

MEETING EVALUATION

No.16, MARCH 2017

FINAL REPORT OF THE MEETING TITLED “LOCAL COUNCILS AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN SYRIA”

Omran Center for Strategic Studies, a Syrian policy research center based in Istanbul, and Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) held a meeting titled “Local Councils and Security Sector Reform in Syria” on 23 March 2017.

The representatives of various public institutions and diplomats serving in the Embassies in Ankara attended the meeting as well as OMRAN and ORSAM representatives. Two reports prepared by OMRAN Center experts with respect to the local councils and security sector in Syria were presented at the meeting.

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<http://en.omrandirasat.org/publications/papers/the-political-role-of-local-councils-in-syria-survey-results.html>

<http://en.omrandirasat.org/publications/papers/the-security-situation-in-syria-and-ways-to-manage-it.html>

<http://en.omrandirasat.org/publications/papers/the-syrian-security-services-and-the-need-for-structural-and-functional-change.html>

At the end of the meeting, the conclusions derived from the presentations, the questions of the participants and the discussions are as follows:

1. At the first session of the workshop, presentations were made with respect to the “local councils” functioning to provide basic services in the



regions where state authority lacks in Syria. As indicated by OMRAN Center specialists, the local councils in Syria are structures established per se, upon the initiatives of local actors and activists, in the regions where there is no state authority. As of 2014, the number of local councils functioning in the regions under the control of Syrian opposition reached up to 900. This figure decreased to 400 when DAESH took control of the east of Syria and PYD occupied the north-eastern part of Syria. There are currently 10 elected Provincial Councils and more than 400 city and village councils. These councils have two main duties. The first duty is representation and the second is the provision of basic services. Local actors have selected 57% of the local councils through a consensus building mechanism and 38% has been elected by local constituents and 2% has been appointed.

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2. OMRAN Center recommend the model of administrative decentralization through local councils in Syria. Although, primarily federalism is not supported by the majority of Syrians according to surveys, there is already an existing defacto reality today of consolidated zones of international and regional control. Omran experts proposed that empowering local councils' legitimacy and operations as a model will keep a united and integrated Syria. Accordingly, a model is proposed to ensure that further powers are granted to local authorities instead of federal districts and that territorial integrity is protected. It is stated that Local Councils should also be supported as structures which will assume the powers of the center in providing basic services.

3. Syrian participants made the clear distinction between the objective of preserving and reforming state institutions to ensure future stability, and the regime that has committed crimes against humanity and is incapable of preserving stability and security in the region. A solution is put forward to secure the state authority again in Syria, from bottom to top, through local councils.

4. There are some local councils organized outside Syria, especially for certain settlements under DAESH and YPG control. For instance, local



councils based in Şanlıurfa function for the city center and districts of al-Raqqa and Deir Azzour. They cannot actively carry out operations since they are situated outside the country, however, they maintained functions of networking with constituents, mapping demographic shifts, and providing relief to their populations that are internally displaced to other provinces or refugees outside of Syria. These structures may come forth as an alternative to the civil authority if DAESH is militarily defeated.

5. Syrian participants propose the following model with respect to the security sector. The Airforce Intelligence has been responsible for the majority of crimes against Syrians, and should be merged into the Military Intelligence, and then both should be strictly restricted to military affairs under the Ministry of Defense. The current National Security Bureau should be renamed as National Security Agency (Heyetül İstihbaratı Amma) and include internal and external functions. The State Security Agency and the Political Security Agency should be merged as they carry out similar and overlapping functions, and become part of the National Security Agency. The security services should be kept completely separate from the politics, and forbidden from interfering in politics or in polarization in the society.

6. A 10-percent section has so far been disintegrated from the Syrian Intelligence and a very small part of those who have left the security agencies are the officers positioned at decision-making centers. Apart from this, the number of officers leaving the logistics or transport units etc. is higher than those who leave the critical units.

7. One of the outstanding topics of the meeting is post-DAESH civil authority in the regions which are currently under DAESH control. Within this framework, efforts have been focused to understand whether the Local Councils, introduced by Syrian participants, will be an alternative to the authority in the regions liberated from DAESH. The population forced to migration from the settlements under DAESH control mostly tries to carry out activities outside the country, notably in Turkey. Therefore, they do not play an effective role in the field. However, it is indicated that Local Councils organized outside the country may be an alternative after the region is cleared of DAESH if these councils are supported. Local civil society organizations should also be empowered to fill the new vacuum.

ORSAM is an independent think-tank specializing on Middle Eastern affairs. ORSAM seeks to diversify sources of knowledge on the region and establish a channel of communication between the local experts and Turkish academic and policy circles. Toward that end, ORSAM facilitates the exchanges of officials, academics, strategists, journalists, businesspeople and members of civil society from the region with their Turkish counterparts. ORSAM conducts studies on the regional developments and disseminates their results to the policy and academic circles as well as the wider public through various publication outlets. ORSAM publications include books, reports, bulletins, newsletters, policy briefs, conference minutes and two journals *Ortadoğu Analiz* and *Ortadoğu Etütleri*.

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