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## Saudi Arabia warns of Syria crisis' regional spillover



Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, in a statement to the Arab League read by Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, warned of serious repercussions of the Syrian crisis on the Middle East' regional security.

King Abdullah said the Syrian regime of embattled President Bashar al-Assad is bent to spoil any initiative to achieve a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Syrian opposition representatives took the country's seat for the first time at an Arab League summit that opened in Qatar on Tuesday, a significant diplomatic boost for the forces fighting President Bashar Assad's regime. In a ceremonious entrance accompanied by applause, a delegation led by Moaz al-Khatib, the former president of the main opposition alliance - the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition - took the seats assigned for Syria at the invitation of Qatar's emir, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. Al-Khatib used the forum to call for a greater U.S. role in aiding the rebels and said he had appealed to Secretary of State John Kerry to consider using NATO Patriot anti-missile batteries in Turkey to help defend northern Syria against strikes by Assad's forces. The decision for the opposition to take Syria's seat was made at the recommendation of Arab foreign ministers earlier this week in the Qatari capital, Doha. The Arab League in 2011 suspended the Syrian government's membership in the organization as punishment for the regime's crackdown on opponents. The Qatari ruler, who chairs the summit, said the Syrian opposition deserves "this representation because of the popular legitimacy they have won at home and the broad support they won abroad and the historic role they have assumed in leading the revolution and preparing for building the new Syria." The diplomatic triumph and Qatar's praise, however, could not conceal the disarray within the top ranks of the Syrian opposition. Besides al-Khatib, the Syrian delegation included Ghassan Hitto, recently elected prime minister of a planned interim government to administer rebel-held areas in Syria, and two prominent opposition figures, George Sabra and Suheir Atassi. Khatib however was the one who did the speaking, after the opposition flag was raised in place of the official Syrian bunting. "We demand ... all forms of support from our friends and brothers including our full right for self-defense and the seat of Syria at the United Nations and at other international organizations," he told the summit. He called for a "freezing of the funds of the regime which it had stolen from our people," estimated by the opposition at around two billion dollars. He also stressed that the Syrian people alone would determine the future of their country. "They ask who will rule Syria. The people of Syria will decide, not any other state in this world," Khatib said, possibly alluding to accusations by Damascus that the rebels are implementing Qatari and Saudi agendas.