

# THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION BEFORE AND AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE 2011 UPRISING

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*One of the most notable aspects of the revolt against the Asad regime in Syria has been the proliferation of opposition movements and the various attempts to join them into a single unified opposition movement. This article will observe the state of the opposition prior to the uprising, note the key new alignments in the opposition, and critically assess the attempts at unification.*

## INTRODUCTION

The uprising against the Asad dictatorship of 2011 was predicted by few within Syria or beyond it. President Bashar Asad himself famously gave an interview to the *Wall Street Journal* on January 31, 2011, in which he dismissed the possibility that he would face a revolt against his rule of the kind that at that time had brought down Presidents bin Ali of Tunisia and Mubarak of Egypt. Bashar contended that his regime's anti-Western stances and support for the Palestinians reflected the deep convictions of his people, and this would ensure his immunity.<sup>[1]</sup>

This prediction proved erroneous, of course. Protests in Syria began in the southern town of Dar'a in mid-March 2011, following the arrests of a number of schoolchildren. The authorities attempted to use a heavy hand against the protestors. This led to larger demonstrations and the rapid spreading of protests from the Dar'a area to Banias, Homs, Hama, and elsewhere.

The Asad regime was caught badly unawares by the outbreak of large scale protests. Having made some initial attempts to placate protestors—first the sacking of Faysal Kalthoum as governor of Dar'a, followed by the granting of nationality to Syrian Kurds long deprived of this, the scrapping of a ruling that banned teachers from wearing the *niqab*, and finally the rescinding of emergency laws—in mid-April 2011, the regime went into a frontal confrontation with the protestors.

This in essence is the point at which things remain six months later, with around 2,900 protestors dead.<sup>[2]</sup> The regime has promised new parliamentary elections in February 2012, and has made vague additional promises of constitutional reform. Such declarations have little meaning. It is clear that the regime is seeking a "security solution" to the uprising—that is to say, its defeat by force.

The revolt, too, has thus far shown no signs of dying down. At the same time, the opposition has not yet managed to develop a single, coherent leadership with a clearly defined program for toppling the regime and replacing it. Rather, a number of competing external opposition groups exist, though efforts to unite the opposition are under way and have made some progress. This article will first briefly survey the fragmented Syrian opposition prior to the uprising. It will then look at the current main bodies of the opposition and will conclude with a tentative assessment of the state of affairs in the opposition at the present time.

## THE PRE-UPRISING SYRIAN OPPOSITION

The Asad regime in Syria resembles in certain ways the regimes that held power in Eastern Europe prior to 1989. One of the defining characteristics of such regimes is the attempt to exercise complete control of the public space by an extensive security apparatus and to prevent all independent political activity. The Syrian regime conformed to this model. All parties other than the ruling Ba'th (renaissance) party were banned under Asad. Membership of the Muslim Brotherhood became an offense punishable by death under Article 49 of the Syrian penal code, enacted in 1980.<sup>[3]</sup> The account that follows is not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, it seeks to identify and describe the most significant events and forces within the pre-2011 Syrian opposition.

Following Bashar Asad's accession to power in July 2000, a brief period of apparent liberalization took place. The so-called Damascus Spring was short-lived, however, and the regime soon moved to crush the civil society forums that emerged hoping to benefit from the liberalization. In October 2005, a group of 250 major opposition figures came together to launch the "Damascus Declaration." The declaration was harshly critical of the Asad regime, but called for "gradual, peaceful" reform. The declaration was launched by pro-democracy activists Michel Kilo and Riad Seif, and it brought together Islamist activists with secular, Arab nationalist and Kurdish figures. The Damascus Declaration was supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Kurdish Democratic Alliance, the Syrian Future Party, and a number of other groups.

The declaration became a focal point for the Syrian opposition within Syria, but little could be done given the strength of the regime. Twelve prominent supporters of the declaration received prison sentences in 2008. The existence of the declaration gave notice to the world of the continued existence of currents of opposition to the Asad regime within Syria. Yet the power of the regime appeared impregnable. The eclipse of the March 14 movement in Lebanon after 2008 and Syria's avoidance of any consequences for its facilitation of Sunni insurgents in Iraq increased the perception that the regime was secure and was part of a regional, Iranian-led bloc that was going from strength to strength.

Prominent opposition figures inside Syria include Riyad Turk, Anwar al-Bunni, Michel Kilo, Haytham Malih, Mamoun Homsy, and Arif Dalila. Turk has spent 25 years in jail because of his opposition to the Asad regime. Bunni, a human rights lawyer from Hama, has championed the cause of Syria's political prisoners. Malih is a former judge, and Dalila the former dean of economics at Damascus University.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS WITHIN SYRIA BEFORE 2011

In the absence of the possibility of effective political organization in Syria under the Asad regime, centers for human rights came to form the only visible, and arguably the most effective, element in Syria in seeking to document the abuses of the regime and act to remedy them. Around ten human rights organizations

and two centers for human rights studies were operative in Syria in the period prior to 2011. One study of the Syrian opposition prior to the uprising referred to this patchwork of civil society groups, human rights organizations, political parties, and individual activists as constituting “arguably the most effective” opposition to the regime.<sup>[4]</sup> Outside of Syria, a number of foci of opposition continued to exist, scattered across the Western world. These included the following groups:

### ***The National Salvation Front***

The National Salvation Front was the initiative of former Vice-President and Foreign Minister Abd al-Khalim Khaddam, now based in Paris. Khaddam, a Sunni Syrian, was a long-serving official of Hafiz al-Asad, associated with hard-line positions. In June 2004, he resigned his positions and a year later went into exile in France. Since then, Khaddam sought to establish himself as a focus for opposition to the Asad regime. His past as a senior official of this regime, however, prevented any real likelihood of success in this regard, and suspicion of him and his motives remained high among the broader Syrian opposition. It was widely believed that Khaddam left the regime because he feared that it would shortly fall. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood for a short period aligned with him in the National Salvation Front and then broke away due to differences regarding the response to Israel’s Operation Cast Lead in Gaza.

### ***The Movement for Justice and Development,***

Described as a “liberal, moderate Islamist” group, based in London, this group is a supporter of the Damascus Declaration. It is chaired by Anas al-Abdah. This group consists largely of former Muslim Brotherhood members. It is closely linked to the Barada TV channel. Wikileaks revelations of State Department cables released in April 2011 showed that this group has received financial aid from the United States amounting to \$6 million and possibly more since 2005.<sup>[5]</sup> Among its most prominent members is the London-based activist Ausama Monajed.

### ***The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood***

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest and most established opposition movement in the country. The movement was active in Syrian politics in the 1940s and 1950s but was banned following the accession of the Ba’th Party to power in 1963. The Brotherhood took up arms against the Ba’th in Hama in 1964, but was crushed. From 1976, the organization again attempted to build a rebellion against the Ba’th. This ended with the slaughter of around 20,000 people in Hama by forces loyal to the Asad regime, and the subsequent elimination of the Muslim Brotherhood as an organized movement in Syria. Membership of the movement is punishable by death in Syrian law.

The movement has continued to organize in exile, taking a more moderate stance toward the regime after the election of Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni as leader in 1996. It was a signatory of the Damascus Declaration in 2005. The Brotherhood, as mentioned above, also took part in a brief alliance with Khaddam. Today it is led by Muhammad Riyad Shaqfa, generally seen as a more militant figure than his predecessor.

### ***The Reform Party***

This Washington-based party is a long-standing Western-based organization promoting the overthrow of the Asads and the establishment of a liberal democracy in Syria. It has not, however, played a prominent role in the events of the 2011 uprising.

### ***Kurdish Parties***

Kurds make up between 8-15 percent of Syria's population.[6] While accurate numbers are difficult to obtain, reliable sources consider that there are today 15 Syrian Kurdish political parties, with estimates of total membership ranging from 60,000 to 200,000. Since December 2009, nine of these parties have been included in a large coalition known as the Kurdish Political Congress. Most of these parties are the result of the myriad split-offs and realignments emerging from the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, founded in 1957. This was the first political party created by Syrian Kurds. Under Ba'thi rule, Kurds have been the target of particular discrimination as an ethnic and linguistic minority under a regime that derived its legitimacy from the ideology of Arab nationalism.

### ***Arab Nationalist and Leftist Parties***

Leftist organizations dominated Syria's largest pre-uprising party alliance, the Democratic National Gathering. The party headed by Riyad Turk, which is the former Syrian Communist Party, was the second largest party in this grouping.

A number of small Nasserist groups, adhering to Arab nationalist and socialist ideology, also continue to exist. Even prior to the 2011 uprising, however, such groupings were largely seen as a relic from the past, with little current relevance.

### ***Salafi and Islamist groups***

More difficult to gauge is the presence of extremist Sunni Islamist groups. Such groups certainly exist in Syria. One openly declared Islamist party operating within Syria is the Hizb al-Tahrir party, with fewer than 1,000 members, according to figures provided by its own activists.<sup>[7]</sup> However, undoubtedly there was and remains a base of support for extreme, Salafi currents of Sunni Islam within Syria. Syrian society has been undergoing a process of increased religiosity in recent years, in common with many other Arab societies. The state has sought to control this trend by monopolizing the religious establishment and seeking to proclaim its own Islamic credentials.

Credible accusations have been made that the Syrian regime has penetrated and made use of Salafi militant cells in order to evoke sympathy from the West to justify its internal repression. On a number of occasions in the post-2005 period, clashes took place between the Syrian security forces and alleged Salafi militants. Little subsequent information has emerged regarding the nature of these organizations. Landis and Pace estimate that there is “no established ‘network’ of Salafis in Syria.”<sup>[8]</sup> This is probably correct.

## **THE 2011 REVOLT: EMERGING NEW ALIGNMENTS IN THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION**

### ***The Local Coordination Committees***

The 2011 uprising took the Syrian opposition by surprise as much as it did the regime. The key elements in organizing it in Dar’a, where it broke out, were the local tribal leadership. As the revolt spread, so a network of local coordination committees emerged.

The local coordination committees had no connections to the pre-revolt Syrian opposition. They have remained the key body responsible for organizing the demonstrations on the ground. An umbrella organization, the Local Coordinating Committees of Syria, has been established, though this organization does not include or represent the totality of local committees. The LCC leadership has put forward a demand for a national conference that would implement reforms and lead the transition to democracy and would rule for a period of no longer than six months. This council, as envisaged by the LCC leadership, would consist of both military and civilian figures.

The coordination committees, and the tribal leaderships in the remote areas of Dar’a close to the border with Jordan and Dayr al-Zour close to the border with Iraq, are the most authentic and visible leaders of the revolt. However, beyond a demand for the end of the Asad regime and the call for a national council, neither appears to have a sophisticated political program for bringing down the regime, or for what should replace it.

A large amount of activity has taken place among pre-existing opposition groups outside of Syria in an attempt to develop a coherent leadership for the revolt in the country. No united leadership has yet

emerged. However, from the myriad of opposition groupings, a number of clear alliances have emerged in the last months, representing different strands of the pre-revolt opposition, aligned with newer elements. The LCC leadership is only one of a number of bodies attempting to organize and coordinate protests within Syria. Other groups that have emerged include the Federation of the Coordination Committees of the Syrian Revolution (FCC), the Free Committees, and the National Action Committees (NAC).[9]

### ***Foundation of the National Initiative for Change***

Early in the revolt, 150 people signed a new “national initiative for democratic change.” Many of these were former signatories of the Damascus Declaration. This initiative was launched on April 29, 2011, and was the first attempt to establish an organized external leadership for the Syrian revolt.[10]

An umbrella group called the Syrian National Coalition for Change was then established. It demanded “free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners, an uncensored press, and constitutional amendments that would allow for a ‘multi-national, multi-ethnic, and religiously tolerant’ society.”[11] This coalition brought together opposition activists in exile, who were mainly liberal and pro-Western, and some of whom had links to the Obama administration. Among the prominent activists involved were Washington-based Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, who runs the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies; Washington-based Ammar Abd-al Hamid; and London-based Ausama Monajed of the Movement for Justice and Development. Ziadeh subsequently met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.[12]

The coalition identified a key task for the opposition of finding a powerful figure within Syria who could be induced to declare an alternative leadership to the regime. For a time, their attention focused on Defense Minister Ali Habib Mahmoud, who subsequently resigned under mysterious circumstances.

### ***Antalya Conferences***

This grouping came together with other elements of the Syrian opposition at a conference in Antalya, Turkey, held between May 31 and June 2, 2011. In addition to the liberal, pro-Western elements noted above, the conference was attended by Muslim Brotherhood representatives, representatives of the Assyrian and Kurdish minorities, and tribal leaders. The conference was the first of a series of conferences in Turkey bringing together Syrian oppositionists. The holding of the gatherings on Turkish soil highlighted the rapidly deteriorating relations between the Asad regime and the Erdogan government in Turkey, and Turkey’s desire to act as a sponsor for the coalescing anti-Asad forces.[13]

The first conference elected a 31-member consultative council and a nine-member executive council. The conference and subsequent gatherings were also attended by U.S., Turkish, and European diplomats, seeking to create links with what could prove to be the future leadership of Syria. The conferences in Turkey, however, rapidly led to splits and disagreements in the Syrian opposition.

Turkey's role and intentions in its dealings with the Syrian opposition were the catalyst. A number of parties representing Syrian Kurds declined to attend the gathering, believing that the Turkish government would seek to manipulate proceedings in order to ensure that the Kurdish question would not receive adequate attention. Others walked out when the demand to change the name of the "SyrianArabRepublic" to the "Republicof Syria" was refused.[14]

Kurdish activists sought to change this title to "SyrianRepublic," to reflect their status as a national minority. Kurdish organizations including the Azadi Party, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, and the PKK-linked PYD, did not attend. There was, however, a minimal Kurdish representation at the conference, consisting of a number of non-aligned Syrian Kurds and a representative of the Kurdish Future party. It is important to stress that the conference nevertheless affirmed the importance of the Kurdish issue and Syria's nature as a multi-ethnic polity.

### ***Foundation of the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change***

A separate body, the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, was formed on June 30, 2011, and was headed by lawyer Hassan Abd al-Azim. This grouping brought together six Kurdish parties, who had declined to attend theAntalyagathering, together with a number of left-of-center Arab parties and prominent opposition figures withinSyria. It includes a number of well-known figures from the pre-uprising opposition, including Arif Dalila, Michel Kilo, Hassan Abd al-Azim (who now heads this group), Husayn al-Uda't and Hazim Nahar.

### ***Syrian Revolution General Commission***

Founded in mid-August 2011, this alliance of 44 separate revolutionary groups represented another attempt to unite the opposition ranks, including both internal and external elements. Its goal, according to its founding statement, was "merging all visions of all revolutionaries from all coalitions and coordinators mutually focusing primarily on toppling the oppressive and abusive regime." It now supports the Syrian National Council (see as follows).

There are indications of deep divides between the external activists trying to create a leadership for the Syrian uprising and the activists within Syria. A flavor of this may be seen in a comment by a member of the Local Coordination Committees, Kris Doly. Doly, when asked regarding the Istanbulconference and the idea of establishing a transitional leadership council for Syria, said, "They are a joke. Those who are inside Syriawill decide." [15]

### ***Salafis in the Uprising***



Salafi and extreme Sunni Islamist elements have undoubtedly been active in the uprising, but locating their precise role is difficult. Some analysts have blamed Salafi elements for the killing of pro-regime figures, such as Saria Hassoun, 22-year-old son of Syria's pro-regime Grand Mufti, Shaykh Ahmad Badr al-Din Hassoun.[16] The Syrian regime, for obvious reasons, has chosen to focus on and highlight the role played by Salafi organizations—the element among its opponents least likely to attract sympathy in the West. Regime mouthpieces such as Wiam Wahhab in Lebanon have thus sought to overlay the presence of Salafi elements, which he claims are linked to the United States. [17] No Salafi organization with known leaders and a recognizable structure has yet emerged seven months into the Syrian uprising. However, it may be assumed that local initiatives of this trend exist, possibly linked with fellow Salafis in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

This issue is particularly murky because of the use in the past by the Syrian regime of Salafi elements. The Asad regime offered free passage from Damascus to Iraq to Salafi fighters during the insurgency in Iraq. The regime has also on occasion used extreme Sunni jihadi groups for its own purposes, such as in the case of Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon.[18]

### ***Foundation of “Transitional Council” and Subsequent Controversy***

At the end of August 2011, a fourth conference was held in Istanbul, Turkey, with the intention of producing a “Syrian National Council,” to act as a leadership for the uprising. On August 29, 2011, the formation of the Syrian National Transitional Council was announced. The council was headed by Dr. Burhan Ghalioun and had a total of 94 members, 42 of whom were in Syria and the rest in the diaspora.[19]

The council did not, however, have the immediate effect of forming a unified leadership for the uprising. Rather, in addition to the aforementioned absence of important Kurdish parties from involvement, suspicions arose regarding the possible behind-the-scenes role of the Muslim Brotherhood in influencing the composition and direction of the council. One informed observer of Syrian affairs reported a conversation with an attendee at the conference who claimed that a small group had been formed a week prior to the conference, in order to direct its proceedings, without the knowledge of other participants. It was widely believed, according to this attendee, that the core group was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and that this represented an attempt to insert the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood as the dominant grouping in the most important opposition body.

Such criticism may seem incongruent, considering the strong positioning of non-Muslim Brotherhood figures such as Ghalioun in the council. Whatever the truth of such remarks, the very fact that they were made suggested that any hopes for the Transitional Council to be accepted as the leadership of the uprising were premature. Subsequent developments also appeared to confirm the suspicions. Many questions remained regarding the nature of this body and its likely future role.

Yet more strident criticism of the new Transitional Council emerged also from elements within the internal leadership of the uprising. Europe-based Muhammad Rahhal, self-described chairman of the Syrian



Revolutionary Council of the Coordinating Committees, said, “Those who formed the Syrian National Council are ghosts claiming to represent a large part of the Syrian people, while they have no relations whatsoever with the revolution. We are not part of the opposition abroad. The revolution has an internal body that decides its course.”<sup>[20]</sup> Rahhal went on to support the commencement of armed activity by the opposition within Syria. The LCC leaderships also did not acknowledge the leadership of the Transitional Council.

### ***Foundation of the Syrian National Council***

A second attempt at forming a comprehensive opposition council to lead the uprising, building on the foundation of the Transitional Council, came in early October 2011, with the announcement in Istanbul of the formation of the Syrian National Council. This umbrella body brought together representatives from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the Damascus Declaration, the Syrian Revolution General Commission, the Local Coordination Committees, local independent and tribal figures, and a number of Kurdish parties. Secular oppositionists accepted that the role of the Muslim Brotherhood was less prominent in the new council.

The council is set to have a general assembly of 190 members and to be presided over by a 29-member general secretariat, representing a total of seven opposition factions. A seven-person presidential council will be the senior body in the council. Burhan Ghalioun is its chairman. Muhammad Tayfur of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is also a prominent figure in it. A partial list of members of the secretariat and the executive was published in October 2011. Of 19 names of members of the secretariat published, 10 were Sunni Islamists.<sup>[21]</sup>

The over-representation of Sunni Arabs on the SNC is thus immediately noticeable, as is the consequent under-representation of minority communities including Christians, Kurds, and Druze. This reflects the fact that the uprising has to a great extent constituted a Sunni Arab enterprise—with Christians worried at the prospect of a Sunni Islamist regime, Druze waiting to see who emerges the stronger between regime and opposition, and Kurds cautiously backing the uprising. However, some opposition activists have questioned whether the SNC can claim to be truly representative of the people of Syria given its make-up in sectarian terms.<sup>[22]</sup>

### ***The Emergence of Armed Resistance***

Regarding the issue of armed groups, there is no evidence yet of massive defections from the Syrian armed forces, or of large scale use of arms by participants in the uprising. This is in spite of the brutality of the Syrian security forces and in particular of the “Shabiha” Alawi irregulars employed by the regime. However, credible evidence has emerged of attempts by some Syrian officers to begin the process of forming an armed capacity for the opposition.

The most significant organization to have emerged professing armed action is the Free Syria Army, led by the former Syrian Air Force Colonel Riad Asaad. Asaad defected from the air force in July 2011, taking refuge in Turkey. The first leader of this group, Colonel Husayn Harmoush, was delivered by the Turkish government back to Syria in dubious circumstances. He then appeared on Syrian state television professing his opposition to the uprising. This episode did not, however, signal the end of the organization.

The Free Syrian Army is prone to making occasional unsubstantiated assertions of achievement against Asad's forces. Asaad told reporters that the Free Syrian Army now numbers 10,000 members. This number is probably inflated. Still, clear evidence is emerging of action and organization on the ground, of smaller dimension than the claims of the organization, but of substance nonetheless.

Desertions from the army are growing, as demoralized Sunni rank-and-file soldiers balk at engaging in further acts of bloodshed against their fellow Syrian Sunnis. Some of the deserters are now finding their way to organized rebel units. A watershed moment in the emergence of armed insurrection against the Asad regime came in the town of Rastan, 110 miles north of Damascus at the end of September 2011. Syrian government forces used armor and helicopter gunships against army deserters in the town of 40,000. They were fighting against a Free Syria Army unit composed of army deserters calling themselves the Khalid Ibn al-Walid battalion, led by one Captain Abd al-Rahman Shaykh. This force, according to eyewitness reports, possesses some tanks as well as small arms.[23]

Government forces regained control of the town after exchanges of fire. The fighting ended with the withdrawal of the insurgents, however, not with their defeat. At least 130 people were killed. The name of the battalion in Rastan reflects the Sunni nature of the emerging military challenge to the Alawi-dominated regime of Bashar al-Asad. Khalid Ibn al-Walid was the Muslim Arab conqueror of Syria in the seventh century. The names of other units associated with the Free Syrian Army—such as the Umar Ibn al-Khattab battalion in Dir al-Zour—also offer evidence of this orientation.

Units associated with the Free Syrian Army are active mainly in the area of Homs. This Sunni city is reported to be now partly under the control of insurgents and is the base area of the Khalid Ibn al-Walid battalion. An additional area of activity is the Idlib province near the Turkish border. In other areas of the country, the uprising remains largely peaceful.

Other voices, emerging from the leadership of the Local Coordinating Committees, [rejected](#) the possibility of commencing armed struggle against the regime. A statement issued by them described this option as “unacceptable politically, nationally, and ethically.” It continued that:

Militarizing the revolution would minimize popular support and participation in the revolution. Moreover, militarization would undermine the gravity of the humanitarian catastrophe involved in a confrontation with the regime. Militarization would put the Revolution in an arena where the regime has a distinct advantage, and would erode the moral superiority that has characterized the Revolution since its beginning.[24]

## **ASSESSMENT: THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION SEVEN MONTHS INTO THE UPRISING**

Prior to the outbreak of the uprising, the Syrian opposition was in a state of disarray. It faced the perennial problems of exiled opposition groups confronting a well-entrenched totalitarian regime. There was little possibility of coherent political organization within Syria itself. As a result, most visible opposition was expressed through human rights groups and the ad hoc alliances and statements of dissident intellectuals. In exile, meanwhile, the opposition was disunited, spread among a sometimes bewildering array of different movements and parties.

The 2011 uprising has witnessed the emergence of a new local leadership or leaderships, in the Local Coordinating Committees and in the tribal leadership in the south and east of the country. These new opposition centers of authority have proven remarkably resilient and tactically resourceful in keeping the revolt against the Asad regime going in the face of fierce repression, for over a half a year. At the time of writing, the uprising shows no sign of flagging, though the regime also is showing no sign of backing down. The new, internal opposition did not emerge from within the circles of the existing opposition inside the country, nor with any connection to the opposition in exile. However, the revolt has also led to ferment in the Syrian opposition in exile, with attempts to realign and unite its disparate forces.

Turkey has made its territory and sponsorship available to the opposition, and the conferences that have taken place on its soil constitute the most important and significant development outside of Syria so far. Syrian oppositionists with known relationships with the U.S. government have taken part in the conferences on Turkish soil. It has been suggested that Washington has in effect ceded the task of helping the formation of a united Syrian opposition to the Turks. The formation of a Transitional Council and subsequently of the Syrian National Council (SNC) is important. It should, however, be noted that significant external opposition currents remain outside of the SNC and not accepting of its role as a provisional governing authority for Syria, or as a representative body for the opposition.

There are also clear indications that parts of the internal leadership of the revolt do not regard themselves as in any way required to accept the authority of the SNC. As such, while the uprising has proven remarkably resilient, no single truly representative, coherent and united Syrian opposition leadership can yet be said to have emerged. The most significant development overall is the birth of determined, internal leaders for the uprising. The task facing both external oppositionists, and indeed traditional opposition figures within Syria, is the establishment of working relations and cooperation with internal leaders of the protests. Elements that are unable to do this are likely to face irrelevance. A second, task that has yet to be achieved is a coherent and united stance on the crucial issues of international intervention and armed action.

The last word on this subject should probably go to a veteran Syrian oppositionist who has emerged as one of the most coherent observers of efforts to organize the opposition. In a statement published in early October 2011, Ammar Abd al-Hamid said, "We spent the last months wrangling over lists of names and councils and quotas, instead of coming up with a strategy to support the peaceful protesters, and to chart a vision for the future that can allay the fears of minorities, attract the hesitant and inspire the protesters. Until now, our revolution still lacks a strategy and a vision."<sup>[25]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> "Interview with Syrian President Bashar Assad," *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2011,

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703833204576114712441122894.html>.

[2] "Syria Protests: More than 2900 Killed Overall—UN," *BBC Online*, October 6, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15203188>.

[3] Joe Pace and Joshua Landis, "The Syrian Opposition: The Struggle for Unity and Relevance, 2003-8," in Fred H. Lawson (ed.), *Demystifying Syria* (London: Saqi Books, 2009), p. 125.

[5] Craig Whitlock, "Wikileaks: US Secretly Backed Syria Opposition," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-secretly-backed-syrian-opposition-groups-cables-released-by-wiki>

[6] Vladimir Troyansky and Ofra Bengio, "Facing the Ba'th: the Syrian Kurdish Awakening," *Tel Aviv Notes*, August 19, 2010, <http://listserv.tau.ac.il/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind1008&L=taunotes-I&P=869>.

[7] Pace and Landis, "The Syrian Opposition."

[8] Ibid.

[9] Asi Abu Najm, "Syria's Coordination Committees: a Brief History," *al-Akhbar English*, October 1, 2011, URL: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/syria%E2%80%99s-coordination-committees-brief-history>.

[10] Katherine Zoepf, "Long Repressed in Syria, an Internal Opposition Takes Shape," *New York Times*, April 27, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/28/world/middleeast/28syria.html?pagewanted=all>.

[11] Michael Weiss, "Syria: Why Does the Obama Administration Let Assad off the Hook?" *Daily Telegraph*, May 9, 2011, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/michaelweiss/100085230/syria-why-does-the-obama-administration-let-as>

[12] "Syrian Dissidents Ask Obama to Demand Assad Step Down," Agence France Presse, August 2, 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/2011/08/02/syrian-dissidents-ask-obama-to-demand-assad-step-down.html>.

[13] Turkey's relations with Sunni opposition forces in Syria pre-date the current uprising and were a function of connections developed between the ruling AKP party in Turkey and Sunni Islamist elements in Syria, according to Syrian opposition sources.

[14] "Kurds Split from Syrian Opposition," *Rudaw*, July 27, 2011, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/syria/3841.html>.

[15] Kinda Kanbar, "Can't Syria's Opposition Learn to Work Together?" *Middle East Progress*, August 30, 2011, <http://middleeastprogress.org>.

[16] Farid Ghadry, "If Assad Remains in Power, the Salafis Will Turn Syria into a Swamp," October 4, 2011, <http://ghadry.com/2011/10/04/if-assad-remains-in-power-the-salafis-will-turn-syria-into-a-swamp/>.

[17] "Wahhab Affirms the Involvement of Saudi Emirs in 'Sabotage in Syria'," April 23, 2011, <http://www.iloubnan.info/politics/actualite/id/60466/titre/Wahhab-affirms-the-involvement-of-Saudi-emirs-in-%>

[18] "New Charges Against Syria, Fatah al-Islam's Real Master," *Asia News*, July 19, 2010, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/New-charges-against-Syria,-Fatah-al-Islam%E2%80%99s-real-master-986>

[19] *Al-Jazeera*, August 29, 2011, <http://blogs.aljazeera.net>.

[20] Joshua Landis, "Who Is Muhammad Rahhal, the Syrian Revolutionary Who Called for Armed Resistance and Attacked Burhan Ghalioun?" *Syria Comment*, September 7, 2011, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/?p=11905>.

[21] Ammar Abdulhamid, "Who You Gonna Believe?" *Syria Revolution Digest*, October 20, 2011, <http://syrianrevolutiondigest.blogspot.com>.

[22] Ammar Abdulhamid, "Council and Consequence," *Syria Revolution Digest*, October 3, 2011, <http://syrianrevolutiondigest.blogspot.com/2011/10/who-you-gonna-believe.html>.

[23] CJ Radin, "The Free Syrian Army Enters the Picture," *Long War Journal*, September 30, 2011, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2011/09/syria\\_update\\_the\\_free\\_syrian\\_a.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2011/09/syria_update_the_free_syrian_a.php).

[24] "Statement to the Syrian People," LCC Facebook Page, August 29, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/notes>.

[25] Ammar Abdulhamid, "Restive Rastan Wrested by Pro-Assad Militias," *Syria Revolution Digest*, October 5, 2011, <http://syrianrevolutiondigest.blogspot.com>.