



Interview with Dr. Wael al-Hafez*

Evangelos Diamantopoulos

English Translation: Ania Louka

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CEMMIS: Do you believe that the unrest in Syria could turn into civil war?

Wael al-Hafez: Do you believe that the unrest in Syria could turn into civil war? First of all it is not an «unrest», but a revolution. Our intention is not to cause civil war, but political change. Assad intends to cause civil war, president Bashar Al-Assad's adviser spoke of a civil war. For us, the Syrian people are ONE.

CEMMIS: What is the stance of the regional powers (Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia) on today's situation in Syria?

Wael al-Hafez: Israel does not want these developments in Syria, it is annoyed. Assad's regime had provided peace and quiet for them. But when Syria will become a democracy, Israel will have to comply with the UN and the international resolutions on peace in the region. Now, about Turkey, it supports its national interests and calm in Syria, in order to keep stability throughout the region, for example in Jordan and Lebanon. Iran is the other big loser of the game, given that until now it has been considered a regional power only through its ties with the Syrian regime. The latter allows Iran to keep providing arms to Lebanon's Hezbollah and to advance its position inside Iraq because of the influence it has on Syria. The changes in Syria will minimize Iran's power.

CEMMIS: And Saudi Arabia?

Wael al-Hafez: Saudi Arabia is also being influenced, because if the situation turns into chaos, as it would in case of sectarian clashes, it could spread throughout the region, to countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. That is why it has been trying to confine the situation in Syria. So, the interest of the Arabs, Europe and the whole world is the consolidation of democracy in Syria.

CEMMIS: Who are the supporters of Bashar Al-Assad inside Syria?

Wael al-Hafez: Apart from the secret services and the security forces in general, he is also supported by the governmental bodies. The country and the regime are

* *Head of the Political Bureau of the "Popular Movement for Change in Syria"*

two different things. Bashar has the regime, the security forces, the corrupt media, the Al-Sabiha paramilitary groups, and some people who have had relationships based on personal gain with the regime for all these years. Now that they see Bashar's imminent fall, they change sides. Bashar is gradually losing ground, everyday he is losing ground. He wants an open war, an armed confrontation, but the protestors insist on peaceful uprising.

CEMMIS: Let's assume that the regime falls. Do you believe that the opposition groups will be able to cooperate in the post-Assad era?

Wael al-Hafez: For the time being, we are in a struggle against Assad and we disagree on which is the quickest way to get rid of him. In the transitory period after Assad, we will have to stay united in order to maintain peace and a widespread security in the country. After that, we move on to elections, which will be the ones to define the future of the country.

CEMMIS: What do you anticipate from Greece and Europe in general?

Wael al-Hafez: We see Greece as a nation of civilization and we have traditional ties with the country. Greece plays a central role in Arab history, as it provided us with science and knowledge. We admire the Greek civilization, the Greek people and the Mediterranean Sea has always acted as a route of communication between us. We love Greece. Greece plays an important role in Europe. We keep telling the European governments and the European Union that stability in the Middle East and in Syria, real stability, requires democracy.

CEMMIS: If the Transitional Council succeeded in taking the power, would it change Syria's foreign policy?

Wael al-Hafez: Bashar al-Assad's foreign policy is based on threats and false promises. He threatens the Gulf countries with Iran, he threatens Iran with Turkey, he threatens Europe with non-existent Islamic fanaticism, and he reassures Israel that he will guarantee Israel's borders if he remains in power. We will have positive relationships and friendship with all the peoples of the world.

CEMMIS: Is there any kind of foreign interference in Syria? If yes, by whom?

Wael al-Hafez: There is military intervention by Iran and by those in Lebanon who are supported by Iran, namely Hezbollah. Five days ago a hundred buses filled with Iranians and supporters of Moqtada al Sadr from Iraq came to Syria and settled in Palmyra town, and we can see them. They came to suppress the uprisings in the towns Homs and Hama and to kill the citizens. Not so long ago, Hezbollah groups entered Homs from its western side. The Lebanese have been providing the Syrian army with military equipment. For days now, Russian ships deliver arms to the Syrian regime at Lattakia port. And while support is provided to the regime, we are waiting for Europe to support this peaceful and popular uprising, that only wants peace, with humanitarian aid, political support and UN resolutions, media coverage of the situation in Syria and we would also prefer that they support us with arms for the Free Syrian Army, that protects Syria's citizens.

CEMMIS: Would you support a Western military intervention similar to that in Libya?

Wael al-Hafez: No, we don't want bombings and destruction. We ask for safe areas for innocent civilians, safety zones. Also, we ask for no-fly zones, in order to prevent the military air force from killing people and a naval blockade to thwart the delivery of arms to Syria from Russia and Iran. We ask from the international community and the international organizations to issue a clear resolution for the protection of Syria's citizens. Also, we request the expulsion of the Syrian ambassadors from Syrian embassies around the world, because they are members of secret services, and we also request sanctions against the people of the regime.

CEMMIS: Do you see a humanitarian crisis, considering the Syrian refugees? What is your comment on the situation?

Wael al-Hafez: Four million, four million Syrians during the rule of Assad cannot return to their homeland for political reasons. Syria is the only country in the world, that if a citizen wants to visit his own country, he has to do an application and a request in order to be reviewed by the secret services. I haven't seen my parents in thirty three years.

CEMMIS: I am sorry for that...

Wael al-Hafez: Thank you, but now it is over, and God willing, everything is going to go well. We thank the Greek people for being friendly to us, they are very hospitable.

CEMMIS would like to thank Dr. Aref Alobeid for his valuable help in conducting this interview as well as for his interpretation from Arabic.