

A MODERN HISTORY OF THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY IN DARAA

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This paper looks at the genesis and development of the Free Syrian Army in the southern province of Daraa, from July 2011 to July 2013.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

INTRO

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) and its supporters have produced a stream of real-time, open-source information on the genesis and development of the Syrian armed rebellion's organizational structures since they first emerged in June 2011.¹ While these data on their own may not provide a full picture of the Syrian conflict, they are richer than any single alternative source. Specifically, the use of YouTube videos to spread information and gain support for the rebel cause has produced a wealth of data available for analysis to anyone with an Internet connection and a decent command of the Arabic language.² The analyst's challenge is not in finding the data but rather in sorting through them and providing context; distinguishing propaganda from news and the real from the virtual can be difficult when the intention is as much to convince as to inform.

The Syrian rebellion as a national phenomenon can hardly be understood without a sense of its constituent regional parts. Nominally an institution with national-level leadership structures, the FSA exhibits significant differences across Syria's various battlefronts. Much of this is due to structural differences: geography and border dynamics, as well as variations in demographic features and strategic importance to the weakened Syrian state. These have, to a large degree, determined the course of the rebellion in several areas. However, the Syrian revolt has also been driven by the dynamics of specific, contingent actions, starting with the violent overreaction of local authorities to dissent in Daraa Province (also spelled Deraa, Dar'a, etc.). The local authorities' heavy-handed reaction put Daraa Province at the forefront of popular mobilization even though it was structurally unfit to lead the armed rebellion for reasons that include flat topography and the largest per-capita presence of Syrian military.³

¹ The data used for this paper, mostly YouTube videos, are detailed in Appendix I. Videos are often posted on multiple YouTube accounts, some of which can be quite ephemeral. For this reason, all links listed in Appendix I are accompanied by the Arabic title of the video. If the particular link listed here is no longer functional, using the video's Arabic title as a search term is often sufficient for finding another version of the same video.

² According to Syrian scholar Carsten Wieland, "After the Facebook-co-ordinated protests in Tunisia and Egypt, Syria experienced the first YouTube revolution in history..." Carsten Wieland, "Syria - a Decade of Lost Chances: Repression and Revolution from Damascus Spring to Arab Spring," (Cune Press, 2012).

³ "The opposition's inability to seize territory in Daraa is largely due to this preponderance of regime positions; Daraa boasts a higher number of brigades per province than anywhere outside of Damascus. Terrain is also a factor, as the Hawran plain confers distinct advantage to the regime's armored forces, unlike mountainous Idlib or urban Homs." Joseph Holliday, "The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency to Civil War," Institute for the Study of War Middle East Security Report 8, March 2013, p. 36.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/TheAssadRegime-web.pdf>

This paper focuses on the FSA's first two years of existence in Daraa Province, from its origins in July 2011 until July 2013.⁴ Daraa's FSA structures are considered more unified than those of other regions, lending the rebellion a sense of stability absent in other parts of the country.⁵ Furthermore, Daraa is of particular strategic importance, occupying a vital position between Damascus and Amman and bordering the sensitive Golan Heights to the west.⁶

The emergence and development of Daraa's FSA can be generally divided into five phases. The first begins with the initial March 2011 protest crackdown and continues through the end of that year. It is characterized by a small number of FSA formations operating under an institutional structure that mimics the Turkey-based national FSA leadership.⁷ The second phase roughly covers the first half of 2012 and is characterized by the defection of mid-level officers and struggles for control over the local military council, as well as the constitution of many new of battalions. The third phase goes from August 2012 through the end of 2012 and is characterized by the incorporation of existing FSA "battalions" into larger "brigades." The struggle for control over the council re-emerges in the fourth phase, which ends around April 2013 and includes some battlefield successes for the rebels. The fifth phase continues up to the point at which this research project was completed (July 2013) and is characterized by a deepening fissure within rebel ranks. Particularly beginning with the second phase, constant flux in terms of unit formation, alliances and dissolution has been the norm rather than the exception. This paper's conclusion seeks to understand whether a hardening division is emerging from these changes or they are instead simply evidence of the absence of a strong central leadership.

⁴ The emphasis here is on the periphery of the provincial capital (also called Daraa). Groups operating in the province's north are more likely to set their sights on the closer and strategically more important southern suburbs of Damascus, and are consequently excluded from this study; those in the west may be oriented toward Jordan and are also excluded. These groups include the Ababil Hawran, al-Haramain, and Shuhada Yarmouk, among others.

⁵ As one study from the summer of 2012 notes, "The Deraa military council represents a higher proportion of active rebel groups in their province than almost any other provincial military council." See: Joseph Holliday, "Syria's Maturing Insurgency," Institute for the Study of War Middle East Security Report 5, June 2012, p. 25. http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrias_MaturingInsurgency_21June2012.pdf

Western press and think-tank analyses usually refer to them as more "moderate." See for instance: "Can Jordan keep out of it for ever?" The Economist, 3/16/13. <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21573605-civil-war-hotting-up-syrias-southern-front-can-jordan-keep-out-it>

⁶ Daraa constitutes the bulk of the Hawran plateau, which also includes parts of Sweida and the Golan, as well as northwestern Jordan. As can be seen from this paper, the term "Hawran" appears often in rebel nomenclature.

⁷ The rebel army consists of four types of units. They do not necessarily conform to standard military convention in terms of size and weaponry, other than being ranked by size as follows:

سرية (saraya) – company

كتيبة (katiba) – battalion

لواء (liwa) – brigade

فرقة (firqa) – division

A careful analysis of the emergence and development of provincial FSA structures is merely a prelude to unraveling the complex dynamics of any given province, not to mention Syria as a whole. This study may provide a template for how to study other provinces, considering the broader Syrian conflict as a series of local conflicts rather than a single national one. A narrow focus on the FSA provides only a partial picture of the rebellion and needs to be complemented by an understanding of non-FSA rebel groups and their links to the FSA units. Unfortunately, that is beyond the scope of this paper.

This study relies on open source Internet data. Much of it, including Facebook pages, YouTube videos and profiles or reports from media outlets sympathetic to the Syrian rebellion, is self-promoting material. The Syrian regime and its supporters have been less prolific, but sources supporting the rebellion yet critical of the armed rebels have grown steadily and help provide balance. Daraa's FSA formations respond to real military needs and their Internet presence may largely reflect conditions on the ground; a robust social media presence, however, does not necessarily equate to real influence.

PHASE ONE: EARLY DEFECTIONS (JULY 2011 – JANUARY 2012)

Syria's YouTube defection videos, in which a single soldier or a group of them announce their defection from the Syrian military and reasons for doing so, began appearing in June 2011.⁸ The earliest defections from the Syrian Army, though, date from late March 2011 when the military was first deployed to the town of Daraa.⁹ In this case, several small units defected from the 5th Division (Armored) of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), finding refuge with sympathetic residents in Daraa city after being deployed and ordered to shoot at protesters.¹⁰ One unconfirmed account by an anonymous Syrian officer states that the Army's praetorian 4th Division was deployed in Daraa shortly thereafter in order to capture or kill these defectors.¹¹

⁸ The first one, which broadly sets the early template, is a video made by Abd al-Razzaq Tlas, from the town of Rastan north of the city of Homs. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATMpc6ss5JM> (Arabic).

⁹ The very first video of a defecting soldier is dated 1 May 2011. It shows a Republican Guard soldier, Walid al-Qashmaai, being interviewed and describing events in the Damascus suburb of Harasta. Al-Qashmaai did not become a player in the FSA and therefore his defection is not considered the first for what became the FSA. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmNsk488nDc> (Arabic).

¹⁰ See for instance: Nicholas Blanford, "Syria's military shows signs of division amid crackdown," Christian Science Monitor, 4/25/11. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0425/Syria-s-military-shows-signs-of-division-amid-crackdown> or: "Witness Describes Syrian Crackdown on Protesters," NPR, 4/29/11. <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/29/135846446/witness-describes-syrian-crackdown-on-protesters>

¹¹ See: "Rais arkan ahda kataib al-liwa 23 yakshif lil-haqiqa min hum a'dha al-'asabat al-musaliha fi Daraa," al-Haqiqa (syriatruth.org). Available at:

The initial cluster of YouTube defections came later, when the Syrian military entered the town of Jisr al-Shughur in early June.¹² Located far from Daraa in a mountainous part of Idlib Province to the north of the country, Jisr al-Shughur provided defectors with the type of cover unavailable in the flat and highly controlled cradle of the rebellion. After crossing into Turkey, the small group of early YouTube defectors found a bully pulpit with the Qatari news channel *al-Jazeera*, which at the time was riding a wave of popularity from its coverage of the Arab Spring. The Free Officers Movement, the precursor to the FSA, was born from these defections. Over the next few months defectors from all over the country began openly joining the movement.

Daraa's first "Free Officer" was Qais al-Qataneh, a captain whose defection video was posted on 10 July 2011. A native of the rocky volcanic plain in northeast Daraa Province called al-Lajah, al-Qataneh was able to disappear from the sights of the Syrian military in ways that few public defectors from the province could.¹³ With a largely Bedouin population, an abundance of natural shelters and challenging terrain for conventional deployments, al-Lajah quickly became a gathering point for aspiring rebels in Daraa.

On 3 August 2011 al-Qataneh issued a YouTube statement identifying himself as commander of the "Southern Sector" in the Free Officers Movement.¹⁴ Only a few days earlier, Turkey-based military defectors announced the formation of the FSA. In a fairly unpolished statement, FSA leader Col. Riad al-Asaad identified "Captain Qais" (by first name only) as a founding member of the rebel army. By the end of September local and national structures were better aligned. On 30 September 2011 the FSA leadership announced the formation of Daraa's first official FSA unit, to be called the Omari Battalion and led by "Captain Qais." The "battalion" conducted several hit and run operations against government checkpoints and mobilizations in Daraa over the next months.¹⁵

http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:nJtK_RySfy4J:www.odabasham.net/show.php%3Fsid%3D46003+&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us (Arabic).

The website of the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (<http://www.vdc-sy.info>) keeps track of deaths and detentions in Syria throughout the uprising. It classifies those killed by the regime as civilians and non-civilians. A cursory glance shows that its database contains several non-civilians killed in Daraa starting in April.

¹² The focus is on defection statements that were recorded and disseminated on YouTube. Many defected and fought both before and after these videos became popular, without making a video of their own.

¹³ Al-Qataneh was, according to his own account, convalescing and then on leave during the early events in Daraa, making his defection relatively easy.

¹⁵ Joseph Holliday, "Syria's Armed Opposition," Institute for the Study of War Middle East Security Report 3, March 2012, pp. 22-24. http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrias_Armed_Opposition.pdf

The province's second defection video appeared on 22 October 2011. In it, First Lieutenant Sharif al-Kayid, from the village of Qarfa,¹⁶ appeared accompanied by seven hooded "colleagues," each holding a machine gun and dressed in military uniform. Behind them was a handmade banner on which was written "Free Syrian Army – Southern Sector Command." Reading from a laptop, Al-Kayid announced his defection from the SAA and the formation of the Ahmed Khalaf Battalion (Southern Branch), which would become the FSA's second battalion in Daraa Province.¹⁷

The FSA introduced Daraa's third official battalion five days later. Its 27 October formation video showed eight armed hooded men, all standing except for one who read a statement claiming that they were military defectors forming the Shuhada al-Hurriyah (Martyrs of Freedom) Battalion. Unlike the Ahmed Khalaf video, the speaker's identity remained secret. Syria's pre-Baathist green, white and black flag, which would become the rebel flag, made its first appearance. On 14 November Mahmood Tuqtuq, a first lieutenant from the city of Homs, announced that he was defecting and joining al-Kayid's Ahmed Khalaf Battalion. In the video he and a man named Ahmed Tuqtuq¹⁸ (presumably brothers) flanked a now-bearded Sharif al-Kayid. The background resembled that of al-Kayid's video from three weeks prior, hinting that it may have been filmed some time before its release. Mahmood Tuqtuq would subsequently identify himself as leader of the Shuhada al-Hurriyah Battalion.¹⁹

On 14 November, coinciding with the release of this video, media sources reported the defection of Republican Guard Lt. Col. Ghassan Hlaihil. Hlaihil did not post a defection video and his Internet footprint is limited, though his defection echoed on Twitter. Two days later he was listed as one of the ten members of the FSA's national-level interim council, in a declaration that was posted online but not made via video; al-Qataneh, on the other hand, was not included in this early national rebel military council.²⁰ Al-Qataneh, nonetheless, appeared to be the FSA's man in Daraa. In a 22 November

¹⁶ Also spelled Garfa, the town is the home of Rustum Ghazaleh, a high-ranking official in the Syrian security apparatus. The town is adjacent to the mixed Christian-Sunni town of Izraa, home to a large SAA military base (12th Brigade).

¹⁷ Ahmed Khalaf was an early defector from Homs who was killed by regime forces shortly after his defection. <https://www.facebook.com/ahmad.khalaf.ho> (Arabic).

¹⁸ Ahmed Tuqtuq would become leader of the Kataib al-Sahaba, one of the groups that took credit for a spectacular attack in Damascus that killed several high-level Syrian officials in the government's "crisis cell," including Interior Minister Assef Shawkat, Defense Minister Dawoud Rajha and Hassan Turkmani, a former defense minister and head of the crisis cell. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuQHReD9Zik> (Arabic).

²⁰ The FSA leadership statement that includes Hlaihil is available, among others, at: http://arab-worlds.blogspot.com/2011/11/blog-post_16.html (Arabic). Hlaihil also is identified as leader of the Muawiya ibn Sufian Battalion in Damascus; his subsequent links to this formation are unclear. According to one account, he

statement he mentions only two FSA battalions operating in Daraa Province: his own Omari Battalion and Sharif al-Kayed's Ahmed Khalaf Battalion. Mahmood Tuqtuq's Shuhada al-Hurriyah Battalion was not mentioned and presumably was a part of the latter.

On 16 November Lt. Mohammed Mustafa al-Maarati posted a defection video, along with four other men in Bosr al-Harir. Little was heard from them after this; al-Maarati, who appeared to be a leader in what became the Salah al-Din Battalion, was killed in late January 2012. On 6 December Lt. Col. Mohammed Khir al-Harbat became the first lieutenant colonel from the region to publicly defect via YouTube. Nothing was then heard from him for several months; however, al-Harbat would subsequently emerge atop Daraa's local FSA structure, albeit temporarily.

In December 2011 and January 2012, three new FSA battalions appeared alongside the Omari and Ahmed Khalaf Battalions, creating the nucleus of the rebel army in Daraa and marking the end of Phase One of the FSA in the province. The first of the final three is the Moatassem Battalion, whose formation was announced in an outdoor nighttime video made by alleged military defectors on 18 December 2011. The identity of its leadership was not disclosed in the video. On 10 January 2012 Major Ahmed Ibrahim Sharrouf, a native of Homs, appeared in a video surrounded by hooded men announcing his defection from the Syrian Army and incorporation into the Moatassem Battalion, presumably as its leader (for a list of Daraa's FSA military units mentioned in this paper, see Table 3 at the end of this paper).

The Moatez Billah Battalion was the next-to-last to form during Phase One, making its debut in a 16 January 2012 YouTube video. Around thirty men appeared in the video, all with their faces covered. This is the first video in which members took an "oath" over the Quran. The final unit, the Rayat al-Haq Battalion (Banners of Truth), was formed in a 28 January 2012 video, filmed at night in an undisclosed public location in the city of Daraa (Daraa al-Balad). These five battalions – Omari, Ahmed Khalaf, Moatassem, Moatez Billah and Rayat al-Haq – would become the kernel of the initial FSA presence in Daraa.

PHASE TWO: BATTALIONS AND MILITARY COUNCILS (FEBRUARY 2012 – JULY 2012)

testified that Manaf Tlass – one of the SAA's most prominent defectors – had been complicit in firing on protesters: <https://www.facebook.com/Hama.Coordinators.Union/posts/490538120972748> (Arabic).

February 2012 was a turning point for Syria's rebels. At a national level the FSA faced its first major leadership struggle with the defection of General Mustafa al-Shaykh, who became the rebel army's highest ranking defector. Over the following months, several attempts were made to formally transfer the FSA's leadership to al-Shaykh. These were resisted by the FSA's founding leadership and in the end al-Shaykh was incorporated in a way that simply added a new layer of bureaucracy to the organization. Meanwhile on the battlefield, major escalation in the city of Homs and its environs foreshadowed the regime's readiness to deal with the crisis militarily regardless of the cost.

In Daraa Province the defection via YouTube of Lt. Col. Yasser al-Abboud had a rapid and profound effect on the local FSA leadership structure. Al-Abboud's defection video is dated 22 February 2012, though he appears to have an earlier connection with local FSA leaders. In his defection video al-Abboud identified himself as leader of the Abi Bakr al-Sadiq Brigade, which he claimed is composed of not only the Rayat al-Haq Battalion, but also Daraa's other four founding FSA battalions and several hitherto unknown units.

Two days later the "Military Revolutionary Council – Southern Command" made its first official YouTube statement. The statement, which was read by the local FSA pioneer Qais al-Qataneh, named Lt. Col. Yasser al-Abboud as the council's leader, Maj. Ahmed Sharrouf as his deputy, Lt. Sharif al-Kayid as the council's secretary general and Lt. Ahmed Marwan Majarish as a member. Unlike the others, Majarish did not make a defection video. In a later video, from May 2012, he is identified as commander of the Omar al-Mokhtar Company (which would later become a battalion), operating in the village of Mahja north of Izraa. Capt. Qais al-Qataneh became the council's official spokesperson. All but Ahmed Sharrouf appear in the video. The new council claimed to command the five initial battalions mentioned above, as well as the Salah al-Din and Abdullah bin Omar battalions. In a sense they replaced Yasser al-Abboud's Abi Bakr al-Sadiq Brigade, which had been declared two days earlier. It is, however, unclear how much consensus there was regarding that particular brigade. Regardless, these seven units became the foundation of the council.

For the next several months of 2012, roughly from February to June, defections and new units proliferated. Videos of individuals declaring their defection were complemented by videos where the defection and unit formation were declared simultaneously. On 24 February 2012, the same day that Yasser al-Abboud was named head of the local military council, Captains Iyad Qaddour and Khalid Fathallah declared their defection and the founding of the al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Battalion in a YouTube video that showed them surrounded by around two dozen men. Several other battalions would

follow suit: Mohammed bin Abdullah, led by Lt. Mohammed al-Qadri; Diraa al-Junoub (Southern Shield), led by Ahmed al-Muqdad;²¹ and Shuhada Hawran (Martyrs of Hawran), led by Lt. Ahmed al-Balkhi. The fighting and competition became more intense, and leaders of new formations were often killed shortly after their public defection. Sometimes the new units survived the death of their leader, other times they did not. Keeping track of these “battalions” and their leaders became slightly more difficult during this fertile period of the rebellion.²²

Videos of formations in which the leader was not identified also proliferated. Often this meant that the units comprised and were led by civilians who feared being identified, at least initially. These included the Hafez al-Muqdad, Saif Allah al-Maslul, Sadiq, Yarmouk and Diraa al-Thawra (Shield of the Revolution) Battalions. Although precise numbers and strength are impossible to determine, not all battalions were created equal. Some, such as the Diraa al-Thawra or Salah al-Din battalions, eventually disappeared; others, such as the Yarmouk, became the foundations of formidable brigades. Battalion names from other parts of Syria – for instance the al-Farouq Battalion – began appearing in Daraa, although it was not always clear whether or not these were local franchises. Some names – Shuhada Hawran, Saif Allah al-Maslul – may have been used by more than one unit in the region, making it somewhat difficult to distinguish among them. While this may have been due to the localized nature of fighting, a deliberate desire to confuse might, in some cases, have played a role. Regardless, the rapid proliferation of units and the occasional overlap in their names introduced a degree of uncertainty for anyone trying to keep track of them in a systematic fashion.

The first half of 2012, in short, was a period during which many “battalions” were created. These battalions varied in strength, combat power, military experience and resilience. Leading them became a riskier endeavor, as many leaders were killed within weeks of their public defection. The simplicity of early 2012, when there were only a handful of FSA units, gave way to a tangled knot in which distinguishing the official, FSA-sanctioned rebellion from the unofficial YouTube rebellion grew increasingly difficult.²³

²¹ Al-Moqdad’s rank in Arabic is مساعد اول, which Wikipedia translates as “Warrant Officer 1st Class.”

²² It is hard to ascertain the exact sizes of these “battalions” and whether a uniform criterion exists to distinguish them from the smaller “companies.” What is certain is that they are significantly smaller than formal military battalions.

²³ As one Western reporter noted, forming a militia often requires no more than a funding source and web presence to verify one’s existence, with YouTube output becoming the measure by which financial backers measured the return on their investment. See: Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, “How to Start a Battalion (in Five Easy

On 22 April Col. Ahmed Fahd al-Naama announced in a statement uploaded to YouTube that he was defecting from the SAA and joining the FSA. The local rebel military council met that same day, and two days later issued a video announcing a major reshuffling. Neither Yasser al-Abboud, the council's previous leader, nor the newly defected Ahmed al-Naama, now its highest ranking officer, was included in the new leadership. Instead, Lt. Col. Mohammed Khir al-Harbat, who had remained largely invisible to the public eye since his 6 December defection video, became the head of the council. Ahmed Sharrouf and Qays al-Qataneh were retained as members from the earlier council; the three remaining former members – al-Abboud, Marwan Majarish and Sharif al-Kayid – were all excluded. Lt. Col. Ghassan Hlaihil, the Republican Guard defector whose name had already appeared in the national leadership of the FSA, became the council's deputy leader. Capt. Khaled Fathallah, a recent defector and one of the leaders of the al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Battalion, was named as a member, as were two previously unknown figures, Maj. Qassim Najim and Maj. Nidal al-Omari.

Neither Qassim Najim nor Nidal al-Omari made a YouTube defection video. Instead, one week after the new local military council was announced, they emerged as leader and deputy leader of a new formation, the Tahrir al-Junoub (Southern Liberation) Brigade. This new unit brought together six former SAA junior officers and their formations: Capt. Najim, Maj. al-Omari, Maj. Ahmed Sharrouf and his Moattasem Battalion, Capt. Iyad Qaddur and his al-Muhajirin wa al-Ansar Battalion, Lt. Sharif al-Kayad and his Ahmed Khalaf Battalion, and Lt. Mohammed al-Qadri and his Mohammed bin Abdullah Battalion.

The response from Yasser al-Abboud, who had been excluded from the new council, did not take long. On 3 May 2012 a YouTube video emerged showing three men seated at a desk. Al-Abboud sat in the center, flanked by the council's nominal leader Mohammed Khir al-Harbat and Ghassan Hlaihil. While Hlaihil fidgeted and grabbed at his weapon throughout the brief video, al-Harbat glanced at al-Abboud from the corner of his eyes, a frown on his mouth. Al-Abboud read a statement that brought him back into the council's leadership, making him its "field commander" while leaving all other positions essentially unchanged. Despite defecting after al-Harbat and being outranked by al-Naama, al-Abboud appeared to be back in control of the council with this 3 May statement. On 19 May al-Abboud allegedly issued a statement naming Bashar al-Zoabi, a civilian, as the military council's sole

Lessons)," London Review of Books 35.4, 2013 (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n04/ghaith-abdul-ahad/how-to-start-a-battalion-in-five-easy-lessons>).

representative abroad. Two days later al-Abboud escaped an assassination attempt with only slight injuries.

The growing tensions and uncertainty within the council took a new twist on 27 May, when the prominent Saudi Arabian daily, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, published an interview with Col. Ahmed al-Naama, identifying him as the new head of Daraa's military council.²⁴ Three days later a video was posted online, showing the largest grouping of local FSA leaders yet, and in which Lt. Col. al-Harbat officially ceded leadership to Col. al-Naama. Yasser al-Abboud, who did not appear in the video, was named the first deputy leader and field commander. Ghassan Hlaihil became deputy for financial and organizational affairs, while al-Harbat became the deputy for armament affairs. Other positions remained the same.

The struggle for control over the military council began seeping into the battalions themselves, with one case standing out in particular. In the lead-up to the announcement of the new council, tensions between those on the ground and those abroad, between rank and timing of defection, and between armed civilians and military defectors all coalesced into a leadership crisis within the Moatassem Battalion. On 11 May 2012 Col. Adnan Sami al-Abboud announced that he was defecting and joining the Moatassem Battalion. Ahmed Sharrouf, the battalion's leader, was not from Daraa and was outranked by Sami al-Abboud; as an early defector who had tied his fate to the military council in place but appeared largely uninvolved with the battalion's day-to-day affairs, Sharrouf was a soft target. In contrast to Sharrouf, the battalion's field commander, Adham al-Abboud (better known as Abu al-Hijah)²⁵ was from the region, a civilian, popular with the rank-and-file, active in the battlefield and close to Yasser al-Abboud.

On 21 May, the day of the assassination attempt on Yasser al-Abboud, the Moatassem Battalion posted a YouTube video announcing that Lt. Col. Mohammed Ali al-Rafaai, a hitherto unknown defector, would replace Ahmed Sharrouf as the battalion's leader for reasons including the latter's incompetence and absence from the battlefield. The statement was read by field commander Abu al-Hijah, who

²⁴ Nadia al-Turki, "Qaid al-majlis al-askari fi Daraa lil Sharq al-Awsat: al-nidham yast'amal khatat al-ijbar 'ala al-ishtibak aw al-ikhla," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 5/27/12. <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=679079&issueno=12234#.Ucta5fmsh8E> (Arabic).

²⁵ The general term "Abu ____" means "father of ____." In Syria and other parts of the Arab world, men are often referred to as the father of their son ("father of ____"). This same formulation is used for "noms de guerre," with the Palestinian Liberation Organization being perhaps the best-known case (many in the West, for instance, know that Mahmoud Abbas is also known as Abu Mazen or Yasser Arafat as Abu Ammar). In some cases, this appellation is interchangeable with a person's given name; in others, it largely replaces it, as is the case with Adham al-Abboud, who is mostly referred to as Abu al-Hijah.

became the battalion's de facto leader. On 29 May Maj. Sharrouf himself announced he was stepping down as leader of the Motassem Battalion and starting the Dhi Qarr Battalion, which would become part of the military council. A few days later Abu al-Hijah issued a statement fully disassociating himself from the FSA's local military council, claiming that the new leadership – meaning al-Naama – had no authority over his battalion. Furthermore, he indirectly accused the new leaders of complicity in the 21 May assassination attempt against Yasser al-Abboud, while also leveling broader charges against the council, including absence from the battlefield, mismanagement of funds and personnel, and lying. On 18 July Abu al-Hijah was killed, allegedly in clashes with regime forces. The following day Yasser al-Abboud issued a statement promising to avenge Abu al-Hijah. The operation to smuggle defected Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hijab into Jordan in August, covered by the international media, was led by Yasser al-Abboud and Bashar al-Zoabi and named after Abu al-Hijah.

PHASE THREE: FROM BATTALIONS TO BRIGADES (AUGUST 2012 – DECEMBER 2012)

New units continued to form during the summer of 2012. Some appeared to establish a presence on the ground prior to issuing YouTube videos. The Jaidur Hawran Brigade, for instance, likely formed around or before August 2012,²⁶ but did not formalize its affiliation with the Daraa Military Council until 30 October, through a video made by the brigade's leader, Col. Yassin al-Aloush. Several groups joined this brigade.

Assessing the relevance of groups became increasingly difficult as videos continued to proliferate. Groups without a prior history were forced to show their relevance via video, whether demonstrating strength in men and weapons or taking credit for specific attacks. Either way, the smaller self-defense units had to band together or join a larger group to remain viable. Videos and claims appeared in ever-increasing numbers, making it difficult to determine broad trends from the short-lived ephemera. Larger and seemingly well armed units sometimes appeared out of nowhere. On 7 August, for instance, in a combined defection-formation video, the Maghawir Hawran (Hawran Commandos) Battalion announced its formation and incorporation into the FSA. Four days later, video emerged of the battalion securing the defection of the deputy police chief of Homs, Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Jabawi. This battalion would later combine with others to bolster the floundering al-Naama-led military council.

²⁶ Jaidur refers to an area of northwest Daraa province. The group uploaded its formation video in December 2012, but its Facebook page begins in September 2012 and references to it predate the upload date of the formation video.

One of the more interesting units to emerge in the summer of 2012 was the Tahrir Hawran (Hawran Liberation) Brigade, formed on 20 August. The brigade was led by Brig. Gen. Omar al-Asfar, who had posted a YouTube defection video the month before. Several battalions would quickly join this new formation, including the al-Farouq Battalion and the Abdullah bin Omar Battalion. On 3 September al-Asfar issued a statement explaining that his brigade would be under the command of the “Syrian National Army” (SNA), a national-level attempt to sideline the “traditional” FSA leadership led by Col. Riad al-Asaad. By the following month the SNA project had fallen apart, and al-Asfar was replaced as leader by Col. Yasser al-Salamat, who incorporated the Tahrir Hawran Battalion into Daraa’s military council.

By the end of August 2012 the local FSA leadership found itself with a growing number of “brigades” to go with its many battalions and companies. The increasing number of defectors seeking a position in the rebel army created inevitable institutional pressures. On 18 August the council issued a statement dividing the “southern front” into eleven military zones, each with its own commander. Whether this announcement had any relevance on the ground is unclear.

Around this same time questions intensified regarding the actions and intentions of military council leaders. The FSA made few military gains in Daraa during 2012. Some signaled that greed and foreign agendas were polluting the Jordan-based leadership’s decision-making process.²⁷ As summer ended, though, the military council appeared to close ranks. On 16 September Qassim Najem, the leader of the Tahrir al-Junoub alliance, made a statement denying that his group had foreign links and foreign representation outside of the official FSA structure. On 17 September Yasser al-Abboud made a video statement announcing he had joined the “new” leadership of the council of Daraa, presumably the al-Naama-led council. It was not entirely clear when he had withdrawn. Similarly, the Omari Battalion (the FSA’s first local formation), which had apparently withdrawn from the council with little fanfare at some point in the summer of 2012, issued a statement on 17 October stating that it was returning to the council.

²⁷ A note posted to the “*al-Hirak News*” Facebook page, for instance, was quite specific, accusing the military council of having failed fighters in the battles of al-Sid Road and the Palestinian Refugee Camp (in Daraa city), as well as engagements in Kafr Shams, Bosr al-Harir, Tafs, and al-Hirak. The post accused Ahmed al-Naama of using money he was receiving as head of the council to strengthen his personal influence and line his own pockets rather than to support rebels on the ground. The note also singled out Ghassan Hlaihil, who by now was in charge of the council’s finances, as well as a defected Lt. Col. named Najem Abu al-Majed (the “Daraa Military Council Operations Commander”). See: <https://www.facebook.com/alhorak.news/posts/459835594039582> (Arabic)

From October to December 2012 a number of mergers took place within Daraa's FSA. In addition, a new YouTube paradigm emerged; larger numbers, heavier weapons, and a listing of all the battalions involved in the merger were some of its key elements. Civilian leadership of major units, although not the norm, was surprisingly common. The five early battalions of Daraa's FSA all either joined or became "brigades" during this period. First among them was the Tawhid al-Junoub Brigade, anchored by the Rayat al-Haq Battalion, which was led by Ismail Mahmoud al-Masri (Abu Saria) and founded on 23 October. The Omari Battalion became the Omari Brigade the following day, under the leadership of Capt. Qais al-Qataneh. On 30 October the Moatez Billah Battalion became the Moatez Billah Brigade, led by Mohammed al-Masri (Abu Obada). The brigade's founding video was made indoors and included only the leaders of the constituent battalions, rather than its men and weapons. On 22 November a video showed the formation of the Ahmed Khalaf Brigade. Its leader, Sharif al-Kayid, read the statement. Of Daraa's five initial battalions, the final one to join a brigade was the Moatassem Battalion, which became part of the Fallujah Hawran²⁸ Brigade, formed on 27 December.

Two other notable brigades appeared during this period. On 8 October 2012 Ahmed al-Omar, a former SAA colonel from rural Aleppo province, formed the Diraa al-Lajah (Al-Lajah Shield) Brigade, operating in the rebel-friendly al-Lajah. Several groups would subsequently join his unit. Finally, on 27 December 2012 – the same day that the Fallujah Hawran Brigade released its founding video – the Yarmouk Brigade, led by Bashar al-Zoabi (the civilian whom Yasser al-Abboud had named as the council's foreign representative) also announced its formation on YouTube.

The continued expansion of Daraa's FSA raised expectations, and bolder attacks were met with strong responses from regime troops. Failed engagements in Tafs and other parts of the province drew the ire of local residents and field commanders within the rebel army. Criticism was no longer limited to the Jordan-based leadership: the increasingly powerful alliance of Yasser al-Abboud and Bashar al-Zoabi, as well as the behavior of other unit leaders and aspiring local strongmen, all came under attack. A Facebook page launched toward the end of 2012, called the "Revolution Stealers in Daraa," quickly eclipsed most if not all militia pages in terms of popularity. A clever expression captured what seemed to be a growing sentiment: "A thief is a thief, whether from the free or regime army" (in Arabic it rhymes: *al-harami harami, in kana hurr aw nidhami*).

²⁸ Most towns in Daraa province have been given nicknames linked to the 2011 rebellion. "Fallujah Hawran" (the Hawran's Fallujah) is the name given to the town of al-Naima, on the outskirts of the provincial capital Daraa (which itself is known as "Mahd al-Thawra" or "The Cradle of the Revolution"). Al-Naima is home to many defectors including Yasser al-Abboud and Abu al-Hijah and has been a center of fighting since 2011.

PHASE FOUR: MORE BRIGADES AND COUNCIL INTRIGUES (JANUARY 2013 – APRIL 2013)

Brigade proliferation continued unabated with the start of 2013. The videos were like those of late 2012: outdoors, with several dozen armed men surrounding the leader, who lists the various battalions that fall under the command of the newly formed “brigade.” On 9 January the Shahid Hawran (Hawran Martyr) Brigade formed; its leadership was not disclosed, although its commander was subsequently identified as civilian Rabiaa al-Musalima. On January 12 the Saqr Hawran Brigade formed under the leadership of Col. Abdullah abd al-Rahim. The Mohammed bin Abdullah Brigade, based on the battalion with the same name and led by Lt. Mohammed al-Qadri, announced its formation on February 6.

On 27 January the Maghawir Hawran Battalion merged with others to become a coalition of battalions, though stopping short of calling itself a brigade. A similar step was taken by what became the Fajr al-Islam (Dawn of Islam) Battalions, which formed a coalition on 25 December 2012; in late February 2013, it became the Fajr al-Islam Brigade, led by Lt. Col. Mohammed Hassan Salama. While the specific threshold is unclear and likely flexible, it appears that some type of criterion was being used to distinguish a battalion from a coalition of battalions from a brigade. It is perhaps no coincidence that both the Maghawir Hawran and the Fajr al-Islam Brigades appeared to be closely linked to the military council in place at the time.

Brigades continued forming in March and April 2013. Iyad Qaddour’s al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Battalion became the nucleus of a brigade. On 23 March another “Maghawir” unit, the Maghawir al-Junoub (Southern Commandos) Brigade led by Col. Khaled al-Hawrani, formed. Three days later the Shuhada al-Hurriyah Battalion, led by Mahmood Tuqtuq, became the foundation of a brigade by the same name. On 8 April 2013 the Hamza Asad Allah Brigade formed, led by Col. Saber Safr. On 17 April 2013 the Usud al-Islam (Lions of Islam) Brigade formed in Northwest Daraa province, led by Capt. Abd al-Hakim al-Aid. On 22 April the Tawhid Kataib Hawran (Unifying Hawran Battalions) Brigade formed, led by Maj. Mohammed al-Turkmani.

As in 2012, late February 2013 was an eventful time for Daraa’s military council. Once again, Yasser al-Abboud was at the center of activity. On 25 February 2013, a year after the region’s first military council formed, a video emerged in which al-Abboud, surrounded by around two dozen men, announced that the military council had been dissolved and new leadership appointed. Practically all of those present in the video wore civilian clothing (including al-Abboud). Al-Majarish was flanked by his

two civilian deputies, Fadi al-Asmi and Abd al-Mullah al-Hariri. Bashar al-Zoabi, leader of the powerful Yarmouk Brigade, was seated with them at the front, with all others standing. Early defectors such as Sharif al-Kayid and Mohammed al-Qadri were also in the video. The new council's purported leader, former SAA Staff Brig. Gen. Faiz al-Majarish, read a statement listing the various brigades that supported the dissolution of the old council and formation of a new one, including the Muhajireen wa Ansar, Fallujah Hawran, Mohammed bin Abdullah, Yarmouk, Ahmed Khalaf, Diraa al-Lajah, Jaidur Hawran, Moatez Billah, Omari, Shuhada al-Yarmouk (Martyrs of Yarmouk), as well as three battalions: Diraa Hawran (Hawran Shield), Dhi Qarr and Saqr Quraysh.

The pushback was swift, with several units quickly issuing statements refusing to recognize the new council. Over the following days those units aligning themselves with the al-Naama-led council included the Abdullah bin Zayd, Shuhada al-Yarmouk (making their exact position unclear), Maghawir Hawran, Tahrir Hawran, Tawhid al-Junoub, Shuhada Hawran, Shuhada al-Hurriyah, Fajr al-Islam, and Saqr Hawran. While real, the split was not permanent.

On 2 March pro-Syrian regime media reported details of an alleged meeting in the Jordanian town of Irbid between members of the "new" and "old" councils, along with Jordanian intelligence representatives. The leaked details of the meeting included the names of those present, the main points of discussion, and an agreement to retain al-Naama as leader.²⁹ Although there was no official statement by the local FSA, the old council was effectively restored, at least nominally. The tensions, nearly a year old, remained.

PHASE FIVE: FROM BRIGADES TO DIVISIONS, FROM UNITY TO DIVISION (MAY 2013 – JULY 2013)

By May 2013 two new dynamics emerged. First, functional brigades were created under the military council's command. On 3 May the council formed the Special Operations Brigade, led by Col. Suhail al-Jawabra. The Daraa council's first artillery squadron was formed under the command of Maj. Abd al-Latif al-Hawrani, who defected on 24 May. Rather than independent units joining the council, these functionally named units appear to have been created by the council itself. The second important trend, perhaps still in its infancy, was the incorporation of brigades into divisions. On 29 May the Maghawir Sahel Hawran Brigade formed. On 7 June they became one of the five constituent brigades of

²⁹ As well as references on social media, this meeting was reported by the website arabi press: "Dawr al-Mukhabarat al-Urduniya fi Idara al-Milishiyat 'ala al-Aradhi al-Suriya," Arabi Press, 3/16/2013. <http://www.arabi-press.com/?page=article&id=63522> (Arabic).

the First Maghawir (Commando) Division, joining the Maghawir al-Junoub, Maghawir Sahel Hawran, Ahmed Khalaf and Saqr Hawran brigades. The Maghawir Division was the second rebel division to form in Daraa. It was preceded by the 18 March Division, which was created on 11 April 2013. This unit brought together three brigades (Tawhid al-Junoub, Shahid Hawran, Tahrir Hawran) under a single command, led by Col. Mohammed Khaled al-Duhni. By 18 July the Tawhid al-Junoub Brigade had left the division following internal squabbling.

On the ground, rebels began making significant advances in February and March. In March the “Jisr Hawran (Hawran Bridge) Battle” began as a well coordinated rebel siege of the 138th Air Defense Brigade base and various nearby positions.³⁰ The base and several other subordinate fortifications were eventually seized by rebels, in collaboration with non-FSA Islamist brigades. The rebels were also able to take control of sections of the key town of Khirbat Ghazalah, located along the international highway linking Amman to Damascus.

On 8 May 2013 Ahmed al-Naama, Mohammed Khir al-Harbat, and Najem abu al-Majed appeared on the frontlines of Khirbat Ghazalah. In a now infamous video al-Naama explained how the town had been liberated and refuted reports that it had been captured by the regime. At some point in the following two days, rebels were told to withdraw due to ammunition shortages, and the regime quickly retook Khirbat Ghazalah. Only a few days later the FSA launched an ill-timed and poorly planned offensive against the large base of the 52d Brigade east of Khirbat Ghazalah, leading many to question the council’s claim that the Khirbat withdrawal was, in fact, due to a shortage of ammunition.³¹

Growing controversy over the military council’s competence came to a boil with the fall of Khirbat Ghazalah. Critics saw it as the council’s latest and costliest strategic blunder.³² Some accused the Jordan-based council leadership of collusion with Jordanian authorities, another example of putting foreign interests above the needs of the revolution. Even Faysal Qassim, a prominent host on al-Jazeera and supporter of the rebellion, mentioned offhandedly on his show that Khirbat Ghazalah had fallen due to complicity between al-Naama and Jordan. The loss of Khirbat Ghazalah marked a turning point in the simmering tensions within Daraa’s FSA.

³⁰ This is an important air defense base near the town of Saida, a few miles east of Daraa city (and near al-Naama). It is technically the 138th Brigade but is more commonly referred to as the 38th.

³¹ For more on this: “Dissension in Daraa,” Foreign Military Studies Operational Environment Watch, July 2013. http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/Archives/GSW/201307/MiddleEast_03.html

³² A “Down with Ahmed al-Naama” Facebook page, carefully documenting what were seen as al-Naama’s transgressions, was started on 7 June 2013. See: <https://www.facebook.com/DownNemaa> (Arabic).

Even within Daraa's FSA, the mood seemed to change. Take for instance Lt. Ibrahim al-Ghazali, leader of the Diraa al-Watan Battalion, a small group which claimed several attacks during the late summer and fall of 2012, sometimes in coordination with larger groups. On 23 May 2013 al-Ghazali wrote a somewhat despondent post on his personal Facebook page, discussing the growth of units from battalions to brigades and from brigades to divisions and decrying what he saw as the main goal of this growth: obtaining weapons from the military council, rather than actually fighting the enemy.

On 19 June a report on *SkyNews Arabia* noted that the local rebel army had created a new "Southern Front Operations Command Center," without giving much detail, but rather simply as a title to a video interview with Bashar al-Zoabi. Although dissension seemed to loom, local rebel military and civilian leaders exhibited unanimity when the national rebel leadership attempted to impose outsiders on them as Daraa's representatives shortly thereafter. Specifically, a 21 June statement, signed by virtually all local military leaders, rejected a bid by the Syrian National Coalition's to name Hawran's representatives without consulting them. Yet in keeping with what appeared to be the dialectic of Daraa's military council, this agreement was quickly followed by dissension. On 7 July the al-Abboud/al-Zoabi faction issued a statement on behalf of the new Southern Front Operations Command Center declaring that al-Naama had been dismissed from his position as head of the local military council and would be arrested and tried by a "revolutionary court" were he to set foot in Daraa.³³ The statement mentioned several council failures and accused al-Naama of putting personal interests before those of the revolution. Along with al-Zoabi and al-Abboud, four members of the southern "Operations Command Center" signed: Maj. Qassim Najem, Capt. Iyad Qaddur, Lt. Mohammed al-Qadri, and Capt. Iyad al-Dawas.

As a result, the coordinating structures of Daraa's rebel army are currently in flux.³⁴ Is this anything new? As this paper has shown, battalions, brigades and other units are constantly changing: new entities are created regularly, and mergers, dissolutions, rebrandings and broken alliances are the

³³ See: "Azl qaid al-majlis al-askari fi Daraa," al-Hayat, 7/8/2013. <http://alhayat.com/Details/530512>

³⁴ Even on Facebook there is confusion regarding council representation, with at least four contending pages (number of likes as of 7/31/13, all in Arabic) claiming to do so:
<https://www.facebook.com/T.R.M.COUNCIL.DARA3A> 11,089 likes ("The revolutionary military council – Daraa province"), est. 2/23/12 محافظة درعا - المجلس العسكري الثوري | Military council leadership
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/462597603768735/المجلس-العسكري-الثوري-بدرعا/> 2,592 likes ("The revolutionary military council in Daraa"), est. 6/21/12 المجلس العسكري الثوري بدرعا
<https://www.facebook.com/MilitaryCouncilLeadership> 622 likes ("The revolutionary military council – Daraa and its countryside"), est. 2/25/13 درعا وريفها - المجلس العسكري الثوري - درعا وريفها Military Council Of Daraa
<https://www.facebook.com/almajlesalthawreal3skarifymohafztDarr> 479 likes ("The new revolutionary military council in Daraa province"), est. 3/18/13 المجلس الثوري العسكري في محافظة درعا - الجديد

norm rather than the exception. At the same time, dissension within the ranks of defectors is apparent.³⁵

The fluctuating dynamics that have been explored in the context of Daraa's FSA are unlikely to be exclusive to this particular province or to the internal machinations of the FSA. A broader picture of dynamics in Daraa province would, at minimum, incorporate non-FSA rebel groups and pro-regime militias into the analysis. No alliances are unthinkable at this point.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, this paper looks at five broad dimensions along which influence will be contested in Syria. It is the interplay of these dimensions that may hold the clue to the future of Syria's war. The battle for control over Syria's armed rebellion is a battle for influence and credibility at the local, national and international levels. These three are not always aligned: material and political resources that bolster influence and credibility at the local level may no longer do so at the national and international one, and vice-versa. This is certainly the case with the five dimensions listed below.

The first dimension captures the tension between the FSA as an institution and the FSA as a coalition of rebel fighters. Inherent contradictions may give rise to uncertainty: as an institution, prior rank is of great importance, but as a revolutionary institution, timing of defection might weigh more. Members of the FSA's "historical leadership," particularly Col. Riad al-Asaad, have proven adept at maintaining their position, even if solely at the media level, within the armed rebellion. In Daraa Province this tension has generally been kept at bay. Several early defectors retain influence and the broader FSA institutions have proved resilient, albeit perhaps at the expense of coherence. The institution may prove malleable enough to survive, but in doing so risks becoming little more than a concept with minimal operational or political influence, as has become the case with the FSA at the national level. For the FSA, the line between being a flexible institution and a mere agglomeration of rebels is a fine one.

³⁵ Furthermore, what may have initially been a fairly clear two-party conflict (rebels v. regime) has transformed into something more complex, as divisions grow within both the rebel and the regime camps. This is only likely to increase with time. The best account of the gradual transformation of the Syrian state into a militia can be found in: Peter Harling, "Syria's Mutating Conflict," *Crisis Group Middle East Report N°128*, 1 August 2012. [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/128-syrias-mutating-conflict.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Syria/128-syrias-mutating-conflict.pdf)

The second dimension encompasses the potential dichotomy between on-the-ground presence on the one hand and the ability to harness outside support on the other. Since its inception this tension has plagued the Syrian opposition as a whole. When rebel resources are scarce (as they have been for much of the Syrian conflict), foreign support helped sustain the rebellion. “Outside influence” has from the outset been a term used by both rebels and regime to discredit one another. It is now infusing the lexicon of rebel factions opposed to one another. Leaders who are overly dependent on outside resources are easy targets for accusations of foreign dependence and absence from the battlefield. At the same time, factions with access to outside resources have significant leverage over resource-deprived units on the ground. In the Syrian case, the early mismatch in domestic resources available to regime and rebels, particularly in weaponry, manpower and ammunition, meant that anyone who could help overthrow Bashar was a friend both to his domestic opponents (the rebels) and his international opponents (especially the Gulf and the West). As resource distribution between the rebel and regime leaders becomes more balanced, the “outside influence” card will likely be invoked with greater frequency within rebel ranks.

Not all outside influences are made equal. The third dimension goes some way toward distinguishing categories of outside influence by bringing to light the distinction between “moderates” and “Islamists.” Most Syrians likely fall somewhere in between; however, the legacy of the Baath state, Syria’s rich and complex religious history, and the involvement of outside powers have together made these categories particularly tangled. From the outset the Syrian regime has accused rebels of being religious fundamentalists bent on overthrowing the secular state it claims to have established. The rise of Islamist fighting groups has given this narrative greater traction. On a broader level, there appears to be a sectarian inevitability to what is occurring in Syria, given events in Iraq, the fierce competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the history of Islam in Syria, and the modern history of the Alawi-heavy Syrian state apparatus. It is therefore only natural that within rebel ranks groups begin distinguishing themselves ideologically, with some benefiting from the invocation of religious symbolism and others gaining from demonstrating their liberal – if not secular – credentials.

The fourth dimension comprises battlefield capabilities and, at least in the short-term, often overrides all other considerations. In the statement dismissing al-Naama, the al-Zoabi/al-Abboud coalition mentions the military council’s several battlefield blunders as a primary motivation for their decision. Members of the same coalition have spoken of their collaboration with groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra as strategic choices based on the latter’s fighting abilities. Battlefield capabilities, though, have

a real and a virtual element to them. When a rebel battalion posts a video documenting its hard-fought takeover of a “key military post,” is the video documenting the facts as they unfold or is it instead putting on a show of false power intended to convince naïve audiences?³⁶ The rebels have assiduously used social media to make their capabilities appear greater than they may be. While more credible than the Syrian regime’s propaganda, rebel accounts of events are coming under increasing scrutiny.

The importance of propaganda inevitably leads to the fifth dimension, which distinguishes between the real and the virtual. Given this paper’s reliance on social media and the difficulty of verifying events on the ground, the harnessing of social media platforms to one’s advantage is of particular importance for both observer and participant. While statements made through platforms like Facebook and Twitter are often hard to verify without invoking additional data sources, YouTube videos are closer to documentary proof. Alone, their story is incomplete. A rebel leader shooting mortar rounds for a video camera may be more infomercial than documented attack.³⁷

He who is most credible will win. The recipe for victory will feature a balanced combination of the five elements described above: between internal and external resources, between “moderate” and “Islamist” ideology, between individual power and institutional strength, and between actual ability on the battlefield and the ability to project this ability through a smart, effective and credible propaganda machine.

³⁶ A commenter on a Facebook page dedicated to Daraa details how a battalion “overran” an empty and largely irrelevant military post, expending a large deal of ammunition and spending 600,000 Syrian pounds to film its battlefield acumen. This is unlikely to be an isolated incident. <https://www.facebook.com/daraa.althawra.5/posts/232031546925133> (Arabic).

³⁷ At least this is what one commenter argues in another Facebook page focused on the secrets of the Syrian uprising regarding a video-op featuring Ahmed al-Naama and the leader of the Moatez Billah Battalion claiming to shoot mortar rounds in the direction of regime forces in Daraa; the commenter claims these rounds landed either in open fields or on civilian infrastructure. <https://www.facebook.com/MaWara3Alsitar/posts/16933530988890> (Arabic).

TABLE 1
PHASE ONE VIDEOS

PHASE ONE VIDEOS					
NAME	DEFECTION	RANK	UNIT	FROM	AFFILIATION
Qais al-Qataneh	7/10/2011	Captain	Aerial surveillance administration	Al-Lajah	Omari
Sharif al-Kayed	10/22/2011	1st. Lieutenant	153d Regiment Artillery	Al-Qarfa	Ahmed Khalaf
Mahmood Tuqtuq	11/14/2011	1st. Lieutenant	3d Division (Armored)/65th Tank Brigade	Rastan (Homs)	Shuhada al-Hurriyah
Ghassan Hlaihil	11/14/2011	Lt. Colonel	Republican Guard	Golan (unclear)	FSA leadership
Mohammed Mustafa al-Maarati	11/16/2011	Lieutenant	5th Division/15th Brigade (Infantry)/852nd Battalion	Khan Shaykhun (Aleppo)	Salah al-Din
Mohammed Saleh Khir al-Harbat	12/6/2011	Lt. Colonel	24th Division/25th Regiment	Al-Hirak	Unclear
Ahmed Sharrouf	1/10/2012	Major	9th Division/52nd Mechanized Brigade	Homs	Moatassem Billah

TABLE 2**MILITARY COUNCILS**

FIRST DARAA MILITARY COUNCIL 2/24/12		
RANK	NAME	POSITION
Lt. Col.	Yasser al-Abboud	Leader
Maj.	Ahmed Sharrouf	Deputy Leader
Capt.	Qais al-Qataneh	Spokesman
1st. Lt.	Sharif al-Kayid	Secretary General
1st. Lt.	Ahmed al-Majarish	Member
SECOND DARAA MILITARY COUNCIL 4/24/12		
RANK	NAME	POSITION
Lt. Col.	Mohammed Khir al-Harbat	Leader
Staff Lt. Col.	Ghassan Hlaihil	Deputy Leader
Maj.	Qassim Najm	Member
Maj.	Ahmed Sharrouf	Member
Maj.	Nidal al-Omari	Member
Capt.	Qais al-Qataneh	Member and Spokesman
Capt.	Khalid Fathallah	Member
THIRD DARAA MILITARY COUNCIL 5/30/12		
RANK	NAME	POSITION
Col.	Ahmed al-Naama	Leader
Lt. Col.	Yasser al-Abboud	First Deputy and Field Commander
Staff Lt. Col.	Ghassan Hlaihil	Deputy for Financial and Administrative Affairs
Lt. Col.	Mohammed Khir al-Harbat	Deputy for Armament Affairs
Maj.	Qassim Najm	Member
Maj.	Ahmed Sharrouf	Member
Maj.	Nidal al-Omari	Member
Capt.	Qais al-Qataneh	Member and Spokesman
Capt.	Khalid Fathallah	Member

TABLE 3
MILITARY UNITS

List is comprehensive though not exhaustive.

PHASE ONE			
UNIT³⁸	LEADER	VIDEO	SUBSEQUENT
Omari (Ba)	Capt. Qais al-Qataneh	9/30/2011	Omari Brigade
Ahmed Khalaf (Ba)	1Lt. Sharif al-Kayad	10/22/2011	Ahmed Khalaf Brigade
Moatassem Billah (Ba)	Maj. Ahmed Sharrouf	12/18/2011	Moatassem Brigade
Moatez Billah (Ba)	Unidentified (Mohammed Abd al-Razzaq al-Masri "Abu Obada")	1/16/2012	Moatez Billah Brigade
Rayat al-Haq (Ba)	Unidentified (Ismail al-Masri (d)/Col. Yasser al-Abboud)	1/28/2012	Tawhid al-Junoub Brigade
PHASE TWO			
UNIT	LEADER	VIDEO	SUBSEQUENT
Al-Nasr Salah al-Din (Ba)	Lt. Ahmed Mustafa al-Maraati	11/16/2011	Unclear
Abdullah bin Omar (Ba)	Unclear (Abu Sliman/Ahmed al-Kumaiti [d])	2/23/2012	Tahrir Hawran Brigade
al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar (Ba)	Capt. Iyad Qaddour/Capt. Khalid Fathallah	2/24/2012	al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Brigade
Saif Allah al-Maslul (Co)	Unclear	3/16/2012	Moatez Billah Brigade
Shaheed Hafez al-Muqdad (Ba)	Abu Yazin Bilal	3/18/2012	Saqr Hawran Brigade
Mohammed bin Abdullah (Ba)	Lt. Mohammed Hussein al-Qadri/ Nidal Omari	3/22/2012	Mohammed bin Abdullah Brigade
Diraa al-Junoub (Ba)	Warrant Officer Ahmed al-Moqdad (d) → Faisal al-Fadhil	4/1/2012	Yarmouk Brigade
Al-Sadiq (Ba)	Unclear	4/1/2012	Unclear
Yarmouk (Ba)	Bashar al-Zoabi	5/19/2012	Yarmouk Brigade

³⁸ Four types of units are included. They are:

- Co - Company
- Ba – Battalion
- Br – Brigade
- Div - Division

Shuhada Hawran (Ba)	Lt. Ahmed al-Balkhi (d) → Ismail Mohammed Matar	5/21/2012	Tawhid al-Junoub/Fajr al-Islam
Diraa al-Thawra (Ba)	Hamza Awair “Abu Anis” (d)	5/25/2012	Unclear
Al-Farouq (Ba)	Ala abd al-Rahman “Abu Abdu “ (d)	6/14/2012	Fajr al-Islam
PHASE THREE (1)			
UNIT	LEADER	VIDEO	SUBSEQUENT
Maghawir Hawran (Ba)	Capt. Munadhil al-Nusairat → Fadi Qarqamas	8/7/2012	Maghawir Division
Diraa al-Watan (Ba)	Ibrahim al-Ghazali/Hamza al-Zoabi “Abu Mussa” (d)	8/13/2012	Unclear
Tahrir Hawran (Br)	Brig. Gen. Eng. Omar al-Asfar → Yasser al-Salamat	8/20/2012	Tahrir Hawran
Jaidur Hawran (Br)	Yassin Ali al-Aloush	10/30/12 (formation likely prior)	Jaidur Hawran
PHASE THREE (2)			
UNIT	LEADER	VIDEO	SUBSEQUENT
Diraa al-Lajah (Br)	Col. Ahmed al-Omar (d)/Lt. Col. Jihad Saad al-Din	10/08/12	Amoud Hawran
Tawhid al-Junoub (Br)	Abu Saria (d) → Malek Hassan al-Musalima	10/21/12	18 March Division
Al-Omari (Br)	Qais al-Qataneh	10/24/12	Self
Moatez Billah (Br)	Mohammed Abd al-Razzaq al-Masri “Abu Obada”	10/30/12	Self
Ahmed Khalaf (Br)	1 st Lt. Sharif Kayad → Col. Ismail al-Naasan	11/22/12	Maghawir Division
Fallujah Hawran (Br)	Lt. Col. Yasser al-Abboud	12/27/12	Self
Yarmouk (Br)	Bashar al-Zoabi	12/27/12	self
PHASE FOUR			
UNIT	LEADER	VIDEO	SUBSEQUENT
Shahid Hawran (Br)	Aala al-Musalima “Abu Hussein” (d)/Rabaa al-Musalima	1/9/2012	18 March Division
Saqr Hawran (Br)	Col. Abu Basil al-Hawrani	1/12/2013	Maghawir Division
Mohammed bin Abdullah (Br)	Lt. Mohammed Hussein al-Qadri/ Nidal Omari	2/6/2013	Self
Fajr al-Islam	Lt. Col. Mohammed Hassan Salama/Maj. Ahmed Sharrouf	2/26/2013	Self
Muhajireen wa Ansar (Br)	Capt. Iyad Qaddour	3/6/13	Self
Maghawir al-	Khaled al-Hawrani	3/23/2013	Maghawir Division

Junoub (Br)			
Hamza Asad Allah	Col. Saber Safr	4/8/2013	Self
Usud al-Islam	Capt. Abd al-Hakim al-Aayid	4/17/2013	Self
Tawhid Kata'ib Hawran	Mohammed al-Turkmani (d)	4/22/2013	Self
Maghawir Sahel Hawran	Ahmed al-Khal	5/29/2013	Maghawir Division
Liwa al-Haq	Maj. Qassim Najim		Self
PHASE FIVE			
UNIT	LEADER	VIDEO	SUBSEQUENT
18 March (Di)	Col. Mohammed al-Duhni	4/11/13	Self
Maham al-Khasa (Ba)	Suhail al-Jawabreh	5/3/2013	Self
First Artillery (Sq)	Maj. Abd al-Latif al-Hawrani	N/A	Self
Al-Maghawir (Di)	Col. Abdullah abd al-Rahim	6/4/2013	Self

APPENDIX I

SOCIAL MEDIA CITATIONS

- *Qais al-Qataneh, a captain whose defection video was posted on 10 July 2011...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKw9IIHLUu0>
انشقاق النقيب قيس القطاعنه وانضمامه للواء الاحرار
- *... al-Lajah quickly became a gathering point for aspiring rebels in Daraa...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWKaFwJfCjk>
اللجاة - أيام مع الجيش السوري الحر - كامل دقة عالية
- *... al-Qataneh issued a YouTube statement identifying himself as commander ...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxKwP9UI5oU>
لواء الضباط الاحرار اعلان تشكيل القطاع الجنوبي لحركة الضباط الاحرار.
- *...FSA leader Col. Riad al-Asaad identified "Captain Qais" (by first name only)...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vd8M5iRj3h4>
إعلان تشكيل الجيش السوري الحر - العقيد رياض الأسعد
- *... the formation of Daraa's first official FSA unit, to be called the Omari Battalion...*
<https://www.facebook.com/damascus.Revolution/posts/256997984341588>
بيان صادر عن قيادة الجيش السوري الحر يعلن قائد الجيش السوري الحر العقيد رياض الأسعد عن تشكيل كتيبة العمري في درعا وتم تعيين النقيب قيس دياب القطاعنة قائداً للكتيبة
- *First Lieutenant Sharif al-Kayid, from the village of Qarfa...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSpAK3zWEPY>
تشكيل كتيبة احمد الخلف بقيادة الملازم شريف الكايد درعا
- *... military defectors forming the Shuhada al-Hurriyah (Martyrs of Freedom) Battalion...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9rw7ax8I5k>
تشكيل كتيبة شهداء الحرية التابعة للجيش السوري الحر
- *On 14 November Mahmood Tuqtuq, a first lieutenant from the city of Homs...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cowrd3PivlI>
المركز الإعلامي السوري درعا انشقاق ملازم وملازم اول بدرعا 20 11 14
- *... Shuhada al-Hurriyah Battalion was not mentioned...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WCwlvWvb-s>
شام ::: درعا - بيان صادر عن قائد كتيبة العمري بالجيش...
- *On 16 November Lt. Mohammed Mustafa al-Maarati posted a defection video...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpATvb4qQe4>
درعا انشقاق الملازم محمد مصطفى معراتي واربع جنود اخرين في مدينة بصرى الحرير
- *... al-Maarati... was killed in late January 2012...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwPKSxyPi8>
للشهيد البطل الملازم اول احمد معراتي
- *On 6 December Lt. Col. Mohammed Khir al-Harbat became the first lieutenant colonel...*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr8LGgA3Sak>

انشقاق المقدم البطل محمد خير صالح الحريات

- *The first of the final three is the Moatassem Battalion...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfuHIIHa4RI>

انشقاق كتبة في درعا وتشكيل كتبية المعتصم

- *On 10 January 2012 Major Ahmed Ibrahim Sharrouf...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5sQZssrzng>

انشقاق الرائد احمد ابراهيم من الفرقة 9 دبابات ميكا

- *The Moatez Billah Battalion was the penultimate to form...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YBKPM3bzhc>

المركز الإعلامي السوري تشكيل كتائب المعتز بالله في درعا القطاع الجنوب غربي

- *The final unit, the Rayat al-Haq Battalion (Banners of Truth)...*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abxKMwlsOWM_1

درعا البلدة بيان كتبية رايات الحق امام المتظاهرين

- *Al-Abboud's defection video is dated 22 February 2012...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02JjdMJ5rcw>

المركز الإعلام السوري إنشقاق المقدم ياسر العبود و إنضمامه للجيش السوري الحر

- *Two days later the "Military Revolutionary Council – Southern Command" made...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfMbl7eCpio>

بيان تشكيل المجلس العسكري الثوري محافظة درعا 2012-02-24

- *... he is identified as commander of the Omar al-Mokhtar Company...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTDxOLWlwEs>

مقابلة كتبية أم المؤمنين مع قائد سرية عمر المختار

- *... as well as the Salah al-Din...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZsyKffAyxA>

حوران إنخل بيان رقم 1 كتبية الناصر صلاح الدين

- *... and Abdullah bin Omar battalions.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE3Gu5yWGPo>

الجيش الحر في مخيم درعا للنازحين

- *... the founding of the al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Battalion in a YouTube video...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJocSN9qQZk>

درعا انشقاق نقيبين وتشكيل كتبية المهاجرين والأنصار

- *... Mohammed bin Abdullah, led by Lt. Mohammed al-Qadri...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYoamCkh8Nc>

بيان تشكيل كتبية محمد بن عبد الله في محافظة درعا

- *... Dira al-Junoub (Southern Shield), led by Warrant Officer Ahmed al-Muqdad...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN-q6-kYbso>

بيان تشكيل كتبية درع الجنوب 1 4 2012 المنطقة الشرقية القطاع الجنوبي

- *... Shuhada Hawran (Martyrs of Hawran), led by Lt. Ahmed al-Balkhi...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DnawIRe4EQ>

انشقاق الملازم أحمد البلخي و تشكيل كتبية شهداء حوران

- *... These included the Hafez al-Muqdad...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CSRloOfmyk>

تشكيل كتيبة الشهيد المقدم طيار حافظ المقداد

- ... Saif Allah al-Maslul...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhr6gYc0M4Y>

تشكيل سرية سيف الله المسلول التابعة لكتائب المعزز بالله القطاع الجنوبي المنطقة الغربية

- ... Sadiq...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFerVykxF9w>

تشكيل كتيبة الصديق في درعا من العسكريين السابقين

- ... Yarmouk...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TStu2uyil4>

درعا تشكيل كتيبة اليرموك في القطاع الجنوبي

- ... and Diraa al-Thawra (Shield of the Revolution) Battalions...

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHjKXBQsbE>

تشكيل كتيبة درع الثورة التابعة للجيش السوري الحر

- ... for instance the al-Farouq Battalion.

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbFH_QgleSY

اعلان تشكيل كتيبة الفاروق - درعا - اللجاة

- ... On 22 April Col. Ahmed Fahd al-Naama announced in a statement...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP8nS8ICdo>

انضمام العقيد الركن احمد فهد نعمه للجيش الحر

- ... issued a video announcing a major reshuffling.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0fyVDolFEE>

اعادة هيكلة المجلس العسكري في محافظة درعا

- ... a new formation, the Tahrir al-Junoub (Southern Liberation) Brigade.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHhHwKUfke4>

المجلس العسكري بحوران تشكيل لواء تحرير الجنوب

- Al-Abboud sat in the center, flanked by the council's nominal leader...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5gQ2Kmj7_M

درعا بيان للمجلس العسكري بدرعا

- ... On 19 May al-Abboud allegedly issued a statement naming Bashar al-Zoabi...

<http://www.syria2011.net/t32318-topic>

أعلن عن تكليف السيد بشار الزعبي لتمثيل الجيش السوري الحر

- Two days later al-Abboud escaped an assassination attempt with only slight injuries.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAOXFM8QCwY>

إصابة المقدم ياسر العبود

- ... in which Lt. Col. al-Harbat officially ceded leadership to Col. al-Naama.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfgrDBXSTuU>

درعا بيان تسليم قيادة المجلس العسكري الثوري

- On 11 May 2012 Col. Adnan Sami al-Abboud announced that he was defecting....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUuywMqnMf4>

درعا | إنشقاق العقيد عدنان سامي العبود

- ... Adham al-Abboud (better known as Abu al-Hijah) was from the region...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYsJV76KMYU>

أدهم عقاب العبود أبو الهيج القائد الميداني لكتيبة المعتصم بالله

- ... Lt. Col. Mohammed Ali al-Rafaai, a hitherto unknown defector....
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlvsR2ZNIUo>
بيان كتيبة المعتصم بالله رقم (1) تاريخ-5-21-2012.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25KIWQP-tbY>
Syria فري برس انشقاق المقدم محمد علي الرفاعي وانضمامه الي الجيش الحر Syria
- On 29 May Maj. Sharrouf himself announced he was stepping down...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwZ7ao3THno>
تشكيل كتيبة ذي قار في المنطقة الجنوبية القطاع الغربي التابعة للجيش السوري الحر
- A few days later Abu al-Hijah issued a statement disassociating himself...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M--sxRORkBO>
بيان لكتيبة المعتصم بالله في حوران
- On 18 July Abu al-Hijah was killed, allegedly in clashes with regime forces.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfKhCmrVMDs>
ادهم العبود (ابو الهيج)
- The following day Yasser al-Abboud issued a statement...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TH3xKzve8BU>
قائد الجيش الحر يتوعد بالثأر لقائد كتيبة المعتصم بالله
- The Jaidur Hawran Brigade, for instance, likely formed....
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5ZBq3ashVE>
لواء جيدور حوران من قلب حوران ورجال حوران يصنع الانتصار
- Several groups joined this brigade.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cu2YEVbxuzg>
صديق تابعة للجيش الحر لواء جيدور حوران 10 9 2012 | أموي سوريا لطرد الاحتلال النصيري
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT4OkSpvDQ8>
تشكيل كتيبة مصعب بن عمير لواء جيدور حوران
- ... the Maghawir Hawran (Hawran Commandos) Battalion announced...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dpcDic2H60>
درعا | القطاع الجنوبي | تشكيل كتيبة مغاوير حوران
- ... securing the defection of the deputy police chief of Homs, Brig. Gen. Ibrahim Jabawi.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEMSCmv8thU>
كتيبة مغاوير حوران تأمين انشقاق العميد ابراهيم جباوي
- ... the Tahrir Hawran (Hawran Liberation) Brigade, formed on 20 August.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4dakOVodSc>
تشكيل لواء تحرير حوران في المنطقة الجنوبية
- The brigade was led by Brig. Gen. Omar al-Asfar...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybz1PBpnpVQ>
درعا - إنشقاق العميد المهندس عمر الأصفر
- ... including the al-Farouq Battalion
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjmKD8EzP8g>
بيان انضمام كتيبة الفاروق في درعا الى لواء تحرير حوران
- ... and the Abdullah bin Omar Battalion.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNFKuH6D-0o>

بيان اعلان انضمام كتبية عبدالله بن عمر للواء تحرير حوران

- On 3 September al-Asfar issued a statement...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoellWbDnvk>

بيان صادر عن لواء تحرير حوران

- ... al-Asfar was replaced as leader by Col. Yasser al-Salamat...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2erYlclCLE>

تكليف العقيد ياسر السلامة بقيادة لواء تحرير حوران

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaAow9UFT_U

لواء تحرير حوران

- ... incorporated the Tahrir Hawran Battalion into Daraa's military council.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DI6pl--tC8E>

لواء تحرير حوران بيان الانضمام للمجلس العسكري بدرعا

- On 18 August the council issued a statement dividing the "southern front" into...

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=487362527958909&id=462597603768735

قامت قيادة المجلس العسكري الثوري في محافظة درعا وريفها بإنشاء مقر قيادة مركزي ومراكز قيادة فرعية

- ... a statement denying that his group had foreign links and foreign representation...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu_-26eWm1l

بيان الرائد قاسم نجم قائد لواء تحرير الجنوب

- On 17 September Yasser al-Abboud made a video statement...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upwh9qPcwNk>

بيان المقدم الركن ياسر العبود

- ... the Omari Battalion (the FSA's first local formation), which had apparently withdrawn...

<https://www.facebook.com/We.All.Horan.Martyrs/posts/415405238523856>

كانت كتبية العمري ، في وقت سابق ، قد أعلنت انسحابها من المجلس العسكري

- First among them was the Tawhid al-Junoub Brigade...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00Q7CEFCeHs>

لواء توحيد الجنوب بدرعا

- The Omari Battalion became the Omari Brigade the following day...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YhoXsoEydI>

تشكيل لواء العمري في درعا بقيادة النقيب قيس قطاعه

- On 30 October the Moatez Billah Battalion became the Moatez Billah Brigade...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64yfMN7TDm4>

اعلان تشكيل لواء المعتز بالله في مدينة درعا

- On 22 November a more standard video showed the formation of the Ahmed Khalaf Brigade.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=389NGsC_JH8

22 11 Daraa أوغاريت حوران , تشكيل لواء الشهيد احمد الخلف

- ... became part of the Fallujah Hawran Brigade, formed on 27 December...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMZxP6uPgDk>
تشكيل لواء فلوجة حوران
- ... formed the Diraal-Lajah (Al-Lajah Shield) Brigade...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwniB8426A>
تشكيل لواء درع اللجاة في درعا
- Several groups would subsequently join his unit...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcfXalphsec>
بيان كتيبة المجاهد عمر المختار إغتنام أول دبابة في حوران.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP88Y5U33-w>
تشكيل كتيبة الشهيد صقر خلف وإنضمامها للواء درع اللجاة
- .. the Yarmouk Brigade, led by Bashar al-Zoabi...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulxmQpb0r84>
أكبر تشكيل للجيش الحر في محافظته درعا
- Failed engagements in Tafs and other parts of the province...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkttZC9cfc>
طفس المنكوبة تهديد الى المجلس العسكري بدرع
<https://www.facebook.com/tanseeq5jbab/posts/422644761135022>
هذه رسالة الى جميع الناس الذين يتكلمون على الجيش الحر الموجود بطفس .. لماذا خرج وماالسبب
- Criticism was no longer limited to the Jordan-based leadership...
<https://www.facebook.com/Tyba.News.Network/posts/544010812293359>
منقول كتيبة اليرموك أصبحت كتيبة الشبيحة بقيادة الخوصة وبشار الزعبي الذين قاموا بوضع اقاربهم بالكتيبة
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=564778820226049&set=a.518905621480036.1073741828.518903131480285&type=1>
الإسم : فادي فرقماس - الملقب ب الحصيني المكان : درعا العمل : قائد مغاوير حوران أو ما يعرف (الحصينيات)
<https://www.facebook.com/horanfreedom/posts/513114975395431>
نشكر الجيش الحر بدرعا وخصوصا مجموعه ابو شافع المصري واحفاد الرسول وخصوصا المقاتل البطل غريب
- ... called the "Revolution Stealers in Daraa," quickly eclipsed many of the militia pages...
<https://www.facebook.com/Syrian.revolution.stealers.in.Deraa>
خفايا و خبايا شبيحة و لصوص الجيش الحر في درعا
- On 9 January the Shahid Hawran (Hawran Martyr) Brigade formed...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJhtJkkB5Xw>
شام-درعا-بيان تشكيل لواء شهيد حوران
- On January 12 the Saqr Hawran Brigade formed under the leadership...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNaqw4JbYTQ>
تشكيل لواء صقر حوران - 2013/1/12 الجبهة الجنوبية
- The Mohammed bin Abdullah Brigade, based on the battalion with the same name...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jta16GvW2vU>
تشكيل لواء محمد بن عبد الله
- On 27 January the Maghawir Hawran Battalion merged with others...
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-B_AdvER04
بيان تشكيل تجمع كتائب مغاوير حوران

- ... in late February 2013, it became the Fajr al-Islam Brigade...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpVywTgkMf0>
إعلان تشكيل تجمع كتائب فجر الإسلام
- Iyad Qaddour's al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar Battalion became...
<https://www.facebook.com/liwaa.almohajireen.wa.alansar/posts/350020461771164>
إلى كافة كتائب وسرايا وجماعات المهاجرين والأنصار:
- .. the Maghawir al-Junoub (Southern Commandos) Brigade led by...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfYcw47iXjM>
تشكيل لواء مغاوير الجنوب في حوران القطاع الجنوبي
- Three days later the Shuhada al-Hurriyah Battalion...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHzcUC6rKyA>
أوغاريت الحراك حوران , بيان تشكيل لواء شهداء الحرية
- On 8 April 2013 the Hamza Asad Allah Brigade formed, led by Col. Saber Safr...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EI0faYoUrA>
تشكيل لواء حمزة أسد الله في درعا
- On 17 April 2013 the Usud al-Islam (Lions of Islam) Brigade formed...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldMw7Ubxmbw>
بيان تشكيل لواء اسود الاسلام في درعا
- On 22 April the Tawhid Kataib Hawran (Unifying Hawran Battalions) Brigade formed...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fr-TFdLOq6w>
لواء توحيد كتائب حوران
- ... al-Abboud, surrounded by around two dozen men, announced that the military council...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImdlZea3yh4>
بيان تشكيل المجلس الثوري العسكري في محافظة درعا
- Fadi al-Asmi...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlrnsFIVwU>
داعل الشهيد الشيخ انيس الجاموس متوجها الى المعركة
- ... Abd al-Mullah al-Hariri
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6XhfcHjBk4> بصر الحرير رسالة من المساجد المدمرة الى المتولين عن الزحف
- Over the following days those units aligning themselves with the al-Naama-led council...
Maghawir hawran:
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=124318001083218&id=4457163521130
27
Tahrir hawran:
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=559100867441241&id=4457163521130
27
Tawhid al-Junoub, Shuhada Hawran:
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=559101740774487&id=4457163521130
27
Abdullah bin Zayd:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBH91lh_6I4

كتيبة عبدالله بن زبير لايعترف بالمجلس العسكري الجديد

Shuhada al-Yarmouk:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPqXhBrWZnM>

بيان كتيبة شهداء اليرموك

Maghawir Hawran:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfCjLJGKKCg>

تجمع كتائب مغاوير حوران بيان حول المجلس العسكري

Fajr al-Islam:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddI-Bq9qXOo>

بيان لواء فجر الاسلام بالمجلس العسكري

Several:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXbg40UDjA8>

بيان هام الوية و كتائب الجيش الحر في محافظة درعا

- On 3 May the council formed the Special Operations Brigade, led by Col. Suhail al-Jawabra.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQkOT00fLkW>

تشكيل لواء المهام الخاصة في المنطقة الجنوبية

- The Daraa council's first artillery squadron was formed under the command...

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=462597603768735&story_fbid=645288915499602

المجلس العسكري الثوري في محافظة درعا الفوج الاول مدفعية

https://www.facebook.com/ghabaghebrevo/posts/308849019196787?comment_id=1850409&offset=0&total_comments=3

انشقاق مجموعة من ضباط درعا الأبطال ويعلنون انضمامهم للجيش الحر ...الرائد عبد اللطيف الحوراني

- On 29 May the Maghawir Sahel Hawran Brigade formed.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvrlM1hfyPs>

بيان تشكيل لواء مغاوير سهل حوران

- ... form the First Maghawir (Commando) Division...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoX9IrW957c>

إعلان تشكيل فرقة المغاوير الأولى بمحافظة درعا

- This unit brought together three brigades...

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=482968955101861&set=a.482968951768528.1073741828.476253872440036&type=1>

- By 18 July the Tawhid al-Junoub Brigade had left the division...

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=260058687452810&set=a.210223315769681.25417.207020172756662&type=1>

- In a now infamous video al-Naama explained how the town had been liberated...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYDMbBdRosM>

قائد المجلس العسكري في درعا يتفقد خط الجبهة في بلدة خربة غزالة

- Even Faysal Qassim, a prominent host on al-Jazeera, mentioned offhandedly...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lqDTWs8Axc>

اضحك مع الاعلامي فيصل القاسم و تواطىء النعمة

- On 23 May 2013 al-Ghazali wrote a somewhat despondent post...

<https://www.facebook.com/aboshab.daraa.9/posts/189979331159789>

مع الاسف الشديد اصبحت ثورتنا مع الموضة في القديم كانت موضة تشكيل الكتائب

- *On 19 June a report on SkyNews Arabia noted that the local rebel army...*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjUKHw-YLd4>

الحر: إنشاء غرفة عمليات جديدة بدرعا

- *A 21 June statement, signed by virtually all local military leaders...*

<https://www.facebook.com/Daraamediaunion/posts/595616303803268>

رفض اهالي حوران اشد الرفض لتعيين اعضاء من حوران في الائتلاف الوطني من قبل الائتلاف نفسه