

# Truth vs. Propaganda: The Situation in Syria

*Mohammad Mahfoud, president of the Danish-Syrian Friendship Society, spoke on the first panel of the Schiller Institute conference in Berlin Feb. 25.*

First of all, I would ask you to excuse my English, because I'm more used to speaking in Danish or Arabic, but I will do my best.

To begin with, I am not involved in the government in Syria; we don't get any money from Syria; we have nothing to do with the Syrian government. We are doing all this only for our love for our country and our Syrian people in Syria. And we think that the media in the West are not fair in this conflict. They are only looking from the one side, and that's what they call the opposition.

But we have another meaning in this conflict, and what is strange now, is that nobody wants to listen to what the Syrians want. The conflict in Syria becomes a conflict for [French President Nicolas] Sarkozy and Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, and nobody wants to hear what the Syrian people want in Syria.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here, and for the opportunity to tell you about the situation in Syria these days. My whole family lives in Syria—parents, sisters, and brothers. I am in daily contact with them, and also with other family members, friends, and others. Last year I travelled several times to Syria, both with journalists and others, and on my own. I travelled to different places in Syria, talked to different people from different groups. On the street, I got a good idea of what is going on; and also from talking to the Patriarch, the Bishop, the Grand Mufti, and supporters and opponents of the government.

Let's start with what is going on, in brief, and how it all started.

It started last March, almost a year ago, with demonstrations; we have to separate between the peaceful and the violent demonstrations. In some cities, there were smaller demonstrations of peaceful demonstrators, who asked for faster reforms. This was accepted by the government, and it became a national dialogue.



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*"There is only one opposition," reported Mahfoud. "It is based in Syria; it has nothing to do with the so-called revolution. The opposition has condemned the foreign actors. The government and the opposition are having constructive dialogues about reforms."*

Then, there are the violent demonstrations. These started in Daraa, a smaller town on the border with Jordan. What at first seemed to be peaceful, suddenly changed their nature: We heard about people being shot at. On the news, we heard the police and security people had shot at peaceful demonstrators, while others said that there were people who shot at both the demonstrators and the security people.

We soon found out that there was a strange third element: Someone wanted to make it a violent conflict, using the different religious sects as fuel. Also it became clear that there were many foreign actors—countries, and groups, and individuals. Money, satellite phones—huge amounts of money were smuggled in.

Terrible crimes against civilians started to happen, something absolutely unusual in Syria. These crimes had a certain pattern, no matter where they happened: The victims were sometimes from one sect, sometimes from another, but the brutality was the same, and the criminals were videotaped in their acts, and [the videotapes were] sent to Al-Jazeera and other channels.<sup>1</sup>

The unrest always took place in areas where extremists and social problems were mixed up.

Also, we saw that the whole cyberspace capability was well-established already from the start. One day,

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1. See Hussein Askary, "Al Jazeera Demystified," *EIR*, Jan. 27, 2012.

there was nothing, and the next day, huge groups with websites, etc., were all over the place. All closely attached to the Muslim Brotherhood abroad, they even had human rights groups that no one had ever heard of before, but became far more important than all the established international human rights groups. The group I'm talking about is the so-called Human Rights Observatory, based in London. It became, from the beginning, the only source that the media in the West would use. Rarely, they would have something from the established ones, but always unconfirmed. At the same time, the media in the West used Al-Jazeera and Barada (based in London, run by the Muslim Brotherhood and certain other figures, and financed by the U.S. Administration), as their main source, together with YouTube.

### Actors in the Conflict in Syria

First, we have to split up what the Western media call the opposition:

1. The real opposition—nonviolent.
2. Armed groups—violent—including many al-Qaeda fighters.
3. So-called exiles.

There is only one opposition: It is based in Syria, it has nothing to do with the so-called revolution. The opposition has condemned the foreign actors. The government and the opposition are having constructive dialogues about reforms. The referendum next week is one of the results. The media in the West don't listen to them either.

Then we have the armed groups in the border cities, near Lebanon (Homs), and Turkey. In these groups, we see mostly foreign fighters, for example, al-Qaeda and French and British forces—and other nationalities, with a high percentage from Turkey, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Libya.

Al-Qaeda and Libyan terrorists are playing a key role in the horrible crimes against civilians and security personnel, and also in terrorist acts, such as the terror bombings in Damascus and Aleppo.

Especially Qatar and Saudi Arabia are financing the whole attack on Syria. Among the key players are [former Lebanese prime minister] Saad Hariri and Saudi Prince Bandar.

Then we have figures, mainly in the West, who may have more or less Syrian blood in their veins. These are the ones whom the West is trying to put up front, and these are again mostly people from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Wherever we look, we also end up among extremists and certain Western administrations.

### Today, Homs as a Center

Homs is next to the border with Lebanon, from where armed groups and weapons are being smuggled into the area called Bab Amro. The other areas in Homs have no problems, but the people are feeling unsafe because of the armed gangs in the town. The armed gangs in Bab Amro have committed terrible crimes against civilians, public figures, and security people. Also, they keep civilians hostage in Bab Amro. So, one relatively small area, where armed groups, mainly al-Qaeda extremists, are terrorizing people in a country with 23 million population, is now getting the whole West into action.

We Syrians support democratic reforms and believe in our President Bashar al-Assad, and his promise of reforms. We will survive those conspiracies against us. We will get a free, democratic selection in 2014, and the Syrian people will respect that selection.

Thank you.

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