American Foreign Policy Council

SYRIA

QUICK FACTS

Population: 17,951,639

Area: 185,180 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7%

Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim (includes Alawite, Druze) 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%, Jewish (tiny communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo)

Government Type: Republic under an authoritarian regime

GDP (official exchange rate): $64.7 billion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated August 2014)

Islamism has featured prominently in the politics and policies of modern Syria on a number of different levels. Like other majority Sunni Muslim Arab countries governed by secular autocrats, Syria has a long tradition of Sunni Islamist opposition activity. The fact that the hereditary dictatorship of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has long been dominated by Alawis, an Islamic offshoot sect viewed as heretical by religious Sunnis, renders it uniquely vulnerable to Islamist challenges. It has managed to survive for nearly a half-century in spite of this Achilles heel by brutally suppressing dissent and tightly regulating Sunni religious practices.

Notwithstanding its heavy-handed treatment of Islamists at home, the Assad regime has eagerly armed, financed, and sheltered foreign Islamist organizations committed to fighting its enemies abroad. The sectarian and ideological affiliations of these groups have been varied, ranging from the Shi'a Hezbollah militia in Lebanon to the Sunni Palestinian Hamas movement and al-Qaeda-aligned terrorists battling U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. In addition to advancing the regime's regional strategic objectives, support for these groups helped defuse Islamist militancy at home by appropriating radical causes that resonated with disaffected youth.

The eruption of a popular uprising against Assad in March 2011 and the country's subsequent collapse into civil war changed everything. Although protests were initially peaceful, multi-sectarian, and explicitly oriented around the pursuit of democratic change, the escalating violence and prolonged breakdown of law and order in many areas of the country were exploited by indigenous and foreign Islamists (including many who had hitherto supported the regime).

Once the bête noire of secularists, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood dominates the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition, but has largely been eclipsed on the ground by more radical Islamist forces. Flush with financing from the Arab Gulf (in contrast to cash-starved, poorly armed, secular-leaning rebel forces), more radical Salafi-jihadists close to al-Qaeda have gained dominion over key parts of northeastern Syria. Many rallied alongside Iraqi jihadists under the banner of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, now the Islamic State), which seized control of large swathes of Iraq's Sunni heartland in 2013 and 2014.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

More than three years of civil war in Syria have enabled an extraordinarily diverse array of Islamist actors to flourish. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into three categories: anti-regime Sunni political Islamists ostensibly committed to advancing their agenda by democratic means; Sunni salafi-*jihadists* committed to either forcibly establishing an Islamic republic in Syria or using it as a stepping stone to pursue regional and international ambitions; and a rump coterie of pro-regime Islamists, mostly Shi'a and non-Syrian.

Political Islamists

The first category of Islamists ranges from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) to various traditionalist, reformist, and moderate Salafi Sunni religious currents that dominate the Syrian opposition in exile.

Though established in 1946 as the Syrian chapter of the Egypt-based pan-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood movement, the SMB had a very different

base of socio-economic support. Whereas the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt drew mass support from rural areas, the Syrian Brotherhood was dominated by the Sunni urban nobility and middle class.

In 1963, the secular Arab nationalist Ba'ath party seized power and began implementing land reforms and nationalizing industries, which severely threatened middle-class interests. With independent political parties and media outlawed, the mosque became the one semi-protected space where dissidents could voice opposition to regime policies.

As power within the regime became increasingly concentrated among a narrow clique of Alawi officers headed by Gen. Hafez Assad, who assumed the presidency in 1971, Brotherhood agitation intensified. In 1973, violent demonstrations instigated by the Brotherhood led the regime to modify a clause in a proposed new constitution that would not require the president to be Muslim (instead, Assad persuaded influential Lebanese Shi'ite cleric Musa al-Sadr to issue a ruling certifying that Alawis are Shi'a Muslims and therefore eligible for the presidency).

During the late 1970s, Islamist militants affiliated with the Brotherhood launched an armed insurrection against the Assad regime with the goal of replacing it with an Islamic state, with some material support from rival Arab states. Unable to rally support in rural areas where armed resistance was more tactically feasible, the rebellion never seriously threatened the regime. Thousands of Islamists were imprisoned, and membership in the Brotherhood was made punishable by death. When militants seized control of large parts of Hama in 1982, regime forces brutally destroyed much of the city, killing tens of thousands.

This episode virtually eradicated the SMB's influence in Syria for the following three decades. Most ranking members of the Brotherhood went into exile,[1] where they splintered into rival factions centered around figures from Aleppo and Hama. Meanwhile, the Assad regime's soaring regional influence in the 1980s dissuaded rival governments from sponsoring armed opposition in Syria. The devastation resulting from the Brotherhood's failed insurrection made dissidents inside Syria wary of any association with Islamism in challenging the regime.

The tenure of Ali Sadreddine al-Bayanouni of the Aleppo wing as head of the SMB from 1996 to 2010 witnessed a gradual moderation of the Brotherhood's platform, rhetoric, and tactics. The SMB renounced violence in 2001. In 2004, it adopted a new political platform calling for multiparty democracy and minority rights. Bayanouni also worked to improve the Brotherhood's ties with secular opposition forces. In 2005, the Brotherhood joined secular dissidents inside Syria in signing the Damascus Declaration calling for a "peaceful, gradual" democratic reform process.

After the Damascus Declaration initiative failed to galvanize internal opposition to the regime, the Brotherhood focused its attention on warming

up to Western and Arab governments bent on bringing Assad to heel in the wake of his alleged involvement in the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. In 2006, it formed an alliance with recently exiled former Vice-president Abdul Halim Khaddam, a Sunni ex-Ba'athist with close ties to the Saudi royal family by way of Hariri.

When international and regional pressure on Syria began to wane, however, the Brotherhood tried to reach an accommodation with Assad. In 2009, following Israel's Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip, Bayanouni suspended the Brotherhood's anti-government activities, apparently hoping that Assad would reciprocate by allowing the movement to reestablish a presence inside Syria. When this didn't happen, Bayanouni and his allies were soundly defeated in internal Brotherhood elections in Istanbul the following year. His successor, Mohammad Riad al-Shaqfeh, nevertheless decided to continue the suspension, expressing hope that Turkey would mediate between the Brotherhood and the regime.

The outbreak of mass protests against the Syrian regime in March 2011 took the Brotherhood by surprise. As in other Middle East states experiencing the so-called "Arab Spring," Islamists initially played little discernable role in the unrest.[2] The SMB declined to endorse the uprising for nearly two months,[3] calculating whether its interests would best be served by extracting concessions from a weakened Assad or helping achieve his overthrow. Once it became clear the regime was not going to be able to extinguish the uprising, however, Brotherhood leaders threw their weight fully behind the cause.

The Brotherhood lacked a strong organizational presence inside Syria, while its predominantly urban social base left it ill-suited to connect with a popular uprising emanating primarily in rural areas and the outskirts of major cities. Moreover, the Brotherhood's secretive and elitist structure (members are typically admitted only after a long process of vetting that can last years), which served it well organizing cell-based resistance in the late 1970s and avoiding regime infiltration in exile, was not a great model for mass mobilization.

Nevertheless, the movement had an advantage over secular exile groups due to its established organizational hierarchy, large network of members and affiliated Brotherhood chapters around the globe, and burgeoning relations with Qatar and Turkey (which turned against the Assad regime several months into the uprising).[4] The SMB played a prominent role in the August 2011 establishment of the Syrian National Council, which brought the Syrian opposition in exile under a single umbrella, and its successor organization, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC).[5]

Since then, a number of moderate Islamist currents have been vying for influence with the Brotherhood within the SNC. A reformist current, more receptive to liberal democratic norms than the Brotherhood, includes the National Action Group, co-founded by Obeida Nahas, who served as political

advisor to Bayanouni and was reportedly the architect behind the Brotherhood's short-lived alliance with Khaddam.[6] Much like Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), Nahas and his allies describe themselves as religious conservatives, not Islamists.[7]

The Movement for Justice and Development (MJD), founded in London in 2006 in response to Bayanouni's alliance with Khaddam, actually named itself after the AKP. Its political platform calls for the Syrian constitution to declare Syria a nation of "Islamic civilization and culture," but without making *sharia* a principal source of legislation.[8] The Syrian National Movement (SNM), led by Emad ad-Din al-Rashid, advocates acceptance of the "Islamic reference" (*al-Marja'iyya al-Islamiyya*) as a source of legislation and the basis for the national identity.[9] SNC Secretary-General Badr Jamous is affiliated with the SNM.[10]

Another current of devout (though not Islamist, strictly speaking) Sunni opposition leaders is comprised of traditional Sufi religious scholars (*ulema*) who fled Syria during the revolt, many of whom had acquired substantial followings inside Syria as a result of the Assad's regime's relaxation of controls over religious life in the past decade. Muhammad Kurayyim Rajih's League of the Ulema of Sham (LUS), led mostly by clerics from Damascus and Homs, is the most notable traditionalist group. Moaz al-Khatib of LUS, former *imam* of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, served as the first president of the SNC. LUS Vice President Sheikh Osama al-Rifai is the spiritual leader of a moderate Sufi movement called *Jamaat Zayd* (Zayd's Group), which was allowed by the regime to operate in Syria in the 1990s.

Finally, the Brotherhood and other political Islamist groups have been joined on most issues by a hybrid movement known as the Sururis. Based mainly in the Arab Gulf, Sururism "blends Salafism with Muslim Brotherhood ideology," notes journalist Hassan Hassan.[11] Named after Muhammad ibn Surur al-Nayef Zayn al-Abidin, a Syrian Islamic scholar initially affiliated with the Brotherhood who emigrated to Saudi Arabia in the 1960s,[12] Sururis adhere closely to the ideological precepts of Salafism (see below), but reject both the political quietism of traditional Salafis and (outside of the Syrian context) the Salafi-*jihadist* embrace of violence.

Due in part to lavish financing from donors in the Arab Gulf, Syrian Sururis have played an influential role in the rebellion. By September 2012, according to scholar Aron Lund, a financing network run by compatriots of the aging Surur and funded primarily by Arab Gulf donors appeared to be "active in supporting both humanitarian and paramilitary Islamist groups."[13]

In April 2011, pro-Brotherhood *ulema* joined together with traditionalists, reformists, and Sururis to form the Syrian Islamic Council (SIC), purporting to be an official religious authority for rebel forces. Headed by Osama

al-Rifai, it is aligned with the Qatar-Turkey axis and opposed to al-Qaeda-linked extremists.[14] Most Islamists in the SNC have avoided raising divisive social issues, such as veiling women and banning alcohol.

Nevertheless, the dominance of Islamists in the SNC has alienated many secular opposition figures. Kamal Lebwany, a dissident physician released from detention in November 2011 after nearly a decade in a Syrian jail, has lamented that the "the Muslim Brotherhood monopolizes everything" and warning that its pretensions to democracy are "a liberal peel covering a totalitarian, nondemocratic core."[15]

Although the Brotherhood declined to establish a fighting force in Syria bearing its name, it has provided funding to a range of different militias. The Commission for the Protection of Civilians (CPC), established in December 2011, is the primary vehicle for this. Most CPC recipients were initially loyal to the Free Syria Army (FSA) and its Supreme Military Command, but they included some Salafi-*jihadist* groups that later drifted away and now operate under the Islamic Front umbrella (see below). The intent of the financing has been less to directly control military units or promote their ideological agenda than to increase the Brotherhood's leverage sufficiently to make gains in an internationally-brokered settlement.

Although the CPC was initially the main source of external financing for the revolt, it was soon supplanted by the fundraising networks of radical Salafi preachers based in the Arab Gulf. Many of the CPC's early recipients have since drifted away from the Brotherhood as more sources of funding have become available, most notably the Tawhid Brigade, Ahrar al-Sham, and Suqour al-Sham.[16]

A second umbrella of Brotherhood-backed militias in and around Idlib and Hama is the Shields of the Revolution, which is nominally loyal to the FSA Supreme Military Command.[17] Over the course of the war, militias affiliated with the Brotherhood have been eclipsed in strength by more radical groups. "Without a negotiated cease-fire," scholar Aron Lund wrote prophetically in mid-2013, "the real outcome of the Syrian conflict is likely to be determined on the battlefield, where the Brotherhood's failure to establish a strong presence could significantly weaken its hand."[1]

Regime-backed foreign Islamists

At the beginning of the uprising in March 2011, the Syrian regime retained an impressive array of foreign and domestic Islamist proxies.

In the Palestinian territories, Syria had supported the Sunni Islamist groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, for two decades. Alongside militant secular Palestinian groups, both were allowed to maintain offices and military bases inside Syria.

In Lebanon, the Assad regime was a principal supporter and conduit to the Shi'a Islamist Hezbollah movement, channeling Iranian arms and funds

to the militia as it waged war against Israeli forces occupying southern Lebanon prior their withdrawal in 2000, then intermittently against Israel itself. Syria also co-opted a number of Lebanese Sunni Islamist factions based in and around Tripoli.

Finally, the Syrian regime covertly supported foreign *jihadists* entering Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.[19] Many Syrian *jihadists* affiliated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) were allowed to set up safe houses and even recruit volunteers inside Syria.[20] When the Assad regime dialed back its support for Iraqi insurgents in 2007-2008, many of these *jihadis* left Iraq. Hundreds were imprisoned upon their return to Syria, while some were allowed to cross into Lebanon, where they founded the group Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp.

When demonstrations against the Syrian regime first erupted in March 2011, most of the regime's Sunni Islamist allies remained on the sidelines.[21] Once it became clear that Assad was unable to stamp out the uprising by force, however, they abandoned the regime in droves. Hamas leaders departed their longtime home in Damascus for Doha, Qatar, in January 2012,[22] while Salafi-*jihadists* came out squarely in support of the uprising.

Hezbollah, on the other hand, has steadfastly stood by the Syrian regime. The movement has used its considerable political power within Lebanon's quasi-democratic system to ensure that the Lebanese Army and other state security institutions have acted to prevent smuggling and other pro-rebel activities in Lebanon.

In late 2012, Hezbollah forces began entering Syria, ostensibly to protect Shi'a shrines but in reality to bolster pro-regime forces. In mid-2013, Hezbollah forces were instrumental in the regime's recapture of Qusayr, a predominantly Shiite Syrian town of 30,000, visible from the Lebanese border and essential to sealing off rebel supply routes into Lebanon.

Many military-age men among Syria's tiny Shi'a minority have joined Iranian-backed militias charged with defending Shi'a shrines throughout Syria, though they are outnumbered by the infusion of thousands of Iraqi Shi'a. The largest is the Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigades, named after a widely revered military commander in the Battle of Karbala between the progenitors of today's Sunni and Shi'a,[23] which reached an estimated strength of at least 10,000 by mid-2013.[24] There have been reports that many Iraqi volunteers have returned to Iraq to defend against the advance of ISIS, and that Hezbollah has been recruiting Lebanese Shi'ites to fill their places.[25]

Salafi jihadists

The Syrian civil war has witnessed a proliferation of militant groups adhering to Salafism, an ultra-orthodox Sunni Islamist current that believes Muslims must return to the ways of *al-salaf al-saleh* (the righteous ancestors) from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and rid themselves of "innova-

tions" (*bidaa*) that have taken root in the centuries since. The latter include not only such secular conventions as democracy and the nation-state, but also a millennium of Islamic jurisprudence and traditions that have come to define how most Muslims practice their faith. Non-Sunni Muslims and Sufis are viewed as heretics. In sharp contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, Salafis traditionally eschewed participation in politics, focusing instead on missionary work (*daawa*) to convert Muslim societies to their way of thinking.

During the late 1970s, a younger generation of Salafis in the Arab Gulf (many of them expatriates) began to reject the movement's traditional political quietism and either agitate for Islamic rule at home or fight perceived enemies of Islam abroad. Thousands went to South Asia to combat the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal and the fall of Kabul to the *mujahidin*, many of these so-called "Arab Afghans" returned home to continue fighting for their beliefs or joined Osama bin Laden's expanding al-Qaeda network. Many Arab Afghans later went to Iraq in the wake of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, where they eventually congealed into AQI, rebranded in a 2006 expansion as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and trained a new generation of *jihadist* youth.

In late 2011, ISI chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi began infiltrating operatives into Syria, many of them Syrian nationals. After releasing a January 2012 video statement calling itself *Jabhat al-Nusra* (The Support Front),[26] the new organization claimed responsibility for a multitude of spectacular suicide and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) bombings during the first half of 2012, most notably a February 10 twin bombing in Aleppo that struck a two military facilities, killing 28, and March 17 bombings against the Air Force Intelligence headquarters and Criminal Security department in Damascus, killing at least 27. Nusra also displayed undeniable prowess on the battlefield, spearheading the capture of numerous regime bases and fortified installations.

Led by a mysterious, as-yet-unidentified commander known as Abu Mohammad al-Golani (assumed to be a Syrian hailing from the Golan Heights), Nusra quickly received endorsements from al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri[27] and influential *jihadi* ideologues.[28]

In sharp contrast to ISI's strategy during the Iraq war, which alienated local Sunnis, Nusra has developed cooperative relations with non-*jihadist* rebels and limited its mistreatment of civilians. When Nusra was officially designated a terrorist group by the U.S. government in December 2012, the Brotherhood and many FSA commanders publicly defended it.

Fearful that Nusra was growing too independent, in April 2013 Baghdadi declared that ISI and Nusra had merged to form the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). However, Golani disputed the merger and asked Zawahiri to mediate. When Zawahiri ruled in favor of Golani, ISIS broke away from al-Qaeda, taking most foreign fighters operating in Nusra's ranks with it.

ISIS aggressively consolidated areas of northeastern Syria under its control, clashing frequently with other rebels, including Nusra, and even executing several of their military commanders.[29] It soon became clear that ISIS, unlike other rebel groups, was not fighting first and foremost to overthrow Assad–indeed, the regime's endurance had created conditions ideal for its growth.

In contrast to most other insurgent groups operating in Syria, ISIS derives most of its income from indigenous revenue sources, not outside donations. ISIS' extortion of local businesses in Syria and Iraq nets around $8 million per month, according to one estimate.[30] Having gained control of most of the oil-rich province of Raqqa, ISIS draws even more revenue selling off Syrian crude oil (as much as $2 million a day, alongside $1 million a day from Iraqi oil, according to one estimate).[31] ISIS (along with Nusra, to a lesser extent) has reportedly sold crude oil to the Assad regime.[32] ISIS was reported to have looted $425 million in cash from the central bank in Mosul after its capture of the Iraqi city in June 2014, making it by some accounts the world's richest terrorist organization.[33]After overrunning much of northern Iraq in the spring and summer of 2014, ISIS changed its name to "the Islamic State."

A third Salafi-*jihadist* current encompasses a broad array of groups funded primarily by Salafi activists in the Arab Gulf, and increasingly by Arab Gulf governments themselves as a means of limiting the growth potential of Nusra and Baghdadi's Islamic State. Most of these groups joined the Syrian Islamic Front, an umbrella coalition established in December 2012, and its successor, the Islamic Front. Together they have roughly 60,000 fighters.

Ideologically, these groups share much in common with hardline *jihadists*. They reject democracy, openly claim to be fighting for an Islamic state, and do not recognize the SNC.

Unlike the transnational *jihadists*, however, the Islamic Front groups downplay or even deny pan-Islamic ambitions (scholar Abdul Rahman Al-Haj calls them "deferred Caliphate" *jihadists*),[34] avoid anti-Western demagoguery, and adopt slightly less inflammatory rhetoric concerning Syrian minorities.[35] The Islamic Front "wants to come across as reasonable and responsible actor," notes Aron Lund.[36] The Islamic Front groups have few foreign volunteers fighting in their ranks (mostly concentrated in Ahrar al-Sham), and none are known to have used suicide attacks significantly.

Most Islamic Front groups rely heavily on financing from Arab Gulf donors, most of it channeled under the guise of humanitarian aid through Kuwait, which has been the primary hub for private fundraising because of its lax regulatory environment and the political strength of Salafis.[37] The tiny oil-rich emirate was dubbed "the Arab world's main clearinghouse" for donations to radical Islamist rebels by the *Wall Street Journal*[38] and "a virtual Western Union outlet for Syria's rebels" by the *New York Times*.[39]

In 2013, the Kuwaiti government prohibited some prominent Salafis from preaching to the public[40] and passed new laws bolstering the power of public prosecutors to monitor suspicious transactions and freeze funds.[41] However, there is little evidence that these measures have been effective. In March 2014, Treasury Undersecretary David S. Cohen warned that Kuwait remained "the epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria," where activists "openly advertise their ability to move funds to fighters in Syria."[42]

Closer regulation of Salafi fundraising may have been intended to pave the way for patronage of the Islamic Front by the Arab Gulf governments. One of the leading Islamic Front groups, the Army of Islam, was formed in October 2013 by the merger of Liwa al-Islam and numerous smaller, Saudi-backed Salafi-*jihadist* groups operating in the suburbs of Damascus. The Saudi government reportedly offered funding to those who joined, with the apparent intention of halting the expansion of Nusra and ISIS.[43] Liwa al-Islam leader Zahran Alloush, the son of Saudi-based Syrian religious scholar Abdullah Mohammed Alloush, became leader of the Army of Islam.

Because "deferred-Caliphate" national *jihadists* are overwhelmingly Syrian-born, the Arab Gulf states are more confident that they will put down their arms when the fight against Assad is over, rather than moving on to the next front in the global *jihad*.

The emergence of the Islamic Front contributed to the eclipse of the FSA, as some of its members, such as Tawhid and Suqour al-Sham, had previously been loyal to the Supreme Military Council.[44] In September 2013, they joined Nusra other major Salafi-oriented militias in signing a statement rejecting the Western-backed SNC and committing to the imposition of *sharia* as the "sole source of legislation."

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Notwithstanding the steady growth of radical Sunni Islamist forces over the past three years, there was little sign of violent extremism within Syrian society prior to the uprising. However, the spread of radical Islamism has been facilitated by socio-economic conditions in much of Syria on the eve of the uprising, sectarian polarization during the war, and the influx of resources from external sponsors.

Syria is an extraordinarily diverse country. Sunni Arabs are by far the largest ethno-sectarian group, comprising 67 percent of the population. Non-Arab (predominantly Sunni) Kurds number roughly nine percent of the population. The remainder consists of non-Sunni, predominantly Arab religious minorities–Alawis comprise about 12 percent of the population, Christians of various denominations 10 percent, Druze three percent, and various Shi'a

denominations around one percent.[45] Communal solidarity (*asabiya*) is very strong among all of these minorities, owing in part to centuries of oppression and discrimination at the hands of Sunni rulers.

Alawis, an offshoot of Shi'a Islam, arguably suffered the most prior to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the close of World War I. Branded as heretics by most Sunnis, shunned as deviants by religious Shi'a, and lacking powerful co-religionist regional allies, Syrian Alawis were poor, under-educated, and socially isolated in roughly four dozen remote villages in northwestern Syria.[46]

During the French mandate period (1920-1943), many Alawis and other minorities joined the military as a means of socio-economic advancement, whereas their Sunni counterparts tended to shun cooperation with colonial authorities. Consequently, minorities were overrepresented in the military when Syria gained independence. Many of these officers flocked to the Ba'ath Party, which espoused a secular, non-sectarian, socialist agenda. By 1963, Alawis comprised 65 percent of noncommissioned officers in the Syrian army, which helped pave the way for the Ba'ath coup that year and Hafez al-Assad's subsequent ascent to the presidency in 1971.[47] In the decades that followed, Alawi domination of the security apparatus became even more pronounced.

But Syria was not an "Alawi state." The ruling party's ideology was rigidly non-sectarian – even references to sect were avoided in state-run media. Indeed, in its zeal to erase the appearance of sectarian differences, the Assad regime pushed its own Alawi community to adopt the outer trappings of Sunni Islam (e.g. building mosques, even though Alawis don't customarily use them).

Assad made sure that the façade of civilian government in Syria appropriately reflected Sunni demographic weight. The positions of prime minister, foreign minister, and army commander were nearly always held by Sunnis, for example, as were most parliamentary seats, judicial offices, and other high visibility posts. Many second-generation Alawi power barons later forged business partnerships with Sunnis and some (including Bashar al-Assad) took Sunni wives.

For most Syrians, opposition to the regime was not primarily rooted in matters of faith. The Assad regime's statist economic development and social welfare policies gave it sufficiently strong base of rural support cutting across sectarian lines that lasted through the turn of the century.[48] "It is quite plain that the conflict is not about religion," noted historian Hanna Batatu wrote in 1982 as the Brotherhood-led revolt reached its climax. "It is not the beliefs of the Sunnis that have been in danger or under attack since the Ba'thist takeover in 1963, but the social interests of the upper and middle elements of

their landed, mercantile, and manufacturing classes."[49] Representing similar constituencies, many traditionalist Sufi preachers in Hama and Aleppo supported the Brotherhood-led revolt against the Assad regime (and in Hama their followers took up arms).[50]

Islamism was an effective tool for mobilizing and channeling mass dissent against an Alawi-dominated regime. Once the leaders using this tool were killed, imprisoned, and exiled, however, Syria enjoyed nearly three decades of relative domestic tranquility, with only sporadic outbreaks of Islamist and sectarian violence. Some observers point to this long stretch of stability as evidence that religious extremism had declined among ordinary Syrians – that bad memories of the Brotherhood's folly had inoculated the country against the appeal of radical Islamism. However, the unrivalled power of the Ba'athist state during this era is sufficient to account for the scarcity of internal Islamist opposition.

Like the rest of the region, Syria began experiencing an Islamic revival during the 1990s, evident in growing mosque attendance, more women wearing the *hijab*, and more men growing beards. Islamic bookshops proliferated and restaurants in many areas of the country stopped serving alcohol.[51]

Hoping to safely channel this religiosity away from political activism, the Assad regime allowed some quietist Sufi currents to begin relatively freely, such as the abovementioned Zaydis. For example, a women's charitable organization known as the *Qubaisiaat*—named after the female religious leader, Munira al-Qubaisi, who runs it—saw its influence spread rapidly.[52]

Assad also allowed some traditional Salafi charities, funded by donors in the Arab Gulf and Syrian expatriates working there, to operate in rural areas during the mid-2000s, though Salafism was a "relatively negligible component of the country's religious scene" at the time of the uprising, notes the International Crisis Group (IGC).[53]

The 2011 revolt

Militant Islamism certainly was not a cause of the popular uprising that erupted in 2011. There are plenty of socio-economic drivers, most notably a pronounced "youth bulge." Syria's population of 23 million is the youngest in the Middle East outside of the Palestinian territories,[54] with 53 percent below the age of 20.[55]

Bashar Assad's economic reforms solidified support for the regime among the urban elites and middle class, but at the expense of rural areas. UK-based Syrian journalist Malik al-Abdeh characterized the uprising as a "revolution of the rural Sunni working classes against the Alawi-dominated military elite and the urban bourgeoisie (both Muslim and Christian) that has profited

from the Assad dictatorship."[56] It was not religion that triggered their decision to rise up to the regime after years of quiet obedience, but the "demonstration effect" of watching Egyptians, Tunisians, and Libyans overthrow their own governments.

Early in the uprising, observers sympathetic to the opposition argued that "there are few traces of radical Islamism in Syria" and that, should the Assad regime fall, "the chance of Syria turning into an Islamic state is almost nil."[57] But the secular democratic orientation of the uprising steadily eroded as the violence escalated and prospects of a peaceful solution evaporated.[58] This was partly because the regime had little trouble suppressing protests in non-Sunni and mixed towns and neighborhoods, where demonstrations were never large enough to give safety in numbers. In Sunni majority areas, in contrast, demonstrations "were 20 to 30 times larger [and] organized under the semi-inviolable protection of mosques."[59] For ordinary Syrians contemplating whether to protest in the streets, ironically, it was much safer to be a Sunni than to be an Alawi.

Moreover, while a majority of Christians, Druze, and Kurds – perhaps even Alawis – supported demands for political reform and human rights, they were much less willing than devout Sunnis to take greatest personal risks challenging Assad. Consequently, regime repression further tilted the demographic composition of uprising by weeding out minorities and those of little religious faith.[60] As the country rapidly slipped into full-blown civil war in early 2012 and it became a question of whether to stand up and fight the regime, the revolutionaries on the ground were almost exclusively Sunni. Sunnification was followed by Islamization as most emerging rebel groups adopted explicitly Islamic names and iconography.

Some attribute this Islamic awakening to the fact that donations from the Arab Gulf states and private Arab donors outpaced assistance from the West. According to such "resource mobilization" explanations,[61] the influx of cash from Salafi donors not only strengthened *jihadist* forces vis-à-vis the FSA, but also led relatively secular groups within the FSA to adopt Salafi dress and customs.[62] Many rank and file fighters of Salafi-*jihadist* militias are devout Sunnis with no firm extremist convictions. "Size, money, and momentum are the things to look for in Syrian insurgent politics—ideology comes fourth, if even that," notes Lund.[63]

However, much as Pakistan and Afghanistan became the crucible for indoctrinating adventure-seeking youth from across the Arab world into the Salafi-*jihadist* path during the 1980s, conditions in Syria are perfect for converting a new generation of extremists.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

In the first three decades after the Ba'ath Party seized power in 1963, the Syrian state worked to secularize Syrian society and control Islamic religious expression, especially in the wake of the first Syrian uprising. All formal Islamic institutions were closely managed by the state,[64] while preaching outside of the mosques or outside of appointed prayer times was prohibited. With no independent political parties, media, unions, or other associations allowed to come between citizen and state, neutering the mosques was the final link in the chain.

Only heavily vetted *ulema* loyal to the regime and willing to actively legitimate it were allowed to preach. The most prominent was Ahmed Kaftaro, head of the Naqshbandi Sufi order and Grand Mufti of Syria from 1964 until his death in 2004. Sermons were typically designed to discourage politicization of religious faith.

The resurgence of Islamic revivalism throughout the Arab world in the 1990s led the Assad regime to take a new direction aimed at endowing Syria with a more authentic Islamic look and feel. The regime released large numbers of Brotherhood members who had been held in Syrian prisons since the early 1980s,[65] while cultivating close ties with Sunni Islamists in the Palestinian territories and elsewhere in the Arab world (its relations with most non-Syrian branches of the Muslim Brotherhood were quite cordial).

Upon ascending to the presidency after his father's death in 2000, Bashar al-Assad continued efforts to promote an Islamic posture. The new president released hundreds of Islamist prisoners, lifted a longstanding ban on wearing female headscarves in Syrian schools,[66] and allowed mosques to remain open between prayer times.[67] He began favorably referencing religion in public speeches,[68] while state universities held Koran reading competitions.[69] The Syrian military even announced that Islamic clergy would be allowed to give lectures to military cadets for the first time in 43 years, a decision that Defense Minister Hassan Tourkmani called a response to "the thirst for God in the barracks."[70]

Rather than seeking to defuse Islamist militancy, state-vetted preachers now sought to harness it in support of the regime. A notable voice was Mohammad Said Ramada al-Bouti, whose televised sermons made him one of the most recognized figures in Syria in the 2000s. Bouti and other state-sanctioned clerics preached that enemies of Islam were conspiring to sow the seeds of *fitna* (civil strife) in Syria and the broader Middle East, using agents ranging from women's rights activists to the Muslim Brotherhood to set brother against brother.[71] In 2003, the aging Kaftaro even issued a *fatwa* calling for resistance to U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq.

Although falling well short of the kind of unfettered religious freedom that could pose direct political and security threats to the regime, state-modulated Islamization dramatically changed the public landscape of Syria, from styles of dress to architecture.[72]

Whereas the late Hafez al-Assad kept his regime's Palestinian and Lebanese Islamist clients at arms-length and never allowed them to operate unsupervised in Syria, Bashar al-Assad went much further during the Iraq war by allowing militant *jihadists* to preach and recruit inside Syria. The most notable was Abu Qaqaa (aka Mahmoud Qoul Aghassi), a preacher in Aleppo who was allowed to directly recruit local youth to fight in Iraq and even offer weapons training at his mosque. Some have suggested that Abu Qaqaa was, or became, a Syrian intelligence agent, as many of his recruits were tracked and arrested upon their return to Syria. His assassination in 2007 was widely seen as either payback from *jihadists* for betraying them or "disposal" by a regime that no longer needed or trusted him.[73]

In addition to directly sponsoring *jihadist* violence for political and strategic reasons, the regime used its close connections to the Islamist underworld to stage false flag operations designed to cast blame on Islamists. The most infamous is the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri in Beirut, which was intended to pin responsibility on Salafi-*jihadists* (the Syrian *mukhabarat*, or secret police, even recruited a real, unwitting *jihadist* to make the video-taped claim of responsibility).

During the height of the Assad regime's support for *jihadists* in Iraq, Syria experienced a number of suspicious and ultimately foiled or minimally destructive "terrorist attacks" that were likely orchestrated by the regime to bolster its diplomatic efforts to present itself as a victim of al-Qaeda, notably an April 2004 attack on an abandoned UN building in Damascus.[74]

In the aftermath of the 2005 Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, the Assad regime allowed numerous Syrian veterans of the Iraq war to infiltrate the country, presumably to create the impression that Lebanon was less secure. There they started a group called Fatah al-Islam that fought a bloody 2007 battle with the Lebanese Army that left much of the Palestinian Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in ruins.

As part and parcel of the regime's Islamic "awakening," the *mukhabarat* organized periodic demonstrations designed to give the appearance that Islamists are allowed to assemble and express themselves publicly. In February 2006, as the controversy over a Danish newspaper's publication of cartoons depict-

ing the Prophet Muhammad was sparking Muslim protests worldwide, the regime engineered large riots outside the Danish and Norwegian embassies (both of which were torched).[75]

During the first four months of the uprising, while thousands of pro-democracy protestors were being rounded up, the Assad regime released hundreds of Islamists in its jails, many of them Iraq war veterans who had run afoul of the authorities after returning to Syria in 2008-2009. Many of these parolees later played major roles in the rebellion, including Zahran Aloush, the commander of the Army of Islam; Abdul Rahman Suweis of the Haqq Brigade; Hassan Aboud of Ahrar Al Sham; Ahmad Aisa Al Sheikh, commander of Suqour Al Sham; and possibly Nusra commander Abu Mohammad al-Golani (whose true identity has never been confirmed).[76]

Some interpreted the releases as a horribly botched effort to win the support or at least quiescence of radical-*jihadists*. Others believe that the releases were intended to have precisely the result they had – jumpstarting a violent Islamist insurgency that will lead the international community to think twice about aiding the Syrian opposition, while solidifying support for the regime among minorities and urban, middle-class Sunnis.

Having blamed foreign *jihadists* for the uprising from the very start, the emergence of ISIS – a *jihadist* organization full of foreigners that makes no effort to appear civilized – was a blessing for Assad. There is some evidence of collusion between the two. For example, regime airstrikes against ISIS bases in some areas of Syria all but stopped when the group began targeting other insurgents in much of 2013 and early 2014.[77] However, fierce battles between the regime and ISIS in the summer of 2014 over control of oil fields belied claims that ISIS is secretly in league with Assad.

ENDNOTES

[1] Thomas Mayer, "The Islamic Opposition in Syria, 1961-1982," *Orient* 24 (1983); Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, *Assad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East,* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), 320-338.
[2] Nir Rosen, "Islamism and the Syrian Uprising," *Foreign Policy,* March 8, 2012, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/08/islamism_and_the_syrian_uprising.
[3] Hassan Hassan, "In Syria, the Brotherhood's influence is on the decline," *The National* (UAE), April 1, 2014. http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/in-syria-the-brotherhoods-influence-is-on-the-decline.
[4] Jared A. Favole, "Brotherhood Raises Syria Profile: Islamist Group Tries to Organize Opposition to Assad Regime, as Protests Waiver," *Wall Street Journal,* May 17, 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703509104576327212414590134.htm; Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Syria's Muslim Brotherhood rise from the ashes as dominant force in the opposition," *Al Arabiya* (Dubai), May 6, 2012, http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/06/212447.html.
[5] Thomas Pierret, "Syria: Old-Timers and Newcomers," in Robin Wright (ed), *The Islamists are Coming: Who They Really Are* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012), 76.
[6] Raphael Lefevre, "Between Pragmatism and Radicalism: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Ba'ath Regime," in George Joffé, ed., *Islamist Radicalisation in Europe and the Middle East: Reassessing the Causes of Terrorism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 173.
[7] Neil MacFarquhar, "Trying to Mold a Post-Assad Syria From Abroad," *New York Times,* May 5, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/06/world/middleeast/from-abroad-trying-to-mold-a-post-assad-syria.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.
[8] Pierret, "Syria: Old-Timers and Newcomers."
[9] Ibid.
[10] Thomas Pierret, "The Syrian Islamic Council," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 13, 2014, http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55580
[11] Hassan Hassan, "New Syrian Islamic Council repeats the patterns of old," *The National* (UAE), April 22, 2014, http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/new-syrian-islamic-council-repeats-the-patterns-of-old.

[12] In Saudi Arabia, Surur developed a large following and influenced the "Islamic Awakening" movement in the Kingdom. Alongside notable Saudi figures such as Salman Al-Ouda (a former student) and Safar Al-Hawali, Surur denounced the Saudi regime after it allowed the entry of U.S. forces into the Kingdom ahead of the 1991 Gulf War. Although the Sururis (*al-sururiyyun*), as they were derogatively called by the Wahhabi clerical establishment (to highlight the movement's foreign influences), fell into line after the Saudi government began arresting their leaders, they retained a substantial following in the kingdom. Some came out in favor of the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, but they have been more reluctant than the Saudi branch of the Brotherhood to press for political change at home. See Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), 36-38. See also Abdulaziz Alhies, "Concerns in the Gulf," *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), December 20, 2012, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/620/21/Concerns-in-the-Gulf-.aspx; William McCants, "Islamist Outlaws: Saudi Arabia Takes on the Muslim Brotherhood," The Brookings Institution, March 17, 2014, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/03/17-saudi-arabia-outlaws-muslim-brotherhood-mccants; Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," London School of Economics and Political Science, May 2014, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56725/1/Lacroix_Saudi-Islamists-and-theArab-Spring_2014.pdf.

[13] Aron Lund, "Syrian Jihadism," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, September 14, 2012, http://www.ui.se/upl/files/77409.pdf.

[14] Thomas Pierret,"The Struggle for Religious Authority in Syria," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 14, 2014, http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55593.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Aron Lund, "Struggling to Adapt: The Muslim Brotherhood in a New Syria," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace," May 7, 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/05/07/struggling-to-adapt-muslim-brotherhood-in-new-syria/g2qm?fa=searchResults&maxrow=20&tabName=pubs&qry=&fltr=&channel=&pageOn=365&reloadFlag=1.

[17] Raphaël Lefèvre, "The Brotherhood Starts Anew in Syria," *Majalla*, August 19, 2013, http://www.majalla.com/eng/2013/08/article55244734.

[18] Lund, "Struggling to Adapt."

[19] Raymond Tanter and Stephen Kersting, "Syria's Role in the Iraq Insurgency," *inFOCUS Quarterly,* Spring 2009, http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/827/syrias-role-in-the-iraq-insurgency.

[20] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Members of Abu Ghadiyah's Network Facilitates flow of terrorists, weapons, and money from Syria to al Qaida in Iraq," February 28, 2008, http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp845.aspx.
[21] Lee Smith, "Crack-up," *Tablet,* April 28, 2011, http://www.tabletmag.com/news-and-politics/65981/crack-up/.
[22] Fares Akram, "Hamas Leader Abandons Longtime Base in Damascus." *New York Times*, January 27, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/28/world/middleeast/khaled-meshal-the-leader-of-hamas-vacates-damascus.html?gwh=58C00E217CFD163EF15817D69C917AF0.
[23] Phillip Smyth, "Hizballah Cavalcade: What is the Liwa'a Abu Fadl al-Abbas (LAFA)?: Assessing Syria's Shia "International Brigade" Through Their Social Media Presence," Jihadology.net, May 15, 2013, http://jihadology.net/2013/05/15/hizballah-cavalcade-what-is-the-liwaa-abu-fadl-al-abbas-lafa-assessing-syrias-shia-international-brigade-through-their-social-media-presence/. See also Phillip Smyth, "Hizballah Cavalcade: From Najaf to Damascus and Onto Baghdad: Iraq's Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas," Jihadology.net, June 18, 2014, http://jihadology.net/2014/06/18/hizballah-cavalcade-from-najaf-to-damascus-and-onto-baghdad-iraqs-liwa-abu-fadl-al-abbas/.
[24] Mona Mahmoud and Martin Chulov, "Syrian War Widens Sunni-Shia Schism as Foreign Jihadis Join Fight for Shrines," *Guardian* (London), June 4, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/04/syria-islamic-sunni-shia-shrines-volunteers.
[25] "Hezbollah mobilizes to defend Shiite shrines in Syria," Now Lebanon, June 12, 2014, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/551145-hezbollah-announces-general-mobilization-in-syria.
[26] Bill Roggio, "Al Nusrah Front claims suicide attack in Syria," *Long War Journal,* February 26, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/02/al_nusrah_front_clai.php.
[27] "I appeal to every Muslim and every free, honorable one in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, to rise to help his brothers in Syria with all what he can, with his life, money, wonders, opinion, and information." As cited in Bill Roggio, "Al Baraa Ibn Malik Martyrdom Brigade forms in Syria," *Long War Journal Threat Matrix* blog, February 18, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2012/02/al_baraa_ibn_malik_martyrdom_b.php.

[28] On March 6, 2012, prominent *jihadi* cleric Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti released an online *fatwa* urging all capable Muslims to join the ranks of *Jabhat al-Nusra.* See "Fatwa by Senior Salafi-Jihadi Cleric: Muslims Are Obligated to Join the Ranks of the Syrian Jihadi Group 'Jabhat Al-Nusra'," MEMRI *Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor* no. 4565, March 13, 2012, http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/6168.htm. Other important *jihadi* ideologues have also given their approval, including the prominent online essayist Sheikh Abu Sa'd al-'Amil, the prominent Jordanian Salafi Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, and the popular Lebanese Sheikh Abu al-Zahra' al-Zubaydi. See Aaron Y. Zelin, "Syria's New Jihadis," *Foreign Policy,* May 22, 2012, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrias-new-jihadis.

[29] Other Salafi-*jihadists* were not immune. In May 2014, for example, ISIS militants captured and beheaded Muthana Hussein, a senior commander of Ahrar al-Sham. See "Islamist militias unite under 'code of honor'," *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 19, 2014, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/May-19/256938-islamist-militias-unite-under-code-of-honor.ashx#ixzz35eSDD8nV.

[30] Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "Saudi Funding of ISIS," Washington Institute for Near East Policy *PolicyWatch* 2275, June 23, 2014, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-funding-of-isis.

[31] Robin Mills, a Dubai-based energy analyst, interviewed in Karen Leigh, "ISIS Makes Up To $3 Million a Day Selling Oil, Analysts Say," Syriadeeply.org, July 28, 2014, http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2014/07/5856/isis-3-million-day-selling-oil-analysts/.

[32] "Rebels in Syria Claim Control of Resources," *New York Times*, January 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/world/middleeast/rebels-in-syria-claim-control-of-resources.html?_r=0.

[33] Terrence McCoy, "ISIS just stole $425 million, Iraqi governor says, and became the 'world's richest terrorist group'," *Washington Post*, June 12, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/06/12/isis-just-stole-425-million-and-became-the-worlds-richest-terrorist-group/.

[34] Abdul Rahman Al-Haj, "Salafism and Salafis in Syria: From reform to jihad," The Afro-Middle East Centre (Johannesburg, South Africa), June 22, 2013, http://www.amec.org.za/articles-presentations/syria/361-salafism-and-salafis-in-syria-from-reform-to-jihad.

[35] Aron Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents: The Rise of the Syrian Islamic Front," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, January 2013, 22, http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/86861.pdf.

[36] Ibid., 18.

[37] Elizabeth Dickinson, "Playing with Fire: Why Private Gulf Financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home," The Brookings Institution, December 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2013/12/06%20private%20gulf%20financing%20syria%20extremist%20rebels%20sectarian%20conflict%20dickinson/private%20gulf%20financing%20syria%20extremist%20rebels%20sectarian%20conflict%20dickinson.pdf.
[38] Ellen Knickmeyer, "Kuwaiti Court Upholds Parliamentary Vote, a Setback for Muslim Brotherhood," *Wall Street Journal*, December 23, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304244904579276383918948044.
[39] Ben Hubbard, "Private Donors' Funds Add Wild Card to War in Syria," *New York Times*, November 12, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/13/world/middleeast/private-donors-funds-add-wild-card-to-war-in-syria.html.
[40] Elizabeth Dickinson, "Sectarian divides from Syria extend their reach," *The National* (UAE), July 26, 2013, http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/sectarian-divides-from-syria-extend-their-reach. "Kuwait scholar Shafi Al Ajami suspended from imamship," *Gulf News*, August 22, 2013, http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-scholar-shafi-al-ajami-suspended-from-imamship-1.1222936. "Kuwait pulls cleric from TV over sectarianism," *Al Jazeera* (Doha), August 13, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/08/2013813124256264315.html.
[41] Zoltan Pall, "Kuwaiti Salafism and Its Growing Influence in the Levant," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 7, 2014, http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/07/kuwaiti-salafism-and-its-growing-influence-in-levant/ha83?reloadFlag=1#.
[42] Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen, remarks of before the Center for a New American Security on "Confronting New Threats in Terrorist Financing," March 4, 2014, http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2308.aspx.
[43] "Saudi Arabia boosts Salafist rivals to al Qaeda in Syria," Reuters, October 1, 2013.
[44] Aron Lund, "Islamist Groups Declare Opposition to National Coalition and US Strategy," Syria Comment, September 24, 2013, http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/major-rebel-factions-drop-exiles-go-full-islamist/.
[45] "Syria," in *World Factbook 2013-14* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html.

[46] Leon Goldsmith, "Alawites for Assad: Why the Syrian Sect Backs the Regime," *Foreign Affairs,* April 16, 2012, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137407/leon-goldsmith/alawites-for-assad?page=show; Akil Hashem, "Former Syrian General Akil Hashem on the Uprising in Syria: Without Intervention, No End in Sight," *Foreign Affairs,* April 16, 2012, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/discussions/interviews/former-syrian-general-akil-hashem-on-the-uprising-in-syria?page=show; Tony Badran, "Divided They Stand: The Syrian Opposition," *Mideast Monitor* 1, no. 3, September-October 2006, http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0609/0609_3.htm.
[47] Hashem, "Former Syrian General Akil Hashem on the Uprising in Syria: Without Intervention, No End in Sight."
[48] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "The Islamic Movement in Syria: Sectarian Conflict and Urban Rebellion in an Authoritarian-Populist Regime," in Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, ed., *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 150-151.
[49] Hanna Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren," *MERIP Reports* no. 110 (November-December 1982), 13.
[50] Paulo Pinto, "Dangerous Liaisons: Sufism and the State in Syria," in S. Jakelic and J. Varsoke, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: From Syria to Slovakia* (Vienna: IWM, 2003), http://www.iwm.at/wp-content/uploads/jc-14-01.pdf.
[51] Eyal Zisser, "Syria, the Ba'th Regime and the Islamic Movement: Stepping on a New Path," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 1 (January 2005), 60-62.
[52] Ibrahim Hamidi, "The Qubaysi ladies take up Islamic preaching in Syria with government approval," *Al-Hayat* (London), May 3, 2006, http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/2006/05/qubaysi-womens-islamic-movement-by.htm; Andrew Tabler, *In the Lion's Den: An Eyewitness Account of Washington's Battle with Syria*, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011), 125; Katherine Zoepf, "In Syria, a quiet Islamic revival," *New York Times,* August 28, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/28/world/africa/28iht-syria3.2620838.html?sq=qubaisiate&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all.
[53] *Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition*, The International Crisis Group, October 12, 2012,. 4, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/egypt-syria-lebanon/syria/131-tentative-jihad-syrias-fundamentalist-opposition.aspx.
[54] "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples," Minority Rights Group International, October 2011, http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5266.
[55] David Kenner, "Syria Comes of Age: An extraordinary population boom fuels the revolt against Bashar al-Assad's regime," *Foreign Policy,* December 8, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/08/syria_population_boom_revolution?page=full.

[56] Malik al-Abdeh, "How I understand the Syrian revolution," syriaintransition.com, March 1, 2012, http://syriaintransition.com/2012/03/01/how-i-understand-the-syrian-revolution/.
[57] Hussain Abdul-Hussain, "Syria After Assad," *NOW Lebanon,* April 13, 2011, http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=261197.
[58] This evolution can be tracked in the names of nationwide demonstrations following Friday afternoon prayers, selected each week from among slogans nominated by major activist groups in a poll on the Syrian Revolution 2011 Facebook page. Early rallies had names such as "Friday of Anger," while later on names with religious slogans began to appear, such as "If You Support God He Will Grant You Victory." "The battle to name Syria's Friday protests," *al-Jazeera* (Doha), April 14, 2012, http://me.aljazeera.net/?name=aj_standard_en&i=8888&section_name=in_depth_features&guid=20124131402 6709762&showonly=1.
[59] Gary Gambill, "Assad's Survival Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, April 6, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/06/assads_survival_strategy?page=full.
[60] "While it is premature to characterize the protests as an Islamist uprising," wrote Gambill three weeks after the start of the uprising, "there is little doubt that those most eager to risk death or severe bodily harm are overwhelmingly Sunni and deeply religious." Gambill, "Assad's Survival Strategy."
[61] Zach Goldberg, Syria's Salafi Awakening: Existential Psychological Primers (Part 1/2), Fair Observer, July 15, 2014, http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/syrias-salafi-awakening-existential-psychological-primers-01474/.
[62] Lund, "Syria's Salafi Insurgents: The Rise of the Syrian Islamic Front," 10.
[63] Lund, "Islamist Groups Declare Opposition to National Coalition and US Strategy."
[64] Zisser, "Syria, the Ba'th Regime and the Islamic Movement," 45.
[65] They were released in several presidential amnesties in December 1991 (2,864 prisoners), March 1992 (600 prisoners), November 1993 (554 prisoners), November 1995 (1,200 prisoners), and 1998 (250 prisoners).
[66] Eyal Zisser, "Syria, the Ba´th Regime and the Islamic Movement," 54.
[67] Sami Moubayed, "The Islamic Revival in Syria," *Mideast Monitor* 1, no. 3, September-October 2006, http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0609/0609_4.htm.

[68] For example, Assad ended a November 2005 speech at Damascus University with the popular saying "Syria is protected by God" a sentiment completely alien to decades of Ba'athist propaganda. See Bashar al-Assad, "Comprehensive Political Speech Delivered by H.E. President Bashar al-Assad at the Damascus Auditorium," official copy of speech issued by *Tishreen* newspaper, November 10, 2005, http://www.presidentassad.net/SPEECHES/ASSAD_DAMASCUS_UNIVERSITY_SPEECH.htm; Tabler, *In the Lion's Den*, 118.
[69] Tabler, *In the Lion's Den,* 134.
[70] Ibid., 134.
[71] Wikas, "Battling the Lion of Damascus," 25.
[72] Lina Khatib, *Islamic Revivalism in Syria: The Rise and Fall of Ba'thist Secularism* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 109-142.
[73] Mohammed Habash, "Radicals are Assad's best friends," *The National* (UAE), January 1, 2014, http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/radicals-are-assads-best-friends.
[74] "The Bombing in Damascus: Ten Reasons to Doubt Syria's Claim," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, May 2004, http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0405_s2.htm.
[75] "Syrian protesters set fire to embassies," Associated Press, February 4, 2006, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/04/religion.syria.
[76] "Assad regime set free extremists from prison to fire up trouble during peaceful uprising," *The National* (UAE), January 21, 2014, http://www.thenational.ae/world/syria/assad-regime-set-free-extremists-from-prison-to-fire-up-trouble-during-peaceful-uprising; Raniah Salloum, "From Jail to Jihad: Former Prisoners Fight in Syrian Insurgency," *Spiegel* (Hamburg), October 10, 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/former-prisoners-fight-in-syrian-insurgency-a-927158.html.
[77] Ben Hubbard, Clifford Krauss and Eric Schmitt, "Rebels in Syria Claim Control of Resources," *New York Times*, January 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/world/middleeast/rebels-in-syria-claim-control-of-resources.html?_r=0.