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Iran's role in re-structuring the Syrian Society



Social Researches

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Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies

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Theoretical and Strategic Introduction

The special relation between the Syrian regime and the Islamic Republic of Iran began right after the latter's establishment. Despite Hafez al-Assad's support for Iran in the war against Iraq, which was led by the second section of the Baath Party, the man made sure to maintain his relation with the Arab regimes, especially Saudi Arabia. He also made sure that Iran does not have an influence on the Syrian interior⁽¹⁾. However, things have changed, after Bashar al-Assad inherited power from his father, as Iran's influence spread in the Syrian society, with the rise of teshyi' activity (converting people to Shiisme) and the establishment of Husseiniyas. However, this influence remained limited because the regime feared a societal and Arab reaction. With that said, Iran's influence on the Alawite army and security officers was gradually growing.

After the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Tunisia in late 2010 and the removal of Ben Ali, followed by the Egyptian revolution and Mubarak's impeachment; the Syrian regime was worried about its fate, and with the transition of the Arab Spring to Libya and Yemen, the regime was terrified, and began to fear the possibility of the spring spreading to Syria. So, Iran offered total support to Bachar and its regime and incited him to show no indulgence or concession, however little, in his policy, but rather encouraged him to use violence, in its various forms. Iran also sent Al-Assad military officers, Internet experts, and sniper soldiers. In fact, Iran considered that an interior conflict in Syria will weaken Al-Assad, thereby opening the door to Iran to interfere in the army, the state apparatus, society and economy, in order to control Syria, alongside Iraq and Lebanon.

The ties of alliance that were once linking Syria and Iran turned into a relation of political subordination and dependency, where Tehran Mullah exercised authority over all Syrian sectors: military, security, economy, politics, and culture, and infiltrated Syria's institutions, mainly through high-ranking officers, politicians and businessmen. The orders of General Kassem Suleimani (former command of Al-Quds faction affiliated with the Iranian revolution guard corps), prior to his assassination, were taken seriously by the Syrian regime leaders and some

(1) Jamil al-Assad, the brother of Hafez al-Assad, founded the Shiite-oriented Murtada Association in 1981 with the support of the Khomeini regime with the aim of strengthening the association of Alawites and Shiites. In retaliation for Jamil al-Assad supporting Rifaat al-Assad in his struggle for power against his brother Hafez, Hafez Assad ordered the association to be dissolved in 1983, see: Hajj, Abd al-Rahman, *The Shiite Baath in Syria*, Jusoor for Translation and Publishing, 1, Beirut, 2017, p. 65.

of these leaders would consider him Syria's real governor.

The wide Iranian influence on Syria did not just assume the shape of military-like subordination, but Iran also infiltrated several aspects of the Syrian power to try to dominate them based on planning and on maintaining the influence; something to be taken into account, especially that such influence is likely to remain even after the potential collapse of Al-Assad regime and the establishment of a new government.

The battle of Al-Qassir, in west of Homs early 2013 was the main turnpoint in Iran's military strategy in Syria. In fact, Iran went from supporting Al-Assad regime forces with logistics and intelligence agents, to its revolution guard officers directly leading the battles and military operations through militias like the Lebanese Hizbollah and other Shi'ite militias like Zaynabioun and Fatimioun. At this point, the Iranian command was not concerned anymore with hiding its participation in the Syrian conflict, so all its policies and strategic planning came to light.

The Iranian role in Syria was not limited to the military aspect, which was the most prominent in the past ten years, but Iran's activity included tightening control over the main functions of the Syrian state and over society and further infiltrating and influencing all social economic and cultural levels, thus having the most impactful role of the international interventions in Syria and the one that caused the disruption of Syrian society, by creating tension, by supporting sectarian entities at the expense of others, and by changing the social balance.

Due to the major involvement of Iran in Syria's politics and military affairs, and to the amount of its financial and military investment in Syria, it is hard to believe that Tehran will withdraw from Syria and give up on its influence there, and that it will dismantle its structures on Syrian soil, without it incurring losses and being forced to make huge concessions. This withdrawal will not happen unless there is a definite change in the balance of power inside Syria as well as in its regional neighborhood; especially that the Iranian leadership is not subject to internal accountability, and the same applies to the military leadership, and therefore its losses so far are limited to its regional surroundings⁽²⁾.

Due to the danger of Iran tampering with the Syrian social fabric, we try in this study, first of all, to review the reasons for Iran's interest in Syria, and then to identify the most prominent aspects of this intervention, its tools as well as its effects.

(2) Zweiri, Mahjoub, Iran - Approaches to Foreign and Domestic Policy, Arab House of Science Publishers, 1, Beirut, 2021, p. 186.



The importance of this study:

This study highlights the danger of demographic changing, and of the hegemony Iran exercised on the political, economic, cultural and educational aspects of the Syrian society, with the support and complicity of the Syrian regime. It also outlines Iran's ambitions to impose its influence on Syria, and the effects of these policies on the future of Syria and on the composition of its social fabric.

Purpose of the study:

The aim of the study is to show the reasons, aspects and tools of Iranian interference in Syria, to highlight the results of this intervention especially those related to changing the composition of Syria's society in those 10 years of war, in order draw the right conclusions, and to provide recommendations on the subject of the study.

Study Approach:

To achieve the goal of the study, the researcher used several research tools

Office work:

- Review and follow up on previous studies, research and reports that dealt with the issue of the Iranian interference in Syria.
- Monitoring and analyzing the changes that occurred in the structure of the Syrian society and in the main functions of the Syrian institutions, on various levels.
- Making comparisons regarding the demographic situation of the areas covered by the study before and after the displacement that took place.

field work:

- Collecting local data and information about Iran's area of control and the demographic changes that occurred as a result of the displacement operations that pro-Iranian militias contributed to.
- Collecting the tools used by Iran to exercise influence onto Syria's institutions and public sectors of and the consequences of such influence..
- Conducting In-depth interviews with activists and residents of the areas of displacement and demographic change, and other areas over which Iranian forces and their militias impose their control.



The Obstacles

- The data collectors' difficulty of accessing the regime-controlled areas and moving around them, especially the areas that prohibit the return of displaced civilians, for fear of being targeted by the security forces and pro-Iran militias.
- The inability to access official information and governmental documents that could be used as main references.
- The unavailability of official military or security or demographical information put at the disposal of the data collectors.

The drawbacks.

- The inability to verify conflicting information about the naturalization of Iranian loyalists in Syria, and their confinement in closed security and military areas, and about the number of converts in Syria.
- The researcher's dependence on cooperative local data collectors who are not trained in the research field..
- Due to the security risks to the collaborating data and information team, the names of a number of local collaborators have been omitted, while the names of the collaborators who have given their consent have been made public.

It should be noted that the tables of this study, its comparisons, statistics and appendices have been prepared based on information collected by the research team and the local cooperating data collection team, and are considered private sources for the research. As for the numbers and figures contained in these statistics and appendices, they are estimated based on first-hand observations, and open sources, not actual statistics; because the Syrian regime does not allow field studies to be conducted, and because the Central Bureau of Statistics did not publish information or statistics on the subject of the study, during Syria's 10-year-revolution..



Chapter One:



Causes and Features of Iranian Intervention in Syria

First: The reasons for the Iranian intervention in Syria:

There are intertwined causes behind Iran's interest in the Arab region as a whole and Syria in particular, and political, economic and ideological factors are at play. Also, the turbulent political conditions in Iran's Arab environment since Khomeini's victory in the revolution, provided incentives for the Iranian incursion into the Arab region and allowed Iranian interventions in states wracked by conflicts, not to mention that these states were not individually or collectively interested in working on a political project or a collective security system that would protect them from external intrusions.

Despite Iran's early desire to enter Syria, its attempts to deepen its influence clearly emerged with the arrival of Bashar al-Assad to power in Syria in 2000. Actually, the alliance between Iran and the regime occurred after the American occupation of Iraq in 2003. From then on, the Iranian infiltration into the Syrian society was very clear to the point that it raised the concern of various social circles within that society. It is after the outbreak of Syria's revolution and the tell-tale signs of Al-Assad regime's collapse that Tehran intensified its attempts to consolidate its influence in Syria. Therefore, Iran decided to support Al-Assad regime and prevent its fall in the face of the revolutionary movement at all costs.

Among the most prominent reasons for Iran's early involvement in the Syrian conflict are the following:

1. Syria's important position and role in what has been called (the axis of resistance), which constitutes an advanced front for Iran in confronting (Israel), since Tehran is working to reach its most important strategic goal, which is to protect the land bridge between Iran and Lebanon, a land bridge formed by Iraq and Syria, that facilitates the flow of weapons to the Lebanese militia Hezbollah to confront Israel; as well as to prevent the establishment of a Sunni regime in Syria, which could oppose the Iranian project and its strategic goal, and which contributes to weakening the power and influence of (Hezbollah).
2. Maintaining the continuity of Iran's geopolitical project in the region, which consists of expanding the Iranian sphere of influence to all the Mediterranean area, for political



and economic reasons, mainly, securing an outlet for Iran to global markets, allowing it to enhance its share in the global energy market.

At this level, Syria becomes the most important region for Iran, because it possesses the crossing and the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, and because it is a crosspath between Iraq in the east and the (Hezbollah) militia in Lebanon in the west.

3. Iran's fears of the collapse of Al- Assad regime, and the serious danger this collapse poses to its strategic objectives and interests, prompted it to take risks and rush towards strengthening its military and economic influence by holding onto the structures of the Syrian state and its institutions in order to ensure its vital interests in any future political settlement in Syria.
4. Ideological motive: Iran's expansionist strategy and its foreign policy in general are based on many ideological pillars, probably on national, religious and doctrinal foundations. The growing Persian nationalist feeling among Iranian leaders did not recede much despite the dominance of the religious principle of "Wilayat Al-Fakih". This shows the pragmatism of the Iranian decision-maker in his alliances with parties his own religious mullahs see as "Satan". Examples of this are secret deals with (Israel) in the eighties, and the objective alliance with the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, the religious sectarian motive remains the most prominent determinant on which Iranian foreign politics are based, notably through supporting the followers of the Shi'ite sect in the region, and calling for victory for the oppressed Shiites and the family of the Prophet, pbuh, by inflaming the feelings of Shiites around the world and ensuring their gathering around one cause they seek to achieve. Also, supporters of this doctrine consider Syria to be the country whose people supported the opponents of Ahl al-Bayt, especially the capital, Damascus, which was the stronghold and capital of the Umayyads. This view was outlined by Hizbollah's 2011 motto: "Zeinab will not be captured twice", a quote promoted by the party to incite his followers to fight in Syria on the side of the Assad regime against the revolutionaries.

With the advent of 2013, the party's discourse became more daring in that it declared its participation in the fight against the Syrian rebels. This took place on April 30, 2013 when Hassan Nasrallah admitted in a speech that his party's elements were fighting alongside the regime forces in Syria, stressing that his fighters are participating in battles against the revolutionaries in the city of al-Qusayr bordering Lebanon to protect the Shiites in the border villages, and to defend the shrine of Sayyida Zainab near Damascus, knowing that there was no threat from the Syrian revolutionaries neither to the followers of the Shiite sect nor to their

worship places anywhere in Syria⁽³⁾.

Second: Features of the Iranian interference in the war in Syria:

The general picture of Iranian expansion in Syria is characterized by various aspects, mainly religious, political, military, security, economic, and cultural activities. Tehran's diverse activity in its quest to consolidate its influence in Syria indicates the existence of a sustainable plan that bypasses the Assad regime's survival in power, and that establishes Iran as a major influential element that determines the future of Syria.

The most prominent features of this intervention are the following:

First: In addition to direct military and financial support, the levels of extension of influence gradually increased. From the silent infiltration into cultural and charitable institutions, to other qualitative forms of intervenence whose effects continue beyond the direct military intervention.

Second: Using the ideological factor in military intervention, by relying on sectarian strife and ideological fighting. The reasons for the intervention were initially linked to the threat to the Shiites' presence, and then the ideological aspect was used to incite the followers to get involved in the conflict, especially that all the Iranian-backed militias in Syria carry names that have a moral impact on the Shiite community (Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas - Fatemiyoun - Zainabiyoun - ...etc).

Third: Focusing on certain places in Syria without others and working to extend influence in them with various tools, including changing their demographics and consolidating the Shiite presence in them. Some of these areas are Al-Sayyida Zainab and Qalamoun, and Homs and its western countryside namely Al-Qusayr, and Aleppo, as well as the towns of Nubl and Al-Zahraa and the southern countryside of Aleppo, and in Deir ez-Zor and its eastern countryside, especially in the city of Al-boukamal on the Syrian-Iraqi border, in addition to other strategic locations where the Iranian forces and their backed militias have established military bases, such as the glass building at Damascus International Airport and the Dimas airport in western Damascus, and other bases in Kiswa, Zabadani and Madaya in Damascus countryside.

(3) 3Nasrallah confirms the participation of his party fighters in battles in Syria - Al-Wasat Bahrain - April 30, 2013 - <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/768555.html>



In western Qalamoun, Iran is working to build a base in the town of Tufail. In the Syrian town of Zabadani, which is Syria's gateway to Lebanon, the Iranian forces dug several tunnels linking the Syrian side to the Lebanese one, specifically in Wadi Al-Khanzira in Sergaya and Wadi Al-Aswad. Huge stores of missile weapons were also built in the camps of Nabaa Barda, Marj al-Tal, Habil, Montorosa, and Villa Al-Sheikh Zayed.

In Homs, scattered bases and missile factories belonging to Revolutionary Guards are stationed in the industrial city of Hasya, and in the foothills of this city's eastern mountains. Also there is an air defense base at T4 airport east of Homs, and in the headquarters of Al-Rida militias in the Abbasiya neighborhood and the Bayada neighborhood, and the Syrian Hezbollah militias in the villages of Mukhtaria, Oyoun Hussein, Thabetiya, Al-Mushrifa and Umm al-Amad, in north and east of Homs.

In Aleppo, forces from the Revolutionary Guard Corps and other Shiite militias are stationed at the Azzan base in the southern countryside, and the military headquarters of the Al-Baqir militia are distributed in the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo.

Also, forces from the Revolutionary Guard Corps and from other Shiite militias are based in the Lajat area in Daraa, in addition to the largest base of the Revolutionary Guards and Iranian militias in Syria, which is the (Imam Ali) base east of Al-boukamal.

Fourth: the economic aspect, where Iran took advantage of the collapse of Syria's economy, (due to the Assad regime harnessing the country's resources to finance its war on the Syrians), to push the Assad regime to conclude economic agreements which served its own interests and influence, and which enabled Tehran to harness the Syrian natural resources to support the militias' work and Shi'ite activity.

In 2018, Tehran supported the Syrian-Iranian Business Forum in order to implement several Iranian projects in Syria that revolve around the energy sector. Most Iranian financial aids to Al-Assad regime take the form of credits and payment facilities, and some foreign media sources report on behalf of the former international envoy to Syria Stephane de Mistoura, that the Iranian debt owed to the Assad regime amounted to about \$35 billion.

A report by the American Al-Hurra channel, on the Foreign Policy magazine website, quotes Iranian officials stating that Tehran has spent more than 30 billion dollars in Syria. Iranwire website explains that Iran's expenditures focused on petroleum products. The payment takes the form of a limited credit account opened by Iran to the Assad government, and whose total ranges, according to Iranian media, from 2 to 3 billion dollars per year, with a total credit limit

of up to 6 billion dollars per year, including food and medical supplies, set by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Jawad Zarif at about 2.5 billion dollars a year.

Jessy Shaheen, the spokeswoman for the former United Nations special envoy to Syria, Stephane de Mistoura, revealed that the United Nations estimates that the average Iranian spending in Syria amounts to 6 billion dollars annually, and about 48 billion dollars over 8 years⁽⁴⁾.

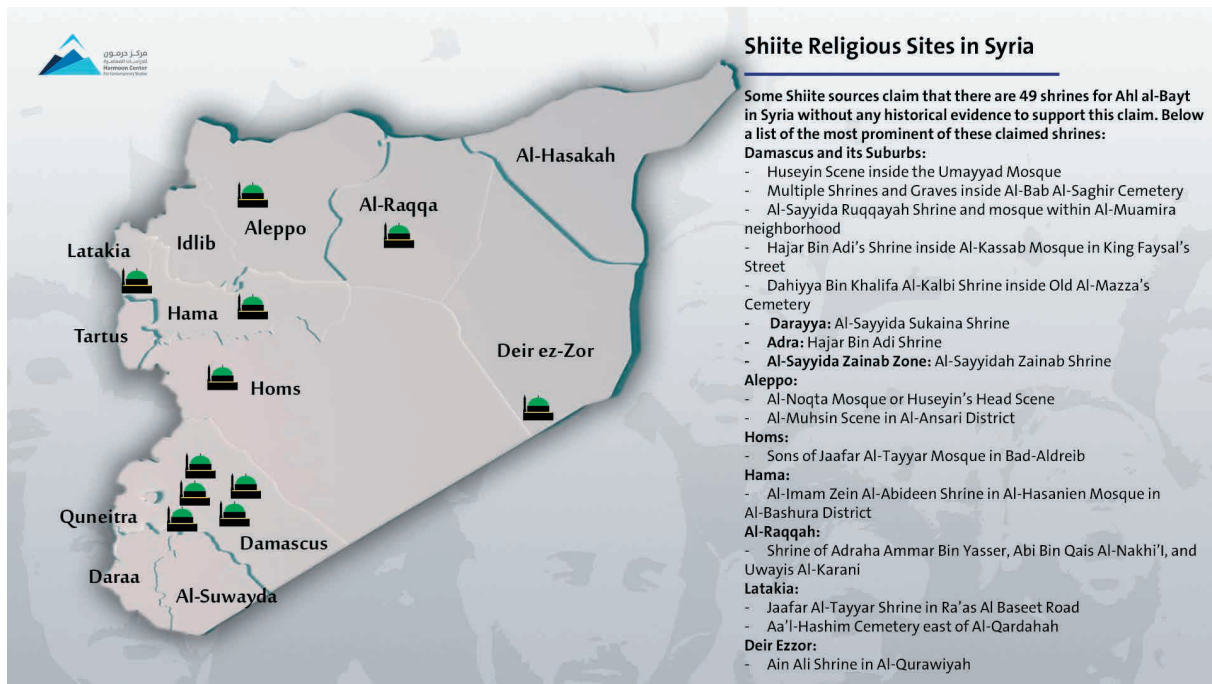
Fifth: the cultural and religious aspects, where Iran's pursuit of power in sectors directly related to culture, society and education, emerged through the establishment of universities, cultural institutions, advocacy groups and missionary centers that facilitated the spread of the Shiite sect in several areas, including Damascus and its countryside, Homs, Aleppo and the eastern regions located on the Iraqi border.

In the religious field, the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council in Syria was established in 2012, headed by the Shiite cleric Sayyed Muhammad Ali Al-Miski. It is an institution similar to the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council in Lebanon. The Council has several goals, most notably representing the Shiite community in Syria, speaking on its behalf, and spreading the principles of Iranian revolution in Syria, as well as establishing religious, educational and charitable institutions in order to get closer to local communities. Muhammad Ali al-Miski visited Iran in 2018, and met with high-ranking political and religious officials, emphasizing the council's link with Iran and its role in Syria.

Also, the Shiite "scholars body" headed by Abdullah Nizam is active on a large scale in all Syrian governorates, especially in Damascus and its countryside.

In addition to these two institutions, many Shiite religious advocacy centers and complexes are active in organizing the affairs of Syrian Shiites and bringing them together, as well as launching campaigns to recruit people into local Shia communities, especially those belonging to clans. Activities include looting sites that Shiites claim to belong to the Ahl al-Bayt; in fact, Shiites maintain that historians have evidence for the existence of 49 shrines for Ahl al-Bayt, the World Assembly of Ahl al-Bayt, the Center for the Sons of Imam Ali, among others. most of which are located in Damascus and Aleppo.

(4) Al-Hurra website - Iran spent \$48 billion in the Syrian war... What gains did it get? 23 /2/ 2020 <https://2u.pw/mUE77>



The Iranian cultural centers are among the most prominent Iranian missionary centers in Syria, with its three branches, two in Damascus and Latakia, and the third and most recent center in the Al-Qusour neighborhood in Deir Ezzor, which was opened in 2018 under the direct supervision of the Revolutionary Guard Corps. The center organizes Shiite cultural and religious events, in addition to its activity in attracting Syrian youths into Iranian-backed militias.

In 2014, Iran established Al-Sirat Cultural Complex in Al-Sayyida Zainab area in the countryside of Damascus and inaugurated, in the same area, the Wilaya Scouts Center, also known as Al-Mahdi Scouts, affiliated with the Imam Al-Mahdi Association. The scout center was established by the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps "Hassan Shatiri" in 2012⁽⁵⁾, and it has centers in several Syrian governorates, such as Damascus, Lattakia, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous and Deir Ezzor. The center focuses on children and young men, with the aim of instilling in them loyalty to the regime of Wilayat al-Faqih in Iran.

(5) Hassan Shateri is a nickname for the head of the Iranian Authority for the Reconstruction of Lebanon, Hossam Khosh Noyes in Syria. He was killed by Syrian opposition rebels near Zabadani in February 2013 on his way from Damascus to Beirut. Iran accused what it called (agents of the Zionist entity) of assassinating him. See: A leader in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard was killed while traveling from Damascus to Beirut, France 24, 142013/2/ <https://2u.pw/NJM0S>



Moreover, the Euphrates for world peace organization, located in Al-MazzeH district in Damascus, acts as a mediator that funds all local community activities that safeguard Iran's interests in Syria⁽⁶⁾. Add to them, many other charitable advocacy associations and institutions, which expanded greatly during the Syrian revolution.

(6) ⁶The Institutions of Iranian Influence in Syria and the Methods of Shiism, Study, Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2018, <https://2u.pw/dSzvF>



Ashura commemoration at the headquarters of the Al-Baqir Brigade militia in Al-Baloura neighborhood, Aleppo - September 2020

Iran's most dangerous role in this regard emerged in the establishment of the Syrian branch of the organization (Jihad al-Binaa) with the beginning of the Syrian revolution. However, it has not operated officially until 2013, according to what was announced by journalist Ayman Jawad Al-Tamimi in an interview with the media office of the Jihad Al-Binaa Foundation in Damascus⁽⁷⁾.

The parent organization (Jihad al-Binaa) was established by Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1988 with Iranian funding. It provides financial aids and medical services to members of Iranian-backed militias and their families in the various Syrian regions in which they reside. It also renovated schools, and cultural, religious and medical centers as well as some infrastructure facilities in the governorates of Damascus, Homs, Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo.

(7) Reconstruction in Syria: An interview with Jihad al-Binaa, Ayman Jawad al-Tamimi's website, 42019/1/, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/22202/>



Ahmadabadi Al-Husseini, Director of the Iranian Jihad Al-Binaa Organization, accompanied by Abdul Ghani Qassab, member of the Executive Office of the Aleppo Provincial Council, during a ceremony honoring the wounded and injured from the militia forces (Local Defense) on 122017/12/ – SANA

This organization plays a dangerous role in Homs and Aleppo in consolidating Iran's influence and Teshyi3 activity (Recruiting Shia) and preventing the return of Eastern Aleppo and Homs residents, by linking its charitable activities to those of al-Baqir Brigade militia in Aleppo, and to the Shiite Al-Rida militia founded in 2015 by Brigadier General in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Hussein Hamazani. Al-Rida elements were trained by the Lebanese Hezbollah, and led by a number of Shiite fighters from the Al-Bayada neighborhood and from the village of Umm Al-Amad in Homs governorate. This organization worked on reconstructing houses owned by the Shia, and renovated the houses of the Sunnite people who were displaced from Al-Bayada and Al-Abbasiya, in order to accomodate Shiite families from the displaced of the towns of Kefraya and Foua, before the Russian police exposed their activities in the Al-Abbasiya, Al-Bayada and Deir Baalba neighborhoods and confronted them with weapons in September 2020, thereby preventing them from completing their plan.



A picture of an introductory billboard for the project to build an electric power transformer station, near the Shiite towns of Nubl and Al-Zahraa in the northern countryside of Aleppo, at a cost of more than two million US dollars, implemented by the Iranian Jihad Al-Binaa Foundation - Internet

The organization also launched Hay-Al-Koussour free hospital in Deir-Al-Zour in 2019, and a huge medical center in Al-Boukamal, in order to win the support of the locals who were suffering from the suspension of various governmental services.



Sixth: Media activity: Iran has not left the media out of its plan. It opened an office for Al-Alam TV in Syria, and obtained from Al-Assad regime exclusive privileges for Al-Manar, Al-Mayadeen and Al-Alam channels to cover events, excluding other channels, including the Syrian channels, which were not allowed to cover many events. Also, Iran has recently opened an office for Iranian logistics in Syria with the aim of broadcasting Iranian religious content to the Syrians. Moreover, the Iranian Content Production and Publishing in Cyberspace concluded an agreement with the Ministry of Information in Al-Assad government to develop the official SANA agency; the contract granted the Iranian side the right to access the Agency's various sources, data, connections, and internal departments.



Chapter Two:



Tools used by Iran for Syria's demographic change

To ensure the expansion of its influence in Syria, Iran harnessed all its available sources from military, economic, financial and media capabilities, all of which enabled it during the revolution years to carry out various operations to achieve its goal of acceding to the Syrian institutions, and of changing the sectarian structure of society, in a way that safeguards its interests.

The effective tools that Iran used to tamper with the demographic structure in Syria can be divided into the following categories:

First: Military Tools:

1. The beginning of support and the formation of militias under the nose of the international community

The Iranian military support to the Assad regime relied on dispatching groups of advisors and expert leaders, mostly from the Basij and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, to face the popular protests, before these leaders began in early 2012 to train groups of Shiite civilians to support the security forces in fighting the protesters⁽⁸⁾.

Then the Iranians got to the point of sending massive groups of special mission fighters and snipers. This stage was followed by the Lebanese Hezbollah's intervention to enter the fight alongside Al-Assad's forces, in April of 2013. This date marked the start of influx of Iranian-backed Afghan, Iraqi and Pakistani militias, to fight on the side of the opposition factions, under the direct supervision of Qassem Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

To elaborate on Iran's gradual military involvement in Syria, we explore its beginnings. The revolution's coordinators and media activists have recorded an effective presence of Iranian snipers since the first demonstrations that started in March 2011. These snipers have contributed to targeting field leaders and prominent organizers of the revolutionary movement.

(8) Facts: Iranian influence and presence in Syria, a report by the American (Atlantic Council) Center for International Studies, 112020/5/ <https://2u.pw/MSGGs>



The early presence of the Iran-backed militias in Syria was associated with Hosm revolution where our field witnesses confirmed that a group of Shiite youth from the armed Shabiha from Al-Abbasiya and Al-Bayyada begun since the “Jomaat Al-Ezzat”⁽⁹⁾ revolution on the 25th of March 2011, to attack the protesters in Al-Saa-Al-Jadida and in side-streets of Al-Bayada and Deir-Baalba. This group carried on its attack on the protesters on Friday, April 1st, 2011 (Jomaat Al-Shouhada’), while cheering for Al- Assad, Khamenei and Hassan Nasrallah. On the other hand, and for the first time in the Syrian revolution, the protesters were heard chanting:” To hell with Khomeini and Nasrallah, thereby outlining the Sunni/Shiite sectarian clash.

The organizers of demonstrations worked to contain the situation before it escalates into a dangerous clash after the massacre of demonstrators camped in Al-Saa Al-Jadida Square in Homs on April 19, 2011, at the hand of the regime forces.

Then these groups began to take more organized forms and become supportive forces, accompanying the security forces during house raids and arrests of activists and demonstrators, and confronting the demonstrations with individual/private weapons and batons. One of their leaders, Jumaa Abda, emerged in early April 2011. He is a soldier who formed an armed group of Shiites in the Al-Bayada neighborhood. The group would support the military security patrols breaking into the slums of Homs.

So, the Iranian snipers began to emerge, according to the documented testimonies of activists, as Iranian elements who spoke Farsi were observed within the force that invaded the neighborhoods of of Homs in late 2011. However, these testimonies did not confirm the presence of Iranian elements within the security forces. In 2013, the Lebanese (Hezbollah) militia forces directly intervened in the Syrian conflict through attacking and occupying Al-Qusayr in the Homs countryside. It’s the appearance of Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Quds Force in Syria, that constituted the missing link in proving Iranian high-level involvement in the Syrian conflict.

The number of Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Syria has reached about 50 military formations, with a military census of nearly 100,000 fighters, according to Iranian statements⁽¹⁰⁾.

These militias are divided, according to the research team, into four main groups:

(9) The popular movement in Syria used to go out to demonstrate every Friday, and every Friday was given a specific name.

(10) The Revolutionary Guards admit: We have recruited 200,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria – Al Arabiya Net – March 17, 2019 <https://2u.pw/7SuFU>

1st Group: Iraqi militias, mainly (Abou Fadl Al-Abbas, Zoulfiqar brigade, Al-Lotf brigade, Al-Maasoum brigade, Al-Imam Ali brigade, Al-Najbaa movement, Sayed Al-Shouhada', Al-Abdal, Iraqi Hezbollah, Kafil Zeinab, Al-Imam Al-Hussein brigade, Al-Hassan Al-Moujtaba, Amman Ben Yasser, HAidar Haider al-Karar – Al-Yawm-Al-Mawoud–Al-Waad Al-Sadek - Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr - al-Khurasani Corps - Brigade of Bakiyat Allah.).

The second group: the Lebanese militias, namely (Hezbollah - Sayyida Ruqayya - Force 313 - Saraya al-Tawhid).

The third group: the Syrian militias, the most prominent of which are (Al-Baqir Brigade - Syrian Hezbollah - Al-Ghaliboun - Islamic Resistance Brigades - Al-Zahra Brigade - Shaheed Al-Mihrab Brigade - Al-Abbas - Al-Foua Brigades - Imam Al-Rida - Imam Al-Hajjah - Imam Zain Al-Abidin - Al-Jazira and Euphrates Mobilization - Al-Mukhtar Brigade -Al-Thaqafi - Labbek Ya Suleiman – Al-tawhid- Liwa al-Jabal - Quwat al-Fahd - Lebwat al-Jabal - Hama al-Diyar - Suqur al-Sahraa – Maghawir Al-Bahr– Qalamoun shield forces - Military Security shield forces).

The fourth group: militias of other nationalities, most notably (the Zainabiyoun Brigade, which consists mostly of Pakistani Shiite fighters - the Fatemiyoun Corps, composed mostly of Afghan Shiite fighters.

It is worth mentioning that the US was following the Iranian military activity supporting the militias in Syria since the revolution outbreak. In August 2012, the American leaders warned against the Iranian support to Syrian para-military organization, when the American ministry of Defense Leon Panetta confirmed that there were “signs that prove that Iran was trying to train a militia inside Syria so that such militia would be able to fight on behalf of the regime”.

Also, The US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey declared that Iran calls militia “the popular army”, and he compared it with the Shiite Mehdi army in Iraq, and he added that it was made up of Syrian elements, majorly Shia, with some Alawites⁽¹¹⁾.

It is also worth noting that Tehran escaped political and legal accountability for its military intervention in Syria, especially for recruiting mercenaries, and for founding, supporting and commanding sectarian militias and brainwashing them with ideologies in order to confront the Syrian protesters.

Despite solid evidence for its involvement in these illicit acts, dozens of human rights reports were ignored, notably the Human Rights Watch report which stated that “the Iranian

(11) Leon Panetta warns that Iran is forming a militia in Syria, The Guardian, 14 August 2012 <https://2u.pw/MACNO>



Revolution Guard Corps recruited thousands of Afghans to fight in Syria under the pretext of defending sacred Shiite sites, some of whom were minors. It offered them financial incentives, and granted them legal residency in Iran to encourage them to join the militias supporting the Syrian regime⁽¹²⁾.

2. The transformations of Iranian military hegemony in Syria:

With the increase in Iranian military involvement in Syria starting in 2013, fundamental shifts have been noted in the Iranian military strategy in Syria. These shifts were caused by several factors, mainly Tehran's insistence on maintaining its influence in Syria at all costs, including the possibility of a direct confrontation with Israel. Also, the Russian military intervention in September 2015, resulted in Iran's increased determination to strengthen its military influence, for fear of receding. The new strategy results appear in two variables:

A. Direct Intervention and Permanent Positioning:

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps abandoned its basic approach of foreign intervention by proxy, mainly through militias supervised by the Quds Force, and of concealing its participation in the Syrian fight; and moved to a new stage in which the Iranian army deployed units of the Revolutionary Guard Corps to create conditions conducive to the permanent military presence of the Quds Force and its militias in Syria⁽¹³⁾.

For this purpose, the Iranian forces seized several military bases belonging to the Syrian army at T4 airport, east of Homs, and Shaayrat airport. They also captured a factory in the Hasya industrial area in Homs, and an air defense base in al-Kiswa in Damascus countryside, among others. Moreover, they shared dozens of military headquarters in Tal Al-Hara and the Lajat area in Daraa with the Syrian army. The Iranian plan included the establishment of basic infrastructure of command centers, operations rooms, regional control partitions, reconnaissance and information-gathering units, a drone regiment with a runway, stores of heavy weapons and other logistical facilities. It also included the construction of factories for missile development and maintenance to turn regular missiles into high-accuracy and long-range

(12) Iran Sends Thousands of Afghan Fighters to Syria, Human Rights Watch Report, January 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2016285569/29/01/>

(13) The Evolving Iranian Strategy in Syria: A Looming Conflict with Israel, Atlantic Council Study, 2018, Washington, <https://2u.pw/DpTsx>



missiles⁽¹⁴⁾, as part of a Quds Force campaign called (The Accuracy Project/Mashrou' Al-Dekka).

B. Iranian infiltration into the Syrian military institution:

By the sixth year of the Syrian revolution, and after the battles expanded between the revolution factions, most Syrian army divisions suffered from a shortage in human and financial resources and in equipment, and incurred major losses on all levels to the point they became unable to compensate for the shortage in manpower. This was accompanied by the Syrian Youth's refractoriness from conscripting into the army, and by the escalation of popular anger in Iran at the Iranian regime for allocating part of its resources to the Iranian army fighting in Syria, thus depriving the people of it.

This occurred at a time where the Russian presence started to grow in Syria, especially inside the Syrian military institution. All these factors prompted Iran to further expand its influence in the Syrian Army and thus started to implement more acceptable formulas for its militias to avoid international accountability for the crimes these militias committed.

As a result, it prompted the Al-Assad regime to integrate the bulk of its militia elements into the official structure of the Syrian army, especially within the ranks of the Fourth Division led by Maher al-Assad. So, elements of the Syrian Hezbollah militia were merged with the Fourth Division of the Syrian Army and the Republican Guard, whereas fighters from militias such as the Fatemiyoun Brigade were witnessed within the Tiger Forces under the command of the Syrian Brigadier General Suhail al-Hassan, even wearing the Tiger Forces' uniforms and badges⁽¹⁵⁾.

With the increase in the operation of militias integration, the largest of which is Al- Imam Al-Hussein Brigade, and the registration of the Syrian Shiite civilian fighters of the Lebanese (Hezbollah) militia as official soldiers in the Syrian army, and with all these militias and these elements remaining under the command of the Iranian militias, the Syrian Army, once dominated by Alawite officers, became largely formed by Shiite fighters and officers who owe loyalty to Iran, and the regular military units have become infiltrated by Iran, and have turned into a mere cover for Iran's sectarian militias.

(14) The future of the Iranian presence in Syria, a study issued by the Emirates Policy Center, 2021, Abu Dhabi, <https://2u.pw/UuEQk>

(15) Agreeing to the presence of regime forces in southern Syria will only promote Iran's goals, Political Analysis, The Washington Institute, 2018, <https://2u.pw/Wf2zS>



3. Methods of demographic change by military forced eviction:

A. The method of bombing, massacres and displacement of the population:

The military forces and Iran-backed militias have practiced large-scale military violence against the civilians with the aim of killing and displacing them; either to exert pressure on the opposition factions to evacuate their positions in their areas of control, or with the to cause a change in the social fabric, or even both.

This military policy mainly consisted of using incursions into civilians areas were heavily and indiscriminately bombarded by either the regime or the Russian aircraft.

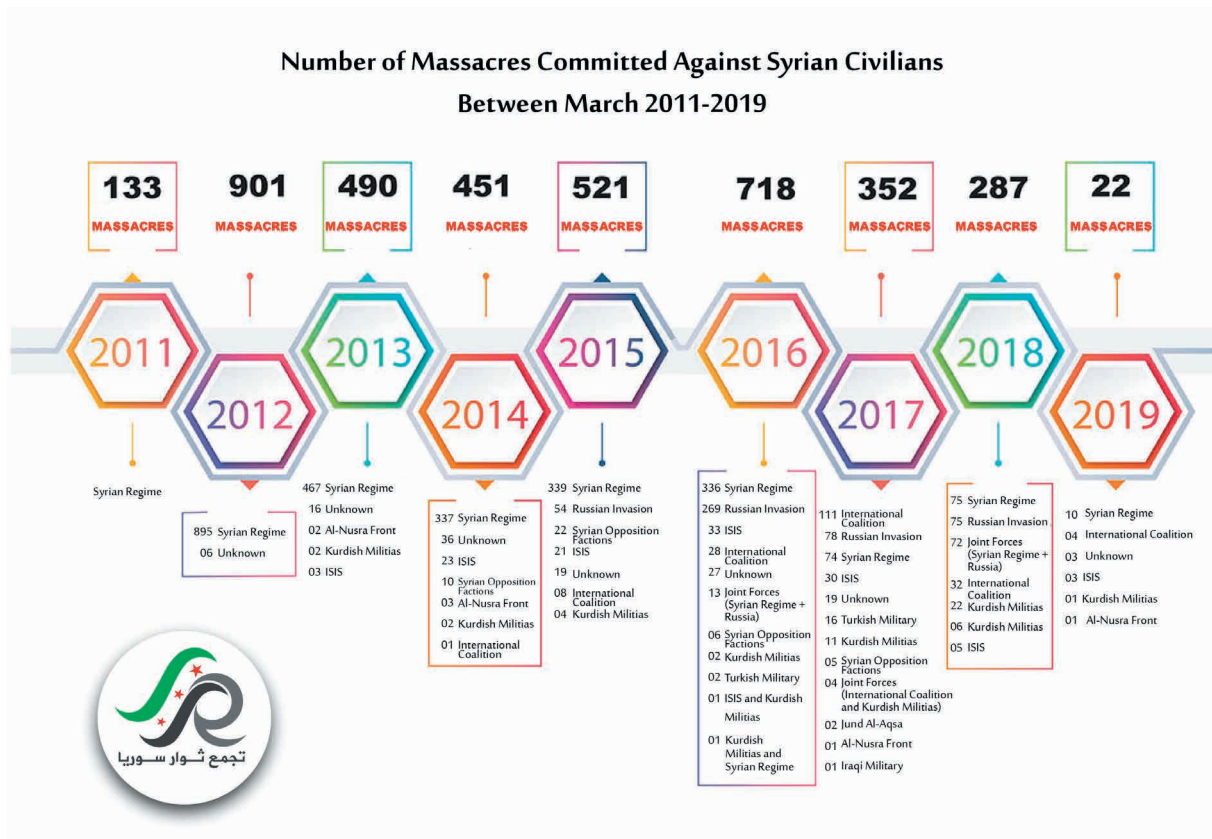
The indiscriminate military attacks on the defenseless civilian population have caused many massacres, which, in international law, constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, including those committed by militias of irregular fighters, most notably the Lebanese Hezbollah militia forces, and local Alawite and Shiite Iran-backed militias. These attacks were carried out unilaterally or by supporting the Syrian regime forces in military operations and security incursions. Among the bloodiest of these massacres were the Al-Qusayr massacres in 2013, the massacre of Rasm al-Nafl village in Aleppo countryside in June 2013, the Mazraa massacre in Aleppo countryside in June/ June 2013, the al-Nabak massacre in Damascus countryside in December 2013, the massacres of Daraya in Damascus countryside between 2012 and 2016, the massacre of Deir Baalba neighborhood in Homs in April 2012, the al-Thiabiya massacre in Damascus countryside 2013, the massacres of al-Malikiyah and Umm Amud villages in Rural Aleppo 2013, and many other massacres of a sectarian nature that caused the total or partial eviction of these areas residents and brought about change to their population fabric⁽¹⁶⁾.

The documentation team of the Syrian Revolutionaries Gathering has counted at least 3,875 massacres against Syrian citizens⁽¹⁷⁾, from the start of the Syrian revolution in March 2011 until March 2019, including hundreds of massacres committed by Iranian-backed sectarian militias⁽¹⁸⁾.

(16) Shiite Militias in Syria, Report, Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2014 <https://sn4hr.org/arabic/20141578/05/07//>

(17) The description of a massacre is given to the killings committed by groups that use crushing force against defenseless victims, and human rights documentation institutions consider that the extrajudicial killing of 3 or more civilians using excessive indiscriminate force is what is described as a massacre. <http://en.esc.wiki/wiki/Massacre>

(18) Documenting at least 3,875 massacres against the Syrian people since March 2011, Hurrya Press website, March 17, 2019. <https://horrya.net/archives/96474>



B. Forced eviction agreements.

A- Forced eviction agreements: Since its intervention in the Syrian conflict, Iran has sought to implement military policies to further infiltrate into the structure of the Syrian social fabric and change its composition. One of these policies was the displacement of the civilian population in the conflict areas. Therefore, forced evictions have been enshrined in agreements that the armed opposition factions were forced to conclude under pressure of siege, starvation of civilians and military attacks from Al-Assad regime and its Iranian allies. The city of Al-Qusayr witnessed the most prominent of these agreements caused by Iranian-backed forces, as the leaders of the opposition factions were forced to conclude an agreement with the Lebanese Hezbollah militia in 2013, mediated by Major General Abbas Ibrahim, Director of Lebanese Public Security. According to the agreement, the opposition fighters and Al-Qusayr residents were transferred to several areas in Qalamoun, hence the evacuation of the city from its original inhabitants.

The pace of these agreements increased to include the displacement of residents of the old neighborhoods of Homs. A total of 17 neighborhoods were subject to a two-year siege by Al-Assad regime and the Lebanese Hezbollah, before all of the residents fled in May 2014 to

northern Syria, and particularly to areas in Idlib and Aleppo that were under the control of the Syrian opposition. Up till now, they are not allowed to return to their cities.

The displacement agreements under which the population was forcibly displaced between 2016 and 2017 led to the forcible transfer of thousands of residents from the areas of Homs, Daraya, Aleppo, Madaya and Zabadani, towards Northern Syria, without being allowed back in their cities after the end of the fight. Also, cases of replacement of dozens of families of Shiite fighters loyal to Iran were recorded in the vicinity of Zabadani and Madaya.

Not to forget the displacement of the residents of Al-Ghouta in the countryside of Damascus and those of the northern countryside of Homs back in 2018. The residents were transferred to Northern Syria by government means of transport and under international.

Crowds of the displaced from the city of Rastan waiting for the convoy to depart towards the north of Syria - Lens of Ali Ezzedine - May 13, 2018





Thousands of civilians have been displaced by government internal transport agency buses, with UN follow-up, from Al-Waer neighborhood in Homs. Photo by Hassan Al-Asmar - 18 March 2017

These displacements caused a wide and profound change in the demographics of these areas, as the proportion of their Sunni population decreased dramatically.

The agreement to displace the residents of the Shiite towns of Kefraya and Foua in Idlib governorate in northern Syria, in exchange for the displacement of the residents of the Sunni towns of Madaya and Zabadani in Damascus countryside in 2018, under regional and international sponsorship and under Iranian pressure, caused a clear imbalance in the structure of society in these areas.

4. Phases of the Syrians' displacement with Iranian support:

- **The first phase:** It occurred in Homs and its countryside in 2012, as the National Defense Militia established by Iran in Homs contributed to the displacement of residents of the neighborhoods of Baba Amr, Bab Sebaa, Ashera, Karm al-Zaytoun, al-Rifai, al-Bayada, al-Sabil, Wadi al-Arab, Jobar, al-Sultaniyah, Kefraya, and the city of Talkalakh.
- **The second phase:** With the support of the Lebanese Hezbollah, most of the displacement cases were concentrated in Homs as well, as the people of the city of Al-Qusayr were displaced in 2013, and those of the old neighborhoods of Homs in 2014 (Jorat



Al-Shayhoum, Al-Qusour, Jouret Al-Shayah, Al-Qarabees, Al-Khalidiya, Al-Hamidiyah, Bab Tadmor, Bab Al-Dreeb, Al-Warsha, Karm Shamsham and Wadi Al-Sayeh), same applied to people from Damascus and its countryside. Also, residents of Al-Qadam, Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, Al Zabadani and Madaya were displaced in 2015 according to eviction agreements, and residents of Quzhal and Umm Al-Qasab in the countryside of Homs, and those of the city of Daraya were displaced in 2016. The residents of Eastern Aleppo were displaced in the last days of 2016.

- **The third phase:** It is characterized by the displacement of people from the de-escalation zones, also based on evacuation agreements which included the neighborhoods of Jobar, Qaboun and Barzeh in Damascus, and Yalda, Babila, Beit Sahem in Southern Damascus. The residents of Al-Waer neighborhood of Homs were displaced in 2017. Those of Eastern Ghouta, Qalamoun, Northern Homs and Daraa were displaced in 2018.
- **The fourth phase:** It witnessed the displacement of the people of the northern Hama countryside, in 2019. (Morek, Khan Sheikhoun and Kafr Zita). The displacement of people residing in Idlib, most notably the city of Saraqib, occurred in 2020.

It is worth noting that Article (7/D) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court states that “the deportation of a population or the forcible transfer of a population, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, constitutes a crime against humanity⁽¹⁹⁾.”

5. Land purchase and confiscation

Purchasing lands or confiscating them are measures followed by the Syrian regime for punitive or economic purposes. In 2012, the regime approved Legislative Decree No. 40 to demolish (unlicensed) residential neighborhoods, and Decree 66 to restore (unofficial) residential areas in Mezzeh, Qanawat, Basateen Al-Razi and Daraya. Under the two decrees, hundreds of properties were confiscated and their residents expelled in order to establish real estate projects whose contracts were awarded to companies controlled by businessmen close to the regime and to the Iranians. One of those projects is the Marota City project. The work started in 2016 by a massive bulldozing operation on an area of 214 hectares in the Basateen al-Razi area in the Mezzeh. The Basateen Al-Razi residents had fled the area after it was the target of military operations following continuous demonstrations against the regime. The Marotta City project is the largest real estate project in Syria. The project was awarded to Al-Sham Holding Company, dominated by Syrian businessman Samer Al-Foz, Iran’s economic forefront

(19) See the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Publications/Rome-Statute-Arabic.pdf>

in Syria.

The second project, Basilia, was launched in 2018 with an area of 880 hectares, four times the area of Marota, thus removing neighborhoods in Mezzeh, Kafr Sousa, Al-Qadam and Daraya⁽²⁰⁾.

Local brokers have also taken advantage of the displaced being forced to sell their properties because of their inability to either access them or prove their ownership, and have thus seized many lands for Iranian traders under cover-up from the government. At times, threats were used against the real estate owners.

Iran's activity has been concentrated in the seizure of land and real estate in specific areas of military or religious strategic importance, such as the border strip between Lebanon and Syria in the cities of Al-Qusayr, Qalamoun and Zabadani, in Damascus and its countryside; also in Sayyida Zeinab, Al-Hassa and Al-Shaghour, and in Deir Ezzor in the Al-Boukamal areas, as well as in Aleppo's Eastern neighborhoods, and in the city of Homs on the outskirts of Al-Waer neighborhood, and the neighborhoods of Baba Amr, Al-Bayada and Abbasiya.

Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese militias managed to seize about 165 plots of land in the Zabadani area, 250 plots of land in the border area of Tufail, and 97 properties in the Bludan area, by threatening their original owners, or by confiscating the properties of the displaced or of opposition members fleeing accountability.⁽²¹⁾

In the eastern Ghouta in the Damascus countryside, most of the residents were displaced by forced eviction agreement in 2018, and in April 2021, groups of Shiite elements from the militia (Al-Abbas Brigade) started a campaign to buy destroyed properties and abandoned agricultural lands belonging to displaced opponents in the villages of Zebdin, Hatita Turkmen, Maliha, and Deir al-Aasafir, through a real estate broker called (Abou Yasser al-Bakari).

Members of these militias were also able to purchase dozens of properties in the vicinity of Baba Amr neighborhood, whose residents fled the bombing of the Syrian regime forces in 2012. Field researchers recorded the territorial seizure operations which occurred either by counterfeiting documents under governmental cover, or by forcing the original owners residing in regime-controlled area to sell their lands.

(20) Places whose people were subjected to expropriation during the war in Syria, a study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, translated by the Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2020, <https://2u.pw/wAGTV>

(21) Iranian militias own the lands. a "new reality" near the Syrian-Lebanese border, Al-Hurra American Channel website, 3/2021/08/



Second: Media tools

Iran has attached great importance to its media machine, and has worked to expand its media networks and diversify its platforms, until it has become a media empire and an effective weapon in confronting its opponents, promoting its policies, and spreading the ideas of its Shiite Sect. Naturally it used it to facilitate the execution of its plans and to rally supporters.

In addition to operating the TV channels Al-Manar, Al-Mayadeen and Al-Aalam, which have the right to broadcast and cover and benefit from privileges not granted even to the local channels, Iran has provided great support to Al-Dunya channel, which supports the Assad regime, before it changed its name to Sama TV. It also devoted the pages of the Lebanese newspaper (Al-Akhbar), supervised by the Lebanese (Hezbollah), as well as its news agencies (Fares, Mehr and Tasnim) to support its speeches and promote its ideas. Iran has also founded a short wave channel to promote the Shiite sect in Al-Sayyida Zeinab, similar to the Hezbollah radio station in Lebanon.

Third: cultural tools

Iran has been striving to infiltrate the cultural life in Syria for a long time, with the aim of replacing the prevailing culture in Syrian society with Iranian culture, in the following ways:

1. Education: Iran's interest in the educational sector in Syria finds its roots in the beginning of the nineties, when Hafez al-Assad issued a republican decree in 1990 to officially introduce the Persian language as a curriculum at Damascus University, and to establish a Persian language teaching center there. Then, the Persian language curriculum was included in both Al-Baath and Tishreen universities in Homs and Latakia respectively. It is the Iranian Cultural Chancellery in Damascus as well as Iranian religious institutions affiliated with the Shiite seminaries that undertook efforts to promote the teaching of Persian in Syrian universities.

During the Syrian revolution years, Iran scrambled to access the educational system in Syria with the approval of Bashar al-Assad regime, which issued in April 2011 Republican Decree No. 48 to establish the Sham Higher Institute for Islamic Sciences, Arabic Language and Islamic Studies and Research, based in Damascus and affiliated with the Minister of Awqaf. The institute uses the Sayyida Ruqayya complex in Damascus as a branch for teaching Sharia sciences on the Shiite sect. Later on, Bashar al-Assad issued another decree, Legislative Decree No. 8 of 2017, which amends the name of (Al-Sham Institute) to become (Levant Universi-

ty for Sharia Sciences), thus granting Iranian-backed institutions wide educational and legal privileges to teach the Twelver Shi'ism as an independent curriculum, in addition to receiving official support from Iranian universities.

The Directorate of Academic Hawzas/seminaries, which was established in 2005, was granted wide powers in terms of establishing and operating dozens of affiliated schools, the most prominent of which are the "Al-Rasoul Al-Aazam" schools for preparatory and secondary students, which adopts "The Ahl al-Bayt Curriculum". It also has the authority to open universities on a large scale. Among these universities, the most notable Al-Mustafa University, Al-Farabi University, Islamic Azad University, the College of Islamic Denominations, and Teacher Education).

Iran is also working in a systematic way to make the Persian language a dominant language in Syria. Therefore, it has implemented it in several courses in universities, schools and institutes. On January 23, 2020, according to the Syrian newspaper Al-Watan, an agreement was signed between the Iranian Ministry of Education and its Syrian counterpart, stipulating the inclusion of Persian culture and language in the Syrian curricula starting next year.

Hama University has signed agreements with 3 Iranian universities, Ferdowsi University in Mashhad, Amir Kabir Technical University, and Al-Zahra University for Women, with the aim of scientific and research cooperation and of sending male and female students to complete their academic studies in Iran⁽²²⁾.

Iran focuses on attracting Syrian Shiite students, and others wishing to study in its universities, by awarding them tuitions and facilities, through agreements and memoranda of understanding concluded with the Ministry of Higher Education in Syria. According to Syrian government officials, the number of scholarships for graduate studies in Iranian universities in 2017 amounted to about 100, and according to Akil Mahfoud, director of political studies at the Ministry of Higher Education of the Assad regime's government, the number of scholarships offered by Iran to Syrian students increased to about 200 in 2018.⁽²³⁾

These tuitions do not include the grants awarded by the Cultural Chancellery in Damascus

(22) For the first time... Hama University signs scientific cooperation and cultural exchange agreements with 3 Iranian universities - Al-Watan Syrian newspaper - 102018/28/ <https://alwatan.sy/archives/171586>

(23) 200 Grants to Iran and 147 to Russia for this year. Mahfoud: There is a difference between a grant and a seat, and each announcement has its own conditions, Ministry of Higher Education website, June 13, 2018, <http://www.mohe.gov.sy/mohe/index.php?node=5511&cat=4952&>



and Latakia, and religious seminaries, especially the Zainah seminary in Damascus⁽²⁴⁾, where hundreds of scholarships are offered annually to study in universities and religious institutes in Iran for students wishing to study Sharia sciences based on the Shiite sect.

It is worth noting that at the beginning of 2021, Iran suspended hundreds of educational scholarships for Syrian postgraduate students due to its economic crisis that resulted from international sanctions, citing the non-renewal of the memorandum of understanding signed with the Ministry of Higher Education in Syria⁽²⁵⁾.

2. Promoting Persian culture and books: The Iranian Cultural Chancellery in Damascus formed an effective cultural weapon that infiltrated Syrian society and attracted supporters. The Chancellery is active in launching cultural projects, publishing Persian cinema, language and literature, offering scholarships and training, holding competitions, and publishing Persian books translated into Arabic. It also sponsors the writing and publishing of books written in Arabic by personalities who support the Iranian project and the Ahl al-Bayt doctrine, facilitating the free distribution of these books and providing rewards for supporting writers and artists. Among the most prominent books promoted by the Chancellery in Syria are the book (Then I Was Guided) by Muhammad al-Samawi, and the book (The Right That They Don't Want) by Adnan al-Rifai, and thousands of other books as well⁽²⁶⁾.

Iran attaches great importance to the Persian language courses in spreading Shi'ite thought and Iran's political propaganda. These courses are organized by the main center of the Iranian Cultural Chancellery in Damascus, and by its second center in Latakia, are interested in organizing these courses. According to the chancellery, 100 Persian courses were launched in early 2020. Those who participate in these courses receive several privileges, including grants to complete higher university studies in Iran⁽²⁷⁾.

(24) The Zainabiya Seminary in Syria is the third most important Shiite seminary after the Najaf seminary and the Qom Seminary. It was founded by Hassan al-Hussaini al-Shirazi in 1975. For more see: Institutions of Iranian influence in Syria and methods of funerals, study, Harmon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2018, <https://2u.pw/dSzvF>

(25) Iran stops the educational grant and Syrian students follow studies at their expense, Syria TV website, 22021/16/ <https://2u.pw/UdeGi>

(26) Literary and artistic competition of the Iranian Cultural Chancellery, SANA Agency, 42020/6/ <http://www.sana.sy/?p=1160867>

(27) In the Cultural Chancellery of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus The opening of the course / 100/ for teaching the Persian language, the website of the Cultural Chancellery of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus, 62020/1/ <https://2u.pw/nltS2>

Fourth: Economic tools

1. Dominating the Syrian economy with support and agreements

Although Iran was not an important economic partner for Syria before 2011, the Iranian economic influence in Syria during the Syrian revolution witnessed profound qualitative changes, as the two sides signed in 2012 a free trade agreement for the Syrian-Iranian region in 2012. During the revolution years also, Al- Assad regime received several Iranian loans in installments.

Moreover, Iran has strengthened its economic influence in Syria through a far-reaching strategy, mainly through companies affiliated with Iran, such as the Iranian Telecommunications Company, Kargoshi Bank, Melli Iran, Mehr, Al-Mustaqbal and Khatam Al-Anbiya Construction Company, and then the agreement signed in 2019 between Imad Khamis, the former Syrian prime minister, and Eshaq Jahangiri, the first vice president of Iran and which is considered the most important in Syria's history. This agreement granted Iran the license to operate a mobile phone network, and Tehran was given an area of five thousand hectares to build an oil port on the shores of the Mediterranean. The ruling party's mouthpiece newspaper, Al-Baath, reported that a meeting was held with the Iranian company (Khatam al-Anbia) to study the construction of a port on the shores of Tartus in the Ain al-Zarqa area near the Lebanese border, and that the port will be fully managed by Iran, with a sea front of 2,500 meters. Researcher Samir Saaifan, economist and director general of the Harmon Center for Contemporary Studies, states in an interview with him that studies had been conducted on this area in south of Tartus prior to the Syrian revolution, and had concluded that it was suitable for a port construction. Actually, the area was visited in 2009 by a delegation from the UAE Al Ghurair Investment Group, which had intentions to invest in Syria, in the maritime transport field among others, but no agreement was reached with the Syrian side due to the dominance of businessmen close to the Syrian regime over the main investment sectors, in addition to the legislative environment that repels investment.

Al-Assad government also licensed Iran to establish infant milk factories, pharmaceutical factories, and the Umm al-Zaytoun Company headquarters in As-Suwayda, as well as the headquarters of Homs' cement factory, a power plant in Latakia, and a tomato paste factory in Daraa.

Iranian companies did not spare any profitable Syrian economic sector. In fact, they dominated every company or production institution that achieved a profitable return. In August



2020, the Iranian (Shehab) Company contracted with the Syrian Arab Company for Electronic Industries (Seronics) to benefit from the second Iranian credit line in order to supply components for television screens, which (Seronics) has specialized in since its establishment in 1960, producing them exclusively in Syria. The General Organization for Food Industries also entered into several contracts with Iranian companies, most notably Itka Company for the supply of production lines for consoles, margarine, dairy products, pasta and oils, and the Syrian Company for the manufacture of cement and building materials, based in Hama, contracted with the Iranian Yasna Trade company to supply equipment for a new production line. The General Company for the manufacture and distribution of agricultural machinery has also signed a contract with the two Iranian companies (Nero) and (ETM) to import thousands of tractors and to establish a joint Syrian-Iranian company to assemble tractors in Syria.

In order to obtain the maximum possible economic gains and compensate for what it spent in support of the Syrian regime, Iran turned to the Syrian oil and gas sector, and under the credit contract signed between Tehran and Damascus⁽²⁸⁾, it obtained the concession to invest in Block No. 12, South of Al-Bukamal city, within an area of 7,500 square kilometers, near the Imam Ali base, which is the largest Iranian military base in the region. The Syrian regime also granted the Iranians the investment contract for field No. 27 in Al-Bukamal in Deir ez-Zor province on the Syrian-Iraqi border⁽²⁹⁾. Despite a clash between the Iranians and the Russians in the Al-Hassian oil field in Al-Bukamal in the first months of 2021, because both parties wanted to acquire the aforementioned oil field, the Iranian militias refused to leave the field upon the request of the Russian military police, justifying their presence by agreements signed earlier between Tehran and Damascus⁽³⁰⁾.

(28) Al-Modon newspaper, "Al-Bukamal Contract" Assad pays off his debt to Iran on Russian terms, May 2020 <https://bit.ly/2RmedfD>

(29) Russian oil experts evaluating the Al-Ward and Al-Taym fields to invest and increase production, Abdel Qader Dwaihi, Syria TV, March 2012, <https://bit.ly/3e8BHfp>

(30) The consensus of Russia and Iran collides in Al-Hasyan in Deir ez-Zor, what happened, Abdel Qader Dwaihi, Syria TV, March 2021 <https://2u.pw/41ezn>



In a meeting held in early 2017 with Ali Akbar Velayati, Ali Khamenei's advisor, the former Syrian regime Prime Minister Imad Khamis invited Iran to invest in reconstruction projects, to which Tehran responded by offering the Syrian regime to rebuild roads, airports, power stations and ports; an offer in favor of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which owns the largest Iranian companies in the construction sector.⁽³¹⁾

Iran also dominated the regime's oil imports, while supplying it with most of its crude oil needs throughout the years of conflict. Iranian oil exports to Syria between 2011 and 2020 are estimated at about 2 million barrels per month⁽³²⁾. The last shipment, which occurred in the first quarter of 2021, was estimated at one million barrels of crude oil. It crossed the Suez Canal despite ongoing US sanctions and pressure on Iran to prevent it from supplying the Syrian regime with oil⁽³³⁾. Therefore, in 2013, the Syrian regime signed a credit contract with Iran worth \$3.6 billion in order to obtain petroleum derivatives.⁽³⁴⁾

The Syrian economy has become largely dependent on Iranian economic and financial support, and Iranian economic interests have played an important role in Iran's adherence to Syria and its regime, given the huge investments that Iran has spent in Syria.

However, the Iranian economic influence in Syria began to be subjected to strong competition from Russia which was the one holding the reins in the Syrian scene, after its decisive military intervention in favor of the Assad regime at the end of September 2015.

With that said, the Syrian regime was constantly keen to allow the Iranians a large share of investments in the various Syrian sectors, including the reconstruction process. This concern was highlighted by the establishment of a Syrian-Iranian construction company in November 2019, specialized in implementing major construction and reconstruction projects with an illegal privilege: awarding projects directly without bidding, despite construction projects being crucial in the reconstruction phase which costs between 250 and 400 billion dollars.⁽³⁵⁾

(31) Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps reaps economic gains in Syria, Reuters, 12017/19/ <https://cn.reuters.com/article/iran-guard-ea6-idARAKBN1532BO>

(32) Reuters, Iran grants Syria \$3.6 billion credit to buy oil products, July 2013, <https://reut.rs/3eONhww>

(33) Iranian oil shipments en route to Syria, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, April 2021, <https://bit.ly/3yn4Xsg>

(34) Middle East monitor, Iran shipment of 3.5m barrels of oil approaching Syria, April 2021, <https://bit.ly/2QRaqq2>

(35) Iran infiltrates the Syrian economy: projects by direct order of Tehran in all governorates - Al-Araby Al-Jadeed website 112019/29/ <https://2u.pw/nstl1>



2. Producing a pro-Iranian business class:

Iran's economic privileges and its injection of substantial capitals into Syria have contributed to its ability to attract groups, personalities and social faces that support its policies and ideological propaganda especially that Iran has offered financial and in-kind assistance to the Shiites and to its supporters using the following methods:

A- Attracting clan elders and dignitaries: as happened with Sheikh Nawaf Al-Bashir and a number of notables from the (Baggara) clan, Faisal Al-Azel, one of the notables of the (Al-Ma'amra) clan, Khatib Al-Talib, one of the notables of the (Al-Bawasi) clan, Nawaf Al-Mulhim, one of the notables of the (Anza) clan, and Mahmoud Al-Akoub One of the notables of the (Harb) clan.

Knowing the importance of such step, Qassem Soleimani sought to consolidate the influence of these notables and arranged a meeting for them, on December 28, 2019, in Tehran, attended by Khamenei's advisor (Ali Akbar Velayati). During the meeting, Soleimani honored the leaders of the Baggara, Al-Bawasi, Anza and Harb, granting them financial gifts, and promising them to provide them with what they need to strengthen their influence in their areas. This has led them to turn against Al-Assad regime, despite having previously declared loyalty to the regime.

B - Supporting businessmen close to Tehran: Iran monitors the role that businessmen play in the Syrian market, and officials in the Tehran regime have worked to attract Syrian businessmen who are accepted by the decision-making authorities.

Iran has helped a select group of Syrian businessmen who has power and wealth to enter vital sectors markets in Syria, such as the energy sector, construction, tourism, real estate investments, transportation, money exchange, the pharmaceutical industry, and other important economic sectors.

Among the most prominent Syrian businessmen trusted by Tehran to hold the joints of the market, economy and money in Syria, the following names stand out:

- **Samer Al-Fawz:** The most prominent economic facefront of Iran in Syria, Chairman of the Board of Directors of (Aman Holding Group), and President of Sorouh Al-Emaar Company. With direct Iranian support, Samer Al-Fawz founded Al-Fawz Charitable Society as a tool to access the Syrian society. The association expanded in the city of Latakia and the surrounding villages, and in Damascus, and Sahel Al-Ghab, and Tartous, among others. With the

diminishing role of the Assad family businessmen, Rami Makhlouf and Muhammad Hamsho, Samer's economic empire gained the largest share of the Syrian market among his businessmen peers, and his companies took over the (Marota City) projects in Mezzeh, Kfar Sousa and (Land Mark) behind Al-Razi Hospital near the Iranian embassy in Damascus.

Al-Foz's wide role in mediation work to buy real estate properties for the benefit of Iranians, made him Iran's backbone, and got him the support of the Syrian regime, especially Bashar al-Assad's wife, Asma al-Akhras.

- **Saqr Asaad Rostom:** He belongs to the Alawite sect. Born in the village of Khirbet Al-Hamam in Homs. He is considered one of the first influential people who established sectarian militias (Shiite and Alawite) in the city of Homs. He led the militias himself under the name (National Defense) to which several sectarian Homs massacres are attributed, , such as the massacre of Karm al-Zaytoun, al-Sabil, and al-Rifai neighborhood massacres. Thanks to huge financial resources that he obtained from Tehran and to looting the properties of the displaced in Homs, he moved to being a businessman, and before soon became the owner and director of (Damas Development and Real Estate Investment Company), and director and co-founder of (Aylol Tourism Investment Company). Rostom enjoys direct support from the Revolutionary Guard Corps in Syria, and from the Lebanese Hezbollah militia.

- **Mosan Nahas:** Secretary of the Syrian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the International Investment Company, the Caesar Investment Company, and the Charitable Development Association. He is considered one of the most active Syrian businessmen close to Iran.

- **Fahd Al-Darwish:** Vice President of the Syrian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce and the godfather of economic relations with Iran in the coastal regions. He runs Al-Baraka pharmaceutical company in Syria, owned by the Iranian Al-Baraka Holding Group, and supervises the production line (manufacture and assembly) of Iranian cars and agricultural tractors, in Syria.

- **Nahid Mortada:** an engineer who founded and runs the (United Builders) real estate company. He is also the technical director of the Sayyida Zainab shrine in Damascus.

- **Shayesh Abdul Razzaq Al-Owaishi:** One of the dignitaries of Al-Owaishat clan from the Al-Naeem tribes in Homs. He claims to be a member of the Prophet's family. He owns and runs the Al-Owaishi Armada Trading and Contracting Company.



- **Hussein Ragheb Al-Hussein:** from the town of Al-Foua (Shiite) in Idlib, a member of the People's Assembly of the Syrian regime, Vice-President of the Syrian-Iranian Parliamentary Friendship Group, and enjoys close relations with Iranian officials, which qualified him to become the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Committee for the Followers of Aal al-Bayt in Syria.

It is worth noting that all the aforementioned businessmen, except for Al-Foz who is supported by Asma' Al-Akhras, Bashar Al-Assad's wife, were pushed by Tehran, against the will of Al-Assad regime, to become directors and members in what was named: "The Syrian-Iranian Joint Chamber of Commerce". The Chamber was launched at the end of January 2019, during the closure of the Syrian-Iranian businessmen congress which was held in Tehran. On the 5th of May 2019, the names of members of the Syrian side were announced.

Photo: Appointing decision of members of the joint Syrian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce



3. Iran's tools to infiltrate society

A- Scholarships: university and graduate students: Iran exploits its strong influence within the educational system and the Syrian state apparatus in order to support these students and grant them study tuitions and specialization offers in Tehran in exchange for their Shi'ism or loyalty to its project. It provides support and assistance for their families as well, especially in the Levant desert and the cities of (Al-Bukamal - Al-Mayadin - Raqqa - Deir ez-Zor), Aleppo, Homs and Damascus. We have previously reviewed Iran's activity in terms of



educational grants.

B- Establishing charitable societies:

Operating Iranian charities, by providing both financial and in-kind assistance to poor families in areas controlled by Shiite militias. Among the most prominent of these charities (The Center of Thaqalain Association, Jihad Al-Benaa, the Social Charity Committee, Al-Zahra Charity, Al-Amin Foundation, Al-Sirat Cultural Complex, Al-Imam Al-Sajid Foundation, Al-Shuhada Foundation) and many others.

C- Exploitation of security stalkers:

Attracting criminal suspects: Iran has taken advantage of the difficult situation of the conscripts fleeing from compulsory service in the Syrian army, and the prosecuted criminals who reside in the Syrian regime's areas, and provided them with guarantees of exemption from persecution by giving them security cards and financial aid for their living requirements. During a period of time, it even recruited them into its militias, and brainwashed others into becoming Shiite.



Chapter Three:



Consequences of Iranian policies on Syrian society

Given Iran's pivotal role in supporting the survival of the Syrian regime during the war, especially after the collapse of the Syrian economy, Tehran obtained from the Syrian regime many privileges which are not only economic and military, but extends to the regime's silence regarding Iran's manipulation of the Syrian social fabric. In fact, the head of the regime in Syria spoke without equivocation of a (homogeneous) Syrian society, which means that there was an extirpation of the groups that reject the Assad regime, and then a re-engineering of the Syrian society in a way that renders it submissive so that there would be no place for opposition.⁽³⁶⁾

The wide implementation of the Iranian policies led to the re-shaping of the Syrian society as compared to what it was like before the 2011 uprising. The re-engineering occurred especially in areas which Iran paid special attention to due to their strategic importance, mainly Damascus and its countryside, Homs, Aleppo and Deir-Al-Zor.

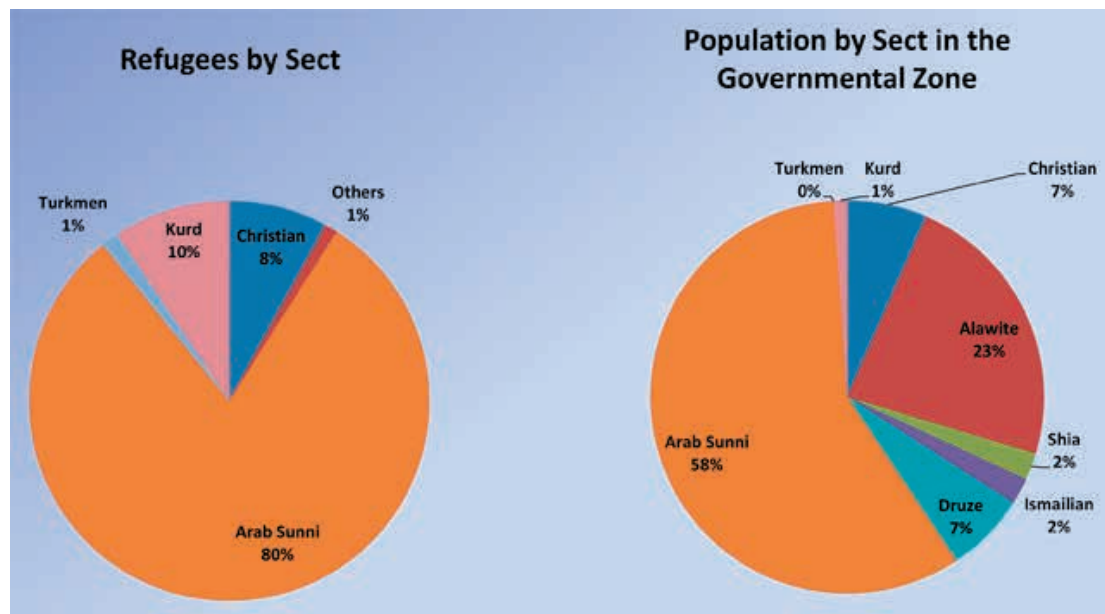
These demographic changes emerged prominently due to the policies of consolidating the Shiite presence and increasing the number of Shiites with the simultaneous decline in Sunnites' number. The International Religious Freedom Report issued in 2006 by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the US State Department estimated that the Sunni population in Syria was about 74%, whereas other Islamist groups, including Alawites, Ismailis, and Shiites, made up an estimated 13% of the population⁽³⁷⁾.

A study by the Washington Institute in 2015 indicated that the percentage of the Syrian Sunnites among the displaced and refugees is about 91%, of whom 80% are Sunni Arabs⁽³⁸⁾, which shows a significant and clear imbalance in the societal structure. So, Iran has contributed widely to Syria's new image which is completely different from its pre-revolution structure.

(36) Bashar al-Assad's speech at the opening of the conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates August 19, 2017, the Syrian Presidency's YouTube website <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b-BclPp0eo>

(37) International Religious Freedom Report 2006, US Department of State, 2006, Syria (state.gov)

(38) Ethnic Cleansing Threatens Syrian Unity, The Washington Institute, 2015, <https://2u.pw/rBmqT>



Ethnic Cleansing Threatens Syrian Unity, Study by The Washington Institute, 2015

We will review the impact of these methods on the demographic situation in Syrian cities, noting that much of the information on which the study relied was collected by cooperative researchers from the people of Syrian regions who are considered as field sources for research, in addition to previous studies and research that dealt with the issue of Iranian interference in Syria, especially during the Syrian revolution.

First: The results of Iran's policies: re-engineering society in Damascus and its countryside:

The popular protests and the opposition's control over some areas of the capital, Damascus, and its countryside posed a serious challenge for Al-Assad regime in the Syrian revolution. These areas were also exposed to the most dangerous policies, used by Al-Assad regime and its allies in the face of the revolution. In addition to destruction, killing and arrests, these areas have also been subjected to a process of systematic demographic change and serious societal re-engineering, through the redistribution of large proportions of their population outside their original areas of residence, or through their forced displacements to outside the country.

Although the Syrian regime and Iran-backed sectarian militias, which include all the Shiite militias and the National Defense Militia, as well as the Russian forces, have all contributed to this wide change in the societal structure, but the regime and Russia had little to do in the cited



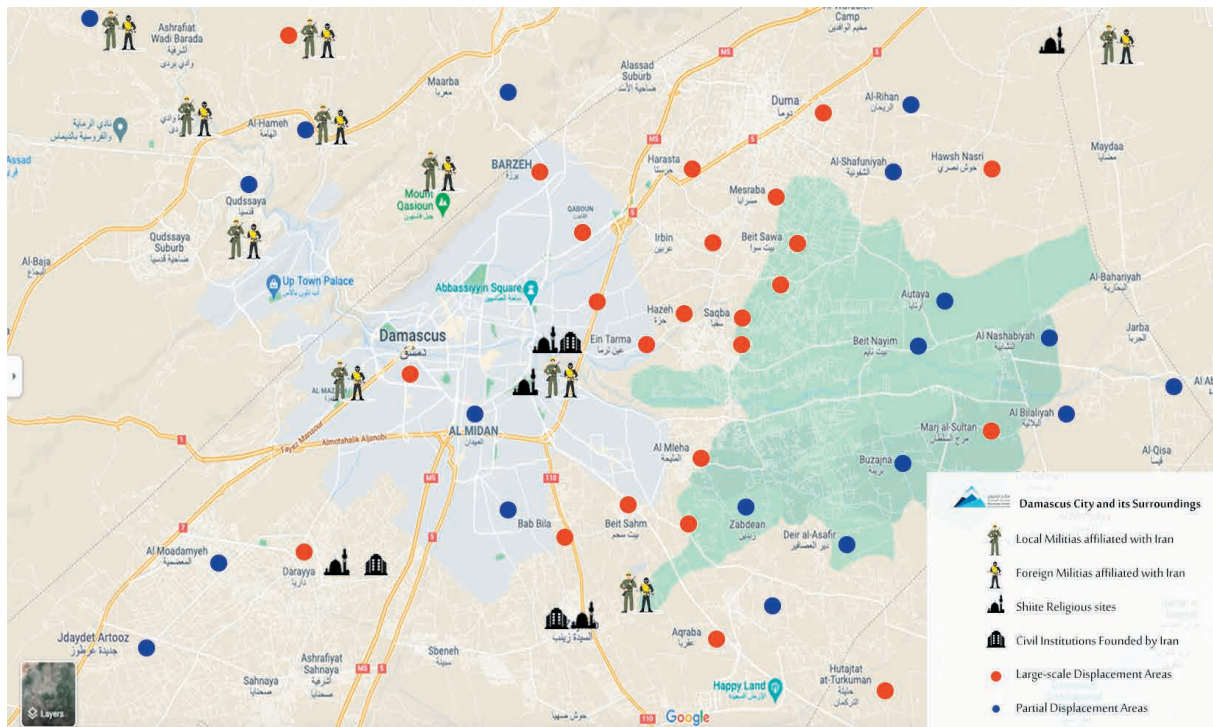
governorates compared to the activity of Iran and its militias.

First, we note that the percentage of displaced persons from the areas of Damascus governorate and its countryside varies between 5% to 100% depending on the areas.

Iran and its militias control the entire Damascus belt (Rural Damascus Governorate), a total of 8 areas, except for the Druze and Christian towns, which are controlled by the Syrian regime.

As for the capital, Damascus, all its areas are under the control of the regime forces, in addition to the symbolic control of the Iranian militias over the neighborhoods inhabited by families of Alawite and Shiite fighters in the military suburbs; with a symbolic presence of the Russian forces in the regime-controlled areas.

As for the Palestinian-Syrian camps in Damascus and its countryside, all of them are under the control of Palestinian militias affiliated with the Syrian regime forces, with the exception of the Shiite militias' control over the Sayyida Zainab camp, which is located in the neighborhood of Sayeda Zainab. The town's sectarian structure was changed by Iran with the tacit approval of Al-Assad regime so that it would appear as a purely Shiite area.



Iran's ambitions in Damascus and its countryside:

Shiite references claim that there are 49 shrines for Ahl al-Bayt in Syria, 20 of which are in Damascus and its countryside⁽³⁹⁾. For years, Iran has been buying real estate properties adjacent to these alleged shrines, and transforming these shrines in what is termed “the war of graves” \ “Harb Al-Qoubour”, to change the population composition in the region.

The Iranian forces and the sectarian militias supported by them contributed to the war of Al-Assad regime forces on all these areas. Then, they imposed themselves as the main occupying force and crowded out Al-Assad forces and kept them away from strategic areas. This is specifically evident in their occupation of Darayya, Jobar, and south of the capital, and the towns surrounding Al- Sayeda Zeinab area, as well as several areas in Qalamoun and the areas adjacent to the Syrian-Lebanese border in Zabadani and Madaya. The Iranian forces and militias forced the displacement of most residents, and took a step further towards buying lands through false contracts. Actually, Bashar al-Assad made them a great favor by issuing Law No. 25 of 2013 which allows the defendant to be notified in absentia through newspapers even if the landowner is not present in court. Because of this law, ownership of the properties of martyrs, detainees, missing persons, displaced persons and wanted persons was transferred to loyalists of Iran and its militias.

(39) Othman, Hashem, The Scenes and Shrines of Ahl al-Bayt in Syria, Al-Alamy Foundation for Publications, 1994, p. 11.



According to the Iranian (Becknet) website, (Iranian merchants and wealthy people paid very large sums of money to buy luxury houses, villas and apartments, in the famous and prestigious areas of the Syrian capital, Damascus. Most of the lands and buildings surrounding the shrine of Al-Sayyida Zainab were bought by Iranians close to the regime in large sums, which caused a significant increase in real estate prices in these areas)⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Shiite clerics in Syria play a major role in the acquisition and real estate deals through local real estate brokers. One of the most prominent Shiite clerics involved in this activity is Abdullah Nizam, a Damascene Shiite religious man who currently occupies several positions. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Bilad al-Sham for Sharia Sciences, head of the Sayyida Ruqayya complex, head of the Mohsiniya Association in Damascus, and one of Tehran's most trusted men in Syria⁽⁴¹⁾.

Another religious man is Sheikh Nabil al-Halbawi, member of the Supreme Committee of the World Assembly of Ahl al-Bayt, representative of the Sayyida Ruqayyah branch at the University of the Levant for Sharia Sciences, and imam of the Sayyida Ruqayya shrine. Al-Halbawi contributed to real estate purchases in the old neighborhoods of Damascus, and also supervised the purchase of several hotels in the Al-Bahsa area in the center of Damascus, according to what was confirmed to the researcher by Damascus merchants⁽⁴²⁾.

By analyzing the changes that took place in the last ten years, we find that the largest demographic change took place in the Damascus countryside governorate. The area has a large population and a wide geographical spread, and includes strategic spots that constitute strategic governing sites, linking the capital Damascus to the southern and central governorates.

Signs of demographic change slowly began to unravel in the capital, Damascus, and its countryside, with the Baath authority taking over the rule in Syria in 1963. The change appeared further with Hafez Al-Assad's seizure of power in 1970, and his attempts to preserve his authority by appointing a majority of Alawite relatives as officers and soldiers, after all whoever controls the capital controls power.

Before 1963, the number of Alawites was very limited in the capital, Damascus, but went

(40) Iranian admitting the wave of buying real estate in Damascus. But why? Arabi website 212016-27-03- <https://2u.pw/tlsoC>

(41) For more: Who is "Abdullah Nizam" Iran's man in Syria? Hurrya Press, 72020/3/, <https://horrya.net/archives/121430>

(42) Written testimonies of 6 merchants from Damascus, confirming that Iran purchased through real estate brokers the Al-Iwan, Kalda and Phenicia hotels, in the Al-Bahsa neighborhood in the commercial center of Damascus.

on to multiply especially after their involvement in jobs in multiple sectors such as the military, economic, administration, media, education, airline and oil sectors. This issue was a hidden policy but became public after March 2011 with military operations that ostensibly expose all heinous acts.

After 2011, these strategic areas were demographically re-engineered, by bringing in thousands of fighters from cities and villages of the Syrian coast, and their families, of course, and thousands of Shiite fighters from Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan and their families, to the capital, Damascus, and to its surroundings, as part of the military mobilization to defend the regime's positions there.

Little by little, the military gathering turned into a long-term settlement project, and the Damascus belt was slowly but surely emptied of its original inhabitants, who are mostly Sunni Muslims. We can confirm that such displacement policies in Damascus and its surroundings did not apply to any of the Druze, Christians or Shiite towns. Although the displacement of the Sunni Muslims may be attributed to them being initially on the opposition side and thus being subject to the regime's military operations and siege which may have led to their migration, but not allowing them to return after the fighting stops and the military situation stabilizes leads to the belief that the process of demographic change is a goal in itself.

In the end, the displacement from the countryside of Damascus was suffered by Sunni Muslims, while the few displaced people from non-Muslim areas moved due to political or social motives, mainly to seek better living conditions, with the latter's percentage not exceeding 5% of the total population of towns with a non-Sunni majority, sometimes this percentage is that of Sunni Muslims, as in the town of Maaloula for example, which has a Christian majority.

By reviewing the current demographic situation of the governorates of Damascus and its countryside, and the change that the displacement has caused in the social fabric, it becomes clear to us how deep this change is. In 2011, the population of Damascus Governorate, according to the statistics team, was estimated at 1,733,000, while the population of the Damascus countryside was, in the same year and according to the same statistics, 2,744,000 people⁽⁴³⁾. However, things have dramatically changed as a result of persecutions, arrests, displacements and population transfer, as well as the bulldozing of a number of lands, and the enactment of administrative regulation laws that facilitate the forfeiture of people's property. Not to mention the policy of accomodating members of active Shiite militias and their families in neigh-

(43) Statistics team, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Population in Syria on January 1, 2011, <http://cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/Data-Chapter2/TAB-22011-2-.htm>



neighborhoods of Damascus and in its rural towns, in conjunction of the policy of preventing the return of the displaced and depriving them of their property. Consequently, it becomes evident that Damascus as well as its countryside were subject to a process of re-engineering its society, thus affecting all of its groups and components.

According to an official survey issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics ,until the end of 2014, the number of displaced persons within Damascus governorate reached 244,000, while about 255 thousand people left Damascus to outside the country. The same survey indicates that the number of displaced persons within the Damascus countryside governorate is 721,000, while about 396 thousand people have left the Damascus countryside governorate outside the country. So, Al-Assad regime confirms that, up till 2014, 652,000 people got displaced from the two governorates.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Note that the major waves of displacements of many areas in Damascus and its countryside occurred after 2014, as most of the residents of Darayya, Moadamiya, Zabadani, Bloudan, Madaya, Qalamoun, Eastern Ghouta and the neighborhoods of Damascus were displaced in successive stages, the last of which was in 2018. This means that the estimates collected by our field researchers seems reasonable, because they include the displacement from the two governorates towards northern Syria, numbers that were not included in the 2014 Population Assessment Survey, conducted by the Syrian Center for Statistics.

The majority of the displaced are distributed in the countries of Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, the European Union, the northern and southern regions of Syria, and a small part of the displaced fled to the neighborhoods of Damascus.

By calculating the percentage of the displaced from the governorates of Damascus and its countryside in comparison to the population of the two governorates in 2011, it appears that about 36% of the whole population got displaced.

(44) Population Status Assessment Survey 2014, Central Bureau of Statistics, http://cbssyr.sy/population_status/Table1.pdf

A table showing the population of Damascus and its countryside, according to the estimate of the Central Bureau of Statistics, compared to the estimate of the Hermon Center

Governorate	2011 Population Number in 1000	Number of IDPs (outside the country only) accord- ing to the system survey at the end of 2014	The total number of displaced people according to Harmon estimates at the end of 2018	The percentage of the displaced out of the population of 2011 according to the estimates of the system survey	The percent- age of the displaced out of the population of 2011, according to Harmon estimates
Damascus	1733	255	500	14.7%	28.3%
Damascus Countryside	2477	396	1000	16%	40.3%
Total sum of Damascus and the countryside of Damascus	4210	651	1500	15.4%	35.6%

Due to the fact that all the areas affected by displacement, whether their residents were internally displaced or sought refuge outside the country, are predominantly Sunni areas, and due to the influx of Shiite fighters and their families to Syria, a definite change has taken place in Syria's social in general, and in the two governorates of Damascus and rural Damascus in particular.

Daraya, under the nose of the Iranians:

The city of Daraya is of great religious and military importance to the Iranians due first, to the presence of the shrine of Al-Sayyida Sakina in the city⁽⁴⁵⁾, second, to its proximity to the most prominent headquarters of the Iranian military leaders at the Mezzeh military airport, and those of the Air Force Intelligence Branch largely dominated by Iran since the start of the Syrian revolution, third, to its proximity to the bases of the Fourth Division led by Maher al-Asad, brother of the regime's president, and which includes thousands of soldiers of the Shiite militias, and fourth to the city of Daraya being near the Iranian embassy, which is about 5

(45) The people of Daraya deny the existence of an origin for the shrine of Sakina bint Al Hussein in their city, and none of the reliable historical references for historians about the city of Daraya indicate the existence of a shrine in the Levant for Mrs. Sakina bint Ali bin Abi Talib, see: Al-Hajj, Abdul Rahman, the Shiite Ba'ath in Syria, Jusoor for Translation and Publishing, 1st Edition, Beirut, 2017, p. 118.



kilometers away.

Iran set its foot in Daraya for the first time in 1985, when, by a decision of the then governor Ali Zayoud, the Damascus countryside governorate acquired about 5,000 square meters of land adjacent to a tomb attributed to Sakina bint Ali Abi Talib. Then, the Shiite cleric Ahmed Al-Wahidi took over the construction work of the shrine of Al-Sayida Sakina, which was inaugurated in 2003.

Over the past years, Iran's attempts to seize additional lands in Darayya did not stop. Local researchers cooperating with the Hermon Center recorded several attempts to purchase real estate properties in Darayya through local intermediaries. Iraqi Shiite militia members succeeded in purchasing destroyed shops and furniture factories near (Al-Basel Roundabout), and the Corniche Road.

A high-ranking Iranian delegation visited the city of Daraya in October 2017, headed by the Chief of the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Major General Muhammad Bakiri. Iranian contractor Reza Al-Wahidi accompanied the delegation; he is in charge of restoring (the shrine of Al-Sayida Sakina) in the city of Daraya, in partnership with a Syrian businessman, close to the Assad regime, Muhammad Hamsho.

The shrine was established in 2003 with funding from the Iranian Cultural Chancellery in Damascus, in order for it to be a shrine for Shiites. According to local sources, Al-Assad regime granted a company run by Iranian businessman Rida Al-Wahidi a contract to build housing complexes in the vicinity of Daraya to house officers and elements of the Revolutionary Guard Corps and local Shiite militias. The project was part of an agreement between Tehran and Damascus to build more than 30,000 housing units in Syria and was announced by Mahmoud Mahmoud Zadeh, Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development in February 2020⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Local sources cooperating with the Harmon Center indicate that the Iranians have not yet been able to restore the shrine of Al-Sayida Sakina and the mosque attached to it, and that the area has not witnessed the settlement of a large number of Shiite families as planned, due to the objection of the Russian military police, with the exception of about twenty families of Iraqi militia fighters from (Al-Nujaba Movement). Also, the regime has not allowed the return of the city residents after four years of its restoration, except for dozens so far. The Russians send every now and then delegates from the Russian Reconciliation Center to assess the city's

(46) Iran is building 30,000 housing units in Syria, Deutsche Welle website in Persian, 22020/2/, <https://2u.pw/SzTCS>

conditions, which local residents view as messages of reassurance over Iran's attempts to control the city.



A picture showing the visit of Iranian Shiite pilgrims to the shrine of Al-Sayyida Sakina in the city of Daraya - October 2019 - Social networking sites

It is worth noting that on September 12, 2016, while attending the Eid prayer held in Daraya, after the regime recovered it from the Syrian opposition with the support of Iranian militias and Lebanese (Hezbollah) forces, Bashar al-Assad answered a question from a representative of (SANA) agency about the issue of population change in Daraya and the likes; he said: "The demographic change changes through generations", pointing out that changes were made based on the citizens' interests. He then added: "Practically, Syria is like any diverse country, the demographic situation changes through generations according to people's economic interests"⁽⁴⁷⁾ «.

(47) Al-Assad after performing the Eid al-Adha prayer at the Saad bin Muadh Mosque in the city of Daraya: The gates of the state are open for reconciliation, SANA Agency, 92016/12/, <http://sana.sy/?p=429486>

Qalamoun.Iranian arms and drug depot

Since it includes a tunnel and a missile factory at the Nassiriya base⁽⁴⁸⁾, the Qalamoun area has become the center for advanced weapons storage and production, in the interests of the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Lebanese Hezbollah militia.

Since Al-Assad regime regained control of the entire Qalamoun region in 2018, with the main support of the Lebanese militia (Hezbollah) and Iraqi Shiite militias, and since the displacement of thousands of residents of the Qalamoun area, Iran has focused its efforts on preventing the return of the displaced people, and establishing permanent military sites in the cities and towns of Bloudan, Madaya, Zabadani, Serghaya, Jayroud, Yabroud and others.



The most prominent cities in Qalamoun, where Iranian-backed Shiite militias are based, and have weapons depots, a missile factory (Al-Nasiriya base), and drug factories.

(48) The Syrian regime “hands over a new military base to the Iranians,” Italian (AKI) news agency, 122019/2/, <http://www.adnki.net/AKI/?p=42020>

There are also drug factories, exclusive to the area, that are directly supervised by members of the (Hezbollah) militia and the Revolutionary Guard Corps. The research team recorded testimonies of activists from Qalamoun confirming that the number of narcotic pill factories in the area is about 14, distributed over the eastern Qalamoun and Zabadani⁽⁴⁹⁾. Local researchers cooperating with the Harmon Center confirm that the largest of these factories is located in the Al-Khrabat area near the town of Sergaya, and is run by members of the Lebanese Hezbollah, under the direct guarding of a military faction belonging to the Fourth Division led by Maher al-Assad, brother of Bashar al-Assad. The existence of these factories explains why the Iranian militias prevent the return of the displaced people to these areas, after 3 years have passed since the opposition factions were expelled from there.

The city of Zabadani stands out as one of the strategic areas that Iran sought to control in order to access to its Sunni-dominated society. Zabadani is the western gateway to Qalamoun, and is located on the Lebanese Hezbollah supply route, which prompted the party, with direct support from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, to besiege the city and bomb it brutally, and to attempt to control the city militarily for years since the start of the Syrian revolution. In 2016, the party forces forced hundreds of families from several areas in the Zabadani Plain to forcibly evict them, most notably the Al-Siddiq Association area, Madaya's vineyards, and the Aqaba area, before the Lebanese (Hezbollah) militia and the Syrian army could take control on the entire city. In 2017, the opposition fighters, and some civilians, forced the evacuation of the city based on the "Four Cities" deal, in which Fadi Burhan, a Shiite cleric from the residents of Zabadani, who is close to (Hezbollah) played a prominent role. So, Al-Burhan became one of the most prominent men in Tehran in the Damascus countryside, and took the position of director of foreign relations in the Khomeini seminary in Sayyida Zainab.

Local collaborators with the research team confirm that the Shiite militias that were stationed in the city of Zabadani turned the great mosque of Al-Hosh town into a Shiite Husseinia, where militia fighters and their families flock to pray. Also, (Hezbollah) established several military bases in and around Zabadani. The most prominent of these is its location in the Nabi Habil Mountain, where the site includes weapons depots and an air defense detachment. This site was subjected to Israeli air strikes in late 2020.

(49) According to the sources of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the drug laboratories in Qalamoun are distributed as follows: 3 laboratories in Sarghaya, two laboratories in Rankous, Assal Al-Ward and Al-Jabba, and one laboratory in Talfita, Bakha, Tufail, Madaya and Al-Saboura, see: *Drugs and the Lebanese Hezbollah... The Syrian Observatory sheds Light on the places of manufacturing in Qalamoun on the Syrian-Lebanese border*, website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 162021/2/ <https://2u.pw/ppqH4>

Moreover, a large proportion of the Druze of As-Suwayda have migrated due to the deteriorating living conditions, or to soldiers of the Syrian regime's army, and some of them due to the security restrictions on the opposition's activity. The survey of the Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the number of As-Suwayda residents outside the country at the end of 2014 at about 165 thousand people, or 45.3% of the population of the governorate. As for the displaced residents of Quneitra governorate, the 2014 survey estimated their number at about 23 thousand people, or 26.4% of the governorate's population.⁽⁵¹⁾

It should be noted that the south of Syria has become almost empty of Syrian Christians in the three governorates. The vast majority of them have been displaced from their former areas of residence in the towns of Izraa, Tasiya, Ghassem, Ma'arba, Rakham and Kharba, due to Al-Assad regime's warning them against joining the revolution, and due to the Bishops of Damascus appealing to the Christians of Syria on June 16, 2011 to avoid being drawn into the conflict. The Christians' fear of the Islamic factions spreading and the policies of intimidation practiced by some opposition factions contributed to their displacement towards Damascus and its surroundings.

The city of Basr al-Sham (40 km from Daraa city center and 140 km from Damascus) is the most prominent area of the Shiite community in southern Syria, where estimates indicate the presence of about 12 thousand Shiites out of a total population of 33 thousand people in mid-2011.

Iran and its sectarian militias have contributed to the military operations, killings, arrests, and bombing of the cities and towns of southern Syria, forcing hundreds of thousands of residents to flee and some of them to seek refuge in Jordan. The majority of the displaced are scattered in Jordan, Turkey, the European Union and parts of South America, and a few are inside Syria.

Before 2011, the Palestinian presence was limited to the two camps of Daraa, with a population of 16,000 thousand people, the vast majority of whom have become displaced.

The proportions of ethnic and sectarian distribution vary from one governorate to another, as well as the reasons for displacement, and the dominant party in the southern governorates due to the different sectarian environment, loyalties and controlling party. The southern governorates record a large Iranian influence on the outskirts of cities and towns, especially those adjacent to the borders with Palestine, compared to a local militia influence affiliated with

(51) Population Status Assessment Survey 2014, Central Bureau of Statistics, http://cbssyr.sy/population_statuse/Table1.pdf



Russia inside the provinces. Since 2018, the region has been experiencing an ongoing cold war between the dominant parties, despite the conclusion of reconciliation agreements.

Information obtained by the research team confirms the presence of Iranian militias supervised by leaders of the Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah in Lajat, Izraa, and Al-Harat Al-Sanamayn. Groups of Shiite militia fighters are deployed in the Syrian army's sites in areas along the front with Israel.

Tehran has established several branches of the Al-Zahra Association in Daraa and the town of Yadoudeh, and it is active through in-kind and financial support for families of Iranian-backed militia members, in addition to similar services for poor and needy families in Daraa.

Our local collaborating researchers confirmed that the Iranians attach great importance to the Al-Zahra Association in Daraa, which prompted them to conclude agreements with notables from the Al-Mousalmah clan to take over the management of the association. Some of these notables are Mohamad Saydali, the most prominent Iranian Shiite figure in Daraa, Issa Al-Masalmah, Issam Al-Masalmah, and Waseem Al-Masalmah who was entrusted with the leadership of Al-Aareen Forces militia 313 Backed by the Revolutionary Guard Corps. The association strengthened its presence in the community after a visit to Daraa by Abu al-Fadl al-Tabtaba'i, representative of the office of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Syria, in September 2018. Al-Tabtaba'i provided generous financial support to the al-Zahra Association as well as to the al-Aareen militia.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards also opened various offices in the eastern countryside of Daraa to recruit fighters into the ranks of the Al-Aareen militia, with wages ranging between 200 and 300 dollars per month. Leaders of the Syrian regime have granted the Al-Aareen militia forces the right to use offices and training grounds in government headquarters and military sites affiliated with the regime's army. The Al Areen Forces militia are fighting groups established by the Revolutionary Guard Corps from Shiite fighters from the towns of Qarfa, Izra', Namer, Sheikh Miskeen and Basr al-Sham under the name (Brigade 313). They were based in the building of the Izra Association for the Revolutionary Youth Union in the southeastern part of the city⁽⁵²⁾.

Despite all Iranian attempts to infiltrate the Syrian society of southern Syria, especially in the

(52) For more: Learn about Brigade 313. Iran's branch in Daraa, Hurrya Press website, 52017/11/, <https://horrya.net/archives/36564>

towns of Qarfa, Tafas, Mleiha al-Gharbiyeh and Basra al-Sham, the results of these attempts did not make a significant difference in the social fabric due to several reasons, including:

1. The conservative environment of the society and the strong clan bond.
2. The inability of Al-Assad regime and the Shiite militias to gain effective control over Daraa and the opposition to the regime remaining there due to the reconciliation agreement sponsored by Russia.
3. The control of the Eighth Brigade belonging to the Fifth Division, supported by Russia and made up of former revolutionaries, reconciliation elements, and locals.
4. The survival of a large proportion of the population in their areas of residence, despite the numerous waves of displacement during the revolution years.

Failed Iranian penetration attempts in As-Suwayda

On the military level:

Iran has worked hard to penetrate the As-Suwayda Governorate, which is of special importance from a demographic point of view, as most of its residents belongs to the Druze sect. To this end, Iran deployed factions and militias backed by the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Lebanese Hezbollah militia to the province's areas, and had them stationed in the Syrian army's military sites between As-Suwayda and Daraa provinces. Another group of party fighters was stationed in the air defense battalion in As-Suwayda. In 2015 the group received headquarters in the 404th Regiment of the Syrian Army located in the north of As-Suwayda near the village of Najran, an area almost devoid of residents, which allows the Iranian militias freedom of movement and secrecy of action, and which the party has turned into a training site for local recruits from Daraa's Shiite youth and As-Suwayda Bedouins. The party also made the regiment a launching pad for military operations, surveillance patrols and assassinations.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps provided the 404th Regiment with advanced weapons and military equipment, including an R330 spy and jamming system, and Fateh 110 short-range ballistic missiles, as well as T72 and T55 tanks initially owned by the Syrian army.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps also tried to exploit the bloody attacks launched by ISIS fighters in July 2018 to provide support and funding to the National Defense Militia, supervised by the Military Security Branch in As-Suwayda, for the latter to counter-attack ISIS. At the same time, the Syrian army units deployed in the area left As-Suwayda civilians without



serious intervention or protection in the face of ISIS massacres. The attacks on civilians caused hundreds of casualties, and dozens of prisoners and abductees, most of whom were women and children, which led to the people of As-Suwayda temporarily accepting the support provided by the Revolutionary Guard Corps and (Hezbollah) militias. In the same context, Iran failed to launch the militia (Liwa al-Tawhid), led by the so-called Saleh Jarbou', which is a fighting group from the Druze sect formed by the Lebanese MP Wiam Wahhab. The group was met with social and (religious) rejection in As-Suwayda, hence its failure to grow into influence.

Iran has increased its support for the National Defense Militia, which is made up mostly of local fighters from the Druze sect. Its step followed the growing strength of the Eighth Brigade faction of the Fifth Division, led by Ahmed al-Awda, which is deployed in Daraa and receives direct support from Russia.

Tehran made gained influence over the National Defense Militia in As-Suwayda, after supporting the militia's elements in several clashes against the Eighth Brigade faction. The most prominent of these clashes which was the battle of Al-Quraya on 29/9/2020, in which dozens of young men and fighters from As-Suwayda residents were killed, wounded or captured.

On the civil level:

The Syrian regime has overlooked the Iranian attempts of incursion into As-Suwayda Governorate, knowing that such attempts aim at promoting the Shiite sect by attracting members of the Druze sect, relying on paying large sums of money to some unemployed young men, inviting some of them to visit Iran, and purchasing lands through local intermediaries. The research team recorded the visit, by Iranian delegations, of religious shrines in As-Suwayda by Iranian delegations, including (Maqam Al-Mahdi) in the village of Mardak, north of the city of Shahba.

Media professionals confirm that Iran was recently able, through local real estate brokers, to purchase real estate properties for the establishment of Iranian pharmaceutical laboratories in an industrial zone after the Syrian regime's government began establishing them in 2009 near the village of Umm al-Zaytun, north of (Shahba).⁽⁵³⁾

The Syrian regime has also allowed a wide scope for Iranian-backed charitable institutions to carry out activities and events and provide support to the families of the dead and injured of the Iranian-backed militias. Charitable organizations included Al-Waad Al-Sadiq Charitable Foundation, which opened a branch in As-Suwayda under the auspices of As-Suwayda' gov-

(53) Iran's attempts to penetration in As-Suwayda, Syria TV website, <https://2u.pw/PhP5x>

ernor Atef Al-Naddaf, and in the presence of Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri, Sheikh Akl of the Druze. In Syria in early 2014, during the opening, the association provided support and assistance to the families of about 500 killed and wounded militiamen and Syrian army soldiers from As-Suwayda Governorate.



«Al-Waad Al-Sadiq» Charitable Foundation honors the wounded of the militias and the Syrian army in As-Suwayda Governorate, with an official and religious presence 2014

It should be noted that the Iranian infiltration in As-Suwayda's society has failed so far and has not produced the desired effect, as the Druze are socially united, and their sect is closed in that it does not allow its followers to belong to another sect, nor to others to become its followers. Not to forget that the sect members are proud of their Arab affiliation. All these characteristics enabled the Druze to contain the Iranian attempts and to deal wisely with some young druze's orientation towards Shiism for mostly non-religious reasons.



Third: The results of Iran's policies in re-engineering society in Aleppo and its countryside

Aleppo has always been an important target for Iran, because it is the capital of the Hamdanids, who were inclined to Shi'ism. Since the era of Hafez al-Assad, the Iranians have tried to expand towards Aleppo. In the early years of the Iranian revolution, the Iranians have shown their great interest in Aleppo; as they paid their attention to the Jaafari Charitable Society, which was founded in the fifties. During the reign of Bashar Al-Assad, the Iranian influence started to strongly expand in Aleppo, mainly through development work that initially focused on the Shiite towns of Nubl and Zahraa, north of Aleppo, and by sending missions and scholarship to attract religious and social figures all of which highlighted the importance of Aleppo to the Iranian expansionist project in the Syrian revolution years. Also, leaders of the Revolutionary Guard Corps supervised the formation of the Ammar bin Yasser Brigade militia and the transfer of the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade militia from Damascus to Aleppo to confront the Free Army, whose factions entered the city of Aleppo in the summer of 2012.

Starting 2014, the Revolutionary Guard Corps and Shiite militias flocked extensively to Aleppo, and the militias of Harakat al-Nujaba, the Iraqi Aasa'ib Ahl al-Haq, the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Pakistani Zainabiyoun Brigade, the Afghan Fatemiyoun Corps, and dozens of other Shiite militant groups entered the battle against the Free Army in Aleppo. Their presence marked the beginning of a new chapter of Iran's domination of the military scene in Aleppo.

With the fall of Aleppo and the departure of the Syrian opposition factions in 2016, the Iranian-backed militias took control of most of the eastern neighborhoods in Aleppo.

Starting 2017, Iran deployed local Shiite militias, including to Aleppo, including (the Aleppo Defenders Corps), the Syrian Hezbollah, and militia members from the towns of Nubl and Zahraa, in addition to the Al-Baqir Brigade militia and its members from the Al-Bakara clan. Al-Fatemiyoun and Zainabiyoun had a symbolic presence, mainly, in the outskirts of the city and in the Jabal Aazzan region, where the main base of the Revolutionary Guard Corps is stationed.

Iran and its militias have used various methods to influence the society in Aleppo, with the aim of changing it demographically: Advocacy activity, charitable and missionary societies, aid, celebrations, and participation in various popular and religious activities, among others.

After the battles stopped and the armed opposition factions withdrew from the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo, Tehran focused on civil service work in order to get closer to the

Aleppo community. So, it supported the Al-Raed Medical Center and the Charitable Hospital in Aleppo, and assigned the so-called (Aleppo Defenders Corps) the tasks of providing the necessary civil services, especially the affairs of Shiite families in Aleppo, and the launching of activities to strengthen relations with representatives of the different religious sects and the notables of the city and its countryside⁽⁵⁴⁾.

Our local researchers recorded that the Aleppo Defenders Corps had carried out large-scale seizures of buildings in the eastern neighborhoods from which the Syrian opposition factions withdrew, in addition to the demolition of a number of cracked buildings in preparation for the construction of new housing units in the same place, all funded by the Revolutionary Guard Corps, in order to settle families of Shiite fighters from Iraq, Afghanistan and from the towns of Kefraya, Al-Foua, Nubl and Al-Zahraa, who belong to the Corps militia.



An advertising poster for the Aleppo Defenders Corps on one of the walls of the buildings in the Al-Sakhour neighborhood of Aleppo – media

Tehran has also focused on restoring shrines and establishing Husseinis, as happened in the neighborhoods of Masaken Hanano, Al-Marjah, Al-Sakhour, Al-Baloura, the stronghold of Al-Baqir Brigade of the Iranian militia, Al-Nairab neighborhood inhabited by Shiite displaced

(54) The establishment of the "Aleppo Defenders Corps" was announced at the beginning of 2017, with the support and funding of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and it was formed from several previous local militias, including the National Defense.



people from Kefraya and Foua, the Hamdaniya neighborhood, the Military Academy and in (the 3,000 apartments project), which is the residence of the officers of (Hezbollah) and the Revolutionary Guard Corps⁽⁵⁵⁾.

It was noteworthy that Iran rushed only a few days after the Opposition's from the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo to restore the mosque and Al-Noqta shrine, also known as (Mash-had Al-Hussein) in Al-Ansari neighborhood, and to reopen it in a big ceremony in April 2017. Al-Noqta is one of the most prominent Shiite shrines in Syria, as Shiite references say that in the shrine is a rock on which a drop of blood fell from the head of (Imam Hussein).⁽⁵⁶⁾

Emphasizing the importance of Aleppo for Iran, and seeking to dominate the restoration of Aleppo and its countryside in the future, Iran opened a Consulate for it in Aleppo in May 2021, in the presence of Iran's foreign minister Jawad Zarif in person.⁽⁵⁷⁾

According to the statistics team of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Aleppo and its countryside, registered at the beginning of 2011, reached 4,744,000, and thus, Aleppo and its countryside - with this large number of residents - are one of the largest cities in the Arab Levant at all, not just the largest of Syria's governorates, in terms of number of population.

Until late 2011, the Shiites in Aleppo did not constitute more than 1% of its population. Our sources estimate that the number of Shiites in Aleppo was about 45 thousand people, 21 thousand of them in the town of Nubl, which is located 22 km north of Aleppo, and another 21 thousand in Al-Zahra village which is adjacent to the city of Nubl and whose residents are all Shiites, and a few thousand are distributed in the neighborhoods of Aleppo, and some of them are in the city of Al-Bab and Bazzaa.

Our local researchers note that this percentage increased significantly during the Syrian revolution. In fact, our researchers estimate that the number of Shiites in Aleppo has increased by 3 times, which means that their proportion to the population has increased to about 2%, given that about a million residents of Aleppo and its countryside (mostly Sunnis, and about

(55) See: Secret Filming in Aleppo Reveals the Spread of Shiite Hussainiyas, Syria TV Channel on YouTube, 72021/6/ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYRaXarYJ30>

(56) For more information on Al-Noqta shrine, see: Al-Hajj, AbdulRahman, the Shiite Baath in Syria, Jusoor for translation and publishing, 2017, page 101

(57) Opening of the General Consulate of Iran in Aleppo, Sana news agency, 22

120 thousand Christians⁽⁵⁸⁾ have become displaced outside Syria.

The Central Bureau of Statistics survey estimates that the population of Aleppo who fled the country at the end of 2014 amounted to about 657938 thousand people⁽⁵⁹⁾, or 13.8% of the 2011 population. Our researchers also estimate that more than 16% have been displaced from Aleppo at the end of 2016, along with the withdrawal of the Opposition factions from the city.

Pictures from the visit of Ayatollah Tabataba'i, the representative of Supreme Leader Khamenei in Syria, to the city of Aleppo and the Al-Noqta Mosque in Al-Mashhad neighborhood of Aleppo, guarded by members of the Fatemiyoun militia, December 2019



The representative of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on a visit to the shrine of the point in the Ansari neighborhood, accompanied by fighters of the Afghan (Fatimiyoun) militia.

(58) The Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, Antoine Audo, confirmed in a press conference held on March 16, 2016 at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva that two-thirds of Syrian Christians have left the country, and that the number of Christians in Aleppo has decreased from about 160,000 to 40,000, swissinfo, the international unit of the Radio and Television Corporation Swiss, <https://2u.pw/MoC4O>

(59) Population Status Assessment Survey 2014, Central Bureau of Statistics, http://cbssyr.sy/population_statuse/Table1.pdf



Fourth: The results of Iran's policies in re-engineering society in Homs and its countryside

Since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, large parts of Homs have turned into a major rebel stronghold. The regime forces began campaigns of raids, arrests, and security restrictions targeting the residents that were involved in the revolution, with broad support from armed militias of Alawite fighters and local Shiites. Our local researchers confirm that the first civilian fighters supporting the Syrian regime were formed by the Al-Shaayrat-born Alawite Wael al-Mulhim⁽⁶⁰⁾, a member of the Syrian People's Assembly from Homs Governorate. He started gathering dozens of Alawite young men from Al-Zahra and Al-Abbasiya neighborhoods and gave them weapons and means of transportation. On March 25, 2011, they marched on (Jomaat Al-Ezza) in a pro-regime rally that confronted the demonstrators in the New Clock Square in central Homs, chanting sectarian slogans before the security forces broke up the demonstration in which one person was shot dead and dozens were arrested.

These groups of civilian fighters have turned into auxiliary elements that accompany the security forces in all campaigns, to storm the rebellious neighborhoods and villages in Homs and its countryside⁽⁶¹⁾. Since 2012, these Alawite and Shiite militias have played major roles in sectarian massacres in the neighborhoods of Karm al-Zaytoun, Bab al-Sebaa, Hay al-Sabil, Hay Asharah, and many others. They also got involved in all military and security operations, as well as in sectarian harassment of civilians. As a result of the large expansion of these systematic crimes, displacement between regions began, and further expanded with Al-Assad regime and sectarian militias adopting the policy of violent indiscriminate bombing and massive military incursions into the rebellious neighborhoods of the city. Those incursions were accompanied by mass massacres that targeted residents in a horrific way, and it seemed that the massacres aimed to terrorize the residents to get them to leave and thus empty the city. As a consequence, all the residents of Baba Amr, Karm al-Zaytoun, the Wajb al-Jandali clan, Deir Baalba, al-Bayada, al-Khalidiya, Jourat al-Shayah, al-Qusour and old Homs moved; this accounts to two-thirds of the whole population, knowing that the city of Homs has a population of about one million.

Researchers also point to violence and sexual assaults practiced on women of rebellious ar-

(60) For more on Wael al-Mulhim, see: The Council People's Enemies - Wael Ahmed al-Mulhim, Hurrya Press website, 082020/24/ <https://horrya.net/archives/128586>

(61) Homs/ Air Force Intelligence and Shabiha al-Iskan al-Askari neighborhood during the sniping of Ashera neighborhood protesters, April 8, 2011, video filmed by the researcher in Homs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GXXqu54Tlc&t=4s>

eas, by sectarian militias, Shiites in particular. These crimes were a major factor in the waves of displacement that Homs witnessed between 2011 and 2012 (especially between November 2011 and March 2012), as it was documented that these groups committed acts of rape, forcing women to walk naked in the streets, or abducting them to commit sexual violence against them in places of detention in and outside Homs. Similar violations were not documented on a large scale in Syria except during that period and in Homs in particular⁽⁶²⁾.

Reviewing the displacement reality that resulted from the systematic destruction and widespread targeting of civilian areas, and from the displacement agreements, it can be noted that all the residents who were displaced from those areas of Homs and its countryside are Sunni Muslims, Arabs with a Turkmen minority, which gives credibility to some extent to the accusations made by the opposition to Al-Assad regime and Iran in that they deliberately target the Sunni community; since the Alawites and Christian areas remained largely safe in the city and its countryside.

Human rights activists interviewed by the researcher link between the regime's deliberate and unjustified military bombing of the Homs municipality building on 1/7/2013, which led to the burning of its real estate registry department for real estate titles, and the subsequent displacement of the population and disregarded attempts to seize the lands of the displaced. After all, Iranian-backed Shiite militias are currently benefiting from these displacements to forge property titles and seize lands in Baba Amr, al-Waer and al-Abbasiya.

Activists also refer to the Shiite militias' attempts to seize the Sunni awqaf to establish Shiite religious institutions, as part of a systematic policy to set their foot in the center of Homs, which is actually free of Shiite presence. In this context, Iranian militias seized the mosque of the sons of Jaafar Al-Tayyar in Jab Al-Jandali, in the center of Homs after the rebels left it in 2014. Projects have been prepared to rebuild the mosque in the style of Shiite shrines, even though it is a Sunni mosque, with no historical reference that relates it to anything Shiite. We note that the regime forces and Shiite militias have prevented the residents of Jub al-Jandali and the neighboring Bab al-Dreeb, who have been displaced since 2012, from returning to their homes, despite the cessation of battles seven years ago.

The destinations of displacement have varied. Some have moved to other neighborhoods in the city, a large proportion have migrated to areas of northern Syria that are under the control of rebels, and a large part have sought refuge in neighboring countries with the rest leav-

(62) What is the reality of the scheme aimed at demographic change in Homs? Study, Raseef22 website, by researchers Abdel Rahman Abbata and Obaidah Fares, August 28, 2016, <https://2u.pw/uymzlz>



ing for countries of asylum.

According to Table No. 2/2 of the Syrian Statistics team, in 2011, the population of Homs reached 1,763 thousand people⁽⁶³⁾, and according to Shiite sources, the number of Shiites in Homs was about 40 thousand people, most of them in the villages of Umm Al-Amad (10 thousand people), Al-Rabwah (7 thousand). Nasma) and the Western Ghor (7 thousand), with a minority of them living in the neighborhoods of Al-Bayada, Al-Abbasiya, and Al-Sabil. Later, the demographic structure in Homs has changed more than any other governorate, and the information of the Central Bureau of Statistics survey estimates that until end of 2014, 278,110 people had left Homs and currently reside outside the country; 101 thousand people⁽⁶⁴⁾ moved to another governorate whereas our local researchers said that the number of the displaced until the end of 2018, when the last batch of displaced people left Homs, amounted to more than 669,000 people, representing 38% of the governorate's total population.

(63) Statistics Team, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Population in Syria on 12011/1/, <http://cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/Data-Chapter2/TAB-22011-2-.htm>

(64) Population Status Assessment Survey 2014, Central Bureau of Statistics, http://cbssyr.sy/population_status/Table1.pdf



	Area	Population Number in thousand in 2011	Number of Displaced people in Thousand	Proportion of the Displaced
1	<p>Homs City</p> <p>Old neighborhoods of Homs (Al-Hamidiyah - Al-Qarabees - Jouret Al-Shiyah - Al-Warsha - Wadi Al-Sayeh(</p> <p>Baba Amro and Saltaniya</p> <p>Eastern and Northern Neighborhoods (Al-Bayada - Deir Baalba - Khalidiya - Teachers' Residences - Al-Qusour - Al-Waer(</p> <p>Southern neighborhoods (Karam al-Zaytoun - Bab Sebaa - Bab al-Dreeb - Bab Palmyra - Jib (al-Jandali - clan - al-Rifai</p>	700	325	46.4%
2	<p>Homs Governorate</p> <p>The northern countryside (Rastan - Talbiseh - Houla - Termaala - Ghanto - Ezzedine - Dar Al Kabira + others)</p> <p>Eastern countryside (Palmyra-Sukhna)</p> <p>The western countryside (Talkalakh - Al-Hosn - Al-Zara - Qazhal - Umm Qasab)</p> <p>Southern countryside (Al-Qusair - Mahin - Al-Qaryatayn - Hassia - Kafraya - Abel + other)</p>	<p>1063</p> <p>265</p> <p>108</p> <p>74</p> <p>126</p>	<p>344</p> <p>120</p> <p>80</p> <p>55</p> <p>89</p>	<p>32.3%</p> <p>45.2%</p> <p>74%</p> <p>74.3%</p> <p>70.6%</p>
3	Total	1763	669	38%



The local council of the National Coalition for Revolutionary and Opposition Forces estimates that the governorate's population has decreased by about 40%, since a large number of Christians left Homs for several reasons, including the desire not to enlist in military service, the search for better life opportunities, and as a result of displacement from the town of Sadad and the city of Al-Qaryatayn after the Islamic State took control of Al-Qaryatayn and Mahin in 2015.

In an interview with the research team, a source in the Homs City Council of the Syrian regime explained that the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Sunnis and Christians during the revolution years led to a clear increase in the percentage of Shiites and Alawites in the province, especially after groups of Shiites from various areas have moved to live in Homs, including the Shiite residents of the Kefraya and Al-Fu'ah towns. The latter got displaced under the Four Cities agreement which stipulated the evacuation of the two towns from their Shiite residents to leave place for the Syrian opposition factions, in exchange for evacuating the towns of Zabadani and Madaya of opposition fighters, their families and most civilians.

Waves of displacement from Homs and the role of Iranian militias:

The first waves of displacement of Homs civilians began in February 2012, when the regime forces took full control of a number of the city's neighborhoods after extensive military operations and sectarian massacres against civilians committed by the National Defense militias (Shabiha). This militia was founded by Iran which supervised the training, arming and financing of its members (Shiites and Alawites) in early 2012.

By May of that same year, the neighborhoods of Baba Amr, Karm al-Zaytoun, Asheerah, al-Bayada, Jobar and al-Sultania were emptied of their residents, before being closed to prevent their residents from returning. Al-Assad forces allowed shabiha gangs to enter these areas for several months with the aim of stealing all their contents, even infrastructure materials, and of converting most houses to uninhabitable homes, before these areas became under the joint control of the regime forces and the Iranian-backed Shiite militias.

As for the neighborhoods that remained outside the regime's control, Al-Assad forces and Shiite militias subjected them to a suffocating siege that extended from June 2012 to May 2014. During that period, the regime forces and militias used all kinds of heavy weapons and aviation to target civilian areas with intense bombardment, thus turning the neighborhoods, including houses and infrastructure, into rubble. As a result, a large number of civilians were



forced to flee through dangerous roads, mainly those open to snipers⁽⁶⁵⁾, while others insisted on staying in their homes. The siege ended with the regime forces and Shiite Militias Including the Lebanese (Hezbollah) gaining control over the neighborhoods of Khalidiya, Jouret Al-Shiyah, Al-Qusour, the old neighborhoods of Homs and others, and preventing most of their residents from returning to them later.

By the end of the siege, about twenty Homs neighborhoods had been largely destroyed, most notably the neighborhoods of Baba Amro, Bab Sba`, Khalidiya, Asheerah, Karm al-Zaytoun, al-Rifai, Jub al-Jandali, Karm Shamsham, al-Bayada, al-Sabeel, Wadi al-Arab, Jobar, al-Sultania, Jourat al-Shayah, al-Qusour, al-Qarabis, al-Hamidiyah, al-Warshah, Bab al-Dreeb, Bab Tadmor, and Bab Hood. For many years, their residents were forbidden from returning before a small percentage of the population, not exceeding 5% of the total number, was allowed to return after subjecting the returnees to complex security measures.

In 2017, Hom's remaining neighborhood, which was outside the regime control, was emptied, based on an agreement signed between Al-Waer rebels and the regime forces following a long siege and violent bombardment. About three-quarters of its population of about sixty thousand people left to the north of Syria.

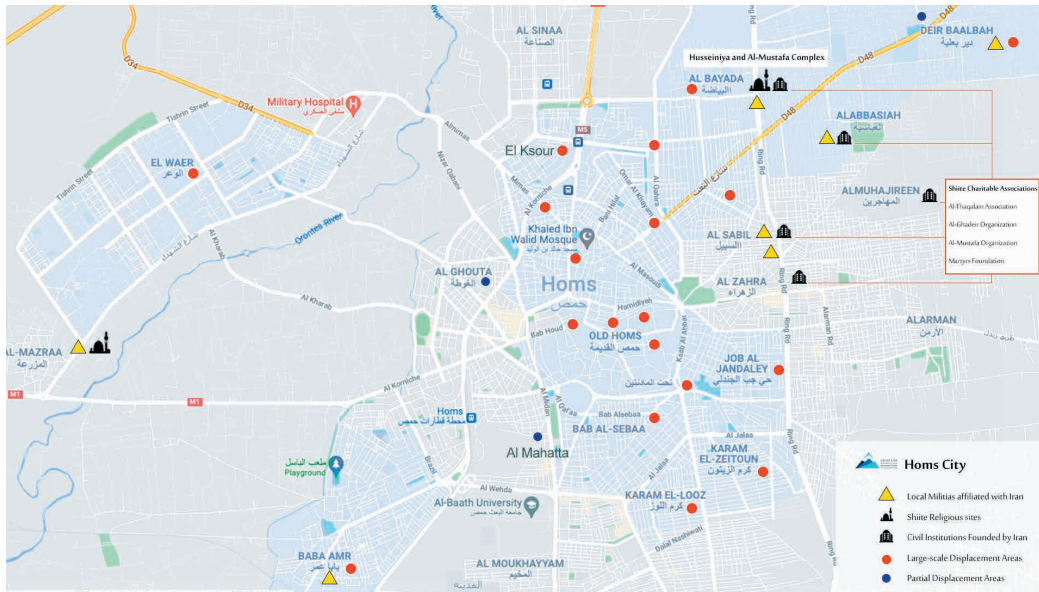
(65) ⁶⁵Al-Fares, Walid, Homs: The Great Siege, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 1, Beirut, 2015, p. 65.



A picture taken of the Corniche Street, in February 2021, by collaborating researchers, Also appear the neighborhoods of Al-Qusour and Jouret Al-Shayah. The picture shows the destruction left by the regime forces and the Hezbollah militia, and the absence of their residents as a result of preventing them from returning.

All those who returned to those neighborhoods, and who were not involved in any revolutionary activity, did not receive services such as rubble removal, restoration, water, electricity, etc. Housing was limited and most neighborhoods remain uninhabitable with the Iranian-backed militia currently in control. Some families from Shiite towns of Kefraya and Al-Fou'a have been settled in the initial residents' houses. The municipality of Homs imposes conditions for the return of a limited number of the displaced, including a security approval that actually prevents return⁽⁶⁶⁾.

(66) "Al-Bayada" neighborhood in Homs. A return to life, with Teshyi' attempts, Eqtisad website, 62018/6/, <https://www.eqtisad.net/news/article/20100/>



Despite government promises to restore basic services to Homs neighborhoods, these neighborhoods have yet to benefit from any government service. The security authorities did not allow those without official ownership titles to live in their homes, but allowed to Shiite militia to confiscate houses in Al-Bayada, Al-Abbasiya, Al-Sabil, and Karm Shamsham neighborhoods.



A picture from the Khalidiyah neighborhood in Homs taken in February 2021 by researchers collaborating with us . The picture shows the destruction left by the regime forces and Hezbollah militia, and the absence of residents due to not allowing them to return..



At a time when all the displaced residents were prevented from returning, and these neighborhoods were left without any service center being restored, the local authorities, backed by Iran, rushed to renovate the Mustafa Mosque complex, located on Al-Sitteen Street near (Al-Bayada Roundabout). It is a Shiite Husseiniya built in the nineties. In fact, the city council and the Directorate of Awqaf celebrated the launch of restoration work in mid-2014, in the presence of the governor of Homs and Shiite clerics. The restoration work was entrusted to the Iranian real estate company, Aman, which established its headquarters on Al-Sitteen Street in Al-Bayada neighborhood, and provides services to Shiite families who have seized dozens of homes belonging to the neighborhood's residents. These houses include the one of Muhammad al-Hamid on Qarawneh Street, and the house of Hajj Mansour al-Muhammad al-Mashrafi on Al Mashaal Street, among others.⁽⁶⁷⁾



The Husseiniya of Al-Mustafa Mosque in Al-Bayada neighborhood in Homs

According to the research team, the area around the Husseiniya, which was built in the middle of a Sunni neighborhood, has turned during the past years, into a Shiite religious ceremonial arena, frequented by members of the Shiite militias and their families, and the people of the Shiite towns of Kefraya and Al-Fou'a who had moved to Homs..

(67) An interview conducted by the research team on March 23, 2021, via Skype with a number of displaced residents of Al-Bayada neighborhood whose houses were taken over by Shiite militias,



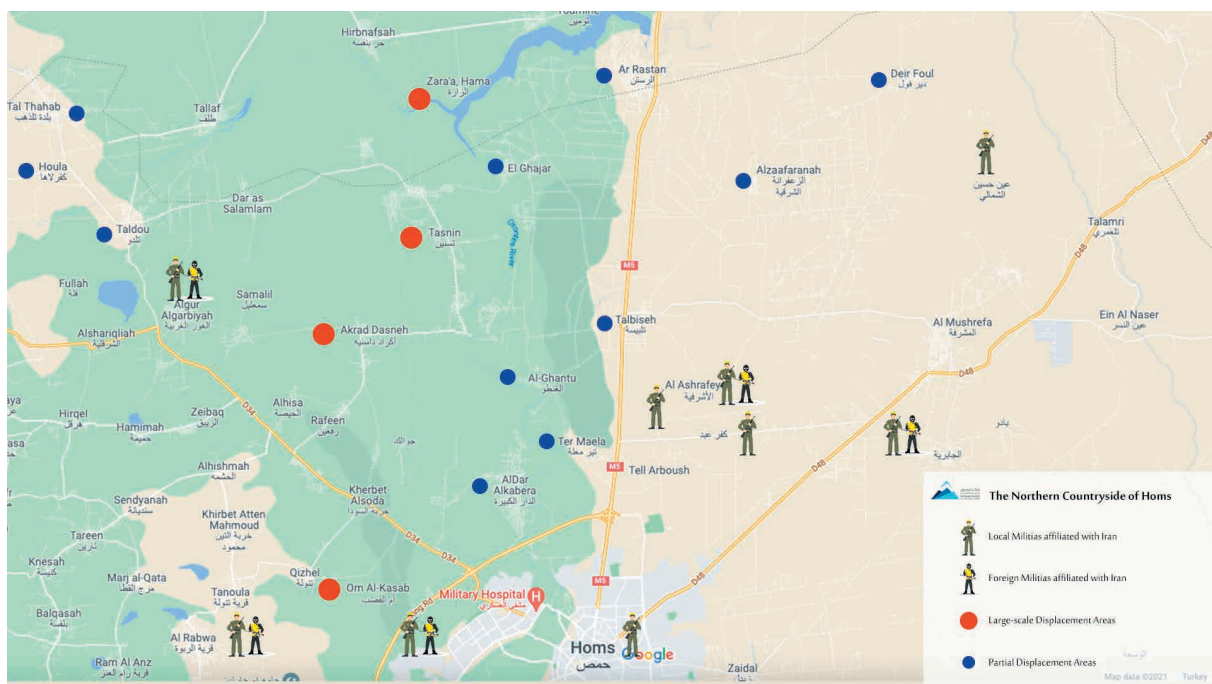
The Shiite community celebrates the Prophet's birthday on October 29, 2020, next to the Husseiniya of Al-Mustafa Mosque in the Al-Bayada neighborhood of Homs

A number of cities and towns in the Homs countryside were subjected to successive waves of displacement, similar to what happened in the city. The displacement began in towns of the western countryside, such as Tal Kalakh, Al-Hosn, Al-Zara and others. Successive military operations took place there, all supported by Iran. The militias and the Syrian army forces committed sectarian massacres in the towns of Al-Zara, Al-Mashrifa, Tal Kalakh and Al-Hosn. Also involved in these massacres were groups from the Lebanese “Hezbollah” militia, and “Al-Za-wba’a Forces” militia led by the so-called Saed Othman from the town of Al-Hawash, and the “National Defense” militia, a predominantly Christian militia led by the so-called Bishr Al-Yaziji from the town of Marmarita⁽⁶⁸⁾. As a consequence, most population of Tal Kalakh, numbered at about fifty thousand, moved out in May 2013, and 20 thousand people left Al-Hosn in April 2014. With that said, less than half of the population returned to the two areas later.

(68) See: The Black List Book, An Organization with Justice, 1st Edition, 2019, p. 295.

In the Northern countryside, thousands of civilians from the villages of Tasnin, Koni al-aasi, Akrad al-Dasniye, and Al-Haisa in 2013, got displaced due to massacres that left hundreds of casualties, and that were committed by sectarian militias. Same happened in the towns of Kozhal and Umm Qasab in 2016 after sectarian militias, most of which are from the Syrian Hezbollah and Al-Rida militia slaughtered 20 civilians with knives.

After the northern countryside was subject to a long siege that lasted until 2018, the Opposition factions were forced to sign a forcible displacement agreement with the Russians. As a result, half of the population of Resten, about 80,000 people, left, and 45,000 left from Talbise, and 100,000 from Hawla as well as 30,000 from Al-Dar Al-Kbire, Teir Maala, and Al-Ghanto. Those who stayed in their towns receive constant harrassment, from members of the security forces, as well as from elements of local Shiite militias, mainly fighters from Shiite neighborhoods lik Al-Mekhtarye, Al-Zarzouriye, Al-Mazraa, and Al-Hazmiye.





displaced forbidden from returning.

The control over Palmyra is shared between the regime forces and Iran-backed militias since 2016, after ISIS was expelled from the city. Even though the city is free of Shiites, the Shiite militia took control of the Omar Ben Al-Khattab mosque in Al-Sana'a neighborhood and turned it into a Husseiniya where its members practice their rituals and call for Teshyi3 on loudspeakers.

Also, compulsory sale of properties was recorded in the city, with the militias forcing the land owners to choose between enrolling their children in the militia military service or send their lands and their houses in return of inaccountability for the deserters in the Syrian Army.

Baba Amro and Al-Qusayr, the most obvious demographic change in Syria.

The first forcible displacements took place in Baba Amro, in Homs city, and in Al-Qusayr, a city located on the Lebanese border. The capture of Al-Qusayr and of nearby villages by Hezbollah militia and the expulsion of the local population, whose number reaches 100 thousand, clearly highlight Iran's ambitions of changing Syria's demography. Hezbollah forces took control of the city and its neighboring villages in 2013 following wide massacres, indiscriminate shelling and systematic destruction. As a result, all the civilians, as well as the Opposition factions agreed to leave the city for Hezbollah forces. 8 years have passed since the end of battles, however, Hezbollah has not allowed the return of the displaced civilians, or maybe just a few Shiite and Christians. Hezbollah even allowed Shiite families from Lebanon and from Al-Rida militia to confiscate the displaced's houses and to settle in them; it also gave them agricultural lands in Al-Qusayr and Abu-Houry to use for housing or work.

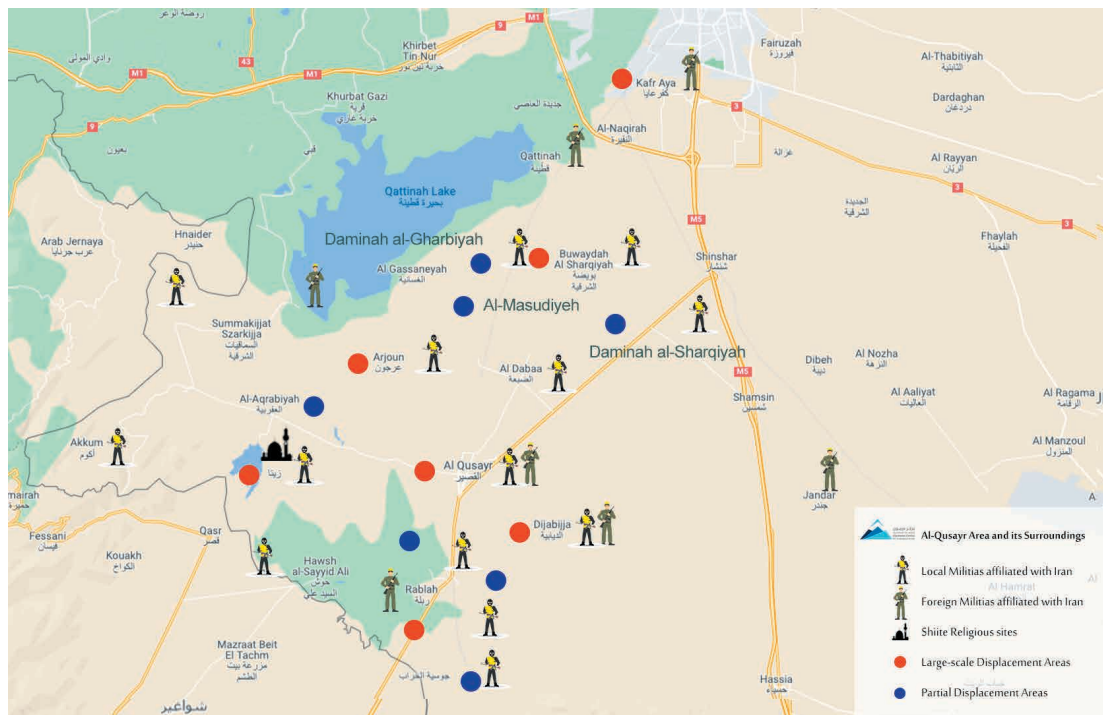
A network of local researchers collaborating with Harmoon center recorded a wide seizure of lands in Al-Qusayr by Hezbollah. Among these lands, there are 20 agricultural plots distributed on both sides of the road between Al-Qusayr and Hosh Al-Sayed Ali; the latter being a military city controlled by the militia, and containing weapon arsenals and training sites.

According to information from our field researches, Al-Hawik village which is administratively subordinated to the town of Al-Akrabiye in Al-Qusayr, as well as the village of Blouzeh, became almost owned by Hezbollah. These two villages have a population of Sunnis and Shiites. At the end of 2019, 170 hectares from the area were bought on behalf of people from Al-Jamal and Al-Bahaq families. It is worth noting that most lands bought by Hezbollah remain undeveloped, in that they remain unbuilt, non-planted and entrance to them forbidden. Eye-witnesses report that Hezbollah started building strictly-guarded apartments in these

agricultural lands. Actually Hezbollah's purchase of lands is a way to ensure weapon transfer from its arsenals in Qara to Al-Hermel, knowing that Matar-Al-Dabaa area near Homs is now a military area that belongs to the party, even the security forces of Al-Qusayr city forbid the residents from returning to it. Anyway, nobody dares to go near that place.⁽⁶⁹⁾

A study conducted by Frederic Ebrit institution shows that Shiite families from Al-Qusayr and Al-Hermel urges Hezbollah to keep the restrictions imposed on the Sunnites of Al-Qusayr. In fact a mediator close to the regime encouraged people to return to Syria, just not to Al-Qusayr. In short: "Much blood has been shed".⁽⁷⁰⁾

Our field researchers confirm that the sectarian criterion is essential when it comes to allowing the return of the displaced to Al-Qusayr. For example, the Hezbollah militia facilitated the return of all the Shiite displaced from Sakarja village, while the Sunnite were not allowed to return up till now. Also, the militia allowed Christian families to seize vast lands in Al-Nazariya and Al-Jousia villages, and to cultivate them, in return for paying tenancy fees to the party leaders. The militia also allows Shiite families to farm lands in Zita and Hoch Said, west of Al-Assi, while the Sunni residents are forbidden from returning to their villages.



(69) In facts and numbers. This is how Hezbollah stole Al-Qusayr properties- Eqtisad website-242019-1- <https://www.eqtisad.net/news/article/23680/>

(70) Land, housing, Capture and Destruction in a strategic area: The case of Al-Qusayr in Syria, translated studies, HArmoon Center for contemporary studies, from Frederic Ebrit Institution, 2019, <https://2u.pw/YvyEO>



Fifth: The consequences of Iran's policies in re-structuring society in Deir-Ezzor

Iran had eyes on Deir-Ezzor governorate since the beginning and has made tremendous efforts to take control of it and infiltrate its society, especially in the Eastern cities that are adjacent to the Iraqi border.

Al-Assad regime forces and Iran-backed militias took control over most of the governorate after expelling ISIS from it in 2017; thus causing the displacement of thousands of residents. Some fled to the Eastern of the Euphrates while others resided in areas controlled by the PYD forces in Al-Reqqa, and Tabqa, and Deir-Ezzor countryside, and some migrated towards the North of Syria and particularly to the opposition-controlled areas such as the cities of Al-Bab and Efrin.

Shiite militias took control of most cities of Eastern Deir-Ezzor and most of its neighborhoods such as Al-Qusoor, Huwayja, Sakr, Rashidiye and Huwayka neighborhoods. They also confiscated civilians' houses and turned them into military sites, and forbid the return of most residents to their houses except those who were residing in regime-controlled areas.



Photo taken by collaborating researchers in the Al-Rashidiye neighborhood in Deir-Ezzor in March 2021. The photo shows the absence of residents due to them being forbidden from returning, as well as the heavy destruction caused by the regime and militias shelling.

Deir-Ezzor's population was estimated at 1,202,000 in early 2011⁽⁷¹⁾, distributed over Deir-Ezzor, Al-Bukamal, Al-Mayadeen, Mohsen, Hajeen, Al-Kawriye, and Sbaykhan.

Due to the successive waves of displacement triggered by multiple causes between Al-As-sad forces, sectarian Iran-backed militias and Islamic State regime, the number of population in Deir-Ezzor significantly decreased.

(71) Statistics Team, Statistics Central Bureau, estimating population residing in Syria in 12011/1/ <http://cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/Data-Chapter2/TAB-22011-2-.htm>



Photo taken by collaborating researches in Houayka neighborhood in Deir-Ezzor in March 2021. It shows the absence of residents due to them being forbidden from returning and the heavy destruction caused by the regime and militias bombardments.

Despite the unavailability of precise numbering of the population in 2021, local researchers estimate that the remaining population of Deir-Ezzor and its cities constitute 66% of the governorate's whole population. The following annex shows the estimates as compared between the researchers' sources and the regime's estimates which are based on a 2014 population survey conducted by the Statistics Central Bureau⁽⁷²⁾.

(72) 2014 Popular survey, Central Bureau of statistics. • http://cbssyr.sy/population_statuse/Table1.pdf



Area name	Population (thousands)	The number of people present according to the system estimates 2014	Harmoon estimates for those present in 2021	Percentage of Displaced people/Harmoon Estimates
Deir Ezzor Governorate	2011	1097	800	33.5%
Deir Ezzor Center	1202	-	400	31.1%
Al-Mayadin area	580	-	200	34.5%
Albukamal area	305	-	200	36.5%

The displacement destinations spanned several areas. Some went to the West, to the Western South and to Central Syria, especially to Damascus, Homs, Lattaqia and areas controlled by the opposition factions or by the PYD. However, the majority entered Turkey, especially Orfa city, due to clan expansion, as the number of people originating from Deir-Ezzor in Orfa is about 250 thousand.

Iranian forces have control on diverse aspects of life in Deir-Ezzor and its countryside. They dominate almost completely all military sites, and the crossing border with Iraq, as well as the city airport. Moreover, the Revolution Guard Corps and Iran-backed Shiite militias, local and foreign, are deployed in all the governorate areas.

According to a research prepared by the Middle East Directions Programme (MEDirections) hosted by the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies in the European University institute in 2019, there are dozens of Iran-backed militias, mainly the Revolution Guard Corps, the Afghan Fatimioun brigade, the Pakistani Zaynabioun brigade, the Syrian Hezbollah militia, Al-Baqer brigade, the lions of the East Army, in addition to a group of Iraqi militias like "Asa'eb Ahl Al-Haq", Al-Nujba' movement, and Kataeb Al-Imam Ali, along with the Lebanese Hezbollah, all of which are directly commanded by the Revolutionary Guard Corps.⁽⁷³⁾

Iran's dominance over other power functions in Deir-Ezzor reached the point of neutralizing prominent leaders of the regime forces. An example would be the capture of some Syrian commanders in 9th of May, 2021 such as the Brigadier Nizar Ahmed Al-Khodir, commander of division 17, and president of the security and military council in Deir-Ezzor following his con-

(73) Iran in Deir-Ezzor: Strategy, expansion and infiltration: Study prepared by Ziad Awwad, Robert Shuman Center for Advanced Studies, European university institution, 2019 <https://2u.pw/yAgob>



flict with Iranian militia leaders on December 2020.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Al-Khodr was arrested and referred to a military investigation council and a forfeiture of property warrant was issued against him, after a clash broke between him and Al-Hajj Hussein, the representative of the cultural Chancellery of Iran in Deir Ezzor, and Al-Hajj Kamil, Shiite forces commander, over Iran-backed militias' involvement in some practices inside the governorate.

Iranian militia's control over Al-Bukamal city

The Iran-backed militias completely control the city of Al-Bukamal and its surroundings. The importance of this city to Tehran is highlighted by Tehran's military hegemony over it, mainly through the presence of officials and experts from the Revolutionary Guard Corps and from the Iraqi popular mobilization forces, as well as through the presence of local militias like the 47th –Guard Brigade, a militia directly commanded by the Revolutionary Guard Corps and trained so well that it became a striking force.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is deployed in a large geographical and administrative area of Al-Bukamal city. The corps has established bases in Al-Jam'iyat in the downtown city, some of which are composed of killer divisions, and some are administrative and logistics bases, while others are allocated for the elements, mainly for their settlement. Civilians are forbidden from accessing the neighborhood, since the bases were set up in the houses of the Syrian Regime's opponents.

Al-Fatimiyoun militia, composed of Afghan fighters, have control over a security square located behind "Al-Entilaq" garage, West of Al-Bukamal city. The militia forbids the initial residents from entering the square, where it has captured houses owned mostly by people opposing the regime forces.

The Revolutionary Guard Corps forbids civilians from heading towards Al-Bukamal desert under the pretext that ISIS has sleeper cells in the desert.

Also, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Mobilization forces are in control of most areas across the border strip between Syria and Iraq, especially on the South of the official crossing gate.

The Iranian Guard forces are deployed at several military sites and has observatories in the

(74) An argument with an Iranian leader took down Brigadier Nizar Al-Khodr, Commander of Al-Assad militias in Deir-Ezzor, Orient News website, 10/20/2021/5/ <https://bit.ly/3c28p1E>



western side of the Euphrates River bed opposite the military bases of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the International Coalition.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps forbids civilians from movement and work in these areas, knowing that the river bed has always been used by the civilians to irrigate their lands and livestock.

Iran's non-military activity in Deir-Ezzor

Iran insisted on infiltrating Deir-Ezzor society following a strategic plan. It started with civil activity

Iran has deliberately infiltrated Deir-Ezzor society, mainly through charitable and service activities by which it has approached the people.

After all, the latter have found themselves in a state of lack of educational, health and emergency public services, especially after the expulsion of ISIS from the province. As for the economic activity in the province, it was halted due to the destruction of markets, small factories and other vital facilities. Moreover, the Iraqi Shiite militias have contributed to the smuggling of goods and weapons from Iraq. In fact, the opening of Al-Bukamal crossing gate with Iraq came under Iranian pressure to increase the flow of goods across the border, and increase commercial activity in areas near the crossing line.⁽⁷⁵⁾

The market movement was enhanced by cash flow from militias which seized small oil wells in the Al-Ward field. The Revolutionary Guard Corps established two small oil refineries in Al-Sanaa and Al-Hizam al Akhdar in the South of the city. Part of their production is sold locally, while part of the extracted crude oil is sold to Al-Qaterji company.

Stealing real-estate properties in Al-Boukamal.

Many sources from Al-Boukamal confirm that there is a land purchasing activity in the area. Local real-estate brokers attempt to buy lands for the benefits of leaders and elements of Iranian militias. The average price of a land is 10 Million Syrian Pounds per acre.

The Revolutionary Guard Corps buys lands in order to evacuate them from their residents, and not allowing the presence of civilians in the area as these lands are located near the smuggling crossings from and to Iraq, which the Revolutionary Guard Corps uses for transporting

(75) Opening of Al-Bukamal crossing shared with Iran and influx of people and goods in September 30, 2019. See <http://www.sana.sy/?p=1026160>

elements and military equipment, and for drug and weapon smuggling.

The Iranian Cultural Center in Deir-Ezzor launches campaigns in to convert civilians to Shiism, and to recruit in the militias young men pursued for having fled the compulsory service in Al-Assad army. The Center is mostly active in Karamish Garden, Deir-Ezzor city, Howayjat Sakr, Sbaykhan, and in Al-Boukamal and its countryside.

With support from Iranian militias, the Center organizes periodic missionary trips to Iran through Iraq with the aim of promoting the Persian language and the Shiite sect among the population.



Free Persian course for children, held by the Iranian Cultural Centre in Al-Mayadeen in July 2021.



Photo of Hajj Sadek Al-Irani, director of the Iranian Cultural Center in Deir-Ezzor, to his side: The Secretary of Baath Party branch in Deir-Ezzor, and other Syrian party officials.

There has also been a tendency to establish Husseiniyas on a wide scale, most notably the Ain Ali Husseiniya. Moreover, the Iranians built Ahl Al-Bayt shrine in Nabaa area near Al-Quria, about 100 Km from Deir-Ezzor.

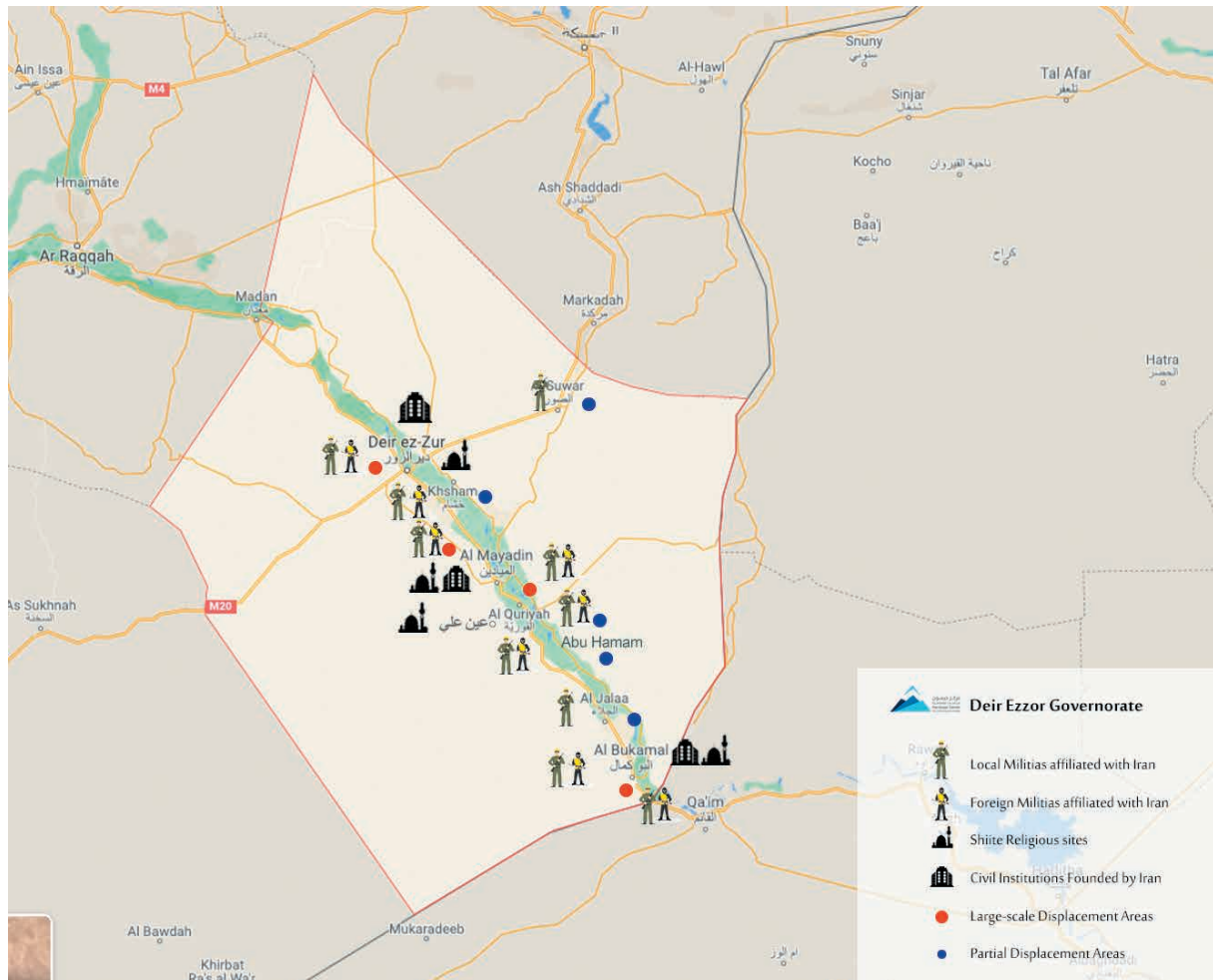


Ain Ali Husseiniya-Quriya

The areas of Hatla and Al-Jaffa witnessed widespread preaching activity during the last three years, which resulted in a significant increase in the number of Shiite converts, especially among Al-Bakara clan from which Sheikh Nawwaf Al-Bachir formed the Al-Baqer brigade, a brigade trained by the Revolutionary Guard Corps and subject to orders from Al-Quds faction.

After the regime forces took control of Al-Mouhassan, (20 Kms east of Deir-Ezzor), with the support of Iranian militias, our field researchers documented the militias' seizure of vast lands, estimated at about 200 hectares; and prevented its displaced owners to return to them. Some of these lands were openly put for sale between militia members.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps militia turned the tammo neighborhood mosque in Al-Mayadeen city into a military base. Militias would use the mosque as a Husseinia before the construction, by the Jihad Al-Bina' Iranian organization, of a new mosque and a Husseinia in the same neighborhood.⁽⁷⁶⁾



The Mahdi Scouts Center in the Officers' club in Deir-Ezzor city

The Syrian-Iranian Friendship Committee established the Scout center for the Popular Committees in Deir-Ezzor, (Al-Mahdi Scouts). The center organizes cultural and social activities as well as religious seminars targeting boys aged between 6 and 18 years.

Director of the Iranian Cultural Center in Deir-Ezzor Al-Hajj Sadek, appointed Rachid Al-Faysal, the former official of the Revolutionary Youth Union of the Syrian regime, as a direc-

(76) The Revolutionary Guard militia turns a mosque in Al-Mayadeen into military headquarters after having turned it previously into a Husseinia where the Shiite Azan is chanted, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights 2020/1/5/ <https://bit.ly/3b0Io61>

tor of the center activities in Al-Qusoor, Al-Ommal, and Al-Joura neighborhoods. In December 2019, the Center organized its first military camp that aimed to recruit children from Al-Qusoor neighborhood in Deir-Ezzor; it also held an activity for children of Al-Ummal neighborhood. The center has weekly events and distributes gifts and money to children and young members on a monthly basis.



Al-Mahdi Scouts Center in Deir-Ezzor



Sixth: The results of Iran's policies of re-structuring society in Hama governorate

The governorate of Hama was not immune to the forced displacement and the demographic change, especially because of its early participation in the Syrian revolution. Partial displacements took place in the first year of the revolution, due to reconstruction policies and security campaigns in the rebellious areas.

With the revolution entering the phase of military battles, and the regime and Iran-backed militias starting indiscriminate bombing and massive military incursions, displacements escalated dramatically to the point of complete displacement of civilians from cities and towns after the regime and sectarian militias took control of them.

In the northern countryside which turned into a field of battles, the displacement has been taking place since 2013 with an increase in pace during the intensification of battles. Almost all residents were evacuated and their return forbidden except for few cases.

Among the most prominent cities and towns affected by displacement are Soran, 60,000 people, Morek 27,000, Lataminah 30,000, Halfaya 30,000, Karnaz 19,500, and Kafr Zita 34,000, all of which had been controlled by the regime forces by 2019. Only 2% of the population has returned.

The same thing was repeated in Al-Ghab Plain in the northwestern countryside, whose residents had also been displaced by 2019, such as in Qalaat al-Madiq 23,000 people, Sharia 18,000 people, Al-Tuwaina 7,000 people, and dozens of other villages whose infrastructure was almost completely destroyed. Only 2% of the residents returned to them.

The eastern countryside of Hama Governorate - which was taken over by the rebel factions and then by the Islamic State- witnessed during those periods repeated waves of displacement until the regime and Shiite militias took full control of it in 2017. Most of its people were prevented from returning to their villages such as in Uqairbat, Suha, Masoud and Jarrah, with a population of about 14,000. Only about a third of the population returned to those villages.

Towns in the southern countryside were subjected to siege along with the northern countryside of Homs until 2018, when the forced displacement agreement was signed and half of the population was displaced from Aqrab, 10,000 people, and Talf of 8,000 people, and other small villages in the far east of the southern countryside, such as Al-Dumina, Tlul Al-Hamr and others. .



All the residents of those areas who were displaced are from the Sunni Muslims who work in agriculture, livestock and liberal professions. They are Arabs with a Turkmen minority. Their areas were destroyed and emptied of them, and they were not allowed to return except for very small percentages who now live without services and in poor living conditions. These areas are controlled by the regime militias, Iranian militias, and dozens of Russian policemen.

The destinations of displacement were towards the Syrian north, which is under control of the rebels in Idlib and the countryside of Aleppo, while part of the population migrated to neighboring countries and countries of asylum.

The Al-Mukhtar Al-Thaqafi Brigade is the most prominent local Shiite militia that has its bases in various locations in Hama and its countryside. It consists mostly of Shiite fighters from the provinces of Hama and Latakia, and enjoys great support from the leaders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Fighting groups from the Syrian (Hezbollah) and fighters from the Revolutionary Guard Corps are stationed at the Hama Military Airport. By 2020, their number decreased significantly in the city of Hama and its countryside after the withdrawal of the Lebanese (Hezbollah) fighters. The latter were replaced in most of the locations which were dominated by Iranian-backed militias by forces from the (Tiger Militia) led by Brigadier General Suheil Al-Hassan, supported by Russia,

The presence of the Russian forces and their strong military police in Hama did not prevent the Iranian-backed militias from attempting to seize economic resources to cover their members' needs, as several media sources reported the outbreak of disputes between the regime forces and the Iranian militias during the pistachio harvest season, over the shared quotas⁽⁷⁷⁾. Media sources spoke of recruiting youth in the countryside of Hama to work in guarding pistachio orchards in the northern countryside of Hama and the southern countryside of Idlib, at the behest of Haidara al-Assad, nicknamed (Abu al-Harith), the cousin of Waseem Badi al-Assad, commander of a militia affiliated with the National Defense in Latakia⁽⁷⁸⁾.

In contrast to most areas of Hama and its countryside, the Teshyi' movement appears to be active in the city of Salamiyah and its countryside, where cases have been recorded among the youth of the village of Sabboura, who initially belonged to the Alawite sect. Activists con-

(77) Iranian-Syrian conflict over "red gold", Middle East Newspaper, 142021/5/ <https://bit.ly/3oEA0v1>

(78) Syria: Recruiting youth to guard the pistachio harvest season at the behest of an Al-Assad relative. 242021/5/ <https://bit.ly/3yEy36B>



firm that the attempts of Shiite infiltration into Salamiyah began years before the revolution, when a (Husseiniya) was built in the northwestern neighborhood of Salamiyah. The Ismaili sect dominates the village and locals blame the “Higher Islamic Shiite Ismaili Council” for its silence over the construction of a husseiniya in a town full of Ismailis.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. Iran is one of the most prominent actors in the Syrian issue, and the most capable of influencing state institutions, policies and orientations of the Syrian regime and determining its options in the face of the crisis. Iran sees Syria as an arena for managing its foreign affairs, so the Syrian regime should be disengaged from its Iranian ally, in order to avoid more bloody clashes in Syria.
2. Iran adopts a religious-doctrinal approach that consists of spreading Shiism to attract support and to secure manpower to form militias such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iraqi Popular Mobilization and others. This means that there is a barrier that requires Iran to double its efforts to be able to access the Syrian society; however, the real danger lies in its determination to actually overcome this barrier.
3. Iran is the most dangerous actor in the Syrian issue, affecting the structure and cohesion of the Syrian fabric, given the several motives that fuel its intervention in Syria. The most dangerous of them is the sectarian motive that brings about current and future risks that may sabotage the unity of the state and of the people.
4. It is unlikely that Tehran will retreat from its policies in Syria, which revolve around dominating the state apparatus and Syrian society, driven by a number of political, economic, religious and strategic interests that are intertwined with Iran's interests in the region (Lebanon and Iraq). Such withdrawal will not happen unless there is a decisive change in the balance of power internally, regionally and internationally, that pushes Iran to either relinquish its influence and withdraw from Syria, or reduce this influence. This requires searching for new approaches in managing the conflict with Iran.
5. Iran's policies have so far not achieved much success in Syria in terms of replacing the residents by people from Lebanon and Iraq loyal to its Iran's policies, given the lack of economic incentives to lure its followers in Iraq, Lebanon and other countries to move to settlement in areas from where the Sunni Muslim population of Syria has been expelled.
6. So far, Iran's policies of spreading Shiism in Syria have not achieved major success, and teshyi' was limited to several decentralized areas, taking advantage of the decline in public services and living conditions of fighters and civilians alike.
7. The limited number of local Shiite groups in Syria, unlike the situation in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, does not form a socio-political force that can be controlled by distinct fanaticism to achieve sectarian hegemony over Syrian society. This obliges Tehran to



be present through its militia military forces it supports militarily, politically and financially, which constitutes a burden for Tehran on the long run, and which requires to find a way to impede the flow of Iranian military and financial support to the militias loyal to it in Syria.

8. Tehran has completed most of its (limited) achievements in infiltrating the Syrian society. The Syrian regime acted as its complice to facilitate its task; after all, it finds itself compelled to accept Iran's dominance over sensitive state organs and over the Syrian society, in return for Iranian support to ensure survival in power. But the regime puts itself at risk of a conflict with (Israel), a price it will probably stop paying once the threats to its existence are removed.
9. Russia has played a key role in setting the bases for Iranian penetration in Syria, especially at the economic and military levels, and specifically in the main cities, in the south and the coast. In many cases, Russia also turns a blind eye to Iran's practices that threaten Syria's society fabric, as long as it needs Iran's efforts to achieve Moscow's main goal of preserving Al- Assad regime and preventing its fall by supporting it militarily and economically.
10. The presence of areas outside the regime's control is a serious obstacle to Tehran's efforts to disrupt the society structure and to weaken the Sunni component in it, as these areas shelter millions of Sunni Arabs who are waiting for the right opportunity to return to their areas of residence and to restore their role in society and the future of the country. This calls for a regulation for the displaced in the areas of their displacement and work towards providing them the conditions for their safe voluntary return.
11. The absence of an effective Arab and international role provided an opportunity for Iran to monopolize the Syrian state and society. No serious Arab position was either recorded regarding preventing Tehran from exploiting the Arab Shiites in Lebanon and Iraq in its war. This should prompt the awakening of an Arab role against Iran kidnapping Shiites in Arab countries and recruiting them against the interests of their countries.
12. Providing support, advocacy and protection to the Syrian community in the areas of influence of Iran and its militias is an essential step at this point. A quick initiative should be put in place to respond sustainably to the needs of the Syrian community and to provide the requirements for its survival in its areas of residence, in order to prevent new waves of displacement, and ensure the safe return of the displaced.
13. Getting rid of Iranian influence, curbing the ambition of hegemony over Syria's state and society, future will not be successful and sustainable except by establishing a democratic regime that consecrates popular authority, guarantees the sovereignty and in-



dependence of the state, and abolishes the authoritarian regime and the illegitimate privileges granted to his Iranian and Russian allies in various fields. Also, ensuring equality between citizens, so as to prevent anyone from imposing their guardianship, protection and support over a group of the Syrian people.



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Appendices

Note: These appendices were prepared based on information collected by cooperative local researchers from the people that are private sources for the research. It should be noted that the numbers and information contained in these appendices are based on estimates based on eye witnesses, and open data and information sources, and not on actual statistics because the Syrian regime allows no field studies.

1. Areas subjected to displacement and social re-engineering in Damascus and Damascus countryside

Annex No. (1) Yabroud area in the Damascus countryside in the north, near the Lebanese border

Subject	explanations
Yabroud Administrative District	Yabroud - Ras Al-Ain - Al-Sarkha - Al-Jabbah - Rima - Assal Al-Ward - Wadi Al-Naeem - Maarat Yabroud.
Total population:	68 thousand people
Sectarian and thnic composition	95.5% of Sunni Arabs, 4.5% of Christian Arabs, are concentrated in Yabroud only (the vast majority are Catholic).
The nature of work of the population:	The residents of Yabroud work in industry and commerce.
The towns that have been displaced and the percentage of displaced people	Residents of the towns of Yabroud work in agriculture.
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the whole region:	Yabroud 30% - Al-Sarkha 100% - Rima 100% - Assal Al-Ward 15% - the rest 5%.
date of displacement	24.6%, or approximately: 16,700 thousand displaced.
Displacement destination:	In 2014, gradually after the regime and its auxiliary militias took control.
Reasons for displacement:	Lebanon - Turkey - the Arabian Gulf - very few into Syria.



The authority controlling the area:	Lebanese Hezbollah Militia - local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (National Defense).
The nature of the services currently provided to the residents of the area:	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.
Entities providing assistance:	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent
Additional information on demographic change:	The towns of Al-Sarkah and Rima were bulldozed and the residents were prevented from returning to them, given the Lebanese Hezbollah militia's control of all strategic areas, and the absence of Syrian regime forces.

Annex No. (2) the administrative district of Al-Nabk in the countryside of Damascus in the north, near the Lebanese border

Al-Nabk Administrative District	It includes the cities and towns of Al-Nabek - Al-Mashrifa - Al-Qastal - Al-Marah - Al-Sahl - Deir Attia - Jarajir - Al-Humaira - Qara.
total population	112 thousand people
The sectarian and ethnic composition of the population	95.5% of Arabs are Sunni Muslims, 2% of Turkmen are Sunni Muslims, and 2.5% of Christian Arabs are concentrated in the city of Nabek, Deir Atiyah and Qara only (the vast majority are Catholic).
The nature of work of the population:	Residents of the city of Nabek and Deir Atiyah work in industry and commerce. Residents of affiliated towns work in agriculture.
The towns that have been displaced and the percentage of displaced people	Nabek 25% - Mushrifa 100% - Qara 30% - the rest of the towns 5%
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the whole region:	18.1%, or approximately: 20,272 thousand displaced.
date of displacement	In 2014, gradually after the regime and its auxiliary militias took control.
displacement destination	Lebanon - Turkey - the Arabian Gulf - very few inside Syria.



Reasons for displacement	Fleeing from arrests and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the minimum necessities of life.
The authority controlling the area:	Lebanese Hezbollah Militia - local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (national defense).
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area currently:	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies
Entities providing assistance:	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent
Additional information on demographic change:	The town of Al-Mashrifa was bulldozed and the residents were prevented from returning to it. Great restriction on the residents of the city of Qara, given the control of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia over all strategic areas, and the absence of the Syrian regime forces.

Annex No. (3) Al-Zabadani administrative area in the countryside of Damascus, near the Lebanese border

Zabadani Administrative District	Zabadani - Bludan - Rawda - Wadi Barada Market - Kafr Al-Awamid - Barhelia - Hosh Jid - Madaya - Huraira - Baqin - Sergaya - Ain Hour.
Total population	89,500 thousand people
Sectarian and Ethnic composition	95% are Sunni Muslims, 5% are Christians, most of whom are concentrated in Bloudan and Zabadani.
The nature of work of the population:	The population works in tourism because the area contains a large number of summer resorts, in agriculture, and very few work in trade.
Towns that have undergone demographic change:	Zabadani 50% - Madaya 30% - Bekin 30% - the rest of the towns 5%.
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the whole region:	25.4%, or approximately: 22,700 thousand displaced.



date of displacement	Before 2016, following the regime's bombing, and gradually after the control of the regime and its allied militias in 2017.
displacement destination	Lebanon - North Syria - Turkey - a few to the inside of Damascus and the neighboring towns.
Reasons for displacement	Fleeing from arrests and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the minimum necessities of life.
The authority controlling the area:	Lebanese Hezbollah Militia - local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (national defense.)
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area at present	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.
Entities that provide assistance	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent - local organizations.
Additional information on demographic change:	The closure of more than half of Zabadani and the prevention of residents from returning to it, and a great restriction on the residents of the towns of Baqin and Madaya, given the control of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia over all strategic areas, and the absence of Syrian regime forces.

Annex No. (4) the administrative area of Al-Tal in the countryside of Damascus in the north

Al-Tal Administrative District	Al-Tal - Minin - Halboun - Maarba - Telfita - Darij - Maaruna - Rankos - Hosh Arab - Fiyadia - Sednaya - Maarat Sednaya - Bedda - Hafir al-Fouqa - Akoubar.
Population: 162 thousand people	93% of Sunni Arabs, 7% of Christian Arabs, mostly concentrated in Sednaya and Maarat Sednaya only.
The nature of work of the population	The residents of al-Tal and Saydnaya work in industry and commerce, while the residents of the remaining towns work in agriculture.
The towns that have been displaced and the percentage of displaced people	Rankos 30% - Hosh Arab 50% - Al-Tal 20% - The rest of the towns 5%, except for Saydnaya and Maarata (two Christian towns)



The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the entire region	14.7%, or approximately: 23,839 thousand displaced.
date of displacement	Before 2014, following the bombing of the regime and its allies, and gradually after the control of the regime and its allied militias in 2014 and 2017.
displacement destination	Lebanon - northern Syria - Turkey - a few to the inside of Damascus.
Reasons for displacement	Fleeing from the policy of arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the necessities of life.
The authority in control of the area	The Lebanese Hezbollah militia - local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (national defense) - the Republican Guard militia and the Fourth Division.
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area at present	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.
Entities that provide assistance	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent and local organizations.
Additional information on demographic change	Preventing the return of the displaced Rankos and Hosh Arab. Al-Tal and Ainmenin have the largest numbers of internally displaced persons from the cities and towns of Eastern Ghouta.

Annex No. (5) the administrative area of Al-Qutayfa in the countryside of Damascus in the north, near the Lebanese border

Al-Qutayfah Administrative District	Al Qatifah - Moadamiya Al Qalamoun - Hela - Al Rahiba - Jayrud - Nasiriyah - Al Atna - Mansoura - Maaloula - Jaba'deen - Ain Al Tineh - Al Tuwani.
Total population:	167 thousand people
The sectarian and ethnic composition of the population	98% are Sunni Muslim Arabs, 2% are Christian Arabs, who are concentrated in the town of Maaloula (the vast majority are Catholics).
The nature of work of the population:	The residents work in trade, grazing due to their proximity to the desert, and agriculture.



Towns that have undergone demographic change and the ratio of the displaced to the total population of the city	Rahiba 20% - Jayrud 20% - Nasiriyah 20% - Jabbaadin 30% - the rest of the towns 5%.
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the entire region	14%, or approximately: 23,430 thousand displaced.
date of displacement	Before 2014, following the bombing of the regime and its allies, and gradually after the control of the regime and its allied militias in 2014 and 2018.
displacement destination	Lebanon - northern Syria - Turkey - Rukban camp - into Damascus.
Reasons for displacement	Fleeing from arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the necessities of life.
Authority currently controlling the area	The Lebanese Hezbollah Militia - Local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (National Defense) - The Third Division Militia, and Shiite militias in parts of the Badia.
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area at present	There are no services, most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.
Entities that provide assistance	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent and local organizations.
Additional information on demographic change	Preventing the return of Muslims from the predominantly Christian town of Maaloula, and forcibly recruiting thousands of young men under threat of arrest and death.



Annex No. (6) Daraya Administrative Region, south of Damascus and adjacent to Damascus

Daraya Administrative District	Daraya - Moadamiya Al-Sham - Al-Hajar Al-Aswad - Sahnaya - Ashrafieh Sahnaya.
population:	365,400 thousand people
Sectarian and ethnic composition	83% of Sunni Muslim Arabs, 10% of Druze Arabs, 7% of Christian Arabs with an Orthodox majority, Druze and Christians are concentrated in Sahnaya and Ashrafieh Sahnaya, and a few Christians are in Daraya.
The nature of work of the population:	The residents of the region work in commerce and industry and in agriculture to a lesser extent.
Towns that have undergone a demographic change: the ratio of the displaced to the total population of the city/town:	Daraya 80% - Moadamiya Al-Sham 50% - Al-Hajar Al-Aswad 30%
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the entire region	44%, or approximately: 161 thousand displaced.
Displacement date:	Before 2013, following the bombing of the regime and its allies, and gradually after the control of the regime and its allied militias in 2016, and before and after this year in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, persecution and restrictions.
Displacement destination:	Lebanon - North Syria - Turkey - Egypt - inside Damascus.
Reasons for displacement:	Fleeing from the policy of arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the necessities of life.



Authority currently controlling area	The Lebanese Hezbollah militia - local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (national defense of Sahnaya residents and Ashrafiyah Sahnaya with a Druze and Christian majority) - the militia of the Fourth Division and Iraqi Shiite militias.
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area currently:	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies
Entities providing assistance	The United Nations through the Qatari Red Crescent, in conjunction with the restrictions on the work of the United Nations in an attempt to disperse the remaining residents of Darayya, Moadamiya and Al-Hajar Al-Aswad.
Additional information on Demographic Change	Preventing the return of the residents of Darayya and imposing an organizational plan for the area that includes Darayya, Moadamiya and parts of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad. Adopting a scorched-earth policy, severe siege, and starvation

Annex No. (7) Qudsaya area west of Damascus

Qudsaya Administrative District	Ashrafiyah Al-Wadi - Al-Hama - Bassima - Jdeidet Al-Wadi - Dahiyat Qudsaya - Qudsaya - Jarmara - Ifra - Deir Qanoon - Deir Muqrin - Kafr Al-Zeit - Ain Al-Fijah - Al-Hussainiya - Al-Dimas and its towns.
total population	148,400 thousand people
Doctrinal and ethnic composition	98% of Arabs are Sunni Muslims, 2% of Arabs are Orthodox Christians and Catholics, concentrated in Qudsaya and Dahiyat Qudsaya.
The nature of the work of the population	Residents of the area work in commerce and industry in the cities and towns in agriculture.



Towns that have been displaced	Qudsaya 30% – Al-Hama 30% – Basimah 100% – Ain Al-Fijah 100% – the rest of the towns 15%..
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the entire region	25%, or approximately: 37,000 displaced persons.
date of displacement	Before 2016, following the bombing of the regime and its allies, and gradually after the control of the regime and its allied militias in 2016 and beyond.
Displacement destination:	Lebanon - North Syria - Inside Damascus - South Syria.
Reasons for displacement:	Fleeing from arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the minimum necessities of life.
Authority currently controlling area	Lebanese Hezbollah Militia - Local militias affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (National Defense) - Fourth Division Militia and the Republican Guard.
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area currently:	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.
Entities providing assistance	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent
Additional information on Demographic Change	Preventing the return of the residents of Ain al-Fijah and Basimah completely, in addition to bulldozing their property. Adopting a scorched-earth policy, severe siege and starvation, mainly in Qudsaya and al-Hama to force the population to choose several immigration options.

Annex No. (8) Douma area, north East of Damascus

Douma Administrative District	Douma - Harasta - Addameer - Adra - Al-Nashabiya district - Harran Al-Awamid - Sabaa Biar - Ghazlaniya.
population	607,206 thousand people
Sectarian and ethnic composition	100% of Arabs are Sunni Muslims, and there are a number of Christian families in Harasta, less than 0.1.
The nature of work of the population:	Residents of the area work in commerce and industry in the cities and towns in agriculture.
The towns that have been subjected to displacement and the proportion of the displaced to the total population of the city / town:	Douma 60% - Harasta 60% - Addameer 25% - Al-Nashabiya 25% - the rest of the towns 10%..
The ratio of the displaced to the total population of the entire region	34.2%, or approximately: 207,657 thousand displaced.
Displacement date:	Since 2012, following the bombing of the regime and its allies, and gradually until before the control of the regime and its allied militias in 2018.
Displacement destination:	Inside Damascus - Al-Tal City - Northern Syria - Neighboring Countries.
Reasons for displacement:	Fleeing from the policy of arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the minimum necessities of life.
Authority currently controlling the area	The Russian occupation forces - the militia of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard - Iraqi Shiite militias in the vicinity of the region and inside strategic points.
The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area currently:	There are few services, while most of the people depend on various aids and personal supplies, in conjunction with a rate of destruction of infrastructure that exceeds 70%.
Entities providing assistance:	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent.
Additional information on demographic change	Preventing the return of the internally displaced residents of Douma and Harasta, a policy of restriction, detention, and forced conscription of the remaining residents of the area.



Annex No. (9) Qatana area southwest of Damascus and close to Damascus

Qatana - Jdeidet Artouz - Saasaa - Beit Jinn.	Qatna Administrative District
290,150 thousand people	Total population
95% of the Arabs are Sunni Muslims, 2% of Druze, 3% of Orthodox and Catholic Christians. Most of the Druze and Christians are concentrated in parts of Jdeidet Artouz, and part of the Christians are in Qatana.	The sectarian and ethnic composition of the population
Residents of the area work in commerce and industry in the cities and towns in agriculture.	The nature of work of the population
The entire Qatana region, 20%, or approximately: 58 thousand displaced.	The towns that have been displaced and the proportion of the displaced to the total population
Since 2012, following the bombing of the regime and its allies, and gradually before the regime and its auxiliary militias took control of Kanaker, Beit Jinn and Qatana.	Residents of the area
Inside Damascus - the Syrian south - the Syrian north - Lebanon.	date of displacement
Fleeing from the policy of arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the necessities of life.	displacement destination
The Militia of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard Corps- Iraqi Shiite militias in the vicinity of the region and within strategic points - the Lebanese Hezbollah militia.	Authority Currently controlling the area
There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.	The nature of the services provided to the residents of the area at present
The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent.	Entities that provide assistance



Implementing severe restrictive policies on the residents of Kanaker, Beit Jinn and Qatana, in order to tighten control and displace the remaining large percentages, such as arresting women and placing the largest number of young people in the three towns in detention.	Additional information on demographic change:
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Annex No. (10) the surrounding countryside of Damascus

The countryside around Damascus	The district of Babila - Irbeen - Kafr Batna - Al Maliha - Al Kiswa - Jarmana.
Total population	1,173,000 million people
The sectarian and ethnic composition of the population	86.3 percent of Sunni Arabs (including 0.5 Turkmen Sunnis), 10 percent of the population are Druze, and 3.7 percent are Orthodox and Catholic Christians. The Druze and the majority of Christians are concentrated in Jarmana.
The nature of work of the population:	Residents of the cities work in commerce and industry , those in towns work in agriculture.
The towns that have been subjected to displacement and the proportion of the displaced to the total population of the city / town:	The displacement operations include all areas of the center of Damascus countryside, except for the Jarmana area, which is inhabited by Druze and Christians. The proportion of the displaced to the total population is estimated at 30%, which is approximately: 352 thousand displaced.
date of displacement	Since 2012, following the bombing from the regime and its allies, and gradually before the regime and its militias took control of Al-Maleiha, until 2018 by taking control of Arbin, Zamalka and parts of Babila.
displacement destination	Inside Damascus - the Syrian south - the Syrian north - Lebanon.
Reasons for displacement	Fleeing from the policy of arrest and killing - forced conscription - restrictions from sectarian militias - poor services and the search for the necessities of life.



Authority currently controlling the area	The Militia of the Fourth Division and the Republican Guard - Iraqi Shiite militias in Sayeda Zainab - Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah militia - Afghan Shiite militias across the southern regions of Ma-liha and Babila, in addition to Palestinian terrorist militias affiliated with Al-Tahrir Organization.
The nature of the services currently provided to the residents:	There are no services, while most of the families depend on various aids and personal supplies.
Entities providing assistance:	The United Nations through the Syrian Red Crescent.
Additional information on demographic change:	Large cities such as Irbeen, Zamalka and Kafr Batna are empty, so that the percentage of those inside these cities does not exceed 30%, in addition to a systematic policy of detention and forced conscription against urban youth.

Areas subjected to displacement and social re-engineering in Homs Governorate

Area name	New Homs - Al-Waer
Information about the administrative area	Tracked to the city of Homs
demographic information	The population was 60,000 people before the revolution. Sunni Muslims Arabs
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement in 2015 due to the regime's bombing of the neighborhood and its complete siege, and the destination of the displacement was the liberated north and the countryside of Homs
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in batches until the completion of the displacement of all opponents in 2017
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Not a large part was allowed to return. The proportion of the population currently residing in the neighborhood does not exceed 25%



Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and Shiite militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For exemple: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	None
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Simple and scarce services from the regime's government
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Shiite militias from the village of Mazraa and National Defense
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Qusour District
Administrative information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 100,000 before the revolution They work in commerce, industry, entrepreneurship, crafts and jobs Arab Sunni
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement was in April 2012 due to shelling and attempts by the regime to storm the neighborhood, the displaced went to the safer neighborhoods and to the north of Syria and neighboring countries.



Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in May 2014 when the regime and Shiite militias took control of the entire neighborhood
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most of the people were not allowed to return. The percentage of residents does not exceed 2%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces.
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	None
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Very poor and scarce services, and most of the neighborhood is unfit and inhabitable
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	None
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Jeb al-Jandali neighborhood
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 60,000 people before the revolution Arabs Sunni Muslims and Alawite minority



<p>The first time that the people of the city were displaced?</p> <p>The reason for displacement.</p> <p>Who is causing the displacement?</p> <p>Where was the destination of the displaced?</p>	<p>The first displacement was in March 2012 due to the regime's bombing of the neighborhood and its storming with the support of sectarian militias. The destination of the displacement was to the neighboring neighborhoods and the countryside of Homs</p>
<p>Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?</p>	<p>Most of the population has not returned since the first displacement.</p>
<p>Were the residents allowed to return?</p> <p>What's the rate of those currently residing in it?</p>	<p>A small part was allowed to return, and the percentage of the current residents of the neighborhood does not exceed 10%</p>
<p>Which authority is currently in control?</p>	<p>Regime forces</p>
<p>Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?</p>	<p>In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe</p>
<p>Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others?</p> <p>Or has the area been subject to demographic change?</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?</p>	<p>Too few services</p>
<p>Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?</p>	<p>Local Alawite and Shiite militias</p>
<p>Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?</p>	<p>None</p>



Area	Jouret Chiyah neighborhood
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population: 50 thousand before the revolution They work in trade, industry, handicrafts and jobs Arab Sunni
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	First displacement in May 2012 Because of the bombing of the neighborhood by the regime forces The destination of the displaced is the other neighborhoods of Homs and its countryside
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in May 2014, after the regime and Hezbollah militia took control of the neighborhood
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most of the people were not allowed to return The percentage of current residents does not exceed 2%
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime Forces
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	None
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services and neighborhood almost completely destroyed and inhabitable.
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	None
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None



Area	Old neighborhoods of Homs
Administrative Information	Tracked to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 90,000 before the revolution Sunni Arabs and Christians They work in commerce, entrepreneurship, liberal professions and others
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement was in March 2012 due to the bombing of the regime forces and the local Alawite and Shiite militias and attempts to storm The destination of the displaced was the other neighborhoods of Homs and the governorate's countryside
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in May 2014 after the regime and Hezbollah militia took control of the area.
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	A large part of the population was not allowed to return. The percentage of current residents does not exceed 10%
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and the Nationalist Party militia (Christians).
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	None
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Bad and scarce
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	None
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None



Area	Karm al-Zaytoun neighborhood
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population: 50 thousand people before the revolution. Arab Muslims and minority Alawites They work in industry, crafts, professions, self-employment and liberal jobs
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	First displacement in March 2012 Because the regime forces stormed the neighborhood and an Alawite local militia and committed two sectarian massacres. The destination of displacement is the neighboring neighborhoods and the countryside of Homs
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	Residents have not returned since first displacement.
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most of the people were not allowed to return. The percentage of residents in the neighborhood currently does not exceed 5%
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and local Alawite militia
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	About twenty families of loyal Shiites from outside Homs were settled in the neighborhood
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Alawite Militias
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None



Area	Al Khaldiye neighborhood
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 80 thousand before the revolution. Most of them are Sunni Arabs, with a Christian and Alawite minority They work in trade, professions and jobs.
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement was in April 2012 due to the bombing of the neighborhood by the regime forces and attempts to storm it.
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in 2014 after Hezbollah militia and regime forces took control of the neighborhood
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most of the people were not allowed to return The proportion of residents in the neighborhood currently does not exceed 3% of the population
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime Forces
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In the north of Syria and outside Syria
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	There is none due to the extensive destruction and uninhabitable neighborhood
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	None
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None



Area	Bayada district
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	<p>The population was 80,000 people before the revolution.</p> <p>Most of them are Muslims and a minority are Shiites</p> <p>Most of them are Arabs and a Circassian minority</p> <p>The population is engaged in trade, entrepreneurship, liberal professions.</p>
<p>The first time that the people of the city were displaced?</p> <p>The reason for displacement.</p> <p>Who is causing the displacement?</p> <p>Where was the destination of the displaced?</p>	<p>The people of the neighborhood were displaced in April 2012 due to the bombing and the storming of the neighborhood by the regime forces and a local Alawite militia.</p> <p>They headed to other neighborhoods and countryside of Homs and outside the governorate</p>
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	Most of the residents of the neighborhood have been completely displaced since that date until now
<p>Were the residents allowed to return?</p> <p>What's the rate of those currently residing in it?</p>	Most of the people were not allowed to return
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime Forces and Local Alawite Militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?	Northern Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and asylum countries
<p>Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others?</p> <p>Or has the area been subject to demographic change?</p>	A number of Shiite families from the towns of Kefraya and Foua were settled.
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	<p>No services</p> <p>Most of the houses are destroyed and completely looted</p> <p>Infrastructure completely looted</p> <p>The role of the Red Crescent is limited to providing very simple assistance in house repair/restoration for those who returned.</p>



Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Shiite Militia
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	The Ashira Neighborhood
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 10000 They work in trade, professions, self-employment and jobs Arabs, Sunni Muslims
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement was in March 2012 due to the storming of the neighborhood by the regime forces and a local Alawite militia. The destination of displacement is the neighboring neighborhoods and the countryside of Homs
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	Most of the displaced have not returned since the first displacement
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	The people were not allowed to return, and the percentage of the currently residing population does not exceed 2% of the neighborhood's residents
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and local Alawite militia
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seen asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	None
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services in the neighborhood



Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Alawite Militias
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Deir Baalba neighborhood
Administrative Information	Belongs to Homs city
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population prior to the revolution: 60,000 Handicrafts, agriculture, commerce, government and private jobs Sunni Muslims - Arab
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	April 2012 due to the storming of the neighborhood by regime forces and local Alawite and Shiite militias. Destination of displacement: the countryside of Homs
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in December 2012 due to the storming of the neighborhood by the regime forces and local Shiite and Alawite militias
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most of the residents have not yet been allowed to return. The percentage of residents currently residing in it does not exceed 10%
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and local Shiite militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Dozens of Shi'a families from Kefraya and Al-Fu'ah came to it, and some of them live in the vicinity of the university housing buildings



Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Very poor services for residents Extensively destroyed infrastructure, homes were completely looted and a large part of them destroyed and burned, by bombing by local Shiite and Alawite militias, and even the foundations of most buildings were stolen, or reduced to rubble, and most residents were prohibited from returning.
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Shiite and Alawite militias and regime security forces
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Baba Amr neighborhood
Administrative Information	It belongs to the city of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 90,000 people before the revolution. They work in trade, self-employment, professions and jobs. Sunni Muslims, Arabs, Turkmen, and Alawi minority
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement was in February 2012 due to the storming of the neighborhood by the regime and a local Alawite militia and its widespread destruction. The destination of displacement is the neighboring areas and the countryside of Homs and Lebanon
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why	Hundreds of families who returned to the neighborhood were repeatedly displaced after a new storming of the neighborhood by the regime in 2013
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Residents were not allowed to return. Only 2% were.
? Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and local Alawite militias



Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In the North of Syria, Europe and neighboring countries.
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Many families loyal to the regime came from several governorates and resided in the neighborhood
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Few simple services offered by the Red Crescent and the regime forces, the destruction rate is high
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Alawite Militia
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	The towns of Qazhal and Umm al-Qasab
Administrative Information	Khirbet al-Tin sub-district - Homs governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 8000 people before the revolution They work in agriculture, livestock, entrepreneurship, trade and jobs Turkmen, Sunni Muslims
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	. The first displacement in 2014 due to the bombing of the regime forces Destination of displacement: Neighboring areas
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated in 2016 due to the storming of the two towns by the regime and local Shiite and Alawi militias
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most residents were not allowed to return, Currently, the percentage of residents in the area is about 10%.



Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and local Shiite and Alawi militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, Turkey and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Local Shiite and Alawi militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Poor and few services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Local Shiite and Alawite militias
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Palmyra
Administrative Information	Belongs to Homs governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 75,000 people before the revolution They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs Arabs, Sunni Muslims
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement of 2015 due to the bombing of the regime forces. Destination of displacement: Neighboring governorates.
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated more than once because of the repeated bombing, after ISIS' control, and also because of the regime's incursions with the support of Hezbollah militia and Iraqi and Afghan Shiite militias
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most residents were not allowed to return. Currently, the percentage of residents in the region is about 5%.



Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Iraqi and Afghan Shiite militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	Dozens of families of Iraqi and Afghan fighters have been resettled, and militia members have purchased real estate

Area	Sokhna
Administrative Infortmation	Follow Homs Governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition....etc..	The population was 32,000 people before the revolution. They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs Arabs, Sunni Muslims
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement of 2015 due to the bombing of the regime forces Destination of displacement to neighboring provinces
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated more than once because of the repeated bombing, after ISIS taking control and because of the incursions of the regime forces and Shiite militias.



Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most residents were not allowed to return Currently, the percentage of residents in the region is about 5%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and Iranian and Afghan militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Iranian Shiite militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Shiite militias (Iraqi and Afghani) affiliated with Iran
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Al-Qaryatayn
Administrative Infortmation	It belongs to Homs governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition....etc..	Population 37,000 people before the revolution They work in agriculture, livestock, self-employment, trade and other jobs Arabs, mostly Sunni Muslims and a Christian minority
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement of 2015 due to the bombing of the regime forces Destination of displacement to neighboring provinces.



Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated more than once because of the repeated bombing, after ISIS taking control and because of the regime and Shiite militia incursions.
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most residents were not allowed to return. Currently, the percentage of residents in the area is about 10%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and Iranian and Afghan militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Iranian Shiite militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	No services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Iranian and Afghan militias
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Al-Hosn
Administrative Information	It belongs to Tal Kalakh district - Homs governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 20,000 people before the revolution. They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs Arabs, Turkmen, Sunni Muslims



The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement in 2013 due to the bombing of the regime's army Destination of displacement to Lebanon.
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated more than once due to the repeated bombing, until the regime forces, Hezbollah militia and Christian militia took control of it in 2014.
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most residents were not allowed to return Currently, the percentage of residents in the region is about 30%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and Shiite and Christian militias
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Shiite and Christian militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Poor and few services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Shiite and Christian militias
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None

Area	Al-Resten
Administrative Infortmation	Belongs to Homs governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 61,000 people They work in agriculture, liberal professions, and government and private jobs Sunni Arab Muslims



<p>The first time that the people of the city were displaced?</p> <p>The reason for displacement.</p> <p>Who is causing the displacement?</p> <p>Where was the destination of the displaced?</p>	<p>The first displacement in mid-2011 due to the bombing and storming of the area by the regime forces</p> <p>Destination of displacement Neighboring areas</p>
<p>Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?</p>	<p>Repeated in October 2011.</p> <p>Then gradually due to the bombing, until the last displacement in May 2018, as part of the forced displacement of the northern countryside of Homs.</p>
<p>Were the residents allowed to return?</p> <p>What's the rate of those currently residing in it?</p>	<p>Non-prosecuted were allowed to return</p> <p>The percentage of residents currently residing in the region is approximately 60% of the original population.</p>
<p>Which authority is currently in control?</p>	<p>Regime forces and militias affiliated with the Iranians and the Russians</p>
<p>Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeked asylum outside Syria?</p>	<p>In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe</p>
<p>Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others?</p> <p>Or has the area been subject to demographic change?</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?</p>	<p>Very simple and poor service</p>
<p>Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one?</p> <p>And what role do they play in the area?</p>	<p>Local militias affiliated with the Iranians and the Russians</p>
<p>Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?</p>	<p>None</p>



Area	Talbiseh
Administrative Information	Belongs to Homs governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 47,000 people before the revolution. They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs. Arabs, Sunni Muslims
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement in mid-2011 due to the bombing of the regime and its storming of the area Destination of displacement to neighboring areas
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	Repeated more than once due to repeated bombing, up to the last displacement in the Forced Displacement Agreement in May 2018
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Part of the population was allowed to return. The percentage of residents currently residing in the region is about 60%
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and militias affiliated with Russia
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeken asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Russian militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Very bad services provided by the regime government and the Red Crescent
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Militias belonging to the Russians
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None



Area	The towns of Dar Al-Kabireh, Tyr Maaleh and Ghanto
Administrative Information	Follow Homs Governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	The population was 29,000 people before the revolution. They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs. Arabs, Turkmen minority, Sunni Muslims
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement was in 2013 due to the bombing of the regime and local Alawite and Shiite militias, Destination of displacement to neighboring areas
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	Repeated more than once due to repeated bombing, up to the last displacement in the Forced Displacement Agreement in May 2018
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Part of the population was allowed to return. The percentage of residents currently residing in the region is about 50%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and militias affiliated with Russia
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Russian militias
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Very bad services provided by the regime government and the Red Crescent
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Russian militias



Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None
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Area	Hula
Administrative Information (It is composed of 3 areas all with the area of Teldo)	Follow Homs Governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 100,000 people before the revolution. They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs Arabs and Turkmen minority, Sunni Muslims, and Alawite minority
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement in 2011 due to the bombing and storming of the area by the regime forces and local Alawite militias Destination of displacement: to neighboring areas
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	Repeated more than once due to repeated bombing, up to the last displacement in the Forced Displacement Agreement in May 2018
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Part of the population was allowed to return. The percentage of residents currently residing in the region is about 50%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces and militias affiliated with Russia and Iran
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In northern Syria, neighboring countries and Europe
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Militias affiliated with Iran's Shiite and local Alawites
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Very bad services provided by the regime government and the Red Crescent



Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Alawite and local Shiite militias, and militias affiliated with Russia
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	A massacre committed by al-Assad forces and a local militia from the Alawites of the neighboring town of al-Qabou took place in Al-Hawla on May 25, 2012, and more than a hundred civilians were killed, most of them were women and children.

Area	talk
Administrative Information	Follow Homs Governorate
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	Population 51,000 people before the revolution. They work in agriculture, entrepreneurship, trade and other jobs Arabs, Turkmen, Sunni Muslims and an Alawite minority
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The first displacement in 2011 due to the bombing of the regime forces and a local Alawite militia. The destination of displacement: to Lebanon.
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	It was repeated more than once due to the repeated bombing, until the regime forces, the Lebanese Hezbollah militia and local Alawite militias took control of it in 2014.
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Most residents were not allowed to return. Currently, the percentage of residents in the region is about 30%.
Which authority is currently in control?	Regime forces, Shiite militias (Hezbollah), and a local Alawite militia
Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphrates or have seeked asylum outside Syria?	In Lebanon, neighboring countries and Europe



Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	Shiite militias (Hezbollah) and local Alawite militia
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	Poor and few services
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	Shiite militias (Hezbollah) and local Alawite militia
Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?	None.

Area	short
Administrative Information	It belongs to Homs Governorate, and to it several villages and towns, southwest of Homs
Population information: 1- Number of Population prior to the revolution 1-Residents' work nature 2- Sectarian and ethnic composition...etc..	55 thousand people Agriculture - Trade and Services Sunni Muslims 80%, Christian 10%, other sects (Alawite-Shiite) 9%
The first time that the people of the city were displaced? The reason for displacement. Who is causing the displacement? Where was the destination of the displaced?	The displacement began in 2011 due to the incursions of the regime forces and local Alawite militias. The destination of displacement is neighboring areas (Yabroud, Nabek, Qara, Hasya), Lebanon, and northern Syria.
Was the displacement repeated after that? And why?	The displacement was repeated more than once until the last displacement in 2013 after the bombing and storming of the regime forces and the Lebanese Hezbollah militia.
Were the residents allowed to return? What's the rate of those currently residing in it?	Families are not allowed to return without a security settlement, and the group of returnees is limited to non-Sunnis, and some internally displaced persons are mostly employees and have no opposition activities. Currently residing is about 5% of its population
Which authority is currently in control?	Hezbollah militia and regime forces



Where are the displaced people distributed? For example: In North Syria: Idlib or the Euphratesor have seeken asylum outside Syria?	Lebanon and the areas of northern Syria, Idlib, and Aleppo to a lesser extent (Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch) and countries of asylum
Did foreigners come to the area, Iranian militia or others? Or has the area been subject to demographic change?	The foreign presence is limited to Hezbollah militia fighters and some Iranian experts (Dabaa Airport). Dozens of families have also been resettled from the towns of Al-Fou'a and Kefraya in Idlib (Shiite Muslims), in addition to some people fleeing from Lebanon (smugglers).
Services provided for residents. Which party offers these services if available?	The services provided vary depending on the neighborhood: In the eastern neighborhood (most of its residents are Christians), there were no combat operations and aerial bombardment, and the infrastructure was not significantly affected, and its residents returned. They are under control of the regime forces and Hezbollah militia as of June 2013. The rest of the city's neighborhoods lack services such as electricity, water and sanitation The city council of the regime government does some service work, but these neighborhoods are not suitable for living and lack security
Are there non-regime militias? If so, then which one? And what role do they play in the area?	The area is mainly under the control of Hezbollah militia, and it is the militia's gateway to Syria, and its main supply routes.



<p>Any other information concerning the demographic change in the area?</p>	<p>The villages of West Al-Asi (Al-Mouh, Saqrage, Al-Khalidiya, Al-Asadiya, Al-Burhaniya, Al-Radwaniyah, Abu Hour, Kadesh): the estimated population is 12,000 people, they were displaced for the first time in May 2013 towards the city of Al-Qusayr, and the rest of the conditions are similar to the city in terms of displacement times and geographical distribution of the displaced. All of these villages are inhabited by Sunni Arabs (with the exception of the village of Al-Mouh, which has Christian families, about ten, who returned after the battles).</p> <p>Other villages and towns: Al-Dabaa, Al-Salihiya, Kamam, Al-Shumariya, Al-Salloumiyeh, Al-Dumaina Al-Gharbiyye, Al-Zara'a, Jossiya: the total population is estimated at 17,000, and the circumstances are similar.</p> <p>Buwayda and Salhia: Population in 2009: 7,300 (all Sunni Arabs)</p> <p>Conditions are similar, number of returnees: 365</p> <p>There are no services provided to residents</p>
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