

Building a New Syria: Elements of a Political Settlement

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Welcome:

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Moderator:

Marwan Muasher,
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Speakers:

Bassma Kodmani,
Ex-member of Syrian National Council

Alan Semo,
Democratic Union Party (PYD)

Bassen Hatahet,
Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Syrian National Council

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JESSICA MATHEWS: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. And it's my pleasure to welcome you here today.

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After nearly 20 months of increasing brutality by President Bashar al-Assad and his security forces, more than 35,000 deaths and millions of refugees, it's hard to even remember that this conflict began with a determinedly peaceful opposition. Not only has it become increasingly violent, but the longer the fighting has gone on, the more the ugly specter of sectarianism has clouded the conflict, and the arrival of outside fighters has threatened to steal the true narrative of this revolution. Deep divisions within the opposition factions and within the international community have complicated and exacerbated the situation and have confounded the search for effective international action.

We know that the greatest challenges lie ahead. We know, from experience from around the world and most recently from Tunisia and Egypt, that post-authoritarian transitions are difficult under the best of circumstances, and in cases burdened by civil war, by sectarian division and by the involvement of outside parties, the odds against success lengthen dramatically.

The Carnegie Middle East program has convened this conference to consider some of the key issues that will be at the center of any transition – the means to achieve a political settlement between the key groups in the country, the socioeconomic challenges that Syria will face in the months and years ahead, and the role of political Islam in any Syrian state.

The stakes for Syria, for the region and for the entire world could not be higher. Left unresolved, this conflict threatens to destabilize an already volatile region, to unravel the fragile balance in Lebanon and in Iraq, to undermine the security of a neighboring NATO ally and to provide fertile ground for extremists to thrive. Ultimately, the process of change must be Syrian-led, if it is to enjoy legitimacy, but the U.S., all of us in this room and the entire international community have a profound interest in how and whether this conflict is resolved. We must all think deeply about what the international community can and should do to help.

[00:02:58]

The work to bring us here today began five months ago, and it has not been an easy task, as many of you know personally. In many ways, some of the challenges that have faced policymakers have plagued this conference as well. Despite tireless efforts and post-coordination with the U.S. Department of State, a number of obstacles were thrown in the way of gathering the key players together. Over the last 48 hours, several expected visas have been held up and have fallen afoul of the Department of Homeland Security processes, as participants readied to actually board their flights. Some key participants from the Syrian National Council were held up at the last minute and did not board their planes yesterday from Doha because of the rescheduled SNC meeting, which did not complete its business as planned.

I'm pleased to say that we have been able to work around many of these challenges, and we have a top-notch group of participants for you today. Several managed to find their way to Washington as planned, and we've been able to arrange for a last-minute video conferencing from three different locations to enable other panelists to join us in these discussions.

I want to thank, first, Katherine Wilkins for her role in organizing this event. Without her vision, her perseverance and tireless efforts in the face of really enormous odds, we wouldn't be here. Omar Hossino and Tiffany Tupper also deserve special recognition for going well beyond the call of duty and working around the problems. And I want to thank Mokhtar Awad for all his help as well.

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I want to express our gratitude to today's panelists for joining us at this very busy moment, in this crucial moment. Many of them have endured enormous – enormous frustrations in getting here. We recognize that, and we apologize for it.

I want to also add my thanks to all of you for being here. No conference is better than its participants, and as I look around the room I'm confident that, for this important meeting, is already in this respect a success. With that said, let me turn the microphone over to Marwan Muasher, the head of Carnegie's Middle East program, who will be chairing today's first panel.

Marwan. (Applause.)

MARWAN MUASHER: Thank you very much, Jessica. Good morning to all of you. Before we start the first panel, let me just take care of some administrative issues. I want to remind everybody to have their cell phones off, please. We also have a video conference connection, and it's very important that your cell phones are off. I also want to tell people that we have translation for today's event. English will be on channel 8 and Arabic on channel 9. At the end of the presentations, we're going to of course open the floor for questions. We have our junior fellows and interns ready to come to you with the microphone. If you just, please, raise your hand, ask questions; we have a lot of people today, so I would urge you to keep your comments to a minimum and ask a question rather than make statements.

[00:07:11]

With that, we will start the first panel, which is about elements of a political settlement in Syria. Twenty months after the start of the uprising, the opposition in Syria appears to be as disorganized and divided as ever. This has been an elusive goal, to unite the opposition, and one that has played an important role in Western decision-making on Syria. And so one of the key questions we would like to ask the panelists is: What is the key obstacle to greater unity among the opposition? Is it personal ambition; is it ideological differences; is it support by outside countries? What was the reason for the failure of the opposition to unite earlier this year at the Cairo conference? And most importantly now, to what extent are the meetings that are happening, you know, this week, including today in Doha, likely to advance the goal of greater unity and diversity in

the opposition? Where do we go from here? Can the elements of a political settlement be put together?

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Syria has been different from other models in the region, such as Tunisia and Egypt, because of the sectarian nature of the conflict and the presence of three significant minority groups – Alawites, Kurds and Christians. Given all this, is it likely that a national political settlement to end the conflict and move the country into a new phase will be reached? When would that happen, over what time frame, and at what point will this become a viable option? There are a lot of questions that, you know, I and all of you, I'm sure, have for the panelists.

We have a panel of really top-notch activists and expert(s) on the issue to help us and guide us through all these questions. Dr. Bassma Kodmani, on my right, is a political scientist, academic and director of the Arab Reform Initiative in Paris. A Syrian – of course – national, she is the ex-spokesperson of the SNC, and until recently has been a very active member of the SNC leadership.

And to my immediate left is Dr. Alan Semo, who is a member of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria as well as a member of the National Coordination Body, “Hayat al-Tansiq al-Watani.” He’s also the head of the foreign affairs committee of the Kurdish Democratic Union, based in London, and a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

And joining us via VC, from Brussels, is Dr. Bassem Hatahet, a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and also the Syrian National Council. He’s a dentist by training, and lives in Belgium and has worked with the Muslim Brotherhood in exile for a number of years.

So I’d like to welcome the panelists. And the way we’re going to do this is I will ask maybe a number of questions, just to open up the discussion, for each of the panelists, and hope that you can answer these and any other questions that you would like.

[00:10:49]

Let’s start with Bassma, who is also on the advisory board, I should say, of Carnegie Middle East program, and has been a very active contributor to the program here. Bassma, much of the focus has been on the external opposition, but what is the status of the internal opposition today in Syria? Are there chances for a peaceful, inclusive movement inside the country, and what has happened to the secular, non-violent movements on the ground in Syria, which we have seen before but may have been overtaken by violence in recent months? Do you see them playing a role in any future political settlement in the country? And what has, finally, been your own personal experience with the SNC and moving forward? So Bassma, the floor is yours.

BASSMA KODMANI: Thank you, Marwan. I’m really very happy to be here. Thank you to the whole team at Carnegie; it’s a big pleasure to be back in a place where we can have a candid and open discussion. And I am in no official position or formal position in the opposition to be –

to be inhibited about anything I would like to say. I still belong to the Syrian opposition, definitely – or I should say, to the Syrian revolution. And the distinction here I think is important, and that might bring a first answer to one of your questions, Marwan.

[00:12:40]

I think we have a revolution, a true revolution that is changing society, changing relationships between groups on the ground, between social groups on the ground, between different regions of the country, between the capital and the other provinces. There is a deep movement that is changing Syria. And then there is an opposition. And this opposition is weak. It grew under authoritarianism. And I think maybe one subject for research one day would be – I think of Marina Ottaway, who conducted her work on semi-authoritarianism; this is full authoritarianism – what do politics look like under authoritarianism? And what we are now experiencing is how individuals with some ideological background that has never faced practical challenges, that has never had to behave in a responsible way because it never was in a situation to develop a strategy to reach power, et cetera, or to build coalitions and so on – this is the state of the opposition.

But the revolution on the ground is something different. What we see today, of course, is that we've had for a good – almost a year – peaceful movement, peaceful demonstrations, peaceful strategies of organizing society to resist. The whole Syrian society entered into resistance in the first year and then emerged the need to defend oneself in face of a regime that pushed very hard to attract the peaceful demonstrations, the peaceful revolt, into the military field, because this is where it has the upper hand.

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The decision to arm the revolution was nobody's decision; it was a spontaneous development, to a very large extent. Some groups understood earlier than others that it would only happen with arms, that it was inevitable at some point to pick – that people carry arms and face the regime, because the alternative is to go back home. And going back home is not going back home; it's going into an even harsher prison for the whole society.

So what happened on the ground is these movements that were peaceful picked up arms. So when we say the Free Syrian Army, we speak of a population in arms. And it is almost impossible to really build a map of all these groups on the ground. There are thousands – tens of thousands of small groups that organize themselves on their own, rarely into big units, and that now represent the reality of Syria across the country. These groups, at the moment their revolt became militarized, the whole revolution became dependent on outside support. And I think this is where Syria lost its independence in the sense that this was not anymore a movement of one society against its regime. The regime resorted to outside support, and receives it very generously, and the population, the moment it needed arms and money, had to resort also to outside support.

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And I would put it in this way for those who have no agenda of their own: Yes, you can say some countries are fighting a battle of their own on Syrian ground. Yes, we can say that some have an agenda for Syria. But if we speak of those peaceful demonstrators who picked up arms, they are – they were – they became dependent on outside support.

And I – and this is what began to change the – not the nature, but the inclination of this revolution. Because the support comes from Islamic conservative countries, we saw a stronger and stronger trend of Islamic groups developing on the ground. Definitely, the lack of international – of an effective management of the situation in Syria also pushed people to say, we have to depend on ourselves; there is no outside support, and therefore we have to resort to the courage that God gives us. I think that was – this is a very important element of why the Muslim discourse gains ground in Syria, why it becomes more popular. But if I were to say, is this an – has it become an Islamic revolution – I would say it's an Islamic-funded revolution, to a large extent, to a very large extent, because there are no alternative sources of financial support and military support, but this is definitely not an Islamic revolution. And groups are dependent on support, but that does not tell us at all what the political thinking is on the ground.

The militarization happened to a large extent, and then came back a civilian factor or a civilian phenomenon, and that's the emergence of local councils. It is a very interesting and promising development. These local councils – because the whole revolution is organized at the local level; that is the only way it can organize itself to face the regime. These local organizations became more and more formal. And we have, now, local councils in many places, in very many places – actually, in every province of Syria – that are more or less organized, with committees that are legal, humanitarian, media and medical, as well as military, of course.

But the civilian component is extremely important. It replaces the services of the regime. The regime is not there anymore, does not provide any services, and the local councils have grown into real entities. They are trying to develop democratic mechanisms to have representation. And they are in the process of aggregating their different units to develop representation at the level of each governorate in Syria, and there are 14 of those.

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If that process continues as it has developed, in a very promising way, I think we begin to have, maybe, an opposition on the ground that we can speak of but that will remain dependent on financial support. As you know, there may be 10 million Syrians now who are dependent on humanitarian aid because of the loss of any resources, and that makes Syria entirely really dependent on what comes from outside.

And if I can say in a few words what the opposition – how the opposition can succeed in uniting its forces now, it is probably by getting the commitment, first of all, by having of course representation of inside and outside, but more importantly, the commitment that financial support will be channeled through a political authority that has credible representation. And only in this case can we unite forces on the ground and the opposition outside will come together. And I'm describing something that is the other way round to that – to what is required from the opposition.

That is, the opposition is required to unite, the Free Syrian Army to come together, to have a unified command, before it can get the support it needs.

[00:22:10]

And the message is look at it the other way round. The financial support and the humanitarian support and the military support is what will unite groups on the ground. And therefore there's a very important role for the international community here to decide that this is what it wants, and I think this will bring the parties to not spontaneously but out of need to come together and work together.

For the moment, support comes from different directions to different groups. If that ends, we will unite the political groups. But the political groups and the military groups will not do it on their own if the financial support continues to come in from different directions and to different groups on the ground.

That's a first answer.

MR. MUASHER: Yup.

MS. KODMANI: Maybe – I don't want to be too long and try to –

MR. MUASHER: No, that – thank you, Bassma. We're going to have a discussion about all these issues. So thank you for all these clarifications.

[00:23:17]

I'd like to move to Dr. Bassem Hatahet in Brussels, and I will ask the questions in Arabic to Dr. Bassem. He will also answer in Arabic. But you have, as I said, instantaneous translations with you, so if you bear with us.

Dr. Bassem – (through interpreter) – Dr. Bassem, good evening to you, sir. You have heard Dr. Bassma and what she said about the internal opposition and also about what she said about the Islamization, not Islamization of the revolution, but the sources of financing of the revolution.

[00:24:02]

Many believe, including those in the United States, that the Muslim Brotherhood did not succeed in reassuring the Syrian minorities, the Kurds, Alawites, the Christians – did not succeed in giving them the reassurances that they could participate in the revolution, particularly in light of the Iraqi experience.

How do you respond to that? What did the Muslim Brotherhood do in order to attempt to gather the different minorities in Syria?

The other question is – which is being presented strongly here and in other international quarters: Is there any attempt to downsize the role of the Salafists and other radical groups that have started appearing in Syria? And are the scenes that we see on television screens of the Syrian regime, which is brutal, but also we've started seeing practices from the Salafis and the radical groups. Are there any attempts to downsize these roles by the Muslim Brotherhood – to downsize the role of these people? What is your vision for Syria after the revolution? Do you support a civil – pluralistic civilian regime? Do you support peaceful deliberations with authorities in Syria, regarding all these issues that have been presented to Islamists in the Arab world?

(Note: Bassem Hatahet's remarks are provided through interpreter.)

BASSEM HATAHET: Firstly, thank you and my greetings to everybody, especially Dr. Bassma. Thank you very much for this, because this meeting, including the participation of Miss Bassma and other people, is very important.

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Let me say a few words about the situation in Syria. The Syrian regime was able to forcefully fragment the Syrian social contract. We had good experiences in the '50s. The Syrians then had a real social contract. The prime minister was a Christian. We had the Kurds and others in the Cabinet. There were no differences between the different factions in Syria.

When this regime took power, they were able to fragment this social contract. Whether we are the Syrian brotherhood, the Muslim Brotherhood, or whole Syrian people, we have to regain that social contract because otherwise we'll have many problems. And we should return to a Syrian state that belongs to all the Syrian people, to be under the umbrella that gathers all the minorities and different factions under this umbrella of nationalism.

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The other point is that we in Syria now – as Dr. Bassma said, this revolution was spontaneous, and immediately it became military – a military movement, not because they like militarism but because the Syrian regime pushed them very strongly in that direction. Any regime that loves their people would not throw bombs and chemical weapons against their own people. We have a war; people were under this brutality for 40 years.

So the regime has really led to the militarization of the revolution. Until the sixth or seventh month of this real movement, we were against the Islamization of this revolution. Therefore, the revolution included all segments of the population.

You asked about the reassurances to the minorities. We'll give you three main facts. Firstly, we are directly cooperating with other groups, such as Christians. We work with them and we meet with them in the Syrian National Council. We talk with them within the civil society groups. Moreover, we had great discussions with Syrian Christian – Assyrian Christian groups and this union is represented in the Syrian National Council. This Assyrian council was working somewhat with

the Syrian regime, but through our discussions with them and meetings with them, now they are part of the National Council.

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So we have even had many meetings with non-Syrians on the Christian issues. We have lots of meetings with our friends in Europe. We talk a lot about Syria and the future of Syria. We do not talk on any given day as Muslim brothers or a Muslim movement. We want a civil state that will emanate from a civilian constitution hundred percent. So Islam would come with a civilian society. If we talk about Omar al-Khatib, he was the first to introduce the idea of a civil nation. That is what we want, a civil central power. Now we are talking about the 21 points; that we want a state that would represent all factions of Syrian citizens.

INTERPRETER: (Speaking aside.) Can you turn it down? Too loud. Is too loud. Can we -- (inaudible).

MR. HATAHET: (Through interpreter resuming.) We want to reassure all dimensions of the revolution whether Christians or our regional neighbors or our neighbors in the world, this is a secular -- a hundred-percent secular state that we aspire for. We just wanted to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. We want state of justice and freedom and equality as to the radicals and the Salafis.

[00:31:53]

MR. MUASHER: (Through interpreter.) Dr. Bassem, thank you very much. About -- specifically I want to ask about the Alawites. Do you have any contacts with the Alawites? You talked about contacts with some of the Christian denominations, but the Alawis in particular, also perhaps Kurds? Now we want to talk about that.

MR. HATAHET: (Through interpreter.) When we speak about the Alawites, actually the Alawites are deeply rooted in the power in Syria and they are contacting their Muslim brothers. For six or seven months after the dissension, they have been trying to contact them. We are always having contacts with the Alawites. Even before that, certain Alawite dissidents dissented either in the army or in civil society organizations. We are not against the Alawites, by any means, but if we are talking about the citizenship for every person, then every Syrian citizen is going to enjoy all the rights of being a citizen in Syria.

What's going on now, for the sake of liberation, is not going on. Therefore, if there is kind of reconciliation between the different sects of Syria, either by the Alawites or non-Alawites, there should be a fair court in order to interfere in that. We have had many meetings with Kurdish political parties in all other parts of the country, and we have been talking about the procedures that are going to take place shortly, and it's going to have an impact on what's going on right now.

Thank you.

MR. MUASHER: Thank you, Dr. Bassem.

(Off mic) – to Dr. Alan Semo to ask a bit about what is happening with the Kurdish minority in Syria. The conflict, of course, has drawn new attention to the Kurdish issue, not just in Syria but in neighboring countries, and particularly in Turkey, and Iraq as well.

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I'd like to ask you what are the goals of the Syrian Kurds, and the PYD in particular. Why has the PYD refused to coordinate with the opposition and work with the Free Syrian Army on the ground, for example? Do you believe that the Kurds are stronger by standing on their own rather than engaging more directly with other opposition groups? What role do you think Turkey is playing in the opposition? And do you see that role as against Kurdish interests in Syria?

And finally, can you imagine a situation where the Kurds of Syria achieve some form of autonomy or self-governance within a unified Syrian state and agree not to be involved in the struggle, let's say, for greater freedom of Kurds in neighboring countries? All these are questions that I will pose to you, and the floor is yours.

ALAN SEMO: Thank you. Thank you very much, Dr. Marwan. And I'm very pleased, delighted to be here to highlight the demands and the role of the Syrian Kurds, particularly.

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Well, the Syrian – just to make it briefly, the fact about the Syrian Kurds, they have been actively contributing to liberate Syria from the French mandate, and since the Ba'ath Party, 1963, the coup of March, takeover and swept power and implemented discriminatory policies toward the Kurds.

So one of them is the exceptional census, where then 120,000 Kurds were stripped of their Syrian nationality and deprived of their human – basic human rights. So the Kurds in Syria still now they cannot get married or register themselves. They don't register – they are not allowed to register children in school. And they cannot come to any hotel to book a hotel because they don't have any Syrian nationality.

And now we're talking about how Syrian Kurds were alive, which was one of their demands – (inaudible) – happening into the Syrian Kurds. And the second policy, discriminatory policy was the Arab belt, where the settlers come into the Kurdish area in order to assimilate and Arabicize the country of the Kurds.

So the Kurds have been Syrian and a part of the Syrian (revolution ?), and they actively contributed. And since the prodemocracy uprising, the Kurds (actively ?) supported the popular uprising for democracy and dignity. This is our clear position, including the PYD and all the Kurdish parties and movement.

During the first two weeks of the prodemocracy uprising, the PYD and the Kurdish people declared their position. We are with the Syrian people in our identity for democracy and dignity, against the corruption, dictatorship and political repression. This was the clear stand of the Kurds in Syria.

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And this was where they cooperated with the Syrian opposition. But after – I do agree with my colleague – after seven months of a peaceful protest and demonstration, the Syrian people proved they can change. They can struggle and resist against this brutal regime with all competence as the Syrian, as a two-mechanism factor that played a role to (fail ?) the opposition and make this brutal regime more brutal, to kill and massacre its own people. The first fact was that the opposition did not adopt the demands of the peaceful people, the Syrian people, that they didn't demand – they didn't adopt the demand and they didn't lead it. And the second point was the regional and international or global powers, players, intervened, and unfortunately and sadly turned the peaceful prodemocracy and dignity (revolution ?) into a civil sectarian war.

So that's unfortunate and it's sad to say that after seven months. So the Syrian – the Syrian revolution, the Syrian uprising for democracy and dignity turned into a sectarian violence. We're talking about the war today.

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And the Syrian people – all Syrian peoples' demands for legitimate democracy and dignity have been trapped in this violent war. Proxy war, I call it. On behalf of – (inaudible) – trapped – this – we Syrian people, unfortunately we're trapped in between these two proxy wars. One proxy war supported to – seeking for a change of the seat of the power. Nobody is talking about democracy in Syria, nobody is talking about the revolution. The institutional revolution in Syria, the change of the mentality. They get woman and children and use them to change the society for democracy. They're talking about toppling Assad, overtopping Assad. Shiite Assad.

And this position makes it that one position that the revolution had been supporting, right, as my colleague mentioned that, I'm talking transparently and clearly. This proxy war was on behalf of Gulf States – Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey – Western powers, and another proxy war on behalf of the brutal regime, Iran, Russia. And we Syrian people, unfortunately and sadly, are trapped in this violent war. We are the victim. We pay the price for Saudi Arabia because they wanted to have a Sunni Arab state. And we pay the price for the Turkey, because they wanted to have an AKP government, Muslims, political Islam in Syria. The U.K. and Western dominant powers want a friendly Western government who can promote the interests of the Western interests.

So in that position, the Kurds have been organizing themselves. And since the regime, the brutal regime lost the control and legitimacy by killing own people, that northern – (inaudible) – area of the Kurds in Syria has been limited and withdrawn because they wanted to concentrate and focusing on Aleppo (people ?). And then the Kurdish people – the Kurdish political parties PYD and the KNC, the Kurdish National Council, cooperated together and took the control of the

Kurdish area. And today, they have made an agreement in Hawler in Arbil with the KRG – in support of the KRG – they got at the Kurdish Supreme Court. And today the Kurdish Supreme Court and all the Kurdish movements are running the region peacefully, democratically, and their stand is clear: All the Kurds and all other ethnic minorities; I can talk about the Kurds and I consider all ethnic minorities in Syria, they are not – (inaudible). There all are with this pro-democracy uprising. We are not pro-Assad, pro-Iran, pro-Turkey. But unfortunately, today the war is a proxy war.

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And we wanted to keep away from this violence because this violence is not benefitting and not promoting the Syrian national interest. This is the question. If today the FSA was saying and fighting against this regime for a democracy, for a plural democratic Syria, I will one of the first who join them. But I wouldn't join them just to throw live people from four and seven story buildings or just because they are saying "Allahu Akbar."

There is a clear position for the changing all of this democracy. And therefore, we are thinking and we are considering now as Syrian National Coordination Body as well, we are part of it, and the PYD is the vice president of that movement. I had a chat with a colleague yesterday and nobody is talking and nobody knows about this internal movement, which have had three positions since start of the revolution: No to violence; no to military intervention; and no to sectarian war.

[00:46:10]

The Syrian National Coordination Body, led by Hassan Abdul Azim and – (inaudible) – is in exile, and within that – this is the model for them. The Kurds have been managing themselves democratically and this is a model for a united Syria. We feel this establishment is no threat to any regional or global powers.

We considered this peaceful establishment as a contribution and a model for a future Syria where the people, all the Syrian people, including ethnic minorities, can rule themselves regionally. They can govern themselves regionally. This is our vision in the future and kind of reform for the population in the Syria. We're thinking about the future of Syria. This is the main option or the main opposition – (inaudible) – because we cannot agree. We are here talking about war and therefore I'm here, I'm talking about the reconciliation and peace plan.

Right? We're not talking about Syrian revolution, unfortunately. We're talking about war, this sectarian war, and here we are here. And I think the Syrian opposition is united. I don't agree that they are divided and weak and – we are united, but we have a different mechanism, which is a democratic view. We have a different mechanism. One mechanism is, by military we can topple this regime, and another one, by peaceful demonstration and by civic movement. There's a difference.

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And the problem is, we cannot agree about on the common interests for the Syria. This is the main issue. And we Kurds in Syria, we are not just to (prove ?) – (inaudible). We are not just living in Syria. We are Syrian. We fight for Syria – the liberation of Syria. Yusuf al-Azmah, the commander of the Syrian against the French, was Kurd. Ibrahim Hananu was Kurd. We liberated Syria. We are Syrian. It is disrespectful for Syrians to say oh, the Kurds, they are separate – separatists and they want to have as their own country. No. We are Syrian. We sacrificed for this country. We’re living here; we have been living here. But we want to have our justice. Not for all. We don’t want to have a self-democracy only for the Kurds. And this is our view for the future Syria. Within that geopolitic united Syria where we learn and get the experience from the Swiss model of country, or the United Kingdom – right? Like Scotland, Northern Ireland, and your policy here of United State and the federal system. And we think and we can believe that the Kurds are integral force or integral people in the united Syria.

So we want to have democratic self-governance just like the Scottish people. They have their parliament, they have their money, they get their language, they get their unity, right, which differs slightly from England or from the Welsh. Why can’t we have small parliaments run by Druze or Alawites or Kurds?

[00:50:27]

So this is our point. We want to be integrated within a united Syria, yeah. We have been living together. We’re going to live together. And this is the fact. We want all the people to be freely and democratically governing themselves within a united Syria. This is the position of the Kurds and the position of the movement for democratic change and peaceful change.

So in view of all that, we are with the Kurds. And with this democratic movement we are willing and we are expecting international legitimacy. And I stress that we talking about this plan and unfortunately we messed up one plan, which was the peace plan of Kofi Annan and Geneva declarations or resolutions. It was comprehensive, a comprehensive peace plan. And because of the insistence of the brutal regime on killing the people, it will not be revised and not get enough support from the opposition.

And unfortunately, we as Syrians are saying– and I totally agree – how we can do this? Yes, very easy. Very – (inaudible). This people who are involved in this proxy war, they are dependent people. They are not independent. They’re dependent on Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, because they’re financing them and they’re sending them weapons. So the first step we can do it to – OK, sorry. To do this one here, cut off this regional and global intervention. And then we, as a Syrian people, can sit down. We can do it.

As you did for the people in the U.K. – in U.S. Four years ago, you said we can make it. You did it. We could do it. We can fight. We are able to resist not just Assad, but hundreds of Assads, brutal regimes because if we change it, we change it ourselves because if Saudi Arabia or Turkey wanted to change us, so they want to have their interests. And Turkey, their interests in Syria is anti-Kurds and they don’t want to have any – (inaudible) – of the Kurd and the second thing is the political Islam ad campaign. They wanted to have a Muslim, as my colleague mentioned, a

Muslim government, not a Muslim country, he said. So what is different between Muslim country and Muslim government, right?

[00:53:42]

So these are the two main things. And this one, if we cut off the intervention by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, who is promoting this war, we can manage ourselves. Let— this is example, let Kurds prove this. They don't get weapons from Turkey, do they? They don't get weapons from the U.S., do they? But they'll manage it themselves. And the Kurdish region now in Syria has been a safe haven. Half of the Aleppo population is now living in the Kurdish area. And this why we stated – we said, this can be the safe haven.

And we can start from Hanishbi (sp), Kubani and Afrin to liberate all Syria. This is our view and this was recalled the opposition and political party in Syria. Right, we did it this one here, let's go move to Hama, Homs, Daraa, Latakia and liberate all these cities from this brutal regime. (Inaudible.) Sorry. So yeah, conclusion – I'm sorry to draw this symbolic point just for that. So I think I made it clear, but I would love to hear your opinions.

[00:55:12]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you very much, Dr. Alan. Let me pose a question maybe to the panelists before we open it up for questions. I mean, there is a disconnect here. We hear a commitment to a democratic state in Syria from the Muslim Brotherhood, from the Kurds, from the different groups. And yet, on the ground, that's not happening. People are not talking about a political settlement on the ground. What we are seeing on the ground is increasing sectarian violence. We – all the opposition, of course, is united against the regime of Bashar al-Assad and everybody agrees that there is no future for Syria with Bashar al-Assad.

But what is the plan – has the opposition put forward a clear plan for what they are for? Are they really for a democratic, pluralistic Syria in deed, not just in – you know, in words? And if they are, why have the different minorities, as well as the Sunni majority in Syria, why have they not been able to come together and put forward a political plan that is clear, that all the sides can subscribe to, and that would have given the international community an easier task in supporting the opposition if they see that they are at least united in a plan then, you know, no opposition would be united on all issues.

[00:56:44]

But why has this not taken place? Is it premature to talk about a political settlement? Is the situation on the ground such that all efforts now are focused on toppling the regime of Bashar al-Assad? And if it is premature, is there not a risk that the sectarian violence would reach a level such that when the regime falls, elements of a particular settlement will be so much more difficult because it has not been given the attention that it needs at the early stage?

Bassma, let's start with you.

MS. KODMANI: I – look, I think the issue of the – I’m not going to pick up everything that Dr. Alan Semo said. I do feel in agreement on him on certain points and very uncomfortable on others. I think there is unity in fighting the regime. Any specific agenda that goes in one direction or another – and we say it’s a Kurdish agenda or it’s an Islamist agenda, the people on the ground reject any specific agenda at this stage.

You will find that – whether it’s Muslim brothers or it’s a minority-based position – there are sort of negative words to characterize these behaviors because nobody wants to see specific agendas implemented now. The people really want unity because they realize that without the unity, there’s no way you can fight this regime, whether on the ground or politically and diplomatically on the international scene.

What has prevented, I think, so far, the unity is the lack of experience, the personal rivalries, a little bit the ideological – but these are not major. The ideological is not the major issue. It is more about the organizational challenge of how you put all these people together. There is no political group – Dr. Alan Semo says the National Coordination Commission. If I tell you the Damascus Declaration or the Party of the Free Syrians or – you take any of these entities, they just come out in pieces after, you know, the first test.

There are no political structures in Syria. So are we going to put thousands of individuals and say they each represent themselves? How do you represent a society when it has never been represented? And you suddenly need to fight an incredible fight on the ground, face death and destruction every single day and survive in this environment, and then tell people – go and be represented, decently, in an organized and structured way, and agree on something.

[00:59:58]

Now, even if – with all these challenges, there are clear documents that have been repeatedly formulated by the SNC early on when it was formed, a month after it came together, by the late – latest document on which all the efforts – the current efforts are based are the documents agreed in Cairo. This is 90 percent of the opposition that agreed on multiparty, pluralistic, diverse state, democratic state, respect and representation and respect for all rights for all communities, specifically on the Kurdish issues.

Now, all of this is stated. What happens on the ground is fight for survival and some groups trying to push their own agendas. And I’m sorry to say neither an Islamist agenda nor a Kurdish agenda is welcome at this point. We – if we have a fight against the regime, you cannot say, I am – well, there’s a proxy war going out there – going on out there; these countries are responsible for the division and the sectarian divisions. No, these countries are not responsible for the division – the sectarian division. The regime armed and continues to try and arm minorities to fight the Muslim majority or the Sunni majority. This is happening every single day on the ground. How can a society keep its immunity when massacres are committed and bodies are thrown in face of another village from the other community just to incite vengeance? So however the immunity this is a very deeply wounded society by a regime that has done so. This is not the nature of Syria now.

[01:01:53]

With such wounds, I don't know who will heal those wounds. I don't know how we will prevent massacres. I do not know how we will prevent partition. I am extremely concerned about the future of Syria. I agree that these documents need to be implemented, but what do you implement? Do you implement a democratic, multisectarian plan across communities? There are networks of trusts that have developed, safety networks that were developed on the ground for communities to communicate if there is somebody that has been kidnapped or taken by one community or another or – to defuse any tension and any vengeance.

We will need a huge transitional justice agenda—a framework that will need to be implemented immediately. We will need outside support. We are going to need probably a big peacekeeping force to prevent any breakaway – temptation to break away from the country. Massacres, chaos, the regime trying to fight back and regain ground – all of these are risks we face. And no government will be able to face those risks.

[01:03:08]

Now, the opposition, based on the Cairo documents, which are very clear and committed to democratic, pluralistic principles – this now faces the organizational challenge of developing a representative body inside and outside and an executive body that will actually work to support the population on the ground. The organizational challenge is considerable. The SNC has not developed the executive body that it should have – never developed it. Why? For all sorts of reasons, but the ideological is one of them only.

Now, a widely supported, from inside and outside – widely supported initiative is called the national initiative – national Syrian initiative. If this comes together and has the pledge that it will be recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, what we need now is to move one step further, and that is to have a body that is legally recognized as representing Syria. The Syrian people are not represented by anyone today, neither the regime nor the opposition. And therefore we are in dire need of a partner for anything that needs to be done, whether it's humanitarian, diplomatic, or political at all levels. We don't have this partner at the moment. It is hopefully in the making, and if it comes about, then I think we can – we will be able to move forward.

[01:04:50]

One last point about what kinds of parallel arrangements could have taken place. I think there is a specific responsibility for the majority to reassure the minorities. It falls upon the majority. It is the duty of the majority, not of the minorities. If they feel unsafe, if they feel threatened, if they feel that their rights have been violated or not respected, it is the responsibility of the majority to provide for that. But an agreement that is of a federal nature can only be legitimate if it is concluded democratically, if it is voted by a democratic entity. It is impossible today – if we – if we go for a plan that says, well, let's have federation and autonomous regions in Syria, we are going for a

Dayton-like agreement. We're going for a Taif-like agreement. We are going – not even Taif; we're going more for a Dayton-like agreement than Taif, really.

We have rejected – and all Syrians have rejected so far – anything that is based on sectarian affiliation. It's a recipe for disaster. It has been tried in several countries. It just doesn't work. Either we have a country, or we don't have a country. But sectarian-based politics and arrangements that actually legitimize and box each community in– with a leadership that usually organizes new authoritarianism under the leadership of the sectarian leaders. And each community is taken hostage by a leadership that then makes arrangements among themselves, and the whole population becomes a victim of something else.

So we're not getting rid of authoritarianism to fall neither under an Islamist regime that the Salafis want and that does not fit in Syria – certainly doesn't fit in Syria – nor do we want a model that says, let's base it on our sectarian affiliations. I don't belong to any community. I was born a Sunni Muslim from Damascus. Do I want to be under the leadership of a Sunni leader who says that Sunnism tells me how I need to live every day and vote? And this is, I think, a large majority of Syrians.

[01:07:23]

The politics of Syria today leave out, I would say, a good 30 percent who are sitting back and waiting to see what happens. They are fearful of the unknown. They don't know what comes after Bashar al-Assad. We need to reassure them. Not only do we need to reassure them; we need to mobilize them on our side, because this is where we will get a balanced representation of Syrians. At the moment it's unbalanced, I agree. We have more Sunnis who are opposing. We have more of those who are ready to fight and those who have pulled out because they can't do it peacefully anymore, and they were not ready to carry arms. Of course we lost some of the demonstrators. A lot of those demonstrators – they came from the different communities. They were frightened by the fight.

Whether it takes a full fight to get rid of the regime – unfortunately we are told by those who know Bashar al-Assad closely that he will only go by force. And I have asked candidly this question to many leaders: Do you really think there's a way we can finish without force? And the answer is usually no. He will only go by force. Are we going to have to fight it until the end, and that will be perhaps more violence? Is there a point that we can reach where we can say he now understands it's over, and countries that have supported him say it is over, and then we can have a political arrangement? I think this is the ideal scenario we would want to see. But there's no guarantee this is going to happen. So the violence obviously breeds violence.

But within this very difficult context, for the opposition to reach out to the different communities and the Alawi community – and we try to do that; but believe me, it's not by having two Alawis on a leadership – a political leadership that we will resolve it. It's not that anymore. It's Alawis carrying arms against the regime that might happen. That is what is now to be expected if the Alawis are to turn against Assad. It's that harsh. Thank you.

[01:09:35]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you. Thank you for this dose of realism, Bassma.

Let me turn to Dr. Bassem. Dr. Bassem – (continues through interpreter) – I'm going to ask you to speak slowly, because there is interpretation here. So please talk slowly. Speak slowly.

Do you agree with what has been mentioned by Dr. Bassma, that the factional agendas are not acceptable, either Islamic – the Kurdish or whatever? We want a national agenda for everybody. What's your opinion in that particular matter?

[01:10:16]

MR. HATAHET: Actually, I say is that Syrians have not been practicing politics for 40 years. Now their policy – there are internal politics, and there are external politics. But the Syrian people, with all their components, have learned some politics or has had some (ideal ?) of politics. Therefore, I think that there should be a real framework for the Syrian people to practice politics. We have been talking about the national Syrian board – council, and that can talk with the Alawis, and we talk with other parties as well – you know, that we can achieve we are looking for.

But as I have already said, regrettably enough and unfortunately, the start of the National Syrian Council did not go the right way, because there are certain national policies that are not going with him. There are other points of view right now that have been mentioned in the field of politics. But basically what is the ceiling we are looking for? We want to topple the regime with all its regimes. If everybody is agreeing to that, there will be no problem because we'll be far from any domestic procedures. Therefore, we are looking for a Syrian constitution and Syrian nationalism. Therefore, if it's going to have all the rights for all Syrians – (inaudible) – the constitution's got to guarantee for the majority and for the minority their rights as Syrian citizens. Therefore, we want to set the draft – a constitution that will take care of all factions in Syria.

I always listen to what has been set as external agendas. Of course it's natural that there are external agendas, as the speakers have already mentioned, because there are many armed groups right now inside Syria that has its allegiance for external forces. Therefore, if we have strong political parties in Syria, we are going to get rid of all external intervention.

MR. MUASHER: (Through interpreter.) Thank you, Dr. Bassem.

Dr. Alan, please.

MR. SEMO: I mean, I do, in some extent, agree with Dr. Bassma. And clearly this is the vision, right? That's why I'm not repeating it; this is the vision we looking forward to having post-Assad or to build a new Syria. So the opposition now – they have been arguing about exclusive, wider representative from the ground. This was the initiative initiated by the state secretary, Hillary Clinton, and by the Syrian opposition, mainly the SNC.

[01:13:57]

Right. The result – we saw it yesterday. There was exclusion – not exclusion. So they wanted get a representative from the ground – with the fighting on the ground from Syria, and they boycott it. They said to the people in Doha, you are not representing us – clearly, right? And the new leadership or the new executive committee of Syrian National Council excluded half of population of the Syrian people: no woman. Half of the population, yeah, 20 million – sorry, 10 million of the Syrian people – 11 million of Syrian people are excluded out of the political decision.

This is a fact, and – (inaudible) – talking about an exclusive and new initiative, which includes all Syrians. The Kurds – oh, not the Kurds; no, their representative is there. The representative of the Syrian people – (inaudible) – there on the ground. They're all on the ground. They're fighting on the ground. You should recognize them. They are not electing you because you're going to stay in a five star hotel, and these people are starving people. And you get money from the king, and they fighting for to find a sandwich on the street in Aleppo.

[01:15:30]

This is a reality. Why doesn't the FSA accept the Syrian National Council? Because these exiled people – the politician who can say – a (inaudible) – representing of the people – right, this is – (inaudible). The model we made, the Kurdish people have agreed. And we have the Kurdish Supreme Council, which democratically represents Kurdish people in Syria – why don't you approach them and negotiate with them? What they did in Doha is just example – the division example, because Turkey is involved. Right, you don't invite Alan; Alan is against Turkey. You will invite Marwan; he's a good guy. He's a close to Saudi Arabia, we get the money.

This is a reality. This is a fact. I'm talking – (inaudible). Yeah, I'm not talking politician – (inaudible) – is representation there. And unfortunately we are no leading this opposition. We need some leader who can lead it independently – yeah, not depending on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Turkey, U.S. or U.K. – (inaudible). We – (inaudible) – we can make it, and we are able to do it, but in our way – in our own way. And if we needed help, we would shout for help if we need it. But now – what's happening now? You're dominating the opposition.

I think that political settlement will be first of all – first of all to stop this violence by all means. By all means – that means the military means as well. We are against military intervention, but the military – the Syrian national military, the Syrian national resistance. The Syrian national resistance – they can resist. They can make a change. They can topple Assad. And this transitional government – whatever we call it – establishment or initiative – whatever we call it – should include all of the opposition.

This is our view. We'll get somewhere – Kurds – the opposition of Syria will get together without excluding anyone – even me, even any child, any woman and youth. Maybe we'll get 2,000 representatives, and then we'll elect up to 20 people – from 2,000 to 20 people. This was not happening in Doha. Kurds wasn't there officially. Other ethnic minorities were there not. The

people who are fighting, have suffered – sacrificed their blood against this brutal regime – they were not there, represented, as they say. Right?

[01:18:35]

So if this establishment happens, this transitional power happens, and we then, after this – (inaudible) – can prepare for a democratic, pluralistic and new Syria based on the constitution, the democratic institutions – not the Syrian Arab Republic, not that the president has to be Arab Muslim. So in Syria I cannot be president under today's constitution, because I'm a Kurd. So it has to be Arab and Muslim, and no Assyrians, Syriacs or Kurds. This is stated under the 8th article of the Syrian constitution, right?

So once we get it together, this transitional period – they can prepare for a democratic constitution. And we do need a compromise of the international communities, a U.N. security resolution, and all who are involved, regionally and internationally – they will make compromise. This is a pact, right? And I think it's starting now. After this thing, this failing of the opposition, and the international community, they are starting to approach each other. They're talking to Russia today. And they're getting some compromise. Once reach some compromise and the Syrian people are ready, right, they'll be ready to have a referendum. We are – I am – yeah, I'm – I'm representing one party of 20 Kurdish parties, all right? I'm one of 20. I'm not saying I represent everyone, right? This is a democratic representation.

[01:20:36]

And this why I'm saying that people in Syria, the Syrian people, after this transitional period of preparing for the constitution, will have a referendum, on how the Syrian people want to run themselves, not by me, not by Marwan, not by Bassma, how they want to run themselves. We have a say. We have to ask them for a referendum. How do you want the constitution, the Syrian constitution, to be? The Syrian people can decide. This is the Syrian people's fate. And everyone should respect it. That is what we're looking for.

If Syrian people wanted to have a separate state, have a separate state. Independent state, independent state. And based on a transparent, a free referendum with a free election. If they will to elect a Muslim – a Muslim, a jihadist, we should respect it, because that is election. But our duty is to explain to the people, explain it, clarify it why it's not good having a jihadist president or have a Kurdish president. I'm not specifying one or the other.

Our people will have a word, have a say, and this is the democracy we are looking for and we are struggling for. This is our model for democracy, and we want it for all the Syrian people, not just the Syrian who are all the (regional ?). And I think this the principle of democracy is going to (contribute ?) to the Syrian regional and for democracy and stabilization in the region.

[01:22:34]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you. Thank you, Doctor.

So let's give half an hour to questions. We're going to go overboard. I'll take three questions at a time. Please state your name and affiliation. And as I said, please be sure to be – are lots of people already – (inaudible) – please.

Q: Thank you all. Number one, welcome to Washington, the three of you. Now that you are in Washington, we have a new president. And the three of you have an opportunity to give a message to the president, American people. What is it that you want, what should American policy be at this point in time?

MR. MUASHER: Sir.

Q: (Name inaudible.) I have a quick comment –

MR. : And – (inaudible) – real quick comment, so I'll –

Q: (Inaudible) – that has lasted for more than 3,000 years and has never shown in the recent history to be sectarian or violent. It was actually accommodating to a lot of minorities that migrated to Syria. The Kurdish came to Syria, the Armenians came to Syria and multiple other minorities came to Syria and stayed there.

The problem started 30 years ago with that dictatorship bred sectarianism in the society. So after that regime is removed, we expect the society to go back to the previous situation. We don't expect it to go in a sectarian violence direction. And the proof for that is we have never heard that the FSA have attacked any Alawite village or conducted a massacre in retaliation for the massacres being done every day on the ground in the other – in all the cities of Syria.

[01:24:29]

The second point is there are two aspects of the problem in Syria and one is political and the other is what's on the ground, the humanitarian situation that exceeds any description. It's a catastrophe of about 20 million people or 18 million people being in need of help. What did the international community do to stop that humanitarian catastrophe and prevent an intervention from outside? If the people of Syria do not have any other –

MR. : Sir, a question – a question, please.

Q: That's my first question for – (inaudible) – Bassma. I have a question for Dr. Alan. And the question is what did the international community do to help that humanitarian catastrophe and stop any outside intervention from happening if they don't like that intervention, and what do the people of Syria have if they don't have any other alternative?

[01:25:29]

The question to Dr. Alan is did the regime in Syria try to work people against each other with help from some Kurdish allies and give them some ability to do whatever they want in order to put them against the rest of the communities? And, for example, what happened in Azaz, next to Aleppo, which is a Kurdish town, when they resisted the regime? Can you tell me that you can – (inaudible) – democracy in Azaz as you did in (Qamishli ?)? These are the two questions that I have.

MR. MUASHER: There's a woman in the back that – yes, please. Yes, yes. Near Tom. Yes.

Q: Hi, Kim Hatas (ph) from the BBC. I know my question may sound harsh. I know that the situation is very difficult in Syria both for the people on the ground and for the opposition abroad as well. But I struggle to understand a little bit when you say that, you know, inexperience is one of the reasons that the Syrian opposition hasn't managed to galvanize international support or make good progress. And we just heard as well, you know, Syria hasn't had a real political life for decades.

I know it's very difficult to compare countries, but the Libyans certainly managed to get their act together when it comes to the opposition and galvanize international support in a very successful way. And I know Syria quite well. There is a real tradition there of civil society even though it has been impeded by the regime. So I really struggle to understand why inexperience is one of the reasons why the Syrian opposition can't seem to make good progress.

MR. : That's correct.

[01:27:07]

MR. MUASHER: All right. Bassma, you want to take the first – (inaudible)? And I hope you can limit your questions –

MR. : Sure.

MR. MUASHER: – your answers in time because there are lots of people who want to ask questions.

[01:27:22]

MS. KODMANI: OK. Let me take the last one and then come to the first – the end. Why not the – why not unity such as in Libya? Look, I don't think you can bring people around – coming from different backgrounds, ideological, cultural, different regions and so on to unite around an objective that is impossible to reach.

Unlike Libya, we have no accessible objective. The international community decided to take the 10, 12 Libyans that emerged as the opposition and to say, here is the council. Here are the people who are asking for intervention. We're going for it.

When you have a common objective, people rally around it. The common objective that we have is the overthrow of this regime. But where is the plan? There is no agreement outside Syria to help the Syrians reach what they need to reach. It takes much longer, it is much more difficult and therefore you will obviously see divisions about why are we failing, why is it not succeeding, who should we blame. Do we blame ourselves? Do we blame each other? I think these are very important reasons for the difference between Libya and Syria.

[01:28:39]

And if we don't have – if today we say, here is what is going to happen with the support of the international community, I am not afraid to say – and this does not delegitimize the Syrian revolution – that we need the international support, humanitarian and otherwise. We are fighting a war that is not against just a regime. We're fighting a war that other countries are fighting on the side of the regime, and unfortunately, we need to go further than simply say we will rely on our own forces. This is what is happening so far, but the cost is much too high and cannot be sustained without considerable damage on the – over the long term.

The second question about what is international community doing: I think it's not doing what it needs to do. And on the humanitarian in particular, there is no – not enough trust in Syrian local channels. If international organizations are unable to come into Syria, they are saying we are powerless. We are incapable of going into the region. The ICRC just stated that yesterday, saying we cannot respond to the needs on the ground. We haven't looked for Syrian channels to do so. And as the lady mentioned, there is a civil society. There are channels that can be used. We are using them. They're very difficult because it's very difficult to channel aid. But this has not been attempted by the international community. Instead, each country says we're relying on our own NGO or we will go to U.N. organization, and the U.N. organization itself cannot reach the people. So trust the Syrian people and use local channels is really the message.

To Obama he should do I think everything that the United States is capable of doing.
(Laughter.)

MS. : (Off mic.)

MR. MUASHER: That's right.

Dr. Semo?

MR. SEMO: Yeah. I'll start it from – (inaudible). U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East and especially after this – what's called Arab uprising is very crucial. So within one week they get Mubarak to leave. And if they wanted and they cooperated really with the legitimate demands of the Syrian people, they could have asked Assad leave – yeah, for one week, maybe two months they could have forced him to leave. Yeah.

And unfortunately, this is a right question about the military – humanitarian-military aid. And the question of the BBC reporter about distributing the humanitarian aid, unfortunately the

comparison – the Libyan people has elected – I don't agree with Bassma; they have elected their representative council, transitional council, transitional government. But ours is not elected. They are talking on behalf of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. They're not talking on behalf the Syrian people.

[01:32:03]

Therefore it's very difficult and complex. Who are you – (inaudible)? Who you giving military medicine? I'm a medical professional. To send it to who? And now there are deep concerns that the humanitarian help is going to the regime hands. (Inaudible) – some report about it, yeah? So therefore, I think it's very complex, that complex because the Syrian opposition is not speaking on behalf of the Syrian demand people, legitimate demand. And therefore it's difficult now. I do agree we have no representative.

And the model I'm talking about, Azaz (ph), this is what we did. Azaz (ph) which is (here /), very closed down border to the Kurdish – (inaudible). And in other areas, we have been working with local commanders of the FSA. We have respect and cooperate. Right, as I mentioned, this area is safe haven for the civilian people who are fleeing the violence, the children and the woman e staying in this area, and we protect them. Every single Kurdish family has four Arab families in our houses. This says we are proud to say we are united people. We share our sacrifice, and we share our fight. We did.

[01:34:43]

And now, because some is not organized, we don't know the FSA. Today it is one commander, next day, say, is another one. One is getting money from Saudia, so he does whatever the Saudis tell him to do. Then Azawaz (ph) is finally to Turkey, whatever Turkey says, you cannot negotiate. Have a central committee agreement with them to approach them and to engage with them.

And then there was the Ashrafia incident last week that provoked, right, and was an attempt to have a control of that civil relatively peaceful established Kurds – (inaudible) – will have told FSA Kurds, look, we're protecting our area, we're helping you, we can – yeah. Starting from this point, right, because you are targeted by the regime, wherever you go, they will bomb you. And these are civilian people. These are not military people. They provoke and they admit it, say, oh, we shouldn't do it, this one, and we should respect it, right, and the FSA should then go to the Kurdish area and provoke the Kurds, say, OK, we're taking that control because they want in – (inaudible) – announce it, oh, we took control all over Aleppo, and Ashrafia is under control of the FSA.

[01:35:12]

And this is a provocation of the – yeah, all the regional – Turkish, and to provoke the relative peaceful establishment – (inaudible) – the area, the – (inaudible). And Ashrafia and Sheikh Maqsud, as you know, are Aleppo people. And this – Ashrafia and Sheikh Maqsud now is the safe haven. This started from there. Let's help them. This is what we told them. This – (inaudible) –

with FSA now. So here you are, and we're going to help you. We help them. We saved eight of them when the regime was in Bustan Pacha, right, when they bombed even the regime, we got them through the Kurdish made them safe.

And this is what we should do now, cooperate and work together. And this is the way forward. So – (inaudible) – not the conflict now. So we started from Ashrafia, and we get to do another area – another area. But we have – we needed a central organized committee.

MR. : (Off mic.)

MR. SEMO: Or the Kurdish parties have – right – this way I'm giving you example.

MR. MUASHER: Can I – can I – can I –

MR. SEMO: (Inaudible) – example, just example –

MR. MUASHER: We really are running out of time.

MR. SEMO: Just example, the Kurdish saying – I mean, they have elected their representative. Why you don't approach them and talk to them? Why you talking to me? Because I'm friendly to you? I said this is a legitimate, elected body. So you talk to them. And this is a clear message for the opposition, for the regime, for everyone getting involved. The Kurds have elected their representative, and they can represent the Kurdish cause. And please, please approach them for any concern regarding the Kurds. Thank you.

[01:37:19]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you.

(Through interpreter.) Dr. Bassem, please go ahead, but try to be sure that we can give (time ?) for others.

MR. HATAHET: I'm talking about the Syrian people who were expecting the U.S. elections, and they were waiting for Obama, who has already succeeded. I hope that's he's going to take a decisive decision to sever the diplomatic relations with Syria and give them logistic and the military assistance in a timely manner, and then they can provide them with services for the civil societies that can take care of all the assistance that's going to be received by them in a right manner. Thank you.

Q: Hi. My name is – (name inaudible) – scholar with the Wilson Institute. I'm also managing editor of NOW Lebanon in Beirut.

[01:38:35]

My question is for Mr. Bassem. I'm going to ask in Arabic. (Through interpreter.) The civil government – we have heard so much about the civil government, but there are no specific dimensions of this. The Muslim Brothers in Istanbul have been talking about the civil society, but when they talk about the civil society, this means nonmilitary. So I'd like to know, do you think that the secular government should be the thing that we are looking for – not only civil or secular society, but we are talking about an overwhelming government. (In English) – and cracking down on the opposition and killing people. How do you think this will affect on Lebanon, and especially the Shia in Lebanon? We see the tension between the Sunni-Shia in Lebanon very much so. And how this is going to evolve, in your opinion?

MR. MUASHER: Gentlemen over here.

Q: (Off mic.) Thank you very much. Manser Isliman (ph) with Al Mayadeen TV.

All this discussion, there was no mentioning of Lakhdar Brahimi. (Scattered laughter.)

And we're talking about political solution in Syria. The reality on the ground is that the Syrian people and entire people of the Arab world and the rest of the world want the bloodshed to stop. You compare with Libya and other places – the reality after 20 months, that the regime has some base of support and have the military – most of the military with them. So any political solution must take into consideration some sort of intermediary period, like if you reject – if you reject Dayton kind, then you're looking for the ultimate solution that probably will never arrive if – when Syria still exists and the people still exist in Syria is if there is some sort of compromise that needs to be produced. How you can be for Syrian people and not looking for that compromise?

[01:41:15]

MR. MUASHER: Farah (ph).

Q: Thank you, Dr. Muasher. (Off mic) –

MR. MUASHER: Wait – if you can wait for the microphone.

Q: Thank you, Dr. Muasher. Farah Hatasi (ph). I would like to ask Mr. Alan, you know, you were – I'm sorry, I came a little bit late. But you were talking about the assistance. I think the – first of all, the Kurdish element inside the SNC – and I'm not defending the SNC here, but the Kurdish groups who joined the SNC elected their representatives at the SNC, and the president of the SNC is Kurdish, Dr. Abdulbaset Sieda.

[01:41:47]

And you're talking about the support of Saudis and Qataris and other regional powers to the resistance, to the Syrian freedom fighters, and the Kurdish party, want to call it, even though we see it's all Syrian – you are Syrian first, and this is the identity of every Syrian who's joining the revolution. But you are also getting the assistant from Mr. Barzani and from the Kurdistan of Iraq.

So it is fair, if you are getting that assistance, and the regime is getting the assistance from Iran and from Russia and from China – so it's fair for the resistance and the freedom fighters to ask for help.

I think, first of all, I would like to welcome Dr. Kodmani in town. We wanted her to be long time ago here. I think now we're talking about Obama and the new administration. I think we as Syrian can do a lot to change the current situation or the position of the U.S. government that they took before the election. I think the administration before the election – and now after the election – they should take another stance in really working hard and take back the leadership role and not leaving the vacuum that the Iranian and the other powers are taking control of the Syrian revolution, destiny and fate, whereas the United States took a step back. We want the United States to come forward and take back the leadership by supporting the Syrian freedom fighter, by supporting the initiative of Mr. Riad Seif and not claiming the credit of that initiative.

I was with Dr. Riad Seif and Dr. Bassma, and that initiative was on the table long time ago, several months ago. So many other national leaders inside – you know, within the revolution – they gave the – it's not only Dr. – Mr. Riad Seif initiative. A lot of Syrian leaders agree in the principle that it is time to have a unified political party that represents the Syrian revolution, away from all these differences. And I think it is a good chance for the Syrians now in Doha to unify against this initiative and take advantage of it. And I don't think the United States should take the credit, or any other power, showing that, hey, we want this. It is a Syrian national initiative, and we should stress the identity of this initiative. And I hope it will work. Thank you.

[01:44:12]

MR. MUASHER: Question from the back – I don't see people from the back. Yes, sir.

Q: Yes, my name is Greg Aftandilian with the Center for National Policy. My question deals with the Alawite community. It seems that if the Assad regime is going to fall, the Alawites themselves have to say to themselves, you know, this guy has taken us down a very dangerous road, and we have to break away from him. But it seems that they would only do that if they can be assured that there won't be any bloodletting after the fall of the Assad regime. So what assurances can the opposition give to the Alawite community that there wouldn't be this type of revenge attacks? Thank you.

MR. MUASHER: One more question.

Q: (Off mic.)

MR. MUASHER: Yes, please.

Q: Thank you. Tamara Rifai from Human Rights Watch. And my question is for the three panelists, because you've all touched upon the increased level of violence, and we all have reports about the more sectarian nature of the violence. You've touched a bit about mechanisms that should be put in place, including justice, but you have touched very little on the concept of accountability. In view of the impunity that is reigning now in Syria from all parts, really, because

we've seen violations from all parties, and this is not a comparison, is this at the center of your thinking for a transition into a Syria where the wounds could heal, like Dr. Kodmani is saying? Because for Human Rights Watch, this is at the center of the thinking of how you can bring justice and how you might be able to deter some of the atrocities happening now if people knew they would be held accountable. Thank you.

[01:46:02]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you. I will give each panelist strictly three minutes, and then we – we're already 15 minutes above – beyond the scheduled time. So Bassma.

MS. KODMANI: (Off mic) – difficult to answer seriously any of these issues.

Look, I think the stability for Lebanon and return to normal life is dependent on how things end in Syria. I would say we have a nonmanagement of the Syrian crisis so far and an accumulation of mistakes and missed opportunities and neglect. And you know, that can lead to the – to the worst disasters in history. I mean, World War I could have been prevented if three or four good diplomats had just defused the tension that was building and avoid the aggressive ones who were pushing for it. And the results it the millions of dead. We can go to the worst with this if it's not managed.

[01:47:09]

The Syrian crisis has not been managed so far. The dynamics inside, the negative dynamics, the dangerous dynamics are just developing, unraveling without any mitigation, I would say, by any serious initiative from outside.

The – Lakhbar Brahimi's role – based on what he can do to bring about a political settlement. He is back to discussing and defending the Geneva document. It is not a resolution. It is only a document. And the Russians have said once more to Mr. Brahimi three days ago, we will not accept that this becomes a resolution under Chapter 7. They are not, so far, really serious about this document.

So if it was to be taken seriously, it should become a resolution of the U.N. Security Council and be a basis for a political settlement. Instead, we have not seen that happen. So I don't think we can really discuss it seriously as the basis.

This being said, I think reassuring communities in Syria, whether they are Alawites or others, is absolutely key. And doing that is not easy when you are faced with a strategy of constant attempts to tear apart the social fabric and the political fabric of the country, but mainly the social fabric. If you want to reassure Alawites while they are committing – while the regime has mobilized militias based not only on Alawites – these are Alawites and Sunnis. The militias of the shabiha in Syria unfortunately are – or fortunately are mixed, completely mixed. So we can't say these are only Alawites. But they are definitely very afraid.

[01:48:58]

What we can – what can be done is – yes, it is including in documents; yes, it's including them in the political opposition. But it's also now developing plans for protecting the sensitive areas in the country to prevent any massacres, because I think it – 1 percent of determined people in the country can jeopardize what 99 percent want for the country by one or two massacres, and we will be faced with outrage and fear and so on.

One last point: I think if we are reassuring – if we are reassuring communities, we should also reassure political groups. There is a big section of Syrians who are affiliated, willingly or out of need, to the Baath party, but there are also some Baathists who believe genuinely that there was a modern, progressive ideology for this country, and it turned – and it was deviated from. This is their beliefs, whether we agree, we – this is political differences. So this is perfectly legitimate. These people need to be reassured. And some of them are Alawites. Some are Christian, and some are Sunnis.

But those Alawites very often – I often say that – they believe – they want to be Baathist. They don't want to be reassured as Alawis; they want to be reassured as having been Baathist and that this is not a shame to have been a Baathist, or a crime. Therefore when we look at the silent communities in Syria, we also need to look at them as employees of the public sector, Baathists, private businessmen who also – a prominent Alawi businessman is a businessman – doesn't care so much about being reassured as an Alawi; he wants to be reassured about his interests, and he comes and negotiates his interests with the opposition. So you should be also aware that – don't look at our societies as just a collection of communities. We also have these social and economic interests that can sometimes be more important.

Thank you.

[01:51:06]

MR. MUASHER: Thank you so much.

Dr. Bassem.

MR. HATAHET: I'd like to also define the civil state as a state that has all legitimate rights of citizenship, political, economic rights as well as social, a state that has civil societies, where a citizen feels full freedoms, not as a minority but to be within a framework of the civil society system. This is the state that what we aspire for, you'd like to call the secular state. We would like to call it a civil – the constitutional state also.

So I – assure the Alawites – I would say that the main issue with the Alawite community – there are a large number of them that support the regime, whether they serve in the government or in the military or they support them financially or by relations. There's very clearly – any deviation, any person who will split from this regime are very welcome. So recently one Alawite female officer dissented, and now she is part of the opposition.

So thank you. Thank you for your brief remarks, Dr. Bassma, Dr. Alan. And – (inaudible) –

[01:52:58]

MR. SEMO: (Off mic) – I love your comments. I love your questions. I would just take a second – nothing – and address them for you. I do agree with the lady, right. The Kurds as one of the questions or comments – considering Kurds as immigrants – yeah, some as immigrants living in – (inaudible) – statement as well. And this – yeah – they are immigrants – if they are immigrants – and they are happily to be supported and go back to the origin, which is Kurdistan. But they're not coming – they're immigrants in Damascus, but they're not immigrants the country. (Inaudible.)

MR : (Off mic.)

MR. SEMO: Right. Sorry, you said your comment – I'm just answering. Yeah, this is a question. Right, they will – they are – sorry –

MS. : They are not immigrants – (off mic) –

[01:53:48]

MR. SEMO: I mean, I'm asking – this gentleman said, is immigrant – (inaudible) – said as well – same as immigrant as in France – Algerian and the Morocco in France. So this is statement of – (inaudible) – was clear. So the political statement – I do agree, and I mention Lakhdar Brahimi. They said we missed that appointment, that six-point peace plan. We were talking about war. This is the peace plan. And we missed that one. And now they realized that they missed that opportunity, and then trying to go to that opportunity via Geneva – yeah, recommendation or advice – (inaudible) – we consider the Geneva – and we want it to be as resolution, a U.N. resolution, despite from Russians or other people, because it's a comprehensive and a democratic – fair representation of the Syrian people. Thank you.

MR. MUASHER: Thank you.

[01:54:46]

Before we end, let me just remind you of the way forward. We're going to take a 15-minute break for coffee. Then we'll have a session on the socio-economic challenges facing Syria both now and in a post-Assad regime. At lunch we have the deputy assistant secretary of state, Liz Dibble, give us the U.S. view. And we're still trying to get Ahmad Ramadan, who is probably being elected now in Doha. But we're still trying to get in the VC to hear their views. And then the afternoon session will be on political Islam and what is going on, also the rise of jihadist groups in Syria, et cetera.

So with that, please join me in thanking the panelists for an excellent session, and – (applause) – we'll take a 15-minute break.

[01:55:40]

(END)