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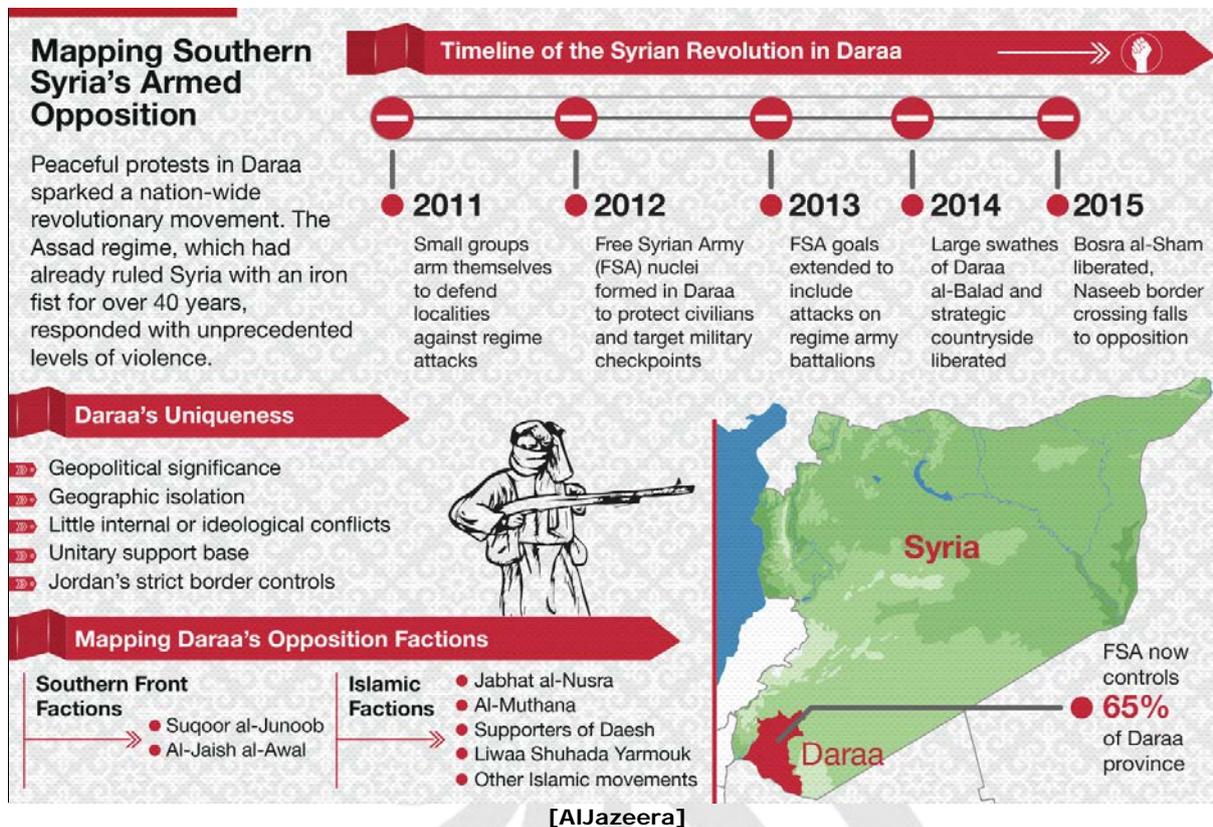
Mapping Southern Syria's Armed Opposition

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13 October 2015



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Abstract

Syrian opposition forces in Daraa province, located in the country's south, have maintained their constant military advancement without any significant defeats, and now control sixty-five per cent of the province. Further, they are attempting to secure territorial contiguity with western Damascus. Daraa is different from other provinces due to several particularities, notably: singularity of support sources, a sensitive geopolitical location as well as geographic isolation from the other areas of the revolution, Jordan's strict control of its borders and the absence of internal and ideological conflicts seen in northern Syria's provinces.

The Southern Front, consisting of a loose assembly of forty-nine factions, has taken lead of the military scene in the province. It is considered the most prominent force on the scene, with the global Islamist jihadist forces, e.g., al-Nusra Front and other local forces, such as the Islamic Muthanna Movement and Ahrar al-Sham, next in the military order. Daraa was not isolated from the emergence of the Islamic State (IS or Daesh), although its effects were limited.

Through the Military Operations Center (MOC) of the supporting countries, regional and international forces managed to greatly influence the scene in Daraa through full sponsorship of the so-called "moderate forces" in the Southern Front. Its strategy focused on using the battlefield to win political gains and weaken the regime to reach a settlement. In addition to isolating and weakening the Islamist movements militarily and socially, the Southern Front remained neutral on the conflict between IS and al-Nusra Front in the south.

Introduction

The city of Daraa sparked the Syrian revolution on 18 March 2011. The revolution started as a non-violent movement by a local community against a ruling regime that had used oppressive security, social and economic policies to control citizens for over forty years. The uprising extended horizontally, emerging in non-violent protests across the majority of Syrian cities. Soon after, the regime's brutal and systematic repression transformed it into an armed revolution. Syria is geopolitically important and holds considerable weight in regional conflicts. It also has a complex internal structure and diverse society. Thus, the Syrian revolution became the local battlefield for regional tension and proxy warfare, with local, regional and international factors mixing to complicate the crisis. The conflict's regionalisation followed the entrance of sectarian militants and Islamist groups to the battlefield. Soon, the conflict was internationalised and transformed into a vast battlefield for major powers to settle their accounts.

The revolution was forced to interact with this dynamism in the majority of rebel areas. Daraa was not isolated from these changes and interactions. This paper analyses the situation in Daraa and its specificities, describes its military and sectarian map, examines the impact of regional and international polarisation on the area and predicts potential outcomes.

First: Field map

The Daraa province began its armed struggle when small, local groups came together to defend themselves and protect peaceful demonstrators. The first direct conflict with the regime's army was over its attempt to enter Daraa on 25 April 2011. Despite being poorly equipped and ill-prepared, these small groups were able to delay the conquest of Daraa for a whole week. These small, local groups evolved to dominate the revolutionary scene by the beginning of its second year, under the name of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA began with attacks on small and isolated military checkpoints, such as police stations and outposts in the western countryside. It soon developed in early 2013 to attack larger military areas, such as barracks in the western region and battalions in the eastern region, and some barriers that cut off roads to Daraa al-Balad. The FSA's greatest achievement was liberating the 38th Brigade in Saida and seizing its large munitions store on 27 March 2013.

Successive victories included vital areas like the Old Customs area and massive areas of Daraa City. In 2014, the FSA liberated strategic hills in the western countryside, including al-Jabiya, Tal al-Jumou and Tal al-Hara, followed by the 82nd Brigade, which paved the way for liberating the key western cities of al-Shaykh Saad, al-Shaykh Miskeen, Nawa, and opening the road towards Inkhil and Jasim. The FSA then extended its territory towards al-Quneitra, seizing important areas necessary to connect with

western Damascus. It gained full control of the Syrian border with Israel along the Golan Heights. In 2015, it seized the Shia-dominated Busra al-Sham, which had been the centre of Lebanese Hezbollah's operations. In a sudden and surprising operation and the largest military and economic blow to date, the regime lost the Nasib border crossing and the free trade zone between Jordan and Syria. This was followed by an attack that resulted in the sudden collapse of the 52nd Brigade, which had been considered one of the most important defence lines for regime forces in Daraa and one of the largest brigades across Syria.

The FSA now controls more than sixty-five per cent of the province.⁽¹⁾ Under major public pressure, the opposition launched "Operation Southern Storm" to liberate the city of Daraa; however, they were unable to meet this goal. Thereafter, the opposition shifted its priority to the western rural areas of the Daraa province in order to lift the siege on western Ghouta. The regime has maintained a siege on western Ghouta for years, so at the end of September 2015, the southern armed opposition launched a new battle, "Give Glad Tidings to the Patient", which has resulted in successive victories, including the liberation of Tanja Squadron and several strategic hillsides, such as Tal Ahmar and Tal "UN". This shift in tactic is intended to stifle regime forces in Quneitira and open the door for the opposition to reach Khan al-Shaykh in rural Damascus.

Second: The factional map

The formations in Daraa province can be classified into two major divisions within a single bloc.

1. Southern Front

Announced in February 2014, this faction is considered the strongest and most significant influence in terms of numbers (in excess of 30,000 fighters), the quality of its armament, capabilities and geographic spread.⁽²⁾ It consists of a loose assembly of forty-nine factions without a central command or solid organisational structure, mostly concentrated in Daraa and al-Quneitra, and partly extending to the Damascus countryside and al-Qalamoun. These factions all receive support from the Military Operations Center (MOC) of the supporting countries independently,⁽³⁾ at varying degrees and according to shifting criteria.⁽⁴⁾

The Southern Front has been unable to organise itself under a unified military command with a strong institutional framework. Rather, it has remained in the form of fragile and loose alliances falling under a singular umbrella. Even the announcement of a joint command on 15 May 2015 did not materialise into tangible changes on the ground in terms of organisation or effectiveness. In addition, significant factions publicly raised

complaints and disputes due to their exclusion, expressing resentment about how the election took place and the mechanisms of candidate selection.⁽⁵⁾

These factions depend on geographic compatibility, pressure on the field, ideological convergence or purely pragmatic considerations in order to form their alliances. They have been affected by delays, failure to mobilise, changes in the field or political and personal disputes. The foremost of these alliances are:

A. Tahaluf Suqour al-Janoub (Hawks of the South)

Announced on 27 December 2014, this coalition is concentrated geographically in Daraa City and areas east of the city. It comprises four factions which formed a joint operations room to coordinate their military operations. Factions include Jaish al-Yarmouk (Yarmouk Army), which is considered one of the most effective players in terms of numbers and equipment. Its leader, Bashar al-Zoubi, is a charismatic figure with good public relations, and he adopts moderately religious speech. The alliance also includes Fallujat Horan Brigade and Osood al-Sunna. In addition, it includes the 18 March Division, which is made up of six factions united geographically and on the frontlines of Daraa City under the command of dissident Colonel Khalid al-Dahni. This alliance is characterised by its massive breakthroughs and experience in urban warfare.

B. Al-Jaish al-Awwal (The First Army)

This assembly of about 10,000 fighters was established on 1 January 2015 under the command of dissident Colonel Saber Safar. It includes the Saudi-backed Syrian Revolutionaries' Front and the Hamza Division. In addition, it includes the 1st Artillery Regiment, which constitutes the offensive arm in battles and is the single faction with rocket launchers, thus creating a qualitative leap in battlefields, particularly in Daraa's western countryside. The First Army seeks (by defining itself as an army, led by an experienced military colonel and based on the large number of fighters affiliated with the army and its fighters in the Artillery Regiment) to present itself as a nucleus for a reliable and dependable army, which subsequently can be relied on to fill the security vacuum after the regime's fall.

2. Islamist Front factions

These are divided into global Islamist jihadist factions. These include al-Nusra Front and IS, as well as local Salafi-jihadist forces such as al-Muthanna Islamic Movement and Ahrar al-Sham, and rising local Islamist movements, which primarily adopt global Salafi speech, but have been unable to completely isolate themselves from taking part in military action; for example, Ansar al-Huda and Mashrou Ummah.

A. Al-Nusra Front

Al-Nusra Front's establishment was announced in January 2012, but its formation in Daraa took place months earlier, as some operations occurred under its local command. Now, it is considered one of the most prominent factions in the south, with remarkably high levels of organisation and discipline among its elements, an estimated 1,500 fighters and an independent military operation centre in battles. Al-Nusra has distinguished military experience from Afghanistan and Iraq, and has trained local leaders with limited combat experience, who later became field commanders in the FSA. Its commanders and personnel are mostly migrants from Jordan, with a large proportion of local fighters – more than eighty per cent. Following the arrival of Abu Mariya al-Qahtani in early 2015 from Deir Ezzor (after it fell under IS control), al-Nusra changed its priorities from fighting the Assad regime into pursuing IS, its sleeper cells and allied battalions.

B. Al-Muthanna Islamic Movement

The al-Muthanna Islamic Movement is considered one of the largest forces in the south, extending throughout large areas of Daraa. It comprises about 1,500 fighters, with local fighters preventing the inclusion of immigrants in its ranks. The movement was established in 2012 as the Battalion of al-Muthanna ibn Haritha, conqueror of the Persians. It carried out joint operations with early founders of al-Nusra Front in Daraa, as well as local leaders, but due to disputes over bombings in residential areas, it became independent.⁽⁶⁾ In March 2013, it evolved into a movement. For pragmatic reasons, the movement joins the FSA when taking part in most battles, and it served as an offensive force in the majority of the liberation operations. The movement has adopted Salafi-jihadist speech and terminology in its declarations and media discourse. Western powers classified the movement as an extremist movement,⁽⁷⁾ accusing it of allegiance to the Islamic State (IS or Daesh) due to its abstention from fighting it,⁽⁸⁾ and its intervention in reconciliation mediations between IS advocates and factions of the FSA and al-Nusra Front, in addition to the presence of IS-like characteristics and behaviours among its personnel.

This movement does not receive any support from the MOC. As a result, it has financed itself through the spoils of war and the development of local agricultural, industrial and commercial investments, in addition to the establishment of familial and tribal support networks in the Gulf. A prisoner released from Sednaya Prison, Amer al-Masalmeh, established the movement. After his martyrdom on 3 March 2013, his brother Naji took the lead, adopting a strict centralised administrative command and extremist speech, which, thanks to his charismatic personality, spread quickly across the movement.

C. IS advocates

Advocates for IS (the Islamic State or Daesh) emerged in both al-Quneitra and Daraa, represented by the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade in Daraa's western countryside, and Jaysh al-Jihad, which appeared in al-Qahtaniya of al-Quneitra in February 2015 after an ambush at al-Quneitra Front but was eradicated quickly under a decision by the judiciary.⁽⁹⁾ None of these factions expressly gave allegiance to IS, but their practices on the ground, including sympathy with Daesh and adoption of its speech and attitude, the use of its slogans, banners and lyrics, denouncing the FSA as disbelievers or apostates and forming independent courts – reinforced lingering doubts about their allegiance.⁽¹⁰⁾

D. Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade

Established in August 2012, the Yarmouk Martyrs Bridge is considered one of the most important forces in the western region where it is concentrated. It is lead by Abu Ali al-Baridi, known as the "Uncle". Clan and tribal kinship ties govern most of its components. It joined the MOC-supported military council and benefitted from its support. However, its relationship with the MOC soon went downhill due to its stances and because it kidnapped twenty-two United Nations employees in mid-2013.

The brigade has no strict ideology similar to that of IS. However, when Ahmed Kassab al-Masalmeh (a known Salafi-jihadist) joined,⁽¹¹⁾ and with the inauguration of sharia courses and camps in conjunction with the dominance of jihadist speech and its effect on the southern region, the brigade's orientation changed. Thus, it is becoming much more radical and has adopted extremist speech.

E. Other Islamist movements

These movements include Ahrar al-Sham, which has no real power or organisation in the south like it does in the north. Its central command in the north is characterised by adopting decisions that do not take into account the southern region's specificity. It also suffers from frequent administrative changes. Lack of harmony among the movement's different sectors has caused a major decline in its effectiveness in the south, which it is now seeking to remedy through restructuring and reorganisation.

Other Islamist movements in the south that cannot be ignored include Ansar al-Huda and Mashrou Ummah, which are military movements active in advocacy and social aspects. However, they suffer from low numbers, a lack of funding and the absence of military effectiveness.

These movements are aware of their weakness and inefficiency, and have thus followed an alliance strategy with factions close to them ideologically and militarily in order to

improve their position. For example, the Islamist movement Ansar al-Huda has allied with Aknaf Bait al-Maqdis under the name, al-Haraka al-Islamiya (the Islamist Movement), while Mashrou Ummah's soldiers have joined Ahrar al-Sham in a new alliance announced this month (October 2015).

Third: Geographic isolation and limited players

Daraa's geopolitical location has distinguished it from other regions, the impact of which is reflected in the map of the southern landscape. This is characterised by Jordan's strict control over its 375 kilometre border with Syria (with the US' logistical support) and its geographic isolation from other rebel provinces.⁽¹²⁾ In addition, the presence of Druze-dominated al-Suweida to the east prevented the flow of migrants, making local rebel factions with no internal conflicts the key players. Thus, the battlefield took priority over the ideological conflict, contrary to the situation in the northern and eastern regions, which witnessed a large-scale flow of the migrants and supporters of global jihadist movements across Turkey and Iraq, stirring up their internal conflicts and dominating the scene.

In addition, the MOC has an absolute monopoly over support to Daraa. In contrast, in the northern and central regions, particularly Homs and Idlib, a plurality of supporters with varying (and sometimes conflicting) priorities and goals have negatively affected the cohesion of factions there and often led to their breakup.⁽¹³⁾

Despite the presence of extremely massive military equipment when compared to other provinces and its location on the borders of two neighbouring countries, Jordan and Israel,⁽¹⁴⁾ Daraa witnessed a continuous increase in liberation operations. The Southern Front was described as the strongest and most organised of all fronts, with no substantial setbacks from which the regime benefited. Nor was the latter able to regain lost ground, despite persistent attempts. Despite Iran's entry into the scene with force, with hints that General Qassem Soleimani would lead its operational command, the Southern Front maintained its ground.⁽¹⁵⁾

These factors made the Southern Front, with Daraa province in the lead, a favourite choice for western dependence and support, with the west viewing it as the last hope for a moderate opposition. This was especially the case after the Islamist groups – IS and al-Nusra – put an end to the presence of “moderate” factions (as per the western definition), including the Hazm Movement, in record time in northern Syria.

Fourth: Regional interaction in the field

The MOC can significantly monitor regional, field and even political interaction in Daraa, including regional and international parties. It includes military advisers, intelligence officers, representatives of France, the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,⁽¹⁶⁾ in addition to Jordanian and Syrian liaison officers, with the ability to directly and specifically intervene in the field and politically. The MOC's media arm, known as the Syrian Media Commission, is considered the official spokesperson for the Southern Front.⁽¹⁷⁾

The relationship between military factions and the MOC is divided into affiliation and rejection, manoeuvring margins of ideological firmness, battlefield priorities and popular pressure. The MOC was able to make use of Daraa's sensitive geopolitical factors and its geographic isolation from other provinces to limit the support and training of most of the Southern Front's formations. Thus, through administrative mechanisms, it was able to dominate decision-making on the ground.⁽¹⁸⁾ Hence, the MOC's recommendations are given and received as "binding advice", which in 2015 evolved into orders that make those who reject them vulnerable to reprimand and sometimes punishment.⁽¹⁹⁾

1. Exploiting the battlefield for political gains:

In response to the regime's military gains on several fronts during the past year, along with stalled Geneva II negotiations, and due to the regime's inflexibility and its ability to change the situation on the ground in its favour, the international community wanted to pressure the regime to return to the negotiating table. They chose to employ the battlefield for this purpose. TOW missiles began to appear, and the Southern Front gradually obtained Grad rocket launchers, both furnished by the MOC. The Southern Front played a crucial role in the battles for the western countryside, al-Quneitra and the 52nd Brigade. It is extremely important to note that the MOC's strategy in applying military pressure through the Southern Front aims to weaken but not quash the regime. The Southern Front has not received anti-aircraft weapons, despite civilian pressure on Southern Front leaders to ask for these weapons. Over time, it has become apparent that these requests are not even open for discussion.

2. Isolating and minimising Islamist movements:

Initially, Islamist forces managed to establish themselves as influential military forces given their experience and combat tactics (car bombs and suicide operations). They also contributed to the victory of several battles. The MOC sought to isolate these movements by offering a strong reliable alternative through the Southern Front. Therefore, it began to (fairly consistently) provide its factions with military, logistic and financial support to fill any gaps. The MOC issued several individual statements bearing

the same script as the Southern Front. These statements outline its refusal to deal with al-Nusra Front or the Army of Conquest (Jaysh al-Fath).(20) Southern Front leaders have received instructions to isolate groups or certain people suspected of supporting al-Nusra Front. In what is seen as further efforts to isolate Islamist movements, the MOC agreed to support battles that were previously rejected after receiving information stating that the Islamist movements were preparing to fight these battles.(21)

The MOC also managed to isolate the Islamist movements in the liberated areas. When the central court or judiciary (Dar al-Qadaa) was founded, it ended in judicial chaos in Daraa.(22) Most factions agreed unanimously on this court, but the MOC sought to weaken the Islamist movements under the pretext that these movements contained extremist factions. It then put pressure on the factions it supported to withdraw from the judiciary. It issued directives contradicting the judgments of the central court (or Dar al-Qadaa), on matters of an Islamic state of war or forming a special executive force, which left the central court without a deterrent force and increased the complexity of its mission.

3. Attitude towards the Islamic State:

The MOC's strategy towards the current war between Nusra Front and IS in the south is "let them fight it out". It addressed a strongly worded message to the Southern Front that entering any fight against IS alongside factions such as Jaysh al-Jihad or Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, was subject to punishment. Therefore, the task of fighting IS has basically fallen on al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham. Fierce fighting continues between the two parties and to date remains unresolved. Some Southern Front formations participated in the fighting, particularly those who try to outmanoeuvre the MOC, risking sanctions and deprivation of certain privileges.(23)

The MOC seeks to strengthen the Southern Front and not plunge it into internal long-term conflicts with tribal and national elements. IS members and supporters are not from the region, but are mainly foreigners. In addition, there is an advantage to draining al-Nusra Front and IS with regard to the conflict's sustainability. Thus, the party who emerges victorious from the fight will be debilitated and easy to eliminate.

Finally: Future outcomes

After Operation Southern Storm failed, and the opposition came to understand the difficulty and danger of liberating cities controlled by the regime, it is expected the armed opposition in the south will turn their attention to cutting off the regime's main supply lines, starting with the highway which runs through Khirbet Ghazala, which will force a battle of attrition with regime forces and cause them to retreat from the area.

The opposition can then complete their expansion towards Baath City in al-Quneitra to ensure territorial contiguity with western Damascus and secure a strategic position for moving towards Damascus, with the intent of matching the Army of Conquest's (Jaish al-Fatah) advance towards Sahl al-Ghab.

A trend has emerged in the Southern Front of trying to balance regional pressure with priorities on the battlefield. Moreover, it seeks, while aware of the difficulty, to form alliances that enable it to break down the monopoly of nations supporting battlefield decisions and carefully wording its priorities to prevent any divisive decisions. This follows the internationally-heralded arrival of barbed wire and other equipment to factions stationed along al-Suweida, in order to isolate them from Daraa City, suggesting international consent for applying a partition plan in Syria. However, in light of the existing balance of power between the Islamist forces, the Muthanna Islamic Movement's position or the Southern Front's decision to fight IS will likely be affected by other priorities, like whether to quash IS completely from the province. This could result in yet another disaster for the revolution, further shifting regional and international priorities towards IS instead of the regime, along with inflicting endless problems on neighbouring states.

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***Osama al-Koshak** is a Syrian activist.

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- (1) Abdullah Raja, "This Is Our Dispute with Nusra Front" [Arabic], Zaman al-Wasl, 19 August 2015, <https://zamanalwsl.net/news/63484.html>.
- (2) Najm Salem, "49 Factions in the Free Syrian Army Form the Southern Front", All for Syria, 13 February 2014, <http://all4syria.info/archive/130995>.
- (3) MOC = Military Operations Center.
- (4) The support includes monthly salaries, relief baskets and training courses in Jordan or Saudi Arabia. Every patrol is granted ten 4WD military vehicles; automatic firearms equal to the number of its patrol members; communication systems; machine guns; anti-tank, anti-aircraft and anti-air missile weapons; and sometimes mortars and TOW missile bases with ten fillings, which the receiving party shall be obligated to document and take photos when it is launched. The author witnessed this in Daraa City January 2014 through August 2015.
- (5) AlJazeera, "Joint Command of the Southern Front in Syria: Is it Election or Appointment?" [Arabic], AlJazeera, 26 May 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2015/5/26/>.
- (6) Testimony collected by the author and corroborated by several leaders who witnessed the incident.
- (7) Correspondence leaked from the MOC operations room and the Southern Front, obtained by the author, which included directives stating not to deal with the movement because it is an extremist group. This correspondence stated, "The military lieutenant general advises you not to cooperate with al-Muthanna Islamic Movement, al-Nusra Front and extremist groups in the forthcoming operation in Daraa City, because cooperation with extremists will have consequences, including that we will withhold assistance from you".

- (8) Step Agency, "The Muthanna Movement Supports the Islamic State and Its Successor, While Daesh Secretly Threatens Factions of the Free Syrian Army in Quneitra"[Arabic], Step Agency, 8 March 2015, <http://stepagency-sy.net/archives/37383>.
- (9) Zaman al-Wasl, "Court Calls on Daraa Factions to Fight the Dawlawi Formation After It Tried to Hinder Anti-Regime Operation"[Arabic], Zaman al-Wasl, 28 April 2015, <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/60253.html>.
- (10) Source: Interview conducted by the author on 22 August 2015 with the President of the Judiciary, Sheikh Osama Al Yatim. The Sheikh confirmed the availability of established and solid evidence proving that both factions had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. He confirmed that the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade received support from the Islamic State, amounting to significant sums. One of these payments equaled one million US dollars.
- (11) See: <https://zamanalwsl.net/news/55182.html>.
- (12) Al-Arabiya, "Jordan: Daesh Monitoring System Along Syria border"[Arabic], Al-Arabiya, 9 July 2015, <http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/2015/06/09/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%b1%d8%af%d9%86-%d9%86%d8%b8%d8%a7%d9%85-%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%82%d8%a8%d8%a9-%d9%84%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%b4-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%b7%d9%88%d9%84-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%af%d9%88%d8%af-%d9%85%d8%b9-%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a7-.html>.
- (13) There are an estimated ninety thousand soldiers loyal to the regime in Daraa province, or about one third of the regime's army. The 9th Division's headquarters is in al-Sanamayn. The 7th Armoured Division and 12th Brigade are near Izraa. The 175th Regiment and 52nd Brigade are in nearby al-Hirak. The 61st Brigade is in nearby Nawa, the 15th is in nearby Inkhil, the 132nd nearby Daraa, and the 82nd in Shaykh Miskeen; an air defense battalion in al-Sahwa, in addition to several other battalions.
- (14) In 2012, the number of new formations in Idlib province was estimated at about 300 , while Daraa had only 120 during the same time period.
- (15) CNN Arabic, "Standstill in Tikrit and Major Losses in Aleppo, Idlib and southern Syria: Has Major Qassem Suleimani's Legacy Failed?", CNN Arabic, 28 May 2015, <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2015/03/28/tekrit-qassem-sulimani>.
- (16) Aron Lund, "The Battle for Daraa", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 June 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=60504>.
- (17) For more information, see the official website: <https://smo-sy.com/>.
- (18) For a detachment to obtain weapons, it must submit its detailed military plan to the MOC operations room. This plan is discussed and then the detachment waits for approval. The decision of initiating any military action is subject to the approval of regional and international powers, which is accompanied by a verbal circular to the tribal and national support networks in the Gulf to prevent any support for military actions outside MOC's limitations.
- (19) The "punishment" includes being deprived of military training courses; temporarily being deprived of salaries, relief baskets and ammunition; or being prevented from entry to Jordan.
- (20) See: <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/206859>.

(21) Author interview with Nusra Front commander in Daraa, 7 April 2015. The commander's explanation was that Naseeb border crossing was closed as a result of the negative economic impact it had on Jordan, but when they found the secret tunnel being dug by Nusra Front, they resumed normal operations out of fear that the Nusra Front would gain control of the crossing. The battles for Tal al-Rabee' near the Israeli border played out in a similar manner.

(22) Judicial chaos resulted as a result of the emergence of three courts in Daraa: the Cobra Court affiliated with the Nusra Front, the Gharz Court affiliated with Free Syrian Army (FSA) factions and the Jileen Court affiliated with the Islamic Muthanna Movement. This chaos was ended by the efforts of Sheikh Osama al-Yateem, who brought together all these courts in a unified judicial branch named "Dar al-Adl" (literally, the Courthouse).

(23) There were public disagreements between Yarmouk and the MOC because of this issue. See the interview of Deputy Commander of al-Yarmouk Army, Abu Kenan al-Sharif, as cited in al-Quds: <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=342159>.