

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 24, 2011 7:30 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: Burhan Ghalioun: No to International Intervention or Dialogue with the Regime -Al Akhbar English

Worth a read.

From: Hof, Frederic C
Sent: Monday, October 24, 2011 4:30 PM
To: 'Steven_N_Simor' [redacted] Sullivan, Jacob J
Cc: 'Hajjar, Hagar H.'
Subject: FW: Burhan Ghalioun: No to International Intervention or Dialogue with the Regime -Al Akhbar English

B6

This is really quite good. I think it captures the essence of his approach. He's not the most charismatic guy in the world, but one of the more serious.

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From: Conlon, Steven M
Sent: Monday, October 24, 2011 8:40 AM
To: Hof, Frederic C; NEA-Syria-DL; Irwin, Matthew T
Subject: Burhan Ghalioun: No to International Intervention or Dialogue with the Regime -Al Akhbar English

In case you missed this, from Oct. 17. See highlighted portions. Overall, a great interview, with the exception of a somewhat unsatisfying answer on the question about greater representation for minorities.

Burhan Ghalioun: No to International Intervention or Dialogue with the Regime



Paris-based Syrian academic Burhan Ghalioun, is pictured at a meeting with members of Syria's opposition in Akersberga, north of Stockholm 8 October 2011. (Photo: REUTERS - Christine Olsson)

By: Ernest khoury

Published Monday, October 17, 2011

Paris-based opposition leader Burhan Ghalioun talks to *al-Akhbar* about his latest stance on international intervention, Russian mediation, the make-up of the current Syrian National Council, and his role in the revolt and a post-Assad Syria.

Ernest Khoury (EK): There have been press reports that Russia is opposed to the idea that you should head a joint government in Syria combining the regime and the opposition. Have you indeed been nominated as head of such a government, if the regime stops pursuing the security solution?

Burhan Ghalioun (BG): No, I haven't been nominated for any such position. I would not agree to engage in dialogue with this regime or participate in any joint governing arrangement with it, even if the security solution were abandoned. I should add that even after the downfall of the regime, I will not assume any official political position in the new Syria. I am currently active in the Syrian National Council (SNC) as a means of achieving liberation, but I have no desire to assume any political post.

EK: You recently hinted that you would be prepared to visit Russia if invited. Do you want to pass a message on to the Syrian regime via the Russians?

BG: I am indeed willing to visit Russia. Even though I have not received any invitation, I am preparing to request an appointment for a visit. But we do not intend to send any message to the regime other than that it should relinquish power. Moreover, we do not need a go-between to pass messages on to the regime, especially as we are not in dialogue with it. We are only prepared to negotiate with those elements in the regime that do not have blood on their hands over one single issue: how to transfer power, dismantle the existing regime, and begin a transition to democracy in Syria.

EK: Other opposition elements accuse the SNC of being selective and excluding some major opposition figures. Were you not overly hasty in establishing it?

BG: To start with, no opposition framework could possibly satisfy all parties. We agreed with the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) to form the SNC at the meeting we held in Doha, which brought together representatives of the Damascus Declaration group, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the NCC. The NCC's representative, Hazem al-Nahar, was with us in Istanbul before we announced the formation of the SNC. I was a witness when Hassan Abdel Azim was contacted from Istanbul before the proclamation of the SNC to confirm whether the NCC still refused to join its leadership. He replied at the time that they were still studying the matter.

We told them that they would have the same share in the SNC's bodies as the Damascus Declaration group (20 representatives in the General Assembly), in line with the principle of equality between the SNC's members. We even informed the NCC that we are willing to negotiate with them about the SNC's political demands. We understand the difficulty of their situation inside the country, and that the demands of the SNC may be difficult for the NCC to adopt, due to the pressure they face from the regime. The doors of the SNC remain open for the NCC and all other parties supporting the revolution.

EK: But some members of the NCC, such as Haytham Manna, accuse you of being traitors and foreign agents. Others charge that you were behind the French authorities' banning of a press conference by Michel Kilo and Fayez Sara in Paris.

BG: May God forgive Haytham Manna. In any case, we do not accuse anyone of treason. As for the issue of the press conference, I have no knowledge of the SNC taking such a step, and I'm sure that did not happen.

EK: Some dissidents also accuse you of being parachuted into the leadership of the Syrian opposition, as some of the SNC's leaders have no record of opposition to the regime.

BG: That may be true, but it is not something to be ashamed of. The vast majority of the people who are demonstrating, being killed, and moving the Syrian revolution forward were never active before in political or public affairs. So if the revolution has prompted opponents of the regime to get involved in opposition activity, that's not wrong.

EK: Hillary Clinton warned you a couple of days ago that minority groups in Syria fear for their future should the regime fall. Also, some ethnic and religious minority groups are dissatisfied with the representation which you allocated them in the SNC.

BG: The SNC is a vehicle for liberation that represents the people who are in revolt, and not a parliament. We did not use sectarian criteria to select the 230 members of the General Assembly, the 29 members of the General Secretariat, and the seven members of the SNC's Executive Board. We view our people as one, while taking religious and ethnic differences into account. The Kurds and Assyrians are represented in the SNC because political organizations speaking for the two communities joined it.

We in the SNC are not in the business of allocating shares and posts to this or that group, but of building a political mechanism to achieve the aims of the revolution. Naturally, our perspective is national rather than sectarian. The condition for any party to be represented in the SNC is that it must have a political presence. The right place for religious and other groups to seek representation is the future parliament.

EK: To what extent is it correct to say that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists generally are the mainstay of the SNC?

BG: That is not true. The Muslim Brotherhood do not have a majority within the General Assembly, the General Secretariat, or the Executive Board of the SNC. They have representation equal to the other main groups — the Damascus Declaration, the Coordinating Committees, and the independents. That is their due, in line with the criteria we adopted that all parties are equal.

EK: In the SNC's founding statement, you called for international protection. Where, according to your definition, does international protection begin and where does it end? Does it entail military intervention, or enforcing an exclusion zone, or no-fly zone for the Syrian military? You have said you reject military intervention. But another SNC leader, the Muslim Brotherhood representative Mohammed Riyad al-Shaqfa, has been openly advocating military intervention and a Turkish-imposed demilitarized zone.

BG: Such contradictory positions have indeed been voiced, and this is a result of poor communication during the period in which the SNC was being formed, and of SNC members not respecting what we agreed to from the outset. I am the sole official spokesman for the coalition until someone else is appointed. This applies until further notice. The SNC founding statement spells out its rejection of military intervention, and affirms our commitment to Syrian sovereignty and independence.

The SNC is opposed to foreign military intervention whether that happens via a NATO mandate or some other way. Anyone who says otherwise is expressing a personal opinion that does not reflect the SNC's position. But it is also necessary to remind everyone that it is the regime's bloody policies that are encouraging intervention, not the opposition or the revolutionary forces. We must appreciate that the threat of intervention will increase if the regime insists on escalating its violence against the defenseless people.

EK: Do you think that the popular movement inside Syria supports foreign military intervention?

BG: Some in the movement inside Syria do indeed support military intervention, because they live under shelling and violence and want the massacres stopped in any way. In fact, they do not seek intervention, but an end to the systematic violence to which they are being subjected. That is what international protection for civilians would entail. All peoples subjected to crimes against humanity are entitled to it. In any case, military intervention is not on the cards at present. This has been confirmed by all the diplomats we meet. The problem today is the bloodshed, not prospective military intervention, because there is no danger of it happening and we do not want it anyway. It's clear what we mean by international protection, and that too has nothing to do with creating a weapons-free zone on the Turkish border or elsewhere.

EK: Is the international protection you are demanding intended to protect civilians or to topple the regime?

BG: Our goal is to protect civilians. Toppling the regime is the task of the Syrian people, not foreign forces. But protection would certainly help sustain the revolution and expand the base of those participating in it.

EK: How do you think it would be possible to topple the regime?

BG: By continuing the revolution, increasing internal and external pressure on the regime, and expanding the scope of the uprising. Greater internal and external pressure can bring down the regime.

EK: Are you counting on a split in the army, or the militarization of the revolution?

BG: We stress the need for the revolution to remain peaceful. That is its greatest strength, and it must retain it to achieve victory and maintain its profoundly popular nature. If the struggle were to be militarized, it would become a fight between regime militias and popular militias. The regime has been trying to lead us into this trap from the start. For our part we are not counting on deserters from the Syrian army, but on the possibility of major political rifts occurring within the regime once internal and external pressures peak.

EK: To what extent can it be said that the establishment of the SNC was the result of a political accommodation between the US, Turkey, France, and the Muslim Brotherhood? What foreign support do you have?

BG: The SNC is not the product of any understanding or agreement with any country, but purely of Syrian will. We in the SNC donate our money and ourselves, and are not paid anything. Turkey might be keen on an understanding with the Muslim Brotherhood, but that does not reflect in any way on the work or structure of the SNC.

EK: Do you in the SNC have any contact or cooperation with Rifaat Assad or Abdel Halim Khaddam, directly or indirectly?

BG: We view these two individuals as part of the regime, or redundant parts of the regime. We have no connection to them and would not cooperate with them under any circumstances.

EK: Only Libya has so far recognized the Syrian National Council. Does the fact that you have not yet secured international recognition count as an early defeat?

BG: This is not a question, but a provocation. The SNC has only just been born, and the formation of its bodies is still to be finalized. We have not yet requested recognition. But we are certain that widespread international recognition awaits us. The Libyan brethren took the initiative, and we thank them for that. But we have not yet begun our external tours aimed at securing international recognition. We will start, of course, in the Arab world. Then we will move on to the regional countries, with Europe to follow, and then North and South America.

EK: Hezbollah's ongoing support for the Syrian regime is based on its conviction that the Lebanese resistance depends on it, and that a new regime may play into Israel's hands in this respect. How would you comment?

BG: Hezbollah's hostility to the rights of the Syrian people and its contempt for their sacrifices is unacceptable and unjustifiable by any standards. The Syrian people are not and will not be opposed to the resistance. Syria has territory of its own that is occupied by Israel. That said, the future democratic Syria's relations with any resistance movements will depend on their willingness to coordinate with the Syrian government.

EK: Are you in contact with the Lebanese government, or the current Lebanese opposition which, in the March 14 context, supports you?

BG: We do not want to get into the Lebanese political game, and we do not want to add to the existing tensions on the Lebanese scene.

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