

## **THE SITUATION IN SYRIA: AN ASSESSMENT**

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### **A/ Insight :**

In Syria, the situation has not calmed down: **unrest escalates, repression becomes harsher and armed groups have emerged** in new some cities and districts where they attacked security forces and the army.

**We consider that the crisis has not yet reached its paroxysm and that the strategic *Moment of Decision* has not come yet. So security will likely deteriorate further.**

Although **the Syrian regime has to face the worst crisis since the early eighties** with the HAMA's case (12,000 to 15,000 died in the governmental repression of the Muslim brotherhood's revolt), we still think that **it is not threatened in its grounds.**

To this day, according to different sources, **at least 200 to 250 died from repression.** However, the regime has influence over the media and families' victims have interest to maintain secrecy over the real number of victims. Therefore, the **exact number of victims is likely to be higher than those released in the Media.**

### **B/ As a reminder: Actors in the conflict**

#### **B.1. Opposition:**

**The Syrian popular revolt has its origins in:**

It is worth reminding that the crisis is not "mono-focal" but result from the presence of distinct factors which combined together widen the basis of the protest movement.

Thereby:

- Riots began in the South (near the Jordan border). The anger of **peasants impoverished by several years of drought** could easily explained riots in this region;
- The youth from the cities (among which **Damascus, Aleppo** and **Latakia**) rallied the movement because of **its aspiration for freedom**;
- The **business class** blame the regime of its state socialism and the lack of effective reforms;
- **Kurds** rallied because they see themselves are underrepresented and because 300,000 of them (out of 1,56 millions, that is 9% of the total population) do not have the Syrian citizenship;
- **The Union of Syrian Tribes** had declared on March 21 “Revolution” against the regime to protest at the Ba’ath party’s monopole on power;
- **Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movement** contest the secularization of the regime;
- Finally, **the Sunni majority (73%)** of the population objects to the **domination of the Alawite minority (11%)** perceived as being “heretic”.

This odd combination of interest into a revolutionary movement is undermined by **profound divisions**:

Indeed, the opposition has at **least 6 different trends**:

- The **leftist, nationalist and secular** trend (the Communist party, the “Nasserist” movement and four other trends) gather in the “**National Rally for Democracy**”;<sup>μ</sup>
- The **Kurdish opposition** is divided in dozens of parties;
- The **Reform Party of Syria**, lead by **Farid Ghadry**, enjoys a relative support from the U.S, however its real strength in Syria is difficult to evaluate;
- The **National Salvation Front** is lead by the Ex-President **Abdel Halim Khaddam**, who appears to have been linked for too long to the **regime**;
- The **Organization of Democracy and Freedom in Syria** is lead by **Ribal al-Assad** who is the son of the former vice-President Rifaat al-Assad and **first cousin of President Bashar al-Assad**. **It is interesting to underline that, being both a genuine democrat, an Alawite and a member “of the family”, Ribal al-Assad coul represent an interesting transition possibility for Syria.**

- The **Muslim Brotherhood** ;

These movements and trends have profound political disagreements and many rivalries oppose the different leaders.

## **B.2. Loyal Supporters to the Regime:**

President **Al-ASSAD** can count on **the support of a significant part of the Alawite minority, a portion of the Ba'ath party, the army as well as secret services and security forces.**

It is worth noticing that **the Ba'ath party possesses its own militia** of which it is difficult to assess its real power, its force, the quality of its training and equipment. Indeed, following deception caused by the lack of reforms, **the Ba'ath party was purged from many of its executive members** in the last years.

### **B.2.1. The armed forces:**

**The Syrian army** is considered by many as having a key role to play in the control of power. It is composed of **3 army corps** and **several independent units** which could line up **200, 000** men and having:

- **7 armoured divisions**
- **3 mechanized divisions**
- **4 Infantry Brigades**
- **2 artillery Brigades**
- **2 anti-tank Brigades**
- **19 Special Forces Regiments**
- **1 Coastal Defence Brigade**

One has to add to count, the **Republican Guard** whose mission is to protect DAMASCUS and high-ranking personalities in the regime. The Republican Guard is composed of **3 armoured Brigades, 1 mechanized Brigade and 1 artillery regiment.**

**Reserve forces** would count 280, 000 men (2 motorized divisions, 2 armoured regiments, 3 artillery Brigades and 30 Infantry Brigades).

### **B.2.2. Special Services:**

Syria counts at least **7 security and intelligence services**, often competing with one another and all involved to diverse stage in the repression of the opposition. The four main services are:

- **Idarat al-Amn al-'amm** (*General Security Directorate*)
- **Idarat al-Amn al-Siyasi** (*Political Security Directorate*)
- **Shu'bat al-Mukhabarat al-Askariyya** (*Military Intelligence*)

- **Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-Jawiyya** (*Air Force Intelligence Directorate*)

These services are composed of **several thousands of men** well trained, well equipped and devoted to the regime.

The **total control of the State over Syrian army and security services and their equipment ensures the primacy of the military in the regime.**

Therefore, one could say that as there is cohesion in the army and services, repression will remain total.

### **C. Evolution during the week from 10 to 15 of April:**

- **April 10**, security forces deployed their armoured vehicles in the port and the city of BANYAS (North of the country) where protestors have already been killed on April 8. Security forces opened fire on protestors.
- **The same day**, in the evening isolated groups responded by firing on militaries. At least one military and dozens of civilians were killed while the city has been entirely blocked.
- **April 11, Mohammad Riad Shaqfa**, the exiled leader (in Saudi Arabia) of the Syrian **Muslim Brotherhood** declared that the organisation was not behind the demonstrations but support the demands. He denied participation in secret negotiation with the regime.
- **April 12**, the villages of **BAYDA** and **BEIT JNAD** (near BANIAS) were besieged by security forces. This intervention led to an unknown number of victims.
- **The same day**, two hundred persons were arrested in BAYDA. The objective was apparently to make hostages in order to pressure this region. The following day, 100 of hostages were freed as a result of a demonstration where 2,000 women and children blocked the road.
- **April 13**, rioters were reported near the university of **ALEP**.
- **The same day**, clashes between isolated groups and the army were reported in **BANIAS**. The number of victims is unknown.
- **April 13**, it was reported that President ASSAD was on his way to RIYADH in order to meet with King Abdullah. The objective was to ask the King to withdraw his support to the opposition and to show a “peace offer” from Iran.
- **April 14**, there was a rumour in **DAMAS** and other cities that Syrian secret services have infiltrated some of their agents in the demonstrations in order to open fire against the army and entailed clashes.

- **The same day**, it was said that secret services were withdrawing from **BANIAS** to give way to the army.
- **The same day**, the Lebanese police arrested two civilians who **tried to smuggle illegal weapons and explosive in Syria**. This information was first denied by Lebanese authorities.
- **The same day**, President al-Assad in a gesture to calm down the protest ordain to free persons detained following demonstration and who did not commit crime.
- **The same day**, it was reported that several hundred of trucks were stuck at the border between Lebanon and Syria. Syrian security forces were searching for arms and explosives.
- **The same day**, clashes occurred between opposition and proponent of the regime in the Druze locality of **SWEIDA**.
- **The same day**, it was reported that clashes occurred in **BANYAS** between militaries who rallied the opposition and group from Security Forces. ***If confirmed, this information would be the first sign of division between the army and security forces.***
- **April 15**, the European Union announced that it withdraws the ready to be signed agreement between the E.U and Syria which aimed at improve bilateral economic relations.

**END.**