

RIAD HIJAB

Former Prime Minister, Syria

Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting is being held in the shadow of the Russian and Iranian escalation in Syria, which has resulted in the killing and injuring of hundreds of thousands of civilians, displacing millions of Syrians and hundreds of thousands of detainees as well as those who are forced to disappear. There is also destruction of the infrastructure that imposes forced displacement, spreads radicalism and terrorist groups and sectarian militias from across borders.

These events are reflected in international security, in which there is a growing refugee crisis in the various Western countries, with an increasing risk of recruitment of young people from Europe and other countries to fight with the “Daesh” organisation which has become one of the most prominent threats to the international security. At the same time, the Syrian people are suffering from frustration due to failure of the international community to stop the violations committed against it by the crumbling dictatorship whose survival constitutes a threat to international security.

This escalation of the war waged by the regime and its Russian and Iranian allies falls under the shadow of pivotal transformations at all regional and international levels. The “Washington” declaration to halt the truce negotiations with Moscow is due to the realisation that the Russians are proceeding to repeat the “Ukrainian” scenario in Syria.

This occurs in the context of the formation of a new American administration that will have a different agenda in dealing with the case of Syria, compared with the Obama administration.

The latest regional and European Security Council initiatives, and the efforts in the field to condemn Russia and hold its regime accountable, represents a significant change in the course of the crisis, especially following the insinuation of the possibility of imposing sanctions on Russia if it continues its escalation in Aleppo.

Undoubtedly, the results expected for the Turkish operation known as “Euphrates shield” will have a great impact in changing the reality on the ground, especially if no-fly zones are imposed and safe refuges for civilians are provided.

It is also expected that the appointment of António Guterres as the new Secretary General of the United Nations will have an impact in involving the United Nations more effectively, enabling it to emerge from the “paralysis” situation that has resulted from the repeated Russian vetoes. Furthermore, there is the expected interaction in the battles against the “Daesh” organisation in Mosul, and its potential impact on the eastern Syria, all the active forces being poised to wage successive operations against the organisation.

The truth that should be emphasised in this context is that the battle of the Syrian people is no longer limited to confronting Bashar Al-Assad’s regime which is determined to remain in power despite losing legitimacy and sovereignty and control of the territory. It rather lies in transforming the conflict into a battle of existence in which the Syrians are struggling to maintain the unity of their country and regain the sovereignty of the state while preserving their institutions from external intervention. The battle for the liberation of Syria has become a regional battle in which dozens of terrorist militias and groups of mercenaries from various countries are embroiled in inflaming a sectarian war that threatens the entire Middle East.

In the context of the multiple factions fighting in the Syrian crisis, it must be stressed that it is not possible to deal with the deterioration of the humanitarian and security situations in our country in isolation from the security balance in the Middle East. The conflict is characterised by a major overlap between the two concepts of regional security and international security; it is not possible for the Syrians to engage in a liberation battle from totalitarianism and extremist ideology on their own. It is inevitable that the international community will have to fulfil its role actively by attempting to exclude the external influences that are aggravating the suffering of the Syrians. This applies in particular to those countries that are openly fighting alongside the regime and that are contribute to the commission of even greater crimes and violations against the Syrian people, in full view of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Syrian opposition forms part of the world's battle against terrorism and it continues to fight fiercely against those who have created an environment of hatred, sectarian tension, forced displacement and mass murder, and made the Syrian situation an incubator for recruiting youth, driving them into the fiery furnace created in the twenty-first century.

This battle cannot be won through being limited to aerial bombardment of certain areas pinpointed by satellite.

The war against terrorism is an all-out battle that we have been waging through comprehensive programmes on which we have been working avidly, preparing them since the establishment of the commission; they include intellectual confrontation, alongside military confrontation, and the eradication of organisational and intellectual incubators feeding radicalism, sectarianism and authoritarianism. The social confrontation requires initiatives to keep young people away from the environment that incubates radical ideology. There must be provision of safe areas for civilians, the refugees and displaced persons must be able to return and programmes must be adopted for de-radicalisation and establishing national reconciliation, while deterring initiatives for retaliation and preserving the rights of civilians within the context of the collective national identity and the undivided homeland. To this should be added economic confrontation requiring the launch of reconstruction projects, restoring the infrastructure and providing basic services for all citizens, without discrimination or differentiation.

Undoubtedly, regaining security, preserving the institutions of the State and strengthening the bonds of national cohesion in Syria will have a considerable impact in enhancing both regional and global security. In order to achieve this, the High Negotiations Commission, inaugurated last September, has a vision for the transitional phase. This is in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 and related United Nations' resolutions that aim to establish a pluralistic system based on the principles of citizenship, human rights, transparency, accountability and rule of law, and ensuring political neutrality of the army and the armed forces. The security services must be enabled to become professional institutions that preserve the sovereignty and independence of the state and protect public freedoms.

The Commission's vision includes the establishment of a transitional steering committee having full executive authority. It strives to preserve the unity of the Syrian territory, maintaining state institutions and continuing the work of the government ministries, the civil service and public authorities of the State.

We want to ensure that this vision is not limited merely to the Commission or any of its constituents. We have strived to represent the aspirations of the Syrian people, doing so by calling for the initiation of a comprehensive national dialogue, conducting a constitutional review and calling for legislative and presidential elections to herald the end of the transitional phase and the establishment of a permanent constitution for the country.



This vision has received acceptance across the broad range of the various Syrian opposition groups and has won praise from the international community. Undoubtedly, its implementation will assist in eliminating the chaos of weaponry; it will form a military council tasked with the integration of all the armed forces, and restricting the right of weapons ownership to the State, disarming the separatist groups, enforcing border control, preventing terrorist infiltration and putting an end to any support that could be delivered to them across the borders.

At the same time, we are working on activating our plans for integrating the young people and assisting them in escaping from the radical incubators and furnace of conflict, so they can make a positive contribution in a healthy environment free from violence.

This can be achieved through the implementation of development programmes and the provision of mature, cultural and intellectual alternatives, while producing successive media campaigns and adopting a comprehensive social reform policy.

On the external level, the foundations of our work are flexibility and having political reality, while not imposing preconditions in our communications and our diplomatic relationships. We must not object to communication with any competent authority claiming to represent the demands of the Syrian people and the fulfilment of its interests.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The process of political change is an arduous phase; numerous civilised nations have been through it at decisive stages in their history. The Syrian people realise that they are experiencing a pivotal stage requiring sacrifice and a demonstration of flexibility and realism, without foregoing principles and foundations. The dilemma lies, however, in the determination of Bashar Al-Assad's regime and his allies to violate international law and avoid the inevitable process of change. It is doing so by targeting populated areas with chemical weapons, poison gas, cluster bombs, phosphorus bombs and other internationally banned weapons, while applying the policies of starvation, murder, forced displacement and demographic change. The regime is inflaming sectarian tensions and foiling international attempts to end the fighting and begin the political transition process.

In order to launch a viable negotiation process, the United Nations should present a new vision through which the mistakes of the past three sessions will be corrected. It should do this through the creation of a suitable environment by implementing Articles 12, 13 and 14 of Security Council Resolution 2254, especially concerning ending the fighting, lifting the siege imposed on Syrian towns and villages and releasing detainees. It must adopt a compelling political transition agenda in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 and impose a clear timetable for attaining political accord.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised in this area that the origins of the fight are a conflict between civilisation and democracy on one side, and the forces of radicalism, authoritarianism and barbarism on the other side. It is a battle that does not warrant compromise with the opponent or any attempt to reach partial solutions with it. The western countries have been shown the error of their ways in their appeasement of the Nazi and fascist forces that overwhelmed Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Balkans in 1939, an error that cost millions of souls in a destructive world war on a scale never before witnessed by humanity.

In the case of Syria, Ukraine and other hotspots, the Allies themselves stand faced with the challenge to protect freedom and democracy against an axis of the forces of authoritarianism, dictatorship and extremism and radicalism. The alliance requires a firm policy similar to the Eisenhower Principle, otherwise the forces of moderation and democracy will be engulfed by the tide of totalitarianism.



Despite these difficult challenges, we are continuing with our efforts to achieve the aspirations of the entire Syrian people, driven by our faith that the Syrian people are able to rise up afresh in their homeland. The role of the C is to preserve the unity of the country and recover the state institutions from the clutches of foreign expansion projects, while working on the creation of reference documents for the transitional phase, an arduous incorporation process. We work hand-in-hand with all Syrians who have made great sacrifices in their striving for emancipation from dictatorship and renunciation of the ideologies of radicalism and hatred in their attempt to gain freedom and independence.