

Harmoon Observatory Report

Monitoring summary of May 2021



Harmoon Observatory

May 2021



مركز حرمون
 للدراسات المعاصرة
 Harmoon Center
 For Contemporary Studies

Harmoon Observatory

Harmoon Observatory aims at monitoring the course of events related to the conflict in, and over Syria, from all sides and for all parties, in order to create a clear perception of what is happening on the various political, military, economic and social levels. As well as to figure out the different opinions of all acting parties and their activities and influence, through reports produced on the ground close to the events, where information about the Syrian issue is gathered and summarized in monthly reports.

The main objective is to monitor the development of the Syrian issue in order to create up-to-date knowledge that helps researchers and informs decision-makers of the latest updates.

Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies

Harmoon Center is an independent nonprofit research institution, focusing on the production of political, societal and intellectual studies and research related particularly to the Syrian issue, and the possible outcomes of ongoing conflict in Syria. The center is concerned with bolstering civil society and democratic awareness. Harmoon Center also works on Arab issues and related conflicts, as well as Arab regional and international relations.

The Center undertakes practical projects and activities, promotes initiatives for building Syria's future on the foundations and values of democracy, freedom, equality, human rights, and equal citizenship rights. Harmoon Center strives to be a platform for constructive dialogue and an arena for exchanging ideas.

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Monitoring summary of May 2021

- As of May 2021, political stalemate is predominant over the Syrian issue.
- European and American positions remain one as to not allowing the legitimization of the Assad regime, despite him holding elections that did not receive their recognition. However, some small European states are now inclined to restore their relation with the regime. Noted increase in support from the European Right of the Assad regime.
- American delegations to the East Euphrates indicate their continuous support for PYD's control over the area, and the absence of any will of withdrawing anytime soon: "We are here".
- Russia is still determined to rehabilitate Assad and his regime, on the Arab front first, then internationally; while reinforcing its military presence, announcing a loan to Syria to import cereals from Russia.
- Prosecuting Assad for the use of chemical weapons is still present in international forums and within the United Nations.
- Syrian refugees are facing additional difficulties due to a more rigid treatment by some European countries, without much change noted in Europe's overall policies towards asylum.
- Return of warmth noted in Saudi relations with the Syrian regime.
- Israeli military operations against Iranian sites on the Syrian territory are ongoing.
- There are regional parties still exploiting the Syrian crisis to recruit Syrians as mercenaries in other countries such as Libya, Yemen, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

- Iran's attempts to infiltrate the Syrian society and state are ongoing.
- military control map in Syria did not see any change worth mentioning, throughout May 2021, Military calm is still prevailing despite occasional clashes between parties.
- Different areas of Syria experienced explosions, assassinations, arrest and torture.
- Kurdish "self-administration" areas saw demonstrations against forced conscription, prices increases, and against some practices implemented by the "self-administration", which PYD militia met with live fire causing many deaths.
- Increased frequency of ISIS attacks in the Syrian desert.
- 90% of the displaced Syrians in the northwestern areas of Syria live under severe conditions.
- The voices of the Syrian elites are rising to demand the formation of a broad political body that represents the Syrians and becomes their voice despite their marginalization.
- Efforts by "Al-Nasra front" to present itself as a moderate organization striving to be accepted by the international community.
- Assad held elections with results known in advance. He exaggerated the celebration of the results and his speech received harsh criticism from large circles in and outside Syria, for its hostile tone.
- The regime continues forced displacement policies in order to reshape the demography of the country.
- Many areas of Syria are experiencing drought which negatively impacted agriculture and caused a shortage in water.
- The regime did not start any reconstruction process and could not provide valuable resources.
- The regime-controlled areas did not witness any economic or financial improvement. Living conditions are still harsh and the prices of basic needs continue to rise. Living

conditions are still dire in other parts of Syria.

- Ongoing Drug production in the regime-controlled areas. Drugs are exported abroad for the benefit of militia, especially Hezbollah.
- Asma' El-Assad's name continues to appear in the news, and she is always present at the side of husband Bashar, while her photos continue to be displayed in official administration offices; this reflects her growing political and economic influence.



Part One:



Arab- International

1. United Nations and its Organizations

- During its 74th session, the World Health Organization took the decision to appoint the Assad regime as a new member of its executive board. Syrian civil society organizations have denounced this decision for it legitimizes war crimes, human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed by Assad throughout 10 years of conflict.
- On May 4, the G7 foreign ministers renewed their commitment to work on executing the UN security council resolution (2254) and on reaching a political solution to end the war that has been going on in Syria for 10 years now.
- Despite Russia's threats to prevent the application of Security Council's decision that allows aid to enter through the "Bab al Hawa" border crossing, and to make all aid enter through the regime's crossings instead, and its demand that the Syrian Red Crescent distributes the aid, the United Nations appealed to the Security Council to let the aid pass through Bab al Hawa border crossing, to reach about three million Syrians in Northern Syria. The UN coordinator Mark Lowcock told the Security Council on May 26: "We want to see more aid passing through the border crossings, because it is a lifeline for more than three million people. We urge the Council to ensure that this "lifeline" is not cut off".
- The UN High representative for disarmament affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, expressed her deep concern about the results of the investigation carried out by the team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons regarding the chemical weapons attack on the city of Saraqib in Idlib suburbs on February 4, 2018. The UN official said in a virtual session held on Thursday, May 6: "There is no justification for the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances".

2. United States

- At the conclusion of the G7 meeting in London back in May 5, the US secretary of State condemned the ongoing atrocities committed by the Syrian regime, Blinken condemned the obstruction of aid and demanded the release of detainees, and effective participation of women in Syria. He also supported the ceasefire in Syria and called for the establishment of a secure environment that allows the return of refugees to Syria.
- US President Joe Biden extended the National emergency for Syria for an additional year, and the White House issued a statement on May 7 that considers the actions and policies of the Syrian Regime regarding the support of terrorist organizations and chemical weapons, a threat to National Security, foreign policy, and the economy of the United States. "The regime's brutality towards the Syrian people, who have called for freedom, not only endangers the people themselves, but also generates instability throughout the region," the statement said, noting that the United States would assess the changes in the regime's government policies in order to discuss the fate of the state of emergency: will it continue or will it end?
- During an unannounced visit to areas in the city of Hasakah under the control of the SDF on Friday, May 21, the commander of the US Central Command (Centcom) Kenneth McKenzie called on countries for the necessary return of their citizens from al-Hol camp, east of al-Hasakah, and re-integrating and ridding them of extremism, and making them productive elements. In the community, McKenzie stressed that deploying the Bradley vehicles in eastern Syria is a message to Russia: "This is not the time to mess with the Americans in the region."
- An American delegation represented by Acting Deputy Secretary of State Joey Hood and other officials visited northeastern Syria, and met with SDF forces leadership, the tribal leadership in Raqqa, leadership of the international coalition, and humanitarian workers in the area. They discussed the defeat of ISIS, and ways to destroy pockets of ISIS presence in the Syrian desert. They also expressed their support of a political solution to the Syrian issue.
- In its annual report, the US High Commission for Religious Freedom called on the administration of President Joe Biden to recognize the "autonomous-administration" controlling northeastern Syria, as a legitimate local government. The commission explained in its report that the governmental experience in northeastern Syria, if successful, may become a model for Syria's governmental politics.
- Member of the General Secretariat of the "Kurdish National Council" in Syria, Fadi Merhi, said that Washington "did not play a neutral role or seriously seek to stop the practices by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), pointing out "the Americans did not try solving the problems of the Middle East, but rather grasping the threads of the problem and

manipulating them according to their interests, which extends to the Kurdish regions.”

- The negotiations regarding the nuclear file with Iran raises concern in Syrian opposition circles, fearing these negotiations being at the expense of the Syrians. The same concern is repeated with Biden who follows the footsteps of Obama, who formulated the US position towards the conflict in Syria, without disturbing Iran, in order to convince them of signing the nuclear enrichment agreement.

3. Europe

- A statement by the foreign ministers of the United States, Germany, Britain, France and Italy condemned Assad's elections, saying “it will not be free or fair.” The statement is issued on Tuesday 25th May, urged the international community to reject Assad regime's attempt to regain legitimacy, without it stopping its violations of human rights, and without significantly participating in the political process facilitated by the United Nations with the aim of putting an end to the conflict.
- The European Union extended sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime since 2011 for an additional year, until June 1, 2022, in light of continued repression of the civilian population in the country.
- On Monday, May 31, pictures circulated in the media showing the Greek flag flying over the Greek embassy in Damascus, indicating diplomatic relations renewal, which analysts described as an attempt by Greece to strengthen its position against Turkey.
- Speculations grew that Cyprus would resume work at its embassy in Damascus. The speculations followed statements by head of the lawyers Syndicate in Syria, Firas Fares, about the syndicate leasing a building in Abu Rumaneh, central Damascus to the Cypriot side in order to reopen its embassy.

4. Turkey

- The administration of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing between Syria and Turkey confirmed that the Turkish government has deported 700 Syrian refugees, some forcibly and others voluntarily, most of whom are young people⁽¹⁾.
- Clashes erupted in the village of Atama, using light weapons, in the northern countryside of Idlib, between IDPs from Karama camp and the Turkish Border Guard on Friday,

(1) <https://bit.ly/3hYPM2H>

May 21, after a child from the camp was shot by Turkish Border Guards.

- Turkey has reduced the amount of water flowing through the Euphrates River to Syria, which caused major a drought and losses in the agricultural season, and halted electricity production turbines, and pumps that withdraw water from the river which farmers use to irrigate their lands.
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the “removal” Sofi Nureddin, general chief of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in Syria, in an operation by the Turkish intelligence and armed forces in northern Iraq. Turkish officials often use the term “removal” to refer to the “killing” of PKK members.
- The Syrian regime released a Turkish citizen who had been detained in its prisons since 2011, after spending ten years without trial.
- On May 16, Turkish Trade Minister Mehmet Mush revealed that 1072.6 kilograms of Captagon narcotic pills had been seized at the port of Iskenderun⁽²⁾. Al-Hurrah website quoted sources as saying that “Captagon pills were hidden within a shipment of building stones sent from Syria, and which passed through Iskenderun transit area,” noting that “Turkey was chosen as a transit point for the UAE.”⁽³⁾

5. Russia

- The Russian media reported extensively on, and promoted Assad’s elections, while Putin congratulated Assad on his victory in the presidential elections.
- Three Tu-22M3 heavy long-range bombers landed at the Hmeimim base, which is controlled by the Russian forces, on Tuesday, May 25, on the new runway recently expanded, to allow the landing of long-range fighters and giant aircraft. This occurs for the first time since the Russian military intervention in 2015, according to the statement of the Russian Ministry of Defense. The goal of the operation is to train crews of long-range bombers, in new geographical areas, on flights in the airspace over the Mediterranean Sea. It was said that the bombers will return to their permanent bases in Russia, after completing training missions.
- International studies have shown a decline in the Russian role in eastern Ukraine, after threats by NATO, and the increase of Russian influence in Syria, compensating for influence lost in Ukraine.
- Russia reiterated its accusation against Washington of being illegally present in Syria, in

(2) <https://bit.ly/3p1RIOD>

(3) <https://arbne.ws/3hBHvBz>

a statement by the Russian Embassy in Washington, in response to a report by the US Department of Defense (Pentagon), accusing Russian forces of violating the “disengagement” agreement between the two countries’ forces.

- On Sunday, May 16, Abkhazian President Aslan Bejania arrived in Damascus on a visit that lasted several days, during which he met with President of the Syrian regime, Bashar al-Assad, with the aim of “developing and strengthening the existing relations of cooperation between the two countries,” according to SANA news agency.
- The sheikh of the Unitarian Druze sect in Israel met with the Russian ambassador, Anatoly Viktorov. The meeting concluded with four main demands: allowing aid into Syria and its distribution in Druze areas; seeking to open a border crossing between Syria and Jordan in Jabal al-Arab; ensuring Syria’s unity, while reorganizing and building its governmental institutions based on a new constitution for the country; preventing the use of Druze youth from Syria as mercenaries fighting in Ukraine and Libya under the Russian leadership.

6. Iran

- In a phone call with Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian regime, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif confirmed Iran’s support for the Syrian elections, and its rejection of any attempts aimed at questioning its integrity.
- Iran has appointed Mehdi Sobhani as the country’s new ambassador to Damascus, according to what IRNA quoted from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The new ambassador previously held the position of CEO of the Strategic Planning and Monitoring Office of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, in addition to several other diplomatic positions.
- On May⁽⁴⁾ 22, the Iranian ambassador in Damascus, Mahdi Sobhani, along with Syrian and Iranian officials, opened the Iranian Consulate General in Aleppo amid clear religious and economic expansion in the city. Iran seeks to strengthen its presence in Aleppo, by purchasing real estate and taking control over the neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city, such as Hanano, Al-Sukari, and Al-Sakhour. On May 13, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif announced the opening of the Iranian Consulate General in Aleppo, under the pretext of expanding economic, cultural and trade cooperation between the two countries.⁽⁵⁾
- According to local sources, Iranian Shiite militias are transporting large quantities of

(4) <https://bit.ly/3oUKbvl>

(5) <https://bit.ly/3ypZUHy>

weapons to new depots near an archaeological area, in the city of Al-Mayadin in the eastern countryside of Deir Ez-Zor.

- Clashes resumed in the Sayyida Zainab area in Damascus, between the Iranian militias on one hand, and the Fourth Division on the other, over the Fourth Division's closure of a main road leading to the area, leaving one main road open. The origin of this conflict dates back to last March, due each of the conflicting parties desiring to consolidate its control of the region. The conflict prompted the Iranian Revolutionary Guards militia to send a number of trucks loaded with weapons and ammunition to the "Sayyida Zainab" area, south of Damascus, to support its militias.⁽⁶⁾
- The Iranian embassy in Ankara denied news reported by the Turkish Anadolu News Agency that the Revolutionary Guard sent 120 Syrian fighters from Deir Ez-Zor Governorate in Syria to Yemen.
- Several media sources reported disagreements between the regime forces and the Iranian militias, coinciding with the approach of the pistachio harvest season, and the two parties' struggle over the crops⁽⁷⁾. Media sources reported recruitment offices in the countryside of Hama hiring young men as guards in pistachio plots in the northern countryside of Hama and the southern countryside of Idlib, at the behest of Haidara al-Assad, known as "Abu al-Harith," the cousin of Wasim Badi' al-Assad, a militia leader affiliated with National Defense in Latakia.⁽⁸⁾
- On May 9, the Syrian regime's security services arrested Major General Nizar Ahmed al-Khodr, commander of the 17th Division and head of the Security and Military Committee in Deir Ez-Zor Governorate, and referred him to a military investigation committee, after issuing a seizure warrant on his movable and immovable assets. Media sources reported that the Iranian militias in the Deir Ez-Zor were behind the arrest of Al-Khodr, following the outbreak of major disputes between them, especially after al-Khodr assumed leadership of the 17th Division in December 2020⁽⁹⁾. The sources stated that a verbal altercation erupted between the Al-Khodr and the Iranian Cultural Counsellorship representative in Deir Ez-Zor, "Hajj Hussein", and the leader of the Shiite forces known as "Hajj Kamil", about some of the practices carried out by the militias affiliated with Iran within the province. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards militia turned the Tammo neighborhood mosque into a military headquarters, after it had previously turned it into a Husseiniya. The sources added that the militia disposed of the mosque and turned

(6) <https://bit.ly/3wI08NZ>

(7) <https://bit.ly/3oEA0v1>

(8) <https://bit.ly/3yEy36B>

(9) <https://bit.ly/3c28p1E>

it into a military headquarters, due to the completion construction of new mosque and Husseinia in the same neighborhood by the Iranian “Jihad al-Binaa” organization.⁽¹⁰⁾

- In Vienna, negotiations of the Iranian nuclear agreement continued, without announcing a clear breach, according to Josep Borrell, the European Union’s foreign affairs chief.

7. Israel

- On Thursday, May 27, 2021, Israeli aircrafts dropped warning leaflets on the outskirts of Qunaitra Governorate, near the border strip. They included pictures of “Jawad Hashem,” a commander in Lebanese militia Hezbollah and other pictures of officers from the 90th Brigade in Syrian regime army.
- Harmoon Observatory recorded several military operations in Syria, most notably: An Israeli helicopter targeted a house in the Ain al-Tineh area, in the northern countryside of Qunaitra Governorate leaving one casualty, on May 10, 2021. News circulated the house was a base for Lebanese “Hezbollah” militia.
- A huge fire broke out in an oil tanker, off the coast of Banias, on May 9, 2021. Media sources suggested the accident was the result of military action carried out by an Israeli special forces unit.
- An Israeli helicopter bombed areas in the Syrian province of Qunaitra, on May 5, 2021.
- Israeli helicopters carried out a night raid bombing deep into Syrian territories in Latakia and Misyaf, on the night of May 5, 2021.
- Israeli artillery shelling on a Syrian air defense site, in response to the firing of 3 missiles from Syrian territory targeting areas in northern occupied Palestine, on May 14, 2021.
- On May 31, 2021, an Israeli army force destroyed a Syrian army outpost in an area west of the Alpha Line in the central Golan Heights.

(10) <https://bit.ly/3bOlo61>

Arab countries:

- Qatari Foreign Minister, Sheikh “Mohammed bin Abdurrahman Al Thani” renewed his country’s position that there is no motive to restore relations with the Assad regime. Al Thani indicated, during an interview with “Arab TV,” that talks about restoring relations with the regime is years old and nothing is changed.
- Violent clashes took place between Syrian refugees heading to vote in the presidential elections and Lebanese citizens rejecting those elections. Including what happened in Jounieh north of Beirut, where Lebanese men intercepted a rally supporting the Syrian regime, tore up pictures of “Bashar al-Assad”, and prevented any march in support of the regime in their region. This came in conjunction with the opening of the doors of embassies in countries abroad to participate in the presidential election play.
- Samir Geagea, the secretary general of the Lebanese Forces party, criticized what he called “the electoral farce in Syria”, and demanded that Syrian refugees who vote in Lebanon leave Lebanon immediately and join Assad.
- The Jordanian government said the amount of funding from the Jordanian government, for the requirements of the response plan to the Syrian crisis, amounts to about 52.1 million dollars.
- Issam Nayal, the ambassador of the Syrian regime in Jordan, made a request to the Jordanian government to facilitate the movement of people and goods and the resumption of flights between Damascus and Amman, during his meeting on Sunday, May 30 with Jordanian Minister of Transport, Wajeeh Azaiza.
- The Minister of Tourism in the Assad government, “Mohammed Rami Radwan Martini,” headed a delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the first visit by an official from the Assad government, since Riyadh severed its relations with the regime.
- The Syrian public showed great interest in the Palestinian events, with great sympathy for the Palestinian struggle against Zionist racism. Demonstrations took place in north-west Syria in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, and to denounce the violations taking place in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. On the other hand, the Syrian street was divided between supporters and opponents of Hamas’ statements thanking Iran and the Syrian regime for their support, while Iran and the Syrian regime are responsible for the war on the Syrian People.

Part Two:



Areas outside the control of the regime

Military situation

- During May 2021, the dominant forces maintained their positions of influence, and the maps of military control did not change. The lines of contact separating the conflicting parties remained stable. Only two violations in Al-Hasakah were recorded where a two-week clash between the “National Defense” militia of the Assad regime and the “Asayish” militia of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia traded control of two positions in the Tai and Halko neighborhoods. The clash stopped after Russian mediation in the first week of May.
- Al-Assad’s forces continued to target areas in northwest Syria, killing 9 civilians with gunshots and bombardment, thus violating the ceasefire agreement, which was sponsored by Turkey and Russia and entered into force in March 2020. On May 4, Assad forces’ artillery shelled on agricultural lands in the village of Al-Ziyadeyah in the western countryside of Idlib, and killed a woman. Another woman, “Amina Al-Youssef”, was killed as Assad’s forces targeted a car carrying civilians, with a guided missile, on the road between Maarat Al-Naaman and Katyan in Idlib countryside.
- On May 8, regime artillery targeted Atareb city west of Aleppo with several shells, killing Ahmed Karmo Al-Youssef (13 years) and a woman, in addition to the injury of 5 civilians.
- On May 2, a missile fired by the SDF militia on residential neighborhoods in Afrin city, north of Aleppo, killed the 5-year-old girl Alia Rahim and wounded her parents.

Bombings and Assassinations

- The frequency of IED explosions increased throughout the Syrian. Harmoon Observatory recorded 28 explosions, targeting various individuals, and military or civilian sites, leaving 30 dead and 14 injured. The Syrian regime areas had the largest share with 10 cases, especially in Daraa governorate, which witnesses near daily bombings and assassinations, followed by Kurdish Autonomous-Administration (SDF) areas, with 8 bombings targeting SDF collaborators.

- Three bombing attacks targeted Turkish forces in northern Syria, most prominent a military convoy at Bab al-Hawa crossing, a Turkish soldier was announced dead and others wounded.
- Six shooting incidents were recorded in western Syria, most prominent of which an attack on the Turkish base in the town of Atama on the Syrian-Turkish border by locals, after Turkish forces shot a child herding sheep close to the base.
- The areas of the Syrian opposition factions were targeted with 6 explosive devices against members of these factions. One instance of targeting Iranian forces was recorded in Jabal al-Bishri in eastern Syria.
- The Hermon Observatory recorded 72 incidents of shooting throughout Syrian. Targets varied from assassinations to military posts. The Syrian regime areas topped the list with 44 shooting cases, majority in Daraa Governorate, which witnesses mutual assassinations between warring parties, and assassinations of regime collaborators. These operations were concentrated mainly in the eastern regions of the province. In addition, 22 shootings were recorded in the "Autonomous-Administration" areas, targeting members of the administration and its collaborators, responsible parties remain unknown.
- Artillery and aerial bombardment incidents throughout the Syrian territories reached 62, the Syrian opposition areas recorded the highest number cases; with 48 military and civilian sites bombed throughout the areas controlled by Syrian opposition. Syrian regime military sites south of Idlib city were also targeted up to 4 times by artillery shelling. Kurdish "Autonomous-Administration" sites in northern Aleppo were targeted by Turkish forces on 3 occasions. Civilian areas under the control of the Turkish administration were targeted in Northern Aleppo with shelling by the "Autonomous-Administration" artillery located southeast of Afrin.
- Five incidents of Russian air strikes were recorded on unknown sites in the desert east of Palmyra, believed to be targeting pockets of the "Islamic State" organization.
- 15 cases of military infiltration and clashes were recorded, along the line separating the "Autonomous-administration" forces and the Syrian opposition forces (the National Army), and between the Syrian regime forces and the opposition forces, on the "Kabina" axes in Jabal al-Akrad and north of Saraqib city.
- 19 explosions due to unexploded ordnances were recorded throughout the Suria, resulting in civilian casualties.
- Harmoon Center recorded the explosion of gas line connecting Al-Jibsa field, under "Syrian Democratic Forces" control in the Al-Shaddadi area, and the Syrian regime's areas near Al-Juhaif, on May 17, 2021.

- In May, IED attacks carried out by unknown parties escalated in various areas outside regime control northern Syria, killing 6 civilians. On May 2, a motorcycle bomb attack took place in the industrial market of Suluk, a town the North of Raqqa under the control of “National Army”; the explosion resulted in the death of 1 civilian, the injury of 4 others, and damage to shops in the place.
- On May 24, a motorcycle exploded in the center of Jarablus city, killing 3 civilians.
- The military police of the “National Army”, in cooperation with the Turkish intelligence, carried out a campaign of raids and arrests in the cities of Al-Bab and A’zaz, north of Aleppo, on Monday 24th of May. Dozens of wanted security men, and a number of “ISIS” affiliates were arrested.
- “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” launched a massive campaign of arrests, in Idlib and its countryside, targeting 26 leaders of the Guardians of Religion Organization, Abu al-Walid al-Hoss, Abu Aya Jaish, and Abu Abdullah al-Suri (son of the former leader in al-Qaeda Abu Firas al-Suri) among others. This is the largest campaign carried out by the HTS against the “Guardians of Religion”, and one of the most prominent goals of Washington and the international coalition, in the areas of northwestern Syria.
- The Idlib Center for Media Services, which is managed by the media arm of the “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” faction, has invited journalists and international media to visit the liberated areas in northwestern Syria.
- Al-Julani is increasing his public appearance in Idlib in an effort to ease people’s discontent with the strict lifestyle he imposed on them, and to promote his image and that of HTS in international circles as a moderate and a pragmatic, despite HTS being listed on as a terrorist due to its jihadist ideology. He appeared last February in an interview with the American journalist Martin Smith. “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” is the de facto ruling party in Idlib governorate and its areas, militarily and administratively.

Victims and violations

- May witnessed an increase in recorded violations throughout different regions in Syria. The observatory team at Harmoon Center recorded the killing of at least 108 Syrians in May, including 97 civilians, 17 children and 9 women, 6 detainees were killed under torture. The victims came from different governorates: 22 from Deir Ez-Zor, 21 from Aleppo, 20 from Daraa, 11 from Raqqa, 9 from Idlib, 9 from Hasakah, 6 from Hama, 4 from Damascus suburbs, 4 from As-Suwayda, 1 from Homs, and 1 from Latakia. The largest number of victims were killed by unknown parties, their number reached 60 casualties, 19 of them, including 7 children and 3 women, killed in explosions and IEDs as well as

unexploded ordnances from the war, while the remaining number were killed after kidnappings or by shootings, among them 3 children and two women. The documentation was unable to verify the perpetrators.

- The Harmoon Observatory documented the killing of 5 people, including civilians by members of the ISIS in of Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates.
- Two civilians, including a child, were killed by an unexploded cluster bomb left over from previous shelling by Assad and Russian forces in a camp near the town of Kafraya in Idlib.
- A Syrian girl was run over by a Turkish armored vehicle in the village of Nayrab, east of Idlib governorate, and a young man was beaten to death by members of the Turkish army, after trying to cross the border into Turkey.⁽¹¹⁾
- On May 11, “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” killed a displaced civilian from the town of Anjara in Aleppo countryside while arresting another civilian and indiscriminately opening fire in al-Dana in the northern Idlib countryside.
- A civilian was killed by international coalition forces bombing of Shnan village in the town of Thiban in Deir Ez-Zor.
- A detainee named “Muhammad Al-Jassim” died of torture in a prison ran by the military police of the “National Army”, in Tal Abyad north of Raqqa. Al-Jassim was a former leader of the Islamic State in the Ma’dan area, before leaving the organization. He was arrested for accusations of re-association with ISIS.

PYD-controlled areas – “Autonomous-Administration”:

- The Defense Office of the Executive Council of the Autonomous-Administration of North and East Syria issued a circular specifying the age requirements for compulsory conscription into (Syrian Democratic Forces / SDF) under the name of “Self-Defense.” The circular states that mandatory conscription applies to those born between January 1, 1999 and April 30, 2003, according to Article No. 1 of the Self-Defense Duty Law.
- The Executive Council of the Autonomous-Administration doubled the price of fuel in northern and eastern Syria, under the control of the SDF, while setting the price of imported fuel in US dollars, before cancelling it under pressure from popular demonstrations.
- The Autonomous-Administration issued a law called (Media Regulation and Legislation), which limits the work of media professionals in the region. The Law imposes restrictions on dealing with public affairs and reporting on the private lives of its civilian

(11) <https://horrya.net/archives/133737>

and military officials, and imposes penalties for violations, most notably the suspension from work for a period of one to four months.

- On Thursday, May 27, Deir Ez-Zor local councils controlled by the “Autonomous- Administration”, demanded that displaced people obtain a “kafala” (guarantee bond), within a period of seven days maximum, under threat of deportation. Likewise, “Autonomous-Administration” in northern and eastern Syria demands from people coming from other Syrian regions obtaining a sponsorship from one of the “native” residents in the areas in which they reside.
- May witnessed peaceful protests by civilians in Al-Hasakah Governorate. On May 18th protests broke out against the practices of the “Autonomous-Administration” and its affiliated (SDF) militias, protesting poor living conditions and high fuel prices. Hundreds of people took to the streets in the al-Nashwa al-Gharbia neighborhood in al-Hasakah city, al-Shaddadi city, and the villages of Abadan and 47 in the southern countryside. The SDF militia forces met them with batons and live bullets, killing 7 civilians, one of them child. The deaths of two civilians by the SDF militia were reported in villages in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor, in addition to the killing of other civilians in Raqqa and Aleppo. Hundreds of residents of the city demonstrated in Manbij, east of Aleppo, amid a general strike in opposition to the forced conscription decision imposed by SDF forces in areas under its control.
- 14 assassinations of civilians were recorded in the Autonomous-Administration’s control areas, mainly in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa. It is likely that the perpetrators of these operations were from sleeper cells affiliated with ISIS, while the organization explicitly adopted two assassinations of two civilians, accused of working for the SDF militia.
- The SDF militia, with the support of the International Coalition forces, launched a massive security campaign in the Wadi Al-Ajeej area in northeastern countryside of Deir Ez-Zor, which lasted 4 days, targeting pockets of ISIS presence.
- On Tuesday, May 25, 2012, Under an agreement between Baghdad and the International Coalition to Combat ISIS, and with the escort of Iraqi forces, about a hundred Iraqi families (381 people) left Al-Hol camp in northeastern Syria, where the SDF is holding about 62,000 people with American support, half of them Iraqis from ISIS fighters and the rest families of ISIS fighters.
- On Friday, May 21, the “Autonomous-Administration” through its military wing, Kurdish People’s Protection Units, detained 160 trucks belonging to Al-Qaterji Company while passing on Rmelan Road to fill their tanks with oil, due to Al-Qatirji’s failure to pay past dues of previous oil shipments, estimated at about \$5 million. Noting that a barrel of oil is sold for 20-25 dollars from Rmelan wells in eastern Syria, for the benefit of the regime through its front commercial companies (Al-Qaterji).

- Harmoon Center reported two detainees' death in prisons ran by (SDF) militia in Al-Ha-sakah and Raqqa.

The Syrian opposition parties:

- Former Syrian Prime Minister Riad Hijab appeared on televised in an interview on (Syria TV channel), and spoke about the lack of international will to solve the crisis in Syria, and demanded a unified Arab role to confront Iranian expansion and intervention in Syria. He called for the full implementation of UN Resolution 2254 instead of simply relying on the Constitutional Committee. He also attacked the opposition, describing it as a degenerate regime, and expressed his support to the Kurdish rights in Syria.
- A founding conference of the National Democratic Front (NDF) was held online, after the Syrian regime banned holding the conference in Damascus last March. Asaad Rashid was elected as its head.
- Increase in visits of delegations from the National Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to the Syrian interior, in an effort to improve their image in the Syrians public perception.
- The Syrian elite continue their discussions about the institutions that represent the opposition (the coalition, the negotiating committee, the constitutional committee), and offer harsh criticism of their feeble and ineffectual presence. Meanwhile, regional and international parties meet to discuss the Syrian issue and the fate of Syria and its people, without the participation of any of the Syrians. The elite repeat their demand of restructuring the coalition according to new foundations and activating it.
- Groups of Syrian elites held webinars through social media, some of them raising the issue of forming a political body to represent them in international forums. Some sporadic initiatives have been started with the objective of creating political bodies able to coagulate some Syrian influence in organized foundations, in order to be the strong Syrian voice on the international scene. However, such attempts remain small and dispersed, with no major impact.
- In an interview with (Syria TV), Arab thinker Azmi Beshara said: "The regime is unable to rule, due to lack of international legitimacy" adding "no measures are in place now towards a solution in Syria that results in Assad's departure," and that "changes need be imposed, but as of now no one is imposing any change." He also warned of the dangers of dividing up Syria: "Syria risks becoming four political entities, that may become entrenched and to some extent stable, they may become the parties other countries communicate with when discussing the resolution of Syrian issue. The Syrian people must be

ready for this moment, when the Syrian issue is addressed by Russia and America.” He added “The role of Syrians in exile is to become a true lobby for the benefit of the Syrian cause.” He called on the Syrians to promptly establish an umbrella organization capable of representing all Syrians, of representing the unity of Syria in a manner that surpasses these entities, and speaks for the entirety of the Syrian people. A political leadership that speaks for the entire Syrian people. A convincing leadership with a social base united around two topics: the unity of Syria and its people, and a pluralistic democratic system for Syria. He explained that this requires organizing the Syrian people through unions for students, women, doctors and workers, and holding a general Syrian conference for the Syrian people, establishing an inclusive organization for Syrians abroad with an executive committee and a financial arm, an organization the international community would be willing to deal with, then the international community will listen to the Syrians.

Displacement, Immigration and Asylum

- The Syrian regime displaced 30 families from the village of Umm Batinah located in the Qunaitra governorate 5 km from the Israeli border. This came following an agreement between the regime and the residents after the regime threatened to bombard and invade the town. On Saturday, May the 22nd the convoy of displaced families from Umm Batinah entered Deir Hassan village in northern Idlib governorate after waiting for about 30 hours at the (Abu Al-Zindayn) crossing separating Assad regime areas and the “National Army” territory, in the city of Al-Bab, east Aleppo. This occurred after they were prevented from entering Al-Bab city by the “National Army” factions, under the pretext of lack of prior coordination with them.
- Syrian refugees in Denmark are increasingly concerned about the Danish government’s intentions to deport Syrian refugees to Syria, on the grounds it is safe for them to return to Damascus, or to move them to refugee camps in countries outside Europe such as Africa.
- Thousands of Syrians and Danish citizens took part in demonstrations and sit-ins in 25 Danish cities on Wednesday, 19th of May, in protest of the Danish government’s decision to withdraw residency permits from Syrian refugees, in a government plan to return Syrian refugees, under the pretext that Damascus and the surrounding areas are safe enough for asylum seekers to return to.
- The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon banned Syrian refugee students from taking school exams, unless they present official documents, noting that Lebanon imposes procedural obstacles on Syrian refugees and strict conditions that pre-

vent about 80% of Syrians from obtaining residency permits. Some school officials have warned Syrian students that May 4th 2021 is the last deadline for submitting documents, including proof of residence, otherwise they will be prevented from taking exams, knowing that Decree No. 40 approved by the Council of Ministers in Lebanon in 2017, requires Syrian students to submit their official grades from Syria for them to obtain the Brevet and Baccalaureate certificates.

Living Standards

- The Watad Fuel Company, which controls the fuel market in the opposition-controlled areas of northern Syria raised fuel prices in May; as a result of the Turkish lira losing value against the US dollar. The price of a gas cylinder became 91 Turkish liras, a liter of gasoline 6.46 Turkish liras, the liter of grade 1 diesel 6.18 liras, and a liter of diesel 4.40 liras.
- In support of farmers in the northern Syrian regions, the administration of (Bab al-Hawa) border crossing with Turkey has temporarily suspended the import of some agricultural products from Turkey. The decision to suspend imports included potatoes, dry onions, garlic, cucumbers, tomatoes, watermelons and zucchini.
- The General Electricity Company of the “rescue government” in Idlib concluded an agreement with the “Green Energy” company to supply electricity from Turkey, the company began supplying the city of Idlib and its countryside with electric power. The power supply for rest of the northern Syrian regions will be completed in stages.
- The local council in the city of Jarablus and its countryside, east of Aleppo, agreed with the Turkish “Ak Energy” company to supply the area with electricity, noting that the service will be paid, and that the provision of electricity for free will stop at the end of this May.
- A report by the Civil Defense Organization “White Helmets” stated that the organization dealt with 832 fires in northwestern Syria, since the beginning of the year until the end of May, including 210 fires in agricultural and forest areas, 77 fires in refugee camps, and 281 fires in civilian homes and commercial stores. About 100 people were rescued, while 8 died due to fires.
- The Syria Response Coordinators team announced that more than 200 camps in northwestern Syria do not have support for providing safe potable water, after some organizations stopped sponsoring water contracts in a number of camps.

- The living conditions of Syrians residing in ad hoc refugee camps that lack the most basic services in northwestern Syria are still extremely severe, and no improvement has occurred despite the residents' repeated requests. The number of non-formal camps in northern Syria is about 264, in which about 550,000 displaced people live. They were forced by the regime to flee their homes, according to estimates from the Documentation Office of "Syria Revolutionaries Gathering."



Part Three



Regime Control Areas

Al-Assad elections:

- In preparation for Assad's elections, the President of the Syrian regime Bashar al-Assad issued on Sunday May 2, 2021 a new general amnesty decree for perpetrators of crimes and violations including conspiracy to commit a "terrorist act", "undermining the prestige of the state", and dealing in foreign currencies. However, the decree included many exceptions that deprived political prisoners of benefiting from it.
- The "Supreme Constitutional Court" issued a list of candidates for the presidential elections which included Bashar al-Assad, Abdullah Salloum, and Mahmoud Merhi.
- The predetermined presidential elections were held according to the 2012 constitution, in contravention of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 adopted in December 2015.
- Majority of Syrians did not participate in Assad's elections, as it was not held in all areas outside the regime's control, namely Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham areas, "National Army" areas, and the Autonomous- Administration (SDF) areas inside Syria. Despite the largest number of Syrian refugees residing outside Syria, many countries also forbid the elections be held on their territories, especially Germany and Turkey, while refugee participation in both Jordan and Lebanon was low.
- Assad announced he won with 95.1% of the votes, and that 14.2 million Syrians participated in these elections. Many have challenged the validity of the elections, and estimated that no more than 2.5 million people voted in the elections. The regime practiced its usual methods of forcing voters to elect Assad.
- Assad received congratulations from the heads of only 10 states, namely North Korea, Russia, Belarus, China, Iran, Lebanon, Venezuela, Oman and the Palestinian Authority, which means 95% of the world's countries did not recognize these elections.
- Al-Assad delivered his elections "victory" speech in the city of Duma (in the suburbs of Damascus), which remained undersiege by his forces who withheld food, medicine, water and electricity for several years. Thousands of its residents were killed, the city itself was destroyed, and the majority of its people were displaced to northern Syria. Large numbers of Syrians found the choice of location to be provocative. Assad's speech drew strong anger among the people and in Arab and international circles, and a lot of

criticism was directed at the aggressive and provocative language, especially since Assad launched a broad attack on the Syrians who opposed him, using hostile language towards all those who do not support him, considering them as non-Syrians, describing them as “bulls”.

- Elections celebrations caused the death of a child and a young man in the city of Aleppo, as Assad forces and loyal militias randomly fired their guns during these celebrations.

Security Situation in Regime-held Areas

- A state of lawlessness and ramped crime continue as Syrians suspect the involvement of organized crime groups with a blind eye from the security authorities of the regime.
- In Damascus, Housam Kabbour (brother of the vice-chairman of the Damascus Chamber of Industry, and owner of matte packaging factories), was stabbed to death in his office in Al-Talyani area of Damascus, despite being within a highly secured area that includes a number of security intelligence offices.
- During May, the city of Jabla, in Latakia Governorate, witnessed security incidents tension, as a result of assassinations and car bombings of military officers and security services. The most prominent targets of assassinations were Major General “Riad Ahmed Shahab,” former director of the military hospital in Latakia, and Lieutenant “Mohammed Ibrahim Salman” from Tartus, Lieutenant “Ali Fouad Ghanem” from Jabla, and Lieutenant “Soumer Saeed Murshid”, from Qardaha.
- The “Al-Jiaan” checkpoint ran by Military Security in the Al-Fawwar neighborhood in Jabla was attacked by armed elements, where a sergeant from the regime’s military intelligence was killed, and another was wounded. This is the first attack of its kind in the city since the Jabla bombings in 2016. Sources suggested to Harmoon Observatory the reason for the attack was a dispute between armed “shabiha” groups engaged in smuggling. Jabla had previously witnessed clashes and arrest campaigns among former leaders of the shabiha militia “Desert Falcons” and “Sea Rangers”, formerly funded by Ayman Jaber (brother-in-law to the Assad family).
- An increase in the frequency of assassinations in different areas of Daraa governorate, where 15 assassinations were recorded, mostly targeting people formerly affiliated with the armed opposition forces, and had settlements with the regime sponsored by Russian, as well as civilians. On May 16th, a woman and her husband were shot dead by unidentified persons on the road between the villages of Abdin and Jamla in the western countryside of Daraa governorate.

- A mine explosion in Wadi Maliha al-Atash in Daraa countryside killed a civilian from As-Suwayda and 3 of his children.
- Activist bodies, councils and committees in the governorates of Daraa and Damascus countryside called for a boycott of the presidential elections in a joint statement issued on May 24th 2021, and called for a general strike during the elections, Wednesday, May 26th 2021.
- Medical and military teams in Homs governorate found a mass grave containing the remains of 15 soldiers in the vicinity of Al-Amiriya near Palmyra in the Syrian desert east of Homs. This took place during a “combing” and demining operation prior to establishing a security checkpoint for the regime in the area. The mass grave, found on Saturday, May 22nd dates back to the period of ISIS control over the area, and it is the seventh to be found in the Syrian desert since the regime regained control from ISIS in conjunction with Iranian and Russian militias.
- The Jordanian border: The Jordanian army killed 3 Syrian smugglers and wounded two others in a clash during an attempt to smuggle weapons and drugs from Syria into the Kingdom. The Jordanian army stated it seized a number of weapons, one million 307 thousand and 655 Captagon pills (stimulant pills), and 2,100 Lyrica pills.
- Hermon Center Observatory recorded 6 cases of death under torture during May, most of whom died in Assad’s prisons as a result of continuous torture. The detainee Bashar Khalil al-Halqi died under torture in one of the regime’s prisons, a former defected army recruit. Although al-Halqi had a settlement with the regime, he was arrested in October 2018, and news of his death came on May 4.
- The regime released 14 detainees of Duma residents, including two women who had been detained for a long time, for belonging to the opposition. The regime organized a big celebration for the occasion in the presence of officials, army and police officers, and forced the released detainees to chant for Bashar al-Assad. Assad had deliberately cast his vote in the city of Duma which witnessed years long fighting between the regime and the opposition, and was almost completely destroyed with tens of thousands of its sons killed or arrested.

Regime Economics

- The Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection in the regime’s government has ratified the statutes of the “Wafa-telcom” telecommunications company, as a third cellular operator. Pro regime media outlets indicated that the real owner of “Wafa-Telecom” is Yasar Ibrahim, who is on the US sanctions lists. Media sources close to the regime also

reported that 7 Syrian companies cooperated to establish “Wafa-Telecom” all of which operate in Damascus.

- Factories are still operating at less than half their capacity, for several reasons, including power cuts, scarcity of imported raw materials and the small size of the local markets, noting that thousands of factories are still closed or destroyed.
- The Credit and Finance Council of the Central Bank issued a decision allowing travelers into Syria to bring in foreign banknotes up to \$500,000 in cash, or its equivalent, provided they are duly declared in accordance with the forms provided by the Anti Laundering and Terrorism Financing Authority.
- The exchange rate of the Syrian pound against the dollar was relatively stable during May, with rates ranging between 3100 and 3150 pounds.
- Bashar al-Assad issued the new Investment Law No. 18⁽¹²⁾, which grants unprecedented customs and tax exemptions to investment projects to encourage investment already scarce as a result of the unattractive conditions.
- Economic sources revealed that the regime’s “Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade” had granted a registration certificate to a new Iranian company in Aleppo called “Phenomenon of business and technology”. The company, according to the same source, aims to “establish and manage medical, commercial, educational, productive, service, scientific, technical, and creative centers”.
- The regime government is looking to increase the scarce resources of the public treasury through various measures, like forcing the property sales payments and taxes to be made through bank payments. The government also put a limit on the amounts of money transferred in cash between governorates in order to compel Syrians to use the banks. It also allowed up to 500 thousand dollars of banknotes to be carried into Syria.
- More news still coming out of confiscation of drug shipments from Syria indicatig the continued production and exportation of drugs from Syria; an activity practiced by militias linked to the regime for self-funding, especially the Hezbollah in Lebanon.
- Damascus Governorate leased the streets of the main markets in Damascus, which can accommodate 3,500 parking spaces, to an Iranian owned company for 2.1 billion Syrian pounds annually, while the company’s revenues are estimated at 7 billion pounds annually.
- The exports of the regime-controlled areas amounted to \$200 million during the first quarter of 2021, and this is a meager number, while official and unofficial imports far exceeded this number.

(12) <https://bit.ly/2SxBDi7>

- Regime government Prime Minister Hussein Arnous issued a decision on May 2nd 2021 dismissing the Director of Customs in Syria, Fawaz Asaad, who hold the position since 2017. State leveled a set of accusations against the Director of Customs, most prominent of which what “Al-Watan” newspaper reported as his “failure to fight corruption” in the customs sector.⁽¹³⁾ On May 22nd 2021 employees of the “Customs Directorate” were expelled and arrested, including customs custom guards, heads of departments and customs controllers in Jdeidet Yabous, Nassib, Lattakia, the Free Zone divisions and the “Directorate of Legal Affairs”.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Syria suffered from drought this year, evident in this month’s wheat and barley harvest season, both of which are two main crops in Syrian agricultural production and a main source of food for the majority of Syrians, especially in difficult economic conditions.
- Twelve instances of burning agricultural crops were recorded, the total area of burned agricultural land was 2,400 hectares.
- Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov announced that Russia has provided a loan to Syria, to finance the purchase of food and grain. The Russian Ambassador to Syria, Alexander Efimov stated Russia has exported about 350 thousand tons of wheat to Syria since last March, according to Interfax news agency. Syrian Economy Minister Muhammad Samer Al-Khalil announced that one million tons of Russian wheat is expected to arrive in Syria before the end of this year.
- Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said that Russian humanitarian aid is being sent to Syria “constantly”.

Living Standards in Syrian Regime-Controlled Areas:

- Many areas in Syria are experiencing water shortages and General Establishment of Water and Sanitation in Damascus and suburbs has announced the start of water rationing program between 10 and 12 hours daily⁽¹⁵⁾. A report by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned Tuesday, May 25th that about 12.2 million people in Syria need access to water and sanitation, because of the severe damage to infrastructure over the past ten years as a result of attacks on water and sanitation infra structure. The water shortage included areas that were known to have abundant water, such as As-Suwayda, Qunaitra and Tartus, where people are now forced to buy water from tankers at a higher

(13) <https://alwatan.sy/archives/256813>

(14) <https://bit.ly/3bZ0nGN>

(15) <https://sp-today.com/news/9737>

cost and a lower level of hygiene.

- The living standards and humanitarian conditions in Syria continued to decline. The Syrians are still unable to secure the most basic requirements of their daily lives. The month of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr increased the financial pressure on the Syrians with significant increases in prices of clothing items, in a way not compatible with the purchasing power of the vast majority of people.
- According to a report on (Lira Today) website⁽¹⁶⁾, most Syrians' salaries range between 50 and 80 thousand Syrian pounds, the price of men's suit in Damascus ranges between 140-200 thousand pounds, and a women's shirt has reached 50 thousand Syrian pounds, the price of shoes is between 35-70 thousand pounds. And a child's clothing requires an amount of more than 50,000 Syrian pounds, which is equivalent to an employee's monthly salary.
- Food prices continued to rise with the Eid season⁽¹⁷⁾, and the price of poultry meat with increased demand due to the inability of the majority of people to buy red meat, raising the prices of live poultry to 6400 pounds per kilo, and 8500 pounds for boneless chicken.
- With the advent of Eid al-Fitr, Bashar al-Assad issued a decree stipulating the disbursement of a one-time financial grant of 50,000 pounds to public sector and military personnel, and 40,000 pounds to retirees⁽¹⁸⁾, equivalent to approximately \$16, based on the exchange rate.
- Early May, the Minister of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection in regime government, Talal Al-Barazi, stated that the regime had adopted a new mechanism for selling bread through a "monthly quota". The system would be implemented at the beginning of next June⁽¹⁹⁾. This means that there will be a rationing of the consumption of bread which is the main food source for poor Syrian families.
- The Communications Regulatory Authority of the regime has raised the fees for mobile phones owned by individuals by 100% of previous fees. A raise in the mobile custom fees based on four brackets according to the quality of the device. The permit fees for the first bracket amounts to 130 thousand pounds, and for the second 220 thousand pounds, for the third 400,000 pounds, and for the fourth bracket amounts to 500,000 pounds⁽²⁰⁾.

(16) <https://sp-today.com/news/9295>

(17) <https://sp-today.com/news/9610>

(18) <http://www.sana.sy/?p=1377105>

(19) <https://bit.ly/2QWP36R>

(20) <https://www.eqtsad.net/news/article/33260>

- The Syrian regime is suffering from a wheat crisis. This has led to a reduction of about 16% of the flour allocations for bakeries and to an increase in the price of a bag of bread to 100 Syrian pounds⁽²¹⁾, despite the regime calling this year the “Year of Wheat.” The regime attributes the decline in the quantities of wheat produced to drought and fires that devoured a large areas of wheat fields⁽²²⁾.
- On Sunday May 23rd the President of the Council of Ministers of the Assad regime Hussein Arnous visited As-Suwayda Governorate, with a government team consisting of thirteen ministers, and presented a government grant under the direction of Al-Assad, amounting to five billion Syrian pounds to As-Suwayda Governorate in an attempt to contain popular anger over the deteriorating living conditions.
- Research results carried out by the Center for Studies and Operations Research in Damascus showed that 63% of the Syrians surveyed wish to leave the country, 60% of whom attributed the reason to the difficult economic conditions, and 56% described refugees outside the country as lucky to have been able to escape from Syria.

On Other Levels

- News of “Asma al-Assad” has become increasingly associated with Bashar al-Assad’s name on some occasions, and her pictures are being displayed in officials’ offices, a reflection of her increasing political influence in addition to her economic influence.
- Bashar al-Jaafari (Deputy Foreign Minister of the Syrian regime) revealed during an interview with Al-Mayadin TV that security meetings held by officials from the Syrian regime and the Turkish side, stressing that these meetings “did not lead to anything.”
- A decision was issued by Bashar al-Assad to retain the Syrian Minister of Defense, Ali Abdullah Ayoub for one month even after reaching the legal retirement age.
- Bashar al-Assad issued an administrative order annulling the retention and recall of officers, non-commissioned officers and reserve personnel, within specific categories, as of June 1.
- The regime-controlled areas still lack the minimum capabilities to confront the spread of the Corona virus, and the availability of testing capabilities are limited, as the costs are not within the reach of most Syrians.
- 12530 cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the areas under the regime’s control.
- High rates of coronavirus in northwest Syria during the month of May, with the total

(21) <https://www.noonpost.com/content/40528>

(22) <https://bit.ly/3um1N4x>.

number of infections reaching 777. The Syria Response Coordinators team said the total number of virus infections from the first of May till May the 23rd is 777 cases.

- The Qatar Red Crescent, under the supervision of the World Health Organization, started implementing the impartial monitoring program for the first round of vaccination campaigns against the coronavirus (Covid-19) in northwestern Syria.



Part Four:



The Syrian issue in international research and media reports

Research dealing with the Syrian issue:

- A report issued by the Middle East Center in the United States titled "The upcoming Syrian elections are almost a foregone conclusion," confirmed that no one expects the presidential elections in Syria to be "free and fair." Even the Russian leaders, in the few moments when they speak without caution, smile sarcastically when discussing this issue. However, there is concern in international capitals that the predetermined results will be used by countries like Russia to call for collaboration with the Assad regime. The report indicated already ongoing moves in the region to allow Damascus back into the Arab League and restore diplomatic relations. The report described this trend as short-sighted and dangerous, as it works to reinforce all the root causes of the 2011 uprising, all of which are worse today than they were a decade ago.
- In a report by the Middle East Center in the United States titled (How the "Autonomous-Administration's" policies contributed to the resurgence of ISIS activity), the analysis reviewed the deterioration of local communities' relations with the "Autonomous-Administration" as a result of several security, military and economic policies. The report outlined an increase in deterioration after the civil councils failed to link local community with the "Autonomous-administration", as a result of their corruption and their failure to prioritize the needs of local communities. This led to a cycle of continuous protests against these councils, a consequence that served the ISIS by inciting public opinion against the "Autonomous-administration". ISIS took advantage of the chaos accompanying the protests and popular discontent with the administration's work, to strengthen its cells and multiply its activities. So, if the tension between the local communities and the "Autonomous-Administration continues, it is expected that ISIS will continue to expand.
- A study by Carnegie Middle East Center titled "How the small town of Sarmada became Syria's gateway to the outside world," dealt with the emergence of the role of the town of Sarmada in northern Idlib, after the conflict in Syria brought about a fundamental transformation in the economic and social system in the region. This led to the decline of Aleppo's role as the economic center of Syria, and the emergence of border towns

within a new economic system closely linked to the borders, including the Sarmada / Bab al-Hawa area, which has become a multi-port gate that naturally arose due to the existing conditions, rather than from previous planning, among the different political economic and social structures in Turkey and Syria.

- Under the title “What is happening in Syria is not (just) another fake election: the implications of resolving the war,” the Washington Institute held a virtual political forum with elite researchers. The forum dealt with the prevailing atmosphere in Syria in conjunction with the presidential elections held by the Assad regime, and the researchers concluded that even though many analysts are aware that the elections currently taking place are not fair, these elections will remain unfair even if peace prevails in the country.
- The Washington Institute has published a political analysis by journalist Kenneth R. Rosen entitled “The Dilemma in Northeast Syria: Options to Advance U.S. Interests,” in which the author addressed the failure of the anti-ISIS coalition to use its de facto security apparatus in northeast Syria to compel local actors to improve governance and adopt a political solution. If the United States and local actors remain bogged in their current disagreements and fail to secure more resources for northeastern Syria, they will facilitate further Russian obstruction to the process of unification and stabilization of the Central Euphrates valley.

Media reports on the Syrian issue:

- A report published by Al-Modon newspaper reviewed the reasons for Asma al-Assad’s absence from the electoral scene in Syria, in contrast to her strong presence on the Syrian scene in the past period, her pictures in government offices and streets and all. The report attributed the reason for this to the pressure that Bashar al-Assad is under from within the Alawite community, after his wife’s conflict with Rami Makhlouf who enjoys the support of the Alawites, as well as to her strong control of the Syrian economy, and to her influence on her husband’s decisions. Some attributed the reason to Asmaa’s desire to sustain the international funding obtained by the “charities” she supervises, which necessitates her impartiality and attention to strictly humanitarian affairs⁽²³⁾.
- Al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper published a report titled “The Election Campaign Shows the New Map of the “Shadow Economy” in Syria.” The report talked about Assad’s supporters celebrating during the “elections” and demonstrating loyalty to him, thereby reveals the economic and social transformations in Syria’s post-war society and the emergence of new families and personalities, most of whom are militia leaders and war

(23) <https://bit.ly/3wDOr5s>

profiteers who are active in smuggling⁽²⁴⁾.

- On May 7th the British newspaper The Guardian published a report reviewing how Syria has turned into a drug state, through the production of the drug Captagon⁽²⁵⁾. The newspaper quoted officials in police and intelligence services in the Middle East and Europe as saying that all shipments came from Syria or across the Lebanese border, where criminal gangs, militia leaders and border gangs were formed, manufacturing and distributing large quantities of drugs on a large scale.



(24) <https://bit.ly/3v6DbOt>

(25) <https://bit.ly/3ff5a9l>

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