



# COUNTRY REPORT: Syria

June 2012





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# Executive Summary



## OVERVIEW

Understanding master narratives can be the difference between analytic anticipation and unwanted surprise, as well as the difference between communications successes and messaging gaffes. Master narratives are the historically grounded stories that reflect a community's identity and experiences, or explain its hopes, aspirations, and concerns. These narratives help groups understand who they are and where they come from, and how to make sense of unfolding developments around them. As they do in all countries, effective communicators in Syria invoke master narratives in order to move audiences in a preferred direction. Syrian influencers rely on their native familiarity with these master narratives to use them effectively. This task is considerably more challenging for US communicators and analysts because they must place themselves in the mindset of foreign audiences who believe stories that — from an American vantage point — may appear surprising, conspiratorial, or even outlandish.

This report serves as a resource for addressing this challenge in two ways. First, it identifies a set of eight master narratives carefully selected based on their potency in the Syrian context and relevance to US strategic interests. Second, this report follows a consistent structure for articulating these narratives and explicitly identifies initial implications for US communicators and analysts. The set outlined here is not exhaustive: these eight master narratives represent a first step that communicators and analysts can efficiently apply to the specific messaging need or analytic question at hand. For seasoned Syria experts, these narratives will already be familiar — the content contained in this report can be used to help check assumptions, surface tacit knowledge, and aid customer communications. For newcomers to Syria accounts, these narratives offer deep insights into the stories and perceptions that shape the Syrian political context that may otherwise take years to accumulate.

Some master narratives cut across broad stretches of the Syrian populace, while others are held only by particular audience segments. This study divides Syria into six audience segments that demonstrate how different master narratives resonate with different sections of the populace. Each of the six master narratives aligns with one or more of the following segments: Regime Insiders, Wealthy Urbanites, Rural Sunnis, Urban Working Classes, Alawites, and Kurds (See the Appendix for a detailed description of these audience segments.)

## THE MASTER NARRATIVES

The table on the following page summarizes the eight master narratives highlighted in this report. For each narrative, it specifies the relevant audience segments as well as the narrative's core themes. The condensed narrative description simulates the voice of someone who believes in the narrative itself, helping communicators and analysts immerse themselves in the mindset of the foreign audience.

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### About the Master Narratives Platform

This report is part of the master narratives platform, a collaboration between Open Source Center, Monitor 360, and other partners across the US Government. The master narratives platform is focused on surfacing and articulating master narratives across a range of important geographies. These insights can be used to better understand critical audience segments and key influencers, build analytic capabilities, and develop actionable messaging and counter-messaging strategies. To learn more about the master narratives platform and how it can be applied to your mission, contact Open Source Center at [MasterNarratives@rccb.osis.gov](mailto:MasterNarratives@rccb.osis.gov).

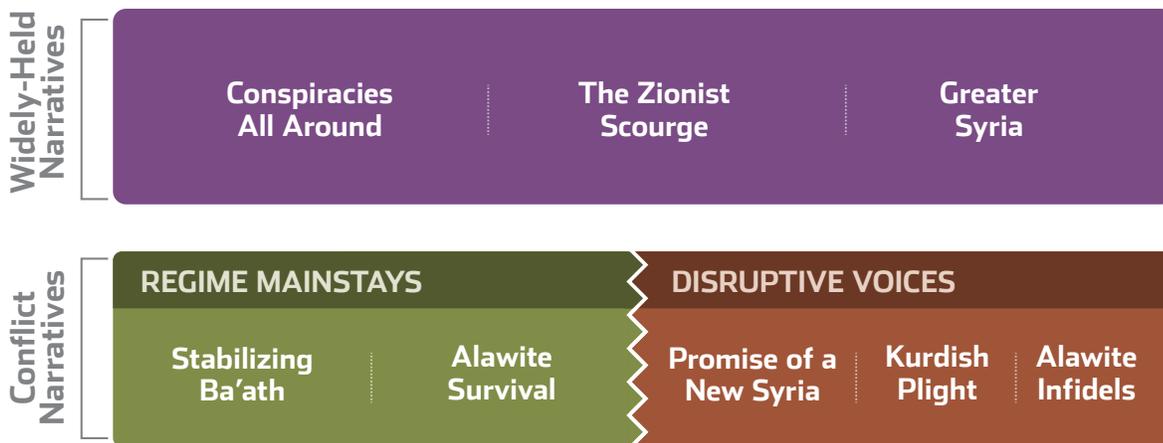
Narrative Title & Audience Segments	Condensed Master Narrative A description of the master narrative as it might be articulated by one who subscribes to it	Core Narrative Themes
<b>Conspiracies All Around</b> <i>Widely held across segments</i>	Long have conspirators plotted against Syrians. The Ottomans taxed and conscripted Syria into ruin, and since the 1920s the West has schemed to keep Syria divided and impoverished. Now secretive cabals inside the country, scheming Westerners, and envious Arab neighbors conspire against the people. Syrians must resist these conspiracies to escape the discord that besets their country.	Conspiracy, Victimization, Vigilance
<b>The Zionist Scourge</b> <i>Widely held across segments</i>	Syrians have stood guard over the Levant as part of the Arab world for millennia. Today, the greatest threat to the Arab world is hated Zionist Israel, born of Western treachery. Syrians must resist the Zionists—first and foremost by regaining the Golan Heights and ending the occupation of Palestine. This is how to put an end to decades of Arab displacement and dispossession.	Aggression, Injustice, Responsibility
<b>Greater Syria</b> <i>Widely held across segments</i>	<i>Bilad al-Sham</i> (Greater Syria) was the cradle of civilization and the heart of the Arab world, intertwining a diversity of faiths in a land that stretched from the Red Sea to the Zagros mountains. The West fractured <i>Bilad al-Sham</i> into French and British colonies in 1924. To restore their pride, Levantines must strive to restore Syria as a homeland for all creeds and a vanguard of the Arab world.	Exceptionalism, Restoration, Tolerance
<b>Stabilizing Ba'ath</b> <i>Regime Insiders, Wealthy Urbanites, Alawites</i>	When the French evacuated in 1948 they left Syria torn apart by selfish politicians struggling for power. Fortunately, out of this chaos, the Ba'ath rose to lead the nation. The prosperity fostered by the regime is now threatened by Muslim extremists who want to push the country into religious war. Syria must crush these extremists, or the country will disintegrate into sectarian bloodshed.	Paternalism, Secularism, Stability
<b>Promise of a New Syria</b> <i>Urban Working Classes, Rural Sunnis</i>	Despite suffering for generations under Damascene elites' greed, the Syrian people were still able to prosper through hard work and ingenuity. This changed when the Al-Asads came to power, ushering in a reign of boundless corruption and terror. Now the Arab world from Egypt to Libya has stood up to tyrants, and Syria, too, must have its liberation. To gain the prosperity and freedom denied to them, citizens across Syria must rise up and topple the regime.	Defiance, Hope, Struggle
<b>Alawite Infidels</b> <i>Rural Sunnis</i>	Syria has been a Sunni nation since Caliph Mu'awiyah's seventh-century reign. Then in 1920 the French made Nusayris, or so-called "Alawites," their lapdogs. Nusayris connived their way into power after the French left, stealing from the successful and brutally repressing the innocent. It is now time for vengeance: the Nusayri regime will be pushed from power and its supporters will be pushed into their graves. Syria will then be ruled by Sunnis in the name of God.	Intolerance, Righteous Cause, Revenge
<b>Alawite Survival</b> <i>Alawites</i>	Consigned to Syria's rocky hinterlands, Alawites barely scraped out a living under Sunni rule. But in the mid-twentieth century the Alawites rose to power through the superior achievement of their people in the <i>Troupes Speciales du Levant</i> (Army of the Levant), and have rightfully ruled the nation for half a century since. Now Alawites are once again threatened by fanatical Sunnis that wish to destroy them. If Alawites do not unite and kill these extremists, they are destined for extinction.	Encirclement, Existential Fear, Survival
<b>Kurdish Plight</b> <i>Kurds</i>	Kurds migrated to northeastern Syria to cultivate the fertile farmland in the early 1900s. Disregarding that the Kurds already had established a home, the French bound these lands to Arab Syria in 1916. Since then Kurds have been abused and treated like despised foreigners in their own land. The emergence of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq gives new hope: Syrian Kurds must claim their autonomy, embrace their language, and be free to oversee their own affairs.	Autonomy, Injustice, Hope

*These master narratives were developed and validated through extensive open source research and subject matter expert outreach, and were further vetted by USG Syria analysts.*

### KEY FINDINGS

Syria’s master narrative landscape is highly competitive, characterized by conflict across ethnic, sectarian, and political lines. Almost all of Syria’s master narratives overtly label adversaries, and the few that do not offer key influencers the flexibility to rally followers against a wide array of perceived foes. Depending on the audience, these alleged antagonists may include the regime, the West, Sunni Muslims, or Syria’s neighbors. Subscribers to these master narratives frequently believe they are enmeshed in an existential struggle with these adversaries. Through the lens of these master narratives, the cost of “losing” to one’s adversary ranges from lost status and precious resources to survival of entire cultures and sects. By understanding these tensions, communicators and analysts will be better equipped to anticipate how domestic Syrian conflicts may evolve, how Syria will position itself relative to its neighbors, and how US actions and policies are likely to be perceived by Syrian audiences.

The figure below provides a structure for understanding this competitive master narrative landscape. The top of the figure represents Syria’s consensus narratives, broadly held beliefs that Syria boasts a proud history but one that is plagued by the machinations of foreign and domestic adversaries. The bottom of the figure reflects master narratives locked in a struggle between the regime’s supporters and an array of Syrian audience segments who feel that the regime has left them marginalized and oppressed. On the left are mainstays of regime rhetoric carefully crafted and cultivated to justify and buttress autocratic rule. On the right are master narratives held by those who aim to disrupt the status quo—for some, through regime change — in response to what they view as longstanding and unaddressed political, economic, and social grievances.



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### Consensus Narratives

These widely held master narratives reflect shared celebration of Syria's civilizational history and deep-seated suspicions that Syria has been thrown into turmoil by conspirators. These master narratives offer a wide array of perceived adversaries that key influencers use to deflect blame and reaffirm their commitment to Syrian nationalism. Regime supporters and members of the opposition compete to lay claim to these narratives by depicting their opponents as trampling on Syria's cultural heritage, conspiring against the Syrian people (often in alliance with foreign countries), and acting as vassals of Israel. Communicators can draw upon these narratives to demonstrate the United States' appreciation for Syria's deep history, while avoiding pitfalls that may inadvertently reinforce anti-Western conspiracy theories. Analysts can use these master narratives to better anticipate how Syrian audiences will respond to the actions and policies of the United States and regional actors. Further, they can help analysts dissect Syrian key influencer messaging and persuasion strategies, as they aim to capitalize on widely held beliefs to advance their own political agendas.

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### Regime Mainstays

These master narratives draw upon centuries of alleged Sunni intolerance and decades of twentieth-century turmoil to justify and build support for the Al-Asad regime's rule. These narratives argue that strong, secular, centralized government is needed to ensure political stability and prevent sectarian violence. Communicators can use these narratives to find opportunities to effectively respond to characterizations of the United States as a foreign conspirator, and to better anticipate how the regime will publicly respond to new US policies and messaging. Analysts can monitor the extent to which these narratives resonate with the broader Syrian population to track changes in the regime's grip on power.

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### Disruptive Voices

These master narratives reflect the desires of a range of Syrian audience segments who challenge the status quo by advocating for long-desired freedoms. Each of these narratives presents a different vision of how to rectify the damage adherents allege the regime has inflicted. Communicators can draw upon these narratives to promote values of freedom, dignity, and national unity. Further, these narratives can act as a foundation for developing messaging that resonates with new national leaders should they emerge from the ranks of anti-regime groups. Analysts can track the relationship between these narratives to identify ideological schisms in the opposition movement and to illuminate popular attitudes on what role Islam should play in future Syrian governments.

Syria's master narrative landscape points to deep schisms in a society in which competing sides perceive their prosperity—and in some cases, survival—to be based upon either uncompromising defense of the status quo, or complete upending of that status quo. Syria's master narratives demonstrate how these schisms predate the Al-Asad regime's rule, and also suggest that these schisms will endure regardless of the regime's fate. They point to a socio-political environment where inter-group competition and suspicion have become the norm, and where the sudden collapse or gradual erosion of the Al-Asad regime would only be a first step in a long and uncertain process of resolving differences between competing master narratives that many Syrians today view as irreconcilable. Should this process begin to unfold, Syrians will turn to the master narratives they have relied upon for generations to make sense of social and political uncertainty, the maneuvering of their perceived adversaries, and the statements and actions of neighbors and global powers such as the United States.

## REPORT STRUCTURE & PAYOFFS

The remainder of this document provides greater analytic detail for the eight master narratives outlined above. Each master narrative is articulated and analyzed in five pieces:

1. **Audience Segment:** With which audience segments does this master narrative reside?
2. **Master Narrative:** How might a subscriber to this master narrative describe it, what evidence reinforces these beliefs, and how do influencers leverage this narrative for their own political aims?
3. **Significance for Strategic Communicators:** How does this master narrative shed light on messaging opportunities and pitfalls?
4. **Significance for Analysts:** How can tracking this master narrative help analysts improve situational awareness, anticipate critical shifts in public debates, and better understand key influencers?
5. **Appendices:** The appendices for each master narrative highlight key phrases, symbols, or themes associated with the master narrative as well as relevant sourcing and validation. These appendices also provide detailed descriptions of each audience segment.

Research for this analysis included primary sources and open source research across a variety of fields, from historical and anthropological texts to news articles, speeches, and statements by key influencers in Syria. In addition to this research, interviews with twenty two subject matter experts were used to surface master narratives, test hypotheses, and validate assertions. These experts were asked a combination of expansive, open-ended questions designed to surface new hypotheses as well as targeted questions designed to verify assertions. Combining these interviews with open source research, this report highlights how each master narrative reflects perceived history, themes, and objectives that are central to Syrian identity.

This report is not a silver bullet: improving US messaging and analysis will continue to rely on the creativity and expertise of communicators and analysts confronted with complex mission goals, changing local conditions, and bureaucratic constraints. What this report can do is help communicators and analysts more effectively place themselves in the shoes of foreign audiences. For communicators, this means avoiding costly pitfalls while more easily crafting effective messaging that taps into themes that resonate with foreign audiences. For analysts, this means better understanding key influencers and their messages, as well as shifting internal and external political dynamics. Finally, this report is an analytic exercise to support decision makers, who can use master narratives to better anticipate how foreign actors and audiences will interpret USG policies and actions. The insights and analysis provided in this report serve as a first step in providing communicators and analysts with the resources they need to seize upon those opportunities and, in doing so, strengthen US understanding of foreign audiences.



# Master Narratives



# "Conspiracies All Around"

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
➤ Regime Insiders	➤ Rural Sunnis	➤ Kurds
➤ Wealthy Urbanites	➤ Urban Working Classes	➤ Alawites

This master narrative is widely held throughout the Syrian population. Regime Insiders subscribe to this narrative due to deeply held suspicion of foreign involvement in Syrian affairs. The Al-Asad regime has used this master narrative throughout the four decades it has been in power.<sup>1</sup> Subscription to this master narrative outside of the regime is further fueled by word-of-mouth conspiracy theories, which have flourished in the absence of a free press.

### MASTER NARRATIVE: "CONSPIRACIES ALL AROUND"

NARRATIVE: Straddling Europe and the Middle East, Syria has long been a prosperous heart of Arab culture, the geographic gateway to the Arab world, and home to hard-working farmers, brilliant intellectuals, and shrewd merchants. Sadly, this prosperity and importance has attracted meddlesome conspirators throughout Syrian history, with plots hatched by enemies inside and outside of the country that seek to empower and enrich themselves at the expense of the Syrian people. The Ottomans impoverished Syria over four centuries of rule, constantly scheming to conscript Syria's sons and tax its people, until 1918 when King Faisal defeated the Turks in Damascus. This victory gave hope that those conspiring to control Syria could be defeated once and for all. Yet even these hopes were swiftly dashed by the treacherous Western Sykes-Picot Agreement, despite Yusuf Al-Azmah's valiant battle against the French General Gouraud at Maysalun. Since then Syria has withered under conspiracies that multiply like germs, with secretive cabals inside the country, scheming Westerners, and envious Arab neighbors all plotting to keep Syrians downtrodden and impoverished. Syrians must remain ever-vigilant of the schemes that are in motion against them. Unless these conspiracies are thwarted, Syrians will never escape the discord that has beset their country for centuries.

ANALYSIS: This master narrative reflects three conspiracy archetypes commonplace in Syrian beliefs and discourses: Western conspiracies to divide and impoverish Syria, conspiracies by Arab neighbors to influence Syria, and conspiracies by Damascus elites against the Syrian public. Presenting a wide array of conspirators working against Syria, this master narrative is highly malleable and is used by both the regime and the opposition to advance political goals and paint competitors in a negative light. The historical underpinnings of this narrative date back to the Ottoman period, with two events solidifying conspiracy as a fixture in the Syrian master narrative landscape after the Ottoman empire's dissolution: the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and the 1920 Battle of Maysalun. Sykes-Picot was a secret agreement between France and England that divided the Levant into spheres of influence after World War I, and the French defeat of the Syrian army at Maysalun signaled the start of colonial rule. Today, pro- and anti-Asad camps use this master narrative to depict opponents as duplicitous actors in broader conspiracies. On the one hand, the regime relies upon this narrative to paint the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising as another foreign-backed conspiracy to control Syria. For example, the regime rejected an Arab League-proposed peacekeeping mission in February 2012, casting the mission as a hostile Saudi-led attempt to undermine Syrian security.<sup>2,3</sup> Similar versions of this narrative are also invoked by Russian and Iranian elites, supporting Syrian Regime Insiders' efforts to depict the 2011–2012 uprising as a foreign backed conspiracy.<sup>4,5</sup> On the other hand, Syrians opposed to the regime invoke this narrative against a cabal of Damascus elites—at the apex of which is the regime itself—as well as foreign countries they view as having historically undermined Syria. They criticize the regime's frequent use of this narrative, asserting that the regime itself conspires to maintain control over Syria by fabricating phony foreign plots. For example, these subscribers assert that the regime's opposition to Israel is a hoax, alluding to an alleged longstanding secret alliance between the regime and Israel—evidenced, they argue, by the relative peace in the Golan Heights.<sup>6,7</sup> The fact that this master narrative is both malleable and deeply entrenched means that it can easily be used by competing factions in Syrian society to fuel suspicion and inspire action.

Regime key influencers invoke this narrative to explain popular uprisings as foreign-led conspiracies.<sup>8,9</sup> In a June 2011 speech at Damascus University, President Bashar Al-Asad explained the cause for domestic turmoil: "I do not think there is a stage in Syria's history where it was not the target of some sort of conspiracy, both before and after independence. Those conspiracies took place for many reasons, some relating directly to the important geopolitical position that Syria occupies."<sup>10</sup> Opposition key influencers also deploy this narrative to cast doubt on the regime. The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria issued an official message in response to reports that Israel was preparing to receive Alawite refugees, stating: "As Syrians, it is our right to have our own reading of the conspiracy plotted by the regime against the dear, free Syrian people... It is clear...that these dark, objectionable rants are part of the conspiracy that seeks to rescue the regime."<sup>11</sup> Syria's long history of alleged conspiracies, originating both internally and externally, contributes to the narrative's malleability and allows a multiplicity of key influencers to deploy it.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Subscribers to this master narrative are likely to view any US messaging skeptically, filtering communications through a lens of distrust and interpreting US actions as part of one of several possible conspiracies against Syria. For example, Regime Insiders subscribing to this master narrative are likely to construe US messaging as a political maneuver designed to unseat the

regime and increase US influence in the Middle East. Regime supporters attempt to reinforce these conspiracy theories by claiming that the US has supported regimes in Qatar and Bahrain during the Arab Spring—regimes that subscribers assert are no less autocratic than Syria’s.<sup>12</sup> These arguments frame US denunciation of the regime as hypocritical and aim to reinforce beliefs that the United States is conspiring against Syria. Some regime opponents are reluctant to be perceived as the beneficiaries of US support, as this may provoke suspicions of their involvement in alleged US conspiracies.

Regime Insider subscribers closely scrutinize interactions between everyday Syrians and international actors—such as NGOs, aid organizations, or local operators—that are not intermediated through the Al-Asad regime.<sup>13</sup> Messaging that even casually references Americans from these types of groups working in Syria may draw significant amounts of attention to their activities, and could be construed as further evidence of Western conspiracies. US communicators may be able to avoid this pitfall by not highlighting specific aid organizations or NGOs that the United States supports or has supported, as subscribers might view these actors as extensions of allegedly subversive US policies. Additionally, association with the United States may call unwanted attention to organizations working in Syria and may delegitimize aid or humanitarian efforts in the eyes of subscribers to this master narrative.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Analysts can track this master narrative to better anticipate opposition key influencers’ strategic intent. Key influencers can use this master narrative for a variety of purposes: to deflect blame by scapegoating external actors, to consolidate support for themselves in opposition to a real or formulated adversary, and to undermine support for competing key influencers. Monitoring how opposition groups use this narrative—for example, to cast doubt on the regime, the West, or even other opposition groups—can provide analysts a lens for monitoring shifting political allegiances and rivalries as they develop in Syrian politics. These changing allegiances and rivalries are likely to be reflected in how key influencers and factions frame perceived foreign and domestic conspiracies confronting Syria today, and who they assert is complicit in them.

Focusing this analysis on the regime’s use of this master narrative, in particular, may be especially useful in gaining insight into Syrian diplomatic planning and intentions. Regime Insiders use this narrative to justify outreach to other regional partners with a mutual interest in confronting the West. Syria’s alliance with Iran, which has strengthened since the early 2000s, is founded upon a mutual antipathy toward the West that supersedes the many cultural differences between the two countries—Sunni versus Shi’a, secular government versus theocratic government, Persian versus Arab. Despite these cultural differences, the “Conspiracies All Around” master narrative aligns with Iranian master narratives, some of which are widely held across the Iranian population and some of which are regime creations [see: Master Narratives Country Report: Iran, “Victims of Foreign Oppression,” “US Betrayal,” “The Great Satan,” and “Defender of the Muslim Middle East”].<sup>14</sup> Evaluating which countries’ regimes echo the themes of Western conspiracy in this master narrative may help analysts better foresee which countries Syrian authorities will identify as natural partners. Given this, comparative analysis of this master narrative alongside widespread or regime-backed master narratives in other countries can shed light on how Syrian authorities choose their partners, and how they craft messaging designed to appeal to Syrian audiences while also resonating with counterparts in countries such as Iran.

# "The Zionist Scourge"

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
➤ Regime Insiders	➤ Rural Sunnis	➤ Kurds
➤ Wealthy Urbanites	➤ Urban Working Classes	➤ Alawites

This master narrative is widely held across Syrian audiences. Regime Insiders have espoused it in attempts to legitimize their rule. The resonance of this narrative has declined for some Rural Sunnis and some members of the Urban Working Classes because it is closely associated with the Al-Asad regime.

## MASTER NARRATIVE: "THE ZIONIST SCOURGE"

**NARRATIVE:** Syrians have stood guard over the Levant, from Jerusalem to Alexandretta, as a part of the Arab world for millennia. They have weathered every Arab conflict and celebrated every victory, and been an integral part of the Arab world's empires and caliphates. Today, the greatest threat to the Arab world is Zionist Israel, born of Western treachery. Israel's ambition knows no bounds—conniving to occupy Arab land, and violating human rights without commitment to law. In 1948 Israel occupied Western Palestine, the great *Nakba* (catastrophe) later followed, and in 1967 the Zionists took the Syrian Golan. Yet Syrians have always stood firm against Israel, never failing to confront Zionists hiding in the United States' shadow. Syrians showed Israelis their might in the 1973 Ramadan War, and will do so again even while other Arab nations like Egypt have sold out to the West. Syrians must put a halt to Zionist bullying, first and foremost by regaining the Golan and ending the occupation of Palestine. Stopping Israel's violence and oppression is the first step to ending decades of Arab displacement and dispossession.

ANALYSIS: In conjunction with the "Conspiracies All Around" and "Greater Syria" master narratives, this narrative has been used by the Al-Asad regime for decades in attempts to legitimize its rule. This narrative has deep historical roots; one of Syria's first presidents, Shukri al-Quwatli, was defeated by Israel in the 1948 War and subsequently overthrown by an internal coup for his failure to lead Syria to victory against Israel.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with Hafez Al-Asad in 1970, the regime has used this narrative to rally support by depicting Syria as the key resistor to Israel.<sup>2,3</sup> One symbol the regime frequently trumpets is the 1973 Yom Kippur War (called the Ramadan War in Syria), depicting this war as proof that Syria is a bastion of Arab resistance.<sup>4</sup> Iran shares a master narrative of resistance against Israel, and both regimes deploy these narratives as rationale for supporting the Syrian-Iranian-Hizbullah alliance [see: Master Narratives Country Report: Iran: "Defender of the Muslim Middle East"].<sup>5,6</sup>

While anti-Israel sentiments are commonplace in Syria, the regime's repeated use of this master narrative has led many audiences to view "resistance" against Israel as nothing more than empty rhetoric when espoused by Regime Insiders.<sup>7</sup> For example, some subscribers assert that "confronting the Zionist" has been used as a "drug to enslave the nation."<sup>8</sup> For much of the Syrian population, this narrative's grievances have been overshadowed by grievances focused on the regime itself [see: "Promise of a New Syria" and "Alawite Infidels"]. Rejection of the Al-Asad regime's use of this master narrative, however, has not translated into a widespread openness to improving relations with Israel. On the contrary, perceptions that Israel is a regional bully and implacable aggressor remain widespread as a result of this narrative's deep historical roots and Israel's continued presence in the Golan Heights. Syrian audiences view the Golan as being unjustly occupied by Israel; prior to the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising, anti-Israeli graffiti was common in areas neighboring the Golan. Opposition key influencers also point to decades of peace in the Golan as evidence that despite its rhetoric, the regime has done little to confront Israel.<sup>9</sup> Syrians also share the view widespread throughout the Arab world that Israel is a militaristic bully, and that Israeli actions in the Palestinian Territories are illegitimate.<sup>10</sup> Although Syrians no longer view the regime's attempts to tap into these grievances as credible, widespread belief in the threat Israel poses suggests that under the right circumstances this master narrative could underpin a spike in Syrian-Israeli tensions.

Key influencers use this narrative to cast doubt on their adversaries by alleging they are linked to Israel. In January 2012 editor-in-chief Muhammad Kanayisi of the regime-backed *Al-Ba'ath* asserted that Syria is the last remaining Arab country opposing Israel, and is therefore the target of a foreign plot: "...the [Ba'ath] party has been able, amid the accelerating dramatic changes that swept the region and pushed most Arab regimes to join the United States-Zionist project and leave Syria alone in the position of steadfastness and resistance, to stick to its ... anti-Zionist principles. The current crisis has confirmed that overthrowing this ideology is one of the major objectives of the psychological and terrorist war Syria faces today."<sup>11</sup> It is likely that Syria's ally, Iran, recognizes the wide appeal of this narrative. After "consultations with a good number of people, in addition to...the political attaché to the Iranian ambassador," regime advisor Hadeel al-Ali sent a 2011 email to Bashar Al-Asad recommending that his messaging should depict "what Syria is facing now in terms of foreign pressures as revenge for its victories against Israel in 1973, 1982, 2000, 2008," further recommending Al-Asad "Confirm that the Syrian people are the biggest enemy to Israel and that is why the president will not shake hands with the enemy."<sup>12</sup> Conversely, opposition key influencers dismiss the regime's usage of this narrative. In January 2012, Colonel Riyad al-As'ad, Commander of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), asserted that "[The regime] deceived the people with the slogans of opposition and resisting Zionism and Israel but were in fact loyal allies of Zionism and Israel and the evidence is

that the Syrian army did not fire a single bullet at the front with Israel for 40 years."<sup>13</sup> Notably, opposition key influencers criticize the regime for failing to confront Israel while alleging that "Zionists" are the regime's allies and therefore enemies of the opposition. This suggests that although the Syrian public dismisses the regime's use of this master narrative as hollow rhetoric, Syrian audiences still perceive Israel as a threat.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

This master narrative leaves US communicators with little room to connect with Syrian audiences. Syrian audiences are likely to link US efforts to promote peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with what Syrians view as a US bias in favor of Israel at the expense of Palestinians and Arab neighbors. Even Syrian opposition leaders and Syrian army defectors, who typically are receptive to building relationships with the United States, attribute US inaction in Syria to Israeli concerns that regional instability might follow regime change in Syria.<sup>14</sup> US messaging on Israel also risks providing fodder for Regime Insider messaging strategies that aim to depict the 2011–2012 uprising as an US-Israeli backed plot.

US communicators could make modest messaging gains by highlighting the numerous instances Hafez and Bashar Al-Asad have deployed this narrative in a duplicitous manner, often at the expense of the Syrian population. To avoid pitfalls associated with discussing Israel directly as noted above, US communicators could instead highlight that the regime has founded itself on illusory fights with its neighbors at the expense of the Syrian public. For example, communicators could highlight how the regime has spent large amounts of state funds on advanced military hardware they have no intention of deploying in protection of average Syrians, while neglecting economic development in rural Syria. Subscribers are likely to see clear parallels between messages like these and the regime's widely discredited use of "The Zionist Scourge."

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

The way in which different political groups and key influencers use this master narrative in the wake of the 2011–2012 uprising can help analysts map out their evolving strategies to compete with one another for power and influence. Should the Al-Asads be removed from power, political actors seeking to consolidate their authority might tap into this deeply and widely held narrative, as it has the potential to unite Syrians across sectarian and ethnic lines. Rival key influencers also might use this narrative to accuse one another of being in secret alliance with Israel, as they have done with the Al-Asad regime. These uses of the narrative offer a window into key influencers' goals and intentions, and have the potential to fuel Syrian-Israeli tensions. As such, analysts can track whether, and how, this narrative is used by rivals within the Syrian opposition to better forecast the evolution of Syrian power dynamics, as well as Syria's future stance toward Israel.

Monitoring key influencers' uses of this narrative can help analysts anticipate the Syrian Government's future support for Hizballah. With the regime's usage of this narrative widely discredited, Hizballah's association with the Al-Asad regime has also fallen under criticism.<sup>15</sup> An increase in the number of Syrians articulating this narrative could indicate a resurgence in popular Syrian support for Hizballah, and create an impetus for future regimes to back Hizballah.<sup>16,17</sup> Should a Sunni-majority government succeed the Al-Asad regime, changes in the frequency with which this narrative is invoked could indicate whether anti-Israel sentiments are strong enough to motivate any new Syrian regime to overlook sectarian differences with the predominantly Shi'a Hizballah.

# "Greater Syria"

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
➤ Regime Insiders	➤ Rural Sunnis	➤ Kurds
➤ Wealthy Urbanites	➤ Urban Working Classes	➤ Alawites

Syria's civilizational history is widely celebrated by Syrian audiences, uniting audiences in nationalistic pride. Minorities invoking this master narrative tend to focus on Syria's historical cultural diversity and its legacy as a crossroads of civilizations. Regime Insiders invoking this master narrative frequently focus on Syria's rightful claim as leader of neighboring countries in the Levant. These subscribers have related but distinct definitions of what it means for Syria to be "Greater."

### MASTER NARRATIVE: "GREATER SYRIA"

NARRATIVE: *Bilad al-Sham* (Greater Syria) was the cradle of civilization, the home of the Umayyad Caliphate, and the heart of the Arab world. Since the days of the Romans, its borders stretched from the Red Sea to the Zagros Mountains, from Cyprus to the Persian Gulf, joining Sunnis, Christians, Alawites, Druze, Isma'ilis and Shi'a in a rich cosmopolitan web of trade and culture at the crossroads of three continents. Although the Ottomans divided Syria into provinces, its people never forgot they were one. After World War I and four centuries of Ottoman rule, Syrians thought they had achieved their dream, trusting the West's promises to Sharif Husayn Bin-Ali to unify the Arab nation in return for fighting the Turks. Instead, their "reward" was to break Greater Syria into French and British colonies, carving Lebanon from Syria's rib. Now the region is rife with divisions and conflict; whether they live in Lebanon or Syria, the people of the Levant must never forget their unity. They must build a homeland for individuals of all creeds and restore Syria as the vanguard of the Arab world. This is how Syrians can reclaim their pride, and their ancient home.

ANALYSIS: This master narrative reflects pride that Syria is a diverse and historically expansive nation. It manifests itself in two primary ways: first, many Syrian key influencers use this master narrative to call for sectarian unity, and second, Regime Insiders have deployed it to justify interventions in neighboring countries. Pride in Syria's cultural and geographic scope has deep historical roots. Although historically the territories of the Levant were never united politically, the region has long been intertwined culturally and economically. A majority of its inhabitants have viewed the region as a contiguous whole called *Bilad al-Sham* (Greater Syria). Subscribers interpret this name to mean "the country of the north" (highlighting connections to the Arab south), "the lands of the Levant" (highlighting Levantine unity), "the lands of Damascus" (highlighting Damascene regional primacy), or simply "Greater Syria" (highlighting Syria's historically expansive borders).<sup>1,2,3</sup> No matter the interpretation, subscribers understand the concept of Greater Syria to refer to a unified whole that spanned the Levant, was the heart of the Umayyad Caliphate, and was divided by the West after World War I.<sup>4</sup>

This narrative retains deep resonance; for example, the honorific *Abu Umawi* ("Father of the Umayyads) is widely used among Damascus shopkeepers, linking them to the wealth and cosmopolitan aura of the seventh-century Arab caliphate.<sup>5</sup> Key influencers use this narrative to call for peace between religions, pointing to Syria's history of religious diversity as a "cradle of civilizations." Regime Insiders also draw upon themes from this narrative as justification for intervention in neighboring countries. For example, this narrative underlies regime attempts to control Lebanon's government, and historical efforts to undermine the Jordanian monarchy, intervene in Palestine, and make claims to Turkey's Hatay province.<sup>6,7,8</sup> When using this narrative, the Al-Asad regime relies on pan-Arab Bath'ist ideology to argue that it is the "beating heart of Arabism," implying influence beyond Syria's national borders. They are less likely than other subscribers to invoke the phraseology *Bilad Al-Sham*; this term's linkage with the Umayyad era gives it religious overtones that conflict with the Al-Asad regime's secular ideology [see: "Stabilizing Ba'ath"]. When justifying interference in Lebanon, Regime Insiders more often invoke the colonial history that divided Lebanon from Syria, a justification that aligns more closely with secular Bath'ist anti-imperial worldviews than with this narrative.

Key influencers deploy this narrative to advocate national unity, and to imply that Syria's borders should be expanded. For example, in an August 2010 statement the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria asserted, "We also affirm our confidence in the lessons of our shining Syrian history that are as deep-seated in our consciences as the oak trees are in the mountains and plains of *Al-Sham* (Greater Syria)...We extend our hands to every lover of liberty in our homeland so that we can build together a spacious Syrian homeland that is big enough to accommodate all Syrians within a compact national unity..."<sup>9</sup> Additionally, key influencers use themes from this master narrative to decry sectarianism. People's Assembly member Dr. Muhammad al-Habash mobilized this strategy in a 2011 article in *Al-Ba'th*: "...we cannot form parties in the homeland loyal only to a segment of its people rather than all of its people...in Syria, the cradle of religions, and the land that brings the yearning of worshipers from all over the world. In the East it is known as the holy Greater Syria, in the West it is known as the holy land of Syria... Syrians have the right to demand civil parties that meet under a ceiling of justice and equality and adhere to a platform that says religion belongs to God and the homeland belongs to all."<sup>10</sup> Opposition and regime key influencers can use this narrative for a variety of purposes—e.g., calling for national unity or advocating for sectarian harmony—by tapping into Syria's rich civilizational history.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Messaging about the importance of Syrians’ leadership in the Levant, based in Syria’s ancient civilizational history, is likely to resonate powerfully with subscribers without explicitly endorsing Regime Insiders’ calls for territorial expansion. For example, US communicators could express support for the Levant Quartet—an agreement between Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria to promote greater regional economic and cultural integration—while underscoring Syria’s central importance to that alliance.<sup>11</sup> Communicators could add to this strategy by highlighting that Syria has been in the global vanguard of cultural achievements for millennia. Messaging highlighting ancient historical achievements in Syria—for example, Ugarit (the world’s oldest West Semitic script), Roman-era archaeological finds in the outskirts of Aleppo, or the Umayyad Mosque (where John the Baptist is believed to be buried)—are likely to be well received. Similarly, messaging that positions Syria as a historical leader of the Arab world is likely to be well-received. US communicators should be aware, however, that this messaging could create tension with other countries competing for regional leadership, such as Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Coordinating this messaging with messaging to these other countries could reduce the risk of being perceived as slighting Syria’s neighbors.

Discussions of Lebanese autonomy could alienate subscribers to this master narrative. Much of this pitfall is based on the view that Lebanon is culturally and economically inseparable from Syria. Messaging on the 2005 Cedar Revolution—symbolized by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, a US-backed tribunal investigating the assassination of Rafiq Hariri—is likely to stir emotions.<sup>12,13</sup> This mindset extends to other issues as well: for example, in March 2012 Syria’s ambassador to Lebanon asserted that “Lebanon is integrated with Syria,” urging Lebanon to help apprehend Free Syrian Army members.<sup>14</sup>

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

The “Greater Syria,” “Conspiracies All Around,” and “The Zionist Scourge” narratives are Syria’s most widely held narratives, and are invoked collectively by national leaders to assert authority. For example, in a 2006 speech delivered at Damascus University, President Bashar Al-Asad combined all three narratives in an appeal to regain the Golan Heights: “You [Syrians] were magnificent in your comprehending the magnitude of the conspiracy . . . you were the beating heart of Arabism with every sense of the word . . . the meaning which will be more powerful when we liberate the Golan by our hands, will and determination.”<sup>15</sup> By monitoring which key influencers incorporate this set of narratives in their messaging, analysts can better anticipate which key influencers are attempting to claim roles as national leaders. Key influencers invoking all three of these narratives tap into a deep wellspring of Syrian pride and anger, and present themselves as individuals who are able to lead Syrians to achieve their national aspirations. Should opposition key influencers begin deploying these master narratives in public fora, it could suggest they are vying to present themselves as leaders for a post-Asad Syria.

# “Stabilizing Ba’ath”

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
➤ Regime Insiders	Rural Sunnis	Kurds
➤ Wealthy Urbanites	Urban Working Classes	➤ Alawites

This master narrative is held by Regime Insiders, Wealthy Urbanites, and Alawites. Regime Insiders include Al-Asad family friends and members of the Ba’ath party and military. Wealthy Urbanites are generally Sunni and are concentrated in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo. Non-Alawite religious minorities also subscribe to this narrative and represent roughly ten to fifteen percent of the Syrian population. These religious minorities are primarily composed of Christians, but also include Druze and Isma’ilis.<sup>1</sup>

## MASTER NARRATIVE: “STABILIZING BA’ATH”

NARRATIVE: When the French evacuated in 1946 they left Syria in tatters, torn apart by selfish Syrian politicians who struggled for power through the 1950s and 1960s to make themselves rich. Out of this chaos, the Ba’ath and Hafez Al-Asad rose to lead the nation, correcting the errors of the radical socialist Salah Jadid. Hafez’s practical secular policies brought new opportunities and united Alawites, Christians, and Sunnis as one nation. A new villain threatens these decades of prosperity: Muslim extremists who want to return Syria to the dark ages of Islamic rule. Although Hafez dealt with these violent fanatics at Hama in 1982, the same radicals who massacred innocents at the Aleppo Military School in 1979 have returned decades later to attempt to install a Sunni caliphate. To preserve the country’s security and stability, Syrians must unite in defense of their state and crush these Muslim extremists. If Syrians turn away from the unifying ideology of the Ba’ath, the country will disintegrate into sectarian bloodshed that will dwarf the violence that sundered Lebanon, Libya, and Iraq.

ANALYSIS: This master narrative expresses the Al-Asad regime’s assertion that the regime is the essential provider of stability in Syria and has protected Syrians from sectarian bloodshed for over four decades. The regime uses this narrative to justify autocratic rule and the suppression of political opposition, appealing to audiences most concerned with safety and stability. Key influencers using this narrative portray the Syrian people as having only two choices— a government that unifies the country through secularism backed by force, or sectarian bloodshed.<sup>2</sup> This choice is rooted in Syria’s tumultuous political history after French forces withdrew in 1948; when Hafez Al-Asad rose to power in 1970, there had been ten successful coups and at least ten other failed attempted coups.<sup>3,4</sup> Even after Hafez Al-Asad’s rise, Syria remained unstable, and the regime engaged in a protracted civil war with alleged Islamic extremists. Subscribers assert that the 1982 destruction of Hama was a justifiable act that stabilized Syria after nearly thirty-five years of political chaos.<sup>5</sup> Today, subscribers to this narrative assert that the regime’s security apparatus prevents the Muslim Brotherhood and other alleged Islamic extremists from once again destabilizing the country.<sup>6</sup> With the regime fueling fears of an Islamist takeover, this narrative appeals to many Syrian religious minorities who view the secular Ba’ath regime as a bulwark protecting them from Sunni extremists. This master narrative also resonates with Wealthy Elite, who profit from relationships with the regime and fear the impact instability could have on their businesses.<sup>7,8,9</sup> The regime has sought to portray itself as the only force able to protect the interests—and even survival—of critical audience segments in Syrian society. Even if regime change were to occur, the underlying fears articulated in this narrative are likely to continue to shape worldviews in a post Al-Asad Syria.

Regime Insiders invoke this master narrative to portray the Ba’ath government as an ideal secular alternative to opposition groups allegedly bent on dividing Syria along sectarian lines. An unattributed July 2011 article in the government-owned newspaper, *Al-Watan*, used this narrative to allege that the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising was composed of Muslim extremists, in an attempt to stoke minorities’ fears: “...since the outbreak of the events in Syria, everyone has been warning of a slide toward the sectarian war that, alone, is capable of assassinating all Syrians, as these wars do not differentiate between a Muslim and a Christian ...the Syrian Arab army has redeployed in many areas, putting an end to acts of violence that broke out among the population, after a terrorist group kidnapped some youths, mutilated them, and threw them into the street. The sources say that the same groups have declared Jihad in one of the areas of Hims, and are repeating sectarian slogans.”<sup>10</sup> Regime key influencers often attempt to legitimize the use of force by depicting it as defense against alleged sectarian attacks.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Messaging highlighting that repression is not a necessary precondition for a religiously tolerant nation could help to undermine regime messaging that relies on the direct connection this master narrative draws between autocratic rule and stability. One way US communicators could do this is by highlighting Syria’s hundreds of years of relative social cohesion and peace before the regime took power. Many Syrians consider themselves to be part of a historically unified Levantine community that predates sixteenth-century Ottoman rule. This historical identity is articulated in the “Greater Syria” master narrative and is used by members of the opposition as the foundation for a vision of a unifying Syrian identity independent of the regime [see: “Greater Syria”]. This messaging strategy is most likely to be well received by Christians, whose historical experience prior to the Asad regime was comparatively more positive than that of Alawites or Druze.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, US communicators that advocate for “stabilizing” Syria

could be perceived as echoing regime messaging strategies. Some audiences could interpret this as implicit support for this master narrative.

To avoid exacerbating fears that regime change would lead to national chaos, US communicators could avoid drawing direct parallels between events in the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising and violent conflicts of the Arab Spring, such as those in Sirte or Aden. Relatives of many Syrians—especially minorities—have fled violence in Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt and settled in Syria following government collapse. These migrants have passed along their personal stories of looting and violence to Syrians, intensifying many subscribers’ fear of instability and reinforcing subscribers’ loyalty to the regime.<sup>12,13,14</sup> US communicators may want to avoid language that draws explicit parallels between regime change in these countries and regime change in Syria, as these statements might intensify fears of political upheaval and reinforce regime support.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Analysts may be able to better anticipate the location and timing of regime crackdowns by monitoring the government’s use of phrases that draw upon themes from this narrative. The regime frequently uses this master narrative in reference to specific cities or regions prior to violent reprisals. Regime messaging often cites the use of force and military intervention as means to establish “security and stability,” a phrase frequently repeated in the regime media outlet SANA.<sup>15,16,17,18</sup> By monitoring regime-sponsored media outlets for phrases that highlight this narrative’s themes—e.g., “the Aleppo Military School,” “1982,” “Al-Qaeda terrorists”—in reference to specific regions of the country, analysts may be able to better pinpoint when and where regime-backed violence is likely to transpire.

The regime has relied upon this narrative to carefully cultivate an image of itself as a stable bulwark of secularism against political chaos and religious extremism. This messaging has been central to the Al-Asad regime’s domestic and foreign brand for decades. As a result, any deviation or decline in Regime Insiders’ use of this messaging strategy could signal efforts to rebrand itself and appeal to new bases of support. Analysts could monitor for these deviations or declines to better anticipate changes in how the regime attempts to consolidate support for itself. For example, the regime could attempt to promote itself as a vanguard of economic development (per Bashar Al-Asad’s economic liberalization strategies in the early 2000s), as a crusader against corruption, or as a leader along sectarian lines.<sup>19</sup> Regime messaging deviating from the “Stabilizing Ba’ath” master narrative may also be an indicator that the regime no longer sees value in appealing to the fears of Syria’s many religious minorities and is downplaying its role as a protector of secularism.

# "Promise of a New Syria"

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
Regime Insiders	➤ Rural Sunnis	Kurds
Wealthy Urbanites	➤ Urban Working Classes	Alawites

This master narrative originated among Rural Sunnis, many of whom migrated to cities and transmitted it to the Urban Working Class.<sup>1</sup> Although this narrative resonates with some religious and ethnic minorities, subscribers to this narrative are predominantly Sunni.<sup>2</sup>

### MASTER NARRATIVE: "PROMISE OF A NEW SYRIA"

**NARRATIVE:** Despite suffering for generations under Damascus elites' greed, the Syrian people were still able to prosper through hard work and ingenuity. This changed when the Al-Asads came to power in 1970. Their rule ushered in boundless corruption; today, drought starves Syria's people while the wealthy in Damascus blissfully gorge themselves in outdoor cafes. Syrians must work two jobs just to earn a living and cannot get a phone line, schooling, or a job interview without bribing the right officials. Meanwhile, Bashar Al-Asad pays lip service to fighting corruption while crushing innocent voices of dissent with unflinching violence. Anyone who speaks against the regime disappears at the hands of the *mukhabarat* (secret police), or is beaten in the streets by the *Shabiha* (pro-regime thugs). This corrupt reign of terror must end. The Arab world from Egypt to Libya has stood up to tyrants and Syria too must have its liberation. Citizens across Syria must tell the world of their suffering and rise up to topple the regime. Only if all Syrians raise their voices and their fists will they attain the prosperity and freedom that has been denied to them for so long.

ANALYSIS: This master narrative is one of two narratives held by Al-Asad regime opponents, and reflects deep-seated anger at the regime's corruption and violence [see also: "Alawite Infidels"]. As this is an evolving narrative, the wide range of anti-regime voices espousing this master narrative do not have a unified vision for Syria's future should the regime fall. This narrative's lack of a concrete and specific long-term vision for Syria's future has contributed to heated debate among opposition groups.<sup>3,4</sup> The anger underlying this narrative can be traced to the 1970s and Hafez Al-Asad's first decade in power. By 1977, corruption was so pervasive that Al-Asad formed an anti-corruption committee in an attempt to repair the regime's image.<sup>5</sup> This effort—like others that followed in 1979, 1980, 2000, and 2009—failed to effect real change, and fueled popular resentment of the regime.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Anger at the regime's corruption is particularly pronounced among poor rural Syrians: a bulge in Syria's youth population, a multi-year drought in the agricultural regions of eastern Syria, and rapid inflation from market liberalization policies under Bashar Al-Asad have exacerbated economic disparities.<sup>9</sup> The regime's violence and repression further intensifies subscribers' anger at the regime for allegedly stealing scarce resources.<sup>10</sup> These combined grievances gave rise to years of simmering tensions, in which handfuls of subscribers publicly called for reform despite the risk of regime reprisals. The Arab Spring movement accelerated the evolution of this narrative, transforming subscribers' demands from "reform" to "regime change," and emboldening thousands of subscribers to publicly espouse this narrative.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, an escalating cycle of demonstrations and government reprisals was sparked in February 2011 by the torture of several Syrian young adults accused of vandalizing posters with slogans from the Arab Spring.<sup>12,13</sup> This emphasis in regime change places the narrative in direct conflict with the "Stabilizing Ba'ath" master narrative. Beginning in March 2011, this conflict gave rise to widespread violence and created a group of subscribers dedicated to overthrowing the regime. Expatriate Syrian activists, many of whom are located in Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have adopted this narrative in an effort to gain support from the international community.

Key influencers use themes in this narrative to unify Syrians against the regime by invoking shared grievances of violence and corruption. Burhan Ghalioun, president of the Syrian National Council, used this narrative to rally opposition in a speech at the "Friends of Syria" conference in February 2012: "Our goal is a free, independent, sovereign Syria... The Syrian people do not want a government that, rather than punishing corruption, revels in it... the revolution of our youth in Syria has brought us to this moment of truth. The time has come for us... rebuild the spirit of national unity and fraternity that the regime has torn apart through its violence and corruption."<sup>14</sup> The Local Coordination Committees in Syria, an informal network of opposition groups, also used this narrative in a March 2012 Facebook post: "Syrians have bravely refused all ...[efforts by the regime] to divert them away from liberation and highest objectives for toppling the regime, tyranny, and corruption and to establish a state of freedom, citizenship, and dignity."<sup>15</sup> Aside from calls for a government that protects human and civil rights, opposition groups have not coalesced around a specific agenda for a post-Al-Asad state.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

US messaging focusing on shared values of human dignity, freedom, and national unity are likely to be well received by subscribers, and may help US communicators win allies among opposition figures. For example, communicators could stress that the US supports groups committed to welcoming minorities into a democratically elected government. In April 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton demonstrated this messaging strategy at the

Istanbul "Friends of the Syrian People" conference: "We want to send a very clear message to the people inside Syria ... the international community stands with you and we want to see an inclusive democratic Syria where members of every ethnic group, every religion are given a chance to be full citizens."<sup>16</sup> Messaging highlighting inclusivity and tolerance, such as this one, might help undermine influencers who advocate sectarian violence [see also: "Alawite Infidels"]. Subscribers are also likely to be responsive to messaging that acknowledges the importance of rights and privileges that they believe have been withheld by the regime, such as equal access to education and jobs, responsive government bureaucracy, and efficient public services. US messaging that articulates a specific vision for Syria's future could, however, alienate subscribers since the "right" structure for a post-Asad government remains a contested topic among the opposition. Most do not share a vision for Syria's future government and society beyond the removal of the regime, and US messaging laying out a clear vision for new, reformed Syrian governance may be filtered through a lens of suspicion among broad Syrian audiences [see: "Conspiracies All Around"].

Communicators could draw upon this master narrative's stance against corruption in order to counter the "Stabilizing Ba'ath" narrative. For example, communicators could highlight the ways in which regime corruption has hurt Syrian businesses by pointing to the relative prosperity of neighboring non-oil exporting Arab countries, such as Jordan or Turkey. Messaging that draws attention to how the regime has slowed economic growth by isolating Syria from foreign markets and limited trade opportunities for Syrian business owners are compelling counterexamples to the claims of the "Stabilizing Ba'ath" master narrative. Juxtaposing Syria's agrarian and urban economic hardships with the Arab world's comparative prosperity could further undermine the regime's claims to have brought prosperity to average Syrians [see: "Stabilizing Ba'ath"].

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Analysts can assess how this narrative evolves over time to understand whether more specific aspirations, objectives, policy agendas, and desired end states emerge and take hold. These changes could reflect that opposition groups are coalescing around a more concrete agenda and could help analysts better anticipate which, if any, opposition groups will play an instrumental role in a post-Al-Asad Syria. For example, if key influencers insert Sunni symbols into this narrative, it might indicate that those key influencers are beginning to perceive less value in welcoming minority participation in the Sunni-dominated opposition. Similarly, if key influencers from multiple factions consistently highlight specific individuals to lead Syria in place of the Al-Asads, it could signify that these individuals are likely to wield outsized influence in Syrian policymaking should the Al-Asad regime fall. Monitoring whether this narrative evolves to articulate clear goals for Syria beyond the removal of the Al-Asad regime could help analysts map potential futures for Syrian domestic and foreign policies.

In a country that has been dominated by urban elites for decades, this master narrative pits rural and working class Syrians against middle- and upper-class residents of Syria's cities. Analysts could monitor how key influencers invoke this narrative in order to gain insight into opposition key influencers' strategies to gain power. Key influencers highlighting the alleged injustices of corruption and wealth concentration in Damascus and Aleppo tap into deeply held rural grievances, suggesting an intention to rally supporters in opposition to urban elites. Conversely, key influencers that downplay urban prosperity and disparage the Al-Asad

regime's rural origins may be attempting to consolidate an urban base of support. In this way, changes in this narrative's usage could coincide with spikes or lulls in tension between Syria's urban and rural classes.

# "Alawite Infidels"

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
Regime Insiders	➤ Rural Sunnis	Kurds
Wealthy Urbanites	Urban Working Classes	Alawites

This master narrative is held by Rural Sunnis, who are more pious than their urban counterparts. A small but growing fraction of Rural Sunnis express extremely conservative religious views. Many have suffered at the hands of the Alawite-dominated security services. Moreover, from 2006-2011 approximately sixty percent of Syria suffered the severest drought in recorded history, forcing many Rural Sunnis to urban centers such as Homs to find employment.<sup>1</sup> In the cities many rural migrants found platforms from which to vent their deep-seated frustrations toward the regime and the Alawite sect to which it is linked.

### MASTER NARRATIVE: "ALAWITE INFIDELS"

NARRATIVE: Since 661 and the reign of Caliph Mu'awiyah, Syria has been a Sunni nation. But Sunni rule ended when the French betrayed the Emir of Mecca in 1920. The French made Nusayris (Alawites) their lapdogs, who then connived their way into power after the French left. For Syria to be dominated by this group of uncultured, uneducated hill people is bad enough. Worse, the Nusayri are apostate infidels who pretend to be Muslim by calling themselves Alawites, "the followers of Ali." The heresy was only compounded when Hafez Al-Asad declared himself, and by extension all Nusayris, to be Muslim in the 1973 Syrian Constitution. As could be expected, Nusayris have abused their power, stealing from the successful and brutally repressing the innocent. Sunnis will never forget how Nusayris butchered tens of thousands of innocent Sunnis at Hama in 1982. After decades it is now time for Syria's true peoples to take their vengeance against the infidels: the Nusayri regime will be pushed from power and those who support them will be pushed into their graves. Then, Syria's natural order will be restored with Sunnis ruling the country in the name of God.

ANALYSIS: This narrative reflects sectarian animosity toward Alawites for their religious beliefs and political and economic dominance, and advocates for violence against Alawites. Subscribers argue that Alawites are heretics, pointing to Sunni Muslim scholars from the fourteenth century who condemned them as the rightful target of holy wars and to Ottoman and Egyptian rulers who unsuccessfully tried to convert Alawites to mainstream Sunni Islam for four centuries.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, key influencers deploying this narrative often refer to Alawites as "Nusayris," disputing Alawites' claims to be Muslim or "the followers of Ali." Subscribers view the Alawites' rise to power as illegitimate for two reasons: First, subscribers assert that the French colonial policy of "Divide and Rule" allowed a network of Alawites to fill high ranking positions in the army, which ultimately led to Hafez Al-Asad's 1970 seizure of power.<sup>3</sup> Second, subscribers disparage Alawites for maintaining their hold on power through corruption and violence and cite how the nominally secular regime has overwhelmingly promoted Alawites to leadership positions in the military and *mukhabarat* (secret police).<sup>4,5</sup> This anger is reinforced by subscribers' views that Alawites, who historically lived on the economic margins via subsistence farming, are unjustly ensconced at the top of Syria's economic hierarchy. Collectively, these grievances spur subscribers to call for sectarian violence against Alawites. As such, this master narrative competes with the non-sectarian "Promise of a New Syria" master narrative. The conflict between these two narratives will play a critical role in determining whether the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising is fought as a political struggle or devolves into sectarian civil war [see: "Promise of a New Syria"]. The violent and heavily religious themes of this narrative also present an opportunity for foreign jihadists to play a role in the opposition and reinforce the themes of the Al-Qaeda master narrative "Violent Jihad" [see: Master Narratives Special Report: Al-Qaeda: "Violent Jihad"]. For example, one Syrian opposition group calls itself the Al-Bara ibn Malik martyrs brigade, a name used by an Al-Qaeda offshoot in Iraq that refers to the seventh-century Sunni martyr known for fighting apostates.

Key influencers use this master narrative to encourage Sunni Muslims to exact sectarian reprisals. In a July 2011 *Wesal TV* clip, Syrian Sunni cleric Adnan Al-'Ar'our declared: "As you know, the [Sunni] Muslims constitute 85 to 86 percent of the Syria population. Therefore, if we overcome [the regime], the punishment will be harsh and painful. I am referring specifically to the Alawite sect. Those Alawites who remained neutral will not be harmed. Anyone who supported us, will be on our side and will be treated as a citizen just like us. As for those who violated all that is sacred, by Allah, we shall mince them in meat grinders, and we shall feed their flesh to the dogs."<sup>6</sup> In March 2012, a demonstration leader in Homs drew on this narrative to engage the crowd in a call-and-response, shouting: "God, avenge us of these criminals! God, avenge the innocent! ...We are all jihadists! Homs has made its decision! We want to exterminate the Alawites!"<sup>7</sup> It is likely this messaging resonates with many protestors within Syria. International observers reported crowds in Homs shouting: "The Alawite to the coffin and the Christian to Beirut," during the outset of the uprising.<sup>8</sup> This narrative demonstrates the potential to incite widespread popular aggression against Alawites.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Pointing out that many Alawites have no ties to the regime and have remained impoverished farmers living alongside Sunnis for decades could be used to discourage this master narrative's call for sectarian strife. Pointing to examples of Alawite participation in the uprising, and praising Alawites for their courage in doing so, is likely to be well received by opposition audiences as most subscribers understand that Alawites join the opposition at great personal

risk. Additionally, many members of the opposition assert that the regime exaggerates this master narrative's resonance. These Syrians argue that the regime does this to depict the regime as fighting Muslim extremists, lending credence to claims to be the nation's stabilizers, and legitimizing extreme violence against the opposition [see: "Stabilizing Ba'ath"]. By supporting the perception that this master narrative is less widely held than the regime asserts, US communicators could help to undermine calls for sectarian violence.

This narrative demonstrates how sensitive the topic of religion in general is in Syria. Even passing references to a particular key influencers' sect or beliefs could be construed as a tacit acceptance of one sect's agenda over another. Syrians' religion plays a significant role in determining social identity, political outlook, and available economic opportunities. As such, Syria's embedded sectarian tensions offer US communicators little room to discuss religion without aggravating tensions.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Monitoring the conflict between this narrative and the "Promise of a New Syria" master narrative can help analysts identify ideological schisms within the opposition movement. Since a March 2012 defeat in Homs, Syrian opposition groups have increasingly relied on Islamist rhetoric to recruit and motivate followers.<sup>9,10,11</sup> This has the potential to create rifts with subscribers to "Promise of a New Syria" who also advocate regime change, but on non-sectarian grounds. For example, in December 2011, Alawite anti-regime activist Mohammed Salah asserted that Syria's opposition must censure sectarian violence, stating: "Those who do not condemn the crimes may just as well be partners in the crimes."<sup>12</sup> He also collaborated with Syrian National Council President Burhan Ghalioun to draft a statement calling for a reduction in sectarian violence. Statements such as these could create rifts with Rural Sunnis who subscribe to "Alawite Infidels." The divergent visions for Syria's future depicted in the "Promise of a New Syria" and "Alawite Infidels" master narratives suggests that the conflict between these two narratives is likely to persist even if a regime change does occur.

Analysts could monitor Islamist organizations that reference this master narrative in order to identify violent extremist organizations attempting to infiltrate the Syrian opposition. The regime's repression of Syrian Islamist groups means these groups do not typically have well organized messaging strategies, presenting opportunities for foreign jihadist influence.<sup>13</sup> For example, *Kavkaz Center*, a news portal of the Caucasian Emirate which aims to establish an Islamist state in the Caucasuses, invoked the themes of this master narrative in a September 2011 article: "It is to be mentioned in this context that the Alawite sect is a kind of extreme Shiite heresy, but in even more disgusting and horrible forms. Alawites hate Muslims, requiring them to abandon the worship to Allah. They declared God the fourth righteous Caliph Ali (ra). Their cult was involved in a mixture of elements of Islam, Christianity and pagan beliefs of the East."<sup>14</sup> This master narrative creates a pathway for foreign jihadist key influencers to tap into the grievances of Syrian opposition forces to gain influence and promote radical Islamist agendas.

# "Alawite Survival"

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

### Powerbrokers

Regime Insiders  
Wealthy Urbanites

### Mainstream

Rural Sunnis  
Urban Working Classes

### Minorities

Kurds  
➤ **Alawites**

This master narrative is held by Alawites throughout Syria. The Alawite community saw its economic and social status rise in the 1970s under the secular Alawite Al-Asad regime, with many families moving from the destitute mountains of the Latakia region to Damascus and Aleppo. Alawites are disproportionately represented in the military and security services, especially in the higher ranks; estimates suggest that two-thirds of all Syria's generals are Alawite.<sup>1,2</sup>

## MASTER NARRATIVE: "ALAWITE SURVIVAL"

**NARRATIVE:** Consigned to Syria's rocky hinterlands, those who follow the teachings of Ali barely scraped out a living under Sunni domination. Impoverished Alawites sold their daughters to rich Sunnis in the cities just to feed themselves, and Ottomans massacred entire Alawite communities. But in the mid-twentieth century the Alawites rose to power through the superior achievement of their people in the *Troupes Speciales du Levant* (Levantine Special Forces), and have rightfully ruled the nation for half a century since. Alawites could finally protect themselves from Sunni Muslims—Hafez Al-Asad put the Muslim Brotherhood in its place at Hama, defending Syria against the extremists that massacred Alawites at Aleppo in 1979. Today, backwards Sunnis have reared their heads once again, seeking to wipe out all who do not conform to their interpretation of Islam. Alawites are threatened on all sides by Sunni jihadists. The only hope for Alawites to survive is to unite and kill the extremists who seek to massacre them. If they do not, the Alawite people will be banished back to the mountains or perish altogether.

ANALYSIS: Rooted in centuries of sectarian violence and persecution, this master narrative reflects deeply entrenched fears among Alawites that their people are on the brink of annihilation at the hands of an aggressive Sunni majority. These fears are reinforced by this master narrative's stark opposition to the "Alawite Infidels" master narrative, a tension that has historically translated into outbursts of sectarian strife [see: "Alawite Infidels"]. Despite its overt support for the secular "Stabilizing Ba'ath" master narrative, the Al-Asad regime also uses this master narrative to rally Alawites through references to historical persecution [see: "Stabilizing Ba'ath"]. Fleeing persecution from Sunnis, Alawites were relegated to mountainous rural areas and occupied the lowest socioeconomic strata of Syrian society for centuries.<sup>3</sup> As they have for centuries, many Syrian Sunnis continue to characterize Alawites as heretics. Alawites' situation improved under the French Mandate as many Alawites received an education and a steady income for the first time through their service in the French-Syrian army, the *Troupes Speciales du Levant*.<sup>4</sup> Hafez Al-Asad's rise to power in 1970 further improved many Alawites' socioeconomic standing. Despite this increased prosperity, centuries of poverty and disenfranchisement have instilled an Alawite worldview in which they are perpetually persecuted and threatened by Sunnis. Subscribers point to the many Alawites who were assassinated during the civil war between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s and early 1980s as evidence of this persecution.<sup>5</sup> Subscribers view the 1982 siege of Hama—during which the Syrian military killed 10,000 to 40,000 people, including many civilians—as a critical moment ensuring Alawite survival, and evidence of the need to respond to perceived Sunni aggression with uncompromising violence.<sup>6,7</sup> As a result, subscribers to this narrative often advocate pre-emptive violence against Sunnis, as this master narrative justifies these acts as essential for Alawite survival.<sup>8,9</sup> However, these pre-emptive acts of violence incite Sunni grievances articulated in the "Alawite Infidels" narrative, thus creating a cycle of sectarian reprisal between Alawites and Sunnis.

Key influencers fan the tensions contained in this narrative by painting the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising as a movement of Muslim extremists similar to those the regime fought at Hama in 1982. In a September 2011 editorial published in the government newspaper, *Al-Thawrah*, author Ali Nasrallah wrote: "A[n]...armed group would appear and use extremist religious rhetoric... the Syrians experienced this kind of rhetoric in the early 1980s...this is a culture that the Syrians knew in the early 1980s and for which they paid a costly price.... Today, Syria is witnessing an advanced version of what it rejected 30 years ago.... But the new thing about the advanced version is the issuance of the calls of *takfir* [Muslims declaring other Muslims infidel] and sectarian instigation."<sup>10</sup> In an August 2011 editorial, Nasrallah alleged that Muslim clerics supporting the uprising issued *fatwas* that "legalized killing one-third of the Syrian people so that the other two-thirds might live happily according to the *takfiri fatwa*."<sup>11</sup> This type of messaging is designed to incite subscribers' fears that the uprising is an existential threat.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Referring to the Al-Asad regime as a "minority" or "clique" is likely to underscore Alawites' minority status, and risk inflaming conflict between subscribers to the "Alawite Infidels" and "Alawite Survival" master narratives. Even seemingly benign references to demographic figures that demonstrate that Alawites are a minority could be construed as tacit US support for Sunni majority rule. This master narrative underscores how any discussion of minority-majority dynamics could stir Alawites' fears of the Sunni majority as well as Sunni grievances associated with being a disenfranchised majority, feeding the cycle of sectarian reprisal. Instead, com-

municators could focus on aspirations that are broadly shared across Syrian audiences, such as freedom from repression, protection of human rights, and curtailment of corruption [see: "Promise of a New Syria"].

Encouraging a vision of a post-Asad Syria in which future regimes establish protections for Alawites may help to convince Alawites that their survival is not dependent on the Al-Asad regime. One way to do this would be to highlight conciliatory statements made by the Syrian National Council toward Alawites indicating they are "extending a hand to the Alawite community," assuring Alawites they have a place in a post-Asad Syria, and deriding the regime for inciting sectarian tension.<sup>12</sup> Most Alawites believe they are "stuck" in Syria should the regime fall—Syria is home to the largest Alawite community in the world—and so, many believe that armed defense is their only option for survival.<sup>13</sup> Messaging that encourages Alawites to believe they have other options could be used to make incremental contributions to attenuating cycles of sectarian violence.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

Simultaneous spikes in key influencers' use of both this narrative and the "Alawite Infidels" master narrative could be a precursor to outbreaks of sectarian violence. The interaction between these narratives underlies one of the most volatile socio-political dynamics in Syria. Analysts could monitor instances in which Alawites use symbols from this narrative to identify when sectarian violence might occur. Celebration of this master narrative's key symbols—such as the 1979 attack on Alawites at the Aleppo artillery school, the Muslim Brotherhood, or fallen Syrian soldiers—often coincides with increases in regime violence against Sunni civilians. Use of these symbols would warrant additional attention if Sunni Syrians respond with symbols from the "Alawite Infidels" master narrative, e.g., "infidel," "Nusayri," or "Hama." Monitoring public statements for symbols from these two narratives in conjunction with local sociopolitical dynamics such as local political divides, sectarian rifts, or prior instances of violence can augment forecasts of where and when sectarian violence might occur.

The frequency with which the Alawite community uses this narrative relative to the "Stabilizing Ba'ath" narrative can help analysts illuminate Alawites' relationship with other religious minorities in Syria. Messaging drawn from this narrative resonates with Alawites but not with other minorities and its use suggests Alawites might be isolating themselves from other sects. On the other hand, if Alawites more frequently invoke the secular "Stabilizing Ba'ath" narrative, it might signal an effort to maintain ties with Christian, Druze, and Isma'ili minorities. By tracking the frequency with which Alawites use these two competing narratives, analysts can gain foresight into whether Alawites seek to maintain alliances with other religious minorities or are rallying along sectarian lines solely to defend Alawite interests. As the Alawite community is highly networked, and some—though not all—have access to significant amounts of arms, political isolation could lay the groundwork for lasting sectarian conflict.

# “Kurdish Plight”

## AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Powerbrokers	Mainstream	Minorities
Regime Insiders	Rural Sunnis	➤ <b>Kurds</b>
Wealthy Urbanites	Urban Working Classes	Alawites

This master narrative resonates with Syrian Kurds, who are concentrated in northeastern Syria and make up approximately ten percent of Syria’s population. Kurdish political parties have historically been fragmented, and are often in disagreement on the best way to advocate for Kurdish rights. Historically, Syrian Kurds have not formed cohesive political organizations. Since 2004, thousands of Syrian Kurds have fled regime crackdowns to refugee camps in Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

### MASTER NARRATIVE: “KURDISH PLIGHT”

NARRATIVE: Kurds, proud descendants of the Medes, migrated to the Al-Hasakah region of northeastern Syria to cultivate the fertile farmland in the early 1900s. Disregarding that the Kurds had established their own home in Al-Hasakah, the French bound these Kurdish lands to Arab Syria in 1916 without regard for the will of the Kurdish people. Both old and new Syrian constitutions pay no attention to this fact, identifying all of Syria as a part of the Arab nation. Kurds were and still are treated as despised foreigners. Their language and identity are outlawed and their people have been abused by generations of Syrian rulers, subjected to arrest without grounds, torture, and murder. Now the fall of Saddam Hussein and the emergence of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq give Syrian Kurds new hope: Syrian Kurds must claim their right to an autonomous West Kurdistan. Kurdistan will always be more important than who reigns in Damascus, and Kurds must make their voices heard to shape Syria’s future. If Kurds succeed, they will regain the right to speak and publish in their own tongue, they will shape the future of a truly Kurdish West Kurdistan, and they will have the freedom to determine what is best for the Kurdish people.

ANALYSIS: This master narrative reflects Kurdish perceptions of long-standing oppression by the Syrian Government, and ambitions for regional autonomy. Kurdish communities in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran share narratives of Kurdish nationalism and persecution, and have sought an autonomous Kurdish nation-state since the late 1940s [see: Master Narratives Country Report: Turkey, "The Lausanne Betrayal" and "Restoring the Kurdish Homeland"]. As in many other Kurdish communities, Syrian Kurdish grievances focus on citizenship, language, and culture. Syrian subscribers point to the August 1962 special census in the Al-Hasakah province, in which approximately 120,000 Kurds lost their Syrian citizenship, as a key symbol of Kurdish persecution.<sup>2</sup> Both the Kurdish language and culture are subject to severe restrictions in Syria—for example, teaching the Kurdish language is punishable by imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> Since the establishment of Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq in 2003, subscribers have voiced this master narrative more frequently and openly, using it to agitate for Syrian Kurdish rights and autonomy. This master narrative gained further momentum in the wake of 2004 riots following a soccer match in Qamishli, in which demonstrators raised Kurdish national flags and yelled pro-Kurdistan slogans, ultimately toppling a statue of Hafez Al-Asad and weathering a regime reprisal that killed dozens of Kurds.<sup>4</sup>

Kurdish autonomy remains the highest political priority to subscribers of this master narrative, and they filter their perspectives on political actors and national conflicts through this lens. Historically, the regime has been the primary obstacle to this goal, with many Kurdish leaders highlighting democratic rule in Syria as a necessary precondition for Kurdish rights.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, subscribers point to the regime's alleged assassination of popular Kurdish leader Mashaal Tammo as the "screw in the regime's coffin," galvanizing Kurdish resistance against regime leaders in Damascus.<sup>6</sup> This resistance to the regime, however, has not translated into direct Kurdish participation in the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising. Many Kurds believe their own campaign for rights and autonomy stands apart from the anti-regime uprising, with some citing the regime's 2011 offer of citizenship to 50,000 Kurds as evidence of progress in agitating for Kurdish rights. Moreover, many subscribers to this master narrative remain unconvinced that their situation would necessarily improve in a post-Asad context, contributing to a struggle between regime and opposition key influencers to secure Kurdish support.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

Kurdish key influencers invoke themes from this master narrative to advocate Kurdish autonomy while offering cautious support for the opposition. For example, in a March 2012 *Al-Jazeera* interview, Abd-Al-Hakim-Bashar, a member of the Syrian Kurdish National Council General Secretariat, said: "The Kurdish movement wants to abolish the Ba'athists' heritage and build a new Syria...[Kurds] call for a secular, politically decentralized system of governance capable of ensuring religious freedom, equality between men and women, and the Kurds' right to self-determination based on the unity of Syria—land and people...we have reached many points of agreement with the Syrian National Council but still have points of disagreement which we hope will be resolved in the near future."<sup>11</sup> Other Kurdish key influencers use this narrative to depict Syrian opposition protests as a distraction from Kurdish priorities. In March 2012, Aldar Xelil, founder of the Democratic Union Party, the Syrian wing of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), stated: "...There is no organizational decision [to join anti-regime protests], but it may be that sometimes young people get involved on their own in activities that are not good. We oppose the display of flags that are not related to the Kurds. Our goal is not rule; our goal is the rights of the Kurds. Let those people hold their demonstrations either before or after our demonstrations."<sup>12</sup> Kurdish key influencers using this master narrative typically subordinate all other national issues to Kurdish rights.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATORS

Syrian Kurdish audiences generally view US intervention in Iraq positively, as it led to the downfall of Saddam Hussein and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Communicators could highlight economic and political success the Kurdistan Regional Government has achieved with US assistance to build rapport with Syrian Kurds. To build on this messaging strategy, US communicators could highlight that the Kurdistan Regional Government achieved autonomy through power-sharing between rival factions and multiparty elections. This would most likely be well-received by subscribers who strongly advocate regional peace and democratic institutions.

Kurds identify first and foremost as Kurds, despite Syrian restrictions on expressing Kurdish identity. Audiences are likely to respond positively to messaging that celebrates or praises Kurdish identity, especially as many are unaccustomed to non-Kurds explicitly acknowledging and celebrating Kurdish identity or culture. Expressing these sentiments in the Kurdish language is likely to be especially well received. This messaging strategy is best deployed in private forums, however, as celebration of Kurdish culture is a redline for many governments in the region surrounding Syria.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANALYSTS

This master narrative provides insight into political grappling among Kurdish key influencers, in which various parties and groups compete to promote their visions of how to achieve Kurdish rights. For example, since 2011, tensions have been on the rise between the Iraqi Kurdistan-backed Syrian Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The former calls for constitutional recognition and the lifting of anti-Kurdish laws; the latter argues Kurds must demand not just autonomy but democratic rule throughout all of Syria.<sup>13,14,15</sup> Because Kurdish key influencers seeking to build constituent support frame their political goals through different and often competing versions of this master narrative, the way individual key influencers tailor this master narrative in public messaging can help analysts dissect their political objectives, and how they compete with one another for authority and public support.

This master narrative can help analysts decipher how Syrian Kurds are likely to interpret messaging and events emanating from Kurdish key influencers and movements outside of Syria. For example, subscribers to this master narrative are predisposed to be more sympathetic to the gains made by Iraqi Kurds focused on strengthening their regional autonomy rather than secession movements such as those in Turkey.<sup>16</sup> This master narrative also suggests that disruptive events associated with organizations such as the Kurdish separatist group PKK may not have as significant an impact on Syrian Kurdish activities, while events associated with the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government may be watched more closely. By monitoring how this narrative is used in response to messaging or events in neighboring countries, analysts can better ascertain Syrian Kurds' receptivity to foreign advocates for Kurdish rights.

# Appendix & Sourcing



# Syria Audience Segmentation

*The audience segmentation below is optimized for surfacing the most potent master narratives in Syria and for delineating the boundaries between these narratives.*

## POWERBROKERS

### Regime Insiders

Regime Insiders constitute a small group of intensely loyal regime supporters, many of whom have direct familial ties to the Al-Asad regime and have been in power since Hafez Al-Asad took power in 1970. This group also includes the elite units of the military, Republican Guard, and intelligence services. Regime Insiders have prospered under the Al-Asad regime, both economically and socially, and see little hope for themselves in a post-Asad regime. Most Regime Insiders view themselves as sophisticated and cosmopolitan and many, like Bashar Al-Asad, have pursued higher education. Many Regime Insiders come from the Alawite sect and include notable figures such as Rami Makhoul, a cousin of Bashar Al-Asad. However, this audience segment also includes Sunnis, Christians, Druze, and Isma'ilis who have demonstrated loyalty to the Al-Asad family.

### Wealthy Urbanites

The Wealthy Urbanites of Syria are concentrated in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo. This audience segment consists of two primary groups: an entrenched Sunni and Christian business class that has existed since the Ottoman Empire and a modern group of business elite that has profited from dealing directly with the Al-Asad regime. Wealthy Urbanites largely see the uprising as a movement of the rural and poor and express support for the Al-Asad regime. The Wealthy Urbanites are apt to see themselves as more liberal, modern, and sophisticated than less wealthy Syrians, and as a result, draw clear boundaries between socioeconomic classes.

## MAINSTREAM

### Rural Sunnis

Syria's rural population constitutes roughly fifty percent of Syria's total population. The vast majority of this rural population is Sunni, and they tend to be more pious than their urban counterparts. The Hafez Al-Asad regime generally enjoyed the support of Rural Sunnis; even though their religious beliefs were different, Hafez Al-Asad and Rural Sunnis shared a common rural upbringing. Rural Sunnis' standard of living also improved substantially under Hafez Al-Asad, primarily through government transfer payments and land grants redistributed from wealthy landowners. However, Rural Sunnis have not fared well under Bashar Al-Asad, who is perceived to be a Western-educated rich Damascene elite who shares little in common with Rural Sunnis. This view is confirmed by Bashar's efforts to implement liberalized economic policies and shift government largesse away from the agrarian sector, where many rural poor work. A multi-year drought in the northern and eastern part of the country has exacerbated Rural Sunni hardship, and has driven masses of suffering farmers into cities such as Homs to find employment. Rural Sunnis express grievances over economic stagnation and regime repression and corruption. This audience segment represents the main body of participants,

both in terms of leadership and grassroots demonstrators, in the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising. The majority of Rural Sunnis' messaging calls for non-sectarian opposition to the regime in order to install some form of democratic government. However, a small but growing percentage of Rural Sunnis express extremely conservative religious views and see the uprising as an opportunity to punish all Alawites and establish an Islamist government.

### Urban Working Classes

The Urban Working Classes consist of shop owners, day-laborers, cab drivers, small merchants, factory workers, teachers, and lower ministry officials who primarily live in Damascus, Aleppo, and other larger cities. Although this audience segment is largely Sunni, it also includes some Christians and members of other minority sects. Historically, the Al-Asad regime has enjoyed strong support from this audience segment as Ba'athist policies and expansion of government brought new jobs and opportunities. However, many of the poorer parts of this audience segment began to express discontent with Ba'ath policies in the 1980s as the government was seen to do little to improve the sluggish economy.

## MINORITIES

### Kurds

Kurds represent roughly ten percent of the population and are highly concentrated in the northeastern region of Syria, known as Al-Hasakah. Syrian Kurds have been historically repressed and discriminated against by the Ba'ath regime's pan-Arab ideology. Until the events of the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising, Kurds represented the most adamant opposition to the regime. However, the Al-Asad regime sought to placate the Kurds in an effort to dissuade them from joining the uprising by granting several hundred thousand Kurds citizenship in 2011. Additionally, many Kurds fear that their community will suffer if an Islamist government were to take power should the Al-Asad regime fall. Most Syrian Kurds seek autonomy from an Arab Damascene-led Syrian government, no matter whether it is led by the Al-Asad family or a new opposition leader.

### Alawites

The Alawite religious sect—'the followers of Ali'—is an esoteric, heterodox offshoot of Shi'a Islam whose followers have historically been persecuted by Sunni Muslims as heretics and infidels. Like mainstream Shi'as, Alawites believe that Ali was the rightful heir to the Prophet Muhammad, but Alawites also imbue Ali with a divine essence. Furthermore, Alawism incorporates elements from other religions; Alawites believe in reincarnation and sometimes celebrate Christmas. These beliefs led French Christian missionaries in the Ottoman period to believe Alawites were lost Christians. The Alawite community saw their economic and social status rise starting in the 1970s under the secular Alawite Al-Asad regime, and many Alawite families have moved from the destitute mountains of the Latakia region to the more prosperous urban areas of Damascus and Aleppo. Alawites are disproportionately represented in the military and security services, especially in the higher ranks; official statistics do not exist but estimates state that two-thirds of all generals in Syria's military are Alawite and most Alawite families have at least one member in the military. Alawites tend to be politically aligned with other minorities, particularly Christians, who have benefitted from the protections of the Ba'athist Alawite regime. However, divisions within the Alawite community do exist—many rural Alawites have not benefitted politically or economically from the Al-Asad regime, and some have joined the opposition. Still, most Alawites support the regime out of fear of sectarian reprisals and a potentially Islamist government.

# Sources

## SYRIA MASTER NARRATIVES AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

### Regime Insiders

- Monitor 360 validated this audience segment with a number of subject matter experts. In an interview with Monitor 360, historian John Chalcraft described how members of the Al-Asad regime have used their power to enrich themselves through cronyism and corruption. Former ambassador David Newton explained that the regime is a “cult of personality” that maintains loyalty through corruption and bribery. David Newton highlighted that although many Regime Insiders are Alawites, there are a few Sunnis and other minority sects who remain steadfastly loyal to the regime. Anthropologist John Borneman asserted that the regime was able to maintain the loyalty of members from the Alawite community and members of other religious and ethnic communities—Christian, Sunni, Druze, and Kurd—through corruption and bribery. Author Elie Elhadj explained that members of the regime viewed themselves as being more sophisticated, educated, and modern than other Syrians. Political psychologist Jerrold Post explained how the regime has staffed the most critical positions in the military and intelligence services with family members so as to ensure loyalty. Monitor 360 interviews with David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Elie Elhadj (Author), 21 February 2012; Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012.
- A June 2011 article in *Reuters* highlighted how Bashar Al-Asad’s relatives, like his cousin Rami Makhlof, have profited from close relationships with the regime: “Before the uprising, Makhlof had been changing the structure of the his companies by inviting Syrian and gulf shareholders, they added. ‘Makhlof has been trying to improve his image and portray himself as a regional businessman,’ one of the sources said. A leading opposition figure dismissed the move to charity as a cosmetic attempt to placate a public angry at the widespread corruption he said Makhlof epitomized and doubted Makhlof would lose his position as one of the country’s power elite. ‘The news that Makhlof will be donating to the Syrian people money he obtained by corruption and from monopolies granted to him because of his family links is comic,’ Walid al-Bunni told Reuters by phone from Damascus.” “Syria’s Makhlof Owes Fortune and Infamy to Assad,” *Reuters*. 16 June 2011: [www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/16/us-syria-tycoon-idUSTRE75F7Z420110616](http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/16/us-syria-tycoon-idUSTRE75F7Z420110616).
- A March 2012 article in the *Los Angeles Times* emphasized that Sunnis in the regime are Ba’ath party members who have remained loyal to the regime for over four decades. Additionally, many Sunni military members have remained loyal to the regime and not defected because they fear reprisals should the regime fall: “Though Sunnis account for the overwhelming majority of Syrian opposition to the Assad regime, there are other Sunnis within the Baath Party’s rank and file that would have few prospects in a post-Assad Syria and so have not opposed the status quo. Sunnis are reported to make up the bulk of the army’s mainly conscript force, but most of them have so far remained loyal to Assad. One factor bolstering the military’s continued support for the regime is fear of ‘de-Baathification’ along the lines of what happened in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.” “Five Best Friday Columns,” *Atlantic Wire*. 2 March 2012: <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/national/2012/03/five-best-friday-columns/49414/#>
- Nikolaos Van Dam asserted that since Hafez- Al-Asad first gained power, the Al-Asad regime has relied heavily upon Alawites to serve in high ranking military and political positions: “Not surprisingly...Alawi officers were strongly represented among the military members elected to the Central Committee. They included President Hafiz al-Asad and his most prominent Alawi supporters, including his brother Rif’at, ‘Ali Aslan (deputy chief of staff), ‘Ali Duba (chief of military intelligence) and ‘Ali Haydar (commander of the special forces)...In the case of the Syrian Ba’th regime, sectarianism might have been curbed successfully if party discipline had been continuous, if there had been no corruption, and if the party’s elite composition had been gradually widened,” Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba’th Party*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. Print. Pp. 102–103.
- A December 2011 article in *Foreign Policy* magazine highlighted how Regime Insiders are predominately Alawite and are a relatively small portion of the overall Syrian population: “Assad depends on the backing of key members of the Alawite clan, a quasi-Shiite group consisting of between 12 and 15 percent of Syria’s mostly Sunni population. The Alawites make up 70 percent of Syria’s career military, 80 percent of the officers, and nearly 100 percent of the elite Republican Guard and the 4th Armored Division, led by the president’s brother Maher. In a survey of country experts we conducted in 2007, we found that Assad’s key backers — those without whose support he would have to leave power—consisted of only about 3,600 members out of a population of about 23 million. That is less than 0.02 percent.” “Assessing Assad,” *Foreign Policy*. 20 December 2011: [www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/20/is\\_assad\\_crazy\\_or\\_just\\_ruthless](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/20/is_assad_crazy_or_just_ruthless).

### Wealthy Urbanites

- Monitor 360 validated this audience segment with a number of subject matter experts. In interviews with Monitor 360, journalist Stephen Starr and anthropologist John Borneman explained that a handful of historically wealthy Sunni families benefited from close relationships to the regime, and that they supported Hafez Al-Asad’s coup against the more socialist Salah Jadid in 1970. John Borneman emphasized the divided class structure of Syrian society and how the Wealthy Urbanites openly flaunt their money in the face of poorer Syrians. Syria expert Joshua

Landis explained that the historically wealthy Syrians are concentrated in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo and are fearful of the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising because many of its participants come from poorer backgrounds. Monitor 360 interviews with John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012.

- An October 2011 article in *Gulf News* asserted that wealthy businessmen in Aleppo and Damascus have close ties to the Al-Asad regime, favor the status quo, and have not joined demonstrations: “Damascus: Some Syrian cities have been persistently roiled by protests; but the two biggest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, have seen much smaller demonstrations because the cities’ business communities continue to favour the government, says Nabeel Sukkar, a former World Bank economist who now heads an economic consulting firm in Damascus... Syria’s big business elite is closely intertwined with the ruling Baath Party through financial and family ties. Disloyalty to the government can mean not only loss of lucrative government contracts, but political isolation and even jail... Sukkar says big business leaders are pragmatic. ‘They expect the unrest to end sooner or later. The regime is well entrenched. The army is certainly loyal to the government.’” “Business Elite Still Loyal to Syrian President,” *Gulf News*. 30 October 2011: [www.gulfnews.com/news/region/syria/business-elite-still-loyal-to-syrian-president-1.920402](http://www.gulfnews.com/news/region/syria/business-elite-still-loyal-to-syrian-president-1.920402).
- A March 2012 article published by the *Associated Press* highlighted that the Al-Asad regime derives support from the wealthy business community: “U.S. intelligence reports suggest President Bashar Assad commands a formidable army that is unlikely to turn on him, an inner circle that has stayed loyal and an elite class that still supports his rule. But none of the defectors thus far is regarded as belonging to Assad’s inner circle, not all who have abandoned him have joined the opposition, and there are no indications of a broader pattern of elites pulling their support for him. That includes not just Assad’s Alawite clan, but the minority Christians, Kurds and Druze, who all fear persecution under a possible Sunni Islamic rule.” “US officials: Loyal army, inner circle back Assad,” *Associated Press*. 10 March 2012: <http://news.yahoo.com/us-officials-loyal-army-inner-circle-back-assad-155141494.html>.
- An article published in the *Washington Post* in March 2012 asserted that the Al-Asad regime has retained the loyalty of the Wealthy Urbanites through close financial relationships: “as much as President Bashar al-Assad relies on family bonds and religious ties to hold his inner circle together, he also makes sure that his loyalists get a disproportionate share of Syria’s wealth. Andrew Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, described the financial arrangements as ‘the real mortar that holds the regime together.’ Assad loyalists are ‘heavily invested in the system,’ Tabler said, and economically disinclined to see it end... But wealthy Syrians have decades of practice of sheltering assets. Many rely on a secretive banking system in Lebanon in which numbered accounts may not even be associated with an individual’s name.” “How Assad wields wealth to keep regime intact” *Washington Post*. 8 March 2012: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/how-assad-uses-wealth-to-keep-regime-intact/2012/03/08/gIQAiTK7yR\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/how-assad-uses-wealth-to-keep-regime-intact/2012/03/08/gIQAiTK7yR_blog.html).

## Rural Sunnis

- Monitor 360 validated this audience segment with a number of subject matter experts. In interviews with Monitor 360, journalist Stephen Starr described the strong societal cleavages between urban and rural populations in Syria, and how Rural Sunnis were more likely to be critical of the regime. Journalist Nir Rosen asserted that although there were pockets of minorities, most rural inhabitants were Sunni and tended to be more religiously pious than their urban counterparts. Syria expert Joshua Landis described how a severe drought, economic inflation, and a youth bulge had created mass unemployment for rural Syrians, many of whom are Sunni. Research fellow Jonathan Spyer recounted that Sunni members of the opposition who were from rural backgrounds were more likely to espouse Islamist rhetoric and be religiously pious. Monitor 360 interviews Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012.
- In a March 2011 *Time* article Joshua Landis described the opposition movement as predominately poor and rural: “The centrality of Dara’a in the uprising may have limited its appeal to the urban elites. The dusty border city marked by tribal loyalties, poverty and Islamic conservatism may inspire Syria’s rural masses who suffer from poverty, a prolonged drought and joblessness, but mass demonstrations there have frightened Syria’s urban elites. Even those who share anger at repressions and hope for liberation with their rural counterparts still fear the poor and the threat of disorder...The last thing wealthy Aleppines, Homsis and Damascenes want is a revolution that brings to power a new political class based in the rural poor, or for the country to slip into chaos and possible civil war.” “As Protests Mount, Is there a Soft Landing for Syria?” *Time*. 25 March 2011: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2061364,00.html>.
- A March 2012 article in the *Economist* highlighted how regime violence against Sunnis in Homs has led the West to fear that that the opposition will resort to more extremist Islamic ideology: “Government troops showed no qualms about killing hundreds of civilians last month to crush armed rebels in Baba Amr, a poor Sunni district of Syria’s third-largest city, Homs. Since then the loosely organised rebel force that calls itself the Free Syrian Army has repeatedly withdrawn from other restless towns to spare them devastation... Particularly worrying is the growing involvement of Islamist extremists, who profit both from experience in Iraq and supply lines to Iraq’s lawless Sunni regions. They had initially been marginal to Syria’s uprising, but locals now echo American diplomats’ suspicions that their foothold has widened. Last month a newly formed Jihadi group, Jabhat al-Nusra (the Salvation Front), released a professional video claiming past bombings against security forces. The attacks appear to have been carefully timed and skillfully executed.” “Bashar’s pyrrhic triumphs,” *Economist*. 24 March 2012: <http://www.economist.com/node/21551085>.

- In a March 2012 article, journalist Nir Rosen asserted that as the uprising has progressed, opposition members have increasingly drawn on Islamism and conservative Sunni ideology, much of which is introduced from foreign clerics: “Syria’s uprising is not a secular one. Most participants are devout Muslims inspired by Islam. By virtue of Syria’s demography most of the opposition is Sunni Muslim and often come from conservative areas. The death of the Arab left means religion has assumed a greater role in daily life throughout the Middle East. A minority is secular and another minority is comprised of ideological Islamists. The majority is made of religious-minded people with little ideology, like most Syrians. They are not fighting to defend secularism (nor is the regime) but they are also not fighting to establish a theocracy. But as the conflict grinds on, Islam is playing an increasing role in the uprising... The Syrian uprising’s reliance on outside help will only increase radicalization. ‘The more time the revolution extends the Salafis will be stronger,’ one activist told me. ‘Each month that goes by the movement turns more Islamic and more radical Islamic. If it had succeeded in April or May of 2011 there would be more civil society.’” “Islamism and the Syrian Uprising,” *Foreign Policy*. 8 March 2012: [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/08/islamism\\_and\\_the\\_syrian\\_uprising](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/08/islamism_and_the_syrian_uprising).
- A February 2012 report by *IRIN* described how a drought beginning in 2006 has affected thousands of rural Syrians and forced them into urban centers to look for work: “Drought has hit much of northern and eastern Syria since 2006, causing tens of thousands of farming families to migrate to informal camps bordering urban centres in search of work. As they are considered internally displaced people, they lack the status of refugees and can hardly benefit from international assistance,” Rula Asad, co-founder of the group Al Hababeen, one of the few providing them with some relief, told *IRIN*. But in the months since March 2011, many of those areas - namely Homs, Hama, Idlib and suburbs of Damascus - have been swept up in a popular, and increasingly armed, uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, who has responded, in some places, with mortar and grenade attacks, as well as fire from tanks and helicopters.” “SYRIA: Insecurity Makes Drought-hit Farmers Even More Vulnerable,” *IRINnews*. 17 February 2012: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/94888/SYRIA-Insecurity-makes-drought-hit-farmers-even-more-vulnerable>.

### Urban Working Classes

- Monitor 360 validated this audience segment with a number of subject matter experts. In interviews with Monitor 360, former ambassador David Newton stressed that while the Urban Working Classes are not a strong proponents of the regime, they are fearful of change, and as a result, have not openly joined the protests in large numbers. Anthropologist John Borneman highlighted the large number of middle class Syrians—consisting of doctors, government administrators, teachers, and shop owners—who are disillusioned by the regime but distrustful of uneducated poorer Syrians. Research fellow Shashank Joshi asserted that the Urban Working Classes, composed of Sunnis businessmen, are the silent majority that has not explicitly supported the regime or the opposition. Syria expert Joshua Landis described how shop owners and businessmen in Damascus and Aleppo take pride in Syria’s history as a center of civilization. Joshua Landis asserted that the Urban Working Classes view themselves as more sophisticated than rural members of the opposition, who they perceive to be poor and uneducated. Monitor 360 interviews with David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012.
- An OSC Analysis in February 2012 highlighted how the Urban Working Classes were beginning to show support for the uprising: “Unrest and security force crackdowns continue to grow in the formerly quiescent regime strong-hold cities of Damascus and Aleppo. An SNC member told Al-Jazirah that a demonstration on 18 February in Al-Mazzah, a suburb of Damascus that houses ‘sensitive and extremely important’ regime establishments, was ‘unprecedented’ and involved 30,000 people. YouTube videos showed thousands of demonstrators filling a street despite a heavy snowstorm. A Damascus-based Syrian writer interviewed by the channel said that the demonstration ‘showed beyond any doubt that the battle for the capital has started’ and that people who had previously been silent were joining the opposition in response to the latest military crackdown in Hims. Mass student demonstrations took place during the past week in Aleppo. On 23 January, Al-Jazeera Online reported that Syrian security forces fired on protesters in two locations in the city.” “OSC Analysis: Syria—Status of Uprising, Regime Cohesion 17-23 Feb,” OSC Analysis via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 24 February 2012: GMP20120224425001.
- In March 2012, *Al-Jazeera* aired a television program which highlighted how protests were beginning to spread to the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, asserting that the residents in these cities would determine the outcome of the uprising: “Anchorman Nasir begins by saying that despite the ‘growing’ protests throughout Syria, both the Syrian regime and the opposition ‘are wagering on the role of the cities of Damascus and Aleppo to decide the situation.’ In an audio clip, a TV correspondent says the Syrian revolution in Dar’a, Homs, Idlib, Latakia, and other cities ‘has begun spreading to the city of Aleppo and central Damascus’... Asked if Damascus is expected to make a major move, especially since the revolution has reportedly won support from some circles in the Syrian regime, Taqi [director of the Al-Sharq Center for Strategic Studies] says ‘the Syrian regime no longer controls large areas of Damascus, which have begun taking part in the protests.’ Asked whether businessmen in Aleppo have realized that their interests with the regime are now being threatened, Manjunah [member of the opposition] says ‘although certain circles in Aleppo have economic links with the regime, city residents have turned against the regime because of the crimes Al-Shabbihah gangs have committed in the city.’ The entire city of Aleppo ‘will move in the near future,’ he says, warning that ‘crimes are being committed in the city with the knowledge of the authority.’” “Syrian Opposition Figures Interviewed on ‘Growing’ Protests in Damascus, Aleppo,” *Doha Al-Jazirah Satellite Channel* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 2 March 2012: GMP20120302648005.
- A February 2012 article published by the *Associated Press* articulated how many middle class urban Syrians were still loyal to the regime because they believed the uprising to be a movement of religiously pious rural Sunnis: “Among the Syrian upper and middle classes, there is often disdain for a protest movement they see as largely dominated by lower-class, religiously conservative Sunnis. Assad has retained support among the country’s

Alawite minority—a Shiite offshoot sect to which he belongs — but also among secular Syrians of all sects, who do not trust the opposition. ‘They want to take us back 100 years,’ Maha Shujaa, a 38-year-old interior designer and Assad supporter, said of the protesters. ‘Who is going to protect me when the president goes, those bearded guys? No thanks,’ said Shujaa, who refused to divulge her religious identity, saying she is ‘a Syrian citizen.’ “Syrian Capital Is a City Changed in a Year,” *Associated Press*. 28 February 2012: [http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2012/02/28/syrian\\_capital\\_is\\_a\\_city\\_changed\\_in\\_a\\_year/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2012/02/28/syrian_capital_is_a_city_changed_in_a_year/).

## Kurds

- Monitor 360 validated this audience segment with a number of subject matter experts. In an interview with Monitor 360, Syria media specialist Ghayth Armanazi stressed that Kurdish populations in northeastern Syria were neither proponents of the regime nor participants in the general uprising. Syria expert Joshua Landis stressed that Kurds were seeking political autonomy and were distrustful of both the opposition and the regime. Research fellow Jonathan Spyer described how Kurdish populations in the northeast had been the biggest opponents of the regime up until the uprising, but have become less vocal in their critique of the regime. Syria political expert Murhaf Jouejati asserted that Kurds were a distinct audience segment that did not wholly identify with Syrian Arab culture or political interests. Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012.
- A January 2012 article published in the *Atlantic* described the size and importance of the Kurdish population in Syria. The article also interviewed Dr. Abdulhakim Bashar, Secretary-General of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, who articulated aspirations for Kurdish autonomy: “It’s hard to know just how many Kurds are in Syria. The last census was taken 50 years ago, though demographers today tend to predict that Kurds number between 3.5 million and 4.6 million, or about 15 to 20 percent of Syria’s total population. Anyone with a nodding acquaintance with the struggles and strategies of this nationless people will know that they have been a decisive force in the federalist system of postwar Iraq and an ever-present human rights challenge for Turkey’s hopes for European Union accession. If the revolution in Syria is to have any chance at success, the Syrian Kurds will mostly likely play a major role... [Bashar stated:] ‘We demand the right to self-determination in a form that would be decided in a national Kurdish referendum, but also within the integrity and unity of the Syrian land. When Syria was formed, it was formed by the Sykes-Picot agreement, it wasn’t our choice. But we want to keep the current borders. With a new social contract between ourselves and all the Syrian components. Second, if we talk about federalism in the Kurdish areas, from the northeastern part of Syria, up to the border with Iraq until Afrin, near where Aleppo is — the Kurds form about 75 percent of the population of that region. That land is the Kurdish land.” “Syrian Kurd Leader: Revolution Won’t Succeed Without Minorities,” *Atlantic*. 20 January 2012: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/01/syrian-kurd-leader-revolution-wont-succeed-without-minorities/251660/>.
- A May 2011 article in *Al-Jazeera* interviewed members of the Kurdish community who expressed how they had been marginalized in Syrian society and persecuted by the government for expressing Kurdish culture: “The long-term policy of dispossession and discrimination against Kurds in Syria has left them among the poorest communities in the country, with poverty levels doubling from 40 per cent to 80 per cent in just three years from 2005, according to a 2008 human rights report by the British Foreign Office. Much of that drastic decline was the result a sustained drought in northeast Syria which has decimated [sic] local Kurdish communities, driving tens of thousands off their land and into urban centres. For Azad the poet, the uprising against the repression of the Assad regime represents an opportunity to regain a heritage threatened with extinction. ‘I want to sing in the Kurdish language at a Kurdish wedding party,’ he said. ‘Why should I be afraid to do that? Why should I expect security will arrest me on charges of ‘splitting Syria and joining a foreign state’? I want to write in my mother tongue, so I can express my feelings and what is in my heart.” “Debate Rages among Syria’s Opposition Kurds,” *Al-Jazeera*. 9 May 2011: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/05/20115816210895560.html>.
- An April 2011 article published by the *BBC* described how the regime granted citizenship to thousands of Kurds in order to prevent the Kurdish community from joining the uprising: “President Assad—who is under pressure from pro-democracy protests—met Kurdish leaders in the city of Hasaka on Tuesday to hear their demands. The decree comes after he tasked a committee with examining the census of 1962 which was responsible for depriving some 120,000 Kurds in Hasaka—20% of the total—of their citizenship. It was not immediately clear how many Kurds Thursday’s decree will affect, but it is estimated between 150,000 and 300,000 Kurds will benefit. But Kurdish leader Habib Ibrahim told Reuters news agency that Syria’s Kurds would continue a non-violent struggle for civic rights and democracy in spite of the decree. ‘Our cause is democracy for the whole of Syria. Citizenship is the right of every Syrian. It is not a favour. It is not the right of anyone to grant,’ he said... Until last week, Syria’s Kurdish population had distanced themselves from protests posing an unprecedented challenge to President Assad’s 11-year rule. But then demonstrations erupted in Hasaka and Qamishli, with protesters calling for the right to citizenship and ‘freedom as well,’ AFP news agency reported. The latest decree is among a series of measures taken by President Assad in what our correspondent in Damascus, Lina Sinjab, says is a bid to please the public.” “Syria’s Assad Grants Nationality to Hasaka Kurds,” *BBC*. 7 April 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12995174>.

## Alawites

- Monitor 360 validated this audience segment with a number of subject matter experts. In interviews with Monitor 360, historian Jason Pack and Syria expert Joshua Landis explained how the Alawites' heterodox religious theology caused Sunni Muslims to view them as heretics, forcing Alawites to flee to mountainous areas centuries ago. Journalist Nir Rosen asserted that the Alawite community was separate from other religious minorities and felt especially threatened by the uprising. Research fellow David Schenker asserted that the Alawite community has attempted to gain acceptance as a legitimate off-shoot of Shi'a Islam by attaining fatwas from Shi'a clerics. Historian Max Weiss described how the Alawite community is so closely tied to the regime due to the community's socioeconomic rise under Hafez Al-Asad. Journalist Patrick Seale stated that the majority of high ranking Syrian military officers were Alawite and that military service was intertwined with Alawite identity. Monitor 360 interviews with Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Max Weiss (Princeton University), 28 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012; David Schenker (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 13 March 2012.
- In his book *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, author Nikolaos Van Dam described the Alawite community and their historically poverty: "About 75 per cent of all Syrian Alawis live in the Latakia region where they constitute the local majority. Most of them work in the agrarian sector and thus represent the overwhelming majority of Latakia's rural population. In the coastal cities and towns they were until the 1970s in the minority as compared to the Sunnis and Christians. ...In the course of time, the Alawi community developed a strong distrust of the Sunnis, who had so often been their oppressors. Alawi suspicion of the Christians was slightly less strong, perhaps because the Christians had also been in a position of weakness and uncertainty. ...In fact, the small tobacco farmers were forced to sell their crops to Sunni entrepreneurs on the coast, often for inadequate remuneration. A remarkable phenomenon, indicative of the extreme poverty of the Alawis, was that the poorest families indentured their daughters as house servants to the richer families, mostly urban Sunnis, who usually regarded the Alawi peasants with contempt." Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. Print. Pp. 7-9.
- An October 2011 article in *Al-Jazeera* described how many Alawites, although saddled by poverty, were still loyal to the regime and served in the security services: "Until three years ago we pumped up water ourselves and had diseases from sewage," he said. There had been some improvements in services since 'the events,' or the uprising. He showed me the sewage pipe locals had built for themselves. It emptied onto the side of the mountain down into a canal at the bottom. The land in Ish al Warwar is not privately owned. Most of it is state land and most residents were technically illegally squatting. Abu Baha told me there had been an attempt in 2006 to grant ownership of the land to squatters. An official blueprint of the area had been made but no further action was taken. 'Neither the city nor the governorate helps us,' he told me, explaining that Ish al Warwar fell through the administrative cracks. 'Sunnis officials help Sunnis and Alawite officials also help Sunnis,' Abu Baha said, expressing a feeling of neglect I heard from many poor Alawites. When I asked why they were so grateful to the regime, he explained it was because of 'where we were, and where are we now.' 'We were besieged in the mountains,' he said. Abu Baha's father was in the military, so they moved to Ish al Warwar from Bareen, in the Hama governorate. Every home in Ish al Warwar has somebody working for the army or security agencies, he told me." "Assad's Alawites: An Entrenched Community," *Al-Jazeera*. 12 October 2011: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/20111011154631737692.html>.
- Theologian and author Theo Padnos described the heterodox, esoteric religious practices of Alawism in an October 2011 article in the *New Republic*: "Alawis believe all humans were once stars, that by a seven-step process of metempsychosis, a pious soul can regain his place in the Milky Way and that impious souls come back as animals. Alawis celebrate the Zoroastrian holiday Nowruz, which marks the arrival of spring, and sometimes celebrate Christmas. It's not very Islamic to drink wine. It's very un-Islamic to read esoteric meanings into the Koran. Alawis use wine in their rituals and believe that the manifest meaning of the Koran (and the Sharia) is a veil that covers truer, deeper meanings. Traditionally, Alawis have not built mosques but have rather prayed in the family home, or out of doors. They are said to worship the sun and the moon because these are aspects of the divine; the air, because god has dispersed himself into the ether; the stars, because one's ancestors abide there; and the fourth Caliph, Ali, because he is the patron of their sect. The religion emerged in the tenth century in a pocket of coastal mountains in northeastern Syria. These hills remain their homeland. When I first arrived in Syria, I was under the impression that if you walked up the right dirt roads in this alpine corner of the country, you would eventually come across villages in which the old faith flourished. I was under the impression that if you came on weekends you would spot the luxury sedans of regime apparatchiks who had driven up from Damascus. They would have come home to be among their own, to walk through the orchards for which the region is famous, and to renew their acquaintance with the stars. Whatever darkness there is within Alawism, I assumed, would make itself known to whoever studied Alawism here, among the cherry trees and the apparatchiks. YOU CANNOT DO THIS, it turns out. In the first place, Alawism is essentially a secret." "The Cult: The Twisted, Terrifying Last Days of Assad's Syria," *New Republic*. 4 October 2011: <http://www.tnr.com/article/world/95722/syria-damascus-bashar-basil-al-assad-sunni-alawi>.

## “CONSPIRACIES ALL AROUND”

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Sykes-Picot Agreement:** The 1916 secret agreement between the French and British that divided the Levant into spheres of influence, contradicting promises made to Sharif Husayn Bin-Ali that he would be the leader of an Arab independent Arab nation. It is one of the earliest and most widely acknowledged symbols of foreign conspiracy by subscribers to this narrative.
- **Zionist:** Zionism describes the nationalist movement to establish an independent Jewish state. Members of both the Al-Asad regime and the opposition accuse their opponents of supporting the Zionist cause, and see opponents' actions as part of a “Zionist conspiracy” to undermine Syrian sovereignty. The regime asserts that the opposition is backed by Israeli weapons and money. The opposition asserts that the regime has entered into a secret pact with Israel that allows the regime to maintain power in exchange for the Golan Heights.
- **General Gouraud:** French General Henri Gouraud led the French Army in the later years of World War I. Subscribers to this narrative remember him as the commander of French forces in the Levant, and point to his victory at Maysalun to be symbolic of the victory of Western conspiracies against Syria. A widely circulated and potentially apocryphal story claims that after his victory at Maysalun, Gouraud stood on Saladin's grave and claimed “Awake Saladin, we have returned. My presence here consecrates the victory of the Cross over the Crescent.”
- **Yusuf Al-Azmah:** Yusuf Al-Azmah was Syria's Minister of Defense in 1920 and is celebrated in Syria as a hero who intercepted French troops near Damascus although severely outmatched. Al-Azmah's forces were badly defeated at the Battle of Maysalun—and Al-Azmah himself was killed—but Al-Azmah is known as a symbol of martyrdom and opposition to perceived Western. A statue of Yusuf Al-Azmah is prominently displayed in Damascus. (image via <http://cafedamascus.com/2011/07/06/the-last-battle-of-syria/attachment/1838/>)



- **Camp David Accords:** The 1978 peace agreement between Egypt and Israel is a symbol of Arab betrayal for subscribers to this narrative who perceive the Accords to be the result of a successful Western plot—led by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger—to isolate Syria.
- **Operation Straggle and Operation Wappen:** Syrian coups d'état, sponsored in part by the United States in 1956, are symbols of secret plots launched by foreign powers seeking to interfere in Syrian domestic affairs.

### Quotations & Citations

1. See, for example, “Syria's Bashar al-Assad blames ‘foreign conspiracy,’” *BBC*. 10 January 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16483548>.
2. “Syria Denounces Arab League's Resolution as ‘Interference’ in Syria's Affairs,” *Syrian Satellite Channel Television* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 13 February 12: GMP20120213625005.
3. “SANA: Ammoura: Reform Steps Did Not Please the Countries Calling for Arming the Opposition to Kill the Syr...,” *SANA* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 5 March 2012: GMP20120305966045.
4. See: Master Narratives Country Report: Russia, “Fortress Russia,” Monitor 360 via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 14 February 2012: FBS20120214692806.
5. See: Master Narratives Country Report: Iran, “Victims of Foreign Oppression,” Monitor 360 via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 28 February 2011: FBS20110215576181.
6. “Syrian Unrest: Roundup of Free Syrian Army Activities, Statements 19–22 Feb,” OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 19 February 2012–22 February 2012: GMP20120223647009.
7. In interviews with Monitor 360, subject matter experts highlighted how opponents to the regime assert that the regime is in an alliance with Israel due to the relative peace of the Golan Heights. Monitor 360 interviews with Elie Elhadj (Author), 21 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 January 2012.

8. "Up to the Minute: The latest political developments in Syria," Middle East Institute. 13 February 2012: <http://www.mei.edu/content/minute-latest-political-developments-syria>.
9. For historical context, see "Syria 1956 -1957," U.S. Foreign Policy In Perspective: Clients, Enemies and Empire. March 2009: <http://www.us-foreign-policy-perspective.org/index.php?id=328>.
10. "SANA: Al-Asad Addresses Nation at Damascus University on Events in Syria," SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 20 June 2011: GMP20120225610001.
11. "Syria: Muslim Brotherhood Assails Israeli Readiness To Receive Alawite Refugees," Muslim Brotherhood in Syria via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 13 January 2012: GMP20120114644002.
12. "Syrian Writer: Corruption, Hereditary Succession in Qatar Warrant 'Revolution,'" *Al-Watan* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 7 December 2011: GMP20111207708002.
13. See, for example, "Highlights: Syrian Press 3 Mar 12," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 3 March 12: GMP20120303610002.
14. "Syria's Alliance with Iran," United States Institute of Peace. May 2007: <http://www.usip.org/publications/syria-s-alliance-iran>.

## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative is widely held in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; Nadim Shehadi (Chatham House), 16 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.
- In a December 2011 interview, Attallah Hanna, the Archbishop of the Sebastian Roman Orthodox Church in Syria, asserted that opposition groups were part of a Zionist, Western influenced conspiracy to divide Arab nations: "He indicated that the conspiracy hatched against Syria is due to its confrontation of the colonial-Zionist scheme... In an interview with the Syrian TV on Sunday, the Archbishop considered that what is taking place in the region is a new Sykes-Picot project aiming at dividing the region and liquidating the Palestinian cause. He called upon all the Arabs to recognize the danger of the current stage which the region is passing through, and to stand by Syria and its people in the face of this dangerous plot." "SANA: Archbishop Hanna: Awareness and Wisdom of Syrians will Foil Conspiracy," SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 26 December 2011: GMP20111226966035.
- In a December 2011 statement, the Muslim Brotherhood, a key group opposed to the Al-Asad regime, derided the regime's claims that it was the victim of a conspiracy, and instead asserted that the regime was a conspirator seeking to oppress the Syrian people: "After 10 months of systematic and growing killing and after thousands of killed people and tens of thousands of detainees and displaced persons and amid this collusion by some countries of the world and the region and the hesitation by other countries, it has become clear to all sane people that the true conspiracy today is the one against the sons of our people and against their aspirations to have a decent life. The parties to this conspiracy are the regime on the one hand and the colluding and hesitant ones on the other hand. They are all wagering on breaking the will of our people and extinguishing the flame of this blessed revolution." "Syria: Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Revolution, Criticizes Regime Supporters," Muslim Brotherhood in Syria via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 15 December 2011: GMP20111215711001.

### Master Narrative

- In interviews with Monitor 360, journalist Nir Rosen expressed how both the regime and the opposition use themes of conspiracy to delegitimize the other party. Research fellow Barak Barfi asserted that conspiracies were a lens through which Syrians view foreign policy and are constantly wary of interaction with foreign powers, especially the West. Media specialist Ghayth Armanazi described the lasting impact of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which has caused Syrian audiences to view the West suspiciously at all times. Research fellow Nadim Shehadi highlighted how the regime has adopted the use of foreign conspiracy as a narrative in order to maintain legitimacy for decades. Journalist Stephen Starr described how the regime has painted other Arab countries as co-conspirators along with the West. Historian John Chalcraft expressed that Syrians are deeply suspicious of conspiracies and that the perceived betrayal of France and Britain has shifted to include Israel, the US, and Gulf Arab countries. Journalist Patrick Seale described how the regime sincerely believes it is the target of a foreign conspiracy, and explained that they had been so concentrated on battling perceived foreign conspiracies that they neglected domestic matters. Monitor 360 interviews with Barak Barfi (Journalist), 14 February 2012; Nadim Shehadi (Chatham House), 16 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.

- In a December 2011 article published in *Al-Ba'ith*, Chief Editor Dr. Sabir Falhut describes a litany of foreign plots that were launched by foreign powers to undermine Syrian sovereignty: “When Syria says it is struggling against the final parts of the chain of conspiracies it has faced throughout its history that extends from the Arab Revolution in 1916 to the so-called ‘Arab spring,’ it is, in fact, asserting the confirmed and clear realities involved in the smallest details of events that are taking place. Syria was sincere when it believed the promises the West made to Al-Sharif Husayn, because the price to be paid to the Arabs in return for standing on the side of the allies in the battle against Turkey and countries of the axis would be the unification of the Arab nation. This had been the dream of the martyrs and heroes of Arabism for more than four centuries of the span of Ottoman colonialism. The West’s reward to the Arabs was the Sykes-Picot agreement that divided Bilad al-Sham [Syria] into entities under two colonialisms—the French and the British, placed Palestine under a British mandate, and issued the Balfour promise that gave Palestine as a national homeland to the Jews. Our people resisted the occupation and rejected the plot of separating the Iskandarun Province from the body of the homeland, and continued the struggle with all available ways and means until the eviction of the French forces in 1946, and thus a new series of events in the conspiracy was set in motion, beginning with the successive dictatorial military coups and governments that were formed in foreign embassies, and on to projects of colonialist pacts—the Baghdad Pact, the Eisenhower doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the tripartite aggression against Egypt, the black Syria-Egypt union separation plot, the 1967 aggression that constituted the gravest setback in the struggle against the Zionist enemy, up to the Camp David plot, which broke the back of the national posture in the confrontation of Zionism.” “Syria: Article Sees ‘Plots’ Against Syria, Latest ‘Conspiracy’ in Final Stages,” *Al-Ba'ith* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 13 December 2011: GMP20111213708002.
- In a December 2011 article published in the government owned paper, *Tishrin*, editor Izz-al-Din Darwish accuses Qatar and *Al-Jazeera* of being conspirators seeking to undermine Syrian sovereignty in order to elevate Qatar’s geostrategic position: “Qatar, even if it has volunteered to be the face of the conspiracy against Syria, aspires, however, to assume a role that is hundreds of times greater than it; and its rulers, especially its Minister of Foreign Affairs, think that this role can be achieved through aiming at Syria, climb on it, and try to break its bones with money, and media disinformation, through the Al-Jazirah channel, which speaks on behalf of NATO, and is managed by English and Israeli experts...these rulers think that the mere idea of attacking Syria could make them big among the Arabs, and in the region, given what Syria stands for, and what it means in terms of resistance, strength, presence, and political and geographic status; that is why they bought the presidency of the Arab League, and the presidency of the Arab Follow-up Committee, and began their failed and naïve plan against Syria that has defied major powers to which Qatar can never be compared.” “Highlights: Syrian Press 22 December 11,” OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 22 December 2011: GMP20111222708001.
- In a November 2011 interview with a government owned Syrian TV channel, Chairman of the Russian Association for Friendship and Cooperation with the Arab Countries, Vyacheslav Matuzov, asserted that the alliance between Russia, Iran, and Syria was based upon a mutual interest in confronting the West and limiting foreign interference in their countries: “What is happening in the region is a US-Western [*sic*] made with the aim of interfering in its countries’ internal affairs...Russia today is with Syria and Iran and all Arab countries which aspire to be independent from the US influence...the US administration supports gunmen and supply them with weapons,” Khreis said, stressing that the conspiracy is doomed to failure and the truth will be exposed due to the steadfastness of Syria.” “SANA: Analysts: Syria Is Strong, Able to Confront Provocations of the West and Any State Trying to Intervene...” SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 9 November 2011: GMP20111109966064.
- In a June 2011 statement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria accused the regime and Israel of being allies, and that both conspire to discredit the Muslim Brotherhood by linking it to Israel: “Within the framework of a Zionist media campaign to support the Syrian regime, the Israeli Channel 2 has fabricated an interview with some Syrian opposition figures, including His Eminence Mr Ali Sadr-al-Din al-Bayanuni, former controller general of the Muslim Brotherhood [MB] in Syria. In attempt to connect the threads of the conspiracy, some media outlets linked to the regime also carried this baseless report to trade in it within the context of the serious national developments Syria has been witnessing. We, in the MB, stress that the interview, which was carried by the Israeli Channel 2 as part of the joint campaign between the Zionist media and the media affiliated with the Syrian regime media to distort the image of the MB,” “Syrian MB Says Interview With Former MB Leader on Israeli Channel ‘Fabricated,’ Muslim Brotherhood in Syria via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 14 Jun 2011: GMP20110615644006.

### Significance for Communicators

- Members of the regime accuse Saudi Arabia of being a puppet of the United States, complicit in a Western-led conspiracy to undermine the Palestinian cause. A March 2012 *Al-Ba'ith* article denounced Saudi Arabia and King Sa’ud as a puppet of the West that oppresses his own people: “the Kingdom of al-Sa’ud, which [was the one that] put forward the Arab initiative for ‘peace,’ to end the Palestinian cause;” he notes that ‘the fight against Iran, as the main enemy of Muslims, and channeling their hostility against it, under the pretext of fear of exporting the Islamic revolution, is actually a systematic service to the Zionist entity, the United States, and its allies.’ He goes on to say: ‘And the oppression of the population of the eastern region, since the establishment of the Kingdom of al-Sa’ud, continues even today on an escalating level; and the Saudis are repeating this with the people of Bahrain, as well as with the followers of the Isma’ili sect in Najran, in the south.’” “Highlights: Syrian Press 29 Mar 12,” OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 29 March 2012: GMP20120329708001.
- In a March 2012 interview, an opposition field commander explained that he was distrustful of foreign aid because he believed it was tied to a foreign conspiracy: “Abu Abdu, a field commander who deals with military and civilian elements of the opposition in the Damascus suburbs told me that he had received calls from people in Jordan, Turkey, London, and the United States who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. ‘People offer us money

but there is a hidden agenda to it and we refuse it,' he said. 'This is a popular revolution, I work for God and the nation. I come out against oppression.' He picked up his cigarette pack. 'I'm not going to replace Marlboro with Gaullois.'" "Islamism and the Syrian Uprising," *Foreign Policy*. 8 March 2012: [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/08/islamism\\_and\\_the\\_syrian\\_uprising](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/08/islamism_and_the_syrian_uprising).

- In March 2012, a Syrian government owned TV station accused star soccer player Lionel Messi of sending secret signals to opposition groups through his in-game dribbling, passing, and goal. Messi's plays were said to describe a smuggling route that opposition groups could use to move arm shipments and other illicit goods. "Lionel Messi accused of sending secret signals to Syrian rebels ... during match," *NBC Sports*. 21 March 2012: <http://offthebench.nbcsports.com/2012/03/21/lionel-messi-accused-of-sending-secret-signals-to-syrian-rebels-during-match/>. (images via <http://nbcoutofbounds.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/messigraphic.jpg> and <http://blogs.independent.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/messi2-300x193.jpg>)



### Significance for Analysts

- In March 2012, the Iranian President voiced his support for the Al-Asad regime and criticized the opposition as a Western conspiracy that seeks to overthrow the regime under the cover of freedom and human rights: "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Tuesday that the arrogant powers are bent on saving the Zionist regime under the popular slogan of human rights and freedom. Speaking to the Syrian President Special Envoy Faisal Maqdad, President Ahmadinejad acknowledged that the Syrian Government has in the course of recent events been facing armed rebellion and said that the Syrian events have been a conspiracy by the western governments. 'Today, it has become clear to all that the arrogant powers try to harm Iran, Syria and the resistance movement, trying to save the Zionist regime under the slogan of human rights and caring for freedom.'" "Iran: News Roundup 27, 28 Mar," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 28 March 2012: IAP20120328802001.
- In an August 2011 interview with Jordanian political analyst Ibrahim Allush, Allush highlighted the West's history of interference in Syrian affairs, making reference to the Battle of Maysalun: "'the conspiracy targets the Arab and Islamic identity in the region.' He says: 'I tell everyone and anyone who cooperates with NATO: The grandchildren of Gouraud [French general who led the French forces in the Battle of Maysalun, which took place between Syrian and French forces west of Damascus near the town of Maysalun on 23 July 1920] will never be friends of the Syrian people.'" "Syrian TV Discusses 'Attempts To Undermine Syria,' Interfere in Internal Affairs," *Syrian Satellite Channel Television* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 8 August 2011: GMP20110808711002.
- An article published in the Mauritanian *Al-Akhbar* demonstrates how other countries suspicious of foreign intervention and conspiracy may also be sympathetic to the regime. The article, published in January 2012, discussed how the Mauritanian president is sympathetic towards Bashar Al-Asad and believes that Syria is beset by a foreign conspiracy: "a deep difference had erupted in the last moments between the points of view of Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz and those of Emir of the State of Qatar Hamad Bin-Khalifah Al Thani over the Syrian dossier...while Qatar was pushing towards besieging the Syrian regime, which was facing a popular revolution and which it was confronting with violent repression, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz favoured the ranks of the Syrian regime's friends, such as Iran, Iraq, and the Lebanese government, on account that Syria was being subjected to a foreign conspiracy." "Syrian file creates rift between Mauritanian, Qatari leaders," *Al-Akhbar* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 6 January 2012: AFP20120106950038.

## "THE ZIONIST SCOURGE"

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Balfour Declaration:** The Balfour Declaration was a 1917 memo written by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour. The Declaration was the first time a world power had expressed support for the creation of a Jewish state, and subscribers view it as a symbol of Western treachery against the Arab world.
- **Nakba Day:** Translated as the "catastrophe," it memorializes the day after Israel declared independence (15 May 1948). The creation of Israel led to the 1948 War, which displaced thousands of Palestinians. Nakba Day is known throughout the Arab world to signify ongoing opposition to Israel.
- **1948 Arab-Israeli War:** The 1948 War was the first in a series of wars fought between Israel and a coalition of Arab countries. This coalition, composed of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Transjordan (Jordan), and Palestinian refugees, was defeated by Israel, leading to the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from Israel.
- **1967 War/June War/Six Day War:** The 1967 War between Israel and surrounding Arab countries resulted in the loss of territory for Arab countries. An Israeli surprise air attack against Egypt crippled its air force, and later engagements with Syria allowed Israel to gain the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. This war changed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, drawing boundaries in the Middle East which are still in dispute.

- **1973 War/Yom Kippur War/Ramadan War/October War:** In the 1973 War, Syrian and Egyptian forces launched a surprise attack against Israel with the aim of regaining territory lost in the 1967 War. Although initial Syrian and Egyptian attacks were successful, an Israeli counterattack defeated Syrian and Egyptian forces, leading Israel to regain the Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula. This war set the stage for Egypt's peace with Israel in the 1978 Camp David Accords.
- **1982 Lebanon War:** The 1982 Lebanon War was a conflict between Syria and Israel in which the Israeli military invaded Lebanon in order to oust the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been using Lebanon as a staging area to launch attacks against Israel. Israel occupied a "security zone" within Lebanon from 1982 to 2000.
- **Camp David Accords:** The 1978 negotiation between Israel and Egypt, mediated through US President Jimmy Carter, formed the basis for the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. In the Camp David Accords, Egypt formally recognized Israeli's right to exist in exchange for control of the Sinai Peninsula, thereby normalizing relations between the two countries. Syrians see the Accords as a betrayal, as this bilateral peace agreement isolated Syria as the only state bordering Israel that remained opposed to peace.
- **Golan Heights:** The southern area of Syria which was lost to Israel during the 1967 War. Syria unsuccessfully attempted to regain this area and return it under Syrian control in the 1973 War. However, since 1973, the Golan Heights has been one of the more peaceful areas of occupied territory.
- **Zionist:** Zionism describes the nationalist movement to establish an independent Jewish state. The Syrian press, media, and officials commonly refer to Israel as the "Zionists," a pejorative term which implies expansionist motives.
- **Hizballah:** Hizballah is the militant Shi'a Islam group which operates in Lebanon and aims to eliminate the State of Israel. Syria has been a financial and political backer of Hizballah in their opposition to Israel. Hizballah was formed in 1982 as a response to Israeli occupation of Lebanon. (Image of Hizballah flag via <http://www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/hezbollah.asp>)



## Quotations & Citations

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2. Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*. University of California Press. 1988. Print. P. 185.
3. Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'ath Party*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. Print. P. 71.
4. "Highlights: Syrian Press 10 Jun 10," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 10 June 2010: GMP20100610708001.
5. "U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Proxy Cold War in the Levant, Egypt and Jordan," Center for Strategic and International Studies. March 2012: [http://csis.org/files/publication/120312\\_Iran\\_VIII\\_Levant.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120312_Iran_VIII_Levant.pdf).
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7. Monitor 360 interviews with Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Hanin Ghaddar (NOW Lebanon), 16 February 2012; Elie Elhadj (Author), 21 February 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012.
8. "Syria: Article Views 'Crime' Against Ali Farzat, Conduct of Syrian Authorities," Muslim Brotherhood in Syria via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 28 Aug 2011: GMP20110829721001.
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10. Monitor 360 interviews with Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Elie Elhadj (Author), 21 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University) 21 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.

11. "Syrian Editorial Says Criticism of Ba'th 'Lacks Seriousness and Objectivity,'" *Al-Ba'th* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 5 January 2012: GMP20120105708002.
12. "Assad emails: 'Suggestions for the president's speech'—translation," *The Guardian*. 14 March 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/14/bashar-al-assad-syria15>.
13. "Syria: FSA Commander Al-Asad Threatens To Take Battle to Regime's Own Backyard," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 7 January 2012: GMP20120107825010.
14. Monitor 360 interviews with Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012; David Schenker (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 13 March 2012.
15. "Adieu, Hezbollah," *Now Lebanon*. 19 March 2012: <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=377701>.
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17. See also "Syria: FSA Officer Denies Regime's Claim Israeli Weapons Were Seized in Hims," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 10 February 2012: GMP20120210825011.

## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with the Syrian population in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ambassador David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Steve McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.
- Chief editor of the government newspaper *Al-Thawrah* reiterated how opposition to Israel was a core component of Syrian identity, especially for Muslims: "...not a day passes when it [Israel] does not offend Islam, Muslims, the Koran, and mosques, as well as churches, religious orders, and monks—many mosques, a myriad of mosques, and eliminated entire cultures, but were not encouraged to reject all that, and win on our behalf by resisting it [that destruction]; they, rather, called our resistance to it 'terrorism.' The West played for long on the chord of Muslim sensibilities, particularly the simple and spontaneous ones, and has made extraordinary achievements to its benefit." "Highlights: Syrian Press 13 Sep 10," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 13 September 2010: GMP20100913708001.
- A February 2012 article published in the government owned SANA reported on a rally led by Syrians living in the Golan Heights voicing opposition to Israel: "People of the occupied Syrian Golan reiterated on Tuesday their adherence to their Syrian Arab identity and their belonging to the homeland, considering their affiliation to the homeland as 'an order of pride and dignity' against the practices of the Israeli occupation aiming at Judaizing the occupied Golan. During a rally staged on the occasion of the 30th anniversary for the Open Strike announced by the Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan, the people stressed that the Israeli occupation will inevitably end, expressing their rejection of the attempts of the occupation to impose the Israeli identity on them. The Golan people hailed the sacrifices of the Syrian Arab army to protect the security of the homeland, underlining the stances of Russia, China and Iran and other countries which supported Syria against the US and western dictations. The Golan people staged the Open Strike on Feb 14, 1982 in rejection of the Israeli Knesset decision issued on Dec 14, 1981 stipulating for applying the Israeli laws on the occupied Syrian Golan." "SANA: People of Occupied Syrian Golan Stress Adherence to Syrian Identity," SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 15 February 2012: GMP20120215966062.

### Master Narrative

- Former ambassador David Newton asserted how Syrians perceive that Israel has the potential to conquer or destroy Syria given its proximity. Historian John Chalcraft described how Syrians have viewed themselves as a bulwark against Israeli aggression, pointing to their refusal to make peace with Israel like Egypt did in 1979. Media specialist Ghayth Armanazi asserted that many Syrians believed that Lebanon and Palestine were rightful parts of Syria, thus when Israel was created, many Syrians perceived it as theft of their territory. Author Elie Elhadj described how the regime has indoctrinated the Syrian public with anti-Israeli sentiment for decades through political messaging and youth education. Syria foreign policy expert Stephen McInerney asserted that Syrians view themselves as the protectors of Lebanon against an allegedly belligerent and expansionist enemy in Israel. Political psychologist Jerrold Post explained how the Camp David accords created a psychological need for Hafez Al-Asad and Bashar Al-Asad to reaffirm their opposition to Israel, and how they chose to make it a national priority and a source of legitimacy for their rule. Syria expert Joshua Landis explained that the Syrian public's antipathy for Israel is deeply rooted, drawing attention to the unreturned Golan Heights, the long history of leaders who opposed Israel before the Al-Asad regime, and how many Syrian political parties regard Palestinians as Arabs and part of either a Syrian, Arab, or Muslim nation. Journalist Patrick Seale expressed that Syrians view themselves as living in the shadow of what they perceive to be an expansionist Israel, and that they must confront and compete with Israel for survival. Monitor 360 interviews with Ambassador David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February

2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Elie Elhadj (Author), 21 February 2012; Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.

- In a February 2011 article published in the government owned newspaper *Tishrin*, Dr. Buthaynah Sha'ban, media affairs adviser to the Syrian president, describes how the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement was a humiliating symbol of defeat for Arab countries: "...Egypt, which was taken out of the Arab-Israeli conflict forcibly by a tyrant, for three decades heavy with the shame of the complicity of another tyrant with the enemy, has weakened—by being out [of the conflict]—the Arabs, in a way that made them suffer shame and humiliation, as they saw the West arming Israel with arrogance and intransigence, and arming the regimes of surrender with dictatorship, oppression, and tyranny. And in the darkness of this nationalist humiliation, Zionism flourished... The third reason is that Egypt over these past decades was restricting its people, and provoking them daily, when they saw it as the first ally of the West and Israel." "Highlights: Syrian Press 14 Feb 11," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 14 February 2011: GMP20110214708001.
- A March 2012 OSC report of opposition activity found that demonstrators believed that the Al-Asad regime had engaged in an alliance with Israel: "A nighttime demonstration was staged in the Jawbar neighborhood of Damascus, where the demonstrators burned pictures of President Bashar al-Asad and Israeli flags 'to condemn the Israeli support for the Syrian regime.' The demonstrators hailed the Free Syrian Army and its struggle in the Baba Amr neighborhood of Homs and other rebelling Syrian areas." "Syrian Unrest: Roundup of Opposition Media Reports on Field Developments 1 Mar," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 1 March 2012: GMP20120302710001.
- Samirah al-Masalimah, chief editor of the government newspaper *Tishrin*, published an editorial in June 2012 which asserted that Syria will reclaim the Golan Heights because Israel remains too weak to occupy Syria's territory: "The time when all the occupied Arab territories will be liberated is drawing closer. No matter how far Israel goes in building its military capabilities and acquiring all kinds of destructive and prohibited weapons, it will remain too weak to retain our occupied territories... If the international community wants to play an active role in maintaining world peace and security, it must begin with the implementation of its resolutions." "Highlights: Syrian Press 25, 26 Jun 10," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 26 June 2010: GMP20100626627001.
- In an August 2011 editorial published in the government newspaper *Al-Ba'ith*, chief editor Muhammad Kanaysi writes that Syria was victorious against Israel in the 1973 War and praises Syria for being the sole remaining country opposing Israel: "the Army, which prevailed in October [1973] war, defended the unity and Arabism of Lebanon, and protected the backs of the Arab resistance movements, will definitely prevail over the gangs of sabotage and crime... what the heroic Syrian Army is doing today is not only protecting the people and defending the homeland's security and stability, but also defending Syria as the last Arab fortress in the face of all the imperialist and Zionist conspiracies and schemes that seek to annihilate resisting Arabism." "Highlights: Syrian Press 01 Aug 11," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 1 August 2011: GMP20110801627001.

### Significance for Communicators

- Members of the opposition assert that the regime has not been sincere in their efforts to oppose Israel, and frequently accuse the regime of being secret allies with Israel. A FSA officer, who wished to remain anonymous, made comments in February 2012 to the newspaper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* refuting the regime's claims that the FSA was funded by Israel: "This is a scenario to scare the people. The fact is that Al-Asad family's regime alone has been the agent of Israel for 40 years. It is starting today to claim that it is the target of an Israeli-American conspiracy and at times claims it is targeted by Al-Qa'ida organization. We assert there are no foreign gunmen in Syria other than the fighters of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hizballah who are fighting alongside this regime for its survival." "A Syria: FSA Officer Denies Regime's Claim Israeli Weapons Were Seized in Hims," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 10 February 2012: GMP20120210825011.
- A sign carried by a protestor at a December 2011 protest in Daraa against the Al-Asad regime shows how the opposition has shifted opposition from Israel to the Al-Asad regime: "Our people in the Gaza Strip, thank God that you are invaded by the Israeli Army, and not by the Al-Asad army." "Syria: Roundup of Facebook Pages on Unrest 29 Dec," Facebook via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 29 Dec 2011: GMP20111229711003.



- A February 2011 *Reuters* article cited Syrian military defectors who reported that Syria's military has nearly \$1 billion in weapons contracts with Russia: "The biggest importer of arms to Syria, Russia sold Damascus nearly \$1 billion worth of arms including missile systems last year, while shipments of hard-to-track Russian small weapons have risen since the uprising against Assad started, government defectors say... I would say that on average the funds (for Defence Ministry expenditure) were doubled for 2011," said Mahmoud Suleiman Haj Hamad, the for-

mer chief auditor for Syria's Defence Ministry who defected in January." "Russia boosts arms sales to Syria despite world pressure," *Reuters*. 21 February 2012: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/21/us-syria-russia-arms-idUSTRE81K13420120221>.

### Significance for Analysts

- A Facebook group, titled *The Syrian Revolution against Bashar al-Asad*, posted a widely circulated memo addressed to Bashar Al-Asad in May 2011 denouncing the Al-Asad regime, drawing attention to the regime's opposition to Israel, and challenging the regime to live up to its anti-Israeli rhetoric with actions: "If you [Bashar Al-Asad] fulfill all of these [demands], you will rescue Syria, and Israel will tremble with fear, or else Israel will win and Syria will lose. You have always spoken about resistance against Israel; it is time to prove that, not through words, but rather through action." "Facebook Group Asks Al-Asad To Schedule 'Free, Democratic' Elections in 6 Months," Facebook via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 7 May 2011–8 May 2011: GMP20110508637001.
- In an April 2012 interview with *Israel Radio*, opposition figure and son of a former PM, Nofal Al-Dawalibi, fully rejected the regime's narrative of resistance against Israel, and implied that the opposition wanted peace: "Dawalibi's interview marked the potential beginning of a change from that mindset [of tense Syrian-Israeli relations], should the Syrian opposition struggle prevail. When asked about the 'fear that many Israelis have' that Islamic forces may occupy the political vacuum in Syria if Assad falls — and what effect that would have on Syria's relationship with Israel—Dawalibi replied that the Syrian people do not want any more fighting. Syrian civilians have been left out of the political process for over 40 years and they only want peace, he added," "Syrian opposition leader, in unprecedented interview with Israel Radio, says Syrians want peace with Israel," *Times of Israel*. 21 April 2012: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/syrian-opposition-leader-in-unprecedented-interview-with-israel-radio-says-syrians-want-peace-with-israel/>.
- In an April 2009 article, the government owned news agency *SANA* reported on a Syrian-Lebanese conference discussing ties between the two countries. *SANA* reported that at the end of the conference, a joint statement was read which drew on themes from the master narratives "Zionist Scourge" and "Greater Syria", and reaffirmed strong relations between Syria and Lebanon: "They examined the unity of Bilad al-Sham [Greater Syria] in World War I and the confrontation of colonialist partition, as well as the common Lebanese-Syrian struggle against the Mandate and the declaration of the states of Syria and Lebanon. They also analyzed the structure of the independent state in the two countries by reading their political and economic systems and the possibility of reforming and developing them. This is in addition to the research papers they presented on the theme of the shared culture, joint struggle, and common destiny through the role of Arab culture in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Lebanese-Syrian struggle against the Zionist project and foreign domination, and finally studying the challenges facing countries in the age of globalization." "Syria: SANA Reports Statement, Discussions of Conference on Syrian-Lebanese Ties," *SANA* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 19 April 2009: GMP20090419637001.
- Government owned news agency *SANA* reported on a speech given by Syrian Vice-President Dr. Najah al-Attar in March 2012, highlighting how the strategic alliance between Syria and Iran was built upon opposition to Israel and its allies: "During her meeting with a press group from Iran on Sunday, Dr. al-Attar stressed the importance of upgrading the common stances in the face of the international hegemonic powers which are continuing their scheme to dismember the region and make it subdue to Israel's interests... 'the scheme against Syria is meant to weaken it and harm its relations with Iran, yet Syria is going to foil the plot thanks to its people's awareness and the strength and unity of its army,' al-Attar pointed out. Vice-President [*sic*] hailed the stances of the Islamic Republic of Iran in support of Syria, underlining that Syria's ties with Iran will remain strong, being built on principled basis as they serve the two countries' peoples and contribute to boosting stability in the Middle East." "SANA: Al-Attar: Importance of Syrian-Iranian Relations, Boosting Common," *SANA* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov) 4 March 2012: GMP20120304966040.
- In June 2011, the government owned *Damascus Syrian Satellite Channel Television* ran a television program covering a pro-regime rally in which demonstrators can be seen waving Hizballah flags: "The program begins by hosting two youths who organized the Syrian Youth Initiative, which is behind the raising the biggest Syrian flag, in the studio to discuss the initiative. The program also hosts two youths with the Syrian Youth Gathering from their studio in Aleppo. During the program the channel shows live footage from Aleppo where 'dozens of thousands' of people have gathered in support of the regime. Syrian and Hizballah flags and pictures of Al-Asad are raised during this demonstration, which is held at the Aleppo Castle." "Syrian TV Carries Live Pro-Regime Gathering in Aleppo 18 Jun," *Syrian Satellite Channel Television* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 18 June 2011: GMP20110618663002. (Image via <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/11/26/syria-buries-security-forces-as-sanctions-loom/>)



## “GREATER SYRIA”

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Alexandretta:** A territory in eastern Turkey that was a part of the Aleppo province of the Ottoman Empire, and was made a part of the French Mandate of Syria after World War I. In 1938 it was renamed “Hatay,” and in 1939 its legislative bodies voted to become a part of Turkey. Regime Insider subscribers refer to the Hatay province as Alexandretta to highlight Syrian claims to the region.
- **“Beating Heart of Arabism”:** A phrase frequently deployed by the regime to refer to Syria’s historical leadership role in the Arab world, while evoking associations with pan-Arab nationalism. As with many regime slogans, this phrase is heavily criticized by the opposition as a distraction used to divert attention from the regime’s alleged crimes.
- ***Bilad Al-Sham:*** The historical name for the Levant; historically a closely integrated region that shares deep cultural and economic ties, comprising modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan. The term “Sham” is also sometimes used to refer to Damascus.
- **The Cedar Revolution:** On 14 February 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated. This led to widespread protests in which individuals demanded the withdrawal of Syrian influence from Lebanese politics, after which the pro-Syrian Lebanese government disbanded. Lebanon and Syria have since re-established relations, and Syria continues to exercise significant influence in the country via Hezbollah.
- **Syrian Social Nationalist Party:** Founded in 1939, this party operates in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. It is backed by the Syrian regime, and advocates for recreating a Syrian nation that encompasses the whole of the Levant. The party was legalized in Syria in 2005, and is estimated to have the second largest number of followers in Syria after the Ba’ath.
- **Oak Trees:** Forests spread throughout the ancient Levant; now much of the Levant has been deforested and trees are confined to a small strip along coastal regions from Turkey to the Levant. Oak trees’ age, regional dispersion, and connection with a bygone era connect them to the narrative of Greater Syria.
- **The Umayyads:** The Umayyad Caliphate was the second of the four major Islamic Caliphates. Its capital was based in Damascus, and at its height, its borders encompassed territory from the south of Spain, to North Africa, the Levant, Arabian Peninsula, and much of Persia. The caliphate lasted from 684-750 A.D. Subscribers to this narrative point to the Umayyad Caliphate as evidence of Syria’s rich and diverse cultural history.
- **Sykes-Picot Agreement:** The 1916 secret agreement between the French and British divided up the Levant into spheres of influence, contradicting promises made to Sharif Husayn Bin-Ali that he would be the leader of an Arab independent Arab nation. Subscribers point to this treaty as having unjustly divided the Levant.

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## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with the Syrian population in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ambassador David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February 2012; Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Max Weiss (Princeton University), 28 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Emad Tinawi (Monitor Group), 6 March 2012; David Schenker (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 13 March 2012.
- Opposition and regime key influencers alike appeal to Syria's religious diversity. A March 2012 article in *Islam4UK* advocated for Christians to join the Syrian opposition, stating: "Therefore... we can say that scaring the Christians of the change and of the future does not stand up to the facts that exist in the Syrian reality. The most prominent fact is that the Syrian community does not possess an asset of rancor or violent confrontations among its components that can be employed or invested in what Syria is witnessing today. Also, the awareness of the Syrian people, their rally, and enthusiasm toward practicing their national and pan-Arab tasks left positive effects on their solidarity, unity, and cohesion far away from sectarian and religious contexts." "All4Syria: Article Reviews Presence, History of Christians in Syria—Part 3," *All4Syria* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 7 March 2012: GMP20120308644001.
- A 2006 report from the State Department highlighted Syria's religious diversity: "Sunni Muslims represented approximately 74 percent of the population (approximately 12.6 million persons). Other Muslim groups, including Alawi, Ismailis, and Shi'a, together constituted an estimated 13 percent of the population (approximately 2.2 million persons). The Druze accounted for an estimated 3 percent of the population (approximately 500 thousand persons). Various Christian denominations made up the remaining 10 percent of the population (approximately 1.7 million persons). The great majority of Christians belonged to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belonged to the autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches, which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope, and the independent Nestorian Church. There was a small Yazidi population. There were approximately forty Jews." "International Religious Freedom Report 2006: Syria," United States Department of State. 2006: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2006/71432.htm>.

### Master Narrative

- This narrative was articulated in interviews with a range of subject matter experts. Historian John Chalcraft articulated a narrative of national unity that centered on Syria's religious, ethnic, and geographical diversity. He also asserted that national unity is viewed by almost all Syrians as the foundation of the nation's strength. Syrian business leader Emad Tinawi confirmed this point of view. Both asserted that this narrative is widely held regardless of religious sect or political affiliation. Research fellow Barak Barfi, interviewed while embedded with the Syrian National Council, highlighted that Syrian influencers view the fragmentation of Greater Syria to have been rooted in betrayal by colonial powers. Syria expert Joshua Landis underscored that the idea of Syria as the capital of the Islamic world resonates widely. Research fellow David Schenker confirmed that articulations of a Greater Syria narrative include claims that Lebanon is a vital part of Syria. Monitor 360 interviews with Ambassador David Newton (Middle East Institute) 13 February 2012; Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Hanin Ghaddar (NOW Lebanon), 16 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University); 21 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Stephen McNerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Max Weiss (Princeton University), 28 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Emad Tinawi (Monitor Group) 6 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012; David Schenker (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 13 March 2012.
- President Bashar Al-Asad frequently draws on this master narrative in his messaging strategies, appealing to national unity to reject the legitimacy of the 2011–2012 Syrian Uprising. See, for example, Al-Asad's January 2012 speech in Al-Umayyad Square: "I have strong desire [*sic*] to be here with you at al-Umayyad Square, in the heart of Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads, Resistance, Civilization, the blessed Bilad al-Sham, which they wanted it to be transferred from the land of harmony, amity, and peace to a land which they plant with destruction, killing, and wreckage," "SANA: President al-Assad: 'We are Victorious against Conspiracy,'" SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 11 January 2012: GMP20120111966123.
- Opponents of the Al-Asad regime also draw upon this master narrative in their messaging strategies. See, for example, a statement attributed to the jihadist group "Al-Sahab Army in Greater Syria - General Command," posted in an online forum in October 2011: "The situation that the Muslims of Greater Syria are going through is

no longer lost on anyone, from the more than 30 years of suffering under the Asad family and its criminal gangs, to the despicable war against Islam and its subscribers, to the relentless plunder and theft of the country's resources. Preachers have been thrown into jail for years, prohibited from promoting religion and its rulings, save for those approved by the regime. Some cities have been besieged, still others destroyed, so that he alone may rule and the country belong to him and his family... Greater Syria is a blessed, fair land that has been desecrated by Asad the father and his successor, the son. Zayd Bin-Thabit al-Ansari—may God be pleased with him—reported that he heard the messenger—peace be upon him—say: 'Blessed Syria! Blessed Syria! Blessed Syria! They said to him: Messenger, how is that? He said: By the angels of God that have spread their wings over Syria,' *Ansar al-Mujahidin Network* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 14 October 2011: GMP20111015588002.

- When articulating this narrative, key influencers sometimes advocate Greater Syrian unity in opposition to Israel. See, for example, an April 2012 article in government newspaper *Tishrin*: "The Scholars of the Levant Conference, hosted by Damascus, yesterday, at the al-Asad library, has personified great and sublime meanings; and perhaps, one of the most important of these meanings, was the presence of clergy representing all religions and sects, from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, [who came] to confirm that the Levant [Bilad Al-Sham], which was the cradle of monotheistic religions, is still an incubator for this religious and sectarian diversity... This, in turn, has pointed the compass in the right direction, turning it toward Jerusalem, which should unite the efforts of the true believers to liberate it from the odious Zionist occupation that is backed by America," "Highlights: Syrian Press 11 Apr 12," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 11 April 2012: GMP20120411708002.
- The British encouraged an Arab rebellion against the Ottomans during World War I. Discussing Britain's support for the Arabs, T.E. Lawrence—otherwise known as "Lawrence of Arabia"—writes: "We could see a new factor was needed in the East, some power or race which would outweigh the Turks in numbers, in output, and in mental activity. No encouragement was given us from history to think that these qualities could be supplied ready-made from Europe...Some of us judged that there was latent power enough and to spare in the Arabic peoples (the greatest component of the old Turkish Empire), a prolific Semitic agglomeration, great in religious thought, reasonably industrious, mercantile, politic, yet solvent rather than dominant in character." T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Methuen & Co. Print. P. 56.

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### Significance for Communicators

- Syrian press reinforces that Lebanon is a constituent part of Syria. In April 2012, *All4Syria*, a website providing news from inside Syria and comments by both opposition and government figures, asserted that Syrian Army Major Rustum Ghazali was the "ruler" of Lebanon: "A high-ranking Syrian source told All4Syria that Rustum Ghazali, head of the Military Intelligence branch of the southern area [in Lebanon], is mainly responsible for giving orders to shoot whenever needed, which means that he is directly responsible for giving orders targeting the Al-Jadid TV crew. It is well known that there is animosity between Tahsin Khayyat, owner of Al-Jadid TV, and Major General Ghazali, since the latter is the actual ruler of Lebanon," *All4Syria* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 10 April 2012: GMP20120411700004.
- In December 2010, Turkish President Abdullah Gul advocated for the establishment of a "Levant Quartet." Turkish newspaper *Today's Zaman* reports: "The ideal of establishing a borderless area of economic unity, much like the EU, in which goods, people and capital can move freely among Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon has found concrete support from the private sectors of these countries... 'One day all borders will vanish except for the political borders in the Middle East, and security will prevail throughout the entire region. The free movement of people, goods and capital will be realized more easily among the (four) nations,' Gul said. The president was speaking at a press conference held in Istanbul on Friday to promote the 'Levant Eastern Mediterranean Quartet' project, which was developed by the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK) and prepared in participation with the business leaders of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan to pave the way for economic and cultural integration in the region, and to sign the Levant Business Forum agreement." "Turkish President Gul Praises Private Sector's Contribution to 'Levant Quartet,'" *Today's Zaman Online* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 4 December 2010: GMP20101204017005.
- International academics, diplomats, and press all frequently highlight Syria as a linchpin to the Arab world. For example, in March 2012 the *Los Angeles Times* reported: "With no end to the fighting imminent, a nation that declares itself 'the beating heart of Arabism' seems poised to become the site of the longest and bloodiest of the so-called Arab Spring revolts. But, as [former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi] Annan noted, Syria represents much more: It is the arena for the region's most geopolitically significant conflict, and potentially the most disruptive one. 'Syria is unique because it is linked to so many players,' said Rami G. Khouri, who directs the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut. 'You have an internal conflict in Syria. But you also have a regional conflict and a global one. It exists at all three levels,' The probable impact on interlocking alliances and rivalries, as well as on long-running sectarian tensions, is almost dizzying to contemplate. Syria is a kind of strategic chessboard on which interests great and small are playing for their future advantage," "Syria's conflict has significance far beyond its borders," *Los Angeles Times*. 18 March 2012: <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/mar/18/world/la-fg-syria-regional-stability-20120319>.

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### Significance for Analysts

- Hizballah is heavily sponsored by the Al-Asad regime, and has long served as a mechanism for the regime to exert influence in Lebanon. In April 2012, Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt asserted that Hizballah would eventually shift its allegiance to the Syrian resistance. Lebanese newspaper *The Daily Star* reports: "In a direct reference to Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah's alliance with Syria, Jumblatt expressed his

confidence that ‘the resistance in Lebanon will one day join the Syrian people’s resistance,’” Jumblatt says Hezbollah will eventually join ‘Syrian resistance,’” *The Daily Star*. 2 April 2012: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Apr-02/168925-jumblatt-says-hezbollah-will-eventually-join-syrian-resistance.ashx#axzz1rs54ST3M>.

- Sectarian conflict in Syria demonstrates the potential to spill into Lebanon, suggesting that Lebanon’s future is likely to be closely linked to Syria’s. For example, in February 2012 three people died in Tripoli as a result of clashes between Alawites and Sunnis: “Three people died and 23 were wounded during fierce clashes on Saturday between Lebanese Sunni Muslims hostile to Syria’s regime and Alawites who support it, a Lebanese security official said. A Sunni and an Alawite were killed and 23 people were wounded in clashes that continued since Friday between people from the neighbourhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tebbaneh in the northern city of Tripoli, the official told AFP.. ‘I am paying the price of a war which is not mine,’ said Zeinab Yaghi, a 55-year-old Sunni Muslim mother of five whose house was hit in the crossfire. ‘I know nothing about politics but supporters of the Damascus regime are causing problems here,’ she said after fleeing her home with her children,” “Three dead in Sunni-Alawite clashes: Lebanon security,” *Dawn*. 12 February 2012: <http://dawn.com/2012/02/12/three-dead-in-sunni-alawite-clashes-lebanon-security/>.
- A 2011 policy paper edited by SNC leader Ausama Monajed highlights that militants in Lebanon could become threats to the opposition: “Hezbollah needn’t even fire missiles. The Syrian-Lebanon border is an easy access point for militants pouring in and out of Syria. Reports of Syrian refugees being kidnapped in broad daylight from the streets of Beirut by Syrian security forces who easily sneak back into Syria means that Lebanon risks being plunged into a secondary military conflict.” “Safe Area for Syria: An Assessment of Legality, Logistics and Hazards,” Strategic Research and Communications Centre. December 2011: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp\\_uploaded\\_documents/111228\\_intervention\\_Syria\\_paper\\_.pdf](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/111228_intervention_Syria_paper_.pdf).

## “STABILIZING BA’ATH”

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **“Security and stability”**: The regime frequently uses this phrase in newspapers and public speeches as an explanation for the use of violence against opposition groups. Regime efforts are said to enhance “security and stability” while opposition conspiracies undermine “security and stability.”
- **Hafez Al-Asad**: Hafez is presented as a heroic symbol and the leader of modern Syria, and is idolatized through statues in most every major Syrian city. (Images via BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8167890.stm>)



- **Ba’ath Party**: The political party of the regime, founded in Syria by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Batar in 1946. The Ba’ath party came to power in Syria in 1963, but a successful inter-party coup led by Hafez Al-Asad and Salah Jadid in 1966 led to a split between the old and new leaders of the party. A second interparty struggle between Salah Jadid and Hafez Al-Asad occurred from 1966 until 1970 when Hafez gained control of the Ba’ath Party.
- **Corrective Movement**: Name given to the 1970 internal Ba’ath coup in which Hafez Al-Asad overthrew Salah Jadid and seized power. The Corrective Movement is glorified in the government-controlled Syrian press as the event which rescued the country from the radical policies of Salah Jadid.
- **“Beating Heart of Arabism”**: A phrase frequently deployed by the regime to refer to Syria’s historical leadership role in the Arab world, while evoking associations with pan-Arab nationalism. As with many regime slogans, this phrase is heavily criticized by the opposition as a distraction used to divert attention from the regime’s alleged crimes.
- **Aleppo Artillery School Massacre of 1979**: Event in 1979 in which members of the Muslim Brotherhood infiltrated the Syrian military academic in Aleppo and killed between 32 and 83 cadets. This event caused shockwaves throughout the Syrian government, and subscribers point to this event as justification for the government’s escalation of force against the Muslim Brotherhood.
- **1982 Siege of Hama**: Subscribers view this battle as a symbol of the regime’s victory against the Muslim Brotherhood, which had seized the city and executed the Hama’s Ba’ath leadership. The military siege led to the death of 10,000–30,000 people in the city and destroyed entire city blocks. The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria was all but eradicated following this event and they were unable to regain a presence in Syria for decades.

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## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with Regime Insiders, Wealthy Urbanites, and Alawites in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Hanin Ghaddar (*NOW Lebanon*), 2 February 2012; Nadim Shehadi (Chatham House), 2 February 2012; Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Steve McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Max Weiss (Princeton University), 28 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.
- A March 2012 editorial in the newspaper *Al-Akhbar* describes the loyalty of Alawites, Christians, and Druze communities to the regime and their reluctance to join opposition protests: “Christians, especially in Damascus, are the most willing to stick with the regime until the end...the two other significant religious minorities in Syria—the Druze and Alawis—have also been reluctant to participate in the uprising in large numbers.” “Al-Akhbar: Syria’s Activists (II): The Struggle for the Minorities,” *Al-Akhbar* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 21 March 2012: GMP20120321966188.

- Author Flynt Leverett confirms that this narrative resonates for Regime Insiders and the Wealthy Elite. In his 2005 book *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, Leverett explains that the Al-Asad's support is formed from a small group of Regime Insiders which includes Alawite and Sunnis: "[Hafez] Asad reinforced this highly centralized power structure by establishing what became, effectively, a tenured inner circle of his regime...the inner circle included a dozen or so senior diplomatic, military and intelligence officials, all handpicked by the president and often with personal histories linking them directly to Asad...During Asad's tenure, the composition of the inner circle consistently reflected the Alawi-Rural Sunni alliance that was the corner of his regime's social base." Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria Bashar's Trial by Fire*. Brookings Institution. 2005. Print. P. 26.

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### Master Narrative

- In interviews with Monitor 360, journalist Hanin Ghaddar stated that Christians are extremely loyal to the regime and fear sectarian reprisals should the regime fall. Journalist Stephen Starr asserted that the business class, concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo, have profited from relationships with the regime and have remained loyal since Hafez Al-Asad gained power in 1970. Historian Jason Pack highlighted how Alawites suffered under the Muslim majority for centuries and how they have enjoyed secular protection of the Ba'ath regime. Historian John Chalcraft described Ba'ath efforts to promote Syrian nationalism and stressed the unifying importance of the regime in light of Syria's history of coups. Syria expert Joshua Landis described the fear and persecution that members of the regime felt in the late 1970's and 1980's during the regime's battle with the Muslim Brotherhood, justifying the siege of Hama for subscribers. Monitor 360 interviews with John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Hanin Ghaddar (*NOW Lebanon*), 16 February 2012; Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012.
- The Israeli government conducted an analysis of the Syrian press, and in November 2010 released an article which stated that the Syrian government was making a concerted effort to highlight the secular nature of Syria's government: "1. During the past few months, the Syrian regime has shown a trend of highlighting Syria's character as a secular country by taking measures to contain clerics' influence on society and, at the same time, staunch the Syrian society's religious tendencies. 2. Under the younger Al-Asad, during his initial years in power, the Syrian regime demonstrated the desire to combat the Syrians' Islamic character. Moreover, Al-Asad tried to win over the public with the help of the clerics and prayer leaders to fortify his status at home and internationally in his clash with the West, mainly with the United States, when Syria was politically isolated, especially between 2003 and 2007. In the past few years, it seems that the Syrian Government has gained sufficient self-confidence to reexamine this policy and the threat it presents to its stability." "Israel Govt Roundup Reviews Syrian 'Trend' of Strengthening Secular Character," Israeli Government via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 11 November 2010: GMP20101111738002
- In September 2011, Walid al-Moallem, Syria's Foreign Minister, gave a speech to the UN General Assembly in which he highlighted how the regime has unified a diverse set of people under secular policies: "Syria provided our region with a model of peaceful coexistence among the different components of the Syrian people, a model which deserves to be emulated. It opted for secularism to promote its national unity in view of the religious and ethnic diversity of the region to which it belongs, a region that was the cradle of divine religious and the birthplace of human civilization." "Syria: 'Political Circumstances' Forced Internal Demands 'To Take a Back Seat'," SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 27 September 2011: GMP20110927637002.
- In an extensive series of articles published January through February 2012, Syrian ambassador Mahdi Dakhilallah describes Ba'ath ideology: "ideological generality, namely, being satisfied with general frames and principles and flexible content that might be acceptable to the largest possible number of people. Generality is an expression of common ground among the majority of people due to its steering away from definition and detail." He says he agrees with the notion that "generality is a denial of ideology from the point of view of discussion," but also wonders whether "it is important for the party to possess a specific and precise ideology in order to be able to ensure a wide popular base to support it." "Syria: Paper Continues Series of Articles on Ba'ath Party Ideology; Parts 4-10," *Al-Ba'ath* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 18 January 2012–1 February 2012: GMP20120118708004.
- In March 2012, As'ad Abbud, chief editor of the government paper *Al-Thawrah*, drew attention to Hafez Al-Asad's ascent to power as a key moment in Syria's history, asserting: "that the Ba'ath movement in 1963 and the Corrective Movement in 1970 raised Arab hopes and revived Arab dreams after periods of disappointments and failures... President Hafiz al-Asad worked to build a strong modern state capable of creating stability and leading the conflict with Israel as the top priorities... President Hafiz al-Asad made great successes in leadership, rule, accomplishments, and construction. ... the challenges grew at the beginning of the new century, with the Arab situation getting much worse. ... President Bashar al-Asad managed to keep the hope and revive the dream." "Highlights: Syrian Press 08 Mar 10," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 8 March 2010: GMP20100308627001.

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### Significance for Communicators

- In an October 2011 interview with *Al-Akhabar*, Syrian National Council member Bassma Kodmani avoided making comparisons to Libya, stating that the Syrian situation was different: "Because the concept of international protection and its implementation is a delicate and sensitive matter, members of the SNC are working hard to find a new interpretation that will prevent the regime from continuing its repression, on the one hand, and avoid military intervention on the Libyan scale, on the other, according to Kodmani. The spokeswoman for the Council says that 'faced with these complications, we have to find other means of support and foreign protection which are

different from the Libyan experience... The situation is difficult because the principle of protecting civilians was implemented in Libya for the first time in history. But we have to invent other ways of implementing it in Syria by looking at historical precedents other than military intervention in the Libyan example. This could be in the form of protected areas or humanitarian corridors, where there is no room for the military element..." "Al-Akhbar: 'Foreign Intervention' Interprets Differently Among Syrian Opposition," *Al-Akhbar* via www.opensource.gov. 29 October 2011: GMP20111030721003.

- In efforts to assuage minority fears of sectarian reprisals and promote a pluralistic vision for Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria issued a statement which emphasized non-discriminatory policy: "The Muslim Brotherhood Group presented yesterday its 'historic' document through which it says that as a movement, it pursues the establishment of a 'pluralistic modern civil state' in Syria. In this document, the group pursues reassuring 'those who are afraid, and those who arouse fear' of the Muslim Brotherhood, presents its 'proof' to both, and then leaves the next step up to them, in a way similar to 'God, I have conveyed the message.' Muslim Brotherhood Controller General Riyad al-Shaqfah goes farther to the level of stressing that the Muslim Brotherhood does not oppose any woman or man of whatever religion reaching the position of president 'as long as the people choose him or her.' Al-Shaqfah has said to *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*: "The Syrian society has never been sectarian." "Syrian Muslim Brotherhood Leaders on Importance of Nondiscrimination, Democracy," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via www.opensource.gov. 26 March 2012: GMP20120326825006.
- In a series of articles published in *Al-Jazeera*, journalist Nir Rosen noted that the opposition has not addressed Alawite non-Muslims fears of sectarian reprisals: "The opposition has failed to reassure Alawites that they have a safe future in a post-Assad Syria. Most Alawite homes have somebody working in the security forces and they are also disproportionately represented in other government jobs. They fear collective punishment and losing their jobs. If the regime collapses, many will flee back to the mountain or coastal villages they came from. At the same time, Sunni residents who are a minority in parts of Latakia, especially in the mountain villages, may also face displacement. I believe a civil war is inevitable. The insurgents will carve out more autonomous zones and those pockets of pro-regime supporters, especially if they are Alawite, will fight or flee. I already know of many Christians and Alawites who have fled from Homs. Alawite neighbourhoods in Homs or Damascus associated with the security forces may be subject to revenge attacks. Members of the security forces might choose to stay in their villages or neighbourhoods out of self-defence and parts of Syria will be caught up in sectarian conflict" "Q&A: Nir Rosen on Syrian Sectarianism," *Al-Jazeera*. 18 February 2012: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/2012218165546393720.html>.

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### Significance for Analysts

- In an unattributed September 2011 article published in the government owned newspaper *Al-Watan*, the Syrian government attempted to undermine foreign media and drew attention to the relatives of a slain military officer. The relatives expressed their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the regime in order to preserve "security and stability", a phrase frequently used by the regime: "one of the relatives of the martyr, Al-Dakhil, 'We are not waiting for Al-Jazirah to tell us who the martyr is,' affirming that 'anyone who has a sense of patriotism will not follow it, and [anyone who has] a grain of ethics should not follow Al-Arabiya either, as they are two politicized stations that should not be followed or have anyone listen to such news.' The son of Al-Dakhil said also that 'the martyr is a loss for his family, his town, and the whole country; but we are all ready to sacrifice for the country, and we will return to the usual stability and security in our country.'" "Highlights: Syrian Press 28 September 2011," OSC Summary via www.opensource.gov. 28 September 2011: GMP20110928708001.
- In April 2011, SANA reported that Syria's foreign minister, Walid al-Moallem, met with ambassadors from Arab countries, asserting that the opposition is being influenced by foreign *fatwas* that seek to undermine the "security and stability" of the country: "The Minister also expressed surprise over the fatwas issued from outside Syria, saying: 'those who issue these fatwas should know that Syria is proud of its national unity and its secular, pan-Arab course and adherence to national standards...Regarding the seizure of weapon shipments smuggled from Iraq, al-Moallem said that this isn't the first time such a thing happened, and that the Iraqi government is uninvolved in this. However, he noted that there are parties that are intently working to undermine security and stability in Syria. Al-Moallem concluded by reaffirming that reform is underway in Syria and that peaceful demonstration is permitted, but violence and vandalism cannot be tolerated. During the meeting, a number of Arab ambassadors affirmed commitment to the security and stability of Syria, saying that this issue affects the region's security and stability.'" "SANA: Al-Moallem to Arab and Foreign Ambassadors: Reform is Underway in Syria Those who Want it do not Us..." SANA via www.opensource.gov. 19 April 2011: GMP20110419966050.
- SANA reported that President Bashar Al-Assad delivered a letter at the BRIC Leaders Summit in March 2012 that painted the 2011–2012 uprising as a group of foreign extremists that violate the United Nations Charter: "President al-Assad, in the letter said, despite that, the situation in Syria was inflamed due to the misleading media campaigns and the continued assassinations and terrorist operations backed by forces who provided weapons and financial support to the extremists and tried to use the international forums for issuing decisions which are not consistent with the United Nations Charter and shouldering the Syrian government's responsible for what is going on... President al-Assad stressed the need to convince the states that support terrorist groups by money and weapons, to immediately cease their support, including the neighboring countries that host these groups and facilitate their terrorist operations against Syria." "SANA: President al-Assad, in Letter to BRICS Leaders Summit, Enhancing Principle of Respect of Sovereignty..." SANA via www.opensource.gov. 29 March 2012: GMP20120329966209.

## “PROMISE OF A NEW SYRIA”

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- Daraa:** Daraa is the southern Syrian town that was the site of the initial protests against the Al-Asad regime in March 2011 after a roughly a dozen teens and young adults were arrested by regime security forces for allegedly spray painting anti-regime slogans. Regime security forces ignored residents’ requests to release the arrested—who were reportedly being tortured—prompting further demonstrations and a rapid escalation in violence. Blue text translated as: “down with Bashar.” (Image via <http://img.ibtimes.com/www/data/images/full/2012/03/15/248618-graffiti-written-in-blue-translated-as-down-with-bashar-is-seen-below-.jpg>.)



- Rami Makhlouf:** The cousin of President Bashar Al-Asad, owner of Syria’s largest telecommunications company, and believed to be the richest man in Syria. His close ties to the Al-Asad regime and alleged participation in many Syrian industries make him a symbol of corruption and cronyism for subscribers to this narrative. In the early stages of the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising, demonstrators routinely chanted his name, denouncing him for his wealth which protestors claimed was gained through corrupt means. Due to his negative public image and close association with the Al-Asad regime, Rami Makhlouf stepped down from his formal roles in the business world in June of 2011 as a concession to demonstrators, declaring that he would devote his wealth and energy toward philanthropy.
- Damascus Spring:** A period of renewed civil and political discourse within Syria that occurred in 2000 after the death of Hafez Al-Asad. This period of political discourse was characterized by optimism as activists thought that Bashar Al-Asad, a western-educated doctor, would reform and modernize Syria to allow more political dialogue and curb corruption. These informal discussions were tolerated by the regime for a year before the Al-Asad regime arrested leading intellectuals and prohibited known members of the Damascus Spring from congregating in public.
- 2011 Libyan Civil War:** Viewed by some members of the opposition as the model scenario for international engagement, which saw the United Nations erect no-fly zones over opposition held territory and engage in direct military strikes against the Libyan regime’s military. Libya is viewed as a positive symbol by some subscribers because intervention did not lead to occupation of the country by international forces. However, some opposition members view Libya as a negative example due to the political unrest which beset the country following the Gaddafi regime’s collapse.
- Iraq:** Many Syrians see similarities between Syria’s and Iraq’s repressive Ba’ath regimes. The 2003 Iraq War has been denounced by the Syrian public, but is also viewed as a demonstration of the US’s ability to elicit regime change through force. Syrian protestors, reminded of the symbolic importance of toppling Saddam Hussein’s statue in Iraq (image on right), toppled statues of Hafez Al-Asad during the first weeks of protest in the late spring of 2011 (image on left). (Images via <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/apr/09/fallenheroes> and [http://www.washingtonpost.com/rf/image\\_606w/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2011/10/09/Foreign/Images/2011-10-08T181534Z\\_01\\_AMM29\\_RTRIDSP\\_3\\_SYRIA.jpg](http://www.washingtonpost.com/rf/image_606w/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2011/10/09/Foreign/Images/2011-10-08T181534Z_01_AMM29_RTRIDSP_3_SYRIA.jpg))



- Mukhabarat:** Slang used to describe widely feared and reviled Syrian intelligence and security services.
- Shabiha:** plainclothes pro-regime paramilitary forces, translated as “thugs”, who have violently suppressed anti-regime demonstrations and protests. Viewed by opposition members as an extension of the regime.

- **Free Syrian Army (FSA):** This anti-regime group is led by Colonel Riad Al-Asa'd (no relation to President Bashar Al-Asad), and is composed primarily of low ranking defectors from the Syrian military. The FSA is relatively disorganized and has been unable to effectively coordinate military operations against the regime. The FSA is based primarily out of Turkey and operates in the northern regions of Syria.
- **Syrian National Council:** The mostly widely recognized political opposition group by the international community. The SNC is composed primarily of expatriate Syrians, many of whom were expelled or fled Syria during the Damascus Spring. The SNC also contains representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist organizations.

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## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with Rural Sunnis, and Urban Working Classes in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Hanin Ghaddar (*NOW Lebanon*), 16 February 2012; Nadim Shehadi (Chatham House), 16 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012.
- In a February 2012 article in *Al-Jazeera*, journalist Nir Rosen recounted how the majority of opposition members were Sunnis from a rural or urban working class background: "The armed phenomenon began in rural areas, known in Arabic as the reef, and in the working class urban *shaabi* areas. Men there were more likely to own guns and were known as *qabaday*—'tough' men more likely to have the courage (and potential for violence) that one needs to respond violently to security forces. They had more grievances—and less to lose—than middle or upper class activists with university degrees... The regime is in a quandary. Its security agencies alone cannot clear or hold a village or a neighbourhood or a city. They need the Syrian army to back them up. But Syrian conscripts are

often from the Sunni majority—and so is most of the opposition—from all over Syria, including from hotspots of the revolution.” “Al Jazeera.com: Q&A: Nir Rosen on Syria’s Armed Opposition,” *Al-Jazeera* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 13 February 2012: GMP20120213966197.

- A June 2011 article published in *BBC* described that the uprising was composed primarily of Sunnis from a rural background: “Claims of corruption and nepotism have been rife among the excluded Sunni majority. And protests have generally been biggest in Sunni-dominated rural areas and towns and cities, as opposed to mixed areas. Opposition figures have stressed that they seek a ‘multi-national, multi-ethnic and religiously tolerant society’. But there are fears of chaos and instability—even talk of civil war—if Mr Assad should fall. Activists say these fears are overblown. But many inside Syria—even those who want to see serious political reforms—say they would prefer to give Mr Assad time to implement them rather than risk instability or sectarian strife.” “Guide: Syria Crisis,” *BBC* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 23 June 2011: EUP20110623960013.

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## Master Narratives

- In interviews with Monitor 360, research fellow Nadim Shehadi described how populations in Syria were motivated to act against the Al-Asad regime by the fall of Saddam Hussein, who they viewed as a similarly brutal and repressive dictator. Syria political expert Murhaf Jouejati described how large portions of the Syrian population are opposed to the regime due to the corruption and cronyism that have persisted for decades. Anthropologist John Borneman explained how many poor Syrians were resentful of the Al-Asad regime and upper-class Syrians for their ostentatious displays of wealth, which the lower class believed they gained through corruption. Journalist Nir Rosen emphasized that the uprising movement—largely composed of Sunnis—espoused notions of a democratic government, but used language invoking Islam as the basis of revolutionary rhetoric. Syria expert Joshua Landis confirmed that the grievances articulated in this narrative were exacerbated by rising unemployment, a long-standing drought, inflation caused from liberalizing economic policies, and pervasive corruption. Monitor 360 interviews with Hanin Ghaddar (*NOW Lebanon*), 16 February 2012; Nadim Shehadi (Chatham House), 16 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Stephen Starr (Journalist), 23 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012.
- An April 2012 article in *Al-Jazeera* profiled Syrian National Council President Burhan Ghalioun, drawing attention to his leadership of the ideologically fractured Syrian National Council: “Syria saw a brief period of political openness that was called ‘The Damascus Spring’. During this time, Ghalioun visited Syria frequently and became very active in politics... The so-called Damascus Spring was soon cut short, and Ghalioun returned to Paris where he concentrated on his academic work. When Syria’s uprising against Assad began in March 2011, Ghalioun quickly sided with the protesters, making many media appearances and working to unite opposition figures. When the SNC was established in August 2011, Ghalioun was selected to lead the wide-ranging umbrella organisation that includes opposition figures with different ideologies and backgrounds. His six-month term as head of the SNC was renewed in February 2012 by the SNC Executive Committee in Doha, the capital of Qatar. The move was criticised by several SNC members and some decided to leave the group in protest. Some within the opposition have berated Ghalioun for not demanding forceful measures, such as direct military intervention, from the international community to topple the Assad government.” “Al Jazeera.com: Profile: Syria’s Burhan Ghalioun,” *Al-Jazeera* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 1 April 2012: GMP20120401966228.
- Members of the Syrian opposition met in Istanbul and drafted the “National Covenant of Syria of the Future” in March 2012, deriding the Al-Asad regime for its corruption and invoking Syria’s history of prosperity and unity: “The Syrian economy will be taken away from the hand of the butcher regime, and the clique of pillagers, monopolists, and public funds embezzlers, and will be used to serve the entire Syrian people... Soon the great Syrian people will put an end to this black period in the history of Syria, and our country will start a new era of democracy and prosperity in which it will regain its true national unity with the participation and cooperation of all its sons so that Syria can assume the status its history and people deserve in the civilized human society. The tyrannical forces of darkness and oppression will not be able to change the course of history, and prevent the people from deciding their own destiny and achieving victory.” “Syrian Opposition Istanbul Meeting Issues National Covenant,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 28 March 2012: GMP20120328876002.
- In a September 2011 interview with *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, former Syrian Vice President Abd-al-Halim Khaddam stated that the current uprising was a movement that was started by young Syrians who reject corruption and aspire for freedom: “[...] some opposition parties] have no relationship with the reality in the Syrian street... This revolution has been launched by Syria’s youths who received their education at the regime’s schools, but at the same time, the regime’s practices have created in them a feeling of anxiety about their fate and the fate of the country, and they have been assisted in this by the technical development in the field of data collection and information; therefore, they are able to see two worlds, one of which is a world in which there is repression, tyranny, and corruption in their country by the regime, and the other is an outside world in which there is freedom, democracy, and ability to change and to call for rights. A world in which there is a possibility to have injustice, but it has freedom, including the freedom to criticize the ruler and to demonstrate against him, and the ability to change him through the ballot boxes. This is how things developed among the youths of Syria who launched their revolution and succeeded in all what the politicians have failed to do.” “Syria’s Khaddam Calls for International Intervention To Protect Syrian People,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 4 September 2011: GMP20110904001005.
- In a April 2012 interview Syrian actress Fadwa Sulayman, a member of the opposition, asserted that minority sects were against the regime and also sought freedom from repression: “Asked on the Syrian regime’s argument that ‘this Salafist and Sunni revolution’ poses dangers to ‘the Alawite, Christian, and Druze minorities’ in Syria, actress

Sulayman says, "This is a veritable misrepresentation of the Syrian people's stands. From day one, the Syrian people have articulated their stand. They said that they rebelled to uphold dignity and freedom, and to restore the lost freedoms in Syria. I have not felt any such thing, in either Homs or elsewhere in Syria." She wonders why Bashar al-Assad is using the Syrian Army to crush the ongoing rebellion, which is only causing this army "to split into two rival camps." Actress Sulayman adds: "Is he really protecting minorities when he sends his army to kill and get killed?" "Al-Jazirah Debates Syrian Minorities Stand on 'Revolution,' Russian Position," *Al-Jazirah Satellite Channel Television* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 2 April 2012: GMP20120402643004.

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### Significance for Communicators

- A March 2012 article published in the Turkish newspaper *Sunday's Zaman* disparaged the United States for its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, and asserted that the United States does not actually support the Syrian opposition. The headquarters of the SNC and FSA are located in Istanbul, and many Syrian refugees have fled to Turkey: "However, what really causes anxiety regarding those who have a dirty history and are trying to solve the crisis is the fact that they aren't sincere. Western countries are known for their dirty and exploitative histories. Most of the dictatorships in the Middle East are products of Western involvement in the region's politics. All dictators, from Saddam Hussein to Hosni Mubarak, from the Assads to other dictators in the Gulf region, are the puppets of the US, France and England. A couple of years ago Condoleezza Rice, then-secretary of state, confessed to this state of affairs and admitted that the US made a big mistake by supporting dictatorships. For years these countries were called moderate regimes. They are still described like this. The only reason for this is the fact that they are for the West. But they are not for the public. We all know why the US recently entered Iraq and Afghanistan. So what is the conclusion? Two ruined countries later, the US still holds much power in the Gulf region. Does it keep its power to protect the public against dictatorial regimes? No, it doesn't. On the contrary, the reason is to defend the regimes against the public. In other words, the US wants the dictatorships to remain." "Turkey: Column Notes Countries Trying To Solve Syrian Counties Are Insincere," *Sunday's Zaman* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 25 March 2012: EUP20120325421002.
- In June 2011, Syrian National Coordination Commission leaders issued a statement outlining their commitment to toppling the Al-Assad regime and instituting a new democratic government that respected freedom of speech, minority rights, and human dignity: "1. Drafting a constitution for a parliamentary system that creates a new social contract to ensure a civilian state, guarantee equal rights of citizenship for all Syrians, ensure political pluralism and equal opportunities for parties, organize peaceful rotation of power through the ballot boxes, rationalize the tasks and powers of the president of the republic, determine the number of presidential terms, ensure the independence of the judiciary and separation among the three powers, and put this draft to a public referendum for approving it. 2. Regulating political life through a modern democratic law for political parties and regulating the media and parliamentary elections based on laws that provide freedom, transparency, justice, and equal opportunities. 3. Respecting human rights and commitment to all international charters related to these rights and full equality between citizens in rights and duties emanating from acknowledging the principle of citizenship, which views all citizens equally irrespective of their affiliations, beliefs, and ethnicities." "Syria: National Coordination Commission Leaders, Final Statement," *All4Syria* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 26 Jun 2011: GMP20110703637003.
- In a March 2012 press release, the Syrian National Council addressed the business community and appealed for this audience segment to defect and join the opposition: "The business community is now clearly taking a position against the Assad regime and in support of the SNC. Additionally, this new alliance not only indicates a genuine will to overthrow the regime, but presents a solid commitment by the business community to rebuild Syria's economy and sustain a transition to a new Syria. The SBC [Syrian Businessmen Council] was founded after extensive communications and networking to build trust within the political, economic, formal, and informal bodies both in the region and worldwide to present an example of the mentality that will prevail in the new Syria... [The SBC] aims to provide all forms of unconditional support for the Syrian people, to ensure the transition to peace and security, and to assure its confidence that Syria's sons and daughters will not be abandoned in the present and future. Economic support will be channeled in support of the Syrian people and their interests, and to assure other nations' investments in the future Syria." "Syrian National Council: SNC Call on Businessmen To Defect," Syrian National Council via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 10 March 2012: GMP20120310700002.

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### Significance for Analysts

- A February 2012 *Financial Times* article discussed the divided nature of the opposition and how competing influences and vision of a Syria post-Al-Assad have undermined the opposition's effectiveness: "One of the biggest tasks facing President Bashar al-Assad's opponents is to bring coherence to a movement that is as diverse and fragmented as Syria itself. An eclectic alliance of fighters, liberals and Islamists need not be fatal to a successful rebel uprising — as the movement that ousted Muammer Gaddafi in Libya showed. But Syria's rebels are still struggling to establish themselves as a rallying point. Peter Harling of the International Crisis Group, an advocacy [sic], says that 'squabbling, lack of vision and lobbying for an ill-defined outside intervention' in the Syrian National Council, the best-known opposition group, scared some citizens 'back into the regime fold' instead of rallying them to its cause... The SNC, which unites intellectuals, activists, Islamists and minority groups, is also hampered by the fact that many of its members are not that well known in Syria — another difference to Libya." "UK Source Examines International Consensus Against Intervention in Syria," *Financial Times* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 21 February 2012: EUP20120222031013.

- In an October 2011 interview featured in *Al-Akhbar*, Syrian opposition figure Haitham al-Maleh introduced themes of foreign conspiracy and ideals of Greater Syria in his denunciation of the Al-Asad regime: “There is a prior accusation against us implicit in that. Of all the Arab peoples, the Syrians are the most Arab nationalist, patriotic, and committed to an Arab Palestine. It is the Assad regime which sold out Palestine and the Golan Heights, not the Syrian people. Does the liberation of the Golan start with Lebanon? The Syrian regime is protected by Israel. The Arab Spring will bring down the borders and spell the end of Sykes-Picot. That will be the beginning of the end of Israel.” “Syria: Opposition Figure Al-Malih Supports International Intervention,” *Al-Akhbar* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 14 October 2011: GMP20111016637001.
- The Syrian Opposition Council, in a April 2012 memo, recognized the rights of the Kurds, and drew attention to the unequal distribution of wealth in Syria and the poverty of their communities: “5. Commitment to combating poverty and giving the areas that suffered from the policies of discrimination sufficient attention within the context of development and achieving justice in the distribution of national wealth, as well as working to raise the standard of living of the citizens from various segments and areas, especially the areas that suffered from deprivation under the current autocratic regime.” “Syrian Opposition Council Document Recognizes ‘National Rights’ of Kurds,” *AllSyria* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 3 April 2012: GMP20120404644003.
- The unequal distribution of wealth and perceived corruption of Damascus and Aleppo was captured by the famous Syrian actor Duraid Lahham. One famous scene from a 1970’s play shows the Syrian actor playing the role of a rural peasant who was being tortured by secret police, but every time they electrocuted him, he would giggle. Asked why by the investigators, he responded “because electricity reached my behind before it reached my village.” Duraid Lahham’s website describes his plays of the 1970s: “[Duraid Lahham] began performing plays that criticized Arab inefficiency, weaknesses, corruption, and poverty. Lahham’s first show was called *Masrah al-Shawq* (Theater of Thorns) and it consisted of naive, primitive political comedy, but was greatly welcomed by Arab audiences. Authorities in Syria wanted to arrest Lahham for his ‘hidden meanings,’... the plays of Duraid Lahham became the only outlet for marginal political criticism and relief in the Middle East throughout the 1970s and 1980s.” “Duraid Lahham, Personal Website,” Duraid Lahham Web. 2005: <http://www.duraidlahham.com/indexa.htm>.

## “ALAWITE INFIDELS”

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Caliph Mu’awiyah:** Mu’awiyah was the first Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty, reigning from the years 661 to 680. He was the first Caliph to govern from Damascus, and funded the city’s development. Subscribers to this narrative credit him with maintaining the unity of the *ummah* (community of the faithful), by signing a cease-fire with rival Caliph Ali, who is considered by Shi’ites to be the first Imam.
- **1982 Massacre of Hama:** Under orders by Hafex Al-Asad, the Syrian Army shelled the city of Hama in February 1982, killing anywhere from 10,000-40,000 individuals. Islamic insurgents against the Ba’ath party had killed approximately seventy Ba’athists during an early morning uprising; in response, the regime conducted a scorched campaign against the city for three weeks.
- **Rifaat Al-Asad/Maher Al-Assad:** Rifaat is President Hafez Al-Asad’s brother. He personally led the 1982 attack on Hama. Maher Al-Asad is President Bashar Al-Asad’s brother. He personally leads the Republican Guard’s most elite unit, the Fourth Armored Division.
- **Muslim Brotherhood in Syria:** Founded in the late 1930s, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria has long agitated for a government guided by the principles of Islam. Banned by the secularist Ba’ath party, it was nearly wiped out as a political force in the 1982 Massacre at Hama. Although most of its leadership is in exile, it has received considerable support from opposition forces during the 2011–2012 uprising and has asserted it would like to play a role in organizing opposition forces.
- **Nusayri:** What Alawites were called, and called themselves, prior to the French Mandate and First World War. This name was taken by the sect’s alleged founder Muhammad ibn Nusayr, a ninth-century religious leader. Unlike “Alawite,” the name Nusayri does not infer any connection to the Islamic faith.
- **Adnan Al-’Ar’our:** A Sunni cleric hailing from Hama who frequently appears on television in Syria. He is one of the most visible supporters of the Syrian protest movement and most-discussed examples of the Islamist role in the opposition to Damascus, and frequently expresses anti-Alawite views.
- **Taqiyya:** The Alawite tradition of *taqiyya* (disimulation) is a religiously permissible deception to conceal one’s faith when under threat. Sunnis view the practice of *taqiyya* as a sign of ingrained treacherousness in the Alawite character.<sup>15,16</sup>

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13. In interviews with Monitor 360, author Elie Elhadj described how the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was all but wiped out following the 1982 Siege of Hama. Research fellow Nadim Shehadi asserted that opposition groups within Syria were disorganized after four decades of regime oppression. Journalist Nir Rosen argued that the Muslim Brotherhood was almost completely driven out of Syria following Hama. Monitor 360 interviews with Nadim Shehadi (Chatham House), 16 February 2012; Elie Elhadj (Author), 21 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012.
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## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with Rural Sunnis in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012.
- The 2006-2011 drought in the north and east of Syria forced many Rural Sunnis into enclaves of tents surrounding Syria's larger towns and cities. In 2010, the *New York Times* reported: "Now, after four consecutive years of drought, this heartland of the Fertile Crescent—including much of neighboring Iraq—appears to be turning barren, climate scientists say. Ancient irrigation systems have collapsed, underground water sources have run dry and hundreds of villages have been abandoned as farmlands turn to cracked desert and grazing animals die off. Sandstorms have become far more common, and vast tent cities of dispossessed farmers and their families have risen up around the larger towns and cities of Syria and Iraq" "Earth Is Parched Where Syrian Farms Thrived," *New York Times*. 13 October 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/14/world/middleeast/14syria.html>.
- In a November 2011 interview with *PBS*, Syria expert Joshua Landis pointed to inflation and economic woes as contributing factors to rural Sunnis' grievances with the Al-Asad regime: "The people at the bottom got hit by a number of factors. One is big inflation, which undermined their income, and two was the run-up in commodity prices that happened throughout the world and really had nothing to do with Syria, but it hammered the lower classes and the rural classes. They didn't have money for food, and food prices, things like wheat, went up 100 percent in the last two years. The average basket of goods that a Syrian eats went up by about 30 percent over the last year. People didn't have money to pay for this stuff. This was the failure that was eating away at the regime." "Joshua Landis: 'I Don't See Light at the End of the Tunnel,'" *PBS*. 8 November 2011: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/foreign-affairs-defense/syria-undercover/joshua-landis-i-dont-see-light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel/>.

### Master Narrative

- Multiple subject matter experts articulated this narrative in interviews with Monitor 360. Historian Jason Pack asserted that Rural Sunnis view Alawites as infidels, and resent having been ruled by them for decades. Journalist Nir Rosen reinforced this point of view, noting that the resurgence of Sunnis in Syria parallels Sunni revivalism that started in other Middle Eastern countries in 2003. Syria political expert Murhaf Jouejati said that anti-regime sentiment has become near-identical with anti-Alawism. Research fellow Shashank Joshi noted that the 1982

Massacre at Hama was not the end of Sunni militancy in Syria, and that these Sunni militants gain legitimacy whenever regime-backed violence escalates in Syria. Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; John Chalcraft (London School of Economics), 16 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012.

- In March 2012 on *Al-Hekma TV*, Syrian cleric Sheik Muhammad Badi' Moussa stated: "We ruled it is permissible to kill Alawite women and children, but advised the Free Syrian Army to warn Alawites before raiding their villages." "Video Clip #3376," MEMRI TV. 14 March 2012: <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3376.htm>.
- Perceptions that the regime's military forces are sheltered by Alawite neighborhoods reinforce this narrative's resonance among Sunnis. In February 2012, the Syrian paper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* reported: "An activist is claiming that the regime is using an adjacent Alawite neighborhood as a 'launchpad' to fire artillery shells and rockets, which 'may leave a deep impact on the social fabric of the city.'" "Analysis: Syrian Opposition Claims Further Defections Imminent," OSC Feature via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 24 February 2012: FEA20120224026657.
- A network of Al-Asad family Alawite ties also reinforces this narrative among subscribers. In April 2011, *Reuters* reported: "Residents of Deraa, cradle of the Syrian protests, say Alawite forces commanded by Assad's younger brother Maher have taken up positions around the southern city. Maher controls the Presidential Guard, the Republican Guard, and the Fourth Armoured Division—key units that form the security backbone of the state together with the Alawite-dominated secret police. 'Some observers consider Maher al-Assad to be excessively violent and emotionally volatile. It appears that President Assad views his brother as totally trustworthy,' said [Professor Andrew W.] Terrill, a specialist in Syrian military affairs." "Assad holds Syria army despite Sunni-Alawite divide," *Reuters*. 6 April 2011: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/06/us-syria-army-idUSTRE73543X20110406>.
- In March 2012, the *Globe and Mail* reported that sectarian violence was taking root in the opposition to the Al-Asad regime: "As the war drags into its second year, however, the fighters acknowledge that more extreme views are emerging among the other rebel brigades. They say regime forces are provoking sectarian feelings by spray-painting propaganda slogans on mosques, and Sunni religious scholars are calling for holy war. They acknowledge that a group of rebels in the Jabal Az-Zawiyah region of nearby Idlib province recently started calling itself the 'al-Bara' ibn Malik Martyrs Brigade,' using the name and flag of an al-Qaeda offshoot in Iraq...If the world is worried about a sectarian war in this country, they should do something quickly," said Abd al-Qader, 21, a former soldier from an air-defence unit who joined the rebels last year." "Syrian factions fear rebellion turning into sectarian conflict," *The Globe and Mail*. 2 March 2012: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/syrian-factions-fear-rebellion-turning-into-sectarian-conflict/article2356039/>.

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### Significance for Communicators

- Open source media suggests that not all Alawite communities support the Al-Asad regime. For example, in an unsigned statement published on an opposition Facebook page on 3 October 2011, individuals claiming to represent a segment of the "national Alawite leadership" argued that not all Alawites support the regime, stating: "We are Alawites that do not accept the regime...how can we accept the repression of protesters demanding their freedom and dignity?" On 5 October 2011, the London-based, pan-Arab news source *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported on a separate statement by three allegedly prominent Alawite Sheikhs in Hims who revealed their names and disavowed the "barbaric practices" undertaken by the regime against "unarmed protesters." "OSC Analysis: Syria—Alawite Condemnations, Rising Violence May Signal New Phase," OSC Summary via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 6 October 2011: GMF20111006431002.
- The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria has attempted to convince Alawites to join the uprising, highlighting that many Alawites suffered poverty and repression under the Al-Asads similar to the Sunnis. In an April 2011 article, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria writes: "We are aware that many of you have benefitted from the Al-Asad family's rule, but we also know that many of you have suffered much from the rule of this family, that some of you have been arrested, and some have been killed, and like all the citizens, some suffer from poverty, repression, exclusion, and banishment. We are aware that the Al-Asad family has sought to recruit you to work for them, by cautioning from other sects, especially the Sunni sect. However, we also know that many of you have dealt in a positive and good way with Sunnis in all fields, social, economic, political, and cultural, and that many army and security officers and others among you have married into prominent Sunni families and developed good ties with the Sunni community through marriage, children, and lasting relations. All the psychological and social gaps with the Sunnis have been removed..." "Syria MB Article Appeals to Alawites To Help 'Getting Rid' of Al-Asad Family Rule," Muslim Brotherhood in Syria via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 21 April 2011: GMP20110421721003.
- The phrasing "Alawite clique" to refer to the Al-Asad regime is common in mainstream Western media. Take, for example, an April 2011 article in the *New York Times*: "Since [2001], Mr. Assad has talked about reform often but carried out very little, content to tinker with the absolute rule of the Baath Party and a mostly minority Alawite ruling clique." "Syrian Protesters Clash With Security Forces," *New York Times*. 1 April 2011: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/02/world/middleeast/02syria.html>.

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### Significance for Analysts

- Sunni clerics across the Arab world have denounced the Al-Asad regime, sometimes declaring "jihad" on the "infidel" Alawites. For example, in March 2012 the Middle East Media Research Institute reported: "Saudi Mufti 'Abd Al-'Aziz Aal Sheikh said in a meeting with Kuwaiti clerics that supporting the FSA with money counts as jihad for the sake of Allah... Jihad against the Nusayris [i.e., Alawis] is one of the most important religious duties in the

eyes of Allah... Jihad against them is more important than jihad against the Jews or Christians, because the damage [they inflict] upon Islam is more severe. Muslim scholars, both ancient and contemporary, ruled that it is a duty to wage jihad against them... It is the duty of every Muslim to assist the Syrian people, according to his abilities..." "Arab Clerics Call to Kill Assad, Fight His 'Illegitimate' Regime," MEMRI TV. 23 March 2012: <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/6214.htm>.

- A March 2012 article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* describes Syrian refugees articulating the conflict between the "Alawite Infidels" master narrative and the "Promise of a New Syria" master narrative: "The refugees seemed ambivalent about describing what they saw as sectarian cleansing. Opposition supporters feared playing into the government narrative and wanted the international community to view them as nonsectarian in their quest for outside military assistance. Many said they personally held out hope for a pluralistic future of religious equality and would support a just government of any sect. But at the same time said they felt Sunnis were targeted, viewed their own struggle in religious terms and blamed Alawites for most of the violence," "Syrian crackdown takes sectarian turn as Sunnis flee to Lebanon," *Sydney Morning Herald*. 30 March 2012: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/syrian-crackdown-takes-sectarian-turn-as-sunnis-flee-to-lebanon-20120329-1w100.html>.
- In February 2012, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri released a video in which he voiced support for the Syrian opposition, stating: "...This ancient sectarian regime is dangerous for the entire Muslim ummah. It is the regime that has fought against Islam and Muslims for decades inside Syria and abroad. It desecrated the sanctities, lives, money, honor, and dignity of the Muslims. It is the regime that keeps the best youths of the ummah in its prisons, torturing and killing them..." "Al-Sahab Releases Ayman Al-Zawahiri Video 'O Lions of the Levant, March Forward,'" *Hanin Network Forums* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 12 February 2012: GMP20120212164002.

## "ALAWITE SURVIVAL"

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Aleppo Artillery School Massacre of 1979:** Event in 1979 in which members of the Muslim Brotherhood infiltrated the Syrian military academy in Aleppo and killed between 32 and 83 cadets—most of whom were Alawite. This event caused shockwaves throughout the Syrian government and Alawite community, and reinforced fears from the Alawite community that the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood was an existential threat to their community's survival.
- **Troupes Espéciales du Levant:** The "Levantine Special Forces," was an army formed by the French during their occupation of Syria that drew heavily from the Alawite community as part of French colonial "divide and rule" policies, which supported minority groups in opposition to majorities. Many Alawites joined the *Troupes*, which later became the core of Syria's national army upon French evacuation in 1946. In the modern era, Alawites constitute the bulk of the Syrian military's high ranking officers. Military service is encouraged and held in esteem in the Alawite community.
- **Taqiyya: Taqiyya** (religious dissimulation) is the practice of disguising religious beliefs and has been practiced by Alawites for centuries in order to avoid persecution from the Sunni Muslim majority.
- **Fourth Armored Division/Republican Guard:** The Republican Guard is the elite military unit designated to protect the regime from opposition, and is composed primarily of Alawites. The Fourth Armored division of the Republican Guard is considered to be the most well equipped and best trained unit in all of Syria, and is composed almost entirely of Alawites. It is led by Bashar Al-Asad's brother, Maher, who has cultivated a reputation for ruthlessness.
- **Latakia:** Alawites constitute nearly two thirds of the province of Latakia in northwestern Syria. During their occupation of Syria, the French created a separately governed Alawite state centered on this province that existed from 1920–1936.

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3. "Assad's Alawites: The guardians of the throne," *Al-Jazeera*. 10 October 2011: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/20111010122434671982.html>.
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## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with Alawites in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ambassador David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February 2012; Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Max Weiss (Princeton University), 28 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.
- A March 2012 interview with Lieutenant Colonel Khalid al-Humud of the Free Army of Syria highlighted the loyalty of the Alawites in the army to the Al-Asad regime: "In view of the regime's mistrust of its army, it has begun to resort to...conscripts from the Alawite community that have blind loyalty to the Al-Asad family. The regime is gathering these to form popular regiments that would act as the nucleus of an Alawite army if the regular army continues to disintegrate." Al-Humud added: "... The influential Alawite officers have begun to arm Alawite villages from the warehouses of the Syrian army and republican guard because the regime is scheming to turn to a long-term civil war. It is beginning to plant the seeds of sedition among the sects in Syria." "SNC: Regime Forming 'Undisciplined' Alawite Bands To Crush Rebellion," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 8 March 2012: GMP20120308825002.
- In his book on sectarian politics in Syria, author Nikolaos Van Dam explains that many Alawites live in Latakia and come from extremely poor, rural backgrounds: "About 75 per cent of all Syrian Alawis live in the Latakia region, where they constitute the local majority. Most of them work in the agrarian sector and thus represent the overwhelming majority of Latakia's rural population...In the course of time, the Alawi community developed a strong distrust of the Sunnis, who had so often been their oppressors...A remarkable phenomenon, indicative of the extreme poverty of the Alawis, was that the poorest families indentured their daughters as house servants to the richer families, mostly urban Sunnis, who usually regarded the Alawi peasants with contempt. Since Syria became independent, and more particularly since the Ba'thist takeover of power...the socio-economic circumstances of the Alawi peasants have improved considerably." Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*. Palgrave Macmillian. 2011. Print. P. 11.

### Master Narrative

- In interviews with Monitor 360, Syria expert Joshua Landis expressed that many Alawites are extremely poor and that many Alawite families derive a portion of their income and social status from service in the military. Historian Jason Pack asserted that Alawites have been persecuted for centuries by Muslims who view them as apostates and heretics, and drew attention to the practice of *taqiyya* within the Alawite community. Syria political expert Murhaf Jouejati stressed that the Alawites are committed to the Al-Asad regime because they fear sectarian reprisals from Muslims should the regime fall. Political psychologist Jerrold Post asserted that Bashar Al-Asad and his brother Maher Al-Asad believe that violence—as demonstrated in the 1982 attack on Hama—is the most effective way to deal with dissidents. Former ambassador David Newton stressed that the Alawites rose through the military and were historically very poor. Journalist Patrick Seale described the Alawite composition of the military, especially at the higher echelons of power. Monitor 360 interviews with Ambassador David Newton (Middle East Institute), 13 February 2012; Barak Barfi (New America Foundation), 14 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Jason Pack (Cambridge University), 22 February 2012; Nir Rosen (Journalist), 24 February 2012; Max Weiss (Princeton University), 28 February 2012; Shashank Joshi (Royal United Services Institute), 29 February 2012; Jerrold Post (George Washington University), 29 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Patrick Seale (Journalist), 8 March 2012.

- In an October 2011 *Al-Jazeera* article, an Alawite sheik described how Alawites feel they are being persecuted by Muslim extremists: “The armed people are ignorant and don’t have any education,” he said. “In the mountains we are all educated,” said one of his guests. “Our orientation is education.” Janud agreed: “This is a conflict between ignorance and knowledge,” he said. Bayda and Baniyas, two coastal towns that had seen demonstrations, had nobody educated in them, the sheikh said, and they were majority Sunni. “And the Alawite villages around [those towns] are all educated”... “The uprising today is based on the same principles as the one of 1980,” he said, referring to the armed uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in which many Alawites were killed. Protesters today were merely “tools executing policy on behalf of someone else,” he said. “They do not have their own ideology.” Their gamble to provoke a sectarian war would not succeed because Alawites would not kill anybody for sectarianism, he said, they would only defend themselves.” *Al Jazeera.net: Assad’s Alawites: An Entrenched Community*, *Al-Jazeera* via www.opensource.gov. 7 October 2011: GMP20111017966184.
- In an article posted to the blog Syria Comment, an Alawite with ties to the Al-Asad regime explains the Alawite community’s loyalty to the Al-Asad regime: “I have discovered that a number of my fellow Alawis who used to be staunch critics of Asad family rule are now championing of Bashar. Some who used to curse anytime the name of the ruling family was invoked (in private of course), have now replaced their own identity with Bashar’s on their Facebook page... The gist of this argument is that Alawi identity has been transformed by Assad rule. No longer is it centered on religious, cultural or tribal life. Because Alawi life has been so transformed over the last century, the single common bond uniting us is Assad rule itself. Our identity as Alawis is defined as ‘that minority sect ruling this country’... They [Alawites] feel under attack because the regime is threatened and may fall. This is tantamount—at least subconsciously—to their identity being shattered. Similar to those German and Japanese who wasted their lives fighting a lost battle street-by-street, the Alawis will fight to the end. It is hard to convince someone fighting for such high stakes to abandon their cause.” “The Alawi Dilemma—Revisited,” By Khudr,” Syria Comment. 22 June 2011: <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/?p=10437>.
- In an article published in the Middle East Review of International Affairs in 2001, Tel Aviv University department head Dr. Eyal Zisser examines the history of Alawite participation in the military and the military’s involvement in civil affairs: “The Syrian army began as the ‘Syrian Legion,’ established by the French in the course of World War I. In 1923, the French established the ‘Special Forces (Troupes Speciales) of the Levant’ to help maintain law and order in the territories of the Levant under their control...the French recruited volunteers for the ‘Special Forces’ from among members of the minority communities and the lower classes of society.... Despite Hafiz al-Asad’s efforts to distance the army from involvement in the state’s politics, ever since he took over, the army had been called on repeatedly to ensure the regime’s stability and even existence. Thus, for example, it was called in during the years 1976-1982, in order to put down the Islamic revolt. First, he bolstered the Alawite presence, and even control, in the army. Most of the senior officers were Alawite and some were even members of his tribe, the Kalabiyya. Indeed, at the time of Asad’s death more than 90 percent of the officers carrying the rank of general are of the Alawite community. It seems that the military has remained the preferred path for social mobilization for members of the Alawite community.” “Syrian Army’s Role in Promoting Regime’s Domestic, External Interests Viewed,” Middle East Review of International Affairs via www.opensource.gov. 1 March 2001:GMP20010330000125.
- In his 1988 account of the Al-Asad regime, journalist Patrick Seale described how the 1979 Aleppo Massacre and war with the Muslim Brotherhood created a sense of fear that permeated the Alawite community: “One of the worst outrages occurred on 16 June 1979 when terrorists slaughtered large numbers of Alawi officer cadets at the Aleppo Artillery School... It was a declaration of war. Some of the victims were prominent officers and government servants, but others were professional men... who were not involved with the regime and were therefore undefended. Most of them were Alawis which suggested that the assassins had targeted the community and were deliberately setting out to sharpen sectarian differences. Every Alawi came to feel he was a potential target and the community as a whole trembled.” Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*. University of California Press. 1988. Print. Pp. 316-317.

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### Significance for Communicators

- A February 2012 article in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* described Alawites who are interested in joining the opposition movement had become disillusioned with the regime. An Alawite who was interviewed asserted that the regime was purposefully agitating sectarian fears: “Ala, an Alawite activist who works secretly with the Syrian coast’s coordination committees...revealed that ‘the inhabitants of Alawite villages have started to become restless with Al-Asad’s regime and are seriously thinking of abandoning it.’ Though Al-Asad said in one of his statements that the struggle in Syria is between nationalists and Islamists, the activist hiding behind several names stresses that ‘the Syrian regime spread from the outbreak of the revolution sectarian rumors and incited the neighborhoods of a single sectarian color against each other. It also armed the Alawite villages and recruited their young men in Al-Shabbihah’s groups which are repressing the demonstrators.’ Ala believes that ‘the Alawites are twice the victims of Al-Asad’s regime, once because they are part of the Syrian people that suffered repression and persecution for decades and another time because they are defending this persecution and want its survival.’ He pointed out that the ‘Alawites in Syria are living in difficult economic conditions and a large percentage of them is poor and needy but Al-Asad’s regime succeeded in deceiving them with sectarian incitement and making them frightened of the other communities.’” “Report Claims Syria’s Alawites Are Getting Restless, Want To Join Revolution,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via www.opensource.gov. 13 February 2012: GMP20120213825013.
- In a March 2012 editorial article published in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, the author Abd-al-Rahman al-Rashid praises the Muslim Brotherhood for its statements affirming the inclusion of minorities, and draws attention to the many Alawites who have not benefited from the regime, “Accordingly, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood have proven to be more progressive than their Egyptian or Jordanian counterparts, or other Brotherhood organizations, simply

because they have accepted the rules of the democratic process that permits all Syrians to equally participate in the political state. Indeed the Syrian Brotherhood, after their statement on Sunday, have proven to be more progressive than the Syrian regime itself... The al-Assad regime does not represent the Alawites, who are mostly marginalized and live under difficult conditions. The al-Assad regime in reality is a suppressive security system and has been for four decades. Its only parallel is the North Korean regime, where the security and military forces control the people and the slightest details of their lives.” “Arab Writer Praises Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s Stance on Democracy, Minorities,” *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* via www.opensource.gov. 27 March 2012: GMP20120327824012.

- A January 2012 article highlighted the role of prominent Syrian actress Fadwa Suleiman, an Alawite, in the protest movement. The article drew attention to the backlash she received from the Alawite community including her own brother who publicly distanced himself from her views: “She has appeared at rallies demanding Assad’s removal, sharing the podium with soccer star Abdelbasset Sarout, one of a number of Syrian celebrities who have backed the revolt... Her life on the run resembles that of other activists wanted for their role in the uprising, except that Suleiman is a woman from Syria’s Alawite minority—the same sect as Assad—taking part in a mainly male and Sunni Muslim rebellion... Many Alawites have disavowed Suleiman, including her brother Mahmoud, who appeared on a state-controlled satellite channel saying Syria’s unity was more important than his sister.” “Syrian actress treads new stage in Syrian protests,” *Reuters*. 5 January 2012: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/05/us-syria-actress-idUSTRE8040WQ20120105>.

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### Significance for Analysts

- In a speech given to students reported in *Sham Press*, President Bashar Al-Assad painted the opposition as a group of Muslim extremists: “We shall pursue those people relentlessly everywhere. Today, the picture is clearer for us. The stages that are being planned are also known for us.’ On the information available to the state about the armed groups, he said: “The armed groups that are terrorizing the Syrian citizens are divided into three groups: A part from the Muslim Brotherhood, a part from the *takfiri* [those who accuse other Muslims of being infidel] Wahhabis, and a third part from the criminals who are sentenced to high sentences, such as the death penalty or life in prison. Why would those people not participate in such acts? He added: ‘During the first phase of the crisis, we collected information and drew a map for the presence of the armed groups. After the month of Ramadan, we started carrying out qualitative operations in this field. We dealt severe and decisive blows to the terrorists.’” “Syria: Al-Assad Speaks to Students on ‘Plots,’ Says Syria To Emerge ‘Victorious,’” *Sham Press* via www.opensource.gov. 27 November 2011: GMP20111127721005.
- In a speech shown on *Syrian Satellite Channel*, President Bashar Al-Assad draws upon the Syrian government’s history of conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood, asserting that the best way to deal with armed opposition is through violence: “Al-Assad says that the dialogue is ongoing in Syria and that the delay in dialogue is not from the Syrian side but some of the opposition parties ‘are not ready’ for dialogue. In reference to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Assad adds that the authorities are ready to carry out dialogue ‘even with enemy parties that committed crimes in the past, in the 1970s and 1980’s... Al-Assad says that the highest priority at the moment is ‘regaining the security’ and this ‘cannot be achieved except by striking terrorist killers with an iron fist... Al-Assad then refers back in history to the seventies and eighties, ‘when the evil Muslim brotherhood, who hid behind Islam for their terrorist acts in Syria,’ noting that it took six years to end the killing, and stressing ‘we do not want to wait all that time, matters are clear for all of us, if we stop and embrace security and the different authorities, I believe that results will be conclusive and quick.’ FYI—Al-Assad Calls For Striking ‘Killers’ With ‘Iron Fist;’ Processing Plans,” *Syrian Satellite Channel Television* via www.opensource.gov. 10 January 2012: GMP20120110625004.

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## “KURDISH PLIGHT”

### Key Phrases, Symbols, or Images

- **Al-Hasakah:** Al-Hasakah is the Primary Kurdish area in the northeastern part of Syria. Formerly known as, and sometimes still referred to, as Al-Jazira, this area borders Kurdish-inhabited areas in Iraq and Turkey.
- **Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria:** Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria is a Kurdish Nationalist political party founded in 1957. The party has been attacked by the Al-Assad regime since its inception, with many of its leaders being jailed in the 1970s. They advocate for a decentralized system of government and constitutional recognition of Syrian language and culture.
- **1962 Census:** In 1962, the Syrian government conducted a one-day census in the Al-Hasakah region, classifying those who could not produce documents as foreign aliens. Approximately 120,000 Kurds lost their Syrian citizenship because of this census, approximately 20% of the Kurdish population at the time. In 2011, President Bashar Al-Assad restored citizenship to many of the affected Kurds and their descendants.
- **2004 Qamishli Massacre:** In March 2004, Kurdish fans attending a soccer game in the city of Qamishli flew Kurdish flags, and shouted support for the President of Iraqi Kurdistan, the President of Iraq, and President George W. Bush. A fight broke out between Kurdish fans of the local team and Arab supporters of the visiting team from Deir Al-Zor, leading to Kurds toppling a statue of Hafez Al-Assad in the town. In response, the regime deployed security forces to the city, killing between 30 and 200 Kurds.
- **1986 Newroz Demonstrations:** Newroz is the Kurdish New Year, commemorating Kurds’ liberation from a mythical ancient tyrant named Zuhak. Kurds frequently demonstrate during Newroz in support of Kurdish autonomy and independence. In March 1986, the Syrian police fired on Kurds in Damascus who were wearing traditional dress to celebrate Newroz, killing one.

- **Arab Cordon:** In 1973, the Ba'athist government cleared the Turkish border area of the Al-Hasakah region of inhabitants. The Syrian regime then sent Bedouin Arabs to resettle the region, while deporting approximately 140,000 Kurds to the Southern *Al-Raad* desert.
- **Kurdish Language:** The right to speak and write in Kurdish is a key grievance for subscribers to this narrative and for Kurds across Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. The Kurdish language is severely restricted in Syria. Publishing and printing Kurdish language materials are forbidden, as is teaching the language.
- **Xenophon:** Xenophon is a fourth-century BC Greek historian whose work *Anabasis* includes the first known reference to the Kurds.
- **Medes:** Medes is a sixth-century BC civilization that occupied territory in modern Kurdistan; Kurdish historians and anthropologists claim that Kurds are descendants of this civilization to justify territorial claims.
- **Sharafnama:** *Sharafnama* is the first recorded pan-Kurdish history, written by Sharaf Al-Din Bitlisi in 1597. Written during a period of persecution at the hands of the Safavid and Ottoman empires, the *Sharafnama* was a motivator for the birth of Kurdish nationalism

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16. For an example of an Iraqi key influencer using a messaging strategy likely to be well-received by adherents, see "President Barzani supports democratic aspirations and Kurdish rights in Syria," Kurdistan Regional Government. 29 November 2011: <http://krg.org/articles/detail.asp?lngnr=12&smap=02010100&rrnr=223&anr=42459>.

## Sourcing

### Audience Segment

- Monitor 360 validated that this master narrative resonates with Kurds in interviews with subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012.
- A March 2012 interview with Syrian Kurdish National Council Member Shalal Gado highlighted the diversity of organizations advocating for Kurds in Syria stating: “As for the situation of the Kurds in the country, the unity of Kurdish ranks is strengthening by the day. This is evident from four Kurdish political parties and 17 Kurdish youth coordination groups joining the Kurdish National Council in Syria, the legitimate representative of the Kurdish people in western Kurdistan,” “Syrian Kurdish National Council Member Gado Discusses Kurds’ Demands, Autonomy,” *Hawlati* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 11 March 2012: GMP20120312716003.
- On 19 March 2011, a website affiliated with the opposition National Salvation Front in Syria released “A National Call of Unity Against the Regime” written by Kurdish youth and addressed to senior leaders. This call cited the leaders of twelve distinct Kurdish advocacy organizations, beseeching them to unify in support of the opposition: “By promptly joining the 15 March revolution, we will come closer to our aspired-for freedom, for which we, as Syrians in general and Kurds in particular, have long been waiting. Any delay will prolong this regime. We therefore need not fear that we will be victimized, for any beginning at any time surely requires sacrifices and the Kurdish people are willing to sacrifice. We have waited so long for this regime to give us limited gains through unofficial promises made by agents, such as Umar Usi, and other false official promises. We have been running after a humiliating illusion. We call upon you, the leaders of the Kurdish movement, and we name every one of you so that this call is not wasted in generalization and so that you live up to your responsibility...” “Syria: Kurdish Youth Call On Senior Leaders To Join ‘15 March Revolution,’” *Free Syria* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 19 March 2011: GMP20110319711007.

### Master Narrative

- In interviews with Monitor 360, Syria expert Joshua Landis expressed that Kurds are taking a wait-and-see approach to the 2011–2012 Syrian uprising, highlighting that Syrian Kurds walked out of Syrian National Council meetings. Syria foreign policy expert Stephen McInerney asserted that Kurds have never felt themselves to be a part of the Arab world, and are willing to fight to retain their language and culture. Syria political expert Murhaf Jouejati described divisions among Kurds, noting that some supported the regime and feared the bloodshed of an uprising, while others view the Al-Asad regime’s fall as a necessary precursor to achieving Kurdish autonomy. This master narrative was articulated and validated in Monitor 360 interviews with a range of Syria subject matter experts. Monitor 360 interviews with Ghayth Armanazi (Syrian Media Centre), 17 February 2012; John Borneman (Princeton University), 21 February 2012; Murhaf Jouejati (National Defense University), 21 February 2012; Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle Eastern Democracy), 24 February 2012; Joshua Landis (University of Oklahoma), 1 March 2012; Jonathan Spyer (Global Research in International Affairs Center), 1 March 2012.
- Kurdish key influencers ardently advocate for their autonomy to the Syrian opposition, and have experienced friction with Syrian National Council leaders because of these demands. Khayr-Al-Din Murad, a member of the Kurdish National Council in Syria, described this friction in a March 2012 live satellite interview with *Doha Al-Jazirah Satellite Channel Television* in Arabic. Asked by Al-Jazirah anchor Nuran Sallam if it is true that that many Syrian oppositionists, particularly those representing the Kurdish National Council, have walked out of the conference, Murad responded: “Yes. That it is true. Several groups walked out of the conference due to the political differences between those groups and the Syrian National Council [SNC], and particularly between the Kurdish National Council and the SNC. Before this conference, members of the Kurdish National Council and the SNC had held several meetings to reach an agreement over a political document that allows the two entities to work together under the umbrella of the Syrian opposition. Unfortunately, the SNC did not take into account our suggestions, as well as the suggestions by other opposition groups... We, the Kurds, are a component of the Syrian people and are part of the peaceful Syrian revolution that has been raging for more than a year now. It is our right to reach an agreement with our partners in the homeland over a document that guarantees our people their national rights in the future during the coming transitional phase.” “Syrian Dissident: Kurds Walk out of Istanbul Meeting for Disagreements With SNC,” *Al-Jazirah Satellite Channel Television* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 27 March 2012: GMP20120327615003.
- In April 2011, President Bashar Al-Asad granted citizenship to many Syrian Kurds. *SANA*, the official press agency of the Syrian Government, reported: “President Bashar Al-Asad has issued decree No. 49 stipulating the granting of Syrian nationality to those registered in the foreigners’ records of Al-Hasakah. Following is the legislative decree: Legislative Decree No. 49: The President of the Republic decrees the following: Article 1: Granting the Syrian

nationality to those registered in the foreigners' records of Al-Hasakah. Article 2: The Interior minister shall issue decisions outlining the executive measures to implement this decree. Article 3: This decree will take effect as of the date of publishing it in the official gazette. Damascus, 7 April, 2011. President of the Republic Bashar Al-Asad" "SANA: President Al-Asad Issues Decree Granting Kurds Syrian Nationality," SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 7 April 2011: GMP20110407641005.

- Regime-backed media downplays Kurdish separatism, and highlights Kurdish key influencers that express support for Syrian "unity." A January 2012 article on the website of the regime's official press agency described "Head of the National Initiative of Syrian Kurds Omar Osi said that the national unity of the Syrian people, despite all media campaigns and the attempts of sowing sedition, reveals the historic reality of this people. Osi said that the continued attempts to call for foreign interference, impose buffer zones and provide support to the armed men were foiled by the steadfastness of the Syrian people," "SANA: Participants in Syrian Family Forum Stress Enhancing National Unity," SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 25 January 2012: GMP20120125700001.
- An October 2011 article in the *Atlantic* highlighted that: "...armed resistance and foreign intervention are still controversial topics within Syrian Kurdish communities. 'I don't back such calls,' Hozan Ibrahim told me. He is a spokesman for Local Coordination Committees of Syria and now lives in Germany. 'It's the call of people under fire, so they need someone to rescue them. Unfortunately some feel that the regime can't be removed without armed action either from inside or outside.' Activists inside Syria report that Kurdish participation in demonstrations increased recently as fierce government repression spread in other parts of the country — and particularly after [Kurdish opposition leader] Tammō's assassination." "In Syria, Kurdish Groups Divided Over Taking Up Arms Against Assad," *Atlantic*. 27 October 2011: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/in-syria-kurdish-groups-divided-over-taking-up-arms-against-assad/247415/>.

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### Significance for Communicators

- In efforts to garner Kurdish support, the opposition in the 2011–2012 uprising has publicly celebrated Kurdish holidays and customs. In March 2012, the opposition Local Coordinating Committees Facebook page noted: "On March 21, during the Kurdish festival of freedom and toppling the dictatorship, the Local Coordination Committees in Syria (LCC) congratulates Syrians in general and the Kurds in particular on Nowruz (new day). This day of Nowruz symbolizes the end of oppression as our people fight for freedom, peace, and love, even as they write human history with their blood in seeking to purge the nation of injustice and repression. We eagerly anticipate Nowruz Day this year because of its importance and great value to the Kurdish people not only because it is a national day, but also because it represents the struggle of humanity and equality. Every year in March, the Kurdish people face the spiteful authority of the Baath Party, which has always used conspiracy, jingoism, and racism to undermine the rich diversity of our national fabric. The regime attacks the legitimacy of Kurdish history, and limits Kurds' eligibility for equal, democratic, national rights. These are rights that must be in line with the coexistence of all components of Syrian society, and in accordance with the values of justice and equality, so that our national cultural mosaic may continue to contribute to our rich civilization," "Facebook LCC of Syria: Nowruz To Become National Holiday," Facebook via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 20 March 2012: GMP20120321700003.
- There are deep undercurrents of support for US actions in Iraq among Syrian Kurdish communities. An August 2011 article from the Middle East Research and Information Project noted: "Four days later, on March 12, there was a soccer match in Al-Qamishli pitting the local heroes against the team from Dayr Al-Zawr. The fans of Al-Qamishli's team were mostly Kurds, while those from Dayr Al-Zawr were mostly Sunni Arabs. The Dayr Al-Zawr fans insulted [Iraqi Kurdistan leader] Masoud Barzani and [Iraq President] Jalal Talabani, and held up photographs of Saddam Hussein. The Kurds shouted slogans in support of President George W. Bush." "The Evolution of Kurdish Politics in Syria," Middle East Research and Information Project. 31 August 2011: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero083111>.

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### Significance for Analysts

- In a March 2012 article, Turkish news source *Hürriyet Daily News* reported that the Syrian regime revived an alliance with the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 2012. *Hürriyet Daily News* reported: "An intelligence report submitted to the Turkish government suggests that the disobedient Syrian leadership has revived its support to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in retaliation for pressure from Ankara on Bashar Al-Assad to step down, *Hürriyet Daily News* has learned from reliable sources. PKK members can move freely inside Syria, and are allowed to bear arms and launch propaganda campaigns against Turkey, the report states, showing a clear change in Damascus' policies, which had banned the PKK's activities in 1999 as a result of a bilateral agreement with Turkey." "Syria supporting PKK, says intelligence report," *Hürriyet Daily News*. 23 March 2012: <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/report-syria-supporting-pkk.aspx?NewsCatID=338&nID=16699&pageID=238>.
- In an October 2010 interview on Turkish television, President Bahsar Al-Asad highlighted that Kurdish nationalism is a "regional" issue, while asserting that the majority of Kurdish nationalism is due to their exploitation by foreign powers. Al-Asad said: "it is a regional issue because it concerns Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq... I think that

if we look at the Kurds in these countries, the majority of them are national individuals, which means the Iraqi belongs to Iraq and the Syrian belongs to Syria... what we face is not the Kurdish issue, but those who want to exploit this issue to interfere in the internal affairs... We have no problem with the Kurds... they are as the Arabs and Turkish... we all have coexisted in this region throughout history... I think the openness is correct, the amnesty is correct but within a national framework” “Turkish Television Interviews Al-Asad on Syrian-Turkish Relations, Regional Issues,” SANA via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 7 October 2010: GMP20101007700005.

- Prior to re-establishing their alliance in March 2011, there were isolated conflicts between the PKK and the Syrian Army. In January 2011, the website *All4Syria* reported: “...clashes erupted between a unit from the Syrian Army and a group from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party [PKK] on the other side of the borders, which link the Iraqi-Syrian borders, or what is called the border triangle on the Iraqi Kurdistan side. The clashes resulted in the killing of two PKK gunmen and injury of three others from the group. Search operations for the remaining PKK gunmen, who were able to escape from the army, are still ongoing.” “Syria: 2 PKK Gunmen Reportedly Killed, 3 Wounded in Clash on Turkey Border,” *All4Syria* via [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov). 20 January 2011: GMP20110123637001.





For more information about the Master Narratives platform, please contact Open Source Center at [MasterNarratives@rccb.osis.gov](mailto:MasterNarratives@rccb.osis.gov).

