

**Syrian Future Movement (SFM)**  
**Scientific Office**  
**Department of Research and Studies**  
**Research No. (2) | 06/08/2023**



## **Assad regime and the Syrian opposition: Normalization Scenarios**

### **Introduction:**

The Syrian revolution went through four phases:

- 1- The peaceful phase; during which peaceful demonstrations were met with a violent crackdown<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> You can review “The Syrian Revolution: Its Reality, Its Path and Prospects”, written by: Salama Kaila (T: 2018), Atlas Publishing House, 2013

And : “Syria’s Path of Pain towards Freedom – An Attempt in Mortgaged History” written by: Azmi Bishara, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, in which the writer chronicled two full years of the life of the Syrian revolution, i.e. from March 15, 2011 until March 2013.

2-See: The Transformations of the Syrian Military Establishment, the Challenge of Change and Reformation, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 2018 , in which there is a study of the establishment of the Syrian Army from its beginnings until the date of the study’s publication.

- 2- The military phase during which many members of the Syrian Army defected in protest against the violence directed towards the demonstrators then they established local battalions called the Free Army.
- 3- The Islamic phase, which witnessed the spread of Islamic military movements and their participation in military action.<sup>2</sup>
- 4- The phase of external intervention; when all local powers became proxies for the main players in the Syrian arena. In other words; foreign countries; "Russia, The USA, Turkey, Iran, and other Arab countries got directly involved in the conflict."<sup>3</sup>

These four phases paint a complex picture of the Syrian reality today, the interaction of different factors; local powers with factional divisions along with other ethnic and sectarian factors, which got mixed with external factors; such as contradicting <sup>4</sup>interests of intervening states form the Syrian reality today.

The Turkish intervention, which started very early, constituted a new turning point <sup>5</sup>since Sochi Agreement in 2018, followed by Astana Agreement in 2019, through which the Quartet Committee to solve the Syrian crisis politically was established, aiming to support a political settlement in Syria, after that the Arab League, headed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, intervened through the Jordanian step-by-step initiative, in order to create a Syrian Taif-like Agreement that would find a political solution for the Syrian crisis.<sup>6</sup>

We in the Scientific Office of the Syrian Future Movement, through the Department of Research and Studies, will study the scenarios of this intended normalization on the international levels, hoping to study its dimensions, and aiming to shed light on the options that we have to reach conclusions along with other theoretical suggestions and recommendations, that we would like to present to those who are interested in the Syrian case.

## **Chapter One: A realistic reading**

The complexity in the Syrian case imposes a complex perception, as most of the differences stem from different perceptions and the multiplicity of concepts, having such a complex

---

<sup>2</sup> See: The Syrian Jihad: Al Qaeda, ISIS, and the Evolution of the Revolution, Charles R. Leicester: Hurst And Company Macmillan UK.. 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Phelps talks about the beginnings of international intervention by all parties in Syria in 320 pages in English, in a book entitled The Battle of Syria... International Rivalry in the New Middle East, Yale University Press, on October 25, 2016,

<sup>4</sup> Ziyad Youssef Ahmed, in his research entitled The Syrian Crisis (2011-2018), a study of the positions of the countries affecting it, tried to demonstrate this complexity in the Syrian arena. p.68

<sup>5</sup> Quadripartite meetings in Moscow discuss, for two days, the normalization of Syrian-Turkish relations - CNN Arabic

<sup>6</sup> See the research paper presented by our department in the Scientific Office of the Future Movement, on the law preventing normalization: <https://sfuturem.org/studies-no-1>

reality, suggesting any theories that are taken out from their context may cause a blurring vision that would end with false results and proposals.

Therefore, the Syrian reality can be divided from the angle of normalization between Assad regime and the opposition into three axes:

**The first axis: Assad regime is the obstructing side**

Since Assad regime launched a campaign against the members of the “Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change” in 2005<sup>7</sup>, and the launch of the Syrian Dialogue Conference in 2011 and its failure due to the regime’s intransigence and its refusal to dialogue with the opposition<sup>8</sup>, until the establishment of the Constitutional Committee<sup>9</sup>, the regime did not make any political concession acknowledging the existence of political opposition to its rule, but rather built its media narrative on refusing any political opposition, accusing it of treason and collusion<sup>10</sup>.

- Assad regime is not honest in its intentions and decisions, its credibility cannot be reassured at any upcoming political turning point, without four pillars:

1- International commitments given by regime’s allies, friends and the international community.

2- Tangible pledges by the regime that convinces the opposition that he is committed to the political solution by keeping security apparatuses away from this case.

---

<sup>7</sup> Damascus Declaration and the crisis of the Syrian state! - SWI swissinfo.ch

<sup>8</sup> The start of the National Dialogue Conference amid the absence of the opposition in Syria (assawsana.com)  
Constitutional Committee | OSES (unmissions.org)

<sup>9</sup> The war in Syria: why did it last 10 years? - BBC News Arabic

<sup>10</sup> The start of the National Dialogue Conference amid the absence of the opposition in Syria (assawsana.com)  
Constitutional Committee | OSES (unmissions.org)

3- To Stop mobilizing the media.

4- To consider the political opposition as a national opposition.

-Because Assad regime has a long history in manipulation and a bad reputation in tyranny; the policy of going into tiny details as stated by Walid Al-Moallem<sup>11</sup>, no one can expect anything but failure for any normalization initiative between the regime and the opposition.

Finally, the problem doesn't lie in the approval of the opposition. Despite its diversity and lack of unification the Syrian opposition, is flexible since it has accepted the Geneva 2254 decisions that were made to ease the suffering of the Syrians. Rather, the problem, as it seems, is with the regime's approval and acceptance of normalization with the opposition, as it considers any participation between it and the opposition a real end to his rule and security grip.

### **The second axis: presuppositions**

In order to reach correct results, three hypotheses must be established as solid precedents. If these precedents are changed, everything built after them will be inaccurate:

- 1- Unifying the vision of the Syrian opposition - or most of it - regarding accepting normalization with the regime. It is not required for this vision to emanate from a single point of view, in the sense that it is not required to unify the opposition in the first place, so different opposition parties are not often required to unite, as their nature is plural, and breaking this nature is a call for ending it. Rather, it is required

That there must be a single vision adopted by the opposition that accepts starting with the idea of normalization with the regime within certain limitations through:

Reaching an agreed upon vision by the official opposition, including the Syrian Democratic Forces, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

\* Working to end the terrorism file of the SDF and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

---

<sup>11</sup> In late 2011, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed the protocol of the observer mission at the headquarters of the Arab League. The protocol included the entry of an Arab mission to monitor human rights violations in Syria, in the first months of the outbreak of protests in the country. In response to a question about the Syrian government's plan to flood the Arab mission with details, Al-Moallem said: "If we are going to flood the mission with details, they have to learn to swim." See: Veteran diplomat Walid Al-Moallem... Deviating from the official text with sarcastic comments (eremnews.com)

\* Creating an alternative to the SDF or the HTS in case they didn't accept the unified vision, either in boycotting and mobilizing international and popular support for that, or in using pressure cards to bring both the SDF and the HTS to the negotiating table.

2- Russians and Iranians have many concerns regarding their existence in Syria, thus their inability to make any upcoming military moves and impose any field withdrawals on the opposition. Losers have no place at the negotiating table, so as long as the opposition imposes its presence on any Syrian area, it is an internal national player whose position on any settlement matters.

3- Practising real pressure on the regime to reach a settlement should be imposed by the relevant international group, as in the absence of serious international sponsorship for the upcoming settlement; there is no meaning to any talk about it.

4- The existence of real statesmen who fulfil these three conditions:

a. They have a patriotic, non-partisan doctrine or personal interests.

b- They have the courage to make decisive "national" decisions.

c. To be immune against emotional delusion of the public, as the street is in its nature is affected by the populist discourse, However, this doesn't mean underestimating the awareness of the Syrian people, but rather balancing between the effects of the pressure of the populist discourse on one hand, and not underestimating the Syrian collective consciousness on the other hand, and that is the task of the professional politician.

## **Chapter two: The scenario of normalization and its determinants**

Expecting the failure of normalization process with the regime due to his mentality that reject any political solution, we put the scenario of the failure of normalization as an expected possibility, let's study the second possible scenario, which is the regime's acceptance of moving towards a comprehensive national settlement, by examining the determinants of the success of this scenario, and looking at the fulfilment of the demands of the Syrian people, those demands because of which Syrians have revolted against the Syrian regime. The absence of achieving these demands will bring us back to the first square, which means that there is no future settlement will succeed. So if the opposition, the peace-sponsoring countries, and the regime, seek a real solution, they must all have a vision of these demands.

.

Our mission, in the Department of Research and Studies in the Scientific Office of the Syrian Future Movement, is to present a vision based on our point of view, publicly benefiting from this issue, that we, as an active Syrian party, possess what can be neither written nor disclosed, however; sharing it may benefit in another way.

Based on this, it is possible to talk about the Syrian demands through two points:

The upper limits for achieving Syrian people demands.

High claims for the unanimous demands of the Syrians, such as establishing a caliphate, or creating a separate Syrian Kurdistan, or other allegations, either that have a high ceiling or those totally deviated from the main subject, all of these claims prompt us to decide the ceiling of the demands which have a public consensus, most important of which are:

- 1- Overthrowing the Syrian regime with all its institutions and personalities and building a completely new national institution.
- 2- Closing all prisons and security detention centres, and limiting the authority of all intelligence branches to interfere with civilians without being referred to the civil judiciary, which must be fully independent and can hold any person in the country accountable within respectable laws.
- 3- Call all foreign forces to leave the country, then to establish fully national institutions.
- 4- To establish a real Syrian army away from politics, whose mission is to protect the country and implement the decisions of the executive authority elected by the people.
- 5- The safe and voluntary return of refugees to their areas from which they were expelled not to other areas.
- 6- To cancel all previous agreements with foreign countries by an elected parliament, and under the authority of a free and transparent media that is not controlled by one party.
- 7- To embrace the international human rights law as a legal reference authority.
- 8- These and similar issues are among the upper limits of the Syrian demands. It is important to shed light and research them and, so that no one will claim others, or raise the ceiling to a degree that exceeds the endurance capacity of the Syrians and their real ambitions and demands.

#### **Minimum requirements.**

As there are higher demands that must be studied, there are also lower demands that must be agreed upon, and betting on them should not be allowed. Therefore, the presence of this limit allows the opposition to stop accusing and treasonous exchanges between themselves, and this limit takes into account the following realistic issues:

- \* Abolishing the current Syrian emergency laws that the Syrian regime exploits, which allow security services to pursue opponents, arrest, kill and displace citizens, and finding a mechanism to prevent their recurrence.
- \* The security apparatuses have full powers, making any option of normalization with the regime dependent on the arrogance of these agencies, as there is no guarantee after agreeing on any normalization, including arresting, killing and kidnapping of any citizen, or even searching for him.
- \* There are Syrian detainees in prisons who are jailed because of false reports or for being supporters of the opposition, even on social media. There must be a real solution for them first, so that their tragedy will not be repeated.
- \* To guarantee the full right of the opposition not to share power or be part of the state.

#### **Position assessment and recommendation:**

- The revolution of the Syrians and their sacrifices are the biggest successful card that the political opposition must use in the interest of the Syrians, therefore, the political

opposition first, and the international community second, must feel the strength of the Syrian cause and the right of the Syrian people to reach a decent life in their homeland.

- The necessity of practising political pressure and besieging the regime.
- Making efforts to make Damascus a centre for dialogue between the opposition and the regime under international auspices.

This would be an official recognition by the regime of the opposition, and a real attempt to change its mentality in the presence of political opponents in its regions, who show up in state- controlled media and talk about the demands of the Syrians. Accordingly, the Syrian Future Movement, through its political vision, recommends the following:

-The need to develop a theoretical road map based on the controls of the "maximum and minimum of Syrian demands" by not tolerating the following:

-Abolishing the emergency law, and revising the Syrian law through an elected parliament of Syrians under the auspices of the United Nations.

-Restraining the powers of the security agencies and preventing them from arresting civilians or politicians, and depriving non-civilian judicial police from arresting civilians, except by a judicial order, with the right to have a legal follow-up and to appoint a defence lawyer, and not to take confessions by force, in addition to subjecting civilians to civil authority and an independent judiciary.

\* Political reforms that guarantee the freedom of political opposition, and the right to political participation for the opposition.

Finally, the Syrian Future Movement believes that it is necessary to preserve the political negotiation card, especially after the international trend towards building a "Syrian Taif", and to use this card to subject the regime to a political solution that depends on the minimum that guarantees success for the upcoming political life.

**Juma Mohamed Laheeb**

**Researcher in the Research and Studies Department**

**Scientific office**

**Syrian Future Movement (SFM)**



**Translated by Mr. Jamal Mamo**

**Head of Translation Department in**

**Syrian Future Movement (SFM)**