

Confidence Building Measures



المنطة المدنية السورية

Syrian Civil Society Platform



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Before we look at measures that could restore trust between sides, a discussion is necessary on the definition of political transition in Syria. Each side defines political transition according to their own perspective, and according to their pursuit of interests on a national, or international scale, in the case of Russia and the United States. A good example is the contradicting interpretations of the Geneva I declaration, among others. This led us to define and specify the aim of the political transition that we seek in the Syrian Civil Platform as follows:

The Syrian Civil Society Platform (SCP) views political transition as the process in which authority and power is transferred from the current ruling authority to a new authority in a peaceful way, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), especially Geneva I and other related resolutions, the last of which is resolution number 2254.

To initiate political transition, there needs to be a set of measures that restore trust, not only between both sides, but also in the overall negotiation process, and a restoration of Syrians' trust in the international community under the auspices of the UN. Such measures can be divided into general measures related to the political process on a national level, and other measures that take into consideration the local Syrian context when starting out on any political track. This is the methodology that the SCP adopts in determining measures for building trust and confidence.

First – Confidence Building Measures at the National Level:

1. A comprehensive ceasefire.
2. Delivery of humanitarian aid to besieged cities and towns.
3. Lifting the siege on besieged cities and towns.
4. Producing lists of detainees' names and locations.
5. Revealing the condition and location of missing people.
6. Ending media campaigns that incite hatred.
7. Dismantling military checkpoints inside cities.
8. Rehiring of discharged employees.
9. Cracking down on sources of arms, and the expulsion of foreign militias from Syria.
10. Return of water, electricity and all public services, and ending their use as a weapon to make pressure.

Second - Confidence Building Measures at the Local Level:

As for Syrian government controlled areas, there are two major issues that can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Distrust between government forces and the pro-government militias (which are generally called 'Shabiha') on one hand, and the local community on the other hand. The required confidence building measures are: Ending the Shabiha's abuse of civilians; the government publishing the names of detainees; disclosing the fate of those who have disappeared; the opening of humanitarian corridors; ending all legal procedures against opposition members, political activists and opinion figures; and dismantling all security checkpoints.
- 2- Adverse economic situation: Lifting economic sanctions that harm the Syrian people as soon as the transition process begins.

As for opposition controlled areas, confidence building measures are summarised (in addition to the ceasefire) as follows: lifting the siege; delivering humanitarian aid and restoring basic services such as water and electricity to besieged areas; rehiring discharged employees; positioning all military brigades outside cities; removing checkpoints inside cities; sending the army back to its barracks; and considering any attempt to besiege any area as a hostile activity that threatens the implementation of the whole process.



Details of Confidence Building Measures in Each Syrian Governorate:

1 - Homs		
Problem	Suggested Solution	Outcome
Areas under opposition control are facing random shelling on a daily basis by various kinds of heavy artillery, rocket-propelled grenades and the Syrian government's air force shells. This shelling is concentrated in places where civilians gather which leads to severe damage, death or injuries that lead to permanent disabilities and the loss of basic necessities in opposition areas.	Comprehensive Ceasefire	Reduction in the intensity of the armed conflict, and returning life to normal in opposition controlled areas.
The systematic process of arbitrary detentions led to a loss of confidence and widened the gap between sections of the Syrian people; there are detainees who have been in absentia for more than five years, in addition to the unknown fate of a large number of detainees in Syrian government prisons.	Release detainees. Reveal the condition and whereabouts of the missing.	Has a positive outcome in calming people down.
The participation of the Syrian government's army along with its savage practices and massacres led to widespread popular resentment against the army.	Pull the army out of cities	Limiting the army's involvement with civilians will reduce the severity of the conflict, as the presence of the army in daily life contributes to fuelling the conflict.
Increased humanitarian suffering due to the siege by Syrian government forces of opposition controlled areas in Homs city: al-Wa'er neighbourhood and the northern countryside of Homs from Granada in the west up to al-Qoniterat in the east, and al-Houla. The suffering in these areas is made worse by lack of most food substances, fuel and other basic necessities.	Lift the siege	Reducing the effects of more than 5 years of violent war by allowing various commercial products to enter besieged areas.



2- Hama		
Problem	Suggested Solutions	Outcome
Shelling	Halt all forms of shelling by airstrikes, long range missiles, cluster bombs, napalm and phosphorus, especially on hospitals, rescue and relief centres and on civilian neighbourhoods.	Will mitigate the severity of the armed conflict, and return life to normal in opposition controlled areas.
Arbitrary Detention	Reveal the condition and whereabouts of detainees and those who have been abducted and forcefully disappeared.	Will calm people down and create an atmosphere of trust.
Siege	Open a civilian corridor under international auspices to neutralize services and ease the movement of injured civilians and the chronically ill to receive treatment outside this area. Work on delivering aid and civil supplies such as diesel and fuel to hospitals and bakeries.	The benefit will be widespread as most of the countryside is under the opposition's control, and the Syrian government has to import its agricultural and food materials. The exchange of trade can be a direct factor in reducing market prices for both sides.

3- Quneitra		
Problem	Suggested Solutions	Outcome
Absence of all necessary services: health, education, telephone, water, electricity and garbage collection due to the lack of a funding agency to provide for such services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooperation between different agencies that are supporting the services sector; active organisations on the ground or the transitional (interim) government. Open checkpoints, end the prosecution of employees and settle their status. Find a mechanism for employees to receive their salaries without going to Syrian government areas, where they risk detention.• Rehabilitate service centres and supply them with necessary equipment to function instead of being lost or destroyed.• Draft and sign memorandums of understanding between local councils and governmental administration that manages service departments to ensure the safety of employees and to facilitate collaborative work on services.	Will mitigate the suffering of people and erase the grudges accumulated by war. Will help encourage both sides to have good intentions and prepare for negotiations between the government and the opposition to accept a political solution.



4- Daraa		
Problem	Suggested Solutions	Outcome
Water and electricity cuts in Syrian government and opposition held areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reach an agreement in which the Syrian government secures the necessary fuel to run the water pumping station for the weekly duration needed, while the opposition repairs the water line feeding the government controlled areas in Daraa city. This agreement was reached and work was commissioned a short time ago.In the Western region, the opposition will pump drinking water to security centres in exchange for supplying fuel and all forms of necessary combustibles and electricity to liberated areas.	Assist in finding common ground to build mutual trust in order to establish collaborative continuity in solving the problems of daily life and mitigating the suffering of civilians.
Captives and bodies of dead Syrian government soldiers held by the armed opposition, and detainees held by the government.	Coordinate prisoner swaps and mediate between both sides to collect the names of detainees to present them to the Syrian government. The government should release them in exchange for the release of captives or the bodies of dead soldiers held by each armed brigade.	Will contribute to calming people down and creating an atmosphere of trust.

5- Aleppo: Confidence Building Measures are Summarised as Follows:

- Cessation of aerial bombardment by Syrian and Russian air forces, and halting any form of shelling by any opposition force on Syrian government controlled areas.
- Releasing detainees, and considering any criminal charges and trials held by the Syrian government against opposition members to be political charges and trials.
- Considering detainees as forcefully disappeared even if they were tried under a terrorism court, and considering this terrorism court to be an exceptional court.
- Disclosing the fate of the disappeared as per the documentation tables provided.
- Releasing detainees held by all sides of the conflict.
- Lifting the siege on all areas and easing the entry of humanitarian aid.
- Considering any attempt at imposing a partial or full siege on any area to be a hostile act that threatens the whole political process.
- Pulling back the army to its barracks at a later stage.
- Starting to ease the return of refugees and the displaced to their own lands.
- Dismantling the security agencies and restructuring the army.



6- Areas under the control of the PYD: includes large areas of Hasakeh governorate, Tal Abyad in Raqqa's countryside and Afrin in Aleppo's countryside. Confidence Building Measures on the Local Level are as Follows:

The Problem:

Lack of trust between the PYD and the Kurdish National Council: this problem started after the PYD-controlled Democratic Self Administration took control of areas in Hasakeh governorate, Kobani and Afrin in Aleppo after the retreat of Syrian government forces from these areas to different locations. The Self Administration established a military force including the People's Protection Units (YPG), Women's Protection Units (YPJ), the Asayish and other special security forces such as the Counter-Terrorism Forces (HAT). The problem then escalated between the Self Administration declared by the PYD party and the Kurdish National Council (which is part of the opposition coalition) after the PYD consolidated its authority over these areas and excluded remaining parties.

A series of unilateral measures by the PYD on the ground further contributed to the lack of trust: military conscription; imposing taxes and royalties; imposing its ideology on people by force; banning protests and freedom of expression; arrests of politicians and activists; closing other parties' offices and attempts to end their political existence; and exploiting all resources to serve its aims and benefit its own political party. These unilateral measures reflected negatively on society and on people's lives and led to the emigration of thousands of youth and families, which threatens the social structure, in addition to fears of dangerous demographic changes to the region.

Measures:

1. Ending retaliatory media campaigns.
2. Cessation of daily violations such as military conscription, detention, property confiscation and imposed taxes.
3. Allowing other parties to engage in political activity and to set up offices.
4. Allowing protests and freedom of expression.
5. Allowing civil organisations to enter and ensuring that they can work freely.

7- Areas under the control of the Islamic State Organisation (ISIS/Daesh):

The most important problems that civilians suffer from:

1. Diseases and the spread of pollution, lack of food, medicine and the absence of service providers to mitigate the suffering of civilians.
2. Patients residing in ISIS areas. As far as ISIS is concerned, it allows patients who have no means of treatment to leave. Meanwhile, patients from the Syrian government areas should be allowed to fly for treatment. There is another issue of compulsory camps in al-Sweida, al-Damir and Adra where patients are prevented from traveling to Damascus for treatment. There is also the problem of border crossing points with Turkey; this should be dealt with to allow humanitarian cases to cross, especially patients and the injured to mitigate their suffering without exploitation from workers at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing.
3. Shelling of ISIS controlled areas. The following must be done:
 - Identifying military targets accurately as it is hard to separate ISIS bases from civilians.
 - Offsetting the risk of shelling of medical points, hospitals, civilian gatherings and markets, and refraining from targeting them under any pretext.
 - Admitting responsibility for all aerial shelling operations executed so far, and taking responsibility for their consequences.



- Relying on medical points and hospitals to communicate with their staff and with trusted activists.
- Relying on relatives of victims and eyewitness testimonies in documenting the outcome of shelling.

4. The problem of communicating with residents in areas under ISIS control: the following should be done:

- Broadcasting radio/internet through satellites to areas under ISIS control.
- Supporting media outlets.
- Messages through social media platforms.
- Messages could be transferred through community leaders using media and social media outlets.

Among the general confidence building measures:

- Avoiding the risk of shelling civilians under any pretext.
- Allowing the flow of medical and food aid.
- Allowing the movement of patients to receive treatment.
- Creating channels of communication with people.
- Holding meetings with refugees in camps and places of congregation.
- Making the voice of public opinion effective.
- Restoring trust between residents and community leaders.
- Gestures of goodwill/reassure residents about their future.
- Including residents' opinions in the negotiation process.
- Including the local community in the political process, and in the management of their needs and services.
- Stressing the importance and credibility of civil society's role in reviving the popular civil movement.
- Separating the humanitarian track from the political one. This will contribute to building trust and pushes forward the whole negotiation process.