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# Manpower Gaps in the Syrian Army

LUCAS WINTER

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# Manpower Gaps in the Syrian Army

*Lucas Winter*

In 2011 and 2012 the Syrian Arab Army (SyAA) lost control of its infantry forces. Large numbers of active duty servicemen defected or deserted, and thousands of reservists and conscripts failed to show when called up. The estimated drop in active military manpower was precipitous: from 325,000 at the start of the conflict in 2011 to an estimated 178,000 in 2013.<sup>1</sup>

When conflict broke out in Syria, the bulk of the SyAA was a corruption-mired institution where “employees’ primary ambition was to leverage their positions for personal gain.”<sup>2</sup> The military conscription process was a case in point: the Recruitment Directorate (*Sh’aba al-Tajnid*) provided plum opportunities for financial gain through the selling of military service exemptions.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, military conscripts were often from poor families lacking any clout in the system (“wasta”). Like the rebels, they were mostly rural Sunni Muslims (including Kurds).

The SyAA was drawn into the Syrian conflict from the outset. Sunni SyAA soldiers were ordered to shoot their coreligionist countrymen. If they didn’t they risked being shot and killed by their superiors or by embedded units from Syrian praetorian forces. Officers whose “regional identification” signaled potential rebel sympathies came under suspicion.<sup>4</sup> Thousands of Sunni privates and officers defected or deserted at the first opportunity. Defections had a multiplier

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<sup>1</sup> Aram Nerguizian. “The Military Balance in a Shattered Levant,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 15. Of those initial 325,000 an estimated 100,000 belonged to the Air Force and Air Defenses and another 50,000 or so belonged to elite units (Republican Guard, 4th Armored Division, and Special Forces).

<sup>2</sup> Kheder Khaddour, “Strength in Weakness: The Syrian Army’s Accidental Resilience.” *Carnegie Middle East Center Regional Insight*, 14 March 2016. Accessed 11 April 2016, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2016/03/14/strength-in-weakness-syrian-army-s-accidental-resilience/iuz7> This same article provides a telling example of conscript training: “Officers also frequently assign conscripts to perform maintenance and construction work on their personal homes and properties, in addition to driving their children to school in military vehicles.”

<sup>3</sup> Details on Syrian conscription laws can be found at: “Syria: Compulsory military service, including age of recruitment, length of service; occasions where proof of military service status is required; whether the government can recall individuals who have already completed their compulsory military service; penalties for evasion (2008-July 2014)” *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada Response for Request*, 13 August 2014. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455461&pls=1>

<sup>4</sup> “Regional identification” was officially registered on everyone’s ID card under the categories of security directorate (*imana*) and place of registration (*qayd*). These categories are assigned at birth and do not change; they often reflect a father or grandfather’s neighborhood of origin. Kheder Khaddour and Kevin Mazur. “The Struggle for Syria’s Regions,” *Middle East Research and Information Project*. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer269/struggle-syrias-regions>

effect, as every defection from the SyAA to rebel ranks represented both a net gain for the rebels and a net loss for the SyAA.<sup>5</sup>

SyAA light infantry units performed poorly in the conflict's first major engagement, against ad hoc militias in the city of Homs and its environs. As rebels opened fronts throughout the country, the few trusted infantry units (such as Republican Guard) became quickly overstretched. In urban areas the SyAA lost hundreds of tanks in poorly planned counteroffensives lacking infantry support units.<sup>6</sup> As the armed insurgency grew the SyAA began withdrawing from weak positions, including population centers, in Sunni-majority parts of the country. The SyAA often encircled and shelled lost territory from a distance, in the hopes of forcing trapped fighters and civilians to surrender.

The Syrian government began taking measures to prepare for a broader mobilization early in the conflict. In May 2011 it extended the active conscript's class service indefinitely.<sup>7</sup> In November of that year it issued new directives regarding travel for military age men, according to opposition sources. In the first half of 2012 the SyAA began calling up reservists to fill its depleted ranks.<sup>8</sup>

Syrian reserve forces were made up of men in their twenties and thirties who had completed military service but not enlisted.<sup>9</sup> They numbered in the hundreds of thousands, but were

...little more than 'paper' forces with no real refresher or modern training, poor equipment and readiness support, and little or no experience in mobility and sustainability.. [which] have often been given cadres of low grade or failed officers and NCOs. They did little more than pointlessly consume military resources that would be better spent on active forces.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In what is likely an inflated number, one prominent defector claimed that by July 2012 100,000 men had defected or deserted from the Syrian military.

<sup>6</sup> According to an estimate from late 2013, in the first two years of conflict the SyAA lost 1,800 tanks and armored vehicles. David Axe. "How to take out 1,800 tanks in two years." War is Boring, 17 November 2013. Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://warisboring.com/how-to-take-out-1-800-tanks-in-two-years-74ecd413cb93#j7z4vixus>

<sup>7</sup> "Strength in Weakness." It is unclear how large this group is. Estimates from 2005 place the number of men reaching military age annually in Syria at around a quarter of a million.

<sup>8</sup> "Strained Syrian Army Calls Up Reserves; Some Flee," *Reuters*, 4 September 2012. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-army-deserters-idUSBRE8830CH20120904>

<sup>9</sup> "Syria: Military Personnel"

<sup>10</sup> "The Military Balance in a Shattered Levant."

The 2012 reservist call-up and ensuing crackdown against draft dodgers hardened divisions between rebels and loyalist. Reporting for reserve duty was difficult and often dangerous in rebel-held areas. The prospect of jumping into the trenches with the SyAA held little appeal, even to government supporters. In government-controlled areas, those who were able to bought their way out of service, and those who could not either fled the country, went into hiding or joined the rebellion. The Syrian government issued – but quickly rescinded – a decree forbidding Syrian males between 18 and 42 from leaving Syria without permission from the Recruitment Directorate. It also began compiling an extensive list of the no-shows. According to opposition media reports by late 2014 the list included half a million names.<sup>11</sup>

The reluctance to comply with the SyAA’s 2012 recruitment efforts was especially noteworthy in the Alawite community, to which the Syrian president and much of his inner circle belong.<sup>12</sup> Already disproportionately represented in the country’s armed forces and security services, Alawites balked at sending more of their men to battlefronts in Sunni-majority areas, for fear that doing so would make their communities vulnerable to attacks from jihadist marauders.

The Syrian government’s response to the failed 2012 recruitment efforts was to arm loyalist communities, particularly ethnic (Kurdish) and religious minorities (Christian, Druze, Alawite, Shi’i). These new self-defense militias became collectively known as the “Popular Committees.”<sup>13</sup> Dwindling resources and growing insecurity incentivized militia formation, and loyalist businessmen and party leaders entered the booming business.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Half a Million Men Wanted for Compulsory Military Service in Syria.” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 24 December 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016.

<http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=13175&article=799354&feature=#.VwEjrT-PeRs>  
<sup>12</sup> “Alawites Refuse Recruitment into the Syrian Army.” *Sky News Arabia*, 26 October 2012 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/my09zX>

<sup>13</sup> “Insight: Minority Militias Stir Fears of Sectarian War in Damascus.” *Reuters*, 7 September 2012. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-militias-idUSBRE88612V20120907> and Nicholas A. Heras “The Counter-Insurgency Role of Syria’s ‘Popular Committees.’” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 11:9, 2 May 2013. Accessed 28 April 2016. [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=40819&cHash=3bd204af671ce03738a33ea1d31c3404#.Vx5LDz9-hOM](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=40819&cHash=3bd204af671ce03738a33ea1d31c3404#.Vx5LDz9-hOM)

<sup>14</sup> Examples include militias linked to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), Palestinian factions, the Baath Party, and the Alexandretta “Syrian Resistance;” Druze and Kurdish militias; the militarization of Lattakia’s mafias (the “Shabbiha”) and the creation of a private military company called the Suqur al-Sahara funded by a prominent industrialist family (the Jaber brothers).

In 2013 the Popular Committees were formalized as an entity called the “National Defense Forces” (NDF), a hybrid military-regime network that effectively plugged the light infantry manpower gap. The NDF blurred the lines between the SyAA and the ruling regime, allowing local regime strongmen access to the military’s patronage network and vice-versa. NDF fighters held front lines, bogged down rebel advances, patrolled loyalist communities, and allowed elite SyAA units to go on the offensive. In some cases NDF units played important infantry roles in counteroffensives, most notably the 2013 Battle of Qusayr. By 2014 their numbers were estimated at 80,000.<sup>15</sup>

The SyAA was also thrown a lifeline by its allies: Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and Hizbullah sent thousands of troops and operators across the border, and Iran facilitated the entry of thousands more from Shi’i-majority areas of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> According to several media accounts, the Syrian NDF forces were often trained and organized by Hizbullah and Iran.<sup>17</sup>

The NDF was a stopgap measure that created problems of its own. For one, the militias’ attrition rates were too high: by late 2014 estimated loyalist casualties exceeded those of rebels.<sup>18</sup> NDF militias were often accused of looting and extorting, tarnishing the SyAA’s already battered reputation among its supporters. The militias’ geographical scope was limited to the home areas of its fighters, and as a consequence SyAA positions in Sunni-majority rebel-friendly parts of the country’s north and east remained vulnerable. In 2014 several such areas – most notably Raqqa Province – were taken over by ISIS/L.

ISIS/L grew in large part thanks to its successful recruitment efforts in Syria and beyond. As the SyAA struggled to replace fallen fighters, ISIS/L seemed to have a manpower surplus, sending constant waves of “suicide fighters” and suicide bombers into battlefronts throughout Syria and

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<sup>15</sup> Nerguizian. “The Military Balance in a Shattered Levant,”

<sup>16</sup> In contrast to a formal military deployment, much of the IRGC-QF’s transfer of fighters into Syria took place under the guise of religious pilgrimage, relying on an extensive network of religious tourism linking the two countries.

<sup>17</sup> “The Counter-Insurgency Role of Syria’s ‘Popular Committees.’”

<sup>18</sup> The estimates come from opposition sources. There is no equivalent government estimate. “Over 120,000 Pro-Assad Fighters Killed in Syria Conflict: Monitoring Group,” *Reuters*, 17 December 2014. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-assad-idUSKBN0JV1ZG20141217>

Iraq. The rise of ISIS/L made Sunni males in government-held areas targets of suspicion, and shortly after the June 2014 re-election of Bashar Assad, his government launched an expansive conscription and recruitment campaign in areas under its control.

The new recruitment campaign began with a list of the names of tens of thousands of men wanted for reserve duty, divided by branch and specialization. The list was issued by the SyAA's Recruitment Directorate and was divided by neighborhood; provincial authorities were tasked with finding the wanted men.<sup>19</sup> In some government offices the payment of wages for military-age males was made contingent on their having an official exemption.<sup>20</sup> Random checkpoints were set up throughout government-controlled territory and those evading reserve duty were seized, put in a one-month training camp, and sent to battle.<sup>21</sup> Military police raided the homes of young men on the lists and the government raised the price of permits for military age men to leave the country.<sup>22</sup> An announcement by the Opposition Coordination Committee for the Sunni-majority Damascus neighborhood of Bab Sreeja, published shortly after the campaign was launched, described the situation as follows:<sup>23</sup>

The Recruitment Directorate in the Midan neighborhood is preparing a list of names of young men born between 1980 and 1982 in order to enlist them as reservists. Regime forces are entering homes to search for rental agreements and to gather data. They write down the names of young men, particularly those that are not from Damascus and around a week later they get a summons for reserve duties. There is a massive bribery campaign in the Recruitment Directorate in Damascus to delay or pardon reserve duties on the pretext that the wanted man is outside the country. Until now the situation in the reserve checkpoints is relatively calm and there have not been many cases of young men being picked up.

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<sup>19</sup> "Assad Regime Calls Up 35,000 Reservists." *Alsouria.net*, 10 October 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://goo.gl/GT8JWu> and "Reserve Duty Worries Syrian Youth, Leading them to Flee." *Al-jazeera*, 3 November 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/7WE8t9>

<sup>20</sup> "As Part of General Military Mobilization Assad's Army Puts New Conditions on Obtaining Monthly Salaries." *Eldorar.com*, 31 December 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://eldorar.com/node/66670>

<sup>21</sup> "Young Syrian Men Forced to Protect the Regime." *Al-Araby al-Jadid*, 2 February 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://goo.gl/3uJ1HT>

<sup>22</sup> "Conditions of Permission to Travel Document from the Recruitment Directorate." *Shaam Times*, 23 December 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.shaamtimes.net/news-detailz.php?id=20142> Syrian men of military age wishing to travel had to apply for official permission from the recruitment branch; it had to be renewed every three months. The document had a cost of \$300, very expensive for many in Syria's inflationary context.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Salihiya Neighborhood Coordination Committees Facebook Page. Post from 14 October 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/SalhyaFreedom/posts/585513204911402>

Those who had the financial means paid to have their name temporarily taken off the wanted reservists list. The process of obtaining exemption was laden with uncertainty as it depended on a complex chain of venal officers each jockeying for a share of the pie. Even regime supporters found the corruption levels inexcusable.<sup>24</sup> An opposition article from 2015 described the recruitment branch in Hama Province as the city's "most corrupt" institution, run by a mafia which profited from extorting young men with the threat of arrest and forced conscription.<sup>25</sup>

The Alawite community once again balked, feeling they had done more than their share of fighting; according to one estimate, Syria's Alawites had by then lost over 60,000 men, with an additional 100,000 injured or disabled.<sup>26</sup> The reduced pool of Alawite males, combined with fears of ISIS/L sleeper cells in urban areas, meant that the government specifically targeted Sunni neighborhoods, particularly in Damascus. The recruitment campaign hardly replenished the SyAA's light infantry. Instead, it led to a new wave of defections and a major outflow of military age males from Syria. It was more effective as a crackdown against Sunnis in government-held areas than as a recruitment campaign.

The militias also undermined the government's recruitment campaign by enticing recruits away with promises of shorter commitments, no distant deployment, and supplemental income from looting and extortion. By late 2014 the NDF had gone from lifeline to nuisance - unpopular among government supporters and increasingly willing to challenge SyAA hegemony. Opposition media began claiming that the Syrian Defense Ministry intended to dissolve the NDF and incorporate its fighters into the military structures.<sup>27</sup> Tensions between some NDF branches and the SyAA intensified in 2015. In April armed clashes broke out between NDF and SyAA units in Homs. An article in a widely read Qatari daily, titled "Autumn of the Syrian Army,

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<sup>24</sup> "Reservists in the Army... Time to Look at their Living Conditions..." *Syria Steps*, 3 November 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.syriasteps.com/?d=127&id=125409>

"Wanted Reservists in Syria Pays 1.5 Million Lira Bribe to the Defense Minister." *Arabi 21*, 3 February 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/PmDXqz>

<sup>25</sup> "Endless Lines in Hama's Recruitment Directorate as Soldiers turn into Middlemen." *Enab Baladi*, 20 December 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.enabbaladi.org/archives/57188>

<sup>26</sup> "60,000 Alawites Killed since the Start of the Syrian Revolution." *All4Syria*, 21 October 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://all4syria.info/Archive/174238>

<sup>27</sup> "The Regime Breaks Up National Defense Forces." *Al-Hayat*, 1 December 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/pgwNjV>

Spring of the Militias,” detailed how paramilitary forces were threatening SyAA primacy.<sup>28</sup> When the SyAA faltered in Idlib Province in the spring of 2015, a telling video showed retreating SyAA forces entering a military encampment where NDF militiamen heckled them for retreating without a fight.<sup>29</sup> In August a close relative of the president’s from the NDF in Lattakia Province murdered a colonel from the SyAA Engineering Corps in a fit of “road rage,” sparking popular outrage in the colonel’s hometown. The SyAA needed a boost but was hesitant to rely further on local militias.

In a televised speech before the Syrian parliament on 26 July 2015 Syrian President Bashar Assad stated that the Syrian military was “struggling for manpower” in its fight against local and foreign Sunni rebels: “There is a lack of human resources... Everything is available [for the army], but there is a shortfall in human capacity.”<sup>30</sup> The day before the speech Assad had declared an amnesty for the thousands of men who had evaded conscription or failed to enlist for reserve duties. Those who turned themselves in could avoid prosecution but would have to serve.

Russia’s decision to intervene in Syria was premised on the idea that Russia would attack Syrian rebels from the air while Iran’s IRGC-QF would lead the charge from the ground.<sup>31</sup> The IRGC-QF’s model for bolstering Syrian ground troops, however, was little more than a continuation of the troublesome NDF – communal militias networked into the SyAA rather than directly in its chain of command. According to an article in the Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, SyAA leaders hoped that

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<sup>28</sup> “Autumn of the Syrian Army, Spring of the Militias.” *Al-Araby al-Jadid*, 27 May 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/AtKFtH>

<sup>29</sup> “Alawite Villages in Hama Refuse Regime Protection.” *Al-Jazeera*, 26 August 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/Dt6Psk>

The video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdhO0McPOgM> Accessed 28 April 2016.

<sup>30</sup> “Syria’s Assad Admits Army Struggling for Manpower.” *Al-Jazeera*, 26 July 2015. Accessed 28 April 2016. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/syria-assad-speech-150726091936884.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/syria-assad-speech-150726091936884.html)

<sup>31</sup> “The Complete Story of Russia’s Decision to Intervene in Syria.” *Al-Safir*, 20 October 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://assafir.com/Article/451301>

An October 2015 report in the *Wall Street Journal* spoke of a surge in Iranian-linked fighters; one estimate claimed 20,000 foreign Shi’i fighters and 7,000 IRGC members and Iranian paramilitary volunteers were on the ground in Syria. “Iran Expands Role in Syria in Conjunction With Russia’s Airstrikes.” *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 October 2015. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-expands-role-in-syria-in-conjunction-with-russias-airstrikes-1443811030>

Russian intervention would help replace the “Iranian Model” of communal militias with a “Russian Model” of strengthened conventional forces.<sup>32</sup>

On 8 October 2015 SyAA Chief of Staff Ali Ayoub announced the establishment of what he called the SyAA’s “4th Corps,” a formation to be trained and equipped by Russian forces.<sup>33</sup> The 4th Corps was eager for recruits.<sup>34</sup> Other SyAA-linked paramilitary organizations independent of the NDF, such as the “Tiger Forces” and the “Desert Hawks,” became additional vehicles through which to recruit into what was being billed as a significantly upgraded army.

Shortly after Russian intervention officially began, the Syrian government launched a new conscription campaign. An opposition newspaper posted a searchable database of 54,000 names it claimed were on the wanted reservists list.<sup>35</sup> Military-age males who did not have a reserve exemption from the Recruitment Directorate were once again picked up at checkpoints throughout government-held territory. Some of those taken were sent straight to a weeklong training on Damascus’s outskirts before being deployed, according to one opposition news website.<sup>36</sup> As before, manning the checkpoints was an opportunity for enrichment, only now NDF militias rather than military police ran many of them.<sup>37</sup> As before, the Alawite community grumbled that it was someone else’s turn to do the fighting. Only it was not clear whose turn it was.

In his July speech, the Syrian president noted, “The homeland doesn’t belong to those who live in it, or to those who have a passport or a nationality. The homeland belongs to those who defend

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<sup>32</sup> “Russian Intervention Hastens the Breakup of NDF Forces Close to Iran...” *Al-Hayat*, 11 October 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/yAngx5>

<sup>33</sup> “The Complete Story of Russia’s Decision to Intervene in Syria.”

The 4th Corps merged troops from areas in Hama and Lattakia that had been reorganized into the SyAA’s 2d and 6th divisions alongside local paramilitary forces.

<sup>34</sup> The opposition news website *alsouria.net* published what it claimed was a list of members of the 4th corps. The list was almost 2,000 names long, a long ways from the purported tens of thousands that the corps aimed to field.

“*Alsouria.net* Unveils Details on the 4th Corps Which Russia is Using to Fight the Syrian Opposition on the Ground.” *Alsouria.net*, 14 October 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://goo.gl/iSCGnZ>

<sup>35</sup> “Search and Download List of Over 54,000 Wanted for Reserve Duty in the Regime Army.” *Zaman al-Wasl*, 20 November 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/66165.html>

The database includes the various branches and units that were calling up the reservists.

<sup>36</sup> “The Regime Sentences Damascus’s Youth to Death.” *Alsouria.net*, 10 November 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <https://goo.gl/C1A9Mv>

<sup>37</sup> “Syrians Facing Military Reserve Call-Up Wish That Duty Were Optional.” *Al-Akhbar*, 5 December 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/247556>

and protect it. The people who don't defend their homeland have no homeland and don't deserve one." The message was clear: Syrians living under Assad would have to fight. Some saw a second message in his words: non-Syrians fighting for him might become Syrians.

Since Russian intervention, SyAA reliance on foreign militias for infantry support has increased. When the SyAA regained control over Palmyra in March 2016, for instance, one journalist described the loyalist coalition as follows: "The Russian air force attacks Isis from the air; the Syrians, the Iranians, the Afghan Shia Muslims from north-eastern Afghanistan, the Iraqi Shias and several hundred Pakistani Shias must attack Isis and Jabhat al-Nusra on the ground."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps seeking to downplay the role of foreign fighters, Syrian media portrayed the local "Tiger Forces" and "Desert Hawks" militias as key participants alongside SyAA forces.

The SyAA has made itself indispensable to the ruling regime, displaying what one analyst called accidental resilience: "[The SyAA's survival] is central to the regime's claim to be the legitimate steward of the country through the conflict. Should the army collapse, the regime would certainly follow shortly thereafter."<sup>39</sup> The SyAA is itself held together by a diffuse network of volunteer militias that are plugged into its chain of command and patronage system at different nodes of the system, making the SyAA all the more resilient.

The SyAA remains the single strongest force in the country in terms of weaponry and reach. Its impending demise has been a constant of Syrian conflict analyses ever since 2012. This prediction, often based on decontextualized analysis of shifts in territorial control, has overlooked the important ways in which the SyAA has adapted to the ongoing conflict. Barring direct intervention by hostile foreign powers, the SyAA's main battlefield threat will remain its own ineptitude and corruption, rather than the rebel forces.

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<sup>38</sup> "Syria Civil War: State-of-the-Art Technology Gives President Assad's Army the Edge." *The Independent*, 26 February 2016. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-civil-war-state-of-the-art-technology-gives-president-assad-s-army-the-edge-a6898741.html>

<sup>39</sup> "Strength in Weakness."

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### **Author Background**

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FMSO has provided some editing, format, and graphics to this paper to conform to organizational standards. Academic conventions, source referencing, and citation style are those of the author.

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