

Study of the document of Alawite initiative





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TURKEY - GAZIANTEP
info@jusoor.co
www.jusoor.co

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Introduction

The British channel, BBC displayed excerpts of (document of alawite initiative) on April 3, 2016, which written by unidentified Alawite intellectuals to determine their cultural identity, features of Alawite's self, and the intellectual and political domain in the historic sequence they believe.

They are seeking for the first time to determine the alawite identity and to clarify their explicit attitude from the major issues about self, identity, Syrian homeland and perception of God.

The document mixed between religion (Alawite) and political (intellectuality), and if some questioned the fact of Document's belonging to a sectarian intellectually, it has been confirmed that it was written by academic politicians which know the truth and history of alawite religion by extrapolation and tracking, and the challenge remains in its credibility due to the acceptability of this document and its representation in Alawites in Syria.

The document is important due to the issuance by individuals represented some of the sectarian internally who they had the courage to talk about the mysterious sectarian situation of alawite which is similar to most of Levantine minorities with the historical religious dimension.

The document was explicit when talked about self and identity and this maybe reflects an urgent need for the Sect to present an accurate definition for itself after the confusion over the past decades, **beginning** from the advisory opinion (fatwa) of Mousa Al-Sadr, the leader of Lebanese Shiite to consider Alawites as a part from Shiite Muslims, and this advisory opinion is considered a political fatwah and does not based on the religious content and issued especially for Hafez Al-Assad, and **ending** by the Shiite Iranian semi-full guardianship on the decisions of Alawites after delivering Syria to the Iranian controlling, security and politically in exchange for their support since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution.

The document is important also in terms of its issuance after 5 years of Syrian revolution, which showed Alawites as a defendant party by standing with the regime clearly, involving in blood, and supporting the regime as an eternal support, and they have the larger losses of war with regime and supporting groups against the rebel people.

Issuance of the document in this time maybe due to revisions interact within the sect, and try to find a map for future of Syria and sect which most of its young were killed in the battle without any clear goals except

some provocative mottos invented by system to keep its supporters, what led to involve the sect in Syrian blood with regime.

So, the issuance of this document expresses some wise voices within the sect which rejected what happened in Syria but they are not able to declare their attitude due to the fear of regime, and the response of alawite sect that rejected the Syrian revolution.

This document appeared in critical political time for Alawites which synchronize with the clear decisions of security council about formation of the transitional provision and restructure of military, security and other Syrian institutions within the Russian pressure on Syrian regime to make political change, or the Russian attempt to impose a new constitution for Syria.

So, writers of the document realized that the era of what can be called (making Syria an alawite state which was continuing for a half of century ago) will disappear and the political alawite and attempts to full controlling on Syria are likely to decline, and thus Alawites must make a real and radical change to ensure to stay as one of the Syrian components, especially with the loss of young in the sect.

Who prepared the document?

The problematic approach for who studied the document is to search for the individuals who adopted and drafted the document to express their movement which started billowing in the sect.

The unknown writers of this document is the main weakness point, but the researcher can notice three qualities in this document:

Religious background, scientific degree and political vision.

The religious background appears in the broad knowledge of Islamic religious principles within their various branches , especially the alawite one , and through emphasizing that Alawites belonged to the cleric (Hamdan al-Khasibi ,unlike what was known that they are belonging to Mouhammed Ben Numaeer Al-Nusairi, and exploration in the intellectual sources of the cognitive Islam , the theorizing about the return (reincarnation) concept of time and talking for the first time about the concept of secret , and history which forced Alawites to make it a base for practice in successive historical stages.

The scientific background appears in the holistic view of the event, the intelligent sentences, the spirit of esteem, mentioning the historical details, narration of the chronology of Alawites origins and back in history for the first points until the separation from the others.

The political vision can be noticed in the document adoption of equality, freedom, citizenship, and in calling for adopting the secular like the democracy, the intense concern for the national concept in integrations and theorizing of the state to manage the differences and other concepts addressed by the document.

Jusoor for Studies center was seeking to communicate and meet some writers of the document, discussion sessions were held and the view of the center was proved about the nature of intellectual, scientific and religious symbolic of the document's writers.

The general trend of these writers seems to be very close to the trend of the Syrian poet, Mouhammed Suleiman Al-Ahmad who was famous as Badwi Al-Jabal, and this trend is Arabism with its historical identity and Alawite with its religious identity which believes in alawite as a component of Syrian civilizational identity, and it has a cultural symbolic and reference role in the sect which led Assad's regime to marginalize its symbols, excluded them politically and even persecute them.

Form and wording of the document

The document was written in a unique drafting and carried the spiritual knowledge in terms of meaning, complexity and symbolic significance, the deep knowledge of its writers in religious symbols and words of minorities with knowledge mystical dimension which are concepts different from the clear religious texts.

The document also is free of any Qur'anic or prophetic texts, and only mentioned the cognitive Islam's paths, and used some philosophical gesture and expressions.

In terms of wording, a various style has been used to change places of words in deliberate attempt to show the eloquence of the document and the strong words used.

The strange words were also used to make the document as a historical statement.

this linguistic affectation maybe hides that writers' want to emphasize their Arab identity, as well as the Arab identity of the sect and to refuse all Attempts which deny their Arabism.

Analytical study

The Beginning of the document drew attention to the idea that the document is not a call for religious reform both in beliefs or methods, so the first sign can be read is the tone of esteem which will appear later in more than a place.

Alawites aims to (according to the document) to declare themselves by themselves, not using others which is consistent with the current situation in Syria where (truth and emergence) are titles for this stage.

An intimation maybe understood that the others are not only responsible for the negative impression which formed over the centuries about the Alawites, the document said publicly: " we announce ourselves pure from dissimulation and the privacy which leads to concealing from others and we will go to the community"

The beginning of the document describes the Syrian territory using eloquent, unfamiliar and not contemporary language saying " places for those which have various characteristics, according to religion, nationality, tribe and clan".

to dispel the public concern which might raise by this definition about the stability of community characterized by pluralistic, the document considers the state as a tool for Neutralizing disputes and reducing its impacts on the public affairs, "the state ensures a common safe and prosperous life for different people " which is " the system to solve disputes in the primary components of society"

This definition of state is similar to the definition of politics as an art to manage differences among components of society peacefully and a tool to prevent using violence.

The document divided into three themes , the first theme entitled : Alawites and themselves " which talked about alawite as an intellectual identity , the second theme entitled "Alawite and Syria" which talked about the Alawites vision of Syrian homeland , history of its formation and their point of view about its future , while the third theme entitled " Alawites and God" which discussed the alawite doctrine , its features , the differences between alawite, Sunna and Shia and the its own concept of God.

First theme

Alawites and themselves

The document in its first article determined a third way for Alawites in terms of religious identity, so they do not belong to traditional Islam which

the document considers it as a base to Follow the Sunni doctrine, and do not belong to the mental Islam which is the base to follow the Shiite doctrine, but they belong to the cognitive Islam according to the document.

The document was keen to characterize Alawites and their own religious mood which is different from the Sunni majority and Shiite religiosity where the public opinion that not aware of this issue are always linking them to it.

In article 2 ,The document publicly stating its rejected this popular supposition in linking the Alawites to Shia , and it explicitly rejected the advisory opinions which inflicted Alawites by Shia which bring us back in the political memory for famous advisory opinion of Mousa Al-Sadr who considered Alawites as Muslims and they are a sect who follow the Twelver school of Shia Islam (Ithna Asharyya) contrary to the reference of Qom which considered Alawites as a rogue band of Islam , to give the legitimacy for Hafez Al-Assad rule in Syria by making him a Shiite Muslim because the Syrian constitution provides that the religion of the president must be the Islam.

The declaration of new Alawites come to dispel fears of Sunni majority which remembered the decay of Arab Shiite component in Iraq within the Iranian project and look with concern to the Assad-Iran alliance and to the foreign military forces in the country, and the new Alawites proved what was said in the last period about grumbling within the alawite sect from the Iranian domination of the Syrian leadership's decision.

According to the document, Alawites will stop feeling that they will disappear and the new feeling will be (solidarity with the majority) which was associated with their historical formation, especially in a place with religious identities' quarrels.

The writers of document introduce themselves as (commissioners of people's consciences) in the sect, and (they are licensed to manage its fate) and they are from the elite of the sect for symbolism of document's writers, and the indirect declaration that the reference of these writers is to sect either religiously or socially without additional determining and without mentioning any name absolutely which grant a value to the document.

Despite our understanding for ignoring names in this security circumstances and danger but that would allow questioning the validity of the document and its issuance by Alawites on the other hand.

So, the document refused the (minority word) because it was rejected by people to remove this idea by Disproven it, where the rebels sought to establish a democratic life.

Although the document confirmation for the differences between Sunni and Shiite, but it emphasized rejection of minority word in the next article and to stop it being a defined element for them.

The document also talked about the famous issue of name which is (Nusairiun) because it is a name rejected by new Alawites due to its indications and mistakes.

Mouhammed Ben Nousair is not the founder of alawite sect as we know, but it was Al-Husain Ben Hamdan Al-Khasibi according to the document, and he was the guide of Alawites in their ritual. Thus, the story of Alawites' appearance completed and it considers the document as a right for Alawites.

The document is showing the story of Alawite evolution as one of the human understanding ways of Islam, which appeared within an environment that considered it as a Defection led to persecution. So, Alawites were isolated and seclusion.

The document did not talk about only the story of formation, but also admitted bravely that there is exaggerate suggestion for the oppressed photo for the sect, and welcomed this situation, but they attributed this to the impacts of isolation and the human nature, and the document described the base using in the issue of (oppressed Alawites) as the half truths.

By this admission plus the exaggeration and welcoming, the alawite narrative has involved myths of founding that means the Sunni majority is innocent from the various charges against it.

We will find this in the article 16 that talked about the advisory opinion of Ibn Taiemyah and Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali.

The article 16 admitted that the famous advisory opinion of ibn Taiemyah and Abu Hamed Al-Gazali were not applied during more than seven centuries except some limited applications despite the capability of Sunni majority to apply it , and also admitted that Alawites are no longer interested in these advisory opinions both to protest on others or the sense of existential concern.

Regarding to the idea of persecution of Alawites, the document announced to stop invoking their historical oppression in forming their collective sense in a dramatic time when the other Syrians revolted and the power of right anger erupted which is the only sign for the Syrian revolution in the document.

Second theme

Alawites and Syria

In article 17

The document talked about the Syrian revolution for the first time, and approved that the whole Alawites sect has not been involved in the Syrian revolution due to the high frankness of the document, and this admission is an approval which some of Sunni majority did not announce it due to the sensitivity in raising some sectarianism for the revolution and giving an impression that it is only for Sunni sect.

The document also suggested a radically revision for a plan to establish new Syria due to all what had been established since the departure of Ottomans to the departure of French did not accomplished by only Syrians, and Syrians did not choose any of them such as borders, nationality and the national flag.

So, we need reconstruction or review by commissioner popular council.

We can notice that the document talked about the emergence of Syrian state just from the departure of ottomans in 1920 to the departure of French in 1946 without mentioning the rule of Assad that had the same problems such as preventing popular decision and the absence of political action for all Syrians.

This notes will be with us during studying all articles of the document to conclude that it did not mention the authoritarian rule of Assad.

In the article 21, the document attributed each disaster in Syria to the problem of " national integration" which the state as a tool of managing disputes to solve it, but not in a way lead to enhance disputes or to remove disputes by force or denying it by lies because these are useless tools.

here the document also did not mention the administration of Assad the son and the father to the issue of disputes between Syrians.

The document condemned and warned from what exactly done by Assad's family for a half of century, where the sectarianism issues in Syria were ignored under the protest of protecting the national unity and were put as a "silent " or "forbidden issues to interactive far away from the public deal, and it was produced in the recently events.

Due to this issue, each voice that rejected the subservience to the demand of power was suppressed.

The document also overlooked the role of Assad in imposing "compulsion" on Syrians, and according to the document " the Syrian territory just lived the compulsion in the form of Emirates, Sultanates and Kingdoms, and in the phase of modern state until now just lived in ambiguous by the authoritarian regimes " thus without defining these authoritarian regimes.

If it was possible to understand the reason of disputes between Islamic sects as a reason prevent consideration the Islam as an official religion for the state (despite the possible controversy about this point) but it is difficult to accept the linkage of document between the foreign concepts and the reasons to adopt Islam as an official religion of state.

In the article 23, the document talked about the secularism, the document called for secularism because it will lead to activate the values of equality, freedom and citizenship and due to the separation of religion from the state.

But the document remedied by saying that the separation is functional not radically or oppositely.

By long definition, the document explained its opinion about secularism as it rejects the demands of it without the original concept of it which is accommodates between religious belief and the rules that affect the religions and its variety.

The document just mentioned the secularism as a separation of religion from the state functionally not radically, which would include the document within the tolerant Anglo Saxon approach in dealing with the religious affairs compared to the francophone extremist vision against any public religious appearance.

As in the first theme which the document confirmed the innocence of Sunni from advisory opinions that said the Alawite are unbelievers, the document discharged Sunni again from any act committed against the Alawites ,accusing the strangers from invaders and greedy with a clear and explicit refusal to make (scars and complaining) the basis for the faith of alawite.

It can be assumed that the document exposed the Shiite that they based on Karbala style with crying and tragic, so the Alawites according to the hint of document were not agree with the Shiite performances and the rituals did not suit them because they have their own rare rituals.

The second theme in the document talked about the Alawites and God, so it was expected to talk about the Alawites entities in Syria during the modern history, especially in the period of the French mandate.

The article 25 has reviewed in details the history of Alawites states and countries which established by the occupation without consulting the population ,from the independent government in Lattakia on august 31 , 1920 to the region of coast within the Syrian Federal which has 5 regions on July 1,1922 , then the state of Alawites on December 5 , 1924 , and the government of Lattakia with its own constitution and flag on May 14, 1930 , and ending with being a part of Syrian state on October 5 , 1936 which is the birthday of Syrian state within union with one flag and one constitution.

The document will mention this date later.

Third theme

Alawites and God

This theme which entitled (Alawites and God) determined what is the alawite religion, definition of its main ideas, main concepts, resources and birth.

The article 28 emphasized for the second time on the (the independence of Alawites from Shiite and Sunni) because Alawites is cognitive sect, not traditional as Sunni and not mental as Shiite.

Alawite did not rely on Shiite, and to prove this idea, the document said that the independence of alawite is original and not a result for development or change in the alawite themselves.

This declaration the strongest to enhance the independence from Shiite and Sunni. which is not depend on the methods and tools only, but also depend on the goal, so what is important for cognitive Islam is (how is god)? but the important issue for shitte and Sunni is what comes from God" to receive and work accordingly.

The article 29 denied the allegations that link between Shiite and Alawite, because the some common formal, modern or original resources did not make the alawite as Shiite.

Then, the articles came successively to clarify the fact of Alawite religion as: the belief on secret which was hidden in the heart of god creatures" and their vision of creator and creatures, and their inner interpretation for

Quranic texts, then the document explained the meaning of esoteric to avoid confusion.

The esoteric means the inner interpretation of Holy Quran, despite the adoption that the Quran of Muhammed with the its text in hands of all Muslims is the only holy book for Alawites, but they took some more ideas and concepts from the other religions and doctrines.

With an expressive conclusion, the document emphasized that it came on behalf of the Alawites and declared that " reform the alawite identity, issued by this document is the reflection of the collective conscience for Alawites".

Strengths of the document

The precedence in raising the Alawite perception of self and identity

The document initiated to detailed view for the vision of Alawites about themselves, country and religious concept which is unprecedented move especially regarding to what entrenched in the collective consciousness us that they have dissimulation. This disclosure coincides with the truth and emergence after the Syrian revolution despite that the document was late for 5 years.

The document stopped the negative perspectives which were formed through ages about the Alawites religion bravely in defining the homeland and self, and tried to limit the impressions about Alawites attitude towards the French colonization of Syria and their demand of separation.

Eloquence of the document and coherence of its language

The document filled with the eloquence words and strong phrases, and the style of writing has the characteristics of middle ages style on the one hand, and the philosophic style on the other hand, which gave the document strength and momentum.

but what seems to be a strengthen can be considered weaknesses because the wording of the document made it as a document for elites, not a public and available for people which will discussed in the next theme.

Tone of esteem

Throughout the document which consisting of 12 pages, the reader barely find a flatter phrase, and the document is almost without any apologetic or justification tone.

In the paragraph of (review the Alawites states) directly mentioned that these states were not outside the events in which lived by all other minorities such as Druze and some regions such as Aleppo and Damascus had autonomy with their own flag and constitution (the mentioning just to make the reader feel that the writers did not Sorry or Regretful.

In third theme, when talking about the Alawites own religious concepts ,and this was not associated with demands to understand or accept , but it was descriptive without interesting in the assessments of others.

Emphasis on the Syrian national

The document emphasized the issue of homeland and the Syrian nationality in several places, which is a positive thing in it , especially in the light of the separatists calls by some religious trends that called to establish Islamic Emirates or by the supporters of democratic union party to establish a self-management cantons ,especially in light of the international demarcations about dividing Syrian to a several countries based on religious and ethnic classifications.

Weaknesses

Elitist of the document

The document cannot be regarded as a popular convention due to the convention usually writes by clear, explicit style and words and with less ambiguity than the document is, and also due to the ambiguity of some phrases and difficulty to understand, in addition to the philosophic style and the spiritual some times.

This make the document less popular which will not access to various popular categories as in conventions.

Clear removal of the Syrian revolution from the document

The document did not mention the great event in Syria¹ for 5 years which is the Syrian revolution.²

there is only positive sign on the document for the revolution in this phrase: the other Syrians revolted ...the power of right anger " and the document is empty from any mention to the revolution completely and surprisingly despite the great effect happened in minds, souls, construction and sociality which considered a weakness.

Ignore the attitude of Alawites towards Assad and (the attempts to make Syria an alawite state)

In light of the tone of esteem in the document, it was not expected that the document will mention the public alawite attitude which is supporting Assad during the years of revolution and the rule of two Assads.

in return, it was expected that document will mention it in bad way.

so, the truth which it tries to show is incomplete.

The document also did not mention even in just a sign, the issue of (attempts to make Syrian as an alawite state) and the centers of making decisions especially regarding to the security and military institutions.

the result was the marginalization of Syrian people.

ignoring these two issues despite the impacts from deprivation and exclusion will reduce the credibility of the document for Syrians.

If the implicit justification to ignore this issue is (suffering was for all Syrians, despite it was restricted to one component) , we can discuss to prove that mentioning this justification will be important to explain the role

1 a poll conducted by (Al-Yawm Al-Tali) which is a Syrian NGO based in Istanbul, about the opinion of Syrians on decentralization, the alawite sect was the most opponents of the idea" Al-Gumhuriya , October4,2016 . <http://aljumhuriya.net/35612>

22 Federalism is not a possible solution in Syria, the decentralization maybe the solution" Al-Yawm Al-Tali , April 26 2016 . <https://goo.gl/1AQFlr>

of Alawites and marginalization issues in the collective minds of Alawites but the total ignorance will be bad for those who were affected.

The unknown writers

The hidden names of writers can be understood within the current security conditions especially due to the Syrian regime was seeking to show Alawites as united sect and trying to hide the questions about validity of this situation, but the ignorance led to reduce the credibility because the weakness of the regime after 5 years of revolution and the greatest crisis in the modern world that it led to make the security justification is not persuasive especially with the adoption of the idea of openness, transparency and truth by writers.

Conclusion

Despite the weakness of the document, and the apathy of media but it may be considered as one of the constituent bases that can be adopted to know the currents that interact within the sect, and to know the inner discussions that resulted from it.

On the other hand, the document can be presented as an expression of the elites of the sect when a public national conference is held to exchange the points of views for the future of Syria after Assad.

Overall, the document contains many themes that contributed in more explanation for the Alawite sect regarding to its perceptions and concepts of self, and the vision of Syria in the future which led to remove all doubts that affected the current impression of the sect.

The challenge of the document is due to the time of issuance coincided by the great event which Syria will live when the war ends.

This challenge will be the great events and problems in all fields including the historical memory and the national narrative.

Although the weaknesses which the study has noticed will weaken the acceptance of the document and reduce the popular interaction with it, but it is very important with its strengths that indicates opinions of elites in the

alawite sect that decided after 5 years of revolution to introduce themselves after long and difficult rejection.

