

Talk by Yasser Munif

Thank you very much for this generous and also very important introduction about the situation in Syria. Thank you to LALIT for the invitation and for hosting this event. Thanks to Lindsey for translating this talk and making this possible.

As Alain explained in his introduction, this event is part of a very of a large campaign that started a few months ago. Today, there are 35 cities around the world where people are demonstrating or hosting activities such as this one. There are actions in more that 35 different cities in the world. I will explain the purpose and goals of the campaign at the end of my talk but in brief, the global campaign of solidarity is creating a global movement and making connections with leftist parties, progressive and social movements all over the world, from Latin America to Africa, to Europe. Building this campaign is to support, sustain and make the Syrian revolution much more visible. It could also help the people's struggle in Syria by building solidarity between the inside and outside. I say this because I have no faith in governments and nation states in what they call their support of the Syrian revolution. The appellation the "the friends of Syria" is an oxymoron.

Here is a brief anecdote to illustrate that. I was at a conference in Tunisia, two months ago, at the World Social Forum, the biggest event for social movements and progressive politics, and I was on my way back to the US and I was stopped at the Customs for four hours. The US is supposed to be a “friend of Syria” and funding the Syrian revolution and helping the rebels and yet, I was stopped for more than four hours and was asked every question possible. Where I am from? When did I leave Syria? Who do I know in Syria? What is my family's situation? What do I think of the Syrian revolution? What ideology do I believe in? etc... They asked every question possible. It is laughable because at the end they said, “what do you have in your bag? You seem to have duty free articles? What are those?” When he heard that I had sausage, he looked at me, surprised, and said "Oh, so you eat pork?" I did not know where that was going and I was surprised when he promptly said that the interview was over. He put down a few notes and let me inside the United States. His logic must have been that since I eat pork, I couldn't be a Muslim fanatic. Later, I realized that they took some papers and documents in addition to my notebook where I had put many of the contacts information of people I met in Tunisia. This is an anecdote to show the real position of the US, which portrays itself as the friend of Syria.

In this talk tonight, I am going to show that all the different countries, states and governments that are involved on both sides of this quite complex geo-political conflict in reality have much more in common than it appears at first glance. Whether it is Iran, Russia, the United States, Europe, France or Turkey or the Gulf, these countries have much more in common than we think they do. They are actively undermining the Syrian revolution and trying to stop the wave of revolt in the Arab world. In this sense, the Syrian revolution is in many ways comparable to the Spanish Civil War. The Syrian revolution is central in the region in the same way the Spanish Civil War was pivotal in Europe. The defeat of the republicans in Spain and the victory of Fascism were a prelude for World War II. The Syrian revolution is, to a certain extent (with important differences), playing the same role. If the Syrian revolution is defeated, it will be a major setback for Arab populations and the wave of revolts in the Arab world will stop for a while. If the regime falls, there will be new challenges but at the same time, there will be new possibilities and the wave of revolts will continue. This is where I am situating the talk today.

In this talk I will explain why it is important to build a coalition with social movements, progressive groups, and intellectuals to support the Syrian people. This project tries to counter-balance the type of alliances that some Syrian opposition groups are building with various governments and nation-states. In the past two years we saw how these different states betrayed all the promises they made because they diverged from their own direct interests. I will also talk briefly about the history of the Ba'ath Party, the ruling party in Syria today and the socio-economic situation in the 40 plus years. I will explain Syria's foreign policy and the relationship between Syria and the United States, Palestine and Israel. This purpose of such a highlight is to dismantle the rhetoric according to which the Syrian regime is anti-imperial and is siding with Palestine and against Israel. I would like to show the inaccuracy of such rhetoric, at least when we scrutinize the recent history of Syria.

Finally, I will talk about the revolt, which is a very complex process with multi-layered narratives. I think Alain did a really good job in introducing the main aspects and the most important moments of that revolt. I will say a few words about the major players, the opposition, the regime and the geo-political players. If we have enough time, I will spend a few minutes talking about the campaign of solidarity with the Syrian revolution and its objectives.

To start I will argue that to take a position on the Syrian revolution should be easy and straightforward: it entails a non-conditional support of the Syrian people's revolt. And yet, it is presented in the media as an extremely complex conflict. In reality, I think it is both. The Syrian revolution is very simple and very complex. In many ways, it is comparable to the Palestinian Question. The Palestinian Question is both. It is very complex and very simple. In the case of Palestine, it should be easy to take a moral or ethical position. Once we understand that there is an Israeli occupation and that Palestinians are resisting against it, it should be easy to take a position. And yet it is an extremely complex situation with internal conflict and external tensions and with an extremely complex geo-political context, with different, divergent and convergent interests amongst different players and states. This type of thinking should also be applicable to Syria. We should start by taking an ethical position and support the people's revolt. Then, we have plenty of space to disagree on as many points as we wish to. And that is always healthy behavior in democratic movements.

I will start with a brief history of modern Syria. It is quite a complex history but I will stop at a few key moments starting with the Ba'ath taking power in 1963 and ruling until today. So the Ba'ath monopolized power for fifty years in Syria, from 1963 to 2013. Starting in 1963, the Ba'ath was ruling, and in 1970, Assad the father seized power in 1970 through a coup. The Assad family or dynasty has been in power since then. Assad ruled in the beginning as a nationalist and socialist but very quickly eliminated his leftist opponents and shifted increasingly to the right. There were progressive factions in the Ba'ath party but Hafiz al-Assad belonged to a right wing within the party. What he basically did was to dismantle the welfare state, which was built between 1963 and 1970. Many things were done during these seven years, for example redistribution of land, free education, the consolidation of the public sector. From the moment he took over and until today, what he did was basically a process of slow liberalization with the father and neo-liberalization with the son.

I will not talk much about this rich history but in brief every time there was a social conflict and there was an economic crisis, the only reaction of the regime was to respond with sheer power and repression and violence. That is why it has a very robust security apparatus: the military, the police with their many branches that it becomes confusing at times for non-Syrians. The irony is that one of the centers where political prisoners are interrogated and tortured is called the "Palestine Branch". If an activist is caught and sent to the "Palestine Branch", they are kept there underground without any communication with the outside world and will most certainly be tortured. This tells us how little the Syrian regime cares about the Palestinian Question.

It shows the cynicism of the regime that claimed to support the Palestinian struggle and yet many (Palestinian and Syrian alike) would be incarcerated and perish in the "Palestine Branch".

As I mentioned earlier, each time there is an economic crisis, the response of the regime is to inflict more repression, which culminated in 1982. The regime handled the economic crisis of 1976 by cutting subsidies and marginalizing the most deprived groups. This was an extremely rich period politically. Leftist parties, the Muslim Brotherhood, and labor unions were initially opposing the Syrian regime peacefully to achieve their goals towards more social justice and freedom. Later, the Muslim Brotherhood became violent as a reaction to the violence of the regime. After that confrontation, the unions lost their autonomy and many of the union leaders were put in prison and replaced by Ba'ath Party members. Some of you might have heard of the Hama massacre in 1982 when the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the state was finally ended through the besieging of Hama and the killing of many residents of the city. There were major repression and massacres in Hama. Tanks surrounded the city for three consecutive days and entire neighborhoods were shelled. There are no precise figures on the number of people killed but estimates vary between 20,000 to 40,000 Syrians. The regime used extreme violence with those who were captured afterwards. According to some accounts, certain political prisoners were actually released in the Palmyra Desert and Assad's nephew hunted them down using machine guns. That was the kind of repression people were subjected to. The Muslim Brotherhood was repressed the most harshly. This was a key moment when leftist intellectuals and parties and other political groups either went underground or were exiled. That was a turning point for the left because of the splits that happened. The two official communist parties sided with the regime; a third communist party went underground to preserve its autonomy but had to face lot of repression. Many of these leaders spent many years in prison, in many cases up seventeen or nineteen years and were frequently tortured.

The new union leaders were appointed by the regime and were therefore very loyal to it. That's why they had no role in the Syrian revolution unlike in other countries where unions played a central role. When the international left talks about the lack of unions' support for the revolution, they ignore the labor history of Syria. Clearly they do not understand the modern history of Syria, they do not know about Syrian society and they do not know how the Syrian regime has been controlling those unions. These same leftist intellectuals also ignore that the liberalization of the economy started early on in Syria but became faster when Bashar Asad seized power. The father wanted a controlled liberalization because he wanted to keep a large public sector to preserve a large social group's dependency on the salary at the end of the month and consequently maintain their loyalty. The public sector in Syria is quite large; there are 1.5 million workers and their families who depend on the regime at the end of the month.

After the Hama massacre, Syrians were harshly repressed and their economic situation was not improving. In the mid '80s, the percentage of people living below the poverty line was around 70%. Clearly, there was an élite that profited from the economy. The oil that was extracted was to a large extent in the budget. It was taken over by the Assad family and close circles. The Syrian population for the most part did not see the fruits of that oil. When the son took over in 2000, there was a process of neo-liberalization. Everyone in Syria can tell you about it since it was very easy to feel it in the everyday life. Liberalization under Bashar el-Assad was going faster than during his father's reign. For example the abolition of rent control, when people were paying only £S100 or £S500 [approximately 32 Mauritian Rupees per Syrian Pound] for one month rent and had to pay much more as rent increased dramatically. Bashar introduced other reforms such as reduction in the import tariffs, cutting in corporate taxes, and privatization of the health and education sectors. This process of neo-liberalization was led by Rami Makhlouf, the brother-in-law of the Syrian president, who was

one of the symbols of neoliberal corruption. As a result, he was targeted by protesters' chants when the revolt started. According to some estimates, he owns around 20% of the Syrian economy. He was the economic branch of the family and Bashar and his brother Maher represented the military/security branch. They were playing complementary roles. That was the situation just before the revolts.

One of the ways for an Arab regime to survive was to claim sympathy and support for the Palestinian Question. That's why there was a lot of rhetoric revolving around the question of Palestine but it was rarely followed by concrete policies. Arab regimes used the question of Palestine as a pretext to repress their populations. They argued that democracy and freedom need to be postponed because the country is in a state of war. This is true in Syria where the anti-imperialist and anti-zionist rhetoric was important because it gave legitimacy to the regime. There is a lot of rhetoric about Palestine and the freedom of Palestine. There is even a joke about it. I do not know if it is a myth or reality but when the first Intifada started in 1989, it is said that the Syrian regime sent a truck of stones to provide ammunition to the Palestinians struggling against the Israelis. That was their only contribution to the Palestinian Question. To understand the way the Syrian regime handled the Palestinian Question, we have to go back to the period when Hafez al-Assad took over and the right wing of the Ba'ath party controlled political life. Early on, like other despots, Assad neither wanted to start a war against Israel nor liberate Palestine nor did he want to have politics surrounding that question. I will give a few examples just to illustrate the point. In 1976, the Syrian Army entered Lebanon invited by the right wing Christian militias, the Phalangists, more precisely to counter the Palestinians groups and progressive groups. That year, in 1976, the same sectarian right wing Phalangists committed a horrible crime against Palestinians in Al-Zatar Camp. The Syrian army crushed the Palestinian resistance groups in Lebanon and did not do anything when the Israeli invaded the country and pushed away Palestinians from Beirut and Tripoli and forced them to relocate in Tunis. Later on, the Syrian regime did a strategic alliance in 1983 with Elie Hobeika, an infamous politician for his role in the massacre Sabra and Shatila and his alliance with Ariel Sharon. As you know, in the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, the Christian militias entered the camp under the supervision of the Israeli army and around 2,500 Palestinians were killed in 2-3 days. There are many accounts of that, I think the most powerful is Jean Genet's "Four Hours in Shatila."

Later on, the Syrian regime sent its army to Saudi Arabia to support the American invasion of Iraq in 1990. It also collaborated with Bush by torturing suspected Syrian citizens and retrieving information that helped the Bush administration in its war on terror. We should also remember that, until the beginning of the revolts, the Syrian regime was allied to Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, these same regimes that it is critiquing today for their alliance with the United States.

The Syrian regime's relation with Islam is also different from what it claims it is. Certain leftist parties claim that the Syrian regime is secular and is against political Islam and sectarianism. This is not exactly true, as I will demonstrate now. The Syrian president, who is Alawite himself, has put people from the sect in key positions in government and security. It had a good relationship with established religious groups to counter the Muslim Brotherhood. It built a strategic alliance with Christian, Muslim and Durzi establishments. That is why during the Syrian revolution, some Christian personalities close to the regime claimed that the rebels committed massacres against Christians. In several cases, it became clear later that these accounts were fabricated by the Syrian Intelligence. Certain Christian personalities told the Western press that the rebellion is committing crimes against Syrian Christians. In reality, several journalists, among whom a German and a British, showed that the priest connected to the Syrian regime was giving false accounts about untrue massacres. In many cases, there were no proofs on the ground that they ever happened. Finally, the regime was really helping jihadists and fundamentalists to come to Syria and cross the Syrian-Iraqi borders to engage

a Jihad war there. You might remember that the actions of the Syrian regime and its involvement in sending Jihadis to Iraq almost started a war between the US and Syria in 2004-2005. The US wanted the Syrian regime to stop the flow and the Syrians were denying any involvement. When the revolt started, the regime released several jihadi leaders and one of them played a major role in the revolts. The regime pretends to be secular and fighting Al-Qaeda and jihadists and Islamists. In reality, what happened in Syria is very similar to what happened in the US when the latter manufactured jihadists and sent them to fight the Soviet in Afghanistan. Later, they came back and fought the US. This is what is happening in Syria today.

Alain did a very good job talking about the revolt and the different moments of the Syrian revolt. In the remaining time, I will talk about the players, who are they and what are they doing and what should be the position of the Left. Very briefly, I think there are three phases in the Syrian revolt.

The first one was extremely peaceful. Even the Syrian regime recognized the peaceful aspect of the revolts in the beginning. Later in 2011, the Syrian President argued that the revolts were peaceful initially but they became violent later and terrorists infiltrated them. That phase lasted between 6 to 7 months. There were peaceful protest every Friday and whenever security agents and the military were not present, tens of thousands of people went out to demonstrate. These protests were similar to the ones that took place in Egypt and Tunisia but in Syria they were repressed much more harshly. For the first time, Syrians discovered their voice. For the first time, people discovered they could be active in the political sphere. For the first time, people discovered they had rights. People were living powerful moments when they chanted 'Down with the regime' in the public squares. But often times, they paid a high price. Around seven to eight thousand people were killed despite the peaceful period of the revolt.

That led to the second stage. In the beginning, there was no FSA (Free Syrian Army). It was simply, people bringing their rifles, hunting rifles, other weapon they could find to protect the peaceful protests. In some cases, the security was less present because some individuals started shooting at them if they attacked protesters. That phase lasted for several months before opening the door for the third and last one.

Since there were major protests and people started taking over major parts of the city, that was scary for the regime and so the regime escalated in its repression of the protests. That was the third phase of the revolt. During the second period of the revolt, we had started seeing the defection of many soldiers who refused to shoot at protesters. That is how the Free Syrian Army emerged in the beginning with defectors and fighters without training joining it. As I will show later, the Free Syrian Army is a very heterogeneous group. So the third phase of the revolt is the one we are in right now, which is extremely militarized and violent and is much less secular. The Islamists are much more powerful and form a much larger part. The FSA has been taking new territories since they emerged in late 2011. In the beginning, the FSA was mostly defensive. Now the FSA is launching attacks, taking over new territories, liberating new areas, the whole North of Syria is considered liberated areas. These are the three phases of the Syrian revolt.

Until today, two aspects of the revolution are co-existing. On the one hand, there is a military and violent aspect. On the other, there is an everyday resistance that is not always visible in the media. In the liberated regions for example, protests are very jovial, people are dancing and chanting for several hours. It is quite interesting because we see a new form of art emerging; people are writing new songs, new poetry; they dance as they struggle and in many cases the protests are similar to ones in South Africa during the apartheid. That aspect is neglected today but should be studied and understood.

And then, there are the flying protests, as we called them. Those are the protests that are in Damascus and Aleppo in areas that are not liberated yet. People go and protest for a few minutes, say a few slogans and they then escape. You can clearly see it in videos. So there is a very big difference between the liberated areas and occupied areas.

Briefly, I will talk about the different groups of the rebellion and the opposition. In the early period, local coordination committees emerged and started to organize protests in every region and they became really powerful. What is interesting with the local committees is that they are very diverse. They were Christians, Alawites, and Sunni and very secular. It was a very important moment because many of those different communities were having important political discussions amongst each other and had a common goal: the fall of the regime. The local committees are still present and powerful but lost some of their power because of the militarization. We do not hear much about them in the media but it is important for us as leftists and as progressive groups to highlight the work that they do every day, day in and day out. This is the aspect of the revolution that does not get much attention or visibility but without which the military aspect would not be possible and the revolution would not be possible.

More recently, we saw emerging the local councils, which are very different from the local committees. The local councils were very similar to the Soviets. They were not necessarily for just organizing the protests, mostly in the liberated areas, but they emerged to fill a gap that the state left behind. Because the state is not present in those liberated areas, people have to solve their own problems and have created these local councils that are solving everyday issues and are oftentimes elected democratically. In some cases, these councils are not elected. Sometimes they are appointed by tribes and powerful people in the village. Sometimes, they are bought by the Qatari and the Saudi regimes. It is important to talk about that diversity and we are trying to make connections with the most progressive ones, which are very critical of everyone else in the opposition. They are doing an impressive amount of work but are targeted by various groups. Various groups are trying to buy them.

Then, there is the FSA. Right now, the FSA has around 160,000 fighters. As I mentioned earlier, the FSA is a very heterogeneous group. They have secular and Islamist fighters; they have people who have been bought by the Qatari and the Saudi and others who are very ethical. Some people are protecting the civilian population and others are manipulating it and in some cases stealing residents. So you see all that diversity in the FSA. Whenever you see someone talking about the FSA as one and homogeneous groups, this is due to ignorance and overgeneralization. This clearly shows that this person is ignorant about what they are talking about. I have met the FSA in Syria when I was there in August 2012 and the people I met were the residents of the neighborhood I went to and they were willing to die to protect their families. Many of them have lost their brothers, their mothers, in some cases, their relatives died under torture. Those are some of the people who are fighting against the regime. The Saudi and the Qatari regimes, the US and others are giving money to certain groups in the FSA and starving others. There are the fat cats of the FSA. They are getting lot of money and they are not necessarily using it to fight. All this diversity and complexity can be found within the FSA.

And then there is the Muslim Brotherhood, the most powerful and organized group but it is not comparable to the one in Egypt. As I explained earlier, they were exiled since 1982, so they are not as powerful but are still dominant in the Syrian context. Right now, the political opposition is split in two, the one abroad that is supporting the military aspect of the revolution but much more liberal and much more inclined to accept intervention although there is no intervention coming, is much closer to the West, to the Qatari and the

Saudi. Then, there is the internal opposition that is more leftist or lefty but has many problems. It is not very popular because it is not taking any real position with the revolt. It is not necessarily always supporting the revolt; it is often willing to negotiate with the regime even when there are massacres. So people are critical of both, to a certain extent although the external is much more popular. Most people are actually critical of political opposition and think that this opposition does not represent them. People think that most local committees and people working on the ground, the local leaders are much more representative of the Syrian people. They are not in the West and they are not in the luxurious hotels that we hear about.

The last group in the opposition is the Islamists. The Islamists are multiple categories, the most radical is the Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliated group. It has been growing and becoming bigger since its creation and since it came into the open. In January 2012, it only had 300 fighters and now they have more than seven thousand fighters and still growing. This is the group with the highest percentage of foreign fighters coming from Iraq and other places. Even within that group, the number of foreign fighters does not exceed 30%. They mostly come from Iraq. The Iraqi leaderships are very corrupt, oppressing the population and in many places, there is rejection of Al Qaeda. Then, there are the Jihadis who do not have an internationalist agenda. They have a domestic political program within Syria unlike Al-Nusra. But they are also becoming more and more powerful. This is becoming a trend as the revolution goes on, the longer it lasts, the more these groups become powerful. That is why I think it is imperative for the left to really push for the fall of the regime as fast as we can because things are going to deteriorate as it lasts longer.

The last player is the regime with its multi-dimensional aspects. The most important component of the regime is actually the military. The high-ranking positions in the military are mostly held by Alawites. The Fourth-armored division and the Republican Guards that were attacked by the Israelis a few weeks ago are its spearhead. These units are composed of 20,000 fighters who are well equipped and are basically surrounding the presidential palace and Damascus and other strategic positions. They were sent to Qusair battle because the regime wants to win this strategic battle that is being fought today [transcriber's note: 31 May 2013].

The total number of men fighting with the regime is 130,000 down from 230,000 when the revolt started. Many have defected since then. In addition to the army, the regime formed committees of popular defense that are mostly from the minorities. Some minorities organized forces allied to the regime to protect their neighborhood but they refused to fight with the regime. And there are the *Shabiha*, thugs, militias that commit the most atrocious crimes, torture and kill and dismember bodies. Most recently, the regime formed the popular army who are mostly Alawites and they count around 10,000 people. This last formation was created to make up for the loss from defections of mostly Sunni soldiers.

The religious establishment is also one of the pillars of the regime. There are Sunni and Christian leaders who back the regime and spread its propaganda. Employees of the public sector are another one of the regime's pillars. They are either supporters of the regime or neutral because they depend on their salary at the end of the month. Finally, part of the urban population is neutral because it doesn't want to side with the regime and is very critical of the revolt. This group lives mostly in large cities such as Damascus and Aleppo and is mostly upper class and middle class. The goal of the left should be to change their opinion and bring them to the side of the revolution.

I want to finish with the geo-political dimension and then maybe take questions if people want to. In addition, I also want to stress a point I didn't mention earlier which is that there are atrocities and crimes committed by both sides. But it is dangerous to equate one side to the other. The situation in Syria is comparable in that regard to the Palestinian Question. Hamas and the PLO have at different times committed

crimes; they torture prisoners and in some cases killed them. Despite the behavior of these organizations, no progressive intellectual or activist would deny the Palestinian's their right to resistance and self-determination. It would be absurd to equate the malpractices of the different political parties to the struggle and everyday resistance of Palestinians against Israeli colonization. This is not an invitation to overlook or deny the crimes of some Syrian groups especially the ones affiliated to Al Qaeda. In any way, more and more people are rejecting Al Qaeda especially the Local Councils because they are suffering from their control. This rejection is not due to ideological disagreement but because of what Al Qaeda, Salafi groups and certain factions of the FSA are doing. Whenever a group oppresses people, it is rejected by the population. This is part of the democratic process that Syria is witnessing in the liberated areas. This is an ongoing process and the revolution has a capacity to resolve some of the problems it is encountering.

Finally, it is important to understand the geopolitical dimension without which it is not possible to comprehend the complexity of the Syrian revolution. I will simplify this geopolitical context to use the remaining time to answer questions. As I explained earlier, Syrians don't have friends among the states and governments of the world. Those who call themselves "Friends of Syria" are in reality the enemies of the Syrian people. Churchill was actually right when he said that "Britain does not have permanent enemies, it does not have permanent allies, it has only permanent interests." And this is true in the Syrian context. This is what we are seeing with all the states that are shifting and changing their positions. None of them supports the struggle of the Syrians; all of them actually undermine the Syrian revolution. We can see that with the Qatari and the Saudi regimes who are both funding different parts of the FSA to create factionalism and fragmentation and prevent the popular revolt to prolong the conflict. These regimes are afraid of the Syrian revolution because once the Syrian despot is toppled in Syria, their turn will be next. And they are afraid of that scenario. They know that the Syrian revolution is going to migrate to every Arab country. There is a revolutionary spirit in the Arab world that is not going to stop in Syria and that is why the Gulf is playing such a vicious role.

Now it is important to highlight a few aspects of the geo-political context and identify the main factors. I will not talk about each country because that would take too much time. Instead, I will talk about four pillars that shape the policies of the West in the region.¹ Those are known to all of us but it is important to remind ourselves of what they are. 1) Israel: due to the strategic relationship between Israel and the West and more specifically the United States. 2) Oil: Syria is not considered an important country for oil production. Because of its geo-strategic position, a democratic Syria may have detrimental implications on the Western interests. 3) Iran: Iran plays an important role in the region because of the nuclear question. 4) Neoliberalism: the West wants to maintain structural adjustment plans in the Arab region. We have seen this in Tunisia and Egypt and the different ways the West is trying to push for neoliberal reforms in these countries. The Muslim Brotherhood is not less neo-liberal than Mubarak's regime. I would even argue that they are more neo-liberal. The revolutionary process is ongoing in Egypt; it is ongoing in Tunisia. In the meantime the West wants to preserve those four pillars and make sure that they are not destabilized. The West does not really care what ideology you represent and the kind of alliances you do in order to preserve these four pillars. For example, the United States had relations with the Mubarak regime and the Jordanian regime that are considered secular and despised Islamists. The United States has also very good relations with the most fundamentalist regimes in the region and its alliance with the Saudi monarchy is an illustration of that. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world without a constitution. The ruling family has been spreading a Wahabi ideology that is

¹ For a detailed discussion see Vijay Prashad's recent book "Arab Spring, Libyan Winter, . AK Press. 2012

one of the most oppressive and yet they are the closest allies of the United States in the region after Israel. The United States did negotiate with the Taliban. This is another example of how the United States is not interested in who you are and what ideology you embraced as long as you safeguard their interests in the region. The prolongation of the war is in the interest of the West. These countries are not opposed to a war of attrition, a war without end. They are not opposed to the fighting between Al Qaeda and Hezbollah both of which are on the United States list of terrorist organizations. The West doesn't mind that the Syrian society and institutions are being destroyed as long as its interests are preserved. That is why I am arguing that no state or government is backing the Syrian revolution even when some of them call themselves 'the Friends of Syria.' These countries have an interest in an ongoing war of attrition that could undermine the revolution.

Thank you.