

The Syrian Revolution: Will the presumed social unity be challenged in the post-Assad period?

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Panel: Between the Hammer and the Anvil? Minorities in a Transitional Region

1. Introduction:

Syria (or more precisely, historical Syria -*Bilad al-Sham*-, which comprises Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Syria) has, throughout its recent history, since the first roots of Arab nationalism against Ottoman rule were planted in its soil, been considered the heart of Arab nationalism. It was the famous Syrian Christian intellectual Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883) who wrote an article entitled “Loving one’s nation is part of one’s faith” (*Nafir Suriya*, 1860), where he identified the sense of belonging to one’s homeland with one’s religious doctrine. It was Syria where the first uprising against the Mandate system in the early twenties of the past century took place. It was Syria where the Baath Party, whose pan-Arab ideology rivaled that of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, was founded by both a Christian (Michel Aflaq, 1910-1989) and a Muslim (Salah al-Bitar, 1912-1980). Finally, It was Syria who, for the Assad rule’s legitimacy purposes, made the Palestinian cause part of its domestic policy and maintained the epithet of being the “last stronghold of Arabism” against the Zionist enemy (Israel) and formed the nucleus of the resistance axis (Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon).

When the Assad family came to power and set up a theoretically lay system, but which took into account important sectarian and religious aspects, nationalist sentiments were not abandoned, but became overshadowed by some latent sectarian tensions that will be explained in the following sections due to the disequilibrium that overcame traditional

social structures that had been maintained since the years before independence was achieved. As Caroline Donati¹ says,

“La disparition du nationalisme arabe profite à l’affirmation du sentiment national syrien. Les jeunes revendiquent une identité syrienne [...] Néanmoins, ce sentiment patriotique ne signifie pas une adhésion à la communauté nationale. ‘Il faut être à l’aise dans son pays pour parler de nationalisme’, explique un jeune ingénieur damascène. ‘La pensée nationaliste fonctionne par rapport à l’extérieur, lorsque le pays est en danger’. ‘Les syriens savent que leur pays ne leur appartient pas’, fait écho une autre étudiant.”²

In this sense, and being aware of this fact, the regime has described the popular uprising that began in March 2011 against its rule as an international conspiracy aiming at both interfering in Syria and the destabilization of the State (which “stands against Israel”, although no incursions towards the other side of the Golan frontier have been registered since 1973³). Whatever the truth of these claims, as a matter of fact, one of the main cleavages between the different political opposing groups is their support for or refusal of any kind of international intervention in the conflict⁴, mainly due to Syrian’s weariness of any foreign intervention in the country. To this we must add the fact that the regime has played over sectarian differences (something it has been doing for the past four decades) and has endlessly tried to provoke a civil war.

¹ Donati, Caroline (2009): *L’exception syrienne: Entre Modernisation et résistance*, La Découverte, Paris, pp. 339-340.

² “The disappearance of Arab nationalism benefits the Syrian national sentiment. Young people claim a Syrian identity [...]. Nevertheless, this patriotic sentiment doesn’t mean their adherence to their national community. ‘You must feel comfortable in your country to be able to speak about nationalism’, a young damascene engineer explains. ‘Nationalist logic only works versus the exterior, when the country is endangered’. ‘Syrians know that the country does not belong to them’, echoes another student”.

³ Except for what happened on May 15, 2011, when, in the anniversary of the Nakba, Palestinians and Syrians were allowed to cross the Golan frontier so as to threaten Israel of what might come in the event of a collapse of the regime and, at the same time, maintain the claim of being the defender of Palestinian rights.

⁴ The regime has succeeded in keeping the opposition divided with a several month-long debate over the possibility of military intervention which up to now has not taken place.

In this complex and changing context, having thoroughly followed the development of events in Syria since the outbreak of the national uprising, both using videos, interviews and published material, it is our hypothesis that, if the regime is toppled and the threat of civil war is contained, it will be the result of the national feeling's supremacy over sectarian differences in the more than one year-long struggle for freedom and dignity. In that case, we believe a national reconciliation between those who supported the regime and those who did not, as well as those who remained silent, will be possible. If not, an uncertain, yet chaotic future awaits Syria, something many voices are warning from.

In order to understand the sectarian card that the regime is playing, building on a latent sectarian awareness that can be felt in society, we should now proceed to analyze the structure of the Assad regime which has only exacerbated these feelings. As Caroline Donati⁵ puts it:

“Loin de pousser à l'intégration nationale, la négation des réalités confessionnelles (religieuses), tribales et ethniques au nom du nationalisme arabe et du consensus national a conduit les groupes concernés à réaffirmer leur différence. Ces formes de résistance silencieuse ne mettent pas en danger le régime, du moins dans l'immédiat, mais relèvent la fragilité des uns et de l'autre [...] Les manipulations identitaires favorisent un repli sur les appartenances primaires : la confession religieuse, la tribu, l'ethnie”⁶.

2. The conformation of the Assad regime: sectarianism or family mafia?

Hafez al-Assad rose to power after a bloodless coup in 1970 against the rule of the Baath Party, which he was a member of, and which had also overthrown the previous regime in

⁵ Donati, *op. cit.* p. 290.

⁶ “Far from going towards a national integration, denying confessional (religious), tribal and ethnic realities in the name of Arab nationalism and national consensus has driven those groups towards a reaffirmation of their differences. These means of silent resistance do not pose a threat to the regime, at least immediately, but show the fragility of the former and the latter [...]. Identity manipulations help developing a retreat into primary identifications, be they one's religious confession, tribe or ethnic group”.

1963. It must be noted here that coups, or at least attempted coups, were nothing new to Syrian political life and had formed part of it since the first stages of Syria's independence (formally obtained in 1946) after the French Mandate had been formally abolished. Most of these coups were the result of the regional aspirations of Arab countries such as Egypt and Iraq, very much related to the environment of Cold War that dominated at that time⁷.

Simplistic analyses systematically repeat that the Assad regime is an Alawite system that rules over a Sunni majority in the country. However, reality is much more complex than that. It is first important to note that the Baath Party was divided into a Military and a Civilian wing, the former of which, was represented by Hafez al-Assad as it became obvious when he assumed the post of Minister of Defense, a position he held until he took over the Presidency and one he was careful enough not to adjudicate to anybody he did not fully trust, so as to avoid a similar destiny. This was even more urgent if we bear in mind that the army had been constantly interfering in politics since the first coup in 1949.

Due to its importance and its being a pillar of the Assad regime (both the Army and the Intelligence and Security forces), deep attention needs to be paid to the political and sectarian composition of the Armed Forces in order to understand the over-representation of minorities and rural elements. Leaving aside the French policy of sectarian "divide and rule" and its promoting the conscription of members of rural religious minorities⁸, which forms the base of this "rural, sectarian" army, since the 1950's Baathist ideology had permeated this body⁹, an easy enterprise because, being mainly composed of members of the rural classes, the Baath seemed to be the party that better represented their interests

⁷ See Saad al-Din, Adnan (2006-2009): *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn fi Sūriyā: Mudhakkirāt wa Dhikrayyāt*, Amman, Dar Ammar, vols. I-V (see volumes I, II and III at various points). See as well, Seale, Patrick (1965): *The Struggle for Syria: A study in Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, Yale University Press; and Hinnebusch, Raymond (1990): *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'thist Syria: Army, Party and Peasant*, Colorado, Westview Press.

⁸ Álvarez-Ossorio, Ignacio (2009): *Siria contemporánea*, Síntesis, Madrid, pp 93-94. See as well, the in-depth study published by Batatu, Hanna (1999): *Syria's Peasantry: The Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables and their Politics*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press.

⁹ See Saad al-Din, *op. cit.*, vols. 3-4

in terms of social justice and equality, especially after it merged with the Socialist Party becoming the Arab Socialist Baath Party. These men represented, thus, the counter to the main Sunni (and also Christian) urban families who had traditionally held power and who usually despised the Army as a profession¹⁰. In contrast, in the eyes of rural minorities the Army provided a means for professional promotion in an urban and upper-middle class (regardless of their being Sunni and/or Christian) dominated society.

However, these facts should not lure us, as it has been said, into oversimplifications claiming that not only the regime, but also the army are sectarian since reality shows a different perspective. When preparing to take power, Hafez al-Assad surrounded himself with those who had been his comrades during the years he spent in the Army and in the Military Committee of the Baath party of which he was a co-founder, and got rid, along the way and once in power, of those who could overshadow him or pose any threats¹¹, which is exactly the same that he did when preparing the country for the succession of his son Bashar al-Assad, when all those who might oppose him were set aside and those promoted knew that they owed their posts to their support for Bashar's succession¹².

This means that he built a patronage network based both on friendship and mutual interest that, bearing in mind what has been said before, explains why many of his trustees, but not all of them¹³, came from minority groups. Furthermore, Raymond Hinnebusch identified a disposition in the shape of concentric circles where he verified

¹⁰ Seale, *op. cit.* p. 176 emphasizes this point: "The contesting parties during the first years of independence, except for the Baath and the Communists, were not based on an ideology or a party machine, but the personal standing and authority of the leading members".

¹¹ Seale, Patrick (1988), *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, I. B. Tauris, London, p. 153, when explaining how the final struggle for power between Assad and Salah Jadid, who was in charge of the government since 1966 but whose extremist Leftist practices didn't satisfy his comrade, says: "Of the five founder members of the Military Committee [...], the remaining two, Assad and Jadid, were locked in a mortal combat for the lonely peak of power".

¹² Álvarez-Ossorio, Ignacio and Gutiérrez de Terán, Ignacio (2009): "La república hereditaria siria: el fracaso de una transición" in *Poder y regímenes en el mundo árabe contemporáneo*, CIDOB, Barcelona, p. 275.

¹³ The three men who supervised the transition from father to son were Sunnis (Mustafa Tlas, Faruq al-Sharaa and Abd al-Khalim Khaddam).

how sectarian proportions were carefully balanced and counterbalanced by Assad to create mistrust and make sure that officers would be loyal to nobody but him¹⁴. Brilliantly articulated, Hinnebusch summarizes it as follows: “where Sunnis are commanders, Alawites are appointed deputies and where Alawites are commanders¹⁵, Sunnis or others are deputy commanders”¹⁶. As it can be inferred, the inner core of the regime is mainly Alawite¹⁷. Nevertheless, with a view to avoiding any struggles for power, Assad reduced the role of those officials present both in the Army and in the political field, especially those holding high positions in the Party, and made some functional divisions that granted the Military Command of the Party and not the Ministry of Defense (the Army) the final decision on matters concerning Defense and Security. This means that those who he allowed to enter the Party were men he trusted. Consequently, the Party served as a mere instrument of cooptation for the outstanding members to hold key positions within the national elite, totally disregarding the emphasis on rural recruitment and the socialist principles of the Baath Party: those who are chosen are more worried about satisfying their superiors than the social popular support base they rely on.

As a result of the loyalty shown by some ex-officers, Assad granted them Ministerial positions and, in the economic sector, made them managers of some public enterprises¹⁸. But to achieve this last aim and avoid side effects, Assad had to compensate those who had traditionally held the economic power, that is, the Sunni urban classes, something

¹⁴ Hinnebusch, *Op. cit.*, pp. 159-163.

¹⁵ Most of the men commanding these units have traditionally been Alawites belonging to the family or to the intimate circle of Assad’s friends (whom he fully trusted).

¹⁶ Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁷ Some people identify some of the Sunni men in the inner core of the regime as members of what has been termed *Political Alawism* (such as Mustafa Tlas, Abd al-Halim Khaddam or Farq al-Sharaa), a system of government that consecrates sectarianism and stands on an alliance and an intersection of interests where Alawites hold both the power and the government, but do not govern. See Ismail, Salwa (2010): “Changing Social Structure, Shifting Alliances and Authoritarianism in Syria”, in *Demystifying Syria*, Fred H. Lawson (ed.), SOAS Middle East Studies Series, Consortium Book Sales & Dist, p. 14.

¹⁸ See Haddad, Bassam (2005): *Left to its Domestic Devices: How the Syrian Regime Boxed Itself In*, Work Document n.44, Elcano Institute, Madrid. Available at: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/riecano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/Elcano_in/Zonas_in/DT43-2005

even more significant if we take into account the fact that he himself was a member of the minorities coming from rural areas. To compensate the traditional bourgeoisie for this loss and gain their support, he made an alliance with the Damascene Sunni oligarchy, who in turn became in charge of the Chamber of Commerce and had especial access to the “mixed” sector (Syria’s economic policies have always been quite blurry and they combine a socialist and a capitalist approach, a combination resulting from the periods of crisis that Syria has been through¹⁹). In this sector, the Damascene oligarchy (in addition to the one in Aleppo, the economic capital of the country) acted as subcontractors in all the agreements signed by the State (part of this alliance is Bashar al-Assad’s marriage to Asma Al-Akhras, from a prominent Sunni family). However, this did not imply the incorporation of these commercial classes to the system, but, on the contrary, they just received political covering to maintain the prerogatives that, in turn, helped them maintain the economic system going, and maintained their personal economies. Fortunately or not, this military-commercial complex²⁰ led to the ascendance of what has been termed *Awlad al-Sulta* (literally, the children of power, that is, the offspring of preeminent military leaders and ex Baath officials as well as the members of the ruling family), such as Rami Makhlof (Bashar’s cousin, who is said to own more than 60% of Syria’s private sector). The unlimited prerogatives of this new class have caused the discontent of the traditional Sunni commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, thus partly destabilizing this pillar of the regime²¹ in what might be termed an Alawite-Sunni dispute (notice again the apparent sectarian cleavage) which is, in reality, the result of a new elite’s (including Alawites and the members of *political Alawism*, those who have entered the family-patronage network) irruption into the old one’s field. Being unable to compete with this new elite, mainly

¹⁹ Perthes, Volker (1997): *The Political Economy of Syria Under Assad*, I.B. Tauris, Nueva York, pp 49-57.

²⁰ Especially in Aleppo, a city dominated by merchants that will remain loyal to the regime as long as their economic interests can be preserved. Up to now, they have maintained the city surprisingly calm as they have succeeded in creating an atmosphere of “everything is fine”, being able to maintain lower prices than the rest.

²¹ Ismail, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

because merchants and businessmen are still reticent to participate in politics (although some of them did in the past, like the ex Member of Parliament Riad Seif), these old elites have shifted to new association systems that show that they are reaching a gradual independence from the system, which might prove negative²². Indeed, as a Syrian demonstrator explained: “If Aleppo and Damascus abandon the regime, it will be finished”²³. There is historical evidence supporting this statement: in 1980, when the merchants (mainly Sunni) in Damascus and Aleppo refused to follow the general strike organized by the syndicates, they virtually enabled the regime to stay afloat during the uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982 (whose sectarian elements need to be understood in a wider context of economical rivalry between old and new elites as explained before, rural-urban cleavages and, in the regional scope, the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the fact that Alawites have for centuries been considered as heretics, although they insist in being considered part of the Shi’a and religious legal statements have been issued to sanction that²⁴).

The preceding facts have shown that what is usually described as a “sectarian Alawite system” is mainly a familiar network of interests which enables us to distinguish between two groups in society: those who profit from their alliance with the regime and those who do not. As the Syrian intellectual Yassin al-Hajj Saleh puts it²⁵,

“Although it is possible that the continuity of the regime in Syria depends on the support of those who are nearer to it or those who can be trusted, which makes it easier for Alawites to identify with it, what is important in this relationship is the protection and continuity of the regime, and not

²² Ismail, *op. cit.* p. 21. Many activists have reported that wealthy businessmen in Syria are helping those affected by the regime’s repressive policies by donating large sums of money anonymously (informal interviews, October 2011).

²³ Informal conversation through chat, December 2011.

²⁴ According to both the Syrian Constitution of 1973 and the one recently approved (February, 2012), the President must be a Muslim, without specifying which branch of Islam he should come from.

²⁵ *Al-Hayat* newspaper, 11/02/2012.

the soft living of the Alawites²⁶ [...]. The expression sectarian regime in Syria does not mean that the regime is Alawite [...]. If we have a closer look at the wider historical context, from before the Assad era to a potential post-Assad era, we may see that Alawites have been the main victims of the regime, a shield used by those men who love power, money and themselves so much, that there's nothing else that matters to them. The regime is not in the hands of Alawites, it is Alawites who are in the hands of the regime²⁷".

As a consequence, the Assad regime is more a mafia-like family system (the first hereditary republic in the Arab world) than a sectarian-based one. As a matter of fact, recent events have shown that members of all minorities, be they ethnic or religious, have taken part in the demonstrations whose aim is to topple the Assad family to establish a civil State and not a sectarian Sunni-Alawite strife which the regime has tried to provoke and has partly, yet not significantly, achieved. To understand the panorama that Syria has been witnessing in the past months, we must carefully examine different aspects of the revolution.

3. The Revolution for Dignity²⁸:

While it was difficult to predict an uprising in Syria, a country that, as mentioned above, had been despotically ruled by the Assad family for four decades, there were enough elements for it to happen: social control through the Intelligence Services, absence of all kinds of freedom (of speech, of the press, of thought, of association, etc.), absence of political pluralism, impossibility of having one's rights guaranteed. Above all, as people have denounced, it meant living without *dignity*.

²⁶ It is widely known that Alawites in Syria are usually given better work conditions, have access to the public sector and are usually granted scholarships to study abroad, among other things.

²⁷ The Syrian actress Fadwa Suleiman, in an informal interview through Skype from Paris (23/05/2012) insisted that: "The regime does not protect the Alawites, it protects itself behind them".

²⁸ As it was named by Syrians themselves.

However, the spark that lit the revolution (besides the “revolutionary environment” in the Arab world) took place in the southern city of Daraa with its tribal composition and not in the main cities of Aleppo or Damascus, when on March 2011 fifteen children aged 11-15 years old wrote on the walls of a building “People want to topple the regime” following the familiar slogan they had heard in Tahrir Square in Egypt. After being detained, their families went to the local governor (which, unsurprisingly, was one of Bashar al-Assad’s cousins) to beg for their children to be returned. However, they still had to wait for a few days to see their children come back home with evident signs of torture. People got to the streets first to ask for reforms and, when being shot at, their main demand became the call for the toppling of the regime.

This episode was enough to spread demonstrations all over Syria (an example of how, despite the regional divisions- very much related to the sectarian tensions sponsored by the regime-, there’s national solidarity²⁹), especially in rural cities and in the main Sunni urban centers of Homs and Hama, where the most repeated slogans were “We prefer dying to being humiliated”, “Syrian people will not be humiliated” and “God, Syria³⁰, freedom and that’s all”.

The regime’s response could have been to pursue the path of reform, especially, when Bashar al-Assad had said that Syria was stable because the government had kept up with people’s needs and demands and that, although some reforms were necessary, they wouldn’t take full root before a couple of generations had passed³¹. However, the promises of reform and the issuing of decrees granting part of those promises throughout the unfolding of events have been coupled with a systematic use of repressive methods,

²⁹ See “Syrian identity: How Dictatorship marginalized Identitarian Adherences and the Revolution enriched them” (Adi al-Zaabi, *Alquds al-Arabi*, 17/01/2012).

³⁰ There is an emphasis on the nation itself, the nation that wants to be preserved after the toppling of a regime that is considered to have literally “stolen” the country (interview through Skype with a Syrian activist, June 2012).

³¹ Interview with the *Wall Street Journal* (31/01/2011).

killings, detentions, kidnappings, power cuts, communications cuts, persecutions and mass punishing of entire families whose houses have been blown down. All this while demonstrations have remained mostly peaceful and were arms have only been held by those belonging to the Free Syrian Army, formed by those who have deserted from the regular army refusing to shot at peaceful demonstrators³², and who claim to be protecting demonstrators from the military and paramilitary corps still loyal to the regime.

Going back to the “God, Syria, Freedom and that’s it” slogan, which has usually been followed by the common expression that denotes the supremacy of God over the tyrants- “God is great” (hardly heard in Tunisia and Egypt) -and another slogan meaning that Syrian people will not accept dictators anymore and which goes “We will only kneel to God”, analysts have hinted at a religious component in the protests against the pretended secular nature of the regime³³. Add to this the fact that demonstrations commonly come out of mosques³⁴ after prayer (the number of demonstrations and demonstrators almost doubled during the month of Ramadan in 2011³⁵). Finally, if we take into consideration that the predominantly Sunni³⁶ city of Homs (followed by Hama) has been leading the protests (and the number of dead, wounded and detainees as well) and the fact that Aleppo and Damascus, where an important Christian community lives, haven’t fully engaged in the popular movement (although this is gradually changing), in addition to the

³² Sofia Amara’s documentary “Syrie: Dans l’enfer de la répression” is an interesting source to learn more about this body. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itpIHfVTgas>

³³ After the Hama events in 1982, the regime pursued a policy of gradual islamization of social life and politics (financing mosque building, sponsoring religious schools, letting Sufi currents spread around the country), so as to regain part of the lost legitimacy.

³⁴ According to a Christian youngster in Damascus, churches were closely surveyed to avoid major “minority” demonstrations. Add to this, that they are generally found in the two main cities of the country, that is Damascus and Aleppo, which are up to date, the regime’s last two bulwarks (Interviewed through Skype in June, 2012).

³⁵ Activists reported that main mosques where being surrounded by paramilitary troops and, indeed, in the holy Night of Destiny (26th August 2011), when Muslims gather in mosques to commemorate the night when the Revelation is thought to have started, one of the mosques in Damascus was brutally attacked.

³⁶ The regime has for some years been trying to make Homs the Alawite capital of Syria following a plan called the “Homs dream”, facilitating the emigration of Alawites to the city and making it easy for them to build houses and find a job.

slow advance of demonstrations in the area traditionally known as Jebel al-Druze (the Mountain of the Druze), we can partly understand why many people have disregarded the plural component of the revolution and followed, instead, the regime's argument of the threat posed by Islamists to minorities and the secular system in Syria.

This argument is based on the fact that, according to the Syrian government, it is the Muslim Brotherhood and armed Salafi groups who are conducting the demonstrations in order to establish an Islamic State that will threaten the *survival* of minorities in the country. As we shall see, such pretensions are nowhere near reality. Indeed, whatever the positions of prominent religious leaders, it must be born in mind that religious leaders are in no way representative of the whole community and that their statements need to be examined in the light of their relationship with the regime.

Despite the fact that it is true that there is a constant reference to God, it should be noted that an important percentage of Syrian society is secular and that, when we talk about a 60-70% majority of Sunnis or any other similar figures, we must remember that this is because people are classified according to the religion of the family they're born in, but not according to their own beliefs or practices. Indeed, it is doubtful that all Sunnis would favor an Islamist group's policies, and many young people declare themselves (mainly in private) secular. Shouting "God is great" when coming out of a mosque to start a demonstration is an act of defiance against the regime, a phenomenon that quickly spread after the regime began talking about Salafi groups so as to make fun of such claims.

This "religious" character of the demonstrations, thus, needs a more in-depth explanation to see the extent of its influence in the revolution especially regarding the religious minorities, which is one of the crucial issues. In a previous research conducted in June-July

2011³⁷, where people inside the country were interviewed and the evolution of slogans and the activities being carried out and suggested in Facebook were closely monitored, this issue was touched upon. Among the interviewees, two of them, one Muslim (not committed to religion) and one Christian, reckoned that sectarian tensions and resentment against the regime's past secular practices had been a thorny issue for years³⁸. The first one stated:

“It is the regime that has encouraged sectarianism: it is a sectarian government (meaning not that it is made up of minorities, but that it encourages the sectarian feelings of people and scares the minorities by telling them that the alternative to its rule can only be the extremist Islamists that will establish an Islamic State)”.

The Christian interviewee insisted that, despite the ongoing accusations of the regime (its only asset left to scare people away from demonstrations) saying that Sunnis are instigating it against the minorities and especially the Alawites, “there is nothing like that”. The Muslim interviewee explained that, since there has been no real political life in Syria, it's normal that people compensate that lack with a sense of belonging to a sect. However, “when real political parties appear, the sectarian question will very much decrease” and the minorities, who after all “want to protect their existence” will feel more secure, concluding that “we are all one same heart”. As a response to the threats that the regime repeats of the country drifting into sectarian conflict, people have taken to the streets to shout “Neither Islam, nor Christianity, we profess freedom” or “Neither Muslim Brotherhood, nor Salafism, we want freedom”.

³⁷ Ramírez, Naomí (2011): “The Syrian Revolution Through the Eyes of the Demonstrators”, study published by the Toledo Center for Peace and the TEIM (International Mediterranean Studies Center). Available at: http://www.toledopax.org/uploads/The_Syrian%20Revolution_August_2011.pdf

³⁸ Ramírez, *Op. cit.*, p.13.

Moreover, a Kurd stated³⁹ that “all Syrians be they Kurds, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Assyrians or whatever, are one body, one flesh, in a united Syria”⁴⁰. In the case of Kurds, fears of their wanting independence and the disagreements between the “Arab” and “Kurdish” political oppositions over the recognition of their rights, have provoked a lack of confidence among some sectors of society. Add to it the fact that some Kurdish political parties are collaborating with the regime⁴¹. The *National Document on the Kurdish Question*, signed by all the members of the Executive Committee of the Syrian National Council on 1st April 2012 and considered as an indivisible part of the National Pact signed by different opposition groups in Istanbul a few days before, has not made matters easier, and there have been many who have risen their voices against it, condemning its being just an appendix to the pact. Whatever the political considerations, Kurds in Syria have proven their will to take part in the revolution exactly as their Arab brothers have.

The regime’s determination to provoke civil war as its sole defense strategy, has been accompanied by strong security measures that, strategically located, prevent specific groups or areas from coming out to the streets⁴². This security measures have been especially harsh in Lattakia, the city with the highest concentration of Alawites, where the clashes between those supporting and those opposing the regime have been constant, especially in the first months of the uprising. The excessive presence of security forces and paramilitary troops in this city and its surroundings follows the sectarian logic of the regime that believes it to be a duty for Alawites to support it. Thus, repression against

³⁹ It is very important to note that since 1962, Kurds have been systematically marginalized as an informal census was conducted in the province of Hassake, where half the Syrian Kurdish population lives and 50.000 were deprived of their citizenship. No wonder why the first packet of reforms announced by the regime in April 2011, included granting the nationality to thousands of Kurds.

⁴⁰ Ramírez, “The Syrian Revolution...”, p.15-16.

⁴¹ Hazim Shagia, *Al-Hayat*, 14/02/2012.

⁴² An example is what happened on the 30th of June 2011. That day was called “Aleppo’s volcano” and the city was supposed to come to the streets in huge masses. Personal testimonies of people who went to the streets (30th June 2011, secret Facebook group information) reported that there were proportionally more members of the security services than potential demonstrations, making it virtually impossible to follow the tide. This is only explained by the fact that Aleppo remains the regime stronghold until today.

“rebel” Alawites has been harsher than the one exercised on the rest of the population. Reality, however, has shown that the regime is not even close to being the protector of this minority, but as one of the interviewees put it, there are two types of Alawites⁴³: those who benefit from the regime and those who suffer even more than the rest of the population⁴⁴. On her part, Fadwa Suleiman, a Syrian actress from an Alawite family, said⁴⁵:

“Families from minority groups exert a lot of pressure on the individuals who dissent. Many splits within families are happening because of this [...]. There are many people from the minority groups in general who are against the regime. This was the case even before the uprising started. Look at prominent opposition figures whose voices are loud. They are from all sects and religions”⁴⁶.

Regarding the reported killings of Alawites in Homs, where predictions have pointed to a potential civil war, she was frank:

“What happened in Homs is that the regime formed a 200-member group of security forces present in the districts where minorities live. They kill people and throw their bodies in other districts to create a sectarian turmoil. We have evidence of this and we released many statements warning people from those criminals living among them [...]. You must realize that those complicit with the Syrian intelligence apparatus are from all sects”.

She explained that minority groups in areas where they are predominant such as the abovementioned Latakia or Suweida (where there’s a large concentration of Druze inhabitants) are threatened even “before they decide to protest”. This explains, in part,

⁴³ Ramírez, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ In an interview with the TV channel *Al-Mustaqilla*, Zuhair Salim, the spokesman of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood said that: “When they mention sectarianism in Syria to me, I always say that among Syrian people only two sects can be found: the one of the beneficiaries (of the regime’s policies) and the one of those who don’t. The first one encompasses a reduced number of individuals, while the second includes the rest of the population”. At this point, the meaning of sect (*ā’ifa in Arabic) must be explained: this word designates any “group, division, separation”, thus, it can be used both in religious terms and in secular ones.

⁴⁵ Interview with *Al-Jazeera* (23/11/2011). Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/11/20111123142157924333.html> Fadwa Suleiman is an actress that moved to Homs, and then to Latakia to call the “people from the coast”, as Alawites in the area are commonly known, to engage in the national uprising against the regime. She finally left Syria at the end of March 2012.

⁴⁶ Such as the Christians George Sabra and Michel Kilo, or the Alawite Louay Hussein.

why when looking at the dead toll, most of them are in Homs, Hama and the surrounding areas, but not in places traditionally inhabited by minorities or in the largest cities (Damascus and Aleppo). There, the regime, despite the demonstrations taking place in both (in smaller numbers than in other areas due to the security measures), has been careful enough not to kill people in large numbers, so as to avoid an escalation of the conflict in its two last strongholds where still a large silent majority has not decided yet whether to join the national movement or not. Nevertheless, the killing of students at Aleppo University on May 3, 2012 was the straw that broke the camel's back and people strongly condemned that.

Against the regime's threats of Syria falling into a chaotic sectarian civil war should it fall, people have tirelessly repeated: "Syrians are one hand" as well as "Islam and Christianity are one hand" and "Neither Muslims, nor Christians, our sect is freedom". In the same line of aborting any attempts to show the minorities engagement, most Christian religious leaders (the Jesuits being an early exception) have shown no solidarity whatsoever with the national uprising and have warned from the risk it poses to minorities by repeating the regime's version. The most notorious example is the one of the Maronite Patriarch in Lebanon, who warned from the advent of an Islamic rule over minorities, claims strongly opposed by many Christians who commented on it in the social networks⁴⁷. Nevertheless, some others have dared to show their support for the mobilizations against the despotic rule they live under and thus, have been accused of treason and sentenced to leave the country (such is the case of Father Paolo in Mar Musa, whose extradition has been condemned by both Christians and Muslims). As well as threatening from civil strives, the regime has put the emphasis on the possibility of the Muslim Brotherhood taking over⁴⁸

⁴⁷ It is interesting to see what thinker Youssef Salamah (*Al-Safir*, 01/10/2011) wrote about the whole idea of confessional minorities and majorities as opposed to the idea of citizenship.

⁴⁸ Many respond with the following statement: "We will not accept any more dictatorships, and the verb 'take over' implies imposing one's rule, thus, a dictatorship".

the country and setting up a theocratic system in a hypothetical Islamic state that would persecute the minorities until they leave or submit to their supremacy (remember that the regime pretends to be the protector of minorities). In response to this, the Muslim Brotherhood, in what could be termed a qualitative change⁴⁹, issued a document⁵⁰ where they no longer made any mention whatsoever of Islamic Law as a guiding legislative principle or of the Islamic background and culture of the country that should dominate all aspects of life according to previous documents. In the above-mentioned document, the Brotherhood committed to the establishment of a “republican representative system of government” based on the principle of citizenship that guarantees equal rights and duties for all members of society and where Institutions are free and independent and where there is a separation of powers. This State should be submitted to the rule of law and make all its efforts to regain the occupied territories of the Golan Heights and help the Palestinian people in their national struggle against Israel. Last, but not least, the most important aspect of this document is precisely the last point it includes, which states the following: the setting up of a State where all Syrians help each other in the framework of a “national reconciliation where there is no room for the false pretexts used by the regime to provoke fear⁵¹ among the sons of one same country”. This is precisely what, as shall be seen, many Syrians are demanding: a national reconciliation. Whether this is just a strategy in order to assume power or a real commitment to democracy remains to be seen. Fears are a reality and the memory of Hama, whatever the Brotherhood’s statements of their

⁴⁹ They insist that the principles of democracy were part of the groups ideology from its inception, and that the 1982 uprising in Hama had nothing to do with the Brotherhood’s postulates, that have always been the same, and that they already re-stated them in the Gentlemen’s Pact in 2001 and in their “Vision for the future Syria” in 2004.

⁵⁰ See:

<http://www.ikhwansyria.com/ar/default.aspx?xyz=U6Qq7k%2bcOd87MDI46m9rUxJEpMO%2bi1s730Vi2uPZymeC3dQ0Mjko9XSNb1%2b%2f2mTR%2beoYEH3PMEr5AWIqS3vabSTmobEdOmMrwK3nhDUYbPPaXFzF8Z4WPBzMEcrsW7wVx1T%2ftX9B2tg%3d>

⁵¹ According to Fadwa Suleiman (interview through Skype, 23/05/2012), when asked whether the wall of fear that had fallen had returned, “they brought it back to us, so that we are all fearful of the future”.

having nothing to do with it or with the Fighting Vanguard⁵², is there. Moreover, Syria is not like Egypt or Tunisia, where there is an overwhelming Sunni Muslim majority. Minorities in Syria add up to around 30% of the country's population. It is doubtful that those would vote for any party with any "sectarian vision". This explains why the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood discourse is much more citizenship-prone than the one in Egypt.

Fears (both among religious minorities and the main confessional group) are licit and not at all unfounded if one takes into account the traumatic unhealed Lebanese experience which divided the country. Nevertheless, in order to understand the full scope of Lebanon's civil war, one must go past the mere sectarian clashes and examine the personal competition among the leaders of the main political groups and the leading families in the country and who, up to know, keep the reins of power and have been unable to achieve an effective national reconciliation that helps the country become a nation and not a conglomerate of cities, parties and confessional groups⁵³. This lack of nationalist feelings in Lebanon, stirred up to some extent by the interference of international powers that date back to the era of the Ottoman Empire and the support of certain communities (or families) against others, is far from reflecting the Syrian case though. Consequently, nationalism (perfectly reflected in the slogans: "One, one, one, Syrian people are one" and "Islam and Christianity, we both want freedom") should help stop any possibilities of the country falling into a confessional strife. However, the attacks being suffered by the Egyptian Copts and the ascendance of Salafi currents in that same country, as well as the Iraqi example need to be taken into account. Anyhow, the rise of Salafi currents in Syria, where they are not even a 20% of the population, at least as far as people estimate⁵⁴ or of

⁵² A group formed by Marwan Hadid, previous member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who committed several sectarian crimes against Alawites in the late seventies of the past century. Its relationship to the Brotherhood is still blurry.

⁵³ See Young, Michael (2010): *The Ghosts of Martyr's Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle*, Simon&Schuster, New York.

⁵⁴ Interview with Syrian activists in Madrid (09/09/2011).

the Muslim Brotherhood who, according to Syrian activist Rami Jarrah (known as Alexander Page⁵⁵), “don’t have any support inside Syria, but who are strong outside the country because they are supported by Saudi Arabia”, is being exaggerated.

As a matter of fact, when the Syrian regime started accusing Salafi groups of instigating the protesters against the regime, it was the Salafi leaders in Lebanon (who, according to the official version, were helping their counterparts in Syria), who denied those pretensions and acknowledged that the Salafis in Syria were so weak and so uninterested in politics, that they could never pose a threat to the regime and even less be those conducting the demonstrations against its rule⁵⁶. According to Thomas Pierre, “Il n’existe pas de champ religieux unifié niveau national, mais plutôt un paysage très fragmenté fait de scènes régionales juxtaposées”⁵⁷. This “localism” among Islamist currents creates a “désintérêt mutuel” (mutual lack of interest) that reduces their potential and, in fact, they are usually oriented to the social level⁵⁸.

Just to remind the world that, whatever the long-term causes, what is happening now has totally different aims from what happened three decades ago, in Homs, the most castigated city in Syria during these protests, the Alawite actress Fadwa Suleiman and the Sunni goalkeeper of the Syrian National Football Team Abd al-Basit Sarut, marched repeatedly hand in hand to the center of the demonstrations since the beginning of November to shout: “No Brotherhood and no Salafis, we want a civil State”. Should there be an imposition of a confessional system like the one in Lebanon, which was first set up in 1943 (National Pact) and then redesigned in 1990 and was meant to be a temporal stage leading towards the implantation of a civil democracy after the civil war (unachieved up to

⁵⁵ Informal interview in Madrid (24/11/2011).

⁵⁶ See <http://periodismohumano.com/en-conflicto/los-salafistas-libaneses-desmienten-a-damasco.html>

⁵⁷ “There is no unified religious field at the national level, but a fragmented landscape formed by juxtaposed local scenes”.

⁵⁸ Pierre, Thomas (2009): “Les cadres de l’élite religieuse sunnite en Syrie : espaces, idées, organisations et institutions” in *Maghreb-Machrek*, n. 198, p. 2.

date), would mean a *de facto* and *de iure* destruction of the nationalist feelings in Syria that have been the motto of the revolution.

4. **Armed struggle or civil war?**

The Syrian uprising began in a peaceful way and for months the demonstrators suffered a violent response from the regime. There are thousands of videos that testify how people were demonstrating completely unarmed and were fired at by the regimes security, military and paramilitary forces. A report issued by Human Rights Watch⁵⁹ proves how soldiers received strict orders from prominent figures of the regime to shoot at protesters no matter whether they were armed or not, as they were told that those were only groups of terrorists directed from abroad to destabilize Syria.

When comparing the situation in Syria with those of Egypt or Tunisia, where the army, leaving aside their hidden aims, stayed by the people or at least remained neutral for the most part, the Syrian case has shown how intricately related the army and the Assad regime are, and how the army structure is vital for the regime to survive and for its top leaders to remain in power. It is not surprising then that, foot soldiers, many of whom see no profit in the army and have no aspirations of promotion⁶⁰ as they know how the cooptation and patronage system works, started defecting refusing to shoot at their fellow citizens, risking their lives in such attempts and losing it in more than one case. Indeed, many people report⁶¹ how they know about soldiers who want to defect from the army but who are afraid of doing so as it might have negative consequences on their families (cases alike have already been reported⁶²).

⁵⁹ <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/12/15/all-means-necessary> (November, 2011)

⁶⁰ Specifically, Sunnis are prematurely forced to retire before being promoted to top positions.

⁶¹ Interviews with activists inside and outside Syria (December 2011-January, 2012).

⁶² Families are a deterrent not only for soldiers but also for activists abroad.

Although in the beginning defectors were only half-organized and did not have the means to conduct a real offensive against the regime and were hardly capable of carrying out their main task, which was, according to their own statements, protecting the civilians⁶³, gradually, some attacks have been perpetrated against the regime's strongholds, such as security service's offices, the headquarters of the Baath party in different localities, etc. Many demonstrators have condemned⁶⁴ these acts, as well as the kidnapping and torturing of soldiers from the army or of members of the security services (as well as some civilians) stating that they are doing exactly the same as the regime and that there is a strong possibility that they become the same, thus failing to maintain the principles of the revolution (add to that the fact that many civilians have joined this armed body)⁶⁵. On the contrary, many others believe that only the Free Syrian Army can protect them and, as such, it is legitimate that they carry out preventive attacks against the regime. No wonder why there was a Friday called: "Friday of the arming of the Free Syrian Army".

The controversy surrounding the Free Syrian Army is fed with the fact that it is doubted how impartial it is regarding the political opposition and how committed it is to the idea of "nationalism", as its main leaders are in Turkey, a country that cannot hide its special relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood⁶⁶, who in turn see in Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) a model that could be followed. Many voices have risen to accuse the Muslim Brotherhood or countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia of secretly

⁶³ "Our main mission now is to protect the unarmed civilians who are asking for freedom". This video shows the defection of Hussein Harmoush, who created the Free Officer's Movement, which later joined the Free Syrian Army. He sends the following message to the regular army: "You have to protect people, not kill them": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z7nO8FiMEA&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

⁶⁴ Many consider them responsible for the massacre at Baba Amro in Homs (January-February 2012) as they were hiding inside the neighborhood risking civilians lives.

⁶⁵ In an interview with *France 24* (14/05/2012), actress Fadwa Suleiman sent the following message to the so-called Free Syrian Army and those carrying weapons: "Whoever kills, will end up being killed, sooner or later".

⁶⁶ Muhammad Riyad al-Shaqfa, leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, insisted that "there is no direct relationship between the Turkish government and us". (*France 24*, 12/05/2012). Nevertheless, it is otherwise difficult to explain why the main conferences of the opposition, especially those under the auspices of the Muslim Brotherhood, for instance the one in Antalya on June 1, 2011, have been held in Turkish territory where the Muslim Brotherhood leadership is currently half-settled.

arming the soldiers in exchange for their spreading Sunni ideology⁶⁷ (Saudi Arabia is known for its campaigns for spreading Wahhabism⁶⁸). This has been corroborated by the testimony of a group of Syrian fighters who reported that, being their need for arms so urgent in order to prevent further massacres by the regime, they cross the border to Turkey to find people ready to arm them, but “for the most part, arms are exchanged by ideology”⁶⁹ and, as a matter of fact, one of the main statements made by Hazem Al-Nahar⁷⁰, a Syrian opposition figure, was that

“It is peremptory that defections do not adopt a sectarian or religious character so as to safeguard the national spirit that unites us, and which must be reflected everywhere, including the names that are given to the defecting brigades or those newly created”⁷¹.

All this, in his aim to make of the Free Syrian Army the future Syrian Army in charge of protecting the Syrian territory and population and not the regime as it has been doing throughout the Assad family rule. The divisions among the different brigades and the lack of a firm leadership, due mainly to the difficulty of coordinating activities all over the Syrian territory, threatens to provoke greater chaos and divide society along wider cleavages, mixing sectarian, partisan and ideological aspects.

5. **“Stop the killing (all of you)”:**

⁶⁷ The gradual islamisation of this corps has been reported. See: <http://periodismohumano.com/en-conflicto/el-islam-irrumpe-en-la-revolucion-siria.html>

⁶⁸ This is especially important in Syria where Iran, Saudi Arabia’s regional arch-enemy, has for years been spreading shi’ism and even luring Sunni’s into converting so as to reinforce its presence in Syria (buscar ref!).

⁶⁹ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 27/04/2012. According to one of the interviewees in the article, said that all groups, from the Left to Islamism, “form their own militias and become their leaders, a situation which divides the people: they do not think about military strategy, they only have politics on mind”.

⁷⁰ *AND Kronos*, 24/04/2012

⁷¹ Some of the names given to the brigades have a suspicious Sunni character (Uthman -the third Caliph of Islam-, Khaled Ibn al-Waleed -one of Muhammad’s companions-, Ibn Taimiyya -a famous Islamist thinker and reformer who issued a fatwa against Alawites), added to the fact that long beards without moustache reminiscent of the Salafi ones can be seen. Compare, for instance, these two videos: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7YveootA2w> (when he defected, June, 2011) and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGE_nAQrmoM (April, 2012).

Indeed, besides the sectarian symbols of the Free Syrian Army, there is another cleavage in Syrian society which up to now has been partly disregarded, that is, the one that divides those opposing the regime and those supporting it or that have remained silent. With the ongoing violence exerted by the regime and the suffering resulting from it, but also because of some actions by members of the Free Syrian Army, killing people among those who support the regime, the debate over a potential military intervention to stop the country from drifting into chaos⁷² has heated up and, Syrians being known for their refusal to any sort of foreign intervention or interference in their domestic issues, many of those who are still silent will remain hesitant of fully supporting the revolution⁷³.

In this context, when people were losing hope, with repetitive religious names for Fridays, which the Facebook page of the Syrian Revolution⁷⁴ took the blame for (the last one of which was “Friday of that who prepares a fighter is a fighter himself⁷⁵”), a young woman in Damascus named Rima Dali went out to the street on April 8, 2012 and stopped in front of the Syrian Parliament or People’s Council, holding a red cloth banner where it was possible to read in white shiny letters: “Stop the killing, we want to build a nation for all Syrians”. She was jailed immediately and released the next day after a strong campaign was launched in Facebook demanding her being set free. This would have meant nothing had it not been for the fact that her act triggered wide following both in Syria and around the

⁷² However, no single country in the world, but the Syrians themselves, are interested in the victory of the revolution and, broadly speaking, the rest of nations either want a weak country or a failed state so as to control the area.

⁷³ Some months ago, some demonstrators stated that: “If there’s an intervention, I will stand by Bashar” (chat interviews, October- December, 2011).

⁷⁴ News about a Syrian Muslim Brotherhood member running it from Sweden have added fuel to the controversy. Eventually, the voting system was changed, preventing people from adding names or seeing the results. The first two weeks during which this new system has worked (Fridays May 18 and 25, 2012) have had no religious choices. The short-term cause for this change was the fact that Friday 11 May, 2012 should have been named, according to many, Friday of the heroes at Aleppo University, in honor to the students killed there; however the “Islamist” option (Friday of God’s victory and the near conquest) won. All over Syria, slogans against this and in praise of the students at Aleppo University could be read.

⁷⁵ The Word for fighter is *ghazi*, which means conqueror, but the whole sentence comes from one of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, when he spoke about spreading the Islamic territory.

world. Banner's imitating that of Rima started spreading around Damascus and detentions ensued in different areas. Rima explained what she had done in a note published on Facebook⁷⁶, where she said:

"How was I to know that the mixture of white and red would mean the beginning of a new era in a nation that we have sacrificed with our own hands? I did not know that a simple can of white paint would provoke such an effect [...]. How can a silent cry open our eyes to something that I am tired of repeating over and over [...]. Never have I tried to hide how painful it was for me to see all those who have fallen in our country. All the bullets are friend bullets because whoever kills is Syrian⁷⁷ and whoever is killed is Syrian as well".

Accordingly, Friday April 13, 2012 was named "Friday of a revolution for all Syrians", when banners imitating that of Rima could be seen everywhere in a bid to fight against both the sectarian threat and the escalation of violence so as to return to the pacific original movement. Not only that, but also messages were sent to the Kurdish population as a means to show that, whatever the political disputes, Syrian people are one: "Dear Kurdish brothers, we will not give up on you" or "Dear Kurdish brothers, marginalizing you means marginalizing us".

Rima's gesture influence did not stop there and a full campaign of awareness has been launched to show both "sides" of the conflict that a real nation can be built before the country is destroyed. Thus, for instance, on April 15 2012, a group of young people stopped in front of the ministry of Interior holding red banners with messages such as: "If you have to arrest me, do it gently", "If you have to arrest me, tell my family where you are taking me (it is commonly unknown where detainees are taken)". As Jafra Baha' wrote in an article for *Al-Arabiya* (19/04/2012):

⁷⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/rima-dali/%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B1/378319722208217>

⁷⁷ It has been reported that foreign fighters from Libya and even members of Al-Qaeda are fighting in Syrian soil, which has come as a blow for many who believe their revolution is being stolen (different interviews with Syrian activists, January 2012).

“If history were to be written in colors, red would be the color of the Syrian revolution without any doubt: Syrian blood has dyed Syrian soil and Syrian hearts and it has certified not only that red is the noblest of colors, but that it has dyed the Syrian revolution with blood and love”.

This last image, blood and love, captures the challenges that the Syrian revolution is facing after more than one year of struggle.

6. Tentative conclusions:

Throughout this article a picture of the evolution of the situation, with a previous analysis of the long-term causes that have prevented, yet pushed towards sectarian strife in Syria, has been presented. The regime has been following a policy of sectarian awakening while officially adhering to the principle of laicism and no discrimination between sects, while presenting itself at the same time as the protector of religious minorities against the “Sunni threat”. For over a year, people have for the most part refrained from drifting into conflict although tensions have grown as violence escalated and chaos began to show up.

If Syrians are able to remain loyal to their nationhood, to their “God, Syria, freedom and that’s it” and their “One, one, one, Syrian people are one”, as recent events show (Friday 4 May, 2012 was named: “Our devotion and fidelity (to the revolution and its principles) will mean our liberation”) and as it is still believed by many like Rima Dali and those who want to build a nation for all, where rancor is little by little forgotten and where the desire for freedom is stronger than the desire for revenge, then the country will remain united and civil war either along sectarian or partisan cleavages will be avoided, whatever the attempts to make it fail. Large awareness campaigns are being launched in the Internet, and thus, Syrians have the final say whether they want to live together in a country for all (love red-dyed) or in a torn country (blood red-dyed).

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