

## Munich Security Conference 2016

Speech by Riad Hijab at the 52nd Munich Security Conference  
14 February 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 52nd Munich Security Conference convenes against a backdrop of unprecedented security tensions in Syria and the region, due to a faltering political process, intensified Russian aerial bombardment and an increasingly rapid pace of external aggression on the Syrian people in different cities and regions.

The country is suffering from an appalling humanitarian situation as a result of operations launched by the regime and its allies, killing hundreds of thousands and displacing millions of Syrians. The level of destruction and devastation of infrastructure is insurmountable in its barbarity. The targeting of populated areas, public facilities, schools, hospitals, medical personnel and relief teams, in addition to forced displacement and the repressive policies of the regime, have and continue to contribute to the widening of the crisis and its spill-over beyond Syria's borders. Furthermore, these factors have and continue to contribute to the spread of extremism, terror groups and extremist cross-border militias.

Hundreds of Syrians die every day from air and artillery bombardment, poison gas, cluster bombs, torture, starvation, cold and drowning; it is horrifying that the largest percentage of the victims are civilians, especially women and children.

The implications of these horrific events on regional and international security are evident: we are now faced with a mass exodus of refugees and a colossal number of asylum seekers in various Arab and Western countries. We are also confronting concerted recruitment of young people from across Europe and other countries to fight alongside Da'esh. This is undoubtedly one of the most significant threats to global security. The Syrian people continue to live the horror in a state of utter despair following the failure of the international community to stop the violations committed against them.

One cannot focus on the appalling security and humanitarian situation in Syria in isolation of regional developments. The security balance in the Middle East is interlocked with regional and international security. The region's strategic importance extends across many continents due to its strategic significance to world powers, and those with deeply entrenched interests.

It could be argued that the current security deterioration in the region comes as a result of growing regional and international conflict and rivalry over the Syria, which has now effectively turned into a failed state because of the wilfulness of Assad and his clique to remain in power despite losing legitimacy, sovereignty and control over the territory. The regime remains reliant on the support of the Iran-Russia axis; these powers have opted for direct military intervention against

the Syrian Revolution, which could engulf the entire region to the brink of a devastating war between various powers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The past five years have marked significant shifts in both the security and military environments. Most notably, strategic importance has shifted away from major regional players to other locations with geographically ambiguous futures, in a fierce battle with terrorism, which has established a foothold in failed states and has targeted Arab as well as Western capitals, and is casting a huge web over the young people of this century. It is clear that the survival and continuation of repressive regimes pose a risk to global security, particularly due to their exclusive dependence on security and military institutions, rather than legitimacy and popular support.

Instead of taking responsible initiatives to address these threats, some world powers exploited the fragility of these countries to expand their sphere of influence by exploiting existing contentious and divisive issues to secure their strategic interests with callous regard for the interests of the people of those countries.

We therefore argue that the solution to the Syrian crisis lies in: neutralising the external forces of Russia, Iran, and their militias in stopping their hostile aggression, and aerial bombing of civilians, and to fight the real source of terrorism in all its forms. Followed by launching the process for political transition within a pluralistic system inclusive of all Syrians, by establishing a transitional governing body with full executive authority. Assad and his despotic regime, with their horrifyingly bloodied past, will have no role in this transition or any future political arrangements.

Since its inception on the 10th of December 2015, the Supreme Commission for Negotiations made a strategic decision to pursue the political process and complement international efforts to achieve a political transition through negotiations sponsored by the United Nations. You have witnessed the cohesion and solidarity of the Syrian opposition, and its ability to work cooperatively within a unified vision for the future of Syria.

However, the regime and its allies remain unwilling to accept the inevitable outcomes of the political process, which will remove the country from a state of chaos to one of civil peace. Without doubt, repressive states cannot survive nor flourish, for such states are not in harmony with their populations; their security and their interests are contradictory to those of their populations.

As the General Coordinator of the Commission, I take the opportunity during this important annual conference to reiterate that the security threats my country and other countries in the region are facing, makes it imperative for the international community to formulate appropriate strategies, compatible with the size and scope of the threats and ongoing transformations, particularly that these clearly have bearing on the internal security and regional security of countries around the world.

To achieve this, an appropriate atmosphere for negotiations must be created, especially with regard to: lifting the siege and blockades, enabling access for humanitarian aid to all those in need, releasing detainees, halting air and artillery bombardment against civilians and civilian targets, and insisting on all parties to immediately honour their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Last but not least, to cease forced displacement and all other violations which the UN has described as war crimes.

We must therefore emphasise that the most effective way to eliminate Da'esh and other extremist groups begins with the removal of the Assad regime, which utilises terrorism as a pretext to prolong its stay in power. Furthermore, fighting terrorism in Syria requires the removal of all foreign fighters, mercenaries and sectarian groups supported by Iran; who have fuelled sectarian tensions and committed humanitarian violations against the Syrian people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This fifty-second annual conference, taking place in Germany, carries many important meanings, which must be noted. This conference should remind us of the resilience of the European people to recover from the traumas of the first half of the twentieth century following the two world wars. These wars had grave detrimental impacts on international security. But it was not until Europe shook off the afflictions of totalitarianism, fascism and Nazism which spread the spirit of hatred, intolerance, injustice and discrimination, that it was able to achieve development and prosperity.

The allied forces could not have won that war with a policy of appeasing dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, which they must confront with decisiveness.

I speak to you on behalf of a people who despite the incredible suffering are still full of spirit and determination to struggle for a return to their homeland, aspiring for a better future.

I am here to convey to you the aspirations of a nation looking from underneath the rubble of demolished homes to the dawn of a new renaissance where there is no room for repression, injustice and discrimination.

Thank you.