

# The Resistance Camp Abandons Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and His Regime

Contributed by MEMRI  
Tuesday, 17 May 2011

## Introduction

The continuing unrest in Syria that began on March 15, 2011, has undermined Syria's relations with its traditional allies and intensified tensions between it and its opponents.[1] The international criticism of the Syrian regime's treatment of the protesters was echoed by elements from the resistance camp, such as Al-Jazeera and other media in Qatar.[2] Even elements in Iran criticized Syria's suppression of the unrest, despite that fact that the Iranian regime employs similar methods to suppress its own opposition.

The London-based daily Al-Quds Al-Arabi, whose editor, 'Abd Al-Bari 'Atwan, has consistently supported the resistance, published numerous articles condemning the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Turkey, which in recent years has tightened its relations with Syria and Iran, was also harsh in its criticism of the Syrian regime, and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the suppression of protesters in Syria was beginning to resemble Saddam Hussein's brutality against the Kurds in Halabja in 1988 and the violence in Hama, Syria, in 1982.[3] On the other hand, Hamas, which has the backing of the Syrian regime, is continuing to officially support it, though reports in the Arab press indicate that there is some tension between the two sides.[4]

At the same time, the unrest in Syria has widened the rift between Syria and its opponents in the moderate Arab camp, particularly Lebanon's March 14 Forces, which have been accused of active involvement in organizing protests in Syria.[5] Syria and its supporters have made similar accusations against "the Palestinians" - meaning the PLO[6] &ndash; as well as the Jordanians[7] and the Saudis.[8]

Saudi Arabia, which belongs to the moderate Arab camp, and which, in an historic move in January 2009, reconciled with Syria in an attempt to pry it away from the resistance camp, has refrained from officially criticizing the Syrian regime, while the Saudi media have limited their coverage of events there. However, the London-based Saudi dailies, particularly Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, which is owned by Prince Salman bin 'Abd Al-'Aziz, have taken a clear and unprecedentedly harsh anti-Syria line.

## Qatar &ndash; From Staunch Ally to Harsh Critic

When the Syrian unrest first began, the Qatari media largely refrained from taking any position on the matter, but as the Syrian regime's violent suppression of the protests escalated, Qatari editorials began condemning Syria's actions and calling on the regime there to quickly implement fundamental reforms. Al-Jazeera also expanded its coverage of the events, and some of its analysts, hosts, and correspondents harshly criticized the Syrian regime. Prominent among these was International Union of Muslim Scholars head Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradhawi, host of the channel's "Sharia and Life" show, who expressed support for the protesters and called for the removal of the Ba'th regime there. Other senior Al-Jazeera staffers criticizing the Syrian regime were former Israeli MP and senior analyst 'Azmi Bishara and Israel/Palestinian bureau chief Walid Al-'Omari.

The Syrian media, for its part, reported on Assad's anger at Qatar's emir following a meeting between Assad and the emir's emissary, Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassem, in which the latter had not expressed support for the Syrian regime. It was also reported that Assad had said no further meetings would be held between the two countries until Qatar apologized for Sheikh Al-Qaradhawi's statements.[9] Pro-Syrian Lebanese newspapers stated that Qatar, formerly affiliated with the resistance camp, had switched sides and was now working against the Syrian regime.[10]

## Qatari Editorials: Syria's Continued Oppression Will Lead to a Regime Change

In an editorial, the Qatari daily Al-Arab explained that the Syrian people had chosen freedom, and that the Syrian regime must realize that it could not eradicate its own people but could only eradicate the oppressive regime itself: "At first, the Ba'th regime believed that it was disconnected from everything that was happening around it in the Arab world, a mistake made previously by Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt and Al-Qadhafi's regime in Libya. Furthermore, [it] had pinned its hopes [for survival] on its years of oppression and maltreatment of the Syrian people, and on ongoing media [brainwashing] and ideological terrorism about conspiracies against the [Syrian] resistance regime... But reality has refuted the false claims of the Damascus regime, and the Syrian people has proven that its liberty is more [important] than anything..."

"Bashar Al-Assad and his regime had a real opportunity to end the protests that started in Der'a, had they descended from their ivory tower and listened to the people, and had they used a modern approach in handling them, instead of an outmoded one [like the one used by] the regime of Assad senior when it killed some 40,000 residents of Hama and exiled twice that many in 1982. All the people wanted was the fulfillment of the promise of reform that Assad junior made in 2000 and nothing more... The Syrian regime must know that oppressing peoples will not eradicate them or erase their footprint. The one who is eradicated is always the oppressor of the people &ndash; and nothing remains of him but curses." [11]

The Qatari daily Al-Sharq wrote in an editorial that the era of the dictatorial regimes had passed from the world, regardless of whether such regimes belong to the moderate Arab camp or the resistance camp: "The security approach in dealing with protests will only spark popular revolution, and will give [the protesters] yet more reasons to continue in the path that will lead only to regime change.

"Many lessons can be learned from the recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen... [namely,] that the time of rule by security apparatuses, totalitarianism, dictatorship, and the single-party [regime] is over, [and] the only way to deal with the people is to listen to their familiar demands and to comply with them in the best and fastest way possible. These revolutions by the Arab peoples that are sweeping through the region from East to West will not skip over regimes, be they 'moderate' or 'resistance' [regimes]..." [12]

Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradhwai: The Ba'th Party Should Not Rule Syria

International Union of Muslim Scholars head Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradhwai expressed support for the Syrian people's protests against the Assad regime, as he had previously supported the protests in Tunisia, [13] Egypt, [14] and Libya. [15] In his Friday sermon of March 25, 2011, Al-Qaradhwai called the measures declared by Assad insufficient and added that the Ba'th party should no longer rule Syria. He said that Assad himself was a prisoner of the Alawi community, and that this was the reason for his failure to institute changes:

"...Syria cannot be left out of the history of the Arab nation. Some have said that Syria is safe from these revolutions. How can it possibly be safe from these revolutions? Is it not part of the nation? Is it not part of the law of Allah... In fact, it is even more in need of a revolution than other countries...

"Now they are trying to downplay the crime... The Ba'th Party has come to an end throughout the Arab world. All these ancient parties are a thing of the past &ndash; the RCD in Tunisia, the NDP in Egypt... These parties are over and done with. The constitutional courts annulled them...

"How come the Higher National Committee of the Ba'th Party still rules Syria? Who the hell is the Committee of the Arab Ba'th Party? Is Syria an estate that you inherited from your father or grandfather, so that you could steer the political activity and control the emergency law? These people are backward &ndash; they live in a different age from us. We live in the era of the Arab revolutions...

"The problem of Dr. Bashar Al-Assad is that although he is intellectual, open-minded, and young, and could have done a lot, he is held prisoner by his entourage and by the [Alawi] sect. He cannot get rid of them. He sees with their eyes and hears with their ears..." [16]

Following this sermon, Assad advisor Buthayna Sha'ban called Al-Qaradhwai's statements tantamount to "calling for civil strife [fitna]." [17] The Syrian daily Al-Watan wrote that while Syrians once enjoyed Fridays, they now feared for their lives and the lives of their children because of Al-Qaradhwai's inciting sermons, which led to fitna and killing. [18] The Damascus University law faculty even filed a lawsuit against Al-Qaradhwai for his incitement against Syria. [19] In his sermon the following Friday, Al-Qaradhwai mocked the lawsuit and further criticized the Syrian regime: "I will never fear those who sue me, and I will continue to tell the truth. They are judging me for harming the country's good name, but a country whose name is harmed by a word is... a very weak country..."

"This is a time of change, and those who do not change will be trampled by [the people]. These regimes have enslaved the people... and when they asked for freedom, they were shot at... The Muslim countries today are backward due to repression and persecution..." [20]

In another sermon, Al-Qaradhwai referred to Syrian Religious Endowment Minister Muhammad 'Abd Al-Sattar as "a stupid fool" for claiming that Al-Qaradhwai was interfering with Syria's internal affairs. He added that the Koran and the Sunna grant the International Union of Muslim Scholars the authority to interfere in Syria's affairs, as well as in the affairs of any country that oppresses its people. [21]

Al-Jazeera TV Israel/Palestinian Bureau Chief: Assad Is Obsolete

Walid Al-'Omari, the Al-Jazeera Israel/Palestinian bureau chief, wrote in the Jerusalem daily Al-Quds that Assad was acting like an outmoded ruler, and that he seems to have missed the chance to salvage his regime by implementing

reforms: "...Apparently, the Syrian president does not yet realize that the era of perpetual [autocracy] is over, and that the [era of the] single [ruling] party and autocrat is inappropriate for the new age and the new Arab &ndash; who, before anything else, longs for freedom and dignity.

"The young Assad has preferred to act like an old and obsolete ruler... instead of confidently leading the revolution of young people in the 'Arab Spring.' The young Assad does not realize that he cannot base his handling of the protests in Syria [on the claim that they are a foreign] conspiracy, without presenting solutions to the basic demands for freedom and dignity...

"There are many signs that [Assad] has missed the chance to save himself and his land through real reforms that would satisfy the aspirations of the people &ndash; who, following his first speech [after the unrest began], called to him, 'The people want regime reform!' and who, following his second speech, called, 'The people want to topple the regime!' How different these two demands are!"[22]

'Azmi Bishara: Syria Has Created a 'Cartel Regime'

Former Israeli Knesset member 'Azmi Bishara, a leading Al-Jazeera political analyst specializing in the recent Arab revolutions who, in the past, was known to have good relations with the Syrian regime, also criticized its handling of the demonstrations and rejected the claims of an anti-Syria conspiracy:

"The people are demanding reforms. How come the people's demand for reforms is met with such a cruel attack? Even demands for reform within the establishment or from Syria's friends are met with a cruel response. How can we believe that you want reform, if you accuse those demanding reforms of being collaborators [with foreign enemies]?"

"Let's assume that there is indeed a foreign conspiracy. All the people who stood by Syria when it really faced foreign conspiracies are now demanding democratic reforms. Let's assume that there is a foreign conspiracy. Does that mean people are not entitled to their rights?! What does this have to do with foreign conspiracies? Even if I prove that there is a foreign conspiracy &ndash; does that mean people are not entitled to their rights?! The Syrian people is struggling for its civil rights..."[23]

On another occasion, Bishara said that Syria had created a "cartel regime" that ensured the continued rule of a party that was politically and ideologically bankrupt. He added that the Syrian security apparatuses were now interfering in aspects of the citizens' lives that had nothing to do with security.

Bishara pointed out that Assad had inherited his position from his father, "which is unacceptable in a republic." He said that the Syrian people had been willing to give him a chance because he presented new and refreshing slogans never before heard from the Syrian regime; additionally, he had spoken with the Syrian intelligentsia and diaspora about fighting corruption. But, said Bishara, not only had Assad failed to fight corruption, corruption had grown, along with the repression of the intellectuals.[24]

Criticism in Iran of Syria's Suppression of Protests

Besides Iranian claims that the protests in Syria were a U.S.-Israeli-Saudi plot aimed at driving a wedge between the Syrian people and the regime and sabotaging the resistance axis,[25] there has also been Iranian criticism of the suppression of the unrest in Syria as well as calls by Iranian officials for reform, out of fear that the events in Syria would have a negative impact on the alliance between the two countries and on Iran's standing in the region. It should also be noted that the U.N. Security Council has reported that Iran is violating a U.S. arms embargo on Syria, shipping weapons to the Assad regime purportedly to be used against the protestors.[26]

The Iranian daily Kayhan, which is affiliated with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, claimed that the Syrian security forces' harsh treatment of the protestors was a mistake because it only caused the unrest to intensify and spread. It said: "The Syrian police and security forces' policy vis-à-vis the protestors was brutal and caused fatalities. This shows that the Syrian security apparatuses do not have the insight required to deal with limited popular demonstrations &ndash; and this is what caused the demonstrations that started in Der'a six weeks ago, which had 10,000-15,000 participants, to spread to other places."[27]

The Iranian foreign ministry expressed support for reforms in Syria that would improve the citizens' lives, saying that the efforts to implement reforms were a great responsibility requiring tolerance on the part of both the people and the regime, and that, if successful, these reforms would be a great victory for Syria.[28]

Earlier, former Iranian ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Irani assessed that the Assad regime would be undermined if reforms were not carried out, and warned that the events in Syria could harm its alliance with Iran: "The changes in the Arab world have so far worked in Iran's favor &ndash; but this trend was reversed by the changes in Syria, which has strategic relations with Iran, and which has always been [Iran's] gate to the Arab world..."

"With regard to the reforms... it seems that the situation in Syria cannot be restored to what it was before. The people's demands are not many, and the Assad regime will be forced to comply with them. In this way, the internal threats to his regime will be turned into opportunities to advance a national reconciliation... The main demand of the people is the immediate lifting of the emergency [law] that has been in force in Syria for more than 48 years... Rescinding this law as soon as possible will not create any special problem for Assad... [and] will comply with most [of the demands], enabling him to continue to rule." [29]

The moderate-conservative website Asr-e Iran termed the events in Syria "a massacre," and complained that Iran's censorship of the media coverage of the Syrian regime's "massacre and repression" was harsher than that of Syria itself. [30]

#### Al-Quds Al-Arabi: Support for the Resistance Does Not Preclude Reform

The London-based daily Al-Quds Al-Arabi, whose editor, 'Abd Al-Bari 'Atwan, is affiliated with the resistance camp in the Arab world, also criticized the Assad regime. At the onset of the unrest in Syria, 'Atwan wrote that he hoped Syria, as the last bastion of the resistance, would swiftly implement reforms. [31] In a subsequent article, however, he expressed doubt that reform, no matter how swift, would help save the regime, and stressed that if forced to choose between the regime and the people, he would support the latter's demand for democracy and freedom, explaining that an oppressed people cannot liberate territory:

"The Syrian regime will not leave easily... What is certain is that the Syrian people, like all other Arab peoples, cannot retreat once its journey towards democratic change, with [all] its martyrs, has commenced. Those who are demanding reforms in Syria are not American and Zionist agents, as the regime and its mouthpieces are claiming in a deliberate smear attempt. The martyrs of Der'a... do not even know where the U.S. is. Indeed, most of them never left the city, not even to visit Damascus.

"[Syria's] support for the Lebanese resistance and its hosting of the secretaries-general of the Palestinian factions in Damascus, after the other Arab capitals slammed the door in their faces, are praiseworthy positions... but I do not see how these positions preclude a response to the Syrian people's demands for reform. And if there is such a preclusion, I would prefer that the Syrian regime put off its support for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian issue [until] it complies with its own people's demands for freedoms, for fighting corruption, for establishing elected legislative institutions, and for creating infrastructure for a regime with integrity. The oppressed peoples cannot liberate plundered land, because dictators' armies have [never] won a war..." [32]

#### Pro-Syrian Lebanese Media Disappointed by Assad's Conduct

Along with blaming the Lebanese Al-Mustaqbal faction for fanning the flames of the protests in Syria, pro-Syrian Lebanese newspapers published several articles calling on Assad to immediately enact reforms. In his column in the Al-Safir daily, Talal Salman wrote: "...For Lebanon's security and unity, in addition to my concern for Syria and for its special status and role in our region, I appeal to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to end this downward spiral of events, to immediately make good on his promise for reforms, and to authorize critical measures, before these violent developments are exploited in order to thwart plans for the future by those who believe in a security approach..." [33]

In his column in Al-Akhbar, Ghassan Sa'ud expressed his disappointment in Assad's March 30, 2011 address, in which he made no concrete promises: [34] "...Most [Syrian] residents expected a speech [promising] change, but did not get one... The weak point of the speech was that it exposed the conflict the regime is facing: It wants to say everything and says nothing, to do everything and does nothing... During Assad's speech, you could have heard a pin drop in Damascus... but afterwards, Damascus seemed just the same... Many did not understand a thing, and many understood and would have preferred not to..." [35]

Al-Akhbar board chairman Ibrahim Al-Amin, in addition to reiterating accusations of foreign intervention in Syria, stressed that the Syrian regime could not ignore the wave of reforms sweeping the Arab world. Hinting at the suppression of the demonstrations, he said, "The complications that accompanied the wave of protests attested directly to the true danger... the civil war that could tear apart Syria and its people..." [36]

#### Saudi Clerics Support Syrian Protestors

The Saudi government press barely addressed the events in Syria, and failed to respond to Syrian accusations of Saudi involvement in the Syrian events published in Syrian and pro-Syrian media.

However, 45 Saudi clerics issued a communiqué openly expressing support for the Syrian protests and condemning "the despotic Syrian regime." Prominent among them were Sheikh Nasser Al-Omar and Dr. Muhammad Bin 'Abdallah Al-Hababan, an associate of 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Barrak, the extremist sheikh and imam of the Al-'Izz bin 'Abd Al-Salam Mosque in Riyadh, who opposed the protests in Saudi Arabia and was among those who called on the Saudi king to enact "Islamic reforms" in the kingdom. [37]

The communiqué stated that the Syrian regime was committing "horrific crimes against its defenseless Muslim people, who demanded their legitimate and usurped rights throughout the meager years, when they lived under oppression and deprivation at the hands of this regime, which is still torturing, killing, and arresting its own men, women, and children in the most heinous fashion." The communiqué called upon all Muslim countries "to prevent this abominable extermination, according to the divine commandment [which requires] every Muslim to help his brethren." It urged the Syrian military and security apparatuses "to stand with the people and protect them from the aggression of the tyrant [Assad], and not to obey his orders to commit crimes against these helpless people." As for the Muslim public, the clerics urged them to help their Syrian brethren, "every man according to his abilities." Finally, the clerics called on the Syrians, whom they called "jihad fighters," "to find shelter in the shadow of Allah during this crisis." [38]

Muhammad Al-Hababan also published an article in which he wished the Syrian revolution success and expressed hope for the departure of the Ba'th regime, calling on the Syrian security forces to join ranks with the protestors. Al-Hababan cited 13th century Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya, who regarded the Alawis (who were known then as Nusairis) as greater heretics than even the Jews and Christians: "Those who understand the danger of the ruling party in Syria understand the greatness and stature of these martyrs [i.e., the Syrian protestors who have been killed]. This Nusairi party [i.e., the Syrian Ba'th party] is one of the most dangerous regimes in the region..."

"This blessed silent revolution against this regime expresses support for the religion of Allah, for the oppressed, the missing who have been [incarcerated] in prisons for years, and the Syrian diaspora worldwide... Therefore, it must be supported and assisted by all legitimate means." [39]

In a video posted on Youtube, senior Saudi cleric Saleh Al-Luhaidan expressed similar sentiments. He called the Syrian regime "sinful, indecent, dangerous, and heretical," called for jihad to overthrow "Bashar Al-Assad the Nusairi." [40]

Saudi London Dailies: The Protests Are Authentic; Syria Has Contributed Nothing to the Resistance

The London-based Saudi daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat provided widespread coverage of the events in Syria, and its editor, Tariq Alhomayed, took up a clear anti-Syrian line. It should be noted that the daily provided no coverage of the anti-regime protests staged in Saudi Arabia.

In an editorial, Alhomayed wrote that the Syrian protests were authentic and that they had been triggered by Syrian oppression: "...Everyone knows that the Syrians' demands are real, [especially] in the country that has imposed oppressive emergency laws and deprived [its citizens of] freedoms the longest. What is more, the Syrian president himself is still promising reforms..." [41] In another article, Alhomayed wrote that "Syria is the most prominent example [among the Arab countries] of an imbalance between the minority and the majority." [42]

Alhomayed dismissed the Iranian claim that the unrest in Syria was the product of a U.S.-Zionist plot against the country for its support of the resistance, saying that Syria, like its allies in the resistance camp, has taken no real action against Israel: [43] "Iran and its allies are ignoring the fact that the Arab citizen is fed up with false slogans and lies. Nowadays, all the demands in the Arab world are national and internal. What resistance are the Iranians speaking of? Syria has not killed even a single dove in the resistance campaign in the last three decades. In fact, it did not even respond to Israeli aggression on its soil. It always reserves the right to respond without actually responding. As for Hizbullah's weapons in Lebanon, they were turned on the Lebanese themselves, especially the Sunnis in Beirut, and [were used to] terrorize other ethnic groups. [After all,] it is [Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan] Nasrallah who is now appointing the Sunni prime minister in Lebanon! Even Hamas oppresses [Palestinians] who protest against it in Gaza. As for Iran, it too... has not fired a single bullet to protect Arab blood. We all remember how [Iranian Supreme Leader] Ali Khamenei forbade Iranians from going to Gaza during the recent war [there]." [44]

'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Rashed, director-general of Al-Arabiya TV and former editor of Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, wrote in the daily that the situation in Der'a would only intensify the protests against the regime. He added that Syria was suffering from a leadership crisis and that the regime had missed its opportunity to implement reforms in the country, saying: [45] "The tragic situation in Der'a shows that the Syrian authorities do not want to end the city's demonstrations; rather, they want to set an example, to make other protestors across the republic learn the hard way. All reports confirm this because the situation in this small city is extremely dangerous; streets are littered with corpses, patients are left without medication, and hundreds of youths are being detained in camps. Der'a is deprived of water and suffers electricity blackouts; food and medicine are denied access into the city, whilst shops, groceries and even pharmacies have all been looted by the regime's thugs. The Syrian regime is definitely mistaken, for Der'a will indeed be an example, but the Syrian people will 'learn the hard way' to fight the regime, rather than fear it..."

"Damascus is certainly suffering a crisis within its leadership, as officials disagree on how to confront the [protests]. President Bashar Al-Assad was prepared to announce reformative resolutions following his first address, yet it was rumored that his associates forced him to retreat, giving priority to the security [approach]. These were the reforms which Buthayna Sha'aban, the Syrian President's media advisor, had leaked to the Syrian news media. Yet, unfortunately, the regime missed its opportunity, and even if it offered the concessions it had promised, it would now be too late. The

leadership must present its scapegoats, announce a wide-ranging reform program, and set a date for parliamentary elections under international supervision. Only then [might] the regime be able to repair what it [has] destroyed."

#### Al-Hayat Columnist: Syria's Foreign Policy Has Failed

Hassan Haidar, a columnist for the daily Al-Hayat, wrote that Assad's theory that Syria's support of the resistance made it immune to internal revolution had proved to be groundless: "The Syrian regime has been forced to discuss lifting the emergency state in the country, which has been in place for 48 years, as well as enacting other reforms. [This discussion] clearly disproves the notion that foreign policy can provide internal stability, [a notion] that Assad emphasized in his [January 31, 2011] interview with the Wall Street Journal, in which he dismissed [the possibility] that the events in Tunisia and Egypt could take place in Syria, [on the grounds that] the views of the Syrian regime and people are fairly close, especially regarding support of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance and Syria's opposition to Israel and cautious attitude toward the U.S..."

"Even though this theory long succeeded in hiding the internal contradictions [in Syria], and was used as an excuse for the lack of reforms and freedoms [there], the Syrian leadership should have considered that foreign relations are a two-way street... and that the success of the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries would open the Syrians' eyes..."

Haidar went on to point out that Syria's foreign policy had proven erroneous and even self-detrimental, providing the example of its ties with Hamas, which he said, following the Egyptian revolution, might no longer consider Damascus its primary supporter. He also noted Syria's tense relations with Turkey, which had in the past worked to break Syria out of international isolation. Regarding Syria's ties with Iran and Hizbullah, he wrote: "During the rule of the late Hafez Al-Assad, the relations between Syria, Iran, and Hizbullah were based on a delicate balance between Syrian interests and Arab sensibilities. Nowadays, however, Iran is the strong element in this relationship... [while] Syrian influence on Hizbullah has declined..."

Finally, Haidar claimed that "even if Assad succeeds in calming the current protests in various ways, it is clear that the country will never be the same again, and he will have to face [the people's] demands, since [his] foreign [policy] has played itself out." [46]

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#### Endnotes:

[1] The unrest began despite Assad's prediction in a January 31, 2011 interview with the Wall Street Journal that, thanks to its anti-U.S. and anti-Israel policy, Syria would not witness any protests like those in Tunisia and Egypt.

[2] On Qatar's membership in the resistance camp, see MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis No. 492, "An Escalating Regional Cold War &ndash; Part I: The 2009 Gaza War," February 2, 2011, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/3281.htm>.

[3] Aljazeera.net, May 11, 2011. On the rapprochement between Syria, Iran, and Turkey, see MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis No. 490, "Recent Attempts to Form Strategic Regional Bloc: Syria, Turkey and Iran," January 6, 2009, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/3137.htm>.

Articles in the Syrian daily Al-Watan, which is close to the regime, responded to Erdogan's statements with criticism against Turkey. For example, columnist Nizar Saloum called Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu "the architect of new Ottomanism." Al-Watan (Syria), May 12, 2011. According to the pro-Syrian Lebanese daily Al-Akhbar, Turkey's ambassador to Damascus has been summoned by the Syrian foreign ministry, which expressed displeasure at the recent Turkish statements. Al-Akhbar (Lebanon), May 12, 2011.

[4] Two weeks after the unrest in Syria began, Hamas issued a statement emphasizing Syria's support of the resistance and especially of Hamas. Palestine-info.info, April 2, 2011. In May, the daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat reported that Hamas had decided to leave Syria and relocate its leadership to Qatar and other countries. According to the report, Hamas Political Bureau head Khaled Mash'al plans to settle in Qatar, while his deputy, Moussa Abu Marzouq, plans to relocate to Egypt. Al-Sharq Al-Awsat editor Tariq Alhomayed and Al-Arabiya TV general-director 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Rashed wrote in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat that one of the reasons for the Palestinian reconciliation was the deterioration of Hamas-Syria relations. The Hamas leaders, on their part, vehemently denied any plans to leave Syria. Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), May 9, 11, 2011; Al-Hayat (London), April 30, 2011.

[5] For example, Syrian TV aired a statement by three young men who claimed that Lebanese MP Jamal Al-Jarrah, of the Al-Mustaqbal faction, had supplied them with funds and weapons in order to commit terrorist acts in Syria. One of the

three said that Al-Jarrah was connected to the Muslim Brotherhood. Syria-news.com, April 13, 2011. The pro-Syrian Lebanese daily Al-Akhbar widely discussed the allegations against the March 14 Forces, and on April 1, 2011, it published an article accusing the Al-Mustaqbal movement and its head, Sa'd Al-Hariri, as well as Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces, of inciting against Syria, making veiled threats against them. See MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 3037 "Pro-Syrian Lebanese Daily: Syria Considers Al-Hariri Responsible for Riots in Syria," April 1, 2011, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/5165.htm>.

[6] Assad's advisor Buthayna Sha'ban accused Palestinians from the Al-Raml refugee camp near Latakia of vandalizing shops in the city in the course of protests staged there, while the Syrian daily Al-Watan claimed Palestinians had been involved in the Der'a protests. Al-Watan (Syria), March 27, 21, 2011.

[7] Al-Watan (Syria), March 24, 2011; Champress.net, May 2, 2011.

[8] On April 7, 2011, the Syrian website Champress, citing a "Jordanian source," reported that Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan, secretary-general of Saudi Arabia's National Security Council, was working from Jordan to exacerbate the protests in Syria. On March 29, the pro-Syrian Lebanese daily Al-Akhbar claimed that the Syrian intelligence services had concluded that "the Wahhabi Party" was one of the main forces working against the Syrian regime. In an April 28 article in Al-Akhbar, columnist Jean 'Aziz claimed that the Saudis, having understood that they could not confront Iran directly, had decided to attack it indirectly by going after Syria and presenting this country with two options: either to topple the Ba'th regime or to abandon its alliance with Iran. On April 10, Hassan Hanizadeh, a staff member at the Iranian news agency Mehr, claimed that dubious and violent elements from Jordan and Saudi Arabia were involved in the Syrian protests.

[9] Al-Watan (Syria), April 10, 2011.

[10] Al-Akhbar board chairman Ibrahim Al-Amin wrote that Qatar had left the resistance camp even though this camp had defended it and given it a role of importance in the region, and that Qatar was using Al-Jazeera to spread lies and incite against the Syrian regime. An article in the Lebanese daily Al-Safir claimed that Qatar was working to overthrow the Syrian regime by financing Arab media in Lebanon and elsewhere and by embracing the Syrian opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, and providing it with political, media, and financial support, in coordination with Turkey. Al-Akhbar (Lebanon), April 29, 2011; Al-Safir (Lebanon), April 27, 2011.

[11] Al-Arab (Qatar), April 24, 2011.

[12] Al-Sharq (Qatar), April 23, 2011.

[13] See MEMRI TV report, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2774.htm>.

[14] See MEMRI TV reports, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2815.htm>, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2793.htm>.

[15] See MEMRI TV report, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2819.htm>

[16] See MEMRI report, <http://www.memri.org/clip/en/0/0/0/0/0/2877.htm>

[17] Al-Watan (Syria), March 27, 2011.

[18] Al-Watan (Syria), April 14, 2011.

[19] Al-Quds Al-Arabi (London), March 30, 2011. 'Issam Dari, a columnist for the Syrian daily Teshreen, wrote in response that every Syrian citizen was entitled to sue Al-Qaradhawi for his incitement, which had led to the killing of civilians and security personnel. Teshreen (Syria), April 12, 2011.

[20] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), April 2, 2011.

[21] Al-Quds Al-Arabi (London), April 24, 2011.

[22] Al-Quds (Jerusalem), April 1, 2011.

[23] See MEMRI TV report, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2907.htm>

[24] See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6fC8Sjh4ts&feature=relate>.

[25] Mehr (Iran), April 10, May 6, 2011; Fars (Iran), April 3, 2011.

[26] [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42995447/ns/world\\_news-mideastn\\_africa](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42995447/ns/world_news-mideastn_africa),

<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/05/12/un.syria.iran.weapons>, May 12, 2011.

[27] Kayhan (Iran), May 5, 2011.

[28] Mehr (Iran), May 6, 2011.

[29] Iran Diplomacy, April 7, 2011.

[30] Asr-e Iran (Iran), March 29, 2011. See MEMRI TV report, <http://www.memritv.org/report/en/5189.htm>.

[31] See MEMRI TV report, <http://www.memritv.org/report/en/5122.htm>.

[32] Al-Quds Al-Arabi (London), March 27, 2011.

[33] Al-Safir (Lebanon), April 11, 2011.

[34] Assad claimed that there was a plot against Syria and promised a schedule for reforms but said it would be subject to change. Al-Watan, SANA (Syria), March 30, 2011.

[35] Al-Akhbar (Lebanon), March 31, 2011.

[36] Al-Akhbar (Lebanon), May 9, 2011.

[37] See MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis No. 674, "In Anticipation of the Saudi Day of Rage on Friday March 11, 2011," March 12, 2011, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/5085.htm>.

[38] Anbacom.com, May 1, 2011.

[39] Islamlight.net, March 26, 2011.

[40] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfqG1MtXkIU>

[41] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), April 14, 2011.

[42] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), March 20, 2011.

[43] Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said that the events in Syria were being guided by the U.S. and Zionism. Entekhab (Iran), April 12, 2011.

[44] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), April 14, 2011. 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Rashed, director-general of Al-Arabiya TV and former editor of Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, wrote that during the four decades Syria had waited for a war with Israel that never materialized, numerous problems had accumulated, ultimately leading to an explosion. Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), March 29, 2011. Egyptian playwright 'Ali Salem wrote in the daily that over the years, the Syrian citizen realized that the resistance was not aimed at the Zionist enemy who occupies Syrian land, but against the Syrian people and their desire for freedom and normal lives. Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), May 1, 2011.

[45] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), May 1, 2011. The original English translation, as it appeared in the English-language version of the daily, has been lightly edited for clarity.

[46] Al-Hayat (London), March 29, 2011.