

# Press Conference: President Jarba's Recent Meetings with SMC Commanders and A Summary of the UNGA Meetings in New York – October 07, 2013

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October 8, 2013

Ahmad al-Jarba  
Syrian Coalition President  
Press Conference  
Istanbul, Turkey  
October 7, 2013

## TRANSCRIPT:

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) Since the Assad regime's chemical weapons attacks, we have started an extensive campaign of communications and meetings; inside and outside Syria. We have tried to push the international community to put an end to the aggression of the terrorist Assad regime on our people, but some international winds blew against the direction of the Syrian revolution. After meetings and deliberations, we have reached clear conclusions, and we affirmed to major states that we adhere to the constants of the revolution. We have urged the international community to assume its responsibilities; on the top of these responsibilities is stopping Iran's aggression and its Hezbollah's militias and neutralizing Assad's abilities to target the Syrian people not only with chemical weapons but also with aircrafts and scud missiles. We have also reiterated the importance of providing rebels with the sophisticated weaponry necessary to repel the regime's aggression and enable us to liberate our country.

Some parties have tried to force us into accepting Geneva II as the only path for any international cooperation; as if Geneva was the only way through which we can make the voice of the revolution heard. As we realize the gravity of the situation and the importance of international support, and as we know the Assad regime is lying, we have decided to deal with Geneva II openly but cautiously. We have said clearly we do not reject Geneva just for the sake of rejecting it. But we agree on Geneva under certain parameters that will ensure the success of such a conference and will prevent the Assad killer regime from buying time. We have presented a set of parameters necessary for Geneva to result in a transfer of power, bringing criminals to justice, restoring peace and stability to Syria, and ensuring the transition of Syria into a free country that has full sovereignty over the Syrian territories. The parameters we have provided to representatives of major states, the UN Secretary General, and everyone we have met with are clearly the following:

1. We have stressed that there will be no dialogue with the criminal regime because a national dialogue takes place between nationalists that want the best for their country, but not between revolutionary forces and a criminal regime that brought militias to occupy Syria. We will not negotiate with an enemy. Our only goal is to arrange and prepare for conditions conducive to the transfer of power and bringing to justice those who have committed crimes against the Syrian people.
2. We have requested that prior to any negotiation process there must be guarantees from Islamic and Arab states; in particular Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Jordan, and all that must be under the supervision of the Arab League.
3. We have rejected the participation of Iran as a broker in any negotiation process. Iran is occupying Syrian land and it has mercenaries that are killing the Syrian people including Hezbollah's militias. If Iran is to take part of any negotiation process it should be standing with the regime but not as a mediator. If Iran wants to broker any political process it should withdraw its Revolutionary Guards Corps and mercenaries, who have come from Lebanon and Iraq, from Syria immediately. After that we could put the matter to discussion.
4. We have reiterated to everyone we have met the importance of those parameters in any feasible negotiation process. If the international community was able to embrace such parameters, it would be possible then to bring the matter to further discussion in the Syrian Coalition's different institutions including the Supreme Military Council which will discuss it with revolutionary forces. And then it will be brought before the General Assembly of the Syrian Coalition for a vote.

This is what we have said clearly and in detail to all those with whom we have discussed Geneva II. We have rejected any decision that is not within this framework. I wanted to make our position clear to the Syrian public and the general public opinion. We have nothing to hide and we have nothing to be ashamed of. Two days ago, I have discussed this position with the Supreme Military Council, Chief of Staff, the General Staff, and commanders of fronts and military councils. They have shown the same position withholding the same constants. And I say that the statement issued by the Supreme Military Council and the General Staff- when I have met with them- I say this unity will be the start of a new era.

**QUESTION:** (Original in Arabic) Muhammed from Anadolu news agency. You have said that you requested that Iran withdraws its forces, including Hezbollah, from Syria prior to the start of any negotiation process with the regime. There are reports that indicate Hezbollah is withdrawing from Syria. What is your take on that? The second question is: there are reports about clashes between the people of Raqqa and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant ISIS, what is your comment on that? Thank you.

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) as for the first question. I do not think that- we have information that Hezbollah is still fighting in our beloved Syria. Yesterday, al-Waer neighborhood in Homs was hit by scud missiles by Assad's forces supported by Hezbollah's militias. Hezbollah claims to be a party of resistance; well I

am not sure liberating Palestine, Haifa, and Jerusalem starts from Qusair and al-Waer. So this is not true. Hezbollah did not withdraw its fighters from Syria. Hezbollah's Secretary General admitted they have forces fighting on the ground in Damascus. If they withdrew their forces they should admit that publicly as they have made public their presence inside Syria.

As for your second question, the province of Raqqa as you well know was one of the first provinces to be liberated. This province, as are the eastern provinces of Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh, are areas where Arab tribes live. Those tribes support the FSA. They have their own traditions that must be respected. Unfortunately, yesterday one of those tribes- al-Fadaan tribe- in Raqqa was attacked by ISIS. We call for self-restraint, and we stress the importance of respecting the traditions of those tribes. The people of Raqqa have endured injustice. We say to them we have to be patient. We are facing this together. We are fighting the regime, and we are liberating areas, but ISIS is exploiting the situation, and they are fighting us instead of fighting the regime. May God help us. We urge all parties to stop this wave of violence and injustice in liberated areas in particular Raqqa. Raqqa is an ancient city. There are Al Nasir and Al Faraj in Tabqa, and Afadila in Raqqa, and Al Fadaan also in Raqqa, who have been fiercely attacked yesterday. All of them support the FSA, and we hope these grave violations in the province will come to an end soon.

**QUESTION:** (Original in Arabic) Nidal from Al Jazeera. There was a meeting two days ago with the Supreme Military Council, as you have said. There was a statement too in which the SMC said they recognize the Coalition. My question is: there are two powerful brigades; Tawhid Brigade and Islam Brigade. It is said one of them has 10 thousand fighters and the other 17 thousand. They control areas stretching from Idlib to rural Damascus. Were these two brigades among the signatories of the statement? Are they now recognizing the Coalition? My second question is we always talk about liberated areas. Still, the meeting took place in Istanbul, Turkey. Why did not take place in liberated areas or Gaziantep for example, just on the border? Thank you.

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) The two brigades you have mentioned did not sign the statement issued by the Supreme Military Council which comprises most of the fighting brigades inside Syria. There are more than 30 brigades in Deir Ezzor subsumed under the SMC. There are tens of thousands in the north; in Homs, Hama, and the Syrian coast as well. Damascus and Dera'a are also represented. The absence of two brigades does not mean we do not have the support of the SMC, military councils, and commanders of fronts in Syria. As for the second question, I do not think there is a difference between Istanbul and Gaziantep. Why we did not hold it in liberated areas? Well there will be meetings in liberated areas. Actually, I have met with the General Staff in liberated areas and will in the future. The fact of the matter is that I had just arrived from New York, and due to some diplomatic and political commitments in Istanbul, it was best to hold it in Istanbul.

**QUESTION:** (Original in English) Hello. I have two questions. Firstly, on what you were just talking about. We know that General Idris went to liberated areas to speak to

these commanders that have split from the Coalition, and other members of the Coalition have told us that there are going to be big efforts to- you know- build communications between- with these groups again. And I wanted an update on how that has gone? And why- it has been almost two weeks since they split off. Why you have not been able to get them back on side. And then the second question I had was about Kerry saying that – you know- that the Syrian- the Assad regime has done really well by- you know- handing over the weapons, and that was going really well, and he praised what has happened today, and I wanted to ask if that makes you worried that maybe they are going back on their wishes to support the Coalition and get Assad out?

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) As for the first question, I have just said that the Supreme Military Council SMC that comprises the majority of the brigades fighting on the ground, has announced its support for the Coalition in the past couple of days. You asked about Gen. Idris. As far as I know, Gen. Idris did not discuss the matter with them. They have issued a statement and then they said it is not against the Coalition. It is against ISIS, which is strange to me. Some of those groups that have signed the statement have communicated; directly and indirectly, that they did not know exactly the purpose of the statement. We are beyond that now, especially after the meeting with the SMC, the General Staff, military councils, and commanders of the fighting fronts in Syria.

**QUESTION:** (Original in English) It is not clear to us though. Are those 13 brigades on board again?

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) No, in the statement they said they are under the command of al-Nusra. We are waiting for them to renounce al-Nusra, and embrace the General Staff and the political leadership in the Coalition. The ball now is in their court.

As for the second question, about Kerry praising the Assad regime, we do not consider those remarks a change in the U.S. administration's policy. However, Mr. Kerry, in his recent remarks, dealt with only a part of the Syrian dossier which is the chemical weapons. It would have been preferable if he had dealt with the situation in Syria as a whole; as a cause of a people being slaughtered by a dictator with all kinds of weapons including chemical weapons. Whatever was the purpose of those remarks, a criminal should not receive the approval and praise of the international community just for handing over one of the weapons it is using in a series of crimes. It is not acceptable that the Assad has transformed from a war criminal into a partner of the international community through the agreement on the elimination of chemical weapons. It is not logical that he who has gassed his people to death turns into an international partner and a media hero. Assad is a coward. He acquiesced when there was credible threat from the west. This is a regime that claims to be resistant. It is only a regime of lies and political deception.

**QUESTION:** (Original in English) Hello Mr. President. Jerome Bastion from radio France International. I have two questions at least. First of all, we heard two days ago

that 8 high ranking officers from the Free Syrian Army, among which Riad al-Ass'ad , were severely wounded. What is the situation? They are in Istanbul in a hospital? And why- how were they wounded? This is my first question. The second question is very simple in fact. What is the situation nowadays of the Free Syrian Army on the ground? Whom are they fighting against? Of course the Assad regime, but out of the Assad regime, the al-Qaeda groups and other groups maybe- what is the situation exactly? Please thank you.

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) You mentioned Riad al-Ass'ad. Of course, he was originally the commander of the Free Syrian Army. He is a respected person inside Syria. His leg was amputated when he was the victim of a cowardly terrorist act during a visit to Deir Ezzor. That was in the past. We have not heard about another incident. As for you second question about the situation of the FSA. The FSA is the guardian of the revolution. It is the military wing of the Coalition. We are proud of it. FSA fighters are facing difficult circumstances fighting a criminal regime that is trying to kill FSA fighters who are defending civilians. The FSA is spread across Syria. Yes there are extremist takfiri forces in Syria, but they are not subsumed under the FSA. They are there and the FSA is there too. We do not want to be distracted from our main goal. We have one enemy that is the criminal Assad regime. That is why the Syrian people took to the streets asking for freedom and dreaming about a new Syria; a free Syria. Any party or group who do not adhere to the principles and constants the Syrian people took to the streets to achieve will be dealt with firmly. However, our enemy that we took to the streets to rid the country of is that criminal regime. Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** Last question.

**QUESTION:** (Original in English) Sorry precisely, precisely. Is the Free Syrian Army fighting any other group than the national Syrian army or not?

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) The Free Syrian Army does not fight any other groups in Syria other than Assad's forces. However, there were some clashes which erupted due to the violations of those extremist takfiri groups in liberated areas. Those groups clashed with the FSA in some areas, and we are trying to exercise self-restraint in order to keep things under control, and because not doing so would open the door for damaging infighting. We have one goal that is toppling the criminal Assad regime. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** (Original in Arabic) Mr. Jarba. Abdul Nasir from BBC Arabic. There were those who are opposed to your position on Geneva II, because there were reports that you accept to go to Geneva as the west proposed. Those have also said that you must be held accountable for that within of the General Assembly of the Coalition. What is your position now? Are you still willing to go to Geneva? Or there is a change?

**PRESIDENT AL-JARBA:** (Original in Arabic) What I have said here I said before an international conference on Syria in the UN. I said that to all the officials that we have met with in New York; the same words I used here. I will not enter into a debate with

some of our brothers and colleagues, but I say that if they attacked me I will not attack them. We should renounce division and not hold grudges against one another. Thank you.