

## Myopia of the Syrian Struggle and Key Lessons<sup>1</sup>

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### FAILURE OF THE ARMED RESISTANCE

By any measure the armed struggle against the Assad regime has been a failure. The armed struggle failed to topple the Assad government, protect civilians, or bring more rights and freedoms to Syrians. Although Assad's government is primarily responsible for the atrocities, the opposition's militarization of the resistance has contributed significantly to what is considered to be the worst humanitarian crisis in the last two decades, which—as of August 2014—has left more than 190,000 people dead, 6.5 million internally displaced, and close to 3 million as registered refugees. Among other things, the armed resistance invited an influx of foreign fighters, decreased the chances of possible reconciliation among various ethnic groups, and made the

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prospect of a democratic outcome highly unlikely. A number of the 'liberated areas' in Syria are now experiencing deep tensions and open conflicts among various armed groups<sup>i</sup> that vie for power and control while endangering the lives of civilians.

Achievements of nonviolent resistance have not been fully assessed and little consideration has been given to possible strategic gains that could have been accomplished had the resistance remained nonviolent. The myopic strategies of the Syrian resistance paralleled a general failure of the international community to provide effective assistance to the Syrian nonviolent movement.

## **RISE AND FORCE OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL RESISTANCE**

The Syrian nonviolent resistance, manifested in mass demonstrations that began on March 15, 2011, created the gravest challenge to the Syrian Baathists in more than 40 years of their rule. The threat was greater than all combined armed uprisings by the Muslim Brotherhood or Kurds in recent Syrian history and more effective than any other opposition toward the Assad regime, including the so-called "Damascus Spring" in 2005. During the first six months—March to August 2011<sup>ii</sup>—the vibrant nonviolent movement was reminiscent of nonviolent and cross-sectional mobilization of Syrians during the 60-day general strike in 1936, which forced France to grant formal independence to Syrians a year later.<sup>iii</sup>

During this period, the regime's brutality backfired and the number of protests and participants steadily increased. Corteges honoring killed activists soon became rallying venues. What started as peaceful demonstrations of tens of thousands of people in a few cities and towns turned to massive protests of hundreds of thousands of people across the country by the end of July 2011. People from diverse ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds were participating. Solidarity among various sects was evident in that Ismaeli Shia from Salamiya donated blood to injured Sunnis that were supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama. Druze and the Greek Orthodox minority in Al-Suwayda organized protests to support Sunnis in Daraa—the bedrock of the revolution. Alawites in Jableh and other coastal cities hit the streets by the thousands to protest, chanting "Christians, Alawites and Sunnis, we are one!" and calling for the trial of Daraa's governor who was responsible for the

arrest and torture of children — the event that triggered the uprising. One of the activists remarked, “no one was thinking of religion, ethnicity, or status. It was all about demanding freedom and supporting each other.” Demonstrators held Christian and Muslim signs and chanted “peaceful, peaceful, peaceful—neither Sunni nor Alawite, we want national unity.”<sup>2</sup> The nonviolent discipline of protesters was a strategic goal to increase the participation. “We were careful not to use force,” emphasized a Syrian activist and an organizer of peaceful demonstrations. “From day one we chanted ‘peaceful, civic,’ and used signs, music, and caricature images [not guns], which attracted people’s attention and generated sympathy.” While the Syrian nonviolent resistance was predominantly characterized by protests, it used other tactics involving art, music, public theater, graffiti, and caricatures to promote their cause. The movement also established “local coordination committees” that spearheaded nonviolent campaigns and opposed militarization of resistance.<sup>3</sup>

With increased demonstrations the movement was winning government concessions that included the dismissal of the governor of Daraa, the release of hundreds of political dissidents, the grant of citizenship rights for Kurds, and the removal of the 48 year-old emergency law. Defection from the bureaucracy, Ba’ath party, diplomatic corps, business community, and the security forces was a growing movement. Prominent intellectual figures such as Muntaha al-Atrash, a Druze and the daughter of the late renowned nationalist leader Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, and famous Alawites actors like Fadwa Soliman and Jamal Suleiman joined the revolution. Security defections including high-level army defections, though limited to Sunnis, accelerated. By the summer of 2011 it was estimated that around 30,000 soldiers had left the Syrian army.

At a time when civil resistance was gaining public support, and both government concessions and a limited yet growing number of defections, the monumental decision was announced on July 31 to form the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to protect civilians and topple the

<sup>2</sup> The video footage of the protest: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCjLWBfaYcG&feature=results\\_video&playlist=PL4ECF881C5FC322BC%20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCjLWBfaYcG&feature=results_video&playlist=PL4ECF881C5FC322BC%20)

<sup>3</sup> On August 29, 2011 the LCC warned and accurately predicted that “militarizing the revolution would minimize popular support and participation in the revolution (...), undermine the gravity of the humanitarian catastrophe involved in a confrontation with the regime [and] would put the revolution in an arena where the regime has a distinct advantage and would erode the moral superiority.” Cited by Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio, *The Syrian Uprising: Syria’s Struggling Civil Society*, *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring (2012), 27.

regime with arms. This, however, played into the regime's hands as it led the rebels to engage the government on military terms where the Assad rule remained at its strongest. The FSA attracted a motley group of secular and religious types, each with its own goals and agenda. As a result, it failed to deploy a more organized force with an effective strategy. Finally, rebels were also responsible for mass killing, executions of minorities and looting, which further deepened sectarian tensions<sup>iv</sup> and undermined solidarity that the nonviolent resistance built.

### **ADVENT OF OPPOSITION VIOLENCE DRIVEN BY EMOTIONS AND MISCALCULATIONS**

With an increase in regime assaults and brutality against protesters including detention and torture of activists, the leadership of the civil resistance movement was decimated and the consensus around nonviolent tactics weakened. This was accompanied by a growing desire for revenge among ordinary people. According to an activist from Hama, the regime "would purposefully capture children and torture them to trigger violence among protesters." In one of the rare surveys conducted recently in Aleppo and Idlib, almost half of polled Syrians identified revenge as the single most important factor behind their decision to join the armed resistance.<sup>v</sup>

Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, which saw sudden mass refusals of the militaries to follow regimes' orders thus helping civil resistance win, the gradual defections from the Syrian military undermined the nonviolent resistance. While the regime managed to maintain its capacity to repress, activists were left unprepared to integrate defecting soldiers into nonviolent protests. Eventually, soldiers organized alternative armed resistance, a tactic they knew best. Tragically, nonviolent actions were undermined by the same armed soldiers who responded early on to the appeal of the nonviolent movement and defected from the regime. To some extent nonviolent resistance became the victim of its own success.

Nonviolent resistance was seen as an unsuitable and weak strategy to face Assad's repression given the level of violence. Consequently, it was seen

as impossible to bring the regime down with only peaceful means. Skeptics spent much less time than needed assessing the level of risks of armed struggle, the resources required to sustain it and the probabilities involved in removing the regime with arms. In this way, civil resistance confronted a much higher burden of proof in persuading others it could be effective against the brutal regime compared to its armed counterpart.

Resorting to arms was also dictated by another misguided assumption. An interviewed FSA member noted that “we did not think for a second that we are going to end up fighting for real and long. We thought we would put on a show, so the international community will come and save us the way it was in Libya. They will bomb Bashar Al Assad’s Palace and bring the government down.” He added, “when this did not happen, we found ourselves stuck in an armed struggle that we were not prepared for.” An expectation that the international community would intervene meant there was no incentive to consider at any depth how well the armed resistance was prepared to take on the Assad regime. After all the very weakness of the armed resistance — as in Libya — could be crucial to its rescue as it increased pressure on the international community to intervene and salvage what was left of the revolution.

Militarization of the resistance has given the Assad government a pretext to use indiscriminate firepower, including warplanes and chemical weapons that were not deployed when the resistance was peaceful. Arming the resistance also meant that Syrians themselves lost control over the trajectory of the struggle. Armed rebellion helped foreign extremist elements to establish their footing in Syria and start competing with FSA for battlefield-derived legitimacy and outside military assistance. Syrians became dependent on foreign states’ sponsorship for arms and money to fuel the armed struggle. A lawyer and activist from Hama acknowledged, “the moment there were arms in the hands of some, we knew we lost our battle. It is what the government wanted us to do. They wanted a reason to fire and we were careful not to give them that excuse. Once the resistance became armed, we had to go home. The dynamic of the conflict changed and it was not our fight anymore.”

Armed struggle in Syria reinforced divisions among religious and ethnic groups, hardening extreme views. The regime’s divide-and-rule tactics, including the use of sectarian militias, have been very effective in further undermining opposition unity. Syrian civil resistance also experienced a significant decline in the weekly protests at the onset of violent struggle.<sup>vi</sup> Violent resistance undermined the solidarity

that nonviolent resistance managed to build as long as it lasted. The armed resistance jeopardized any attempts to develop a more unifying and inclusive vision of a future Syria. By choosing to shoot its way to freedom, the opposition squandered its chance to make all ethnic groups stakeholders in the political change—the idea originally advanced by the civil resistance movement.

## **CIVIL RESISTANCE PERCOLATING ON THE SURFACE OF CIVIL WAR**

Although overshadowed by the armed resistance, nonviolent resistance remains visible and active despite ongoing civil war — a testimony to the endurance of peaceful struggle and its deep roots that were developed during the first few months of the resistance. This is evident in the work of grassroots committees that sprang up across Syria to provide humanitarian assistance and basic services. It is also expressed in civic actions such as the “Stop the Killing” campaign organized by minority women<sup>4</sup> to monitor the work of the local councils and promote the culture of rights and justice,<sup>vii</sup> the peaceful protests in various Syrian towns against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its authoritarian practices and the establishment of an alternative schooling system, including volunteer-run baccalaureate exams. The Karama (“dignity”) Bus—a mobile center for addressing trauma in children—was organized by women in Kafr Nabl outside the regime controlled area but with the intention to expand to other places.<sup>viii</sup> In the same town, a group of young activists called ‘Sharaa’ (Arabic for “street”) deploys graffiti as a way “to gain back the public space that was stolen from us by the militias,”<sup>ix</sup> according to one of its members. The proliferation of local newspapers and political magazines is another example Syrian civic groups’ self-management. The number of publications available went from less than a dozen that were tightly controlled by the regime to more than sixty independent outlets run by popular groups.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the Stop the Killing campaign and each of its actions check its Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.309765662466852.67278.220124418097644&type=3>.



If nonviolent organizing and mobilization is still blooming in a predominantly violent environment, then how much more could be achieved if the opposition violence was taken out of the conflict and the resources committed to supporting armed groups were instead used to strengthen the Syrian nonviolent resistance?

For instance, the return to nonviolent resistance could be highly disruptive for the Assad regime and prove to be a more rational choice with more realistic chances of success than its violent counterpart. Media reports point to growing dissatisfaction among the members of the Alawite community from which the Assad regime draws its main power and support.<sup>x</sup> Members of the Alawite sect feel they are bearing an unusually large burden of sacrifice to keep Assad in power and receive relatively few benefits in return. But they remain unwaveringly loyal to him and his family because they are genuinely terrified of violent insurgents. The moment this fear is assuaged, Alawites would be ready to challenge Assad by asking for a "payback" for the costs they endured. Thus, the internal dissent and strife among Alawites would be much more likely to result in political action if the current violent insurgency would cease and open the way for the return of unarmed resistance.

## KEY LESSONS FROM THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

### *An Extremely Violent Adversary Wants Civil Resistance to Turn Violent*

It is widely thought that a regime that rules with brutal violence can only be stopped by another more powerful violent force. However, violent regimes are often caught off balance when challenged by the unarmed resistance. The British historian B.H. Lidell-Hart, who interrogated the German generals after the World War II, noticed that Nazis were bewildered by nonviolent resistance. Therefore, "it was relief to them when resistance became violent and when nonviolent forms were mixed with guerrilla action thus making it easier to combine drastic repressive action against both at the same time."<sup>xi</sup> The

Syrian regime brutalized its people with the goal of suppressing the resistance. When this did not succeed the regime used indiscriminate violence to force people to abandon peaceful resistance in favor of armed uprising. According to an activist who later joined the FSA, the Syrian security forces were leaving caches of weapons in public areas to encourage the use of arms. If brutal regimes are interested in facing a violent rather than peaceful challenge, activists must develop a plan to thwart that desire.

### *Fewer Civilian Casualties in Civil Resistance Campaigns*

For civilians the cost of armed struggle will always be higher than the costs of civil resistance even in cases where violent resistance succeeds. A study that examined violence against civilians in wars between 1989 and 2004 showed that civilians' risk of dying in conflicts that did not devolve into armed struggles was less than one percent.<sup>xii</sup> During the relatively low intensity armed resistance in South Africa, a former African National Congress (ANC) operative noted that ANC's own intelligence assessed the survival rate of an ANC armed insurgent to be between three and seven days on average. Despite the risks involved in suffering from years of imprisonment, the death rate among nonviolent resisters was much lower. As for Syria, the probability of dying in the conflict became three times higher once the opposition abandoned nonviolent resistance in favor of the armed rebellion.<sup>5</sup>

### *Developing a Mindset for a Protracted, Five to Ten Year Long Struggle Against a Brutal Regime*

Two factors contributed to the failure to develop a collective mentality and strategies for a protracted struggle and led to a premature

<sup>5</sup> "During the first five months of nonviolent civil resistance (mid-March to mid-August, 2011), the death toll was 2,019 (figures exclude regime army casualties). In the next five months (mid-August 2011 to mid-January 2011) mixed violent and nonviolent resistance saw the death toll climbed to 3,144, a 56 percent increase. Finally, during the first five months of armed resistance (mid-January 2012 to mid-June 2012) the death toll was already 8,195, a staggering 161 percent increase in comparison with the casualties during nonviolent struggle." See Maciej Bartkowski and Mohja Kahf, "The Syrian Resistance, Part 2."



abandonment of the nonviolent resistance: the impatience of the opposition mixed with the belief shared by policy makers in other capitals that Assad would step down as quickly as his counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia.

The research on nonviolent and violent campaigns concludes that it takes on average three years for nonviolent resistance to run its course (whether it succeeds or fails) while a violent uprising requires at least nine years.<sup>xiii</sup> In practice, Syrians allowed for only one-fifth of the average lifespan of a nonviolent movement before they turned to arms.

### *Winning the Loyalty Contest*

Unlike other autocrats in the region, Assad had initially a larger social base of support that included minority groups, business entrepreneurs, religious figures, military, and middle-income citizens across various ethnic groups. The loyalties of some of these groups were shaken with the onset of nonviolent resistance. However, the regime made a concerted effort to keep the loyalties intact and attract neutrals with financial and political incentives. It was relatively effective in preventing major loyalty shifts within its pillars of support—a strategy that the opposition was unable to counter successfully.

Ultimately, it was degeneration of the conflict into a civil war that offered a major boost for the government. Opposition violence combined with the influx of extremists allowed the regime to consolidate the rank and file people who until then sat on the fence. They did not necessarily support Assad's policies but they did favor him over radical Islamist groups that hijacked the armed struggle and whose presence they associated with the interference of foreign powers, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, backed by the West, in the affairs of their own country.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Devising a Viable Strategy to Shift from Armed Toward Nonviolent Resistance*

South Africa, Nepal, Egypt, Palestine, West Papua, Western Sahara, and East Timor have all seen the reduction of emphasis on armed

struggle replaced by an emergence of mostly nonviolent campaigns after re-evaluating their goals and means, taking stock of the costs, and weighing the risks and probabilities of the success of civil resistance. Syrians can rely on existing citizens' councils and the ongoing nonviolent organizing in localities, which is also extending mutual aid networks and developing cross-sectional coordinating bodies. All of these efforts are developing the foundations of future "peace communities." Examples of resistance-driven and self-managed nonviolent local communities abound in countries that experienced high level of violence including Colombia,<sup>xv</sup> the Philippines,<sup>xvi</sup> Mexico,<sup>xvii</sup> Kosovo,<sup>xviii</sup> Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Bosnia.<sup>xix</sup> They offer encouraging lessons for Syrians. Their local populations rose up and defied violent state and nonstate groups, establishing zones of peace where organized citizens expelled or kept at bay violent perpetrators. In violence-torn places like Liberia, the emergence of women-run networks helped launch anti-civil war campaigns and forced the warring parties to negotiate and sign a peace accord.

### *Reinventing the Role of the International Community*

From the beginning of the conflict in Syria the international community resorted to traditional instruments of pressuring the government. In May 2011 the European Union and the United States introduced a series of targeted political and economic sanctions against the Assad regime. What became clear is that the international community lacks instruments to protect and assist nonviolent uprising when it lasts. There is an urgent need to reinvent the role of the international community in helping nonviolent movements.

## **THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE SYRIAN NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT**

No amount of external assistance can substitute for an authentic grassroots movement to achieve its civic and political goals. Unlike

violent resistance, nonviolent struggles are owned and won by the indigenous population alone. However, international aid could support these grassroots movements in achieving their goals more effectively. The Syrian tragedy showed that the international community has yet to develop effective mechanisms to support civil resistance movements, at least with the same energy and material aid that it devotes to finding diplomatic solutions, reaching peace accords, or intervening militarily.<sup>6</sup> When, in early 2012, senior US policymakers were asked why the international community had not encouraged a sustained civil resistance, their response was: "Why should we bother? Assad will be gone in a couple of months." Although Western governments were not enthusiastic about backing armed resistance and probably wanted civil resistance to succeed, their support for nonviolent movement was modest.

Lessons from Syria show that there is a genuine urgency to develop new international norms or understandings (e.g. in the form of a universal right to help) designed to refocus international efforts to assisting nonviolent resistance movements and preventing them from turning to arms. A global normative framework for helping nonviolent movements could also benefit from the establishment of an international rights-based institution devoted entirely to supporting civil resistance movements around the world. In the Syrian case, such an institution could have deployed small teams of veteran nonviolent volunteer-activists from the Arab-speaking region and more broadly from across the world to meet their younger, more inexperienced Syrian counterparts to share lessons from their respective struggles. The extended "train-the-trainers" program in different localities across Syria could have been devised to share practices and experiences among activists. When strict security measures made it difficult to facilitate the entry of trainers, commonly used and accessed online technology could have been used to disseminate information and address the bedeviling problem of how to plan a *protracted* nonviolent struggle. Other activities undertaken by a specialized international

<sup>6</sup> As for the latter, the bill for a relatively short-lived NATO military intervention in Libya (limited to 8 months of air campaign) was estimated to reach at least \$2 billion. See Jessica Rettig, "End of NATO's Libya Intervention Means Financial Relief for Allies," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 31, 2011, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2011/10/31/end-of-natos-libya-intervention-means-financial-relief-for-allies>.

institution could include in this case distribution of Arabic-language educational toolkits that highlight aspects of civil resistance movements and explain what makes them historically more successful than their violent counterparts.

Providing technology and communication equipment including laptops, portable printers, satellite phones, and cameras without the usual bureaucratic red tape could support nonviolent movements in spreading their messages faster and more effectively. Such assistance, according to a young Alawite female activist who was part of the 2011 uprising, would have been extremely helpful. "We were too poor to afford to buy computers, toners, printers that were needed to produce informational brochures to break government propaganda." During the government's nationwide shutdowns of the Internet, the availability of inexpensive, subsidized, and secure satellite technology to coordinate protests among activists inside the country and communicate with the outside world would be particularly useful. Other valuable support from the international community would include access for activists to mainstream media or support in setting up local radio or TV broadcasts so that activists could beam information about the achievements, progress, and challenges on the nonviolent battlefield. Provisions of such technology and resources would benefit from greater discretionary powers given to diplomats on the ground by their own capitals. A major impediment that Robert Ford, the former US ambassador to Syria, found in his work was a lack of autonomy in decision-making. He recalled, for example, spending time in "long meetings to debate small issues, such as which Syrian opposition members he could meet with and whether it was okay to give cell phones, media training and management classes to a local Syrian government council controlled by the opposition."<sup>xx</sup>

Finally, benchmarks of the progress of civil resistance could be set up to assess levels of defections, increases in civic mobilization and participation, and government responses including any concessions as well as the toll from repression, and costs to society. These benchmarks could be used to compel those advocating military solutions to explain and show how they could achieve more and with lower costs. In the Syrian case, millions of small handheld radio and TV devices could

have been distributed to the public, making it easier to reach out to hesitant minorities with messages of unity and cooperation.

On the military front, the international community could have facilitated exchanges between activists inside and outside Syria on how best to prepare for gradual defections from the security forces so as to prevent defected soldiers from undermining the nonviolent nature of the resistance, including effective ways of integrating them into the civil resistance movement. If that would not have been feasible, the international community should have developed strategies to keep defecting soldiers and their arms away from the urban centers where civil resistance was thriving.

The establishment of large military camps in remote places closer to the border with Turkey or Jordan and Iraq where soldiers could receive stable salaries, training, and modern equipment would have attracted fighters and, in turn, encouraged more officers to defect. Arguably, the existence of such camps could have incentivized foreign countries in the region that transferred weapons and fighters into Syria without much coordination and strategic planning to channel their material and human resources to the established military camps. Containment of defected soldiers in camps protected against regime's air-strikes could have kept them safe and occupied until such time when a capable, vetted, and professional force was ready for deployment. By then, however, civil resistance might have already won the struggle and a military force could have been used to perform a policing function and provide security for all segments of the Syrian population regardless of religious affiliations to win them over to support the common fight against violent foreign extremists.

Today, local councils and civil administrations in both liberated and conflict areas are in a need of more decisive international support. For example, according to UN staff, the administration of the city of Homs is taking great risks in trying to implement water projects benefitting both sides of the conflict. Local administrations need to be trained in governance, rule of law, and civil liberties, including inclusive policies for women and minorities. Local administrations should be funded so they can rebuild critical infrastructure such as water and sewage

systems, and electric power infrastructure. Setting up local police forces would require help in re-training and equipping policemen that defected from the Assad regime.

Both the international community and mobilized local population have yet to acknowledge that they are engaged in a genuine race with extremist groups such as ISIS not to determine who can deploy the most capable fighting force but who can be most effective governance manager. This is because ISIS secures local support not purely by military conquest and brutal repression but also—if not mainly—by restoring damaged infrastructure, delivering water and electricity to the population in the territories they govern, and by providing basic social services as well as jobs and salaries. The communities with the experience of nonviolent mobilization and organizing will be better prepared than violent groups to establish and run more effective governance while, at the same time, staying stronger to defend their autonomy. This understanding could help international community develop appropriate tools to assist these communities become more skilled governance managers.

With extremist Islamic practices taking place in many liberated areas, outside support for civil institutions such as schools and courts is needed to counter views and actions of radicals that are despised by most Syrians. Various protests contesting the authoritarian and brutal practices of ISIS<sup>7</sup> took place in Aleppo and Raqqa. More than 40 percent of Syrian children are out of school, mainly in conflict zones but also in some liberated areas, where Islamic teaching is becoming the only alternative to nonfunctioning public education. Support for building schools and developing curricula that promote self-expression, critical thinking, and basic democratic and civic concepts would be invaluable for a democratic future of the country. Similarly, in areas where *Sharia* Islamic courts are functioning and sentencing people to public flogging, civic courts and local councils need to be supported to counter religious courts. International funding could also

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<sup>7</sup> Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. For more on the foreign fighters in Syria see Aaron Y. Zelin, "Who Are the Foreign Fighters in Syria?" *The Washington Institute*, December 5, 2013.



aid defected judges and lawyers who are now working to establish civic courts in places like Harem and Atareb to counter *Sharia* law.

Most valuably, the international community could work to ensure that external sponsorship for armed extremist groups dries up, incentivizing armed groups to disengage and providing space for civil resistance groups to reemerge and renew nonviolent conflict.

Despite the ongoing civil war, threats from the regime and Islamist reactionary groups, hatred combined with a lust for revenge, and seemingly insurmountable divisions among Syrians, nonviolent activism and mobilization remain the most realistic alternative for achieving social and political change in Syria. The Syrian resistance movement failed to plan for a prolonged confrontation while the actions of the international community were less than adequate to strengthen the Syrian nonviolent resistance and prevent it from becoming violent. It is time that both learn from their short-sightedness. In the current humanitarian crisis, a number of opportunities might emerge to build solidarity and mutual aid-networks across divided ethnic communities affected by the war. Nonviolent activists must identify and utilize such opportunities while the international community must remain ready to step in to support activists' efforts.

## Notes

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