

BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

THE SYRIAN UPRISING: WHAT IS NEXT?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: Good evening. Good evening, *salaam alaikum*. My name is Salman Shaikh, for those of you who don't know me. I'm the director of the Brookings Doha Center. Thank you very much for coming this evening, for I know what will be a very interesting event.

Before I introduce my guests, let me just say that I think it was about the start of March when 15 children, actually, in the midst of this extraordinary change in the Arab world, wrote some graffiti on a wall talking about the toppling of the regime in Syria. Since then, of course, we've seen some unprecedented events, the likes of which I think experts could not have foreseen. In fact, I remember very clearly a *Foreign Affairs* article which, still in April, talked about the steady house that Assad built.

Well, we're now in very different times. We've had more than 1,500 people killed, over 11,000 people detained. We've had three major speeches from President Assad, I think none of which have quelled

the protests. We're also seeing now the effects -- the regional effects of an unstable Syria, both on the borders and inside Turkey as well as in Lebanon, more and more on a knife edge, as well as regarding Israel.

It's for that reason that I'm very, very pleased tonight that we are addressing this particular subject. We're obviously looking at the current situation, but also trying to get into a discussion on what does a peaceful transition in Syria look like? And what does the future hold for Syria?

Without further ado, it's my great pleasure to introduce my three guests who have travelled -- two of them, at least -- from quite a number of distances to be here. On my right, Obeida Nahas. Many of you will know him as a Syrian politician and journalist. He's the director of the Levant Institute, a London-based think tank specializing on Syria. He's a founder and editor of *Levant News*. (Speaking in Arabic.) And where he worked as a member of -- from 2001 to 2004. And he's of course a member of the National Coalition to Support the Syrian Revolution.

Recently, he was appointed a spokesman of the Coalition of Free Syrian Revolution Youth. Obeida, it's wonderful to have you here. Thank you for coming.

Then on my left, Yaser Tabbara. He's the executive director of the Syrian-American Council. He's an attorney by profession, civil rights activist and leader. Previously, he -- you worked with CARE and you still are working with CARE on these issues in the United States. In particular, you've come in from Chicago, so thank you very much for making the trip.

And certainly last but not least, Mustafa Kayali, certainly a friend of the Center. You have been for many years a Syrian activist. You were a member of the -- founding membership of the Damascus Declaration. And of course, you're a dentist by profession. It's also wonderful to have you here.

What we'll do is, we'll take statements from all three of them, and then I will fire some questions. And then we'll have the opportunity, *inshallah*, to -- for you to ask some questions.

Obeida, let's start with you, please, thank you.

MR. NAHAS: Thank you, Salman. And thank you, everyone, for coming tonight.

I think it's interesting to see how the legitimacy of the Syrian regime has fallen so fast since the people went out on the streets. For 10 years, people were arguing about how legitimate the Syrian regime is. And the regime always played the card of stability. It always said, we have a stable country, it's one of the most stable countries in the region.

Even when the Arab Spring started, President Assad went on the media -- on the American media to say that we are ahead of everyone else. We have done a lot of steps, and we do understand how delicate the situation is in the Arab world. And he had -- he also said, you have to be ahead of the game if you want to continue.

Now, it seems he wasn't. He lacked the understanding of how frustrated the Syrian society has become. Syrians today are not going out to protest

against Bashar's rule. They are out asking for freedom and dignity. Bashar had the chance to be part of political change. That for three months, he only wasted opportunity after opportunity.

Today, we mark the 31st anniversary of a massacre that took place in Tadmur Prison back in 1980 that claimed the lives of more than 1,000 innocent political civilians. These people were jailed back then because they were not the people who carried arms against the regime. Let me be clear about this. We all know what happened back in Syria in the late 1970s, 1980s. Probably most of at least know. And some people went through a long struggle with the regime back then. But the people who were in jail on the 27th of June of 1980 were the peaceful protesters, the peaceful opponents of the regime who surrendered to the authorities and went to jail because the people carrying arms back then were fighting on the streets.

Now, after a failed attempt on the life of President Hafez al-Assad, his brother, Rifaat, went to Palmera Prison on 27th of June night. And his defense

brigades went into the jail, into cells, and killed people who were unarmed, using all sorts of arms, including some bombs.

Thirty-one years on, we have a similar scenario in Syria today. We have a president who talks about reform, and his brother, Maher, is in control of a security solution taking place on the ground claiming more lives. And so far, we have almost 2,000 people dead since the 15th of March.

The regime talks about reform, and Bashar has spoken about reform for 11 years. But what reform did we get? Nothing happened, really, on the ground. Everything was just some more -- I mean, we only had some more talk from time to time. Even when he started seriously taking people's demands into consideration, he formed more committees to study reform rather than to implement reform.

The main organizer of the protest in Syria and the most successful one has been Bashar himself. Every time he delivered a speech, more people decided to go out and protest against him. The first speech

was very arrogant and empty. His second speech was also full of promises and going into details. And he has this habit of going into too many details that he himself forgets what he's talking about. And the third speech was meant to be a very positive one. Because he, for the first time, addressed the issue of a crisis in the country. But what did he do? He went offline for 20 times and messed up the whole speech.

He sent out the wrong signals, and people on the ground read his speech sarcastically. Some people understood that he was calling them germs. And of course, after the infamous speech of Qaddafi, who called his people rats, you can imagine how people were reacting.

He also spoke about people on the run who should be in prison, and he mentioned a number -- 60,000 people. The problem Bashar is doing and his team around him, they are portraying a failed state in Syria today. The whole image of Syria has been harmed by the government, not the protesters. The regime is trying to say that the protesters have ended the state

-- the very safe state, the safe haven we had in Syria. But this is not true.

Today, we have people on the ground organized by coordinating committees, but they are faced with death squads called Shabiha. So, because the regime dismantled the civil society over 30 years, the civil society -- when it started seeing a new civil society emerging, it formed its own un-civil society, the death squads.

We have peaceful protesting faced with crimes against humanity. The legitimacy of the regime is on the line. If the regime doesn't understand this yet, then the international community should clearly state so. So far, we only heard some comments on its legitimacy, but they were not strong enough. Or at least, they came from the wrong players on the international scene.

The regime still thinks it has a chance, and it plays the regional card it holds. Now, for a long time this regime has thought that it can play these cards and no -- and it would remain intact. I think

it's about time that the regime knows this is not -- these are not the rules of the game anymore. And I think the legitimacy of the regime has ended, especially after people went out on the streets and decided to say so. At least for the Syrians, the legitimacy is over. The international community has to understand so, and I think we cannot continue in Syria from now on as we used to. There's no chance of this regime staying as it is.

If there is a political group in the regime that -- I still believe some of these people do exist -- if they are there, they have to show that they understand the gravity of the situation. But I think they have to be sincere to their own people. We haven't -- we are not seeing this yet, as our Foreign Minister went on to talk to the press the other day. And he didn't seem to -- you know, to understand the situation, I think.

But though I think some of his comments were tricky, when he said that we are as Syrians going to present an unprecedented democratic example in the

region, he said we will be having a national dialogue, we will have social justice, and accountability. And, the region will realize that Syrians have delivered an unprecedented democracy.

But I say, Mr. Mu'alem, this is true. But I'm not sure people in this regime are going to be part of it.

Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much, Obeida. I think it's the first time anyone has delivered their remarks via iPhone, so thank you very much for showing us that, too.

Mustafa, please.

MR. KAYALI: (Speaking in Arabic.)

(Applause)

MR. TABBARA: Thank you, Salman. I wanted to start my remarks by saying that I've been traveling for the past 24 hours so I'm suffering from a severe case of jet lag. So excuse any incoherence if I come across it.

I'm here wearing many hats. In fact, I'm a

Syrian-American, I'm an attorney, and I am a supporter of the Syrian revolution. And an important point to make at the present is that I'm someone who has been an independent, who has not been affiliated with any political program or any classic opposition -- Syrian opposition, if you will -- in the past. I am someone who has been back and forth to Syria many, many times. I've taught at a university over there for about a year, public international law and other subjects, as early as 2007.

But like many independent-minded Syrian-Americans -- or I should say, like many independent-minded Syrians -- I've made up my mind on March 15th on where I need to stand in terms of the Syrian revolution. And the main obvious reason is the way that the Syrian regime has chosen to deal with the revolution on the ground and with the peaceful protests.

The brutal suppression, the use of live ammunition, the incredible show of inhumanity per the documentation of many, many human rights organizations

and credible sources, basically -- this allows me the chance to -- and many other independent Syrians -- to not take a firm stand on where we belong in terms of the Syrian revolution.

And that's important, that's relevant because as we heard our -- Dr. Mustafa, our previous speaker, refer to what's been dubbed as the classic opposition and their lack of vision. Now, I may or may not agree with that assertion, but what I can tell you is that what's happening on the ground is a leader-less, non-ideological, non-Islamist movement that is akin and very much similar to a lot of these revolutions that swept the region. Whether it's Tunis or Egypt or others.

And as such, the resolution or the solution that this leader-less revolution will bring about will not come from anywhere but that revolution. And but that movement on the streets.

Now, I think the Assad's regime, criminality, and legitimacy at this moment in time is not in dispute any longer. I think that many of us in

the international community have arrived at the conclusion that, indeed, it is a criminal regime. It is a regime that has lost its legitimacy. I think it's a matter of semantics at this point, how we choose to describe this regime and how many in the international community representatives, European governments, the American government, choose to deal with that description of the Assad regime.

What's being disputed or, if you will, what's being debated is the alternative. And again, that's something that was referenced by Dr. Mustafa in his speech.

The solution that is coming about -- I mean, right now we're in the 13th week of this uprising. And I tend to take a slightly different approach than our previous speakers, my respected colleague.

When it comes to describing the attempts of what I would call "consolidation" of positions, of anybody who was on the other side of the regime. And I really hesitate to call that universe, if you will, opposition. I really dislike putting that blanket

description on that -- whoever opposes a regime to be the classic opposition.

I was one of the participants in the Antalya Conference. I was an invitee, I was not by any means an organizer or an insider. And I went there with the understanding that I'm going as an independent to offer a -- you know, my input, my abilities, my competencies in support of the movement on the ground.

And I think that what I was pleasantly surprised with, as a result of the Antalya Conference, and then what I've heard happened in Brussels and other conferences, is that nobody has attempted to present a -- the formation of a transitional council or the formation of a shadow government. I think what has been emphasized is that these gatherings are merely an attempt to consolidate and bring together a number of activists across the globe, from all over the world who share a common agenda. And that common agenda is to stop the bloodshed, stop the criminality, and the oppression of the Assad regime vis-à-vis the peaceful protests.

And, to see the day that a democratic regime take place in Syria. I argue a democratic regime will necessarily have to exclude Assad and many of his cohorts.

Now, again back to the idea of a solution. And we can delve into that in our discussion afterwards. Because the revolution is a revolution that is non-ideological -- and allow me this kind of, if you will, freedom of expressing what will seem to be a little bit of a vague notion. But I think it's more of a methodological dilemma or problem. It's more of an issue of logistics that we on the other side of the regime have been working out over the past 13 weeks.

Whether it's coming together in Antalya and basically talking to each other, forming networks, forming, you know, competent teams that will take certain tasks and follow up on these tasks in terms of, you know, lobbying the international community, speaking to their entities -- outside entities. Trying to persuade the international public opinion

towards the support of the Syrian revolution. I think that has been very much achieved through these gatherings. Even the conference that supposedly took place today in Damascus -- and I'm sure we will get to a point where we'll discuss it in this discussion session afterwards.

In my opinion, it was also an attempt to bring together these people under one roof. And basically, talk about ways where we could move forward. Nobody's proposing establishing an alternative or a shadow government at this point, and I think that should not necessarily scare the international community into supporting the revolution or the uprising on the ground, for the simple reason -- that is, we're seeing real hope in people coming together and consolidating these opposition movements, if you will. And secondly, because the international community and the major international actors will not afford a day where Syria will be Assad regime-free. Where they did not stand on the right side of history.

It would be very counter-productive for, for

example, the U.S. government or some of the European governments to try to salvage the relations with the new Syrian government, the new democratic Syrian government, where they took either a silent position on the uprising and on the atrocities that are taking place by the sitting regime, or by opposing. Or, by not saying enough. So I think that's extremely important.

I wanted to close -- and I don't want my remarks to be too long because I know that there will be a lively discussion afterwards, hopefully -- by addressing the other hat that I'm wearing, which is the lawyer's hat. Part of what came out of the Antalya Conference, again, and the Brussels Conference were the establishment of -- or the coming together of a group of activists that understood that we need to do some serious and deliberate and strategic reaching out to the international community. Including moving on the front of the International Criminal Court, and a referral of the Assad regime to the International Criminal Court.

And as such, we took it upon ourselves to go to the ICC and the HAIG and present them -- present specifically the Office of the Prosecutor -- specifically within that Office of the Prosecutor, we met with the head of the investigation and information unit, where we gave them something called an Article 15 communication. And as all of you know, in order for Syria to be prosecuted -- or, sorry, in order for the Syrian regime or members of the Syrian regime to be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court, there has to be -- since Syria is not a signatory party to the Rome Statute establishing the ICC, there has to be a referral by the UN Security Council. And as we all know, there are permanent members and non-permanent members with that -- with such a resolution, especially in light of the more recent resolution that was issued against the Libyan regime. With all of the differences that we're advocating.

Obviously, a very important footnote, no one as far as I'm concerned, as far as I know, is advocating for any sort of form of military

intervention in Syria, as opposed to the Libyan scenario. And that should be understood, especially by the Russians.

And so, what we tried to do, understanding that that is where things basically have to happen, is we tried to take a two-pronged approach. On one hand, we submitted this Article 15 communication which allows anyone -- any non-governmental organization or any individuals -- to actually meet with the Office of the Prosecutor and tell them, look. What's taking place in Syria is crimes that are under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. They're crimes against humanity per the definition of international criminal law. And we can get into the elements of what constitutes a crimes against humanity later on in the discussion.

And as such, we would like the Office of the Prosecutor to conduct the preliminary analysis that will reach the same -- a similar conclusion, that there are crimes against humanity that have been committed in Syria. Just like they did prior to the

referral of Qaddafi and his regime to the ICC. Obviously today marks a major, in my opinion, milestone as far as the ICC prosecution is concerned. Where the Office -- or the court itself has issued a -- (speaking in Arabic) arrest warrant against Muammar el-Qaddafi, Saif el-Qaddafi, and Senussi, his head of intelligence. And so, now they are pretty much outlaws, international criminals that are awaiting the execution of international justice. Notwithstanding, of course -- I mean, we are very aware of this whole notion of victor's justice and the fact that there are others that should have been prosecuted by the ICC and are not. But I don't want to get into that at this point.

I think the -- what we tried to do is, we tried to put some pressure and some international community pressure to say that -- go ahead, talk about the ICC referral. Say that it's crimes against humanity what's happening in Syria. The other side of the -- the second prong, if you will -- was a campaign where we are in communication with the U.N. Security

Council member states, asking them specifically to pass a resolution condemning the Syrian regime and making a referral to the ICC.

Within that pressure or within the context of that pressure, we make -- again, the solid, unequivocal point that we are not for any sort of foreign military intervention.

With that, I will close my remarks at this point. And I am hoping for a lively question and answer session.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much, Yaser.

(Applause)

Oh, let's start this lively session. Later.

Is there really any alternative to Bashar Assad? I mean, let's play devil's advocate here. He has, in his last speech, offered a national dialogue process which, to some -- may be quite a few in Syria -- is a sensible way to go. Especially if there is more insecurity and instability as the alternative.

You've talked -- privately we were talking about perhaps two tracks that he's following. One of

dialogue and the other of crackdown. Are there any scenarios by which Bashar Assad in particular can lead dialogue?

MR. NAHAS: Well, my main comment when I am faced with this question is, do we have a leadership in Syria today? You just mentioned that Bashar is signing his -- going through two tracks at the same time. He gets one decree talking about political reform, which he signs. And then he signs simultaneously another decree on crackdown. Now, this is a serious lack of leadership. Because the way he's doing this is, when his generals come in and suggest to him that we have to do a crackdown somewhere in -- just for show, for example. He doesn't want to look like a weak leader, so he signs the decree straight away.

And when he's faced with his political advisors who say, well, Mr. President, we have to have a national dialogue. Then he says, okay. Let's do it.

Now, this is not a real leader, so why are

we always faced with the question of the alternative? To be honest, I think Syria has produced too many great leaders in the past. And this regime has worked tirelessly over the past 50 years to deprive the Syrian people of any sort of leadership. The -- what we are left with now is, we don't have a civil society. When the civil society started to flourish again back in 2000, its crackdown on that and it even created its own civil society. The regime cannot understand -- it cannot deal with a situation where it doesn't control every single element of society.

Back in 1980, it dismantled the unions and re-created new unions linked to the regime, to the Bath party. So, there has been a Bathification of the unions, the legal system, everything. And after 2000, after the crackdown, and when the EU, for example, and the U.S. were looking for civil society organizations to give grants to in Syria, there was a legal issue that I still remember that was discussed again and time and again about how can we pay grants to unlicensed organizations? And the regime solved this

problem by licensing civil society organizations that linked directly to the first lady. And then, it managed to channel all European grants to state-run civil society.

Now, this regime has left us in a situation where we only have personalities on the ground. And the conference in Damascus today shows that these -- I mean, I read most of the comments by the attendees. And they even seem to be looking for a way to understand who represents the people on the ground. They don't feel like they represent the people on the ground, and their comments are very obvious. They -- some of them even say, people have gone -- advanced -- more advanced than we have gone. And people have -- I mean, people have found what they wanted while we are still discussing what we want.

I mean, this is -- I know that the international community wants a clear alternative. But this is not going to happen if we don't have a free democratic society where people can choose their leaders. What we are seeing right now is, the

emergence of new forces on the ground and these are the real people leading the protest. These are the people who brought us to this table, even. Because even me and Yaser, we are in exile, and we can't do anything. We can only, you know, deliver the message. And we can be the voice overseas.

But to be honest -- I mean, the opposition overseas has tried for many years to unify. And they fail to do so. Today, I think the society is producing new leaders who are not well-known yet.

MR. SHAIKH: I'll turn to you, Yaser, and then to you, Mustafa, in a second.

Yaser, you called it consolidation. But how much time do we have for consolidation? Especially if you're expecting the international community also to take seriously the alternatives? So -- and in fact, Mustafa, you talked very compellingly about fragmentation of the elites. And you referred to who represents the people on the ground.

Who do represent -- who does represent the people on the ground right now?

MR. TABBARA: The people that represent people on the ground are the people on the ground. And I know that sounds vague, but I think what Obeida was trying to say was that as these leader-less sort of coordinations that are taking place on the ground emerge, there are unknown names that are coming about who are kind of taking charge of these coordinations, taking charge of the movement on the ground. And I think that we need to start basically paying more attention to those names and those leaders.

But I wanted to first address, actually, the point or the question that you presented. I mean, this is a regime that is dealing with the question of the "opposition" in a very tricky, very deceptive manner. When you call for a so-called dialogue with the opposition, and at the same time you have that opposition under severe surveillance, under severe oppression, that particular -- that very opposition that you're calling to a dialogue with is basically subject to being arrested at any second.

Simultaneous to your calling for a dialogue

you have people still killed in the streets of Syria. Peaceful protestors -- we've heard of seven or eight that were killed by live ammunition in the Damascus suburbs just yesterday, for example. And you have people that are filling the -- political prisoners that are filling the prisons to the brim. And I mean, you obviously -- you try to make a -- try to make yourself seem like you are -- you know, you're legitimate and you're having -- you're outreaching and trying to reach a political solution to this process. When your security solution has not ended and you're calling for a dialogue, that is extremely disingenuous. And that is something that should not be called a dialogue in the first place.

And I think, this is really what's preventing from these unknown leaders that Obeida was talking about. From coming forth and coming forward, because there's still an extreme risk for, you know, these names to be known and for, you know, these, you know, coordinators to be basically killed and arrested. And I think that is -- you know, that is

the problem with terminology, dialogue, or (speaking in Arabic). That is extremely problematic in my opinion at this point.

MR. SHAIKH: Mustafa, let's just focus for a minute on the regional dimension. That you very compellingly raised. And focus on the current situation.

Particularly, rather than focusing perhaps on the future, which I think is a point very well taken, about what could happen to Syria if it develops into a weak, vacuous state in terms of the regional influences on it. But let's just focus for a second on perhaps the role of a couple of countries in particular.

First of all, Iran. If you could tell us your thoughts in terms of the Iranian influence now and juxtaposed it, perhaps, with the role being played or not being played by the Gulf states regarding Syria.

MR. KAYALI: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. I'll throw this -- we

should open this up now for your questions. Thank you very much, Mustafa.

Before -- just some quick ground rules. Please, I'm sure many of you already know this, but just to reiterate, if you could please clearly state your name and if necessary, any affiliation you may have, that would be useful to our guests here.

I should also tell you that we are actually live Tweeting this discussion tonight. We've got some of our colleagues who we're encouraging to do that, and of course, if you feel the need please do so as well.

I'll start with Dr. Zacharia

DR. ZACHARIA: I have a pessimistic -- Salman, I have a pessimistic point of view. Let me say that all in the Arab Spring, all revolutions are linked together. Tunis gave us inspiration; Egypt, creativity; Yemen, insistence; Libya, sacrifice; Syria, miraculous.

What I would like to say, the Arabs -- (Applause) -- in the Arab Spring, I reached a

conclusion. After the collapse of two dictators in less than one month, I came from Egypt only from a few days. Counter revolution in Egypt are in full gear now. So what I'm saying, after the collapse there was a global decision. No more collapse of dictators. Even to support Qaddafi (speaking in Arabic).

After the arrest warrant which was issued today from ICC, I am sure there will be no arrest warrant for Assad or for al-Assad. So, Saudi Arabia is leading the counter-revolution and financing it. I am sure, because I come from Egypt now. So, Bashar Assad said that all Arabs are supporting us after he depicted his people as microbes. Before Qaddafi said, rats. So these are the mentality of our dictators.

Thank you very much.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. We'll take a couple more questions first. Lady here? Lady in red here. Sorry.

MS. TURKMANI: So, I'm the lady in red? I'm Reem Turkmani from the Imperial College in London. I also chair a London-based charity called the Damascus

Trust, where we support civil society initiatives in Syria, like development projects. We have legal advice centers and other projects on the ground in Syria.

My question is mainly to Mr. Mustafa Kayali. May I ask you in Arabic, is that all right? (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. SHAIKH: And if I heard you correctly, you were speculating as to whether the meeting would take place? Of course, it did take place today.

MS. TURKMANI: (inaudible)

MR. SHAIKH : Yes, yes.

MS. TURKMANI: They want to live (inaudible). You can't have a (inaudible) cultural center.

MR. SHAIKH: That's right.

MS. TURKMANI: (inaudible) won't go there and so forth.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me just read to you, actually, an extraordinary statement which was made actually in the center of Damascus at the Sheraton

Hotel by Michael Kilo. He said, the solution to this crisis has to address its root causes. This regime must be toppled and replaced by a democratic system. This was said today, in Damascus by some of these groups.

Okay, we'll take one more question, please. Gentleman at the back.

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Start with you, Obeida. I'm -- we've got quite a lot more questions. If you'll keep your answers fairly brief, that would be great.

MR. NAHAS: Okay. I'll start with a first comment on -- I didn't see it pessimistic. I saw it very optimistic, from my point of view. And I think in Syria we are paying the price of mistakes in other Arab revolutions. We are paying the price of mistakes of Libyans, for example. Of Egyptians.

I, myself, believe that after the revolution it wasn't time for revenge against Hosni Mubarak. It was time for rebuilding Egypt. And once you start the

revenge process, you should expect a counter-revolution. Because people were associated with the old regime will start to fight. And they will fight back.

It's not easy. We're talking about millions of people affiliated to the regime. In Syria, we have 2 million Bath party members. If we start talking about revenge, about putting all these people to -- making them all accountable for the past, I think we are making the path much more difficult.

I agree with you that Syria's revolution is a miraculous one. In fact, I call it the revolution of -- what -- revolution impossible, to be honest. Now, the only -- the main thing I see positive of what's going on in Syria now, I know it's taking a long time. I know it's making -- it's difficult for people to continue at the same pace for a long time. But I think this gradual development of the revolution is something good for the future because we are trying to diffuse a situation and to dismantle an old regime. We're not dismantling the state, by the way. We're

not trying to dismantle the republic. This republic has been built with people's sweat and blood for 60 years. We are against that, and this is definitely not going to be a second Iraq, because what happened in Iraq seven years ago, eight years ago was the dismantling of the state. And this created new enemies from within.

Now, we refuse to do so. We're trying to minimize the number of people who will go, basically. And these are the people who have killed people during the revolution.

As for the dialogue in Damascus today. I do admire these people, they are our colleagues. And I read most of their comments today. They were very courageous to make them in Damascus. And I was discussing this earlier with my friends, and I believe what is happening today.

First of all, the number of people joining the political scene in Syria is very big, it's very huge. For the past 10 years -- and I was affiliated to the traditional opposition for some time, for 8, 9

years. And I have -- I am now affiliated to the new forces on the ground. Now the thing is, for 10 years the biggest opposition conference I attended had no more than 70 participants in a best scenario -- in the best-case scenario. Today, we had Antalya, where almost 400 people attended, and after 1 day 240 people attended another conference in Brussels -- 249, to be accurate. Six hundred people, because 40 people came from Antalya to Brussels, now 600 people gathering in 5 days, and these are only a small percentage of the people active outside Syria supporting the Syrian revolution.

I think what the people coming to join now are in their tens of thousands. And it's difficult to gather them all together. Conferences are a way of gathering these people and trying to get some common understanding. But sometimes they are used by other parties. And I think what happened in Damascus today, as I said, is a positive step. But the regime is trying to use it for its own good.

And even the difficulties they put until

last night -- and I was aware of that. I think that was part of the game played by the regime. And this is why the coordinating committees on the ground did not like this. I mean, the regime is trying to say today, look. These are the patriotic Syrian opposition who gather inside Syria, not those outside who are trying to bring in Western or international intervention. And this is not true, by the way. Nobody, not a single Syrian opponent, has called for international intervention.

Now, I have a question to Syrian officials that I'm not going to get an answer for, anyway. But, if these people -- yeah. If these people are patriotic, why were they jailed before? I mean, Michael Kilo attended a similar conference back in 1980. Hell, it was called for by the regime back then. And they called all these intellectuals to come in and say whatever they think and Michael did. And then he went to prison.

Now, I'm not sure he's not going to prison this time. So -- and I pray for his safety. I mean,

it's not that straightforward. We will always -- there will always be complications. I'm probably not as harsh on the regime -- sorry, on the conference today as Michael Eads back in the coalition I represent. But the people on the ground are much more frustrated than us. We are probably sitting here in air conditioned -- in an air conditioned venue talking about the revolution while they are doing the hard work on the ground.

As for the -- looking for the common good, let's say, between everybody, I think it's eminent that we have to do so. Now, the problem is, we are still trying -- we are trying to learn after 50 years of dictatorship. It's not easy. I mean, I saw many opposition conferences in the past 10 years where people failed to agree on very small things, on very, you know, basic ideas.

The opposition has become very fragmented. It was only individuals everywhere trying to talk their mind. Because once you have a group -- even outside Syria, people would pay the price of that.

And of course, inside Syria under the state of emergency you couldn't gather more than three people, as we all know. So, that's --

MR. KAYALI: (Speaking in Arabic.)

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. KAYALI: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. TABBARA: Just quickly responding to the three questions. First question, I share Obeida's optimism, actually, as well. And I think that the arrest warrants that were issued today were an indication of an international community will, one way or another. I mean, we really cannot distinguish -- and this is kind of a sad reality, but at the same time it's working for the favor of this point at this particular moment.

The will of the international community to issue arrest warrants against someone like Muammar el-Qaddafi and others in the Libyan regime shows that there is that will to not let these dictators go with impunity. And I think it's an indication that we will go in that direction when it comes to Yemen or it

comes to Syria in the future.

And from a legal standpoint, we also have to recognize the fact that international criminal justice in general is a complimentary notion. And so if we get to a point where, in Yemen for example, you know, a democratic government takes power and a truth and reconciliation process takes place, and there's a decision that there will only be few -- you know, certain people prosecuted by the local national legal system, then the International Criminal Court will not have jurisdiction anymore over these matters. Even if there is a referral. It will only have jurisdiction if there is no serious attempt to prosecute these criminals, or to achieve some sort of truth and reconciliation serious process. And I think the same could apply to Syria. So, I'm not pessimistic about that.

In terms of the comments by -- I'm sorry, the lady in red, again. I mean, this is the point that I was trying to make about consolidation. I absolutely agree with you. I think that these are all

hopeful signs -- and again, I go back to the quorum that I presented to everyone at the very beginning of this speech. Is that, it's more of a logistical issue. And really, we're not paying much attention to that.

There's so much misinformation out there about who the opposition figures are, who are those who are opposing the senior regime, what are there agendas. And a lot of people are saying a lot of different things. Very few that we hear from them specifically speaking on behalf of themselves. And for example, the Antalya Conference. And this is at the background of (inaudible), who is a prominent human rights activist in Syria and opposition figure, boycotted at the beginning the Antalya Conference.

As far as I know, the reason was that there was a lot of rumors. They didn't know what the Antalya conference was intending to accomplish. And there was a lot of rumors about the Antalya wanting to establish a transitional government, for example, which was -- nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, as one of the participants, I think there was not a pre-set agenda coming into Antalya. The agenda was actually set in Antalya. So it wasn't a top-bottom approach, it was a bottom-up approach in terms of setting, you know, the priorities and the agenda and kind of the nature of -- and I know some people might disagree, but I'm saying as a participant -- as an independent participant, that's the impression that I got.

And the same thing, I think, goes for the meeting in Damascus. Is that, opportunity for everyone to get together, basically, kind of work out the logistics. You know? That they didn't have in the past. Have a face-to-face interaction, express their points of view, and then come up with the (speaking in Arabic), the vision for a democratic Syria. I mean, I think that's step two.

(Speaking in Arabic), the common points, I think, are all point in that direction. I think Brussels had a lot of reference points to Antalya. And Obeida can correct me if I'm wrong.

I think there was a lot of deference to what happened in Antalya, and Brussels. They were happy at the process, they were happy that this was a place where people came together and came together with a final declaration that was very decent. I think there is a lot of acknowledgment of these gatherings, and I think that's a positive step. I know it's not moving at the pace of the street, and I think that -- maybe this will sound pessimistic. But I think that because the revolution is on the ground, I think the ground is going to determine the timeline of, you know, international community acting. So once you see millions in the streets of Haleb and Damascus, for example, it will become inevitable. But the risk that the international community is taking with that is that they are following. They're not leading, they're not saying that, well, you know, we are standing on the right side of history early on. They're basically flip-flopping until they make 100 percent sure that things are going in the direction that they think are going. And then they will -- they, you know, put

their chips on that particular gamble.

So, that's what I wanted to say.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me just say, in terms of the international community and what you pointed to, when President Assad, I think, spoke on April the 16th, about 200 people had been killed. When he last spoke last week, over 1,400, 1,500 had been killed. And we had a refugee crisis and a humanitarian situation. The question remains, when is the international community actually going to take this much, much more seriously.

More questions, please. Sir. Just wait for the mic.

SPEAKER: I would prefer to speak in Arabic, because it's really -- I need to express --

MR. SHAIKH: Please.

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic.)

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. And I'll get them to answer that, because I think it's very, very important. I think this is what they've been

talking about. But to really focus on that. Sir.

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic.) (Applause)
(Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. Of course, it's a pleasure to have you here. And all of our friends from Syria.

We're running out of time. We've gone a little bit over because we started late. But I'm sure all three of you would want to comment. So, let's have some quick comments from you, please.

MR. NAHAS: Okay. I have to admit that people on the ground have gone fast and far beyond what we are saying here outside. I mean, well probably too much mixed up with international politics that we are losing touch sometimes with what's going on on the ground. But, I can't remember the number of times we cried, really, and some of the scenes we saw. People going out, bare-handed, facing tanks and sometimes air raids.

I just need to address a few things quickly. First of all, I do believe that the Syrian people are

moderates. And even though there might be a large percentage of conservatives, the Syrian society might be conservative. But this doesn't mean that it will necessarily choose an Islamic government. Now, this is something that's important to know. And if we refer to early examples of democracy back in the '50s, the Damascene society, which was much more conservative than today didn't necessarily elect Islamic MPs.

The other thing that I might have not made clear before is the idea of dismantling the regime, not the state. And I am reemphasizing this. We want the regime to go, we don't want the state to fall. Because you mentioned that. You don't want -- you probably mixed the regime and the state. And I think the regime has turned against the state, even recently. And when we say the regime, we are referring to this security, both -- security at Paratas regime.

As for the responsibility of the president, I think in his last speech he made it very clear that

he is responsible. He said, for all these people listening to rumors and asking about me and the family -- and I think he was referring to two specific rumors: the rumor that he had -- that he was ill, and not in control; and the other one, that he was under house arrest. And I think he responded to that and said, I am okay, I'm fine, to imply that I am in control and I am the guy issuing the orders. So, I think he was very clear about this.

Going back to some other comments, quickly. We don't have a plan, because all that happened in Syria was unplanned. Now, people are coming together, trying to coordinate. Trying to come up with a roadmap, but this is not clear yet. And I think the reason for this is, we can't draw the map from outside. And you are trying to get this done by our friends and colleagues on the ground. And now, we can talk about few bodies being created on the ground between coordinating committees. And this is promising, because when things started they were unorganized. And now they are very much well-

organized. At least we know that people have a name for each Friday that's used everywhere. This is promising. I'm seeing a new society being born where you can have a single leadership, which is a bit strange for Syrians. Because the Syrian people are -- all think of themselves as presidents, according to the late president Shokry al Kwatly back in the '50s, when he resigned for the -- from the post of president. He told General al-Abdel Nasser, I'm handing over the people of 3 million presidents. So, try to control them if you can.

I mean, the Syrians are very difficult to control. But now, I think the new generation is showing that they can be led by a strong leadership. If this leadership is genuine and knows exactly what the people on the ground want -- and this is why I'm always referring to a leadership inside the country. And I don't think of us here, other than their voice overseas. I still believe that leadership will emerge from inside the country.

As for the media coverage, yes. The media

coverage is not necessarily fair and the issues on the media are not exactly what we hope they would be. But I think there's a problem with the lack of -- the prevention of journalists from going inside Syria. And when this refugee status was created in Southern Turkey, Turkey allowed journalists to go there while Syria didn't allow journalists to get into the country. And that's why they got the coverage they got, which is unfortunate because I also believe that this is not the issue today. I mean, we have only 15,000 refugees. And this is not the main issue. It's -- I think it's being politicized for different reasons.

My last comment would be, as for people here in Doha. While -- I mean, I don't live in Doha, so I know that some activists here tried to organize some demonstrations.

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

MR. NAHAS: Okay. I mean, I -- what we can do is, we try to deliver the people's message to different governments. And we have been trying to do

so. But I mean, it's -- we still have a long way to go.

MR. SHAIKH: I'll turn to you, Yaser. Just I sense there's an impatience here, you know? There's a lot of people here on the ground who are risking their lives who have shown extraordinary courage. And they want a plan. Is there three things that you can tell us that, you know, are absolutely something that this -- the organizing committees are agreed on and are working towards? You talked about the ICC referral, for example.

MR. TABBARA: Right. Well, I think it's very crucial for us to draw some comparisons here, because, you know, we've had very recent few profound lessons. For example, what took place in Tunisia, what took place in Egypt. Was there a plan for the millions of the people n the streets? And what was their plan? And I don't think that that was the case. I mean, I think that it was a culmination of circumstances that brought together a toppling of a president and a regime. There was a cooperative army

that was kind of the point of trust of many people, that kind of is leading the transition, if you will, into, you know, a more democratic Egypt at this point.

My point is, in Egypt these culminating circumstances included severe international pressure -- international community pressure. They included severe domestic pressure. there were millions of people on the streets. And I think that what brought people -- what brought the millions of people on the streets was the fact that Egypt was very well-covered by the media and was very well-documented. Where in Syria, that's almost an impossible task. I mean, the Syrian regime is in full control of that, and we just heard recently that allowed a few journalists. But they fully control their movements inside Syria, and they want them to cover exactly what they want them to cover.

And I think that that's where the international community's pressure is absolutely crucial. Once the entire world denounced the Syrian regime as an illegitimate regime, the isolation of

that regime has increased to an unbearable level. Where we will see, for example, defections in the diplomatic court. Which would be, you know, very important for a next step. We are putting as much pressure as possible on the U.N. Security Council member states to re-ignite the resolution that would potentially refer the Assad regime to the International Criminal Court. That would increase the -- you know, the whole idea, the whole notion of international isolation of the regime.

I think it is a hand-in-hand kind of process.

MR. SHAIKH: Where is Russia and China in this, why are they blocking?

MR. TABBARA: Well, Russia has classically -- had had a strong relationship with the Syrian regime, as most of us know. That goes back decades. And part of that relationship is a military arrangement and a presence in the Mediterranean Sea, for example. That is very much linked to a continuation of the Cold War, if you will, with the

U.S. and NATO.

And what they are afraid of and what they fear tremendously is, once the current regime is toppled or replaced, that that sort of relationship, that sort of leverage they have over the Middle East through -- vis-à-vis Syria will dissipate or disappear. What we're trying to do with the Russians is that, reassure them that whatever new entity is going to come forth in the new democratic Syria is not necessarily going to be just pro-Western or pro-American. It's going to be an entity that will govern Syria per the national interests of Syria. And if the national interests of Syria dictate that we have a strong relationship with the Russians, then so be it. And if the national interests of Syria dictate that we have strategic relationship and alliances with those who are not necessarily aligned with the West and aligned with NATO, then so be it.

I mean, but that's when -- you know, that's -- again, I mean, this is kind of a Catch-22 argument. That's where the international community, specifically

Europe and the United States have to go in and have to basically engage in the process early on. Everybody has to engage, because the toppling of the regime is inevitable, in my opinion and in the opinion of many, many analysts, I think. It's a question of when.

And so again, do you want to be on the wrong side of history? Or do you want to basically be early on -- take place, process -- in the process of engagement with the new democratic Syria. And then align your interests that way with that very, very strategic place.

I think the other points were just responded to by Obeida very well.

MR. SHAIKH: Mustafa, I'll leave the last word to you, very quickly, please.

MR. KAYALI: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. SHAIKH: Well, before I close. I think for those who are here, particularly in the international community. I think you've heard loud and clear, at least from these guys up here as well as very poignantly from the floor that momentum here is a

two-sided coin. I think the people of Syria are doing their absolute best to peacefully move to a different system. I think there's quite a lot that the international community can still be doing, and so far its response has been willful.

With that, let me please thank the gentlemen here. Yaser, Obeida, Mustafa. Thank you very much for coming and for talking. And of course, thank you very much for coming and for staying so much longer. For all of you, whether from Doha or Damascus or anywhere else, you're most welcome. Next door, we have a little bit of food for you, and refreshments. So please join us for that. But, let's please say thank you to these people. (Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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