

## Fikra Forum Interviews New Head of Syrian National Council

Jun 20, 2012

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**On June 15, 2012, the newly elected head of the Syrian National Council (SNC), Abdulbaset Sieda, gave Fikra Forum his first extended Western media interview since assuming the post on June 10. The interview was conducted by Skype, in Arabic, by Fikra Forum editor Lauren Emerson and contributors Maya Gebeily and Jihad Saleh. Key points include: 1. Sieda asserts that the SNC does not lead the FSA, and that this could lead to the "disorganized and haphazard use of weapons" and an "uncontrollable ... security coup," as he says has occurred in Libya. 2. He says it would be fine to "coordinate" with the Kurdish opposition and others, rather than try and bring them back into the SNC. 3. He says there could be dialogue with regime elements "with no blood on their hands," but only concerning "the timing and process of the fall of the regime." 4. He denies that the SNC should do anything to demonstrate its independence from the MB, which is "an essential faction of the Syrian opposition."**

**T**he following is a translated transcript of this interview; it can also be viewed on the Fikra Forum website at <http://fikraforum.org/?p=2315&lang=en> (<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2315&lang=en>). The original Arabic can be found at <http://fikraforum.org/?p=2318&lang=ar> (<http://fikraforum.org/?p=2318&lang=ar>).

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**Fikra Forum (FF):** It seems that the restructuring of the Syrian National Council (SNC) is an enormous project that the council is working on right now. What is the SNC doing currently to respond to developments on the ground and the quickly-deteriorating situation in Syria? How does the SNC get information about these developments? Finally, how does it plan on facing and leading these developments, as opposed to reacting to them like the rest of the world?

**Abdulbaset Sieda:** Thank you very much for this question. Of course, we have announced our plan more than once. First, we are in the process of rearranging the Executive Committee of the Syrian National Council (SNC). We are trying to make the SNC's committees much more effective through restructuring the council's hierarchy. We have created a committee, which met today in Istanbul, because time is running out and we're in a race against it.

We will make the processes of the committees much more effective, so that the council can accomplish its goals in an effective way. In addition, we are in communication with the various factions of the Syrian opposition in order to get them to join the Council or coordinate with us to face the regime.

In addition, we will communicate in order to deepen our ties with the internal opposition movement and to strengthen this movement. Also, we must coordinate our relationship and organize with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) so that it can become more effective and able to defend Syrian civilians.

**FF:** How does the SNC plan on coordinating with the Free Syrian Army (FSA)? Is the SNC the political leader for the FSA?

**Sieda:** The SNC is not the political leadership [of the FSA]; however, it is the political leadership in the sense that the political representative of the Syrian people is in the SNC. The FSA was formed before the SNC, and we [the SNC] did not take part in the decision to establish the FSA.

Nevertheless, we seek to organize the relationship we have with them so that the military situation can be organized and disciplined. In a situation like the Syrian situation, disorganized and haphazard use of weapons would be uncontrollable and would lead to a security coup like the one from which the Libyans have suffered after their revolution.

**FF:** Have there been any pledges from the international community to support the FSA with weapons, especially now that the regime has increased its military operations and has resorted to massacring the Syrian people?

**Sieda:** These matters are specific to the professionals. To this effect, we have a communications office which follows these issues; therefore, this is a matter for the professionals.

Your first question has to do with the opposition's factions and how we coordinate with them. We are in communication with the majority of these factions and we work with them so that we can reach a shared vision about the features of the transitional period and Syria's political future -- in a way that reassures Syrians, regional powers, and the international community. We are looking into this issue with the different factions, one of which is the Kurdish National Council. Of course, we invite these factions to join the SNC and to participate in it. Some factions and some political sides do not want to join, and prefer to simply coordinate with us. We are fine. That is with regard to dialogue with the factions of the opposition. With regards to dialogue with the regime, this is an issue that has come up partly in the past. For a while now, we have said that dialogue with the regime is no longer possible. The only possible form of dialogue would be negotiations about the timing and process of the fall of the regime. This dialogue would only be with those that did not stain their hands with the blood of the Syrians or did not order the killing of Syrian civilians.

With regards to the naming of a transitional leader, I have touched on this in an earlier interview in which I said that the Annan plan is written on the basis that Assad would hand over his powers to his deputy Farouk al-Shaar. However, it appears that journalists sometimes want additional details, and when they cannot find them, they fabricate them.

**FF:** Are there any efforts to communicate with parts of the regime, the military leadership, the intelligence service, or the old guard so that they may join the revolution?

**Sieda:** Of course, these are highly technical and confidential issues, which fall under the domain of the appropriate professionals in the communications department.

**FF:** The SNC has been highly criticized recently with regards to the rumors that the council is dominated by the

Muslim Brotherhood (MB). What are you personally doing (and what is the SNC's Executive Committee doing) to combat these rumors and to assure the international community and the internal opposition that the SNC is in fact not dominated by the MB?

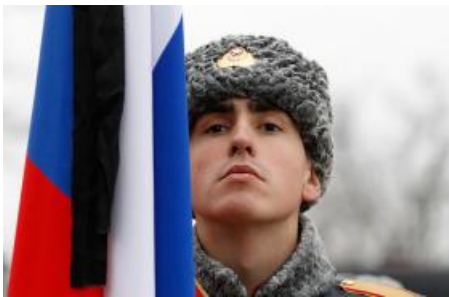
**Sieda:** The Muslim Brotherhood is an essential faction of the Syrian opposition. It was oppressed at the hands of Assad's father's regime, and there existed an order to hang anyone who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is not an unusual case, as it has precedents in Syrian history; for this reason, we affirm that this is an Arab group that has been oppressed and that today is an essential part of the Syrian National Council. However, on the other hand, we see the Damascus Declaration, secular forces, liberals, revolutionary movements... The Muslim Brotherhood, of course, has its role in the SNC, they helped establish it just like other forces. However, to prove that this council is outside the control of the Muslim Brotherhood and to distance them from any committees or institutions... I believe that when we decided to ally ourselves with them, we did not enter on this basis. ❖

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