

Position of the Syrian Coalition on Latest Political & Field Developments in Syria

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Press Release
Syrian Coalition
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1- On the recent developments in Idlib province

The grave and unfortunate developments that have recently taken place in Idlib province did not come as a surprise given the conspicuous lack of sufficient support for the Free Syrian Army groups and the failure to empower the Syrian people through their legitimate political institutions to establish a unified national army. In addition, there has been obstruction of the efforts to channel support through a single source. We have already expected and repeatedly warned concerned countries of such results in case they carried on with these policies. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which support has been managed and provided have led to fragmentation of the opposition armed groups and to more divisions among these groups as well as to stripping them of any political authority that is legally and organizationally responsible. Even at the level of divided support, no serious train and equip programs have been carried out. The weapons that have been provided to the armed opposition groups have been of low quality and small quantity compared to the weapons being provided to regime forces and their allied sectarian militias as well as to terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Jabhat Alnusra.

The latest developments in Idlib province have put the opposition armed groups in front of a national responsibility to unify into a single national army whose primary task is to defend the liberated areas from the attacks of the Assad regime forces and their allies and to liberate the areas under the control of terrorist groups.

The Syrian people are the primary stakeholders in the eradication of terrorism and extremism, and the only party with the capability to eradicate terrorism by eliminating its root causes, chiefly among them are tyranny, corruption, and extremism as well as the existence of many grievances among the majority of the Syrian people.

We call upon friendly countries to provide the necessary support to reorganize the opposition armed groups within a unified national framework so that they become an integral part of the international coalition against terrorism and empower them to preserve the security of citizens in the liberated areas and protect public facilities as well as to enable civil administrations to carry out their task to ensure that terrorist organizations do not return to these areas once they have been liberated.

2- On the de-escalation agreement in eastern Ghouta and the southern front

The Coalition welcomes any and all international efforts to stop the bloodshed and to

alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. We are closely following the full implementation of all the agreements that have been concluded. Monitoring mechanisms must be established to ensure full implementation of these agreements. These agreements must lead to a halt to the bombardment and a full ceasefire on the entire Syrian territory and be complemented by other confidence-building measures as was stipulated by the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Moreover, these steps must be carried out in parallel with the immediate activation of the political process through direct negotiations in Geneva to address the fundamental issue, which is political transition. This process will allow the integration of efforts, the consolidation of the domestic front in the war on terror, addressing the grievances and ensuring justice for the sacrifices of our people. The transition process is also crucial to the consolidation of security and stability and for reconstruction to start. It is vital to put an end to this dark chapter and build a new Syria that is free and enjoys full sovereignty over its entire territory, a democratic, pluralistic a state of citizenship which guarantees equality for all its citizens in terms of rights and duties.

3- The fight against ISIS in Raqqa, civilian casualties, and the future administration of the city

The Syrian Coalition stresses the importance of combating terrorism in all its forms and eradicating it by tackling its roots. The revolutionary Syrian forces and the opposition have been at the forefront of rejecting and countering terrorism, including cross-border terrorist groups such as ISIS and Qaeda, and the Iranian terrorist militias operating under the command of the terrorists Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah as well as the death squads of the Assad regime.

The Coalition believes that Raqqa is a precious part of the Syrian homeland. It is the first provincial capital to be liberated by the Free Syrian Army. Residents of Raqqa must be allowed to fully administer their province through an elected local council under the supervision of the Syrian Coalition and the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and with the participation of civil society away from foreign interference and the influence of extremist forces that do not adhere to the guiding principles of the Syrian revolution and its goals.

The Coalition strongly condemns the death of civilians at the hands of the International anti-ISIS Coalition as it calls for an end to attacks on civilians, launching transparent investigations into attacks that have led to the deaths of hundreds and possibly thousands of civilians, including women, children, and entire families. The Coalition also calls for an immediate investigation into reports about the displacement of residents of whole villages and towns in rural Raqqa and war crimes committed by the militias operating in the province, especially, murder and extrajudicial killings by the militias of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

4- Position on ongoing preparations for the battle of Deir Ezzor

The Free Syrian Army Groups have been fighting terrorism in the Syrian Desert for several months and have liberated several areas. However, regime forces and their allied foreign militias are attacking these areas which have been liberated by the Free

Syrian Army groups and have captured some of these areas. They are also impeding the efforts of the FSA groups in their fight against ISIS by acting as a buffer between ISIS and the FSA groups. This proves that the goal of the regime and its allies is to eliminate the armed revolutionary groups, not to fight terrorism.

The FSA groups, especially those made up from the local residents of Deir Ezzor, are still present in the Syrian Desert and are ready to participate in the liberation of the city from ISIS and all terrorist forces. Therefore, there is a need to continue with the provision of full support for these groups.

5- Hezbollah's intervention in Qalamoun and attempts to displace the people of the area

The Syrian Coalition condemns the blatant intervention of the terrorist Hezbollah militias in the Qalamoun area and the siege they imposed on several towns and villages in the area as well as their attempts to displace its local population. These actions are aimed at serving Iranian plans to bring about a demographic change in the area, which includes large areas of Rural Damascus. The Coalition calls for a unified Arab and international position calling for the withdrawal of these terrorist militias and all other terrorist militias from all the Syrian territory. It urges the Lebanese government to take the necessary measures under international supervision to prevent the crossing of elements of these militias from Lebanon to Syria to commit crimes and fight alongside the Assad gangs against the Syrian people.

6- On the siege of Syrian refugee camps in Arsal and attempts to displace refugees or force them to return to live under the rule of the Assad regime and Hezbollah

The Coalition expresses its appreciation to the official bodies and civil organizations that support Syrian refugees who were displaced from their cities and towns after crimes committed by the Assad regime and the Hezbollah gangs. The Coalition condemns and expresses concern over the continued targeting of Syrian refugees and attempts to force them out of the camps, especially from the camps in and around the Lebanese town of Arsal through arbitrary detentions, torture and burning of camps as well as the forcing of refugees to return to Syria even though their cities and towns are occupied by the terrorist Hezbollah and the Assad regime militias. We warn that the refugees will be subjected to detention and violations if they are forced to return. The Coalition urges the Lebanese government not to use the fight against terror as a pretext to allow these crimes to be carried out against Syrian refugees. The Coalition reiterates calls for an international investigation into the attacks on Syrian refugee camps in the Arsal area by the Hezbollah militias on June 30 and the subsequent developments, including the death of a number of detainees under torture after they were detained by the Lebanese army intelligence. Furthermore, the Coalition calls for the Lebanese government to assume its political and moral responsibility towards these attacks which must be brought to end. It underscores that the first steps to combat terrorism should be the withdrawal of the Hezbollah terrorist militias from Syria, to prevent the passage of its militias to Syria, and stopping any interference in Syria by

Lebanese parties. The Coalition categorically rejects any exploitation of refugees and their situation by terrorist organizations as it recognizes and respects the security and safety of Lebanon.

7- On the upcoming meetings in Astana and Geneva

We believe that the Astana process is facing a fundamental challenge, which is the number of agreements reached, signatories, and guarantors involved, especially as most of the parties refuse to accept Iran as guarantor. The question thus is, will the Astana process be able to frame these agreements and their implementation mechanisms within a single joint mechanism?

These same negative aspects may complicate the political process in Geneva. Everyone knows that the Geneva process has not yet risen to the level of the “political process.” The Geneva process has so far taken the form of dialogue among the parties and the UN envoy and his team. Even the technical consultative mechanism, which is a non-binding mechanism, is being discussed by the opposition and the UN team. It is surprising that the United Nations accepts the negative participation of the delegation of the regime. It is also surprising that the UN views the mere participation of the regime delegation as an achievement, thus departing from the real substance and content of the Geneva process.

The continuation of the Geneva process without achieving tangible progress, and amid the continued military escalation by the regime and its allies and their attempts to resolve the conflict militarily, has hampered the process, undermined popular confidence in it, and sapped the required momentum behind it. It is widely believed now that the regime and its backers are exploiting the process to give the impression of engaging in a political process which they have emptied of any substance or meaning. The resumption of the Geneva process requires focusing on direct negotiations addressing the issue of political transition in a practical and detailed manner and in accordance with the international resolutions and with the full support of the international community.

8- Issues of detainees, displaced, and besieged persons

The Syrian Coalition deeply regrets the failure of the international community and its organizations to save over a quarter million Syrians who are being held in Assad’s prisons and subjected to systematic torture by the Assad regime’s death squads. The Coalition also regrets the failure of the international community to force the Assad regime to disclose the fate of over 150,000 missing persons, including women and children, who have been kidnapped and taken hostages. Nothing has been known about them ever since they were kidnapped, nor have their relatives or the concerned human rights organizations been able to know anything about their fate.

The issue of detainees and missing persons is one of the most painful and tragic issues for the Syrian people who have been afflicted by the tyranny of the criminal Assad regime. Despite the Caesar photos, the massacre in Sednaya prison and the mass graves containing the bodies of thousands of detainees who died under torture, and the continuation of these crimes until today, the UN Security Council has thus far failed to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice because of the political cover provided

by some countries to the regime, including Russia, which prevents any progress in this file at the level of the negotiations in Astana and Geneva. Russia also continues to block the transfer of the dossier of war crimes to the International Criminal Court and the start of prosecution proceedings. The Coalition reassures the Syrian people it will remain committed to work for the cause of detainees and missing persons. A national commission has been set up for this purpose and to unify the efforts of the concerned organizations and initiate effective international action in this regard.

9- Reforming the Syrian Coalition

These dangerous developments have made it imperative to conduct a transparent review of the whole course of the revolution on the political and military levels. This review has resulted in the development of a comprehensive reform program for the Coalition and its institutions, including the activation of the role of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and enhancing the political representation of the opposition armed groups in the Coalition with the aim of unifying the military efforts within a single national framework to achieve the goals and aspirations of the Syrian people. Moreover, the Coalition continues to hold dialogue and consultations with the organizations and institutions of the revolution, civil society, and political parties and movements. This dialogue and consultation will continue as we institutionalize and systematize this consultation mechanism.

The reform process aims to affirm the eligibility of the Coalition to administer the liberated areas through SIG, local councils, the Coalition-affiliated armed groups, the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) and the trust fund. This administration covers everything related to state property and its institutions as well as issues related to sovereignty, such as the police, judiciary, education curriculums, the issuance of certificates, civil registry, land registry, and any other activities.