



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES

RESEARCH PAPERS

# Critical Discussion of Study

Dr. Housam al-Din Darwish | March, 2012

Critical Discussion of Study

Series: RESEARCH PAPERS

Dr. Housam al-Din Darwish| March, 2012

Copyright © 2012 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

---

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

**Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies**

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel.: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

[www.dohainstitute.org](http://www.dohainstitute.org)

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Background of the Syrian Revolution	4
Agriculture	6
Documenting and Analyzing the First Five Months of the Syrian Revolution	17
Prospects for Syria and its Revolution	44

## Introduction

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies has published on its website a series of articles entitled: “*The Last Decade in Syria: The Dialectic of Stagnation and Reform*,”<sup>1</sup> by Mohammed Jamal Barout. These articles deal with the Syrian revolution, its background, its current path, and, briefly, its future prospects. The historiography of the past (the last decade in Syria) and the present (the first five months of the revolution), as well as an examination of the future and its implications, all intersect in Barout’s research.

The intention of the author appears to have been to write four articles on the economic, social, political, and dialectical background of stagnation and reform of the last decade in the history of Syria. The numbering system for the first two articles indicates this; however, the escalation of the Syrian protests likely caused Barout to move on to a fifth study comprising five sections. In the final article, the emphasis shifts away from history, turning instead to future prospects. The series of articles concludes thus, making it possible (and even beneficial) to deal with it as a nearly finished book for the purposes of study, analysis and criticism.

It could be fairly stated that the current title of the paper, *The Past Decade in Syria: The Dialectic of Stagnation and Reform*, reflects only the content of the first four studies. From the fifth study onward, the focus is on documentation and discussion of the highlights of the Syrian revolution (from February until the end of July, 2011). The first studies appeared in April, and the final one in October.

Many articles have emerged in relation to the recent revolutions and protest movements in the Arab world in general, including the Syrian revolution. However, Barout’s series of articles can be viewed as the first analytical, forward-looking, and in-depth study of the progression of the events in Syria to date (November 2011). For this reason, and because these studies deal with significant issues for the Syrian people, a critical discussion of some of the most important ideas and facts in these studies will be

---

<sup>1</sup> “The research can be found and downloaded on both the English and Arabic versions of the ACRPS websites.”

presented here. The criticism will seek to demonstrate the inherent legitimacy of these ideas, while simultaneously exploring the limitations of this same legitimacy\*.

Simply put, criticism is intended to shed light on both positive and negative aspects of a given situation or paradigm. The critical mechanism can be simplified in the formula: "... this is true, but..." where the legality of any idea derives from its possibility and reality. Using the terminology of logic, this refers to truthfulness (internal and external consistency) as well as sincerity (consistency with reality). This basis in reason can be explored through the study of theoretical foundations and supporting facts and evidence; also, through adherence to consistency in drawing conclusions based on these foundations, facts, and evidence.

Any discussion of the legitimacy of the ideas in the study must be accompanied by discussion of the limitations of this legitimacy. Although these are in-depth and comprehensive studies, they remain, as do all bodies of research, to some degree partial and relative. Appearance and absence, revelation and concealment, are contiguous and correspondent, beginning with the theoretical framework on which the study is based. Reference to the partiality of the articles is not meant to demean them or diminish their value, but simply to highlight the fact that they are not comprehensive. Any study addresses a certain aspect of the reality under examination, and as such cannot address reality in its entirety. Reference to the articles' relativity draws attention to their partiality on the one hand, and to the relationship between the adopted method and intellectual framework on the other. The terms *point of view*, *viewpoint* and *perspective* all point to the partiality of these studies, and of human knowledge in general; i.e., why we see things in one way and not another<sup>2</sup>.

---

\* The meaning of criticism practiced here is derived from Kantian philosophy in criticism (as per German philosopher Emmanuel Kant, 1724-1804) and from Ricoeurian Hermeneutics (from French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, 1913-2005). Criticism practiced by Kant and Ricoeur was based on clarification of the legitimacy of the intellectual field or subject being researched and the extent of this legitimacy, with emphasis on the partiality of this legitimacy and its relativity and limitations at the same time.

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method: Basic Guidelines for Philosophical Interpretation*, translation: Nazim Hassan, Ali Hakem Saleh, Review: George Katoura, first edition, (Tripoli: Dar Oya, 2007), p. 268. It is worth mentioning here that the phrase "point of view" and the term "perspective" first appeared in optical sciences and were drawn later generally into the field of philosophy by the German philosopher Leibniz (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 1646-1716) who believed that each *monad* (basic unit of perceptual reality) provides a representation of a picture of the world according to his view, and through a personal relationship with this world. Leibniz says: "Each time one looks at a particular city from different angles, it appears to have a very different shape, as if it has multiple perspectives. There are also – according to the infinite amount of simple gems – multiple different worlds, that are only perspectives of one world according to the different and separate viewpoints of each *monad*." (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz,

In short, the partiality of the articles, and their relativity, reflect the simultaneous need for methodology, epistemology, and ontology. This necessity is consistent with human knowledge in general, including scientific knowledge. Thus, the discussion will try to reveal both what the study says or wants to say, and also what it does not say or want to say. It will reveal the significance of presence and absence, or their indications, as well as their importance in the strategy of discourse and the reality revealed by that discourse.

Barout's study is divided into three main sections. The first section analyzes the background of the Syrian revolution by studying the last decade of the country's history. The second section develops an analytical historiography of the first five months of the Syrian revolution. The final section is devoted to discussion of a forward-looking vision for Syria's future prospects, beginning with the state of the revolution and the crisis currently at hand. It is important to point out that the aim of this paper is not to present a summary that could act as a condensed substitute for Barout's articles. Rather, this study aims to encourage the reader to re-visit the original articles, and to examine them for confirmation of their value and importance.

---

*Monadologia, Principles of Nature and Grace, Founded on Reason.* Translation, presentation and comments: Abdul Ghaffar Makkawi, first edition, Cairo: The House of Culture, 1978, *Monadologia*, paragraph 57, p.157). Chladenius (Johann Martin Chladenius, 1759-1710) introduced these terms into hermeneutics, humanities and social sciences, in general, and literary hermeneutics and historical criticism, in particular. Just as Leibniz sees that each monad grasps the same world that is grasped by others from a personal perspective and according to his own capabilities, Chladenius sees that historical and documentary knowledge could differ from one person to the other as it reflects the personal perspective of the researcher, without negating that it refers to the same reality. See also:

– Freiherr v, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, translated by E.M. Huggard, edited by Austin Farrer (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007) p. 343;

– K. Mueller-Vollmer, 'Introduction' in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2006) p.7;

– Y. Sherratt, *Continental Philosophy of Social Science: Hermeneutics, Genealogy and Critical Theory, From Ancient Greece To The Twenty-First Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 55-56.

To say that the studies reflect a point of view does not mean that it is only an opinion in the Plutonian sense, as the knowledge that the studies contain is generally based on methodological and epistemological principles that are as strict, clear and accurate as possible.

## The Background of the Syrian Revolution

The first four sections of the series involve a socio-economic analysis of the protest movement currently taking place in Syria. This examination of context cannot be considered as an explanation of the causes (in the epistemological sense of the word) underlying the protests, as the writer resorts to chaos theory to indicate that developments in the Middle East do not happen according to set rules that can be predicted and controlled. Rather, they occur in surprises, leaps, and political earthquakes (1/9)<sup>3</sup>. Barout uses this rule or basis as a general characteristic for all revolutionary situations, asserting that every revolution follows its own path and internal logic, where the sudden or random play a more prominent role than the causal (4/9-5).

Analysis of the background circumstances in Syria leading up to the revolution reveal the existence of a state of general congestion, creating what both the writer and Azmi Bishara call the *revolutionary potential*. This revolutionary potential developed into an actual revolution in Syria subsequent to the occurrence and success of revolutions in other Arab countries. Barout points out that the domino theory does not satisfactorily explain the spread of revolutions from one Arab country to another, as there was little similarity between the various authoritarian Arab regimes on the economic-socio-political level. The focus in this series of articles is on the socio-economic dimension, with the first four sections of the study examining the existing context in the country in the time leading up to the protests.

At the same time, Barout warns against viewing the issue from a limited economic perspective, one that perceives the economic reality through growth rates and ignores how much these rates contribute to development. While this approach is a quantitative one that concerns itself with growth rates, the developmental approach is qualitative; it examines the degree to which growth contributes to achieving lasting development in terms of reducing the spread of poverty, minimizing unemployment, achieving greater equity in the distribution of income, and other such concrete goals. The importance of the developmental approach in this research is evident; it demonstrates that the Syrian economy, despite its maintenance of reasonably acceptable growth rates over the last

---

<sup>3</sup> Citations here are documented through the use of two numbers: the first refers to the number of the study, the second to the page number. Note that the fifth study includes five parts and their numbers are 1-5 till 5-5; an example is (2/10-5), which denotes page 10 of part 2 of the 5th study.

four decades (and particularly in the most recent one), has yet not managed to achieve the bare minimum of desired development.

In a *friends and relatives economy*, the majority of the fruits of economic growth are distributed amongst cronies and familial relations. Syria's economic growth rate in the 1970s was the highest in the Arab world, reaching 10.5 percent. However, the plundering of public money created a situation in which this healthy economic growth rate primarily enriched top- level bureaucratic, governmental, political, military, and security elements in the country.

The research reveals shocking figures detailing the extent of catastrophic devastation on the Syrian economy from increasingly liberal economic policies. Also affecting a large segment of the population, these policies were implemented from 2001 until they reached their peak between 2006 and 2010. The Syrian economy moved from a *curse of the pharaohs* scenario, referring to imitation of the Egyptian policies of economic openness in a diluted form (1/19); to *Mexicization*, or imitating the Mexican experience (which proved to be a disaster for their economy and was later abandoned). This model was based on the total liberalization of the economy, without preceding or concurrent measures to prepare or strengthen it.

The policy adopted by the Syrian regime from 2006 onwards had catastrophic consequences for the country's economy and also for a sizable portion of the population. A transition took place away from the paradigm of a central economy to that of what was called *social market economy* (essentially denoting the shift from authoritarian bureaucracy to liberalized authoritarianism). A naive liberal program was applied, unencumbered by connections to institutional or developmental reform, whereby the process of economic liberalization benefitted a new segment of businessmen: the *young wolves*, to use Barout's term. These wolves collaborated to create a number of holding companies, the most important of which was al-Sham Holding Company. This company alone controlled 60 percent of Syrian economic activity, according to Rami Makhlouf, the largest shareholder in the company (2/20) and the leader of the wolves.

These holding companies and the government came to an unbalanced agreement, whereby the government yielded to the interests of the companies and their elite to a much greater extent than the latter conformed to the government's policies (2/21). The companies neglected the agricultural and industrial sectors entirely, giving priority



instead to service projects that could generate quick profits and were tailored to meet the demands of the richest and most powerful classes (2/22). The *level playing field philosophy* is based on a mechanism of transparency and fairness in the business world. With the emergence of *friends and relatives capitalism* (also known as *crony capitalism*), transparency, integrity, and access to information (2/30) were all ignored in favor of oligopoly.

The Syrian telecommunications sector and its two companies are a model for this type of monopoly, where the interests of businessmen are looked after at the expense of those of the state. Such monopolies tended to take refuge behind the legal façade of “contracts by mutual consent” (2/31). Consequently, corruption reigned in two primary manifestations: small (associated with the disproportionate ratio between salaries and prices) and big (obscure networks between businessmen and bureaucracy, facilitating communication with mafias inside the different bureaucratic apparatuses) (2/30). It is natural for crony capitalism to concentrate wealth in the hands of a select group of investors for individual or political purposes (2/31). These economic policies, and the corruption that served both as their creator and their beneficiary, eventually provoked the collapse of the two most important economic sectors: industry and agriculture.

## **Industry**

Stagnation of economic reform, increased trade liberalization, and underutilized production proved a toxic combination to Syria’s industrial sector. The widespread freezing of public industrial projects, as well as the abandonment of plans for reform and repair, led this sector inexorably toward its imminent destiny: complete collapse (2/7).

## **Agriculture**

Between 2006 and 2009, Syria experienced its worst drought in many decades, which happened to coincide with the process of agricultural liberalization. At the same time, a plan to remove subsidies on production essentials resulted in a sharp reduction of subsidization on oil derivatives in general, and diesel oil in particular. This proved disastrous for the agricultural sector and those working in it (3/43). A quarter of the population of the Hasaka province left their homes to look for alternative employment,

with the rate of migration in affected villages reaching 50 and 75 percent (3/44). The Syrian government confronted the national agricultural and economic catastrophe with the firefighter mentality: attempting to extinguish the fire after it has already spread. This strategy was simply not adequate to fully repair the damage done by risky liberalization policies (3/45). These policies led, both directly and indirectly, to a marked reduction in the number of Syrians engaged in the agricultural sector: from 1.4 million down to 800 thousand people during the period from 2002 to 2008, or a decrease of 44 percent (4/4-5).

### **Economic growth**

The standards of the developmental approach clearly demonstrate that the observed increase in economic growth over the last decade was accompanied both by an increase in the number of poor people, and by a significant decline in their standard of living. This resulted in more than 7 million people, or 34.3 percent of the Syrian population, living below the poverty line (3/8). Inflation rates (the harshest enemy of the poor) have increased sharply over the last decade to reach 15.15 percent in 2008; this occurred as a result of substantive and political factors, the removal of subsidies, and a rise in price of energy, oil derivatives and a large number of goods (3/10,11). Taxation policies have only reinforced the distortion in income distribution. Direct taxes on real gain, affecting the rich in particular, were lowered (the tax rate average plunged to become the lowest in the world), and indirect taxes and fees were levied against other sectors of society (3/12).

Thus, rising impoverishment of a vast portion of the population came to be juxtaposed against the flourishing of the private sector and, in particular, approximately one hundred individuals from the top financial echelon (the above-mentioned wolves). Despite official figures made available by the Syrian government, which indicated a decrease in unemployment from 12.3 percent in 2004 to 8.1 percent in 2009, Barout's study highlights the fact that the unemployment rate now exceeds 16.5 percent, which is equivalent to 3.4 million unemployed individuals (1/12).

These figures and others point to the miserable economic reality that the majority of the Syrian population has experienced, to varying degrees. Since 2005, Barout has predicted catastrophic results if the ruling authority in Syria should fail to effect complete and comprehensive reform. Under the title *Syria, 2010: Reform or Disaster*,

he wrote: "It can be said loud and clear, without any hesitation, that there are not many options left for Syria in its current state. In fact, there are only two: complete political, economic, administrative, human development reform under the mature and democratic management of the ruling system and society, or disaster"<sup>4</sup>.

The analysis of the background of the revolution is primarily an economic one, sometimes slipping into *quasi-economics*. Rather than affecting the legitimacy of the study, this highlights instead the limitations of this very legitimacy. What is meant here by the term "quasi-economics"? Where and when did it appear in this study? Why and how can it contribute to establishing limitations on the legitimacy of the study?

The writer uses this term to refer to an economic approach that deals almost exclusively with growth rates or quantity, without concern for development and the social, political, environmental, aspects, reasons or results that are necessarily connected to this development. Barout is critical of this narrow perspective, insisting that the subject should be approached in a way that is developmental, and concerned with potential reasons for the revolutions and socio-political tensions currently existing in various parts of the Arab world. Four of these reasons are highlighted in the study:

- The prevalence of an authoritarian development structure in police or semi-police states that tends to lead to the fruits of development being distributed according to cronyism and nepotism.
- The dominance of an authoritarian-security structure, rather than one based on rule of law, in the relationship between the state and society.
- An increase in tension between large demographic supply and limited economic demand leading to high unemployment rates and socio-economic marginalization.
- The repercussions of the development fallout in various provinces, and a growing disconnect between the northern and southern regions of the same nation (1/5,6).

To understand the deep-rooted internal dynamics underlying the protests, it is necessary to examine their origins and *modi operandi*, as well as the development of their dimensions and indicators (1/6). Thus, Barout sees the developmental approach as

<sup>4</sup> Barout, Mohammed Jamal, Syria 2010: Reform or Disaster, Arab Renewal, 02/06/2005.

<http://arabrenewal.info/الكارثة-أو-الإصلاح-2010-سوريا-6772-عاديي-كتاب/>

The meaning of this kind of quasi-economics and its forms of appearance will gradually be explained in the study beginning with the current page.

the most applicable in this situation, permitting as it does an understanding of these factors over a relatively long period of time, which in turn facilitates predictions as to their eventual outcomes (1/6).

Thus, the writer uses study of the socio-economic background not only from the perspective of methodology, but also as a way to investigate its most important factors and causes. Economic, social, political, security, and other issues are examined, but the focus of the research is on economic and social factors - specifically, the relationship of these elements to authoritarian-security structures as catalysts for revolutions and socio-political tensions in the Arab world. In this way, the study sidesteps one type of quasi-economics only to adopt one of a slightly different nature.

For the purposes of this paper, the term "quasi-economics" will refer to the second type, i.e., a focus on the economic factor or dimension as the principle reason explaining the other factors or dimensions (political, social, cultural, or otherwise) that become secondary or marginal in comparison to the former. Quasi-economics can assume various forms. Firstly, a repeated emphasis can be observed on the presence of different factors or dimensions, when seeking to unravel the background of the Syrian revolution, accompanied by mention of economics as the primary dimension. Analysis of the economic dimension typically occupies the bulk of the analysis of this background. Aside from these formal associations, quasi-economics is also evident within this study in some of the explicit content of various reports and assessments that contribute to it.

In the discussion of the tenth five-year plan (2006 - 2011), it is pointed out that both the non-implementation of this plan, and the reduction of reform to a liberalization process similar to *Mexicization*, marked the beginning of a socio-economic turning point that could explain the subsequent course of events (1/32).

The reform plan, lavishly praised and granted explanatory power by Barout's articles, did not include any discussion of political reform. The studies suggest that it was limited to support for a comprehensive process of socio-economic transformation, in order to shift Syria from a centralized economy to a social market one. Pro-poor policies, including renovation of deprived and marginalized areas with the goal of integrating them into the development process, were also advocated (1/30). This is, therefore, a socio-economic reform plan, lacking any framework for real political reform; however,

the writer suggests that its implementation could ultimately have opened the door to lasting and positive political change (1/30).

The fundamental question here is whether it is possible to achieve any economic reform in Syria without the precedent of real, comprehensive and thorough political reform. The study is optimistic in this regard. Such optimism, however, stands in marked contradiction to the writer's own analysis of the Syrian economic structure in recent studies and articles. It is similarly inconsistent with the principle dialectic relationship between the political and economic dimensions of any institutional reform implemented by the Syrian regime over the last decades, or that could be applied by any new system in the future.

Barout describes the Syrian regime as an authoritarian one, but most of the study's attention is focused on the background of the Syrian revolution. The bulk of the analysis relates to economic policies and trends associated with the authoritarian system (bureaucratic or liberalized) rather than on examination of its authoritarian character. The absence of this examination leads to an overestimation of the value of the economic dimension, making of it an explanation for "events that happened or could happen."

The writer discusses the general Syrian economic situation over the last decade, and more specifically, the development process of the tenth five-year plan (in terms of what it could have achieved and the consequences of not implementing it). A conflict is invoked between *advocates of liberalism* (proponents of economic liberalization), *advocates of corrective measures* (those opposed to liberalization of the economy and supporting the central role of the public sector) and *advocates of development* (those trying to reconcile liberal and corrective perspectives without a clear vision).

These three trends are linked to different elements which the writer refers to as the *nominal authority*, consisting of *partisan and political tools*. He assigns the role of *real authority*<sup>5</sup>, absent to a large extent, to the security and military leadership. It thus becomes difficult to discuss problems and solutions or identify socio-economic roots of the crisis in Syria for the following reason: the security and military authorities are not

---

<sup>5</sup> The writer suggests that the security and military authorities in general are the real authority, while the partisan and political tools are simply nominal organizations through which the real authority exerts its influence (5/1-5).

only making the key decisions, but also maintaining the structures of nominal authority in all political, representative, and administrative bodies – extending even to the roles of mayor and minister (5/1-5).

The writer's discrimination and description of the roles of the two authorities, both the real and the nominal, seems to indicate that the nominal authority (i.e., the government, the Ba'ath Party, the Progressive National Front, and other such organizations) could not in fact implement or effect any real economic reform. To effect reforms of this nature would necessarily be detrimental to the economic and other interests of members of the real authority and their associates, which explains why such reforms will not be implemented under the current circumstances. Many examples are cited in the study to demonstrate that the real authority is effectively thwarting any attempt to achieve economic reform that could harm their interests and influence.

During the era of late President Hafez al-Assad, segments of senior governmental, political, military, and security bureaucracies exerted significant pressure on the president to dismiss Abdel Raouf al-Kassem's government. This pressure was applied because these groups perceived there to be a conflict between their own interests and certain the government policies. The government was accordingly dismissed in 1987 (1/17). This process was then repeated in an almost identical way during the presidency of Bashar al-Assad, when the government admitted – as articulated by Abdullah al-Dardari, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs in the government of Mohammed Naji al-Otari – its own inability to move forward with the process of reform on an effective level because of the opposition of businessmen and influential bureaucratic segments (2/21).

It can thus be concluded that no real socio-economic reform in Syria can be achieved as long as the security apparatus is so deeply embedded in the relationship between the government and society (4/28); i.e., as long as they interfere to exert their influence, whether within the scope of their duties or not (4/11). Some say that the Syrian regime's transition over the past decade from bureaucratic to liberalized authoritarianism was accompanied by a parallel transition from rigid cruelty to increasing flexibility. Even assuming this, the transition cannot be described as substantial except in terms of quantity (the extent to which it was applied) and shape (the structure of the regime's authoritarianism), rather than in terms of quality and content (the nature, structure, and composition of the regime itself).

Therefore, even if substantial changes took place in the intensity of authoritarianism over the past decade (4/12), these changes did not affect the nature or structure of the regime, which remained a thoroughly authoritarian, security-military construct. Without real political reform that could extend to the regime's fundamental nature and structure, the implementation and success of any reform-oriented project (whether economic or otherwise) is essentially inconceivable.

A specifically related issue here is whether it is possible to reform the education sector without first eliminating the partisan-security hegemony and its ubiquitous interference. Corruption in general, and big corruption in particular, are significant obstacles that cannot be overcome without addressing their roots in the security-military system and its hegemony over all state and social institutions. Quantitative loosening of the grip of security and its strict and arbitrary application has occasionally been effected, for example, by minimizing the implications of the state of emergency. This does not, however, reflect a change in the nature of the political security-military regime, which is always ready to use any kind of repression necessary to achieve its aims.

An example of this can be observed in the fierce campaign waged by security forces between late 2010 and early 2011 against those on the run from justice. This was undertaken with considerable ruthlessness, damaging citizens' sense of security in daily life. It also served to push many cities back into a state of emergency, including as it did individuals who had committed even minor offenses, with the arrests occurring outside judicial channels (4/29).

In principle, no reform process can succeed in Syria unless it is both so radical as to address the foundations of corruption, and comprehensive enough to address various political, economic, and social considerations. This necessary correlation between radical and comprehensive reform is not in itself a novel idea, as indicated by the discussion surrounding the lost chance for institutional reform that was embodied in the tenth five-year plan (2006 -2011), a plan that was neither approved nor ultimately applied. The writer suggests that this opportunity was thus squandered and lost, and that it is no longer possible to look at the institutional reform program (3/48).

Instead of asserting that it is no longer possible to achieve a socio-economic institutional reform in Syria, except in parallel with and linked to political reform aiming



to achieve democratic transition or democratization, emphasis should have been placed on the necessity of this parallelism and intertwinement. Barout himself has in the past stressed the close relationship between development on one side and democracy and freedom on another (2005): "In Syria it is impossible to envisage development without freedom and good democratic governance [...]. Democracy here is development and development is democracy or in Amartya Sen's words, 'development as freedom.'<sup>6</sup>"

To suggest the possibility of separating political from socio-economic reform is a proposition that effectively conforms with decisions made by the Syrian authority years ago. At this time the authority emphasized the priority of economic reform while postponing the fulfillment of all promised reforms on the political level. The study includes examples pointing to the Syrian regime's refusal to effect political reform or fulfill any promises made in relation to it. In 1989, former President Hafez al-Assad promised political reform, but elements of the body politic, having prepared themselves to be integrated into the regime's containment mechanisms, were ultimately disappointed (1/21). Reforms were limited to allowing a degree of economic pluralism, granting membership in parliament to some independents representing the private sector, and freeing several political prisoners.

A similar situation was repeated after the inauguration of Bashar al-Assad, disappointing many whose hopes had been bolstered by his initial presentation of himself as a proponent of the development and reform process. In his inaugural address, he made promises concerning respect for the opinions of others, institutional reform, revitalization of political life in general, and other related issues. Politico-cultural forums sprang up, forming a movement demanding democracy, reform and change; it was dubbed the *Damascus Spring*. The spring turned to autumn as the months passed, and the forums disappeared one by one; some activists were repressed and others were arrested. Thus, another opportunity had been missed to revitalize political life and activate social participation.

During the last decade, political reforms were still not forthcoming; any reform enacted was confined to general and economic liberalization, without any attempts to democratize the system or invigorate political life. Even those limited promises made by

<sup>6</sup> Barout, Mohammed Jamal, Syrian Liberation Faces a Dual Test, Arab Renewal, 29/09/2005.

<http://arabrenewal.info/مزدوج-امتحان-امام-السورية-التحريرية-8637/عاديي-كتاب.html>

The writer refers here to the title and content of this book: Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom, page 1, (Alam al-Ma'rifa, Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature, issue 303, May 2004).



the regime in 2005 were not implemented, and the only changes that took place were measures for economic liberalization procedures undeserving of placement in the category of real reform. In his last interview prior to the revolution, Assad insisted on the suspension of any reforms other than cosmetic ones, pointing out that “in order to be realistic, we will have to wait for the next generation to achieve this reform.”

The study’s quasi-economic analysis does not manifest itself solely through its focus on the socio-economic context of the Syrian revolution. Also, it conspicuously lacks any analysis of the regime’s general structure, composition and role, and particularly of the institution of the presidency itself. The Syrian president is the head of two authorities simultaneously: the real (security and military institutions) and the nominal (the Ba’ath Party, the Progressive National Front, and the government). This is why it seems strange - and lacking in objectivity - that the roles of the president and the presidential institution are not examined in this study of the country over the last decade.

Some reasons could justify an exclusive focus on the last decade in the history of Syria in a study concerned with the background of the Syrian revolution; for example, the beginning of the last decade was concomitant with the start of the term in office of a new president. This somewhat convincingly explains the subjection of this particular historical period to analysis. Knowing this, it becomes more difficult to ignore the president’s role and responsibility in recent and current events. This omission, then, necessarily limits the comprehensiveness and objectivity of the study, compromising its ability to shed light on the reality at hand.

Barout’s study generally subscribes to the popular belief that the president is fundamentally good, but surrounded by corrupt and authoritarian influences in the form of his advisors and entourage. This is evident primarily in two aspects of the study: the first is the general avoidance of any mention of the president’s role and responsibility for what has happened and is happening in Syria. The second is the strong focus on the roles of other people or factions, attributing to them all responsibility for any negative occurrences. In his discussion of the regime’s repression of the Damascus Spring movement in 2000 - 2001, the writer explains that the Syrian political leadership, including leaders of the security forces, stopped this movement and repressed its members by taking some of them to court and imprisoning them. To whom, in fact, is he referring to when he speaks of political leadership? It would seem that, as the head

of this leadership, the president bears at least partial responsibility for the suppression of the Damascus Spring movement.

The implicit, or perhaps even explicit, suggestion in the text is that the answer to the last question is "no". On the one hand, it describes the political leadership's way of dealing with this movement as contradictory and in conflict with presidential pledges of respect for diversity of opinion (1/14). On the other hand, it explains that the political leadership dealt with the Damascus Spring movement using the traditional authoritarian mechanisms of exclusion familiar from the previous president's regime.

The last point is a clear indication of the author's position that Assad was not one of the parties in the political leadership that repressed the Damascus Spring movement. This event took place only a few months after his inauguration, while the political leadership referred to in the text is described as being long accustomed to mechanisms of exclusion. It blames the repression of the movement on high-ranking bureaucratic officials fearful of reform - in particular, on former Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam. The president was purportedly opposed to the repression of this movement, seeking even to give it new impetus by allowing forums and intellectual movements to resume their work, but that all stopped after a campaign of selective arrests on September 10 and 11. The traditionalists took advantage of these incidents to tighten their grip, paralyzing any movement in the direction of political reform.

The author penned an essay in 2005 entitled *The End of Khaddam: the End of an Era*. This piece places responsibility for obstructing political and economic reform squarely on Khaddam, portraying him as a notoriously conservative, powerful, and influential individual who curbed the reform process at the fundamental economic and political levels<sup>7</sup>. The article also refers to some events of the new era as having been positive. On the economic level, the centers of power moved from the old wolves to a newer generation of young wolves, but this shift was not balanced by good governance policies enforcing economic, political, and cultural competitiveness that could end or at least limit monopolies. These are indeed democratic policies, yet they do not involve anything more substantial than the mechanisms of typical democratic systems<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> Barout, Mohammed Jamal, The End of Khaddam: The End of an Era, Arab Renewal, June 23, 2005. <http://arabrenewal.info/عاديين-كتاب/6962/عهد-نهاية-خدام-نهاية.html>

<sup>8</sup> Barout, Mohammed Jamal, In Order that the Change in Balance does not Favor the Young Wolves, Arab Renewal, June 30, 2005.

Accordingly, there has been no real political reform after the departure of Khaddam, who was perceived to be one of the major sources of obstruction and restraint on economic and political reform. On the contrary, the alternative path of economic liberalization has proved more brutal than the “populist” economic system of the bureaucratic past, lacking as it did any consonance with the principles, behaviors, policies, and standards of good governance<sup>9</sup>. This emphasizes the fact that, even according to the writer himself, meaningful economic reform is not possible unless carried out in conjunction with political reform on a similar scale.

The conspicuous omission of any discussion of the president’s responsibility and role is evident throughout the majority of the study. In discussing conflict or disputes at the economic level, between advocates of corrective measures and advocates of development, there is no reference to the president and his position. This conflict led, initially, to the formulation of the tenth five-year plan; subsequently, some parts of it were rejected, then frozen and shelved, in favor of a naïve process of economic liberalization that led to catastrophic results for the Syrian economy and most Syrian citizens. What was the role of the president in this cronyistic version of capitalism? No mention was made of the family relationship between the Assad and Makhoul families, the latter being the largest shareholder in the al-Sham Holding Company, which controls 60 percent of Syrian economic activity.

The relationship between the Assad, Makhoul, Shaleesh, and other families close to the regime can be viewed as a model for understanding the dynamics of the economy of oligarchy and cronyism that has prevailed in Syria in recent years. It also confirms the need for coherence between political and socio-economic dimensions for any desired institutional reform to take place. Analyzing this relationship can also help to address important questions, such as: to what extent can the system in Syria be described as operating on familial lines, in addition to its security/ military dimensions?

The familial aspect of the system’s framework, embodied in the leadership of a handful of prominent families over the most important political, military, security, economic, and media institutions, can be viewed as a major contributor to the longtime cronyism controlling the Syrian economy. It could similarly explain why the ruling authority has not, over the past decades, made any political reforms nor tolerated any attempts to implement real socio-economic change. Such an analysis could have clarified not only

---

<sup>9</sup> The previous source.

the background of the Syrian revolution, but also its current progress and future prospects.

The next section will show that the analysis and documentation of the first five months of the Syrian revolution continuously avoids examination of the structure of the regime in general, and the institution of the presidency in particular. It will demonstrate the impact of this avoidance on the ability of the study to portray reality in a balanced, clear, and objective way. In a brief study of this analysis, its most salient points will be highlighted and discussed, and its usefulness will be made clear in terms of the abundance of information, diversity of sources, and depth of some of its theses and ideas.

## Documenting and Analyzing the First Five Months of the Syrian Revolution

In this series of articles, the author avoids explicitly referring to the events in Syria as a revolution. Instead, he speaks of a "protest movement", of "events" and of "disorder". However, while the term "Syrian revolution" itself is not found in his writing, references are made to the "Daraa revolution" or the "revolution in the suburbs of Damascus". The study does not include a clear and accurate definition of the concept of revolution, as did, for example, Azmi Bishara's study in reference to the conditions under which the Mountain Revolution started against the French occupation.<sup>10</sup> This movement later went on to become a great national revolution after winning the support of the indigenous middle class.

Similar reference was made to the uprising or revolution of Saleh al-Ali, which took the form of a movement for national liberation due to its alliance with the revolution in the north. These examples emphasize two basic ideas. The first is the importance of random factors in the creation of revolutions in general, and in the current Syrian revolution or protest movement in particular. The second confirms that a protest movement cannot be a revolution unless it is national (as was the case in the two

---

<sup>10</sup> Bishara says: "What is meant by revolution is the wide popular movement outside the current constitutional structure, or outside legitimacy. Its purpose is to change the current governing regime", Azmi Bishara, *On the Revolution and the Ability of the Revolution*, First Edition, (Doha / Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2012), p. 22.

examples given, the Mountain Revolution and the revolution of Saleh al-Ali). Both ideas warrant further exploration.

The theory of coincidence or chaos<sup>\*</sup> can be usefully and logically applied when documenting and studying revolutions, including that in Syria. This theory, while not initially appearing in the field of humanities, is well-suited to the methodology and epistemology of these sciences. It is necessary, however, to thoroughly examine its meaning, limits, and implications of this theory as they pertain to the Syrian revolution. The basic premise of chaos theory is that complex systems comprise a vast number of possible eventualities, making it impossible to determine or assert a clear future course of events.

This theory lacks a single linear progression of cause and effect; rather, it posits several interrelated branches. Each one of these includes, in principle, the potential for an infinite number of subordinate branches, set in motion by the factor of chaos. Of course, certain of the concepts and ideas related to this theory must be considered with caution in relation to revolutions in general and Syria's situation in particular; this point is not specifically acknowledged in Barout's work.

The four articles are used to explain the background of the Syrian protest movement in such a way as to facilitate deeper understanding of its causes; however, they tend to exaggerate the role of the chaos factor, even attributing to it a role of greater prominence than that of the specific causes themselves. Certain incidents were described as random factors that had a significant role in setting off the protest movement and, ultimately, the revolution.

Examples of these would be the police officer who severely beat a citizen in Harika, and the president of the political security branch who insulted dignitaries in Daraa and then rejected their demands for the release of children detained for writing anti-regime slogans on the walls of the school. It is reasonable to question the writer's logic in attributing to such specific incidents greater significance than to more systemic issues: for example, the regime's police state and its adoption of devastating economic liberalization in conjunction with widespread crony capitalism that perpetuates unemployment and poverty in the general population (7-1/6).

---

\* Editor's Note: the word "shawash" can be translated in English as "chaos"; it means disorder, and everything that is against the regime.

According to Barout, "revolution is a social process created by a very complex set of factors. The motives, goals and objectives of those involved in it vary, whether they are active or indirectly involved. It is a process of surprise. That is, it explodes from simple unexpected facts, explained by the theory of "coincidence" or "chaos" and not a theory of historic cause and effect." (4/9-5). Can the beating or insulting of a citizen by a policeman or a security officer be reasonably considered a surprise or a coincidence? On the contrary, these things happen often (even frequently) in a country ruled by an authoritarian regime such as the one in Syria.

Of course, it may be difficult to predict which specific security officer or policeman will resort to insult or violence, and who, specifically, will be humiliated and beaten; examination of the situation in Syria, where the security forces are the masters of the state (4/ 28), reveals that the incidents in Harika and Daraa were neither elements of coincidence nor surprise. Rather, they were entirely predictable and normal in both form and content; the only unpredictability lay in the specific details of the location and the protagonists.

On this basis, it is not possible to place coincidence, chaos or random factors in opposition to historical cause and effect. Furthermore, the issue is not one of irresolvable differences (the random factor versus historical cause and effect). Randomness, as manifested by the events considered to have been catalysts for the beginning of the Syrian revolution, is inherently entangled with historical cause and effect. It is, accordingly, inappropriate to present them as discrete factors, as the writer sometimes does: "these facts are explained by the theory of coincidence or chaos and not the theory of historical cause and effect."

This distinction is more evident in Barout's commentary than in the documentation itself, as in his self-described attempts to "notice the emergence of the effects of the depth of history in its microscopic manifestations" (4/9-5). The natural convergence of the theory of coincidence with that of historic cause and effect is evident in the well-known scientific definition of the concept of coincidence itself: *the intersection of two causal chains or more, without a direct causal relationship between them*.

There is a thesis stating that any protest movement is necessarily and inherently nationalistic ("muhayatha" in Arabic)\*. It further states that such nationalism is a necessary condition for a situation to be classified as a revolution; perhaps this could be the reason (or one of the reasons) why Barout's articles refrain from referring to the current protest movement in Syria as a revolution. Does this protest movement really lack patriotism? What are the criteria that define a popular movement as patriotic or not, disregarding the empty slogans that characterize most views of the defenders of the current regime? Answers to these questions are not immediately evident in the study, but there are three particular indications that Barout does not perceive the current protest movement to be a patriotic one.

Firstly, in discussing the breakdown of tribal, sectarian, and regional links, the writer posits this as "an index of socio-political decline, which points to the failure of the process of social or national integration" (5/39-5). Secondly, while talking about the national implications of both the Mountain and the al-Ali revolutions, Barout argues that: "the Syrians will discover when they look back on these revolutions how they lost their understanding of them" (4/10-5). On that basis, it seems dubious to propose a hypothesis that refrains from using the term "Syrian revolution". This could be the result, at least to a certain extent, of a belief that the current level of awareness in Syria has retreated below the patriotic consciousness characterizing some of the previous Syrian revolutions.

Thirdly, and on the same lines, the writer believes that if the revolution fails to acquire this depth, it will degenerate into a situation of turmoil and social chaos. The specific term "turmoil" was repeatedly invoked to describe the current protest movement (for example, 1/9 and 1/4-5). The marked avoidance of any reference to the event as a revolution thus implies a belief that it is not, in fact, a patriotic movement.

Returning to the Mountain and al-Ali revolutions, it is evident that Barout understands the Mountain revolution as having demonstrated its patriotism and transformed into a major national revolution due to its alliance with national groups and by "[establishing]

---

\* al-Muhayatha is a philosophical and cinematic expression referring to the essential presence of the object/ text, and its independent presence, isolated from any events surrounding it. It appears from the argument in this critical study by Jamal Barout that the writer insists that the Syrian national protest movement is essentially independent, in order for it to be purely Syrian in its totality and in its independence. Only then can it be called a revolution. The author of this study presents arguments and evidence to prove the presence of this nationalism.

by blood and sacrifice the unity of the current national Syrian nature" (4/10-5).

Similarly, in al-Ali's revolution, "what gave Sheikh Ali's outrage its patriotic revolutionary nature was his alliance with the revolution of the North, and then with the Kemalists, through the northern revolution in Syria" (1/10). It can thus be concluded that, according to the study, the alliance between different Syrian factions and national groups increases the unity of Syrian society. This, in turn, is what bestows a patriotic and revolutionary character upon a protest movement, even one stemming from a single, random incident.

It is important not to underestimate the strength of the alliance amongst Syrians currently involved in the protest movement. After the protests spread beyond Daraa, the most commonly heard slogan was: "With our soul and blood we will redeem you, Daraa." As time went on, Daraa was replaced in the chant by a succession of other locations to be redeemed by the demonstrators: Banias, Homs, Hama, Douma, and others. This particular slogan represents a slight variation on the theme of a familiar refrain carrying deep national significance: "With our soul and our blood we will redeem you, O Hafez" (or "O Bashar"). The same applies to the slogan: "O Daraa (or other cities and areas of Syria), we are with you until our deaths."

However, these chanted slogans do not represent the alliance Barout refers to as the "embodiment of the Syrian national unity." In fact, two types of alliance are relevant here, neither of them consisting of a collaboration between Syria's geographical regions, cities, or towns. The first is an alliance of the national middle class with the rebels, and the second is a coalition of those belonging to different races, religions, sects and doctrines. The author characterizes both of these types of alliances as embodying Syrian national unity.

The term "national middle class" is not clearly defined in the study, nor is its relationship to the separate term "middle class". Temporarily ignoring the qualifier "national", it can be observed that the study uses the term "middle class" quite loosely, in reference to three different groups: one produced by the modern education system, a new globalized one created by the system linking education and consumption, and a traditional one composed of landlords, craftsmen, grocers, and others (1/10-5). These groups generally joined the protest movement in the Kurdish areas (4/25-5), in smaller



towns and cities (the suburbs of Damascus, for example) (4/21-5), in medium-sized towns (such as Daraa) (1/17-5), and also in larger towns (like Homs and Hama).

The study stresses the generally negative attitude toward the events taking place of the professional middle classes in larger cities such as Aleppo and Damascus (1/4-5). The relative importance of these two cities in particular derives from their position as the economic and political capitals of Syria and also "the largest reservoir of the middle class" in the country (5/20-5). It could be reasonably argued, then, that the Syrian middle class is not allied with the protest movement, because of their weak or absent participation in Aleppo and within the city limits of Damascus.

Here, two points must be emphasized. The first is that the population of both Damascus and Aleppo make up only about 20 percent of the population of Syria and 37 percent of its urban population. The second is that in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo should not necessarily be linked, as is sometimes done in the study, when talking about the lack of their participation (2/22-5). According to Barout, "during the progress of the protests and their development over five months or more...the two cities appeared as if they were disconnected from what was going on." (5/25-5)

This description holds true for the city of Aleppo, but is not accurate for Damascus, whether referring to the city proper or to Greater Damascus. During the first five months of the revolution, there were 16 pockets of protest within the Damascus city limits (4/2-5), "and these are considered significant pockets since they occurred within the very small area of the city limits of Damascus, which is only 118 square kilometers" (4/2-5).

Greater Damascus consists of the Damascus city limits and its surrounding small and medium towns. These are connected administratively to the province of Damascus, and considered, in both human and economic terms, an integral part of the city itself (2/7-5). Essentially, the unrest that has occurred has been in the suburbs of Damascus and other surrounding areas (5-4/2). It is not, therefore, accurate to suggest that the participation of the city of Damascus in the current protest movement has been minimal, nor to equate its role with that of the city of Aleppo. This applies even when discussing events within the city limits of Damascus only. Whether in Damascus or Greater Damascus, a healthy and active opposition movement clearly exists.

Syria's middle classes have actively participated in the revolution in all the cities and provinces that have experienced significant unrest (Daraa, Homs, Hama, Damascus, and others). It cannot reasonably be stated that the middle class has not allied itself with the protest movement simply based on the tepid participation of Aleppo (and, to a lesser extent, of Damascus). Even assuming that the middle classes of Aleppo and Damascus are representative of those of the rest of the country, it is a tenuous assertion indeed to cite the half-hearted participation of these cities as evidence for a lack of national unity in the revolutionary movement as a whole.

In analyzing the protests, the study arrives at the central thesis that they were representative of some groups but not others; in essence, that it was an uprising of the poor and marginalized. The description in the articles alternates between two types of centers for protest and two types of participating parties. Sometimes the locus of the center is postulated as being in large cities, which have been the primary beneficiaries of economic growth (Damascus and Aleppo). The participating parties, in this case, are the people in the cities and surrounding areas that have suffered from the consequences of the liberal economic policies applied in recent years. Alternatively, the center is presented as being located in other large cities, in addition to medium and occasionally small ones. Here, the participating parties are neighborhoods, small towns, and the surrounding areas.

It may be realistic to say that the participation of the center (specified as the cities of Aleppo and the Damascus) in the protest movement was weak or nearly non-existent compared to the participation of other areas (such as the provinces and cities of Daraa, the suburbs of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Idlib). Then, however, it becomes dubious to argue that the protest movements were focused generally on the outskirts of large, small and medium-sized cities or that "these movements are, at their peak, still an urban revolution of groups from medium, small and tiny towns" (14-4/13-5). This cannot be said, for example, in the case of the two major cities of Homs and Hama, both of which experienced major uprisings in their centers as well as their suburbs.

In connection with the idea that nationalism in a protest movement is a defining characteristic for it to be considered revolutionary, an example cited in the study refers to an incident that sparked a revolution among the Druze, before "this revolution joined forces with that of other national parties". Reference was also made to an event leading to a revolution among the Alawites, before they joined forces with the revolutionary

movement in the north (which was not itself Alawite in terms of the religious or sectarian affiliation of the rebels). Therefore, Barout's conception of a national revolution is one in which the different ethnic, religious and sectarian Syrian groups participate in it and mutually support one another.

It can be stated with reasonable certainty that most of Syria's current rebels or protestors are Arabs in terms of nationalism, Muslim in terms of religion, and Sunni in terms of sect. This observation does not ignore the fact that a significant number of Syrian Kurds are participating in the current revolution. However, the potential of the Kurds to intensify and expand revolutionary activity in areas where they constitute a majority remains limited. Similarly, it is understood that a considerable number of Ismailis have participated in the revolution, though they number fewer than the participating Druze, Alawites, and Christians. Finally, it must be remembered that a very large number of Sunnis, especially in Aleppo, have not taken to the streets.

National affiliation can be said to transcend (in the sense of absorbing without necessarily eliminating) race, ethnicity, religion, and other demographic factors. It is difficult, however, to discuss the comprehensiveness of this affiliation, or of its maturity and ability to absorb, so long as the authoritarian regime remains in power. Its presence and continuity drives most citizens back to their narrow sense of identification, or provokes them to "escape forward" by adopting affiliations of a broader humanitarian nature; alternatively, they lose sense of their belonging entirely and resort to acting out of individual self-interest. This is understandable in light of the fact that it is difficult for people to identify with a sense of nationalism if they do not first feel that they are citizens. This feeling of citizenship does not come easily when living in the shadow of a regime that treats its people like subjects rather than citizens.

The Syrian regime, essentially authoritarian by nature, "builds its relations with the citizens on the basis that they are subjects to whom it grants its sympathy, and not citizens who have rights guaranteed by law, and on the basis of violence rather than law" (1/8-5). This fact, however, does not necessarily mean that the revolution is a sectarian one, nor does it diminish the revolutionaries' sense of nationalism or the revolutionary nature of the movement itself. Nonetheless, it is possible to say that nationalism experienced a rebirth with the start of the protest movement. It caused many Syrians to join forces against an enemy whose acts of suppression and tyranny finally unified them, after having torn them apart with its wrath for decades. This unity

could be viewed as insufficient evidence of nationalism. Yet the pure humanitarian aspect of this unity cannot be denied, as it exceeds nationalistic feeling without necessarily eliminating it.

Several questions remain to be answered. The reasons are still unclear for the limited participation of minorities, especially religious and ethnic minorities, in the current revolutionary movement. It has been suggested that the revolution should be considered sectarian, or at the very least non-national, since most of the demonstrators are Sunni Arabs. There exists an assumption that, due to non-participation of all ethnic, religious and sectarian groups, the revolution cannot be considered to be nationalistic. Simultaneously, a contradictory assumption exists that the reluctance of minorities to participate is itself due to, among other reasons, the actual or perceived non-national nature of the revolution.

A distinction must be made between these two incompatible perspectives; also, it can be observed that the logic underlying the first assumption is faulty. The fact that minorities and the rest of the population did not join the revolution does not necessarily mean that it is not based on nationalism. On the other hand, the sectarian nature of the revolution, or its element of religious fanaticism and extremism, could compromise or even negate its nationalistic attributes, discouraging many minorities from participating.

The study points to two theories in particular to explain the reluctant participation of the minorities. The first invokes a concept from social studies (the scientific, not colloquial, variety): the sectarian behavior of minorities subject to persecution. A frequent reaction to great crisis or hardship is to unite and develop a strong sense of solidarity with fellow sufferers (5/39-5). The second refers to the breakdown of tribal, sectarian, and regional ties, coupled with the emergence of a false and neurotic ideology that criticizes the regime on a sectarian basis (on the same basis, incidentally, as it contradicts Hezbollah and Iran). This can be perceived as an indication of general social and political degradation, pointing to the role tyranny has played in the failure of Syria's social and national integration (5/39-5).

The study does not present any analysis of the markedly sectarian behavior of the persecuted minorities. Examination is also absent of the position ranges between neutrality and distance on the one hand, and absolute support for the regime on the other (where the existence and destiny of minorities is linked to the existence and

destiny of the regime itself). This incomplete analysis also reveals the ideological fallacies in the mentality of the minorities (as opposed to the protest movement). It appears then, rather, to be a sectarian contradiction, in addition to the influence it wields over supporters of the protest movement. It cannot be forgotten that the main factor behind the reluctance for broad participation among minorities has much less to do with the statements and actions of the protesters than with the inherent dynamics of the minorities themselves. Thus, this factor is not sufficient to qualify the revolution as non-nationalistic.

The second factor is the emergence of indications of sectarianism among the protesters as the sects intermingle (as in Homs and Latakia, as well as in Banias and Jabla) (23/2-5). While not underestimating the gravity of such tension and unrest, and the disruptions they tend to engender, the author emphasizes their secondary nature (34/3-5). "The presence of the Sunni element does not at all mean that is tainting the protest movement. These protests are not exclusively Sunni. . ." (38/5-5). Thus, Barout creates a distinction between the "Sunni'ism" of the protest movements (such as those occurring in Sunni areas, or in regions with a Sunni majority), versus their "Sunni'ization", which appears in some ethnically mixed areas in varying degrees, and tends to be a secondary issue.

Contrary to popular perception, describing the revolution as Sunni does not refer to its Sunni'ization. Characterizing the movement as Sunni might give the impression of it being a religious movement, which is not accurate; the reference is merely to the religion or the sectarian make-up of the regions where the majority of protests have taken place. It categorically does not follow that the movement in its entirety had religious or sectarian aims. It can be stated that the majority of the demonstrators are Arabs without being (at least during their demonstrations) Arabians; Muslims without being Islamists; and Sunnis without being motivated by their "Sunni'ness".

This line of reasoning is not intended to purify the image of the revolution, nor to make it appear angelic. A popular revolution is, in effect, an explosion of anger that necessarily includes many imperfections and shortcomings; a stepping away from "what should be." These imperfections and shortcomings certainly exist in the case of the Syrian revolution, manifesting themselves in the sectarian nature of some slogans and actions, in poor organization and theorizing, in the weakness of the political framing, and other such features. The study's scientific position on the sectarian behavior of

minorities in major crises is that they tend to reveal their true or ordinary nature; they fade out or collapse when confronted with the sectarian behavior of the majority.

The negative aspects of a revolution are generally a predictable consequence, in the scientific sense, of the presence of dictatorship, tyranny, oppression, impoverishment, and marginalization. This is especially true in a multi-religious, ethnically diverse country with an inherently composite identity. The current protest movement must not be denied its national and revolutionary qualities because of these negative aspects or others. "Revolution is an agitated social dynamic, naturally involving disruption and chaos, and the potential to result in disturbances. It includes both chaos and order, noble and immoral slogans, moderates and extremists. Every society that yields to its anger produces variations of such forms, depending on its culture, development and situation" (11/4-5).

Thus, Barout emphasizes that the presence of disruption and chaos, decadent slogans, and extremism in the protest movement, do not negate, in principle, its revolutionary nature and thus its nationalism. The revolution "is not the work of angels, but of humans" (11/4-5). The juxtaposition between the terrible practices of the regime (including, in most cases, various extremely violent methods of oppression) and the current situation makes the actions and words of the Syrian people appear angelic in contrast.

The series of articles includes a useful and relatively broad discussion of the most important religious and sectarian trends prevailing in the Sunni majority, with an elaboration on Salafi and Wahhabi trends in particular. However, because of the very breadth and unilateralism of the study, i.e., its focus on the religious trends prevailing among the Sunnis, it may lead to an inaccurate conception of the religious and sectarian composition of the protest movement. This impression is reinforced by certain dubious interpretations and inaccurate generalizations, of which the three following examples are typical.

- 1• On a number of occasions, the writer states that the slogans shouted by the protesters against Hezbollah and Iran are in fact a metaphor for sectarian slogans against the Alawites (19/1-5), (24/1-5). In fact, the use and spread of these slogans is not necessarily a sign of sectarianism, and it is unlikely that they were intended in that way at all. Three arguments in particular support this view.

Firstly, is it not possible to view such slogans as being addressed, at least to some extent, to those parties who support it, rather than looking at it from a religious or sectarian perspective (juxtaposing the Sunni protesters against the Shi'ite Hezbollah and Iranian contingent)? Many anti-China and anti-Russia slogans have also appeared, as well as chants directed against people and parties whose attitudes or positions are considered inappropriate by the protesters. It is thus understandable that slogans against Iran and Hezbollah have appeared, since these parties are among the most important allies of the Syrian regime (perhaps, ultimately, the most important).

Secondly, an anti-Shi'ite Gulf Salafist element has taken hold in Syria in recent years, and has had some impact on the public attitude toward Iran and Hezbollah. Yet Hezbollah still enjoys significant popularity in Syria, even among Sunni circles, a fact clearly reflected during the July 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon. It is only natural that the party's popularity has decreased with its continuing support of the regime. The role of religion and sect should not be exaggerated in this matter, as the slogans condemning Hezbollah and its position have also appeared among those who previously supported them, regardless of religious or sectarian affiliation.

Thirdly, the slogans targeting Hezbollah and Iran have been accompanied by other chants railing against sectarianism. This proves that the revolution's support base is not limited to a specific religion, sect, or geographical region. Its underlying framework, rather, is one of national unity, without regard to ethnic, religious, or sectarian differences. Among the slogans documented in the study are: "Sunnis and Alawites, what we want is freedom" (27/1-5), and "No Salafi, no Brotherhood, people want freedom" (12/3-5). This could be taken to mean that the slogans directed against Hezbollah and Iran are intended to express a political position, not necessarily a religious or sectarian one, by many of those chanting them.

2. One of the odd and inaccurate interpretations regarding this issue is that the Friday known as the "Friday of the descendants of Khalid bin Waleed" was named after the mosque located in the neighborhood of Khalidiya, which witnessed clashes with Alawite neighborhoods (13/5-5). In fact, there is no direct relationship between the name, the mosque, or the Sunni neighborhood where that mosque is located. The title was intended to help support the protesters and rebels in Homs, which is known as the "city of Khalid bin Waleed."



The term "descendants of Khalid bin Waleed" refers here to the rebels and the protesters of Homs, rather than to demonstrators from the Khalidiya district specifically. The association between this label, the mosque, and the Sunni neighborhood surrounding it is therefore surprising. More appropriate would be a link to the people of the city in general, who consider the name Khalid bin Waleed to represent their city, just as the city of Aleppo is represented by the name Saif al-Dawla al-Hamadani.

There is no doubt that Khaled bin Waleed is a problematic and disputed figure. Many Sunnis revere him, while other communities, notably the Alawites, do not. However, there is no direct relationship between the choice of this particular name and the conflicting attitudes toward bin Waleed himself. Important to remember is that the naming of each Friday requires a vote in which many people participate, some of whom are religiously associated with the chosen moniker. Very likely, the vote in favor of this name was probably meant to honor the protests in Homs as well as the city itself, which later came to be thought of as "the capital (or heart)" of the Syrian revolution.

3. According to the writer, Sheikh Anas Airoot's request to the Minister of Interior "to admit the existence of weapons in Qardaha", in response to the minister's allegations of "the presence of armed gangs in Baniyas," marked the point at which "this form of sectarian discourse had reached hysterical heights" (11/2-5). This begs the question of whether the mention of Qardaha and its weapons was necessarily a sectarian reference, and also, to what extent it justifies discussion of "hysteria of sectarian discourse". Qardaha is an Alawite city, but more importantly, it is the birthplace of Hafez al-Assad and his family (the current rulers of the country). For this among other reasons, and in the popular tradition, it became the city of some of the major supporters of the regime and a symbol of the ruling family's authority. In interpreting Airoot's speech, his words on Qardaha should be considered in this context, rather than as focusing purely on the Alawite nature of the city.

A number of similar generalizations appear in Barout's articles, where the level of accuracy and realism is brought into question somewhat. An example of this is the statement that, with the exception of the protest movements in Daraa, Douma and the Kurds, "the intellectual religious leadership has dominated the traditional protest movements and demonstrations in small and medium cities" (3/2-5). The nature of the information supporting this generalization is not clear.



If the point referred to previously lacks sufficient support, this is because much of the documentation related to the Syrian revolution has depended on sources of questionable credibility. One such dubious source has been confessions of detained demonstrators, such as that of Sheikh al-Sayasinah and Ibrahim al-Musalimah (18/2-5), broadcast by Syrian television and published in both official and semi-official newspapers. The detention conditions imposed by the security forces in Syria clearly nullify the reliability of such confessions, extracted as they are under inhumane circumstances.

On some occasions, the study adopts the regime's version of events without sufficient critical analysis. For example, a discussion was cited concerning the existence of orders given to the police to not to use violence against the demonstrators (16/2-5), based on a statement by Walid al-Muallem, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Syrian government. From the outset, key Syrian authorities (as well as official and unofficial representatives) repeatedly confirmed that strict orders had been issued to the security forces not to fire on the protesters and to avoid inflicting any injury. However, the reality on the ground was that dozens of people died and hundreds were wounded by the violent actions of the security forces.

The misleading statements and outright lies of authority figures, not to mention the official media, have revealed themselves in many situations (as in the case of the village of Bayda). The reliance on documentation and analysis provided by the official media, as well as on its version of events, results in compromised reliability of the conclusions reached in the study. In some cases, statements by official media outlets and government officials can indeed be relied upon, but consideration must be given to how best to employ such statements.

If they must be mentioned to illustrate the perspective of those in power and their version of events, then they must also be dealt with in a strictly critical way. Official statements should categorically not be accepted at face value without the existence of evidence and corroborative sources that can prove or suggest their authenticity and sincerity. In some instances, the study fails to provide such corroboration.

Documentation of the events of the Syrian revolution should not be limited to placing them in chronological order, but should also extend to analysis of factors and phenomena which elucidate their meaning and various dimensions. Analysis of the

Syrian revolution generally divides the protagonists into two groups: the rebels, their supporters, and all opponents of the regime on the one hand, and the pillars of the state, its supporters, and its instruments on the other. Documentation tends overwhelmingly to be focused on the first group, with insufficient attention generally devoted to the second.

The political opposition and its role in the protests has been studied in explicit detail, including the coordination committees that emerged from the revolution, the structural patterns and features of the protest, and the social, economic, political and religious makeup of some of the most active areas (notably Daraa, the suburbs of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Idlib, as well as the cities of Baniyas, Albab and Abu Kamal). Missing, however, in the documentation and analysis of the protests, is a focus on the actual power structures embedded in the government institutions: the presidency, the army, the security forces, the gangs, and the Shabiha militias.

For this reason, the analysis present in the study should be regarded as one-sided, inasmuch as it fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the struggle. The revolution is in a state of conflict between the two major sides, yet Barout's articles devote detailed discussion only to the opposition. Left largely unaddressed are issues related to the composition and nature of the political, security, military, and family structures with which the protesters find fault.

The study makes only minimal reference to the Shabiha phenomenon. It mentions, for example, the Shabiha attack on the al-Nour mosque in Khalidiya (2/14-5), and refers as well to the fact that Aleppo's Shabiha is both funded and provided with security forces by businessmen (5/19-5). Reference is also made to the participation of the Shabiha in killing protesters and mourners at the al-Shughour Bridge (5-4/16), and to their relationship with some members of the Assad family (5-4/6).

However, this is a phenomenon deserving of more careful analysis, including an attempt to answer in detail the following questions: Who are the Shabiha? What is their relationship to Syria's authorities in general, and to the security forces specifically? What is the mechanism of their work? What role have they played in the suppression of the protesters? What are the social, economic, tribal, religious, and sectarian dynamics of their membership? The Shabiha are often described as the Syrian version of the mafia; they are said to be closely linked with the regime and in cooperation with security forces and certain businessmen (for example, the hundred wolves). Without a

full understanding of such semi-official mafia-like militias, it becomes impossible to comprehend the background of the Syrian revolution in terms of its current progress, its various dimensions, and its future prospects

A similar statement could be made in relation to the security and military institutions, organizations which Barout describes as holding actual power in Syria. He draws a comparison between the Syrian revolution and the larger phenomenon of the Arab revolutions in general (with a specific focus on the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt). However, left unaddressed is the basic issue of the Syrian army's unique attitude in comparison to those of Tunisia and Egypt. In these two countries, the stance of the army was a crucial factor in the relative success of the revolutions, helping to achieve the most important goal of overthrowing the regime and launching a democratic transition process. For this reason, it is imperative to study the structure of the Syrian army and its different brigades, with particular attention to the Republican Guard and the Fourth Brigade. Similarly, attention must be given to the relationship between the military security services, the institution of the presidency, and the family makeup of the regime, where members of the Assad and Makhoul families are at the head of some of the most important military and security institutions.

Addressing such issues is certainly complicated, not least because of the difficulty involved in obtaining adequate and reliable information about them. Nonetheless, the conspicuous omission of reference to these elements detracted from Barout's study and its ability to shed light on the revolution under documentation. Following is a discussion and analysis of the real role of the security and military institutions in the Syrian revolution and its development.

## **Security Establishment**

Barout refers to the violence committed by the state security forces as one of the most likely and immediate provocations for the protests. One of the articles asserts that, as the security forces have played the role of assailant, the protest movement has intensified and expanded its range, with a series of new catalysts emerging to ignite further protests as a result of the excessive number of deaths. The absence of specific provocation (in the form of severe repression) could be seen as one of the factors explaining the relative calm in some areas. Bearing this in mind, it is worthwhile to recall the events in Hama as an example of the first dynamic, and those of the city of

Aleppo and its environs as an illustration of the second.

The author states that provocation by the security forces has sometimes acted as a powerful catalyst (more so than other factors) in increasing the scale of the demonstrations. This applies to the events in the city of Hama, where the excessive violence of the security forces transformed what began simply as a series of demonstrations into an extensive civil disobedience movement. Conversely, the relative calm in Aleppo and its surrounding regions can be explained by the absence of provocation and violence from the security forces.

It should be noted that this thesis organizes the transformation of successive or parallel events into a distinctly cause/ effect relationship. Questionable, perhaps, is the notion that the severity of repression is a decisive factor leading to the increase in frequency and intensity of the demonstrations, whereas a more lenient attitude from security forces has fostered an according diminishing of intensity in the demonstrations in other cases. It is certainly possible to point to an alternative causal relationship whereby the level of repression itself increased as the protest movement gathered momentum. It could also be suggested that heightened repression can produce a variety of results - succeeding at times and failing at others to weaken the protest movement. In fact, a straightforward relationship between the intensity of repression and the spread and persistence of the demonstrations cannot be easily established.

It could certainly be maintained that the demonstrations began, continued, and escalated in spite of the severe repression practiced by the security and military forces, rather than as a result of it. Violent actions such as arrests, killings, and torture may indeed incite fear among some opposition members and thus prevent them from engaging in demonstrations; however, such actions could equally well provoke increased anger and resentment in others. Accordingly, their determination to demonstrate may increase despite repression by the security forces, not only because of it – and perhaps not because of it at all.

It is useful to consider in this case the protest movement in Hama, according to the documentation presented in the study. Hama joined the protests on the *Friday of Pride*, with a small demonstration of around a thousand participants; a similar number of protestors then returned on the following Friday (the *Friday of Martyrs*). Soon, the numbers had swollen to around 2,500 demonstrators by the *Friday of Steadfastness*.

The size of the demonstrations continued to expand until they were no longer confined to the vicinity of mosques. On *Good Friday*, the demonstrators gathered for the first time in al-Assi Square. It was then that Hama's first martyr fell; subsequently, on *Azadi Friday* the size of the demonstrations increased yet further, as did their severity.

The intensity of clashes between security forces and demonstrators escalated when one of the demonstrators, who suffered from cerebral palsy, died after being beaten. This incident inflamed tensions throughout the city, raising the demonstrations to a fever pitch of approximately 100,000 participants on the *Friday of the Children of Freedom*. Security forces responded with a terrible massacre, fatally shooting 68 demonstrators; the following day, the security forces withdrew from the city and the men of Hama took to the streets to observe the martyrs' funerals. This was followed by a mass strike in which 99 percent of the community members and businesses took part. On the subsequent Friday (the *Friday of Clans*, known to the people of Hama as the *Friday of Fear*) around 150,000 people participated in demonstrations in al-Assi Square that later became a daily phenomenon, until the army and the security forces re-entered to take control of the situation.

This summary of the development of the protest movement in Hama during the first months of the Syrian revolution is useful in several ways. Firstly, participation in the demonstrations in Hama is revealed as having escalated and expanded even before the intensification of security-related provocation. In fact, the increased repression appeared in response to existing widespread protests, so it would be better described as a result and rather than a cause of demonstration-related activity. After the massacre of the *Friday of the Children of Freedom*, the protests expanded and intensified yet further. Important to note is that this happened after the security forces had left the city and broken off combat with the demonstrators. This raises the question of whether the demonstration movement intensified in response to the security-perpetrated massacre, or rather because the repression and provocation had in fact ceased.

Interestingly, the entry of the army and the security forces into Hama at the beginning of the month of Ramadan, and the considerable violence accompanying their arrival, weakened the demonstrations in both number and intensity. Protests at this time numbered, at best, in the hundreds or thousands of participants. It can thus be

surmised that the increased repression of the protest movement in Hama reduced the frequency of demonstrations rather than increasing it, as proposed in the study.

It is worth investigating whether Barout's thesis about the causal relationship between security provocation and the increasing intensity of demonstrations can be reasonably applied to the protest movement in Aleppo. The fact that "the Aleppo security apparatus appeared as if separate from general repressive strategy" is presented as one of the most important factors to explain the relative calm in this city? However, it seems more likely that adopting the opposite of the thesis, or an anti-thesis, would be more true to reality in this case. Such an anti-thesis would state that the intensification of repression is a result of an increase in demonstrations, rather than the cause. Far from denying the dialectical relationship between the two factors, this thesis instead confirms it, highlighting the seemingly paradoxical fact that intensification of demonstrations can sometimes act as both the cause and the result of security provocation. More often, it is a cause rather than a result.

Applying this thesis to the protest movement in Aleppo reveals that demonstration activity remained largely muted in practice, except for some hot spots here and there, and that no single demonstration numbered more than a thousand people. The level of security activity was analogous to that in Hama during demonstrations of a similar size, with direct repression limited to use of tear gas, beatings, and arrests. The scale of the demonstrations in Aleppo failed to intensify as they did in Hama, where the regime felt compelled to utilize measures of excessive force, such as live rounds and various forms of light and heavy armory. The question remains as to whether, had the scale of the demonstrations increased as it did in Hama, the Aleppo security forces would have continued to deviate from the general repressive strategy. The reaction of the regime to an increase in the scale of demonstrations or attempts to organize sit-ins was otherwise largely predictable in all cities and provinces (Daraa, Homs, Douma, Hama, Deir al-Zour, and others).

It is not unreasonable to assume, then, that the regime would resort to the same response if presented with the same level of protest activity (i.e., a marked increase in the size and frequency of demonstrations). It can be concluded on this basis that the study is prone to reversing the relationship between the severity of oppression and the intensity of protest; replacing the cause (the increased momentum of the protest activity) with the result (the increase in repression), and vice versa. Naturally, this

observation does not negate the existing dialectical relationship between cause and effect, as defined above.

The weakness of the critical analysis devoted to the structure of government authority (security and military forces) may contribute to the impression that the regime is seeking, or may seek, a political solution to the current crisis in Syria. This assumption is evident in analysis of the events of *Good Friday*, or rather, *Bloody Friday*. In small and medium towns in general, and in Daraa in particular, the Syrian leadership was driven to contain the crisis using violent repression, effectively suspending efforts toward a political solution until such time as the security strategy had run its course.

It is a dubious proposition to suggest that any real confusion existed among government departments regarding the choice of soft power (a political solution) over rough power (a security solution). According to the author's data, a total of 112 martyrs fell on *Bloody Friday* alone, challenging the idea that the Syrian leadership was actively seeking a political solution to the crisis prior to that date. The death of so many people seems a clear indication that any rhetoric related to a political solution was simply a tactic adopted by the leadership to divert attention from its absolute adherence to a security solution. It seems that this was regarded as the only appropriate method for confronting the revolutionary activity.

Beyond statements issued by the leadership itself, few (if any) actual and concrete steps were taken indicating that serious hopes of finding a political solution to the crisis were being entertained by the authorities. The author indicates that until the *Friday of Steadfastness* in mid-April, the regime had made considerable political concessions, which took a number of forms.

Some governors and heads of security were replaced, but all the replacements were themselves also military or security officers; others were referred to trial, but the trials were largely farcical and did not result in any officials being punished. Committees were formed to investigate events, but no concrete conclusions were drawn. The emergency law was revoked, but this did not lead to any substantive change and was soon replaced by the *law of judicial police*, giving broad additional powers to the security forces. A new law was issued to regulate the right to peaceful demonstration, which, in light of its application, would have been better described as a law to regulate the prevention of peaceful protest.

Similar observations could be made about all actions undertaken by the regime under the umbrella of reform. It thus becomes clear that these concessions are only significant when evaluated according to the traditional mentality of the ruling authority. By any other standards, they are revealed as inconsequential and mainly serving an aesthetic purpose. For example, they had no effect on the essence of the constitutional system, based both on the Ba'ath Party's leadership of the nation and on the differentiation, rather than separation, of the three authorities. Nor have the concessions affected the structure and the authority of the security and military forces, the real agents of power in Syria. Therefore, it cannot be reasonably stated that these actions constituted a significant attempt at reaching a political solution to the crisis.

In fact, no real steps have been taken, or can ever be taken, by the current regime in the direction of a political solution. The reason for this is simply that the inherent security/ military nature of the regime cannot produce anything but security/ military solutions. Consequently, and on the basis of the regime's conspicuous avoidance of any real political reform in decades, it can be stated with confidence that the Syrian government depends solely on maintaining a tight grip on security, with varying degrees of severity. Discussion of any real desire on the part of the government for a political solution to the current crisis thus becomes essentially invalid.

## **The Army**

A key issue, largely overlooked by the study, is the question of why the military establishment has remained so faithful to the regime (to the point of being transformed into an instrument of repression against the people in rebellious regions). The army has shown neither signs of neutrality nor of solidarity with the protesters, as have their counterparts in the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt. Rather than investigating this factor, the articles suggest that the army has at times itself been a victim of armed gangs.

This echoes the embrace by the official media of an episode in which military and security forces were said to come under attack in Daraa on April 22 and 23, resulting in a number of injuries and several deaths. It is important to note that these reports were received by the demonstrators and other observers with intense skepticism; they were viewed either as consisting of pure fabrication, or, alternatively, actual events instigated



by the authorities in order to justify counter-attacks on peaceful protest movements.

It is not clear why the author is so supportive of the government's representation of events, to the extent of asserting that the gangsters' attacks on the army compromised its dignity. This loss of face is cited as legitimate reason for the violence subsequently perpetrated by the security forces in the area of the attack and its environs. The rationale given is that such a situation pits the people against the army, allowing the gangsters to accuse the military apparatus of using a specific strategy against them. Barout portrays this as the trap into which the army was unsuspectingly lured.

In this case, the credibility of the official story is obviously called into question. Also questionable, however, is the implication that the army's reaction arose out of sheer necessity, in response to the presence of armed gangs seeking to provoke and implicate it in crimes against local people. Rather than speaking of a trap into which the army was lured, perhaps it is more rational to assume that this military intervention represented direct steps taken by the government to eliminate the peaceful protest movements by whatever means necessary. It strains credulity to maintain that the intervention of the army came about purely as a result of the appearance of armed gangs and violence against the forces of the regime.

An alternative explanation is that the army, security forces, and Shabiha were exposed to armed resistance from protesters or soldiers having defected in the wake of this violent intervention. The study's frequent adoption of the regime's official and semi-official media viewpoint is consistent with the portrayal of the army as a victim of provocation by gangsters and local people. It would seem, rather, that the security forces in general became complicit the moment they faced the peaceful protestors with live ammunition, as documented by the author himself.

Barout's articles allow the army to appear as the sole victim of traps and provocation. Soldiers having defected from the army are, according to this documentation, victims of a trap of another sort. This reflects their failure to understand that both local and international powers are unwilling to weaken or overthrow the regime, and, indeed, would be unable to do so even were they willing. According to the study, such soldiers ended up serving as pawns in a great intelligence game; first begging those who granted them asylum to play the role of employer, and later, being taken advantage of by the same parties (who exploited the emotional fervor of the defectors to serve their

own ends). Barout describes these soldiers as foolish and crazy, arguing that the rules of the game require them to deepen the divide within the army rather than separating themselves from it entirely.

It seems inappropriate at first glance to use such adjectives to describe defectors in a serious scientific or academic study; however, perhaps such a description is deserved if it is also applied to members of the army, security forces, and the Shabiha who routinely kill and torture peaceful protestors. This begs the question of what standards were used to establish the idiocy and insanity of these particular soldiers. The author implies that it was their readiness to fall into a trap through ignorance of the fact that international and regional powers would be unwilling to overthrow the regime (and also unable to do so).

A relevant question arising at this point is whether this was indeed the main reason for the defection of Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush, as well as other officers and soldiers. Their defection, based on the statements of some soldiers, was the result of their unwillingness to participate in the suppression and killing of the peaceful protestors. Most had only two options: either to contribute to the campaign of murder and repression, or to be killed themselves. Indeed, participation in murder should not be required to absolve oneself of accusations of idiocy and insanity. Contrary to the implication made in the study, this does not constitute part of the rules of the game.

What was described in Barout's study as foolish and crazy, appears to others as heroic and brave. Regardless of the rational arguments behind the usefulness of the first defections, they nonetheless provided ethical models which restricted and narrowed the scope of the demonstrator's slogan: "Traitor, traitor, traitor, the Syrian Army is a traitor." The defectors proved that there were, among the army and security forces, some who refused to kill defenseless people. These men tried, by defecting, to protect themselves as well as the people. Perhaps they failed at times, but they succeeded at others; there may indeed have been something of madness and folly in their defection, but revolutions depend on such impulsive qualities. The Syrian revolution may never have started or continued if those involved had acted rationally.

Judging the events in Syria in this way shows a poor understanding of revolution as fundamentally voluntary and irrational in its essence; as an act based on rejection, anger and the desire to radically change what exists, rather than something

condemnatory, judgmental, and influenced by the logic of profit and loss. The defectors may have erred in some or all of their considerations, but that does not negate the logic of their refusal to participate in killing, repression, and torture. The fundamental question here remains unanswered throughout the articles. Why does the author criticize the soldiers' decision to split from the army, suggesting that they should have instead "deepened the split in the army from within," yet all the while maintaining that the regime cannot be overthrown?

### **Institution of the Presidency**

It is of utmost importance to understand the role of the institution of the presidency when evaluating how the regime has dealt with the protest movement. Among the questions that arise are: what is its relationship with the forces of oppression embodied in the army, security forces, and the Shabiha gangs? What approach has the presidency adopted, or intends to adopt, in dealing with the protest movement? To what degree can this institution claim responsibility for the security tactics pursued by the regime in dealing with the protest movements?

While Barout's study does not enter into a serious attempt to address such questions extensively or in detail, certain brief references do contribute valuable insight.

According to the author, the process of restructuring the country's economic, social, and political framework during the first decade of this century has been instrumental in chipping away at the construct of the charismatic leader embodying the character and unity of the ruling party, state, and society. The destruction of this image has not, certainly, been complete, with the totalitarian mechanism in the regime continuing to surround President Bashar al-Assad with charismatic ceremonies. In recent times (since 2005) such rituals were summarized in the slogan: "God, Syria, Bashar, and nothing else."

Barout's position is that the president opposed these tactics, and that the former slogan is neither consistent with Assad's ideology as expressed in his inaugural speech, nor with his actions and behavior patterns. Here again, by adopting this stance, the author is embracing the popular view regarding authoritarian regimes: i.e., that the president himself is well-meaning, but surrounded by corrupt and authoritarian influences. It is somewhat difficult to believe that the president could have found himself surrounded to such a degree by charismatic rituals and slogans if he indeed disagreed with them so

utterly. In the face of serious and effective opposition from the president, it is unlikely that he would have continued to be portrayed in this manner.

A politician's public image in general, and that of a dictator specifically, is not a trivial matter that a leader can afford to overlook or ignore. This image is a part of the ideological framework that seeks to legitimize what is in actual fact a partial or total lack of legitimacy. It must be emphasized that this does not apply to a president with weak authority, or one lacking broad powers, thus unable to impose his will. Indeed, President Bashar al-Assad enjoyed absolute privileges, most specifically during the period between 2007 and 2010. These privileges were granted him constitutionally under a far-reaching system of authority, with both effectual and nominal authorities yielding directly to him. He held absolute power over these authorities, a fact which essentially eliminated any potential opposition to his will.

Barout's portrayal of the president as an absolute ruler occasionally becomes complicated. At times, he removes the president from his position of absolute sovereignty and authority, reversing the relationship between ruler and subjects, so that the president seems to become himself subject to the real authority (instead of it being subject to him as is the case in reality): "But the real authority regained its role and its power to control the position of the president himself, and his decisions after the outbreak of events. It managed in light of the theory of conspiracy to postpone a political solution until the mission the security forces solution was completed. The balance of power slipped into the hands of the real authority." This is a prime example of a misconception that recurs frequently in the study; namely, that the institution of the presidency is not part of the real (security/ military) authority, creating alternating situations wherein one of these authorities controls the other.

According to this logic, then, at times the presidency controls the real authority, and at other times, the real authority controls the presidency. Only through study's lack of in-depth analysis of the institutional structure of the presidency and the nature of its relations with the real and nominal authorities is this mistake able to perpetuate itself. First and foremost, the institution of the presidency is a security and military authority. Its strength derives not from the vast constitutional powers enjoyed by the Syrian president, nor from the fact that he is the general secretary of the leading party and chairman of the National Progressive Front. Nor can it be attributed to any other political positions he holds within the existing regime's security/ military systems. The

broad powers that the president enjoys, and the highly ranking positions he fills, are above all a result of his strong affiliation with and control over the security/ military apparatus itself.

The strength of the institution of the presidency is based on the fact that the president and his close associates are themselves the actual leaders of the organizations of real authority. On this basis, it is meaningless to talk about the real authority reclaiming its role, strength, and ability to control the decisions of the president himself; he is the head of the real authority and also its strongest and most capable member. As the head of both the real and nominal authorities, he has used the institutions of these two authorities to prolong his rule and to achieve what he wants. In the case of relative calm and stability, he can effect a reduction in the use of the regime's military and security tools, but these same tools can also be put to greater, more visible, and influential use should those in charge of the real authority need them. The president would be the first to take such steps. Based on this fact alone, the emergence of the role of the security and military forces in the current events becomes clear.

The institution of the presidency, and the regime's security/ military nature, has driven it to resort to violence and repression against those who oppose it. The use of violence and repression has increased along with the strength of the opposition and their numbers, and it is perceived as natural for the regime to use a variety of the available forms of violent repression to suppress the popular uprising against it. This revolution is the most significant episode of opposition the president has faced since he assumed his position in 2000. It should be noted that even in the period in which the author reports that Assad enjoyed absolute power (2007 - 2010), the security forces retained their authority and had a higher rate of intervention in governance and daily affairs. Thus, it is irreconcilable to state on the one hand that the president in Syria has absolute power, and on the other that the security agencies are the real leaders; impossible, that is, unless it is acknowledged that the authority of both the president and the security apparatus is one and the same.

To maintain that the security/ military institutions are controlling the president's decisions during the current crisis gives the impression that the president is weak, and that these forces, rather than the president, are responsible for implementing the existing security solution and deferring the so-called political one. The study tends to

adopt and reinforce this viewpoint through its documentation of the events of the Syrian revolution.

The president's first speech during the crisis, which was given on March 30, was accurately described by the author as "more than disappointing" and "a shock and a slap in the face." It had the effect of shocking both the general public as well as the elite with its highly unexpected content, and represented the end of one phase and the beginning of a new, accelerated series of events. The thematic focus was on the need for an immediate security solution, in reaction to flourishing conspiracy theories and sectarian agitation. In this regard, the speech was in fact in tune with the real authority's preference for a security-based solution, as well as with its tendency to exploit conspiracy theories and sectarianism to its own advantage.

The author then quickly retreats from this position, falling back on the prevalent theory that the speech was not in fact the original one that the president had intended to deliver. He notes that at this point many still had faith in the president, despite their disappointment in the speech, and were searching desperately to find plausible excuses for the unexpected message.

Accordingly, rumors began to spread that certain forces had forced him to radically change it at the last minute; these rumors cannot be totally disregarded, as more than a few individuals in the employ of the president corroborated this version of events. It has not, unfortunately, been possible to identify the parties who purportedly instigated the changes, nor to ascertain the veracity of the rumors themselves. The information that lent credence to them in the study is not in fact verifiable, given as it was by two individuals who insisted on anonymity.

It could be that the individuals behind the changes were members of the security and military institutions, which, as noted earlier, the author perceives as controlling the president's decisions and movements since the outbreak of dissent. Alternatively, they may have consisted of external forces (e.g., the United States or other Western European countries) as Dr. Imad Shuaibi, among others, has intimated. The spread of the rumors effectively helps to polish the image of the president, distancing him as much as possible from responsibility for the security solution as well as from the atrocities and crimes that have resulted from its implementation. It creates a paradigm in which the president appears to be the hapless victim of hidden forces who are

exerting pressure on him to say or to do the opposite of what he himself wants (and what his people expect from him).

These attempts at polishing the presidential image employ several mechanisms, which vary according to the given situation. As previously established, the study perceives the president as being in opposition to the totalitarian mechanisms of the state, arguing that he had opposed such charismatic rituals and slogans as: "God, Syria, Bashar and nothing else". This view is supported by the observation that the content of these slogans is inconsistent with messages conveyed in the president's inaugural speech; the speech is thus used as the point of reference and the basis upon which to evaluate his ideas as well as the extent to which the slogans appear compatible with them.

Barout also uses other methods to rationalize various elements of the president's speech, such as the inclusion of claims of conspiracy and sectarian strife in justifying increased use of force to suppress dissent. According to this view, the "shocking and disappointing" speech does not reflect the president's viewpoints, or what he had himself intended to convey, but is instead a product of the pressure exerted by certain forces, as yet undefined. This implies that the president has good intentions and a will to reform, but the bad guys (abroad and/ or at home) neither allow him to exercise these intentions nor to implement any real reforms.

## Prospects for Syria and its Revolution

The fifth section of the fifth article devotes a considerable amount of discussion to the issue Syria's potential prospects in light of the current objective reality; this discussion focuses on the new balance of power achieved by the popular youth protest movement through its courage, tragic sacrifices, and, most relevantly, peaceful approach. This new reality is characterized by four basic features: the first is the high degree of segregation between the various religious communities in Syria's highly complex social structure. The second is the perception that the collapse of the regime will necessarily entail the collapse of Syria as a country (not to mention the region at large) along sectarian, regional, and tribal lines.

The third of these features is the idea that inherent divisions among the Syrian opposition render it unable to form a unified coalition for the coming transitional period. The fourth and final feature is the failure of the opposition to develop an internal and

relatively independent leadership structure that can take effective and autonomous political action. Such a leadership framework could play the role of social agent in a movement for democratic change, simultaneously transforming the spirit of the movement from a negative protest to an alternative democratic program.

It could also establish a new socio-political paradigm, based on reaching a historic compromise between factors that have long proved notoriously problematic. The old, ineffective system would be buried, and an agreement could be reached on a new, serious, and democratic paradigm in the spirit of a historic settlement. Thus, the actual players would agree on the basis of transition, in order to switch from the old regime to a new, alternative one, with society paying the lowest price possible (i.e., “bury your dead and arise”).

This historic settlement could conceivably emerge from two main premises, reflecting the new balance of power on the street. The premises are that it is both impossible to overthrow the regime, and similarly impossible for it to carry on in its old form; in both cases, the focus is on the concept of possibility and its opposite. The question remains, however, has the actual possibility of this historic settlement been properly examined?

The dream of a historic settlement is one held by most Syrians, but it is accompanied by a widespread belief that this dream is, in fact, unachievable. This is due to the intransigence of the regime and its insistence on the suppression of the protest movement using all available forms of violence. Another contributing factor is the regime’s willingness to offer only limited concessions instead of meaningful changes, or indeed, even aesthetic ones.

The author himself does not give details as to the specific nature of such a historical settlement, a prospect which he considers merely a dream. Rather, he adopts the role of the sober thinker and researcher, limiting his endeavor to the laying out of a vision. In this respect, then, he disregards the absolute need for his characteristic sober techniques and intellectual approach, ignoring the fact that subjective standards can often serve as temptation to prophecy.

The question must be confronted of whether the idea of a historic settlement is in fact different in any substantive way from a prophecy, in the complete absence of any research on the possibility of adopting and applying it in reality. An author can propose



what he considers to be the most viable path to success, but he must still strive to preserve a sober intellectual perspective. He must, similarly, avoid the pitfalls of adhering to subjective standards that will lead him into the realm of prophecy. Rather than positing an ideal solution, he should gravitate toward the best-case scenario under the given circumstances. The articles in question lack rigorous scholarship in this regard.

There are no doubt those who remain convinced of the possibility of reaching a historic settlement, regardless of the lack of discussion or analysis in the study as to how reasonable such a settlement would be. However, it is imperative that the logic underpinning the study's proposition, and the premises on which it is based, be examined.

The first premise will come as no surprise to anyone having closely observed the unfolding of events in Syria: it is not possible, now or in the near future, for Syria to return to the political situation obtaining prior to the start of the revolution. The second premise, which states that the regime cannot be overthrown, deserves a more detailed and lengthy discussion. Before either premise can be satisfactorily examined, however, there is a question begging to be answered: why and how did the protest movement reach the point of demanding the overthrow of the regime?

The study documents the emergence of this demand as it became the basic, most essential requirement put forth by the protest movement. Barout portrays the slowness of the political and institutional frameworks, as well as tardy decision-making on both selective and partial issues (long after control of the crisis had already been lost) as leading to the launch of the slogan "the people want the overthrow of the regime."

In other words, the failure of the authorities to respond promptly and fully to the demands of the protesters provoked them to call for the overthrow of the regime. However, some believe that this slogan originated as more of a reaction to the previously mentioned slowness rather than an actual demand, and remained so for over a month. Acknowledging that the protesters were not at first serious in their demands for the regime's overthrow has a clear implication: the regime was given ample time to manifest its professed will to reform before demands were amplified to include calls for the overthrow of the regime. It should be recognized, then, that it was in large part the growing public incredulity at the authorities' stated intentions of effecting reforms that

produced calls for overthrow of the regime itself. This observation deserves careful consideration before proposing the idea of a historic settlement.

The study's outlook on Syria's future runs counter to the trajectory of the protesters' demands. While the protesters initiated the slogan of overthrowing the regime because they were convinced of the regime's indifference to their reform-based demands, the study proposes the idea of a historical settlement based on the premise that the regime cannot be overthrown. More advisable, perhaps, would have been to analyze the content of the protesters' convictions before adopting an idea that contradicts, both in content and in occurrence, the beliefs of those same protestors.

The initial political demands, which the authorities declined to respond to in any meaningful way, are of interest here. These included the release of all political prisoners (regardless of when they had been detained), the abolition of the state of emergency, and the bringing to account those who had ordered the killing and brutal suppression of the protesters.<sup>11</sup> The regime's failure to respond fully to these demands can be seen as a sign of its unwillingness, or indeed, its inability, to implement any reforms. Its lack of response to these simple demands - simple in comparison to that of the overthrow of the regime – bodes ill for its willingness to respond to the request for a historic settlement. This comparison becomes even more telling upon consideration of the radical reforms that would be required in order to transform Syria's political structure from authoritarianism to democracy.

Any structural or historical study of the authoritarian political regime in Syria would clearly show that it is possible neither in practice nor in theory for this regime to reform

---

<sup>11</sup> The demands made by the dignitaries of Daraa on behalf of the residents of their province can be found on the following link:

[http://www.syriarose.com/ar/news/view/30775.html?utm\\_campaign=%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9+%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9](http://www.syriarose.com/ar/news/view/30775.html?utm_campaign=%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9+%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9)

We refer to statements in a paper entitled Estimating the Position (issued Thursday November 17, 2011 by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies under the title Can the Arab League save Syria?). In discussing potential scenarios for the developing events in Syria, the study states that the possibility of the regime actually accepting the Arab initiative "[which would] lead to achieving the historic settlement between the regime and the Syrian opposition. . . seems unrealistic and its prospects look weak" (pp. 7-8).

HYPERLINK "<http://www.dohainstitute.org/file/pdfViewer/bd32d6c2-c689-41f4-8b6b-3e5c63df9a4c.pdf>"  
<http://www.dohainstitute.org/file/pdfViewer/bd32d6c2-c689-41f4-8b6b-3e5c63df9a4c.pdf>

and accept a historical settlement with any real momentum toward democracy. Many details presented in the study predict the authority's refusal to participate in such a settlement: the documentation of the last two decades and the first five months of the revolution, the description of former president Hafez al-Assad's attitude toward political reforms, and the examples cited of the regime's practices and behavior.

For thirty years, Hafez al-Assad had refused to undertake any radical political reform of his authoritarian regime, also failing to keep promises made regarding these issues. The current president has in this way followed in his father's footsteps, making many promises yet fulfilling very few. No significant or radical changes have taken place at the political level during his tenure in office. Even in the days leading up to Syria's revolution, he continued to maintain that "we must wait until the next generation to achieve reform."

Little of essence changed in this situation when the revolution began; the regime did not modify its behavior or orientation, nor did it carry out any real reforms. Had they taken place, such reforms would have been viewed as an indicator of the regime's actual desire to effect a democratic transformation. As it stands, the regime's behavior over the years has not shown any sign of being amenable to a settlement that would change the authoritarian nature of the state and move in the direction of democracy; in light of this, the conviction that such a settlement is within reach becomes increasingly dubious.

This conviction, then, seems to be derived primarily from a strong desire for it to be true; it is thus an illusion in the full Freudian sense of the word<sup>12</sup>. A historical study of the political situation in Syria seems not to have been sufficient to counteract the adoption of this hopeful belief/ illusion. Perhaps, then, it would require a more thorough examination of the structure of the Syrian political regime than is available in the study to illustrate the impossibility of the regime undertaking any real, radical reforms that run counter to its military/ dynastic nature.

---

<sup>12</sup> Illusion, according to Freud, is a belief derived from desire, or resulting from desire, without actually having a basis in reality. Freud says in this regard: "Every belief driven by incentives and needs to fulfill desire, and which does not take reality into consideration, is considered an illusion, just as illusion fails to find in reality a confirmation of itself". Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, translated by George Tarabishi, first edition, (Dar al-Taliaa: Beirut, 1974), p. 43.

On this basis, the practical possibility of the regime accepting a historic settlement and reaching a national agreement seems non-existent, with none of its behavior before or during the revolution having indicated such a possibility. Even on a theoretical level, this eventuality is entirely implausible; the basic requirements of a historic settlement are contradictory to the structural features of a security/ military dynastic regime which derives its power from tyranny and corruption.

The existing regime is unable to change, reform, or contribute to any radical process that would transform Syria into a democracy. This is the conclusion that the protesters and their supporters reached in the first weeks of the revolution, keeping in mind the behavior of the regime before the revolution. For this reason, they have insisted on the overthrow of the regime, despite the great sacrifices this has required and the violent repression it has brought upon them. This reality should have been duly considered before the idea of a historic settlement was proposed. Barout's conception of this settlement, one that he appears to staunchly believe in, is that it is accessible to political negotiation and would thus exemplify the art of compromise.

The author invokes Hassan Saab<sup>13</sup> in suggesting that compromise by choice is the highest achievement of civilized society, and that its aim is freedom. It must be questioned whether Syrian society is in fact actually advanced enough to achieve this posited highest level of refinement. The articles do not themselves provide an answer, but myriad signs exist that strongly refute Syria's ability to rise to these heights, especially at the given moment. Barout's study presents the country as having a relatively sectarian society, which, both now and in the past, has shown signs of political and social degradation indicating the failure of any attempt at social and national integration; this is purely as a result of the incumbent state of tyranny.

This may prove that tyranny itself, or any politically degraded system, necessarily leads to the disintegration of society in some form, which in turn leads to a breakdown in social and national integration. In a society with a diverse sense of identity, tyranny becomes even more dangerous, as it tends to increase the use of violence in both frequency and intensity. This is indeed just the manner in which the tyrannical Syrian regime is dealing with the current protest movement. This dynamic should have been considered before proposing the idea of historical settlement or compromise by choice as being the ultimate aim of a civilized society.

---

<sup>13</sup> Hassan Saab, *The Science of Politics*, seventh edition, (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm Lilmalayeen, 1981), p. 29.

Also missing from Barout's series of articles is a detailed discussion of the characteristics of a new democratic paradigm that would need to be agreed upon by social and political activists. This paradigm would be derived from elements related to Syria's present condition, and would include rejection of external interference, sectarianism, and the carrying of arms. These basic assumptions themselves are verbally implied in the three no's (no external interference, no sectarianism, and no violence) which constituted the theme of the conference held by the National Coordination Committee in Damascus on September 17, 2011. Rejection of sectarianism is surely more than a slogan; it is a fundamental principle that must be applied and strived for at all times.

The author was not specific in his use of the term "foreign intervention". It is impossible, given the contemporary political climate obtaining in general, and in the Arab region and Syria specifically, to disregard the possibility of some kind of foreign interference in the issues or internal affairs of any country. Such intervention could manifest itself in many different ways, from making statements and coordinating between internal groups (parties, personalities, institutions, and organizations) and external parties, to direct military intervention, as in Iraq and Libya. On that basis, it is questionable whether the intervention of Arab and international organizations (the United Nations, the UN Security Council, the Arab League, and various human rights groups) can be rejected.

The rejection of arms would mean, among other things, limiting the right to carry weapons to members of the military and security forces. It might also extend to those Shabiha militias which are directly sponsored by the state (as in the case of Aleppo's Shabiha, for example). Previously, attention was drawn to the author's condemnation of the defection of some members of the army and security forces. A related issue would be that of protesters carrying arms to defend themselves in the face of the violence inflicted on them at the hands of the state; should their bearing of arms be rejected as well?

It can be assumed that the author would answer affirmatively to such a question. However, such a decision, as well as the rejection of calls for outside intervention, bring into question the nature of the historic settlement itself. Under such circumstances, it would seem to belong most fittingly to the realm of romantic moralism.

It is difficult to conceive of the regime abandoning its dictatorial nature and permitting a real and fundamental shift towards democracy, when it has maintained such an iron grip on its inherent authoritarian nature for more than four decades. It will not concede power willingly. Thus, the question becomes one of how the regime can be coerced (or forced) into responding to the conditions for a historic settlement, as outlined in the study. Another important consideration is whether it is possible for this compulsion or coercion to occur in the absence of foreign intervention, increased armament, or both. One cannot depend on the good intentions of the state, nor heed its doomsday predictions of societal collapse, when it refuses to consider a historic settlement or national compromise;

There seems to exist throughout the study the perception that the killing of demonstrators in Daraa's initial outbreak of violence represented the first public example of the state's moral corruption. Indeed, even a cursory review of the regime's behavior over the past four decades will unequivocally reveal that any moral code had been dispensed with long ago. In light of the state's general immorality as well as its inability to behave morally in politics, the question of how it could be forced to accept the historical settlement becomes even more contentious.

The study's implication seems to be, ironically, that what should be rejected by the historic settlement is a necessary precondition for its fulfillment. In the imagined negotiation between representatives of the revolutionary movement and those of regime, each party will impose its own terms and demands, based on the degree of actual power it possesses on the ground. Under the current circumstances, it would be difficult - indeed, impossible - for the protesters to impose any conditions, without the backing of external parties, the internal armed forces, or both.

The balance of power proposed by the study suggests that Syria today is faced with only two choices: either the historic settlement, or the total collapse of society, state, and the region as a whole. However, the regime has other alternatives in mind. Among these are: remaining in power and implementing minimal cosmetic reforms, or enacting total destruction and division resulting in seismic changes on a local, regional, and possibly international scale. Fortunately, the people's attitudes and aspirations offer possibilities that exceed both the theoretical yet unrealistic choices posed by studies, and the pragmatic yet tyrannical and fraudulent alternatives posited by the state.

A situation now exists in which those rebelling are unable to accept the superficial or partial reforms that the regime is seeking to impose in order to ensure its continuity. Simultaneously, the protestors are aware that the authority is categorically unable to accept or implement a shift to actual democracy, which any historic settlement must necessarily include. Thus, the people have no choice but to continue their struggle until such time as they can overthrow the regime and establish an alternative structure in its place.

The author makes a valid point in recognizing the possibility of the state's collapse with the downfall of the regime, and the fact that steps must be taken to avoid this eventuality. However, only increased use of force, or quick, effective external intervention (or perhaps both) seem to be the only available solutions to avoid that crisis – or, failing that, to handle it in the least damaging way possible. Therefore, the two main premises forming the new balance of power in Syria are: a popular revolution determined to overthrow the existing, tyrannical regime, and a regime that insists on suppressing the revolution and is prepared to make only superficial, cosmetic reforms.

Rather than focusing on negotiation of the demand to overthrow the regime, as the study proposes, perhaps it would be wiser to direct these negotiations toward the regime's relinquishing power as quickly and painlessly as possible. For all those who believe that the regime cannot be overthrown and that the opposition should thus mitigate their demands, there are also those who believe that the opposition will never stop until the regime is overthrown, so the priority is to achieve this in the most expedient way.

The basic error in predicting Syria's prospects does not lie in the unrealistic proposal of the historic settlement, nor in the lack of in-depth analysis of the theoretical and practical feasibility of this proposal. Rather, it lies in describing the inevitability of the collapse of society, state, and region if the regime were to be toppled, and in the assertion that the regime cannot possibly fall. Even without focusing on the contradiction between the stated inevitability and the impossibility of collapse, it seems more effective, and more systematic, to approach the issue from the point of view of the chaos (or coincidence) theory.

Barout adopted this theory as a methodological and theoretical reference in his microscopic documentation of the Syrian revolution; it states that the possibility of

unexpected events always exists, and that such events serve as random factors to cut existing causal chains and forge different ones, unleashing new dynamics. This theory was correctly described as relevant to the case of the Syrian revolution, inasmuch as the Middle East has not developed in accordance with exact, precise rules that are subject to control, but instead in a series of unexpected political upheavals.

A contradiction can be noticed between the judgments and assertive propositions that accompany the examination of Syria's prospects on the one hand, and the idea that development in this region is antithetical to predictable principles on the other. In light of this contradiction, it becomes implausible to justify the assertive propositions with the logic that they have been compiled according to a study of Syria's recent development and current situation, or indeed a comparison with Arab and other revolutions. As the articles also insist, each revolution acts according to its own inherent logic, in which the sudden or random plays a more prominent role than that of orderly cause and effect.

Barout duly points out that the current situation in Syria is open to a variety of eventualities. He describes some of these before alluding to the existence of other possibilities, not yet considered because of the high level of uncertainty and the likelihood of unexpected events occurring. At the beginning of his detailed predictions for the trajectory of the revolution, it is emphasized that the forms produced by the dynamics of the protest movement are ongoing, or open, forms. This means that they are still in a stage of development whereby surprises or unpredictable events are wholly possible.

Thus far, this has proven to be true. It can therefore be said that the practical situation and the theoretical framework of the Syrian protest movement are not compatible with overarching judgments about the country's future. The conclusion that the regime cannot be overthrown, and that negotiation on the matter is futile, is likely a result of an underestimation of the protest movement's strength and national revolutionary nature. In fact, the Syrian revolution refuses virtually all implications arising from this assumption. The basis of the revolution is its voluntary nature that will achieve, through determination, resolution, and sacrifice, what may appear to be impossible.

If the existence of human free will complicates the process of making predictions in the humanities, then it becomes exponentially more complicated in the case of a revolution,



where the role of free will is greatly magnified. The growing understanding of this has led to the appearance of the chaos factor, which influences the course of history in innumerable ways. Thus, at both the intellectual and systematic levels, chaos theory can be referred to in order to interpret and understand the role of free will. Similarly, it can be said that if politics is the art of the possible, then revolution is the art or opportunity to achieve the impossible<sup>14</sup>.

The "impossibility" brought about by the revolution seems impossible only from the perspective of a mind restricted to chains of cause and effect; however, free will creates its own sets of causal relationships, which always include something novel and unexpected. There are those who have avoided involvement in the revolution, refraining from intellectual commentary and removing themselves from their community and its revolutionary activity. Perhaps this grants them a certain neutrality, characterized by cold reasoning that steers away from the subject of 'warm' revolutionary will. Paradoxically, such neutrality may in fact detract from their objectivity in examining the prospects for Syria's revolution.

"There aren't imperatives in history, but opportunities and options that we may invest in or waste. The future is not a place we go to but something that we create<sup>15</sup>". These are the author's own words, stated eloquently and wisely on a previous occasion (2005). This very principle must be emphasized when discussing Syria's future prospects. It is not logical to assert that the regime cannot be overthrown, and that the collapse of the regime will necessarily lead to the collapse of the Syrian state, society, and the region. This revolution presents a rare opportunity for the Syrian people to impose their own choices and to gain their freedom and dignity – and these heroic people are not willing to miss such a chance. They have shown full determination to seize the moment and have the final say in creating their own future, rather than leaving it in the hands which have dominated it for decades.

Damascus, November 15, 2011

<sup>14</sup> See: Hossam el-Deen Darwish, Politics is the Art of the Possible, Revolution is Achieving the Impossible, Alawan, 05/07/2011.  
<http://www.alawan.org/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85,10046.html>

<sup>15</sup> Mohammed Jamal Barout, Syria 2010: Reform or Disaster, The Arabic Renewal, 02/06/2005  
[arabrenewal.info/الكارثة-أو-الإصلاح-2010-سوريا-6772/عاديين-كتاب.html](http://arabrenewal.info/الكارثة-أو-الإصلاح-2010-سوريا-6772/عاديين-كتاب.html)

