

THE ROLE OF ARMY IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF SYRIA. FROM THE SYRIAN BATTALION TO THE SYRIAN ARAB ARMY

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Introduction

The eight-year Syrian armed conflict is one of the most devastating conflicts and arresting issues in the international area in the 21st century. Undoubtedly, the investigation of the role of Syrian army has its both scientific and political significance. Indeed, without having scrupulously studied the role of the army it is impossible to perceive in details many aspects of the political history of Syria. In any other Arabic country the army did not play such an outstanding role in the political life as it was in case of Syria. This reality can be proved by the serious inner-political processes that run in contemporary Syria, when the army appears as a substantial factor again. This topic has its actuality in regard of our perception of rather complicated inner-political processes happening in modern Syria today, whereas the army plays an important role as well.

This research deals with certain aspects of the formation of Syrian army, its officer stratum, as well as discusses issues dealing with military overturns in Syria, their reasons and aftermath for the country in the post-independent period, as well as investigates both ethnic and confessional background of the Syrian army.

It is a well-known fact that in the question of gaining independence by the Near Eastern Arabic countries during the period of the mandate status, the army played an outstanding role.

The history of creation of the Syrian state, the formation its army and officer stratum as well as the role of army in the political life of the country can be divided into five main periods: from the independence to unification with Egypt (1946-1958), the three and half years of existence of the United Arab Republic (UAR) (1958-

1961), from the collapse of the UAR till the period of Hafez Al-Assad's come to power (1961-1970) and the Al-Assad family's rule (1970-2000), particularly, that of Hafez Al-Assad, and then Bashar Al-Assad since 2000 onwards.

The most valuable link in military forces was the officer stratum, which was integral part of the governmental system. The Syrian army gradually turned into a serious political factor what is proved by military overturns that occurred in Syria.

For the rich political history of Syria an investigation of the role of army is important not only from the point of Syria's role on both regional and international levels, but also for Armenian Diaspora and Armenian-Syrian relations in the modern times.

Historical background

The process on the formation of Syrian army began in the period between two World Wars. A background of the Syrian army formed the Syrian battalion of the Oriental (Armenian) Legion.¹ The Oriental Legion, which consisted of five battalions, on 18th of January 1919 was divided into two parts: the Armenian Legion with 4 battalions and the Syrian having only 1 battalion. The number of volunteers in the Oriental Legion was nearly 5000 where 4,124 soldiers represented the Armenian battalions while 698 the Syrian one.²

On 8th of March 1920 the Syrian national congress declared about the creation of the independent Syrian state. Faysal Ibn Al-Husayn became the King of Syria.³ Based on the military law issued in December 1919 the government of Hashim Al-Atasi announced the draft and the creation of the military units. Early in the morning of the July 24th 1920 began the battle of Maysalun which the French troops won.⁴ As a result Syria lost its independence and turned into a sub-mandate country of France.

¹ Van Dusen 1971: 40.

² Փարամանովեան 1998: 213:

³ For more details on the Arab nationalists, Al-Kahtaniya and Al-Ahd, See: Փաստարյան 2016:

⁴ الأتاسي 2007، 85.

In 1924 the Syrian Legion consisted of 6,500 soldiers. It includes 137 French and 48 local officers who received their military education at the Damascene Military Academy established in 1920. Only in 1932 it was removed to Homs where it then became famous as the Military Academy of Homs.⁵ In 1925 the French established the so-called "Troupes Supplétives" that consisted of countrymen and mobile forces, as well as gendarmerie. Before this they had founded the "Troupes Auxiliaires" that mainly consisted of Alawites (Nusayrites), Druzes, Circassians, Armenians and Kurds.⁶

On 20th of March 1930 the Syrian Legion, which was additionally supplied by both "Troupes Supplétives" and "Troupes Auxiliaires", turned into (Troupes Spéciales du Levant).⁷ The "Special Troops", created by the French mandate government, were basically supplied by representatives of the faraway retarded provinces, also by national and religious minorities, for instance, the Alawites, Druzes, Ismailites, Kurds, Circassians, Armenians and others.⁸

The growing tendency of the national movements for independence that rose during the World War II resulted in new elections of the National Parliament of Syria held on 17th of August 1943.⁹ The newly elected parliament declared the leader of "Kutla Al-Wataniya" party, Shukri Al-Kuatli as new president of Syria.¹⁰

Under the pressure of the Syrian national forces from one side and international community from another one on 8th of July 1945 France announced officially its readiness to withdraw the "Special Troops" to Syria and Lebanon. The transfer of forces was over by the 1st of August 1945. Since that time onwards the 1st of August is the Army day in Syria. By that time the Syrian army numbered 5000, where 3,500 were policemen.¹¹ A withdraw of French and English troops from Syria began on 15th of April and was over on 17th of

⁵ Khoury 1987, 80.

⁶ Drysdale 1977, 78.

⁷ Bou-Nacklie 1993, 651.

⁸ Be'eri 1969, 334.

⁹ مردم 1994, 233.

¹⁰ Winder 1962, 414.

¹¹ Torrey 1964, 44-45.

April 1946.¹² That day is a national holiday in Syria. After almost a quarter of century the struggle for liquidation of French mandate and creation an independent state was finally over.¹³

In 1948 Syria, along with its allies Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, took part in the Arab-Israeli war. Syria sent to Palestine multi-units numbering 1,900 soldiers under the command of Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Hakimi. By that time the number of Syrian army was ca. 8,500, though only 5,500 had been trained satisfactorily. The rest 1,070 were the high ranks, 1,500 patrolled the borders while 395 were at the Homs Military Academy. Some time before the "Salvation army" (Jeysh Al-Inqadh Al-Arabi) was created which then became known as "The Arab liberation army" under the command of Taha Al-Hashimi, Ismail Safwati and Fawzi Al-Qawuqji. That army became the military wing of the League of Arab Countries.¹⁴

In that war Syria, following the example of other Arabic countries, was defeated. In that war the fiasco of Arabic countries appeared as a first trial for the Syrian army and another blow onto the Syrian national and state dignity. Since these times onwards the role of army in the political life of Syria has been growing. The military forces and its most important link, the officers, became an important part of the state system. They gradually turned into a serious factor in the Syrian inner-political life.

The phenomenon of military overturns

The Arab-Israeli war of 1948 opened a way for the military overturns. In 1949-1954 the military top took part in several military overturns in Syria. These were led by Husni Az-Zaim, Sami Al-Hinawi and Adib Ash-Shishakli.¹⁵ These overturns were implemented by various groups of people who based themselves on the military. Due to the frequently organized military overturns of 1949-1954, Syria faced with a difficult political and social-economic situation. The overturns damaged the natural development of Syrian

¹² هندي 1962، 183.

¹³ الأرمنازي 1953، 186-188.

¹⁴ For more on the Arab Liberation's Army, See: **Al-Qawuqji** 1972, 27-58.

¹⁵ **Carleton** 1950, 1-11.

governmental system.¹⁶ In the beginning of January 1958 the military top had secret negotiations where the representatives of 22 military units discussed the question of Syria's unification with Egypt. In the evening of 12th January 1958 a group of 14 military highest ranks made for Cairo to negotiate with Egyptian side about the unification. The delegation was led by the head of the major command Afif Al-Bizri. The latest offered a unification of both states with a federative basis, but the majority of the military delegation that were the allies of Abdel Hamid As-Saraji and Salah Ad-Din Al-Bitari, demanded a total unification. Although the unification had a democratic outlook, indeed, it occurred with the army's direct interference, in fact, as a result of the so-called "semi-military overturn".¹⁷

On 21st of February 1958 a referendum took place for the question of unification of Syria with Egypt. Gamal Abdel Nasr was elected the president of the UAR. On 5th of March 1958 a temporary UAR Constitution was announced in Damascus. It included 73 articles that were divided into two parts, each dealing with a sole country of Syria and Egypt. The capital of the UAR became Cairo.¹⁸ Right from the creation of the UAR the president initiated a unification of both countries' military forces. According to the order 118 issued on 15th March 1958 the unification of the forces was finished. It dealt with bringing the police, security and Beduin units under one common command. By that time the number of Syrian army was 42,000.¹⁹

After the officers came over to Egypt in summer of 1959, a small group of the activists from the "Baath" party created a secret military organization, which subsequently became famous as the Military Committee. The command of the Military Committee (Al-Lajna Al-Askariya) consisted of five officers, three of Alawites, i.e. Muhammad Umran from Muharram (Homs), Salah Jadid from Duayr Baabda (Latakia) and Hafez Al-Assad from Kardaha (Latakia) and two Ismailites, particularly, Abd Al-Qarim Al-Jundi from Salamiya (Hama) and Ahmad Al-Mir from Mazyaf (Hama). Subse-

¹⁶ معروف 2003، 99-92.

¹⁷ شعبي 2008، 85-88.

¹⁸ Hopwood 1988، 40-41.

¹⁹ Roberts 1987، 46-50.

quently, when the staff of the Committee was enlarged, Salim Hatum and Hamad Ubayd both from Jabal Druz became the members of the organization.²⁰

On 28th of September 1961 a military overturn took place and Syria broke the alliance with Egypt. On 12th of November 1961 a temporary Constitution of Syria was declared by which the country was announced as constitutional democratic republic. On 14th of December new presidential elections took place where Nazim Al-Qudsi became the president of Syria.²¹ On 28th of March 1962 another military overturn occurred in Syria organized by Abd Al-Qarim An-Nahlawi. The commander of Syrian army Zahr Ad-Din dissolved the Constitutional parliament. Both legislative and executive power passed to the highest military commandership.²² However, this overturn did not bring peace to the country either.

A transfer of power in Iraq to "Baath" party in February of 1963 strengthened the positions of the Syrian "Baath" followers who greeted openly the overturn and new regime in that country. One month after the overturn of the 8th February 1963 in Iraq, a new overturn happened in Syria on 8th March 1963.²³ By that time the Syrian army had 65,000 soldiers. The military forces consisted of land forces, air forces and limited naval forces. The program for the overturn was worked out by the leaders of the Military Committee Muhammad Umran, Salah Jadid and Abd Al-Qarim Al-Jundi. One can conclude that after the overturn in Iraq, and that one of the 8th of March 1963 conducted in Syria, the Syrian authorities were aspiring to strengthen their power as well as to spread the influence of the "Baath" over other Arabic countries.²⁴

On 23rd of February 1966 the military units led by the members of the dissolved regional "Baath" bureau implemented the next overturn. The power now came to the temporary regional "Baath" authorities that included the representatives of the left, revolutionary democratic wing of the party. Salah Jadid was

²⁰ Van Dam 1981, 49.

²¹ Rathmell 1995, 159.

²² طلاس، 267-264.

²³ Abu Jaber 1966, 66-67.

²⁴ منافخي، المدني 2009، 133.

appointed its general secretary, while Nur Ad-Din Al-Atasi became a new president of the SAR.²⁵

The Arabs were defeated in the 6 day Arab-Israeli war of 1967. As a result Israel could seize from the Arabs huge territories that embraced some around 70,000 km². Israel seized from the UAR the Sinai Peninsula having provided for itself an access to the right bank of the Suez Channel. They also captured Sharm Ash-Shaykh, the western bank of the Jordan River, Al-Kuneytra and the Golan Hills that had preciously belonged to Syria. The Israeli troops were standing at a distance of 40 km from Damascus.²⁶ After the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 Syria was in a deep inner-political and social-economic crisis. Because of an anti-tolerant attitude towards the policy of the left wing of the "Baath" party in the post-war period, the army faced with both moral and psychological crisis.

On 17th of September 1970 a bloody engagements took place between the followers of the Movement of Resistance of Palestine, military forces of the Liberation Front of Palestine and the army of Jordan. In historiography these events received the name "Black September". With a purpose to help the Palestinians, on 20th of September 1970 Syria interference into those events by means of sending there its "As-Saika" troops. These were followed by Syrian tank divisions that carried the marks of the Palestinian liberation army.²⁷ In November 1970 Syria survived a new turnover but for this time without a bloodshed. Hafez Al-Assad was now made a Prime-minister and convened his government. The power in Syria now went to Hafez Al-Assad, a representative of the military wing of the "Baath" party. The Syrian army and its officer corpus were supplied by members of the Alawite community. After the "Baath" party came to power the most important and skillful divisions of the Syrian army were put under the Alawite rule.²⁸ If the Syrian army would not have such a staff, it would be hardly possible for the Alawites to keep in their hands the political power in Syria for such a long period of time.

²⁵ Rabinovich 1972, 195-200.

²⁶ Olson 1982, 112-115.

²⁷ Ma'oz 1988, 38-39.

²⁸ Վարդանյան 2017, 35-41:

The role of army in Syria's both internal and external policy

In November 1970, the Syrian army under the command of Hafez Al-Assad spread its control over the country. The purpose of the announced by Hafez Al-Assad "Corrective Movement" was a come back to the main principles and ideology of the "Baath", from which the previous left-Baath authorities had turned down.²⁹ In 1971 when Hafez Al-Assad was elected president of the SAR, the military forces had 120,000 soldiers. From the first years of his government Hafez Al-Assad was paying an attention to the mobilization, rearmament and increasing military skills of the army. As a result Syria could completely restore its military forces and acquire a new modern army. This army demonstrated its power in the Arab-Israeli fourth war of 1973. In it Syria could get back from Israel the territories, including the Golan Hills and Al-Kuneytra, that had been seized by Israel still in 1967.³⁰

In June 1976, 12,000 Syrian army troops entered Lebanon for establishing order there.³¹ Some time after the invasion the major part of Lebanon came under the control of Syria.³² In 1982 the revolt of the "Muslim brothers" was suppressed in Hama. The "Defensive division" under the command of the president's brother Rifat Al-Assad came out against the rebelled forces.³³

It is necessary to note, that the most reliable forces of the regime of Hafez Al-Assad were the intelligence forces under Ali Duba, air forces reconnaissance led by Muhammad Al-Khuli, civilian reconnaissance party of Fuad Absi and his deputy over intelligence forces Muhammad Nasif, 10,000-15,000 "Special forces" under the command of Ali Haidar. The next military unit was the presidential or national guard with 10,000 soldiers under the command of Adnan Al-Makhluf and the "Fighting forces" of Adnan Al-Assad. In the years following the 1982 War, the Syrian army grew considerably, almost doubling from about 300,000 men in 1983

²⁹ Commins 1996, 74-75.

³⁰ Ахмедов, Исаев, Филоник 2000, 35-37.

³¹ Weinberger 1986, 209.

³² Հարությունյան 2007, 211.

³³ Seale 1989, 332-333.

to about 500,000 in 1985.³⁴ At the end of 1986 the Syrian Armed Forces comprised between 450,000 and 500,000 soldiers in active service. The principal changes in the Syrian Armed Forces in 1987 and the early part of 1988 were a reduction in ground formations and the arrival of MIG-29 aircraft.³⁵ Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 opened new opportunities for Syria and the Middle East peace process. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the ministers of foreign affairs of the Gulf states, Egypt and Syria assembled and issued a statement condemning Iraq's actions. In the meeting it was decided that united Arab army would not be established, and therefore Kuwait and Saudi Arabia called upon the United States for military support. Against all expectations Syria decided to join the coalition force against Iraq, even mobilizing 20,000 troops to Saudi Arabia.³⁶ The first post-crisis security move on an Arab level was the "Damascus Declaration" convened in March 1991. The Gulf Cooperation Council states, Egypt and Syria agreed on strategic and military cooperation.³⁷

Hafez Al-Assad died on the 10th of June 2000. He was succeeded by Bashar Al-Assad who in 2007 was reelected as president of the SAR.³⁸

In the late 2010 - early 2011 the inner-political stability of the Arabic states was interrupted. A wave of revolutionary movements in the Arabic world that rose in 2011 spread over Syria too. These unrests are known today under the term "Arabic spring".³⁹ Bashar Al-Assad implemented some reforms, nevertheless active foreign interference resulted in long-term political and humanitarian crisis in Syria which afterwards turned into international conflict.⁴⁰

In 2011 the "Syrian national council" was organized. It turned into the executive body of the opposition. It included various ethnic

³⁴ Zisser 2001, 7.

³⁵ Levran, Eytan 1988, 197.

³⁶ Пир-Будагова 2015, 279-280.

³⁷ Карякин 2010, 96.

³⁸ Zisser 2007, 41.

³⁹ Подгорнова 2014, 4.

⁴⁰ From 1963 to 2011 Syria was under emergency law, which allowed for oppositionists' arrests and repressions. Syria's emergency law was put into effect when the "Baath" party came to power in a military coup in 1963.

and confessional strata, also both the representatives of the “Muslim brothers” that were in exile and the Salafites. The military wing of the opposition was based on the so-called “Free Syrian army” which was supplied by a considerable number of fugitives from the Syrian governmental army.⁴¹ To remedy the situation, in 2013 the government began training new armed troops based on militia formations.

At the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the Syrian army was one of the largest and best-trained forces in the Arab world. In 2011, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reported that the Syrian Armed Forces had 295,000 active forces, including some 220,000 in the Army and another 100,000 paramilitary forces associated to the ruling “Baath” party.⁴² In March 2011, the Syrian Arab Army was divided into twelve divisions, whose basing areas were heavily concentrated around Damascus and in southwestern Syria.⁴³ In 2012 the “National coalition of the Syrian opposition and revolutionary forces” was founded in Qatar. This was accepted by some Arabic and European countries including France, UK and the USA.⁴⁴

Starting from June 29 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which announced itself an “Islamic State” (IS), presented its objectives: the establishment of a state for all Muslims in certain regions of Syria and Iraq. In July 2017, the Iraqi government retook Mosul from IS, which had been part of the latter’s territory since 2014.⁴⁵ But the most important moment was the fall of Raqqa - the heart of the IS-proclaimed caliphate - in October 2017.

In the context of the “Arabic spring” the “Syrian revolution” being provided by foreign countries with military, ideological and

⁴¹ Meet Syria’s Opposition, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/02/meet-syrias-opposition/>.

⁴² Instability in Syria, http://csis.org/files/publication/111213_SyriaMilitaryIntervention.pdf.

⁴³ Strength in Weakness: The Syrian Army’s Accidental Resilience, carnegie-mec.org/2016/03/14/strength-in-weakness-syrian-army-s-accidental-resilience-pub-62968.

⁴⁴ Naumkin 2013, 28-29.

⁴⁵ Aleppo and Mosul Tragedy: Similarities and Differences, <http://book.ivran.ru/f/tragediya-aleppo-angl.pdf>.

financial assistance brought the country to a social-economic and political crisis. Thus, the military ranks having deserted from the Syrian army were able to form their own military units. After having received both military and technical support from abroad they undertook a military overturn in Syria which, however, was over unsuccessfully.

In the question of putting Syria under pressure an important role was played by USA, its regional allies Turkey and some Arabic monarchies of the Persian Gulf such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia.⁴⁶ By means of interfering the political life of Syria these countries, in fact built up both military and political background of the Syrian opposition.⁴⁷

Concurrently, in September 2015, the Russian air force began to launch attacks on rebel and jihadi forces in Syria, accompanied by a surge of Iranian and Shia Islamist forces on the ground.⁴⁸ In 2015, under the leadership of Russian and Iraqi consultants, the Syrian government started to create its 4th and 5th army corps, which integrated the units. Notwithstanding these measures, by the autumn of 2015, the number of Syrian government soldiers totaled no more than 100,000, while at the beginning of the conflict this figure was closer to 300,000. It is not surprising that by October 2015, the Syrian government controlled no more than 20 percent of the country's territory and could not endure without support from abroad. On August 26, 2018 Damascus and Tehran signed a military cooperation agreement which envisages Iran's help to rebuild Syrian military industry and infrastructure.⁴⁹

As of December 2017, U.S. officials reported that approximately 2,000 U.S. military personnel were deployed in Syria in support of counter-IS operations.⁵⁰ Surprising its allies, the US

⁴⁶ Pashayan 2018, 82.

⁴⁷ Свистунова 2013, 40.

⁴⁸ Tabrizi, Pantucci 2016, 51-52.

⁴⁹ President al-Assad stresses importance of developing long-term cooperation plans that enhance Syrian-Iranian steadfastness, <https://sana.sy/en/?p=145465>.

⁵⁰ Armed Conflict in Syria, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33487/156>.

announced on 20th December 2018, the full withdrawal of over 2,000 US troops in Syria, declaring victory over the “Islamic State”.⁵¹

In 2018, after years of war and sectarian killing, the Alawite dominance within the armed forces appears overwhelming.⁵² There are four main security, intelligence agencies (Mukhabarat), further subdivided into regional, thematic, and technically specialized branches:

- The Military Intelligence Department (Shaabat Al-Mukhabarat Al-Askariya) is the foremost and largest of the agencies, commanded by Gen. Muhammad Mahmud Mahalla.
- The Air Force Intelligence Directorate⁵³ (Idarat Al-Mukhabarat Al-Jawiya), which appears to have grown in importance during the conflict, is led by Gen. Jamil Al-Hassan.
- The General Intelligence Directorate (Idarat Al-Mukhabarat Al-Amma), is the main civilian security service in the country, also known as State Security, is led by Gen. Muhammad Dib Zaitoun.
- The Political Security Directorate (Idarat Al-Amn Al-Siyasi), smallest of the four, is commanded by Gen. Hussam Luka (from December, 2018).

Technically, all four intelligence agencies report to a body that is alternatively called the National Security Bureau or Presidential Security Council. In practice, each agency reports directly to the president, rather than being integrated into a single chain of command. In practice, the Bureau seems to have little control over

⁵¹ Trump shocks allies and advisers with plan to pull US troops out of Syria, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/19/us-troops-syria-withdrawal-trump>.

⁵² Syria has had twelve prime ministers and three foreign ministers since Hafez Al-Assad assumed the presidency in 1971. All have been Sunnis. The Ministry of Defense and the General Staff were led by Sunnis for nearly all of Hafez Al-Assad’s reign, but by a succession of Sunni, Christian, and Alawite officers under Bashar Al-Assad. All the senior deputies that manage the “Baath” party have been Sunni Muslims since 1970. With the special exception of Rifat Al-Assad, a wayward family member promoted a face-saving solution to a bungled coup, all vice presidents under both presidents Al-Assad have been Sunni Muslims.

⁵³ Not coincidentally, it is also treated as the most influential and powerful security service in Syria since Hafez Al-Assad’s time. He spent his military career in the Syrian Air Force and therefore trusted this agency particularly.

other security chiefs, but its head, Gen. Ali Mamlouk, has emerged as one of Bashar Al-Assad's most trusted associates and envoys. After the deadly terror attack in Damascus on July 18, 2012, when several key Syrian officer figures were killed, including Defense Minister and Army General Dawoud Rajha, Bashar Al-Assad's brother-in-law, Deputy Head of the Armed Forces and Director of the National Security Bureau Assef Shawkat and others, the Bureau was made directly subordinate to the president's office.⁵⁴ It is important to note, that the Syria's military and security forces also play a key institutional role, which has kept the country from total collapse during the last eight years of war.⁵⁵

On Russia's initiative, tripartite talks in Astana were organized to manage the Syrian conflict on terms acceptable to Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran. In January 2018, the Astana troika organized a Syrian peace congress in Sochi, Russia.⁵⁶ This visibly stage-managed event ended in a decision to create a constitutional committee in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.⁵⁷

It is noteworthy that Syria's friendly-fire shootdown of a Russian signals-intelligence IL-20 during an Israeli raid in autumn 2018 triggered a strong reaction from Moscow, which subsequently announced the delivery to Syria of 3 free of charge S-300 PM 2 anti-aircraft missile systems.⁵⁸ In terms of returning peace to Syria, a significant role is played by Russian sappers and the sappers of the Syrian army trained by them. As of January 2019, Russian deminers

⁵⁴ Assad names new security chief after bombing, <https://www.reuters.com/article/syria-assad-security/assad-names-new-security-chief-after-bombing-idINDEE86N0BO20120724>.

⁵⁵ Most experts believe that there are currently some 100-120 active armed opposition units in Syria (including the "Islamic State" and "Jabhat Al-Nusra") that comprise no less than 70,000 professional and heavily armed soldiers.

⁵⁶ Final statement of the Congress of the Syrian national dialogue, www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3046246.

⁵⁷ Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2254 (2015), Endorsing Road Map for Peace Process in Syria, Setting Timetable for Talks, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12171.doc.htm>.

⁵⁸ Moscow finally delivers on Syria's S-300 ambitions, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2018/11/russia-delivers-s-300-damascus-ambitions>.

cleared 6,500 hectares of the territory, 19,000 buildings and constructions, 1,500 kilometers of roads. There are tens of thousands of defused explosive objects.⁵⁹

In an interview with Russia Today in May 2018, President Al-Assad stated that “the only problem left in Syria is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)”. He continued by saying that there are two options to deal with the SDF: negotiations, which the Government claims to have started, or retaking SDF-controlled areas by force.⁶⁰ The UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, a Swedish-Italian diplomat, led political talks in Geneva from 2014 until his resignation in October 2018.⁶¹ The Geneva process was initially based on a 2012 agreement among external actors, known as the Geneva Communiqué.⁶² At the UN General Assembly’s 73th session (September 2018), Syria’s Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign and Expatriates Minister, Walid Al-Moualem, claimed that Syria’s fight with terrorism is almost over and the country is getting ready to welcome back more than 5 million refugees who fled during the seven-year war.⁶³

Conclusion

The creation of the Syrian army is a victory of Syrian people. Syrian army is a “boiler” where various stratum, in this regard, the representatives of both ethnic and confessional minorities, were smelt together.

⁵⁹ Humanitarian Operation of the Russian Army in Syria,
<http://book.ivran.ru/f/gumoperaciara.pdf>.

⁶⁰ We were close to direct conflict between Russia & US inside Syria,
<https://www.rt.com/news/428299-assad-syria-russia-interview/>.

⁶¹ **Samsonyan**, Interviews in the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP), Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), November 2014, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁶² “Geneva Communiqué,”

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Syria%20S2012%20522.pdf>.

⁶³ The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations-New York, September 29, 2019,
https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/73/sy_en.pdf.

The Syrian armed conflict began in 2011 as a civil war, stemming from the Arab Spring protests. Over the course of eight years of war, the Syrian Arab Army has engaged in armed conflict against various opposition forces composed of domestic rebels and foreign volunteers, often equipped with light weapons. At the beginning of the war, the Syrian army numbered between 250,000 and 300,000 troops; nevertheless, over the years of the conflict, due to casualties, defections and desertions, this number has greatly decreased. The first organized opposition to the Syrian Government, the FSA, came into being in 2011 when defectors from the Syrian army organized themselves into a militant group. Since its beginnings, the FSA has expanded and become a loose umbrella term for many armed groups, with little coordination, organized military planning or cohesive ideology. Without support from the Turkish military through intelligence, aerial support and logistics, the FSA would be unable to overpower other militant groups. At the beginning of the 21st century Turkey created a new strategy for the Middle East aimed at strengthening the regional positions of Ankara. Nevertheless, the Syrian crisis has brought along some new forms of Turkey-Russia cooperation and new developments in Turkey-Iran relations.

The struggle for power in the region has drawn into the conflict countries such as the Russia, Iran, US, Turkey, Israel and many others. To a degree, the conflict has become more international in character, rather than remaining faithful to its non-international civil war roots. The armed conflict is no longer only about Syria's government, in recent years it has become a pawn in the geopolitical struggles of the Middle East.⁶⁴ To date, Russia and China have jointly vetoed six resolutions on Syria since 2011 and Russia vetoed another six alone, mostly relating to UN and OPCW investigations of Syria's chemical weapons.⁶⁵

Having said that, the international community has played an important role in trying to facilitate peace talks between the Al-Assad government and the opposition groups. One example is the Astana talks in 2017, which managed to set up de-escalation zones in Syria, sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran, as well as the demili-

⁶⁴ **Gevorgyan** 2018, 92-93.

⁶⁵ See: Security Council - Veto List, research.un.org/en/docs/sc.

tarized zone brokered by Turkey and Russia in the last remaining rebel stronghold in Idlib in September 2018.⁶⁶

Finally, in July 2018, Al-Assad managed to retake control of the southern Syrian district of Daraa, which has been under rebel control since the beginning of the war. This is an important strategic and symbolic win for Al-Assad as Daraa is considered to be the “birthplace” of the 2011 revolt against Bashar Al-Assad. In 2018, most of Syria is back under the control of Al-Assad’s government. The Syrian Arab Army, with the help of Iran-backed militias and Russian aerial bombings, has reclaimed most of Syrian territory from the rebels.

The Middle East and the Near East events highlight similar problems existing in other countries, including those of the Soviet Union space. It concerns not only internal political processes, as mentioned above, but also new challenges stemming from the whole system of international security, established after the World War II. The military and political processes that are run in nowadays Syria are very important for Armenia too. The Armenian-Syrian relations have a long history. In different historical periods a traditional friendship and sympathy towards each other helped Armenia and Syria to pass through a long and difficult way in their relations. During the reign of the Al-Assad family the Armenians were the low-abiding citizens of Syria who enjoyed both appraisal and respect of the Syrian society and government. However, the current political turbulence in Syria can seriously damage not only the Syrian statehood and people but also the Armenian community in Syria. In February 2019, 83-strong group of Armenian specialists comprising humanitarian deminers, doctors and security personnel arrived in Aleppo, Syria for providing humanitarian aid to the Syrian people.

⁶⁶ In 2018, 50 thousand tons of grain were exported from Crimea to Syria, **Samsonyan**, Interviews in the Crimean Republic, October 2018, “Crimean seaports”, Kerch, Feodosia.

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**ԲԱՆԱԿԻ ԴԵՐԸ ՍԻՐԻԱՅԻ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԿՅԱՆՔՈՒՄ .
ՍԻՐԻԱԿԱՆ ԳՈՒՄԱՐՏԱԿԻՑ ՄԻՆՉԵՎ ՍԻՐԻԱՅԻ
ԱՐԱՔԱԿԱՆ ԲԱՆԱԿ**

Բանալի բառեր՝ Սիրիական լեզեոն, Հափուկ զորամասեր, Սիրիայի բանակի սպաներ, Արևելյան (Հայկական) լեզեոն, քաղաքացիական պատերազմ, Արաբական գարուն, ռազմական հեղաշրջումներ, Արաբական Միացյալ Հանրապետություն, Բաաս կուսակցություն:

Հոդվածում քննարկվում են Սիրիայի բանակի կազմավորման, այդ թվում՝ սպայական վերնախավի ձևավորման գործընթացը, բանակի սոցիալական հենքը, դրանում էթնիկ և դավանական գործոնի նշանակությունը, 1949-1970 թթ. Սիրիայում տեղի ունեցած ռազմական հեղաշրջումները և դրան հաջորդած փուլում տեղ գտած հեղաշրջման փորձերը, ինչպես նաև զինված ուժերի դերակատարությունը երկրի հասարակական-քաղաքական կյանքում: Վերլուծության են ենթարկվում նաև 2011 թ. սկիզբ առած սիրիական ճգնաժամը և դրա շուրջ ընթացող զարգացումները: Զինված ուժերի ամենագործուն օղակը՝ սպայական վերնախավը, եղել և մնում է պետական համակարգի անբաժան մասը: Ուստի պատահական չէ, որ սիրիական բանակն աստիճանաբար վերածվեց այդ երկրի քաղաքական կյանքի լուրջ գործոնի, որի ապացույցը Սիրիայում տեղի ունեցած հեղաշրջումներն են:

Ցույց է տրվում, որ արաբական ոչ մի երկրում զինված ուժերը քաղաքական կյանքում թերևս այնքան գերիշխող դեր չեն ունեցել, որքան Սիրիայում: Այդ հանգամանքը մեկ անգամ ևս հաստատվում է մեր օրերում Սիրիայում ընթացող ներքաղաքական բարդ իրադարձությունների օրինա-

կով, երբ բանակը կրկին հանդես է գալիս որպես լուրջ քաղաքական գործոն:

Համեմատվում և ուսումնասիրվում են Սիրիայում ալավիների ռազմաքաղաքական իշխանության հաստատման խնդիրները, ինչպես նաև ներկայացվում է այն, որ «Բաաս» կուսակցության իշխանության գալուց հետո բանակի կարևորագույն և ամենամարտունակ զորամասերը դրված էին ալավիների հրամանատարության տակ: Եթե չլիներ նման կազմով սիրիական բանակը, ապա դժվար թե քաղաքական իշխանությունը Սիրիայում այդքան երկար գտնվեր ալավիների ձեռքերում:

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