated, however, because it is directly linked to events taking place in Syria. Moreover, the migration of some Syrian elements, whether cultural or religious, may create an imbalance in population structure and threatens a shift in cultural identity, which obligates setting fixed strategies to overcome this issue.

The return of displaced and refugees to their regular places of residence is a fundamental issue, as it is the first step to alleviate human suffering in addition to restoring the economic and social life cycle. Without doubt, the extent of the destruction that affected the areas will need economic plans to rehabilitate residential areas, in addition to creating an economic revival plan to overcome the output of the battles in those areas.

On the other hand, the consequences of the increased rates of immigration, due to the fear of violence or worry about future, will become clear after the end of the crisis, whether through the loss of the technically and scientifically qualified personnel or the lack of human resources that are needed to overcome the crisis, which means that clear “assurances” after the return of calm would be needed to motivate the displaced to return home and to engage in processes to bypass the crisis.

## **5.Future role of President Assad**

One of the most controversial points among Syrians now is the issue of the future role of President Bashar al-Assad. Opinions hugely vary with regards to this question, and they go between two extreme parties, the first of which want President Bashar al-Assad to rule Syria forever, and the second wants to get rid of President Bashar al-Assad the Qadhaffi way.

It is obvious that moving towards a real plural democracy is one of the demands that are agreed upon among wide segments of the Syrian people. The regime tried to respond to this demand through moving from a referendum system into multi-party election and to fix presidential terms as a maximum two, for any president to remain, in the Syrian constitution that was approved at the start of 2012.

The argument with regards to the future role of President Bashar al-Assad did not stop, however, and it is useful that discussing this issue should take into consideration the following elements:

- The real popularity of President Bashar al-Assad, avoiding disruption and propaganda exaggeration, whether positive or negative.
- The role that President Bashar al-Assad plays in the unity of the army and its coherence, in addition to the importance of the continuity of Syria’s regional and international role.
- Suspicions and fears of the opposition with regards to regime’s non willingness, inability or misunderstanding of how to run impartial and free presidential elections.
- Syrian national dignity and not heeding to foreign demands, in this domain, but approving that which possesses real popular and national interests.
- Some opposition factions regard the president to be responsible for all that happened and for the Syrian blood that was shed in the crisis, therefore they won’t accept dialogue with him or the idea of him being a candidate for the next election.

In light of these elements, organising Syrian presidential elections in 2014 can be discussed, or early presidential elections under the supervision of a national unity government and with the presence of

international monitors from friendly countries that did not directly get involved in the Syrian crisis. President Bashar al-Assad would be a candidate for these elections like any other candidate within constitutional and legal constraints that would allow all candidates to benefit from the state resources in their election campaigns in an equal, fair and orderly fashion, including national media, and would also allow running election campaigns without any harassment from state apparatuses. These election campaigns should be transparent and explain the sources of spent money, along with preventing any of the candidates to receive election support from any foreign parties and limiting election support to a maximum, with regards to domestic parties, with transparency guaranteed.

This solution takes into consideration the feelings and needs of many Syrians who believe not in exclusion or foreign demands but in ballot boxes, and it allows enough time for the opposition for agreeing on one or more candidates who would stand against President Bashar al-Assad in the elections.

## **6. Security and violence**

The need for security is the most important of human needs, after the physiological ones. As a result, the security concern occupies a large section of the Syrian citizen's spectrum of concerns, these days.

The current Syrian generation has lived through a long period of stability and turned, like any social state, into a culture (the culture of stable society.) And within the atmosphere of the culture of stability, the culture of social and individual ambitions for growth and development is established.

Afterwards, mutual violence incidents came to bring down this stability for it to be replaced with a security chaos that was manifested in a number of ways, including:

- Mutual war, and the resulting violence from both sides of the conflict may seem random in a lot of cases, with all kinds of weapons, in addition to terrorist bombings, which led to the killing of thousands of civilians and the destruction of burning of their property.
- Security vacuum and the shaking of the state prestige opened the door before the culture of violence so that it turned into a phenomenon of the society. Killing, robbery and abduction incidents and demanding ransoms or fees spread all over.
- The total or partial destruction of many factories, warehouses, crops and infrastructure, as well as the movement of goods and commercial exchange being affected, resulted in a shortage in many necessary goods, medicine and energy. Even the environment and monuments that represent the civilised heritage of the Syrian citizen were affected by destruction and looting.
- The media played a huge negative role in spreading terror amongst the ranks of the people, from old to young.

All the previous elements led to the paralysis of many sectors, whether partially or fully, including the education sector. Some university and school areas have become unsafe and others turned into refugee centres, in addition to the fact that the people's fears in general have prevented them from sending their children to schools, partially or fully.

Therefore, the Syrian citizen has a direct fear for oneself and for family members, a direct fear for the safety of the house and property and a direct fear for the safety of economic interests. This daily state of fear and anxiety from a future that is unclear, in fact from a tomorrow that is unclear, has reflected on the behaviour of citizens, their conduct and work, which lead to a backdrop in their conduct, in general. Thus, the socioeconomic situation is increasingly becoming more complicated.

The security situation was a direct cause for displacement and migration, including the migration of expertise, capital and investment.

This experience that Syrians are going through developed a nostalgia for the days of stability and realising its importance. This crisis strongly shed the light on the importance of the security status and the discipline of the society and state, alike, in order to consolidate the state of stability.

Healthy political change and economic and political development would only be available in an atmosphere of stability. The lack of the stability of security means the lack of the ability for planning and future calculations at all levels, as a result of which a recession would take place in all domains. No political change would be able to remedy that damage, no matter how perfect it may be, unless after a long period passes, which forms, in the end, a part of time the country needs to progress towards any achievement.

The importance of the security issue is matched by the difficulty in resolving it. For despite the relatively swift transition of power in some Arabic countries, after the upheaval that took place in them, they are still suffering until this day from the lack of political stability, and from security upheaval and social violence. From control of armed militia to revenge between factions to increase in organised crime levels and political violence, to genocide. In the modern and old history there are more violent examples, for the French, for example, presented more than a million victims until the French revolution stabilized.

Violence that is taking place has many reasons, some of which are political and historical, some of which are sectarian, some of which relate to the fabric and composition of the society and some of which relates to foreign intervention or the presence of non-Syrian extreme armed groups. Therefore, solutions are either swift and short term or long term.

A political solution would come at the very front of the short term solutions, and with it the justification for many violent actions would end. The more the political work progressed, the more the mutual violence receded.

Despite the problematic nature of the security apparatuses, their presence (disregarding its current form) under clear leaderships is quite necessary for controlling the increasing security slip, restoring the state prestige and the judiciary authority, impartially holding those who made mistakes to account and eliminating terrorism.

The role of raising awareness that is played by the state and civil society institutions, and religions and media institutions would work on the longer term, and achieving justice, later on, would alleviate the state of congestion and revenge.

## **7. Dialogue vs Revolution**

Despite the disagreement in reading the dramatic Syrian events (Revolution, uprising, street movement, planned foreign conspiracy, rightful or wrongful demands, sectarianism, peaceful, violent or both), it is no longer a secret that violence has escalated at a regular pace, and the conflict took so much a destructive form that no Syrian party would be declared a winner.

What were the results of the conflict?

Tens of thousands of victims and martyrs, thousands of those who were abducted, detained and forcibly displaced, a complete loss of security, the spread of gangs and mercenaries, and a



catastrophic economic crisis as a result of the systematic destruction of industrial zones and dismemberment of the economic cycle. In addition to all that there are foreign economic sanctions, a lack of basic materials, a high rate of unemployment, a recession in national and social unity and civil peace, and an increase in various fanaticisms, on top of which are instigations and sectarian actions, the destruction of state institutions and their most important service functions, and a dangerous foreign intervention by all possible means.

All previous facts are escalating at a dangerous rate, and this kind of destruction needs tens of years and more than a hundred billion dollars for us to go back to where Syria was in 2010. All this indicates that Syria has entered into a comprehensive national crisis, with catastrophic possibilities for its development.

The regime didn't fall; but on the other hand, the military and security solution perpetrated by the regime against its opponents didn't work. Months have passed on this situation, despite the faith of the supporters of both sides that the end is close. Therefore, what is needed now from all parties is the transition to rationality, to start thinking about settlements and compromises for the sake of the country. All conflicts end by sitting around the dialogue or negotiation table.

With both parties seeking foreign help and the lack of trust between them made the American and Russian role in the conflict a very important one. It became necessary to have an international guarantor for the outcome of the dialogue, and to supervise fair elections at all levels.

Everyone has blood on their hands, and everyone committed serious mistakes. The military victor will impose a similar despotic security rule, which would be a natural and inevitable result, and it would resume an endless war for existence. Dialogue, agreement on a transitional period and a national unity government, and taking the other side's fears into consideration would ease tension and put Syria's interest above all.

Before initiating dialogue, all parties should identify their representatives, show goodwill gestures, work on facilitating relief operations and contribute towards finding solutions for all problems. Launching the dialogue would encircle the manipulating parties and promote the legitimacy of the state in confronting the destructive and violent elements. Putting an immediate end to violence and finding political solutions so as to reach a comprehensive peaceful democratic change, is the demand of the majority of Syrian people.

## **8. Need to develop sentiments of belonging, citizenship and other intellectual reforms**

How could we understand the Syrian crisis within the context of the aggravation of a number of issues? The crisis exposed a complicated structure upon which all developments and repercussions were based. One of the many components of this context is the "Cultural Structure" of the individual and the society, and perhaps the crisis was a sort of revelation of all the accumulations that preceded it, especially the question of the unity of the society, as severe social discrepancies took place at all levels. Moreover, as the crisis developed, serious defects appeared within the body of education, whether at the technical level or the intellectual curricula one, or even with regards to its ability to have an impact over the general trends within the society.

Prior to the crisis, the education sector suffered from a number of challenges that can be summarised as follows:

- High drop-out rates from basic education that led to high illiteracy rates, particularly in the north eastern region.
- Deteriorating educational infrastructure, whether in school buildings or educational staffs, that became inadequate to increasing numbers of students.
- The affiliation of the educational institution to the political one (State Education Bureau) which led to weakening links between the school and society.

The crisis further added to these challenges a decrease in the number of available schools for education whether due to destruction or due to usage as shelters for the displaced. It also raised questions pertinent to the cultural identity of the society and individuals, amongst a clear division, an increase in extremism and students becoming involved in many incidents that Syria witnessed.

These challenges appeared while social life became more and more complex and the emerging of violence against children and “special” educationally marginalised groups of children (labour children, children with unknown parents and juveniles), taking into consideration that the number of unrecorded children of both sexes was estimated at 125,159 as per the multi-indicators cluster survey of 2006.

Therefore, within the framework of bypassing the crisis consequences crisis on education and building of individuals, some opinions are of the view of dealing through a clear program that includes:

- Peace and citizenship curriculum: It would illustrate rights and duties for both the state and the citizen, within a modern, civic, secular and democratic state, and would be adopted by schools and various NGOs. The state should work on promoting feelings of belonging to Syria as a multi cultural, ethnic, religious and partisan country that guarantees equal rights to all groups and parties. Such a curriculum could be adapted to re-include and rehabilitate the currently fighting youths through life skills curricula, in order to build the individual’s personality.
- Sex and reproductive health curriculum: Raising awareness and orientation about such topics should be carried out in a safe and healthy environment such as that in schools and specialized NGOs.
- Peer education curriculum: Children and adolescents tend to absorb information more smoothly, when coming from peers. Therefore, training and qualifying prominent ones is considered crucial to participating in various aforementioned training sessions.
- Capacity building of governmental staff in the educational sector, and all other sectors.

Moreover, another approach to the education issue and development of individuals stresses the importance of composing a curriculum on consolidating the “Cultural Identity”, regardless of the used techniques and methods. Moreover, whether using the aforementioned ideas or further ones, it is highly important to note that the Syrian crisis put the cultural identity in question between two extremes; one adopting the religious heritage, which is called by various terminologies like “fundamentalism” and “Salafism”, and another trend that is liberal. Re-consolidating the cultural identity is key to overcome the current difficult situation that is creating extreme polarization within the society and directing it towards permanent conflicts.

## **9. Restructuring security apparatuses**

Up until the start of the current crisis, the general feeling in Syria was that the regime was capable, through the presence of its fearsome security apparatuses that are highly skilled and have unique

expertise, to isolate Syria from the wave of upheaval that stormed the region and Syria's neighbours throughout the previous years.

Despite that some, like those who sought playing a public role in the political life from outside the regime or Islamists, were subject to pressures of various levels from these security apparatuses (like harassment, detention, torture or sentences of imprisonment by special courts), the majority of Syrians accepted to a certain extent the role that security forces played in the public life, despite the controversial practices by them, in exchange for keeping peace and security in the country. The spread of many jokes and sarcasm of the role of those organisations, whether among the public or even in drama and comedy series that easily found their way to the official TV, is nothing but an indirect notion of the acceptance of the situation that prevailed in that domain.

The crisis, however, shook this image that prevailed for many years, and many Syrians felt that these security apparatuses were not at the expected level, with regards to efficiency and effectiveness, as the Syrian borders appeared loose in front of the flood of weapons and militants, whether Syrians who found shelter in the neighbouring countries and started crossing borders back and forth or Arab and foreign jihadists who flooded into Syria. Many rumours also spread, and some of which is true, about the collaboration of some who are inside some of the security apparatuses with those who carried out acts of violence against the army, public and private establishments and civilians. Many Syrians feel that the security apparatuses failed to anticipate the crisis, due to several reasons that vary between corruption, inefficiency or even ideological beliefs of some elements that contradict national beliefs. Moreover, their performance in managing the crisis and limiting its damage was not convincing.

In addition to that, some video clips were leaked throughout the crisis, especially at its start, which show the violent treating of the security apparatuses with some groups, of whom some had committed criminal offences and some were simple peaceful demonstrators. These clips showed the lack of security professionalism in dealing with peaceful demonstrators and the violations and offences that were committed against them, and showed the regime as a violent and tyrannical regime that was unable to deal with the opposing view.

On another hand, many Syrians believe that the security apparatuses, especially the military ones among them, were the greater reason, in addition to the coherence and might of the military establishment, why Syria resisted the militant insurgency that was backed by the outside and had patronage and training by some of the regional countries and other countries of the world. Many Syrians also believe that the security apparatuses managed to foil terrorist activities in their earlier stages that could have resulted in many casualties among civilians and in the ranks of the army and security forces. It is also fair to look at the performance of the security apparatuses in light of the huge support that the militant insurgents receive, and the huge political, diplomatic and popular pressure that these apparatuses were subject to.

Practically speaking, the case against the security apparatuses, as per opposition groups, is that they still represent an additional authority, and many accuse all reforms, including the abolition of the emergency law, that they protected the security apparatuses from any legal questioning. The crisis proved, according to their view, that the security forces were incapable of explaining many behaviours and remained, at the same time, outside judicial accountability.

One of the important subjects that should be noted in the process of restructuring is the issue that is related to separating a religious person and an extremist. The religious groups of the Syrian society must be reassured that they won't be target of security harassment, and that their religious freedom would be respected side by side with that of all other groups, and that anti-terrorism laws won't be used to tighten religious freedoms, as long as those freedoms are a personal thing and that the person in question is not involved in any specific activities that are proven by clear evidence and form a danger to public security or national unity.

These apparatuses still play an important role in protecting Syria from the more dangerous consequences of the crisis. Moreover, many leaders and elements of these apparatuses have discipline, efficiency and national spirit, and these work hard to protect citizens on a number of levels. Also, some of the security apparatuses chiefs have exceptional expertise in the affairs of extremist militant organizations in the region, and many of them proved their loyalty to the country and their non-corrupt nature. However, some of their practices need a lot of development and training, and some other must be classified as crimes that are punishable by law.

It is important, in the restructuring process of the security apparatuses, that this would not lead to security vacuum that citizens would pay for. At the same time, it should lead to a comprehensive modernization of these apparatuses that would make a true change in dealing with security risks and put those apparatuses under the authority of the people, through specialized parliamentary committees. It is clear that combating the corruption of the security apparatuses and preventing their interference in civil and political appointments, and implementing mechanisms to audit their work is needed, without harming the confidentiality and efficiency of their operations, and without making such operations subject to political mood, as in the case in some regional states. The most important elements in this reform remains to be getting rid of the corrupt leaderships wherever they are present, and to limit the mission of the security apparatuses to protecting the safety of the homeland and the unity of its territories, and to divert all daily tasks (audit on institutions and individuals) to the police, the public attorney and the judiciary.

It is also important that absolute support is provided to the security apparatuses in their specific mission of protecting Syria, its citizens and the state apparatuses. This support could not be achieved without reaching a certain level of transparency that allows for consolidating public trust in those apparatuses, their role and their practices. Judicial audit over the work of the security apparatuses play an important role in this domain, through making the offences that may be committed by the security apparatuses subject to civil law, excluding them from immunity, and making available bringing their elements before a fair trial when they commit violations or offences.

## **10. Sovereignty**

Turmoil, no matter what type it is, pushes one to think of the main component of the state, for states rarely remain far from the foreign interference, when confronted with crises. The question of violation of sovereignty not only formed an issue within the Syrian matter, but it provided a political and cultural challenge for the Syrian society that has been faced by predicting the risk of partition since the early days of the crisis, while “political schemes” had observers, “separation forces” and other terms.

Concerns over Syrian sovereignty and unity of her territories was a common factor between pro-government supporters and wide segments of the domestic opposition. The difference between the two parties’ interpretations of sovereignty conditions during the crisis did not cause a stark contrast with regards to this issue, for the dreadful Libyan scenario was the strongest element to pull attention. And despite of the repeated use of veto in the Security Council by Russia and China against resolutions that allow military intervention in Syria, which prompted the opposition abroad to take a hostile attitude towards them, the violation of sovereignty has taken a variety of forms. Here we could notice the following:

- First: the National Council was clear from the start that the overthrow of the regime could only be achieved through a scenario that carries some kind of intervention, or perhaps gradual intervention.

- Second: political steps, like Arab and foreign observers, created a disparity in attitudes, although these “steps” can be described as unfinished business, they did end at a certain point, after that new steps, which do not rely on what has been achieved, would be taken.
- Third: violation of sovereignty meant “direct military intervention” for the majority, while the political opposition has different opinions with regards to interpreting of the ” violation process.” They regarded the regime’s dependence on Russia, China and Iran as a kind of outside intervention and a breach of sovereignty that cannot be justified, and considered these countries to be complicit in killing Syrians, for they supported the regime.
- Fourth: Symbols of sovereignty were subject to direct violations. The protest movement quickly replaced the Syrian flag, without a real justification, and the media campaigns focused on the personality of the president, the national army and the official television. Moreover, titles appeared that were headed directly towards national symbols, like the free army, and this coincided with campaigns that questioned the political history of Syria. All that took place while the movement of the U.S. ambassador went in contradiction with all the rules of diplomacy, dictations towards the resignation of the president, the enforcement of a buffer zone, the justification of the presence of militants, of Arab and foreign nationalities, who fought in the opposition ranks, and the targeting of strategic sites that are related with the front with Israel.

The concern of "sovereignty" has turned into different fears after more than twenty months of the crisis, for the issue of the civil war did not remain only within statements of Europeans officials, but moved towards the battles that are taking place in Syrian territories. On the other hand, some believe that the unity of the Syrian territories in the present moment is infiltrated by the armed outposts, no matter how small, as there has been a transition since the start of the crisis from a country with a prominent regional role, to fears of a partition.

Over the Syrian crisis, Syrian sovereignty goes back to the starting point at which the state appeared. There is a society that pressurizes drawn political boundaries, and there is a crises arch at the middle of which Syria is situated. It is at the centre of historical pressure masses (Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt), besides ”a geographical margin” that forms a centre of economic gravity (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait) which tries to polarize the regional policy, and finally there is the axis of the conflict with Israel, which can be regarded as ” the international standard“ for the balance of the region and regulating its roles. This complexity would probably forcefully impose itself may inside any political power in Syria and, during the current crisis, it raises questions about “the existence of the state” of Syria under the reshuffling of regional balances.

Moreover, the difficult question in light of the economic ruin that took place due to the crisis, wouldn’t the subject of sovereignty become more complicated at a time when we would need aid and support that we may have to pay for with part of our sovereignty and independence?

## **11. Sectarianism, national unity and future role of religion in Syria’s political system**

The current crisis brought back to the forefront the question of determination of the Syrian identity and the role of religion in the foreseeable future. During the Ottoman era, the areas that currently form the Syrian country were geographically divided on sectarian, tribal and ethnic bases. Areas like the Alawite mountains suffered from isolation, while the Druz mountain in the south was an independent principality that was not subject to the central authority. The principle of the unity of Syrian territories on which the Syrian elites agreed upon since the Syrian Congress in 1916 paved the way before unifying the Syrian spectrum and reinforcing the national identity under the ceiling of the homeland, despite the fact that the French occupation authorities did practically divide Syria according to an ethnic and sectarian logic.

After 66 years have passed since the independence of Syria and some two years on the start of the crisis, the identity of the state and the society became threatened due to a number of elements that could result into substituting the national identity with narrow sectarian, ethnic and tribal identities that do not unify Syrians but separate them just like the way they were during the Ottoman Khilafa. The ghost of the past hovers over the Syrian society and, in the best of cases, the country could be on the verge of repeating the Lebanese or Iraqi formula that is representing by sectarian allotments, or even federalism. The Syrian society has become divided between what is called the majority and the minorities, which indicates a worsening in the concept of citizenship and a threat to eliminate it, as the crisis escalates and gets internationalised and turned into a regional struggle between Sunni and Shiite forces.

The uprising of the religious intellect within the political domain, according to many, results from a number of elements, including: intellectual and political desertification that the regime imposed throughout five decades, poverty that results from corruption and Western sanctions because of Syria's position with regards to the Arabic Israeli struggle, the failure of Arabic left in the face of the Israeli and American aggression in the region, and also the increasing influence of the oil kingdoms that strongly support political Islam in its Wahabi and Salafi facade. Some also accuses the Syrian regime of inflaming sectarianism through concentrating the actual executive authority within the hands of one sect, only.

At the time of wars, religious and ethnic instincts increase and become rooted in non-civic societies. The phenomenon of extremism is manifested in the military and political rise of Islam and the return of the Jihadi-Takfiri intellect. The identity crisis is also manifested in the return of the family, ethnic and sectarian feuds in Syria, especially in areas where ethnicities, religions or ever tribes exist.

Some opposition figures are of the opinion that extremist currents came as a reaction to the military oppression that is practiced by the regime. These accuse the regime of inflaming the fears of minorities in order to weaken the opposition. The reality, though, may not be that simple, for despite the fact that some opposition segments deny sectarian incitement, they turned a blind eye on it, as it appeared as a winning card in their battle. This incitement proved that it has a qualitative and heavy influence in attracting masses in the poorer and most marginalised areas. The sectarian card also proved its effectiveness in bringing in financial and military aid from the Gulf states, which support formations of religious nature.

Syrians are wondering now whether the sectarian feelings and religious polarisation is temporary or whether it would set the stage for a sectarian future. This concern may be larger among the Syrian minorities due to the dominance of the exclusive Islamic tendencies over the military body of the opposition, which reminded everyone of their sectarian origins. Therefore, the civic state of the society receded in the face of feelings that have risen from deep in history.

Some political factions are of the opinion that bringing back political life requires mechanisms and thoughts to form new party currents on national bases, taking into consideration that allowing religious parties, or ones of sectarian nature, would inflame the sectarian formula. At the same time, the balance between Syrian politics and variety needs today a comprehensive national reconciliation.

## **12. Corruption**

Corruption is viewed by some as endemic in Syria. Others go as far as regarding it as one of the main causes for the current crisis. Many would agree, nonetheless, that corruption is a key subject that needs to be continuously tackled, given its impacts on the overall health of the economy and society. The corruption phenomenon presents a key issue, which is providing a definition for it, especially that such an issue depends on people's experiences and the nature of their understanding of "corruption".

Spontaneous solutions are based on the lack of clear challenges and an understanding of the underlying issues of this phenomenon, which leads to inability to finding systematic solutions for corruption and our inability to measure our success in combating it. Any solution would need to deal with the underlying issues for corruption and understanding that each solution would have its economic and social costs. What is also needed is a management of expectations that are linked to measuring methods of combating corruption, in order to assess the level of success in this domain, which is dependent on a free and responsible journalism and on the people who are involved in the objectives of this process, in addition to the governmental parties that deal with this issue, especially the judicial authority.

The word “trust” often appears explicitly and implicitly when corruption is discussed. Examples on the lack of trust include the government’s inability to solve citizens’ problems, to achieve its obligations, abuse of power, personal gain that is related to power or position, bribes, awarding certain individuals/companies most public bids, corruption within the judiciary system and the possibility of buying judges, and the list goes on...

When it comes to the specificity of corruption in Syria, some view the issue as rooted in the constitution and the way public assets are managed. They believe that breaking up the government’s monopoly on these resources is needed so that we could start dismantling the corruption mechanism.

There is another opinion in viewing corruption and lack of trust in the government, as those who adopt it believe that some social segments revert back with their identity to (the clan, tribe, sect, area or clan, or others), i.e. to the pre-state mentality, and they tend to destroy its institutions, which do not belong to them anymore.

A contrary view is that many emerging economies (and democracies) are plagued with corruption (eg. India, Russia and Mexico), yet its levels have not resulted in wide spread revolts. Even Canada, despite its efforts in the domain, has had its own share of corruption cases. “No country is entirely free of corruption” according to the web page of [Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada](#). Other opinions are of the view that the “[occupy movements](#)” which took place in many countries as a symbolic and limited expression to the lack of trust in government administration, private business sector and their governance mechanisms that they adopt.

Some believe that taking a strong and serious stance on corruption would have a positive impact on how citizens perceive the state and its trustworthiness. In the past, very few individuals were effectively held to account for corruption. Syrians need to redesign the structure of government through separation of authorities and enforcement of accountability and governance standards (within public and private sectors), instead of becoming no more than just a topic of discussion. The seriousness of the corruption issue requires a legal assessment of what is actually there, and then determining additional measures that are required.

To generate further discussion and to go deeper into the subject, one needs to define “corruption” from the perspective of “corruption offences” (similar to [OECD’s practice](#)) and to provide potential solutions. A document worth reading is Transparency International’s [Global Corruption Perception Index](#), which demonstrates the fallacy of linking success in fighting corruption with the introduction of democracy in previously authoritarian states. For example, the 2011 report ranks Syria (country 129 out of 182), as it succeeded in combating it more than countries that are ranked as democratic, like Lebanon (134), Iraq (175), and Afghanistan (180). However, the measurement of corruption is important to determine progress towards the goal.

Do we use Transparency’s 2011 results as our baseline for improvements or do we start our own baselines for Syria? What matters most for Syrians when it comes to tackling corruption? Fighting corruption is a long term process which will definitely incur societal and economical costs and

requires co-operation from all members of the society. Managing unexpected possibilities in corruption reform processes is essential to ensure true reform, to avoid disappointments and to maintain popular support to the corruption fighting efforts.

### **13. Role of the army during the crisis and beyond**

The Syrian army got evolved in the Syrian crisis at an early stage, as it has not only preserved the authority of the state, but it has been targeted as well less than a month into the crisis, starting from the village of Al-Baida, Southeast Baniyas, and it is the key player on the ground events, today. At the same time, this institution was a centre for media and political focus since the army entered the city of Daraa until today. The questions presented by the crisis with regards to the army remained confined to the security work, and perhaps its political role in Syria's modern history was missed, or even of being a hub of sovereignty as a result of the geopolitical position of Syria.

The majority of Syrians developed an opinion of the Syrian army that saw a pioneering and brave role in what it is doing, especially during harsh and unfamiliar circumstances of a war. This passion was reflected whether through media campaigns or social networking media. On the other hand, a certain group of the opposition, especially those that advocate military action, found in it a mere supporter of the regime, while other segments see the army as a "factions" institution.

With the situation developing and the dominance of the military situation over the crisis, many factions of the opposition started to consider the army an entirely hostile party, and to use certain expressions like "liberated areas", which denote a detached perception of the military institution. On the other hand, other segments of the opposition believe that all combat operations don't absolve the army from explaining the nature of its operations and justifying a number of violations. There is a failure in creating a connection that preserves the institution's position as a national army that defends the country's unity. Moreover, the spread of some videos, regardless of its reliability, show flagrant violations and no investigations or accountabilities have come into the open, although the crisis demands transparency amid a conflict and unverified charges.

Practically speaking, the opposition's narrative didn't provide a full vision of the military institution. In fact, there are some indications in the opposition statements that what they wanted was for the army to remain neutral. All in all, the narrative regarding the army goes into two main dimensions:

The first is to regard it through the crisis dimensions. Politically speaking, there is no "non-security state", as those who deal with this subject view that talking about "the security state" is to damage and diminish the capabilities and of the Syrian army and security forces or exhaust them, and therefore damage Syrian sovereignty and security. According to this approach, the army and security forces have the right to use maximum force against the ongoing armed rebellion. On the other hand, a number of the opposition factions wishes practically of totally neutralising the army from any political issue, thus creating an opposite "doctrine" to what the military institution has followed, perhaps since the independence.

The second is about looking at the army through the perspective that has been evolved throughout the "armament", which wasn't about using weapons and violence only, but trying to break the legitimacy of the army by organizing armed "factions" called the "free army". According to this dimension, the opposition itself was divided according to its position towards the emergence of the "free army" as a "concept" rather than a unified organization. The faction that supports the armament gave political legitimacy for "the armed opposition" as being the vanguard that can restructure the army organisation all over again.



It's obvious, through the opposition's narrative, that the vision of the military institution is to take the army out of the political game, which is not possible in light of the struggle with Israel, because the start of the intervention by the military institution into political affairs was through this subject, after only a few years of independence. Therefore, the position with regards to the military institution is pursuant to the opposition's approach in dealing with Israel

Discussing the army occupies a huge space in media, particularly with regards to the battles, and is the subject of the media campaigns from both sides. However, the depth of the matter remains absent, because any new formulation of its role requires not only setting legal limits for the overlapping of the military and political institutions, but changes in the structure and finding different orientations for it, as well.

## **14. Division Regarding the Direction of Economic Reform in the Future**

The Syrian economy was built over four decades on the idea of the government's ownership of entire sectors of the economy, while keeping the other sectors under the direct supervision of the government or agencies that the government controls. This mechanism managed to lead an important phase of accelerating economic growth in the seventies, based on rent that comes from petroleum products and aid from the Gulf states after the 1973 war against Israel. Despite the fact that constraints against inflation, which usually accompanies accelerated growth, remained under control by the government that provided a primary social security network in the sectors of health, education, social services and governmental employment, but the requirements of public deficit and debt exploded in the second half of the eighties. The state was no longer able to fulfill its primary obligations, with regards to providing the care and protection network and the minimum level of social welfare. Nonetheless, the approach that lasted for many years and consolidated a perception within the Syrian society with regards to the economic role of the government remained in control of both public policies and society expectations, even after it was evident that these policies have failed and were not able anymore to pursue the requirements of development. There is a general view among Syrians that they deserve all free services of the state, that they would only pay the minimum taxes, that their salaries should rise, and that all this should take place with the least amount of inflation.

The economic reforms came as a pressing need to try and involve the private sector and local and foreign investments in financing economic growth and opening new horizons for the Syrian economy that are capable of absorbing the increasing demographic growth and the entry of hundreds of thousands of young people into the labor market every year. However, while the economic reforms succeeded in liberalizing wide sections of the economy and bringing in foreign investments, they remained confined to a general political and ethical mechanism that view the government's role as being primary and the private sector's role as secondary, no matter how large it becomes. Therefore, the economic growth movement was not paralleled by a movement of judicial, administrative and political reforms. The result was that the continuous growth rates that Syria witnessed throughout the six years preceding the crisis was not reflected into real economic opportunities, with regards to the vast majority of Syrians.

Despite all the primary indicators of the macro economy, the micro indicators remained almost static. The growth of the domestic product took place in sectors of high productive nature but do not provide large employment opportunities. Therefore, job opportunities grew in services jobs at the expense of productive jobs. The major growth in the business and banks sector, for example, took place in parallel to the loss of huge employment opportunities in the agriculture sector. Moreover, the growth of a middle class of a wide spectrum (one million small 1,600 cc cars throughout the past ten years), came at the expense of poverty that consolidated among the segment of citizens who live under the absolute poverty line. All this created a general feeling that the gap between the poor and the rich

became so huge that the Syrian culture, which is organically linked to the previous socialist experience, did not accept it.

Economic reform came in segments and was not accompanied by political and administrative reforms that allow accountability and questioning, which promoted the spread of types of corruption that surpassed everything that Syria had witnessed in the past. The economic growth remained tied in the hands of a network of patronages that did not allow benefiting from the revenues of economic growth and distributing it fairly so that they would affect the poorer groups of the society. The policies that the government put in place were incapable of creating a society protection network to deal with the expected results of the economic liberalisation process. The government kept using ineffective and insufficient tools for basic support to the poor, instead of developing those tools and linking them with society enabling tools that would help the poor from exiting the circle of poverty. Moreover the consolidation of the idea of leaving everything to the government continued, despite the role of the government dramatically changing.

This general feeling of economic unfairness was accompanied by a stagnation in the human development tools, in comparison to other neighbouring countries. For despite Syria being a pioneer in providing a number of primary services, like health and education, the general feeling was that the government did not sufficiently develop its tools and that the neighbouring countries have surpassed us. This feeling was reinforced when Syria signed economic agreements with Turkey, through which the weak competitiveness of the Syrian economy as well as indicators of human development became evident, in comparison with the neighbouring countries. This also reinforced a general feeling that the government did not adequately protect the local economy.

To summarise, the general policies of economic liberalisation kept being highly controversial between those who benefited from them and those who were harmed by them. The crisis came to increase the state of flounder with regards to the economic policies. For instance, there are those who demand more liberalisation and openness and on the other hand there are those who followed the populist tendencies and threw all the blame for the crisis against the economic openness. The objective economic discussion does not change the general perception of many that the economic openness resulted in humble, insufficient, late, and unfairly distributed results. What increased the intensity of this debate is that the government tried to hold the persons who were responsible for the economic openness responsible for the crisis, whereas the bitter truth is that the reasons for the crisis are secondary economical, but primary they are linked to the administrative reform, corruption problems and lack of accountability.

The economic role of the government in the future will affect the shape of the solution that Syria seeks to end the crisis. Would Syria draw loans to cover the reconstruction expenses, who would lend them and under what circumstances? How would Syria be able to pay back the loans that she would draw for reconstruction? Would the state adopt supply side policies, like before, defend the role of public institutions and support production through public sector institutions, or would she support the role of the private sector and create demand side policies? Would she implement reconstruction processes through public bids that could be swift but ineffective and non-employment generating, or would they come through society incentives that could be slow but less expensive and employment generating, within small and medium enterprises?

All these questions would determine the shape of the economy for Syrians, through which they would work, and would force them to make tough decisions with regards to their future. Therefore, many Syrians call on the conflict factions to clearly determine which economic approach they would take the country towards, in the future. Moreover, as everything in the Syrian crisis took an extreme tendency, the economic dialogue has also become a field for dispute between the varying and opposition interests. Many today seek mounting pressure in order to determine the shape of the Syrian economy once more, within frameworks that would protect their interests, and in order to guarantee these interests, they demand deciding the shape of the Syrian economy in the constitution.

In fact, there is no clear and delicate mechanism to know the majority opinion in this regard. Even if such a mechanism exists, it would be subject to change according to developments. All projections that some make in order to portray their vision as the most appropriate model, remain more of a utopian intellect. Characterising the most suitable economic system for Syrians is one of the primary issues upon which political parties would compete in the future. Such characterisation would continuously change according to the change in the perception of the voters. The problem lies in the non-existence of a political system that allows for change in political policies when they prove to be a failure (or outdated). The Syrian electorate would have to decide the correct formula in the future and this would only be through a number free and transparent election cycles, in which the experience of auditing economy through democratic process would be crystallised. The decision with regards to Syria's economic future should be for the Syrian electorate and not for the Syrian elite, in a way through which the democratic institutions would guarantee correcting the path every time politicians fail in adopting real economic solutions to the country problems.

It may be premature today to engage in theoretical debates with regards to the economic form of the coming phase, in light of the more persistent questions regarding the provision of primary human needs. This is especially the case as these questions are being presented today by many in terms of blame shifting and not in terms of finding solutions. The most important economical questions in this phase would focus on the priorities of humanitarian aid and relief, and on the type of available incentives for reconstruction and the stability and return of the displaced. They would circle around reparations for the aggrieved, the healing of the wounded, and other primary necessities. Moreover, feasible incentives should be searched for gathering weapons from the hands of all armed parties, and to tempt them to come out from the parasite war economy to the productive peace economy. As for the hard questions with regards to the nature of the economic system and, therefore, the nature of the tax system, the subsequent laws that are linked to work, the protection that the law provides to workers and the balance between these rights and incentives, which would be made in order to attract investments into Syria once more, these questions could only be answered with a political democratic system that determines the nature of the political economy of the country through democratic institutions and not through allowing the winner in the crisis to impose their opinion by force.

## **15. Regional role and the ever present Israeli threat**

It is normal that the parliamentary majority is the one that controls foreign policy in any democratic country, or that that is in transition towards democracy. However, like all democratic countries, or those in transition towards democracy, there must be fixed basic principles from which wavering is not possible. We could preserve this principle through determining the level of political issues that no future government, even if it came through a democratically elected parliament, could decide without reverting to higher national references. Such references could either be in the parliament, for some issues, or through direct public referendums in some major steps, like those relating to national security, relating to signing or cancelling co-operation agreements with other countries, or those related to signing any agreement with the Israeli party.

Statements and practices that were issued by some opposition factions, especially from the National Council, caused much concern among a large segment of Syrians with regards what they believe to be Syria's principles and here national and regional role that she accumulated over the past decades, which is the aggregate that this important segment would like to preserve and not waste. We believe that it is necessary to insist on seeking the opinion of the Syrian citizen when any government would face requirements of key or historical nature, and such key decisions would not be left for an unbound behaviour that could be made by any future government, even if democratically elected. A mechanism to commit government to obtain parliament's approval before going through decisions at such a level should be legislated, in order to force the ministry of foreign affairs to co-ordinate with the foreign

affairs committee in the parliament and with the president, prior to moving forward on any key or historical decisions.

There is no point ignoring that the current crisis revealed a real division among Syrians in their perception of the neighbouring and regional states, and to the sought relations with the countries of the region and the world. Anyone who would lead Syria in the future should understand this division, try to understand its reasons and, therefore, not to ignore it in any decisions he or she might take. Those who would want to present a certain approach must work on gaining the opinion of the masses through convincing this crowd and communicating with them, not to impose it on them. They should also stop demonising the ally states of the other faction and sanctifying their own. Syria's regional policies were only successful when she managed to preserve balance between regional blocs.

## **16. Dignity and human rights**

There is a general impression that the Syrian crisis is an “Uprising of Dignity”, for the starting point of the revolution in city of Dara'a had symbols that show the correlation between tyranny, dignity and human rights. In spite of the complications of the Syrian crisis, which showed quite early, the majority of details during the past two years presented the question of “Dignity” as a key issue. Thus, Syrians who suffered from one type of tyranny, primarily political, got to know other types during the crisis, such as humiliation due to the intensified conflict, humiliation due to the economic deterioration and another humiliation later, with the armed groups practicing kidnapping, torture, violence and killing, which was based in some cases on religious identity, in addition to threats and insults to those who didn't support the rebels/ or “the revolution”. Moreover, due to forced migration and displacement that both fighting parties were responsible for, not to mention the continuation of violating human rights by political authorities.

Some may view the Syrian crisis as a “Revolution of Dignity” due to practices that Syrian citizens were subject to for decades. These would see that such violations played a large role in the development of events. However, the Syrian citizen's dignity and human rights require a new position, now, that goes at the heart of building the citizen for the post crisis phases.

Practically speaking, some opinions among the Syrian opposition are of the view that the explanation of what took place in Syria lies in a accumulative mechanism that reached a peak in the Dara'a incident, which historically marks the start of the Syrian uprising, perhaps in a simple way. What is most significant in the Dar'a incident, even if its details are yet to become clear, is that Syrians of various acceptance levels towards the regime, were and still are ready to easily believe the humiliating tale of the students' parents. Why? Because many of us could easily recall similar insults that we suffered from by government officials who actually represent the regime.

A narrative emerged for this approach through analyses in the press talking about a “Rural Uprising”, which was supported, on the other hand, by an economic analysis. The humiliation was not solely confined to one incident but rather to economic marginalization and impoverishment, which created an explosive reality.

Dignity had to appear as integral part of the Syrian event because what happened in Syrian surroundings woke up the society to many possibilities, and perhaps to the need to look at human dignity from various angles. And despite the fact that the developments of the Syrian issue brought further violations of human rights, this issue became a key component of a socio-political package that is in need in Syria and that is linked to strict laws that are applicable to all.

## **17. Justice, Tyranny, Reform of the Judiciary and Guaranteeing its Independence**

The formula for stability Syria, since the early pre-crisis stages, had been based on a balance that combines security and stability of political power. Within this balance a lot of details that were considered “the guarantor” for continued stability have been dropped. A sense of injustice has manifested itself during the current crisis, and a demand for “justice” has strongly appeared, whether in opposition’s narrative or even in discussions regarding political reforms.

Practically speaking, some opposition factions see that corrupt have established relationships within the state to protect themselves, ensure their interests and hinder attempts by the negatively affected to restore their rights, which caused citizens to lose confidence in the state due to their inability to regain their rights unless by become part of the corrupt system. According to some, this sense of injustice was a crucial element during objections and turbulences throughout the Syrian crisis.

However, the lack of fairness and the sense of injustice weren’t only the responsibility of the political power, according to another segment of Syrians, for the political authorities shares the responsibility with a “social system” that is intertwined with the “political system”.

Although it seems logical to blame the government for injustices, but it is insufficient, for at the same time a need emerges to protect the rights of individuals and minorities against oppression by the majority (religious or ethnic), in order to overcome the prevailing emotions that result from the lack of justice.

There is certainly a need for a long-term, multi-faceted vision for the issues of justice, but there is a priority for the issues of transitional justice, otherwise we would end with the victor’s justice, whose random practices are becoming manifested today. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the importance of focussing of the concept of the state of law, which is based on the principle of separating the three powers: the legislative, the executive and the judicial, in addition to protecting the rights of citizens under the ceiling of the civic state that is governed by laws according to the constitution.

There are two points with regards to the issue of justice that specialists try to clarify:

### **Rights**

There is confusion between rights and privileges. Many transactions between citizens and government departments are, in essence, not human rights, as they are classified as “privileges” and should be given to the people who deserve them (driving licences, import certificates and so on). A management of the process to obtain these privileges should be designed and developed (many countries around the world did so) for it to be effective and easy. Victims of injustice in these issues are victims of ineffective systems that suffer from procedural and regulatory dysfunctions. These terrible conditions breed corruption, cronyism and nepotism in all government sectors and committees.

### **Justice**

In addition to implementing the principle of state authorities separation (legislative, executive and judicial), justice is based on good practice and implementation of the duties of these authorities. Judicial decisions that are issued by an independent judicial authority contribute to consolidating justice. In this domain, the independence of the judiciary is regarded as primary element in achieving democracies.

However, no matter how independent is the juridical system, there should also be the ability of effective law enforcement that is capable of creating a sense of the social equality among all citizens.

In Syria, the question of justice enforcement seems to be a complex issue that is not only related to the juridical authorities. For even if the judges were to be independent and judicial discretion was used to administrate justice, that question would still remain in how to make law applicable. Enforcing laws is mostly subject to the influence of the “power centres” in the government and society, which makes the judiciary ineffective. Therefore, underpinning the independence of the judiciary is not enough, but a search is also needed on means that are sufficient to implement law, which is the responsibility of the executive authorities.

## **18. Roles, Freedom and Responsibility of Official Private and Individual Media on Social Networks**

The crisis exposed a serious malfunction among the regime team, with regards to achieving a minimum level of useful communication with a large segment of Syrian citizens. This generalisation goes to official, semi-official, private and even personal channels. These channels tried, without much success, to compensate for their lack of freedoms, and for the ambiguity of their roles and responsibilities, through injecting a huge amount of propaganda, which contributed to inflaming the crisis.

It is clear that the regime had worked, over the past decades on restraining the ability of the intellectual, the journalist and the citizen, in general, with regards to discussing issues that it regarded as sensitive, like public policies, the sectarian and ethnic issue, corruption, nepotism, and other sensitive issues. Throughout the same period, its media were limited to producing a shiny image of the state and leadership performance, whereas its strategy with regards to tackling the tough questions was limited to ignoring them and leaving them to time, which is a media strategy that fell dramatically and its shameful and costly failure was proven to an extent beyond comprehension. And whereas some private media, especially those that are internet based, achieved some progress, they very much suffered from an intensive and continuous limitation, from a chronic weakness in funding and they were not given the chance to become a substitute that would satisfy citizens who are desperate for credible news.

The result of all that was that, since the start of the crisis, media channels of Qatar (Al-Jazeera) and Saudi Arabia (Al-Arabia) and tens of other channels of many Arabic and Western countries, almost entirely monopolised the domain of news and opinion making. This decisive media control clearly pushed for forming a forced awareness among many Syrians, which led them to take steps on the ground, some of which are irretrievable. Moreover, tens of Wahabi or Salafi style channels, which are funded and operated by some Gulf states with Saudi, Kuwaiti, Egyptian or even Syrian staffs, contributed to inflaming congestion and intolerance among wide segments of the Syrian society, in addition to Arab fundamentalists, and contributed, in the end, to securing a continuous flow of volunteers who are mobilised for militancy against what was marketed to them as the enemies of religion. This media front that is loaded with heavy media weapons, was empty and totally deserted by the Syrian faction.

The normal Syrian citizen also contributed, through using Facebook (and to a lesser extent, Twitter), to increasing congestion by spending long hours on a daily basis in spreading opinions, articles and stereotypical images that reinforce the pre-position that they took, whether with this or that faction, along with accusing the other party of treason and ridiculing their opinions. With this, the social media contributed, in their turn, to increasing entrenchment among all parties.

And whereas Syrian official and semi-official channels tried, at the start of the crisis, to host some debate programmes, the intensifying of the crisis and the continuation of the incitement media from the other part soon pushed the Syrian media to entrench behind propaganda which focuses on a stereotypical image that glorifies all achievements of the national army and reduces the entire Syrian spectator spectrum in an idealistic image that supports the regime. This also contributed to increasing congestion in the Syrian and Arabic street, in general, with regards to the crisis in Syria.

All these elements, and many others that also circulate around the lack of dialogue or communication, contributed to creating and deepening a very severe polarisation that took the Syrian public opinion by storm in an unprecedented way. We now have two totally contradicting versions of the same events and the same crisis. Moreover, with the breakdown of the dialogue language, the learning mechanism broke down and every possibility to understand the motives and fears of the other party was paralysed, which created a general feeling of the lack of possibility for dialogue and the need for reverting to armed violence in order to impose the vision of each party on the other, as a sole solution that could be envisaged for the crisis. With the crisis going for longer and the propaganda media increasingly becoming relied upon, heavy fogginess prevailed in circulated information and news, which pushed the audience, which was already polarised and tense, to revert to building understandings about the crisis that could only be described as myths. Some of them deal with the causes for the crisis and some of them confirm the imminent victory and the imminent resolving of the crisis, so everyone fell into an empty circle whose title was violence, weapons and blood.

There is no way to break this deadly circle until the majority of Syrians get convinced that there is no other way, nor an alternative, but dialogue, and that there is no escape from trying to reach a common ground between them. Leaderships and major personalities in this crisis should be a role model for their audiences in showing their ability to listen and conduct dialogue, to accept the reality as it is and to stop inciting and regenerating the abolitionary and exclusive intellect.

And if we, as Syrians, cannot prevent fierce propaganda campaigns, and we all know that they are not doing what they are doing for the love of us, for the sake of us or of our country, nor in pursuit of better freedoms or rights for us, we can decide against committing an error in return for an error. We can decide not to be pushed by a journalistic crime to commit a similar one in return for another, and we can decide to stick to our ethics and humanity, no matter how hard this seemed to be.

## **19. The environment**

The environment deterioration has been a concern for citizens since a long time, due to some harsh environmental circumstances imposing on citizens a feeling of bad management by specialised authorities, on one hand, and also awareness rising among them with regards to the need for the availability of healthy environment circumstances, through which their relation with their immediate surrounding would become better.

Therefore, some environmental phenomenon that Syria witnessed had highly effective economic and social dimensions. We mention, for example, the drought in the past years, which forced rural inhabitants in many villages in northern Syria to migrate to the suburbs of major towns in order to make a living. That internal migration had an effect on the deterioration of their livelihoods, on one hand, and on the concentration of population growth in the city suburbs, which led to a growth in unemployment phenomenon in cities. Moreover, environment phenomena that are related to drought led to a shrinkage in agricultural land and, therefore, the Syrian economy, which is largely dependent on agriculture, was affected.

The environmental problem that resulted from bad management by specialists, and also by bad usage from citizens, can be categorised into two parts:

- The first part is related to the volume of available resources and their shortage in fulfilling the increasing needs of people, like a cut in drinking water, the wastage of water and the drought of the Barada river.
- The second part is related to the quality of environmental resources and the pollution that they are subject to, like the pollution of drinking water and pollution of the air in Homs because of the refinery, and in Baniyas because of the cement factory, and the increase in pollution phenomena and bad scents because of the shortage in maintaining sewage pipes and garbage fills.

In addition to that is the expansion in industrial and population projects at the expense of green areas, like Damascus Guta, which is threatened by pollution and extinction because of industrial projects and their waste.

The apparent reason is explained by some citizens as being neglect or shortcomings by the authorities in managing environmental issues, especially those that are related to preventing bad usage and management risks. We mention, for example, forest fires and the catastrophe of the Zaisoun dam collapse in 2002, which contributed to an increase in anger among some citizens and their feeling of impotency towards the physical and emotional effects that come as a result of catastrophes.

Despite modern steps that the previous governments adopted, especially with regards to environmental legislations, there is an impression that the environmental issue in Syria is yet to crystallise in a political, social or even scientific formula of any significance. On the other hand, there is a growth in public awareness with regards to the need of preserving the environment and to preserve their immediate surroundings. This is noticed through an increase in complaints in Syrian journalism, which expresses the fact that these fears are real.

The current crisis came to aggravate the risk of environment collapse through the freehand it suffered in fires that targeted forests, agricultural areas, oil wells, electricity generators, to garbage piling and increase in gasses and pollution as a result of battles. Moreover, with the neglect and bulldozing that affected agricultural lands in order for them to be made a theatre for military operations, and their inhabitants having to flee them, we came before a real environmental catastrophe that requires an environmental awareness, a specialist action and a new culture to rescue what was destroyed and to rebuild once more which requires work that would take years.

## **20. Occupied Territories**

Some of the key elements that affect the Syrian crisis have been absent or were neutralized. The issue of the Golan Heights, as part of the conflict with Israel, was foggy, perhaps a media piece that was directed against the political authority, or even within the discussion about the consequences of the political regime. The Syrian crisis is considered an internal affair, which excludes the "occupied territories" from the priorities or the explicit demands of some opposition parties. Yet, this issue posed a series of questions within the framework of thinking about the crisis and its solutions:

The Golan issue has been tackled from the internal political dimension point of view, for the political regime is classified under the "Resistance" system, which, under through indirect negotiations arrived in 2010 to an advanced stage towards regaining the Golan Heights. On the other hand, some political parties see that it did not come even close to the hope of liberation, and could not, through political routes, manage to mobilise Resolutions 242 and 338. The Golan Heights had social consequences that were manifested in the "problem of the displaced", whose repercussions were absorbed, according to some parties. The deeper dimension of the Golan is manifested in the blockage of the strategic horizon of the conflict with Israel.



The symbolism of the occupied territories has moved since the start of the crisis towards "Liwa' al-Iskenderun" (The Sanjak of Alexandretta) either through refugee camps or through training camps, and it entered into the heart of the events, although a political wing inside the National Council (the Muslim Brotherhood) refuses to talk about it as a Syrian land. Liwa' al-Iskenderun formed an issue for Syria in the first half of the last century, but understandings with Turkey at the end of the last century ended a lot of its outstanding political trails, for it to come back today to appear strongly.

In contrast, the opposition itself and especially the "National Council" went very casually over the issue of the Golan Heights, and its political statement in this regard was ambiguous. Its political narrative, however, only made an indication that the army didn't play any role in the struggle with Israel, but it carries out war operations in the Syrian interior.

The crisis has certainly opened more space to reflect on what might be called "fragile geography", which seemed like main pressure lines to Syria, and was manifested in the northern borders with Turkey, or what is known as "Brussels line", Liwa' al-Iskenderun area, or the border with Lebanon. The circumstances that are specific to the Syrian state became open towards major changes both inside and outside Syria.

Some of the trends that describe what has happened as a comprehensive national crisis go towards searching for terms of future stability of Syria, including border issues on the one hand, and the struggle with Israel, including the issue of the Golan Heights.

Some link the question of the Golan Heights with the northern borders, according to the logic of regional balance, for the Syrian-Israeli disengagement accord for the year 1974 formed an international understanding to guarantee a balance that wouldn't lead to a regional war, and despite falling in between two factions, it is also intertwined with international understandings that led to its emergence. On the other hand, the northern borders are a result of the post WWI "Versailles" conference accords (San Remo and later, Lausanne) which shaped the Middle East, and the current crisis established a breakthrough in the northern borders, down to the southern ones (Entry into the no man zone in the Nakba anniversary and the withdrawal of UNDOF after militants entered post border territories, which leave the door wide open for reviewing the Syrian borders according to a different balance.

The question that poses itself amid this discussion that is linked to the Golan and the rest of the occupied territories, would Syria's future image bear a different treatment of this subject? Or would the Golan Heights talk be only an element in the exchanged media campaigns between the two factions? And would the Syrian people be ready to pay the price for liberation, however different are its methods?