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Transformations of the Syrian Military:

The Challenge of Change and Restructuring



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Omran Center for Strategic Studies

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An independent think tank and policy research center focusing on presenting an objective understanding of Syria and the region to become a reference for public policies impacting the region.

Omran began in November 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey. It publishes studies and policy briefs regarding Syrian and regional affairs in the areas of politics, economic development, and local administration. Omran also conducts round-table discussions, seminars, and workshops that promote a more systematic and methodical culture of decision making among future leaders of Syria.

Omran's work support decision making mechanisms, provide practical solutions and policy recommendations to decision makers, identify challenges within the Syrian context, and foresee scenarios and alternative solutions

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Executive Summary

- Throughout its history, the Syrian military has gone through a number of stages in its structural and functional evolution. These include processes undertaken based on the need to develop the military's professional and technical capacity, or as required for the domination and control of the regime over the army, or as dictated by the war conditions. But since Hafez al-Assad took power, the military has become a major actor in local "conflicts," whether as a result of the social composition of the military and the sectarian engineering efforts started by Hafez al-Assad and continued by Bashar al-Assad, the special privileges granted to military members, or as a result of the military doctrine that is customized for the preservation of the regime and not based on national ideals. Some of the most significant structural and human changes in the history of the Syrian military took place between 2011 and 2018. These shifts included the entry of auxiliary non-Syrian forces, both individuals and groups, which completely changed the role of the "army" from that of a traditional national army into a force used primarily to protect the ruling regime.
- As a result of the unexpected outbreak of military operations across the country against a popular uprising, there was a significant increase in the number of amendments made to laws governing the military establishment in order to address gaps in those laws. Some of the laws were ignored in favor of custom and tradition. This was reflected in the promotion and evaluation of officers based on sectarian or regional affiliations. The introduction of a partial mobilization in Syria without official certification of the decision as a result of the events starting in 2011, and the issuance of a new mobilization law at the end of 2011, supported the regime's efforts to distribute mobilization tasks to all state institutions and departments. Previously, the last law on mobilization had been issued in 2004.
- At the outset of the uprising in Syria, the military's deployments were characterized by complete chaos. The regime's use of local and foreign

militias, in addition to the Iranian and Russian regimes, transformed this deployment from complete chaos to a more organized chaos. The regime was able to recapture many villages and cities based on a strategy of collective punishment, scorched earth offensives, and guerrilla warfare. The Syrian regime's use of local and foreign militias led to an imbalance in the structure and responsibilities of the army during the revolution, so that the military became a more Alawite-dominated institution because of its reliance on its Alawite members. Most of the officers were corrupt, and that corruption became much worse during the years of revolution, causing the military to become increasingly distant and isolated from society. This pushed the officers to collude with corrupt networks within the regime and to exploit them to achieve further gains and accumulate wealth.

- In 2018, the military landscape witnessed many major transformations, most notably the division of the country into three main international spheres of influence, each of which contained a diverse mix of local political powers. In the first sphere controlled by the regime, there were indicators of increased Iranian and Russian influence, as well as an attempt to consolidate the militia scene, with some being dissolved and others linked to Iran being integrated and merged with others. In the second sphere: includes the armed opposition forces in northern Syria backed by Ankara, the map of relevant armed actors became more disciplined and contained under the framework of the Astana talks. Opposition forces displaced from southern and central Syria were restructured by Ankara in support of the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations. In the third sphere: the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued to perform their security and military functions under the self-administration project and its legal framework. At the same time, their negotiations with the Assad regime continued, leaving their options wide open and making it more likely that the situation would get more complicated because of the lack of a clear policy from the Americans who supported the SDF on the one hand and pushed for further negotiations on the other.

- The regime's attempts to reduce and contain the roles carried out by Iranian and local militias were not comprehensive or well organized. On one hand, many Iran-backed militias became integrated into the official regime military structure following the formalization of Iranian operations in Syria, which did not reduce or contain its power or impact. On the other hand, the overall reintegration strategy was not adhered to especially with regards to local militias or groups that settled through reconciliation agreements, as the objective of conducting operations against opposition forces is still prevalent and dominating deployments. This process of reintegration will face further obstacles that will greatly hinder any restructuring process as a result of the deep infiltration of such militias and the diverse roles they play in society and within the security sector.
- The data and indicators examined by the papers contained in this book highlight the deep and significant impact of transformations in the military institution both in the medium and long terms. These transformations are observed in the structural and functional imbalances of the military institution especially as it faces a deficit of power, capacity, and resources. Furthermore, the regime's military institution has become one of many other actors in the scene and often held hostage to local and international networks of power, whether it is the Russian or Iranian or other local groups. It is also restricted in its capacity because its imbalanced societal composition, has not adopted political neutrality, and the ideological party doctrine that dominates. All this necessitates a rebuilding strategy that is absent from the current regime's agenda as well as its allies in favor for superficial rehabilitation for the purpose of regaining control of territory and society.
- In the face of the current frame of reference that guide the reform course of the military institution, the absence of a national agenda or vision should be noted. This vision should stipulate the requirements for the reform process, most important of which is the political process and change, depoliticizing the military institution, protecting political life from military interferences, and the reinforcement of healthy and normal civil-military relations that enhance its performance.

Introduction

Based upon the need to redefine the roles of the Syrian military institution in light of the profound transformations in the concept of nation-state, Omran Center for Strategic Studies launched this research project to further analyze those transformation and address the challenge of change and restructuring. The approach first deconstructs and assesses the functions and structures of the Syrian army, its doctrine, and causes behind its involvement and interference in social and political affairs in accordance with the regime's philosophical vision of domination and totalitarian control. The papers contributed by researchers in the first phase of this project are as follows:

1. The Syrian Army 2011-2018: Roles and Functions
2. Military Actors and Structures in Syria in 2018
3. Stability and Change: The Future of the Military in Syria
4. Annex Report 1: Significant Transformations in the Army: 1945-2011
5. Annex Report 2: Laws and Regulations Governing the Military After 2011.

The outputs of papers and reports in this book assess indicators of instability in the map of military actors and measure its impact on the centrality of defense and security functions and the future end game for the nodes of power within the military after possible reintegration processes. It also focuses on the relationship between the military and political spheres, in the sense that it evaluates the potential for military actors to contribute to various avenues of reform, including the redistribution of power in a legally decentralized manner. Similarly, it also looks at the changing political situation and the positions taken by regional and international backers of armed groups, which influence the decisions of military actors, leaving them with limited options.

This book first outlines the main historical developments in the Syrian military in order to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the shortfalls in the military structures and how they developed. It also looks at the most important laws and amendments related to the military establishment and how they have evolved over time. The book also describes how the

military leadership used these laws after the start of the Syrian revolution to recruit fighters to the military that were completely loyal to the ruling regime.

The papers and reports in this book try to answer a number of key questions such as: does the military in its current state embody features of effectiveness, adopt a national outlook, have the capacity and ability required to preserve and promote the outputs of a political process, and able to create and promote conditions for stability? Addressing these questions necessitated first to recognize the positioning of reform policies within the current and future military institution agenda, and to assess the presence or lack of a cohesive and stable structure after the profound transformations it witnessed. Finally, the book outlines an initial vision for a framework for reform that would allow this institution to be a catalyst for societal cohesion and adopt a politically neutral position to become a source of stabilization in Syria.

Omran Center plans to launch a second phase with additional papers to be based on the outcomes of papers contained in this book as well as discussion and feedback received from participants in the workshop held in Istanbul on October 25th, 2018 to focus potentially on the following topics:

1. Sectarianization mechanisms in the Syrian military
2. Power nodes and networks in the Syrian military
3. Management of surplus manpower: a case study of the 4th and 5th corps
4. The military judicial system
5. Non-technical challenges in the reform of the military establishment.

Chapter 1

The Syrian Army 2011-2018: Roles and Functions

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Chapter 1: The Syrian Army 2011-2018: Roles and Functions

Introduction

Since its establishment 1946, the Syrian army has been a unique and controversial structure among Syrian institutions. The army emerged as a main player in the Syrian political scene and played an active role in the successive military coup d'états that took place between 1949 and 1970, while being absent from the military scene except for defensive acts and limited skirmishes with Israel. Despite all this, it formed a national sentiment based on the doctrine of defending the country's borders. Despite the emergence of some opposition blocs and divisions in military's ranks based on political and ideological differences, their impact remained limited, and did not weaken the army's nationalistic characteristics.

When Hafez Assad took power in 1970, he began to transform the army into a personal tool of power by linking it directly to himself. He created military and security networks and groups with special powers and absolute authorities. These networks are fully loyal to him personally as he realized that controlling the army secures his power and authority and prevents the possibility of another coup. This practice has been previously introduced during the French mandate, but evolved during the Assad rule where he integrated the military institution with the ruling party and its ideology and doctrine. This allowed Assad to control different nodes of power in the armed forces and further consolidate his authority by ensuring full loyalty of the military institution to the doctrine and objectives of the ruling regime.

With the start of the popular uprising in 2011, there were many questions in the early days about the army's position towards the movement and whether it was going to intervene on behalf of the regime, remain neutral, or support the revolutionary effort. As the population uprising expanded, the army started to intervene and to fulfil the role that it was built for - protecting the ruling regime and propping it up at any cost. The army began using violent measures to deter unarmed civilians, taking a clear side in the conflict between the people and the regime.

This study evaluates the status of the Syrian army from the start of the popular uprising in 2011, and analyzes its function roles and structural problems. This is especially important because any political effort working to find solutions to the Syrian conflict will remain inadequate without restructuring the roles and structures of the Syrian army – considering its role as a main belligerent in the conflict – and its many related groups. The fate of all of these organizations must be determined during the restructuring process.

This paper analyzes the Syrian army's role to understand its reasons for intervening against the popular movement, and highlights the most important changes and transformations in the army's structure and functions from 2011-2018. The paper aims to present a clear and objective explanation of the military establishment in Syria during this period in order to offer a template for a future structure of the army and its role and functions within the context of the desired political solution in Syria.

First: Framing Syria's Military-Civilian Relations

After Syria's independence from the French mandate in 1946, the founders of the modern Syrian state tried to establish an independent military institution that integrates and welcomes all ethnic and racial components of society. However, the series of military coups, the last of which was led by Hafez Assad against Nur al-Din al-Attasi in 1970, turned the military establishment into a tool used for deepening societal tension and increasing polarization. The political and ideological divisions along with sectarian conflicts and alignments that evolved into sectarian-based policies, especially as witnessed during the 1963-1970 era, all were instigators of the military coups during that period⁽¹⁾, ending with Hafez Assad's 1970 ascendance to power. Since that date until the time of publication of this paper, the army assumed a new function and objective of extending its influence over all of the state's civil

⁽¹⁾ Several coups took place between 1946 and 1970, starting with Hosni Zaim (March 29, 1949), Sami Henawi (August 14, 1949), Adib Shihakli (December 19, 1949), then Adib Shihakli again (October 28, 1951), Hashem Atasi (February 25, 1952), Abdelkarim Nehlawi (March 28, 1962), The Baath Coup (March 8, 1963), then an attempted coup of Jassem Alwan (July 18, 1963), then finally Hafez Assad coup (November 16, 1970).

institutions by means of a single ideological framework based on the “ideological army” that dominates the Syrian army⁽²⁾.

For many years, the military establishing has been operating according to the strategies laid out by Hafez Assad. The policies of starvation and economic siege on Syria during the 1980’s made it easier for high-ranking Alawite officers and their close circles to significantly increase their powers through unlawful means, enabling them to take full control of the country while hiding behind slogans of resistance to the west. In return, many people openly expressed their loyalty and support for the authorities in hopes of gaining their approval and securing the most basic human rights. Networks of informants and spoilers were established among the people in order to impose upon them the power of the security structures that managed a game of organized crime⁽³⁾.

When Bashar Assad took power after his father’s death in 2000, he pursued the same ruling strategies as his father. He maintained a civilian facade through the Ba’ath Party in both the government and parliament (as the leader of the state and society), and relied on the security and military structures to maintain the balance of power. The military was used to quell protests in the city of Suweida in 2000 and against the Kurds in 2004. The military officers continued to consolidate power in a way that increased corruption and reduced the army’s combat readiness.

With the outbreak of the popular uprising in 2011, the public image the of Syrian state's defense and security structures have undergone drastic changes. The image of the army's was completely destroyed and its ability to keep social order has seen extensive disruptions and breakdowns. It also suffered from extensive disintegration in the form of material and human losses of various causes. The military has become more isolated from the wider community. The military networks have shifted from the nepotism, which

⁽²⁾ The ideological army is an army that adopts a specific ideology or doctrine, or is overly reliant on a sectarian group, and is controlled by a regime, not a state. It is not typically a professional army that adopts political neutrality. It regularly interferes in politics in favour of its dominating group or sect. Examples can be seen in Syria, Iraq and Iran. For more, read: Jihad Hisham Mohamad Dayf, *The Role of the Military Institution in the Syrian Political System 2011-2016*, <https://democraticac.de/?p=47953>.

⁽³⁾ Eiad Shurbaji, *The Syrian Revolution and the Sunni-Alawite Conflict*, Part 4, http://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/6819.

was already deeply entrenched before 2011 – especially in the officers' corps of the army – into organized networks of theft and corruption. The new status quo left many officers with no choice but to collude with the regime's networks and exploit the corruption to supplement their low salaries⁽⁴⁾.

The general nature of the military establishment has become recruitment based on sectarian identity or on the basis of kinship and marriage, instead of qualifications such as competence and merit. This was especially the case after several paramilitary militia groups were formed under different names, such as the National Defense Forces (NDF) and the Ba'ath Brigades. Overall, structural transformations have led to a military establishment that became more corrupt and isolated from society. The creation of this large gap with society increased feelings of resentment and discontent towards the regime and the army itself.

This is how both Assad the father and the son sought to create a system over all of Syrian society to establish non-traditional paths through which people of his choosing would have their needs met through favors arranged within the state's power structures. This was done by accommodating specific interests through circles of influence, direct bribes to decision makers, or by personal relations. These pathways have led to the corruption of the society and the eradication of people's independence, even of its opponents who also sometimes had to walk some of these paths. Thus, Syrian society lost trust amongst its own members, fear and calculation became the hallmark of social relations. The collective national identity was fragmented and Syrian civil society was disenfranchised and transformed into small cantons with conflicting interests.

An Analysis of the Syrian Army's Intervention Against Popular Protests

The fact that the military establishment stood with the Syrian regime from the first days of the popular uprising raises many questions about the real reasons for this occurrence. Some Arab and Western analysts, in light of the Tunisian

⁽⁴⁾ Khedder Khaddour, Strength in Weakness: The Syrian Army's Accidental Resilience, Carnegie Endowment, March 14, 2016, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2016/03/14/strength-in-weakness-syrian-army-s-accidental-resilience-pub-62968>

and Egyptian experiences⁽⁵⁾, predicted that the Syrian army would follow the same behavior as the their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt (before the military coup), but what actually happened was much different. This has lead to serious questions about the military's involvement with the Syrian regime against the popular uprising. To find out the truth of this phenomenon, some explanations are offered below:

1. The Social Configuration of the Military Establishment

With regards to the social composition of the Syrian army upon its formation, Alawites occupied important positions of power within its ranks. The French had adopted a special policy towards minorities whereby minorities were recruited to form a new army of ten thousand fighters named Special Forces of the Levant. This force served as support forces to the French army, with one third of it drawn from the Alawite community. This force was later the core component of the newly formed Syrian Army after the independence in 1946. During the period between 1946 and 1963, the official policy of the army did not give preferential treatment to minorities, but Alawites remained to comprise the majority of armed forces, with higher concentration in the infantry forces⁽⁶⁾. With the arrival of Hafez Assad to power, he began to establish the grip of power over the military with the formation of sectarian and tribal military units whose sole duty was to protect the regime. He also appointed Alawite officers to prominent positions. This strategy was built on his belief that tribes and ethnic groups teach their children ideological affiliation, unity, and tribal fanaticism⁽⁷⁾.

This resulted in Alawite officers taking a majority of the sensitive high-level leadership positions, especially those in control of strategic weapons systems. Under Hafez Assad, Alawites accounted for 85% of the graduates of the military academies both inside and outside Syria. Sunni officers were put under intense pressure and were under constant surveillance by Alawite

⁽⁵⁾ The position of the Tunisian army was closer to the position of neutrality after the revolution in Tunisia. The army did not intervene to support President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and to fight the opponents. It did not intervene to remove the president from power. The army monitored the situation and waited to see how events would play out. In Egypt, in the January 25, 2011 uprising, the army did not intervene to stand with the regime and did not intervene to oppose the regime either. When Egyptian tanks rolled into the streets on January 28 to protect the country's facilities, President Hosni Mubarak was forced to hand over power to the military council and reigned out of his own accord.

⁽⁶⁾ Nasser Rabbat, *Anatomy of the Syrian Regime*, London Review of Book, 14 July 2016, <https://goo.gl/aiQgz6>

⁽⁷⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedin, *The Army and Politics in Syria*, 1st Edition, 2008, page 425.

officers who took complete control of the Air Force and Military Intelligence branches. The consequences of having an Alawite-dominated officer corps that controlled all high-level positions was that this minority sect invested in increasing its influence and created a specific culture within the military institutions. Various fear tactics were used to scare Sunni officers who violated this culture, including cutting off their salaries or putting them on military trial. This was done to show strength and to ensure that there would not be any military coup d'état attempts like those of the 1950s and 1960s. It also ensured that the military would stand with the regime in the case of any uprisings or anti-regime movements.

When Bashar Assad took power, the Air Force and Navy military structures were both dominated by members of the Alawite minority sect, as was the leadership of all intelligence branches of the armed forces, the Republican Guard, and the special forces. Bashar fired several military commanders, appointed his brother-in-law Asif Shawkat as the Chief of Military Intelligence, and replaced a number of Air Force commanders in an attempt to strengthen his grip on the military. Most of the people Bashar Assad appointed were related to him either through blood or marriage, because Bashar depended on relatives more so than his father, who exploited ethnicity and tribalism instead. Bashar appointed his brother Maher Assad as head of the Republican Guard, and also gave relatives from his mother's side of the family many high-ranking positions⁽⁸⁾.

When the popular resistance movement started, the percentage of Alawites in the military establishment increased as a result of the many Sunni defections, and also because Sunnis and other minorities were prevented from completing their mandatory service at that time. The Alawites that remained in the military were granted many perks and rewards for their loyalty and some sectarian militias were formed. In this manner, the regime was able to issue orders through a cohesive system of reliable individuals that are connected directly to Bashar Assad by family ties as well as shared business and security interests. Rami Makhlof, Bashar Assad's cousin, started funding the Tiger Forces in 2013, supplying them with better equipment than the rest of the

⁽⁸⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedin, *Ibid.* P 519

army⁽⁹⁾. Businessmen who supported the regime provided financial support by funding the “shabiha” gangs with large sums of money⁽¹⁰⁾. The “shabiha” also gathered funds through intimidation, extortion, kidnapping, and blackmail⁽¹¹⁾.

It can be concluded that the social composition of the Syrian military establishment had a significant impact on the army’s support for the regime and its strong repression of the popular uprising. However, it is not the only reason for the regime’s success, as there are some military commanders that are not from the Alawite community and do not have any familial ties with Assad, but have remained with the regime and fought against the uprising throughout the eight year conflict.

2. Privileges given to Military officers

Offering privileges to army officers is one of the main features of the army’s strategy to deal with Syrian society. Since the days of Hafez Assad, Syrian army officers have enjoyed considerable privileges and influence. They are heavily involved in commercial and economic activities and hold senior positions in the economic sectors under the military's control. Hafez Assad worked to strengthen the economic status of senior military officers in order to buy their loyalty and link their fates with the survival of the regime's governing structures and their leader. The officers also had considerable influence over politics and governance thanks to a decree issued in 1984 that gave the commander of each garrison executive powers over the area where his unit was located⁽¹²⁾. It also allowed them to reap great wealth and money by entering into partnerships with business leaders. This coincided with a

⁽⁹⁾ These forces are led by a top intelligence official, Colonel Suhail al-Hassan, and his lieutenant. Most of the officers and elements of these forces are Alawites and they are equipped with the best military equipment. The forces participated in many decisive battles and were so successful that the unit became well known among supporters of the regime and the media.

⁽¹⁰⁾ This is an armed group mostly belonging to the Alawite sect. They carry out illegal activities, but they enjoy the support of the intelligence services. They have immunity and permits to carry weapons. Their numbers are approximately 25,000. The regime has depended on them since the outbreak of protests and provided them with money and weapons in order to support the army and relieve some of the pressure on it.

⁽¹¹⁾ Khedder Khaddour, *Strength in Weakness: The Syrian Army’s Accidental Resilience*

⁽¹²⁾ Nabil Youssef, *The Syrian Army The Doctrine of Loyalty When and How?* http://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/5524

period when Syria benefitted greatly from international loans and gifts from wealthy Arab donors after the October 1973 war⁽¹³⁾.

Under Bashar Assad, the army also relied on a large number of relationships and established new networks of patronage and mutually-beneficial relationships to obtain grants, promotions, and in-kind benefits. Officers have amassed great fortunes through their partnerships with businessmen in the private sector. The collection of personal wealth by officers has continued, reducing the combat readiness of the army and institutionalizing corruption. Bashar al Assad's neoliberal economic policies also resulted in the increased financial benefits for officers.

One example of the special privileges enjoyed by the officers is what Syrians call in colloquial Arabic "tafyeesh" or "التفيش". This term is used to refer to the payment that a conscript makes to his superior officer in order to avoid actually reporting his mandatory military service. Some officers have dozens of recruits who pay them tens of thousands of Syrian pounds every month in exchange for the officer turning a blind eye to their absence from their military units. Conscripts are also used to carry out different jobs at officers' homes, farms, and other personal properties. A second example of officer privileges is the joint plan launched by the Syrian Ministry of Defense with a group of businessmen in 2007 to sell luxury cars to retired army officers at a tax-free reduced rate. The officers can pay for these cars in installments from their pensions. This program has increased the social standing of the officers, because luxury cars have always been available only to the elite because of the high import duties, which amounted to about 200, and because of the limited purchasing power of most Syrians. In addition, officers were able to sell their cars immediately, earning huge profits from the tax savings alone⁽¹⁴⁾.

These and other privileges motivated army officers to remain in their positions and to support the regime for fear of losing the privileges they gained and compromising their properties and the futures of their children in the universities outside Syria and within the Syrian economic structures. Those tied to the military have issued public positions against any protest

⁽¹³⁾ Jihad Hisham Mohammed Deif, *The Role of the Military Establishment in the Syrian Political System 2011-2016*: <https://democraticac.de/?p=47953>

⁽¹⁴⁾ Khedder Khaddour, *Strength in Weakness: The Syrian Army's Accidental Resilience*, previous reference.

movement, one senior army officer was recorded to have said that it was necessary to “wipe Dara’a off the map.” Senior businesspersons and academics directly connected to the military, view the military as equivalent to power and money, and citizens are just consumers. One influential businessman said that “It would be ok to eliminate a quarter of the population and displace half of the population if deemed necessary for the preservation of the regime.”

3. The Ruling Ideology or Doctrine of the Syrian Army

Complementing the previous reasons, the dominant ideology established by Hafez Assad and reinforced by Bashar Assad is one of the main reasons the military establishment stood with the regime against the popular uprising. Hafez Assad integrated the government and military institutions through a doctrine based on an ideological army, which transforms the army into an internal security structure whose main goal is to ensure the continuity of the regime. This ideology increased the power and influence of the army at the expense of the Ba’ath Party, which became little more than an ideological façade for the regime. Bashar Assad reinforced this evolution, especially following the start of the popular uprising. He took measures to militarize the Alawite sect and turn its youth into soldiers to protect the regime. This was made possible by reinforcing the idea that the future of the Alawite sect would be bad if the regime fell, and that the survival of the Assad regime was synonymous with the survival of the Alawite community⁽¹⁵⁾.

The regime played the sectarian card, and in Alawite-majority areas, pro-regime militias were formed. The Alawite militias helped the army commit sectarian massacres in a number of provinces after the regime was able to convince them that the fight against the opposition was existential. Thus, the fall of the regime would mean the fall of the entire Alawite community and their allied networks of other minority sects and economic interests⁽¹⁶⁾. The Dutch researcher Nikolaos van Dam described this in an interview with Reuters where he said that the fate of many of the top leaders in the Syrian

⁽¹⁵⁾ Zoltan Barany, Why Most Syrian Officers Remain Loyal to Assad, www.dohainstitute.org/17/6/2013

⁽¹⁶⁾ Jihad Hisham Mohammed Deif, The Role of the Military Establishment in the Syrian Political System 2011-2016: <https://democraticac.de/?p=47953>

army was directly linked to that of Assad “Any attempt at an internal coup would be extremely dangerous for those contemplating it. If they were discovered they would be quickly shot”⁽¹⁷⁾. Hence, we can confidently assert that the ruling ideology of the military establishment played a significant role in ensuring the army’s support for the regime.

4. The Existence of Multiple Parallel Military Organizations

In addition to all that we have discussed, there is always a sense of fear and terror generated for members of the military who are not from the Alawite sect due to the existence of a number of parallel military and security institutions that have notorious reputations. Most of these parallel institutions were established during Hafez Assad’s reign and remained intact even after his death. Their objective became competition for power, influence, and proving their loyalty to the leader of the state, who is the only one capable of managing them. These institutions recruited most of their members from the Alawite sect to make them even stronger than the military and able to complete duties such as deterring and preventing a military coup. The most notable of these parallel institutions and agencies are the: Military Intelligence Directorate, Air Force Intelligence Directorate, the Republican Guard, and the 4th Division.

- **Military Intelligence Directorate:** One of the most important structures that enjoys expansive authority within the military establishment. It was created to oversee the security of military units, the border, conscripts, officers, and the security of military installations. It is responsible for overseeing the behavior of members of the military establishment, which includes monitoring and investigating any officers or personnel who speak out against the different corrupt practices going on.
- **Air Force Intelligence Directorate:** This is the regime’s most loyal institution, with the lower proportion of non-Alawite officers and conscripts compared to other institutions. It was created when Hafez Assad rose to power. It is overseen by the Ministry of Defense, which provides it with administration, funding, and weapons but has no real

⁽¹⁷⁾ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-army/analysis-desertions-show-unease-growing-in-syrian-army-idUSTRE7861WX20110907>. And Nabil Yousef, Syrian Army: the doctrine of sectarian loyalty: when and how it was formed, Orient TV, dated September 29, 2013, <https://goo.gl/L4ErmN>

authority over it. On the contrary, the Air Force Intelligence Directorate along with the Military Intelligence Directorate oversees the work of the Minister of Defense and has a say in who is posted in that position.

- **Republican Guard Forces:** This is one of the most elite and heavily armed forces of the Syrian military. Its main objective is to protect the capital Damascus from any internal or external threats. Its officers receive significant shares of the Syrian oil revenue to guarantee their loyalty. The Republican Guard determines the working relationship between security and military structures as well as between the regime and the citizenry. It is also the official center of logistical coordination of all pro-regime militias in Syria since the start of the Syrian uprising, including the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shi'ite militias.
- **4th Division:** It is one of the best formations of the Syrian army in terms of its training, capability, and it owns the most modern heavy machinery. The vast majority of its members are from the Alawite sect. It consists of several regiments and brigades that have their headquarters at different entrances to Damascus, including Mo'adamiya, Zabadani, Ya'afour, and Saboura. It is important to note that the commanders of all the regiments and brigades are Alawite. The 4th Division is currently headed by Brigadier General Maher Assad, Bashar Assad's brother⁽¹⁸⁾.

From the above overview, it can be said that one of the most important reasons for the army's intervention against protests, and its siege of the Syrian cities that revolted, and its standing with the regime, is the social engineering of the military establishment and the fact that Alawite officers control all of the most sensitive leadership positions. Also, the officers had significant privileges that gave them exaggerated influence, allowing them to amass large sums of money that they did not want to lose by standing against the regime. Additionally, the ruling ideology of the army created a fear of its institutions and the parallel organizations within the military establishment, which have developed notoriously bad reputations.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Maen Talaa, The Syrian Security Services and the Necessity of Structural and Functional Change. <https://www.omrandirasat.org/14/7/2016>.

Second: The Army's Activities from 2011-2018

Before the outbreak of the popular uprising in 2011, the Syrian army was not combat ready. The many long years of rampant corruption resulted in the army being stripped of its combat skills. However, after eight years of the Syrian uprising, the regime has been able to survive, despite all the analyses and predictions that said the regime would be unable to last. This raises the following question: how did the regime manage to survive these eight years despite the rampant corruption in the military establishment, which had stripped the military of its combat capacity.

To answer this we will briefly discuss the Syrian regime's strategy in dealing with the popular protest movement from its inception until the time of writing this paper. This strategy is one of the main reasons that the regime has survived all these years, despite the contradictions in the strategy itself, which brought the regime to the brink of collapse on two separate occasions. Each time the regime was able to stabilize and rise once again due to the help of its external allies, that which saved it from collapse.

In March 2011, the Syrian army consisted of 12 divisions, most of which were concentrated in the south and southwestern parts of the country, near Israel. The 5th and 9th Divisions were based on the outskirts of Dara'a city and the 15th Division was based in Suweida. There were six divisions around Damascus, two divisions – the 11th and 18th – in Homs, and 17th Division was based in Raqqa⁽¹⁹⁾.

The army's fortification in large areas of Syrian territory has helped the regime maintain control over key population centers. The regime has achieved some success by virtue of the absolute authority given to the commanders of the military divisions to deal with the areas under their control as they see fit, without requesting permission from leadership in the Ministry of Defense. Although large areas of the country fell to opposition forces, and many soldiers and officers defected, the leaders of the divisions remained the same and continued to control their areas of operation. The defections did not have a significant impact on the army's cohesion or its operational capacity because the positions previously held by the defected officers were not critical

⁽¹⁹⁾ Khedder Khaddour, *Ibid*

to the army's performance. Thus, networks of nepotism emerged as the de facto chain of command of the regime. When the popular protest movement reached its peak in 2012 the Syrian regime was able to activate an effective system of command and control manned by reliable individuals who were directly tied to the regime's interests through family and sectarian relations as well as shared business and financial interests.

The army's movements during the first two years of the uprising were constrained by the regime's fears of increasing defections. Instead the regime depended on its elite sectarian forces that were absolutely loyal and in an unprecedented move, it retained the entire 102nd mandatory service session⁽²⁰⁾. As a result, the regime was forced to cede control of some parts of the country, including rural and remote areas, in order to defend strategic areas like major population centers, sectarian enclaves, military bases, and strategic lines of communication. This may explain the initial rapid advances made by opposition forces, which forced the regime to seek reinforcements from local and foreign militias and made it increasingly dependent on them to halt its losses and restore its credibility. Although the army was on the front lines in the early days of the war, this ended after the battle of Baba Amr in Homs in 2012, where the army suffered heavy casualties. The battle of Khalidiya in 2013 highlighted a new approach for the regime: the militias were ordered to eliminate the opposition forces, while the army supported them from behind and waited to take control when the fighting ended⁽²¹⁾.

By mid-2013, after the army completely failed to reenter the cities it had lost control of, its reliance on warplanes became essential. Their goal shifted from taking control of these towns and villages to transforming them into uninhabitable areas. Their main tactic consisted of sending a single aircraft to conduct a bombing raid. Because of their lack of sufficient aircraft and air-to-surface bombing capabilities, the military resorted to using naval torpedoes, mines, depth charges, and explosive barrels. The attacks targeted crops, bakeries, hospitals, and critical infrastructure necessary to support life⁽²²⁾. The aim of these tactics was to force people out of the opposition areas, thereby

⁽²⁰⁾ This recruitment group joined mandatory service in the May 2010 and was held until 2018, when part of it was discharged after 8 years of mandatory service.

⁽²¹⁾ Khedder Khaddour, *Ibid*.

⁽²²⁾ Brian Jenkins, *The Dynamics of Syria's Civil War*, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE115.html>.

depriving the opposition of popular support. These tactics help to explain the massive numbers of displaced people and refugees.

By 2015, three full Syrian military brigades were disbanded and the few remaining personnel were integrated with other military detachments. At the same time, the National Defense Force (NDF) militias were expanded on the basis on sectarian allegiance, with more Alawite loyalists joining, and the regime became increasingly reliant on them⁽²³⁾. Thus the Syrian army's role was significantly diminished to the point that it was no longer the main actor in the war effort, which was instead being fought by foreign forces. During this period, the Syrian army came close to falling twice. The first time was at the end of 2012, but the Iranian intervention and its support of heavy weapons and militia fighters, especially the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, helped the regime continue. The second time was in the fall of 2015. The Russian regime intervened directly at the end of September, saving the regime and resurrected it after it had suffered considerable losses that left it with control of less than 20% of Syria's territory. The military situation changed in 2016 as the regime began to gain the upper hand in the military fight, recapturing much of what it had lost with the help of Iran's foreign reinforcements and Russian air support. The army's movements during this period were characterized by a scorched earth strategy where they would encircle and besiege an area – cutting off all access – then use heavy and indiscriminate bombing to force the population to flee. Opposition fighters were then forced out of the area so that the regime's forces including the army, the militias, and special forces, could enter and take complete control.

By 2017, the regime had the advantage on the ground. While taking territory from the opposition in military operations, the regime has also been making de-escalation agreements in other areas. Through these de-escalation agreements, the regime avoided having direct military conflict in various regions and Syrian fronts at the same time. The regime took advantage of the fact that the armed opposition did not make decisions as a single unit and the existence of competing regional interests that influenced the opposition groups. Therefore, it made deals with the armed opposition groups in southern Syria separately from the deals it made with the factions

⁽²³⁾ Radwan Ziadeh, How the Syrian Arab Army collapsed, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/2018/4/18>.

in northern Syria, and Eastern Ghouta, and Homs. By compartmentalizing the de-escalation zones, the regime, along with its Russian and Iranian allies, was able to concentrate attacks on areas of critical importance while ensuring that they would not have to fend off attacks in other areas. In this manner, they attacked and captured large swaths of territory in eastern rural Homs, eastern rural Aleppo, Deir Ezzor governorate, then eastern Hama, eastern Idlib, then Eastern Ghouta, Southern Damascus, and finally Dara'a⁽²⁴⁾.

In summary, the Syrian army's strategy over the last few years of the uprising shifted from complete chaos to organized chaos with the help of the Russians and the Iranians. The chaotic military situation was used by the army in its hybrid policy that relied on three main military strategies: collective punishment, scorched earth campaigns, and non-traditional (guerilla) warfare, in addition to the destruction of infrastructure in order to weaken the armed opposition's public support and create more pressure on it in the areas it controlled. This often forced the opposition to accept deals for surrender and deportation. This was successful in a number of strategic areas, notably the city of Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, northern rural Lattakia, and other areas.

In this manner, the regime was able to strengthen its local political and social support base and turn the military patronage networks created before the uprising into an effective force that helped the regime survive, after the recruitment of militias that helped in a number of land battles.

An Analysis of the most important changes and transformations in the army's structure and functions

The last several years of Syrian crisis have left a very clear mark on the structure and function of the Syrian army. During this time, the army underwent fundamental structural changes in its size, organization, and structure. The regime used three different categories when referring to different parts of the Syrian army, namely:

⁽²⁴⁾ Nedaa Syria Center, Russian Strategy in Facing the Syrian Factions, an analytical paper, 26 March 2018, <https://goo.gl/DDUpXu>

1. Changes within the Armed Forces

The Armed Forces relies greatly on military conscripts⁽²⁵⁾. They numbered around 330,000 before the start of the uprising⁽²⁶⁾, and it was believed that the regime could theoretically call up a total of 1,700,000 soldiers⁽²⁷⁾. At that time, the army was divided into 12 divisions grouped into three corpses⁽²⁸⁾.

The army's organizational structure is made up of land forces, naval forces, and the air force. According to a 2010 estimate, these forces comprise of 295,000 active duty personnel including 220,000 in the ground forces, 5,000 in the naval force, and 70,000 in the air force and air defense⁽²⁹⁾.

After eight years of conflict, some military experts estimate that the army is one quarter of its pre-war size, while others estimate that only one-fifth of the army is left. Some of the factors that led to the dwindling of the army's numbers include people evading their mandatory service, and people leaving the country as refugees or migrants. Additionally, many younger volunteers prefer to join the local and foreign militias over the regular army due to the lack of attention paid to conscripted soldiers, who are abandoned on the frontlines battlefield without support and have their food rations stolen. They would have to pay their unit officers part or all of their salaries in order to get out of the service. Militias also they enjoy privileges not available to regular military personnel regime's army. There are also killings and dissent that led to the disappearance of several military contingents.

2. Affiliated Forces

This refers to the local volunteer militias like the NDF and Popular Committees that were formed under the guidance of Iran and in coordination the with the Republican Guard. They were intended to focus their operations

⁽²⁵⁾ Military service in Syria is mandatory for 18-year-olds for 18 months, excluding those who have not completed the fifth grade; their mandatory service period is 21 months.

⁽²⁶⁾ This number was estimated by cross referencing different reported numbers provided by a group of officers who researcher met in the southern Turkey in June 2018.

⁽²⁷⁾ Jenkins, Brian Michael, *The Dynamics of Syria's Civil War*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE115.html>.

⁽²⁸⁾ The 5th and 9th Divisions were stationed on the outskirts of Daraa, while the 15th was in Sweida. Around the capital Damascus there were six divisions. In Homs, the Eleventh and Eighteenth divisions were in the city, while the Seventeenth Division was stationed in Raqqa.

⁽²⁹⁾ For more details: http://www.moqatel.com/openshare/Behoth/Dwal-Modn1/syria/Sec09.doc_cvt.htm

in important regime-controlled communities, such as Latakia, Tartous, Homs, Hama, and Damascus.

These forces formed primarily as small lightly-armed local groups. These groups soon began to spread and take part in different battles all across Syria as members realized that these militias were a sanctuary from legal commitments and a way to escape the mandatory military service.

These forces do not necessarily operate under the regime's direct control and much of their funding comes from businessmen loyal to the regime. They are recruited on a sectarian basis under the command of the IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah⁽³⁰⁾. They have some well-known leaders that are staunch regime loyalists like Suheil al-Hassan, commander of the infamous "Tiger Forces"⁽³¹⁾, and Brigadier General Issam Zahreddine, commander of the "Supporter of the Lion of God" militia⁽³²⁾. Some of these militias became semi-independent, carrying out military and security missions without coordinating with higher-level commanders. They also engaged in tens of thousands of systematic ("tafeesh or تعفیش) looting operations, many were sectarian motivated, such as in eastern Aleppo, northern rural Hama, or motivated by nationalism, such as in Ayn al-Arab, Tal Abyad, and Tal Tamer, and others were motivated by tribal loyalties such as those that took place in the country sides of Mayadeen and Albu Kamal.

These forces are estimated to include between 40 and 43 thousand fighters, and a large number of them have been integrated within the traditional army structure⁽³³⁾. These forces are credited for playing an effective and prominent role in supporting the army in a number of battles around Syria. The most well known of these forces are the NDF established in 2012, the Tiger Forces, the Eagles of the Whirlwind, the Desert Hawks, the Arab National Guard, and

⁽³⁰⁾ Abdul Rahman al-Masri, Analysis of the Fifth Corps and the Case of the Syrian army, at: <http://www.alghad.com/articles/1382622>

⁽³¹⁾ Tiger Forces are cross-military and security institutional forces that rely on three main pillars: first, a security-military complex; the second is its nature as voluntary and Alawite forces; and the third is its governance through a state administrative framework (Ministry of Defense). These forces were formed in 2013 to carry out several military and security tasks and to respond to the changing security situation. They are also tasked with removing security from the Alawite community. They enjoy social support from most of the Alawite community on the one hand, and financial funding from the Al-Bustan Association of Rami Makhlof on the other hand. The official state media also expresses their support for them. For more information see Maen Talaa, *Ibid*.

⁽³²⁾ He was killed in a mine explosion in Deir Ezzor on 18/10/2017.

⁽³³⁾ The number was estimated by the Information Unit at Omran Center, which designed a model for monitoring their numbers and the most important changes witnessed by militia movements in Syria.

others. These forces have a similar role to that of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, which supported the army there in much of the fighting against ISIS.

When discussing affiliated forces it is pertinent to mention the 4th and 5th Corps that were established over the past several years in order to confront the shortage of the Syrian nationals compared to the large presence of foreign fighters among the pro-Assad forces, and the need to institutionalize these foreign forces and integrate them into the army. The 4th Corps was established in October of 2015 through the combination of army and affiliated forces in Lattakia, including the NDF, Tiger Forces, Eagles of the Whirlwind, and the Ba'ath Brigades. They were supported by Russian artillery batteries brought from the 8th Artillery Regiment, the 120th Artillery Brigade, the 439th Artillery Brigade of the Republican Guard, and 20th Rocket Regiment⁽³⁴⁾.

The 5th Corps was formed in November 2016 to try to take control of the military establishment in the medium and long term after it was far beyond its breaking point. This was necessary following the many years of heavy human losses in battle, and the large numbers of defections and conscripts avoiding military service. This was coupled with rampant corruption and massive violations committed by the armed forces and their affiliated militias. In addition, there were attempts to provide legal cover for the integration of these forces that were formed outside the framework of the traditional military establishment, so that they will not to be targeted in any future political solution, and will instead be treated as part of the army itself. The Syrian military service law allows the establishment of sub-forces and other forces when necessary to fight along with the army. On the other hand, it can be said that the establishment of the 5th Corps reflected a Russian desire to find a way to balance Iran's influence within the Syrian military establishment and to prevent Iran from imposing its own vision on the military, especially after the formation of the 4th Corps made up of the Civil Defense Forces and other Iranian-backed militias.

⁽³⁴⁾ Khedder Khaddour, *Ibid*

3. Allied Forces

This refers to foreign forces that have entered Syria to support the regime, including the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, and Shi'ite militias from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, as well as Russian troops and security companies. Some reports estimate that the total number of Iranian troops and their affiliated militias in Syria are exceeds 70,000, including the Russian soldiers who participated in combat operations⁽³⁵⁾.

These forces played a prominent role in supporting the regime and bolstering its forces at the two critical times when it was close to defeat. Both times, Iran sent military advisors and thousands of Iraqi, Afghani, and Lebanese militiamen to Syria to support the regime and provide it with both fighters and weapons. They coordinated their deployment to the frontlines directly with the Republican Guard and the 4th Division. The Russian military intervention was decisive in reversing the regime's military losses. Russia provided comprehensive aerial support during the regime's battles against opposition forces and provided the regime with advanced high-tech armored vehicles that gave the regime a significant advantage in battles and allowed it to take back large swaths of territory. The regime's foreign support from Russia and Iran and foreign militias played a key role in allowing the army to survive and continue fighting by offering financial, logistical, and operational support and assistance.

From the above, it can be said that the structure of the Syrian army changed significantly after 2011, when two new corps were added, making a total of five. Most of the fighters in these two new units come from local volunteer militias that were recruited on a sectarian basis, such as the NDF, the Popular Committees, the Desert Hawks, and Eagles of the Whirlwind, and others. This turned the army into a mix of traditional forces and non-traditional militia forces, where the affiliated and allied forces make up more than half of the total personnel. Although the regime has succeeded in achieving this in numerical terms, it has failed in terms of organizational and operational effectiveness on many occasions and in many battles. These formations in turn weakened the army, with a large part of them turning into militias that

⁽³⁵⁾ Israeli reports: The number of Iranian forces and militias in Syria exceeds 70 thousand fighters: <http://www.souriyati.com/2017/11/18/89680.html>

are not based on military hierarchy. This has caused considerable confusion among field commanders because of the lack of discipline of the militia members, their randomness, and their lack of military experience. This consequently resulted in differences between the different leaderships, which led to the failure of many military operations fought by the two corps against the opposition forces. In some cases armed clashes broke out after the militias had amassed more power and authority than the military without assuming official responsibilities or having to be accountable to the law.

Under these external influences, opportunism replaced weak professionalism and military doctrine. Syrian officers and elements often changed their style and behavior according to the forces they work with. This situation prompted the regime at a certain stage, especially after the Russian military intervention, to exert more effort to manage and control these militias and to make the Syrian army the backbone of the distribution of tasks and operations between the army and non-traditional militia forces. Furthermore, many of the militias were disbanded and broken apart for a number of military and political reasons. From a military point of view, once the regime took control of areas that were previously unattainable such as Eastern Ghouta, southern Damascus, northern Homs, Dara'a, and Quneitera, these militias no longer needed to control the geographical areas under regime control. Politically, this can be explained by Russian and American pressure, which came within the framework of a set of international conditions for a solution to the conflict includes fighting against all irregular military entities, which according to the Western perspective includes local and foreign militias, especially Iranian or Iranian-backed ones.

In conclusion, it can be said that the changes in the Syrian army's structure had a major institutional impact that will be reflected in the decisions on Syria's future. This will not only impede the peace process between Syrians in the event of a political solution, but will also affect regional stability. This is especially true in light of the many Iranian and Russian plans in Syria, which are based on integrating their militias within the structure of the Syrian army and using them to secure future gains, particularly the 4th and 5th Corps.

Regardless of the type of solution reached in Syria, Syrians will continue face a complicated network of overlapping relationships between actors in the

military, security, economic, political, and civilian sectors that are resistant to change. At the head of all these will be the military establishment, which will be a major player in the settlement processes and any scenario for peace if it can be reached. This makes the task of restructuring the army into a proper national army a priority in the resolution of the Syrian crisis. Restructuring is a preferable option after the failure of attempts in other cases to dismantle the military establishment and terminate its work, such as in the Iraqi case following the American invasion in 2003. All indicators suggest that the political solution required of the international community includes the preservation of state institutions, especially the army. It is not in any party's interest for the army to be taken apart because that would likely result in the complete breakdown of the state and the resurgence of war. It is necessary to take a professional, systematic, and thoughtful restructuring approach in order to ensure the principle of equal opportunities for applicants from all components of Syrian society without discrimination. The military should be professionally trained on matters of battlefield operations and logistics, coupled with a military doctrine built upon a national political framework that takes into consideration potential threats. The process should also take into consideration the Syrian public's rejection of the sectarian fiefdoms created by the French in the early 1920's, as well as the lessons learned from the realities of Iraq.

Conclusions

- The events following the start of the Syrian uprising showed that the Syrian army was not prepared to engage in long-term battles because of the pervasive corruption. It also revealed that decision-making mechanisms were in one way or another inaccurate in estimating Syrian army deployment plans and operational priorities, as well as the feasibility of many of the army's chosen tasks. The Syrian regime had full conviction that the situation in Syria would not reach the level reached in other Arab countries hit by the "Arab Spring" like Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.
- The events of the Syrian uprising also made clear that the most important reasons for the army's intervention on behalf of the regime against the popular protest movement were the social composition of the military

establishment and the dominance of Alawite officers and their affiliates in high-level positions in the military. The Alawite officers also wanted to maintain the privileges they enjoyed that gave them considerable extralegal influence and the allowed them to amass large amounts of money. The army also had a ruling ideology that was established by Hafez Assad and reinforced by his son Bashar, and people feared the military institutions and their affiliated forces, which have notoriously bad reputations.

- After eight years of Syrian uprising, the Syrian army has becoming more corrupt and more isolated from the Syrian public. Corruption, which was already entrenched before the uprising, increased significantly, stripping the military of ability to perform basic functions and turning it into an institution for looting, kidnapping, and extortion.
- The Russian and Iranian interventions helped transform the army's operations from a state of complete chaos to organized chaos. The chaotic military situation was employed in a hybrid policy that relied on three main military strategies: collective punishment, scorched earth campaigns, and guerilla warfare. These strategies targeted the public support for the opposition, destroying infrastructure in order to disrupt this support and increase pressure on the armed factions in areas they control. This has helped the regime and its allies succeed in pushing the opposition to accept deals for surrender and deportation.
- In recent years, the regime has been able to strengthen its local political and social popular support. It has also managed to transform the patronage networks that existed before the uprising into an effective tool that helped the regime survive after the mobilization of militias that helped in a number of land battles.
- Despite the defections that occurred at the start of the uprising, the regime was able to gain the upper hand over the opposition both in numbers and firepower. The regime's strategy to suppress the uprising was adopted from its previous experience in quelling the Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the 1980s. The regime depended on top-level officers and ideologically-committed individuals who would turn a blind eye to the

policies implemented by the military after 2011. The regime also received a significant boost from Iranian and Russian expertise.

- Young regime loyalists were more easily recruited into the local and foreign militias than the regular army because the militias offered more flexible policies and greater financial benefits. Militias also had more power and authority over the civilians. This negatively impacted the army's image and morale, since many of the militia leaders exercised more power than the state itself.
- The formation of the 4th and 5th Corps by the regime at the request of Iran and Russia, and the attempt to institutionalize them and integrate them into the regular Syrian armed forces deepened the sectarian nature of the army, since most members of these two new corps were Alawites or Shi'ite mercenaries. This is very similar to the Iraqi government's decision to give an official government status to the Shi'ite dominated Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units and place them in the ranks of the Iraqi military establishment as legitimate forces.
- The major changes in the structure of the Syrian army since the start of the uprising will be reflected in Syria's future conditions. This will not only impede the peace process between the Syrians in the event of a political solution, but will also affect regional stability, especially in light of the many Iranian and Russian plans in Syria to integrate their militias and non traditional forces into the Syrian army's official command structure and use them to make future gains.
- Restructuring the Syrian army must be done in a professional, systematic, thoughtful manner on the principle of equal opportunities for qualified Syrians from all cohorts of society in hopes to build a professional national army. It is important to restructure the army instead of dismantling it to avoid repeating a scenario like the Iraqi experience following the American invasion in 2003.

This paper assessed the Syrian military institution's structural and functional roles, as well as its justification to intervene and suppress popular protests. This paper also highlighted the most significant changes to the army's structure during the years of the Syrian uprising. The fact that the Syrian army

stood with the regime from the very first days of the popular protests in Syria in order to protect the ruling regime took it out of its traditional role, or that of any traditional army. The regime used all types of weapons from tanks, aircraft and artillery to chemical weapons in order to put the army side by side with the regime in direct opposition to the people. The army gave up its role of managing violence within the community after it became the regime's protector, defending within the framework of the various reasons described. There is no doubt that the roots of the army's strategies are found in the social structure built by Hafez Assad when he took power in 1970 and continued by his son Bashar. This changed the army from a national institution to a special interest organization that benefited a specific sect and its allied networks in order to protect the ruling regime. The privileges granted to the army officers are one of the main reasons that the army stood by the regime. The army's ruling ideology established by Hafez Assad and reinforced by his son Bashar directly linked the fate of the Alawite sect with that of the regime. Finally, it is important to mention the structure of the affiliated forces, such as the sectarian and security forces, that strengthened the grip of control on military developments as a whole and increased the regime's defenses.

Initially, the army was in a state of complete chaos as the regime tried to use it to quell the uprising in the early days. The regime's use of local and foreign militias along with the support of the Russian and Iranian regimes allowed it to shift from a state of complete chaos to one of organized chaos. The regime was able to retake many villages and cities using strategies such as collective punishment, scorched earth campaigns, and guerilla warfare. The regime's dependence on local and foreign militias during the uprising created an imbalance in the structure of the army so that it became predominantly Alawite compared to previous years, with recruitment depending largely on the Alawites. A majority of the officers were engaged in various forms of corruption, which increased significantly during the Syrian uprising, further isolating the army from the public. This paved way for the officers to further entrench themselves with the regime's networks of corruption, taking advantage of the opportunity to amass more wealth in a number of ways.

Despite the Syrian army's lack of combat readiness because of the years of corruption that decreased its capabilities, it was able to survive

multiple security and military threats. The army was also able to continue defending the regime despite defections and the emergence of the Free Syrian Army by depending on a number of local and foreign militias, as well as open-ended support from Russia and Iran in the form of equipment, weapons, advisors, and fighters.

Chapter 2

Military Actors and Structures in Syria in 2018

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Chapter 2: Military Actors and Structures in Syria in 2018

Introduction

The political scene in Syria during the years of the uprising and the ensuing multi-level conflicts was accompanied by fragmentation that targeted state structures on the one hand, and was characterized by the movement of local actors and their impact on Syrian geography on the other. On the issues of defense and protection functions, the overall military landscape in Syria has become a scene of extreme change and displacement and is closely linked to the "crisis management" policies in Syria. These include the push to make the military situation balanced such that it increases pressure on both sides of the conflict and pushes them to enter into a political settlement, the geopolitical understandings that lead to a changes in the military status quo determined by security situations that change the political calculations of the allies of the conflicting sides, and the spheres of influence that have been created and developed throughout the conflict. What is clear from this state of affairs is the absence of the traditional centralized roles of security and defense forces in all parties, which have transformed instead into an intelligence effort and military operational movements motivated by their desires to achieve strategic advantages over others so that they can impose their own political conditions. This paper will focus on the changing shape of the military landscape in order to determine an index of the stability of the situation, and determine what factors contribute to this state of affairs.

This paper is based on a few key assumptions. The first is that the unstable military situation contributes to the lack of clarity about the fate of the centralization of defense functions and uncertainty about the final shape of military power centers following the expected integration of forces. Secondly, the military situation directly impacts the political reality by imposing the military actors' visions on a potential path to reform, or the or ability to extract official concessions of decentralized authority. On the other hand, the changing political circumstances and fluctuating interests of regional and international allies will limit the options available to military actors, who have fewer available alternatives. The third assumption is that the multiplication of

military actors over these many years of war makes it more difficult to restructure the military and to stabilize its central responsibilities. The final assumption is that regardless of the shape of the political solution, the desire for policies of national improvement and reconstruction is a shared national desire that is intrinsically connected with the elements of cohesion and stability. It is important to remember that most of the results associated with observations of this period are temporary and may shift.

This paper aims to map out the military landscape and its actors, as well as constant and variable features in order to quantify its initial impact on the relationships between the main actors, with a special focus on the opposition and the Syrian Democratic Forces (since other papers in this book focus on the Syrian military and its transformations). The information in this report will contribute to the formation of a framework to understand the overall situation and discover the potential factors for growth. The paper's main questions are: (1) What is the map of military arrangements in Syria for 2018, up to the date of preparation of this report? (2) What are their general characteristics? (3) What are the expected effects of this landscape on the questions of reform and correction?

First: Revolutionary Forces and Islamic Factions: Unstable Interactions

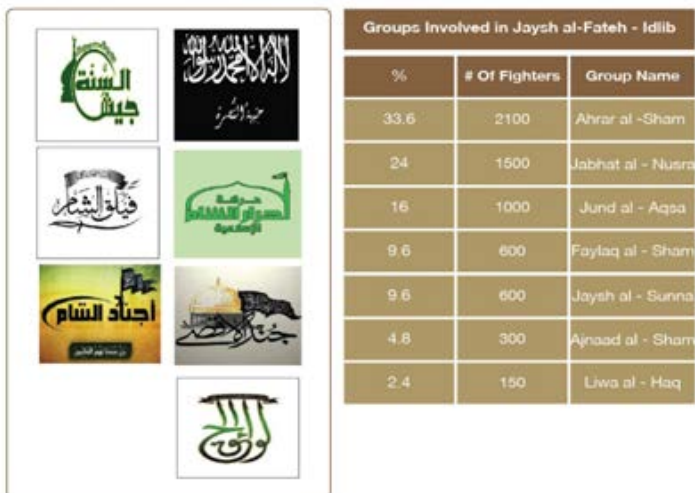
During the past years, the revolutionary forces and other factions have experienced several events and developments that led to changes in the map of control of different actors. Indeed, certain periods even witnessed some groups disappear completely and the emergence of others. In order to meet the aims of this paper will focus on the mechanisms and features of military operations, as well as highlighting the most important military actors and their transformations.

1. Coordination Operation Rooms

Most of the revolutionary and Islamic factions agree on the general objective of military action, namely, the use of weapons and military plans to "overthrow the regime." The manifestations of this goal varied between first supporting the revolutionary movement and protecting it, then targeting

regime intelligence and military units with the intention of establishing geographical control, using both offensive and defensive methods. Despite the structural, ideological, and tactical differences as well as differences in the project forms and the political motivations of the different factions and in their support and assistance, one strategy that has increased the effectiveness of these forces is the practice of establishing coordination or operations rooms that exist for the purpose of coordinating in battle and are usually closed when the battle is finished. Some of the notable of these operations rooms are as follows:

a) The Jaysh al-Fateh Operations Room (Idlib)



One of its most prominent achievements was taking control of the city of Idlib after more than three days of fighting. The operations room also established the strategic "Mastouma Camp" and the "Brick Factory" camp, which was one of the regime's strongest remaining encampments in northern Idlib⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Orient - Jaysh al Fateh: the battle to liberate Idlib with the participation of all factions - 23 February 2018 - <https://goo.gl/sxu8da>.

The Jaysh al-Fateh Operations Room also managed to stop offensives by Iranian backed militias (the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Forces (IRGC), and Hezbollah) into rural southern Aleppo and to take back a number of villages and hilltops, most notably Tal al-Ais. The factions of Jaysh al-Fateh, in coordination with the Fatah Halab Operations Room, broke the siege imposed on the city of Aleppo after the capture of the Castello road⁽²⁾ by the regime. They were able to do this after taking control of the university complex southwest of Aleppo at the beginning of August 2016.

The Operations Room managed to defend the Castello Road for more than a month and a half before the regime and its allied militias cut it off. The room did not continue after its second attempt to break the siege of Aleppo in November 2016. The two main reasons for this are the conflicts between the two main groups, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Al-Nusra) and Ahrar al Sham, and the subsequent formation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham⁽³⁾, and the accession of a number of from the Operations Room into the new group. The Operations Room ended its activities after a year and nine months of military operations.

b) The Jaysh al-Fateh Aleppo Operations Room (Southern and Western Rural Aleppo)

On March 27, 2016, the revolutionaries in Aleppo announced the formation of the Aleppo Fateh Operations Room⁽⁴⁾, which included the largest armed opposition groups in Aleppo. The main goal of the Operations Rooms was to replicate the success of the Jaysh al-Fateh room in Idlib. The Aleppo room's most prominent successes include taking control of a number of building clusters in the Zahraa Foundation west of Aleppo, al-Rashideen neighborhood, and the scientific research barracks in western Aleppo. Jaysh al-Fateh also participated in retaking a number of areas in southern rural Aleppo, in the defense of the Castello Road for more than a year and a half, and in the defense of the Handarat Camp, which is the entrance to Aleppo's

⁽²⁾ Al Jazeera - The Opposition announces lifting the siege of Aleppo - August 7th, 2016 - <https://goo.gl/ZxGtyo>.

⁽³⁾ Tahrir al-Sham - The newest version of Al Qaeda in Syria - February 22, 2017 BBC - <https://goo.gl/HHku56>.

⁽⁴⁾ Shaam Network - A number of groups in Aleppo and rural areas announce the formation of Fateh Aleppo - April 26, 2015 - <https://goo.gl/4MAQfC>.

eastern districts. The most important factors contributing to the Operation Room's failure were the exit of civilians and revolutionary forces from Aleppo at the end of 2016⁽⁵⁾, in addition to fighting (previous Fatah al-Sham) with the most prominent factions of the Operations Rooms that went to rural western Aleppo, including Jaysh al-Mujahideen, Al-Jabhat al-Shamiyeh, Tajamu Fastaqim, and Al-Fawj al-Awal. The disintegration of these groups in the rural western Aleppo resulted in the end of the Operations Room's existence without any official announcement.

c) Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous Operations Room (The Southern Front)

This operations rooms formed in December 2015 in Dara'a after the Southern Storm Operations Room failed to achieve its goal of taking control of the regime's last positions in the city⁽⁶⁾. Members of Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous room included the local factions of the Southern Front's Free Syrian Army, Jaysh al-Yarmouk, Ahrar al-Sham, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Jaysh al-Islam, and Jama'at Bayt al-Maqqdis.



The Bunyan al-Marsous Operations Room was one of the most successful opposition military formations in southern Syria in recent years. It was the core of the Central Operations Room in the South, formed in June 2018. The new room includes all of the following operations rooms: Bunyan al-Marsous Operations Room, Ras al-Sufoof Operations Room, Tawheed al-Sufoof Operations Room, Sad al-Ghuzaat Operations Room, Muthalath al-Mowt Operations Room, al-Nasr al-Mubeen Operations Room, and Sad al-Bughaat Operations Room. These forces played a key role in defending the liberated parts of Dara'a city for more than a year

⁽⁵⁾ Sky News - The evacuation of civilians from eastern Aleppo finishes - December 23, 2016 - <https://goo.gl/pgRmHA>.

⁽⁶⁾ Shamm News Network - "Bunyan Marsoos" Operations Room, which is expected to return the debt to Assad and his allies in the cradle of the revolution Dara'a - June 13, 2017 - <https://goo.gl/TNqaqQ>.

from attacks by the regime, which was attempting to open the road to the Naseeb Border crossing with Jordan. In the first half of 2018, the Operations Room made slow and steady advances to take control of the al-Manshiyah neighborhood of Dara'a, the last regime-controlled neighborhood in the city. The main reasons for the failure of al-Bunyan al-Marsous are the obstacles the group faced over the past years, most importantly its relationship with specific sources of international support which reduced its ability to make independent decisions and its motivation to unite. Regardless, none of these issues changed the structure of the original Operations Room until the regime began its last offensive in July 2018 with help from its international allies. The regime and Russia were able to infiltrate the opposition forces through military operations and reconciliation agreements. The fate of al-Bunyan al-Marsous Operations Room was similar to that of the rest of the factions in the Southern Front. About 70% of the fighters reconciled with the regime, except for Ahrar al-Sham, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, and Jaysh al-Islam, who completely rejected reconciliation and instead were transported to Idlib in a deal arranged by the Russians.

d) Olive Branch Operations Room (Northern Aleppo Governorate)

Ankara launched Operation Olive Branch targeting the Afrin region in northwest Syria on January 20, 2018⁽⁷⁾. The main objective of the operation was to defeat the PYD, the Syrian wing of the PKK that is listed as a terrorist organization in Turkey and a number of other countries. The Turkish leadership's decision came after Washington hinted of its intentions to form a border security force using 30,000 members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Operation Olive Branch was launched only after high-level meetings between Turkish and Russian officials. Despite regime threats against Turkish jets, the Russian dominance of Syrian airspace in northern Syria made those threats unlikely and gave a clear message that the Russians did not object to the Turkish operations in general, although there may still be some disagreements over their long-term goals.

The U.S. policy towards the PYD and YPG was one of the main catalysts that accelerated the start of the operation. Turkey realized that it had no choice but

⁽⁷⁾ Al Jazeera - "Olive Branch" Battle to retake Afrin - <https://goo.gl/QDGCZc>.

to launch the operation by that point, after having lost all hope that the United States would stop their various forms of military support to the YPG after four months of diplomatic and political efforts to stop the arrival of support for them, especially near the Turkish border⁽⁸⁾.

Name of Group	Ideology	Support	Operations Commander	Approx #s
Jabhat al-Shamiyeh	Moderate Islam	Independent	Hussam Yasin	3,000
Firqat al-Hamza	FSA	Pentagon (suspended)	Abdullah Halawa	800
Liwa al-Motasem	FSA	Pentagon (suspended)	Mustafa Sijri	1,500
Liwa al-Fateh	Moderate Islam	Turkey	Abu Ahmad Aleppo	500
Tajumu Fastaqim Kama Umirt	FSA	MOM (suspended)	Mustafa Biro	700
Al-Firqa 13	FSA	MOM (suspended)	Lt. Col. Ahmad al-Saud	1,000
Al-Liwa 51	FSA	MOM (suspended)	Colonel Haitham al-Afisi	600
Liwa al-Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih	FSA	Turkey	Ahmad Othman	1,200
Firqa al-Sultan Murad	FSA	Turkey	Fahim Issa	1,400
Liwa al-Muntasir Billah	FSA	Turkey	Mohammad al-Salim	1,000
Liwa Samarqand	FSA	Turkey	Khalid Attiyeh	800
Kitabat al-Safwa	Moderate Islam	MOM (suspended)	Ghassan al-Najjar	500
Al-Firqa 101	FSA	MOM (suspended)	Colonel Abu Khalid al-Khalid	600
Faylaq al-Sham	Moderate Islam	Turkey	-	4,000
Noureddin al-Zinki	Moderate Islam	MOM (suspended)	-	3,000
Firqa Halab Al-Awla	Moderate Islam	Turkey	-	250
Ahrar al-Sharqiya	Moderate Islam	Turkey	-	400
Jaysh al-Ahrar	Moderate Islam	Independent	Salih al Tahhan	2,300
There are 18 factions in the opposition forces + 8 small groups affiliated with the main factions				23,550

⁽⁸⁾ The exclusive information for this chart about the opposition forces came from an interview with a commander from the Jabha Shamiyeh on April 10, 2018.

e) Euphrates Shield Operations Room (Northern Aleppo Governorate)

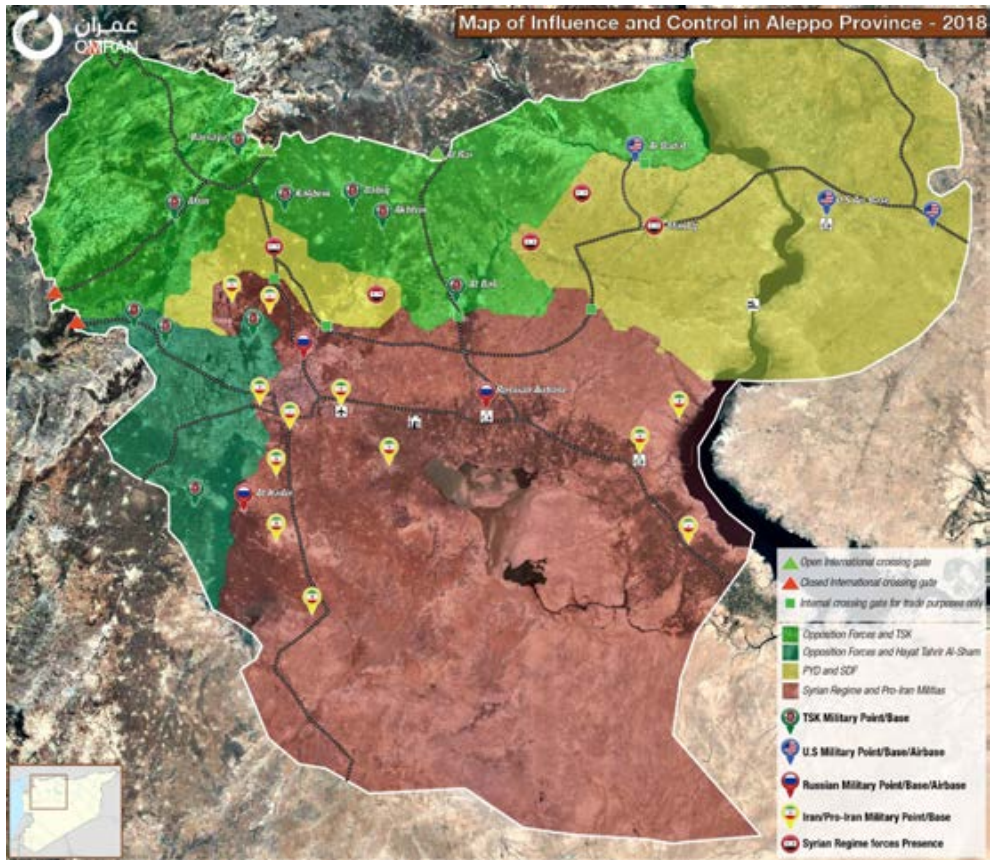
Operation Euphrates Shield was launched with Turkish military support on the morning of August 24th, 2016⁽⁹⁾. The goal was to take back the city of Jarablus on the western bank of the Euphrates River near the Turkish border in northern rural Aleppo from ISIS control and protect the border areas from ISIS attacks. Jarablus was the last important city on the Turkish border under ISIS control, since it had entered it in January 2014. It was also launched to prevent the Syrian SDF – of which the YPG makes up its backbone – from taking Jarablus and annexing it to the area of Manbij, which is only 36 km to the south, and which the SDF took from ISIS. The operation also aimed to prevent further expansion of SDF-YPG control in northern Syria⁽¹⁰⁾, especially between Kobani canton and Kurdish Afrin, and to prevent a new wave of refugees from entering Turkey. The operation also aimed to protect the border and create a safe zone in Syria from which future operations could be launched. The zone extends southwards to the outskirts of Aleppo city, and covers the area from Jarablus in the east to Azaz in the west. The territory will be more than 70km wide and at least 20 km deep.

Name of Group	Ideology	Support	Commander	Approx #s
Jabhat al-Shamiyeh	Moderate Islam	Independent	Hussam Yasine	1,500
Firqat al-Hamza	FSA	Pentagon	Abdullah Halawa	400
Liwa al Mo'atasem	FSA	Pentagon	Mustafa Sijri	1,000
Liwa al-Fateh	Moderate Islam	Independent	Abu Ahmed Aleppo	300
Fastaqim Kama Umrit	FSA	MOM Operations Room	Mustafa Birro	800
Al-Firqa 13	FSA	MOM Operations Room	Lt. Col. Ahmad Al-Saud	500
Al-Liwa 51	FSA	MOM Operations Room	Colonel Haitham Al-Afisi	500

⁽⁹⁾ Al Jazeera - Euphrates Shield..A military operation with multiple fronts and objectives - July 5, 2016 - <https://goo.gl/QiNiI2>.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Information for this chart were collected during interviews with a Faylaq Al -Sham commander on December 5 2016.

Liwa al-Sultan Muhammad al-Fateh	FSA	Turkey	Ahmad Othman	300
Firqat al-Sultan Murad	FSA	Turkey	Fahim Issa	700
Kata'ib al-Safwa	Moderate Islam	MOM Operations Room	Ghassan al-Najjar	350
Al-Firqat al-Shamaliyeh	FSA	MOM Operations Room	Colonel Abu al-Khalid	200
Faylaq al-Sham	Moderate Islam	Turkey		600
Noureddin al-Zinki	Moderate Islam	MOM (suspended)		-
Firqat Halab al-Awla	Moderate Islam	Turkey		100
Ahrar al-Sharqiya	Moderate Islam	Turkey		100



Map 1: Control and Positions in Aleppo Governorate, Showing the areas of Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield, December 17, 2018. Source: Omran Center Information Unit

In order to establish security in the Euphrates Shield territories at the start of 2017, the office of Turkish-Syrian relations in Reyhanli in southern Turkey launched a reception center for young Syrian volunteers living in Turkey to join the Free Police in the city of Jarablus in the Euphrates Shield territories. They announced the opening for volunteers a week after graduating an initial class of 450 police officers that trained for five weeks in Turkey⁽¹¹⁾. They were trained on all police specialties, including civilian police to be distributed in all stations and sections, as well as specific groups that received advanced training in criminal security, counterterrorism, rapid intervention, de-mining and dismantling explosives, customs, immigration, passports,

⁽¹¹⁾ Eqtisad - Security and Police in Jarablus: Its soldiers' structure, responsibilities, and salaries
<https://goo.gl/A7NU1i>

traffic, and administrative officers to manage civil affairs and facilitate citizen services⁽¹²⁾.

The national security service was built as follows: the Police General Command and the Syrian National General Security Force, Police Commands, District Commands and stations, Precinct stations and centers. Together they were responsible for carrying out a number of tasks including: to secure public and private property, field complaints from citizens, prevent crime, and to punish criminals according to the law. The police's responsibilities include criminal security and guarding, manning police stations, special forces, counter terrorism, engineering units to dismantle mines and remnants of explosive devices, district security, and customs.

The police and security forces face a number of challenges, the biggest of which is controlling the proliferation of weapons and stopping cases of armed robbery. With the aim of establishing security in Jarablus, at the beginning of 2017 the newly formed security apparatus announced a number of decisions, the most important of which were: a circular prohibiting any arrests except under orders from the security institution or central court in the city, an order banning armed groups from stopping cars or interfering in their work. At the end of December 2016, the armed groups in Jarablus announced that all armed military opposition groups should leave the city and give the city to a civilian administration. This decision was taken due to the mounting pressure from public protests in the city asking for the armed groups to leave. In October 2017, Free Syrian Army fighters in Jarablus announced the formation of a "Military Council" to protect the people of the city from acts of destruction and act as the military representative of the city. They also announced that they would coordinate their activities with the General Chiefs of Staff of the Syrian Interim Government, approved by the Ministry of Defense⁽¹³⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ Interview with Navar Shaaban, Manager of the Information Unit at the Omran Center, discussing the security situation in Jarablus, 2/4/2018, Istanbul, Turkey.

⁽¹³⁾ This information was summarized from the following:

Shabab Post 29/1/2017 <https://goo.gl/4uwvXk>

Smart News 14/2/2017 <https://goo.gl/gzRBnw>

Micro Syria 5/3/ 2017 <https://goo.gl/m6Vc8g>

Media Office of the Revolutionary Forces 3/9/2017 <https://goo.gl/3m7ury>

Micro Syria 23/10/2017 <https://goo.gl/SCWJRA>

Turkey (the opposition's guarantor in the Astana agreements) pushed for this institutionalization and centralization of the security operations in the Euphrates Shield areas to address the spreading chaos. Ankara also granted the Kilis governorate expanded authority in Azaz and Gaziantep governorate expanded authority on Jarablus and Al Ra'i. Turkey also provided 1,500 civilian police officers for Azaz and the areas surrounding it, a figure similar to that of Jarablus and its countryside.

An effort is being made to transfer this framework to Afrin, but the initial work in this regard has only been to open a single security headquarters overseen by the national army that is responsible for general security. Since it is in the beginning stages, they are still formulating a methodology and continue to rely on factions including Faylaq al-Rahman and fighters from Jaysh al-Islam⁽¹⁴⁾.

2. Armed Groups: Changes and Functional Shifts

The armed group landscape was directly impacted by the Russian intervention in 2015, which focused on changing the balance of territorial control on the ground and changing the military balance by directly attacking the oppositions military capacity, especially in Idlib and Aleppo (Around 93% of the Russian operations were aimed at opposition forces while only 7% of their attacks were aimed at ISIS areas and military positions). This strategy resulted in the opposition factions being forced out of eastern Aleppo, the siege of a number of opposition-controlled enclaves near Damascus, and then the work of forcibly displacing the oppositions military and revolutionary factions from areas like Daraya, Wadi Barada, Mo'adamiyat al-Sham, etc.

Many of the armed opposition groups especially in northern Syria were later forced to join the Astana process, with Turkey as a guarantor. The Russians used the Astana platform as a political investment to balance out the influence of the Geneva process. Through Astana, they pursued a multi-pronged policy that included establishing de-escalation zones to stop the fighting on the front lines, along with security understandings to guarantee the involvement of regional and international powers in the process of taking control of the

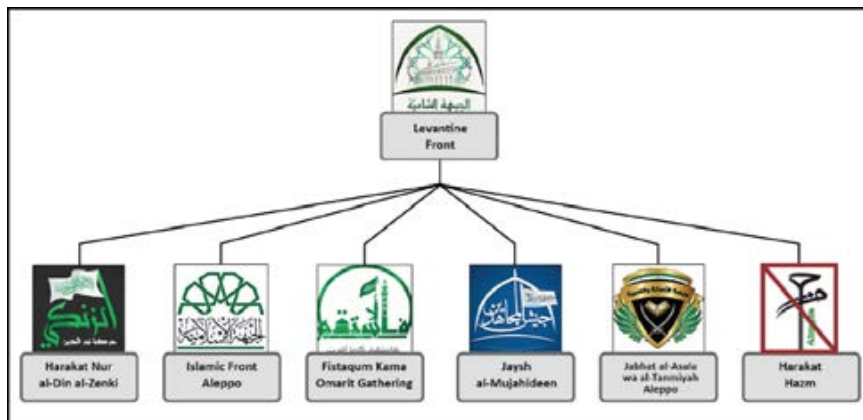
⁽¹⁴⁾ An interview conducted by the researcher via Skype conducted with one of the leaders of the Jaysh al-Islam in the northern Syria on the nature of the possible roles of the group, Date: 29/4/2018.

security situation and strengthening the arrangement of the political landscape in line with Russian interests. It also included conditions for the regime and its allies to continue their offensives into “non-useful Syria,” as part of the fight against terrorism through the Syria Badia desert region, Deir Ezzor governorate, and the southwestern entrance of al-Raqqqa governorate.

The circumstances preceding the Sochi conference at the end of January 2018 (and motivation to begin with a political settlement process) made military operations more prevalent than political actions in determining the situation on the ground. Moscow realized that the announcement of a separate political plan by the U.S., UK, France, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan just days before the Sochi conference was an attempt to foil Russian plans. In other words, Russia realized that after Sochi there was still an opportunity to weaken the opposition’s leverage by removing any opposition-controlled pockets that still existed in “useful Syria,” including Eastern Ghouta, South Damascus, western Ghouta, rural Homs, Hama, and finally Dara’a. The opposition lost large swaths of territory during this process and the opposition landscape changed several times.

Internal fighting amongst the armed opposition groups also weakened their strength. Forced displacement imposed the presence of the displaced armed opposition groups on the situation in northern Syria and forced them to figure out their place in the landscape. The group’s effectiveness was tested and many were at risk of being eradicated. The relevant groups are described below:

a) Al-Jabhat al-Shamiyeh (Aleppo Governorate):



In January 2014 a number of armed opposition groups announced the formation of al-Jabhat al-Shamiyah (JS) in Aleppo governorate, with the intent of complete integration and unification. JS included some of the largest armed opposition groups at the time. The JS was one of the most prominent opposition factions in the northern Syria fronts and was one of the main groups fighting against ISIS in northern rural Aleppo. JS was active in Mare'a, Souran, and Azaz, and played a key role in defending against ISIS attacks by the end of March 2015.

b) Jaysh al-Nasr (Central Fronts):

Sixteen armed opposition groups announced on August 3, 2015 that they would unite under a group called Jaysh al-Nasr. Its stated goal was to liberate Hama city and the surrounding areas. It included a majority of the factions that received support from the MOM operations room at the time. According to their statement, the member groups included Jabhat al-Sham, Al-Wiyat Suqoor al-Ghab, Liwa Suqoor al-Jabal, Tajamu al-Izza, Harakat al-Fedaiyeen al-Suriyeen, Al-Firqa 101, Jabhat al-Inqath al-Muqatila, al-Liwa al-Sadis, Al-Firqa 111, Al-Firqa 60, Liwa Bilad al-Sham, Kutilat al-Fowj 111, Katibat Suqoor al-Jihad, Liwa Shuhada al-Tarimsah, Kata'ib al-Mashoor, and Liwa al-Adiyat. Support from the MOM operations rooms was the main catalyst behind the formation of Jaysh al-Nasr and the main motivation for many of the groups to join. Furthermore, other groups in northern rural Hama were less effective than the new formation, which encouraged large numbers of unaffiliated fighters to join the new grouping.



c) Jaysh al-Sham (Central Fronts):

Announced on October 9th 2015, Jaysh al-Sham was formed in the countryside of Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo. It was led by Mohammed Talal Bazrbashi "Abu Abdul Rahman al-Souri," a former senior leader in Ahrar al-Sham. Abu al-Abbas al-Shami also became a prevalent figure as the lead

“Shari’a” official of Jaysh al-Sham⁽¹⁵⁾. Jaysh al-Sham included several prominent Ahrar al-Sham and Free Syrian Army commanders, as well as some smaller groups that were not affiliated with larger factions. Jaysh al-Sham’s numbers were estimated to be around 4,000 fighters total.

Jaysh al-Sham has good relations with Ahrar al-Sham and operates in close proximity to it. Many of Ahrar al-Sham’s former commanders are now leading Jaysh al-Sham. This includes the current Jaysh al-Sham leader Mohammad Talal Bazrbashi, aka “Abu Abdul Rahman al-Souri,” a former well-known commander of Ahrar al-Sham. There is also Abu al-Abbas al-Shami, one of the founders of Ahrar al-Sham and the group’s former mufti. Observers noted that despite Jaysh al-Sham’s leaders leaving Ahrar al-Sham, the group praised Jaysh al-Sham and expressed high expectations for the group. Despite Ahrar al-Sham’s positive position towards Jaysh al-Sham, there has not been any discussion of coordination or combining the forces of the groups for a number of reasons. First, some of the Ahrar al-Sham leaders feared that the new formation would fail and they did not want to associate Ahrar al-Sham with the failure. They also felt that the new formation lacked internal organization. Some of these leaders also feared the ideology or nature of groups that might join Jaysh al-Sham in the future. Generally, Jaysh al-Sham lacked a clear military strategy and had an unofficial subordination to Ahrar al-Sham. These factors made it an ineffective operation, which was unable to recruit new fighters into its ranks. This in turn resulted in Jaysh al-Sham’s dissolution at the beginning of 2017, when 80% of Jaysh al-Sham’s fighters joined Ahrar al-Sham. The remaining fighters joined other groups including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Who is Abu al-Abbas al-Shami? He is one of the founders of Ahrar al-Sham that contributed to the formation of Jaysh al-Sham. He said “The idea of Jaysh al-Sham came from the fact that there are tens of groups spread all round that are not interested to join the larger groups that currently exist.” He added “This new formation could die soon because of the lack of support. Members will be discouraged and some of them will go to Turkey and others will go to Europe.”

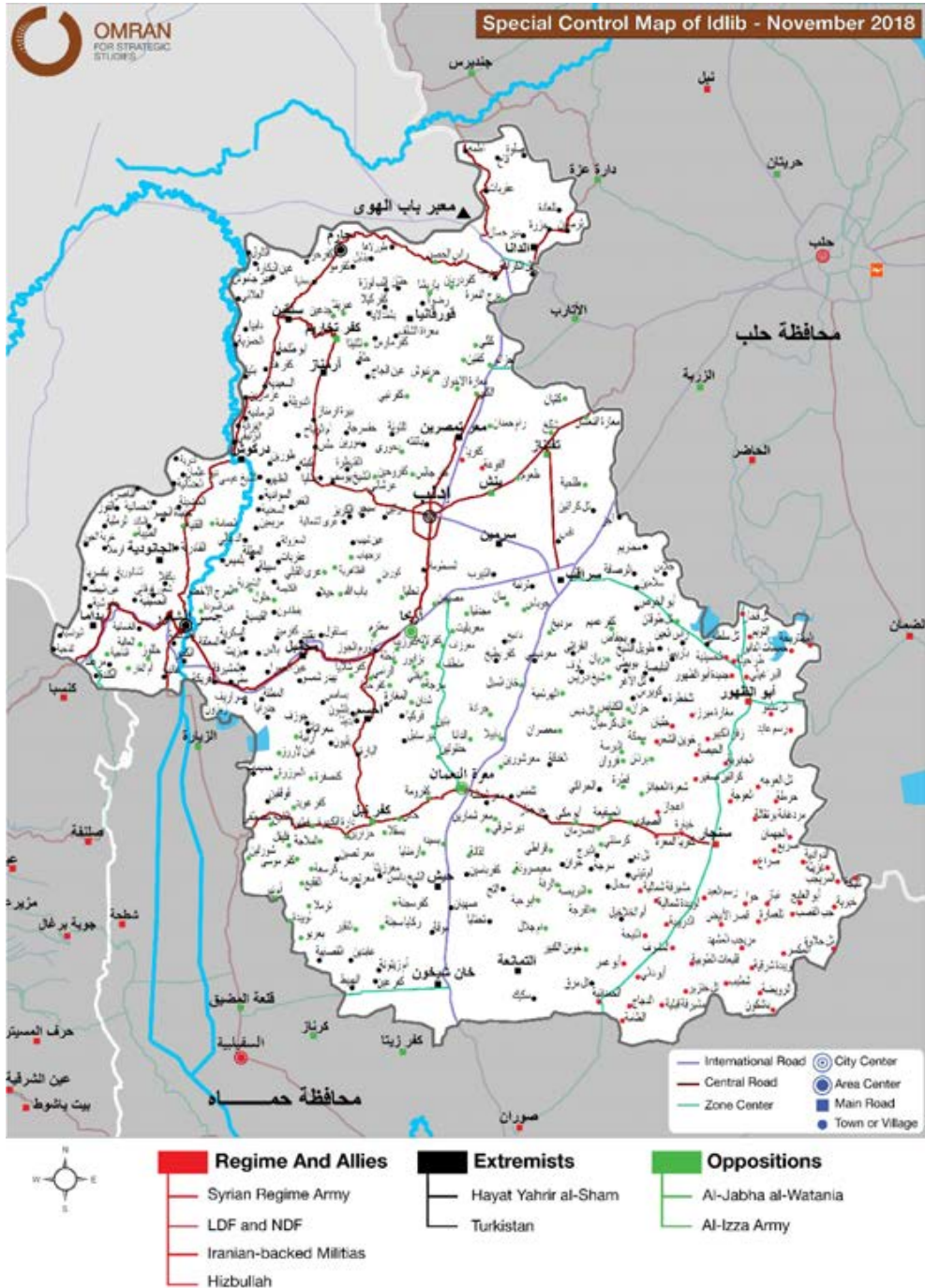
d) Ahrar al-Sham Islamic Movement:

The group, which emerged on November 11, 2011, is an Islamist militant group that aims to establish an “Islamic state governed by Shari’a law.” It is estimated to have had around 30,000 fighters distributed in the northern and central Syria, and Eastern Ghouta. Initially it included the following groups: Harakat al-Fajr al-Islamiya, Kata’ib al-Iman al-Muqatila, Kata’ib Ahrar al-Islamiya, and Jama’at al-Tali’a al-Islamiya. As of October 2018, Ahrar al-Sham is one of the main components of Jabhat Tahrir Souriya (the Syrian Liberation Front), which includes Harakat Ahrar al-Sham, Harakat Nouredin Zinki, Al-Wiyat Suqour al-Sham, Jaysh al-Ahrar, and Tajamu Dimashq⁽¹⁶⁾. Ahrar al-Sham’s leadership, with the help of its Shari’a commanders, aimed to conduct religious rehabilitation projects that would turn their members into a group of ideologically committed fighters who believe in the goals and principles of Islamic law. The group’s military strategy aimed to attack valuable regime positions and collect the weapons from there. They also benefited from the experience of many members with producing cheap Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and intensified their use of IEDs as a result. This also explains why Ahrar al-Sham worked hard to get the Liwa Abu Bakr Siddiq faction based in al-Bab to join them, as it has extensive experience and skills producing IEDs. During 2016, signs of internal dissent appeared within the movement due to differences of opinion on participation in Turkey-led Euphrates Shield Operation in northern Syria. There have also been new disputes among the group’s leaders regarding the issue of joining Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (also referred to by some as Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria). Hashem al-Sheikh, the leader of a wing of Ahrar al-Sham called Jaysh al-Ahrar, decided to defect away from Ahrar and joined Hayaat



⁽¹⁶⁾Ahrar al-Sham, like other Salafist formations, depends on the narrative of the Sunni grievances, which are used by a large group of organizations that have taken the "defense of the Sunni community" as a main slogan to take up arms. The movement does not adhere to the revolutionary flag and replaces it with a white flag that shows a falcon symbol and the name of the movement. The group lost its leader Hassan Abdo (Abu Abdullah al-Hamwi) and his brother the military commander Abu Talha and the Islamic Legal Commander Abu Abdul Malik with 45 other top commanders in an explosion at a meeting place of the Shura Council in Ram Hamdan in rural Idlib on September 9, 2014.

Tahrir al-Sham. At the start of 2017, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS, the precursor group to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) started attacking groups that participated in the Astana process. Despite Ahrar al-Sham's refusal to participate in Astana, it considered the JFS attack against its allied groups as an attack on itself. JFS attacks against groups that participated in the Astana talks in Idlib resulted in Ahrar al-Sham losing 40% of the territory it controlled in Idlib until they launched a counter-offensive and retook a portion of the lost territory.



Map 2: Description of territorial control in Idlib governorate as of November 2018

The Most Prominent Groups Currently Belonging to Ahrar Sham:

Name of Group	Ideology	Measure of Strength on a scale of 1-10
Liwa Omar al-Farooq	Moderate Islam	2
Liwa Bader	Moderate Islam	6
Liwa al-Abbas	Moderate Islam	2
Liwa Jund al-Sunnah	Moderate Islam	5
Liwa Fajr al-Sham	Moderate Islam	5
Liwa al-Fateh	Moderate Islam	7
Liwa al-Hijra	Moderate Islam	3
Liwa Ansar al-Haq	Moderate Islam	3
Liwa Ahfad al-Sahaba	Moderate Islam	2
Liwa al-Hamza	Moderate Islam	1
Fowj Ahrar Idlib	Moderate Islam	1
Liwa al-Firqan	Moderate Islam	1
Jaysh al-Iman	Moderate Islam	5
Al-Janah al-Kurdi	Moderate Islam	3
Liwa al-Khattab	Moderate Islam	3
Liwa al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar	Moderate Islam	3
Liwa al-Adiyat	Moderate Islam	2
Liwa al-Hudood	Moderate Islam	6
Liwa Ahrar al-Jabal	Moderate Islam	4
Liwa al-Sahel	Moderate Islam	2
Liwa Ajnad al-Sham	Moderate Islam	4
Liwa al-Mo'atasem	Moderate Islam	2
Fowj al-Mugheerat	Moderate Islam	1
Liwa al-Tamkeen	Moderate Islam	5
Western Rural Aleppo Sector	Moderate Islam	6
Southern Rural Aleppo Sector	Moderate Islam	2
Northern Rural Aleppo Sector	Moderate Islam	9
Rural Hama Sector	Moderate Islam	8
Homs Sector	Moderate Islam	7
Northern Rural Homs Sector	Moderate Islam	10
Latakia Sector	Moderate Islam	10
Eastern Qalamoun Sector	Moderate Islam	1
Southern Damascus Sector	Moderate Islam	2
Eastern Ghouta Sector	Moderate Islam	5
Western Ghouta Sector	Moderate Islam	0
Dara'a and Quneitra Sector	Moderate Islam	7
Sugour al-Sham	Free Syrian Army	8
Jaysh al-Islam Idlib Sector	Free Syrian Army	9
Tajamu Fastaqem	Moderate Islam	6
Al-Shamiyeh Western Rural Aleppo	Moderate Islam	7
Jaysh al-Mujahideen	Free Syrian Army	5
Thuwar al-Sham	Moderate Islam	5

Kata'ib Ibn Taymiyyah	Moderate Islam	2
Liwa al-Miqdad bin Amru	Moderate Islam	1
Liwa Omar	Moderate Islam	1
Kata'ib al-Farouq	Moderate Islam	4
Liwa al-Batar	Moderate Islam	1
Liwa Ahrar al-Junoob	Moderate Islam	2
Katibat Syouf al-Haq	Moderate Islam	2
Katibat Syouf al-Islam	Moderate Islam	3
Katibat Shuhada al-Jabal	Moderate Islam	1
Katibat Usood al-Sunna	Moderate Islam	4
Katibat Bayariq al-Jabal	Moderate Islam	1
Katibat Al Nasir Salah al Din	Moderate Islam	1
Katibat al-Mu'atasim Billah	Moderate Islam	2
Katibat al-Wala wal-Baraa	Moderate Islam	1
Kata'ib Jund al-Sham	Moderate Islam	8
Kata'ib Zitan	Moderate Islam	2
Al-Firqa 13	Free Syrian Army	6
Suqour al-Mu'ara	Moderate Islam	2
Siryā Jaysh al-Suqour	Free Syrian Army	5

e) Jaysh al-Islam:

It is considered one of the largest armed opposition groups, with around 10,000 fighters and previously controlled around 65% of Eastern Ghouta, especially Douma and the surrounding areas as well as the front lines against the regime in al-Marj south of Douma. Jaysh al-Islam formed months after the peaceful uprising started in Eastern Ghouta as a small-armed group under the name Siriyat al-Islam in September 2011. Its operations were focused on repelling regime attacks around Douma. After several months, the group developed further and called itself Liwa al-Islam, and eventually became what is now known as Jaysh al-Islam. The group adopts a form of Salafist thought.

Since its inception, it has contributed to the formation of a number of other military blocs such as Tajamu Ansar al-Islam and al-Jabhat al-Islamiya. Its representatives participated in the establishment of a number of opposition political bodies such as the Syrian National Council and the Syrian National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Jaysh al-Islam also



participated in the Syrian opposition Riyadh meetings on December 8, 2015, which was considered an acceptance of the principle of negotiations with the regime to reach a political solution in Syria.

On April 12, 2018, most of Jaysh al-Islam's leaders, including the top tier leader Essam Buwaydani, left Douma heading for the north. Around 8,000 Jaysh al-Islam fighters arrived in the north with only light weapons. A basic condition of Russia and the regime during the negotiations was for Jaysh al-Islam to surrender all of its heavy weapons to the Russian military police, including tanks, armored vehicles, and rocket launchers⁽¹⁷⁾.

f) Harakat Nouredin al-Zenki:

This group was formed at the end of 2011 in the village of Qubtan al-Jabal in rural Aleppo by Tawfiq Shihab al-Din, who is still heading the group today. Nouredin al-Zenki played a big role in fighting ISIS and driving them out of Aleppo in 2014. At the time of their formation, they were estimated to have around 9,000 fighters.



This was one of the groups that raised the Free Syrian Army flag at the start of the conflict, and participated in a number of operations rooms formed to fight regime forces. The group experienced a number of changes and its alliances fluctuated between other armed groups that are considered moderate as well as jihadi factions. For example, al-Zenki joined the Jaysh al-Fateh Operation Room that led the fight against the regime and drove it out of Idlib in 2015. With the start of the Astana talks at the beginning of 2017, al-Zenki joined JFS with part of Ahrar al-Sham and

⁽¹⁷⁾ The most important events in the history of Jaysh al-Islam:

- Zahran Alloush announced the formation on June 1, 2012, and spread its presence throughout the Eastern Ghouta and Eastern Qalamoun. In September 2013 Jaysh al-Islam was officially announced. It included about 60 battalions divided into different military specialties and was located in various Syrian provinces. The main stronghold of the army was the city of Douma and its surroundings in Eastern Ghouta.
- In early 2015, after they agreed with the Unified Military Command of eastern Ghouta, the Military Council of Damascus and Rural Damascus, under direct command of Zahran Alloush. Jaysh al-Islam leaders in the north announced on April 26, 2015 along with other major groups in Aleppo the formation of Fateh Haleb Operations Room. In early 2017 Jaysh al-Islam in northern Syria joined Ahrar al-Sham, for fear of an expected attack by JFS.
- On December 25, 2015, Jaysh al-Islam announced that its founder, Mohammad Zahran Alloush, had been killed in on the front lines in March in Eastern Ghouta and that Abu Hammam al-Buhaydani had been chosen as a new leader.

formed Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, making Hayat Tahrir al-Sham the largest armed opposition group in northern Syria. Zenki quickly pulled out of HTS in mid-2017 when the group started attacking Ahrar al-Sham elements that refused to join.

3. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham al-Islamiya (HTS): Open-Ended Changes

It was formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda's Syria branch, until it changed its name to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. It is currently the strongest group in Idlib after it ousted its partners from other opposition groups in July 2017 in order to take control of the governorate. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham had conflict with al-Qaeda central as a result of its announcement to break ties with the latter in July 2016. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is a result of the organizational transformations experienced by the transnational salafi jihadist organization al-Qaeda movement in the local Syrian context. This was due to the following factors: its complicated relationship with the international community, the jihadi experience in Iraq, its relationship with al-Qaeda central, and the issue of public support.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham aims to establish its presence gradually and adopt an Islamic governance model of rule through an “emirate” or “caliphate” in the long term. It has taken advantage of the experiences of the organizations from which it originates, as well as the guidance and reinterpretations of some core concepts and the experiences of other jihadi groups. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's local governance system depends on three tools: providing social services, policies of coercion, and the dissemination of ideology. Its system includes the following administrative bodies: General Administration of Services, military and security forces, The Dawah and Guidance Office, and a judiciary.

When the regime advanced in Idlib on January 7, 2018, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham criticized the armed opposition groups that lost ground to the regime. They accused those groups of selling out Idlib to the regime through political deals reached in the Kazakh capital Astana during 2017. The other armed opposition groups responded by redirecting blame back onto Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

Most Prominent Changes to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham:

1. Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham (January 2012-July 2016)

Jabhat al-Nusra was formed in January 2012 with support from al-Qaeda in Iraq and multiple sources of ideological inspiration that underwent review by the central al-Qaeda command. It was clear from the beginning that Jabhat al-Nusra's commander Abu Muhammad al-Jolani wanted to avoid the mistakes of the Iraqi jihad experience and stay committed to al-Qaeda's new approach without announcing an official affiliation, despite the central al-Qaeda's tacit approval of the Syrian branch. The strategy was based on efforts to integrate with communities by paying attention to the local concerns and protecting the communities from any tyranny and oppression. The group also tried to maintain a Syrian identity in order to avoid drawing the attention of the international community. Jabhat al-Nusra came under several sources of pressure during this period, including: (1) Being listed by the U.S. as a terrorist group in January 2012 and by the UN in March 2013, (2) Their conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq following Baghdadi's announcement of the "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" in April 2013, and then of the Caliphate in March 2014, (3) The public announcement of their pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda, which resulted in negative reactions from the Syrian revolutionary ranks, (4) The Russian military intervention in September 2015.



2. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (July 2016 - January 2017)

In the presence of a number of significant Syrian jihadi figures, al-Jolani announced the end of Jabhat al-Nusra and the creation of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham that was independent from al-Qaeda. Al-Jolani explained that the move was taken to remove any pretext for the international community to attack the group and to protect what he described as the "Syrian jihad."



Al-Jolani wanted to manage the group's complicated relationship with the international community by announcing the formation of a new group under a new name and clarifying that it was independent from al-Qaeda. He also hoped that it would restore public support for his struggling jihadi project, which began losing popular support when international strikes against armed opposition groups were justified by saying that there are al-Qaeda affiliated elements among them. They also had a notorious reputation for intervening in local civilian affairs that they wanted to take over.

We can say that Jabhat Fateh al-Sham is a result of the competition between Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, and their competing attempts at monopolizing representation of the "Syrian jihad." Al-Jolani wanted to pressure Ahrar al-Sham with the new formation by draining its resources and weakening its jihadi legitimacy. The presence of two sheikhs, Abu Abdullah al-Shami and Abu al-Faraj al-Masri, during the video announcement of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham gave it the religious backing that it needed, while also maintaining the symbolic presence of al-Qaeda in the new formation.

Jabhat Fateh al-Sham did not last long before it changed its name once again to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham at the beginning of 2017. This was due to the size and persistence of both internal and external pressures, which forced the group's leadership to look for new ways to salvage their organization.

3. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (January 2017)

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) was formed through the integration of a number of armed opposition groups in northern Syria at the end of January 2017. These groups included: Harakat Nouredin al-Zinki, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, Jabhat Ansar al-Din, Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar, and Liwa al-Haq. Furthermore, a number of local salafi jihadi preachers joined the group, including Abdulrazzaq al-Mahdi, Abu al-Harith al-Masri, Abu Yusuf al-Hamwi, Abdullah al-Muheisni, Abu Taher al-Hamwi, and Musleh al-Ilyani.



Jabhat Fateh al-Sham made many attempts to deal with the internal and external pressures that sought to isolate and eliminate the group. These

pressures were especially intense during the Eastern Aleppo agreement (December 13, 2016), the Ankara-brokered ceasefire deal (December 30, 2016), and the Astana conference (January 23, 2017). In response, the formation of HTS was announced in attempt to circumvent Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's designation as a terror organization. Any potential military operation against HTS by the international community were complicated by the fact that it included armed opposition groups not classified as terrorist organizations and that were previously close to western powers, such as Nouraddin al-Zinki. The formation of HTS can also be seen as a result of continued competition between Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. HTS was able to attract more than 25 armed factions away from its competitors, including Ahrar al-Sham, which lost 16 of its sub-groups to HTS. Ahrar al-Sham also lost many of its well-known commanders to HTS, such as Abu Saleh Tahhan and Abu Yusuf al-Muhajir .

HTS has between 19-20 thousand members including fighters, administrators, and Islamic judges. The group is distributed across Syria, varying between an intensive presence at headquarters and permanent checkpoints in some areas to a light presence in areas where routine patrols are conducted⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Ayman Dessouki - Local Government of the "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" and its view on local councils - June 23, 2017 - Omran for Strategic Studies, <https://goo.gl/T45gGU>.

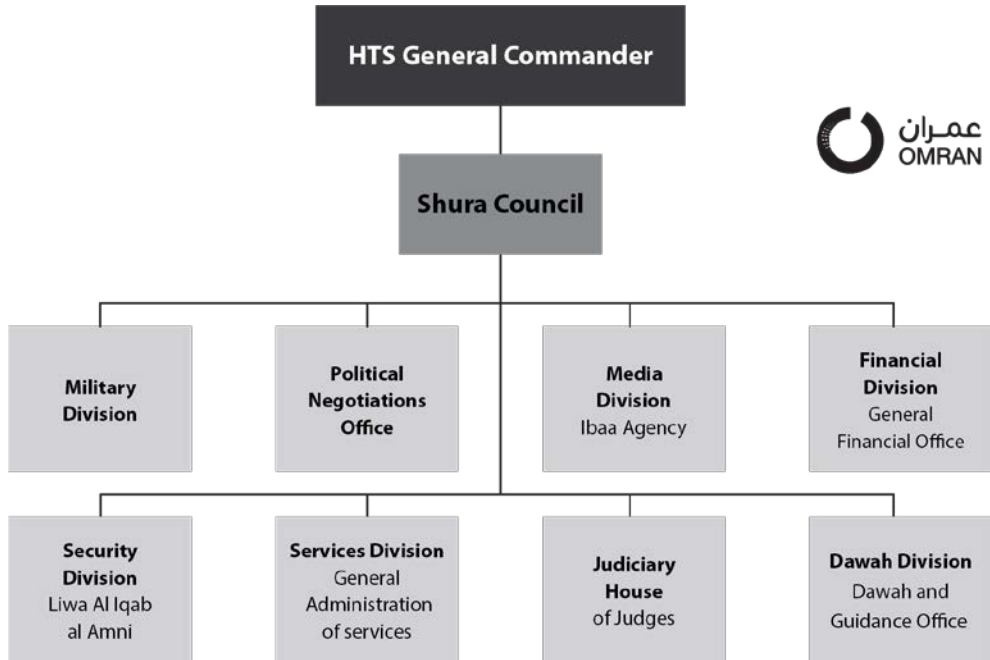


Figure 1: Organizational structure of HTS

The Most Prominent Factions Currently Members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham⁽¹⁹⁾:

Name of Group	Area of Operation	Assessment of Power on a Scale of 10	Defected From
Fursan al-Sham	Southern Aleppo Rural	2	Jabha Shamiye
Part of Katibat Huthayfa Bin al-Yaman	Darr Izza – Aleppo	2	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat Swarikh al-Sham	Idlib	4	Faylaq al-Sham
Liwa al-Haq	Taftnaz - Idlib	7	Ahrar al-Sham
part of Liwa al-Sunna	Dara'a	1	Ahrar al-Sham
Jabhat Ansar al-Din	Southern Aleppo Rural	8	
Katibat Riyah al-Jannah	Eastern Hama Rural	1	Ahrar al-Sham
part of Liwa Ahrar al-Jabal	Latakia	2	Ahrar al-Sham
Kata'ib al-Sahaba	Eastern Hama Rural	2	
Katibat Suqour al-Ez	Idlib	2	Ahrar al-Sham

⁽¹⁹⁾ Information was gathered from a number of interviews conducted with Ahrar al-Sham and al-Zenki members on April 7, 2018.

Siryat al-Aqsa	Southern Aleppo Rural	1	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat al-Rasheed	Khanasir	1	
Katibat Muhammad al-Asfoora	Hilfaya - Hama	2	Suqour al-Ghab
Jabhat Fateh al-Sham	Aleppo - Idlib - Hama - Latakia	10	
Katibat Asad al-Khilafa	Southern Aleppo Rural	5	Jaysh al-Mujahideen
Katibat Taliban	Sarmada - Idlib	1	
part of Liwa al-Tamkeen	Idlib - Latakia	7	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat Ahmad Assaf	Binnish - Idlib	2	Ahrar al-Sham
part of Jaysh al-Sunna	Idlib	8	
Katibat Fursan al-Sunna	Southern Aleppo Rural	3	
Kata'ib Usud al-Rahman	Unknown	3	
Katebat Qawafel al-Shuhadaa	Khan Sheikoun - Idlib	1	Ahrar al-Sham
Tajamu Ahfad Ali	Unknown	1	
Tajamu al-Hussein	Unknown	1	
Kata'ib Usud al-Harb	Khan Sheikoun - Idlib	4	
Jaysh al Muhajireen wal-Ansar	Idlib - Western Aleppo Rural	8	
Liwa Saif al-Sham	Eastern Hama Rural	8	
Jama'at al-Murabitin	Eastern Hama Rural	4	
Katibat al-Baraa bin Malek	Aleppo	2	Liwa Fateh Aleppo
Jaysh Mohamed	Western Aleppo Rural	2	
Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari	Idlib	2	
Katibat Mujahidu Ashidda	Southern Aleppo Rural	1	
Ashirat al-Saab al-Abiye	Unknown	1	
Liwa a al-Qadisye	Northern Hama Rural	1	
Mujahidu Yaqed al-Addas	Western Aleppo Rural	1	
Mujahidu Haritan	Haritan - Aleppo	3	
Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad	Unknown	1	
Katibat Ahfad Bani Umeyye	Khan Sheikoun - Idlib	2	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat Ansar Banias	Latakia	2	
Katibat Rayet al-Islam	Aleppo	2	
Katibat al-Shahid Abd al-Salam	Anadan - Aleppo	2	
Katibat Abdullah bin Abbas	Khan Sheikoun - Idlib	2	

Liwa Ansar al Sahel	Sahl al-Ghab - Hama	4	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat al-Shilka	Latakia	4	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat al-Shahid Firas abu Ayman	Unknown	1	
Katibat abu Jasem Hiwer	Southern Aleppo Rural	1	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat al-Shahid Mohamed Yasin Najjar	Unknown	1	
Sariyet Usama bin Zayd	Latakia	5	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat Fursan al Khilafa	Western Aleppo Rural	1	
Liwa Jund al-Malahem	Sarmin - Idlib	1	
Kata'ib Ansar al-Sham	Latakia	6	Jaysh al-Islam
Liwa Saraya al-Nasr	Southern Idlib Rural	5	Faylaq al-Sham
Jabhat Shuhadaa al-Sham	Qalamoun - Rif. Damascus	1	
Sariyyet al-Ishara 13	Latakia	1	
Katibat Mohamed Rasul Allah	Sarmada - Idlib	4	Faylaq al-Sham
Kata'ib Jund al-Sham	Northern Hama Rural	1	
Katibat Bayt al-Makdis	Jisr al-Shughour - Idlib	1	
Katibat al-Izz bin Abdussalam	Unknown	1	
Katibat al-Shahid Ibrahim Qabbani	Binnish - Idlib	1	
Katibat al-Tawheed	Saraqib - Idlib	7	Ahrar al-Sham
Katibat Ahrar al-Janub	Rural Southern Aleppo	5	Al-Jabhat al-Shamiyeh
Katibat Mujahidi al-Shamal	Hayyan - Aleppo	3	
Kata'ib al-Saif al-Omari	Qalamoun - Rural Damascus	1	
part of Jund al-Aqsa	Northern Hama Rural	7	
Katibat Shuhadaa Soran	Northern Hama Rural		Jund al-Sham
Katibat al-Nasr	Northern Hama Rural		Jund al-Sham
Katibat al-Iqab	Northern Hama Rural		Jund al-Sham
Katibat Abu Mohamed al-Hamwi	Northern Hama Rural		Jund al-Sham
Katibat al-Shahid Abu Asid	Northern Hama Rural - Khan Sheikoun		
Jabhat al-Sadiqin	Northern Hama Rural	2	
Ahl al-Sham	Northern Hama Rural	3	Faylaq al-Sham
Katibat al-Shahid Abdullah Makhzum	Western Aleppo Rural - Tqad	1	
Katibat al Shahid Abu al-Sit	Western Aleppo Rural - Tqad	1	

Katibat al Shahid Said al-Deek	Western Aleppo Rural - Tqad	1	
Al-Rashidin Operations Room	Western Aleppo Rural – Al-Rashidin	3	
Katibat al-Sadiq abu Bakr	Western Aleppo Rural - Khan al-Asal	1	
Katibat Saad bin Muaz	Western Aleppo Rural - Khan al-Asal	2	
Katibat al-Saaiqa Sarmada	Sarmada - Idlib	2	
Katibat al-Dabbabat	Unknown	2	Jund al-Sham
Katibat Siyanet al-Dabbabat	Unknown	1	Jund al-Sham
Katibat al-Nassir al-din Allah	Unknown	1	Al-Jabhat al-Shamiyeh
Katibat Shuhada al-Izza	Unknown	4	
Katibat al- Muhajjreen fi Sabil Allah	Kafr Yahmol - Idlib	3	
Military Medical Corps	Unknown	1	Ahrar al-Sham

4. Current Situation of the Factions: Between Displacement, Reconciliation and Continuity

The following tables outline most prominent factions based on their geographic distribution and their current situation after the de-escalation agreements. This leads us to a couple of conclusions about the situation, the most important of which are:

- The integration of some reconciliation forces in the army that took part in the effort to retake territory from the opposition.
- The distribution of new military tasks to some of the displaced opposition forces and integration into the state of affairs in northern Syria.
- The changes in the military circumstances depend on exploiting special forces and converting human resources into allied forces.
- The proper environment for integration and restructuring is not yet available due to the constantly changing military situation.
- The regime’s expansion of control, especially in “useful Syria” reinforces the regime’s desire to retake all Syrian territory.
- The Syrian opposition is no longer considering or able to control vast swaths of territory at this stage.

- Structural cohesion is not necessary for a group to maintain its existence and strength. There are groups like Jaysh al-Islam that lost all of its territory but remained in tact.
- The displacement and assigning of roles to the different fighting groups opens new military opportunities, especially with continue Turkish backing.

A. Main Groups in Damascus Governorate after the De-escalation Agreement

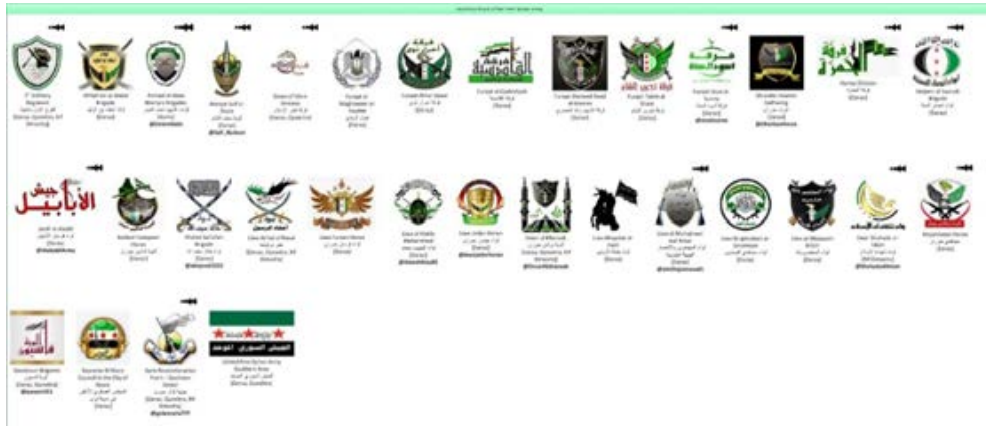
Name of Group	Assessment of Power on a Scale of 10	Area of Operation	Current Status
Alwiyat Habib al Mustafa	3	Damascus-Eastern Ghouta	Displaced to the north
Liwa Tahrir al-Sham	3	Rankus-Jarud Qalamoun	Joined HTS - displaced to the north
Faylaq al-Rahman	10	Around Damascus International Airport	Displaced to the north - 50% reconciled with the regime
Jaysh al-Islam	10	Eastern Ghouta-Qalamoun	Displaced to the north
Ahrar al-Sham	7	Eastern Ghouta-Qalamoun	Displaced to the north
Tajamu Alwiyat Kata'ib Ahmad Abdo	7	Qalmoun-Jeroud - Quteifa	70% reconciled with regime - others displaced to the north
Jaysh Usood al Sharqiyeh	5	Dumair - Qalamoun - Al Mihsa al Ziraia-	Based around Tanaf
Commander of the operations room in Qalamoun	3	Qalamoun	100% reconciled with regime

B. Prominent Groups in Northern Rural Homs after the De-escalation Agreement

Name of Group	Assessment of Power on a Scale of 10	Area of Operation	Current Status
Haraket Tahrir Homs	10	Northern Rural Homs	Inactive
Faylaq Homs	10	Northern Rural Homs	Merged with Faylaq al-Sham in Idlib
Liwa Shuhada al Qaryatayn	3	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved
Liwa 313	4	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved
Military Council in Al Qusayr	-	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved
Ahrar al-Sham	8	Northern Rural Homs	Merged with Ahrar al-Sham in Idlib
Fawj al Maghaweer	-	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved
Commander of Military Council in Al Qusayr	-	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved
Liwa Salahaddin	-	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved
Jihadi Islami	-	Northern Rural Homs	Dissolved

C. Prominent Groups Active in Eastern Qalamoun

Faction Name	Area of Influence	Strength (1-10)	Current Situation
Maghawir al-Thawra	Al-Tanf crossing in al-Sham desert	8	Located around al-Tanf
Shuhda al-Qaryatayn brigade	Eastern Qalamoun	5	Most of the faction joined the Regime
Shuhda al-Qalamoun brigade	Eastern Qalamoun	5	Most of the faction joined the Regime
Jaish Ahrar al-Eashayir	Al-Sham desert	5	Inactive



E. The most prominent jihadi factions active in Syria until 2017

Faction Name	Areas of Influence	Current Situation
Islamic Turkistan	Jisr al-Shughur	Independent and allies of HTS
Junod al-Sham	Western Aleppo	Inactive
Jund al-Aqsa	Sarmin	Active under al-Tawhid army
Jaish al-Ustra	Western Aleppo	Part of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
Jaish Mohammed – Abu Obaida al- Muhajer	Southern Aleppo	Part of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
Jabhat al-Nusra (Fateh al-Sham)	Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, and Lattakia	The main faction in HTS
Al-Tawhid and al-Jihad	Southern Aleppo	Part of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
Jaish Mohammed al-Muhajer	Idlib	Part of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
Jaish al-Muhajreen and al-Ansar	Northern Lattakia	Part of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham
Jabhat Ansar al-Dien	Northern Hama	Independent
Fajr al-Islam	Northern Hama	Part of Ansar al-Dien
Sham al-Islam	Northern Hama	Part of Ansar al-Dien
Huras al-Dien	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Independent
Jaish al-Malaheem	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien
Jaish al-Sahel	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien
Jabal al-Islam	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien
Jaish al-Badya	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien
Sarayya al-Sahel	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien

Saryyat Kabul	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien
Jund al- Sharia	Northern Hama and Northern Lattakia	Part of Huras al-Dien
Imam Bukhari Battalion	Western Aleppo	Joined HTS

The armed opposition and Islamic groups in Syria underwent a number of transformations in 2018, the most important of which include the formation of the opposition's National Army. The Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Defense of the Interim Government announced the formation of the National Army on December 30, 2017. The announcement added that they would operate in Euphrates Shield territory in rural Aleppo. Members of the Chief of Staff, Interim Government and armed opposition military leaders attended the announcement. The announcement followed numerous attempts at organizing the military and security structures in northern Syria. The last of those attempts were in October when the opposition forces were split into three Corps. The First Corps was under the command of the Jabha Shamiyeh. The Second Corps was under the command of the Sultan Murad Brigade. The Third Corps was under the command of a number of groups the most important of which are Faylaq al Shaam and Ahrar al Sharqiyeh⁽²⁰⁾.

The most important result of the meeting was the insistence on the reorganization of military structures in northern Syria in two phases: Phase 1: the creation of three Corpses: National Army Corps, Jabha Shamiyeh Corps, Sultan Murad Corps. Phase 2: to eliminate the titles of individual armed components and logos, and to unify military ranks. Additionally, it would mean the reorganization of these groups under the command of three Corpses each with three Divisions under which there are three Brigades and under them three companies. This was perhaps the most difficult task since it

⁽²⁰⁾ The Turkish side played a key role in the formation of Faylaq al Shaam and even the formation of the National Army. Turkey held meetings during 2017 to strengthen the state of security in northern Syria and to end the conflicts between the military groups. The latest meetings were held in October and included members of the Turkish intelligence, Governor of Gaziantep, Governor of Kilis, Head of the Turkish Special Forces, representatives from the Interim Government, the Vice-President of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, and representatives from the Free Syrian Army groups in northern rural Aleppo. For more see: The Interim Government announces the formation of the National Army. Ennab Baladi: 30/12/2017, <https://goo.gl/76yZCx>.

required taking away powers from armed groups that they enjoyed in northern Syria since 2016.

Despite the clear results that appeared on paper from those meetings regarding the structure and mandate of the National Army, it is not considered as the unifying body that encompasses all the forces. Following Operation Olive Branch, the geographic territory expanded and the conflicting interests of groups became more visible, especially with fragile security conditions and the increased assassinations committed by ISIS pockets and YPG forces- as the armed wing for the PYD. Opposition groups and Turkey were then left with little options and out of necessity focused on establishing and building a security force - “The Military Police - Special Security Forces”. This new body was given all the attention and support it needed and the National Army project development was postponed.

Another important development in 2018 was the **formation of the National Liberation Front** as an umbrella coalition for 11 opposition armed forces under a unified command declared on May 28, 2018. It included Faylaq al-Shaam, Free Idlib Army, First Coastal Division, Second Army, Second Coastal Division, Jaysh al Nukhba, First Infantry Division, Jaysh al Nasr, Shuhada al Islam (Daraya), Liwa al Hurriya, and the 23rd Division. Faylaq al-Shaam⁽²¹⁾ plays an especially important role in this formation as the group does not have a clear combat doctrine. Their priority is to unite under a single banner without complete integration and not allowing defected officers from holding high command positions⁽²²⁾.

Another significant development was that northern Syria was becoming the last safe haven for anti-Assad forces. At the beginning of 2016, northern territories controlled by armed opposition forces, especially Idlib province, became a safe haven for armed opposition groups that were forced out of

⁽²¹⁾ Faylaq al Shaam was formed as a result of the merger of 19 Islamic groups from Aleppo, Homs, and Hama in March 2015. It was one of the groups that took part in the Fatah Aleppo operations room under the command of Yaser Abdul Rahim in April 2015. In 2018, it has more than 12,000 fighters with 2,700 of them based in northern rural Aleppo and in the northeastern parts of Euphrates Shield. They also made significant contributions to Operation Olive Branch in Afrin. Faylaq al Shaam is now one of the strongest groups due to Turkish support. Faylaq al Shaam always avoids political conflict and remained neutral in a number of instances choosing not to take sides in conflicts between armed opposition forces. Today it is a main part of the National Front for Liberation.

⁽²²⁾ The National Front for Liberation: Its main leaders and formations, Shaam Network: 05/28/2018, <https://goo.gl/FuWXks>

central and southern Syria through a series of deals between the parties to the conflict in Syria. In exchange for safe passage to Idlib, opposition forces surrendered territory to the regime. The concentration of such a large number of armed opposition members in a single area changed the state of affairs for the groups that were already there and the groups that were moving in. Previous conflicts prevented groups from working together and integrating into a single force. Instead they merged into new formations based on the various internal conflicts and international pressures coming from donor countries⁽²³⁾.

Second: Syrian Democratic Forces: People's Protection Units under a New Name

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were formed less than two weeks after the Russian intervention in September 2015. Then only two days after the SDF's formation on 12/10/2015 the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that C17 freight aircraft escorted by fighter jets landed in Hasaka governorate delivering more than 100 containers of supplies including small arms ammunition and hand grenades. The military aid equated to more than 50 tons of small arms ammunition and hand grenades⁽²⁴⁾. According to unofficial statements this delivery was coordinated by Lahor Sheikh Jinki, the nephew of the KDP's late Secretary General Jalal Talabani. The announcement of this delivery was the second of its kind. The first delivery of aid to the YPG was during the fight against ISIS in Ain al Arab on 20/10/2014⁽²⁵⁾.

The SDF is an alliance of forces between Arab tribes and armed groups in Burkan al Furat that were allied with the YPG at the end of 2015. The announcement of the formation of SDF came at the same time that the YPG were expanding their control into Arab tribal lands in rural Hasaka, Raqqa and Afrin. The announcement also came only 11 days (29/09/2015) after the Pentagon announced the suspension of its training of anti-Assad Syrian

⁽²³⁾ What's left of the Syrian opposition forces?, MENA Monitor, 09/26/2018, <https://goo.gl/bAqHdf>

⁽²⁴⁾ The conflict in Syria: U.S. planes drop weapons for fighters fighting ISIS in Hasaka, BBC News, 12/10/2015, link: <https://goo.gl/NqtzSX>, You can also see: News of the arrival of the first shipment of American weapons to the People Protection Units, Shaam Network, Date: 12/10/2015, link: <https://goo.gl/SdJuJW>.

⁽²⁵⁾ U.S. aircraft "dropping weapons and supplies" to the YPG fighters in Ain Al Arab, source, date: 20/10/2014, link: <https://goo.gl/1GzkY9>.

opposition fighters outside Syria and a comprehensive review of the U.S. strategy to form a moderate armed Syrian opposition force.

1. Organizational Structure: Codified Centralization of the PYD

The first meeting for the Syrian Democratic Forces was held on 10/10/2015. Its bylaws claim that the organization aims to “liberate the Syrian state and people and to defend them both from attacks by enemies and terrorists that threaten their existence.” The SDF insists on right to self-defense granted to them by international common law within the context of protecting human rights and abide by the international agreements on armed conflict including the Geneva conventions and its related international agreements⁽²⁶⁾.

- **Syrian Democratic Forces General Commander:** is elected by the Military Council. He/She is responsible for leading the Military Council and General Command’s meetings. He/She also oversees the General Command’s activities and directly oversees their activities as well as approve all decisions that occur between the Military Council meetings. He/She also appoints the spokesperson for the SDF.
- **Syrian Democratic Forces General Command:** Has 9-13 members according to the needs. They are elected through transparent democratic elections with candidates selected from the Military Council ensuring that women are included in the General Command. It is responsible for executing the decisions made in the Military Council as well as organizing, commanding and distributing SDF forces. The General Command also oversees battle plans in the field. Orders from the General Command are binding on all SDF forces and non-negotiable. No military unit can start any military operation against any enemy without permission from the General Command.
- **Military Discipline Committee:** Includes 5-7 members appointed by the Military Council. They follow up on all disciplinary matters in the SDF ranks. They also punish the forces, which do not perform as required. It also addresses all the internal conflicts that arise within SDF ranks.

⁽²⁶⁾ Adoption of the bylaws of the Syrian Democratic Forces after its unanimous approval, Location: SDF, Date: 25/01/2016, link: <https://goo.gl/35r8rK>.

● **Administrative Offices:**

- Public Relations Office: it is responsible for developing the local and international relations of all the democratic and civil powers as well as the military organizations, tribes, and national figures. The aim is to take advantage of all resources and apply them during battle. No group is allowed to develop its own diplomatic or military relations without the knowledge and approval of the General Command.
- The Preparation and Training office: its role is to prepare the basic infrastructure of the forces, including the preparation of training programs (theoretical and political, military and other), in addition to preparing the necessary means for schools, academies, institutes and preparation of training teams, books and training publications as necessary.
- Information Office: This office organizes and manages the media war. It coordinates with the media offices belonging to the SDF's affiliated groups. It directs its media activities and prevents any group from issuing content independently.
- Self-Archives and Archives: This office prepares the identification records of all members, officers and officials of the Syrian Democratic Forces.
- The Office of Finance, Armaments and Supplies: It regulates the financial through the development of appropriate budgets to reconcile the needs and potentials. Armaments and supplies are considered to be controlled and rationalized, especially in light of limited possibilities and as a material value for the uprising.
- Military Information Office: This office includes trained personnel to collect information by all means available to serve the military forces in their operations and campaigns, including the use of the necessary technologies and human resources.
- Office of Women's Combat Affairs: This office organizes the affairs of the fighters in the ranks of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and works to

organize and develop the participation of women in the defense process⁽²⁷⁾.

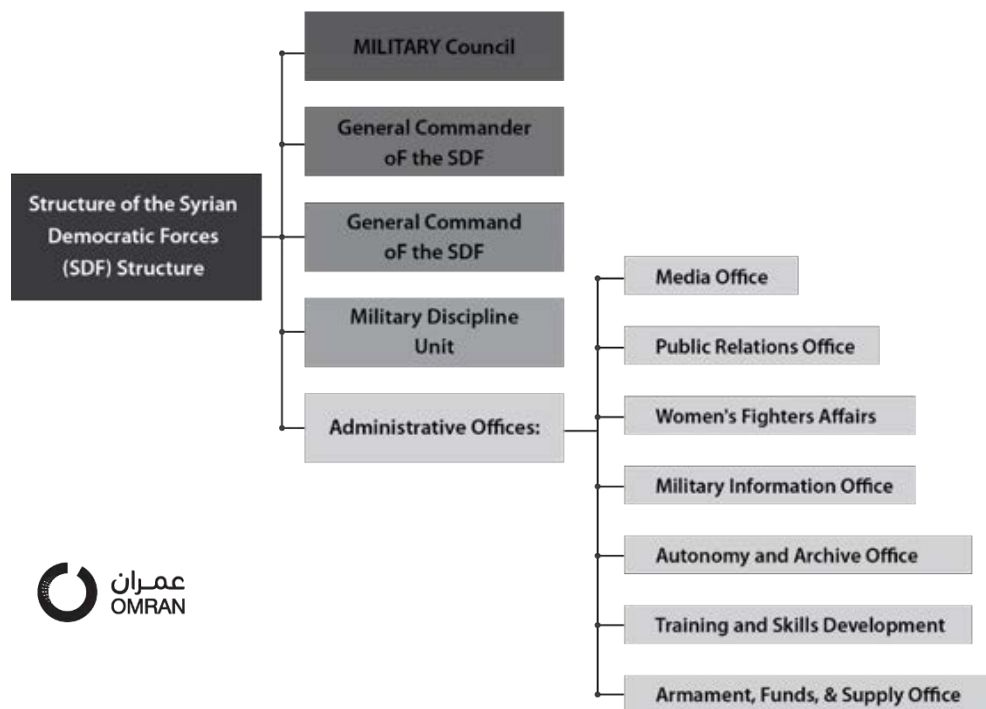


Figure 2: The organizational structure of SDF

2. The Main Military Forces in the SDF: A New Painting with the Same Names

Generally, military and security functions of different actors assigned security roles and duties in the Self-Administration areas are similar to those of the same institutions under the Assad regime before the uprising. The priority is to control society to conform with the political ideology of the ruling regime, and justify political repression and arrests, as well as the militarization of society to be correlated with the security needs of the central power.

After the uprising started, the PYD created organized cells, especially among the ranks of the Revolutionary Youth Union, under the command of Khabat Derik. He is a former Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) member and many

⁽²⁷⁾ Bylaws of the Syrian Democratic Forces, signed by: Democratic Union Party, Date: 03/02/2016, link: <https://goo.gl/A8PGV3>.

people credit him for founding and commanding the first YPG forces. As events played out, many new organizations and branches came into existence. Now the Democratic Autonomous Administration (DAA) comprises a number of security and military actors including: People's Protection Unit (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ). They were declared "legal" military forces according to Article 15 of the Social Contract of the DAA passed during Session 1 on 6 January 2014. It dictates that the YPG is the single national force responsible for the defense and safety of the administration's territorial integrity and regional sovereignty. The text confirms that the YPG is at the service of the people and protecting their goals and national security. They are estimated to have approximately 20-30 thousand fighters in addition to the Autonomous Defense Forces (HPX). The DAA's social contract established the Self-Protection and Defense of Authority on 21 January 2014.

Faction Name	Areas of Influence	Current Situation
YPG	Hassaka, Raqqah, and Deir Ezzor	Main part of SDF
YPJ	Hassaka, Raqqah, and Deir Ezzor	Main part of SDF
Syriac Military Council	Al-Hassaka	Security Forces
Al-Sanadid Forces	Al-Hassaka	Inactive
Thwar al-Raqqah Brigade	Al-Raqqah	Inactive
Jaish al-Thwar	Al-Raqqah and Manbij	Part of its fighters joined ES
Saljika Brigade	Manbij	Part of Jaish al-Thwar
Shams al-Shamal	Al-Raqqah	Part of Jaish al-Thwar
Jabhat al-Akrad	Al-Raqqah	Part of Jaish al-Thwar
Jaish al-Salam	Manbij	Security Forces
Al-Jihad Brigade	Manbij	Part of Jaish al-Salam
Jund al-Harmeen Brigade	Al-Raqqah	Part of Jaish al-Salam
Al-Tahrir Brigade	Al-Raqqah	Inactive
Burkan al-Furat	Hassaka, Raqqah, and Deir Ezzor	Inactive
Jaish Al-Qasas	Deir Ezzor	Part of Burkan al-Furat
Saryya Jarabulus	Al-Raqqah	Part of Burkan al-Furat
Military Council in Manbij	Manbij	Western Manbij
Military Council in Deir Ezzor	Deir Ezzor	Participating in al-Hajin battle against ISIS

The Euphrates Brigades	Manbij	Inactive
International Freedom Battalion	Hassaka, Raqqah, and Deir Ezzor	Participating in al-Hajin battle against ISIS
Sutoro	Al-Hassaka	Security Forces
Asaysh Rojava	Al-Hassaka	Security Forces
Desteya Parastin	Al-Hassaka	Security Forces

The DD’s Leslative Council approved the Self Defence Law on on 13 July 2014. This law requires every family to offer one of its members between the ages 18-30 to serve the self-defense duty for a period of 6 months, which was later extended to 9 months on 1 January 2016. The new Self-Protection and Defense of Authority was tasked with administering the mandatory service program and detailings its procedures and regulations. This policy is more strictly implemented on Kurdish citizens within the DAA territory, while other Arab and Christian security actors -especially the Sanadeed Forces of the Shimmar tribe- implement this within their areas of control.

There is also a group of paramilitary forces, the most important of which are: The World Freedom Battalion and the foreign advisors. The World Freedom Battalion was formed because of the increased numbers of foreigners that were coming to Syria to join the YPG after the battle of Kobani against ISIS. The battalion was officially announced on 10/06/2015 in Ras al Ayn with 25 fighters. The battalion attracted fighters from around the world, the most interesting of which are the leftist Turks from the Marxist Leninist Communist Party (MLKP) and the Workers and Villagers for the Salvation of Turkey Army (the military wing of the MLKP and goes back to 1973). Leftist activists from Eastern Europe came to Syria to join “Roj Ava” forming a variety of other organizations as well.

The battalion is split into two groups: Bob Crow Brigade - named after a British Union figure and Henry Krasucki Brigade - named after a French socialist leader. The leadership of the World Freedom Battalion is headed by

a 30-year-old Kurdish woman who uses the nome de guerre Deniz. They are around 200 - 300 fighters⁽²⁸⁾.

The presence of western forces in Kurdish areas is not only in the form of volunteer fighters but there are also a large number of western troops that came to the region to train YPG forces first and then SDF forces later. They came from France and the United States and some from the United Kingdom. They are estimated to be around 500 advisors who help assist in air operations against ISIS.

3. Armament and Military Support: Large Amounts of U.S. Weapons

The foreign arming of the YPG - the backbone of the SDF - was surprising since it was the first time that it received military, political and popular support in such a public way. In an unprecedented move, tens of Peshmerga forces from the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq crossed international borders to reach Kobani through Turkish territory. The international coalition airdropped a weapons delivery to the YPG as well.

Six patterns of U.S. support to the SDF can be identified as follows:

First, there was the consistent air cover during critical battles such as the Battle of Raqqa, Battle of Shadadi, Battle of Al Houli, and Battle of Manbij.

Second, the U.S. forces constantly assured YPG and SDF that they would be protected from any attacks by the Assad regime. The first test of this was in Hasaka when Asayish forces of the Autonomous Administration faced off with regime and National Defense Forces. During the skirmishes, an American aircraft patrolled the airspace over Hasaka preventing regime aircraft from entering the area. On August 19, 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that it sent American aircraft to protect its advisors working with YPG forces.

Third, the U.S. sent experts, advisors, Marines, and other special forces to SDF-controlled territory. Despite the lack of a clear number of total U.S. forces, we do know that there are at least 10 American bases in SDF territory.

⁽²⁸⁾ Badir Mulla Rashid, Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria, 24 Jan 2018, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, <http://omranstudies.org/publications/reports/military-and-security-structures-of-the-autonomous-administration-in-syria.html>

At the start of the Raqqa operation, there were approximately 2,000-3,000 international coalition forces.

Fourth, continued and increased direct military support to the SDF. The rate of delivery of support to SDF has only increased since it was established. Turkish sources estimate that 809 freight trucks entered northern Syria between June and July 2017 alone. Over the past two years, an average of 300 freight trucks per month carrying ammunition and military vehicles entered northern Syria⁽²⁹⁾.

Fifth, both the Obama and Trump administrations have managed Turkish fears repeatedly by offering guarantees to Turkey about the type of weapons being delivered to the SDF. The U.S. promised that they would not allow those weapons to reach the hands of groups that would use them against Turkey - especially the PKK, which has a strong relationship with the YPG. The U.S. also promised to retrieve these weapons once the agreed upon mission was complete⁽³⁰⁾.

Sixth, high level American officials made visits to YPG-controlled areas including the U.S. Envoy to the International Coalition to fight ISIS Brett McGurk in 2017. In addition, the former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and former U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith visited the region in 2016⁽³¹⁾.

Third: The Militias Scene in Regime-Controlled Areas: Dissolution or Reintegration

The features of cohesion and central command and control in the regime's military structure is now a debatable and problematic matter since foreign allied militias began flowing into Syrian territory. Local groups and militias were formed with connections and backing by prominent regime figures. This section will outline the landscape of local actors in regime-controlled areas.

⁽²⁹⁾ Pictures: U.S. military reinforcements from Iraq to Syria, Location: Micro Syria, Date: 08/01/2017, link: <https://goo.gl/9CXdfz>.

⁽³⁰⁾ Turkey welcomes the commitment of America to withdraw weapons from the Kurds of Syria, Location: New Gulf, Date: 23/06/2017, link: <https://goo.gl/rVB3wm>.

⁽³¹⁾ European-American Delegation in Roj Ava, Location: Hawar Agency, Date: 20/11/2016, link: <https://goo.gl/ZVrjkg>.

1. Local Militias: A Formula for Militarizing Society

A number of factors contributed to the degradation of the regime's central control (in terms of security and military strategy): the regime resorted to giving some of its powers traditionally concentrated in the military and security forces to loyalist local residents that organized into armed militias. These militias do not have an interest in development, skill level or affiliation (the assumption is that they are all loyal to the Assad regime). These groups pose a serious threat to a future military institution, especially since many of these groups are integrating into the traditional military with no regard for national interests. This has brought about the following results:

1. Local militias are given security authority to police the local populations where they exist as well as some military related responsibilities.
2. The militias are allowed to develop their military roles and expand their presence beyond the areas where they operate contributing to a central militia structure that fills in force gaps around Syria.
3. The militarization of society and directly linking the public's fate with the regime's survival. This directly violates the sovereignty of the state and the rights of the citizenry.
4. The institutionalization of the militias for economic reasons and turning them into strategic centralized security and military assets.

First, the local militias were formed to support the regime's military operations through lightly armed local groups that established themselves using local resources. These groups expanded by participating in fighting all around Syria. However, at their core these local militias are a result of the social and economic dynamics that a large portion of the Syrian population suffered through during the war. Militia volunteers preferred to join these groups because they did not have an official status but were an acceptable way of avoiding mandatory service in the military. Syrian conscripts are not treated well, fed well, and serve for extended periods of time. The militias made the military look bad and militia leaders grew in influence so much that in some cases they had more authority than the state itself. There were some instances where militia leaders showed more influence than Syrian military commanders. This reinforced the skewed viewpoints of soldiers towards the military causing outrage among Syrian conscripts. Furthermore, militia

members were given good salaries and significantly more authority than if they were normal conscripts in the military. The presence of militias also increased the amount of crime and chaos in Syria. This is mainly due to the mafia style presence of militias in Latakia and Aleppo governorates. It is important to note that these militias are funded by prominent tribal or partisan businessman linked in one way or another to the security forces.

Despite regime attempts to affect the state of the militias in Syrian territory through official decrees or by way of Russian pressure, it has proven too difficult for the regime to make progress, especially with larger militias. The regime knows that it desperately needs the militias and that it cannot start a direct conflict with them because of the possible sudden changes that could occur in military terms at any time. The regime also recognizes the importance of coordinating with the militias to create an environment in which they can face their joint challenges effectively. However, the regime went ahead with cutting off salaries from the National Defense Forces militia in most of western Ghouta. Also, many militia leaders were dismissed as well as Popular Committee and other militia checkpoints banned in Damascus, Homs, and other major cities. This is the regime's policy for a final solution. This policy was applied to many of the smaller militias including: Ahmad Darwish Militia and Ali Shala in Hama, as well as, Simon al Wakil and Ayman Sayadi in southern Aleppo. Official ID cards were retracted from the militia members, especially from Suqoor al Sahraa, which was headed by Ayman Jaber - who also lost his license to import and sell cigarettes. Many of the militia members are concerned about their futures following the recent policy changes.

The below table illustrate the map of local groups supportin the regime:

Palestinian Militias					
#	Name	Relation with Russia	Relation with Iran/Hezbollah	Areas of Influence	Note
1	Fatah al-Intifada	Good	No Relation	Damascus	-
2	Free Palestine Movement	Good	No Relation	Damascus	-
3	Al Jalil Forces	Good	Good	Damascus and Aleppo	Affiliated with Harakat al-Uamel al-Watni
4	Al Quds Brigade	Good	Good	Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, and Al-Raqqah	-
5	Al-Suwayda	Good	No Relation	Al-Suwayda	-
6	Sarayya al-Awda	Good	No Relation	Al-Suwayda	PDP Affiliated with
7	General Command	No Relation	Good	Damascus	Affiliated with Al Jabha Al Shabia
8	Palestine Liberation Army	Good	No Relation	Damascus	-
9	Janhat al-Nidaal	No Relation	No Relation	Damascus and Lattakia	-
10	Al Saiqa Forces	No Relation	Good	Damascus and Lattakia	-

Druze Militias					
#	Name	Relation with Russia	Relation with Iran/Hezbollah	Areas of Influence	Note
1	Dire al-watan	Good	No Relation	Al-Suwayda	Participated in the battles of al-Safa against ISIS
2	Jaish al-Muaheden	Good	No Relation	Al-Suwayda and Al-Quneitra	Participated in the battles of al-Safa against ISIS
3	Abu Ibrahim Forces	Good	No Relation	Al-Suwayda	Part of Jaish al-Muaheden
4	Jalmeed Umran	Good	No Relation	Al-Quneitra	Part of Jaish al-Muaheden
5	Humat al-Dyaar	Good	No Relation	Al-Suwayda	Part of Syrian Regime

6	Laybak Ya Salman	No Relation	Good	Al-Suwayda	Active in al-Suwayda desert
7	Al-Jabal Brigade	No Relation	Good	Al-Suwayda	Inactive

Second, the military wings of political parties also so an increase in activity. These include the military wings of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. They worked on strengthening their local presence reaching the level of a partner security force directly connected to the central power with shared benefits and interests. The most prominent groups are: **Ba’ath Brigade**: Established in the summer of 2012 it is made up of Ba’ath Party members in Aleppo and led by Hilal Hilal. They operate in Damascus. **Nusoor Al Zoubaa**: Also, a Syrian Social Nationalist Party oriented group that believes in the concept of “Greater Syria”. This is different from the Arab nationalist Ba’ath Party ideology. Approximately 5,000 Nusor al Zoubaa fighters, including Lebanese citizens, took part in fighting in many parts of Syria. However, they are mainly based in Homs and Damascus. The Arab National Guard: a pan Arab militia formed in 2013 made up of around 1,000 fighters. It operates in Aleppo, Damascus, Dara’a, Homs, and Quneitra. It has Arab nationalists from a number of Arab nationalities including Palestine, Tunisia, Syrians, and Yemenis. The militia is made up of several subgroups. **The Syrian Resistance**: it is formerly known as “The People’s Front For the Liberation of Iskenderun”. It is a Marxist-Leninist pro Assad militia led by Mirac Ural who is an Alawite Turkish National with Syrian citizenship. He is known as Ali Kayali in Syria. He is thought to responsible for the Bayda massacre in Banyas⁽³²⁾.

Third, Palestinian militias also supported the regime’s military operations. The most important of these militias are the ones that have existed since before the start of the uprising such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command. Under Ahmad Jibril’s command this group played a key role in attacking protesters as soon as they appeared in the Yarmouk Camp in Damascus. It continued its support for the regime even as

⁽³²⁾ All the infographics are produced jointly by the Information Unit and Cody, an expert on the Syrian armed groups, @badly_xeroxed

the fighting turned into full on armed conflict. It was founded in 1983 under the command of Saeed Maragha and the Saeqa Forces. The Saeqa Forces are the Ba'athi wing of the Palestinian armed militias. It was established and administered from Syria. It is directly linked to the Syrian Ba'ath Party and a member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Other Palestinian militias that existed before the uprising include the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, the Palestinian Democratic Party and the Return and Liberation Front. The Palestinian militias formed in Syria by the regime after the uprising started include: Jalil Forces: approximately 1,000 Palestinians under Fadi al Mallah's command. They were trained by the Syrian regime and Hezbollah and took part in the battles in Qalamoun. They describe themselves as Palestinian citizens who identify as Syrians. Liwa al Quds: is a militia made up of Palestinians that support the Syrian regime. They operate in Aleppo. Another is the Palestinian Liberation Army led by Tareq Al Khudra. They are different than the Palestinian Liberation Army of the PLO. This group participated in a number of battles around Syria - most notably in Adra, Daraya, Tal Sawan, the siege of Mo'admiyat al-Sham, and Zabadani. This group has three brigades: Quwat Hittin based in Qatana in rural Damascus, Quwat Ajnadin based in Jabal al Sheikh, and Quwat al Qadisiya present in Suweida⁽³³⁾.

2. Shi'ite Militias as integral parts the Army

Shi'ite militias are present on a number of Syrian fronts fighting against armed opposition groups while other groups were on the front lines against ISIS. In Damascus and its suburbs, the Lebanese Hezbollah is present in Old Damascus near the Umayyad Mosque. This is because the mosque is thought to house the shrine of Imam Hussein. Nearby there is also the Shrine of Ruqqaya. This puts Hezbollah and other Shi'ite militias in control of the areas around the Damascus Citadel all the way to the Eastern Gate. Rural areas of Damascus also have a large Shi'ite militia presence. It was first present in the Seyda Zainab area in 2012 where the Iraqi Kata'ib Abu Fadl al Abbas militia has an especially large presence. The Damascus International airport is the main gateway for Shi'ite militiamen to enter Syria. Both Shi'ite militias and

⁽³³⁾ Maen Tallaa, Security Relaities and its Governance in Syria, 27 January 2017, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, <https://goo.gl/7KwN64>

regime forces cooperate to protect the international airport and the main road known as the “Damascus International Airport road”. The road leading to the airport is surrounded by Al Buwayda, Al Thiyabiya, Al Nashabiya, Deir Salman, Shabaa, and Jaramana. All of these villages were taken over by Shi’ite militias and its original inhabitants driven out at the end of 2012 and start of 2013.

In northern rural Aleppo: the towns of Nubul and Zahraa in rural Aleppo were the main bases for Shi’ite militias. They are generally individuals from the local populace. The main groups there are Hezbollah and Katibat Qamar Bani Hashem. The two militias played a key role in lifting the siege on Nuhil and Zahraa in February 2016. Some of the militia members that were previously besieged in Nubul and Zahraa joined the regime in its operations in Mayer once they had finished protecting the two towns. Some of the militiamen also joined Suheil al Hassan’s forces and helped the regime forces retake Aleppo completely. Shi’ite militias are also present in southern Aleppo in Al Hader. These forces are the tip of the spear against opposition forces. In eastern rural Aleppo Shi’ite militias have a significant presence on Khanaser Road and around the defense factories in Sfeira. Shi’ite militias also helped the regime retake Aleppo city and displace its native residents as well as the opposition fighters to Idlib. Later on the regime pushed out many of these militia forces outside of the city in an attempt to strengthen fronts west of Aleppo facing opposition forces. Another portion of the Shi’ite militias were used to fight off ISIS in eastern rural Aleppo and eastern rural Homs.

In Homs and its surroundings: Shi’ite militias are based in at least 50 villages in rural Homs including Um al Amad, Um Jabat, and Um Janaynat. These villages are an important source of human resources for the regime to support militia efforts. The militias based in this area include Liwa al Ridha. Hezbollah is based in Al Qusayr and some other villages in western rural Homs. Iranian forces are present in Dabaa Airport and Tayaas Airport and Sheiraat Airport. There are also a large number of local and foreign Shi’ite militias in eastern rural Homs fight ISIS.

In Hama and its surrounding areas: The Syrian army’s 47h Brigade is present near Hama city, Hukama Private School near Khattab town, the new veterinary college near Khattab Town, in eastern rural Hama on Ithraya road,

in Sahl al-Ghaab, Jureen Gaarrison, Mujanzarat School east of Hama near the town of Tayba Turki, Jabal Zayn al Abidin bin Ali near Hama on the international road. Lebanese Hezbollah is present near Muharda alongside the Iraqi Harakat al Nujaba and Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces.

In Latakia and its surrounding areas, there aren't many Shi'ite militias because there is already a significant National Defense Forces presence. Only after the Russian intervention did Shi'ite militias start to make their way towards the coast. The Shi'ite militias helped the regime take back all of the Akraad and Turkmen Mountains in rural Latakia. Lebanese Hezbollah announced in mid 2015 the opening of an office in Latakia. The Maghribi Mosque in the Ashrafiye neighborhood in the middle of Latakia city was turned into a husseinia (Shi'ite shrine) to prothetylze Shi'ite beliefs. This decision was supported by the Cultural Administration in Latakia as well as pressure from the regime's security branches. The groups taking part in current fighting around Latakia include Lebanese Hezbollah, Liwa Thul Fiqar, Liwa Asadullah al Ghaleb, and some Liwa Fatimiyoun⁽³⁴⁾.

These militias are not linked financially to the military institutions. In fact, Iran remains their main funder and provides them with weapons, organization, and training. They also receive funding from donations gathered at Shi'ite shrines and holy places in both Iraq and Iran. The militias also supplement their income with looting and other criminal enterprises.

In general, since the beginning of the armed conflict in Syria Iran has sent forces its Quds Force that is part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. It entered the conflict early on and limited its intervention to sending military advisors and its elite fighting forces - most of which were highly trained snipers. Once the armed conflict increased, the Iranians started pushing their military forces into a number of fronts including Aleppo, Idlib and Damascus. A majority of these forces came from the Iranian Quds Force. As time went on the Quds Force suffered large losses. This forced the Iranian regime to dip into their traditional army forces. The Iranian army is built such that each

⁽³⁴⁾ The information about the militias is a summary of the Information Unit's interviews with internal sources - journalist Natalya Sanchez from the Bayes website - researcher Mona Al-Alami.

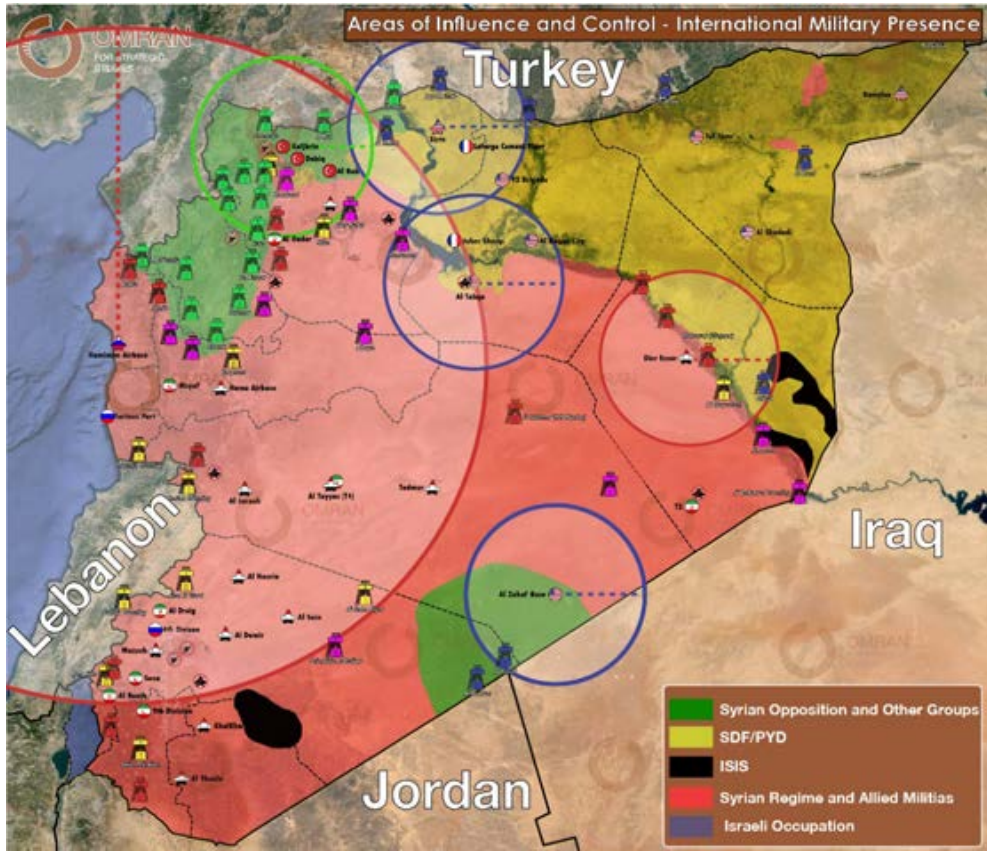
administrative area has its own military forces. Iran decided to take a group from each of the administrative territories and sent them to fight in Syria.

Sure enough, Iran started to send regular army forces to fight in Syria once the Quds Force was unable to take on more losses or continue fighting for extended periods of time. The Quds Force is a small portion of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and is built to conduct quick special operations and not stay deployed for extended periods of time. The Quds Force losses forced Iran to send at least 4,000 regular army troops to Syria following the Russian intervention. They were brought to Syria in Russian military aircraft from Iran to Hmeimim Military Airport in Latakia. They then transferred to battlefronts in the coast, rural Aleppo, Dara'a, Quneitra, and rural Hama. Following Russia's misleading claim that it was pulling out of Syria on 15/03/2016 in April 2016 Iran began sending fighters from The 65th Elite Brigade by air to Syria.

Iranian militias organized the battlefronts in Syria into five regions:

1. Damascus and rural Damascus.
2. Southern front in Dara'a, Quneitra, Suweida.
3. Central front in Homs, Hama, and Idlib.
4. Coastal front in Latakia and Tartous.
5. Northern front in Aleppo and Raqqa.

Data suggests that permanent military bases were established for each of the fronts defined above which hold at least 6,000 fighters, heavy weapons, air support, and air defense missiles. It is clear that Iran is interested in protecting its ability to continue to support and protect the Assad regime and Lebanese Hezbollah. See the map below:



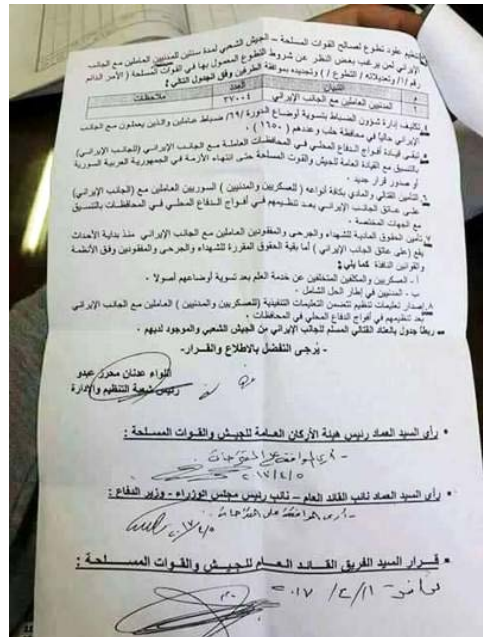
Map 3: Map of international armed actors and distribution in Syria

It is worthy to note that Iran established its own Command Center next to Damascus International Airport. This makes it easy for the Iranian commanders to receive fighters, weapons, and money coming from Iran into the airport. The building has 5 floors and 180 rooms and is surrounded by cement anti explosion walls. There is a large force dedicated to protecting the building in which more than 1,000 Shi'ite work.

Some of the Iranian backed militias are now recognized as regular military troops. The pictures below display the Iranian policy in this regard. In addition to the National Defense Forces (NDF) formed in 2012 under direct supervision by Iran as a paramilitary force, the Iranians also established the Local Defense Forces. The LDF includes a number of small local militias that operated with no official connection to the military. Iran continues its support for the LDF tying its structure directly to the regular military. The Iranians avoided the mistake they made with the NDF and who have recently been asked to reconcile their status with the regime and forced those militia members to join the regular Syrian army without counting their time of service in the NDF.



On April 6, 2017, the "Division of Organization and Administration - Branch of Regulation and Armament" sent a request to the Commander and Chief of the Syrian Armed Forces Bashar al Assad to organize the relationship between the Syrian civilians and military personnel working with Iran and to take special interest in their circumstances throughout the crisis. Bashar al Assad agreed to those demands.



The documents are signed by the President of the Division of Organization, General Adnan Mehrez Abdo, the Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces General Ali Ayoub, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defense, General Fahd Jassem Al-Frej.

Based on the request a committee looked into ways to organize these forces in terms of organization, command, fighting skills, financial support, rights of fighters and injured, and reconciliation for those who had tried to avoid mandatory service or civilians who left their barracks and joined Iranian backed forces.

They reached the following recommendations and proposals:

First, organizing the civilians and military personnel fighting with Iranian backed forces into the Local Defense branches in the different governorates. The document contained a table of the numbers of fighters that had run away from military service, avoided going to mandatory service, civilians, and those who had reconciled their situation according to governorates. The total number of fighters from these categories is 88,733.

	Gov.	Escaping Mandatory Service (AWOL)	Escaping Reserve Service	Defections /Run Aways	Civilians	Reconciled	Total
1	Damascus	4106	4824	600	9485	601	19616
2	Dara'a	421	359	658	857	0	2295
3	Tartous	321	0	0	679	100	1100
4	Homs	980	1124	1127	4314	1506	9051
5	Hama	2144	2654	2549	3915	864	12126
6	Aleppo	3925	5687	1213	10241	4864	25930
7	Idlib	1123	211	279	2929	3487	8029
8	Latakia	790	302	477	3165	700	5434
9	Raqqa	213	235	148	220	0	817
10	Deir Ezzor	461	870		645	0	1976
11	Hasaka	388	465	952	554	0	2359
Total		14,872	16,731	8,003	37,004	12,122	88,733

The **second** suggestion was to reconcile all the fighters who had avoided military service, ran away from military service, and the reserve forces. They would be transferred and assigned to Local Defense groups in the various governorates. Those who worked with Iranian forces and reconciled their situation would also be folded in to the Local Defense. The table below shows that the total number of all these fighters adds up to 51, 729.

Category	Numbers	Description
1	14,873	Those who avoided the mandatory service
2	8,003	Those who went AWOL
3	16,731	Those who did not report for the reserves
4	12,122	Those who reconciled with the regime
Total	51,729	

The **third** proposal was to draft volunteer contracts that would allow civilians working with Iranian backed forces to join the Syrian military for two years of service regardless of their background. The documents show that there are 37,400 civilians working with Iranian backed forces in Syria.

The **fourth** proposal regarding officers was to settle the circumstances of 69 active officers who are currently working with the Iranian side in Aleppo. There are currently 1,650 Syrian regime officers working with Iranian backed forces.

The **fifth** proposal would leave the commanders of the Local Defense working with Iran in their positions in coordination with the General Command of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces until the end of the conflict in Syria or until a new decision has been made.

The **sixth** proposal calls for full military and financial support for both Syrian military and civilian personnel working with Iranian forces after they are folded into the Local Defense forces in the governorates.

The **seventh** proposal is that Iran should secure financial support for the families of those killed, injured, or missing who were working with the Iranian forces.

The **eighth** proposal calls for all orders to come for the organization of both military and civilian personnel working with Iranian forces after the organization of Local Defense branches in each of the governorates.

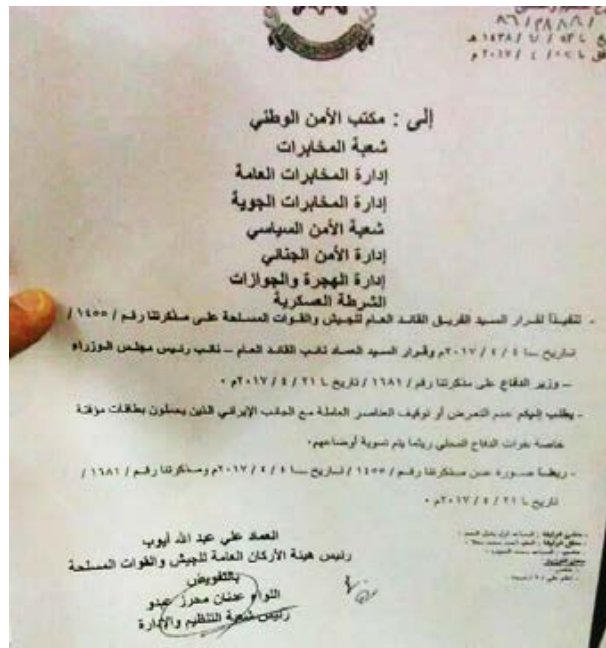
Below you see the main groups that made up the Local Defense forces at their formation. They were estimated to be around 45,000 fighters at their formation. Most of them came from the Baqqara tribe as part of Liwa al Baqer.



There were many other groups that participated in battles in southern rural Aleppo at the start of 2018. The Local Defense forces also were the tip of the spear for attacks in Deir Ezzor and southern Raqqa against ISIS. The Local Defense forces now administer and secure the territory from southern rural Deir Ezzor to southern rural Raqqa to eastern rural Aleppo and Aleppo City. Below are the most prominent that joined the Local Defense forces at the start of 2018:

Name of Group	Area of Operation	Origin of the Fighters
Liwa al Doshka	Aleppo	Syrian
Liwa al Sfeira	Aleppo	Syrian
Liwa al Bari	Hama	Syrian
Katibat al Hikma	Hama	Syrian
Faqj Nayreb	Aleppo	Syrian
Islamic Resistance in Syria	Aleppo-Raqqa	Syrian - Iraqi - Lebanese
Quwat al Rida	Homs	Syrian
Quwat al Riwan	Homs	Syrian
Quwat Suqoor al Dhahir	Idlib	Syrian
Nusoor Khan al Asal	Aleppo	Syrian
313 Force	Deir Ezzor	Syrian - Iraqi

On April 4, 2017 the Defense Minister Fahad Jasem al Freij announced a general amnesty to all of the Iranian fighters operating under the Local Defense Forces⁽³⁵⁾.



⁽³⁵⁾ Information about the Local Defense forces was compiled in the following ways:
 Special interviews conducted by the Information Unit with special sources from the city of Aleppo
 Special interviews conducted by the Information Unit with a dissident officer from the local defense
 Special interviews conducted by the Information Unit with a fighter discharged from the Local Defense due to injury

Ayman Jawad Tamimi - The Local Defence Forces: Regime Auxiliary Forces in Aleppo – 23 March 2016 - <https://goo.gl/344QGm>

3. Profiles of the most prominent Shi'ite militias in Syria

There are a number of Shi'ite militias operation in Syria. The graphic and table below show the most important information about these militias and the areas where they are active in⁽³⁶⁾:

Foreign militias (Shiite majority)					
#	Name	Origin	Ideology	Fighters #	Areas of Influence
1	Brigade of Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	3000	Damascus and Aleppo
2	Al-Abdal Movment	Iraq	Khomeini	1300	Rif. Damascus
3	Special Intervention Regiment	Iraq	Aithnay Eshry	800	Damascus International Airport
4	Jaish al-Imam al-Mahdi	Iraq	Sadri	2000	Aleppo
5	Sarayya al-Khurasani	Iraq	Khomeini	600	Damascus International Airport
6	Saryya al-Allah	Iraq	Khomeini	500	Rif. Damascus
7	Al-Juja al-Muntzra battalions	Iraq	Khomeini	1200	Rif. Damascus and Aleppo
8	Al-Yawm Al Maoud Brigdae	Iraq	Sadri	1500	Rif. Damascus
9	Qamr Ibn Hachim	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	750	Damascus
10	Assad Allah Brigade	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	800	Damascus
11	Haidar Karar Brigade	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1000	Damascus
12	Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades	Iraq	Aithnay Eshry	1500	Southern rural Aleppo
13	Hezbollah Nujaba	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	7200	Southern rural Aleppo
14	Al-Lutf Brigade	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	500	Damascus
15	Master of Martyrs Brigades	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1000	Daraa
16	Zulfiqar Brigade	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1200	Qalmoun and Damascus

⁽³⁶⁾ The table information was compiled based on interviews conducted by the Information Unit in 2016 and 2017 with local sources operating in regime areas in the administrative section of Damascus International Airport. It was a special interview with foreign journalists who have permission to work in regime areas.

17	Baqir al-Sader Forces	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1500	Damascus
18	Imam Hassan Mujtaba Brigade	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1700	Damascus
19	Asaeb Ahl al-Haq	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	2000	Southern rural Aleppo and Lattakia
20	Sayf al-Haq Brigade	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1400	Damascus
21	Saraya al-Areen	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	600	Lattakia
22	Imam Zain al-Abdeen	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	1000	Athrya and Tadmur
23	Kafil Zainab Regiments	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	750	Damascus
24	Al-Emam Ali Brigades in Iraq and Sham	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	600	Damascus
25	Zainab al-Kubra Forces	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	550	Damascus
26	Saraya Ansar al-Aqida	Iraq	Khomeini-Sadri	500	Damascus
27	Faylaq al-Waad al-Sadiq	Iraq	Sadri	1500	Al-Qalmoun
28	Al-Emam al-Hussin Brigade	Iraq	Sadri	1200	Rif. Damascus
29	Badr Organization	Iraq	Khomeini	3500	Southern rural Aleppo
30	Fatmiyon Brigade	Afghanistan	Khomeini	7000	Daraa countryside - Quneitra - Damascus - Aleppo
31	Zainab Brigade	Pakistan	Khomeini	3000	Daraa countryside - Quneitra - Damascus - Aleppo
23	Baqiat Allah Brigade	Mixed	Khomeini	800	Damascus International Airport
33	Lebanese Hezbollah	Lebanon	Aithnay Eshry	8000	Lebanese border strip - Aleppo - Damascus - Zabadani - Quneitra
34	Amal Movement	Lebanon	Aithnay Eshry	1000	Al-Qalmoun
				61850	

Iranian Forces				
#	Name	Origin	Fighters #	Areas of Influence
1	IRGC	Iran	8000	Damascus - Daraa countryside - Quneitra - Aleppo
2	Basij Forces	Iran	2500	Damascus - Daraa countryside - Quneitra
3	Al-Quds Battalions	Iran	2000	Damascus - Daraa countryside - Quneitra
4	Saraya Talaie al-Khursani	Iran	1000	Damascus International Airport
			<u>18000</u>	

Conclusions: Fragile Arrangements and Diverging Directions

This report offers a description of the military situation in Syria in 2018. It shows that the military situation has undergone a number of major changes. The most important of these changes is the establishment of three main international spheres of influence under which local political actors operate:

1. In regime areas the Iranian and Russians have taken a prominent role. There have been attempts to reign in the militias by eliminating some and integrating those affiliated with Iran. The groups are yet to be organized appropriately but they are critical since the Iranian backed militias are shoring up the regime's lack of manpower and the Russian air support is shoring up the regime's lack of technical capacity.
2. In the north, armed opposition groups are organized according to the Astana agreement. Armed opposition forces displaced from southern and central Syria are now based in the north. Their capabilities are being integrated into the ongoing operations there within the context of Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch. This is helping the opposition groups better organize their military capabilities under Turkish oversight.
3. The SDF continues in its security and military role under the auspices of the Autonomous Administration. All the while they continue to negotiate with the regime in unresolved discussions about their existence. This issue will likely remain unresolved and further escalate due to the

problematic views of the SDF's American backers that are supporting the SDF's autonomy on the one hand while pushing for negotiations with the regime on the other.

As for the armed groups that were displaced to the north their weapons, members, and capabilities were carefully catalogued and recorded. Some of them were used as local security or police. Others joined larger armed opposition groups. Some also took a step back and avoided getting involved with the military groups in the north, which they found different than the groups they had arrived with. These fighters became civilians sought out means of supporting a family and left their arms behind.

The regime's attempt to marginalize or reduce the roles of Iranian-backed militias was not comprehensive. On the one hand, some of the militias were transformed into regular military forces and Iranian operations were institutionalized in Syria. This does not reflect a policy of marginalization. Furthermore, there is no clear strategy for dealing with the issue of integration of local militias or the opposition groups that reconciled with the regime. The priority remains the fight against the opposition and is the main reason for the delays in any integration efforts. In the long-term integration will be a very difficult task due to the heavy presence of militias and their varied social and security roles.

This scenario includes several constants and variables:

- **The constants are:** the expansion of territory controlled by the regime and the decline of territories held by opposition forces, the opposition opting to avoid new attacks against the regime to defend territories they control and extend negotiations, the regime continues claim it is controlling and consolidating the militia scene, Iranian presence is becoming a reality reinforced within the structures of the army and its functions as confirmed by the Astan process, the continued presence of foreign bases in Syria, the decline of opposition armed group influence in areas of their control in favor of unification and coordination efforts, the continuation of the Al Nusra Front dilemma under its various names which will not be resolved until existing agreements are completed, the regime's retaking of territory came with inadequate temporary security

measures, The Syrian army is depleted both technically and in numbers, the SDF negotiations with the regime are determined by the American vision.

- **The variables include** ones that are recognizable and others that are less so. First there is the issue of integration in the three spheres of influence, the crystallization of patterns of governance in the north and east via ever more clear military structures, international military interventions that will test the balance of power in 2018, and the issue of confronting Iran brings with it its own set of variable.
- As for the impact of this situation on reform efforts, the political solution will determine the capacity for reform in regards to the constitution and elections. On the other hand there is a need to work on national programs for integration and rebuilding of institutions, which the regime does not view as a priority and instead a challenge worth delaying. In both cases, it seems that these issues will not be addressed and postponed for future talks or developments on the ground.

Chapter 3

Stability and Change in Syria: The Future of the Military in Syria

*Maen Tallaa**

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Chapter 3: Stability and Change in Syria: The Future of the Military in Syria

This paper is focused on a set of core questions: Does the Syrian military establishment in its present state possess the foundations needed to be effective and strengthen national patriotism? Or the capacity and skills to protect the outcomes of a political negotiation process and provide stability? These questions force us to recognize the need to start a process of policy reform related to the army's current and future structure. They also demand an examination of the military's structural integrity and stability, considering the dramatic changes that it has gone through during the recent years of conflict. From there, one can outline a preliminary conceptual framework for the reform of military institutions so that they become drivers of political cohesion and neutrality, as well as main sources for establishing and maintaining stability in Syria.

First: Guiding Principles for Reforming Military Institutions: An Absence of a National Vision

The limits of the military reform process in Syria are affected by a number of interrelated political factors related to the negotiating frameworks guiding the political process, including the views of the regime and its allies, Russia and Iran.

Most of the international documents governing the political process (the Geneva Communiqué, Security Council resolutions, in particular Resolution 2254, the Vienna statements, the 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles put forward by De Mistura, the "four baskets") called on all parties to "preserve the institutions of the state," especially the military establishment. The seventh point of De Mistura's 12 Principles document makes clear that the political process aims at "A strong, unified, meritocratic and national army that carries out its duties in accordance with the constitution and the highest standards. Its functions are to protect the national boundaries and the people

from external threats and terrorism... The use of force shall be the exclusive prerogative of competent state institutions"⁽¹⁾.

The seventh principle requires an expansion of the United Nations' mechanisms and strategies for countering terrorism. This is especially true since the basket focused on security and counterterrorism in the "four baskets" presented by De Mistura should be guided by UN standards such as the United Nations' Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2006 (strategic issues related to counterterrorism, administration of the security sector, internal and external conditions related to the spread, prevention, and control of terrorism), guaranteeing the state's ability to uphold the rule of law and human rights while combating terrorism - especially in its security institutions. These standards should also be applied when addressing issues related to the central control of the armed forces, oversight and control of the security services, establishing a capable police force, addressing the issue of foreign fighters, as well as "confidence-building measures"⁽²⁾.

The UN's strategy is split into four main parts described below:



According to the above, the conditions of change can be applied to the vision guiding the political process in Syria is as follows:

⁽¹⁾ The text of the document: "The 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles," Al Quds newspaper, 2/12/2017, <https://goo.gl/2c6r3z>.

⁽²⁾ For more information, see the UN website and see the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy at <https://goo.gl/gCt3QN>; and A Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy at <https://goo.gl/nYBKHF>.



The vision described here is organically connected to the achievement of a political solution backed by the international documents that are guiding the political negotiations in Syria. Of course, the interpretations of these documents have been redefined from time to time, and are now focused primarily on two issues: the constitution and elections. Consequently, the limits of change are dependent on the constitutional process and how it defines the roles and responsibilities of overseeing military and guaranteeing its political neutrality. These matters are not yet evident because of the changing situation on the ground in favor of the regime and its allies, which makes this vision more elusive due to the current landscape and the constantly changing circumstances.

On the other hand, these matters are partly determined by the visions held by the regime's allies. The Russian and Iranian interventions came mainly because of failures in the Syrian military's structure and operations, which were depleted in terms of both manpower and technical capabilities over the

years of conflict. Thus, these military interventions were accompanied by a package of political measures related to the military and security institutions, even including options for control over the military and defense institutions in support of the demands of their allies' political visions (agreeing tactically but diverging strategically), which slowed down the declining indicators of the Syrian situation.

The Russian policies in Syria developed significantly in terms of the tools used. Russian engagement was initially a combination of military, political, and diplomatic support, but shifted in a more robust direction through direct engagement in the changing circumstances on the ground. The intervention was able to stop the armed opposition's military advances and reduce the incompetence of the Syrian regime and its militias, thus changing rules governing the military and geographic balance of powers. Russia was also able to eliminate threats to its strategic interests in the so-called "useful Syria" region and to block other regional interests convincing them not to oppose the intervention, forcing other powers to consider Russian conditions in their regional political and military agendas. Furthermore, the Russians pursued a local economic, social, and political approach that maximized their ability to control developments in the landscape⁽³⁾.

Russia became particularly interested in the defense infrastructure because of its desire to rearranging local realities, especially after the militia mindset had taken over the military and security operations in Syria. This militias ideology, which became prevalent by the end of 2012 when the army was losing many regular forces through defections and conscripts avoiding evading their mandatory service. Tehran made efforts to create, fund, and arm "Popular Committees" within the National Defense Force (NDF) militias under the supervision of the Iranian Basij forces. These militias quickly turned into a mafia notorious for stealing, looting, corruption, gun smuggling, drug smuggling, and committing violations against civilians.

⁽³⁾ Group of researchers: Challenges of national advancement during the Russian intervention, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 31/3/2017, link: <https://goo.gl/4qhibM>.

The most important restructuring that happened to the Fourth and Fifth Corps of the Syrian Army are as follows⁽⁴⁾:

- In October 2015, the Chief of Staff of the Syrian army, General Ali Ayoub, announced from the Russian military base in Hmeimim their intention to form a "Fourth Corps." The Corps was stationed at the infantry camp in Masyaf where the regime transferred a number of battalions, with some changes to their officers and commanders. But Moscow's attempts to integrate the militias into this new unit did not succeed, and military coordination remained minimal.
- In November 2016, the formation of the Fifth Corps - assault was announced with the aim of restoring the authority and sovereignty of the state. At the same time, it aimed to draw Syrian elements out of the Iranian-backed militias, and to limit their concentration to specific locations and within a single structure, while the regime took over responsibility for assembly and coordination. Russia directly oversaw the leadership of this corps by installing Syrian commanders that it considered loyal⁽⁵⁾.

Since the mid-2017, the Russian control of regime structures has become clear through the ongoing changes in the Defense Ministry, the Chief of Staff, and some security services. While some Russian efforts appear to be focused on the rampant corruption and decreasing the amount of waste of the military's resources, others can only be understood as an effort to install a network of pro-Russian Syrian officers and place them in prominent and sensitive military and security positions. There are a number of matters that

⁽⁴⁾ Yusuf Fakhreddine and others: "The Russian project in Syria," Geroun site, Date: 14/2/2017, link: <https://goo.gl/D92Qac>.

⁽⁵⁾ In contrast to the Iranian intervention in Syria, the Russian state has, since the beginning of its intervention, tightened its grip on the remaining institutions of the collapsed regime (its security, military and judicial institutions), which Iran has not seized. Russia pushed in the direction of attempting to impose its control in an attempt to restore the state and its legitimacy. One example of this trend is the issue of Suleiman Assad, and his imprisonment, and the prosecution of the Shabiha of al-Arayed neighborhood of Tartous. It relied primarily on the military security, which has witnessed a quasi-stalemate since the outbreak of the revolution and took on a secondary role after the advance of the Iranian-trained Air Force intelligence. At the same time, the security establishment deliberately marginalized the leaders of the militias, and their fighters, gradually bullying without causing a major disturbance, and restored powers to the police, military and security forces gradually. The different groups living in government-controlled areas received all this with relative comfort.

are indicative of this Russian experience⁽⁶⁾: Russians decided to use the Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces offices in Damascus as a base for themselves and started to make changes in the Chief of Staff and Ministry of Defense that reached to the level of the Minister of Defense himself and his aides and advisors. A group of Syrian officers was sent to Russia for four months of training before returning to Syria to fill high-level positions. Additionally, a number of retired officers and advisors, who were loyal to Russia under Hafez al Assad's reign, were brought out of retirement and returned to the service as advisors to the Chief of Staff, responsible for specific issues within the army such as dress code and food.

The idea that the creation of these new corps is an important step towards integrating and regulating militias is vulnerable to many criticisms. Firstly, such efforts are not enough to fill the gaps in the Syrian army created by the collapse of its structure and the loss of its most prominent leadership. Furthermore, there is unchecked instability in military roles and responsibilities due to the multiple sources of custodianship and funding, and the promotion of particular ideologies over military expertise. The addition of a unit such as the "Fifth Assault Corps" to the army and the institutionalization of its presence only deepens the sectarian nature of the military, and contributes to the creation of a "large militia" within the structure of the "national army." It also promotes international dependency within the military's structure, creating the possibility for conflicting interests and mechanisms within a single component. Not to mention that the growing

⁽⁶⁾ The issue began with the issuance of a presidential decree to repeal article 25, paragraph (ح), of the Military Service Act, which allows for the exemption of those eligible for reserve service by a decision of the Army Command or the Minister of Defense. The decree came on the back of what was said to be "corruption cases" in the Ministry of Defense. In July 2017, Russian orders were issued to freeze Defense Minister Fahad Jassim Al-Frej, his office director, Brigadier General Mahmoud Nizam, and the ministry's most senior assistant, Abu Al-Layth, who controlled the file of exemptions and acted as "keys" in those cases. Al-Fureij, according to a source for the "Al Modon", avoided the issue of exemptions and corruption in his ministry and run by the network headed by his son Khaldun who would help people get out of reserve service for money. He assured people that all necessary approvals come directly from him. A source close to the staff told "Al Modon" that the changes included more than 150 officers, some of them decision-makers in the army, and in the position of responsibility for direct military operations in the vicinity of Damascus.

Dozens of officers have been moved to the building adjacent to the chief of staff, which has been reserved since Hafez Assad's time for unpopular officers or those whose services were no longer needed. The Freij case ended after the appointment of General Ali Abdullah Ayoub. He would remain under direct Russian supervision. Al-Frej was placed in an undisclosed residence with all of his affairs monitored. Ayoub's appointment came after the nomination of three names for the Ministry of Defense by the National Security head Ali Mamluk. One of the candidates was General Talal Tlass, who served as deputy chief of staff. However, Ayoub was chosen and Tlaas was announced to be dismissed by the end of 2018 due accusations of corruption.

decentralization of military control makes it difficult to take control the borders and establish stability throughout all of Syria's geographic territory. Also, such steps require a variety of pre-military preparatory programs focused on a national doctrine and the importance of functional consistency. For this reason, we should discuss the Chief of Staff's limitations, powers, and roles.

These efforts to reform and improve the military establishment lack a national vision to guide the agenda of those institutions. The conditions for such a vision include most importantly of which is the need for political change, and to isolate and separate the military from the arenas of political and partisan competition in favor of neutrality and the protection of citizens' political lives, in addition to strengthening civil-military relations in order to improve the performance of the institutions.

Second: The Army and Requisites of Stability: The Need for Reframing and Rebuilding

The current status of the Syrian army is characterized by several conflicting approaches, by virtue of the political situation dominating events. On the one hand, changing the military balance in Syria and shifting to offensive strategies that accelerate complete control over all of Syrian territory is linked to the "structural cohesion of the ideological army." This approach claims that, despite the challenges facing the military, it is still a cohesive institution with a coherent decision making mechanism that allows it to fight on multiple battlefronts and manage military affairs in a precise and professional manner. However, in the absence of that body, the military went through a number of setbacks and lost its ability to gain the strategic initiative or maintain its gains on the ground, forcing it to resort to support from local and foreign militias and Russian and Iranian intervention, to prevent further collapse and attrition⁽⁷⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ As a sample of these positions, see the following sources:

1. A specialized site showing the Syrian army victories: <http://www.syria-victory.com>.
2. How Assad Won, Sputnik site; 4/10/2017, <https://goo.gl/7wt1Jx>.
3. National: Victory of The Syrian Army in Eastern Ghouta that Establishes Steadfastness and Resistance, The Bulletin, 3/4/2018, link: <https://goo.gl/fGyvDM>.
4. The Victory of the Army Heroes in Ghouta Re-draws Events in the Region, 2018, link: <https://goo.gl/mjU2WU>

At the same time, most opposition approaches emphasize that the Syrian army is in a state of complete collapse based on a number of factors, including: increased defections in the regular army units, and the growing involvement of the army's regular forces in actual combat operations, even non-operational reserve forces, such as the 17th and 18th Regiments. Mass defections left some divisions with only a few remaining battalions, which were then integrated into other units. In parallel, the National Defense Force militias were forced to ensure sectarian loyalty. They also increased operational cooperation with the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, and then sectarian Iraqi militias, leading to growing accusations of the Syrian army's ineffectiveness and cowardice⁽⁸⁾.

In order to understand the current state of the army and its ability to maintain cohesiveness and to support any stability achieved through a political process, there are a number of criteria it should have concerning human resources readiness, operational control, and institutional depth and strength.

With regard to human readiness, the intervention of the regime's allies can be seen as an indicator of the deterioration of this readiness, both quantitatively and qualitatively. We can then estimate that the peak of the attrition experienced by the Syrian military was at the end of 2015, the date of the Russian intervention, which emerged as a necessity due to the critical political and military moment in the conflict. That is the period when the appearance of the strategic losses of Russia's foreign instruments first arose, and the likelihood that these losses would increase further in the face of the opposition's military gains against the gradually declining Syrian regime and its militias. The losses increased so much that they came close to shifting the strategic balance on the ground and threatened the regime's ability to protect the so-called "useful Syria." Between 2011 and 2015 the military's human resources suffered significant losses due to a number of factors:

1. Defections across the board, which hastened the breakdown of the military⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ Radwan Ziadeh: "How the Syrian Army Collapsed." The New Arab, 19/4/2018, link: <https://goo.gl/u2vbma>.

⁽⁹⁾ The Acceleration of Defections in the Syrian Army, Sky News, 30/7/2012, link: <https://goo.gl/TxagFx>

2. The depletion of reserve forces and increased numbers of conscripts avoiding mandatory service⁽¹⁰⁾.
3. Their inability to stop the force attrition and the emergence of a clear gap in the ranks of enlisted and commissioned officers (lieutenants, first lieutenants, captains, majors, and colonels)⁽¹¹⁾.
4. The absence of Sunni personnel among the active duty volunteers⁽¹²⁾.
5. The formation of the National Defense Forces, the Fourth Corps, and Fifth Corps, to make up for human losses.
6. The increase in human losses. According to some estimates, the death toll among regime forces reached 63,000 soldiers, mostly from the 3rd, 9th, 4th, 7th, and 1st divisions⁽¹³⁾.
7. Exhaustion of the reservoir of reserves from pro-regime communities from the Syrian coastal areas, the Hama countryside, and western rural Homs, as these areas are the ones that have suffered the highest numbers of casualties among the Syrian regime forces⁽¹⁴⁾.

Some signs of recovery emerged after 2015 due to the Russian air support and Iranian ground support, which slowed the depletion of the army's ground units, allowing them to serve mainly as "clean up" forces. The situation improved further after the many reconciliation deals were reached around Syria since the start of 2018. This achievement was made possible as a result of the decreasing number of active fronts, whether due to the de-confliction line along the Euphrates River, or because the regime was able to retake areas previously outside its control like Eastern and Western Ghouta, southern Damascus, Qalamoun, Daraa, rural Homs, and rural Hama. The conditions of the reconciliation agreements, which dictated that those in the newly recaptured areas who had not finished their mandatory service must join the military, contributed to the military's ability to conscript more reserve forces.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Syrian youth and the issue of Mandatory Military Service Law; Hikayat Syria, 24/11/2016, link: <https://goo.gl/QghTc4>

⁽¹¹⁾ Rami Sweid: "Fall of the Army of the Syrian Regime and the Rise of Militias", The New Arab, 24/11/2016 Link: <https://goo.gl/4DnHEF>

⁽¹²⁾ The splits within the Syrian army are gnawing the bones of the Assad regime, Zaman al-Wasl, 8/7/2012, link: <https://goo.gl/p795uS>

⁽¹³⁾ The human losses of the Syrian regime forces, Iranian militias and revolutionary factions within 6 years, Durar al-Shamiya, 12/3/2017, link: <https://goo.gl/88eYjC>

⁽¹⁴⁾ The "Free Alawite Movement" the death toll exceeded the 133,000, while the number of disabled is 67,000 and 3800 missing, adding that in the city of Tartous only 89,567 fighters were killed, and 58,216 are injured with a disability. There are 28,589 dead in Lattakia, 4,568 disabled and 6,543 dead in Homs and 8,760 dead in Hama.

The graph below shows the changes in manpower from March 2011 until today, with the highest attrition rate reaching 40% of field forces).

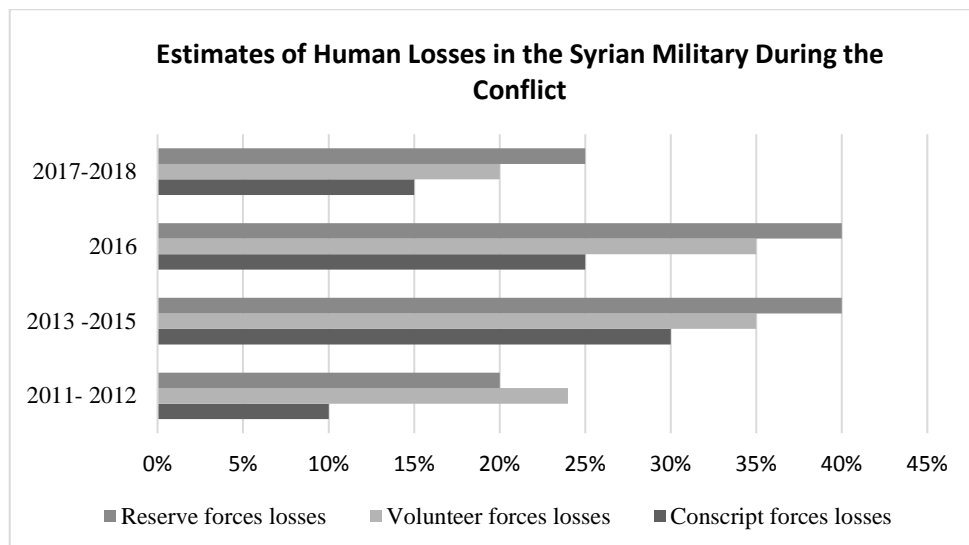


Figure 3: Estimates of Human Losses in the Syrian Military. Source: Omran Center Information Unit

Despite the heavy human and material losses that the Syrian army suffered, it still maintains its structural and organizational integrity. All of its branches and institutions are still under a central command that answers to and is loyal to the regime. Despite the different power circles and militias that appeared, the regime maintains its status as the ruler of the land, including the military and security structures. However, this does not conceal the qualitative changes to this military structure. Interviews conducted by the research team with defected officers of various ranks confirm the following observations:

1. There was an absence of central leadership for the various formations and divisions, and multiple sources issuing military orders.
2. Russian and Iranian military personnel overpowered Syrian commanders within the military hierarchy
3. Soldiers did not receive proper training to become fighters. Training and preparation periods were significantly shortened.
4. Newly formed groups (such as the Tiger Forces and groups commanded by Issam Zahr al-Din) drained traditional military structures of their strength by recruiting people into their groups.

Control and command in operations: Military operation rooms had a pivotal and central role in implementing plans and carrying out military orders on the ground in engage and proceed to expand control. The military operations rooms in Syria have taken on forms and functions that are commensurate with the nature of the military, financial, and political support they received.

There is a heavily bunkered military operations room that is 30 meters underground that was armored and equipped to be a command center for military operations against Israel. At the beginning of the uprising, it was transformed into an operations room to organize Syrian military efforts against the popular revolutionary movement, and was led by the central leadership of the Syrian army. It was also an attempt at making sure that no external or regional powers could influence decisions that were made during the execution of operations. The operations room was suitable for the nature and size of the operations at the time. Later on in the early stages of the uprising, the first **crisis management cell** comprising the heads of some security and military branches was attacked. Thereafter, individual operations rooms were created in each governorate, which all reported back to the central command operations rooms in Damascus. Then the regime established parallel operation rooms commanded by Suheil al-Hassan, who used all types of weapons and forces necessary to achieve “victories”⁽¹⁵⁾.

In the third and fourth year of the uprising, a Shi’ite-led operations room was created under Iranian command, and following that, the Russians also created their own operations rooms. From that point on, military units carried out their operations based on what command controlled them. Naturally, the Syrian regime’s decision-making influence in the operations rooms diminished over time, as its ability to give orders was limited by global maneuvering and not military realities⁽¹⁶⁾.

In terms of structural strength, the following tables and maps show how the fronts and changing circumstances on the ground determined where the Syrian military manpower was distributed. They also contribute to a better

⁽¹⁵⁾ Interviews with defected officers of different ranks in 2018.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Ibid

understanding of the administrative mechanisms that contributed to dissolution of some military units and imbalances in others⁽¹⁷⁾:

First: 2011 Operations aimed at attacking and besieging rebel areas

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment
555th Airborne Regiment	4th Division	W. Damascus	Dara'a / Mo'adamiyat al-Sham / Daraya / Al-Qaboun / Baba Amro / Al-Khaldiyeh / Al-Bayada / Homs
18th Division	3rd Corps	Homs	Homs / Talbisah / Al-Rastan / Hama
62nd Brigade	10th Division	Qatana	Qatana / Sheikh Miskeen / Dara'a
35th Regiment	Special Forces	Damascus	Dara'a / Banyas
45th Regiment	Special Forces	Masyaf	Banyas / Idlib / Homs
46th Regiment	Special Forces	W. Aleppo	Idlib / Hama
85th Brigade	10th Division	Qatana	Al-Mastouma / Ariha / Jisr al-Shughour / Al-Ghab
554th Regiment	14th Division		Banyas
105th Brigade	Republican Guard	Damascus	Douma / Harasta / Nawa / Dara'a
7th Division	1st Corps	S Damascus	Homs / Idlib
40th Brigade	4th Division	W Damascus	Mo'adamiyat al-Sham / Daraya / Al-Qaboun / Dara'a / Banyas / Zabadani
106th Brigade	Republican Guard	Damascus	Eastern Ghouta
104th Brigade	Republican Guard	Damascus	Eastern Ghouta / Baba Amro / Homs
42nd Brigade	4th Division	Qatana	Daraya / Mo'adamiyat al-Sham / Al-Qaboun / Dara'a
90th Brigade	1st Corps	Quneitra	The Triangle of Death (intersection of the administrative borders of Damascus, Dara'a, and Quneitra)
826nd Regiment	Independent	Lattakia	Banyas / Lattakia / Jableh
65th Brigade	3rd Division	Qalamoun	Douma / Dara'a
5th Division	1st Corps	Dara'a	Dara'a
9th Division	1st Corps	Dara'a	Dara'a / Hama
11th Division	3rd Corps	Hama	Idlib / Hama

⁽¹⁷⁾ Movements were monitored according to a model adopted by the Information Unit at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies.

10th Division	2nd Corps		
15th Division	Independent	Sweida	Dara'a / Sweida
Syrian Navy	Independent	Lattakia	Lattakia

Second: 2012, the year of campaigns and counteroffensive operations

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment
555th Airborne Regiment	4th Division	W. Damascus	Hama / Zabadani / southern rural Idlib
154th Regiment	4th Division	W. Damascus	Homs
12th Brigade	5th Division	Izra / Dara'a	Idlib
45th Brigade	Special Forces	Masyaf	Idlib
33rd Brigade	9th Division	Sanamayn	Hama
40th Brigade	4th Division	W. Damascus	Aisha River
106th Brigade	Republican Guard	Damascus	Aleppo
104th Brigade	Republican Guard	Damascus	Misraba / Aleppo/Tal Mnein / Deir Ezzor
57th Brigade	1st Division	Rural Damascus	Aleppo / Anadan / Azaz
76th Brigade	1st Division	Rural Damascus	Brick Factory/ Idlib
4th Division	Independent	Rural Damascus	Idlib
5th Division	1st Corps	Daraa	Idlib

Third: 2013, the year of the spread of militias (local and foreign), a tactic to reduce costs

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment	Comments
During this year and thereafter, the regime forces avoiding large-scale operations and instead entrenching in their positions in order to avoid losing more territory to the advancing Free Syrian Army. Instead of offensive operations, the regime resorted to targeting opposition-controlled areas with rocket and artillery fire. Sending reinforcements between garrisons and the arrival of militias started in the second half of 2013.				
The Tiger Forces	Air Force Intelligence Directorate	Hama Military Airport		The core of the Tiger forces began to form at the Hama Military Airport after the arrival of Brig. Suhail Hassan, who participated in most of the most important battles in Syria, either against the opposition or against ISIS.

Fourth: 2014, Multiple fronts in the important geopolitical context

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment
4th Division	Independent	W. Damascus	Mleiha
Republican Guard	Independent	Damascus	Mleiha
The Tiger Forces	Air Force Intelligence Directorate	Hama Military Airport	-
11th Division	3rd Corps	Hama	Homs

Fifth: 2015, Consecutive losses, the most important of which were:

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment	Comment
105th Brigade	Republican Guard	Damascus	Damascus	Regime defended against Battle of Allah Ghalib launched by Jaysh al-Islam in September, 2015

Sixth: 2016: Stopping losses and Russian reinforcements

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment	Comment
Tiger Forces	Air Force Intelligence Directorate	Hama	Aleppo / Eastern Rural Homs	Battle for Aleppo
4th Division	Independent	Damascus	Aleppo	Battle for Aleppo
Republican Guard	Independent	Damascus	Aleppo	

Seventh: 2017: Expansion of control

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment	Comments
1st Division	Independent	Rural Damascus	Syrian Desert	Participated in the battle of Palmyra
8th Division	3rd Corps	Hama	Hama	Participated in the battle of the northern Hama countryside
9th Division	1st Corps	Sanamayn	Harasta	Participated in the battles of Vehicle Management Building in Harasta

42nd Brigade	4th Division	Al-Dimas	Harasta	The Ghaith Forces are led by Colonel Ghaith Dallah
Tiger Forces	Air Force Intelligence Directorate	Hama	Northern Rural Hama	Northern Rural Hama battles
5th Corps	Independent	-	Hama	Northern Rural Hama battles

Eighth: 2018: Headed towards a final solution

Military Unit	Affiliation	HQ/Garrison	Area of Deployment
Tiger Forces	Air Force Intelligence Directorate	Hama Military Airport	Idlib Countryside / Idlib / Aleppo / Hama / Eastern Ghouta
5th Corps	Independent	-	Idlib Countryside / Aleppo / Hama
42nd Regiment	4th Division	W. Damascus	Eastern Ghouta / Quneitra
Republican Guard	Independent	Damascus	Eastern Ghouta
15th Division		Al-Suweida	Dara'a
9th Division		Dara'a	Eastern Ghouta / Southern Damascus / Dara'a
5th Division		Dara'a	Dara'a
7th Division		Dara'a	Dara'a
1st Division	Independent	Al-Kisweh	Quneitra

The changes in control and the large number of foreign bases in Syria also show the magnitude of the fatigue incurred by the military establishment. Below are tables showing control and influence levels as well as deployment regions during the different phases of the crisis.

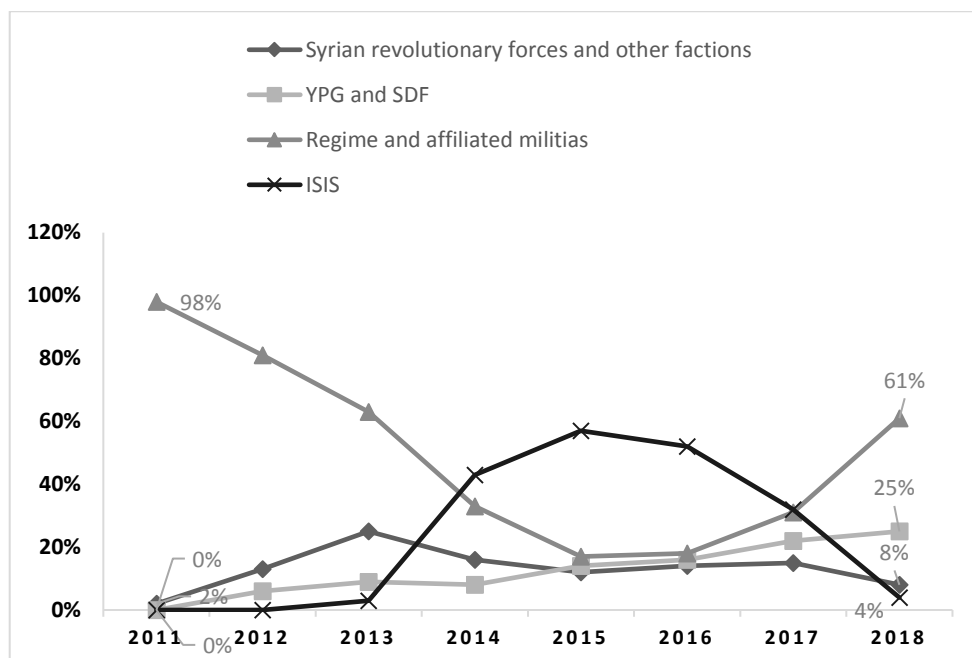


Chart 1: shows the variation in control ratios between 2011 and 2018

Groups Controlling Syrian Territory	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Syrian opposition forces and other local actors	2%	13%	25%	16%	12%	14%	15%	8%
YPG and SDF	0%	6%	9%	8%	14%	16%	22%	25%
Regime and allied militias	98%	81%	63%	33%	17%	18%	31%	61%
ISIS ("Daesh")	0%	0%	3%	43%	57%	52%	32%	4%

The table and graph above show that at the beginning of 2013, the regime suffered losses on a number of fronts and key lines of communication⁽¹⁸⁾. Due to the Syrian military's lack of equipment and personnel, and their inability to cover all the fronts, the regime focused on retaking the strategic areas it lost around Damascus at the end of 2012. The regime was unable to retake Aleppo or secure the Damascus-Homs highway until it sought the assistance

⁽¹⁸⁾ Note: Areas under Israeli occupation are not calculated. The amounts show the entire amount of control and not the populated areas only.

of Lebanese Hezbollah in June 2013, at which point it was able to take back the strategic city of Al-Qusayr. Hezbollah also carried out operations in eastern and western al-Qalamoun. By the beginning of 2014, the regime only controlled 33% of Syrian territory.

ISIS increased its attacks on regime positions in rural Homs and Damascus during 2015, specifically in the months of September and October. During this time period, ISIS increased its control of Syrian territory significantly while other Syrian actors lost territory. According to a map produced by Omran Center's Information Unit on 5 October 2015, territorial control was as follows: Syrian revolutionary forces and other factions - 12%, YPG - 12%, regime forces and affiliated militias - 16%, ISIS - 43%, desert and mountain areas not under the control of a specific party - 15%⁽¹⁹⁾.

By the end of June 2018 the regime and its allied militias had control of 58% of Syrian territory, according to a map produced by Omran Center's Information Unit⁽²⁰⁾. One of the most important reasons for this is the military operations carried out by the regime against the de-escalation zones in Syria, with the help of its Iranian and Russian allies. This put the regime in control of eastern al-Qalamoun, Eastern Ghouta, northern rural Homs, and the Southern Front. At this time Russian statements came out about the regime's intention to retake all of eastern rural Homs and southern rural Deir Ezzor and eliminate ISIS in those areas. However, it has proven difficult to control the desert areas, and the Russian statement is better understood as an attempt at marketing the effectiveness of the regime and Russia in the war against terror.

ISIS lost most of the territory it once controlled with the total size shrinking to only 4% of Syrian territory. They lost this territory both to the regime and its allied militias advancing in the Suweida desert and also to the YPG and SDF that advanced east of the Euphrates.

The areas controlled by Syrian revolutionary forces and other factions also significantly decreased due to the loss of all of southern Syria, which dropped their total amount of territorial control to 8%. At the same time, the areas controlled by YPG and SDF increased to 25% of Syrian territory.

⁽¹⁹⁾ <https://goo.gl/MDjUps>.

⁽²⁰⁾ <https://goo.gl/3LpSnE>.

Generally, the developments register major transformation with high impact on the integrity of the military institution on both the medium to long terms, resulting in deep fractures both structurally and functionally. Regime forces became one of many other actors with competing interests both domestically and internationally.

Third: The Path to National Reform: Prioritizing Political Neutrality and Strengthening of Civil-Military Relations

Early on, the regime realized that any shortfalls in military and security measures would allow the situation to move from “contain and control” to “lawlessness” and finally to “loss.” The regime believes that military gains are the best way to control and redefine the political process. Assad had a plan from the very beginning. From the moment that Tunisian President Zayn al-Din al-Abidine fled his country, the Syrian regime began to make speedy advance preparations to create political propaganda and others measures to deal with what it knew was coming. It was at this time that the regime conducted a widespread arrest campaign of 60,000 wanted criminals and sent them to training camps, later releasing them under the first presidential pardon during the uprising. This was a sign of the regime’s intention to engage in a complex strategy of repression, entrusting these tasks to the infamous “shabeeha.” There are a number of additional significant indicators to mention here⁽²¹⁾:

- Security changes and state of emergency starting on 1 February.
- The killing of a number of demonstrators on the very first day by Special Forces who parachuted into the protests.
- Repeated Iranian visits to the country.
- Bashar Assad's first speech in the People's Assembly after the events of Dara'a, which was not moderate and was filled with accusations of treachery and cooperation with enemies of the state, greatly exaggerating the real impact of the protests at the time.
- The 27 April 2011 decision of the Chief of Staff of the Army on to end all demobilizations from military service until further notice.

⁽²¹⁾ Maen Tolla: The Syrian Revolution The Story of the Beginning, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 2013, p. 11.

The regime adopted a strategy of enforcing its full dominance on areas in revolt (targeting both protesters and the locals who support them) in any way possible. The regime depends on two main tools to achieve this at first: the military establishment and the security establishment. The regime adopted several policies to achieve its goals without taking into account the human, cultural, or even the institutional losses that would result, and other institutions supported these policies through information, politics, and economic means. The military and security institutions were tasked with quelling the protest movement using any means necessary and in the beginning relied on specific units within the institutions to do so. As the revolutionary activities spread, each military branch was made responsible for dealing with insurrection in the areas nearest to their bases, while maintaining strategic points to be shared by those groups. It was at this point that the military as an institution lost much of its symbolic public support, as it became clear that the military was a politically driven institution⁽²²⁾.

In order to explain the military intervention in the political life, it is necessary to identify the extra-military role of the military and to identify it as a phenomenon that goes beyond local and regional factors. It is best summed up by the characteristics related to the military's status as an organization controlled by the president who acts as commander and chief of the army and the armed forces. This makes the military subject to political confrontation with the regime's opposition, because of the theoretical political cohesion of the groups controlling the military that are exclusively loyal to the regime, and can use all necessary military power to enhance the regime's political power. According to Morris Janowitz, one of the founders of civil-military relations theory, the link between political aspirations of military personnel, their backgrounds, social status, level of education, and their position on the nature of the relations between the military and government will determine how likely it is for the military to intervene in politics. Other factors include kinship, political allegiance, and sectarian loyalties, all reinforced by the engineering and social composition of military⁽²³⁾. Additionally, there are ideological factors related to the military establishment. Despite the

⁽²²⁾ Ibid

⁽²³⁾ This methodology of interpretation was based on the following reference: Mohammed Dakhoush: "How, When, and Why Does the Army Intervene in politics?" Link: <https://goo.gl/HNWfbW>

termination of Article VIII of the Constitution, that declares the Ba'ath Party the head of the state and society, the Baath party continues to fill that role. This includes the military, which is under the control of the Ba'ath party whose weekly meetings continue uninterrupted. Until now, the examinations administered to potential officers prepared by the intelligence branches give the priority to those who are loyal Ba'athists over others who are more qualified.

According to the above explanations (and before moving on to the technical issues related to reforming military institutions), the principle of political objectivity and the strengthening of civil-military relations must be reinforced in the following ways:

1. **First - The constitutional approach:** Constitutional reform plays a special role in strengthening civilian control over the military establishment by constitutionally restricting the tasks of the military and defining the role of legislators. However, oftentimes texts are not translated into reality, so constitutional reform requires the formulation of new laws to govern this relationship.
2. **The culture of professionalism:** A professional military culture protects soldiers from violating democratic principles and norms. The basic military mission and professional code of ethics should be redefined based on self-restraint and respect for law and civil authority.
3. **Social composition and recruitment:** The status of the military establishment depends on its acceptance in society. This is achieved through its reflection of the social, ethnic, and geographic components of society as well as the clarity of the policies and mechanisms of conscription, in order to reduce exploitation and corruption.
4. **Parliamentary roles:** There are major tasks that parliaments should generally undertake⁽²⁴⁾:
 - a) The creation of an accurate public framework of the military establishment's jurisdiction, legal powers, organization, and mode of operation.

⁽²⁴⁾ Changing the Security Structures in Syria, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 48 - 54, 2017.

- b) Accountability through democratic civilian oversight within a framework that protects confidentiality.
- c) Not violating laws and observing international norms and standards, including the protection of human rights, and religious and gender equality.
- d) Participation in military situation assessments and decisions related to war and peace.
- e) The army's general budget, with the understanding that parliamentary responsibilities in this regard differ from one system to another. In some countries there are unlimited powers, such as Sweden, whose parliament has the right to amend the budget items including items related to the security and defense sectors. These parliaments can amend budget items even if their amendments result in an increase in the total expenditure or the addition of new items to the budget. On the other hand there are parliaments with limited powers, such as in Switzerland and Spain, whose parliaments can introduce amendments to the budget but cannot adjust the total amount allocated for expenses. There are some parliaments with even more limited powers, such as in Britain and Canada, where the parliaments can only reduce the amount of budgeted expenditures.

5. **Dialogue and integration:** If three main sectors of society – the military elite, political elite, and civil society – can agree to take into consideration the military's concerns and meet its interests as an institution, reinforcing the civilian nature of the state and politics, this will lead to less military interference in politics. This requires the existence of strong political bodies that have widespread public support and can act as a balance to military power. The nature of the civil-military relations is determined by the strength of political parties and forces, and their ability to form a unified civil democratic bloc in the face of the military and its political aspirations. Just as the division of elite members of society increases the change of military intervention, the opposite is also true. The military will not retreat from political life if it is clear that the alternative is weak and unable to take control in a divided party and political system.

6. Collaboration local and government roles: To face security threats, especially terrorism, requires radical changes in the structure of state institutions so that they can perform their political, social, and security functions efficiently based on legitimacy, satisfaction, and community participation. There should also be local participation in the restructuring of civil-military relations: through the disarmament, dissolution, or integration of armed militias into the military establishment, and the dissemination of a culture of peace and its accompanying values. Local participation is the real gateway to establishing the will to rebuild the nation state.

The reform process should also take into consideration changes to the military establishment as noted in the following national agenda:⁽²⁵⁾

1. Places of change should include: the military's structure, hierarchy, organization, and behavior. The military reform process is complicated due to the many interventions and complicating factors in the Syrian crisis as a whole. This it is preferable that the reform effort be carried out sequentially according to a specific timeline.
2. The timeline for the reform process should start from the moment that a political agreement is reached that results in the stabilization of the security sector in the country, and after the constitution clearly defines the military's role and ensures its political objectivity. All military units should return to their garrisons outside of the cities.
3. Reform should take into account the conditions of positive change, such that: feelings of security prevail over fear, being a good citizen replaces treasonous behavior, stability replaces chaos, equality replaces discrimination, and respect of state authority replaces coercion. The reform should be consistent and irreversible, because temporary changes are not considered reform.

Conclusion: Reform as a Condition for Stability

The rapid deterioration of the Syrian army and its allied local and foreign militias in mid-2015 was a main factor in the military's transformation to the point that instability became its most predictable characteristic, and it is still

⁽²⁵⁾ Interviews with defected officers in Hatay September 2018.

facing an uncertain fate. This is due to the multiplicity of non-Syrian parties influencing the army's decisions and reform mechanisms, as was described in this paper. The fragmentation of the legitimacy of the state and the erosion of its functions and institutions is clearly reflected in the security and military reality, which is governed by several different approaches, references, tools, and command methodologies that have made the Syrian political reality even more complicated.

The link between the legitimacy of the process of restructuring military and security institutions and their ability to impose public order in accordance with higher governance principles is an organic one. This challenge casts a shadow over military realities and increases the burden on military structures, especially in the context of restructuring the power arrangements in international post-conflict situations. This requires radical changes in state institutions so that they can fulfill their security, defense, social, and political responsibilities efficiently and with legitimacy based on public support.

The process of rebuilding the state generally revolves around these key issues:

1. Building the state's political, economic, and social institutions and ensuring that they have the minimum level of capacity to perform their functions within the framework of the concept of a viable state.
2. The adoption of new rules and arrangements for the transition of power and the nature of the governance mechanisms.
3. Restructuring security institutions to accommodate armed groups and prevent renewed conflict between different factions.

Rebuilding the state in Syria is likely to be impacted by several factors, the most important of which are⁽²⁶⁾:

1. The structures of social groups. Syria is characterized by religious pluralism, and complex intertwined cultural and ethnic identities.
2. Trends of hostility and violence during the state reconstruction process are linked to the distribution of hostile internal and regional alliances that determined the course of conflict in Syria.

⁽²⁶⁾ Mohammed Abdullah Younis: "How to Rebuild the Syrian state after the Settlement," Research Services Group, link: <https://goo.gl/n4QAoP>.

3. The impact of the geographic distribution of special resources like oil, fresh water, and arable farmland.

Perhaps the most important factor remains the desire of external actors, ensuring that the institutional reform process must support the interests of those foreign actors. This will be the factor that distinguishes a successful state building process, like what happened in Kosovo and the Balkan countries, from one that is less successful, like those that took place in Somalia, South Sudan, and Iraq. The regional and international powers involved in the conflict are the same ones overseeing the peace process. They may invest in stabilizing and strengthening Syrian state institutions after the end of the conflict if it supports their own interests, but they could try to undermine state institutions and weaken their capabilities, leading to the emergence of a weak state that is unable to perform its most basic functions.

To begin the process of reforming the military establishment we must first initiate the process of state rebuilding, which should aim to balance political and social consensus to establish a stable is power-sharing equation. This is linked to reaching a “political settlement,” where a consensus between the political elites and the conflicting parties becomes a starting point for rebuilding the state. The process of state building is usually governed by the agreement between different parties to the conflict regarding the nature and system of government, since these are determinant factors in the matter of the distribution of power between the conflicting parties.

It is critical that the process includes all parties and does not exclude any group, so that the political settlement meets the interests of all related parties. This will make it more likely that a negotiated settlement will last. For example, the collapse of the political settlement in Libya is a result of the lack of participation of some groups in drafting the Skhirat Agreement, which called for the formation of a national unity government with representatives from all political and social groups, as well as the formation of a High Council of State, a High Council of Local Administration, a reconstruction commission, a Constitution Drafting Assembly, and a National Defense and Security Council. Although the agreement was rewritten and reviewed more than once to take into account the various interests of the parties involved, it failed because of the efforts of the UN envoy to Libya Bernardino León to

suggest specific names to lead the national unity government. This was rejected by the political groups in Libya and resulted in the breakdown of the fragile agreement before the conflicting parties could even start implementing what they had agreed upon⁽²⁷⁾.

The promotion of social cohesion and national reconciliation will be a driving force in improving the security situation and thereby enhancing opportunities for reform, change, and the capacity to meet the challenges. It should be reinforced here that impact of the drive towards creating a secure environment builds confidence in community stability and support for reform plans, particularly military ones.

All of this being said, the importance of institutionalizing civil-military relations is essential in any reform process that leads to stability. The sustainability and stability of the political settlement depends on restructuring civil-military relations in parallel to a path of political transition that includes the disarmament of citizens and factions wishing to engage in the political process, and the integration of armed militias into the military as individuals rather than as groups, as well as a set of safeguards to prevent the military organization from drifting away from its role in defending the interests of the state without interfering in the scramble for power. Most importantly, clear legal and institutional controls should be established to ensure the political neutrality of military and security personnel after the end of the conflict through the formation of a legal and institutional framework to regulate the control of civil political institutions over the military establishment. These powers should include reviewing the level of military spending, the size of the army, its level of armament, and reforming the military doctrine. Finally, the chain of command and leadership structure should be reformulated to ensure that elected institutions manage military institutions, whose roles are concentrated in the performance of security and defense functions.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ibid.

Annex Report 1

Significant Transformations in the Army: 1945-2011

*Colonel Ahmad Hamada **

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Annex Report 1: Significant Transformations in the Army: 1945-2011

The structural and functional evolution of the Syrian military establishment has gone through a number of phases. These phases include times with focus on its capacity building and necessities of constant upgrading, or focus on domination and control mechanisms of its nodes of power by the ruling regime, or a focus on defensive warfare that Syria has witnessed. This annex report will offer clear explanations of a number of dysfunctional elements in the military's structure, doctrine, function, and its civil-military relations starting from the establishment of the military until March 2011. These dysfunctional elements of evolution surfaced more clearly post 2011 due to the complicated nature of the conflict and the fact that the military has become a major actor in an ongoing local conflict and has experienced severe structural and personnel shocks, necessitating the support of non-Syrian elements at both the state and group levels. This annex has been divided into five time periods corresponding with the most decisive events in the formation and development of the Syrian military.

First: 1945-1948: Turbulent formations

The institutionalization of the Syrian military dates back to 1916 during the Great Arab Revolt, when the formation of the Northern Army – which arrived in Damascus in October 1918 then moved on to Homs and Hama – attracted many Arab soldiers and officers.¹ On 5 October 1918, Faisal announced the formation of a government in Damascus and the start of the formation of the Arab Army, made up of three formations as follows:²

⁽¹⁾ The Arab forces consisted of three armies: the Southern Army led by Prince Ali with its base in Rabigh; the Northern Army led by Prince Faisal with its base in Yanbu; the Eastern Army led by Prince Abdullah with its base in Wadi Al-Ais. The total forces of the Great Arab Revolution were between 25 - 30 thousand fighters, including around two thousand regular soldiers. See more: The Battles of the Great Arab Revolution 1916-1918, General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces / Arab Army, link: <https://goo.gl/VKU8TP>

⁽²⁾ History of Ground Forces in the Syrian Arab Armed Forces, Syrian Ministry of Defense; link: <https://goo.gl/kGjCuN>

1. **The 1st Division:** Based in Damascus with around 5,000 fighters. Its area of operations extended from Homs in the north to Sheikh Meskin in the south, and from the Badiya desert in the east to the road between Tel Kalkh, the Bekaa Valley, and Quneitra to the west. This division even faced the French army at Maysaloon.
2. **The 2nd Division:** Based in Daraa, it operated from Sheikh Meskin in the north to Maan and Aqaba in the south, and west to Palestine which was under the control of British forces.
3. **The 3rd Division:** Based in Aleppo, it operated from Hama in the south all the way to Jarablus in the north, and from Iraq in the east to the Syrian coast, which was under French control.

Each Division consisted of three infantry brigades and an artillery brigade. Each infantry brigade consisted of three regiments, each of which contained three battalions and one Machinegun Company.

General Henri Gouraud, commander of the French forces in Syria, (what is his official time/name and years) issued a warning on 9 July 1920 to King Faisal's government calling him to demobilize the Arab Army, and to hand over public facilities as well as any fighters who rebelled against France. Faisal eventually accepted the demand as French forces moved in on Damascus. At the same time, a decision was made to confront the French campaign in Maysaloon on 24 July 1920. The effort was led by Minister of War Yusuf al-Azmeh (official title/years?), and resulted in his death and the advance of French forces into Damascus. After France entered as a mandated protectorate by the League of Nations, it began to establish its "Eastern Forces" after the dissolution of the army that had been established by King Faisal and led by Minister of War Yusuf al-Azmeh. A majority of the soldiers of this new force were recruited from minorities, especially Alawites, who joined as volunteers. These were new local military units independent of the French Eastern Army. In 1936, an agreement was signed with the French Mandate Authority and Syrian notables in which the Syrian government would establish a national army drawing mostly on these armed units, but France delayed the handover process. The French forces finally handed over

control of these units to the Syrian government on 30 July 1945, and the next day – 1 August – became an official holiday for the Syrian Arab Army⁽³⁾.

Following this date, the Syrian military began to organize itself within a new framework. The Chief of Staff of the Army issued order 55/3 on 29 August 1945 which divided Syrian territory into three military zones: the southern zone, which centered around Damascus and included Suweida, Daraa, Quneitra, Homs, and Hama, the northern zone, which was centered around Aleppo and included Latakia, and the eastern zone, which was centered around Deir Ezzor and included Hasaka. These primary zones were further divided into secondary zones as follows⁽⁴⁾:

- Southern zone:
 - Sub-zone 1 – Damascus (it included the General Command)
 - Sub-zone 2 – Suweida
 - Sub-zone 3 – Hama and Homs
- Northern zone:
 - Sub-zone 4 – Aleppo
 - Sub-zone 5 – Latakia
- Eastern zone:
 - Sub-zone 6 – Deir Ezzor
 - Sub-zone 7 – Hasaka, Qamishli, and Raqqa

The army's existing regiments were integrated into brigades as follows:

1. First Brigade – Based in Damascus
2. Second Brigade – Based in Aleppo
3. Third Brigade – Based in Deir Ezzor

Each brigade was made up of three battalions and each battalion had four companies with around 150 soldiers. Each brigade was also reinforced by a mechanics regiment and an artillery regiment.

⁽³⁾ The Army of the East is sometimes confused with the Eastern Special Forces, but the Army of the East was an entirely French army, unlike the Eastern Special Forces.

⁽⁴⁾ History of Ground Forces in the Syrian Arab Armed Forces, Syrian Ministry of Defense; link: <https://goo.gl/kGjCuN>

The organizational structure of each infantry brigade consisted of:

1. Brigade commander.
2. Brigade chief of staff.
3. Two Infantry regiments.
4. A mechanics regiment (armored fighting vehicles and armored vehicles).
5. An artillery regiment.
6. A command company⁽⁵⁾.

Thus, the Syrian military command came to be arranged in the following manner⁽⁶⁾.

- Chief of Staff: Commands the first, second, third, and fourth divisions
- Regions: eastern, northern, southern, and desert
- Brigades: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and the Badiya Brigade.
- Military College, Flight company, Construction company, Intelligence company, Health and Hospitals company, Command company, Transportation company, and the Cavalry regiment.

On 1 October 1945 the Desert Forces were expanded and the three companies reorganized into three regiments under a newly formed Badiya Brigade:

1. 1st Regiment: Based in Dumayr to protect the southern desert.
2. 2nd Regiment: Based in Palmyra with responsibility for the central desert region reaching to al-Sukhna.
3. 3rd Regiment: Based in Deir Ezzor with responsibility for the northeastern parts of the desert and al-Jazira.

Each regiment included under its command four companies: Command Company, Armored Company, Hajana Company, and a mixed company

⁽⁵⁾ Order 55/3 also specified the names of the commanders and officers of the three brigades. In addition to these formations, administrative units were formed linked to the command of the secret forces of Al-Meera Platoon and the Signal Platoon, construction, headquarters, transportation, and a medical corps all based in Damascus. It also formed a flight squadron stationed at the Mezzeh Military Airport near Damascus and the second squadron stationed at the Nayreb Military Airport near Aleppo. The Officers Military College was based in Homs. After their formation the brigade became the basic formation of the army instead of the regiment.

⁽⁶⁾ History of Ground Forces in the Syrian Arab Armed Forces, Syrian Ministry of Defense; link: <https://goo.gl/kGjCuN>

made of elements from the different companies including a sub-unit that is responsible for monitoring tribes in Aleppo⁽⁷⁾.

On 12 November 1945, Decree 1271 was issued. Decree 1271 listed the army's personnel according to the following table⁽⁸⁾:

Formation	Officers	Corporals	Private 1st class	Private (Soldier)
Government Armed Forces	474	834	1,400	5,100
Paramilitary Forces	112	401	665	2,400
Total	586	1,235	2,065	7,500

On 16 November 1946, Legislative Decree No. 49 was issued by the President to regulate the Ministry of Defense. It created a new organizational structure with thirteen departments and directorates, including: Military Chamber, General Joint Chief of Staff, Directorate of Aviation, Directorate of Navy, Directorate of Supply, Procurement and Maintenance, Directorate of Warehouses, Directorate of Military Health, Directorate of Justice and Military Judiciary, Bureau of Inspection and Controller, Bureau of Records and Statistics, Bureau of Conscription, Directorate of Accounting and Registrar. A committee was formed chaired by Ahmad Lahham to complete the organization of the army at the departmental level. As for training functions, the joint chief of staff contracted with experts to train the army in areas where there were no Syrian experts including aviation, aeronautical engineering, telecommunications, and meteorology⁽⁹⁾.

On 22 February 1947, pursuant to Ministry of Defense Decree No. 232, officers and soldiers were sent to the United States for training in aeronautical engineering⁽¹⁰⁾. They also sent ten soldiers to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in Britain for two years of basic military training⁽¹¹⁾. Legislative Decree No. 831 of 11 August 1947 sent a number of officers to Egypt for training on jet engine mechanics, weapons, aerial reconnaissance, and

⁽⁷⁾ Organization of the Syrian Army 1945-1947, Syrian Ministry of Defense, link: <https://goo.gl/RpvuaJ>

⁽⁸⁾ The decree was signed by Prime Minister Shukri al-Quwatli and Prime Minister Saadullah al-Jabri, who was also minister of defense. In addition to completing the army training, a number of officers were sent to Egypt for training in intelligence and signaling. For more on the decree, see: Decree 1271, Syrian Ministry of Defense, link: <https://goo.gl/4s7nfU>.

⁽⁹⁾ Organization of the Syrian Army 1945-1947, Syrian Ministry of Defense. Ibid.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Certified in the Ministerial Cabinet Resolution No. 760 of 9/9/1947 - Official Gazette of 1947, pp. 17-58.

⁽¹¹⁾ Ministerial Resolution No. 4467 of 28/3/1947 - Official Gazette of the year 1947-280.

paratrooping. Another group was sent to Iraq to study military general staff administration, Iraqi laws, and the different types of Iraqi military formations and force structures. Four officers were assigned to the Iraqi General Chief of Staff Military College for two years and another group of officers graduated from the Military College in Homs in December 1947. Also, two groups of weapons specialists graduated from a weapons training school⁽¹²⁾.

During this time, infantry soldiers were carrying 8mm French 1892 model rifles, 7.5mm 1935 model rifles, and the 8mm FM Chauchat light machine guns. Other weapons the infantry carried includes: the M1916 light machine gun, 60mm and 80mm mortars, anti-tank 25mm artillery 1935 model. In 1947, the armored units also had Dodge armored vehicles with a machine gun, three two-ton T16 track tanks, armored English Marmon vehicles armed with a short barrel 37mm artillery cannon and 5/7mm machine gun, and nine French Renault tanks.

The heavy artillery pieces delivered a by the French made up two artillery divisions armed with 75mm battle cannons. One was based in Jabkhaniya barracks in Damascus under the command of Aziz Abdul Karim. It was later transferred to al-Qaboun and the Directorate of Armament remained to be based in Jabkhaniya. The other was based in Aleppo under the command of Aram Karamanoukian and it included two batteries. By the end of 1947 two new regiments were formed. The 35th regiment was armed with a German 105mm artillery cannon and the 36th regiment was armed with French 105mm artillery cannons. The Syrian General Joint Chief of Staff was busy arming themselves in preparation for a war in Palestine. To generate reserve forces, a call was made for demobilized, retired, and independent forces to join under Ministry of Defense Decree No. 788 on 12 October 1947.¹³ In addition, the demobilization of active officers and soldiers, even those that had passed the age of retirement was suspended with the Ministry of Defense Decree No. 792 on 16 October 1947.

A Mandatory military service was imposed, with an initial term of one-year, under Decree No. 356 on 15 January 1947. On 12 April 1948, Decree No. 874 organized the Public Recruitment/Conscription offices. This brought in a

⁽¹²⁾ Official Gazette 1947, pages 12-35.

⁽¹³⁾ Official Gazette of 1947, pages 4-19.

number of former officers from the Ottoman and Faisali armies, putting them to work as recruitment officers. The first group of mandatory recruits under Decree No. 874 were born in 1929 and totaled 45,209 people. Of these, 20,911 of them were enlisted and the others postponed their services because of education or health reasons, while others paid the exemption fees.¹⁴

On 16 October 1946, the Syrian Air Force was established by official decree under the command of Abdul Wahhab Hakim. The Air Force had the following formations: **flight school** (based in Mezzeh, Damascus and staffed with Egyptian and European trainers as well as engineers and specialists), general workshops (included engineers and graduates of the Riyahq School from the French mandate period), technical depots and garages, medical clinic and general services company. The first group of eight pilots graduated from the Air Force Academy on 28 February 1948. At the time, the Air Force had two squadrons of 12 Harvard class fighter jets each, and three Dakota transport jets. When Mezzeh became too crowded, the Air Force Academy was moved to al-Nayrab in Aleppo. During the second half of 1948, the Naval Forces were created under Nizar Ghazal who set up command posts all along the Syrian coast. They were initially called the Coastal Guard and were in command of the coastal zone⁽¹⁵⁾.

Second: 1949-1961: The Army as a Main Actor in the Political Scene

Upon the 1948 defeat, the civil-military tensions increased eventually leading to the resignation of the Minister of Defense Ahmad al-Sharabati when investigations revealed instances of corruption in the military. On 22 June 1949, Decree No. 151 formed the Ministry of National Defense and appointed the president of the republic as the Commander in Chief and the highest authority over the Armed Forces. Decree No. 152 was also issued, dealing with the military code⁽¹⁶⁾.

After 1954, the number of Syrian soldiers increased, as did the number of Syrian military formations, which were provided with more weapons. The

⁽¹⁴⁾ Organization of the Syrian Army 1945-1947.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Air Force, Syrian Ministry of Defense website, link: <https://goo.gl/zu4CEH>.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Journal of Military Thought, Issue no. 2, 2012

Syrian military defenses were reorganized with the establishment of a first line of defense and a second line of defense, as well as a strong reserve force that included artillery and engineering units. After the arrival of weapons from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union, larger formations were created at the brigade level known as al-Jamhara. New artillery and anti-aircraft units were also created⁽¹⁷⁾.

In the wake of internal strife, the defeat in Palestine, and the French influence on officers that resulted in a series of coups, the state institutions were in a state of paralysis. Since the common denominator among all the military leadership was that, they all came from different political backgrounds, and the coup by Adib Shishakli resulted in a redistribution of military posts on the basis of loyalty⁽¹⁸⁾. **In February 1954, signs of a fifth coup appeared** with the rebellion of the garrison in Aleppo, which was joined by garrisons from Deir Ezzor, Latakia, Homs, Houran. In total, around 16,000 soldiers out of 20,000 total personnel in the army supposed the coup to overthrow Shishakli. A new government was formed in March 1954 and in 1955 military expenditure significantly increased, reaching USD \$45 million. This significantly expanded the military force, which reached a size of 40,000 active duty officers and soldiers and 90,000 reserves⁽¹⁹⁾.

It was at this time that Baath leadership started assuming military leadership positions. At the beginning of April 1957 the military command agreed to form the command council, which included 23 officers of different armed forces⁽²⁰⁾. The military command was represented by: Afif al-Barzah as chief

⁽¹⁷⁾ History of the Syrian Arab Army Volume I and II - Center for Military Studies.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The following appointments were made: Colonel Aziz Hakeem, Commander of the Artillery Corps in lieu of Aram Karba Mukyan (Armenian); Col. Mohammad Nasser, Commander of the Air Force instead of Colonel Salah Eddin Kankan; Brigadier General Shawkat Shukair, Commander of the Fourth Brigade in Homs; Colonel Sa'id Subhi as head of the second division instead of Mahmoud al-Rifai. In 1957, the division was headed by Colonel Abdulhamid al-Sarraj; Colonel Hisham al-Samman, head of the third division; commander of the military police was lieutenant Ibrahim al-Husseini instead of Mohammed Ma'arouf; First Lieutenant Ameen Bu Assaf instead of General Shishakly who became the Deputy Chief of Staff and the Armoured forces the command of Captain Abdul Haq Shahada.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Khaled Mohammed Al-Safi: "Trends in the coup of Hosni Al Zaeem, Syrian, Arab and International. Journal of Human Sciences, Al-Aqsa University, 28, Winter 2016, p. 133.

⁽²⁰⁾ Colonel Afif al-Bazra; Colonel Amin al-Nafouri; Colonel Abdul Hamid al-Sarraj; Lt. Col. Mustafa Hamdoun; Lt. Col. Tumah Al Aouda Allah; Lt. Col. Abmad Abdul Karim; Lt. Col. Bashir Sadiq; Lt. Col. Akram al Deiri; Lt. Col. Jado Ezeddine; Lt. Col. Ibrahim Farhoud; Lt. Col. Ahmed Hneidi; Lt. Col. Amin Hafez; Lt. Col. Abdul Ghani Qanout; Lt. Col. Louay Al Shati; Lt. Col. Zuheir Aqeel; Lt. Col. Yasin Farjani; Lt. Col. Jasem Alwan; Lt. Col. Abdullah Jasoumah; Lt. Col. Hussein Hada; Lt. Col. Ghalib al Shaqfa; Lt. Col. Bakri Zoubari; Lt. Col. Jamal Al Sufi; Lt. Col. Mustafa Ram Hamdani.

of staff, Amin al-Nufoori as deputy chief of staff, Abdul Hamid Sarraj as commander of the Second Division, Ahmad Abdulkarim as commander of the Third Division, and Mustafa Hamdoun as commander of the First Division.

On 28 February 1958, the union between Syria and Egypt was announced and the two armies were integrated of. At that time, the Syrian army had 30,000 forces. It was used a professional force that only dealt with military issues and began to adopt an eastern combat doctrine. Both the Soviets and the Egyptians attempted to enhance the organizational structure and training capabilities of the Ministry of Defense and the First Army. Administrative and warfare military systems were modernized and new departments were created and structured. The reserve forces were upgraded and National Guard units were formed that would be based on the border areas near Palestine, made up of locals. The naval forces and air forces were reorganized and their firepower was increased. New educational centers were opened and a combat mobilization program was developed. There were significant developments in the military's structure, firepower, and organization during those years in addition to the development and upgrading of the reserve forces. **The command and armed structure underwent some changes and new committees and administrations were created, some of which still operate today. These include the Training Committee, Officers Affairs Administration, the General Headquarters, and others. The reorganization process also included the restructuring of the naval and air forces. The three years of unity with Egypt had a major impact on all aspects of the development of the military.**

In addition to upgrading the systems and procedures relating to human resources and working conditions, some civilian affairs departments were annexed to the Defense Ministry secretariat office instead of other civil ministries, such as the civil aviation agency, the ports and border monitoring towers, and the Israel boycotting office. Additionally, two new bureaus were established: public mobilization and recruitment office, and the war museum. Other agencies that were annexed to the defense ministry included: defense manufacturing agency, social services agency and the metrological

association⁽²¹⁾. This continued until the secession from the union with Egypt. At the start of the union, Afif al-Barzeh was relieved of duty and Jamal Faisal was named the commander of the 1st Army in the north. The terminology for rank was standardized as follows:

Before the union: Lieutenant - First Lieutenant - President - First President - Captain - Colonel -Leader- Brigade - General- Marshal

After the union: Lieutenant - First lieutenant - Captain - Major - Lieutenant colonel- Colonel- Brigadier general- Major general, General - Marshal

The army, which was a main factor in the union with Egypt, and also turned out to be a main reason for the eventual split and destruction of the union. This is partly due to the poor behavior of the military command under the command of Marshal Abdul Hakim Amer towards Syrian officers⁽²²⁾. During the union, Jamal Abdul Naser tried to keep the military out of politics during the union's founding charter, negotiated between Egyptian officials and Syrian officers negotiating to join the union. The military committee was then still a secret group dominated by minorities such as Lieutenant colonel Mohamad Imran (Alawite), Major Salah Jadid (Alawite), Lieutenant colonel Abdul Karim al-Jundi (Ismaili), Lieutenant colonel Ahmad al-Mir (Ismaili), and Captain Hafez Assad (Alawite). This secret committee within the army aimed to spoil the union with Egypt and to eliminate or marginalize the Baath leadership including Michel Aflaq and Bitar, so that they could select a command that matched their political interests⁽²³⁾.

Third: 1961-1970: Baath Control and Key Structural Changes

In April 1962 a meeting of 40 officers was convened and they elected the following military command: General Abdul Karim Zehreddin as commander

⁽²¹⁾ History of the Syrian Army, Syrian Ministry of Defense Website: <http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php?node=554&cat=945>.

⁽²²⁾ Major General Amin al-Nafouri mentioned at the Arab League conference in August 1962 that 1,100 officers and 3000 reservists officers were demobilized during the time of the unit. The number of officers who were transferred to the southern region of Egypt was 500 officers and 2,300 Egyptian officers were taken to assume command positions in the first army.

⁽²³⁾ For more, see the fall of the mainstream Baath Party in the 1960s and its reasons from the book of Hananu Batatou, *The Farmers of Syria: The Sons and the Policies of Their Rural Minorities*, Translated by Abdalla Fadel Raed Al Naqshbandi, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, First Edition, Beirut, October 2014, Pp. 327-336.

of the army, Major General Nameq Kamal as chief of staff, Major General Wadee Muqabari as commander of the air force, Major general Alber Arnouq as commander of the Supply and Logistics Authority, Major General Mikhail Andraus Ward as commander of the training committee, Brigadier General Mahmoud Sabri as operations commander, Lieutenant Colonel Hisham Orfaly as commander of the naval forces, Brigadier General Akram al-Khatib as commander of Organization and Administration Branch, Brigadier General Hashem Agha as commander of intelligence, Brigadier General Khalil Mosuli as commander of the officers affairs administration. These circumstances did not satisfy the Baathist officers, including: Colonel Jasem Alwan, Colonel Louay al-Atassi, First Lieutenant Saeed Dabah, First Lieutenant Muhammad Ibrahim al-Ali who became the commander of the Popular Army with a ministerial rank, and Major Hamad Obeid. These officers gathered in Aleppo and announced a strike in the name of the Free Officer's Command but their uprising was quickly squashed. A series of coup attempts, revolts, and tensions in the military under the command of General Abdul Karim Zehreddine led the Nasirists, Baathists, and nationalists, to organize a successful military coup on 8 March 1963⁽²⁴⁾. The government of Khaled al-Azem was overthrown and President Nathem al-Qudsi was removed from office. They reenlisted dozens of officers who were dismissed following the dissolution of the union, most of whom were Baathists like Major Salah Jadid, Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Omran, and Captain Hafez Assad. The coup was led by Col. Louay al-Atassi and was promoted to General, and was appointed as the Commander/Leader of the Armed Forces and the Revolutionary National Council. Brigadier general Rashid Qatini was promoted to Major General and assigned as deputy to Louay al-Atassi. There was also Colonel Muhammad Ziad al-Hariri, who was promoted to Major general and appointed as the Chief of Staff of the Military and Armed Forces⁽²⁵⁾.

After the 8 March 1963 coup, the Baath-led government pursued an ideologically indoctrinated army instead of a professional national army. This transformed the military into an institution directly tied to Baathists ideology

⁽²⁴⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedin: " The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000" Critical Study, Dar Al-Jabia, First Edition 2008, p. 309.

⁽²⁵⁾ The memoirs of the team of Abdel-Karim Zahrudin, the army commander from 1961 until the coup d'etat 1963

and removed any threat of its interference in matters of politics. Brigades were formed to reinforce the concept of an ideological popular army with a nationalistic ethno-centric approach. The Baath party took over the indoctrination process of the armed forces. The revolutionary command council issued a decree reinstating dismissed Baath officers to important military positions in and around Damascus. They relied on Alawite officers and the command was divided into two circles of influence: one half supported Pan-Arab Nationalism like Muhammad Omran, Amin al-Hafez, Hussein Mulhem, and Mustafa al-Haj. The other half supported the Baath Nationalist Socialist Party like Salah Jadid, Abdul Karim al-Jundi, Ahmad al-Mir, Hafez Assad, Selim Hatoum, and Hamad Obeid. They were all members of the Party's military committee. The sectarian makeup of the military became divided as follows⁽²⁶⁾:

- A bloc led by Maj. Gen. Salah Jadid, supported by some Alawite and Ismaili officers
- A bloc led by Maj. Gen. Muhammad Omran who was a rival of Salah Jadid and Amin Hafez for the leadership.
- A bloc led by Captain Selim Hatoum who was supported by Druze officers like Major Hamad Obeid and Brigadier General Fahd al-Shaer.
- A bloc led by Maj. Gen. Amin Hafez.

The Baathist leadership took control of Syria in a military coup led by Maj. Gen. Salah Jadid on 22 February 1966. Then President Amin Hafez and the national leadership were expelled from the country. A competition arose between the Salah Jadid bloc and the new Selim Hatoum bloc after he was marginalized and was not rewarded for his efforts in the March 8th coup. He tried to kidnap President Nouredine al-Atassi and Chief of Staff Salah Jadid in Suweida but the attempt failed when then Minister of Defense Hafez Assad threatened to attack Suweida with jets. Hatoum went into exile in Jordan and a large number of Druze officers were dismissed from the military⁽²⁷⁾.

⁽²⁶⁾ Members of the Party Military Committee of the Army after its expansion: Major General Mohammad Imran, Maj. Gen. Salah Jadid, Maj. Gen. Hafez Al Assad, Suleiman Haddad, Othman Kanaan, Colonel Abdul Karim al Jundi, Major Ahmad al Mir, Captain Selim Hatoum, Major Hamad Obeid, Maj. Gen. Amin Hafez; Lt. Col. Mohammed Rabah Tawil; Mustafa Haj Ali; Ahmed Swaidani.

⁽²⁷⁾ Hanano Batato: Farmers of Syria, p. 311.

The Party committee had great influence in the military and the armed forces. Major General Salah Jadid, the chief of staff, and Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Omran as the minister of defense, he also led the 70th Armored Brigade from 1963 to 1966. Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Omran was then expelled to Beirut and assassinated in April 1972. Maj. Gen. Hafez Assad was named head of the air force and then minister of defense. These are the officers that oversaw the transformation of the military into an institution that served their interests of their own sectarian group by managing military leadership with an ideological agenda.

At the same time when Syrian intelligence agencies were busy pursuing and monitoring its opposition and political opponents and interrogating those involved in previous coups, the Israeli army and Mossad was busy collecting intelligence on the Syrian military, its presence in the Golan Heights, and its capabilities. Israeli forces were able then to take control of the Golan Heights in 1967 in the Six Day War, which ended in a ceasefire on 10 June 1967. In that war, Israel deployed two Armored Brigades on the Syrian front and they faced off with the following Syrian ground forces⁽²⁸⁾:

- **Active forces:** Six infantry brigades, two armored brigades, an artillery brigade consisting of five battalions, four independent artillery battalions, an anti-tank regiment, nine anti-aircraft regiments (regional defense system), two reconnaissance battalions, two commando battalions, a paratrooper battalion, three engineering battalions, two signal battalions, two transport battalions, a chemical prevention battalion, and a border guard regiment.
- **Reserve forces:** Four infantry brigades, five artillery field battalions, two light anti-aircraft artillery battalions, and two anti-tank battalions.

The Syrian military lost 2,500 soldiers, 500 were injured, and a large number were also captured. Much of the Syrian arsenal was destroyed or damaged, and 50 Syrian fighter jets were destroyed on their runways by Israeli air strikes. The ground fighting demonstrated the empty rhetoric and false claims made by the Syrian command. In just six days the Arab forces, including the Syrians, lost very strategic territories such as the Golan Heights.

⁽²⁸⁾ Land Forces, Syrian Ministry of Defense website.

The internal power struggle within the Baath Party Military Committee was perhaps more aggressive than the fighting in the Golan Heights, where the 70th Armored Brigade led by Brigadier general Izzet Jadid retreated without a fight. A rivalry began between Salah Jadid and Hafez Assad became more public. Izzet Jadid was dismissed from the command of the 70th Armored Brigade and the headquarters of Col. Abdulkarim al-Jundi, then head of National Security and the General Intelligence Administration, were surrounded and it was rumored that he committed suicide in mysterious circumstances⁽²⁹⁾.

In 1968, then Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Army and Armed Forces Hafez Assad formed a committee, headed by Chief of Staff of the military Major General Mustafa Tlass, to restructure the Armed Forces and specified its size and compositions according to duties outlined by the general command office. Assad ensured that this reorganization coincides with his ambitions to contain and indoctrinate new recruits to support his vision in creating brigades within the different military divisions for them.

In 1970, Salah Jadid, as secretary general of the Socialist Arab Baath Party, introduced a number of new brigades and 200 tanks into the battle of Black September between Palestinians and Jordan. This resulted in severe losses to the military forces because minister of defense Hafez Assad refused to provide air cover to the ground troops headed to Jordan. As a result of the rivalry between the different poles controlling the military -Jadid and Assad-, Jadid decided to dismiss Hafez Assad and Mustafa Tlass from their positions, which led Assad to respond by launching a new military coup known as the "Corrective Movement." He sentenced Salah Jadid, President Nureddin al-Atassi, Prime Minister Yusuf Zayen, Brig. Gen. Izzet Jadid and Brig. Gen. Kaser Mahmoud – both commanders of the 70th Armored Brigade – to prison until their deaths. Hafez Assad recognized that the party and civil society were the weakest links among the conflicting power centers. Therefore, the regime built a strong military institution that extends broad influence through the formation of a number of military teams that were

⁽²⁹⁾ For more see the reference: Adnan Saaduddin, Baathist rule (Alawite) from 1963 until 1977, link: <https://goo.gl/jd3G46>

established to protect the regime and make that objective within its security interests⁽³⁰⁾.

Based upon the philosophy of absolute loyalty to an iconic supreme leader, the military doctrine was developed based on the North Korean experience and supported with a security architecture that dominates public life by relying on sectarian elements. This doctrine enabled the recruitment of large number from the sect and tribe of Hafiz Assad into the military, as well as to the war academy's first Baath course.

The start of 1970 saw a transformation of the army's structure with an increase in enlisted soldiers, training, and armament. New committees were established to organize the forces into military divisions rather than the old system of brigades, regiments and battalions. The 72nd Armored Brigade based in Qatana became the nucleus of the 10th Division, the 70th Armored Brigade in al-Kisweh became the nucleus of the 1st Division, the 132nd Infantry Brigade based in Izraa became the nucleus of the 5th Division, the 68th Brigade became the nucleus of the 7th Division based in Zakiyeh, and the 38th Rangers Regiment became the nucleus of the Special Forces⁽³¹⁾.

There are two types divisions in the Syrian military based on their armaments. The first is armored divisions like the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 9th, and 11th Divisions and the second is mechanized divisions like the 4th, 7th, 10th, and 17th Divisions, or special forces teams like the 14th and 15th.

Fourth: 1970 -1985: Concentration of Power with Loyalists

On 6 October 1973, Syrian forces joined Egyptian forces in launching a war against Israel that lasted 18 days. They failed to achieve their goal of liberating the Golan Heights, which had been occupied by Israel since 1965, due to the lack of preparation and the centralization of decision-making power with the commanders in such a way that it prevented the flexibility needed in

⁽³⁰⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedin, *The Army and Politics*, pages 370- 380.

⁽³¹⁾ Research interview conducted with Colonel Mohammed Khatib in Hatay, Turkey on 23/6/2018.

military operations. Such circumstances created a deficit in decision-making, which proved disastrous when the Israelis launched a counteroffensive.

As for changes that Assad undertook in the military institution, he formed new structures and reorganized others that are loyal to him to prevent any potential for coups. These structures and tactics included the following⁽³²⁾:

1. The Defense Brigades

It was founded in 1971 and commanded by Rifat Assad, Hafez Assad's brother, with 20,000 men from the al-Matawra tribe, making 90% of its total members. The unit was formed of 20 battalions and deployed around the capital Damascus. By 1982, they were 55,000 recruits after a large number of from the Murshidia sect joined. They became special forces armed with the latest heavy artillery, air defenses, missiles, helicopters, and had its own special intelligence unit led by Colonel Selim Barakat. Its members had special privileges, including its own intelligence service to monitor elements opposed to the regime both inside and outside the military. It had its own prisons and acted independently of all security services. The defense brigades were dissolved after the coup attempt by Rifat Assad against his brother Hafez Assad in 1984⁽³³⁾.

2. Republican Guard

It was founded in 1976 with the task of defending the presidential office, and was the only force entitled to enter the capital. It was headed by Major General Adnan Makhlouf, the cousin of Anisa Makhlouf, the wife of Hafez Assad. This force was made up of the most loyal individuals and officers in the regime. It was comprised of brigades headed by close relatives including Hafez Assad's sons Bassel, Bashar, and Maher, who was transferred to the command of the 4th Division. There were also units under the control of

⁽³²⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedin, *The Army and Politics*, pages 454- 455.

⁽³³⁾ It was worth mentioning that the Defense Forces committed a massacre in Palmyra prison under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Mo'in Nassif (the brother-in-law of Rifat al Assad), which killed 12,000 regime opponents, prisoners of conscience and Muslim Brotherhood members. There is also the army's most horrific massacre in Hama in 1982. The British journalist Robert Fisk said that more than 25,000 residents were killed while others estimated 60,000 were killed through mass executions and the arrest of thousands whose fate has not yet been determined. These events resulted in numerous arrests in the army on charges of sympathy or participation in operations against the security of the army. After these events the Alawite personnel was considered to the preferred individuals for command position and centers of power in the armed forces.

Monaf Tlass, the son of the Minister of Defense Mustafa Tlass, the 103rd, 105th, 104th, and 106th brigades. The number of members in Republican Guard is around 35,000 and most of the officers are Alawites. They are equipped with the latest weapons, including 350 T72 tanks, 350 BMPs, heavy artillery, helicopters, and rocket launchers. The Republic Guard is based in Qasioun, which overlooks the capital Damascus, and enjoys special privileges and can directly intervene in civilian affairs⁽³⁴⁾.

3. Special Units

The Special Units are composed of a number of independent regiments including the 35th, 41st, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 53rd, and 147th. They were led by loyal officers, the most notable of whom include: Brigadier General Hashim Mu'alla, who together with the 3rd Division led by Brigadier General Shafiq Fayyad committed the massacres in al-Musharfa, al-Kalasa, Aqyoul, and Bustan al-Qasr in Aleppo in 1980, as well as some massacres in Lebanon. There were approximately 20,000 of these forces in Lebanon led by Major General Ali Haider from its formation in 1968 until 1994. Haider was an Alawite from Hallet Aa'ra village in Jableh, and belonged to the Hadadin tribe that was connected to a number of repressive operations in Lebanon and Syria. After Ali Haidar's dismissal, the unit was renamed the Special Forces and Major General Ali Habib was appointed the commander. He later became chief of staff and minister of defense. He was also a member of the Matawra tribe of Hafez Assad.

4. Military divisions and groups with special powers

The 3rd Division formed in 1978 under the command of Brigadier General Shafiq Fayyad, the cousin of Hafez Assad, and based north of the capital Damascus in the Qatifah area. It participated in the repression of civilians in Aleppo alongside the Defense Brigades, Special Units, and the 4th Division which was formed in 1984 under the command of Maj. Gen. Hikmet Ibrahim to absorb the soldiers and officers of the Defense Brigades, which were dissolved after the coup attempt by Rifat Assad in 1984. It is currently led by

⁽³⁴⁾ Its leadership was given to Alawite officers exclusively: 1. Maj. Gen. Adnan Makhlof 2. Maj. Gen. Ali Hassan 3. Major General Noor Al-Din Al-Naqar 4. Major General Shuaib Suleiman 4. Major General Badi Ali 6. Brigadier General Mohammad Ammar 7. Major General Mohammed Yousuf 8. General Muhammad Ali Dergham.

Major General Maher Assad, Bashar Assad's brother, and is stationed around the Damascus-Beirut Road.

5. Taking control of the military intelligence

The Military Intelligence directorate is responsible for military planning, security operations, and surveillance. Major General Ali Doba, headed the unit upon its establishment and ensured absolute loyalty to Hafez Assad by embedding an army of informants in all spaces of public civilian life. The Intelligence directorate reports administratively to the Joint Chief of Staff Command structure and is at the same time linked in terms of the type of tasks it handles with National Security office. It is legally mandated with securing the military and all armed forces from external and internal threats, but it also intervenes in all civil, military, political, cultural, and judicial affairs, as is the case with the other security services. Its leaders have included Major General Ali Doba, Major General Hassan Khalil and General Asif Shawkat, husband of Bushra Hafez Assad, and is led by Major General Mahalla.

6. Reinforcing the powers and duties of the Air Force Intelligence

The Air Force Intelligence was led by Brigadier General Mohammed al-Khuli for 30 years, and he enjoyed great confidence from Hafez Assad. It supervised the army's secret programs, including the chemical weapons file, and has branches spread all over the country. It was tasked with protecting the security of the air force and air defenses and ensuring the security of pilots. It also kept the state's secret weapons and investigated the strength and power of the enemy's military forces. It was led at one point by Major General Ibrahim Hawija, and is currently led by Major General Jamil Hassan.

7. The Office of National Security

It was established in the Presidential Palace against the background of the increasing influence of intelligence officers and their involvement in public affairs, and the emergence of conflicts between the intelligence services about the scope of their authority and benefits. It was led by Ahmed Diab at its founding and was tasked with coordination between the various intelligence services and the collection of security reports from all security services. It was the highest security authority in Syria. In 1978 Engineer Abdul Raouf

Al-Qassem was appointed as its leader, in 2000 Major General Mohammed Saeed Bakhitan was appointed. In 2008, its name was changed to the National Security Office, and it is currently headed by Major General Ali Mamlouk.

8. Restructuring within Corps System

In 1985, Brigadier General Ali Aslan was tasked by the deputy chief of staff with restructuring the military into corps in order to integrate the growing number of officers and soldiers in the armed forces. The military was subsequently organized as follows⁽³⁵⁾:

- a) **First Corps:** Formed from the 5th, 7th, and 9th divisions and a number of other independent brigades. It was based around Damascus and tasked with securing the area from Damascus to the borders of Palestine.
- b) **Second Corps:** Made up of the 10th and 14th divisions and a number of independent brigades. It was based in Zabadani and tasked with securing the area from the north of Damascus to Homs. It was formed in 1988.
- c) **Third Corps:** It was formed at the end of the 1980s and consisted of rocket installations in the desert, Deir Ezzour, and the Turkish and Iraqi borders.

The armed forces increased in numbers after 1985, reaching 400,000 active duty officers and soldiers and 300,000 reserve forces.

Fifth: 1980-2011: An Indoctrinated Military and a Short-Lived Military Ambassador

The policy of the "leading party," enshrined in the 1970 Constitution, contributed to harnessing all the state's capabilities to continue what the regime had begun, especially with regard to the army, to integrate all institutions within the security paradigm under the auspices of the political Baath Party⁽³⁶⁾.

The leading figures of the army assumed a prominent status in the Central Committee of the ruling Baath Party as the leader of state and society. The committee had 18 members – 12 of whom were Alawites – that could

⁽³⁵⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abidin, *The Army and Politics*, p 456-459.

⁽³⁶⁾ Interview with Major Mustapha Al-Kanji from Syria via Skype on 24/6/2018.

intervene in political matters and in civil affairs. In 1980, committee members from the army included General Hafez Assad (Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces), Maj. Gen. Ali Aslan (Deputy Chief of Staff for the Military and Armed Forces), Brigadier General Rifaat Assad (Commander of Defense Brigades), Maj. Gen. Ali Douba (Head of Military Intelligence), Maj. Gen. Ali Haidar (Head of Special Units), Maj. Gen. Ali al-Saleh (Commander of the Air Force), Maj. Gen. Ibrahim al-Safi (Commander of the 1st Division), Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ibrahim al-Ali (Commander of the Popular Army), Maj. Gen. Shafiq Fayyad (Commander of the 3rd Division), Maj. Gen. Adnan Badr al-Hasan (Commander of the 9th Division), Maj. Gen. Fuad Absi (Head of the State Security Directorate), Maj. Gen. Mohammed al-Kholi (Head of Air Force Intelligence), and Major General Mohammed Nassif, deputy head of the State Security Directorate)⁽³⁷⁾.

In 1982, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon under the pretext of fighting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and expanded its influence in southern Lebanon, occupying about 10% of Lebanese territory. This area became a base for the proliferation and growth of the Syrian-trained and Iranian-controlled Lebanese Hezbollah. It was also an ideal situation for supplying arms under the pretext of resistance against Israel, protecting the borders from rebellion, and working to “oust the occupier”. The Syrian army assumed the role of a deterrent force in Lebanon with a mandate and a declaration by Lebanese officials and public as well as other Arab states, and continued to use the pretext of normalizing the Palestinian presence and expelling the Israeli army to occupy Lebanon.

The Syrian military acted as a diplomatic mission in Lebanon even after the retreat of the Israeli army from Lebanon’s al-Shouf Mountain in 1983, when bloody fighting broke out between the Druze and Christians. The Syrian regime took advantage of its Lebanese presence and played the role of the intermediary force that controlled the direction of any decision related to the expansion of militia groups such as Lebanese Hezbollah and the Amal movement. Even though the military underwent some changes after Hafez

⁽³⁷⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedin, *The Army and Politics*.

Assad's death in 2000 and the power transfer to his son Bashar Assad, the regime continued with these same military policies⁽³⁸⁾.

The Presidential Decree issued by Hafez Assad in 1984 recognized the military commanders' de facto martial rulers of the territory under their command and their teams played a direct security role. Damascus and the Ghouta areas were under control of the 1st and 3rd Divisions, south of Damascus was under the command of Brig. Gen. Ibrahim al-Safi, and north of Damascus was under the control of Shafiq Fayyad. This decree was one of the clearest sign of the corruption in the military, as it gave commanders full authority to deal with all matters in territory under their command independently, without seeking permission from the leadership.

The Syrian army entered into Lebanon under the pretext of subjugating the Palestinians in Lebanon and expelling the Israeli army from its south, in addition to a request from the Lebanese President Frangieh for the Syrian army to intervene to protect the Christians. The Syrian army entered Lebanon and stood by the Christian militias and broke into Palestinian positions. They also set up the first bases, which would later become training centers for sectarian militias such as Hezbollah and the Amal movement. The Syrian army moved to establish alliances with the various parties.

The assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 was the main factor in ending the role of the Syrian army in Lebanon and its withdrawal to Syrian territory. Army units returned to their positions after a quarter of a century in Lebanon. Prominent leaders returned to Syria, including Ghazi Kanaan, Jamia Jamia, and Rustam Ghazali. This also resulted in some new formations in the military including the 15th Special Forces Division and the 17th Division.

Higher military commanders adopted a tactic of engaging different military units busy in active tactical operations across the country according to their expertise and size. There were also intense physical routines but not enough material support to foster an environment of creativity or excellence. In addition, special procedures were made along the borders on the pretext of increasing defenses and preparation. They also graduated a number of officers

⁽³⁸⁾ Ibid.

without any real expertise or curriculum except that which was used in years past and had proven to be a failure. Despite this, the higher military command insisted on following this path. This created a sort of cognitive dissonance regarding the futility of the rules and practices pursued by the military commanders. This was especially true with regard to questions about the repeated building of defensive assets that were known to be ineffective against the enemy. There were also questions about the non-operational and degrading machines with no efforts to renovate or fix them unless they belonged to the Republican Guard or the 4th Division, which had the latest vehicles, modern T80 tanks, and well equipped barracks. This made the rest of the military units feel disenfranchised and less motivated, hence the trend towards busy work⁽³⁹⁾.

Conclusions

- The building and formation processes of the military establishment did not stabilize from its initial establishment by King Faisal in 1916 until the coup d'etat of 1970. These processes have undergone several periods of regression that left the military structure incomplete, particularly the special eastern units established by the French mandate. From 1945 to 1963, the armed forces suffered from internal conflicts and partisan divisions, leading to a series of military coups, rebellions, and disobedience.
- Despite the efforts off post-independence governments to improve the structural framework of the army as well as its organization, ideology, and armament, they failed because the military leadership behind these efforts wanted to control the military in order to ensure their own continuity at the expense of security of the nation. This situation dismissed all objective thinking regarding the military, especially in terms of ideological orientation, which assumed that the commander was the ultimate leader and commander of the armed forces and its members.
- The 1948 war and the defeat in 1967 revealed structural weaknesses in the military and destroyed about two-thirds of the air force. This in turn

⁽³⁹⁾ Ibid.

brought about a defense-oriented policy that received much of the government's focus. Issues of reformation and development were not a priority due to the Baath Party's control over the government on one hand, and Hafez Assad's efforts to secure power for himself on the other. This did not prevent the leadership at the time from trying to breathe new life into the military with the creation of divisions in place of the regiments and brigades. This had an impact on the decision to enter the October war, despite the setbacks resulting from the war of attrition and weaknesses in tactical and strategic planning.

- One of the most prominent transformation in the army was when Hafez Assad created specially trained and armed military units with absolute loyalty to him either through highly supported and armed loyal units or through the sectarian policy followed in the formation of those units, most of which are loyal to Assad virtue of being Alawite, or through expanding the intelligence powers of the military and directly linking them to the president. This was meant to strengthen and maintain the government and prevent military coups.
- The 1970 Constitution solidified the Baath Party's control of the state and society through the concept of party leadership. This contributed to the transformation of the military into an ideological military directly linked to the ruling party. The military was a functionally troubled institution during this time. On the one hand, it was deployed according to the requirements of a confrontation with Israel, but without putting resources into the development of human and organizational capacity building. Corruption dominated the military's interaction within its units. Newly created or regenerated units were entrusted with the security functions and respective powers within the civilian sectors.
- Some of Hafez Assad's decrees contributed to the transformation of the role of the military commanders to de facto martial rulers of the territory under their command. They were given expanded authorities that transformed Syrian administrative units into military areas of influence. These roles were further advanced by the external political role played by the Syrian army in Lebanon to exert control and influence over Lebanese decision-making and society. It also led to the establishment in

Lebanon of a nucleus of training centers for sectarian militias, where the military was making alliances with local political parties.

- The changes under Assad's son were not very profound. Bashar Assad maintained the same policies on which his father Hafez Assad had worked. He also issued some legislation and laws, as well as changes in leadership names in the military (especially in the air force). He pursued a policy of keeping the military busy with tactical projects but without offering enough financial support, technical support, or human capacity development to improve operations - especially in regards to the repeated breakdown of damaged and degrading vehicles.

Questions related to restructuring the Syrian military remain outstanding, in terms of its structure, the governing political doctrine, de-politicization of the military, and codification of civil-military relations, training, development, and methodological policies for the army's human resources, and correcting the roles and functions of some military units and groups and defining their relationship with civil society.

Annex Report 2

Laws and Regulations Governing the Military After 2011

*Omran Information Unit**

* A report prepared by the Omran Center Information Unit team members.

Annex Report 2: Laws and Regulations Governing the Military After 2011

Introduction

Since the formation of the Syrian state following the end of Ottoman rule, mandatory recruitment was enforced through the mandatory service decree of 1919. The Syrian military also took advantage of having Arab officers that had served in the ranks of the Ottoman military. However, the French occupation led to the annulment of these laws and dissolution of the national army. France later established the ‘Special Forces of the East’ through High Commissioner’s decree no. 3045 on 20 March 1930. This decree detailed the authority, responsibilities, and rights of officers and soldiers in the newly created force⁽¹⁾, which formed the nucleus of what would later become the Syrian army. The Syrian army was first organized into a new structure by way of decisions made by the military command at that time. The organizational structure of the military developed gradually as new decisions were made by subsequent military and political leaderships based on the context of their time. Major events also had significant impacts on the organizational and legal structure of the Syrian military and armed forces.

At the forefront of those transformations was Syria’s union with Egypt, which transformed the military dramatically with the establishment of military bodies and departments that still exist today. Next was the rise of the Baath Party rule, during which the military was changed from a national army into an ideological one. This period also witnessed the appearance of the modern terminology for the Army and the Armed Forces. The next major inflection point was the Syrian army’s defeat in the June 1967 war and the destruction of its basic infrastructure. The military then began preparing for the war of “liberation” and created heavily armored and mechanized divisions with regular forces and increased weaponry and equipment levels. Other events that can be considered as pivotal moments that shaped or impacted the

⁽¹⁾ The issue of special forces: Website of Ministry of Defense:
<http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php?node=554&cat=1172>

evolution of the army include the 1973 war, the Israeli aggression in Lebanon in 1982, and finally the ascension to power by Bashar Assad in 2000. When Bashar Assad took power, he initiated what he called a phase of modernization and development, issuing new laws on military service and military pensions in 2003 and then withdrawing Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005. The start of the Syrian uprising in 2011 revealed weaknesses in the organizational structure of the Syrian armed forces. The regime passed a series of reform laws to try to deal with the changing circumstances, which had not been foreseen by lawmakers. At that point, all resources were dedicated to try to keep the regime in power.

Following Bashar Assad's arrival to power in Syria, there were legal and organizational changes to the structure of the Syrian army. New laws were passed to address issues related to conditions of military service and mandatory military conscription. This was accompanied by the revocation of some older laws and the modification of others to try to keep pace with the structural developments of the military, such as the creation of new military corps, and an increase in the number of military divisions, special forces, and independent brigades. This report seeks to illustrate and briefly analyze these legal developments because of the important role they played in shaping the current structure of the Syrian army and armed forces, which has been significantly impacted at all levels in recent years due to the military operations it has conducted across the entire geographical area of Syria.

This report will outline the laws governing the military establishment and its organizational structure. It will detail the most important laws and decrees governing military affairs along with their amendments. These laws include the: military service law, military pensions act, mandatory conscription law, recruitment and mobilization law, the military penal code, and military trials law. The report will illustrate the rationale behind the changes to these laws and the impact they have had on the army's structural organization.

First: The Military Service Law - Amendments to Control and Termination

The Military Service Law is defined by Presidential Legislative Decree No. 18 of 4 April 2003 on the military service for officers, which describes the positions of officers and volunteer soldiers⁽²⁾. Before it was issued in 2003, there were two separate laws covering this topic: one of which was the Officers Service Law No. 278 of 27 November 1969, and the second was the Non-Commissioned Officers and Volunteers Law No. 53 dated 3 July 1962, along with the related amendments. After Bashar Assad came to power in 2000, he began introducing amendments to the previous decrees and laws before finally issuing Legislative Decree No. 18 of 2003. The Presidential Legislative Decree contained the new text of the Military Service Law that pertains to the service of officers, non-commissioned officers, and volunteers in the armed forces. The previous two laws 278 and 53 referenced above were nullified.

The Military Service Law is one of the most important laws related to military affairs, as it regulates a large number of aspects in detail related to organization, finances, and promotions, as well as the size, doctrine, and composition of the army and the armed forces. The Legislative Decree consists of eight basic articles. The Military Service Law contained in the Legislative Decree consists of 197 articles divided into 16 sections, each composed of several chapters. The Legislative Decree also established a **Joint Defense Council for the armed forces consisting of the following permanent members**: Commander in Chief of the Army and Armed Forces – President, deputies of the Commander in Chief of the Army and Armed Forces, Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces, deputies of the Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces, Head of Logistics and Supply Authority, Head of Operations Authority, Head of Training Authority, Head of Intelligence Directorate, Air Force and Air Defense Commander, Navy and Coast Guard Commander, Director of Financial Administration, and Director of Officer's Affairs. **Advisory members** for the Joint Defense Council include the commanders of corps, heads of authorities and commissions

⁽²⁾ Military Service Law as per Syrian Parliament website:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5571&cat=16006>

reporting to the Commander-in-Chief, heads of authorities and commissions reporting to the Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces, other officers invited by the Commander in Chief.

This Joint Defense Council has a number of responsibilities, foremost of which is the study of:

1. Combat military doctrine.
2. Determining the size, organization structure, positioning, arming, equipping, and training of the army.
3. Propose laws and regulations related to the armed forces.
4. Preparing studies and assessments for issues requested for review by the Commander in Chief of the Army and Armed Forces.

Article 4 of the Legislative Decree also provides for the formation of an Amnesty Committee made up of a chair and six members of the Joint Defense Council. The Amnesty Committee has jurisdiction to issue amnesties for rulings issued by the military judiciary, and the Commander in Chief can also refer judicial decisions related to amnesty to the Joint Defense Council for further review.

The Military Service Law regulates all matters related to military personnel, including all organizational and financial aspects, promotions, military ranks, uniforms, etc. **However, these provisions do not apply to the Internal Security Forces, which have their own laws, although the Internal Security Forces are legally part of the armed forces.** The Military Service Law defines the composition of the armed forces according to the following units⁽³⁾:

1. **The regular forces of the Syrian Arab Army** including the ground forces, air force and air defense, and naval forces.
2. **Subsidiary forces** consisting of the Internal Security Forces that are governed by their own internal policies.
3. **Auxiliary forces** such as the reserve forces, Popular Army, and other forces that may be necessary to establish per a decision by the Commander in Chief.

⁽³⁾ Internal Security Forces, Ministry of Defense Website <http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php?node=554&cat=3253>
Date of Visit 06/07/2018.

Syria is unique from other countries in that the word “army” is used to describe collectively not just the formal Syrian armed forces, but also the additional subsidiary forces that can be established as needed. This is what opened the door for the formation of paramilitary forces to support the Syrian military, such as the **National Defense Forces**, the **Local Defense Forces**, and a number of other militias that the regime used in its military operations against the Syrian opposition. These groups were given legitimacy under this stipulation of the Military Service Law due to the functional and military links between the militias and one of the security services. In this way, the regime effectively legitimized these groups, since the legal basis for such a relationship has existed since 2003, eight years before the start of the uprising.

The General Command establishes a committee charged with overseeing the affairs of officers in the Armed Forces composed of the following members: Commander in Chief of the Army and Armed Forces – President, deputies of the Commander in Chief, Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces, deputies of the Chief of Staff of the Army and Armed Forces, Head of the Organization and Administration Branch, Head of the Military Intelligence Directorate, Commander of Air Force and Air Defense, Commander of the Navy, and the Head of the Officers’ Affairs Authority as secretary general of the committee⁽⁴⁾. The committee may also consult with the relevant commander of a unit when reviewing issues pertaining to his/her command unit officers. It convenes meetings based upon the request of the Commander in Chief or the Chief of Staff of the Army, and requires the quorum of half of its members to legally meet. The decisions of the committee are taken by simple majority vote of attendees so long as it is not less than half of the members of the committee. When the number of votes are a tie, the president’s vote overweighs the final vote.

The committee’s responsibilities is outlined in 16 articles, the most important of which is appointing officers in the Armed Forces and ending or reinstating service, transfers, and temporary appointments. Some of the committees’ decisions are valid only after the Commander in Chief approval, while some are implemented with the approval of the Chief of Staff and after the approval of the Commander in Chief. After the appointment of General Ali Abdullah

⁽⁴⁾ The Head of the Organization and Administration Branch was added to the committee per Law No. 35 of 2009.

Ayoub as Minister of Defense on 1/1/2018, replacing General Fahd Freij Al-Jassim, the position of Chief of Staff remains vacant for more than seven months. Something that is unprecedented in Syria.

The Military Service Law has been amended 18 times since 2003. Amendments before the start of the uprising in 2011 were administrative, organizational, and financial in nature and dealt some matters related to military service. Amendments also dealt with the Military Pensions Law because it was functionally linked to military service laws. These amendments from routine to critical in nature, such as adding provisions regarding reserve forces in the Legislative Decree 37 of 2004. In 2010, Assad issued Legislative Decree No. 48 reintroducing two ranks for non-commissioned officers that fall below 2nd Lieutenant and above the Warrant officer 1st class ranks (Murashah and Murashah Awal).

After the start of the revolution in 2011, there were a number of changes made to the Military Service Law to address the shortcomings that became clear with the deployment of troops and military operations throughout the country during wartime. One of the amendments allowed for military personnel that finished their service within the past three years to reenlist. All of the amendments made were done for the benefit of the military to help ensure its continuing loyalty to the regime as sought to defeat its war against the Syrian people.

The overall trends for amendments relating to Military Service Law can be highlighted as follows:

- 1. Amendments deemed necessary for the further consolidation of powers and control of the Commander in Chief**, such as Decree No. 36 of 2004, in which Article 166 (an amendment to Decree No. 18) allows the commander in chief to retain officers whom he wants indefinitely regardless of service age limits. In Decree No. 25 of 2006, the commander in chief was granted an exceptional authority to retain a brigadier general for two years without regard to the limitation set by military regulations.
- 2. Changes that elevate the status and positioning of the army's Chief of Staff**, such as Decree No. 24 of 2006, which affirmed that, the Chief

of Staff would be treated equally to a minister in terms of salary, compensation, and other entitlements.

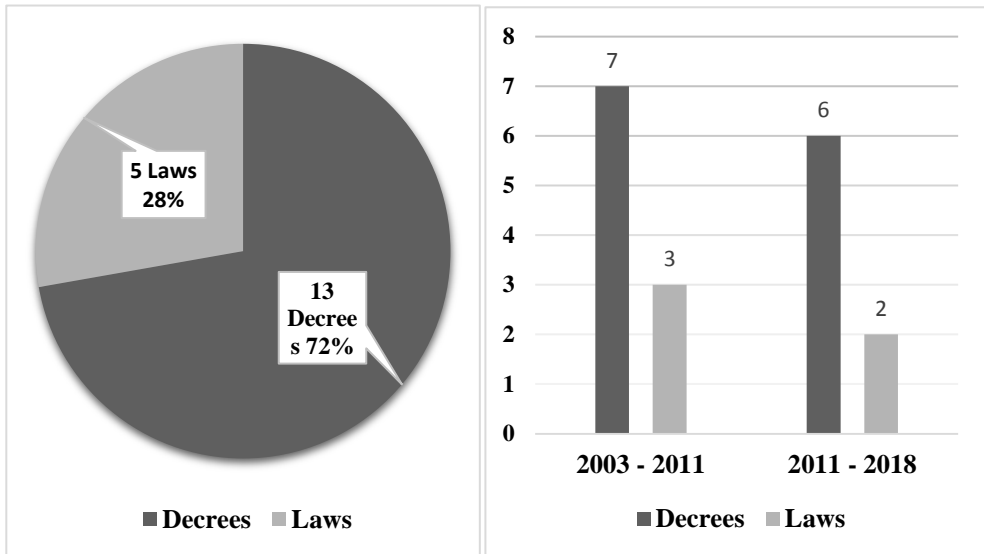
3. Changes enacted for the purpose of providing legal justification to the army’s engagement with popular uprising and protest movement. For example in April 2011, the government passed Decree No. 57 which added the term "war operations" as an added form to regular warfare or an official "state of war"⁽⁵⁾. In June of that same year, Decree No. 66 was adopted adding the following loose language to the end of Article 71, paragraph b for authorization procedures of warfare: "Of particular interest to the State or in service of the armed forces."

4. Changes to bypass lack of military readiness of army personnel, including both volunteers and officers. Decree No. 6 in 2012, which amended the second paragraph of Article 55 of the Military Service Law No. 18 of 2003, extended the duration of service period required for eligibility of a promotion for a 1st Lieutenant officer to five years, for army medical doctors and 4-year military academy graduates to four years, and Bachelors Degree graduates to six years. Also, Decree No. 1 of 2013, which amended Article 29 of Law 18 of 2003, affirmed that the duration of volunteer periods should be no less than ten years for officers in training or going to study at a university and active officers, and five years for non-commissioned officers and other low-ranking personnel.

The following table illustrates the authority issuing amendments to the Military Service Law:

Time Period	Amendments by Presidential Legislative Decree	Amendments by laws passed by Parliament	Total
2003 – 2011	7 decrees	3 laws	10 amendments
2011 – 2018	6 decrees	2 laws	8 amendments
Total	13 decrees	5 laws	18 amendments

⁽⁵⁾ Since the start of the uprising in 2011, there has been no official “declaration of war” that legally permits the deployment of armed forces outside of its jurisdiction or the engagement in warfare against an enemy. This is why the regime used the new amendment of “war operations” to justify such deployments and operations against the opposition without a legal declaration signed by the commander in chief to begin war.



It is worthy to note that most of the amendments, 72%, were issued directly by the president of the republic (the commander in chief) by a “presidential legislative” decree, while only five, or 28%, of them amendments were made through laws passed by the People's Council (Parliament). This is indicative of the desire of the presidency to strengthen its military powers and prioritize military action within the government's executive agenda.

The Military Service Law cannot be considered sacred while the current customary practice exists and as long as the military is ruled in a sectarian and unprofessional manner. During focus groups and field interviews a number of defected Syrian officers agreed that the existing laws are generally acceptable but they are not implemented in an impartial or professional way. Their most important observations about the implementation of the Military Service Law include:

- The promotion process, for both officers and non-commissioned officers mentioned in the Military Service Law, depends on the evaluation process, which is impacted by the particular mood and security concerns of the unit's security officer.

- Personal interests heavily influence the evaluation process and the competency report, because these assessments are not based on professional or impartial standards, but instead on sectarian, class, or geographical considerations. This evaluation process is confidential and its results are not available to the individual being evaluated.
- The Military Intelligence Directorate has the primary responsibility for approving promotions. If the Directorate does not approve the promotion of an officer that has met all of the normal standards required for a promotion, this might be due to several reasons including the special security evaluation made about each officer⁽⁶⁾.

A number of defected officers who were interviewed separately confirmed the existence of a security file located in the Military Intelligence Directorate that was not governed by the Military Service Law. They said that the reviews and reports contained in this file on each individual member of the military play a big role in promotion decisions, postings, and upward mobility, and are held by the unit's security officer. Each unit has a security officer whose rank correlates with the size of the armed unit he is assigned to serve with. More than 90% percent of appointments to this post are also based on sectarian affiliations of the officer and his loyalty to the regime. Security officers are assigned to units up to the level of battalion, then for smaller units like a Company there is a non-commissioned security officer. Additionally, there are always undercover security agents embedded within units and are only known to other higher ranking intelligence officers⁽⁷⁾.

It is noteworthy that in response to the financial and economic deterioration of recent years, the Syrian regime leadership attempted to increase the salaries/pensions of current state employees, retired civilians, active military personnel, and military retirees. Bashar Assad issued a number of legislative decrees, including cost of living compensation stipends, such as the following:

⁽⁶⁾ Interview with Colonel AH Istanbul 5/25/2018.

⁽⁷⁾ Interview with Colonel AH Istanbul - Turkey on 18/5/2018 and an interview with a group of dissident officers Hatay - Turkey Date 24/4/2018.

- **Legislative Decree No. 7 issued on 18 January 2015**, granted a cost of living stipend of 4,000 Syrian pounds to employees of state institutions, including the military. The decree did not include military conscripts serving their mandatory service⁽⁸⁾.
- **Legislative Decree No. 13 issued on 18 June 2016**, granted a cost of living stipend of 7,500 Syrian pounds to be added to the living compensation issued by Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2015. This decree included military conscripts serving their mandatory service⁽⁹⁾.
- **Legislative Decree No. 8 issued on 4 June 2018**, increased military salaries by 30% of the total salary, after the addition of the cost of living stipend to the current salary, as stated in Article 1 of the decree⁽¹⁰⁾.

Second: Military Pensions Law - Changes Directly from the Commander in Chief

Legislative Decree No. 17, dated 13 April 2003, includes the Military Pensions Law, which includes issues relating to pension, compensation, and insurance rights for military servicemen, officers, and volunteer personnel. It does not apply to members of the Internal Security Forces, who have their own pension laws. The text of the Military Pensions Law consists of 88 articles divided into six sections, each of which is divided into a number of chapters. The law clarified the provisions of pension rights, types of pensions, health boards, additional compensation, insurance, and the distribution of rights to the beneficiaries in the case of death or "martyrdom." Article 88 of the law stated that recruits and reservists were entitled to the same provisions applied to other military personnel except for insurance⁽¹¹⁾. Their pension rights are equal to those of similar volunteers, and if they are employees in the state, whichever law is best for them in terms of pension or compensation applies.

⁽⁸⁾ Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2015 - People's Assembly website:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5589&cat=13950>.

⁽⁹⁾ Legislative Decree No. 13 of 2016 - Website of the People's Assembly:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=16438>.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Legislative Decree No. 8 of 2018 - The People's Assembly website:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=19624>

⁽¹¹⁾ Insurance, contained in Chapter 4 of the Military Pensions Act: a previous source

It is noteworthy that the Military Pensions Law was amended 12 times since its promulgation in Legislative Decree No. 17 of 2003. The amendments happened in two phases: before the beginning of the uprising and after. As mentioned previously, some amendments included the Military Service Law. The amendments tried to fill the legal and organizational gaps in the law, changes to the schedule of compensations (amended again in 2017), and the method of proving injuries or cases of "martyrdom" or disappearance. The law was also amended to include the payment of entitlements and compensation for the conscript soldiers and non-commissioned officers with the rank of honorary lieutenant⁽¹²⁾. Compensation to the families of those killed in combat was increased as well as the compensation rates for injuries resulting from hostilities, which were increased by 5% in cases of partial or total disability, because of the increase in the number of these cases as a result of the military operations. They also included military personnel commissioned to the Internal Security Forces in these changes.

These changes were made within a legal context that is fully controlled by the Commander in Chief as the ultimate decision-maker as head of state, and could make any law or pass any decree. This highlights the absence of any civilian role or oversight in setting financial standards for human resources in the military. Instead, these standards are fully controlled by the leadership without taking into account other interests. This exemplifies the prominent practice of aligning the interests of all state institutions with the military establishment and accepting the military institutions view of the revolutionary movement as an internal war that requires sacrifices.

The following list details the amendments to the Military Pension Law made before and after the start of the revolution:

First: A set of legislative decrees issued during the period between the passing of the Pensions Law until March 2011. These decrees put forward amendments to articles contained in the Pensions Law needed to address problems faced during its implementation. These include:

⁽¹²⁾ A new rank adopted for the officers, volunteers, reservists and recruits who were killed in combat after 15/3/2011

1. **Legislative Decree No. 23 passed on 5 April 2006:** Active duty army personnel were granted a one year grace period to request the application of extensions services stipulated in Articles 9 and 10 of the Military Pensions Law.
2. **Legislative Decree No. 34 passed on 18 April 2006:** The following is added to the end of Article 29 of the Military Pensions Law: "In the absence of a rank similar to the next rank at the end of his service, then the pension rate is based on the last rank they had."
3. **Legislative Decree No. 12 of 2006:** On 26 January 2010 and amendment was made to Section 1 of Article 72 of the Military Pensions Law and related payment schedules entitled for the beneficiaries of "martyrs," missing, or deceased.
4. **Legislative Decree No. 17 passed on 31 January 2011:** Article 39 of the law was amended so that an injury that occurred during a military operation would be confirmed in writing by the direct commander of the injured soldier in a report explaining the time, place, and circumstances. In the case of "martyrdom," military operations, or extrajudicial killing by enemy forces during military operations, then the direct commander of the person killed could prove the "martyrdom," or loss without the need to present the case to a military medical council, and can instead be directly certified by the Commander in Chief. This gave unchecked authorities for compensations to martyrs and victims of the war.
5. **Legislative Decree No. 28 passed on 14 February 2011:** Added to the end of Part A of Article 88 of the law, that: "These provisions shall apply to conscripts performing mandatory service in the units of the Palestine Liberation Army."

Second: A set of legislative decrees and laws issued after March 2011, where internal military deployments and its financial needs guided the nature of such amendments. These included:

1. **Legislative Decree No. 63 issued on 5 June 2011:** The provisions of Articles 29, 31-35, and 50-52 of the Pensions Law was applied to Internal Security Forces, which were previously not covered. The provisions of this article were also applied to cases of "martyrdom,"

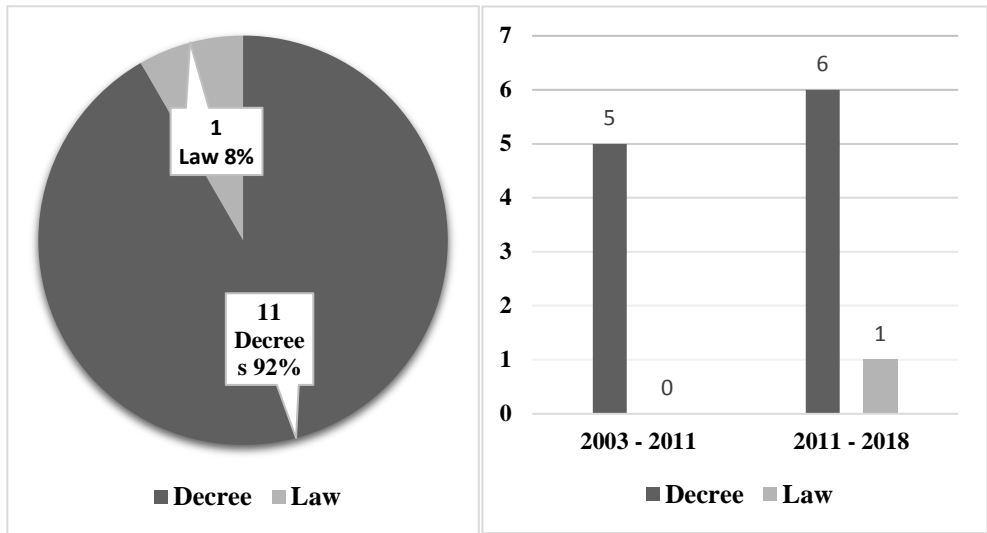
injury, disability or loss of members of Internal Security Forces that occurred as of 15 March 2011⁽¹³⁾.

2. **Legislative Decree No. 111 issued on 7 September 2011:** Amended end of service entitlements, such as pensions and additional compensations (except for insurance), for martyred non-commissioned officers and conscript soldiers, who are promoted to “honorary 2nd Lieutenant” to be compensated equal to an active duty volunteer 2nd Lieutenant.
3. **Legislative Decree No. 112 issued on 7 September 2011:** Military personnel are granted an additional grace period to claim service periods in other public agencies prior to his military service and extensions to qualify for additional benefits per the law.
4. **Legislative Decree No. 20 issued on 30 April 2015:** “Honor” cards were given to spouses and children of "martyrs" and missing persons due to military operations or those who died due to similar cases stipulated in the Military Pensions Law or who were killed by "terrorist gangs" or "hostile elements." They were also granted other privileges such as health services, discounts on transportation, etc.
5. **Legislative Decree No. 5 issued on 24 January 2016:** The ratios and compensation rates for injuries resulting from hostilities were adjusted and increased by 5% in cases of partial or total disability. This also applied to the Internal Security Forces.
6. **Law No. 16 issued on 5 April 2017:** No. 3 of the table in Article 72 of the law was moved to the assessment column 8/8 instead of 4/8, in the category of one or both parents for those entitled to compensation.
7. **Legislative Decree No. 9 issued on 4 June 2018:** Provided a 20% increase in retirement payments paid to military retirees. The cost of living stipend is added to the pension after calculating this increase.

⁽¹³⁾ This date was explicitly mentioned in Legislative Decree 63 of 2011, the supposed date for the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011.

The following table illustrates the authority issuing amendments to the Military Pensions Law:

Time Period	Amendments by Presidential Legislative Decree	Amendments by laws passed by Parliament	Total
2003 – 2011	5 decrees	0	5 changes
2011 – 2018	6 decrees	1 law	7 changes
Total	11 decrees	1 law	12 amendments



The Military Pensions Law witnessed a number of fundamental amendments following the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011. This confirms that the regime only made it a policy priority to address the subject of pensions, entitlements, and minimum disability limits and payments due to the increase in military operations. These amendments rewarded military personnel and aimed to improve their futures or the future of their relatives, guaranteeing these rewards in law. The regime took care not to overlook the issue of a cost of living stipend for retirees, which was approved by Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2015 in the amount of 4,000 Syrian pounds, and in Legislative Decree No. 13 of 2016, which added 7,500 Syrian pounds to the pension compensation. However, in Legislative Decree No. 9 of 2018, an increase of 20% was approved for the retired military servicemen already covered by the

Military Pensions Law, thus, the value of the cost of living stipend was added to the salary after the increase was applied. This is contrary to what was mentioned in Legislative Decree No. 8 of 2018 for the active duty soldiers where the calculated cost of living stipend was included as part of the base salary, and then a 30% increase in military salaries was approved afterwards.

Third: The Mandatory Military Service Law - an absence of parliamentary oversight frameworks

Until mid-2007, the Mandatory Military Service Law adopted in the Syrian Arab Republic was on Legislative Decree No. 115 dated 5 October 1953, and its subsequent amendments⁽¹⁴⁾. Then on 3 May 2007, the president issued Legislative Decree No. 30, which included new rules and regulations for mandatory military service and reserve service. The law consists of 126 articles divided into eight main sections, each containing several chapters⁽¹⁵⁾.

Mandatory Military Service is required of all male Syrian Arab citizens who are capable of defending the nation, as stipulated in the law. It consists of two tracks: mandatory service and reserve service. The provisions of the law provide details on all of the rules of mandatory and reserve service, as well as the responsibilities, rights, guarantees, financial provisions, and penalties. The Commander in Chief also issued Legislative Decree No. 27 of 2007, with specific administrative and operational instructions regarding the implementation of Mandatory Military Service. The Syrian revolution and the evolution of the conflict have led to a number of notable changes in the Mandatory Military Service Law. These are explained below, divided into two distinct periods⁽¹⁶⁾.

The first period – The situation prior to 2011:

1. Family circumstances were taken into consideration, which allowed postponement of in cases where someone had another brother in active

⁽¹⁴⁾ Legislative Decree No. 115 of 1953, which describes the Mandatory Military Service Law. Website of the People's Assembly: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=11451>.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2007 containing the Mandatory Military Service Law - The People's Assembly website: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=4921>.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Interview with Major Khaled al Mousa in Iskenderun, Turkey on 21/4/2018 and A series of interviews with Colonel Ahmed Hamadeh in Istanbul, Turkey between April and May of 2018.

service was the only male child, was the sole breadwinner, or for educational purposes.

2. Special considerations are granted to citizens residing or studying outside the country, and those with medical conditions.
3. The issuance of a decree allowing people to pay a military exemption fee led to increase in corruption, bribery, and the forging of paperwork by medical committees on behalf of military personnel and civilians. Many personnel found guilty of such infractions were referred to intelligence branches and others dismissed.
4. Corrupt practices also surfaced regarding the exemption fees for those living abroad in the form of increasing forgery.

The second period – the realities of the regime after 2011:

1. Refusal to dismiss soldiers even after their mandatory service period was completed.
2. Increase levels of corruption networks.
3. Refusal of exemptions or postponements and forcing citizens of age into the mandatory service.

Like other laws, the Mandatory Military Service Law has been amended many times:

First: A set of legislative decrees issued since the issuance of the law and until March 2011. These laws focused on easing out restrictions and conditions of mandatory service, which encouraged the spread of corrupt networks in the absence of any civilian oversight process.

1. **Legislative Decree No. 20 issued on 13 April 2008:** Article 97 was amended to state that anyone who exceeds the required age of the mandatory service and did not fulfill it for reasons other than the accepted exemptions or postponements provided in this law should pay a fine in lieu of the military service.
2. **Law 16 issued on 10 September 2008:** Reduced the mandatory service from 24 months to 21 months, except for those who had not completed at least a fifth grade education who still serve 24 months.
3. **Legislative Decree No. 45 issued on 16 August 2009:** Removed the first paragraph of Article 13 of Legislative Decree No. 30, which includes the

Mandatory Military Service Law related to the military service exemption fee.

4. **Law No. 36 issued on 8 December 2009:** Amended Articles 10, 13, 48, 73, 74, 95-97, 99, 100, and 113. These amendments included several administrative changes related to postponement, military service exemption fee, violations, etc.
5. **Legislative Decree No. 35 issued on 19 March 2011:** The duration of the military service was reduced to 18 months, except for those who did not complete a fifth grade. The duration of their mandatory service remained at 21 months.

Second: A set of legislative decrees and laws issued after the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011.

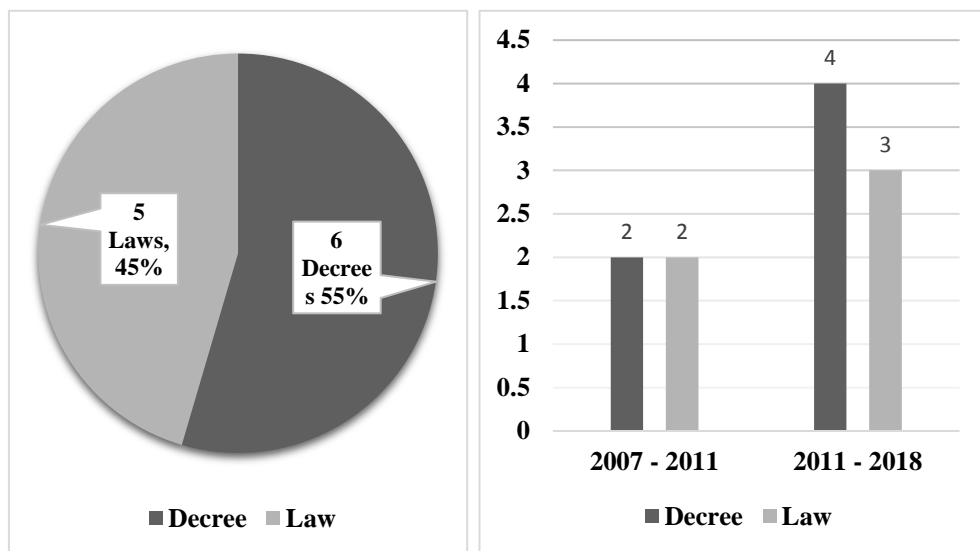
1. **Legislative Decree No. 33 issued on 3 August 2014:** Articles 13 (Sections 1) of decree 33 was amended relating to administrative affairs of postponement, military service exemption fee, or violations and fines. Along the same lines and scope, amendments were made to Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2017, Article 25 (paragraph B), and Articles 49, 74, 97 and 10.
2. **Legislative Decree No. 38 issued on 13 September 2015:** This decree amended Legislative Decree No. 33 of 2014, Article 74, as follows: "The provisions of paragraphs 2 and 3 of this Article shall apply to all employees in the mandatory reserve service or those who joined as of 15 March 2011 and continued until 3 August 2014 **and thereafter**."
3. **Law No. 14 issued on 20 July 2016:** Allowed the Prime Minister to overturn the termination of employment for public servants.
4. **Law No. 3 issued on 5 January 2017:** Amended Articles 48 and 49, increasing the value of the bond for travel to 50,000 Syrian pounds, while it was determined previously on the category of conscript and the reason for travel.
5. **Legislative Decree No. 24 issued on 5 July 2017:** Section H "ح" of Article 25 of Legislative Decree No. 30 and its amendments to the Mandatory Military Service Law, were repealed. This paragraph on exclusion from the reserve service opened a door to evasive corruption practices that implicated the Minister of Defense, General Fahd Jassem

al-Fureij himself. Article 25/H stipulated that the "General Command has discretion to grant exemptions from service as it sees appropriate". Russia exerted great pressure on the regime to remove this clause, which eventually happened.

6. **Law No. 35 issued on 15 November 2017:** Amended Section b of Article 74 and Article 97 of the Mandatory Military Service Law. This resonated widely when it was adopted because of its provisions, which stipulated that a person who exceeded the age of the specified age for mandatory service but did not serve for any reasons other than approved exemptions or postponements provided for in this law, should pay a service fine of US \$8,000 or its equivalent in Syrian pounds within three months, at the exchange rate issued by the Central Bank of Syria at that time. The amendment also allowed the reserve services to withhold a person's property and accounts if they failed to pay within the time allotted. This allowed the regime to force citizens, especially those displaced, to settle their situations and pay the exemption fee or else it could result in the confiscation of their property.

The following table illustrates the authority issuing amendments to the Mandatory Military Service Law:

Time Period	Amendments by Presidential Legislative Decree	Amendments by laws passed by Parliament	Total
2007 – 2011	2 Decrees	2 Laws	4 Amendments
2011 – 2018	4 Decrees	3 Laws	7 Amendments
Total	6 Decrees	5 Laws	11 Amendments



Amendments made after the Syrian uprising were increasingly aggressive, especially with regard to the military service exemption fee. The regime also tried at the start of the revolution to entice young people by reducing the duration of mandatory service. However, later they retained all the groups that were in active duty, especially the 102nd training session, whose members were retained in service for almost eight years. Those eligible for mandatory service took advantage of several provisions, including the payment of living compensation of 7,500 Syrian pounds in Legislative Decree No. 13 of 2016. They were previously deprived of the cost of living stipend issued in Legislative Decree No. 7 of 2015, which compensated state employees both civilian and military.

Fourth: General Mobilization Law – Questions of its public and private application

In general, mobilization is defined as the transformation of the national armed forces into a state of war or semi-war, and the reconstruction of the economy, institutions, capacities, material and human resources, and laws in order to provide for long-term war needs to allow the armed forces to meet its military objectives, especially the mobilization of forces. It should be noted that

natural disasters fall under the category of semi-war conditions⁽¹⁷⁾. Mobilization may be comprehensive or partial, covert or public.

In Syria, the concept of mobilization has evolved several times based on the situations that Syria has experienced since its independence, and has been caused by both internal and external factors. Mobilization was previously addressed by Law No. 87 of 1960⁽¹⁸⁾, issued during the period of the United Arab Republic⁽¹⁹⁾, as well as Law No. 127 of 1969⁽²⁰⁾, which included the addition of new articles to the former general mobilization law. Later during the period in which Bashar Assad tried to develop and modernize the legal and regulatory structures of the armed forces, a new mobilization law, Law No. 64⁽²¹⁾, was issued on 30 December 2004 and previous mobilization laws and their amendments were cancelled. After the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011 and the subsequent developments, Bashar Assad issued Legislative Decree No. 104 on 21 August 2011⁽²²⁾. This decree included a new law of mobilization despite the fact that it had been only seven years since the previous mobilization law had been passed, because of the failure of those prior laws to successfully address developments in the country. This suggests that legislators were not prepared to face internal unrest or national crises. This is clearly demonstrated in the differences between the mobilization laws issued in 2004 and 2011, which include:

- Mobilization in 2004: Mobilization is the transformation of the country in general and the armed forces in particular from a state of peace to a state of war, through the implementation of specific measures and actions.
- Mobilization in 2011: Mobilization is the transformation of the country in general and the armed forces in particular from a state of peace to a state of war, in order to be prepared to defend the nation's sovereignty

⁽¹⁷⁾ Definition of General Mobilization: vWikipedia: [https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/تعبئة_عامّة/](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/تعبئة_عامّة).

⁽¹⁸⁾ General Mobilization Law issued in 1960 - People's Assembly:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=10239>.

⁽¹⁹⁾ United Arab Republic: Egypt and Syria (1958-1961).

⁽²⁰⁾ Legislative Decree No. 127 of 1969 - Adding Articles to the General Mobilization Law - The People's Assembly Website: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=8238>.

⁽²¹⁾ General Mobilization Law issued in 2004 - The People's Assembly Website:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=16702>.

⁽²²⁾ Legislative Decree 104 for the year 2011 including the General Mobilization Law - The People's Assembly Website: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/eindex.php?node=201&nid=4393>.

against internal and external threats, including natural and man-made disasters.

The clause “in order to be prepared to defend the nation’s sovereignty against internal and external threats, including natural and man-made disasters,” was added to address the uprising conditions. Additionally, mobilization would be declared by the President of the Republic in a legislative decree per the 2004 law. However, full public mobilization requires the approval of the People’s Council, while partial mobilization declarations can be declared by the President according to his assessment. Additional cases were added in Article 3 of the 2011 law, where public or partial mobilization can be declared in the following cases circumstances:

- In the event of war between the Syrian Arab Republic and one or more States, or the threat thereof.
- When regional and international relations are strained or tense.
- When internal disturbances threaten national security.
- When faced with natural and man-made disasters.

The People’s Council (Parliament) was also entrusted with certain responsibilities under the 2011 mobilization law. According to Article 5 of the law, the People’s Council (Parliament) is responsible for preparing and approving mobilization expenses within the general budget of the state, and for adopting laws related the preparation and execution of mobilization efforts.

The law of mobilization issued in Legislative Decree No. 104 of 2011 is laid out in 43 articles divided into ten chapters. The most important points included in the law are:

- **The duties of the legislative and executive authorities in the preparation and implementation of the mobilization**, defining the following: president of the republic, the People's Council (Parliament), the Council of Ministers, the ministries, and the responsibilities of the executive organs and local administrative institutions.
- **The duties of public institutions, private companies, and citizens related to the preparation and implementation of mobilization.**

Eleven duties were determined upon the institutions in comparison to three duties enforced upon citizens.

- **The organizational foundations for the preparation and implementation of mobilization.** The Public Mobilization Administration is responsible for mobilization efforts, and assigns tasks and responsibilities to the mobilization committees formed in the provinces, regions, towns, local administrations, institutions, and companies. It is also responsible for providing military's obligation to provide transportation, funding the mobilization efforts, organizing the efforts, and protecting information and records related to mobilization efforts described in this decree, in accordance with the document security system.
- **Citizens are summoned to reserve military service when mobilization is declared,** in accordance with this Legislative Decree and the Mandatory Military Service Law. Those convicted of crimes that pose a danger to the external or internal security of the State as described in articles 236-289 and 291-307 of the General Penal Code, shall not be subject to reserve mobilization calls⁽²³⁾. The provisions of the Mandatory Military Service Law shall be applied in matters of deferral or exemption. The General Command of the Armed Forces and Army shall determine the system of summoning citizens. The law also defines the responsibilities of those who are called upon for the reserve military service.
- **Citizens summoned for public mobilization are excluded from serving the military reserve service during mobilization.** They are placed in positions in the state structures, and local administrations, and companies, and are not invited to join the military reserves.
- **Wages and Salaries:** Summoned individuals from the public sector receive wages and salaries during their entire mobilization period from their original public sector employer, in addition to allowances and bonuses granted to military personnel in his category of employment whichever is more. On the other hand, individuals summoned from the private sector receive compensation and salaries from the agency that

⁽²³⁾ General Penal Code - People's Assembly:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=55151&cat=12278>.

summoned them equal to what his peers (in education level and years of service) receive from the Ministry of Defense. If the summoned is subject to the reserve service, he will receive the salary and benefits stipulated according to his rank, in addition to his right to return to his previous work. If the summoned is martyred, his decedents benefit from all his entitlements per Legislative Decree No. 9 of 1985 and its amendments⁽²⁴⁾ regarding assigning housing to families of martyrs (this was not in the mobilization law of 2004). In the case of death or injury or falling captive with the enemy or disappears, the pensions law applies to the summoned citizens per Legislative Decree No. 17 of 2003 and its amendments.

- **Costs and expenses of goods and services required by a mobilization are determined as follows:** The costs and expenses for products, materials, means of transportation, and engineering and naval equipment for mobilization shall be the price valid on the date of the mobilization. Real estate and industrial and commercial properties shall not be compensated more than the interest accrued on its invested capital according to current market prices in addition to maintenance and normal wear and tear cost for facilities., and in exceptional cases a compensation for the use of equipment or its replacement cost to be paid not exceeding profits of the previous year. Costs and use fees are determined by committees formed by a decision of the Prime Minister, and with consultation of experts from relevant ministries.
- **Penalties:** This chapter clarifies the duration of penalties imposed on anyone subject to the law of mobilization, which range from one to two years. The sanctions specified in the legislative decree do not prevent the imposition of the heavier penalties stipulated in the other relevant laws. The Military judiciary shall have jurisdiction over all offenses stipulated in this legislative decree.

The mobilization law issued in 2011 was not subjected to any amendments, as it took advantage of internal developments caused by the Syrian uprising, and addressed gaps in the previous 2004 text. The 2011 mobilization law was more organized in that it distributed responsibilities among state institutions including the presidency, parliament, ministries, and local councils, others.

⁽²⁴⁾ Legislative Decree No. 9 of 1985 - People's Assembly:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=16252>.

After a process of research and monitoring, a new law was issued on 31 July 2017, Legislative Decree No. 28. The new mobilization law exempted vehicles used for mobilization from fines imposed as a result in late payment of annual fees during the time of mobilization. This was provided so long as executive decisions related to this law were issued by the Transportation Minister in coordination with the Minister of Defense⁽²⁵⁾.

Fifth: The Penal Code and Military Court Procedures – Everyone is subject to military laws

The Penal Code and Military Judiciary and Litigation Procedures are among the oldest laws related to the armed forces that are still in force. This law was issued in Legislative Decree No. 61 on 27 February 1950, and it regulates military trials and those who are part of them. The law identifies one or more judges in each brigade or similar unit and establishes a permanent military court based in Damascus. It also allows for the establishment of other permanent or temporary courts by decree issued on the proposal of the Commander in Chief. In times of war, special military courts can be created based on a recommendation from the Commander in Chief. **The authority of the military courts during wartime or domestic revolutions extends to the territory occupied by the enemy and all the relevant areas covered by the decree of its composition.**

According to the law, the individual judge considers all offenses and misdemeanors, and all crimes of weapons, ammunition, etc., whether the crimes take place in a time of war, state of emergency, or in areas under martial law, and regardless of the character of the perpetrator. A state of emergency in Syria has been in effect since the Arab Socialist Baath Party came to power in the so-called revolution of 8 March 1963, and was announced by the Military Decree No. 2 issued on 8 March 1963. This state of emergency remained in effect until around five weeks after the beginning of the Syrian revolution, when it was ended through Legislative Decree No. 161 issued on 12 April 2011. Syria had a continuous state of emergency for

⁽²⁵⁾ Law 28 of 2017 - Website of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers: <https://goo.gl/sfQnxu>.

48 years, one month, one week, and six days (17,575 days), and was subsequently replaced by Terrorism Law No. 19 of 2012⁽²⁶⁾.

In general, the military judiciary in Syria is one of the exceptional courts⁽²⁷⁾, consisting of Military Justice Department, Military Prosecution, Military Investigation Judges, Military Personnel Judges, Permanent Military Courts, Military Criminal Courts, Military Chambers of the Constitutional Court of Cassation.

Although 68 years have passed since the issuance of the Penal Code and Military Court Procedures, it has not been replaced by a new law, and was instead amended several times in the 1950s. The most significant amendments under the rule of Hafez Assad and Bashar Assad are as follows:

First: A set of legislative decrees and laws issued from the promulgation of the law until the start of the Syrian revolution in March 2011:

- **Legislative Decree No. 6 issued on 26 June 1952:** Two paragraphs were added to Article 3, one relating to false testimony and swearing in during trial before the individual military judge, and the addition of crimes to the Penal Code and Military Court Procedures.
- **Legislative Decree No. 120 issued on 6 October 1953:** Articles 3, 19, 55, 89, 113, 114, 123, 167, and 172 were amended. These are considered some of the most important amendments made given the importance of these articles.
- **Law No. 68 issued on 4 May 1955:** Articles 147-150 and 154-161 of the Military Penal Code were amended and the Court of Cassation was charged with hearing the aforementioned cases.
- **Law No. 449 issued on 10 November 1957:** A paragraph was added to Article 47 relating to the crimes set forth and punishable by the provisions of Article 123 of the Military Penal Code committed with the use of printed materials.

⁽²⁶⁾ Anti-Terrorism Law - People's Assembly website:
<http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=4306>.

⁽²⁷⁾ The Military Justice - The Judicial System in Syria - Lawyer Mohammed Nahl Al Masri:
http://damascusbar.org/arabic/judicial_sys/ifram/law_sys.htm.

- **Law No. 152 issued on 7 June 1959:** Replaced the text of Articles 147-150 relating to the penalties for military personnel who establish organizations or groups that aim to overthrow the regime.
- **Legislative Decree No. 120 issued on 11 November 1964:** Provided for the repeal of the text in the first paragraph of Article 34 and replaced it with the following text: "The President of the Court shall be an officer of at least the military rank of major or a civilian judge who is at the second tier level or above."
- **Legislative Decree No. 125 issued on 18 June 1969:** Added at the end of Article 123 of the Military Penal Code: "The provisions of this article shall apply to those who commit the acts contained therein against allied armies and the armies affiliated with the Charter of the League of Arab States, provided that their laws or agreements contain similar provisions."
- **Legislative Decree No. 31 issued on 14 May 1973:** Amended Articles 100, 101, 103, 110, and 146, related to the penalties for internal and external escape/desertion/defection from service.
- **Legislative Decree No. 27 issued on 31 July 1976:** The text of Article 133 was repealed and replaced by five paragraphs relating to the penalties for military negligence.
- **Legislative Decree No. 21 issued on 17 July 1979:** An article was added related to the punishment of army volunteers, those in the mandatory military service or appointees in the Ministry of Defense or related institutions who adds false information or documentation to the records of service.
- **Legislative Decree No. 19 issued on 17 August 1983:** The text of Article 38 was repealed and replaced by the following text: "No military judge may be transferred before completing one year of service at every function or post he is assigned, except for extreme necessities. In cases other than extreme necessity, transfers of military judges may take place only once a year during the month of July."
- **Legislative Decree No. 8 issued on 6 August 1984:** Articles 16, 17, 105, and 139 were amended. The Chief of Public Prosecutions should be at least of the rank of major. A penalty of six months to three years of jail time was laid out for those who intentionally or unintentionally enter one

of the minefields that are fenced off by the armed forces. There is also a penalty of provisional detention if someone destroys or disables any of the mines laid there. If the perpetrator intended to facilitate or assist the enemy then the penalty is execution.

- **Legislative Decree No. 64 issued on 30 September 2008:** The following was added to Article 47 of the Military Penal Code: Crimes committed by officers and members of the Internal Security Forces, members of the Political Security Branch and members of the Customs Control, the General Command Office is entitled to issue a warrant for their arrest, such cases brought before the ordinary courts are referred to military courts.
- **Law No. 44 issued on 30 December 2009:** Article 15, Paragraph 4, of the Military Penal Code was amended as follows: "The sentences issued against military personnel in time of war are final except for the death penalty which is subject to appeal."

Second: A set of legislative decrees and laws issued after the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011

- **Legislative Decree No. 92 issued on 26 July 2011:** Article 167, Paragraph 2, of the Military Penal Code was amended. It orders the removal of all persons of military rank that commit a felony or any of the offenses stipulated in Articles 341, 343, 347, 349, 353, 460, 628-635, and 641-656 of the General Penal Code and Article 133 of the Military Penal Code related to forgery, theft, fraud, and embezzlement.
- **Legislative Decree No. 96 issued on 28 July 2011:** A paragraph was added to Article 47 of the Military Penal Code. The crimes stipulated in the Weapons and Ammunition Law, promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 51 dated 24 September 2011 and its amendments were added,²⁸ and relevant cases should be referred to the military court.
- **Legislative Decree No. 31 issued on 2 May 2012:** A paragraph was added to Article 47 of the Military Penal Code, adding the offenses stipulated in Law No. 26 issued on 20 December 2011,²⁹ related to the

⁽²⁸⁾ The Weapons and Ammunitions Law issued by Legislative Decree No. 51: The People's Assembly website: <http://parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=5555&cat=16034>.

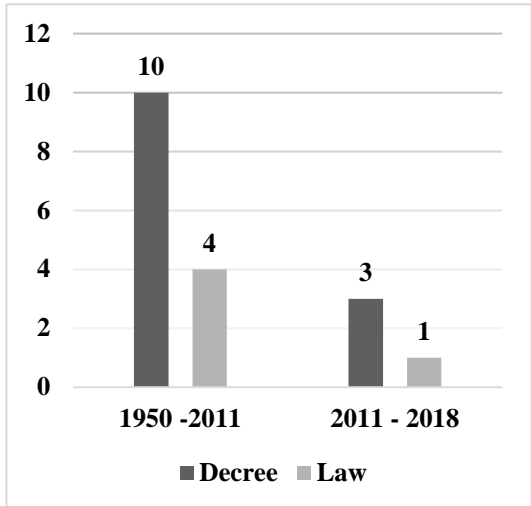
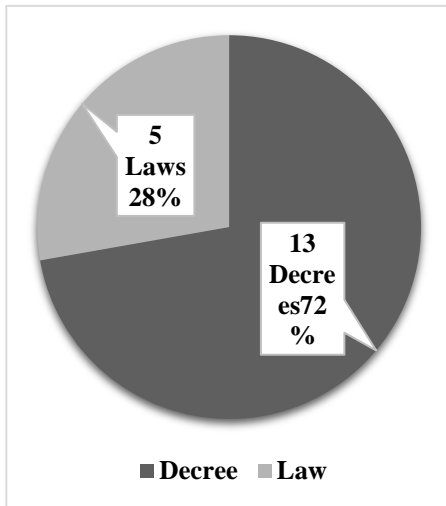
⁽²⁹⁾ Law No. 26 of 2011 - Criminalization and Punishment of Arms Smuggling - Website of the People's Assembly: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=4354>

criminalization and punishment of arms smuggling. Relevant cases should be referred to the military court.

- **Article 13 issued on 20 July 2016:** A paragraph was added to Article 167 of the Military Penal Code stating that: An exception is hereby granted from the imposed punishment (for losing weapons and military equipment) of dismissal from the army as stipulated in Section A of Article 133 of the penal code and judicial procedures law, if the missing weapon is a personal one, or if it was lost during warfare or during military operations or during confrontations with rebels and insurgents.

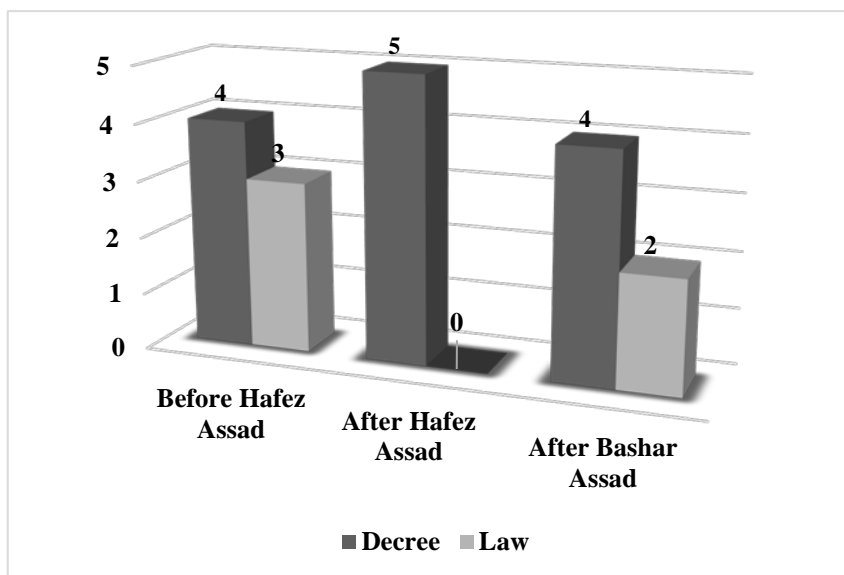
The following table illustrates the authority issuing amendments to the Penal Code and Military Court Procedures:

Time Period	Amendments by Presidential Legislative Decree	Amendments by laws passed by Parliament	Total
1950 - 2011	10 legislative decrees	4 laws	14 Amendments
2011 – 2018	3 legislative decrees	1 laws	4 Amendments
Total	13 legislative decrees	5 laws	18 Amendments



The Arms and Ammunition Law and the Criminalization and Punishment of Arms Smuggling Law were promulgated after the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011, its punishments were added to the military penal code, and its cases referred to military courts. Law 13 of 2016 exempted soldiers from being dismissed if they lost their weapons during a confrontation or battle or enemy forces. The enemy forces here were understood to be the opposition forces that appeared to fight against the regime after the start of the Syrian revolution.

The Penal Code and the Code of Military Trials and Procedures is criticized as being old and outdated and has undergone numerous amendments. It was not until 2008 that the Internal Security Forces, the Political Security Branch, and the Customs Control was included. The law also relies on a large number of articles from the General Penal Code and the Arms and Ammunition Law and the Criminalization and Punishment of Arms Smuggling Law. The Penal Code and the Military Courts have imposed a large number of penalties on civilians for crimes related to the military and armed forces, while it does not specify provisions for crimes committed by military and armed forces against civilians, installations, or infrastructure.



Sixth: Organizational Structure - Substantial transformations that undermine coherence

Due to the ambiguity surrounding the nature of the government in Syria and the presence of the Israeli enemy on the border, the army's organizational structure and the armed forces remained secret. This is made more difficult since the references on this subject are scarce and full of errors, and there is a lack of information on the military's organizational structure. This report will include open-source information that was collected by the authors of this report.

The drifting of Syria towards the Soviet Union, both politically and militarily and the subsequent changes during the unification with Egypt (1958-1961) had a major impact on the development of the organizational structure and armament of the military. Furthermore, during those years there was significant development of the reserve forces, reorganization of the army command, and the creation of committees and administrations that still exist today like the training committee, Officer Affairs Administration and the General Headquarters, and others. The changes also included the reorganization of the naval forces and air forces. The three years of Arab unity had a significant impact in the development of the army in all respects. After the arrival of the Baath Party to power, there began a process of transformation of the army from a national force to an ideological one, which became known as "the Army and Armed Forces."

The Syrian army's defeat in the July 1967 war had a major impact on the structure of the army, decimating its corps and brigades. This necessitated a comprehensive reconstruction process in preparation for the 1973 war. The army was reorganized again and a new military structure appeared as combat groups were transformed into armored and mechanized divisions, and the Syrian army received significantly more weapons and equipment. In early 1968, General Hafez Assad, the Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of the Army and Armed forces, formed a committee in the General Command headed by Brigadier General Mustafa Tlass, the chief of staff of the army and armed forces. The Committee was tasked with preparing a study on the reorganization of the armed forces and to determine required size and composition. In early 1984, Hafez Assad introduced radical reforms in the

armed forces in the wake of a coup attempt. The task was assigned to the deputy chief of staff and the head of the operations room, General Ali Aslan, who made significant efforts towards the development of the Syrian army despite the lack of resources. He contributed to more realistic and contemporary strategies in the War College in Homs⁽³⁰⁾.

The Military Service Law, in its second chapter, defines the composition of the armed forces as a regular military body composed of officers, soldiers, and other members of the forces⁽³¹⁾. Syria is divided into five military zones: the southern region, which includes Damascus, Rural Damascus, Suweida, Daraa, and Quneitra, the central region, which includes Hama and Homs, the coastal area, which includes Latakia and Tartous, the northern region, which includes Aleppo and Idlib, and the eastern region, which includes Deir Ezzor, Raqqa, and Hasaka⁽³²⁾.

At the top of the organizational pyramid is the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces which is the is the headquarters of the Commander in Chief of the Army and the Armed Forces, followed by the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff of the Army and Armed Forces, as follows:

The Ministry of Defense consists of: Registrar and Records Office, Spokesperson, Office of the Minister, Office of Advisors (International Relations Adviser, Logistics Adviser, Technology Advisor, Legal Advisor, Human Resources Adviser), Institutions, Administrations, and Offices (Veterans Association, Financial Administration, Military Insurance Association, Military Social Association, Martyr's Affairs Office, Military Territory Administration, Production Administration, Military Works Administration, Military Barracks Administration, the Blood, Medical, and Production Transport Administration, and the Military Construction Implementation Corporation).

The General Staff of the Army and Armed Forces consists of: the Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Affairs, Deputy Chief of

⁽³⁰⁾ For more see Bashir Zein al-Abedin: "Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000" Critical Study, Dar al-Jabiya, First Edition 2008, pp. 465- 479.

⁽³¹⁾ Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2007, which includes the Mandatory Military Service Law - website of the People's Assembly: <http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=201&nid=4921>.

⁽³²⁾ Ministry of Defense Website: <http://www.mod.gov.sy/index.php>.

Staff for Planning Affairs, Deputy Chief of Staff for Training Affairs, Deputy Chief of Staff for Security Affairs, Deputy Chief of Staff for Artillery and Missile Affairs, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Staff for Administration Affairs, Office of the Chief of Staff, Director of the Office of the Chief of Staff⁽³³⁾.

The committees, branches, and subsidiary forces consist of:

1. **Organization Department** (Services branch, Administration and Organization Branch, Mobilization Branch, Planning and Marketing Branch, Rehabilitation Branch, Clubs and Events Branch, Judge and Control Branch).
2. **Operations Committee** (Planning Administration, Strategic Planning Administration, Operations Planning Committee).
3. **Training Committee** (Administration of Classes, Educational Facilities Administration, Physical Fitness Administration).
4. **Artillery and Missiles Committee** (Rockets Administration, M/D Artillery Forces).
5. **Armed Forces Logistics Authority** (Medical Services Administration, Appointment Administration, Fuel Administration, Mission Administration, Transport Administration).
6. **Military Intelligence Directorate:** (Officers Department, Soldier's Department, Technical Communications Department, Reconnaissance Department, Administrative Department, Foreign Department).
7. **Inspection Committee:** (Forces Administrations, Reserve Forces Administration, Technical Affairs Department, Planning Department Naval Forces Department).
8. **Independent Administrations:** (Judicial Administration, Military Police Administration, Officer Affairs Administration, Reconnaissance Administration, Automation and Control Administration, Measurements and Weights Administration, Political Administration, Engineer's Administration, Armament Administration, Military Records Administration, Signals Administration, Mobilization Administration, Chemical Administration, Electronic Warfare Administration, General recruitment Administration, Civil Defense Administration, Military

⁽³³⁾ The Chief of Staff may increase or decrease the number of deputies as he wishes, as may be required.

Engineering Academy, Vehicle Administration, and Higher Military Academy).

The combat forces and formations consist of⁽³⁴⁾:

1. **Ground forces**, consisting of special units, reserve brigades, border guards, Republican Guard forces (defense line brigades, and the corps and divisions).
2. **Naval forces:** Commander of Naval Forces, Deputy Commander of Naval Forces, Chief of Naval Forces Staff. Consists of Sections and Branches: Automation Department, Technical Department, Finance and Budget Department, Finance and Payrolls Department, Studies Department, Signals Department, Armament Department, Artillery and Missile Department, Underwater Weapons Branch, Chemistry Department, Reconnaissance Department, Air Defense Department, Physical Fitness Department, Moral Guidance Department, Electronic Warfare Department, Marine Technical Affairs Department, Sailing Department, Navigation Department, Auditing Department, Training Department, Operations Department, Organization Department, Marine Construction Department, Documentation Department. There were also combat formations and installations such as the Naval College and a driving center.
3. **Air Force and Air Defense Forces:** Commander of Air Force and Air Defense, Deputy Air Force Commander, Deputy Air Defense Commander, The Air Force Chief of Staff which includes Air Intelligence Directorate and the following administrative departments: Department of Management, Department of Operations, Air Defense Department, Training Department, Aviation Logistics Management Department, Aviation Engineering Department. Additionally, there are combat formations made up of divisions and brigades, and independent branches including: Morale Department, Computer Department, Chemistry Department, Artillery Department, Sailing Department, Navigation Department, Aircraft Department, Inspection Department,

⁽³⁴⁾ The detailed organizational structure of the combat corps, divisions, brigades, regiments and their deployments but is not the topic of this report. This report focuses on the organizational framework and cohesion and its most important transformations without entering into competencies and the nature of combat tasks.

Officers Affairs Department, Explosives Department, Financial Department.

4. **The Popular Army** is composed of branches and sections including the Organization Branch, the Training Branch, the Technical Affairs Branch, the Administrative Branch, the Moral Guidance Branch, the Lookout Branch, the Signal Branch, the Physical Fitness Branch, the Finance Section, the coded communications section, and also includes a number of combat regiments and platoons.

The Syrian armed forces experienced changes in the organizational structure as a result of its military operations and the Russian and Iranian interventions. These can be summarized as follows:

First: Changes due to the combat operations:

During this period the regime used the military to suppress the Syrian revolution, slowly evolving towards the use of violence and weapons. The regime adopted a strategy of compartmentalizing its forces. Instead of deploying homogenous units, the regime would gather troops from several different units and send them to a specific station. This led to dysfunction and disorganization as defections increased, the opposition grew stronger, and the Free Syrian Army arose and organized. These forces caused the regime severe setbacks with the loss of significant geographical territory as well as huge losses in equipment through combat, defections, or destruction.

At each stage of the conflict, signs of weakness appeared in the army's performance, which eventually saw the army losing entire units or a majority of a single unit. This forced the military to regroup and combine the remaining disconnected parts of various regiments, brigades, and battalions. The least affected were the Naval forces since they did not get involved in the combat of the conflict for a long time.

These mergers brought about new formations in the Syrian military, after they were deployed to away from their original headquarters. They were dispersed without a strategic plan and in some cases were deployed on missions that were different from what they had prepared for (such as a war with Israel). Some of these units were also lost. There is also the issue of the foreign intervention by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Forces and Lebanese

Hezbollah that imposed themselves as the de facto commanders of regular units. In some cases, regime officers were acting only as guides for the Iranian and Lebanese officers.

Later, the 8th Division was formed from a number of forces in Hama and brigades the 9th and 11th Divisions, including the 33rd Tank Brigade, 47th Tank Brigade, 87th Brigade. The 33rd Brigade was part of the 9th Division while the 47th and 87th Brigades were part of the 11th Division. The following table shows a number of military units that were almost completely destroyed and remained only in papers records:

Military Unit	Affiliation	Headquarters	Area of Operation	Change
112th Mega Brigade	5th Division	Nawa, Daraa	Nawa	Taken over by opposition forces.
78th Tank Brigade	7th Division	Qatana, Rural Damascus	Rural Damascus	Destroyed by opposition forces.
34th Tank Brigade	9th Division	Al-Masmiyeh, Daraa	Daraa	Taken over by opposition forces.
52nd Tank Brigade	9th Division	AAI-Hirak, Daraa	Daraa	Taken over by opposition forces.
38th Air Defense Brigade	24th Division	SSaida, Daraa	Daraa	Taken over by opposition forces.
35th Regiment	15th Division	Damascus Road	Jisr al Shughoor, Idlib	Fully destroyed by opposition forces.
61st Brigade (Hayta)	Independent	Sheikh Saad, Daraa	Daraa	Taken over by opposition forces
57th Tank Brigade	1st Division	Al-Kisweh	Anadan - Azaz	Destroyed by opposition forces
76th Tank Brigade	1st Division	Al-Harjala, Rural Damascus	Brick Factory	Destroyed by opposition forces
85th Mega Brigade	10th Division	Qatana, Rural Damascus	Ariha - Jisr al Shughoor	Destroyed by opposition forces
17th Division	Independent	Raqqa	Raqqa / Hasaka / Deir Ezzor	Taken over by ISIS, just as the opposition forces were on the brink of invading.

Second: Transformations resulting from the Russian intervention

The Russian intervention in September 2015 had significant impacts on the conflict in Syria, making it the most influential factor in the complicated balance of power in the fighting. Russia is the biggest beneficiary of its military presence in Syria, which was preceded by its significant political support for the regime. Russia pursued such policies for a number of reasons including its desire to make a strong return to the global political arena. The Syrian war also gave Russia an opportunity to test its weapons systems in real combat. Russian arms factories even started producing what it referred to as the Syrian versions of its weapons. Furthermore, Russia was able to reach long-term agreements with the Syrian regime regarding Hmeimim Military Airport and the Tartous base, control of the phosphate mines, entry into the oil sector, and access into Syrian state institutions, especially the military. Russian influence reached a level where the Russians demanded specific officer appointments and amendments to laws related to the military, in addition to having direct oversight over the restructuring of the army and the armed forces.

Only a week after the Russian intervention, General Ali Abdullah Ayoub announced the establishment of the 4th Assault Corps on 8 October 2015. This declaration carried many indicators, especially after the near collapse of the regime forces in the battles in Idlib governorate, which almost resulted in the regime losing control of the entire province. It was preceded by a Russian announcement of preparations for their military intervention. The Russians tried to include the best military units in this new corps.

After the regime took control of the city of Aleppo, the 30th Republican Guard Division was created, gathering all of the forces in the city, and attached to the Republican Guards. It should be noted that the Republican Guard is composed of brigades and not divisions. Subsequently, Russia created the 5th Corps in order to recruit the largest number of volunteers to join its project.

Following a series of regime military “victories,” and the increase in Russian penetration into military divisions and departments, the impact of its intervention became clearer. First, the Administrative Branch merged with

the Officer Affairs Branch and the new office was renamed Human Resources Administration⁽³⁵⁾.

Then the 1st Division was restructured from a tank division to a mechanized division. The 1st Division was made up of three tank brigades, a mechanized brigade, and an artillery regiment just as all tank divisions are organized. After the restructuring of the 1st Division into a mechanized division, it was decided to convert two of the tank brigades into mechanized brigades and retaining a tank Battalion in each of the mechanized brigades. The remaining tank brigade was allowed to remain a tank brigade after integrating the necessary equipment from the other two brigades. Excess tanks would be transferred out of the division. This was confirmed by members of the 1st Mechanized Division itself⁽³⁶⁾. The Russian plan is expected to include the restructuring of the 3rd Division and the rest of the other armored divisions⁽³⁷⁾. This plan will increase the number of mechanized divisions at the expense of the armored divisions, making the military closer to a security force instead of a traditional army combat force.

Third: Changes resulting from the Iranian intervention

The nature of the Iranian intervention differed from the Russian intervention in that the Iranians built military bodies outside the structures of the Syrian military, such as the National Defense Forces and sectarian militias, and only assisted with training and support of troops on the ground. The translation of the book "Letters of Fish" by the Iranian writer Kalaal Babaye, published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, includes testimony from Hussein Hamdani⁽³⁸⁾, who said: "Syrian security officials clearly opposed the interference of the Iranians in the army. They told us: 'we just want your material support.' But we said to them 'we want to give you the experience of eight years of war and the experience of dealing with crises and riots. The enemy that plotted this conspiracy against your country is the same one, who

⁽³⁵⁾ Leaks ... Assad begins restructuring the army with Russian orders - Link Zaman al Wasl, : <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/88519/>

⁽³⁶⁾ Previous source.

⁽³⁷⁾ Previous source.

⁽³⁸⁾ Letters From Fish, Memoirs of General Hamdani: Iranian Patronage over Syria, https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/document_94477B76.pdf

has plotted against us,' and finally we persuaded the Syrians to allow us to start training the troops."

Even from a legal perspective, the Iranian intervention was not the same as the official Russian reaction. Iran demanded that the status of the National Defense Forces be legally settled and merged into the army. Iran later worked to establish forces loyal to it, such as Local Defense Forces and tribal resistance. It also managed to include a number of its militias into regular army forces, such as the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas militia which became part of the Republican Guard, and the Imam Hussein militia, which joined the 4th Division.

Conclusions

- This report attempted to identify the most important laws and regulations governing the work of the military establishment, and to follow their evolution and amendments from the date of issuance until the last modification. It also looked at how the military leadership used these laws after the start of the Syrian revolution to recruit soldiers that would ensure the regime's continuity through absolute loyalty to the leadership.
- The unexpected onset of military operations across the entire territory of the Syrian Arab Republic against an internal rebellion or a popular revolution led to a significant increase in the pace of amendments to the laws governing the military establishment, in order to cover gaps in those laws.
- Some laws were ignored in favor of custom and tradition. This was reflected in the promotion and evaluation of officers and soldiers on the basis of sectarianism and regionalism, in addition to the military leadership's decision to keep officers in active duty despite their service being fulfilled due to their need for these officers due to the years of continuous military operations.
- In order to foster loyalty among the military ranks and to keep them in active duty service, the regime raised salaries as a cost of living stipend, under the pretext of the rising cost of living due to the war. Later on, the amount was paid as part of the basic military salary.

- The regime's leadership focused its attention on the subject of pensions, entitlements, disability determination and compensations rates, due to the increased level of military operations. The regime also aimed to reward those remaining in the ranks of the regime's forces by ensuring that their future or the future of their loved ones was guaranteed by law.
- A partial mobilization was initiated in secret as a result of the events taking place in the country after 2011. A new mobilization law was issued at the end of 2011, which facilitated the regime's efforts to distribute the mobilization tasks to all state institutions and departments. The previous law on mobilization had been issued in 2004.
- The Penal Code and the Code of Military Trials and Procedures Law, promulgated in 1950, remains the law in force in the administration of military justice. Unlike the efforts of the regime in modernizing and promulgating other new laws, this law was instead followed by many amendments and was not replaced, unlike the case of other laws such as the Military Service Law, the Mandatory Military Service Law, and the Pension law.
- The Penal Code and the Code of Military Courts impose a large number of penalties for civilians in the event of crimes against the army and the armed forces, while they do not specify sentences for crimes committed by military and armed forces personnel against civilians, public property, or infrastructure. Crimes not covered under this law are dealt with under the general penal code.
- The lack of a reliable source is a challenge in determining the organizational structure of the army necessitated relying on open source research and field interviews with officers and personnel.
- In monitoring changes in the organizational structure of the military structure as a result of the military operations from 2011 until the present time, this report highlighted the most important and prominent formations of the military that cease to exist or have changed its size and function as a result of changes in the balance of power and a decreased level of armament.

- Assessing changes that took place within the organizational structure of the army and armed forces is essential in any peace building process, especially determining the level of impact to interferences by the Russian army in the internal mechanism and structures.

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