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**The political role for the armed
factions of opposition in Syria**



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Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	3
The experience of searching for a role and a political representation.....	4
First: the political offices	4
Second :The National Coalition	5
Third :The Supreme Commission for Negotiations.....	7
The International Information:the opportunity and crisis.....	7
The Opportunities for effective participation	8
The impediments of the effective participation	8
The recommendations	10
The intellectual domain	10
The organizational domain.....	11

Summary

The Syrian military factions is trying to take a role in the Syrian political status...through the formations of political offices of the factions, their expression of political positions through media, and their participation or support for the participation of others in the local, regional and international political events.

But this political presence is still limited, due to subjective and objective factors, and the most important factor is the lack of coordination between the factions themselves, the weakness of their political vision and its intersection geographically and organizationally and sometimes internationally, regionally and locally unacceptable groups.

The factions need two levels of changes: intellectual and organizational, to strengthen their current political presence, and ensure their representation in any future political solution, and the most important changes are producing realistic vision at the level of one faction, forming a body unites factions, to be possible to deal with the political project seriously.

Introduction

There is not any accurate estimate for the number of the military factions in Syria, in spite of the large number of studies and reports about them and maybe there are about 250 essential opposition factions¹, but the small factions can be more than a thousand faction which vary in their relative size, in their real control of, in their political and field impact depending on many factors.

we refer to the factions as a one group in this paper as in all similar research papers but this used just to research not for describe these factions which are armed and not united formations and their goal is fighting to get rid of the regime.

The political file in the Syrian situations is present permanently, locally, regionally and internationally but the military factions have not able to produce a political vision or attend in the political situation or even make a united military decision as in other various actors such as Kurdish forces, Syrian regime and Al Nusra front.

According to the fast international information since the Russian intervention, there is

1. See a list about them in: Cafarella, Jennifer and Casagrande, Genevieve, Syrian Opposition Guide, the Institute for the Study of War, Washington, October 2015, p4 and after:

http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrian%20Opposition%20Guide_0.pdf

Russian - American rapprochement in dealing with the Syrian file and this will increase the possibility to find a political solution during the increasing withdrawal of the regional actors because of the American and Russian pressures or because of local and international commitments which make the military factions in need to find a common vision and body to be able to deal with any new fast events.

A careful reading for cases that are similar to the Syrian case shows that those who did not attend the political events during the preparation for solutions, would be still outside these solutions and their supposed ability to disable these solutions will change into a limited ability to confuse the execution within a level which will not effect to change the general path of the plan.

Thus, Jusoor for Studies presents an estimation for the political representation to the military factions, and the possible ways to help these factions to take a more important and more effectiveness role in the current period, and participation in any possible political solution.

The experience of searching for a role and a political representation

The various military factions in Syria sought to an impact and political role since the early stages of its establishment, and they try to seek more through time, and they faced problems with the current political formations and problems between the factions themselves and sometimes within the same faction.

the process of seeking to a political role influences by internal and external factors and this process rises when there are political initiatives on the table or events for the political solution (for example: Geneva conference, Vienna conference, etc.) while the process decreases if there are not such as these events.

The most important forms in the political presence for the factions as following:

First: the political offices

Most of the military factions sought to form their own political offices in order to achieve two main goals, the first is to give advice and political information to the military faction leadership, and the second is to represent the faction politically in the public opinion and

the political meetings.

The presence of the factions' political offices limited to issue statements in some political occasions without providing any strategic or political vision and most of the factions did not have the political morals which define the shape of the state the faction wants or the government system the faction supports and just issue some summarized articles to emphasize overthrow of the regime and wide phrases to describe the following government.

The political offices accomplished some of common statements between a number of these offices and with The National Coalition sometimes. these common statements helped to create a political network among the factions and produce an opportunity which could be used in next stages.

Second: The National Coalition

The joining of Joint Chiefs of Staff to The National Coalition for the Revolution and Opposition forces with fifteen members was the first step to represent the military side of the Syrian revolution in the political bodies and this was in the expansion that approved on 31-5-2013.

But this representation did not satisfy the factions which did not consider the joint chiefs of staff as a representative for them. Also the representatives of the joint chiefs of staff in the coalition turned into a part of the already existing political conflicts, and thus they could not represent the military component, as the factions accept.

The relationship between the factions and the coalition was not stable (traction and attraction) but there was a relationship with a hope and good coordination between them in 2015.

On 24-5-2015 the first consultative meeting was held between the coalition and some military factions and (other field bodies) and they agreed to form "the follow up and coordinate common committee"² and there were some of similar meetings later as well as the 2. the meeting was attended by: Al-Islam army, Ajnad Al-Sham Islamic Union, AL-Sham Corps, Thwar Al-Sham battalions, Homs Corps, AL-Yarmouk Army, Ansar Al-Islam front , Al-Ababel army , Fa Stakem Kama Oumert gathering ,division 24 Infantry, Al-Habeb Al-Moustafa brigades , division 69, the free judicial council , Idleb province council , Aleppo province council, Damascus countryside province council, Hama province council, Jound Badr 313 brigades , Amoud Houran division , Al-Moutaaz Billah brigade ,Homs province council, the first corps, the southern battalions integrations' brigade, Fursan Al-Haq brigade, the division 101.

See National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces, the statement of the first consul-

meetings of “the follow up and coordinate common committee “.

On 15-6-2015 the general Commission for the Syrian National coalition decided to form the supreme military leadership in order to “ensure the representation of the active field battalions and factions” and also decided to form a committee to arrange forming the new leadership depending on the criteria which agreed upon

as well as to freeze the supreme military council for Joint chiefs of staff and keep the representative of the Joint chiefs of staff within the general Commission until the formation of the new leadership.³

These meetings helped to issue a common political positions, as on 28-09-2016⁴ and 2-10-2015⁵ and 23-1-2016⁶ as examples.

tative meeting between the coalition, factions and revolutionary forces ,28-4-2015

<http://goo.gl/NUECda>

3. National coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces, the conclusion of the meetings for general the Commission of coalition and the formation of the supreme military leadership on 15-6-2015

<http://goo.gl/F9wKR4>

4. The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, about the common attitude of the coalition and the military factions from the political developments on 28-9-2015 <http://goo.gl/j1dor4>

5. The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, a common statement about the latest developments and the implications of the political process in Syria, on 10/02/2015:

<http://goo.gl/83Mn9z>

6. The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, the coalition and the military factions renew their adherence the fundamentals of the Syrian revolution, 01/23/2016

<http://goo.gl/XnjxEK>

Third: The Supreme Commission for Negotiations

Saudi Arabia invited to a meeting for the Syrian opposition in Riyadh on 9 and 12.10.2015, and the conference ended to declare a supreme commission for negotiations.⁷

Some of military factions participated the conference including Ahrar Al-Sham movement and Al-Islam army but Ahrar Al-Sham movement left the conference in the second day to protest at:” giving a main role for National Coordinating Commission and other bodies which follow the Syrian regime”⁸

The participation of the factions in the Commission and then in the negotiation’s delegation and in the meetings of Vienna, represented the first political presence of these factions, while some factions decided do not participate and supported those who participated. other factions refused to participate.

The International Information:the opportunity and crisis

The Russia’s military intervention in Syria led to rearrange the Syrian file differently internationally, because Russia was an active part within many active parts and turned into a direct actor in the Syrian file after the military intervention.

This change caused further American’s falling back toward the Syrian file and create pressures on the regional actors which support the Syrian opposition and obliged them to change their previous attitudes, and limited their available options in Syria and enhanced the political power of the Syrian regime and other actors such as the democratic union party.

According to American-Russian consensuses that both actors can work commonly militarily in Syria to target Al-Nusra front and ISIS and agree for a political solution that takes care of their common interests⁹

7. Riyadh conference prepares to meet the opposition with the Syrian regime, Al Jazeera Net, 11/12/2015 <http://goo.gl/gdo3hw>

8. A Syrian opposition faction announce his withdrawal from the opposition meeting in Riyadh, Reuters, 12/10/2015: http://ara.reuters.com/article/ME_TOPNEWS_MORE/idARAKBN0TT0Y520151210

9. The common action to fight ISIS and Al-Nusra front explicitly in the meeting which held by the American and Russian foreign ministers in Moscow on 14-7-2016:

Kerry meets with Putin about cooperating against Islamic State in Syria, Reuters, 15/7/2016: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-idUSKCN0ZU25O>

The Russian-US consensus on the one hand, and a narrow regional options on the other hand, lead to reduce the available space of the factions, and perhaps pushed rapidly to political options which may not be prepared for them.

The Opportunities for effective participation:

The Syrian military factions have great opportunities for effective participation in the political process due to many considerations the most important considerations are:

1. They have a large part in the areas controlled by opposition in Syria, while the political forces that form the national coalition and other political groups did not have these parts. The military control means that any political solution will pass if they approve it partially although such approval may be forcibly if the sponsors states decided to these factions or were forced to stop the financial and military support for them.
2. All military factions seek for the political participation, and their desire of participation reflected in establishment the political offices for each faction and in their presence in the political councils either to monitor or effective attendance or to move some of them to the political presence within the international framework through articles, the international media interviews or arranging for meetings with international politicians.

The impediments of the effective participation:

Despite the great possibilities that the military factions have on the ground and financially but their effective political participation faces wide impediments prevent the achievement and move the political power directly to the political forces...the most important impediments are:

1. The military factions shared controlling most of the under opposition's controlled areas with Al-Nosra front which is a strong actor and it can disable the political options that the other factions did and it is unacceptable actor completely and internationally at the same time. It could be an international target in the next stage so, the field fighting with it will make the other factions also targeted and its weakness will reflect to the military factions gains directly.

2. All factions lack a strategic vision for what they want after the regime stage and their morals refer to only some general values concepts and most of their ideas revolve around what was rejected by these factions, do not about what they want. The absence of vision for each faction lead to limit access to a common vision among the factions.
3. The absence of a united body among the factions, and the lack of coordination among them, where coordination is limited mostly to the common operations rooms that have geographical or field targets or on the technical coordinate committees in the common controlled areas. This leads to Weakens the factions comparing to the other parts including the Syrian political forces and the regional and international related powers.
4. Conflicts and disputes within the same faction, either those based on intellectual and ideological dimensions, or those based on interest or zonal different dimensions lead the factions to refrain from providing a clear vision for the future because going into details can lead to crack the faction while the unclear attitudes will lead to move the disputes to the next stage.
5. Most of the factions rely on donors which are outside Syria, and some of them are like states and the others are not like a states. The disputes between the interest of the donors and their attitudes lead to the obstruction for a lot of strategic partnerships among factions and prevention the independence in the political decision.
6. Most of military factions do not have the essential political experiences for the effective participation and they rely on people outside the political atmosphere to make their political decision or rely on people who do not have even academic experiences or political theory.

The recommendations

According to the previous information, this research paper presents the following recommendations for the Syrian military factions in order to help them in the political presence effectively in the next stage and help them to turn into a natural component in the public life in the political solution stage.

The intellectual domain

1. The factions should work to produce a detailed vision for what they want in the new Syria and work later to share their vision with the other factions to be able to produce a united vision or quasi united vision. this vision must be a detailed process, moving away from general and literal sentences, and must be realistic, applicable and take the external and internal information into account.
2. The factions should unite their political speech which direct to the outside and between the speech which directed to their internal and wider audiences because the states do not rely on the attitudes through the formal statements only, and if there is any contradiction between the formal and informal speech, the second speech will be more believable.
3. The international framework controls most of information inside Syria nowadays, including the financial, military and logistic supporting for the factions so this framework should be taken in a realistic way to form the strategic of the factions and their political programs.
4. The factions should take into account the field, political and military information because these factions shared controlling on 15,2% from the Syrian ground¹⁰ with Al-Nusra front and that these factions have not been able to achieve their announced goals during 5 years and have not been able to extend their geographic control.

10 Jusoor for Studies, the military influence map, June 2016, 4-7-2016: <http://goo.gl/gCKrh5>

The organizational domain:

1. The need to establish a united body for the political coordination among the factions, and this body seeks to move from the partial field coordination to a higher stage beyond the specific geographical framework within the areas controlled by these factions including helping to represent the demands of these factions seriously through the Syrian opposition actors or through the actors regionally and internationally.
2. The coordination among the current political opposition bodies and to coordinate with them to create common visions and programs, and to seek for integration in them instead of facing and disrupting their works or compete them.
3. The geographical overlap and the coordination overlap with Al-Nusra front sometimes represents a main impediment to the participation of the political factions and their future presence in any project for solution, because Al-Nusra front connects to an external project which do not take Syria and its revolution into account and this requires to separate from Al-Nusra front totally.
4. The body that the factions create to represent them politically should be given the authority to create external relationships regionally and internationally with stopping the direct relationships for the factions with these states.
5. It is important to find a regional partner that represent the custodian for the common action of the factions and help the factions as a state to ensure the commitments which made by these factions and to ensure the commitments of the other actors. this is indispensable because there is not any international legal recognition for any Syrian opposition actor.



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