

**Field studies: the impact of the Syrian
conflict on society**

The Conflict in the Town of Salamiyah

A Model for the Formation of ‘Mafias’ in Syria

Garib Mirza – Humam al-Khateeb



Democratic Republic Studies Center

www.drsc-sy.org



September – 2015

Field studies: the impact of the Syrian conflict on society

**The Conflict in the Town of Salamiyah
A Model for the Formation of 'Mafias' in Syria**

Garib Mirza - Humam al-Khateeb

Translated by

Ullin Hope

Reviewed by

Tarek Aziza

Supervised by

Yousif Faker Al Deen

Guidance

Dr. Youssef Salama

Mr. Anwar al-Bunni

Cover image:

Ash-Shuhoud (The Witnesses) a sculpture by the artist Mahmoud al-Saadi

All rights reserved - Democratic Republic Studies Center www.drsc-sy.org

September - 2015

Preface.....	4
Executive Summary	4
This paper aims to achieve the following:.....	7
Chapter 1	10
Introduction.....	10
The protest movement	11
Current living conditions	14
Defining Salamiyah’s crisis	17
Crisis profiteers, the war economy and the dominance of ‘the outlaws’ ⁽¹⁾	17
1. The smuggling of fuel on to the black market.....	18
2. Kidnapping.....	18
3. Other violations.....	20
Types of violation.....	20
Chapter 2	22
Why don’t the townsfolk volunteer in the militias to repulse ISIS and armed Islamist groups like Jabhat al -Nusra?	22
From the first wave of public outcry to the crisis of the upturned cup - a brief history.....	25
The current crisis.....	27
Acts of a mafia-like nature	29
The aftereffects of ‘mafia’ formation in Salamiyah.....	33
The response of the community.....	33
Uprising of Salamiyah’s Youth	36
The ‘state’s’ relationship with the community during the ‘mafia’ crisis.....	41
The consequences of the ‘state’s’ role in the crisis	43
The ‘mafia’s’ response to the community, and to the state/ regime	44
Chapter 3	45
The strategies of the regime, the ‘mafia’ and Salamiyah’s community.....	45
The community’s ‘strategy’ for the current crisis	46
The strategy of the ‘mafia’	49
The regime’s strategy towards the ‘mafia’.....	51
Recommendations.....	58
Chapter 4: Appendixes	59
Appendix 1 - types of violations committed between June and September 2015	59
Appendix 2: semi-official military formations and mafia gangs	66

Preface

Executive Summary

This report deals with the present situation in the Ismaili majority town of Salamiyah⁽¹⁾ four years on from the outbreak of the crisis currently raging in Syria. It is an attempt to understand the changes that have beset the town, the struggles that are taking place in it and the dangers it faces. The paper focuses on how worn out the town has become, what civil peace remains in a community at risk of exploding, and the relationship between that community and its surroundings. It draws on previous reports by the Democratic Republic Studies Center (DRSC), which provide insights in to the effect the Syrian conflict has had on society. Because of the studied area's particular geographic, demographic and sectarian character, the questions raised in the paper have provided new insights into this issue.

Salamiyah is located in central Syria and along with most of the surrounding countryside it is completely under the control of regime forces and semi-regular pro-regime forces. The front in the area has remained quiet generally speaking, and especially over the past two years, despite the close proximity of armed opposition groups. In the past, these groups were Free Syrian Army (FSA) brigades but more recently they have been supplanted by Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra. The latter is now the only military force in the areas that neighbor Salamiyah to the west. The Islamic State (ISIS) also controls several nearby villages and some of its positions are no more than 10 kilometers away from the town.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, two phenomena have come to define the essential features of unrest in the town:

Firstly, a large number of locals took part in anti-regime demonstrations from an early stage. This contradicted regime rhetoric: a minority group had rebelled against it, causing its claim that it was a 'protector of minorities' to fall apart.

1- Ismailis in Syria are predominantly based in Salamiya, villages on the Khawabi River and the town of Masyaf. Their total numbers come to 400 thousand people and their affairs are organized by the National Ismaili Council, which in turn, comes under the authority of the 49th Ismaili Imam. The official position of the Ismaili council is that no-one should bear arms on behalf of any side and that there should be action to restore peace to the country (according to witnesses from Salamiya.)

Secondly, residents of the town have been kidnapped and attacked by armed regime supporters; that is, the people in control of the National Defense Forces (NDF) and the network connected to those people.

With the decline of the first phenomenon, the second one has become ever more deeply entrenched and the people responsible for it have openly established a war economy.

The second phenomenon has now become a crisis. For example, at a certain point the town was seeing between one and three kidnappings or assaults per week. For this reason, our paper focuses on researching the development of this 'mafia' network over the past two years and the resulting deadlock, which has manifested itself for all to see in recent months.

The paper comes at the same time as similar events elsewhere in the country. At a demonstration in the city of Latakia, Alawites called for the execution of Suleiman al-Assad⁽²⁾, a son of the ruling family and the leader of one of the 'mafias' protecting the Syrian regime. Shortly after the demonstration their demands were circumvented and Suleiman al-Assad was released. Notwithstanding all the implications⁽³⁾ of this demonstration at this time and what its being circumvented indicates with regard to the regime's present state, its relationship with the 'mafias' that help protect it and its relationship with what is widely perceived to be 'the part of the public that clings to it most,' the situation in the town of Salamiyah, through what distinguishes it from the situation in Latakia, adds new perspectives. Consequently, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the regime's complex relationship with the 'minorities' it claims to protect and the strategies connected to this. It also sheds new light how the various sections of Salamiyah's community have reacted to the conduct of a network of armed individuals who belong to the NDF and analyses the strategy of

2- See, Rateb Sha'bo: After the last crime of Suleiman Al Assad in Latakia.. The Syrian loyalists cross a red line.. The Syrian regime will lose anyway, DRSC, 13/08/2015. <http://drsc-sy.org/en/after-the-last-crime-of-suleiman-al-assad-in-latakia/>

3- Ibid.

the NDF itself, which we have concluded has made considerable headway in the process towards becoming a 'mafia.'

We have found that, today, the 'crisis' has reached a critical point; that is, the town is facing a potentially dangerous trend to which no alternative will be found unless there is a fundamental change to the factors at the base of the Syrian conflict as a whole. In spite of this, we have tried as much as we are able to forecast the immediate future and the possibilities it holds.

The crisis has arrived at this critical point because the open confrontation between the townsfolk and what we have termed the 'mafias' has reached an unprecedented level. The 'mafia' has imposed an attrition-based dominance that is causing an increase in emigration among locals (along with other factors of course), loss of security, the sale of real estate and the frustration of development projects, among other things. What this means is that Salamiyah's residents are being made to pay the price of the war in Syria by 'the mafia,' when they had feared they would be made to pay that price by Islamist extremists.

At present, the 'Salamiyah community' finds itself restricted, if not completely helpless, with regard to putting an end to the 'mafia.' With each new violation, the dominance of the 'mafia' increases and the 'standing' of the community's various representing bodies declines. As for the 'state,' in spite of the promises it has made, its failure to contain what it describes as 'outlaws' has continued. This has led to a growing conviction among regime supporters and people who don't usually voice their dissatisfaction that it is either incapable of combatting the 'mafia' or doesn't want to.

For this reason, one of the people from the town who we interviewed calls the current crisis "the crisis of the upturned cup," and it is this term that we have chosen to describe the situation:

An upturned cup, which stands on a table and contains slowly leaking water, is held by three parties: the community, the 'regime' and the 'mafia.' Each one of them seeks to attain the contents (to control interests) and the only way this can happen is if the table itself is turned upside down; that is, the occurrence of a

fundamental change in the rules of the current conflict within the town and within Syria. So, the three parties continue in a kind of equilibrium to reduce the 'leakage' of the water (the interests), as much possible, from the upturned cup. None of them can possess their own 'interest' by themselves because the interests of the three parties are at odds. Either the water will escape once and for all, meaning that the rules of the conflict will undergo a fundamental change as a natural accumulative result of the crisis (a large demographic change in the town for example) or the glass will be set upright once again; that is, by the strategy of one of the sides claiming victory – through intentional artificial means rather than natural spontaneous means – and imposing what serves its interests. In both cases a crushing defeat will be dealt to one or two of these parties, either through an effective intentional act or spontaneously as a natural result of the direction in which things are moving. The only thing these parties have in common in Salamiyah is tension and conflict. The 'natural social condition' of a shared and balanced socio-civil interest within a 'healthy' state does not exist or perhaps it can no longer exist among the current parties after the turn matters have taken.

It is this situation that we have tried, as much as we are able, to approach in all its depth. Using the means available to us, we have tried to deduce and explain the regime's strategy⁽⁴⁾ in this period and forecast what shape it will take in the future.

This paper aims to achieve the following:

1. To document the various violations that have taken place since June 2015, the parties that committed them and the response of the community;
2. To analyze and describe the nature of the relationship between the authorities and the local community in Salamiyah;
3. To explore the nature of the *shabiha* or semi-regular armed committees, their transformation in to 'mafias,' and their characteristics and defining

4- See: The Authority of Authoritarianism Strategy Versus the Syrian Revolution, various authors, DRSC, 12/10/2013 <http://cutt.us/EJgGn>

features. We should note here that the formation of predatory armed gangs in collapsing states or those suffering from civil wars is a near certitude. We have not addressed the connection of the gangs in the town, some of which have become 'mafias,' with the presence of 'foreign Shiite militias,' including Hezbollah, as that was the subject of study published by the DRSC in booklet form⁽⁵⁾.

4. To describe and analyze the 'crisis' the town is witnessing;
5. To forecast likely future scenarios; and
6. To provide recommendations and suggestions.

We have employed the descriptive-analytical method and used the following tools in the report:

1. Observation: Events on the ground were monitored through our many partners in the area; and
2. Interviews: Testimonies were taken from intellectuals and activists who follow the situation in the town and have taken part in the local movement.

We wish to note that our use of the term 'mafia' here is in line with the commonly understood notion of gangs that carry out illegal acts, have their own internal customs and policies, and engage in organized activity. It is within this general understanding that we have built our concept; that is, we are talking about a gang that meets the following criteria:

1. It engages in criminal activity for financial gain;
2. It engages in organized activity within an organized framework and intends to continue in this manner;
3. It has a fundamentally family-based structure; and
4. It operates in a manner that is neither hidden nor clearly visible; which means it leaves a clear impression but no conclusive evidence.

5- See: Warlord's Era and Reviving of Protectorates and Tutelages, Work Team, DRSC, 16/11/2015 <http://drsc-sy.org/en/shiite-militia/>

Syria saw a structure like this during the reign of Hafez al-Assad when the infamous shabiha gang took shape in the coastal region. It is this gang that inspired the term '*shabiha*,' which some Syrians now apply to the semi-regular forces that support Bashar Al-Assad. The gang used to engage in smuggling, kidnapping, drug dealing, prostitution and other illicit activities, and it had a very bad reputation in the coastal region as well as the rest of Syria.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Although the majority of Salamiyah's inhabitants are Ismailis and the town is considered an Ismaili stronghold historically and symbolically, it is also home to an obvious confessional mix. There are Sunni inhabitants who were originally Ismailis or came from other areas as well as Alawites who lived in the surrounding villages and moved in to the town. Furthermore, Salamiyah lies on the edge of a semi-desert region where Bedouin villages have been established. There are also a small number of Twelver Shiites, who either converted to Shiite Islam in recent years or were Shiites originally and came from villages in Homs Governorate – like the Dom family, which came to Salamiyah from a Homs Governorate village.

Within this religious framework, we should also mention the sectarian strife that played out between Syrian Alawites and Ismailis⁽⁶⁾ at the beginning of the last century and remains alive in the community's collective memory. During that period, a large wave of Ismailis emigrated to Salamiyah from villages around Masyaf, Qadmous and Tartous because of a bout of unrest between the two sects. As well as this, problems related to the economic class struggle led some Ismailis to embrace the Sunni confession so that they would be able to compete with Ismaili feudal lords. This group went on to form villages in the countryside around Salamiyah like Hamada Omar⁷. Notwithstanding the above, it is well known that within the same family in the town one can find an Ismaili, a Twelver Shiite and a Sunni. Previously, there was no sectarian tension in the town. All aspects of life were marked by coexistence and cooperation. However, the sensitivities referred to above had not been forgotten. The townsfolk had simply reached a mutually agreement to ignore and avoid them.

6- For more information on the relationship between Ismailis and other Syrians, see Farhad Daftary's *A Modern History of the Ismailis*, published by I. B. Tauris in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

7 Well-known Baathist officer Abd al-Karim al-Jundi, who was part of Salah al-Jadid's anti-Hafez al-Assad wing, has been accused of holding this bias against the Ismaili sect's former feudal lords. Jundi, who played a key role in establishing the Department of State Security and the National Security Bureau, committed suicide in 1969 when it became obvious that Salah Jadid's wing would be defeated by Hafez al-Assad. Although he was born in Salamiyah, Jundi was a Sunni, not an Ismaili as many people think, and many members of the sect from the area treated him as an inciter of anti-Ismaili sentiment.

Salamiyah is also distinguished by the fact that many of its residents have been members of the Baath Party, the Syrian Communist Party and the factions in to which it split, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. In the eighties and nineties, a large number of people from the town were held as political prisoners and since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, many of these individuals have played a prominent role in leading and directing protests. Children of these individuals who were influenced by them have also taken part. However, it should also be pointed out that a large number of young people who are not involved in politics have made their own contribution.

Economically speaking, the town is not well off. It has a high number of government employees and has suffered from water shortages and poor services for many years. It has also seen a fuel and heating crisis in the last two years. According to our witnesses, this has been felt most acutely since the regime banned firewood deliveries from the coastal region.

The protest movement

From March 2011, the town participated in the protest movement sweeping across Syria. Like the ones that took place in other minority regions, the demonstrations in Salamiyah were met with light repression at first. As much as possible, the regime refrained from killing people during demonstrations in order to avoid the kind of social reactions that result from such actions. Since mid-2013, it has pursued the strategy of throwing activists in prison and torturing them to death. Residents of the town from various backgrounds have taken part in the protests, and played an important role in assisting displaced persons from other areas – especially the city of Hama – who have lived under siege and been subjected to shelling⁽⁸⁾.

In the Syrian revolution's first phase and until just before the proliferation of weapons, the regime was unable to mobilize large numbers of its supporters to

8- Sabr Darwish, Syrians and the Tribulation of Emigration... The Relation between people of Salamiyah and the forcible emigrants, DRSC 9 October 2014. <http://drsc-sy.org/en/syrians-and-the-tribulation-of-emigration/>

counter the demonstrations in the town calling for its ouster. In the best of cases – during that phase – it managed to rally a few hundred supporters (most of them school students) while by the lowest estimations the number of demonstrators protesting against it reached 15 thousand. It should be noted at this point that in April 2011 the local Baath Party branch asked a number of youths from the Alawite villages around the town to come to Salamiyah and “defend the regime.” This reawakened Alawite-Ismaili tensions that people had previously been trying to forget.

The only armed opposition to take shape in Salamiyah was modest in terms of its numbers and equipment. Moreover, its appearance came at a late stage in comparison to the formation of the armed opposition in Syria as a whole and it had no presence inside the town. Eventually, Salamiyah’s armed ceased to exist with the arrest and dis-armament of ‘Abu Mansour’ and his brigade⁽⁹⁾ by Jabhat al-Nusra at the beginning of 2015.

Generally speaking, the armed opposition gave no support to the militants that emerged from Salamiyah. The main reason for this was sectarian – they were Ismailis – and consequently the already negligible strength of their formations diminished even further⁽¹⁰⁾.

As a result, Sunni-Ismaili tension awoke in certain circles. However, the fact that many displaced Sunnis and Salamiyah’s original Sunni residents continue to live in peace in the town shows that this has not yet reached the level of sectarian unrest. Tension has been increased by current Islamist rhetoric, the arrival of ISIS on the town’s outskirts, and the several occasions when shelling by rebel factions that pledge allegiance to ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra has led to (exclusively) civilian casualties. The local coordination committee in the neighboring village of Izz al-

9- The Salamiya Martyrs Brigade was disbanded and its members arrested by Jabhat al-Nusra for sectarian reasons, despite the fact that the group put national identity before sectarian affiliation. The patriotic, civil and democratic discourse in the Salamiya Martyrs’ Brigade’s founding statement is documented by the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKCMfIWCHMQ>

10 Sectarian discrimination has not been limited to armed opposition groups. At the beginning of this year, four peaceful activists were killed as they tried to reach Turkey through an area controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra. This means that the last escape route for individuals wanted by the regime or people ordered to sign up for military service is now either dangerous or closed entirely, as they cannot leave via Lebanon or Iraq.

Deen (which is controlled by its Na'im clan Bedouin residents) has praised each of these attacks only to withdraw its praise after noticing that the operations anger cause an equal amount of anger on both sides of the pro-regime anti-regime divide.

Consequently, a clear barrier has formed separating the vast majority of Syria's various armed opposition groups – which loudly proclaim their 'Sunni' identity – from the opposition in Salamiyah and its popular support base. The latter has been excluded and isolated from all military and even political opposition groups, which has in effect, caused a tight blockade on the town. Eventually, an incident in which four activists from Salamiyah were killed in rebel held territory led to the near complete closure of last escape route for army conscripts and people in danger of being detained, leaving locals under even greater pressure than before.

However, before the aforementioned disassociation many people had already become disenchanted with the opposition. Members of the younger generation who participated in anti-regime protests from the word go and risked death under torture in the regime's prisons by contributing to relief efforts stopped playing an active role in these activities for reasons related to corruption⁽¹¹⁾. Now most of them have chosen emigration, which has added to the opposition's decline in the town. Today all that remains of it is a few barely active Facebook pages, despite the fact that the situation in the town has become critical.

Due to the difficulty of carrying out a field survey or interviewing people on a large scale we cannot provide a precise or conclusive picture of public opinion. However, we can provide a general picture supported by testimonies. Over the past two years the gray, neutral section of society that considers the regime and the opposition to be "as bad as each other" has grown. As well as this, support for the regime has diversified with the arrival on the scene of the regime's 'new' supporters, who tend to view it as being better than the opposition but make a clear exception of the shabiha from this rule. Even the regime's most fervent

11- The researcher met with a number of these individuals. Y told us that he donated the salary allocated to him by the opposition to displaced persons only to find out later that the money was being stolen and hadn't reached anyone. He was also promised a Kalashnikov but the amount of ammunition provided with it when it arrived was minimal. He added that he had seen initiatives fail as a result of woefully poor administration.

Baathist supporters have begun to condemn the actions of the *shabiha* because of their involvement (sometimes openly) in violations against the town's inhabitants who just two years ago used to see them as protectors and heroes.

In a shifting reality where it is impossible to view the present as a set form, the situation has changed almost completely; therefore, in our report, we have tried to draw those defining features of it that are most likely to remain stable.

Current living conditions

People in the town and in the surrounding countryside areas are facing the following difficulties:

1. **Poverty and unemployment:** Many of the people now living in Salamiyah were forced to come to the town from other parts of Syria in successive waves. There have been various reasons for this, including the capture of certain areas where they had lived for a long time by Islamist brigades (Like, Ar-Raqqa/Tabaqa, and the neighborhoods of Jobar and Adra Ummaliya in Damascus...) This has caused the town's work force to grow (doctors, pharmacists and laborers, etc.) A simultaneous lack of resources and jobs has led to rising prices and an increase in unemployment.
2. **Water and electricity crisis:** The town is suffering from a severe lack of water. Locals are now forced to buy water at extortionate prices, with the cost of filling up an average sized water tank (500 L) reaching 1000 Syrian pounds. As for electricity, for the last two years it has been cut off for an average of 17 hours per-day.
3. **Fuel crisis:** Gas stations in Salamiyah have been accused of conspiring with the district chief to steal fuel and sell it on the black market. People have also complained that Salamiyah's fuel allowance is insufficient. The fuel crisis has played a large role in triggering the current crisis in Salamiyah and will explore this issue later in the report.



Fig 1.

A list of complaints put forward by a popular Facebook page, in which an official from Masyaf is accused of sending Salamiyah's diesel allocation to his hometown.

Morning news

A brief bulletin on the situation in the town of Salamiyah:

- Gasoline has disappeared from the town and it costs 375 on the black market.
- Diesel has disappeared leaving the town's residents to wait for a harsh winter. Furthermore, there is news that Masyaf has taken Salamiyah's allocation because the manager of Sadcop, a Masyaf resident, has deprived Salamiyah of diesel and our town's officials have been bribed with the diesel they need.
- Water comes to one area every 12 days.
- Electricity is very bad. There is long and unfair rationing with

repeated blackouts and pre-arranged excuses.

-There has been an ongoing series of kidnappings in the town.

The most recent victim was a trader from the Towqan family.

-Many people whose cars have tinted windows have not abided by the decree for the removal of tinting. Their excuse is that they are a policing authority that protects citizens, despite the fact that they were the ones accused of kidnapping people in the first place. Meanwhile, citizens who have not been accused of kidnapping and have no-one to protect them are being bullied.

-Insanely high market prices for goods and medicine while buying power is virtually non-existent.

-The cash machines in Salamiyah are a humiliation to citizens and the elderly but no-one is listening.

Citizens have grown tired from complaining about all of the above and everything that citizens lack or are deprived of is available to officials or people with connections.

Please use the following hashtag in your posts and comments and we will present what gets published to a big media outlet.

#Salamiyah_ilik_allah (Salamiyah, all you have is god.)

4. Military service: A large number of the town's residents have been called up for mandatory military service or reserve duty. According to some estimations, there are 20,000 such people. At the moment, a large number of them are either fleeing the country or staying in hiding inside the town. If a state employee is called up for mandatory military service or reserve duty and they fail to join the army, their salary is stopped. We were told by several witnesses from inside the town that if these individuals do not continue to work they are dismissed. The regime has set up a kind of bargain, whereby instead of arresting the person who has been called up for military service or searching feverishly for them, their salary is cut off and they are forced to go to work. A number of people who have

alternative sources of income have accepted this bargain. Most others have chosen to emigrate.

5. Emigration and sale of property: Faced by considerable economic pressures and lack of security, increasing numbers of young people are resorting to emigration. They are being forced to sell the properties they have inherited from their parents over the years to secure the necessary sum, which comes to at least \$2,500 US (for this price the journey to Europe is completed by travelling through the Balkans on foot.) According to our witnesses, Aal Salama and other *shabiha* from the Alawite quarter are buying up these properties. As a result people are beginning to worry that the town's demographic makeup is at risk of being disturbed.

Defining Salamiyah's crisis

ISIS has a presence in areas bordering the town to the east and in April of this year it committed a massacre in the village of Mabuja, leaving painful memories that are still felt. Then there are the successive attacks launched by Jabhat al-Nusra from the west. However, *the current, acute problem in the town – the crisis – is not only connected this threat.* Despite the fact that the overall picture at the moment is one of animosity – towards ISIS obviously and also towards Jabhat al-Nusra; and despite the fact that only a very small minority see Jabhat al-Nusra (or even the Army of Conquest) as a force of liberation, failure to join the army, emigration, public outcry, anger and complaints and are not connected to the threat posed by these two groups.

Crisis profiteers, the war economy and the dominance of 'the outlaws'⁽¹²⁾

The situation in Salamiyah is no different to the situation in other towns, both those controlled by the regime and the opposition, where the sturdy foundations of a war economy have taken shape⁽¹³⁾.

12- 'Outlaws' is the term used by regime supporters to refer to the *shabiha*.

13- See: Rim Turkmani et al, Countering the logic of the war economy in Syria, London School of Economics and Political Science 30 - 7 - 2015 <http://www.securityintransition.org/publications/countering-the-logic-of-the-war-economy-in-syria-evidence-from-three-local-areas/>

See also: Jad el-Karim el-Jibaii, The effect of the war economy on social organizations (Arabic), DRSC, 01/09/2015

In Salamiyah, the following main types of war-economy activity can be found:

1. The smuggling of fuel on to the black market

The official price for one liter of diesel is approximately 130 Syrian pounds and the price for a liter of gasoline is 160. The price of both can be double that or more on the black market and ordinary citizens are being forced to buy them illicitly as they are not available at gas stations.



Fig 2: A man selling black-market fuel in Salamiyah.

This situation is angering the townsfolk, who have accused the district chief of selling fuel on the black market in cooperation with gas station owners.

2. Kidnapping

From the beginning of the revolution almost, kidnapping has been a prime source of worry for the townsfolk (at one point it was their only worry) and a source of profit and riches for the people responsible. Kidnappings have played the greatest role – and used to be *a concealed role* – in stirring up anger and tension among locals. Eventually, it pushed them to stage protests that were independent of any coordination with the opposition and permitted by the regime.

Kidnappings inside and outside the town began to take place at the beginning of the war, and generally speaking the finger was pointed at Bedouins living in nearby rural areas as well as criminals of unknown identity from inside the town. There is a great deal of evidence (not just accusations) that during this period certain Bedouin groups engaged in kidnapping and passed themselves off as FSA

brigades. Of all these groups, the Abu Hashish Gang was the most well-known in the Salamiyah area.

Usually, people were kidnapped from farms near the town or on the roads linking it to neighboring villages. The hostage would be released in one of two ways: either through the paying of a ransom or by the hostage's family kidnapping one person or more from the kidnapper's tribe. This step was taken after the kidnapper's identity was suspected or established to put pressure on them and force them to release the hostage.

Later on, when this profitable trade boomed, the kidnappings evolved, taking on a form that was cruder and more confrontational. They started to happen in broad daylight inside the town and new kidnappers appeared. These were people everyone knew and they went about their work in a near open manner. As for the Bedouin-populated rural areas, they had become something akin to military zone. As it has become impossible to kidnap people there, blaming the Bedouins is now completely out of the question.

The second period of kidnappings dates back to early 2013. From this time onwards, almost everyone gradually began to attribute responsibility for committing these acts to Aal Al-Salama⁽¹⁴⁾ and other '*shabiha*.'

Apart from starting to take place in broad daylight, the kidnappings had become bloodier: hostages were killed after the price for their release had been paid, sometimes brutally. This happened more than once in 2014, especially during the period when a local *shabiha* member called Ali Hamdan was still in the town (for more on Ali Hamdan see Appendix 1.)

Public outcry against the kidnappings escalated and everyone, even regime supporters, began openly using the names of the people responsible – all of whom were *shabiha*.

14- The Aal Salama family are relatives of Major General Adib Salama, the head of the Aleppo Branch of Syria's Airforce Intelligence Directorate. They are Alawites from the Dahr al-Maghr neighborhood in the south of the town and played a greater role than anyone else in arresting, killing and oppressing demonstrators.

At the time of writing, kidnapping remains a main cause of concern for Salamiyah residents and a source of great wealth for the kidnappers. Despite its big promises, the regime has done nothing, or perhaps it is unable or unwilling to do anything. According to some reports, during the period that preceded the second wave of public outcry in the town there were between 1 and 3 kidnappings per week. After that they became less frequent but did not cease altogether.

3. Other violations

After the kidnappings, violations of another kind started to occur in Salamiyah and it is these violations that were the direct cause of current severe 'crisis,' or rather, the current public outcry against these new violations. As for the kidnappings, they can be considered a latent and indirect cause. The lack of sufficient evidence has made it impossible to lodge a clear and conclusive accusation against the responsible parties, despite the fact that the town's residents know exactly who they are. These (other) violations have been brazenly committed in plain view of everyone. See Appendix 1, where we have listed them, starting from June 2015.

Types of violation

1) Seemingly natural violations: These violations take place between armed individuals in pro-regime militia formations. Their only cause is the kind of arrogance these individuals usually develop when they are not subject to legal accountability. These are people who come from an environment where poor education and poverty prevail – most of Salamiyah and the surrounding countryside, have long suffered from chronic neglect by the state. Before the uprising, many of them were seen as having been 'socially excluded.' Violations in this category include gunfire after traffic disputes, simple disagreements, drunkenness in cafes and other such situations.

2) Seemingly natural violations accompanied by domineering behavior: In this case the perpetrators are exclusively 'powerbroker *shabiha*'⁽¹⁵⁾ and party

15- 'Powerbroker *shabiha*' are members of semi-regular armed formations like the NDF, who enjoy greater influence than the security apparatuses and the army. The great majority of them are members of the Alawite sect and their strength comes from their connections with high ranking officers. Notably, most of them are from poor, marginalized social groups.

subjected to the violation is always the one or more of the town's ordinary residents. Type 2 violations are not caused by the factors that cause type 1 violations alone; they are the manifestation of an attempt to establish dominance, strike fear in to society and force it in to submission. An example of this occurred in the spring of 2014, when a *shabiha* member tried to return a mobile phone after buying it from a shop in the town. The shop owner refused to return the *shabiha* member's money so he left and came back with a group of his friends, one of whom, Ibrahim Al-Saleh was well-known for his criminal behavior (and was later killed by another *shabiha* member.) Al-Saleh proceeded to hit the shopkeeper over the head with the butt of his handgun, causing him to pass out. He then walked nonchalantly out of the shop. This incident triggered the first wave of public outcry in the town, which we shall return to later. Another example of type 2 violations, took place in Mabuja, where armed elements from Sabboura stormed in to a gas station, fired in the air and shouted insults at people (see Appendix 1.)

Importantly, these situations have become a part of daily life, and according to our interviews with a large number of young people from the town, they are one of the main drivers of emigration.

3) - Violations committed solely to enforce dominance: The perpetrator in such cases is always one of the 'powerbroker *shabiha*.' The victim is both society *and the state* in all its various forms, whether this means members of the security forces, state institutions, official decrees or anything that benefits society as a whole. It should be taken in to consideration here that the state is always the loser in these cases, and up until now, its standing has not been restored in any shape or form. One example of a type 3 violation is what happened when Samir Al-Zarif was let out of jail. Al-Zarif, who the townsfolk had accused of involvement in kidnapping and murder, was only detained by the state for a short period, despite the community's certainty that he was guilty. Upon his release, his comrades celebrated by shooting in the air with Kalashnikovs, DShK 1938s, heavy machine guns and – for the first time – rocket propelled grenades, which constituted a threat, not just to the state, but to the community as a whole. Similarly, in spring 2014 Ali Hamdan was responsible for several provocative acts.

For example, he took a rifle in to his baccalaureate examination, and beat up a police officer and his mother. After the first wave of public outcry in the town and as complaints against him were increasing, instead of being punished he was tasked with leading a security patrol. When his violations continued he was arrested. Sources have told us that he now works in Homs and enters Salamiyah in secret. Then there is the clash in which members of the security forces and troops from the Syrian army's Fourth Division found themselves pitted against *shabiha* from Khunayfis (an Alawite village near the town) led by Mahmoud Afifa. The clash ended with the formation of a new group made up of Afifa's men and the Fourth Division troops they had attacked. Many more examples of violations can be found in Appendix 1.

Chapter 2

Why don't the townsfolk volunteer in the militias to repulse ISIS and armed Islamist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra?

This question deals with a situation that is vitally important, both in terms of its analysis and as a reality; answering it may lead us to understand both the subject

we are dealing with and its background with the highest possible level of accuracy. It is an attempt to answer – or to re-examine – the question: who threatens minorities and who protects them? This is a worrying question for the international community, especially the United States as its discourse is based in part on the protection of minorities (see: Syria and Iran through the American Repositioning⁽¹⁶⁾.) It also worries those who are still betting on the Syrian state, whether they believe it is separate from the regime or that the regime is the state, especially members of the Baath Party.

Despite the close proximity of ISIS to Salamiyah, with only several villages separating it from the town on its eastern side, despite the horrific massacre the group committed in Mabuja and the fact that, according to military experts we interviewed, a raid would not be particularly difficult for it, and despite the presence of Jabhat al-Nusra and its consecutive attacks from even closer areas to the west, most young men still prefer leaving or staying behind in hiding over volunteering in the local armed formations. This is a truth that can be felt: Despite the numerous rumors – which some witnesses believe are spread by the regime – about the formation of a military force made up of mandatory service absentees in the town, despite calls by regime supporters for young men to volunteer in the NDF, and despite promises from the military leadership that volunteers will remain in the town, there has been no tangible change.

We should point out here that this refusal to enlist in the regime's military is something which extends further than the town's particular situation. The Alawite inhabitants of the coastal region, who are directly threatened by the Islamist battalions that have reached their borders, now shun military service. From their perspective, it is preferable to volunteer in the formations that have recently been created for them by the regime to defend coastal areas alone (see the book – Warlord's Era and Reviving of Protectorates and Tutelages (1) Shiite Militia⁽¹⁷⁾.)

16- Yousif Faker Al Deen, Syria and Iran through the American Repositioning, DRSC, 26 October 2013, <http://drsc-sy.org/en/syria-and-iran-through-the-american-repositioning/>

17- Warlord's Era and Reviving of Protectorates and Tutelages, Work Team, DRSC, 16/11/2015 <http://drsc-sy.org/en/shiite-militia/>

There are several reasons for this, including – and this is the most important reason in Salamiyah's case – the collapse of trust in the military institution, especially during the season of great defeats that the army has just passed through and the false promises that have been made in recent months. For example, while the town's most enthusiastic army supporters were talking about the imminent recapture of Palmyra, the Jazal oil field fell, and while they were prematurely celebrating the capture of Aleppo, Jisr al-Shughour fell. Perhaps its inability to manage media coverage of its defeats – on the popular level – has reflected negatively on the regime and its institutions. For example, whenever an area fell that the regime had promised directly or indirectly to retain like Jisr al-Shughour, Abu Dhuhur Airbase and Al-Mastuma, etc. regime supporters said treachery in the army was to blame. Consequently, they have found themselves confronted by a large sum-total amount of treachery that continues to grow every day. This explains why the most fervent regime supporters refuse to enlist in the army – to put it simply: because the army has become a failed institution. They also refuse to join semi-regular forces like the NDF and other armed groups – apart from certain young men of course – because of the great decline the reputation of these forces has suffered, the fact that they are dominated by people who commit violations openly and more recently because they have been blighted by internal disputes (see Appendix 2.) All of this has made young people lose faith in these militias. They have not been asked to intervene in the current crisis, despite the fact that they claim to protect the townsfolk – not even the groups in which Ismaili *shabiha* are the majority (Appendix 2.) Most of them are involved in acts that harm locals. As a result Salamiyah has become sharply divided: enthusiastic regime supporters are defending or volunteering in the semi-regular forces while a large section of the community has said implicitly – as their demands make clear (fig. 3) – that these militias are the very cause of the current problems and called for them to be brought under the control of retired army officers from the town.

We should also note that people refusing to fight outside their own areas is nothing new. In the village of Tel Jadeed, which is inhabited by a majority of Ismailis and Alawites as well as several Bedouin families, Ismailis refused to take

part in fighting anywhere else. According to witnesses from the village, they limited their role to defending the Tel Jadeed itself and as a result the people in charge of the regime's militia refused to give them weapons. This was repeated in the Ismaili majority village of Al-Mufakkir al-Sharqi, except that in this case the residents refused to take up arms at all, preferring to leave for Salamiyah. As a result, government troops that had come to the village looted a large number of houses – including some owned by *shabiha* members from the village – and accused the locals of cowardice, treason and the like. This happened in the summer of 2013, during the Qadimoon Battle, which armed opposition groups said aimed to break the siege of Homs. However, all these groups did was occupy the agricultural land around a village that had refused to take up arms, leaving Homs to be emptied of its inhabitants. Events taking place in the village of Al-Sa'n, which is closer than Tel Jadeed and Al-Mufakkir al-Sharqi to Bedouin majority areas, may deviate somewhat from this trend but the situation there is not very different.

Generally speaking, absenteeism from the army has two causes: On the one hand, it is the result of prevalent public opinion, which according one person we interviewed, now sees what is happening as “a futile war and bloody bartering.” On the other, it is the result of the aforementioned corruption, which has become the hallmark of all pro-regime armed groups.

From the first wave of public outcry to the crisis of the upturned cup - a brief history

When the anti-regime protests stopped and Salamiyah's homegrown opposition collapsed inside and outside of the town after having enforced a real balance in the first days of the revolution, *shabiha* members rose to prominence and perpetrated the three types of violations described earlier in the report. During

the spring of 2014, because of accumulating tension, the first wave of public outcry took place in the town.

In the first wave of public outcry locals from the town participated in a demonstration that was unique at the time because it was the first demonstration to include both opponents and supporters of the regime. The demonstration was held to demand the holding to account of those responsible for violations, and the accused were named clearly: they were powerbroker-*shabiha* from Aal Al-Saleh.

As we said earlier, Ibrahim Al-Saleh directly caused this first wave when he hit a shopkeeper over the head with his handgun. This excited the tension that had built up after violations became routine (the violations of the powerbroker-*shabiha* against the locals.)

As a result of the demonstration, the governor of Hama came to the town and reassured the locals that the authorities would stamp out the causes of the violations, but nothing of note actually happened. In fact events took an even more dangerous turn. In response to the demands of the locals that they either leave the town or be held to account, a large number of *shabiha* gathered near Zeinab School where they fired their guns in the air and shouted: "Alawites, Alawites... We will trample you Salamiyah."⁽¹⁸⁾ According to their testimonies, this apparent sectarian threat made locals recall the old troubles between Alawites and Ismailis at the beginning of the last century. None of the people involved were held to account and promises were made by the state but not kept (with the exception of Ali Hamdan's expulsion from the town after he committed brazen violations in broad daylight.)

After the regime's failure to live up to its promises, tension started to accumulate once again. This expressed itself in the direct naming of criminals, and by regime supporters in particular. Naming them alone was a brave step; before they had only been referred to in an opaque or roundabout manner. The growing tension

18- See Garib Mirza, The Letting of the Minorities' Blood Looms on the Horizon in Syria, Sada al-Shaam newspaper, 22 - 4 - 2014

brought on the second wave of public outcry, and this in turn marked the beginning of the current crisis at the start of summer 2015.

Before we address the second wave of public outcry we should emphasize the following:

As time went by, all of these violations took on an accumulative nature; that is, after beginning at an early stage, they recurred and became more frequent. This is important as it means that the aforementioned armed groups were seeking to enforce their dominance from the beginning. We suspect that the violations were a policy the leaders of these militias decided to employ at the regime's instruction. (As mentioned above, the local Baath Party branch asked Alawites from the surrounding villages to come and defend their regime in the town.)

The current crisis

The current crisis began with the second wave of public outcry on 10 July 2015, when Alaa Al-Saleh (the brother of the slain Ibrahim Al-Saleh) attacked a young man near Al-Ferdous Cafe. The young man ran in to the cafe and sought the protection of one of the people inside. When this person tried to push Alaa Al-Saleh away the latter shot him in the shoulder (the injured person was from Aal Zino, one of the town's big Ismaili families.) But the incident did not end here: a phone call was made to Alaa Al-Saleh's friends by a woman who was with him at the time, and who works as a dancer in one of the town's cafes. Al-Saleh's friends then arrived heavily armed and threatened everyone present.

After this incident, the second wave of public outcry began but this time there were no demonstrations. It was a wave of fierce anger and the townsfolk threatened to respond in a number of ways. After a notable from Salamiyah interceded, Interior Minister Mohammad Sha'ar came to the town on July 15 and listened to the local's demands (fig. 3.) Sha'ar promised to put an end the problems and set up joint patrols in which several security branches worked together to reign in the *shabiha* but *the person who caused the confrontation in the first place – Alaa Al-Saleh – was not arrested*. There can be no doubt about what this means: The regime was either unable or unwilling to make the arrest so it set up joint patrols to control any subsequent events that might take place. It

also means that the regime is dealing not with one person – whether that person is Alaa Al-Saleh or any other individual – but with a group of people which can prevent the arrest of its members. Despite the measures taken, the only change was a slight decline in the number of kidnappings.

The crisis reached its peak on 12 September 2015, after Alaa Al-Saleh shot another person in the shoulder. This time it was the owner of Umm Masaad Gas Station. When the district chief led an attempt by the joint patrols to surround his house and arrest him, support arrived from Mahmoud Afifa's group in Khunayfis and clashes in which DShK 1938 machineguns were used broke out. When this happened the members of the joint patrol took cover in the neighboring houses, and Al-Saleh and Afifa's men took their weapons⁽¹⁹⁾. After this last incident, Salamiyah's residents prepared to respond by closing the Homs international highway, which passes through the town.



Fig. 3

19- The title Al-Jazeera Net used for its coverage of this story implied that the town had seen 'Alawite-Ismaili sectarian unrest.' Apart from the woeful inaccuracies it contained, the article heavily emphasized sectarian identity for no logical reason. Omar Abu Khalil, Alawite-Ismaili clashes in Hama over fuel, Al-Jazeera Net 10/09/2015. <http://cutt.us/PnWN>

The demands presented by locals to the interior minister

1. No-one can be above the law, the law must apply to everyone and the warrants issued against the outlaws must be executed.
2. Corrupt individuals must be held to account.
3. Weapons must be kept out of the town – action must be taken to put an end to the open bearing of arms inside the town by the military police.
4. A military operations room led exclusively by army officers must be created and all armed formations in the areas must be incorporated in to it.
5. Action must be taken to give the security and executive apparatuses an active role with support from locals.
6. Legal actions must be taken against traders, fuel sellers and officials who have exploited the crisis – these people's identity is known to all.
7. The entries around the town must be closed off by digging a trench. Four main roads should be left and they must be monitored to prevent kidnapping, rape and theft, and to maintain the town's security.

Acts of a mafia-like nature

As appendix 1 shows, the acts that have taken place in Salamiyah match the description given at the start of the report. Therefore, they can be considered mafia-like in nature.

All of the violations listed, from kidnapping and non-developmental dominance of the economy to control of checkpoints for-profit (motorists have to pay bribes to be allowed through) are actions in which the armed groups in Salamiyah engage. We can begin to understand the essential nature of these groups, which have come to be known as '*dawaesh al-dakhi*'⁽²⁰⁾, through noting the following points:

1. They all gain their legitimacy from supporting and defending the regime. (This sets them apart from the formations that take shape in opposition-held areas and gain their legitimacy through claiming to 'resist' the regime.)
2. Although they carry out their illegal actions openly, they make sure to 'clean their crime scenes' and make people afraid of giving testimony in order to

20- Lit. '*The 'ISISes' of the interior*' i.e. armed individuals or groups in regime controlled areas who regime supporters liken to the Islamic State.

entrench submission to their power and domineering behavior²¹. When they use sectarian language or mark the release of one of their members from jail after no more than a week's detention with heavy celebratory gunfire in which rocket propelled grenades are used, they are telling the community that they can and will use force if they want to and that the state itself is unable to stop them. (Appendix 1.)

Some examples of this are listed below:

- a- The people involved in kidnapping are now well-known to everyone. They persist in kidnapping but without admitting to it openly; having said that, if they abduct a Bedouin who they consider a terrorist, they openly take pride in the action, because this is an act of resistance. If a resident of Salamiyah is kidnapped, the act, no matter how obvious, is never admitted to openly, even if it is admitted to tacitly in a manner that leaves no room for debate.
- b- At the beginning of 2014, N. was kidnapped from inside the town. The men who surrounded him said they were from the security apparatuses so that he would not try to resist. Then they beat him up and led him away to an unknown location. Luckily, one of his relatives – who worked in a state institution – was able to trace his mobile phone and discover that he was being held in Khunayfis. His family then threatened Aal Salama, and because the hostage was poor and had no money, he was released after having been stripped of everything on him, even his shoes. While he was being abducted, his kidnappers spoke in imitated Bedouin accents and pretended they were FSA members, but it was obvious to the hostage that

21 The domineering party carries out their violations openly in a way that only prevents a direct accusation being lodged by a small margin. The purpose of leaving this small margin is to create what is referred to in evolutionary biology as a "strategic balance." This creates a situation where the other party is given an opportunity to withdraw without the domineering party saying so openly. A hidden contract is then formed between the domineering party and the victim that is transferred to the subconscious of the current generation. This happened in the eighties in Syria and the regime is now doing the same thing when it tortures people to death then denies it or fires at demonstrators and accuses unlawful elements. The *shabiha* also do this by kidnapping and killing or carrying out violations from behind a mask. The purpose of this mask is not to hide but to dominate (for more detail on this the reader may refer to many of Michel Foucault's writings. It should also be noted that the practice of dominance in the case in hand is different from the confrontations taking place between the FSA, for example, and the regime.) The legal reasons for concealing such actions are a secondary consideration.

they were Alawites. When they decided to release him, they told him he was in a security forces branch and that they had only been interrogating him. One of the researchers followed the kidnapping from beginning to end.

These cases are a perfect example of the kidnapping policy employed by the '*shabiha* mafias': A tacit admission is made rather than an open one and responsibility is clearly implied but not claimed. As we said previously, this is why the kidnappings themselves were not what generated the anger that came to the surface in waves of public outcry; incidents where the responsible party was obvious and the evidence undeniable were what struck the sparks.

3. Who are these people? (See appendix 1 and 2 for their names and some the information we have documented about them.)

Family structure forms the basic foundation of the 'mafias' that commit these acts, especially Salamiyah's Aal Salama. Its members live in the town's Dahr al-Maghr neighborhood, which locals have begun to call "the state of Dahr al-Maghr." The same applies to Mahmoud Afifa's group in the village of Khunayfis, which the townsfolk now call "the state of Khunayfis" in an indication to its complete independence from the state. Then there are the armed men in Sabboura, like Ghazwan Salamouni, who has been accused of complicity in the Mabuja massacre, and was detained – for under a week – as a result. When he was released, he resumed his thuggish activity once more as if nothing had happened. In fact, his release from jail was marked by heavy celebratory gunfire. A few months later he shot a policeman in the Grand Serail for refusing to let him enter with a weapon, and after all of this he still wasn't apprehended. Even the most enthusiastic regime supporters now mention all of these people by name.

In addition to their obvious family structure, these 'mafias' have a sect-based structure. This is one of the most significant consequences of the regime-protecting function they were originally created to perform. It can be observed that the most prominent of these groups are familial/sectarian extensions of the person who supports them in the security apparatuses. For example, Aal Younis, who are Alawites from Sabboura, have retained control of positions in the Airforce Intelligence Directorate's Salamiyah branch. In turn, Aal Salama have been given influence in the town by Adib Salama, who is in charge of the Airforce Intelligence Directorate's Aleppo branch.

This is not to say that all the people involved are Alawites. Some of them are Ismailis, like Fadel Wardeh and Wael Jakeesh, and others are Sunnis like Samir Zarif. Notably though, they do not enjoy the same level of influence as Aal Salama, Rami Al-Derbouli and Mahmoud Afifa, among others.

4. In the past few years, some of these groups have clashed, because of attempts to enforce influence, as happened between Aal Salama and Aal Dom (At the beginning of the revolution Aal Dom, who are Twelver Shiites, formed their own exclusively Shiite militia, which receives support from Hezbollah inside the town. At one point they clashed with Aal Salama after a dispute over influence⁽²²⁾.)

Appendix 1 provides several examples of clashes between members of various groups or between members of these groups and the army or the official security forces. Such cases are an expression of a sense of identification with gangs that gather members and make sure to protect them. What is causing this sense of identification to become entrenched is that when the state wants to take action against a person who belongs to one of these 'mafias,' it deals with the 'mafia' in question, treating it as an actor with powerful influence, rather than dealing with the individual, as happened after the interior ministers visit.

22- See the aforementioned book - Warlord's Era...

5. These groups control a number of the town's economic sectors. For example, Aal Salama controls Souq al Haal, the town's vegetable market. Other groups control the checkpoints, which bring in a large amount of money for their 'proprietors,' like the Al-Milyoun checkpoint and its 'proprietor,' Rami Al-Derbouli. We have no precise information about them buying up real estate on a large scale in the town but we have received a number of testimonies confirming that they are paying large sums to buy properties and that this sometimes takes place through an Ismaili intermediary so as not to inflame sectarian sensitivities. Buying real estate is one of the reasons they put pressure on the townsfolk to emigrate and sell their properties. There are also a number of rumors being circulated about them by regime-supporters that say they sell weapons on the black market, even to ISIS.

Therefore, they are operating through an illegal framework within the war economy – which is directly dependent on violence. They have used the dominance that they enjoy and the great riches they have amassed to impose their economic influence on sources of large-scale commercial activity, such as Souq al-Haal and real estate brokerage. Several of the people whose testimonies we took said that “nothing is preventing them from opening businesses up in the future to launder their money and firmly tighten their economic grip on the community.” Whatever the case, they are the ones with firmest grip on the economy today.

The aftereffects of 'mafia' formation in Salamiyah

The response of the community

The community's response to these 'mafias' has taken several forms, ranging from the natural spontaneous kind to the kind resulting from 'crisis management' by the regime, and none of them have been sufficiently well organized by the community.

Parallel entities have been formed, like the local branch of the Desert Falcons (see appendix 2) – a militia made up of 'elite shabiha' that has carried out operations in Homs Governorate and the coastal region. For a time, the militia's local branch portrayed itself as a force for law and order in Salamiyah by pursuing some of the kidnapping gangs or trying to prevent kidnappings. For the most part, it is manned by people from the town. However, there were disputes between its leaders and members, and now, unlike during the spring when the group's fame was at its height, it is rarely mentioned in Salamiyah.

The Baath Brigades was also formed as a security force to protect the town from transgressions. Although we have not received any information about violations carried out the Baath Brigades itself, the militia has certainly not been able to do anything about what is happening in Salamiyah. Notably, the militia's members – some of whom we know personally – are strict Baathists. It seems that the demands of locals, which exceed the presence of a branch, have irritated them and increased the Baath party's marginalization in the town. This is in keeping with what we have already mentioned about the new 'mafia' members beginning to encroach upon everyone's authority. Meanwhile, the Baath Party has attempted maintain its status as holder of authority in the town, if only in a tokenistic fashion. As a result, entities of this kind have failed to attract many locals, despite their attempts.

Another response has been to emigrate. As one person who left the town told us, "now there is a formula in place on the ground. Nothing will be solved and the state won't do anything. You either accept what's happening or emigrate." There can be no doubt that the townsfolk have suffered great losses as a result of emigration. As for the people who have left, many of them see what they have been through as forced displacement rather than emigration. Several of them have told us that the 'mafia' was the main reason they chose to leave.

The community responded directly and gave the crisis the clear framework it has today in the second wave of public outcry. It prompted the interior minister's visit and his promises that the problems would be solved. These promises turned out

to be empty and impossible to enact on the ground. Additionally, because the plan that was drawn up stipulated the formation of joint patrols, the state ended up being incriminated even further; before long these joint patrols had stopped functioning and locals were accusing them of hanging around on the main roads during the day to get money and wandering the town's main streets at night harassing women. As for their appointed tasks – like enforcing a ban on tinted car windows to reduce kidnapping – they remained uncompleted for the most part. In the end, the minister's plan exposed high levels of state incompetence. This will complicate the state's task in the future and reduce the choices available to the locals.

Naturally, a visit by the minister had been expected. It was hoped that he would 'solve the problem' and after he had made his promises, the wave of anger receded. The situation remained calm until 12 September 2015, when Alaa Al-Saleh shot the owner of Umm Masaad gas station in the shoulder and then proceeded to attack the joint patrols. This was the same person who had caused the second wave of public outcry and it was his slain brother who caused the first.

The violations continued and the kidnappings continued. For example, volunteer officer Sami Jammoul was taken hostage in the heart of Salamiyah at half past one in the afternoon, which locals considered an "insult to the army." The townsfolk were also enraged by the continuation of the fuel crisis, which was "tantamount to daylight robbery." As a result, public outcry began to escalate once more, but this time it had taken on a bolder form: regime supporters themselves had begun directly naming the people committing violations. Influenced by what happened in Latakia, and later on in Suweida, organizations aiming to "take what's due" appeared for the first time. Uprising of Salamiyah's Youth appeared first and after it Fedayoun Qadimoun. (If action by these organizations develops further we will be confronted by a fourth type of action that may prove dangerous for the town.)



Fig. 4

A Facebook post by Uprising of Salamiyah's Youth from September 2 suggests that just as demonstrations against corruption are taking place in Suweida they will also take place in Salamiyah. This was before the assassination of Waheed Balaous.

Uprising of Salamiyah's Youth

There has been no statement about who directs or stands behind this group, which announced it would begin to operate secret night patrols and use hidden cameras to photograph people involved in kidnapping and corruption. It appears that the group has not tried particularly hard to maintain its secrecy and conceal the identity of its members, which suggests that they are not afraid of the 'mafia's' response.

At first the initiative's discourse gave the impression it was neutral and only concerned with civil matters. However, it later thanked the Military Intelligence Directorate for keeping watch over one of the gas stations, which means that it works according to the principle of the 'strong state' that is willing and able to combat 'corrupters.'

The furthest extent of its discourse, as seen in fig. 5, was to call for a peaceful protest if its demands were not met.

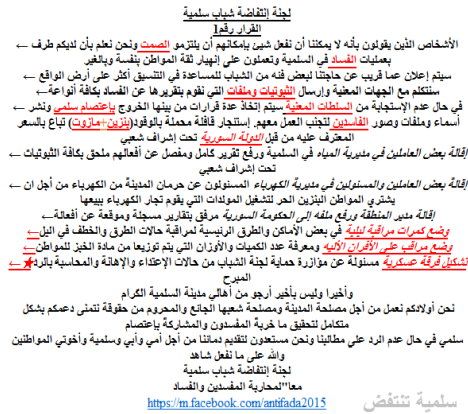


Fig. 5

‘Decree Number 1’ from Committee of the Uprising of Salamiyah’s Youth

Committee of the Uprising of Salamiyah’s Youth

Decree Number 1

The people who say that we cannot do anything can maintain **silence**. We know that you favor a particular party→

which is involved in **corruption** in Salamiyah and that you are working to erode the trust of citizens in themselves and in others.

Shortly we will announce our need for several groups of young people to help increase coordination on the ground→

We will speak with the competent authorities and send the **proofs and files** we are recording concerning corruption of all kinds→

If there is no response from **competent authorities** a number of decisions will be made, including the holding of a **peaceful demonstration** and the publication→

of the names, files concerning the **corrupt persons** and pictures of them so that working with them can be avoided. A convoy carrying **Gasoline and diesel** will be hired and the fuel will be sold at the price recognized by **the Syrian state** under popular supervision.

We demand the dismissal of certain persons working in the Water Directorate and the submission of a complete and detailed report about their actions accompanied by all of the necessary proofs→
under popular supervision.

We demand the dismissal of certain persons and officials working in the Electricity Directorate who are responsible for depriving the town of electricity → so that citizens will buy free market Gasoline to operate the generators sold by the electricity traders.

We demand the dismissal of the district chief and submission of his file to the Syrian government accompanied by recorded and signed reports about his actions→

We demand that *nighttime surveillance cameras be placed* at certain locations and on the main roads to monitor the condition of the roads and kidnappings in the night→

We demand that *a person be appointed to monitor the mechanical bakeries*, and that the quantity and weight of bread distributed to citizens be disclosed→

We demand *the formation of a military squad* that is responsible for supporting protection of the Committee from assaults and humiliations and that any aggression should be met with a harsh response.

Last but not least I make this request to the good residents of Salamiyah:

We, your children, are working for the good of the town and the good of its hungry people who have been deprived of their rights. We hope to have your comprehensive support so that we can put right the damage caused by corrupt persons. We hope that you will participate in a peaceful protest if there is no response to our demands. We are ready to give our blood for my mother, my father, Salamiyah and my fellow citizens.

God shall bear witness to our actions.

Committee of the Uprising of Salamiyah's Youth.

Together for the combatting of corrupters and corruption.

<https://m.facebook.com/antifada2015>

Notably, after this 'Decree' was issued and with the sharp growth of the crisis after September 12, no 'Decree Number 2' was issued as one might have expected. This has aroused doubts in the town about the initiative's seriousness. Among the people we asked, opinion was divided. Some saw the initiative as the work of "naïve youngsters." Others distrusted it and pointed out its similarity to tricks the security apparatuses have used before to ensnare supporters of such movements and destroy any potential for a real initiative. Whatever the case, it seems that new tools are needed to confront or manage the crisis.

Apart from this initiative, which has been silent throughout the severe crisis that began after September 12, there have been calls by residents to close the Homs International highway, which starts in Salamiyah, or to demonstrate on the town square. There has also been a call for the town's families to hold a meeting and take a joint decision, and there has been talk, once again, of an initiative from the government to solve the problem facing the community once and for all, etc.

On 14 September 2015, several of the town's families met. This meant that action had now become linked to family membership, which gives an unrivalled feeling of strength and of falling back on blood ties. It was agreed that a silent vigil would be held on Wednesday, September 16, and that if the demands were not met protest could be escalated in to a strike.

Some individual voices appeared calling for Hezbollah and Liwa Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas to enter Salamiyah because the two militias possess the necessary strength to form a deterrent force (a similar pattern has developed in several Alawite villages where action has been taken to confront local *shabiha*. For more information, see the aforementioned book - Warlord's Era...)

Therefore, it can be seen that this first type of action is rhetorical in nature and depends on making threats. The community has reacted very slowly under the influence of a collective consciousness of the danger posed by the 'mafias,' which are providing more and more proof of their strength.

The second type of action is the most dangerous and the least prevalent at the same time: resorting to the protection of foreign, sect-based forces that have an openly sectarian discourse built around the Shiite Vilayat-e Fakhri model. If this happened it would constitute a threat, not only to the town's identity but also to the authority of the Baath Party.

The third (potential) type of action is the holding of demonstrations and rallies. No such actions have been taken since the first wave of public outcry, which was confronted by a counter-demonstration accompanied by heavy gunfire and crude

sectarian chants. This means that the response by the 'mafias' has borne fruit, if only temporarily.

The regime's apparatuses and the officials who came from Hama to contain the crisis on 16 September 2015 (the date of set for the silent vigil) insisted that the vigil should not be held and promised to fulfill the people's demands. This means that the regime is intent on stopping the community using its natural tool (protest) even if it does this to help ensure application of the law. This point confirms to us, once again, that the regime's plan is to keep the community powerless without disempowering the outlaws, as it calls them (the 'mafias.')

This endeavor by the regime was a complete success. Once again, the community acquiesced after promises were made. This meant it had suffered a defeat at the hands of the mafia, in a repeat of what happened several months before and one year ago.

After this response by the regime another initiative that was similar to Uprising of Salamiyah's Youth appeared and its name was Fedayoun Qadimoun. While the former was based on local identity within Salamiyah, the second was openly based on Ismaili identity. The people behind the new initiative identified themselves as Ismailis who would "exclusively" protect other Ismailis from the terrorism of "oppression."

The immediate appearance of Fedayoun Qadimoun after the latest incidents and the group's declaration that the officials' promises had not been fulfilled right after they were announced suggests the involvement of the intelligence services. In any case, it makes little difference whether such involvement exists or Fedayoun Qadimoun is a spontaneous initiative; if the latter is true it is unknowingly serving the interests of the security apparatuses. At the very least, this type of 'counter gang' will strengthen the 'mafias' raison d'être, especially as both have begun to use sectarian identity. If the group is a reaction it shows that the 'mafias' have evolved to a level, which, in light of the community's repression, has prompted the appearance a counterweight that resembles them and justifies

all their actions. A turn of events like this would be a sad and frightening repetition of what happened at the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, when the regime made use of armed sectarian jihadists and fueled their growth. Therefore, we believe that this type of action constitutes a great danger to the town. If it is not confronted and stopped it will take away every excuse the community has to protest and there will be no room to even think of demonstrating; the situation will become one of extreme sectarian tension, clearly dominated by the 'mafia,' which will hold more power than anyone else. In this situation the only loser would be the community.

Finally, there are two key aspects of the recent dissent in Salamiyah that clearly distinguish it from the demonstrations that took place in 2011.

Firstly, a demand for improved living conditions has been made and those making it have worked diligently to separate it from any political demands. This is the complete opposite of the political form taken by the first demonstrations of the Syrian revolution in 2011.

Secondly, a complete proposal was put forward – which recognized the 'state's' ability, legitimacy, competence and will to solve the problems at hand – and this has remained true, even during the most dramatic escalation, when the threat of carrying out a strike was made. This dependence has remained fundamental and essential, even for the counter gangs, whereas the 2011 protests quickly identified the regime with the state and attempted to break away from both in order to fulfill a 'desire' for a new state and a new regime.

The 'state's' relationship with the community during the 'mafia' crisis

In this relationship the state has acted as an intermediary between the two parties involved in the crisis (the community and the 'mafia'.) At every juncture

where there has been friction between the two, it is the state that has interceded, quelling the anger of the community and threatening to reign in the 'mafia.' This was obvious when the governor visited Salamiyah during the first wave of public outcry, when the interior minister visited during the second wave, and when Hama Governorate's top ranking security officials visited after the incident on September 12.

From this we have deduced the following:

1) The state affirms the unlawfulness of the people we have called the 'mafia' while simultaneously affirming their national 'legitimacy,' thereby distinguishing between legitimacy and the law. This distinction is based on the view that although they really are breaking the law, they gain legitimacy through their 'defense of the homeland.'

2) Rather than asserting its authority the state has postponed it and negotiated with the violator of its sovereignty (the 'mafias'.) This postponement process has manifested itself in the taking of new measures, such as the joint patrols. This means that in its current situation, the 'state's' apparatuses are incapable of controlling the 'mafia.' This has forced it to create new combined apparatuses, which in turn are incapable of solving the problem and may later become a problem themselves.

In the words of one local, the state has been "sedating us with an anesthetic needle." And it really has been doing that: The postponements of authority, the increasing rank of the state representatives who came to the town and the failure to live up to any promises form a process that would make any citizen lose confidence in their state.

Finally, the regime's conduct suggests that it has made the following assumption: the town's inhabitants will come back to it every time because they cannot turn to a third party and they are incapable of rebelling against it in the current complicated situation for geographical economic and security related reasons,

some of which we have discussed. It is this (with other factors) that has allowed the regime to postpone its problem with 'mafias' it needs to protect itself. In fact, as some of our witnesses say, "this kind of equation is comfortable for the regime, which is now in the position of an arbitrator between litigants." The regime's aforementioned strategy, which can rightly be described as an 'adventure,' shows that this is a well-founded analysis.

We should not forget that the regime/state's narrative is one of protecting minorities; therefore, its repression of minorities strikes at the heart of this narrative, which is not only an embarrassment to the regime but also to certain international actors.

The consequences of the 'state's' role in the crisis

The 'state' has been unable to fulfill its promises and this has happened because the 'mafia' has rebelled openly against its decisions. This means that there has been a real increase in the power of the 'mafia' – with conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary assistance, from the state/regime.

This failure has also reduced the number of options available to the townsfolk. So, to what extent can the state be relied upon? What length of time will be allowed for its decrees to take effect? These questions have become commonplace among the townsfolk, according to testimonies given to us by several of them. At the same time there now is a widespread belief that any time limit they give the state would only amount to putting themselves on an equal footing with the mafia, and would not provide any hope of solving the problems. According to one witness, this has led to a conviction that "any failure to meet the demands immediately will mean we have lost."

We may conclude then, that the regime's actions have had the following consequences: the 'mafia's' hand has been strengthened and it has gained a monopoly on authority; that is, to a certain degree the 'mafia's' authority has become independent of the authority of the state/regime. The regime's efforts to bring the situation with the townsfolk to a conclusion, and at their expense, have moved Salamiyah nearer to a critical moment. This moment, which now seems far closer than ever before, will define not only all future relations between the mafia, the state/regime and the community but the future of the town itself.

The 'mafia's' response to the community, and to the state/regime

Essentially, the 'mafia's' identity has taken shape through its responses; firstly, to the community through – for example – entrenching its sectarian and family based identity (as happened in the counter-demonstration the *shabiha* held in response to the first wave of public outcry and on other occasions); and secondly, through openly rebelling against state decisions and coming out victorious every time.

Sectarian actions:

'Mafia' members have intentionally played on sectarian sensitivities from the time of the first wave of public outcry to today, as we can see in fig. 7, which shows a comment posted on social media by a member of Aal Salama. However, this does not mean that their actions have sectarian origins, as their victims come from all sects, and include Alawites.

Conversely, the response by Salamiyah residents has remained non-sectarian up until now, with the exception of Fedayoun Qadimoun, and so far we have been unable to find anything proving that the movement really belongs to the local community. Our findings show that the community's response has maintained the characteristics of a civil movement against people who operate outside the law.



Haydara Salama: The Salama family is more honorable than you, you sectarian Ismaili (the instigator is the most unjust.) There's nothing filthier than you, and your people are no more than dogs. We've tied them up on the outskirts of Salamiyah so that they can protect our military boots, because if it wasn't for our military boots (your honor and your family reputation) there would be no Salamiyah.

Haydara Salama: And by the way, so no one will think I'm trying to write like an intellectual without being insulting... I'd like to tell you to kiss my ass from among the donkeys... because you're all donkeeeeeeeeeys and you just don't get anything.

Fig.7 Sectarian hate-speech by Haydara Salama

Chapter 3

The strategies of the regime, the 'mafia' and Salamiyah's community

The strategy followed by any cultural, political or even biological entity allows us to forecast the behavior of that entity/structure over a long period, given a sufficient amount of time. This is because the strategy will never be changed unless the entity undergoes a paradigm shift, whether that is to seize some

opportunity that its old strategy could not or to save itself from a catastrophe that the old strategy is no longer able to prevent.

In order to define strategy as a procedure – to the further possible extent – we can say that it is the regulator that remains more stable and more constant over time than any other, and that it always has a clear identity. It is therefore not possible to speak of 'non-strategies.' Every entity has its conscious or unconscious strategy, and to define this strategy analytically means to answer the question: how does that entity go about managing the two elements of loss and gain to achieve a primary goal, i.e., its survival (where survival includes the subsequent ability to continue.)

In strategy, neither loss nor gain have their own particular value as gain (a tactical positive on its own) and loss (a tactical negative on its own); rather, they take on their value within the realm of strategy, which means that a situation where loss = positive and gain = negative is possible, in strategical terms.

The community's 'strategy' for the current crisis

Apart from being disorganized and more unconscious than conscious, the current strategy in the community is distinguished by its division in to several contradictory strategies. Within this there are two parties that completely oppose to one another: One party has chosen emigration to Europe on an individual basis and the sale of property. This, if running away on an individual basis can be called a strategy, is the opposite of group action, as it is based on a purely individual solution – or a solution used by a group of dispersed individuals. The other party's strategy, the strategy of protest covered in the previous pages, is the antithesis of this approach: to hold on to the town's tightly-knit local community and work to improve living conditions, which necessitates halting emigration and refusing to abandon the land. At the same time, the two do converge in their demand for the basic needs of daily-life to be met and in avoiding any political demands, as a

result of the fear caused by what has happened from one end of Syria to the other.

The strategy of running away (emigration) finds its basis in the idea of the state's 'failure,' and therefore its illegitimacy, even with regard to the provision of services. The person who emigrates has given up hope in the ability of the state to solve their problems and refused to enlist in its army. On the other hand, the strategy of protest that has been employed in the town has so far been based on acceptance of the state's legitimacy and the idea that it is willing and able to fulfill the demands that have been made.

This chaotic strategic arena has other variations. In short interviews with 16 people from Salamiyah, whose political leanings vary between neutrality, being closer to the opposition and being closer to the regime, and all of whom are active intellectuals with influence in the community, we found the following results:

Main problem	Likelihood of the problem continuing	Best possible solution
14 of the 16 people believe that the main problem in Salamiyah at the moment is the <i>shabiha</i> , the attacks on locals, the lack of security and other dangers brought on by the presence of these armed bands of outlaws.	9 of the 16 people do not know whether the causes of the problem are capable of continuing or not.	11 of the 16 people believe that international protection is the best thing possible for Salamiyah and 1 of those people believes that the best solution would be international protection with the presence of a local force made up of all the parties that have not yet taken part in fighting.
1 of the 16 people believes that the problem is emigration, and that	5 of the 16 people believe that the problem will continue and two of them	2 of the 16 people believe the solution is to empower the army and

this is driven by the inherent weakness of the people who emigrate.	believe it will continue but will be slightly less severe.	allow civil society organizations to operate freely or deploy the army and give decision making authority to the town's notables.
1 of the 16 people believes the problem has an economic dimension as all life-essentials are lacking.	2 of the 16 people believe the problem can only be solved by the presence of a military force capable of bringing the situation under control.	3 of the 16 people believe that joint control of the town by its residents and the FSA is the best solution, but only after the FSA is reformed.

This number of people is insufficient to draw general conclusions, firstly because it is a small number of people and secondly because the people who expressed their opinions did so in private and were not under the impression that what they said about the fate of the townsfolk would have any consequences, for the townsfolk or for themselves. This is where what was said differs fundamentally from strategy, which can only exist in the public sphere, and takes many fears and concerns into consideration. This is what makes a strategy a strategy.

We took these sample views as a survey of convictions that could change or solidify the community's strategies should circumstances allow. We also wanted to see what the interviewees' criticisms of the existing strategies were and to what extent new strategies might be generated.

The survey shows that most of the interviewees believe the 'mafia' is the problem. Although their opinions differ as to whether the problem will continue or not, only two of them believe the state is part of the solution. The majority believe that the solution, first and foremost, is the presence of a United Nations force.

Other actors in the community, who are affiliated with both the regime and the town's Ismaili component, such as organized Baathists, Ismaili NDF members and

the town council, etc. have taken a position of neutrality or silent protest and made occasional attempts to calm the situation.

The result

As we can see, the local community in Salamiyah is governed by sharply varying interests. It operates according to a fragmented 'strategy' that has no force of its own and depends on the state or other parties with sufficient force because it realizes that it cannot possess an armed and influential force itself. As the goal of these strategies is to secure the bare minimum of life's necessities, they do not rely on confrontation. They tend towards postponing demands and bargaining or even silence and running away in some cases. It is a strategy to the 'reduce the impact' of the problem, not to eliminate it, so how could it ever become a strategy that aims to meet growing developmental needs?

The strategy of the 'mafia'

Based on the information provided so far, the 'mafia's' strategy can be defined as:

Monopolization of armed force, swift accumulation of wealth and imposition of dominance on all actors, the 'state' included. The 'mafia' also monopolizes the claimed protection of civilians from terrorists. To this end it presents some dead bodies, which has given it part of its legitimacy.

But would this 'mafia,' the army and the semi-regular forces really be able to protect the town from ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra if either of them decided to attack?

A military commander in the armed opposition who we interviewed told us that while ISIS has 46 tanks in the Balaas Mountains, the area's largest pro-regime military compound (the village of Sabboura, which is ISIS's closest front to the town) only has 10 tanks. That is besides the high-tech anti-armor guns ISIS possess, its vehicle borne improvised explosive devices and its advanced combat

doctrine. Regime troops and their weapons are completely incapable of confronting such a large force. “Even the DShK’s status has declined to that of an ineffectual training weapon,” one witness told us. He believes that ISIS, if it wanted to, could storm the town at any moment. The regime now knows full well that it is completely incapable of recapturing any village it loses, as has been the case with the village of Uqayribat.

There are many signs that support the assertions of our witness. For example, one attack launched by ISIS on the Ithriyah road this year led to the death of 70 members of the regime’s semi-regular forces. In another attack on the same checkpoint a few months later 40 were killed. These figures surely point to gross military incompetence. However, the reason ISIS did not take control of the checkpoint does not lie in its incompetence. After all, shortly before this report was written, it seized Palmyra and the Jazal oil field. Controlling the checkpoint was not part of ISIS’s strategy, which focuses on two things: building a state⁽²³⁾ and carrying out raids – and the latter is what happened in Mabuja. The goal of these raids is to take prisoners, loot urban settlements and seize weapon stockpiles.

The regime and its fighters know this full well, yet despite this they feel no great fear of the opposition forces that are not part of ISIS.

The bottom line is that the ‘mafia’ knows its true function does not allow for it to play any real role in protecting itself from armed opposition forces. Its claims to this end are no more than a poor attempt to justify its own existence, and they show that it has set its strategy to work, in cooperation (we assume) with the regime, to control rather than to protect the town. If the regime had wanted to fortify Salamiyah it would have reinforced the other semi-regular forces and the army, not weakened them or allowed them to be weakened.

23- Rim Turkmani, Ibid page no 13.

The regime's strategy towards the 'mafia'

In the DRSC's book "The Authority of Authoritarianism Strategy Versus the Syrian Revolution"⁽²⁴⁾ we lay out the fundamental elements of the Syrian authorities' strategy from before the Muslim Brotherhood's uprising in the eighties until today.

The regime has relied upon impoverishing the middle class and keeping its members busy with everyday needs, deployed informants and corrupted people's lives. It has also used violence to keep society under control and repress any form of open rebellion. The authorities cannot implement structural reform, as reform of this kind would mean their destruction. Therefore, they have implemented tokenistic reforms, while retaining their core structure as it is (this is similar to what we mentioned earlier about the policy of postponement the regime has employed.) As well as this, the authorities have overseen the managed fragmentation of society (along family, sectarian, class and regional lines) in order to eternalize the regime and taken decisive action within the regime in the interests of the 'hard core' that decided to gamble with the country in order to reinforce its dominance. They chose to push matters towards civil war, allowed the formation of extremist groups and formed their own sectarian militias, thus causing the situation to degenerate in to complete chaos, in the hope that they would become the only acceptable choice internationally.

These elements are still key parts of the regime's strategy. So it is understandable why it has been reluctant to make any change, while the current conflict is going on, that could alter the strategy of the 'mafia' (there have been recurrent examples of the 'mafia's' conduct in Latakia, Salamiyah and most recently Dahiyet al-Assad⁽²⁵⁾.) For the state/regime, this would mean changing its strategy at the

24- The Authority of Authoritarianism Strategy Versus the Syrian Revolution, Democratic Republic Studies Center, electronic book.

25- One such example came during the large scale attack launched against Dahiyet al-Assad, Harasta and the nearby international highway by Zahran Alloush, which was the biggest ever attack of its kind and threatened to isolate the capital. *Shabiha* looted the houses of officers who live in Dahiyet al-Assad after they had fled the suburb. News of the looting was made public by regime supporters. For more info see the reaction of Syrian MP Ahmad Shlash: <http://www.enabbaladi.org/archives/45406>

core, and that would mean the beginning of the end. We find this eventuality highly unlikely for the following reasons:

1. The regime's 'hard core' has evolved its strategy⁽²⁶⁾ towards the following: granting a more prominent role to sectarian Shiite militias and its various local militia affiliates; transforming the army in to something resembling a militia; and, entrenching the idea of reliance on militias at the expense of the army – like when it formed the Coastal Shield Brigade. The above leaves no room at all for backing down, and it seems the regime has accepted this no matter what the cost.
2. The military and symbolic losses⁽²⁷⁾ that the state has suffered – the first such losses since Hafez al-Assad's reign began – mean the loss of the symbolic power it had exercised over members of the Alawite body it created to protect itself (see Rateb Sha'bo: After the last crime of Suleiman Al Assad in Latakia.. The Syrian loyalists cross a red line.. The Syrian regime will lose anyway.) It has become clear, since the incident involving Suleiman al-Assad, that the state needs a new force to impose its dominance. That new force is the 'mafia' groups: it is these groups that will guarantee the survival and dominance of the authorities, not matter what kind of solution is found for Syria's crisis⁽²⁸⁾.
3. The role played by the 'state' shows that the regime has created two arenas. The regime is present in both and it needs both. The first is the state and its institutions, which the regime controls. The second is the 'mafia.' A relationship of defiance, tension and truce-making exists between the two. This augments the regime's ability to maneuver and benefit from the characteristics of both while exerting its dominance over the public as a whole

26- Yousif Faker Al Deen, Appendix 2, the Authority of Authoritarianism Strategy..., ibid

27- The symptoms of these losses were evident when chants of "our blood and our souls we sacrifice for you *oh Tiger* (Colonel Suheil al-Hassan)" were heard rather than "... for you *oh Assad* (Assad is the Arabic for lion)." The new chant blamed the state for its military failures and contradicted the narrative of official media.

28- See Garib Mirza, The Letting of the Minorities' Blood Looms on the Horizon in Syria, ibid. After the Syrian crisis is over, the Syrian government (if conflict disappears and peace with the permanent enemy is achieved) will be faced by obligations it cannot fulfil. This will threaten to cause an uprising by the section of society that supports the regime. It will also endanger Iran which has invested in that section of society (see also: Warlord's Era...)

Therefore, the state will either try to maintain a situation of constant violence, which will have to come to an end at some point, or it will resort to the mafia, which will become its tool to dominate 'its' confessional section of society and secure permanent domination for itself and for Iran.

and its supporters. It does this by containing the two opposite arenas – containing both the 'state' and the 'mafia' in the hope that neither of them will manage to come out from beneath its robe. Despite the fact that the 'hard core' has used sect and family based allegiance to guarantee the loyalty of the 'mafia,' we believe this is an 'adventure,' because with the regime's declining power complete control over such gangs is almost impossible.

In any case, analysis of this kind leads one to ask whether the regime itself has undergone a structural transformation in to a network of 'mafias' and militias, and this is no literary metaphor as was previously the case in the writings of opposition figures.

The result:

As we can see, with regard to Salamiyah the last thing the regime will do is fulfill the people's demands and put an end to the actions of the 'mafia.' Therefore, it will take one of two paths:

The first is to make more promises and continue to postpone any action. If the section of the community that engages in protest accepts this (something it has already tried many times) it will have been defeated and the strategy of running-away will have won. Up until now, this is what has happened. If it does not, the regime will take the second path: a confrontation that gradually progresses from mysterious/obvious assassinations – as happened in Latakia – to direct repression and clashes with the *shabiha*, and this confrontation could take a sectarian Alawite-Ismaili form.

The strategies followed by the community are useless against the 'mafia.' At root they are built on an incorrect and delusional assumption that 'the regime will bow under pressure and fulfil our demands.' Apart from this the community's strategies are of a fragmented nature, and it is this that weakens them.

Another scenario would arise if ISIS were to carry out a massacre – with the regime’s consent, whether through a direct agreement or not. This would provide another bloody exit for all three sides (the state/regime, the community and the mafia.)

هذا ما كنا نرجوه نقلاً عن اللجنة المنظمة للإعتصام ، والقادم سيسعد الجميع
انشاءه
الغاء الاعتصام :
نتيجة الاجتماع مع اللجنة الأمنية خلصنا الى مايلي :
الوفد الرسمي الذي راز مدينتنا برئاسة رئيس اللجنة الأمنية قرر البدء المباشر
بالمعالجة لأزمة سلمية و اعطاء الحق لأصحابه عن طريق تفعيل كافة الاجراءات بحق
كافة المتجاوزين و الحقيقة انه تم البدء بالعمل الرسمي و وصلت تعبيرات أمنية و
استلمت بالفعل صلاحيتها و سيستمر العمل لانهاء كافة الارزات التي تعاني منها
المدينة بحيث يتم تنفيذ كافة المطالب التي تقدمت لجنسنا بها
لذا نحن أعضاء لجنة المتابعة بالاتفاف مع باقي الفعاليات قررنا بالتوافق الغاء أي
مظهر من مظاهر الاحتجاجات و الاعتصامات لما رأيناه من مبادرة جادة و حاسمة و
سنعطي كافة النشاطات الشعبية الخاصة بالحراك حرماً على سير العملية الأمنية
الرسمية و نترك للدولة المجال للمتابعة و التنفيذ بالشكل المناسب
نرجو من الجميع احترام هذا التفاهم الذي تم بين الجهات المسؤولة و بين أهالي
المدينة لأن عنوان الحراك أمان و سلامة المنطقة و كل شخص سيخالف سيكون
على مسؤوليته و نحن نعلق كافة النشاطات .
كل الشكر لانياء مدينتنا الكرام

Fig. 8

The demands and the community’s response are no different than they were one year before.

This is what we had hoped to hear from the committee organizing the protest. The coming events will gladden everyone, god-willing

Cancellation of the protest:

As a result of the meeting with the security committee we have reached the following conclusions:

The official delegation led by the head of the security committee has decided to begin resolving Salamiyah’s crisis immediately. People will be given what is rightfully theirs and all applicable procedures will be put in to effect against all transgressors. In truth, official action has begun. Security reinforcements have arrived and they really have been given authority. Action will continue to end all the crises the town is suffering from; all the demands our committee put forward will be fulfilled.....

Therefore we, the members of the follow-up committee, in agreement with the other involved parties, have made a consensus decision to cancel any kind of protests or demonstrations because of what we believe is a serious, decisive initiative. We will suspend all of the movement’s group activities out of our concern for the correct progress

of the security operation and we will allow the state to follow-up on and implement the operation in a suitable fashion....

We kindly ask everyone to respect this understanding that has been reached between the official authorities and the townsfolk because the movement stands for the area's safety and security. Anyone who breaches this understanding does so at their own responsibility. We have suspended all activities.

We thank the good people of our town

Notably, as a result of the meeting with the security officials a statement was produced called "The Statement of the National Popular Forces," in an obvious example of old school Baathist rhetoric. This clearly means that the regime's supporters have managed to take advantage of the 'upturned cup' situation and the tension between the three parties that keep the ongoing 'leakage' to a minimum. They have also managed to neutralize the others, who represented the 'congregation of the locals.' Instead of the statement by the townsfolk, which has real representation on the ground, Salamiyah got the "The Statement of The National Popular Forces," (which is empty rhetoric and means nothing on the ground.)

بيان القوى الشعبية الوطنية في منطقة سلمية...
 إن القوى الوطنية و الشعبية التي تمثل كافة الأحزاب الوطنية و المؤسسات الرسمية و ممثلي الأهالي و القوى المجتمعية بكافة أطيافها و استجابة لمطالب الأهالي تؤكد على مسلمات الوحدة الوطنية و تعزيز صمود الجيش العربي السوري في مكافحة الإرهاب و الحفاظ على وحدة و سلامة تراب الجمهورية السورية و بعد عدة لقاءات فيما بينها خلصت إلى مايلي :
 - إن هذه القوى ترى في التجاوزات على الحق العام و الاعتداء على هبة الدولة المتمثلة بالأجهزة المعنية و الاعتداء على كرامة المواطن و التضيق عليه اقتصاديا و معيشيا قد ساهمت في خلق جو من عدم الاستقرار و الاستياء الشعبي .
 إن منطقة سلمية بما لها من موقع التميز لدى القيادة متمثلة بشخص السيد الرئيس الدكتور بشار الأسد و لأنها تنبأ مكانة وطنية لما قدمته من الشهداء في كل بقعة من ارض سوريا الحبيبة و لأنها بلد الفكر و الأدب و عمق الانتماء و سلوك الوفاء للوطن الغالي أرضا و إنسانا تطالب القيادة بما يلي :
 1- رفع الغطاء الأمني عن كافة الأشخاص المتورطين بارتكابات جرميه و تجريدهم من كافة الصفات الأمنية و من السلاح الموجود لديهم .
 2- إحكام قبضة الأمن في سلمية و إنفاذ الأحكام القضائية و استعادة سلطة الدولة و ذلك عبر القبض على مثيري الفتن و مرتكبي التجاوزات التي تؤدي إلى فتنة لا يعرف لها مدى و لا قرار .
 3- رقد القوى الأمنية الموجودة في سلمية بقوة من خارج المنطقة معززة بالعتاد الفاعل لبيسط هبة الدولة و إلغاء القبض على المطلوبين .
 4- محاسبة كل من سولت له نفسه بارتكاب الجرائم و الاعتداءات على المواطنين و العيب بمقدرات الوطن .
 كما قررت تشكيل لجنة لمتابعة هذه المطالب مع كافة الجهات المعنية على مستوى المحافظة و القطر .
 ختاماً تؤكد القوى على الارتقاء بالحالة الوطنية و الوعي لما يحاك للوطن من مؤامرات و تهيب بجمع أبناء سلمية بالوقوف صفا واحدا خلف الجيش العربي السوري و قائد الوطن المفدى حتى تحقيق النصر .
 و نرفع شعار (سلمية تنتصر على الفتنة و تنتصر للوطن)
 المجد و الخلود لشهدائنا الأبرار ... عشمتم و عاشت سوريا حرة أبية
 2015 / 9 / 16

Fig 9.

Statement of the Popular National Forces in the Salamiyah Area...

In response to the demands of the townsfolk, the national and popular forces that represent all the national parties, official institutions, representatives of the townsfolk, and all of the community's forces, affirm [their support for] national unity and the strengthening of the Syrian Arab Army's steadfastness in confronting terrorism and maintaining the unity and safety of the Syrian Arab Republic's soil. After several meetings together, the Forces concluded the following:

-These forces believe that the transgressions against the rights of the public, the attacks on the state's standing as represented by its competent apparatuses, the attacks on citizens' dignity, and the economic pressure being imposed upon them have contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of instability and popular resentment.

The Salamiyah area, in view of the position of distinction afforded to it by the leadership, as represented by the President, Dr. Bashar al-Assad, and because of the martyrs it has given in every part of the beloved land of Syria, occupies a position of national importance. Because it is the land of thought, literature, depth of belonging, and loyalty to the dear nation's land and inhabitants, the leadership demands the following:

1 - Removal of immunity from all persons involved in criminal violations. They must be stripped of all security status and all weapons in their possession.

2- Tightening the grip of the security forces in Salamiyah, implementation of judicial rulings and the restoration of state authority. This is to be achieved through the arrest of agitators and those who commit transgressions that lead to sedition of unknown extent and depth.

3 - That the security forces in Salamiyah receive the support of a force from outside the area that is equipped with effective weaponry so that state authority can be enforced and the wanted persons arrested.

4 - The holding to account of every person who submitted to the temptation to commit crimes and acts of aggression against citizens and misused the nation's resources.

The Forces have also decided to form a committee to follow-up on these demands with all the competent authorities at governorate and country level.

In conclusion, the Forces emphasize that the national situation must be improved and that we must all be aware of the conspiracies being woven for the nation. The Forces call upon all residents of Salamiyah to stand as one behind the Syrian Arab Army and the nation's cherished leader until victory is achieved.

We hereby take up the following slogan: Salamiyah is victorious over sedition and it is victorious for the homeland.

Glory and immortality for our righteous martyrs... Long may you live and long live Syria, proud and free.

16/09/2015

This is how the crisis of the unturned cup has become so deeply entrenched.

The 'mafia' may temporarily reduce its visibility, because as long as it knows it can defeat the community through its position of dominance it will not want a heated confrontation.

The regime, which we suspect has threatened to use force against the townsfolk and officials in Salamiyah, does not want confrontation with anyone from the community either (certainly not with the mafia.) One particularly strong reason for this, is its awareness of the community's fragmented strategies; why would it use violence to unify them?

The section of the community that engages in protest has sought to protect itself, and as its latest statement clearly demonstrates, it realizes that it has only done this temporarily.

In this way, the three strategies have converged on extending tension for another period, however long it turns out to last. This period will undoubtedly be a temporary one, lasting only until the occurrence of a big change that does away with at least one of the three parties (state/regime, 'mafia,' community) either spontaneously as a natural result of the tension between them or through an intentional act by one of them, as we said at the beginning of the paper.

They all know that time is passing and that what is postponed today will not necessarily be solved tomorrow.

At the present time, the feeling that the state and the opposition are dying is opening the door to a growing acceptance of the idea of international protection or support. At the moment no-one has the power to 'overturn the table/cup' and change the rules of the conflict. However, no-one is ignorant to the fact that the current situation is condemned to death. Its death will mean the decline or disappearance of at least one of the three parties, and this has made the people we interviewed prefer international protection.

Recommendations

Based on our knowledge of the community in Salamiyah and this analysis:

1. Notables in the town should evolve and unify their strategy. Their improved strategy should not stop at demands related to security and daily life necessities, as this would be of no use. Such a strategy can never escape its inherent impotence. A unified strategy must be evolved, that draws its authority from being strong and meeting developmental needs.
2. The town's elites, to be precise those of them who are now outside Syria, must endeavor to find mechanisms that put pressure on the international

community, the Syrian regime and the opposition so that support will be given to the demands of the townsfolk.

3. The local community must take advantage of the good relationship it has built with the city of Hama so as to play a role in mending or re-building social peace. This would allow the community to achieve peace with the surrounding areas. This is a peace that cannot exist unless the pre-conditions of good living standards for the community and for its Hama-Governorate surroundings are created, as the latter are closer than anywhere else. This would help re-built the state.
4. Civil society forces inside Syria and abroad must focus on awareness of the difference between the sectarian 'mafia' and the Alawite sect as well as between the Alawite sect and the regime's use of a section of to protect itself. This will help check gravitation towards a sectarian war. Civil society must be aware that the 'mafia' phenomenon is not limited to those who use the name of the Alawites. It is also applies to those who use the name of the Sunni community in other areas where the opposition is in control. 'Mafias' that use the name of the Ismailis could also appear later.

Chapter 4: Appendixes

Appendix 1 - types of violations committed between June and September 2015

In this appendix we review the violations committed by the 'mafias' in the town of Salamiyah from June to September. We have documented these violations through the testimonies of activists and witnesses. All incidents mentioned here have been confirmed by at least three testimonies, and we have organized the incidents according to the date on which they occurred.

Introduction

The *shabiha* have engaged in mafia-like activity since the beginning of the Syrian revolution and this activity has gradually increased:

In 2013, Ibrahim Al-Saleh, a member of the Alawite sect, cut an opposition fighter's head off and hung it on a pillar in the National Hospital for everyone to see. No-one dared to take it down and the incident caused a great deal of anger in the town.

In the winter of the same year, several women from the town were kidnapped. One of them, 'K,' turned up in the Damascus neighborhood of Mezze 86, an Alawite slum where a considerable number of the inhabitants work in the security apparatuses. She was released after a ransom was paid. One of her relatives, who described her condition to us, said she appeared to have been assaulted and was in a confused mental state. Several members of her family, despite the fact that they work in the security services and have continued to support the regime, blame Alawite *shabiha*. The fact that a kidnapped person crossed the many checkpoints between Salamiyah and Mezze 86 is clear evidence of the kidnapper's identity, especially as negotiations for K's release took place on the Mezze highway near Damascus University's Faculty of Literature (which is located in a central part of the capital.)

In 2014, the Alawite and *shabiha* member Ali Hamdan appeared on the scene. Hamdan became known for his brazen, public violations, like the time he beat up a policeman from Aal Ajoub and his mother, and the acts of robbery and the kidnappings he committed, some of which ended with the murder of the hostage after the price for their release had been taken. In another incident, he took a Kalashnikov in to his baccalaureate examination to terrorize the observers and the other students.

In the spring of the same year, Ibrahim Al-Saleh assaulted the owner of a mobile phone shop from Aal Al-Kassir, sparking the first wave of public outcry.

Looting by these types was a constant occurrence. For example, in 2013 when armed opposition forces came close to the village of Tel Jadeed, a large number of its Ismaili inhabitants from Aal Hamawi fled. Aal Salama and *shabiha* from

Sabboura came to loot their houses but they were stopped by the village's Alawite inhabitants. The same thing happened after the Mabuja massacre in spring 2014. Sabboura's *shabiha* took no action when ISIS attacked the village but they quickly made their way there after the group had withdrawn and looted the houses of locals, who had either fled or been killed. The reaction of the village's inhabitants led to the detention of Ghazwan Al-Salamouni, the leader of the *shabiha* in Sabboura, but not for more than a week.

The following links to the Arabic language news website Zaman al-Wasl document several violations by these individuals:

<https://zamanalwsl.net/news/48708.html>

<https://zamanalwsl.net/news/55562.html>

<https://zamanalwsl.net/news/48553.html>

<https://zamanalwsl.net/news/48881.html>

Documentation of Violations from 08/06/2015 to 12/09/2015

Incidents from 08/06/2015 to 18/06/2015 type 3

A military police checkpoint on the Salamiyah-Homs road stopped a person working for Mahmoud Afifa (the leader of one of the 'mafia' gangs in Khunayfis - Appendix 2) and this was on charges of absenteeism from the Army. Backed-up by Aal Salama, Mahmoud Afifa attacked the military police checkpoint. After this, when the joint patrols were sent to seize him, he resisted them and a clash took place. After this, the regime sent Fourth Division members to seize him and he resisted them, with support from Aal Salama. In the end it was agreed that members of his group would be merged with the Fourth Division and that he would be the leader of this new formation.

Incidents of 18/06/2015 type 1

A fist fight, firing in the air and an attack on a shop took place because of a dispute between a person from Aal Al-Jarari who was a member of Ghazwan Al-Salamouni's group and a person from Aal Salibi who was a member of the Desert Falcons.

Incidents of 20/06/2015 type 2

After fuel arrived at Mabuja gas station (Mabuja is an Ismaili majority village near Salamiyah) a person called Munqiz Al-Salamouni tried to jump the queue and the owner of the gas station stopped him. Munqiz then called the *shabiha* in Sabboura who arrived soon thereafter. They proceeded to fire in the air with DShK 1938s and Kalashnikovs, insult the people present and beat them up. As a result, one person was injured.



A picture of the person injured in the Mabuja incident

Incidents in Salamiyah on 26/06/2015 type 2

After Samir Zarif, who had been accused of kidnapping and robbery, was let out of jail, members of his gang assembled and walked through the town in a procession, repeatedly firing in the air with DShK 1938s and Kalashnikovs, and for the first time rocket propelled grenades. At the same time, the bodies of 40 men killed in an attack by ISIS on a checkpoint near Ithriyah arrived, which angered regime supporters in particular.

29/06/2015 Salamiyah type 2

The attempted kidnapping of a young man took place during the night in the eastern neighborhood.

10/07/2015

Alaa Al-Saleh provoked the second wave of public outcry by assaulting a young man in Al-Ferdous Cafe. The latter fled in to the cafe and another young man from Aal Zino (one of the town's big Ismaili families) tried to protect him. Then Al-Saleh's friends arrived to back him up after he had shot the second young man in the shoulder. This was followed by the outbreak of the first wave of public outcry, which we have covered in the report. The situation remained unsettled until after the interior minister arrived in Salamiyah on 17/07/2015 (this event is also covered in the report.)

The demands presented to the interior minister were as follows:

1. No-one should be above the law, the law should apply to everyone and the warrants issued against offenders should be enforced;
2. Corrupt individuals must be held to account;
3. Work must be done to stop the open bearing of arms inside the town, the military police should be empowered to perform this role, and weapons should be kept out of the town;

4. A military operations room led exclusively by army officers should be created. All armed formations should be incorporated in to this operations room.
5. Work should be done to empower the security apparatuses and they should be supported by the townsfolk.
6. Legal action should be taken against fuel sellers who are exploiting the crisis.
7. All the possible points of entry in to Salamiyah should be closed off by digging a trench with the exception of four gateways, so that monitoring and searches will be more effective. This would protect the town and reduce incidences of kidnapping.

11/07/2015

The front windows of a shop in Salamiyah's Zeinab Street were broken because of an argument between the owner and armed *shabiha*.

18/07/2015

Rami Al-Derbouli, who commands the Al-Milyoun checkpoint (near Khunayfis), widened the area covered by his residence by erecting earth embankments. In doing so he had trespassed on land owned by a number of individuals and the state. This happened three days after the Interior Minister's visit.

21/07/2015

Ali Jaata broke in to a house armed with a rifle and attempted to murder the son and grandson of the owner. Jaata, a *shabiha* member, opened fire inside the house but no-one was injured thanks to the intervention of the neighbors.

23/07/2015

After being let out of jail, Ghazwan Salamouni bought a car for 17 million Syrian pounds. He had been detained in relation to the Mabuja massacre.

24/07/2015 (Hama)

A clash took place on Hama's Orontes Square between members of the NDF and the Airforce Intelligence Directorate after Colonel Naji Al-Sabbagh was arrested on charges being involved in prostitution. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights covered the clash but due to the site being hacked we cannot add a link to its account of what took place. However, the incident was covered by several other media outlets⁽²⁹⁾.

02/08/2015

Abu Fadi Farha was kidnapped. Between this time and the interior minister's visit 7 people were kidnapped but we were only able to acquire Abu Fadi Farha's name.

03/08/2015 (village of Al-Kafat)

A group of people belonging to an unnamed security department stole a tractor on the Al-Kafat road and attempted to murder the owner by forcing him to drink diesel. Al-Kafat is close to Salamiyah.

On the same date, army volunteer officer Mazen Sami was kidnapped at 01:00 p.m. on the Al-Ferdous road inside the town.

26/08/2015

Mohammed Ali Thalja was kidnapped at 3:30 p.m. close to Burkan Cemetery.

26/08/2015 (Hama)

Clashes broke out between Airforce Intelligence and Military Intelligence members in Hama over control of the Kazo checkpoint. Both sides took members of the other side prisoner before the problem was solved. This shows that these

29- Airforce Intelligence chief and military commander arrested over prostitution (Arabic), 26/07/2015
<http://cutt.us/Jpqq>

security departments have turned in to gangs, each of which controls a certain area of the city⁽³⁰⁾.

05/09/2015

After a person from Aal Salama stabbed someone from Aal Dibbo in Bahaa Salama's Sawa Rabbayna cafe, the latter opened fire on the former and the incident escalated in to an armed clash in front of Faraj Hospital.

09/09/2015

After a car driven by armed *shabiha* hit a child in Salamiyah's southern quarter, the residents tried to perform a citizen's arrest but the *shabiha* open fire on them, injuring several people before driving off.

12/09/2015

Alaa Al-Saleh opened fire on the owner of Umm Masaad gas station's son, hitting him in the shoulder. After this a joint patrol led by the district chief went to arrest Al-Saleh, but back up arrived for him from Mahmoud Afifa in Khunayfis. Afifa's group proceeded to open fire on the patrol with DShK 1938 machine guns, prompting its members to take flight and conceal themselves in the neighboring houses. Meanwhile, Al-Saleh and Afifa's men took their weapons.

Appendix 2: semi-official military formations and mafia gangs

1 - Mahmoud Afifa's group

Mahmoud Afifa is from the Alawite village of Khunayfis near Salamiyah. There are around 300 people in his gang, and he has three tanks and 20 vehicles with

30- Dispute escalates in to infighting between Airforce Intelligence branch and Military Intelligence in Hama, 26/08/2015, Al-Souria Net, <http://cutt.us/Yf76>

mounted DShK 1938s. His gang has become so famous for rebelling against the state that people now refer to the village where he is based as the “state of Khunayfis.”

At the height of the latest crisis, his gang – backed up by Alaa Al-Saleh – opened fire on the district chief’s patrol from cars equipped with mounted DShK 1938s.



Picture of Mahmoud Afifa

2 - The Desert Falcons

The name of the Desert Falcon’s Battalion first appeared during the battle to recapture the Shaar gas field from ISIS over a year ago. The battalion’s name also appeared in connection with the battle to retake the Maheen weapons depots in Homs Governorate from the group. Before this it had taken part in the battles of Kasab and Observatory 45.

The battalion was led by Colonel Major Mohsen Saeed Hassan who is also known by the nickname ‘Khudour’ and came from a village near the town of Safita. Benefiting from his experience with the ‘thunderbolt’ training undergone by Fourth Division members, he made sure his forces were trained to a high standard. Hassan was the head of the Military Intelligence Directorate’s Al-Badiya Branch.

Colonel Khudour was killed during fighting with ISIS in the Shaar gas field on 17 November 2014.

In April, Hafez Mahmoud, one of the battalion's commanders from a village near Masyaf, was killed during fighting in Jisr al-Shughour⁽³¹⁾.

In addition to its headquarters in Ras al-Bassit, the battalion has a number of branches in Masyaf, Homs, Salamiyah and elsewhere.

In Salamiyah its name became well known under the leadership of Ismail Khabbazi (an Ismaili) and then Ali Eid (another Ismaili.) The latter was eventually dismissed or resigned after internal differences. The battalion is now controlled by Al-Jaber brothers, Ayman and Mohammed, both of whom are mafia giants⁽³²⁾ and were wanted by the Turkish and Syrian governments before the crisis.

Notably, at the beginning of this year, a clash took place between the Airforce Intelligence Directorate's Salamiyah branch and the Desert Falcons' Salamiyah branch.

3 - Ghazwan Al-Salamouni

31- See - The Desert Falcons: the Assad regime's strike-force for oil, 27/11/2014, <http://cutt.us/auEC>
Zaman Al-Wasl - <http://zamanalwsl.net/news/55388.html>
<http://zamanalwsl.net/news/60269.html>

32- Zaman Al-Wasl, 04/07/2015 - <http://cutt.us/fWg9>



Picture of Ghazwan Al-Salamouni with Grand Mufti Ahmad Hassoun

A resident of the village of Sabboura, Al-Salamouni is the leader of the National Defense Forces-Sabboura Section. He has become famous for his many violations, especially for highway robberies on the Raqqa road, where he has set up a number of checkpoints for that purpose. He has been accused of complicity in the raid on Mabuja by ISIS and the horrific massacre that followed, in which 50 civilians were killed. After this he was detained for a short period to quell the anger of the locals and then released to heavy celebratory gunfire by the members of his gang.

Al-Salamouni is thought to be the man who appears in a recently circulated video beating and humiliating a woman and her husband.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef7EtNKKaYU>

4 - Aal Salama in Salamiyah

Aal Salama have the upper hand in the town and their influence comes from Adib Salama, the head of the Airforce Intelligence Directorate's Aleppo branch. They are members of the Alawite sect who have lived in the Dahr al-Maghr neighborhood in the south of the town for several years.

When the revolution started, they quickly became involved in repression of demonstrations and all the mafia-like activity we have mentioned. Firas Salama, son of Museeb Salama, currently leads the gang, which has around 50 members.

5 - The Salamiyah Airforce Intelligence branch

There Airforce Intelligence Directorate never used to have a presence in Salamiyah. The new branch was established when the uprising began and Wareeth Younis, an Alawite from Sabboura, was appointed as its commanding officer. After he was killed, his brother, Rajab Younis took over, and after several complaints, leadership of the branch was given to a member of Aal Al-Khateeb.

The branch supports Sabboura's *shabiha* and Aal Salama in their mafia business, and the fact that its leadership was transferred from brother to brother is certainly noteworthy.

For the first time people from the town people were tortured to death in the new intelligence branch, and they died at the hands of Wareeth Younis.

6 - Other names

There are a number of people of note who have been involved in illegal activity, especially kidnapping.

Wael Jakeesh:

Jakeesh is a member of the Ismaili sect and has been accused of torturing several people. He works for Fadel Wardeh, the leader of the NDF in Salamiyah, but he has no influence. Wael Jakeesh and Fidaa Jakeesh were arrested but later released.

Ibrahim Al-Saleh and Alaa Al-Saleh:

The Al-Saleh brothers sparked the first and second waves of public outcry. They come from a poor Alawite family and before the revolution they used to do ordinary jobs, including garbage collection. After the revolution they became rich.

(Ibrahim Al-Saleh was killed by a *shabiha* member after an argument.)