

## CHAPTER 10

# Building a Professional National Army in Syria



**S**ince Syria gained its independence in the mid-1940s, the Syrian Army has played a large role in the country's political life, one that often goes beyond its natural role of protecting the country from foreign threats and maintaining civil peace. A series of military coups have been launched during this time against the political establishment, which Syrians themselves wished to see take the form of a civilian multiparty democracy. The country's first military coup, launched by Husni al-Za'im in 1949, presented a model that was fundamentally hostile toward democracy. This was followed by a second coup launched by al-Hinnawi the same year, which helped restore Syria's character as a democratic country. This was followed by two successive coups launched by Adib Shishakli in 1951 and 1953, which presented new setbacks for democracy in Syria, putting a stranglehold on political parties. Shishakli's regime was then overthrown in 1954 in a military coup that returned former president al-Atassi to power, who ruled until Syrians elected Shukri al-Quwatli as president in 1955.

Under pressure from the army, Syria entered into a short-lived union with Egypt in 1958, eventually seceding three years later in 1961. This was followed two years later by another military coup launched

by the Ba'ath Party in 1963, making Amin al-Hafez president and ushering in a new era in Syria's history, led by a group of new political elites who were able to climb through the ranks of the armed forces. During this time, there was no participation on behalf of the masses in any sort of democratic political life. In 1966, another military coup from within the Ba'ath Party itself occurred, which resulted in the appointment of a new president. In 1967, Syria's army, like that of other Arab armies in the region, suffered a huge defeat during the 1967 Six-Day War (or the "June Setback," as it is referred to in the Arabic literature) with Israel, which led to the loss of parts of Syrian territory, in addition to the complete occupation of the Golan Heights. This was followed by yet another internal military coup in 1970, referred to as the "Corrective Movement," led by Hafez al-Assad, who appointed Ahmad Hasan al-Khatib as temporary president, before Assad himself assumed the role of president in 1971. A referendum was then held on the country's constitution in 1973, which granted Assad wide powers.

Assad's rule continued until his death in 2000, with his son, Bashar al-Assad, succeeding him in taking up the role of president. The army played a prominent role in helping to spread and secure the

rule of the father Assad, particularly during the internal struggles of the late 1970s and early 1980s between the army, the security forces, and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. The most remembered of such events was the blockade and invasion of Hama, which led to the destruction of much of the city's infrastructure and the death and injury of tens of thousands of Syrians.<sup>1</sup> After this period, the role of the army in the country's domestic affairs decreased, replaced by that of its security forces, whose power and influence became widespread on the Syrian street.

The Syrian Army invaded Lebanon in 1976, eventually asserting near complete military control over the country following the Ta'if agreements between Lebanon's various political forces in 1990, a process that left the army tired and overextended due to the state's limited resources. During this time, Assad began to think of the possibility of obtaining material support from the Gulf countries in addition to military aid from Russia, eventually creating an Air Force Intelligence Directorate, led by Mohammed al-Kholi, who served as chairman. It was after this period that the influence of the country's security forces began to be imposed on its various army formations. Rifaat al-Assad was elected leader of what was referred to as the Defense Companies, the most powerful military unit operating outside the framework of the National Army. In 1975,

Rifaat al-Assad became a member of the country's national Ba'ath Party leadership, a move that reflected the beginning of Hafez al-Assad's increased reliance on members of his family and those from his own sectarian background in order to hold onto power. After that time, Syria became known as "Assad's Syria," with a number of additional monikers adopted to refer to Hafez al-Assad's personal ownership of the country—including "Assad's office," "Assad's hospital," "Assad's garden," and "Assad's lake."

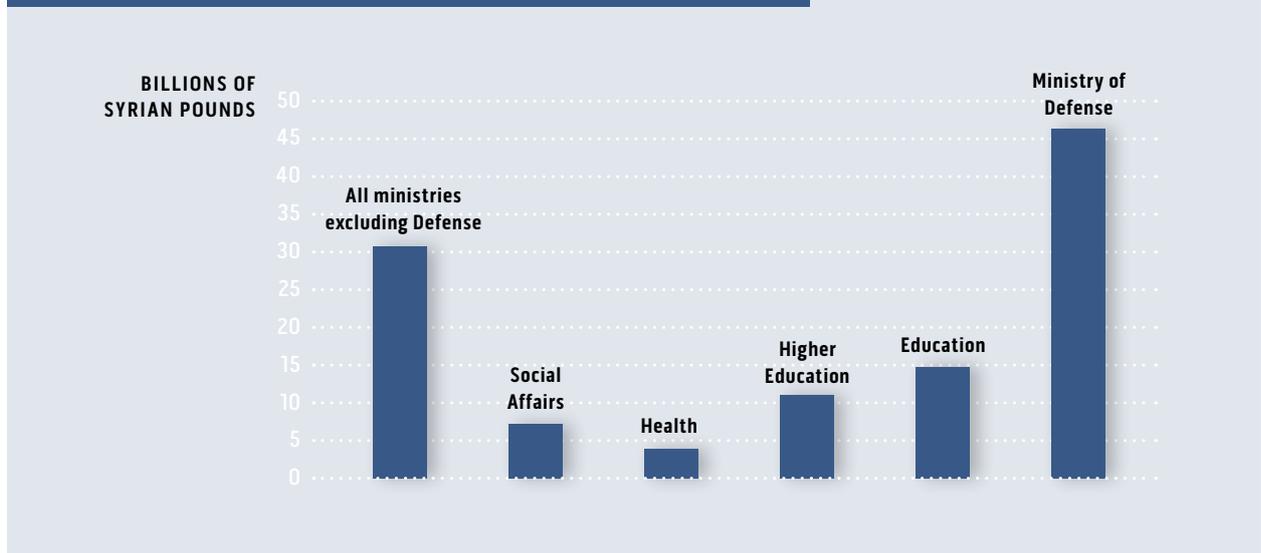
Conflicts between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1980s helped solidify a new reality for the Syrian armed forces, represented by the appointment of Rifaat al-Assad as leader of the Defense Companies, and Ali Haider as leader of the Special Forces, both of whom were members of the Alawite religious sect, which extended its hegemony over most high-ranking and sensitive positions within the army and security services. The end of the "Brotherhood" crisis and the horrific Hama massacre in 1982, whose casualties totaled upward of 25,000, helped bring to full circle the horror story that would come to characterize life for Syrians.

Because the army and Military Intelligence under its new composition became the institutions charged with running and administering the country, Syria began to witness high rates of military spending,

**Table 10.1. The Militarization of Society, Comparing Indicators for Syria and the Rest of the World, 1982**

Indicator	Syria	The World
Ratio of military spending to gross domestic product	14	5
Cost of military imports (millions of dollars)	1,900	38,445
Cost of military spending (millions of dollars)	2,176	673,925
Total spending on education (millions of dollars)	1,023	642,979
Total spending on health services (millions of dollars)	65	526,859
Rate of military spending per soldier (dollars)	9,802	26,373
Military spending per square km (dollars)	11,762	5,074
Total population (thousands)	9,434	4,587,730
Total number of armed forces (thousands)	222	25,554

Sources: Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures* (New York, 1985); Ghasan Salama, *State, Society and the Arab Mashreq* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1987), 29.

**Figure 10.1 State Budget Spending Levels and the Top Expenses in 2002**

Source: Central Statistics Office, "Statistics Group, 2003," 487–88.

which in the 1970s and 1980s reached nearly three times that of the international average. This came at the expense of demands made by those within civil society for increased funding for health, education, and human services in the newly created country (table 10.1).

During the reign of Hafez al-Assad, the Syrian Army enjoyed high levels of prestige, which was directly linked to the president himself, with the military's influence in state affairs peaking between 1985 and 1990. During this time, the number of regime troops within the National Army reached 400,000, with an additional 300,000 reserve troops also recruited. Defense spending on the army during this period consumed 60 percent of the annual budget. As a result of the high prestige enjoyed by the Army Joint Chief of Staff within the Central Committee of the Ba'ath Party's Regional Command, officers began to involve themselves in civil governance affairs, imposing their own policies on the civilian government. This assumption of power was based on a decree released by Hafez al-Assad, while sick at the beginning of 1984, that made each garrison commander the martial governor of the area in which he was deployed.

The Syrian Arab Army today is believed to total upward of 450,000 soldiers, distributed among three

corps, and other types of formations, which are widely spread across all the Syrian territory, in even higher concentrations than along the national border (figure 10.2).

When Bashar al-Assad inherited control from his father after the latter's death on June 10, 2000, following the conclusion of a special session of the People's Council, Syria's constitution was amended, in particular the paragraph related to the minimum required age for candidates for office, changing the requirement from forty to thirty-four years of age, that of Bashar al-Assad at the time. Bashar was the only candidate nominated by the Regional Command, and his selection was ratified and approved by the People's Council of Syria. A referendum was then later held on Bashar's nomination, which was approved with 97 percent. Bashar inherited from his father a highly militarized state held strongly within the grip of a single family. Bashar's rule has not changed much from that of his father in terms of the performance of the state regarding freedom, democracy, and the deterioration of state citizenship, with Bashar himself largely taking control of civil society, bringing an end to what has been deemed the Damascus Spring.<sup>2</sup>

However, it was not long before the Syrian regime would suffer a huge setback that would cast a large

shadow over the country, and the army in particular, in 2005, after the outbreak of what was termed the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon on March 14, the result of a state of upheaval that gripped the streets of Lebanon after the assassination of former Lebanese president Rafiq Hariri. The regime in Syria was largely blamed for the assassination, and as a result the Syrian Army withdrew from Lebanon.

### THE STATE OF THE SYRIAN ARMY BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION

The Syrian Army falls under the authority of the country's commander in chief of the armed forces, represented through the president and his defense minister. Service in the Syrian Army is mandatory for all men over the age of eighteen who are not only sons.

Before the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, the Syrian Army was estimated to possess a large arsenal of long-range Scud-C missiles, with a range of more than 500 kilometers, in addition to Scud-D missiles, whose range is more than 700 kilometers. The army also possesses a number of T-80, T-72, T-64, and T-55 tanks, and the Republican Guard possesses T-90 tanks.<sup>3</sup>

By 2005, the number of soldiers in the army totaled 450,000, making it one of the largest in the region, consuming large amounts of the country's budget, estimated to total upward of \$1 billion annually. The Syrian Army consists of three corps: the first corps in Damascus, which covers the region stretching from Damascus to the Jordanian border; the second corps, covering the region stretching from Damascus to Homs along the Lebanese border; and the third corps, covering the region stretching from Hama to the Turkish and Iraqi borders, in addition to the country's coastline. The third corps is responsible for protecting the country's biological and chemical weapons stockpiles and the Syrian Navy.

The army consists of eleven brigades, each of which possesses eight armored divisions and three mechanized divisions. In addition, there are four independent infantry brigades; four shock divisions, known as Division 14; ten independent regiments

from the Airborne Special Forces; two independent artillery brigades; and two anti-armor brigades. The Ground Missile Command possesses three regiments, each one consisting of three brigades, in addition to three maritime missile defense brigades, one border guard brigade, one Republican Guards division, three armored brigades, and an artillery division.

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY

After the outbreak of protests and demonstrations in a number of cities throughout Syria, the regime sought to address and put an end to what was then a peaceful movement through the use of violence, referring to protesters as terrorists and criminals operating outside the law in order to justify vicious attacks and use of the military solution. Meanwhile, many claim that the Syrian regime was itself directly responsible for pushing for the militarization of the revolution. This does not just refer to the regime's deployment and deadly use of its army and security forces in regions witnessing large numbers of demonstrations, but also to accusations made by some that the regime in fact desired to see small amounts of arms make it into the hands of the opposition in order to justify the regime's attacks on protesters. The regime sought to facilitate the transfer of small amounts of arms to protesters, in addition to spreading talk among their ranks that doing so may be beneficial. But Syria's protesters did not fall for the trap.

However, while the regime took to implementing strong security measures, inserting the army into the conflict, a number of soldiers and members of the country's security forces refused to take part in the regime's campaign of violence, leading many to defect and redirect their energy and resources toward protecting peaceful protesters. Many army defectors said that they had been pressured and threatened into killing, torturing, and firing live rounds at civilian demonstrators. The defection of a number of high-ranking army officers led to the eventual creation of a number of armed groups dedicated to protecting protesters in a number of regions—including Homs, Idlib, and other districts—particularly on Fridays, a fact that

eventually enabled larger numbers of protesters to take to the streets.

On April 23, 2011, the first case of defections being recorded on video took place, when Republican Guard conscript Walid al-Qashami, along with others serving at his side, defected due to their refusal to fire upon protesters in the city of Harasta, which is located in the Rif Dimashq Governorate (the Damascus countryside). Residents of the city later supported and embraced Walid and those others who defected. On June 7, 2011, First Lieutenant Abd al-Razaaq Talas defected from the Syrian Army in what is thought to be the first defection of a major officer during the war. This was followed by the defection of Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush following a military campaign in the Jisr al-Shughur region of Idlib, which he described as, “monstrous.” Following his defection, Harmoush created the Free Officers Brigade, which launched a number of attacks against Syrian security forces in the Jisr al-Shughur region, beginning in early July. It was said that more than 100 Syrian Army soldiers and members of the security forces were executed and killed by the Free Officers Brigade.

By the end of July, Colonel Riad al-Asaad, along with a number of other officers and conscripts, defected from the Syrian Army, creating what came to be known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), with the goal of protecting revolutionaries and civilians until the regime itself was overthrown. In September 2011, the Free Officers Brigade announced that it was merging with the FSA after the assassination of Hussein al-Harmoush. Toward the beginning of October 2011, a number of defectors from the Syrian Army announced their formation of the Khalid Bin Walid Brigades, which was also created for the purpose of protecting civilians until the Syrian regime was overthrown. A number of other armed brigades consisting of defectors from the Syrian Army, operating in regions throughout the country, but largely in the countryside, also began to carry names containing various Islamic symbols and imagery.

Meanwhile, the rate of defections continued to increase, with Brigadier General Mustafa al-Shaykh and four other officers announcing their defection

from the Syrian Army and subsequent merging with the country’s revolutionaries in January 2012, forming what they called the Military Council.

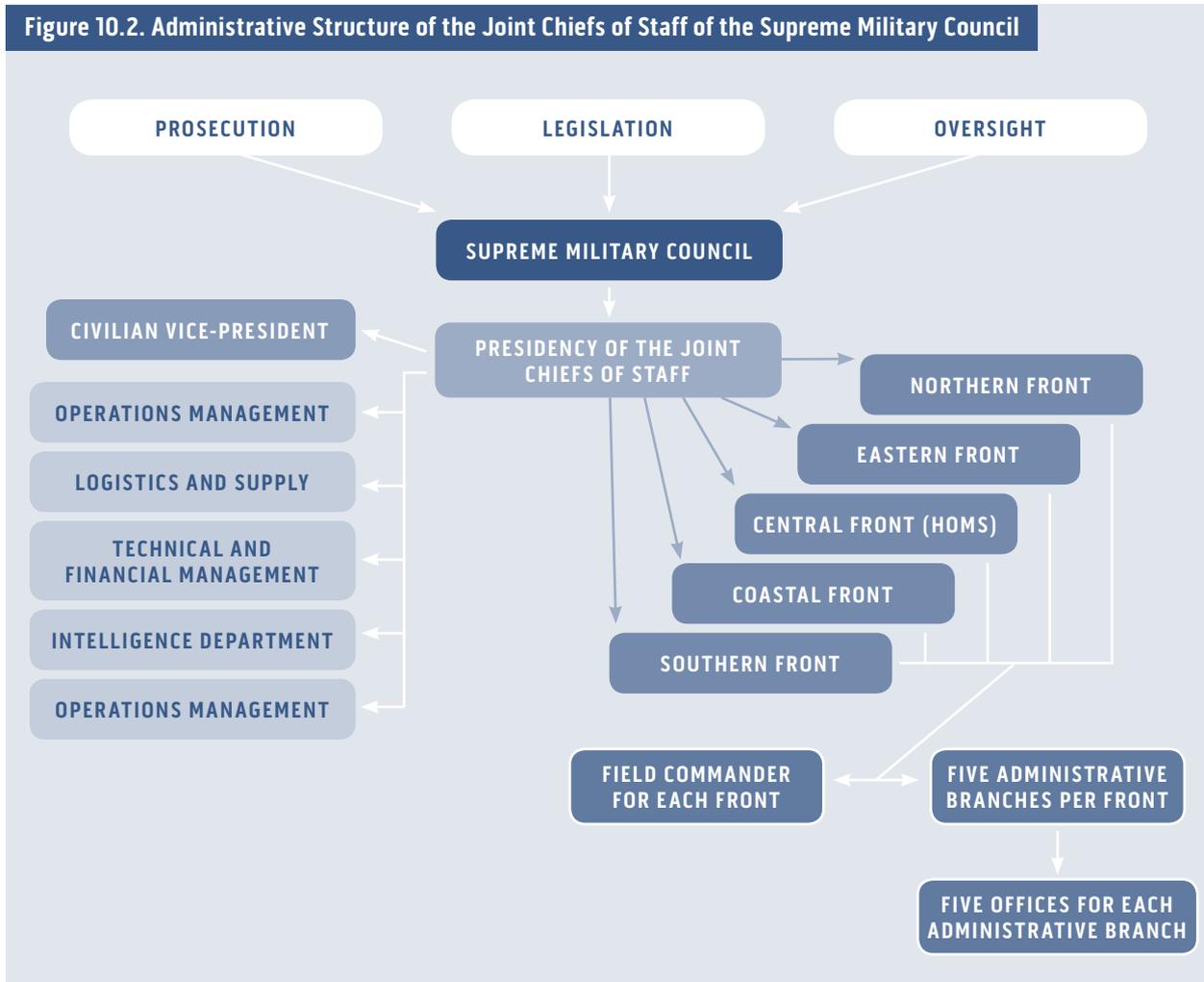
On June 20, 2012, Colonel Pilot Hassan Mirei flew his MiG 21 jet into Jordan, and later announced his defection from the Syrian Army and requested asylum as a political refugee. Colonel Manaf Tlass, a prominent leader within the Republican Guard and one of those close to President Bashar al-Assad, also announced his defection from the regime after moving to France.

In August 2012, General Mohamed al-Hajj Ali announced his defection, stepping down from his position as director of the National Defense Faculty within the Syrian Army’s Supreme Military Academy, becoming the highest-ranking military official to defect from within the ranks of the regime. He further called for the establishment of a new rebel body, to be named the Syrian National Army.

In September 2012, Syria’s disparate revolutionary and military brigades called for the establishment of a jointly run leadership command structure for all the country’s various revolutionary military councils, on three separate levels—the first level being the president, who would serve as the commander in chief; the second level being an Office of Coordination and Liaison; with the third level consisting of additional military councils operating within each province. In an announcement made to all of Syria’s revolutionary and military forces, the joint leadership called on all militias to join its ranks and work together in order to serve the revolution, protect the people, and overthrow the regime. This new joint leadership structure was met with widespread political support from the Syrian National Council, in addition to both Syrian and Arab political leaders, revolutionary activists, and religious scholars.

In December 2012, the Supreme Joint Military Command Council (Supreme Military Command / Joint Chiefs of Staff) was created in the Turkish city of Antalya, the most comprehensive and organized of all the Syrian armed opposition forces. A total of 260 representatives serve within the council, representing those military forces operating on the ground throughout the country. Elections were held soon

Figure 10.2. Administrative Structure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Supreme Military Council



after its creation, nominating thirty members, at a rate of six per each of the five various combat fronts designated within Syria (North, Coastline, Central, South, and East). In November 2012, immediately following the announcement of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, a command structure for the Joint Chiefs of Staff was created within the Supreme Joint Military Command Council (figure 10.3).

Regarding the internal structure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it consists of thirty representatives (six from each fighting front), forming what is referred to as the Supreme Military Command, which monitors the performance of the staff's president, providing him with counsel, in addition to monitoring the performance of the organization's administrations

and branches, and apprehending those who violate its rules and bylaws. The president is responsible for overseeing five administrations, each one possessing a branch in each front, existing within each of branch five offices charged with performing the functions assigned to them. Each leader from each front is considered an aide to the president of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, the structure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is burdened by the fact that it is incredibly complex and possesses a large bureaucracy. Also, a number of rebel officers and on-the-ground field commanders remain conspicuously absent from the leadership structure, in addition to what has been deemed unjust representation in the first conference held regarding the Supreme Joint Military Command Council's five fighting fronts.

**A total of 260 representatives serve within the council, representing those military forces operating on the ground throughout the country.**

On December 21, 2012, after the announcement of a joint supreme military leadership center (Joint Chiefs of Staff) in Antalya, the Syrian Islamic Front was created, composed of a number of Islamic brigades, the most prominent of which are Ahrar al-Sham and al-Farouk Brigades in Homs, in addition to the Islamic Dawn Movement, operating in Aleppo and its countryside.

## **CONSTRUCTING A MODERN NATIONAL ARMY**

Several factors coalesced to push Syrians to defend themselves and their revolution through the FSA. Chief among these were the regime's insistence on employing the military option in response to the demands of the revolution; its refusing to accept any kind of political settlement while continuing to wage war against the Syrian people; and its destruction of the state's infrastructure along with its primary components and foundation. The FSA was created by Syrian Army defectors and revolutionaries who sought to protect what was left of their country.

It is clear that one of the most important tasks in a post-Assad Syria is the rebuilding of the Syrian National Army, which would be tasked with protecting the people and the territorial integrity of the country. This is all the more critical considering the performance and actions of Syria's army, which largely sided with the regime, combined with the

large-scale destruction of the country. While the FSA was formed to liberate and protect the country, it is feared that some brigades might break off and transform into independent militias.

## **GOALS AND PRECEPTS FOR REFORMING THE ARMY**

Despite the loss of prestige suffered by the Syrian Army in the eyes of the people due to its involvement in the relentless bombing, shelling, and murder of civilians, most Syrians still view the army as an authentic, national institution responsible for protecting the Syrian nation in its entirety. The army's name and reputation have been historically tied to that of Yusuf al-'Azma, who is known for making heroic sacrifices all over the Arab world for the sake of land and the blood of his comrades. However, today the Syrian Army is being held hostage by a sectarian, dictatorial regime, which is in the grip of one authoritarian family that has failed in its national duty and instead chosen to point its guns, artillery, and planes toward the chests and houses of those Syrians seeking to resist. Furthermore, the existence of Syria's ever-present state of war with Israel has long served as a pretext for the regime to each year expand the amount of money set aside for the army from the country's budget.

The main goals and objectives for rebuilding the Syrian Army are as follows:

- ▶ Preserve the institutional framework of the Syrian Army in its entirety, while rebuilding a national, modern army that seeks to serve all Syrians according to standards of efficiency, persistent training, genuine loyalty to the state, and the protection of state institutions and various interests.
- ▶ Rebuild confidence previously lost between the people and the army by placing the military under the control of a civilian authority (a civilian minister of defense). Removing the army from the political playing field would reduce its role as a propagator of ideology and eliminate its traditional substate affiliations, making it an

independent, professional, and impartial state institution.

- ▶ Defend Syria's sovereignty and status as an independent nation, preserving its territorial unity and integrity based on its current political borders and working to achieve its goal of liberating occupied Syrian land, in addition to permanently ensuring that the law, constitution, and public order will remain protected.

These goals for the new Syrian National Army can be thought of as the compass with which the army will begin to step down the path toward better protecting the people, in addition to the territorial integrity of the country and its borders. The army will thus be transformed from a tool used to monitor, conquer, kill, and wreak havoc into a national institution whose symbolism, prestige, mission, and accomplishments will forever remain fixed in the minds and consciousness of the Syrian people.

The following procedural steps will help create the general framework within which the reform and restructuring of the army will take place according to professional, nationalist, and institutional standards:

1. Creating rapid response military units, to be recruited from within the officer ranks of the FSA, in addition to retired army officers and the remaining honorable military officers. Their mission will be to help guard and preserve those military installations with stockpiles of heavy and unconventional weapons immediately following the overthrow of the regime, whose existence will be recorded through documented court procedures.
2. Creating a Supreme Military Council—made up of military experts with various specialties, including military sociology—for the purpose of reforming and restructuring the Syrian Army. The council will help to determine and identify the army's needs, in addition to assessing the military's current capacity and what it requires.
3. Reassuring army officers and their conscripts that the reform and restructuring of the military will help to improve both their standards of living and professional prospects, in addition to reasserting their symbolic place within Syrian society.
4. Purging the military and all its branches of those officers responsible for committing human rights abuses in the name of the Syrian people and their revolution. Those accused will be brought before the country's courts, and those attempting to flee prosecution will be pursued.
5. After the overthrow of the regime and stabilization of the country, forming a joint revolutionary military council that will operate under the jurisdiction of the defense minister within the transitional government. This council will collect the arms possessed by the country's revolutionary forces and army defectors, eliminating the existence of such weapons within the country's military barracks and warehouses. The specification, type, and source of all such weapons will then be documented and recorded, using flexible and transparent methods, all the while keeping in mind that those military forces from within the FSA will eventually come to form the nucleus of a future independent army, charged with preserving peace and security in all cities and villages throughout Syria.
6. Taking effective regulatory measures vis-à-vis the country's military, with the practices and behaviors of its commanding officers being closely monitored. The regulatory sector within the military will be allowed to effectively monitor the actions of all army officers and assess their professional performance.
7. Assessing the current status of the military formations and the state of their technical equipment. Working to stop the importing of Russian weapons, to be replaced with various forms of advanced weapons, obtained either through import or domestic production. This process should remain of utmost importance over the coming period.
8. Performing a complete overhaul of the current training curriculum within the country's military

academies. This will entail changing course materials to better reflect the values of citizenship and nationalism within Syrian society, in addition to the military's commitment to protect the country's territory and borders, while promoting unity from among the people. Work to break the connection that currently exists between the army, acts of political partisanship, and the propagation of ideology.

9. Changing the promotion standards within the Ministry of Defense, to be based on the values of progress, efficiency, effective training, and qualifications. This will mean freeing the ministry from its culture of corruption, and reliance on kinship and personal interests, which plague all its regulatory, administrative, and promotional functions.
10. Modernizing the leadership structure within the Ministry of Defense and various military formations, and encouraging continual training for employees. This will involve promoting the modernization of infrastructure within the country's military institutions, in addition to increasing the ministry's stockpile of modern supplies, equipment, and advanced weaponry; as well as working to improve the ministry's understanding of modern military science.
11. Respecting the Syrian soldier, keeping in mind that humanity is the foundation upon which all military formations are built. Weapons hold no value when seeking to defend and liberate land if the soldier using them is not free or does not believe in the nation and the value of the citizenship for which he is willing to sacrifice his blood.
12. Bringing the army and armed forces under the rule of a civil administration, consistent with the standards of democratic transition within countries. This will entail creating a high committee for the army and armed forces to be led by the president, prime minister, or commander in chief—a choice to be determined by the state. The committee's task will be to draft the country's peace and wartime strategy, in cooperation with the country's political leadership.

13. Integrating the country's revolutionaries into the army, security forces, or civilian institutions as needed, and teaching them the true meaning of citizenship and tolerance toward others. This will include working toward granting licenses for light weapons to those who desire to possess them.

In terms of the size of the army, its arrangement, and distribution among both military formations and geography, these are issues to be determined by the Ministry of Defense and Supreme Army Council, based on studies conducted for and brought to the attention of the president or prime minister. Regarding mandatory military service, this is an issue that should be decided by an elected Parliament. However, such service should be suspended until a true decision can be made, a fact that depends upon the success with which the government is able to persuade revolutionaries to lay down their weapons and be reintegrated into the state.

## DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

The goal of reintegration is to create a peaceful, safe, and secure environment after the conclusion of armed conflict in Syria, which has forced a number of Syrian civilians to take up arms.<sup>4</sup> The regime has also been responsible for arming a number of militias loyal to al-Shabiha, or what is referred to as the Popular Committees or the National Defense Army. All are sectarian militias funded by the regime for the goal of bringing an end to the popular revolution. The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs seek to reintegrate Syria's armed groups into civilian life and pursue military demobilization, whose goal is to purge Syria's army and military institutions from those who have committed violations against human rights in the name of the Syrian people.

The reintegration stage is considered the last step in the process of helping former fighters make the transition to a post-conflict environment. Each phase of the DDR process would ideally occur one after the other, with the disarmament phase always set to occur

first, before beginning any of the other processes, given that each process complements the others.

The reintegration process helps to facilitate the transfer of Syrian society from a state of conflict to that of a natural state of development. The ultimate goal of the reintegration policy is to provide support to former fighters in their attempt to reincorporate themselves back into civil society, both socially and economically. It will be necessary during the DDR programs' planning process to make clear any additional indicators that might occur, such as the expected results of implementing the program. It is also important to think about and identify expected sources of funding in addition to the types of individuals who would benefit from the program.

The Syrian Expert House believes that the development of such a DDR program should begin once studies and assessments are concluded regarding the environment in which the country will find itself after the conflict ends. Such studies should warn of and discuss those who would threaten the success of the program, in order to ensure that they do not successfully obstruct its progress. This group of people may include those who possess mid-level to high-ranking positions within various militias, who may expect the program to provide them with better opportunities than other, lower-ranking soldiers. After the conclusion of combat operations, a number of fighters will be suffering from medical problems and will need medical assistance. In order for the program to be considered successful, it will be necessary to ensure that it provides health insurance services to former fighters. All the physical and mental problems suffered by fighters must be addressed after the conflict has ended. Treatment must remain a constant priority for the country's transitional government during the period in which the program is implemented.

Often, social and economic reintegration are implemented at the same time. However, both these processes need to be given special consideration until a more comprehensive program can be achieved. Economic and social reintegration transforms demobilized former fighters into an influx of new labor. This change in the market can lead to renewed bouts of violence and tension. The prospect of the economy

being rebuilt as a war economy may hurt chances for stability in the period following the conclusion of the conflict, as doing so will weaken state institutions, the rule of law, and the democratic process. If Syrian society finds itself penniless upon the conclusion of the conflict, then former fighters will be unable to find a place for themselves within society, making them increasingly poor. For the reintegration process to be successful, it will be necessary to work to immediately meet the needs of a future society. The program must include attempts to reincorporate former fighters into the workforce in the long term, in addition to promoting private-sector development plans.

Social reintegration helps to rebuild confidence between former fighters and members of society, and often includes new public education initiatives in addition to economic aid packages for psychological rehabilitation programs.

This policy must enjoy widespread support from within society in order to succeed. In the event that such support is absent, former fighters will find it difficult to successfully return and adjust to civilian life, or live among individuals without suffering or feeling as if they have been defamed. Support must also be provided to those neighborhoods and communities set to absorb former fighters, in a way that creates new economic opportunities that will help such communities serve as an integral part of the reconciliation process, and help protect against a renewal of violence.

The various stages of the military DDR process naturally follow one after another; however, they also often overlap significantly. That being said, it is advisable to begin the reintegration process during the military demobilization process. Coordinated planning for the three primary stages within the program help to support and strengthen each stage. For example, one could begin to develop and organize information collected during the screening process within the military demobilization stage in a way that allows for such information to remain beneficial during the reintegration stage. At the very least, such information could help determine the nature, size, and number of former fighters set to take part in the reintegration process.

One could also benefit from information gathered regarding groups of former fighters set to take part in the military demobilization phase during the reintegration phase as well. Once the demobilization process has begun and former fighters are recorded and registered, the next step would be to conduct a survey, collecting economic and social data for those participating in the program, in order to better distribute detailed information regarding individuals. Such data could include age, sex, rank, level of education, and familial and military status, in addition to other information and characteristics.

Before undertaking the military demobilization stage, the transitional government must also conduct a campaign to direct and inform former fighters regarding the opportunities and available service that will be provided to them after the conclusion of the program. The United Nations has already developed management information system software from which any DDR program could benefit.<sup>5</sup>

### Assistance during the Transition

It is the transitional government's responsibility to provide limited assistance to ex-combatants during the transition process, in the form of financial or relief packages that include cash and in-kind assistance, services, and opportunities. Through this aid, ex-combatants can be supported during the period between the end of military demobilization and the beginning of a reintegration program. These packages are provided monthly and cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their dependents; they frequently include a stipend, food, clothing, shelter, health services, and tools, as well as educational and short-term professional services. Financial assistance for ex-combatants is useful not only in preserving an element of their dignity and providing them with security but also to help them cover some necessary costs, such as transportation.

In order for the reintegration program to be successfully planned and prepared, the transitional government must conduct a number of operations to study and assess Syria's present political, economic, and social environments. A special committee must be commissioned, which should aim to construct an

integrated scheme for the policy of DDR, with the intention of strategic planning.

Those planning the reintegration program must conduct studies on specific regions in Syria where the process is expected to run, and this analysis must pay attention to public infrastructure, such as roads, buildings, and communications systems. Health services, other services, and the security situation in the region must be studied, and it will also be necessary to research and analyze the labor market, in order to identify employment opportunities for ex-combatants in both local and regional markets. This analysis will help identify the types of training and professional programs that will be useful for this particular region. Planners should also study existing educational organizations, and create a list of facilities that can be used during the reintegration program.

The process of studying a given region helps gauge opinions of members of the community, and it will be exceptionally difficult to achieve the main objectives of the programs without the support of members of the community. The initial survey of the community's opinions can assess the level of opposition that may prevent ex-combatants' attempts from integrating socially, as the nature and causes of the conflict shape a community's opinions of ex-combatants to a large degree. Information collected during the military DDR programs may be of use during the reintegration program. For example, information collected through the military demobilization program may provide a more nuanced picture of the program participants' aspirations and socioeconomic situation. If there were any omissions or oversight in the original evaluation process, this information will help the transitional government readjust its priorities and resources after the conflict ends.

### Goals

Successful programs usually identify their goals before implementation begins. The main objective of the DDR programs is to support combatants' efforts to integrate with civil society, both economically and socially. Side goals and smaller goals of the programs should also be defined, and the number of people benefiting from the programs—including men,

women, and children—should be estimated. Other goals need a timeline, complete with activities and important events, in order to be accomplished. These goals will help the transitional government evaluate and manage the reintegration process.

## Funding

It is important to find donors and sources of financing during the programs' early stages, in order for it to be able to continue. These donors can include governmental agencies, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, and they can provide financial assistance in the form of grants, loans, or technical expertise.

The United Nations Development Program and its partners currently provide assistance in 177 countries around the world. The program often works in coordination with developing governments inside the state, international financial institutions like the World Bank, states, and other private donors. Multistakeholder trust funds have also been able to fund military demobilization programs and reintegration programs in a number of countries. Usually, donor countries trust the World Bank to assume the task of overseeing funding, in order to provide accountability and transparency. However, the subsequent funding will continue to come from multistakeholder donations, and will have greater transparency than funding with more sources. This kind of funding often includes stringent regulations and delays in spending, whereas bilateral donations enjoy greater flexibility, and funds can be spent faster.

## Dealing with Those Threatened by the Programs' Success (Combatants with Particular Sensitivities)

Throughout the development and implementation of the DDR programs, the transitional government must attend to the needs, statuses, and sensitivities of people involved in the process, especially al-Shabiha and militias loyal to the regime. Some people must be prevented from igniting the conflict once again—high-ranking officers pose a significant threat, and thus the transitional government may sometimes be forced to give these individuals special treatment.

Leaders of the FSA brigades may also pose a threat to the safety and success of the programs, as they may expect higher results than those the program provides. Some leaders may show signs of displeasure with their loss of power, which could also threaten the program's progress. Therefore, the transitional government must deal with those in leadership positions with particular care in order to keep the program from being harmed in any way.

**Many conflicts leave injured or generally disabled people in their wake, and their problems require health facilities.**

## Options for Designing the Programs

Program design begins immediately after the fall of the regime and as soon as the transitional government has evaluated and studied the postconflict environment, because a successful program must include representatives from all related parties. These parties include international and local authorities, members of society, notable people in society, ex-combatants, religious figures, groups of children and women, any other local association whose presence is thought to be of use, and the like. It is useful to consult a large and diverse number of individuals before making decisions, in order to facilitate communication between these groups and to guide the program's priorities. Additionally, conflicting interests must be reconciled in order to facilitate and promote security.

## Health Services

Combatants often suffer from health problems after a conflict has ended, including problems caused by the conflict and also unrelated problems. The DDR programs are able to deal with such health problems

both before fighting has stopped and during the period when the programs are implemented. The reintegration stage may represent the last chance to develop a comprehensive solution for the safety of ex-combatants, before they return to the community and civilian life. Dealing with ex-combatants' health problems before they return to the community avoids transmitting medical conditions to the community, and thus maintains stability.

Many conflicts leave injured or generally disabled people in their wake, and their problems require health facilities. However, if such facilities were affected or destroyed during the conflict, the reintegration program can provide temporary health services, including health workers and necessary equipment. People with permanent disabilities need special care to prevent any psychological harm and to keep them from being discriminated against because of their disability. In order for the program to succeed in reintegrating injured and disabled ex-combatants, support from the community itself is necessary, and we stress that this support can be found in the planning stage of the program. In addition to medical treatment, the reintegration program can ensure that ex-combatants with disabilities are able to obtain the same degree of education and training as other combatants who do not suffer from health problems.

Regardless of their ability to provide professional mental health services in a postconflict environment, programs can include a number of treatments that rely on the community. Depending on local customs and traditions, therapy or group counseling may lead to positive results. The feelings of shame that often accompany mental health issues can be overcome through the support of the community, and can include campaigns that encourage those who need help.

### **Economic Integration**

Reintegrating ex-combatants into the economy will ensure a healthy and stable environment after the end of the conflict. Permitting the type of economy that existed during the war to continue beyond the end of the conflict will end up weakening state institutions, the rule of law, and democracy, thus destabilizing the

postconflict phase. Ex-combatants will not be able to achieve stability again within impoverished and underprivileged communities. Therefore, if possible, reintegration programs should try to meet needs of the combatants' future communities and unify efforts to establish development projects.

A team specialized in studying and monitoring the market must gather and analyze data for the initial implementation of the program, and periodically assess the economic integration process. Any information unrelated to the communities' situation and resources may damage the integration process. Also, given the lack of information relevant to local labor markets, combatants who are trying to live peacefully within their communities once again may make choices that will not help them build their skills. Ex-combatants practice professions that are not high in demand, which will saturate the local market's needs for a limited set of skills or exclude members of the community who had previously been working in this field. Perhaps surveys can be conducted of the pertinent companies and government agencies, in order to identify the occupational fields required by the labor market. Fields always in need of the kind of labor that can be provided by ex-combatants can often include construction, transportation, and maintenance.

### **Skill Building and Formal Education**

The skill-building programs offered by the transitional government, local agencies, nongovernmental organizations, religious organizations, or local craftspeople will prepare local combatants to take advantage of long-term economic opportunities. These skill-building programs include vocational training, apprenticeships, and formal education.

Vocational training will be able to develop ex-combatants' existing skills or teach them new skills, with which ex-combatants will be able to find employment or start working on their own. The decision to find a job or begin working depends on what skills the ex-combatants have and what kind of job they prefer, as well as on the market in the local community. Training programs can provide simple training for rural enterprises like agriculture, food processing,

knitting, producing oil, and fruit drying. They can also provide training for some small trades and in local service fields, such as bicycle and water pipe repair, and transportation services.

Although usually without pay, apprenticeships attract individuals willing to work when formal training is not available. Through apprenticeships, ex-combatants benefit their future communities by tying their own economic development to that of individual members of the original community. Apprenticeships also benefit ex-combatants by strengthening popular solidarity through their support of traditional crafts and local industries.

Based on data collected in the military demobilization phase, the assumption is that integration programs will enable skill building for each fighter individually.

### Job Creation

Short-term demand for certain professions can be created through business loans and fast track projects. Projects like these are useful to improve the public image of participants, provide appropriate training for them, and provide useful work experience free from violence. Fast track projects can include rebuilding residential or commercial areas damaged by the war, mine clearance, and infrastructure projects. Labor-intensive construction projects represent good short-term job opportunities for highly vigorous ex-combatants, and the projects serve the community by strengthening infrastructure.

Some countries integrate ex-combatants into rebuilding programs by creating jobs for ex-combatants, as they have in the past. This provides them with training in a variety of skills, and also helps to restore the economic capacity of the state. In Kosovo, for example, the United Nations created the Kosovo Protection Corps, a civilian agency whose mission was to support reconstruction efforts, including rebuilding hospitals, reopening blocked roads, and providing emergency services after natural disasters and humanitarian crises. By integrating ex-combatants within efforts to rebuild the state, the corps was able to create a sense of personal ownership

for development projects, giving local participants greater hope of success.

### Employment in the Security Sector

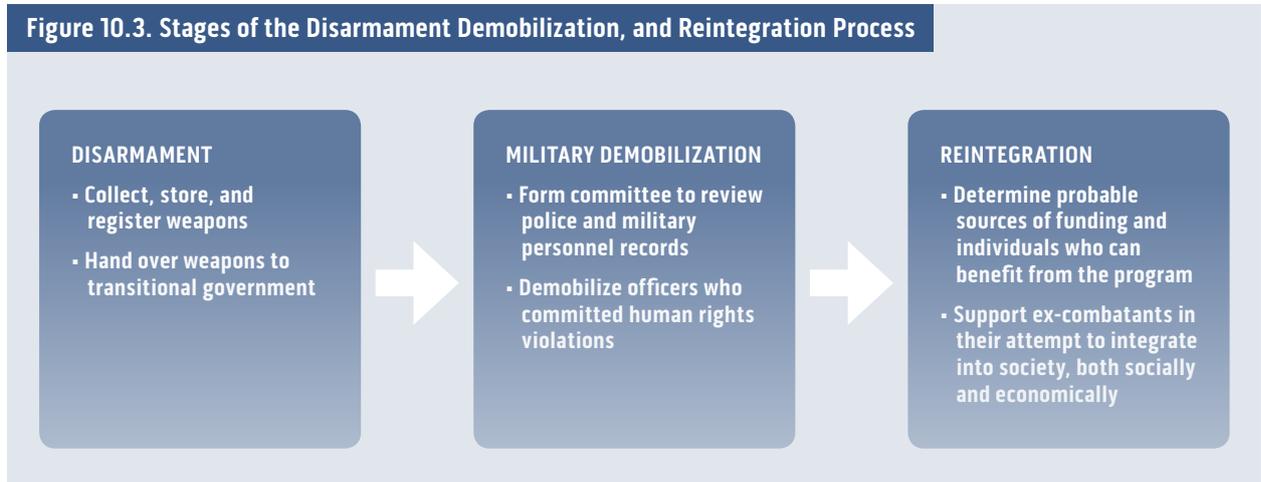
The security sector may be a means of providing long-term employment opportunities within the security forces, the military, or the police. At the same time, cutting job openings in the armed forces could steer ex-combatants toward criminal acts. Further, this work would not require ex-combatants to acquire new skills, and may in fact encourage ties between those who fought each other in the past, promoting “mutual acceptance or reconciliation.”

It is likely that responsible officers will be preferred over other soldiers for employment in the military, but this could create a problem due to the limited number of openings in the armed forces and police. The distribution of positions among various armed groups could also become a source of tension. The positions should be distributed in a proportional manner among the parties that participated in the conflict to demonstrate justice and nondiscrimination.

### Developing the Private Sector

Typically, developing and growing the private sector during a reintegration phase is facilitated through large-scale loan programs, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and microloans to individuals. The quality and accessibility of a competent legal system, transparent financial sector, and equitable distribution of resources are other factors that promote the proper development of the private sector. In the absence of these, individuals who benefited materially from the conflict may also be able to take advantage of the privatization process through corrupt and coercive methods. This could undermine any political, social, and economic progress, and also re-create the unjust distribution through new economic structures.

Following the Bosnia conflict, the World Bank focused on delivering financial and technical assistance to market-based institutions so as to create a fertile environment for private-sector development. Before the war, ten large conglomerates dominated the economy. To develop the private sector, the World Bank focused on several areas: promoting

**Figure 10.3. Stages of the Disarmament Demobilization, and Reintegration Process**

competition, the privatization of state- and community-owned assets, and developing an organized and competitive financial sector. The U.S. Agency for International Development provided loans to small- and medium-sized enterprises, and it cooperated with the European Union to privatize large state-owned enterprises. The World Bank supported the government-funded privatization program despite the fact that its results were weak due to the rapid distribution of control over businesses, which in turn led to weak and unproductive corporate governance.

### Social Integration

The social integration process works to build trust between former fighters and other members of society. Thus, it could include solving the problems of adapting to cultural and popular differences, in addition to mechanisms for reconciliation. The processes of economic and social integration are usually pursued simultaneously; however, it is necessary to consider each separately because of their differing requirements.

The process of resettling former fighters may also present problems that contribute to tension. Ex-combatants often return to find their homes to find them vacant or occupied by others who moved in during the war. This can strain relations between community members and former fighters returning home. Access to resettlement assistance for former fighters is critical, especially for those coming from a rural environment.

The national and local authorities must step in to create a strategic resettlement plan so that the most sensitive issues can be solved through political reform.

Finally, the transitional government must develop reintegration programs to ensure that former fighters remain peaceful in order to support security and stability in the postconflict environment. For the transitional government to design successful reintegration programs, they must be based on the unique nature of the conflict and postconflict environment in Syria.

International experience demonstrates that studying several issues in the postconflict environment is necessary before a successful reintegration program can be implemented. It is necessary to define clear goals and review progress toward them to ensure that the program stays on course. Collecting and storing information about ex-combatants in an organized way creates a better understanding of the challenges that the program could encounter, and helps direct the flow of resources in an effective manner. A comprehensive study of the labor market and makeup of the private sector can point program organizers toward providing appropriate education and employment opportunities for ex-combatants.

Above all, however, community support is most important for the successful implementation of the program. Without the support of individual members of society, returning fighters will find discomfort and a sense of shame when they return to their civilian lives. To prevent a return to violence, it is necessary to educate communities that will receive ex-combatants,

so as to engage them in creating economic opportunities and in making the community a vital part of the reconciliation measures (figure 10.4).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics: 1961-1978* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Fred H. Lawson, "Social Bases for the Hama Revolution," *Middle East Research and Information Project Reports*, November–December 1982, 24–28.
- 2 See Radwan Ziadeh, "The Damascus Spring," Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies; and Radwan Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*. (I.B. Tauris, 2011).
- 3 See International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Military Balance," 2010.
- 4 See the detailed report released by the Public International Law and Policy Group, "A Program for Disarmament," Legal Memorandum, February 2011.
- 5 See Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of the United Nations Development Program, *How-to Guide: Monitoring and Evaluation for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2009), [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/cpr/documents/ddr/ddr\\_how\\_to\\_guide.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/cpr/documents/ddr/ddr_how_to_guide.pdf).

## Challenges and Recommendations

Attempts to reform or rebuild the army, will face major challenges, especially early in the transitional period. These challenges for reform will converge with the problems of dismantling the security apparatus in light of the strong links between and the mutually reinforcing nature of the two institutions. These challenges include:

- ▶ Foreign intervention seeking to meddle in the revolution and throw it off course by weakening the army, destroying what remains in the way of infrastructure, organization, and material.
  - ▶ Attempts by regime remnants to provoke armed conflict with Israel by way of the army units deployed along the Syrian-Israeli border. These include foreign and domestic backing of local movements that aim to undermine security and stability.
  - ▶ Attempts by the former regime to continue fighting and building up military, security, and political forces as symbols of the former regime. These would hamper efforts to reform the army and would potentially drag it into an extended civil war.
  - ▶ The appearance of private militias with their own agendas and means of exerting pressure. Their refusal to submit to a unified command under the civilian control of the transitional government makes them a competitor for political control of the state by armed force. An added challenge is the difficulty of collecting all types of weapons.
- ▶ The lack of funding for military cadres and personnel, both officers and enlisted. This includes inherited military infrastructure that is destroyed, obsolete, and not capable of rehabilitation through investment or military science.
  - ▶ Strained relations between the political and military classes during the transitional period that could follow the regime's overthrow, especially if armed revolutionary militias are responsible for the regime's fall.

To meet the challenges of building the Syrian Army—which include establishing its control of the country, imposing order, and protecting the borders—it is necessary to strengthen relations between the political leadership and the leaders of the Free Syrian Army. It will also be necessary to rely on local councils at the town and city level for leadership in the early days of the transitional period. The units of the FSA must display the highest standards of military conduct. This can be ensured through the coordinating office between the Interior, Security, and Defense ministries in the transitional government, as well as between the organizational framework and local councils in each governorate. Finally, it is also necessary to protect the stores of conventional weapons and of unconventional weapons of mass destruction, in addition to controlling and safeguarding heavy weapons and air power.