

**Special Report**

# **The End Game in Syria**

**Adnan Khan**  
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<sup>a</sup>Israeli occupied with current status subject to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement; <sup>b</sup>Israeli occupied with current status subject to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement;

**“The [US] administration has figured out that if they don’t start doing something, the war will be over and they won’t have any influence over the combat forces on the ground. They may have some influence with various political groups and factions, but they won’t have influence with the fighters, and the fighters will control the territory.”**

*Jeffrey White, former Defense Intelligence Agency intelligence officer and specialist on the Syrian military<sup>1</sup>*

**“Sunni rebels appear poised for victory. It’s vitally important for the Obama administration to discourage a new Syrian government from supplanting the secular dictatorship with a more dangerous regime based on Islamic law. Another Islamic state in the Middle East could threaten regional residents with more religious tyranny, perpetual war with neighbours and another caliphate.”**

*Fred Gedrich, the Washington Times<sup>2</sup>*

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# Introduction

Russia's deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov, admitted on December 13<sup>th</sup> 2012, what many have known for some time. Russia's official admitted that that the Syrian government may be defeated by opposition forces as al-Assad's forces were "*losing more and more control and territory.*"<sup>3</sup> The death toll in the country is now approaching 70,000 people since the conflict began.<sup>4</sup>

The revolution in Syria is has now been raging for two years. The massacres by the al-Assad regime are beamed around the world on a daily basis and have almost become normalised. The people of Syria rose up against the brutal rule of Bashar al-Assad in spite of the brutal tactics of suppression used to quell the uprising. With little in the way of weaponry and with massacres being carried out across the country the people of Syria caused a stalemate with the Syrian regime and now have regime forces on the retreat. The Ummah continues to show tremendous metal in the face of tanks, fighter jets and artillery.

What began with a single man in the markets of Tunisia spread to thousands on the streets of Cairo and evolved to hundreds of thousands demanding political change for the entire region. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia created a sweeping wave, which crossed the artificial borders in the region until it reached Syria. It was only natural it would engulf Syria as the people of the country have suffered for decades under the brutal rule of the al-Assad's who rule the country like the mafia.

The uprising in Syria has many moving parts and the outcome in the country will determine the future direction of the Arab spring. This has kept the international community fully engaged in the evolution of the crisis. Syria is now the official battleground between those who wish to see the nation continue playing a role in protecting foreign interests in the region and those who wish to change the destiny of the country and make it representative of their values and independent from outside interference.

This special report from Khilafah.com will look at Syria past, present and the future. It will look at emergence of Islam in Al-Sham and the impact it has left on the people of the region. The report will highlight the creation of modern Syria by the Sykes-Picot agreement between the French and British, which brought the Alawi's out from the wilderness and for the first time into a position of power. It will highlight how foreign interference has remained in the country to this very day though different guises and how the Ba'athist regime has protected foreign interests. As the uprising in Syria has evolved it has been interesting observing the changing positions of the world's powers to the developments on the ground, these will be analysed in order to accurately highlight their indifference to the demands of the indigenous people of Syria.

This special report will analyse Basher al-Assad's strategy for survival and why he has failed to halt the advance of the opposition groups. The opposition has been very successful in reducing the

regimes grip to pockets around the country and Damascus, even though they lack numbers, weapons and capability. This report will analyse the different elements that make up the opposition and their strategy for overthrowing the regime and why they have been so successful.

With the end game now clearly in sight the day after scenario will be looked at, focusing on the polices and challenges that will need to be dealt with.

Imam Ahmad and Tirmidhi narrated in their respected collections on the authority of Zaid ibn Thabit that the Prophet (saw) said, 'How blessed is al-Sham? The companions around asked: 'Why is that? The messenger (saw) replied, *'I see the angels of Allah spreading their wings over al-Sham.'*

Adnan Khan  
28 Rabi' al-Thani 1434  
10<sup>th</sup> March 2013

# Protests Emerge From Many Corners of Syria's Diverse Population

— Shiites

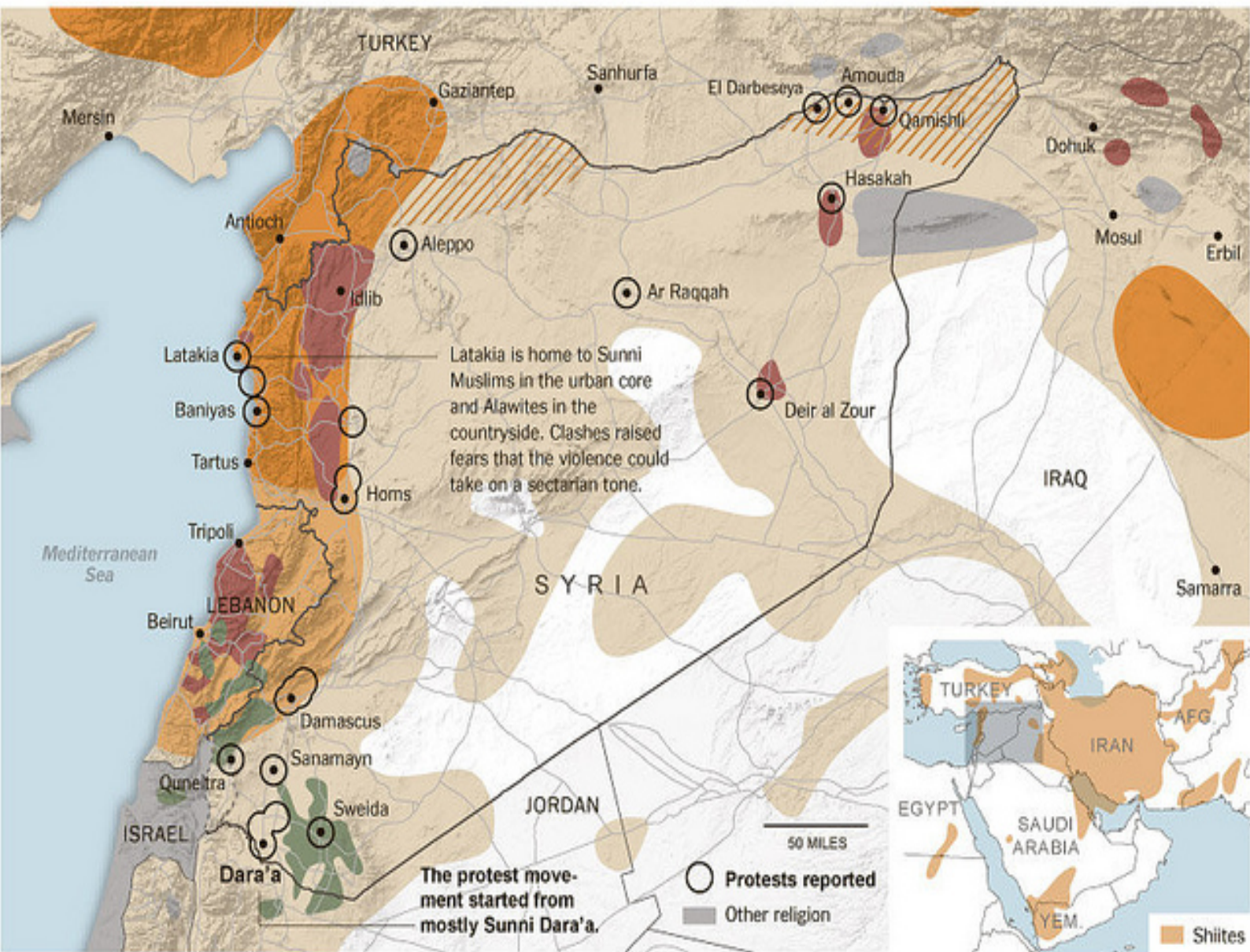
**Alawites**, whose faith is an offshoot of **Shiite** Islam, are a minority, but hold most of the top positions in the government and military. President Bashar al-Assad's family is Alawite.

**Christians**, who are largely supportive of President Assad, hold a number of senior government positions.

The **Druse** population is generally considered supportive of the government, but **protests have been reported in Druse areas**.

The majority of Syrians are **Sunni**. Tensions with Alawites have been made worse by four decades of Shiite control.

Until recently, many **Kurds** were considered noncitizens and didn't have equal access to education, health services and legal protections. **Protests have erupted in Qamishli, Amouda and Derabasiyeh**.



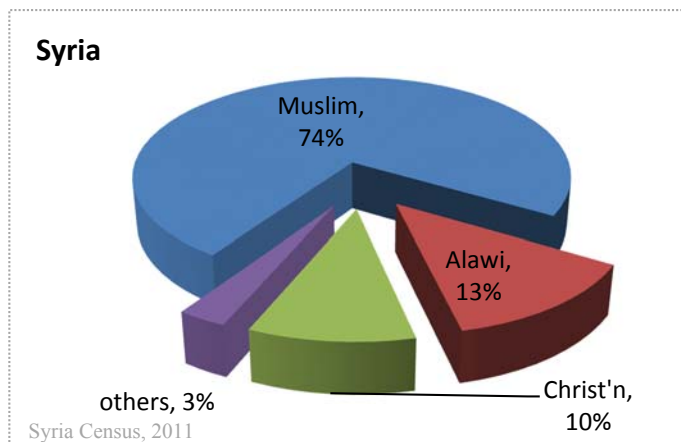
Sources: Dr. M. Izady, Columbia University's Gulf 2000 project; U.S. Department of State

NICOLAS RAFF/THE NEW YORK TIMES

# The Geopolitics of Syria

Modern Syria is located along the eastern Mediterranean Sea, bordering Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. Syria is composed diverse ethnic groups around mountainous terrain with Damascus as its heartland.

Today's Syria is much smaller than Al-Sham which spanned from Lebanon to the west and Jordan and Israel to the south. Its current borders were set by the British and French who carved up the region after WW1.



Syria's current population, based on the country's official census is 21.8 million. The country's population is composed of Muslims, Alawi's, Kurds, Druze, and Christians. 65% of the population is under the age of 35 and more than 40% under the age of 15.

Syria's ruling Alawi minority sits on the northern coastal plain to the west of the Jabal an Nusayriya mountains and to the north of the Anti-Lebanon mountains. Latakia has historically been the homeland of the Alawi's. Between these two ranges, the Homs Gap has often been the point of



invasions from the Mediterranean Sea. The interior region of the country is dominated by the majority Muslims.

The Syrian Desert is divided into two competing regions. The first, Damascus, is the historical capital and the seat of power for the Alawi's. The other, Aleppo, is situated in the agricultural heartlands in the north of the country. The Euphrates river divides this plateau from the much more arid Jazirah plateau and allows for irrigation in an otherwise desert region.

## Mineral wealth

Syria produces relatively modest quantities of oil and gas but the country's location is strategic in terms of energy transit. Syria's known oil reserves are mainly in the eastern part of the country in the Deir ez-Zor Governorate near its border with Iraq and along the Euphrates River; a number of smaller fields are located in the centre of the country

Syria accounts for just 0.5% of the global production and has just 2.5 billion barrels of proven oil reserves its two key production streams are the sour and heavy Souedie crude, which yields lower quality oil products, and the sweet and lighter Syrian Light grade. Syria has produced heavy-grade oil from fields located in the northeast since the late 1960s. In the early 1980s, light-grade, low-sulphur oil was discovered near Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria. More than half of Syria's oil output is processed at the state-run Baniyas (133,000 bpd) and Homs (107,000 bpd) refineries. But the country has to import gas oil and diesel to meet demand, much of it for oil-fired power generation. Some 150,000 barrels per day (bpd) of mostly sour Souedie crude are sold by state marketing firm Sytrol. Most is exported to Germany, Italy, and France, according to the International Energy Agency. Syria has three Mediterranean oil export/import terminals -- Baniyas, Tartous, and the smaller port of Latakia.

About half of the country's electricity is generated by burning refined oil, much of which has to be imported, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Oil production is controlled by the state-run Syrian Petroleum Company (SPC), which is responsible for about half of existing production in the country and takes 50% foreign companies operating in the energy sector include Royal Dutch Shell, French Total, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), India's Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), Canada's Suncor Energy, Britain's Petrofac and Gulsand's Petroleum, along with Russian oil company Tatneft and engineering firm Stroytransgaz. Foreign firms help Syria produce light crude and gas while state run firm Sytrol exclusively produces Souedie and markets it outside Syria.

## **Agriculture**

After oil processing the Syrian economy is dominated by Agriculture. Northern Syria watered by the Euphrates has for most of Syria's recent history made it self-sufficient in agriculture. The bulk of the country's exports are agricultural based, the bulk of manufacturing is based on agro processing, a large share of trade and commerce is based on agriculture, and many services are also linked to agricultural production. Furthermore, a large share of employment is provided by agriculture.

## **Security**

Syria has very little indigenous defence industry to speak of, thus leaving the country reliant on foreign procurement of military weapons and systems. However despite this it has for long been assembling Scud missiles in cooperation with North Korea and Iran. Syria's military industry also manufactures rockets, notably the 220 mm and 302 mm rockets, which are of Syrian design and have been absorbed by the Syrian forces and even passed on to Hamas.

The special security relations Syria has with Iran has also aided arms transfers into Syria. Both countries maintain close security relations and have jointly developed weapon systems, such as ballistic missiles. Iran has also provided Syria financial aid for arms purchases from Russia.

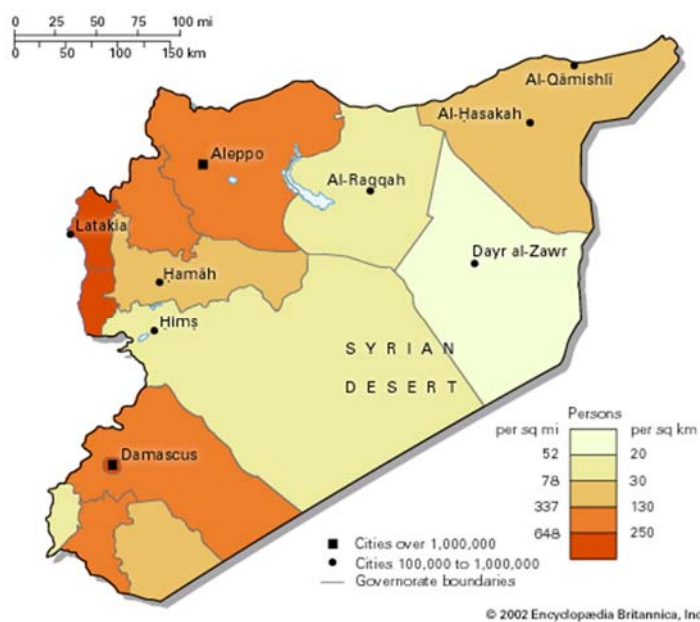


Today the Syrian military consists of air, ground, and navy forces. Active personnel are estimated as 295,000, with an additional 314,000 reserves. The majority of the Syrian military are Sunni, however most of the military leadership are Alawi. Whilst Alawi's make up 12% of the Syrian population, they are estimated to make up to 70% of the career soldiers in the Syrian Army. The military's most elite divisions are the Republican Guard and the 4th Mechanized Division, which are commanded by Bashar's brother, and are exclusively Alawi.

Only the air force consists mostly of Sunnis. The Syrian military has been configured to protect the interests of the al-Assad clan and subsequently the minority Alawi's of the country.

The Soviet Union was for long the principal source of training and military hardware for the Syrian forces. The collapse of the Soviet Union plunged it into a crisis, given the loss of their patron that had supplied them with arms and technical support. As a result, Syria stopped acquiring weapon systems, and over many years its military decreased in capability and as its arms became obsolete suffering from severe shortages of parts.

Syria's population primarily resides along the corridor that stretches from Dera'a, next to the border with Jordan in the South, through to the north of the country to Aleppo. With energy reserves on the border with Iraq as well as untapped offshore energy reserves the challenge any government faces in Syria is linking the different population centres through infrastructure development and distributing the nation's wealth.





# Islam and Al-Sham

Syria has a long history which stretches back over 10,000 years. The country has always been a place of interest to the world's powers. Its agricultural development and irrigation earned it the title of the 'fertile crescent.' Syria became a transit country for rulers from the East and West, who crossed it in pursuit of power and wealth. Cultures from all directions left their effects on Syria, including the Aremaeans, who were followed by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, Persians, and finally, Greek and Roman rulers. Thereafter Syria or al-sham came under the attention of the Muslims lead by the Prophet (saw) himself.

Al-Sham was a Roman colony where Roman culture and Christianity were predominant, it was under Roman rule for seven centuries prior to the Islamic conquest. Al-Sham included Palestine and all the desert plains north of the Hijaz to Anatolia. In 629 AD the Prophet (saw) sent forces to the Roman borders near Busra as punishment for the murder of a Muslim envoy. The battle that ensued was known as the Battle of Muta, where Khalid Bin Waleed was able to instil fear in the Romans with minimal casualties where the Muslims were outnumbered 6:1. This success aided Abu Bakr (ra) when he became khaleefah, who strove to carry through on the Prophet's (saw) vision to take Islam to the world.

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The conquest of Al-sham was undertaken in three phases. Southern Sham, bordering the Hijaz was first targeted, the Muslims came to easily dominate the open Southern countryside of sham due to very little resistance.

The second phase consisted of the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius sending his imperial army to combat the Muslims. This led to direct engagement between the armies and in 636 the battle of Yarmuk took place. The Byzantine imperial army was defeated as the Ghassanids - a Byzantine vassal state, were overthrown and following the Battle of Yarmuk, some 12,000 Ghassanid defected to the Muslim side - this was the decisive blow. This defeat broke the ability of the Byzantines to offer organised resistance in the face of the Muslims advance.

The final phase constituted the consolidation of the conquest into the Northern areas of Al-Sham. A number of towns were left alone to resist as the Byzantine army collapsed, they still put up some resistance. Damascus, Beirut and eventually Jerusalem were brought under Islam. The Muslim army pushed further into Armenia and Anatolia, Heraclius' homeland. The city was isolated from the remainder of Anatolia and having little hope of help from the Emperor, Antioch surrendered in 637 under the condition that all Byzantine troops would be given safe passage to Constantinople.

## Islamic Rule

The inhabitants of Al-Sham were promised security for their lives, property and churches, on payment of the Jizya. The integration of the Nestorian and Jacobite Christians and Jews was completed through this strategy as previously they were persecuted under Byzantine rule. Islamic rule was further consolidated when Damascus became capital of the Khilafah. Christianity in the Khilafah experienced a new and unprecedented level of revival and vigour. Nestorian and Jacobite theologians and philosophers became teachers in Islamic institutes and contributed to the flourishing of Science and learning in the region, Nestorian's also became the attending physicians of the Muslims.

The consolidation of Al-Sham, which included Palestine and Jerusalem, took place after the Byzantine army was shattered and routed. The Siege of Jerusalem lasted for four months and when all further resistance was hopeless the Patriarch, Sophronius (the head of the Christian defenders) capitulated on the terms that the Christians were to keep their churches and sanctuaries and that no one was to be forced to accept Islam. Sophronius insisted that these terms should be ratified by the Khaleefah Umar (ra) in person. Umar (ra) came himself to accept the surrender of Jerusalem. The Umari treaty was agreed, it was signed by Umar (ra) on behalf of the Ummah and witnessed by some of the Sahabah, hence in April 637 - Jerusalem was officially surrendered to the Muslims.

The Umari treaty became the template for Muslim - non-Muslim relations which included:

*In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent.*

*This is what the slave of Allah, Umar b.Al-Khattab, the Amir of the believers, has offered the people of Illyaa' of security granting them Amaan (protection) for their selves, their money, their churches, their children, their lowly and their innocent, and the remainder of their people. Their churches are not to be taken, nor are they to be destroyed, nor are they to be degraded or belittled, neither are their crosses or their money, and they are not to be forced to change their religion, nor is any one of them to be harmed. No Jews are to live with them in Illyaa' and it is required of the people of Illyaa' to pay the Jizya, like the people of the cities. It is also required of them to remove the Romans from the land; and whoever amongst the people of Illyaa' that wishes to depart with their selves and their money with the Romans, leaving their trading goods and children behind, then their selves, their trading goods and their children are secure until they reach their destination. Upon what is in this book is the word of Allah, the covenant of His Messenger, of the Khulafaa' and of the believers if they (the people of Illyaa') gave what was required of them of Jizya.<sup>5</sup>*

The application of Islam unified the different people in society by not intervening in their worships. It commanded their loyalty in return the Khilafah provided security and sanctuary. Arculf, a Frankish bishop who went on a pilgrimage to the city in the seventh century, gave the following account: *"The caliphs of Damascus (661-750) were enlightened and tolerant princes, on quite good terms with their Christian subjects. Many Christians (e.g. St. John Damascene, d. c. 754) held important offices at their court. The Abbasid caliphs at Baghdad (753-1242), as long as they ruled Syria, were also just and tolerant to the Christians. The famous Harun Abu-Ja-'afar (Harun al-*

*Rashid, 786-809) sent the keys of the Holy Sepulchre to Charlemagne who built a hospice for Latin pilgrims near the shrine."*<sup>6</sup>

## **Ummayyads**

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The Ummayyad's took over the reins of power in 661. Mu'awiyah bin Sufyaan (661-680) was the first of the Ummayyad rulers and enacted a policy of spreading Islam. Under the Ummayyads North-West Africa (Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), Spain, Western India and portions of Central Asia were added to the Islamic territories. Mu'awiyah also strengthened the military of the Khilafah, this included a powerful navy and the creation of military bases. Mu'awiyah had realised that the decisive battle against the then superpower the Byzantines would be at sea. Mu'awiyah's policies resulted in the creation of dockyards in Acre in Syria and also in Eastern Egypt which was in Muslim control by 641. By 649 the construction of 1000 fleet was complete. This policy also resulted in ship building factories being constructed at important ports such as Abla and Sirafin in the Persian Gulf, Tunis on the North African Coast, Sus in Morocco then after further victories facilities developed in Palermo and Messina in Sicily and Bari in Italy. Within a hundred years these ports also served as commercial centres for trade which facilitated the Khilafah's riches.

As a result of Ummayyad economic and military policies and with a supply line supported by two huge military bases and a powerful navy. In 711 the Berber turned Muslim Tariq ibn Ziyad, from around Tangier (modern day Morocco), with an army of around seven thousand three hundred crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and began the conquest of Spain.

The Ummayyads also minted the first standard coinage. This replaced the Byzantine and Persian coins, which until the reign 'Abd al-Malik were the sole currency in circulation. 'Abd al-Malik coined *Dirhams* in specific Islamic style carrying Islamic texts engraved upon the *Dirhams* in Kufic script after abandoning the Persian style. He coined *Dinars* in a specific Islamic style and engraved upon them Islamic texts with Kufic Arabic script while abandoning the previous Byzantine style. After Abdul Malik had coined *Dirhams* and *Dinars* in a specific Islamic style, Muslims had their distinct currency in a unique Islamic style and they abandoned other people's currency. This under the Abbasids resulted in the development and sophistication of the system of banking and exchange.

## **Ottomans**

The Uthmani Khilafah ruled over Syria from 1616 and divided the region into four wilayah's: Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli and Sidon (in modern Lebanon). The industrial revolution and subsequent colonization of the world by Western powers brought the Islamic territories to the

attention of preying Western eyes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Napoleon led European colonialism into North Africa and the Middle East. The French, British and Italians divided the region into their spheres of influence.

The breakout of WW1 led to the Uthmani's to side with Germany, the subsequent defeat at the hands of the allied powers led to the break-up of the Uthmani Khilafah. The British spy TE Lawrence "on behalf of his majesty" promised Prince Faisal of the Hashemite royal family in Mecca Arab independence in return for his cooperation against German and Uthmani rule. Anglo-Arabian troops moved to Damascus in 1918 and Faisal in 1920 was elected king by a Syrian Provisional Congress. The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 had, however, divided the region between France and Britain. France received Syria and Lebanon, Britain took Iraq and Transjordan/Palestine. French troops moved into Damascus and expelled Faisal to Palestine. The Treaty of Sèvres confirmed the new colonial situation. France separated Lebanon from Syria and founded a new state of "Greater Lebanon." The French divided the remaining area of Syria into four parts. The result was the districts of Aleppo, Latakia (where the Alawi's were located), Damascus and Jebel Druze to the south.

The last French troop left Syria in 1946 and ever since April 17 is the day Syria celebrates its Independence Day.



# Syria and the Alawi's

The Alawi's trace their origins from the ninth century. In 859, Ibn Nusayr, a follower of the eleventh Imam, Hassan al-'Askari declared himself the *bab* 'gateway to truth'. On the basis of this authority, Ibn Nusayr proclaimed a host of new doctrines which, brought Alawism into existence and rendered him an apostate. Alawi beliefs include holding Imam Ali divine as well as holding the Alawi faith in strict secrecy from outsiders. The five pillars of Islam are viewed as symbolic only and therefore not practiced. Alawi's are much closer to Christianity as they celebrate most of their festivals, they also believe in reincarnation. Thus the Alawi's are not remotely close to the Shi'ah and their beliefs are what led them to being ostracised from Islamic society for most of their history.

Centuries of hostility defined the Alawi psyche. They acquired a reputation as fierce and unruly mountain people who resisted paying taxes they owed the authorities and frequently plundered other villagers. Alawi's retreated to the mountains and have historically taken Latakia as their homeland. Lacking any political power, isolated from the larger polities around them the decline of the Uthmani Khilafah could not have come sooner. By the time WW1 came about the Alawi's were considered the poorest in the East. It was when the French took hold of both modern Lebanon and Syria in 1920 that Alawi fortunes changed.

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The Alawi's adopted a pro-French position even before the French conquest of Damascus in July 1920. According to Yusuf al-Hakim, a prominent Syrian politician, "*The 'Alawi's saw themselves in a state of grace after hell; accordingly, they were dedicated to the French mandate and did not send a delegation to the [General] Syrian Congress.*"<sup>7</sup> The Alawi's rebelled against Prince Faisal, whom they suspected of wanting to dominate them, they launched a rebellion against his rule in 1919, using French arms. General Gouraud received a telegram in late 1919 from 73 Alawi chiefs representing different tribes, who asked for "*the establishment of an independent Nusayri union under our absolute protection.*"<sup>8</sup>

The French, similar to their colonial strategy in Africa were looking to consolidate their rule through forging links with minorities. French efforts to cooperate with minorities meant the Alawi's gained political autonomy, the state of Latakia was set up on 1 July 1922. They also gained legal autonomy; a 1922 decision to end Sunni control of court cases involving Alawi's transferred these cases to Alawi jurists. The Alawi state enjoyed low taxation and a sizeable French subsidy. Not surprisingly, Alawi's accepted all these changes with enthusiasm. At the time when resistance movements were mounted against the French mandate, when Damascus, Aleppo, and the Hawran witnessed continuous rebellions on behalf of Islamic unity and independence, the Alawi's were blessing the division of the country into tiny statelets.



In return, the Alawi's helped maintain French rule. They turned out in large numbers when most Syrians boycotted the French-sponsored elections of January 1926. They provided a disproportionate number of soldiers to the government, forming about half the eight infantry battalions making up the *Troupes Spéciales du Levant*, serving as police, and supplying intelligence.<sup>9</sup> As late as May 1945, the vast majority of *Troupes Spéciales* remained loyal to their French commanders. Alawi's broke up demonstrations by Muslims, shut down strikes, and quelled rebellions. The Alawi's publicly favoured the continuation of French rule, fearing that France's departure would lead to a reassertion of Muslim control over them. Henri de Jouvenel, the French High Commissioner for Syria (1925-27), quoted a leading Alawi politician telling him: "*We have succeeded in making more progress in three or four years than we had in three or four centuries, leave us therefore in our present situation.*"<sup>10</sup>

The French mandate provided the critical boost to the Alawi's. The French spent years trying to legitimise and support the Alawi's against the Sunni majority, the French even had the Nusayri's change their name to Alawi's to emphasize the sect's connection to Ali (ra) and to the Shia'ah. Along with the Druze and Christians, the Alawi's enabled France to build a more effective counterweight to the Sunni Muslims in managing the French colonial asset.

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The French reversed Uthmani designs of the Syrian security apparatus which allowed for the influx of Alawi's into military, police and intelligence posts to suppress challenges to French rule. Consequently, the end of the French mandate in 1946 was a defining moment for the Alawi's, who by then had got their first real taste of a privileged life after centuries of poverty.

The Alawi's dominated the armed forces upon the French departure. While Muslims occupied the top posts within the military, the lower ranks were filled by Alawi's who could not afford the military exemption fees paid by most of the Muslims. The seed was thus planted for an Alawi-led military coup. The 1950's 1960' and 1970's was a period of intense struggle between the British and the US which led to numerous coups and counter coups in the region.

The birth of the Ba'ath party in Syria in 1947 was a key tool for eventual Alawi domination of Syria. The Baathist campaign of secularism, socialism and Arab nationalism provided the ideal platform and political vehicle to organize and unify around. In 1963, Ba'athist power was cemented through a military coup led by President Amin al-Hafiz, who discharged many ranking Muslim officers, thereby providing openings for hundreds of Alawi's to fill top-tier military positions. This measure tipped the balance in favour of Alawi officers who staged a coup in 1966 and for the first time placed Damascus in the hands of the Alawi's.

The bloodless military coup led by then-air force commander and Defence Minister Gen. Hafez al

Assad against his Alawi rival, Salah Jadid in 1970, Alawi rivalries and Syria's string of coups and counter-coups were also put to rest. The Alawi's of Syria remain composed of four tribes: Matawira, Khayyatin, Haddadin and Kalbiyya. The al-Assads, belong to the Numailatiyaa clan of the Matawira tribe, hail from the north-western village of Qardaha, near the coastal city of Latakia. Upon ceasing the reins of power Assad stacked the security apparatus with loyal clansmen while taking care to build patronage networks with Druze and Christian minorities that facilitated the al- Assad rise. Just as important, the al-Assad leadership co-opted key Muslim military and business elites, relying on notables like the Tlass family to contain dissent within the military. The Alawi state took over the administration of religious funding, cracked down on groups deemed as extremist and empowered itself to dismiss the leaders of Friday prayers at will. With a minority ruling over the majority and after centuries of being marginalised the Alawi leadership dominated by the al-Assad family ruled with brutal force oppressing the Muslim majority.

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### **Syria and the Al-Assad's**

After WW2 and with the European continent devastated, both Britain and France were bankrupt and unable to hold onto many of their colonial holdings. With both the Soviet Union and America emerging stronger from the war, America specifically began working to bring the Middle East under its influence. It is here that both Syria under the al-Assad's and American interests aligned. Hafiz al-Assad took power in a country dominated by Muslims and being a minority would entail getting support from a major world power to subdue the majority.

Hafez Al-Assad proved to be ruthless, preventing any challenge to his rule, banning an open press and political debate. He strengthened the secret police (Mukhabarat) and turned them into permanent informants. Hafiz al-Assad showed his loyalty to the US with his consistent position on Israel. In Israel's unilateral invasion of Syria's Golan heights, Hafez al-Assad, the then Defence Minister, sent a strict order of withdrawal to the Syrian army from the Golan Heights at the beginning of the war. This was before any sign of defeat or real confrontation against the Israeli military which resulted in the occupation of such a strategic location.<sup>11</sup> It was through this move, Assad gained the trust of the US in defending Israel's northern border, which he continued to do for the next three decades.

Syria participated in the US led multinational coalition aligned against Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf war [1990-91], which marked a dramatic watershed in Syrian relations with other Arab states. It was one of the only non-monarchical Arab states to have backed the United States against Iraq during the first Gulf War, dispatching troops to support Operation Desert Shield.

In Lebanon, the Syrian presence directly contributed to the protection of US interests, Syrian troops invaded Lebanon at the beginning of the civil war. The silence on part of the US against such an occupation was a "green light" to Hafez al-Assad to initiate and continue this invasion until 2005, when a French-mandated resolution pushed the Syrians out with American reluctance. One political

analyst described this US role by saying: "*[The US] seemed tacitly to acquiesce to continued Syrian ascendancy in Lebanon.*"<sup>12</sup>

By the time George W. Bush came to office his administration may have depicted Syria as an international pariah state however, away from public scrutiny the US government viewed Syria as a surrogate that was needed in the region. The US even secretly orchestrated talks between Syria and Israel to settle the matter of Golan Heights. The Israeli paper Ha'aretz said the meetings, held in Europe, began in September 2004 initiated by the Syrians. They involved Alon Liel, a former director general of Israel's foreign ministry, Geoffrey Aronson of the Foundation for Middle East Peace in Washington, and Ibrahim Suleiman, a Syrian businessman living in Washington who is from the same Alawi sect as the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. The paper further stated that a document was drawn up dated August 2005, covering security, water, borders and normalization of ties. It called for a demilitarized zone on the Golan Heights and an early warning post on Mount Hermon operated by the US, with military zones on each country's side. The paper also confirmed that US Vice President Dick Cheney was kept abreast of the talks. President Assad even tried to convert the secret talks into a formal peace process with Israel but was rebuffed both by Tel Aviv and Washington.<sup>13</sup>

*By the time George W. Bush came to office his administration may have depicted Syria as an international pariah state however, away from public scrutiny the US government viewed Syria as a surrogate that was needed in the region*

In Iraq, the public perception was that Syria encouraged Islamic fighters to cross over into Iraq to undermine the authority of the Iraqi government. The reality was that Syria played an active role in infiltrating such Islamists and passing on valuable intelligence to the US led coalition. Syria's influence over the Sunni resistance fighters that operated in Iraq was emphasised by the Baker-Hamilton report. In May 2006, the Department of Defence quarterly report, titled "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Syria's influence was outlined: "... *Syria continues to provide safe haven, border transit, and limited logistical support to some Iraqi insurgents, especially former Saddam-era Iraqi Baath Party elements. Syria also permits former regime elements to engage in organizational activities, such that Syria has emerged as an important organizational and coordination hub for elements of the former Iraqi regime. Although Syrian security and intelligence services continue to detain and deport Iraq-bound fighters, Syria remains the primary foreign fighter gateway into Iraq...*"

The Alawi's collusion for nearly half a century with foreign powers was confirmed by the wikileaks cables, when a senior Alawi official confirmed "*about 70% of Syria-US interests are shared interests in the region*".<sup>14</sup> Syria's importance is not due to its resources, as is the case with much of the colonised world, but due to its geopolitical importance i.e. its location. Relative to the region Syria possesses few gas and oil fields and even fewer reserves of energy. The countries central location in the Muslim world makes it the heart of the Middle East and this led to the Alawi minority to play a role in the region in order to maintain and protect itself. This is why Britain and the America fought over control of the country with multiple coups and counter coups in the past.

Syria borders Israel, which is a key tool for the US in protecting its interests in the region. Syria being at war with Israel would expend considerable Israeli resources so having a regime in Damascus which is friendly with Israel secures and protect the Jewish state. The seizure of Lebanon in 1975 for 30 years by Syria shows it can influence the politics of another country which also shares a border with Israel.

Thus, due to being at the heart of the Middle East and the Arab world, having influence over Syria will help in securing dominance of the region.

**Manaf Tlass, for long basher  
al-Assad right man defected in  
July 2012**



**Jihad Makdissi was the foreign  
ministry spokes men since  
1998 and defected in  
December 2012**

**Lt Gen Abdulaziz al-Shalal,  
the highest ranking officer  
in the Syria army defected  
in December 2012**



# Syria, The Arab spring and Foreign Interference

The international community has changed its posture to the Syrian crisis utilising different strategies based on the changing political landscape. What follows is a timeline highlighting the key developments that have taken place in the country and the response of the world.

**March 2011** - This is when large scale demonstrations first started. It was also the beginning of the brutal crackdown by the regime In the southern city of De'ra, security forces shot and killed several protesters at a 'Day of Rage' rally.

**June 2011** – Opposition begins to form.

**July 2011** – Establishment of Free Syrian Army (FSA) by colonel Riad al-Assad, who defected from the army

**August 2011** – Syrian National Council (SNC) formed

**December 2011** – Arab league observer mission dispatched to Syria to report to the UN its observations

**Britain** – The countries immediate position was that Assad is a reformer and he should do the right thing, this was outlined by foreign secretary William Hague.<sup>15</sup> This was very quickly changed with Britain actively calling for Basher al-Assad to step down and leave, this was, and still remains the French position.

**US** – The countries original position was laid out by Hilary Clinton: *"There are deep concerns about what is going on inside Syria, and we are pushing hard for the government of Syria to live up to its own stated commitment to reforms. What I do know is that they have an opportunity still to bring about a reform agenda. Nobody believed Qaddafi would do that. People do believe there is a possible path forward with Syria. So we're going to continue joining with all of our allies to keep pressing very hard on that."*<sup>16</sup>

After months of the US backing the regime through only calling for reforms, Assad failed in subduing the Ummah the US started the process of his demise by backing the opposition. The US called for the opposition to unify so that a new ruling council could be formed, with whom the US could deal with just as what happened in Libya with the National Transitional Council. Mark Toner, the US State Department's deputy spokesman, told CNN that: *"President Barack Obama's administration would like to remain in touch with the Syrian opposition as it grows."*<sup>17</sup>

There was no immediate response from the world as the ramifications of this at the time was not clear

**US, France, Britain, Turkey and Qatar** - The West very quickly backed the Syrian National Council (SNC), which was established and led by the Paris-based dissident Burhan Ghalioun. The council was composed mainly of foreign dissidents who went into exile due to the Assad regime. The council consisted of various groups secular and moderate with many vying for eventual power in a new Syria.

The massacres continued even in the presence of the Arab League monitors. The Arab league monitors were provided transport and security by the Assad regime. It was the regime that escorted them around Syria. The credibility of the monitors quickly evaporated after many in Syria were counting on them to expose the crimes of the Assad regime. In the end the Arab league monitors colluded

with al-Assad by constantly arguing it needed more time to carry out its mission. Muhammad Ahmad Ad-Daabi the head of the delegation, constantly called for more time and concluded that Homs was not under attack – all of this was when images beamed around the world of the massacres taking place at the hands of the Assad regime.

**April 2012** – UN resolution vetoed by Russia

The resolution condemned the Syrian leadership with vague prospects of intervention. Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister said: *“Russia was not going to accept any resolutions that might open the way to foreign intervention or that would pre-determine the political outcome in Syria.”* Richard Gowan, an analyst at New York University's Center for International Cooperation said: *“And to some extent the high-profile diplomatic clashes with the Russians let the Americans look tough and active but without them actually having to invest militarily. In a sense, the angry diplomacy of the Security Council has been an alibi for military inaction in Syria.”*

**May 2012** - UN, Kofi Anan lead ceasefire

The international community unanimously accepted Kofi Annan’s six point plan which did not specifically call for al-Assad to step down. Philip Gourevitch, the US author and journalist outlined this initiative: *“In real life, the UN has effectively run cover for the Syrian regime’s bloody campaign by deploying Kofi Annan, the weak and accommodating former secretary general, to Damascus. The peace plan Annan cooked up with Assad in late March is another soap bubble, and the UN military observers who are supposed to monitor it are useless – or worse: when the butchery began in Houla, the regime told the UN monitors to stay away, which they did, bringing back bad memories, from the mid-nineties, of the false promises of protection that were extended, under the UN flag, to the people of Bosnia and Rwanda before they were abandoned to their killers.”*<sup>18</sup>

**May 2012** – Proposal of applying the Yemen model to Syria

President Obama, together with the leaders of the G8 at Camp David stressed the need for al-Assad’s departure. He pointed to Yemen as a model for a political transition that could succeed in Syria. Following this the US National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon also stated that Obama raised the issue of a transition plan on the Yemeni model with the Prime Minister of Russia, Medvedev. This proposal proved that all previous strategies had failed.

**July 2012** - Bombing of the National Security headquarters in Damascus. This attack eliminated several of the regime's top security bosses and possible candidates to take over. The Syrian Defence Minister Dawoud Rajha, former Defense Minister Hassan Turkmani, Interior Minister Mohammad al-Shaar, National Security Council chief Hisham Biktyar and Deputy Defense Minister Assef Shawkat (Al-Assad’s brother-in-law) all reported to have perished, whilst Al-Assad’s brother Maher al-Assad

At this point the uprising had been ravaging on for more than a year, Bashar al-Assad had failed to quell the uprising, despite the brutal tactics of suppression utilised. This bombing showed the opposition had grown in capability in that they were able to target the very epicentre of the regime. The **US** made a flurry of statements including the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of staff, US Defence Secretary, the Secretary of State and the President himself increasing the calls for military intervention.

The threat of civil war and the use of chemical weapons by the regime was the position the international community took.

**For more than a year the US called for reforms and when the opposition showed they were capable of removing the regime the US began calling for intervention.**

- the Republican Guard and Fourth Division Commander was reported to have lost his legs.

**August 2012** – US attempts to build alternative, loyal opposition separate to the Syrian people fighting in the country

**November 2012** – Opposition groups begin launching attacks on Damascus amongst their many other gains

**December 2012** – US placed Jabhut al-Nura on international terrorist list

**December 2012** – US-Russia plan to keep al-Assad in power leaked

**January 2013** – Rebels capture the Taftanaz airbase, the largest airbase in northern Syria and the second largest in all of Syria.

The UK daily telegraph reported that: *"An underground network of Syrian opposition activists is receiving training and supplies of vital equipment from a combined American and British effort to forge an effective alternative to the Damascus regime. Dozens of dissidents have been ferried out of Syria to be vetted for foreign backing."* Recruits face *"two days of vetting designed to ensure that the programme does not fall into the trap of promoting sectarian agendas or the rise of al-Qaeda-style fundamentalists."*<sup>19</sup>

The opposition forces captured the Marj al-Sultan air base, near Damascus and forced the closure of Damascus International Airport. They also forced the regime into an Internet black out. The energy-rich Deir el-Zour governorate was seized where they acquired Surface-to-air-Missiles after a two month siege on the 46th regiment near Atarib. In Aleppo the situation became dire for the regime as its troops in the provincial capital were essentially surrounded. The many rebel battalions in Damascus and the countryside merged under a single leadership called Ansar al-Islam Assembly with thousands of fighters situated near Damascus, in order to launch a sustained assault on the Syrian capital.

The **US** and **Europe** hurriedly constructed the Syrian National Coalition as the Syrian National Council failed to gain any influence over the rebels on the ground. This new group was also given a military council to replace the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Obama said: *"At this point we have a well-organized— opposition coalition that is representative — that we can recognize them as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people."*<sup>20</sup> US and EU officials confirmed: *'The United States and like-minded governments are rushing to fund and legitimize a newly-formed Syrian opposition group amid fear that plans for a political transition are being outpaced by rebel military gains, US and European officials said.'*<sup>21</sup>

US placed Jabhut al-Nura on the terrorist list in a desperate step to halt the rebels from ousting al-Assad. A total of 29 opposition groups, including fighting "brigades" and civilian committees, then made public that they signed a petition calling for mass demonstrations in support of Jabhat al-Nusra.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the international envoy visited Damascus and confirmed the US-Russia plan for the formation of a transitional government that keeps Basher al-Assad in power until 2014.

This success and rapid advance by rebel's forces led the Moaz al-Khatib, the head of the Syrian National Coalition declaring he is prepared to negotiate with the al-Assad regime.<sup>22</sup> Khatib had not even finished his press conference when **Israel** carried out strikes in North Syria stating it feared the advancing rebels would get their hands on chemical weapons, as was confirmed by an analyst: *"analysts have*



*suggested that the greatest danger was not the use of chemical weapons, but that advancing rebels might seize them.*"<sup>23</sup>

**February 2013** - Syria's biggest power-generating facility, The Thawra Hydroelectric dam on the Euphrates, is overrun by rebel forces and Operation Epic begins which is a new offensive for Damascus. Positions along the strategic Ring Road that encircles Damascus change hands several times

The New York Times revealed the US through Jordan and Saudi Arabia has begun distributing heavy weapons amongst selected rebel forces. The New York Times reported: "*The weapons' distribution has been principally to armed groups viewed as nationalist and secular, and appears to have been intended to bypass the jihadist groups whose roles in the war have alarmed Western and regional powers.*"<sup>24</sup>

Two years since the Syrian uprising began the following observations can be made:

- It has become very clear US interference in the uprising is all about keeping as much of the regime together after al-Assad is removed. The US initially believed Basher al-Assad could withstand the uprising and gave him plenty of cover through Arab league and UN observer missions to quell the uprising. The success of the rebels forced America to find an alternative to al-Assad, which turned out to be elements of the intelligence apparatus and the army. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, in an interview with the CNN in July 2012, said: "*I think it's important when Assad leaves - and he will leave - to try to preserve stability in that country. And the best way to preserve that kind of stability is to maintain as much of the military, the police, as you can, along with the security forces, and hope that they will transition to a democratic form of government. That's a key.*"<sup>25</sup> The US wants to keep as much standing pieces of the old regime so it can use them in the post-Assad era to influence the form of government and to ensure the loyalty of the future regime.  
*The US wants to keep as much standing pieces of the old regime so it can use them in the post-Assad era to influence the form of government and to ensure the loyalty of the future regime.*
- America's strategy has been the establishment of loyal groups and individuals instead of direct intervention to influence the outcome in Syria. Initially the US backed the Syrian National Council (SNC) and viewed them as the legitimate opposition in Syria. The ability of the rebels on the ground to seize Syria's countryside clearly proved the SNC had no influence on the ground. In November 2012 the US worked in replacing the SNC with other elements it could work with and constructed the Syrian National Coalition. Hilary Clinton said: "*We've made it clear that the SNC can no longer be viewed as the visible leader of the opposition. This cannot be an opposition represented by people who have many good attributes but have, in many instances, not been in Syria for 20, 30, 40 years, There has to be a representation of those who are on the front lines fighting and dying today to obtain their freedom.*"<sup>26</sup>

- The West as well as their media have completely blocked out the call for Islam by rebels groups. They have maligned such calls by calling rebels groups extremist's or foreign groups. There are numerous indications that Islam is playing an important role the uprising in Syria. Many defectors who went on to form brigades have made speeches that they are yearning for Islam and its application. Numerous Brigades as well as individual units have now openly stated and documented there wish to establish the Khilafah after the fall of Basher al-Assad. The US has regularly stated the presence of radicals within the ranks of the rebels who need to be sidelined. From a number of other speeches it would appear a number of the Brigades have been working with Hizb ut-Tahrir, who is working to establish the Khilafah. Many demonstrations and ambushes from the rebels have been with the presence of flag of 'laa ilaaha ilallah Mohammadur RasulAllah. This is why Western reporters continually cite the existence of radicals. The US has stated on record that it has to be careful who it exactly backs from the opposition as it would not want weapons to fall into the hands of the radicals, this would indicate the call for Islam exists and is recognized by the US.<sup>27</sup>
- Whilst the US has constantly stated it supports the opposition in Syria it has acted as a barrier for them receiving weapons and ensured they do not receive any heavy weapons which would have made the biggest difference in the uprising. Observing the attacks the opposition have conducted for over two years, aside from a handful of reports of downing fighter jets the rebels have mainly been armed with AK-47s and RPG-7s. Some weapons have definitely come their way through defections and a few heavy weapons captured from the Syrian government. There has been some use of IED's but very little in the way of heavy weapons. AK-47s and RPG-7s can be brought relatively easily in the region, some reports have suggested corrupt officials in the Syrian regime have even sold such weapons to the opposition.<sup>28</sup> The apparent support a number of countries constantly say they are providing as well as the 'non lethal,' aid the US constantly speaks about hasn't led to any change in tactics or an increase in capability. Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2012, about issues that were restraining the United States from supporting the armed opposition in Syria. He said, *"It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition – there has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed, or contacted."* This would suggest the US failed in infiltrating the opposition. The anti-aircraft weapons and heavy weaponry the rebels have reportedly used since November 2012 have been after their gains in the north in Aleppo province!
 

*Whilst the US has constantly stated it supports the opposition in Syria it has acted as a barrier for them receiving weapons and ensured they do not receive any heavy weapons which would have made the biggest difference in the uprising*
- Iran has been playing a role in preserving al-Assad's regime. Iran has used the Alawi minority's insecurities to achieve its own dominance of the region. With the end near for al-Assad this presents another challenge for Iran as the future Syrian government will very likely not be composed of Alawi's. This is why it was no surprise Iran dispatched its Republican guard corps to provide technical help to al-Assad as well as providing snipers across Syria to defend the regime against the uprising. Tehran bolstered Syria's economy with large amounts of aid. Despite the huge economic toll of international sanctions against the Iran, it provided \$10 billion to prop

up Assad and his floundering regime. In September 2012, Guards commander Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari said, '*A number of Quds Force members are present in Syria and Lebanon... we provide (these countries) with counsel and advice, and transfer experience to them.*'<sup>29</sup> It is very likely Iran will use its military and security links to the Syrian regime to ensure it has a say in the future set up of the country.

- The international response to Syria has been depicted for months as Russia and China supporting al-Assad, with the principled US and EU on the other side. Russia and China attempted to complicate the US plan in Syria by opposing attempts to pass a vague resolution and then using this as a cover for military intervention. It was under the guise of imposing no fly zones in Libya that the West armed the Benghazi rebels, trained them, France, Britain and the US then cultivated links with different personalities to maintain influence after the overthrow of Gaddafi. Both Russia and China generally oppose the West and use the forum of the UN to oppose Western plans. Such positions are generally weak and the veto from Russia was no different. Aside from a naval refuelling facility in Syria, Russia lacks any political influence in Syria. The stance by primarily Russia and then China in reality was a weak attempt to influence the Syrian crisis. As one expert outlined: "*Enlisting Russian support was a cynical ploy. With Washington's stated preference for a "peaceful solution," talking to the Russians enabled the administration to maintain the pretence of meaningful diplomatic activity, all while allowing it to blame the lack of any breakthrough on Moscow. Lavrov was right in saying that some in the West were "praying" that Russia continues to block intervention, "as sanctioning it would mean they must act. The White House is happy to run out the clock doing its two-step with Vladimir Putin, knowing full well that neither the Russians nor the rebels, and clearly not Assad, will change their stated positions. As Ambassador Robert Ford noted, "three times the Russians have said they would pressure Assad and have done nothing....They have repeatedly said that they have no way to influence Assad's decisions. Instead, Moscow knows that the myth of its centrality in Syria is a creation of the Obama administration.*"<sup>30</sup>
- Britain and France have always been calling for military intervention to oust al-Assad, as this will give them the opportunity to intervene in the country and shape the nation where their interests can be protected post – al-Assad, whilst the US has obstructed this by utilising various delaying tactics, which will allow it the time to construct a replacement for al-Assad. As America struggled to build a loyal alternative to al – Assad Britain and France tried to hasten a solution as it saw the US was not in a strong position if al – Assad fell. This was however a weak attempt by both nations who have very little influence in the country. Britain and France will eventually join the US in its solution to the Syrian crisis in the hope of complicating US plans. This in reality all both nations can do as they have very little tools to do anything else.

- Turkey has housed the leadership of the FSA and South Turkey has been used to smuggle weapons into Syria. Turkey has constantly presented the establishment of a buffer zone inside Syria, which could become a safe haven for fleeing Syrians. Turkey over the last decade has been playing a role in the wider Muslim world, by not proposing new solutions or strategies but by partaking in implementing US plans. Turkey's role in the world was clearly outlined by Erdogan at AKP party group meeting: *“Today Turkey is interested in most of the subjects in the world that the USA is interested in. We share a common vision in a very broad spectrum from Afghanistan to Iraq, Palestine, and Balkans. But most importantly we are in a concrete cooperation. As Mister Obama stated in his visit we have entered a model partnership phase and we are acting accordingly. There are some things we can make public and there are some things that cannot be shared. Those who want to cloud the Turkish-American relations are ignoring the multidimensional quality and the depth of these relations.”*<sup>31</sup> Turkey's real concern is Kurdish independence, as Syria has for long armed Kurdish separatists groups in Syria against Turkey. Although the prospects for an independent state in Syrian Kurdistan remain dim, it is likely some level of Kurdish autonomy will result, along with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, this would erode Turkey's power in the region.
- Qatar has also supported the opposition in Syria and its recent history is littered with support for various groups in Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen and the wider region. Like Turkey, Qatar has not proposed any new solutions to the regions problems but taken part in implementing, hosting, organising and bringing the various parties in the regions conflicts together in Doha. Qatar like many of the Gulf city states are dominated by the power and ambition of Iran in the region. This has led them to turn to international powers to protect themselves. In the case of Qatar all the groups it supports and provides sanctuary for seem to be hostile to the US. Qatar was in fact at the forefront in all the strategies by the EU for Syria. Qatar was central to the friends of Syria conference in April 2012, which was a EU organized meeting to bring the various groups and factions in Syria together.
- The people of Syria have been at war for two years now, with experience and aid from defecting Syrian troops, their fighting acumen has improved. The sharp increase in the number of destroyed Syrian army tanks and armoured fighting vehicles attests to the capability of the Ummah. The influx of fighters from other countries as has been reported has also bolstered the Ummah. This influx includes experienced Syrian and Iraqi fighters who fought in the Iraq war against US forces. Their experience in improvised explosive devices (IED's) would appear to have had an enormous effect on the Ummah's capabilities to inflict casualties and damage on the

Syrian military. This is why the Syrian military has avoided costly armoured attacks on rebel-held urban areas where armour is more vulnerable. The regime has come to rely on air-power and shelling from afar using tanks, artillery and attack helicopter support. The opposition has not needed to match the security forces' numbers or firepower because they can force the regime to fight everywhere at once, taking advantage of their superior mobility and flexibility to mount effective raids and ambushes where and when it suits them.

- The invasion of Libya was justified on the blood bath that was going to take place in Benghazi. As Obama said: "*Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. The United States of America is different and as President, I refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.*"<sup>32</sup> In Syria after multiple massacres the US, as well as the wider West has still refused to intervene.

## Case study: Syria's Chemical Weapons

In October 2012 the US department of Defence confirmed that a team of US military planners were in Jordan in order to deal with Syria's Chemical weapons. *"We have been working with Jordan for a period of time now ...on a number of the issues that have developed as a result of what's happened in Syria,"* US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta told a news conference in Brussels. Panetta said those issues included monitoring chemical weapons sites *"to determine how best to respond to any concerns in that area."*

Syria is not a signatory to either the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) or the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). As a result it began developing chemical weapons in the 1970's and made serious efforts to acquire and maintain an arsenal of chemical weapons. Former Foreign Ministry spokesman, Jihad Makdissi, said at a news conference shown live on Syrian national television in July 2012, confirming Syria possessed chemical weapons: *"These weapons are made to be used strictly and only in the event of external aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic, any such weapons were carefully monitored by the Syrian Army, and that ultimately their use would be decided by generals."*

Syria reportedly manufactures Sarin, Tabun, VX, and mustard gas types of chemical weapons. These are from chemical weapons production facilities that have been identified by Western non-proliferation experts at approximately 5 sites, plus one suspected weapons base, which include Al Safir, Cerin, Hama, Homs, Latakia and Palmyra.

Independent assessments indicate that Syrian production is a mere few hundred tons of chemical agent per year. This is because Syria is not able to internally produce many of the necessary precursors to create chemical weapons therefore is dependent upon importing these important precursor

chemicals and production equipment. The CIA reports in nearly every declassified acquisition report to the US Congress the efforts of Syria over the last five years to obtain precursor chemicals and equipment from external sources. The chemicals stockpiled prior to international export controls have likely long been exhausted.

Chemical weapons however will do little to alter the facts on the ground.

Syria does not possess large quantities of chemical agents. What Syria does have will also need to be transported in large yields to cause significant damage. As military commanders learned on the battlefields of Europe during World War I, and during the Iran-Iraq war, chemical agents are volatile and quick to vaporize, and they tend to dissipate quickly. As a result, deadly concentrations can be difficult to amass in a real-world setting.

The nature of the uprising in Syria is that it is taking place all over the country. The rebels do not have fixed facilities or headquarters where they stock their weapons. Using artillery to disperse chemical agents would have little impact as the opposition forces are dispersed around the country and thus chemical weapons would have little impact when dispersed over a large area.

Chemical weapons could be deployed using a delivery system such as a missile. The hazardous material would need to be manufactured in lethal amounts as a warhead and integrated with a missile. Al-Assad's relationship with Russia has resulted in large weapons exports which included a large stock of Scud missiles. Scud missiles are a series of tactical ballistic missiles developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They were exported widely to other countries, including Syria.

For carrying out tactical military operations, Scud missiles are an ineffective tool. The Scud missiles shot into Israel from Iraq in 1991 did not hit any significant military, government, or infrastructure targets, and only two Israelis died from the direct impact of Scuds. Scud missiles are more a weapon of terror to strike fear into the enemy. Scud missiles are suited to larger targets such as ports, airports, industrial sites etc. Integrating a chemical warhead with a Scud missile will only be useful if there are silos' or heavy machinery to target in fixed areas, which is not the case in Syria. Al-Assad is fighting an unconventional rather than conventional force. The unconventional battle and use of asymmetric tactics is what is leading to a stalemate. In Syria there will be too many rebel units to target and scuds are notoriously inaccurate. It is also questionable if the al-Assad regime has even succeeded in integrating its chemical weapons warheads with a missile. In July 2007, a Syrian arms depot exploded, killing at least 15 Syrians. Jane's Defence Weekly, the military and corporate affairs magazine believed that the explosion happened when Iranian and Syrian military personnel attempted to fit a Scud missile with a mustard gas warhead.<sup>33</sup>

Highly built-up urban areas usually protect targets from 95% of the chemical

substances in an attack. Air conditioned buildings have positive air pressure and can prevent the agent from coming in, except for the air conditioner intake itself. Therefore, using chemical weapons in an urban area would yield few casualties relative to the amount used (it would be inefficient) and would be most useful for its psychological impact and as a temporary area denial measure. The ideal target for these types of weapons would be opposition forces in the open in a valley or trench-type geographic feature when weather conditions are cool, dry and still, such as in the early morning. High winds, humidity and heat dramatically shorten the time these substances stay concentrated in one area, which can also prevent or seriously degrade their effectiveness.

Chemical weapons are a weapon of mass fear rather than destruction. It should be remembered the invasion of Iraq was almost entirely justified on the pretext Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD's). The propaganda around Syria's chemical weapons was outlined by Israeli analysts: *'analysts have suggested that the greatest danger was not the use of chemical weapons, but that advancing rebels might seize them.'*<sup>34</sup>





# Assad's Survival Strategy

There are a number of pillars the al-Assad regime was constructed upon, as these fell apart one after the other as the regime resorted to brutal tactics in order to quell the uprising.

1. The first pillar has always been the Alawi population from who the al-Assad family are from. As a minority, they consist of at most 2.3 million people; 11% of the population. For the Alawi regime to subdue a Muslim majority, it has to control every aspect of the state's apparatus. The Alawi's permeated every sector of the state's institutions and aligned themselves with other minorities like the Druze, Christians and Shi'ah in a position of unquestioned power. This sectarian base however, began to unravel due to the accumulation of deaths within the Alawi officers that fuelled discontent of their families as well as the financial extortion inflicted upon the Alawi community by the Shabiha to finance their campaign against the rebels due to the regime's incapability to pay their bills.<sup>35</sup> A sense of hopelessness and post-Assad retribution by the rebels led some Alawi families to question al-Assad's authority which provoked his supporters into deadly clashes in his hometown of Qardaha, the heart of the Assad regime. On September 28 2012, a fight broke out between Assad family members and other prominent Alawi families in the city, which led to the killing of Mohammed al-Assad himself, cousin of Basher al-Assad.<sup>36</sup> Alawi unity which for long was the support base of the regime started to wane.

2. The second pillar was the security apparatus. Syria's four main intelligence services were directly under the control of the Syrian president and have overlapping functions so that the regime is not overly dependent on any one of them. Each operates in near total secrecy. The secret service is responsible for internal surveillance of the population in general and detecting signs of organized political activity that run counter to the interests of the regime. Over the past 40 years, the Syrian security apparatus has been successful in clamping down on the entire country. Political dissent was virtually non-existent, whilst any Syrian citizen wishing to travel abroad would have to pass a number of stringent security checks. However the Syrian security apparatus has seen its grip on the country shaken following the outbreak of uprising, to the point that much of the country is now outside of the control of the central government. Rebel forces not only attacked government buildings but targeted the security apparatus, with many killed and others driven out of towns. On December 26 2012 Major General Abulaziz al-Shalal (who job was to monitor the security services) appeared in a video aired on Al Arabiya TV saying he was leaving the "regime army" to join the "people's revolution,"<sup>37</sup> this shows this pillar of the regime is also on its last legs.

*the Syrian security apparatus has seen its grip on the country shaken following the outbreak of uprising, to the point that much of the country is now outside of the control of the central government*

3. The third pillar has been the patronage networks the regime established with a number of Muslims in order to placate the majority Muslim population. The Tlass family, who Hafiz al-Assad established links with soon after he came to power in 1963 was critical to the al-Assad clan's ability to maintain military support among the Muslim elite, the family was also a major link between the Alawi and the Muslim business community. Mustafa Tlass, the patriarch of the Tlass family, was the Muslim pillar of the predominantly Alawi al-Assad regime. He served as defence minister for the al-Assad regime from 1972 to 2004 and played an instrumental role in ensuring that the young Bashar al-Assad would have the support of the old guard in succeeding his father, Hafiz al Assad. His son Manaf Tlass was a close friend of Basil Assad, Hafez Assad's eldest son and heir apparent until his death in a 1994 car accident. Having attended military college with Bashar al-Assad and after Hafiz al-Assad's death in 2000, Manaf Tlass became Bashar al-Assad's right-hand-man. Manaf Tlass helped Bashar al-Assad increase his base of support by introducing him to members of the Sunni business elite. Tlass even held unsuccessful talks with the Syrian opposition during the Syrian uprising.<sup>38</sup> In July 2012 Tlass defected from the regime along with 23 other officers.<sup>39</sup> The regime patronage network and key pillar in placating the majority Muslim population also fell apart.

4. The fourth pillar has been the army. Today the Syrian military consists of air, ground, and navy forces. Active personnel are estimated as 295,000, with an additional 314,000 reserves. The majority of the Syrian military are Sunni, however most of the military leadership are Alawi. The Alawi's make up 12% of the Syrian population but are estimated to make up 70% of the career soldiers in the Syrian Army. The army however has been stretched to breaking point by this crisis. On paper, the army has 220,000 soldiers, but most of the rank-

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and-file are Sunnis – and their loyalty to al-Assad, is not guaranteed. Consequently, the burden of the fighting has fallen on two dependable elite units: the 4th armored division, under the de facto command of Basher's brother, Maher, and the Republican Guard. Together, these formations have no more than 30,000 men – less than 14% of the army's total strength and they have borne the lion's share of the task of combating the uprising.<sup>40</sup> Basher al-Assad has been forced to utilize only a small fraction of the army as he cannot count on the loyalty of the majority of the Muslims, this is one of the key reasons why after two years the regime failed to quell the uprising.

In November 2012 faced with the prospect of losing Aleppo Bashar al-Assad vowed to “*live or die in Syria, I am Syrian, I was made in Syria, I have to live in Syria and die in Syria. I do not think the west is going [to intervene], but if they do so, nobody can tell what is next. I think the price of this invasion if it happened is going to be more than the whole world can afford.*”<sup>41</sup> Speaking to Russia Today TV, the Syrian president made clear he had no intention of fleeing.

The uprising in Syria started in March 2011. By April 2011, realising the growing number of demonstrations and the fact that arrests and torture had failed to subdue the masses Basher al-Assad

launched a massive crackdown on his own people, shelling towns, besieging them and sending in tanks. Dera'a was the first town, to have faced al-Assad's strategy of crushing the people with overwhelming force. Snipers took up positions on rooftops, water supplies were cut, as well as telephone lines and the town was completely cut off from the rest of the country. Demonstrations still continued in large numbers, even as the regime expanded its strategy of besieging towns.

*Whether it was Jisr al-Shughour, Rastan in Homs, Jebel al-Zawiya in Idlib, Zabadani or Baba Amr in Homs the regime strategy has been to crush the opposition by using overwhelming force, besieging towns and indiscriminately firing to root out the insurgency*

Whether it was Jisr al-Shughour, Rastan in Homs, Jebel al-Zawiya in Idlib, Zabadani or Baba Amr in Homs the regime strategy has been to crush the opposition by using overwhelming force, besieging towns and indiscriminately firing to root out the insurgency. Regime forces converged on towns from all directions with formations of hundreds of armoured vehicles. Towns were besieged and neighbourhoods shelled with artillery ahead of ground clearance operations. All roads leading into neighbourhoods were cut off, and after heavy shelling to soften the rebels' defences, the security forces then lay siege with the Sabihah militia's usually integrated into regime forces.

Bashar al-Assad attempted to prevent the armed opposition from holding terrain by crushing the opposition with ever greater use of force. However after decades of oppression the Ummah overcame its fear of the regime and stretched the security forces thin, allowing the Ummah to defend pockets of control for increasing periods of time.

As the uprising continued the regime found itself fighting on multiple fronts in all of Syria's provinces. As the military moved troops from one area to reinforce another threatened sector, the area the troops vacated would come under increasing pressure from local rebel units. This problem has been on display in Damascus. Rebel hit-and-run attacks have tied down a sizable number of regime troops in the capital, and despite large-scale search-and-destroy missions launched around the suburbs, the regime has been unable to deploy sufficient units to other threatened areas. As 2013 started the regime failed to demonstrate the capacity to conduct enough large, simultaneous, or successive operations in multiple areas to suppress the insurgency.

Bashar al-Assad's forces are now faced by a countrywide insurgency, with opposition pockets forming in all most key governorates. Given the regimes finite resources, the regime has prioritized its operations. So far, the military continues to go on offensives aimed at destroying opposition pockets in critical areas. This has led to large swaths of the countryside effectively ceded to the rebels as the regimes forces focus on amassing enough personnel and firepower to maintain solid control over critical cities and supply lines. Each time the regime besieges a town, it is to the detriment of regime positions in other areas.

The regime also found it increasingly difficult to supply its troops. It has been forced to increasingly use military and

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civilian transport aircraft to deliver supplies to its forces in the north of the country. Resupply from the air is far more costly and inefficient than resupply from the ground, and there are limits in terms of volume when delivering by air.

The Ummah in Syria has fought the regime across the country, due to employing guerrilla tactics and using a decentralised command and control structure they have had superior mobility and flexibility to mount effective raids and ambushes where and when it suits them. The regime on the other hand has had to fight everywhere and been over-stretched and their supply lines have been successfully attacked on many occasions. Like much of the Arab uprisings across the region the Ummah in Syria left behind their fear of the regime and all the notorious tools it uses and decided to take on the regime and have improved in their coordination and tactics. The Ummah in Syria has been at war for 2 years, with experience and aid from defecting Syrian troops, their fighting acumen has improved.

Basher al-Assad's armed forces possess more capability than the opposition forces and this has allowed al-Assad to pursue a four pronged strategy of crushing the uprising:

- **Air raids and long range artillery bombardment** - These have been a consistent feature of al-Assad's strategy to subdue the masses. Dara'a in March 2011 was the first town, to have faced al-Assad's strategy of crushing the people with overwhelming force. Snipers took up positions on rooftops, water supplies were cut, as well as telephone lines, the town was completely cut off from the rest of the country as artillery rained upon the town. The use of Soviet era aircraft is part of Assad's psychological war. Residents have confirmed *"pilots employ psychological tactics. Jets frequently swoop down in mock strafing raids, break the sound barrier over urban centers, or fly menacingly at high altitudes, a sign of a possible bombing raid. Low flying helicopter gunships also spray streets with machine-gun fire, and residents lose sleep over air activity at night that frays the nerves of civilians and rebels alike."*<sup>42</sup> This strategy softens the rebels' defences ahead of the next part of the strategy - conducting a wide scale siege.
- **The siege of beleaguered towns** – The al-Assad regime's central tactic has been the indiscriminate siege of towns that fail to come under regime control. The siege of Homs which began in May 2011 lasted for over 8 months and the indiscriminate slaughter of anyone who stood in the face of Assad's army units. Entire urban districts are shelled, after all supply routes are blocked allowing tank's to roll in. A number of towns the night before the start of operations had their electricity cut.<sup>43</sup>
- **The Shabiah** - The use of mercenaries in the crackdown has also been another feature of al-Assad's strategy for survival. The Shabiha have been carrying out a campaign of intimidation by killing and beating people who attend demonstrations, they have also been carrying out executions, drive-by shootings and sectarian attacks. As the Syrian army is composed mainly of Sunni's al-Assad has been forced to rely on just a handful of trusted units - the 4th Armoured Division, the Republican Guard and 14th Special Forces. As a result militia groups have been used consistently imbedded with the army to lay siege on towns. One Shabiha member highlighted his role: *"The government gave me 30,000 Syrian pounds per month and an extra*

*10,000 per person that I captured or killed. I raped one girl, and my commander raped many times. It was normal."*<sup>44</sup>

- **Disengagement from direct confrontation** - Bashar al-Assad's forces have now been engulfed by a countrywide uprising. As the regime is only using a fraction of its forces and given its finite resources, the regime has prioritized its operations. The military continues to go on offensives aimed at destroying opposition pockets in critical areas. This has led to large swaths of the countryside effectively have been ceded to the people as the regimes forces focus on amassing enough firepower to maintain control over critical cities and supply lines. As a result the regime has come to disengage from direct confrontation in most areas it is facing an uprising. As of now Aleppo and Damascus are the only areas where direct confrontation continues, the regime cannot sustain supply lines or losses in direct engagement in most of the country.

In spite of possessing more troops and more weapons than the opposition the regime had been held to a stalemate. This has fundamentally been due to the Ummah placing its fear into the dust bin of history and taking on the brutal rule of Bashar al-Assad and whatever he can muster. Unable to trust his own army as defections continue al-Assad has been forced to restrict operations to his most trusted units

It is two years since the Ummah of Syria rose up against the regime of Basher al-Assad. The regime initially used its notorious secret service to quell the uprising, but the regime then turned to its military as the uprising spread to the whole country. The military has employed all of its military might against both civilian and opposition forces in the hope of halting the uprising. In the face of defections and divisions amongst segments of Alwai's, for the moment Basher al-Assad maintains a tenuous grip on power.

## Case study: Homs Siege

Homs is the third most populated city of Syria, located 100 km north of Damascus and considered the “Capital of the Revolution” by the opposition. The fighting initially started as a crackdown against anti-government protesters. The situation evolved into prolonged street fighting between the security forces and the residents.

On 6 May 2011 the Syrian military confronted and clashed with protesters, after Jumma prayers, the death of 11 soldiers and policemen, including five at one checkpoint, led to the beginning of an operation with tanks rolling into several districts of Homs, with a witch hunt for all known opposition activists and supporters. The night before the start of the operation, the military cut electricity to the city.

The siege of Homs which lasted for over 8 months saw the indiscriminate slaughter of anyone who stood in the face of Assad’s army units. The Syrian Army began by launching an offensive against the district of Baba Amr, even though Baba Amr had no heavy weapons. A large scale siege was conducted, the entire Baba Amr district was shelled, after all supply routes were blocked. Reinforcements from the elite Syrian military unit, directed by the brother of the Syrian president, took positions in Homs. They managed to completely seal off the city, notably by destroying a tunnel.<sup>45</sup>

Following this, tanks rolled into several districts of Homs. Fleeing residents gave reports to a BBC journalist of atrocities in Homs. Fleeing refugees said that Government loyalists had rounded up 36 men and boys in the district and killed them. Witnesses said that the loyalists had been cutting the throats of prisoners. This is while men from an elite army division defected and said that they

defected because they had received orders to shoot everything, military and civilian alike and one said he witnessed his commander executing an old man.<sup>46</sup> By the 5 March 2012, Channel 4 News showed a film from a military hospital in Homs showing evidence of covert abuse, of injured civilians being subjected to torture - electrocutions, leg breaking, beatings with whips and electrical cable, shackled to beds, penises tied to prevent urination, gangrene left untreated by antibiotics.<sup>47</sup>

Homs’ southwest Muslim majority neighbourhood Baba Amr remained a thorn in the regimes attempt to end the uprising. By early February 2012, the security forces abandoned their efforts to take back Baba Amr through a ground assault alone. Cutting off all roads leading into the neighbourhood and shelling it with heavy artillery fire, the security forces laid siege to Baba Amr through the whole of February. The indiscriminate use of force in Baba Amr resulted in a humanitarian crisis with thousands of civilians killed and wounded and many more displaced.

In October 2012 Homs experienced its third army offensive and probably its worst bombardment in months when warplanes, tanks and artillery fired missiles and mortars at rebel controlled neighbourhoods. Unable to completely placate the rebel fighters the regime resorted to chemical weapons. The Assad regime used Sarin gas against innocent civilians in the Bayada district, Homs, where many people died and scores more were wounded. Maj-Gen Abdoul-Aziz Jassius al-Shallal, the former chief of the Syrian military police, who defected to the opposition on the 26 December 2012 confirmed the use of chemical weapons in Homs.<sup>48</sup>



# The End Game in Syria

Outgunned, outmanned and with a regime that owns the airspace, in any analysis of war, the opposition would stand little ability to overpower the regime. But as the Syrian uprising approaches two years, this is exactly what they have achieved. The opposition has gone from a handful of small units to a highly organised armed force. The opposition has shown tremendous metal in the face of brutal tactics by a much larger army. Questions such as why the regime has failed to quell the uprising? And how the rebel forces have been able to weaken the regime continue to dominate discourse on the Arab spring in Syria.

The murder of a number of men in the initial uprising in the Southern city of Dera'a in March 2011 by the regimes security service personnel led to the people of Syria carrying out individual acts of rebellion, which then galvanised nationwide protest. The regimes use of disproportionate force, led some to defect from the army and this was where the first organised armed rebellion began, which has got more and more organised over the course of the uprising. Fighting has taken place in five key areas which eventually spread and encompassed most of the country, these were:

1. **Idlib Province** - Jisr al-Shughour, Idlib City, Jebel al-Zawiya,
2. **Homs Province** – Rastan, Bab Amr
3. **Latakia**, and the coastal region
4. **Damascus** and its environs
5. **Dera'a province**

The first units that organised into a Brigade was in September 2011 in Rastan, Homs. The uprising in Homs remains a thorn for the regime and the people of the area have become highly organised in the face of regime forces. Army defectors reinforced by local fighters formed the Khalid bin Walid Brigade and conducted a number of lethal raids and ambushes in the area against the regime.<sup>49</sup> The security forces besieged and recaptured Rastan in an operation that required hundreds of armoured vehicles. The opposition resisted the security forces' assault for four days, utilizing the urban terrain to control key choke points.

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The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has attracted the most attention from amongst the opposition. The FSA is composed of defected Syrian Armed Forces personnel and volunteers. The leader of the entity is the first defector from the Syrian army - Colonel Riad al-Asaad. It was him who announced the establishment of the FSA and declared it would work with demonstrators to bring down the regime.

As the regime increased its massacres the FSA utilized guerrilla tactics in the countryside and cities. The FSA's focused on a dispersed countrywide guerrilla campaign with a tactical focus on armed action in the capital Damascus. From what has been reported they have not focused on holding



territory, but spread the government's forces and their supply lines thin in the battles for urban areas. In February 2012, when the regime focused on defeating pockets of armed resistance in Homs, it lost the capability to address an accelerating insurgency in the Idlib countryside in northern Syria.

The people of Syria organised into rebel groups based on the areas they were from and from where defections took place. By July 2012, more than 35 distinct rebel units used the same name as at least one other rebel organization. For example, at least six different units each used variations of “Abu Bakr,” “Salah ad- Din,” and “Hamza.” As the number of rebel groups increased military councils sprung up managing groups of rebels. These provisional military councils derived legitimacy from the local rebel groups operating under their command, who themselves come under the umbrella group FSA. Viable provincial military councils formed in Homs, Hama, Idlib, Dera’a and Damascus and eventually became Brigades. Each military council coordinated with a revolutionary council that organised demonstrations.

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The opposition in Syria are not only army defectors who have become part of the FSA. An Al Jazeera journalist highlighted the composition of the opposition, he said: *“the media frequently attributes armed engagements with loyalist forces to defectors, even though a large percentage of the rebels are not defectors. The majority of them are “civilians who have taken up arms. The rebels are “not armed gangs,” the journalist continued, but rather “a popular armed struggle or insurgency, [who] use the term muqawama or ‘resistance’ to describe themselves.”*<sup>50</sup>

The rebels have acknowledged that the majority of their numbers come from the civilian population, but defectors have constituted an important organizing force within the opposition. According to another journalist who travelled through northern Syria to learn about the armed opposition, he said, *“The Free Syrian Army is much more organized than the rebel fighters in Libya. Because of the growing number of defectors, there’s a stock of able, trained soldiers and officers mounting in Syria.”*<sup>51</sup> The defections that have taken place have all more or less been below the individual and small unit level, as the cost of defecting remains high. As one interviewed Syrian Army soldier put it, *“I would defect tomorrow if you could protect my family, but if I defected they would arrest my father and my brothers and the whole family would have no income. The regime is still in control.”*<sup>52</sup>

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) thus functions more as an umbrella organization than a traditional military chain of command. The FSA doesn’t always issue direct orders to the units fighting under its banner, but many of the most effective militia units operating in Syria have stated their allegiance to the movement and identified themselves as part of a national insurgency. Many of the names, faces, operating areas, and activities of the insurgent leaders affiliated with effective fighting units are available in on the internet.

There has been much in the media about exactly where the FSA is getting its weapons from. Observing the attacks the opposition have conducted the FSA has mainly been armed with AK-47s and RPG-7s. AK-47s and RPG-7s can be brought relatively easily in the region, some reports have suggested corrupt officials in the Syrian regime have even sold such weapons to the opposition. An Al Jazeera reporter said that during his meetings with Syrian rebels, he observed that “*the Syrian insurgency is not well armed or well-funded. Fighters purchase their weapons locally on the black market, from arms dealers and smugglers who are profiting from the violence in Syria. I have been with insurgents purchasing weapons and seen how they arrange to do so via smugglers from Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey.*”<sup>53</sup>

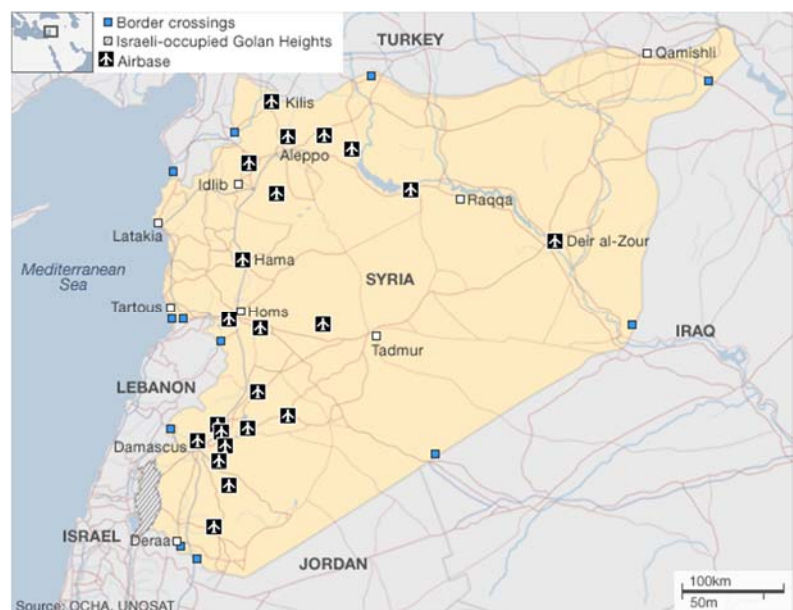
After two years of facing off against the regime security forces and army the rebels have been able to overcome many of their own limitations in facing the regime and even though they have been forced to withdraw a number of areas due to overwhelming force the opposition has pursued a specific strategy to overthrow the Assad regime.

- **Guerrilla tactics** – The rebels have utilised asymmetric tactics and faced-off with regime forces utilizing their advantages. Rebels have not needed to match the security forces’ numbers or firepower as they have forced the regime fight them all over the country at the same time. This allowed the rebel forces to take advantage of their superior mobility. Due to this the Assad regime had to make the hard choice of retreating from the countryside and only holding the main cities of each province. The rebels used this weakness and launched continuous campaigns on smaller towns until they carved up large liberated regions on the outskirts of the main cities. The aim was to achieve a safe-haven where they can organize and train and therefore have a launching point for future offensives. In the Northern provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, al-Raqqah and al-Hasakah, the rebels swept across from the Turkish border down towards the major cities. In Idlib, another offensive came from the southern part of the province in Jabil az-Zawiya, where the rebels had a stronghold since the beginning of the revolution.  
*Rebels have not needed to match the security forces’ numbers or firepower as they have forced the regime fight them all over the country at the same time. This allowed the rebel forces to take advantage of their superior mobility*
- **Cutting regime supply lines** – Rebel forces have focused on cutting supply lines to army units. The rebels strike against weak points of the regimes military infrastructure through ambushes until it has drained the regime’s resources. This has disrupted the supply lines of al-Assad’s forces, especially to the main city of Aleppo, in northern Syria. There are 2 main highways that reach Aleppo: the M5 from Damascus and the M4 from the east coast of Latakia. The rebels concentrated on 3 main cities to isolate them: Saraqeb which lies on the intersection of both highways, Ma'arat an-Numan southwards on the M5 and Ariha westwards on the M4. After cutting off the supply lines, the rebels encircle the main cities and slowly eliminate Assad’s hold on them.
- **Decentralised structure** – The Syrian army still uses the inherited highly centralized, top-down, take-no-initiative style of warfare from the Soviet era. The rebels have utilized a

decentralized structure which has allowed individual units to take on the regime and take advantage of any openings without having to clear this with any superiors. This has allowed the rebels to fight anywhere and everywhere and mount attacks across the country without having to coordinate this with others. The lack of a clear command and control structure amongst the rebels as found in most armies has been their biggest asset for the moment. This has allowed the loss of territory in one part of the country to not have an effect on other parts. It also means the death of leaders and key personnel in any part of the country will not impact the overall rebel advance. The US has placed as a condition for heavy weaponry the creation of a command and control structure, who it will then negotiate with. This was outlined by a diplomat in the Marrakesh meeting in December 2012 that created the Syrian National Coalition: *"No option is ruled out. But there are big issues about the legality of intervening in a civil war. Any support to any group depends on the command control and the discipline on the ground,"* the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.<sup>54</sup>

- **Surgical strikes** - The international community denied the rebels any anti-aircraft weapons to counter the destructive power of al-Assad's air-force, as such the rebels resorted to a different tactic that would mitigate this danger. Since the rebels couldn't attack Assad's jets while in the air, they planned to attack the planes while they are parked on their runways. They infiltrated military airports and bombarded others destroying large numbers of helicopters and fighter crafts. In Idlib, rebels bombarded the Taftanaz airport and held siege for days around the Abu Dhuhur airport. In Dier ez-Zour, the rebels attacked the Hamdan airport and similarly Aleppo's International Airport. Its biggest achievement was in Damascus on November 2012 when the rebels destroyed the strategic Marj as-Sultan helicopter military airbase. Using this tactic, the rebels put a strain on Assad's air force and sabotaged lots of air facilities which were his biggest advantage.

- **Military Bases** – The lack of weaponry led the rebels to target military bases to capture weapons and ammunition depots. By doing so the rebels have been able to capture a large amount of rifles, ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades (RPG-7) and other light weaponry. In many cases, they have been able to capture T-55/62/72 tanks and other armoured vehicles. They also captured much needed heavy machine



guns like the KPV-14.5mm and the ZU-23mm anti-aircraft auto-cannon. The greatest gain came from besieged air-defence military battalions where the rebels captured the much needed shoulder held surface-to-air missiles (MANPADS) of the advanced Igla-1 & S (SA-16/24) which has the capability to shoot down regime's fighter jets.

- **Offensive operations** – After defending and holding territory for much of the past two years the rebels transitioned to offensive operations as the Assad regime forces began to weaken. As a result the disparate rebel factions which operated through a semi-autonomous lack of central command and control structure, they have transitioned themselves in order to overrun remaining bases and airfields. The rebels set up command structures to deal with offensive operations on the different fronts. Agreements have been signed with the Druze community and Kurdish leaders for increased cooperation in facing the al-Assad regime. In Idlib in January 2013 rebels set up a council of Ulema for disputes among rebel groups. Rebel leaders swore pledges before the council to work in unity with one other. The Ulema council was also charged with collecting and distributing all the weapons before an attack. Furthermore, it secures and divides the spoils of war after each attack to avoid disagreements.

As of now the rebels' growing strength and the increased pressure on al-Assad's remaining troops, have been forced to abandon the goal of retaking control over all of Syria. Regime offensive operations have decreased markedly, and al-Assad's forces have effectively been forced on to the defensive.

From the province of Hama to Damascus in the south as well as within the coastal region, regime forces continue to maintain a tenuous line of defence. Bashar al-Assad's forces now face a countrywide uprising, with opposition pockets forming across all the key towns. As of now Aleppo is surrounded and Damascus is now being given more and more attention by rebel forces. The end game is now in full swing

## **Rebel Forces**

Ever since the successful attack against on the National Security Headquarters (NSH), in Damascus, in July 2012, the world has been shocked at the progress of the many rebel groups. The opposition has grown in numbers and capability and the West has been stunned at their progress. A former US intelligence operative encapsulated the situation: *“The [US] administration has figured out that if they don't start doing something, the war will be over and they won't have any influence over the combat forces on the ground. They may have some influence with various political groups and factions, but they won't have influence with the fighters, and the fighters will control the territory.”*<sup>55</sup>

The opposition rebel groups consist of various individuals and groups of individuals organised into individual units as well as groups of units forming brigades. The rebel groups are composed of defected military personnel, civilians and fighters from the region. The opposition can be broadly categorised into three groups:

1. Those working to overthrow Basher al-Assad and his regime
2. Those looking to replace Basher al-Assad and his regime with an Islamic government
3. Those looking to replace Basher al-Assad and his regime with a secular regime

The two rebel groups that have garnered the most attention and have been arguably the most successful, has been Jabhat al Nusra and the al-Farouq brigades, these two groups are key players on the rebel battlefield. Both have demonstrated tactical efficiency and military prowess in operations against regime forces.

**Jabhat al-Nusra** - Whilst many political and rebel groups are administering areas no longer under regime control, Jabhat al-Nusra has been able to control and secure supply lines in order to provide basic goods and services. It has successfully secured important state infrastructure such as hydroelectric dams, grain factories and oil fields. The group engages in Jihad and is composed of many individuals that fought US forces in Iraq. It announced its formation in January 2012 and is well funded and well equipped. Jabhat al-Nusra has played a central role in the North of Syria where it showed proficiency in cutting regime supply lines to military bases and airports around Aleppo. Jabhat al-Nusra operates outside the FSA and has taken over the distribution of flour to bakeries in rebel-held areas of Aleppo. It has thus taken on governance duties, especially in areas where FSA units failed to organise the distribution of basic foodstuffs. In an interview with TIME magazine Abu Adnan one of the group's leaders confirmed the group is working to establish an Islamic state in Syria.<sup>56</sup>

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**Al-Farouq brigades** - The al-Farouq brigades was officially formed in Homs in mid-2011. Since then, it has expanded its operations south toward Dara'a and as far north as the Syria-Turkey border. More advanced than other rebel brigades, the al-Farouq brigade has its own media arm. The Battalion was led by Lieutenant Abdul Razaq Tlass (the nephew of former Defence Minister Mustafa Tlass) and has operated as a component of the Khalid bin Walid Brigade and was extremely effective in defending the Homs' Baba Amr neighbourhood. What got the al-farouq battalion global attention was an incident in January 2012 when they captured seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force agents working with Syrian security forces in Homs.<sup>57</sup> The capability of the Farouq Battalion and its success in repelling regime offensives in Baba Amr contributed to the regime's decision to use heavy and indiscriminate artillery against the Baba Amr neighbourhood throughout 2012. In September 2012, a large number of Islamic brigades, including the al-Farouq Brigades and the Suqour al-Sham formed the Syrian Liberation Front. The new Front has more than 40,000 fighters and aimed to establish an Islamic state.<sup>58</sup>

**Suqour al-Sham brigade** – This brigade rose to prominence in the Idlib province and is one of the most influential rebel groups in province. The brigade is known for being disciplined, trained and well-resourced. Suqour al-Sham is known for being Islamic and runs three field hospitals, a Shari'ah court, and a prison. The Brigade identifies itself as part of the Free Syrian Army and recognised the Syrian National Council.

**At-Tawhid division** - The largest group, which also has Islamic inclinations, has been the At-Tawhid division. It is the largest armed coalition in Aleppo consisting of over one hundred armed

factions. The division made headlines when it issued a joint statement in 2012 with a number of armed groups in Aleppo regarding the establishment of an Islamic state and denounced the 'National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces' as part of a conspiracy.<sup>59</sup> Later At-Tawhid published another video statement dissociating themselves from this stance. The sheer size of this division meant there were differences amongst them.

**Islam Brigade (Liwa al-Islam)** – The brigade is led by Sheikh Zahran Alloush and operates in the vicinity of Damascus. It is one of the most powerful rebel groups in Damascus. Under their Command the attack on Syrian government's national security headquarters in Damascus on July 18, 2012 was conducted.

**Khalid bin Walid Brigade** - The Khalid bin Walid Brigade, continues to operate near Homs, It was the first unit that mounted a concerted defence against a regime offensive in Rastan in September 2011. The unit withdrew from Homs after regime forces conducted a full month of siege warfare. The brigade managed to preserve their combat power and have continued to fight elsewhere.

**Harmoush Battalion** - Another important unit has been the Harmoush Battalion in the northern Jebel al-Zawiya Mountains, they disrupted the Assad regime's movement along the north-south line of communication. The Jebel al-Zawiya's rebels continue to conduct raids and ambushes against regime forces. This unit fights as a component of the FSA.

**Free Syrian Army (FSA)** - The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is composed of many of Secular units and its army brigades have earned a negative reputation in a number of areas. The FSA took charge of two grain silos in Aleppo in late 2012, but corruption and disorganization ensued. Residents complained that many bakeries had to shut down because the group struggled to organize flour delivery and sales, which led to public demonstrations. Unlike Jabhat al-Nusra, the FSA plays a much smaller role in securing and protecting key resources and staples, as many view the army in a negative light.

**Administrative Councils** - Several local administrative councils have been set up throughout the country, by the Syrian National Coalition. These councils have received \$8 million in a donation from Qatar. Though these councils reportedly exist in all of Syria's 14 provinces, most have little to no control or influence, these local councils are secular and Jabhat al-Nusra does not recognize them. In some cities, the councils are responsible for providing bread and local services, but in most cases their roles are overshadowed by Jabhat al-Nusra.

Aleppo's transitional revolutionary council was established in August 2012 and is composed of predominately secular professionals. The council is in the process of establishing a 500-member police force, and a few courts have been set up in the city, but the most pressing problem is the bread crisis. To help alleviate this, the council has decided to use their \$1 million share of Qatar's donation to purchase wheat and identify a more long-term solution. Despite the council's administrative role, without Jabhat al-Nusra's maintenance and protecting Aleppo's grain silos, the city would be facing much graver issues.

*The challenge facing the rebels is to maintain their unity in removing the regime and to continue this unity after the regime has been overthrown*

There at least 100 rebel units organised into a minimum of 20 brigades fighting regime forces across the country. As each unit fights across a number of brigades the US has found it extremely difficult to gain influence over the rebels groups fighting on the ground. General Salim Idris the head of the 30-member Supreme Military Council, elected by hundreds of Free Syrian Army commanders, in Turkey, in December 2012, in a NYT interview confirmed: *“he could work with most of the Islamist factions fighting in Syria, putting their number at about 50 percent of the rebels.”*<sup>60</sup>

The challenge facing the rebels is to maintain their unity in removing the regime and to continue this unity after the regime has been overthrown. Differences are beginning to emerge, On January 9 2013, the leader of the al Farouq brigade's northern command, Thaer al-Waqqas, was shot to death on the Syria-Turkey border. Prior to his assassination, al-Waqqas was suspected of having been involved in the murder of Firas al Absi, a leader of Jabhat al Nusra.

## Case study: The Battle for Aleppo

Aleppo is important to the regime for many reasons. It is the largest city in Syria, Aleppo is culturally and historically significant because of its position on the Silk Road and thus serves as a major economic hub as Syria's commercial capital. The wider Aleppo province is a major agricultural centre that contributes a substantial portion of the country's food supply. The rebel success in the North of Syria, especially Aleppo has been the regimes biggest concern.

The clashes started slowly following the twin bombings in Aleppo city on 10 February 2012. Over the next five months, major clashes left large parts of the rural countryside under rebel control, with the capital of the province, Aleppo city, still being firmly under government control. On 19 July, rebel forces stormed the city and a battle for control of Syria's largest city and economic hub had begun.

The regime rushed reinforcements to the city to the detriment of regime positions in other areas, The rebels in these areas took the opportunity presented by the regime forces' redeployment to mount a series of offensives. Aleppo is in the North of the country, sitting far from the capital Damascus as well as the Mediterranean coast

The rebels strategy was to disrupt the supply lines of the Assad forces, to Aleppo and Aleppo city. There two main highways that reach Aleppo were targeted to cut regime supply lines. They then isolated the main towns around Aleppo and effectively eliminated Assad's hold on them.

The fact that the regime was forced to redeploy its troops showed the Syrian military was not large enough to respond to every threat it faces simultaneously, forcing it to redeploy frequently. Redeployment requires forces to be transported around the country frequently, burns fuel, creates maintenance problems for equipment and creates ambush opportunities for the rebels. As the rebels

became efficient in conducting ambushes and hit-and-run attacks the regime was forced to increase the use of military and civilian transport aircraft to deliver supplies to its forces in the north.

The rebels then increased their targeting of airports and air bases used by the regime to launch airstrikes and deliver supplies. Rebels focussed on outlying bases to Aleppo and took the Hananao barracks and the sprawling base near Sheikh Suleiman in December, which now means rebels control the West of Aleppo all the way to the Turkish border. The main airport in the centre of Aleppo city is now under attack.

Colonel Abdel-Jabbar Oqaidi, who heads the rebels' military council in Aleppo explained the rebel strategy: *"At the beginning ... we were forced to attack the (Assad) forces in the districts to kick them out so that they do not harm civilians. After achieving fighting experience, we went back to the countryside to liberate the big military bases. These bases are fortified with tanks, rockets, artillery, mortars, in addition airplanes. The siege ... cuts off the supply lines to these bases and most importantly it helps elements to defect, making it easier to eventually storm the bases."*<sup>61</sup>

Logistics are a critical factor in any conflict, the regime forces in Aleppo are finding themselves increasingly cut off from supply, they would be able to hold out only as long as prepositioned supply stocks lasted. The regime may yet make a concerted effort to keep its supply lines open, but this would likely require a considerable diversion of forces from the capital, leaving Damascus even more vulnerable to rebels in the area. If the rebels are able to sever supply lines to regime forces in Aleppo and trap them there, a considerable portion of the regime's forces would be at risk of being captured or killed. The situation in northern Syria is now dire for the regime, government troops in the provincial capital are essentially surrounded





# Syria – The Day After

There is much international interest in what will unfold after the overthrow of Basher al-Assad. This discussion is unfortunately being led by the West and through their proxies in the region such as Qatar and Turkey. Russia, Europe and the US are all in agreement that as much of al-Assad's security services and regime should be preserved, through a transitional period – where Basher al-Assad even remains, to be eventually replaced by one of his cronies.

This biggest problem the west has is their little influence over the rebel groups on the ground that are now launching attacks on Damascus – the seat of the regime. The end game in Syria is between the rebels groups in Syria, who will control the territory after they have removed al-Assad and the West led by the US. Creating internal cohesion, unifying the many rebels groups, integrating the army and the different ethnicities into a new set up are some of the key challenges a new Syria will face. Central to this will be a new constitution which will act as a reference point for new institutions, practices and systems for the country. This should also be the starting point for a new Syria.

## **Constitution**

- Whilst Syria may have different ethnicities a constitution that enshrines the relationship between state and society and defines the organs of state and how accountability can take place, would be the place to start. The people of Syria need to change the basis of the country from a vague concept of nationalism and loyalty to an ethnicity to Islam. This is because Islam is indigenous to the nation and will provide it with a coherent system to organise state and society.
- As the basis of Islam is the Qur'an and Sunnah a new constitution that outlines the detailed Islamic position on the economy, social system, accountability and judiciary should be drawn up, made public so every citizen can see the laws he/she will be judged by. This will create a coherent society and create unity amongst the populace.
- The constitution should clearly state the obligation of political parties and the establishment of the Majlis of the ummah, which will have the power to impose certain restrictions on the ruler. This mechanism will allow for accountability to take place in an institutionalised manner. This will allow for a close relationship between the ruler and ruled and create a society which cannot be penetrated from the outside as changes can be brought and discrepancies can be raised directly through this domestic institution rather than turning to outsiders.

## **Justice**

- The rule of law has been completely eroded in Syria by the Al-assad's. The justice system has been severely distorted and its institutions have been subject to capture, its personnel

politicized, its laws manipulated, its formal civilian courts side-lined by extraordinary courts, its prisons kept secret, and all these failings cloaked with impunity.

- The rule of law can be quickly established in Syria as the majority of people in Syria are Muslims, the implementation of the Islamic rules is the end point of their revolution to replace al-Assad and everything he stood for. The rule of law is all people are restricted by the same laws i.e. all people are held accountable by the same laws.
- All extraordinary and exceptional courts are to be ended, repeal laws that grant jurisdiction to military courts and Military Field Tribunals to prosecute and try civilians are to be replaced with a new court system which takes ‘innocent until proven guilty,’ as its guiding principle. All legislation which provides immunity from prosecution to political, security, police, and customs officials for crimes committed while on duty is to be replaced by the Islamic injunction that all citizens are accountable for their actions. This can be achieved by compiling a list of employees of the justice system (judges, prosecutors, prison officials, and police officers) and the Ministry of Justice, using existing files.
- All the notorious prisons where many have been incarcerated for political gains should be closed. Prisons under civilian rather than military control should review cases using the Islamic legal principles which place the burden of proof at a very high level. A list of prisoners convicted of serious crimes needs to be identified as well as determining where they are, this can be done through the current prison officials.
- Public revolutionary courts should be immediately established and all of the military officers who were involved in the bloodshed should be tried through this tribunal, especially those high-ranking officers that gave orders and forced soldiers to shoot at innocent civilians.

## **Security**

No nation is independent unless it controls its own security. Sovereignty does not exist unless a nation can secure its borders and is self-sufficient in this. Whilst much has been made of Syria’s chemical weapons, which in reality is a pretext for possible foreign intervention, the Ummah of Syria will need to take over the country and bring the countries heavy industry and weapons arsenal under its control. This will be essential in the case of military intervention by foreign powers and also for the wider Islamic aim of reunification with the wider Muslim world. In overcoming these challenges the following policies can be undertaken:

- The Al-Assad regime is now on its last legs and is entirely reliant on military loyalty. The entire command structure of the Syrian military should be encouraged to defect and join the opposition. There is no need for more sons and daughters of the brave Syrian people to suffer for the sake of the butcher Bashar. The forces amassed around Aleppo should defect en masse to the opposition and this would deal a dramatic and irreversible blow to the al-Assad regime and accelerate the inevitable conclusion with minimal further bloodshed. The military are a vital part of Syrian society and should defend their people, not destroy them.

All possible measures should be undertaken by the Syrian opposition to facilitate the defections.

- The new leadership should then consolidate and secure the nation's military and weapons; and secure its borders in order to deter those with designs on the nation. The nation has eight armored divisions and three mechanised divisions; these will need to be brought under the new leaderships authority. Their equipment includes 4,700 tanks, 4,500 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC), 850 surface-to-air missiles, and 4,000 anti-aircraft guns. The air force has 611 combat planes.
- Syria possesses 130 surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries. These have had significant resources devoted to them in terms of maintenance and upgrade and would complicate any potential foreign intervention. These batteries will need to be secured.
- The security services in the Arab world are notorious for their brutal methods of torture, often being the only line of defence for the rulers of the region. Syria's Military Intelligence Directorate – Makhbarat, plays a major role in the region and not just in Syria. The role of the secret service should be changed to protecting the people from external threats, rather than internal policing. They should also be paid a wage commensurate to this, to weed out corruption.

### **Internal Cohesion**

Internal cohesion was maintained in the country by successive rulers through the secret service permeating every facet of society. Whilst much has been made of civil war and sectarianism, non-Muslims make up less than 25% of the country's population. Unifying Syria into a cohesive society is one of the biggest challenges the new leadership will face, especially as foreign powers have designs on the nation.

- The constitution should clearly outline the rights of all citizens in the post al-Assad set-up. The Alawi's and Christian minorities must understand clearly that the constitution of the state, with its Islamic foundation, will enshrine the rights of all of the people of Syria into law as demanded in Islamic Fiqh regardless of denomination.
- There is a whole area non-Muslims will see no interference by the state or any other individual citizen of the new Syria. Non-Muslim in terms of their beliefs and worship are free to worship who they believe and the state will protect this by seeing any interference by any individual within a new Syria as a violation of that person's rights. Non-Muslims are to be treated in matters related to foodstuffs and clothing according to their faiths and within the scope of what the *Shari'ah* rules permit. Similarly in matters of marriage and divorce these are to be settled among the non-Muslims according to their faith with courts set up to deal with these issues.

- In the public domain all the Islamic *Shari'ah* rules in areas such as contracts, penal codes, testimony, ruling and economics will apply equally upon Muslims and non-Muslims, something that has been absent for over 50 years in Syria.
- Islam ordains the *Jizyah* on male, mature non-Muslim citizens who have the means to pay, it is a graduated payment that can be set at different levels based on the person's prosperity. It is a pledge by which the new Syria government is responsible for the security, lives, property, beliefs and honour of non-Muslims. Ahl al-Dhimmah within the Islamic territories should be elected to the Council of the Ummah and have the right to vocalise their issues and concerns with regard to the implementation of Islamic laws upon them.

### **Foreign interference**

Syria was an artificial creation by the deal made by the French and British in the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1918. Whilst European influence was replaced by the US after WW2, the West ensured the minority demographic ruled over the majority, who would always need foreign help to remain in power. Successive rulers remained loyal to the West protecting their interests in the region, which ensured military hardware kept flowing into the country. Stratfor outlined its view on the post Assad scenario: *“Foreign diplomacy surrounding the conflict, rather than the rebels fighting within Syria, will determine what the endgame looks like. Stratfor expects a scramble among the foreign stakeholders in Syria to protect their interests and emerge from the growing chaos with some degree of leverage.”* In order to deal with foreign interference the following policies should be pursued:

- Removing US interference will be central to the future of the Muslim world as well as Syria. To achieve this US tools for this need to be eliminated. Since the US came to the Muslim lands it has used agent rulers, economic aid, investment for infrastructure and military sales as key tools in keeping influence in the region. Each of these will need to be deconstructed and removed.
- Former members of the al-Assad regime need to be put on trial for the crimes they have committed. Justice needs to be brought to the millions who suffered at their hands. These trials should be completely public, comprehensive and just. Similarly members of the Syrian National Council (SNC) should be not be permitted to return to the country as they are close to the West and their loyalty to a new Syria cannot be guaranteed.
- No arbitrary limits should be placed on the requirement for appropriate weapons to deter attack. Islam in origin forbids the use of weapons that indiscriminately destroy. However, it allows Muslims to possess such weapons to be used reciprocally for the purpose of deterrence only. Appropriate weapons development programmes should seek to secure the state from foreign invasion.
- The “rogue state” label has been developed in the Capitals of the West to justify interference in the Muslim lands and to subvert any call for the return of Islam. The West has engaged in many heinous crimes without any accountability. This includes their lies concerning

WMD's in Iraq and their cosy relationship with Ben Ali, Gaddafi and Mubarak amongst others. Syria's new leadership should expose the wars, repression and poverty that have been a direct consequence of Western foreign policy. The main protagonists have watched the world suffer while they reaped many benefits. The negative and destructive nature of Western foreign policy has destabilised the world and they should be, in a diplomatic sense at the very least, be held accountable for this internationally.

- The Ummah's best defence is reunifying the Muslim world. By uniting and expanding very quickly, any foreign aggressor will be dealing with a much larger area, with more resources, economic and military power opposing them. As Afghanistan and Iraq has shown, long supply lines weaken the front lines. It should also be borne in mind that the US makes use of a number of military bases that have been provided to them by rulers of Muslim countries, cutting such supply lines will severely hinder US capabilities.

## **Economy**

Syria's modern history can be encapsulated as economic consideration was subordinated to political priorities, which remained for the regime, the retention of power. In Syria under the al-Assad's politics always trumped economics. The al-Assad state used the economy to gain the loyalty of people through subsidies and a large public sector. Patronage networks were also set up with influential businessmen and families ensuring no centres of power could threaten their rule. This meant most people either languished in poverty or lived on state subsidies creating relationships of dependency. Ever since the Alawi's rose to power the wealth the nation created has remained within a narrow segment of the population.

- The Shari'ah guarantees the basic needs for every citizen by obliging every able bodied person to work to earn a living wage for themselves and their dependents. The Shari'ah obliges children or other heirs to support parents if they are unable to work. It also encourages neighbours and community to support each other. Finally for those who are genuinely unable to obtain support through the means above, the government steps in with funds from the State Treasury.
- The Shari'ah prohibits subsidies, which prop up inefficient and unproductive businesses. Food subsidies are unnecessary if prices stabilised. Ending subsidies will release government funds to target assistance to those people who have no dependents and other specific areas where the Shari'ah has obliged a priority or a focus e.g. schools, hospitals and infrastructure.
- The implementation of the Gold and silver standard as the legal tender should be immediately perused. This will bring the much needed stability to prices across Syria and ensure the value of assets do not fluctuate widely. The state currency should be reverted immediately to a bimetallic standard by either issuing new currency or backing the existing paper currency with gold/silver at a rate determined by the government and taking into account factors such as the country's gold/silver reserves. The money supply would

consequently be stabilised with a knock on stabilisation effect on prices of goods in the domestic market.

- Land reforms should be immediately carried out as not only did those loyal to the al-Assad's have a disproportionate amount of land today only 20% of Syria's arable land is irrigated. The distribution of land should be managed by the state and not the free market.
- The Islamic injunction on land rules should be applied which include confiscation of land which has not been utilised for three years and the application of land taxes such as the usher and Kharaj. The Kharaj is a tax on the estimated output of a land, regardless if it is irrigated and usher is a tax on the actual produce from a land.
- The distribution of wealth in the country away from the patronage networks is the fundamental change needed in the economy. Islamic economics achieves this by removing the obstacles to wealth distribution such as interest, western style financial markets, direct and indirect forms of taxation and fiat currency. The new leadership in the country will aid job creation through ensuring basic infrastructure, defence and education is created, this should set the nation on the path to economic development.

# Conclusions

When the history books are written the people of Bab al-amar in Homs as well as the people of Aleppo, will be remembered like the Ummah of Fallujah in Iraq who despite insurmountable odds are the towns where the beginning of the end for empires and oppressive rulers began. The Arab Spring has shown the Ummah is looking to take her destiny into her own hands and remove the oppressive rulers once and for all. Despite the tactics of Basher al-Assad the people of Syria have continued to brave the elements and show tremendous bravery against tanks and missiles.

The people of Syria have shown when they all come together anything can be achieved, despite the odds. The continued siege of Homs and especially Bab al-amar has seen the rebel forces with local people weaken the regime after engaging them in constant battles and spreading them over a large geographic area. The regime maintains a weak position in the province and was eventually forced to redeploy troops to the North in Aleppo province as the regime remains on the verge of losing the North of the country. Unity between the Ummah in Syria's provinces has been the key factor that has allowed the people to withstand whatever the regime has thrown at them.

On the second anniversary of the Syrian uprising Basher al-Assad has lost the entire countryside to rebel forces, his troops are surrounded in the North of the country and resupply efforts to troops in central Syria is proving to be difficult as military bases and airbases are either under rebel control or significant fighting continues to take place. As the end game is in full swing defections continue to take place regularly. The choice loyal forces to al-Assad face, is an inevitable battle against multiple Muslim rebel groups, and though Alawi troops are well-equipped, they are outnumbered. Syria's remaining troops with the means to defect are each facing an existential choice: either stick with their fellow Alawi's against growing odds or defect. In this context reports are already emerging Hizbullah has been reaching out to senior Syrian officers, including al Assad's elite personnel and have been offering housing in Beirut and employment should the Syrian regime face impending collapse. This would indicate Hizbullah is expecting an impending collapse of the al-Assad regime.

*The choice loyal forces to al-Assad face, is an inevitable battle against multiple Muslim rebel groups, and though Alawi troops are well-equipped, they are outnumbered. Syria's remaining troops with the means to defect are each facing an existential choice: either stick with their fellow Alawi's against growing odds or defect*

There should be no doubt that the west led by America is not supporting the people in Syria but pursuing their own narrow agenda. This should not be surprising when US plans in the region have always been to subjugate the region. Seeking help from the US will only handcuff another generation. American attempts to hijack the Syrian uprising, for its own end are no longer even hidden. The NYT highlighted: "American officials have been increasingly worried that extremist members of the resistance against the government of President Bashar al-Assad, notably the Al Nusra Front, will take control of portions of Syria and cement its authority by providing public services,



*much as Hezbollah has done in Lebanon.*"<sup>62</sup> Whilst al-Assad commits slaughter after slaughter the US is more concerned about the rise of Islam in Syria and it trying to counter this by arming the secular and nationalist factions, which was confirmed by the New York Times: *"The weapons' distribution has been principally to armed groups viewed as nationalist and secular, and appears to have been intended to bypass the jihadist groups whose roles in the war have alarmed Western and regional powers."*<sup>63</sup>

The people of Syria took to the streets when they saw the method of change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in removing their rulers. What continues to take place in Syria is another component of the Arab spring, to bring an end to the brutal rule of al-Assad. The ramifications of this will not be restricted to Syria but will echo throughout the region and even globally, as a nation at the centre of the Middle East would have deconstructed an architecture created by the west to forever have colonised the country. This would mean the people of Syria can take their destiny into their own hands, with the loudest call being for Islam in the country. It is the eventuality that keeps Washington, London and Paris worried and forces them to concoct proxy groups such as the Syrian National Council and its sister the Syria National Coalition to do its bidding.

The Ummah of Syria face a number of steep challenges to ensure the uprising remains pure and is not hijacked by the west. There are three critical areas for this:

1. **Foreign Help** – There is no doubt the situation for many in Syria is dire and only now is the country coming out of its winter period where many were forced to reside outside their homes for fear of rocket and fighter jet attacks as well as the fact that the regime cut of electricity and gas to many towns. Help from the West, will always come with strings attached and those supplying weapons will expect something in return aside from creating a relationship of dependency for military equipment. On the second anniversary of the uprising the guerrilla tactics employed by rebels has humiliated regime forces who are now running scared to Damascus and the coast as they are being routed. All this was achieved with very little external help.
2. **Unity** – The only factor that can stop the onslaught in Damascus is division amongst the rebel groups. Whilst the rebel forces are composed of numerous units with different leanings, the Islamic minded units dominate the military landscape. The US is looking to draw a wedge between the rebel forces though promises of military equipment and initially by outlawing Jabhut al-Nusra. The remaining groups need to be integrated into the Islamic units and operate as one block as most units have been doing for two years. This will break the back of the al-Assad regime and make it immensely difficult to penetrate from outside.
3. **Post al-Assad** – The system that will be implemented after Basher al-Assad falls needs to be agreed and its details widely distributed now. This will ensure a clear road map exists to transition to this new system and will do away with differences that could emerge which external powers could manipulate for their own ends. Islam is the central call by the most successful rebels groups and considering the majority of people are Muslim in Syria it is only natural this system should prevail. This will allow the people of Syria to view the

country from a regional perspective and begin the process of reunification with the wider Muslim world which will completely end western interference.

Allah (swt) reminded the Ummah:

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

Verily, with hardship comes ease

and

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا  
اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ  
بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ  
الْفَاسِقُونَ

*Allah has promised such of you who believe and do good deeds that He will surely make them to succeed (the present rulers) in the earth even as He caused those before them to succeed (others); and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and will give in exchange safety after their fear. (TMQ 24:55)*

# Notes

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Weighs Bolder Effort to Intervene in Syria's Conflict, New York Times, November 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/world/us-is-weighing-stronger-action-in-syrian-conflict.html?pagewanted=1>

<sup>2</sup> Fred Gedrich, Syria on track to become Islamic state, the Washington Times, 3 January 2013, <http://m.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jan/2/syria-on-track-to-become-islamic-state/>

<sup>3</sup> Syria government losing control – Russia official, BBC Online, 13 December 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20710561>

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<sup>5</sup> See, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/14131343/The-Pact-of-Umar>

<sup>6</sup> Written down from his account by Adamnan, monk of Iona (d. 704): "De locis terrae sanctae", lib. III (P. L.,LXXXVIII, 725 sq.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Pipes, Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition, Oxford University press, 1992, Pg 166

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Pipes, Syria: The Next Generation, *Prepared for the Orkand Corporation*, 1989, <http://www.danielpipes.org/190/syria-the-next-generation>

<sup>11</sup> See, <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/pages/fa527ac3-2308-4892-945e-7978486e3ac5> (arabic)

<sup>12</sup> Ending Syria's Occupation of Lebanon: The U.S. Role, Report of the Lebanon Study Group, May 2000, <http://www.meforum.org/research/lsg.php>

<sup>13</sup> Full text of document drafted during secret talks, Akiva Eldar, Haaretz, January 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/exclusive-full-text-of-document-drafted-during-secret-talks-1.210053>

<sup>14</sup> See, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/03/09DAMASCUS179.html>

<sup>15</sup> Not too late for Syria to do the right thing, says Hague, Guardian, 27 April 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/27/not-too-late-syria-do-right-thing-hague>

<sup>16</sup> US dept of state, Hilary Clinton interview with Lucia Annunziata of "In Mezz'Ora," May 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/05/162817.htm>

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