



جسور للدراسات
JUSOOR for STUDIES



**THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN SYRIA :
THE AVAILABLE CHOICES IN THE CRITICAL
INFORMATION**



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Introduction

The Syrian event forms a political dilemma in whole area and seems to be a dilemma for the whole world as a result for the Unprecedented Complex Interests for actors in the region and their loss of the capacity to give a single solution or to impose their own solutions

But this dilemma takes a deeper dimension when we speak about the Syrian political opposition because they try to balance fighting, conflicting and competing actors and try to balance military actors who are conflicting themselves and connected to the international and regional interests at the same time and also they try to keep their place in the fast changing events and searching for an attitude that can be acceptable from a larger category than their targeted category.

This research tries to read the opposition situation based on the current information and to estimate the possible attitude for all political and military opposition parties.

No events.... the absence of noise and fading in the scene

The Syrian opposition scene was very poor in political events during the first seven months of 2016 and it there were not a lot of events like previous years, neither in the announced internal disputes nor the rapprochement between the various political entities.

Anas Al-Abdah was elected as a president for the National Coalition on 5/3/2016 to replace the former president Khaled Khouja, and unlike previous elections, there are not any tension or problems between the components of the coalition in election event and the president was chosen in a consensual, for the first time in the history of the coalition and the National Council before it.

The heaviest electoral battels were the battle of choosing a new prime minister for the interim government to replace the former prime minister Ahmad Tu'mah, where there were a lot of clashes and tension between the political groups and the candidates themselves in standing for election and the election process and the election event ended choosing Dr. Jawad Abu Hatab as a prime minister on 16/5/2016 and granting the confidence for his government on 11/7/2016.

Dr. Abu Hatab formed his government from ministers live inside Syria and this government started holding its meeting in Idleb countryside and got popular positive impulse.

However, the battle of the government presidency formed in a large part an attempt from political bodies in the coalition to complete a previous political conflicts rather than an original conflict for the presidency which turned into inactive stage practically.

The supreme commission for negotiation had a series of changes because of resignation

and dismissal some members, the commission accepted the resignation of senior negotiator and the representative of Al-Islam Army faction (Mohammed Alloush) on 29/5/2016.

The silent conflict

Absence of announced noise between various political bodies in and out the coalition does not mean stop or calm the conflicts. It shows in some dimensions the situation of silent tension within the political opposition.

The conflict over the attending and influence of the national coalition on one hand and the supreme commission of negotiation on the other hand formed the clearest features for the previous months in 2016 .The commission of negotiation fill the political presence in Geneva before and after holding the conference on 22/1/2016 especially through its president Dr. Riad Hijab and its official spokesman Dr.Riad Nassan Agha with a weak presence for the National Coalition in the political events and its turning into a component of the commission.

There is silent tension between the component of the coalition, the leaders of the first raw almost withdrawal from the political events to self-retreat or to establish their own political projects.

This withdrawal maybe because of their believing that this stage is not important for the National Coalition but this does not mean that the coalition is not important for them or they are ready to leave it.

Determinates of the opposition's performance

The performance and presence of the political oppositions associated with several internal and external determinations that contribute to define the oppositional work features in each stage.

The international environment

The Syrian situation in the last years turned into announced internationalization especially with the Russian direct intervention in Syria in the last quarter of 2015.

The internationalization reflects in the Syrian situation presence in the international meetings and thus the presence of the opposition in their institutions, but the Russian direct intervention effects the form of the opposition presence and representative because Russia pushed heavily to join the interior opposition as it called them and to give a greater role to the coordination commission and the democratic union party.

The conference of Geneva gives an important opportunity to the political opposition represented by Supreme Commission for Negotiation to active their presence and role by

supporting from international and regional parties such as united states of America, Saudi Arabia and turkey .But the conference stops and the inflexible political solutions proposals for the rest of the year as it seems heavily led to limit presence of the commission and this situation maybe will continue until the new international conference in 2017 at least.

The regional environment

The regional actors play a main role in activating or inactivating the political institutions of the opposition as well they have similar roles in the military field

The environment of the Syrian political opposition was affected by changing the priorities of some main actors regionally (priority of the Yemeni file in Saudi Arabia, priority of the internal file and Kurdish file in Turkey...etc.) and affected also by changing the relative importance for the main opposition's institutions (National Coalition, Interim Government, Supreme Commission for Negotiations, Coordination Commission and others).

change of priorities in the countries of the region led to a great weakness in the available financial resources especially the government that did not get any financial support since 2015¹, and also the coalition did not have enough resources and the available recourses are just for the current expenses without the capability to achieve any projects or support any other components.

And the coup attempt took place in turkey 15/7/2015 and the Turkish -Russian rapprochement especially after the coup attempt maybe will lead to change in the Turkish government priorities towards the Syrian case but this change still unclear and maybe need several months to be clear and obvious.

The local field events

The achievements of the armed opposition factions and their failures, as well as the events and violations (like huge massacres) affect the Syrian presence in the political and media scene, where the military achievements give a direct push for the political opposition and the humanitarian events enable them to do campaigns that achieve the presence they want.

2016 year until the end of the seventh month witnessed relatively slowdown in the military achievements of the opposition factions comparing to progress of the Kurdish forces and militias supported by them, and progress of regime forces and the foreign militias that supported them. also this year witnessed several failures for the opposition forces which led to decrease the political opposition discourse.

Any real field progress can restore the vitality to the political opposition environment²

1. The interim government got a financial support from the national coalition about 25 thousand dollars after the election of Dr. Jawad Abu Hatab

2. The president of the national coalition Anas Al-Abdah and the prime minister Dr. Jawad Abu Hatab held a common press conference on 8/8/2016 to speak about the field progress for the opposition factions

as happened in breaking the siege of eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo on 6/8/2016 but at the same time this progress will increase the opportunities for the factions to be in the political field and thus to weaken the opposition institutions that somehow based on the oppositional move.

The internal competition and conflicts

Competition and conflicts between the components of the political opposition and the competition between them and the military components play a main role in defining roles and the relative importance for each political component.

The conflict and competition between the National Coalition and the supreme commission of negotiation form the clearest form of conflict inside the political institution of the opposition where both of them are competing to represent the same audience unlike the coordination commission for example.

The commission represented mainly by its president; presents successive political attitudes trying to repositioning in a competent political role for the coalition away from the functional role that connects to its formation, also the commission arranges for continuous meetings with the military factions and its continuous comments on the field and on political developments in clear intersections with the role of the coalition.

At the same time, it does not seem that the active armed factions will actually recognize the coalition if they are not in it, and they did not consider the military members in the coalition as a representative for them and all the regular meetings between the national coalition and these factions failed to fill this gap between the two parties³.

The presence of some big factions in Supreme Commission for Negotiation which happened because of a great pressure on the big factions when the commission formed, does in Aleppo, in their first common appearance, to be as an enhancement for the political opposition presence according to the field progress.

see: National coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition, the coalition: the rebels moved from under sieged to set the land and human free ,12/8/2016. <http://goo.gl/cOa6yp>

3. The coalition arranged for several meeting during the last four months with the military factions attended by: Al-Islam army, Ajnad Al-Sham Islamic Union, AL-Sham Corps ,Thwar Al-Sham battalions, Homs Corps, AL-Yarmouk Army, Ansar Al-Islam front , Al-Ababel army , Fa Stakem Kama Oumert gathering ,division 24 Infantry, Al-Habeb Al-Moustafa brigades , division 69, the free judicial council , Idleb province council , Aleppo province council, Damascus countryside province council, Hama province council, Jound Badr 313 brigades , Amoud Houran division , Al-Moutaaz Billah brigade ,Homs province council, the first corps, the southern battalions integrations' brigade, Fursan Al-Haq brigade, the division 101.

See National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces, the statement of the first consultative meeting between the coalition, factions and revolutionary forces ,28-4-2015

<http://goo.gl/NUECda>

not mean that the factions accepted the form and the representation and does not ensure that the factions will withdrawal anytime based on the field information that will be with them when they give a new appointment for the negotiation.

If the coalition and the commission have not been able to give solutions that help to build the trust with the factions, the factions will establish their own political entity sooner or later which will be a real competitor for the coalition and commission together because this entity has the relative control on the ground which the coalition and the commission did not have.

What's next?

The political opposition institutions face difficult choices in the next stage after the stage of inflexible and within the last months.

It is expected the tension between the coalition and Supreme commission for negotiation will continue and will affect the legitimacy and presence of the them.

It does not think that international scene will witness any serious call for any political solution before the spring of 2017 which means that the opportunities for both institutions will be initially limited in the short and medium term.

The information indicates that main military factions will form a common body which will represent them politically supporting from some regional countries and this is because either this body will push the military solution they want or to dominate the role of the other political institutions which means taking the legality from both the coalition and the commission if they have not been able to deal with this information effectively and proactively.

The common body for the military factions will help to enhance the position of the coordination commission in the political opposition environment as a representative for the categories that the factions and their supporters do not represent it in contrast to the coalition and the supreme commission for negotiation.

The available choices: Recommendations

The National Coalition

1. The political opposition and the coalition specifically should make a radical reform in the structure and components to ensure a real and participatory representative to stop their searching for participatory representation out the

coalition which will appear mostly in a project to establish their own political body. if this body establishes, it will increase the diversity between the political and military components and will not be good for the political opposition directly and will not be good for the military opposition indirectly. The required restructuring process includes giving the main factions the right of military representation in the Coalition and giving them seats with guarantor or disabled majority.

2. The national coalition should make a serious review for the role of the interim government which was a victim for the political games and if the coalition does not want or does not able to support the interim government financially, cancelling or disabling it by a formal decision will be one of the choices and it will be less expensive than the continuing of it in the inactive situation that will left bad affects for the government, the coalition and the political opposition as a whole. If the interim government move to inside Syria it will give a political opportunity and an important process for the coalition to prove its presence inside Syria and provide obvious services for people and even to improve his situation and image among the Syrian public opinion. This opportunity should be invested.
3. Coalition needs to announce a clear political attitudes which enable it to distinguish his presence from the media institutions .the weakness in these institutions lead to the absence of the clear attitudes from the problematic issues and its announced political attitudes just limit to public statements and seems to be through it like trying to gain the public opposition more than expressing the political attitudes .there were important events without any action such as when Al Nusra front announced renamed and disengagement from Al-Qaeda ,the declaration of the factions in Aleppo to give the name of the captain Ibrahim Al-Yousef to their operation, in addition to other events.
4. The coalition and the interim government has been unable to persuade the supporting countries of the possibility to supervise the executive and life affairs within areas controlled by armed opposition factions so, the countries and their institutions support the civilian institutions in these areas directly or encouraging the factions which supported by these countries to facilitate the civilian affairs or establish institutions to do that .this issue needs intensive efforts by the coalition and the government to fix all what lead to this failure and trying to bypass them in the next stages.

Supreme Commission for Negotiations

1. The political opposition needs to arrange the intergrade relations to ensure sharing roles and positions between the coalition and the supreme commission for negotiations clearly, so the coalition take roles in media and policy while the commission take the functional roles for negotiations.
2. The commission should produce its own essential system which define the mechanisms to make decisions, choosing its supreme commission and its president and how to expend the commission and membership circulation.
3. The commission will face a crisis about the representation of the armed factions on it in the first next event if there are not an open dialogue with the factions about the representations (size and shape).

The armed factions

1. Most of parties in the political scene agree on the legitimate right of the factions to participate in the political decision but the presence of these factions through their own body away from the current bodies will not give her the political representation they want because these factions lack the political experience firstly and lack the international recognition secondly which cannot impose the obliged policy alone. Access to a common formation with the coalition that ensure an active participation in making decisions for the factions will be an ideal choose for factions so they do not bear the responsibility of the political decisions that they do not have their tools or the ability to control in their information.
2. The factions cannot present the negative messages to the international community continually, believing that they can impose their choices upon it by their weapons and the support that they get from some of the regional countries can provide them with support and protection later. These factions need for a comprehensive review of their political discourse and the common work with the political and civilian entities inside and outside Syria which enable the factions to rationalize their political performance and provide a common base to help them integrate into any future political solution.



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