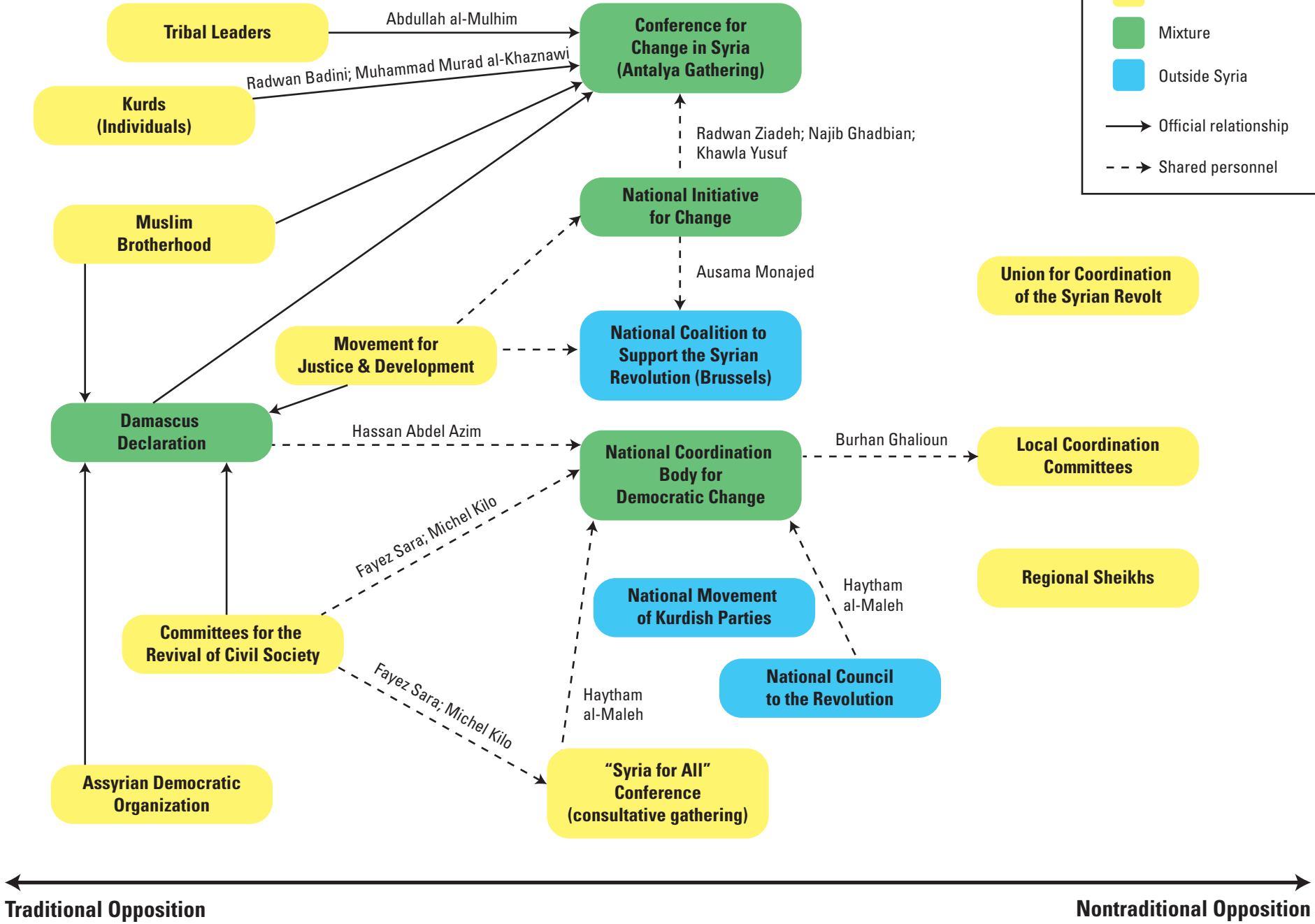
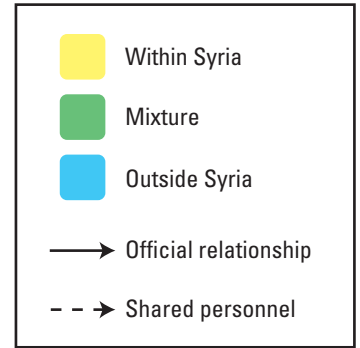


# WORKING MODEL OF THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION

August 2011



## **Summary of the Syrian Opposition: A Working Model, August 2011**

The twelve groups and coalitions depicted by the above illustration have emerged as leading members of the Syrian opposition during this year's uprising. The groups are arranged on a spectrum ranging from "traditional" to "nontraditional" (left to right). Solid arrows indicate an official relationship between two organizations and originate with the group that was first established. Dotted arrows indicate key players who have relationships with both groups; such arrows originate with the organization with which the individual is primarily identified and extend to the group in which that player has most recently been active. Each color corresponds to the group's role as either an external, internal, or "mixed" opposition organization.

### **Local Coordination Committees (LCC)**

This grassroots activist organization has chapters throughout Syria and is the main united force engaged in planning nationwide protests. As the uprising began, local committees were formed in various cities and villages to organize protests; these committees then joined to coordinate protests and issue public statements. The LCC is composed of committees in Deraa, Homs, Baniyas, Saraqeb, Idlib, Hasaka, Qamishli, Deir Ez Zour, Hama, Raqqa, Swaydda, Damascus, the Damascus suburbs, and on the Syrian coast. In addition to organizing protests, the LCC has put forth a political vision that has garnered public acceptance by leading opposition activist Dr. Burhan Ghalioun and the Committee of Kurdish Youth. This vision calls for a national conference to lead the transition to a democratic and pluralistic state, with a transitional period lasting no longer than six months. The transitional council, according to the LCC, would implement reforms and consist of military personnel and civilians. Omar Idlibi serves as one of the LCC's spokesmen inside Syria. The LCC boycotted the June 27 "Syria for All" Conference (see below).

### **Union for the Coordination of the Syrian Revolt (UCSR)**

Not much is known about this organization, but it serves the same primary function as the LCC. The UCSR, too, denounced the "Syria for All" Conference and publicly announced its refusal to negotiate with the regime. Some UCSR members feel that the LCC "hijacked" the revolution that they themselves launched.

### **Regional Sheikhs**

A number of sheikhs have emerged as leading local opposition figures. One of these, Imam Sheikh Anas el-Airout, was a preacher at the main Rahman mosque in Baniyas before he was arrested by Syrian security forces in early May. El-Airout had addressed groups of two to three thousand protestors, during which he emphasized the importance and peaceful nature of the protests. Another notable local figure is Imam Sheikh Ahmad Sayasna, of the Omari mosque in Deraa, who is currently in hiding. In an interview, Sayasna, who is blind, complained of the regime's neglect of Deraa's needs. Security forces raided his home on April 30, searching for him, and killed his son. A third leader, Sheikh Muadh Raihan, was based in Hama and, as of May 19, had been missing for three weeks. In Deir Ez Zour, Sheikh Nawaf al-Bashir, a member of the Secretariat General Head Office of the Damascus Declaration, has frequently spoken out against the regime's violence and has accused Hizballah of attacking protestors during the demonstrations.

### **National Initiative for Change**

This group identified itself on April 29, about six weeks after the revolution began. It sought to keep most of its members secret, but provided some names to the New York Times. The group claimed that its 150 members in Syria "represent a broad spectrum of groups opposing... Bashar al-Asad" and also include "most of Syria's diverse ethnic and religious communities." The group's hope is to target high-level officials in the Syrian regime in order to persuade them to defect; two of these "targets" are Defense Minister Gen. Ali Habib and Chief of Staff Daoud Rajha. The group identifies the military as the only force within Syria that would be capable of leading the transition to a democratic system. Some leading members of the coalition who have been named are Radwan Ziadeh and Najib Ghabbian, who are on the consultative council of the

Antalya Gathering (see next section); Khawla Yusuf, who is on the executive committee of the Antalya Gathering; and Ausama Monajed, one of the organizers of the "National Coalition to Support the Syrian Revolution" conference, held in Brussels.

### **Conference for Change in Syria (Antalya Gathering)**

This conference was held May 31-June 2 in Antalya, Turkey. Its stated goals were to create a support group to lobby internationally on behalf of the Syrian revolution as well as for the ouster of President Bashar al-Asad and the dismantling of his regime. The conference was attended by dissidents of various political backgrounds and included Kurdish, Muslim Brotherhood, Assyrian, and tribal representatives. A thirty-one-member consultative council was elected, as well as a full-time nine-member executive council. The conference's final statement called for Asad's resignation and the handing over of power to his vice president, in accordance with constitutional procedures, for a transitional period of one year. It also unequivocally rejected foreign military intervention in Syria and affirmed Syria's multiethnic identity. Wide controversy surrounded the sparse Kurdish representation at the conference, which consisted, according to one source, of a single figure -- Muhammad Ammo of the Kurdish Future Party. However, as seen on the diagram, two individuals from the independent Kurdish community were elected to the gathering's consultative council. Meanwhile, invitees from the Kurdish Left Party in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party, and the Kurdish Azadi Party skipped the event owing to its location in Turkey.

### **National Coalition to Support the Revolution**

Organized by Ausama Monajed and Obeida Nahhas, this conference took place in Brussels on June 4-5 and brought together various opposition members who largely appeared to be based outside Syria. Almost no specifics are available on actual conference attendees, but a final statement was issued that outlined legal, political, and media-related recommendations for handling the uprising. The statement clarified that the coalition was not a mouthpiece for the opposition but rather an entity in support of the uprising. The statement also called for avoiding any actions that would incite "religious or sectarian sentiments or conflicts."

### **Muslim Brotherhood**

The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria has been part of the country's "traditional opposition" framework and is a signatory to the Damascus Declaration. But since membership in the Brotherhood is punishable by death in Syria, members have concealed their traditional opposition activities, making them hard to track. Still, Brotherhood support for the opposition can be seen on many fronts, including its overall condemnation of regime attacks on peaceful protestors and its overarching demand for the cessation of violence. The group has also called for the withdrawal of Syrian army forces from cities, the release of political detainees, the elimination of unjust laws, and the drafting of a new constitution and political parties law. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was present at the Antalya Gathering and is represented in the conference's executive council by Melhem al-Durubi. Additionally, the group's website covered the "National Coalition to Support the Syrian Revolution" conference in Brussels. It did not, however, attend the "Syria for All in a Democratic State" meeting in Damascus. Former Syrian Muslim Brotherhood controller Ali Sadruddin Bayanouni has commented frequently on the uprising, and has explained that although the Muslim Brotherhood has no direct role in anti-government protests, the group continues to be "an integral part of the structure in Syrian society due to [its] peaceful approach." It is still difficult to ascertain exactly what the Syrian Brotherhood's post-revolution political aims or role will be.

### **National Coordination Body for Democratic Change**

This entity was formed on June 30 and is headed by Hassan Abdel Azim, secretary-general of the Democratic Arab Socialist Union and spokesman for the National Democratic Gathering. Members reportedly include leading opposition groups and six Kurdish organizations, as well as individuals such as Michel Kilo, Haytham al-Maleh, Burhan Ghalioun, Fayez Sara, and Rami Abdel Rahman. The body supports "overall national dialogue" to solve the Syrian crisis and called for the release of political detainees and the formation of a new constitution that excludes Article 8, which stipulates that the Baath Party is Syria's ruling party. It declined to participate in the Syrian regime's national dialogue meeting, which occurred July 10.

## **National Movement of Kurdish Parties**

This twelve-party coalition led the boycott of the Antalya Gathering. Composed of the General Council of the Democratic Alliance in Syria, the Kurdish Political Council, and the Democratic Union of Syria (Yekiti Party), the group launched its own initiative on May 15, aligning itself with the national democratic movement and mainly demanding an end to discrimination against the Kurds. After being asked by the Asad regime to engage in dialogue, the coalition ultimately refused on June 8, citing regime-initiated violence against the Syrian population. The coalition did, however, call for a national conference as a platform for dialogue between all opposition parties and the regime.

## **National Council for the Revolution**

On June 19, before President Asad made his second speech to the Syrian people, the National Council announced its existence in a village near the Syria-Turkey border. Spokesman Jamil Saib identified the group as consisting of "all communities and representatives," both inside and outside Syria, who support the revolution. Correspondingly, the group called on protestors around the country to work to bring about the fall of the regime. Notable members include Abdullah Trad al-Moulaḥim, Haytham al-Maleh, Suhair al-Atassi, Aref Dalila, Sheikh Khaled al-Khalaf, and Mamoun al-Homsi. Since its formation, the National Council has made no announcements and taken no public actions.

## **"Syria for All" Conference (Consultative Gathering)**

Organized by Talal al-Mayharni and Louay Hussein, with well-known activists Michel Kilo and Anwar el-Bunni in attendance, this one-day conference on June 27 was designed to give "independents" and civil society activists a forum to discuss "a way out of violence" and a path forward for Syria. Hussein explained that the meeting was not meant to be the "national dialogue" announced by Asad in a speech, even as conference attendees did confirm their openness to dialogue with the regime. For its part, the Asad regime knew about and apparently brooked the meeting, but no government representatives attended. This lack of government representation sparked the widespread accusation that the regime was merely paying lip service to the idea of dialogue, while its true intent was to use the military to violently suppress protests. The gathering was officially boycotted by the Damascus Declaration and the LCC.

## **Damascus Declaration**

Written and signed in October 2005, the Damascus Declaration reflects the platform of the "traditional opposition" in Syria. (The document name concomitantly refers to its signatories.) As a result of its call for reforms, this group has repeatedly been targeted by the Syrian regime. The declaration's signatories include the National Democratic Gathering/Rally, the Kurdish Democratic Alliance, the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society, the Kurdish Democratic Front, the Syrian Future Party, and the Muslim Brotherhood, among others. Of late, the group's various parties have acted independently of each other, and the group's secretary-general in Syria, Samir Nashar, has offered no unifying statement with respect to the revolution. Nevertheless, several individuals associated with the Damascus Declaration attended the Antalya Gathering, and Salim Monem -- secretary of the group's national council abroad -- was elected to the gathering's consultative council. The Damascus Declaration officially boycotted the "Syria for All" Conference, but a number of individuals known to be associated with the group did attend.

*Illustration and text compiled by Maya Gebeily, a research intern at The Washington Institute.*

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