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**Syria**

# **“The enemy within” and the centrist forces**

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**The television interview given by Syrian dictator Bashar Al Assad on August 29, 2012 presented in clear terms the despotic regime’s strategy against the revolution and the opposition. The messages sent to regional and international forces were also clear. The revolutionaries were no longer presented as “intruders” or “microbes” as in the past, but any Syrian citizen who did not support the regime was clearly accused of being part of an “enemy within” which should be crushed.**

During this broadcast, Assad said “this time, the enemy comes from inside and not from outside... and any Syrian who executes a foreign enemy plan becomes an enemy and is no longer a Syrian”. Therefore, the margin of manoeuvre of those components of the opposition who have sought - or are seeking - solutions at the centre, as in Yemen or elsewhere, becomes narrow if not non-existent.

We talk here of the National Coordination Committee of the Forces of Democratic Change [\[1\]](#) and those who adopt its political strategy, one way or the other.

The dictator did not stop there; he described as them “merchants of the crisis”. If he did not cite them by name, he spoke of the opposition which called for “dialogue”：“We were surprised by the dialogue. It has refused to participate in the dialogue because it had conditioned the dialogue as being between the state and these groups.” He described as trying to “opportunistically win political positions to negotiate with the state”.

Responding directly to the invitation issued by the Coordination Committee to hold a congress “for the salvation of Syria” in Damascus in mid-September, the tyrant said: “Recently we learned that they began to talk about dialogue... but if you want to arrive so late, then you need to come sincerely and not again in an opportunistic fashion”. And he concluded by speaking to these forces: “you’re talking about the rejection of violence and weapons” by requiring of them that they recognize that they had lied in the past or at least that they had “committed an error of judgment”.

This speech was a slap in the face to the ambitions of the leaderships of these forces, centrist at the level of their discourse and opportunistic in their practice. They had hoped to hold their planned congress in Damascus, but the dictatorial regime gave its approval on condition that they participated “in the framework imposed, otherwise, they would be in his eyes, like the rest of the opposition, a domestic enemy”.

## **Centrist positions, opportunistic practice**

Criticizing the discourse and the practice of the Syrian political opposition forces, especially in the context of the popular revolution, is not intellectual vanity, but a necessity because political practices which have harmful consequences on the course of the revolution have to be addressed.

From the beginning of the popular revolution, the Coordination Committee and its partner, the Democratic Forum [\[2\]](#), have by their concepts and practices taken an ambiguous position with regard to the revolution and the regime.

The Committee was in fact neither for the revolution nor for the fall of the regime, despite some recent press releases published under the pressure of the revolutionary movement, which could give the illusion to the contrary. Each time,

they came back to their original position and attempted to lead in their wake other forces, like the Maan movement and the Watan Coalition [3]. The Coordination Committee has systematically emptied meetings and encounters of their revolutionary dynamics. The fluctuations in the positions of their leaderships - seen as being on the left - have damaged the image of the Syrian left in general and its capacity to act in the revolutionary movement.

The left forces which had joined the Coordination Committee, such as parties like the “Rally of the Marxist left” [4] monopolized its flag for a short period. This “left” decided to conduct its political action through the Coordination Committee, renouncing an independent practice. On the other hand, the forces of the official Communist Parties have defiled the heritage of struggle of the Syrian left very early on by rallying to the clique in power. And the radical left supporting the revolution and militating within it had to stand out quickly from all these opportunists of the “left”, whether they are allies of the regime or centrist opponents. This was the role of several left groups supporting the revolution as the Syrian Left Current [5].

The position of the Coordination Committee has established itself as a component of consensus with its initiative to put an end to violence, announced on August 14, based on an analysis of the “balance of forces” between the forces of the revolution and those of the regime in the shadow of an “international equilibrium not allowing the victory of the two parties over the other”. Based on these assumptions, the Coordination Committee placed itself in a mediating role, despite the denials of some of its leaders. Its initiative called for “consensus on a temporary truce between the parties carrying out armed action”, in other words, it puts the forces of the revolution and popular resistance on equal terms with the violence and savagery of the regime.

In fact, the Coordination Committee advocated this centrist position from July 26, 2012 in the Rome communiqué, published on the heels of a meeting at which it was the organizational backbone. Also present were personalities from other forces, such as the Watan Coalition. The Rome communiqué says that “weapons are not the solution” and that the situation needs “more than ever a political solution” calling for “renouncing weapons... to get to negotiations excluding nobody”. The last paragraph is the prelude to dialogue and negotiations with the regime, so dear to the Coordination Committee.

The Coordination Committee made its final shift to a centrist course in the violent class struggle underway in its last appeal, published on August 28, 2012, for the holding of “a national congress for the salvation of Syria”. It said that it will be held in Damascus on September 12 [6], considering that the violence of the regime – this amounted to a rhetorical assertion – “was the cause of the emergence of counter-violence”.

So the popular resistance is reduced to “counter-violence”. To justify its approach, it centres its statement on the loss by Syria of its national sovereignty, since she has become “totally dependent on foreign, international and regional decisions”. So Syria would be, as a country, society and state, now “completely dependent” on abroad, according to the Coordination Committee, and this would be a justification for the latter to save the country and play a role of mediator between the forces which are “party to the conflict” in Syria. It is no longer a question of the revolution of a people, nor of sacrifices made to confront a bloody dictatorship. The position of the Committee takes shape: neither with one nor the other, it assigns itself the role of mediator.

## The left face of the Coordination Committee

As the “Rally of the Marxist Left” is no more than an appendix endorsing the policy of the Coordination Committee, and has no independent political activity, in the editorial in the latest issue of its publication “The way of the left” (Number 39, August 2012), it has the headline “Against the violence of the opposition” where it announced that the

regime has managed to push opponents into “using arms” to “make the opposition lose its moral influence and make it look like the regime”. At a single stroke, the armed popular resistance of the masses to the killing of the dictatorship machine automatically becomes “morally decaying”. In fact these remarks dramatically illustrate the intellectual failure of a certain Syrian left.

The editorial says that what is happening in Syria is the repetition of the tragedy of Hama in 1982, namely, a conflict between the Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime. It also says that the Muslim Brotherhood “is back, and with them many oppositionists look back thirty years after at the tragedy that had extended the longevity of the Syrian regime...”. This miserable argument to justify the conciliatory position of the Committee and its partners of the “Rally of the Marxist left” is truly deplorable. Only a limited mind can equate the events of the 1980s - the armed struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood against the then regime - with the deep popular revolution going on in our country for eighteen months, where the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists are only slightly influential despite the impressive media and financial support received from Qatar, the Saudi Arabia and Turkey. During the first months of the revolution they were absent from the revolutionary movement, having pursued truce and dialogue with the regime since 2006.

Thus we can understand the agreement of the “Parties of the Popular Front” with the opportunism of Kadri Jamil and Ali Hañder, who participate in the government of the dictatorship on the initiative of the Coordination Committee. As well as the approximation of their positions in the fact of the popular revolution, the consensus arrived at meetings of coordination between the Popular Front Government and the Coordination Committee at the beginning of September.

We are witnessing a realignment of the political “left” forces, with two rapprochements, that of the opportunistic and centrist forces, and that of the radical forces. This will lead to renewed pressure on the hesitant forces inside the Maan movement or the Watan Coalition, forces that quickly need to clarify their real political position. They must choose between a clear and radical position on the revolution or a rallying to conciliatory opportunistic policies.

In a context of radicalization of the Syrian masses against the dictatorial bourgeois regime, the conditions exist for developing a radical left cadre committed to the popular revolution, separate from these “left” opportunist and centrist forces.

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[1] This Committee was founded on 30 June 2011, mainly by nationalist parties (Nasserite and Baathist), the parties of the “Rally of the Marxist Left”, some Kurdish parties who withdrew quickly (with the exception of the PYD, a Syrian Kurdish party affiliated with the PKK in Turkey) and independent personalities. On September 11, 2012 a number of cadres of the Committee announced their break with it because of its centrist policy. On September 14, 2012, the Maan movement (a radical democratic movement created on June 23, 2011) announced its break with the Committee while on September 18, the Commission of Syrian Communists also announced that it was leaving the Committee

[2] Since February 2012 defectors from the Committee and others (among them Michel Kilo, Fayez Sara, Hazme Nahar and Samir Aita) have created a new organization called the Syrian Democratic Forum. It held its first meeting in Cairo between April 13 and 16 and is “a space for dialogue, discussion, a gateway uniting the opposition for a conciliatory action”

[3] founded on February 13, 2012 by 14 democratic and radical left groups

[4] Founded in 2004 by five surviving groups of the former radical left, including the Communist Action Party, but with a reformist program

[5] A group of revolutionary Marxist activists involved in the revolutionary process. They were formed in October 2011 and have a monthly publication “Amami”

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[6] The Congress was eventually held on September 23 with few participants - its final declaration called the fall of the regime and an international conference to prepare for the transition period