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### The impossible partition of Syria

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The idea of a partition of Syria along sectarian boundaries has been circulating among pro-government circles, reaching the ears of Western commentators, as a way to partially save the Syrian regime, restore peace and protect the Alawite minority from a feared Sunni victory. However the historical, economic, political and, above all, the demographic reality of Syria and those of the neighboring countries indicate that such a solution would lead to a disaster. The ethnic and sectarian composition of the Syrian society and the distribution of the population across the country make the partition of the country impossible. A partition would not only fail to restore peace but it will also be a danger for the stability of neighboring countries. Mustafa Khalifa demonstrates this through a mapping of the ethnic and sectarian composition of the different urban and rural areas of the country. This mapping is inevitably incomplete and based on estimations due to the unavailability of reliable statistics. It provides nevertheless an important contribution to the knowledge about Syria that policy circles need to have when discussing the future of the country.

Syrian society is unique in its diversity, with many different ethnic, religious and sectarian constituent groups. In this respect it is equalled in the Arab world only by its neighbour Lebanon, which was created in similar conditions and with which it has an extensive shared history.

After the beginning of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, with peaceful protests turning into an armed struggle between Bashar al-Assad's regime and the different opposition groups, the issue of the composition of Syria's population was revived locally, regionally and internationally. This discussion was revitalized for many reasons, the most important being:

1. The success of Assad's regime in almost entirely polarizing the Alawite sect and forcing it into conflict with opposition forces, along with a number of other minorities. To observers, this seems to have led to a semi-divided society in Syria.
2. The deadlock of the armed struggle and apparent impossibility of a decisive military victory by either side. There is a possibility that the conflict may evolve into a longstanding civil

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war, with great human and material costs. This conviction has become entrenched among many people in Syria, in the region and internationally.

3. Fear among regional and international players that the continuation of the war over an extended period may extend the effects of the war into neighbouring countries and threaten their security. This could lead to a conflagration of the entire region, given the crucial significance of competing strategic interests in the country.

Some groups, considering the demographic situation in Syria, have debated the possibility of partitioning Syria into two or more states to protect the main social groups of the country and to end the conflict which, as of late 2013, appears to be irremediable. These groups, which have varying motivations, opinions and commitment to the idea of partition, are:

- The Syrian regime: Some people in circles close to Bashar al-Assad have leaked rumours that the partitioning of Syria and the establishment of an Alawite state is an option if the stranglehold upon the regime intensifies. In reality, these leaks are threats directed primarily at two audiences. They are directed first at the Syrian opposition, which is dedicated to maintaining the unity of Syria's land and people and, secondly, at the neighbouring countries supporting the Syrian opposition since the partitioning of Syria could have consequences for these countries. This is particularly true of Turkey where the existence of significant sectarian and ethnic minorities could constitute ripe grounds for conflict, though the dangers of partition are less than in Syria. When the Syrian regime began leaking the idea of partition, as a threat and as psychological warfare, it was done at a time when they were still hoping that they could be victorious and crush the opposition. It is clear, however, that the regime will resort to this option in the event that it feels it is about to be decisively struck by opposition forces.
- Iran: If Iran feels that the fall of its ally, the al-Assad regime, is inevitable, it would prefer to keep a piece of the cake. In this case, it would likely support the founding of an Alawite state, considering this situation to be the lesser of two evils. In this case, it will do its utmost to ensure that this state has geographical access to Iraq, achieving its goal of establishing what has been referred to as the Shi'ite crescent extending from Iran to Lebanon. From the Iranian perspective, the partitioning of Syria is a legitimate alternative to some worse scenario. But Iran's strategic ambition is much greater. It wants to be able to exercise power over all of Syria, and also to be able to have control over Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine through Syria. It will, therefore, accept only temporarily a limiting of its influence to a small geographical area controlled by an Alawite state, and after that, will seek to change the balance of power which has compelled it and Assad's regime to accept this state of affairs. The region will therefore not be peaceful and settled even after any possible partitioning of Syria and the establishment of an Alawite state.
- The Western states that are active and influential internationally, and at the level of the Syrian crisis. In decision making circles in these states, and in some connected research centres and think tanks, the option of partitioning Syria into two states has been discussed in the belief that that this solution could guarantee the end of the conflict between Assad's regime and the opposition forces.

Some important questions emerge here and must be addressed:

Is the partitioning of Syria realizable in reality? If the answer is yes, is it the best way to avoid the dangers that have led to this idea being proposed? In other words, would this solution reduce the human and material costs that might be expected with a widespread civil war? Would this solution bring stability to the region and prevent a conflagration? The answer to these questions requires, to

begin with, a study of the demographic situation in Syria, its main ethnic, religious and sectarian groups and their distribution in the country.

	1943		1953		GROWTH %
<i>SUNNIS</i>	1 971 053	68,91%	2 578 810	70,54%	31%
<i>SHI'ITES</i>	12 742	0,45%	14 887	0,41%	17%
<i>ALAWITES</i>	325 311	11,37%	398 445	10,90%	22%
<i>ISMAILIS</i>	28 527	1,00%	36 745	1,01%	29%
<i>DRUZE</i>	87 184	3,05%	113 318	3,10%	30%
<i>YEZIDI</i>	2 788	0,10%	3 082	0,08%	11%
<i>TOTAL MUSLIMS</i>	2 427 605	84,87%	3 145 287	86,03%	30%
<i>JEWS</i>	29 770	1,04%	31 647	0,87%	6%
<i>CHRISTIANS</i>	403 036	14,09%	478 970	13,10%	19%
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>2 860 411</b>				

Different estimations have been made on the demographic composition of Syria. They usually correspond to these figures however they can vary depending on the aims of the sources. For example, some give the figure of 7% for the number of Alawites, while other studies raise this figure to 15%, so it is therefore best to rely on sources that appear to be more neutral. According to records of civil statistics, on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011, the number of residents of Syria was 24 million, distributed over the 14 governorates in the table. These residents comprise a mixture of many ethnicities, religions and religious sects, as described below.

### Divisions in Syrian society

Generally, we can speak of the composition of Syrian society along three dimensions: the ethnic, religious and sectarian.

### The ethnic groups

**Arabs** constitute the major ethnic group in Syria, making up between 80 and 85% of the population. They are the majority in all districts except for the Hasakah governorate.

**Kurds** are the second largest ethnic group in Syria, making up around 10% of the Syrian population and distributed among four regions. Most of the Kurdish population is concentrated in the northeast, bordering on Iraq and Turkey. The second area, in which smaller Kurdish communities are also found, is central Syria. The third area is in the regions of Kobani (Ayn al-Arab) and Afrin, and despite the fact that most maps show these Kurdish regions as though they were connected, there is actually a large Arab and Turkmen bloc that separates them (Jarabulus, Manbij, Al-Bab, Azaz).

The fourth area is in the capital, Damascus, mainly in the neighbourhood of Rukn Addin. Kurds in Damascus are entirely Arabised and do not speak Kurdish very well.

The major locales in which Kurds are found are: the city of Hasakah and the villages surrounding it, Qamishli, Amouda, Darbasha, Malikiyah, the city of Aleppo, Ayn al-Arab and most of the villages around it, Afrin, and nearly all the villages around it, as well as minorities in Damascus, Homs, Idlib, and Ar-Raqqah. The only area in which the Kurds constitute a majority is the Hasakah governorate, where they make up 60% of the population. The Map in the Annex 2 shows the distribution of Kurds in Syria.

Different groups of Kurds have held different positions in relation to the uprising against Assad's regime. Some Kurds consider themselves part of the revolution and part of the Syrian people and have actively participated in it. Others have tried to keep the Kurdish regions separate from the impacts of the conflict. Other Kurds saw in the revolution a historical moment to be exploited in order to realize Kurdish demands for an independent nation state.

The great majority of the Kurds in Syria are Sunni Muslims, with a Yazidi minority that numbers around 40,000, and a small number of Alawite Kurds. The Kurdish minority is the only ethnic minority of which some members have made demands to separate from Syria. Different options proposed have been for the establishment an independent state, or for self-rule, or to form part of a greater Kurdistan composed of parts of four countries: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

**Turkmen** are the third largest ethnic group in Syria, making up around 4-5% of the population. Some estimations indicate that they are the second biggest group, outnumbering Kurds, drawing on the fact that Turkmen are divided into two groups: the rural Turkmen who make up 30% of the Turkmen in Syria and who have kept their mother tongue, and the urban Turkmen who have become Arabised and no longer speak their mother language. Turkmen are mostly found in the urban centres and countryside of six governorates of Syria: Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Latakia and Quneitra.

The main locales in which the Turkmen live in Aleppo governorate are the city of Aleppo, the countryside in the northern part of the governorate, and the villages next to the cities of Azaz, al-Bab and Jarabulus. In the governorate of Latakia, Turkmen live in Jabal al-Turkman, al-Badrusiyeh, Umm al-Tuyour, Asobah, and some of the villages beside the Turkish border. In the governorate of Homs, Turkmen live in Gharanata, al-Krad, Burj Qa'i, al-Sam'lil, and other villages in the Houla plain, as well as some of the villages in the districts of al-Quneitra and Hama. The overwhelming majority of Turkmen in Syria are Sunni Muslims.

**Assyrians** are the fourth largest ethnic group in Syria. They represent the original and oldest inhabitants of Syria, today making up around 3-4% of the Syrian population. A large number of them have emigrated to Sweden, Australia and other countries in recent years as a consequence of the deterioration of their economic situation and the neglect of their regions during the rule of Hafez al-Assad. They are mainly concentrated in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, and a number of villages on the banks of the river Khabur. The most important of these villages is Tel Tamar which was the principal seat of their spiritual leader. Most Assyrians are Christian with a small Muslim minority. They have kept their original language.

**Circassians** are the fifth largest ethnic group in Syria, making up around 1.5% of the population. They live mostly in three Syrian governorates: Homs, Hama and Quneitra. In Homs, they live in the centre of the city and in villages such as Deir Ful, Tel Omari and Ayn An Nasr. In Hama, they live in the centre of the city of Hama and some of the towns and villages around it like Tel Sanan, Tel Aadi and Dil al-Ajal and Jabassein. In general, Circassians in these regions live in villages close to the Syrian desert. In Quneitra, they live in the city centre and in the towns and villages of Beer

Ajam, Al-Khishniyah, al-Adnaniah and al-Mansoura. Some Circassians also live in Aleppo, Manbij, and Khanasr and there are small communities in Damascus, Ar Raqqah, Daraa and al-Hasakah, and Rif Dimashq. Circassians are all Sunni Muslims, and most speak very good Arabic while also retaining their mother tongue. Some of them returned the Caucasus their region of origin after the fall of the Soviet Union.

**Armenians** are sixth largest ethnic group in Syria, making up around 1% of the population. They are concentrated in the cities of Aleppo and Qamishili, in rural Latakia, and with a small number in Deir ez-Zor, Damascus and Homs. There have been Armenians in the city of Kesab since the first century. The popular name for them is the “ancient Armenians”. The largest and most recent influx of Armenians into what is now Syria occurred following massacres shortly before the fall of the Ottoman Empire. They have all kept their mother tongue and are all Christians.

There are also a small number of other ethnic groups in Syria, including Greeks, Persians, Albanians, Bosnian, Pashtuns, Russians and Georgians. A significant number of these ethnic groups have become Arabised to some degree, particularly those that are adherents of Islam. With time, they have lost much of their previous sense of ethnic affiliation, unlike their religious and sectarian affiliations which have not changed or been subject to external influence.

### **The religious groups**

There are three main religious groups in Syria, along with some very small groups which are not taken into account in this paper.

**Muslims:** The overwhelming majority of Syrians are Muslim, in their different sects and ethnicities, constituting around 90% of the population and forming the majority in all districts.

**Christians:** Christians now make up less than 6% of the population, having fallen from around 20% at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their numbers have decreased due to a number of factors, especially their lower birth rate relative to that of the Muslims, as well as emigration to Western countries and to Australia. It has proven relatively easy for Syrian Christians to integrate into these communities for a number of reasons, particularly their level of education and shared religious customs. The level of emigration increased after 1970 due to negative economic, social and political conditions during the rule of Hafez al-Assad.

Syria was an important early cradle of Christianity, and most of its Christians are Arabs. They live in a number of areas, including:

- Wadi al-Nasara region: Christians make up around 60% of its inhabitants, located in the towns and villages of Marmarita, al-Hwash, Zweitina, Mashta Aazar, and Safita.
- The city of Aleppo: Christians make up around 20% of its population and live in areas such as Azizieh, Al-Telal, Al-Sulaymaniyah and others.
- Homs governorate: Christians live mainly in neighbourhoods of the old city such as Bab Al-Saba, Bab Al-Darib, al-Hamidiyyah, and in suburbs such as Zaidil, Furuza and Rablah.
- Jibal al-Qalamoun: Christians live in a number of towns including Ma'aloula, Sadinaya, Deir Atieh, Al-Nabk and Yabrud.
- Hama governorate: Christians live in the central area of the city of Hama, and in the northern countryside in a number of towns including Muhradah, al-Suqaylabiah and al-Bayda.
- Latakia governorate: Christians live in the old areas of the city and in the town of Kesab.

All major eastern and western churches are represented among Syria's Christians, though the majority of them are Orthodox. Annex 3 shows the distribution of Christians in Syria.

**Jews:** The majority of the Jews emigrated from Syria following the establishment of the state of Israel, and the last wave of emigration happened towards the end of Hafez al-Assad's rule. Only a small number have remained in Syria, in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo.

### **The sectarian divisions**

**Sunnis:** They are known as the people of the Sunna and the consensus of the umma, and the majority of Syrians (over 75%) belong to this group. All of the large cities and thirteen out of the fourteen governorates' capitals, have Sunni majorities except for the governorate and city of Suwayda. In the countryside, the only areas where they are not the majority are the countryside of Latakia and Tartus, where the Alawite sect forms the majority, and the Wadi al-Nasara region where the majority are Christian.

**Alawites:** The Alawites are the second largest sectarian group in Syria, making up around 10% of the total population, and numbering around 2.5 million people. The Alawites are divided into two main groups: traditional Alawites, the majority, and the minority Murshid Alawites, who do not consider themselves to be Alawites. Murshid Alawism rose from a modern schism in the Alawite sect at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was founded and led by Suleiman al-Murshid, from whom it takes its name. Suleiman al-Murshid was executed after the departure of the French forces from Syria.

Hafez al-Assad and his son Bashar belong to the Alawite sect. Alawites live mainly in the Coastal Mountain Range: in the countryside of the Latakia and Tartus governorates on the western side of the mountains, and in the countryside of the Homs and Hama governorates on their eastern side. In the governorates of Latakia and Tartus, Alawites make up a majority of around 60% of the population. In Homs and Hama, they make up around 10% of the population in both the countryside and the cities, living in Talkalakh, Al-Mukharram, Al-Qabo, Shin, Al-Riqama, the Houla plain, Maryamin, Qarmas, Al Muhani, and the areas of Zahra and Naziha. To a lesser extent, they also live in the areas of al-Waar, Akrama, Tel Salhab, al-Ziyara, Ayn Halaqim, Awj, Beirin and Yansaf. Alawites also live in some coastal areas, such as the towns of Latakia, Tartus, Jableh and Baniyas, in neighbourhoods that have been established since 1970 for officers and soldiers of the Syrian regime's army and where they are not considered in the civilian statistical records to be residents of the city. Alawites also live in the new areas of Homs and in some areas on the outskirts of Damascus: Mezzeh 86, Ash Al-Wurur, the Tishreen neighbourhood and Maskain Al-Haras. Annex 4 shows the distribution of the Alawite population in Syria.

**Druze:** Also known as the Unitarians, they constitute the third largest of the Islamic sects, making up around 3% of the population of Syria. This figure comprises only those Druze resident in Syria and recorded in official statistics but there are many Druze living abroad, particularly in Latin America, who have emigrated there over the past hundred years, as a result of a number of factors. In Venezuela alone there are half a million Druze immigrants of Syrian origin. Annex 5 shows the distribution of the Druze sect in Syria. Members of the Druze sect live in four of Syria's governorates:

- Suwayda: This is the main centre of the Druze population, and the region of small towns and villages under its authority is called the Mountain of the Arabs or the Mountain of the Druze. Among the small towns are Shahba', Salkhad and al-Qariyya.

- Quneitra: The Druze of this governorate live mainly in five towns: Hadar, in the part of the Golan Heights that is not occupied by Israel, and the villages of Majdal Shams, Mas'ade, Baq'atha and Ein Qiniyye, in the Israeli occupied part of the Golan Heights.
- Rif Dimashq: A Druze community lives in the town of Jaramanah close to Damascus.
- Idlib: The Druze make up a small minority in the areas of Harem, Abrita, Muamara al-Ikhwani, Kafr Maris and Arshin.

Ismailis: The Ismailis are the fourth largest group of the Islamic sects, making up just over 1% of the population. They live mainly in two governorates:

- Hama: Ismailis live mainly in the city of al-Salamiyah, considered the Ismaili capital both of Syria and of the Middle East. It lies 35 km east of Hama and there are Ismailis living in most of the towns and villages around it. They also live in the city of Masyaf and in the surrounding countryside. There is also a small minority living in the city of Hama.
- Tartus: Ismailis live in the town of Qadmus, and its surrounding countryside and in the district of Nahr al-Khawabi east of Tartus and its villages Al Barikah, Bayt Daybah and Naba'a Nasr. Annex 6 shows the distribution of Ismailis in Syria.

Shi'ites: The Shi'ites are the smallest of the Islamic sects in Syria, making up around 0.5% of the population. They live in the Amin neighbourhood in Damascus and in two villages close to Aleppo, Nubl and Zahraa. Ja'afari Shi'ites are found mainly in Qadmus, in the governorate of Tartous.

## **On demography and division**

Following this brief exposition of the demographic map of Syria and its most important component parts, we may return to the question of what benefit would come from the partitioning of the country. Two different entities have been proposed as possible new states following any partition of Syria. The first is a Kurdish entity formed on the basis of ethnic distinction. This has little support at the present time other than from some Kurdish political groups formed through regional sensibilities. It is not, therefore, suggested as something to be implemented urgently, though the idea of it has been discussed for a long time. For many years its creation was the only proposal for the partition of Syria.

A more recent idea for partition has arisen with the proposal to create an entity for the Alawite minority. This entity, created on the basis of a sectarian distinction, has been proposed as a solution to the present conflict since Alawites constitute the main body of Assad's forces fighting against the opposition, which is mainly Sunni. Some experts say that the fact that the composition of the opposition is mainly Sunni in character is natural and does not represent a sectarian motivation, for two reasons:

- First, Sunnis represent the majority in Syrian society, and so it is natural that the backbone of any social movement of this depth and breadth should be formed of a Sunni majority.
- Second, the Sunni sect was the most greatly harmed by the rule of the Assad family, which lasted more than forty years, and which conferred many advantages upon the Alawites at the expense of the Sunnis.

Before returning to the fundamental question of partition, it is helpful to look back to history and explore the experience of the French mandate, the only instance of the establishment of an Alawite state. After the entry of French forces into Damascus in 1920 and the fall of the two-year old Arab state of King Faisal, French forces established military control over the entire country on the basis of the French mandate, assigned it by the victorious forces of WWI. General Henry Gouraud

announced the founding of an Alawite state on August 31<sup>st</sup> 1920, subsequently called the government of Latakia. The French defined the borders of the state, covering an area of 7000 km<sup>2</sup> and with a population at the time of around 300000 people.

Measures were taken to prepare the framework and institutions of this state. First and foremost, a 17-member council of deputies was formed, with membership divided among the sects: ten Alawites, three Sunnis, three Christians, and one Ismaili. This government did not find any popular support among the Alawites on the ground. Apart from a few people among the Alawite leaders and those associated with the French, no local elements supported this government. Some Alawite groups even founded armed movements opposed to their separation from their motherland of Syria, including the revolution of Sheikh Saleh al-Ali. The French, led by General Giraud, sensed the lack of desire among the Syrian people for partition, and were compelled to dissolve the government of Latakia, and then announced the unification of Syria on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1922. At the end of the 1930s, the French repeated their efforts and again founded the government of Latakia. This led to the announcement of general strikes and of civil disobedience in February 1939 and again in June 1939. Under the pressure of strikes and popular demands, France was forced to reintegrate Latakia into Syria on September 20<sup>th</sup> 1942.

The comparison with the failed French experiment in founding an Alawite state cannot be relied upon as an analogy. The important question is one of popular support. The partition that was rejected by an overwhelming majority of Alawites at the time of the French experiment might receive a torrent of popular support if it were viewed as the only safeguard against the existential fear that the regime has sown in the hearts of the Alawite sect: a conviction that the Sunnis will slaughter them if the regime falls.

This fear is an important variable that is liable to change. It also cannot be disregarded that other factors that had led to the failure of the idea of partition during the time of the French, may still exist and in some cases could have the same importance. There are a number of factors involved, the most important ones being the demographic factor and the economic factor.

### **The demographic factor**

Alawites live primarily in four governorates and it might be Assad's ambition that these four governorates should become part of his Alawite state. If he was not able to accomplish this, then three might be enough, or even two: Latakia and Tartus. There are thus three possibilities for establishing an Alawite state, with the number of Alawites always estimated at 2.5 million.

The first possibility is the establishment of an Alawite state that includes four Syrian governorates, Latakia, Tartus, Hama, and Homs. Since the total population of these four governorates is 6.443 million (see Figure 1), of whom 2.5 million are Alawite, there is a population of approximately 4 million non-Alawites in these four governorates. They are predominantly Sunni, with some representation from religious minorities.

The second possibility is the establishment of an Alawite state that comprises three whole governorates, Latakia, Tartus, and Homs, plus the part of the governorate of Hama inhabited by Alawites. The population of the governorate of Hama is 2.113 million, of which around 30%, or 700000 are Alawites. In other words, 1.413 million of the inhabitants of the Hama governorate are not Alawites. The number of inhabitants of an Alawite governorate established according to this second option would be 5.030 million people, if it were possible to fully exclude the non-Alawite population of Hama. This would result in an Alawite state with an Alawite population of around 50%.

The third possibility is the establishment of an Alawite state comprising only two governorates, Latakia and Tartus, along with the regions under the authority of Hama and Homs inhabited by an Alawite majority. The total number of Alawites would remain at 2.5 million, calculated as follows: the number of Alawites in the governorates of Hama and Homs is estimated at 1.4 million. The total population of Latakia is 1.229 million and the total population of Tartus is 954 000. If it were possible to include only the Alawite populations of Homs and Hama, this option would result in a total population of 3.683 million for the Alawite state, including 2.5 million Alawites, and around 1.2 million non Alawites.

The Assad regime and behind him, Iran, would prefer the first or second possibilities because they would safeguard a geographical connection with Iraq. With the first possibility, however, the Alawite state would have an enormous number of non Alawites (~ four million) while in the second possibility, the number of non-Alawites would be more than two and a half million. The obvious question is, therefore: what would be the future of these inhabitants? What would be their reaction to the process of partition?

### **The economic factor**

The economic factor will be essential in the success or failure of any plan to establish an Alawite state in the coastal area of Syria. A quick look at Syria's economic situation reveals that in terms of commerce and industry, it is concentrated in the large cities of Damascus and Aleppo. In terms of agriculture, petrol and phosphate, they are mostly concentrated in the inner governorates. It is significant that the Assad regime has sought for more than forty years to exclude the Alawite regions from any real development projects, in order to keep the Alawite land and population in a state of dependence towards the state and use as a human storehouse to supply its military and security apparatuses with what it needs in the way of human forces. On the other hand, the commercial ports of Latakia and Tartus and the oil port of Baniyas are the only seaports available for the Syrian economy – and all of them would be part of any potential Alawite state. Based on what has already been presented we are confronted with the following realities:

1. The Alawite state would be generally weak in resources, in all three scenarios, especially given that its creation would be in the midst of a strongly hostile environment making it difficult or even impossible to cooperate with its neighbours.
2. The lack of easy access to a sea port for Damascus or Aleppo would thwart any possibility for oil exports and would amount to the economic strangulation of the interior Syria.
3. If an Alawite state was established according to the first or second scenarios, with the governorate of Homs (connected with Iraq) included, the rest of Syria would be divided into two areas: a southern area including Damascus, Rif Dimashq, al-Quneitra, Daraa, As-Suwaydam and a northern area including Aleppo, Idlib, Ar-Raqqah, Deir Ez-Zor and al-Hasakah. The Alawite state would constitute a huge geographical barrier to any unified economic functioning between the northern and southern areas.

### **Conclusion**

Having examined the demographic structure of Syria, and having reviewed which factors in the success or failure of Syria's past experience with partition are variable and which are unchanging, let us return to the questions addressed at the beginning.

First, to what extent is the idea of partition is realistic and possible for implementation on the ground? There is a general consensus within the opposition to oppose the idea of partition and will

resist it by force. Similarly, although Assad may be “threatening” to implement this solution as a last resort, this does not mean that the Assad regime and its supporter Iran will be satisfied with control over the Alawite state only. Their retreat within the borders of such a state would be only temporary, imposed by a balance of forces on the ground. The slightest shift in the balance of power would lead them to resist the partition by force and to bring about their overarching goal of reclaiming and controlling all of Syria.

Since the warring local forces and their regional supporters therefore reject this solution and are resisting it, and the international community is not prepared to send one soldier into the quagmire of Syria, who would enforce the partition? Who would oversee its implementation on the ground? The conclusion may swiftly be reached that the partition of Syria is nothing but the expression of an idea in the heads of some politicians and Western intellectuals, and is merely an idea floating in the air rather than something that could ever be workable on the ground in reality.

Second, can partition lead to a lessening of the costs, material and in human life, which may occur if the conflict devolves into an open and longstanding civil war? Apart from the thousands of dead, Assad has, over the past two years of conflict, destroyed nearly half of the country – buildings, schools, hospitals and infrastructure – and any future authority/state will therefore suffer greatly. It will take a decade or two for Syria to revert back to how it was before the start of the protests. There have, therefore, already been major costs that are liable to rise further if there is on-going damage to the regions emerging from the control of the Assad regime.

If we start from the hypothesis that the division of Syria is accomplished peacefully and all parties concerned accept what is drawn out on the ground, an unrealistic assumption, what would be the fate of the non-Alawite bloc living within the borders of the new Alawite state? The numbers in this group fluctuates – depending on whether we take the first or second scenario – between 2.5 and 4 million people. The Alawite state would not want this group to stay since they would undermine the identity of the new state and the basis on which it was established. This group also would not want to live in the shadow of an Alawite state that is hostile towards them. This leaves a number of possible scenarios: the most unlikely being that both sides accept this shared way of life without any reaction, or that this non-Alawite bloc reacts in a limited way against the new sectarian authority, and is oppressed by Assad proportionately to the magnitude of the uprising, leading to its containment and extinction. But the most likely scenario, which follows from an understanding of the nature of Assad’s regime and of the current state of the conflict, is that the way will be paved for the outbreak of a devastating open civil war between the two sides, in which Assad would resort to more bloody and violent methods to force this group outside the borders of the Alawite state.

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that there could be widespread slaughter as part of a campaign of sectarian cleansing (as occurred in Houla, Al-Qasir and Baniyas), and as a reaction to these killings from the other side. In all this analysis we are assuming that there would be no support movements from the armed opposition at the borders of the state for their brethren being subjected to maltreatment and slaughter at the hands of Assad’s soldiers. We may thus conclude that partition that was intended, among other things, to reduce the costs to human life and material costs of the conflict in Syria, could be a gateway to an escalation of these costs to unprecedented levels.

The third question asked at the start of the paper was whether partition could help avoid the dangers of a regional conflagration. Perhaps the most negative consequences in the case of the partitioning of Syria would be for the neighbouring states, especially Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. It would set a historical precedent that could be built upon by any groups with an interest in copying the Syrian partition experience. This would probably spark off conflicts and separatist wars and the region

would be placed in an explosive situation with no certain end that could have negative repercussions at an international level. In the end, all this would likely lead to the most radical and extremist factions taking control of the Syrian stage, whether in an Alawite state, or in other areas of a divided Syria.

## ANNEX 1

## عدد السكان لعام 2010 في سورية

لقد بلغ عدد السكان في سورية وفقا لتقديرات المكتب المركزي للإحصاء: 23695000  
اما عدد السكان المتواجدين حاليا هو 20619000

\* السكان السوريون حسب الجنس و المحافظة وفق سجلات الأحوال المدنية في 1 / 1 / 2010 ( بالآلف )

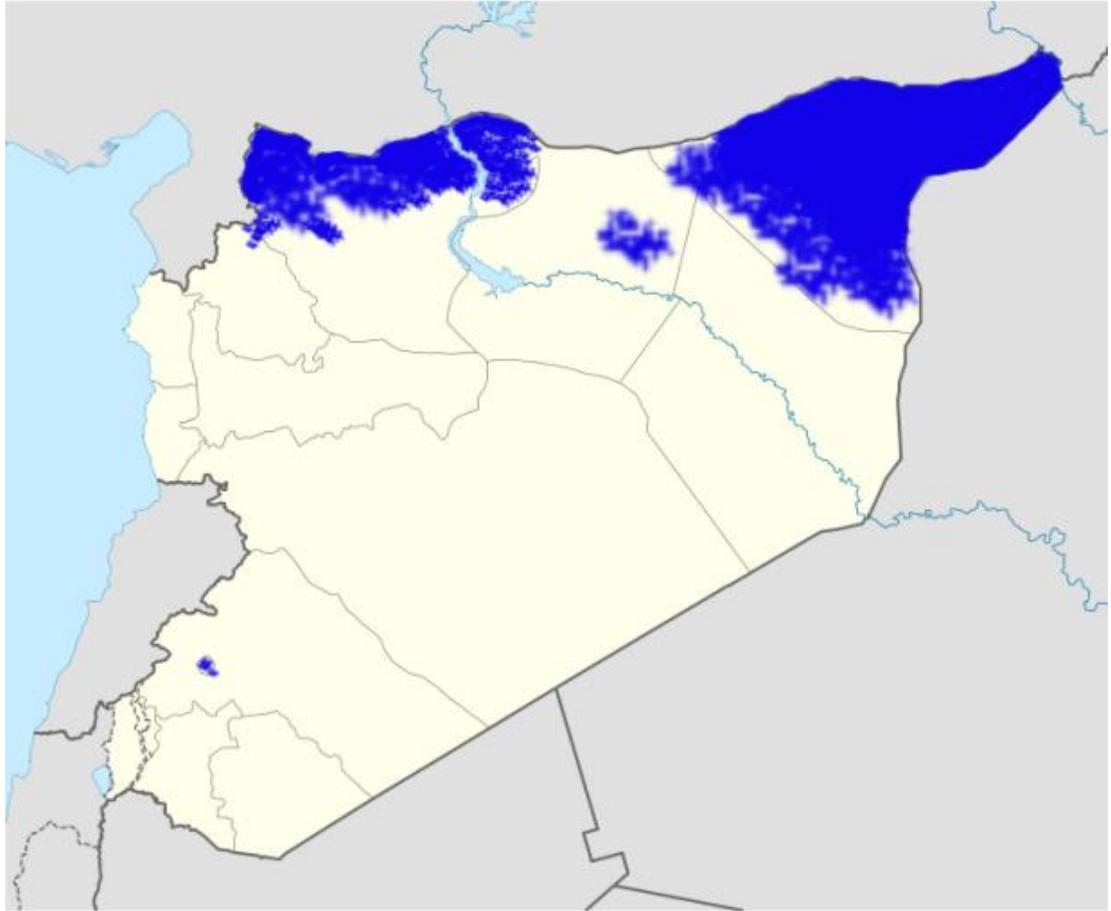
## Syrian population by sex and governorate according to civil affairs records on 1 / 1 / 2010 ( 000)

Governorate of Registration	** نسبة الجنس	% من مجموع سكان القطر	Sex		الجنس		محافظة التسجيل
			مجموع	إناث	ذكور		
	** Sex ratio	% Of total Population	Total	Women	Men		
Damascus	100	7.4	1749	874	875		دمشق
Rural Damascus	103	7.7	1820	895	925		ريف دمشق
Aleppo	101	24.0	5680	2829	2851		حلب
Homs	102	8.8	2087	1031	1056		حمص
Hama	103	8.7	2052	1013	1039		حماة
Lattakia	100	5.1	1207	604	603		اللاذقية
Deir-ez-zor	98	6.8	1623	818	805		دير الزور
Idleb	102	8.4	1997	987	1010		إدلب
Al-Hasakeh	99	6.5	1540	775	765		الحسكة
Al-Rakka	97	4.1	966	491	475		الرققة
Al-Sweida	100	2.0	476	238	238		السويداء
Daraa	103	4.6	1085	535	550		درعا
Tartous	101	3.9	938	466	472		طرطوس
Quneitra	101	2.0	475	236	239		القنيطرة
TOTAL	101	100	23695	11792	11903		المجموع

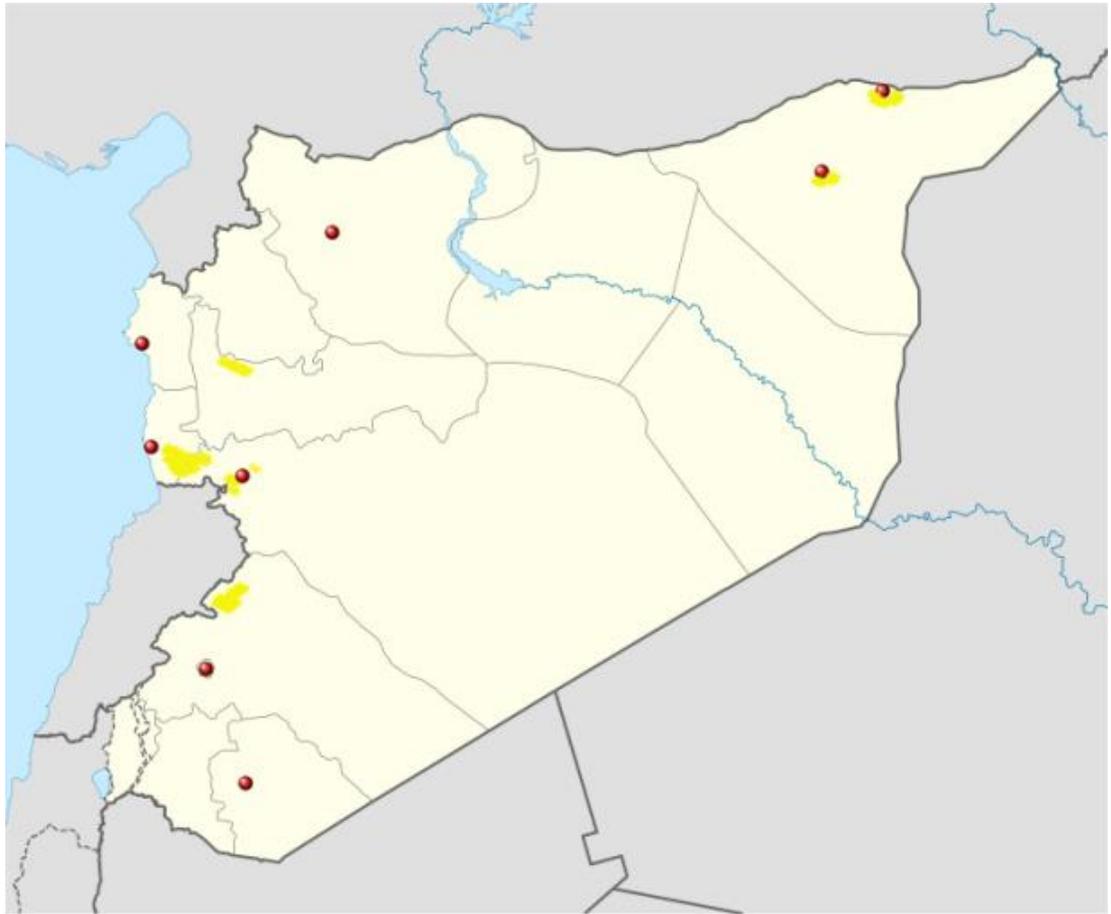
\*these numbers represent the number of Syrian population according to Civil Affairs Records\*\* Male number for every one hundred Female

\* تمثل هذه الأرقام عدد السكان السوريين المسجلين في سجلات الأحوال المدنية\*\* عدد الذكور لكل 100 أنثى

ANNEX 2: Repartition of the Kurdish population in Syria



ANNEX 3: Repartition of the Christian population in Syria



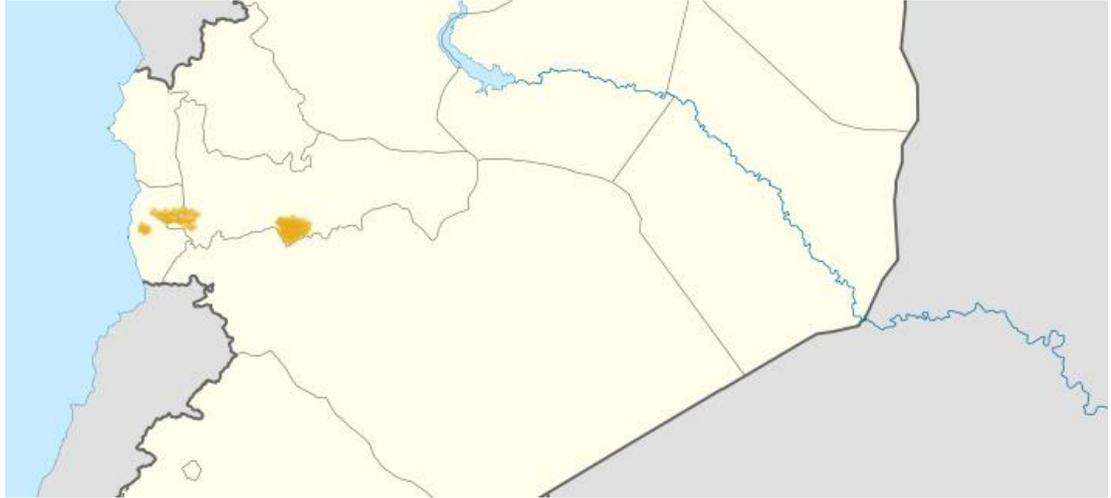
ANNEX 4: Repartition of the Alawite population in Syria



ANNEX 5: Repartition of the Druze population in Syria



ANNEX 6: Repartition of the Ismaili population in Syria



## Sources

International Religious Freedom Report for 2011, United States Department of State-Bureau of Democracy-Human Rights and Labor

BBC New Country Profile – Syria – Mai 2013

مركز الجزيرة للدراسات، جورج كدر- 8 آب / أغسطس 2012، سوريا وديموغرافية ما بعد الثورة.

### **The demographic composition of Syria**

There is no detailed information about the ethnic, religious and sectarian distribution of the Syrian people. The first census that focused on sectarian distribution was carried out in 1932 under the French mandate and did not cover the whole country. It was carried out only in the lands under the short-lived government of Latakia (the state of the Alawites established by the French) and covered only 7000 km<sup>2</sup> out of modern Syria's total area of 185000 km<sup>2</sup>.

In his book *Minorities in the Arab World*, Oxford, 1947, Albert Hourani published statistics from a general census of Syria in 1943 giving details of the constituent groups of the population and the rate of growth of each. The data is listed below, along with estimates for 1953.