

The Evolution of Syria's Opposition: A Status Report as of July 3, 2012

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The Evolution of Syria's Opposition: Agenda

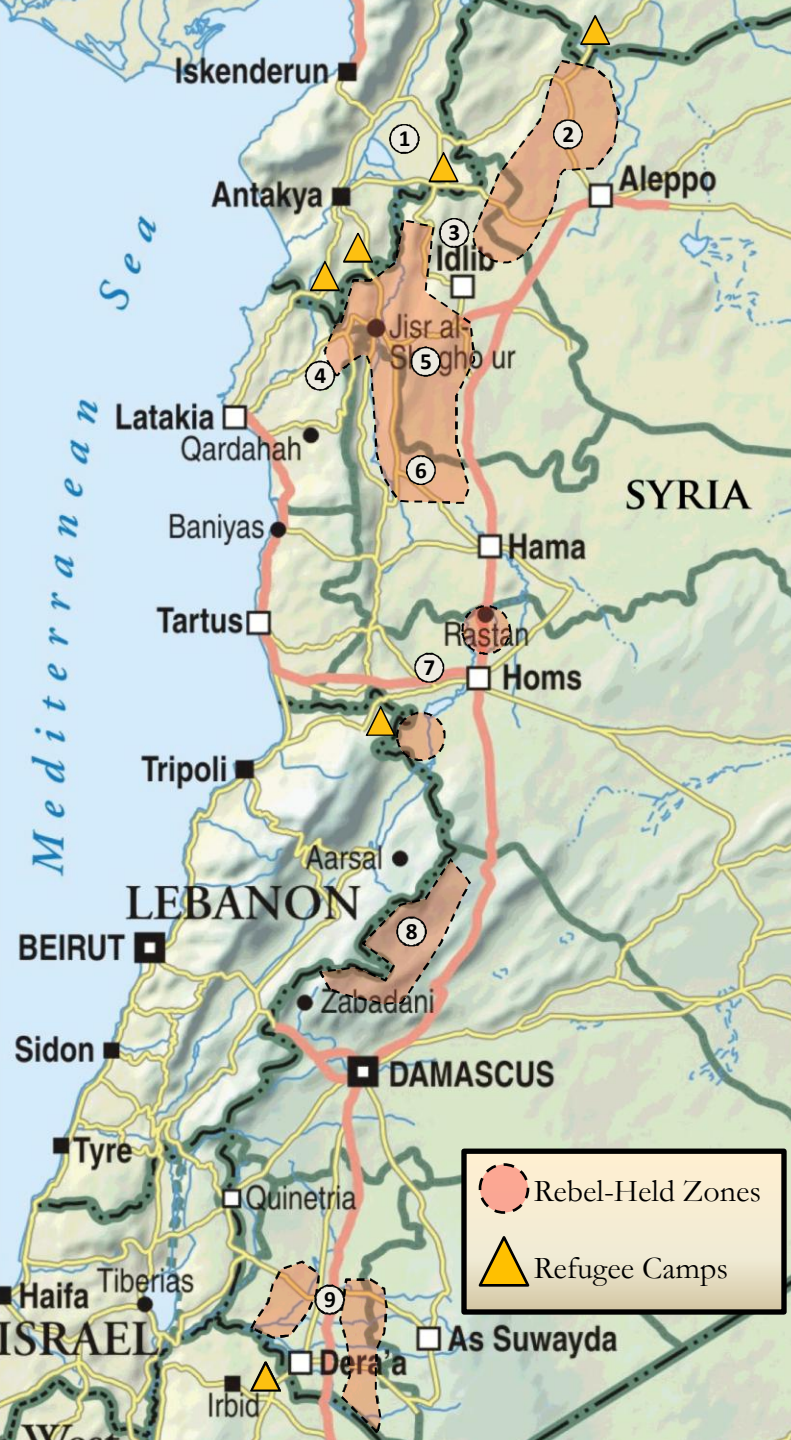
This product reviews the current situation of the Syrian Opposition in terms of its military and political components.

In the context of the military stand-off between the opposition and regime security forces, the product depicts the Urban-Rural stalemate that has emerged in terms of terrain secured by both sides. It also describes the emergence of Provincial Military Councils that provide operational command and control for disparate rebel groups.

In terms of the political opposition, the product also establishes the grassroots political opposition that has organized around Revolutionary Councils that cooperate and correspond with the military Provincial Military Councils. These Revolutionary Councils have consolidated into three National Political Coalitions that achieve effective pan-provincial representation.

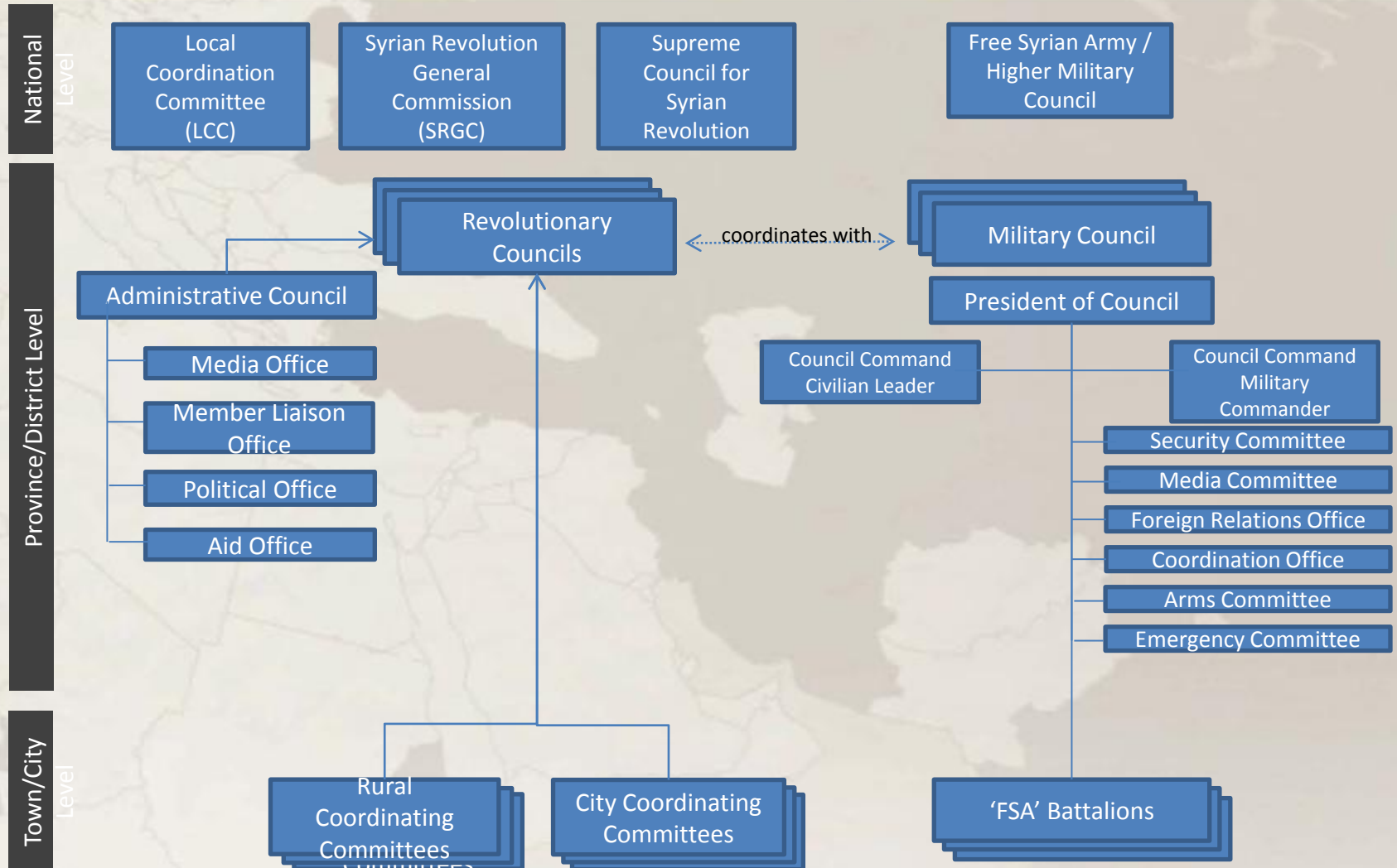
Enduring challenges exist with regard the limits of the Expatriate Opposition, vulnerabilities to rebel radicalization, and factionalization as exacerbated by external support. Opportunities also exist to support the professionalization of the militant opposition in order to treat these challenges.

Rebel-Held Zones As of June 2012



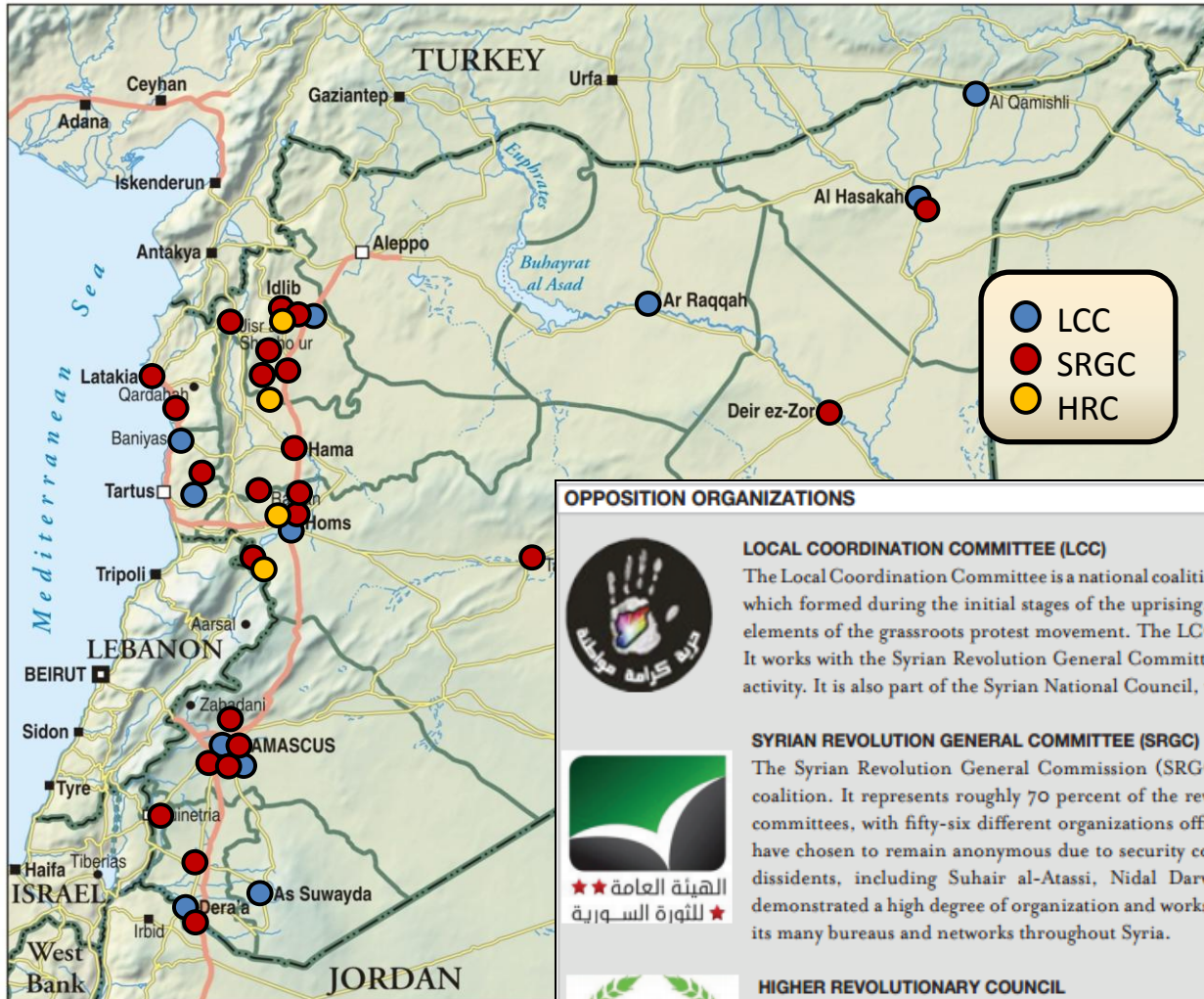
- 1 Refugee camps in Turkey's southern Antakya and Gaziantep provinces house tens of thousands of refugees and serve as headquarters for the umbrella rebel organization known as the Free Syrian Army.
- 2 In March 2012, fighting erupted for the first time in northern Aleppo province. Fighting even spilled over the border into Turkey in May, and by the end of that month, the rebels could report effective control over most of the northern Aleppo countryside.
- 3 After the regime seized Idlib city in mid-March 2012, rebels fled north, where they opened new fronts against the regime along the Turkish border and west of Aleppo.
- 4 Fighting spread to Latakia's mountainous Haffeh district, where rebels battled security forces throughout June. The insurgency's proximity to the coastal Alawite stronghold threatens the regime close to home.
- 5 Idlib province's mountainous Jebal al-Zawiya region has been a center of rebel activity since the Fall of 2011. Rebels here overran a regime outpost in early June, and resisted regime incursions throughout April and May.
- 6 Rebels operating in the southern Hama countryside form the southern front of Syria's largest de facto safe zone. The insurgents here began to transition away from hit-and-run attacks, mounting large scale offensives against regime outposts.
- 7 The Assad regime has maintained control of Homs city since it seized the city in May 2012, but rebel strongholds remain to the city's north (Rastan) and southwest (al-Qusayr). Rebels in these towns have successfully defended against regime incursions, and suffer frequent artillery bombardment.
- 8 Despite increasingly frequent and effective rebel attacks, the regime security forces have maintained control of Damascus and its environs. However, in the remote valleys of the Qalamoun area that separates Damascus from Lebanon, the rebels have been able to operate with impunity.
- 9 In southern Deraa province, the rebels have not attempted to hold zones of influence, focusing instead on guerrilla raids and ambushes. Nevertheless, the rebels have maintained freedom of mobility among the rural towns and villages scattered across this agricultural plateau.

Political-Military Opposition Structures in Syria



Political and military structures have developed inside Syria. These structures exhibit a level of command and control and have an identifiable leadership. These political-military organizations maintain popular support and provide some local governance. They have largely coalesced at a district/province level, where the most sophisticated structures have developed.

Support for Syria's National Political Coalitions



The revolutionary councils operating at the district/province level and local coordinating committees have begun to align into national organizations that could set the groundwork for a multi-party system in the future, and help transition to a democratic government.

OPPOSITION ORGANIZATIONS



LOCAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE (LCC)

The Local Coordination Committee is a national coalition that represents the local coordinating committees (tansiqiyyat) which formed during the initial stages of the uprising. These committees are dominated by Syrian youth activists and elements of the grassroots protest movement. The LCC claims to represent fourteen local tansiqiyya sub-committees. It works with the Syrian Revolution General Committee and the Higher Revolutionary Council to coordinate protest activity. It is also part of the Syrian National Council, with members sitting on the council's general assembly.



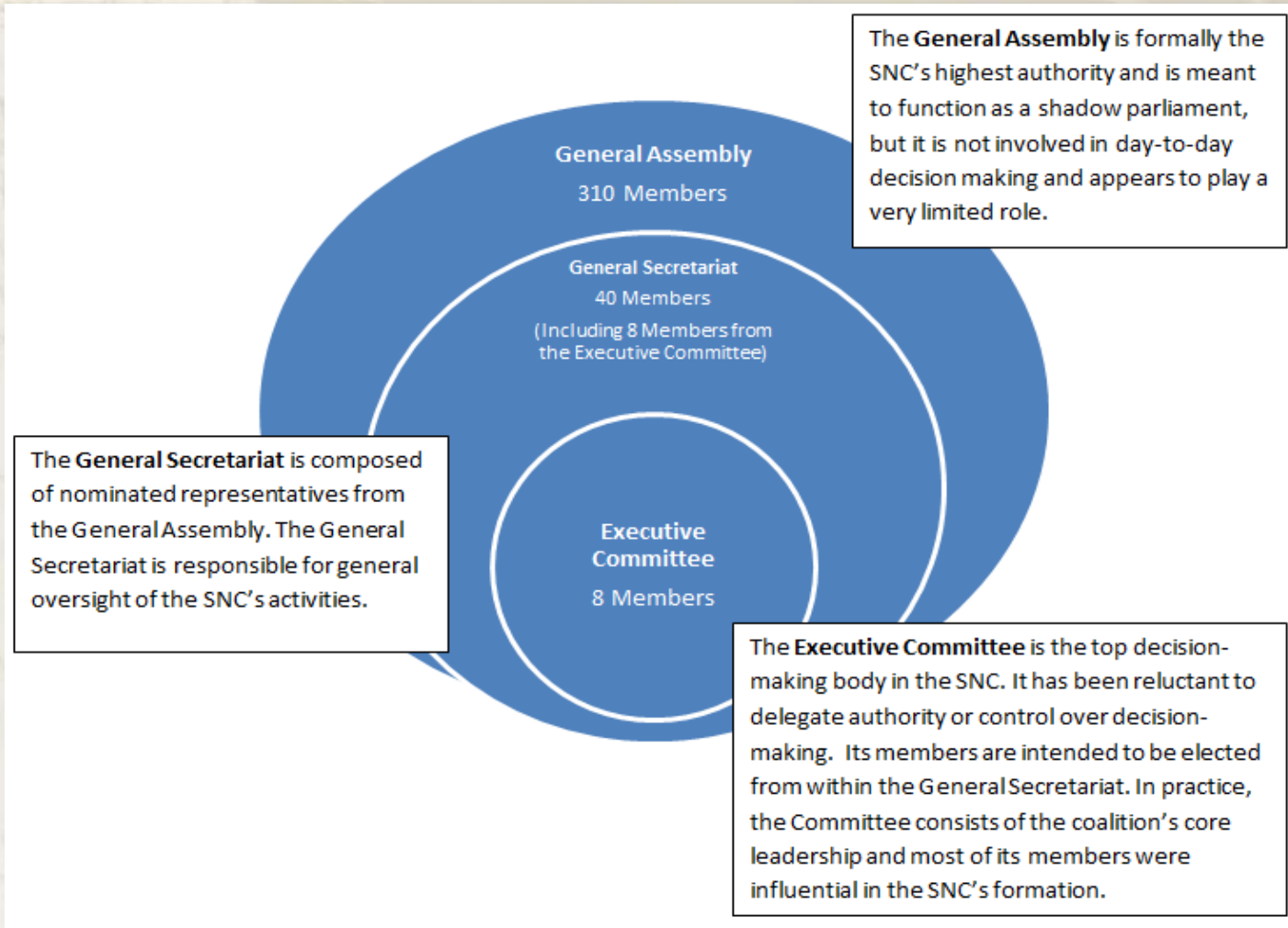
SYRIAN REVOLUTION GENERAL COMMITTEE (SRGC)

The Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC) was established in August 2011. It is the largest grassroots coalition. It represents roughly 70 percent of the revolutionary councils and the majority of the local coordinating committees, with fifty-six different organizations officially recognized in its charter. Though many of its key leaders have chosen to remain anonymous due to security concerns, the commission does include a number of prominent dissidents, including Suhair al-Atassi, Nidal Darwish, and SRGC spokesman Bassam Jarra. The SRGC has demonstrated a high degree of organization and works in conjunction with the local coordinating committees through its many bureaus and networks throughout Syria.



HIGHER REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL

The Higher Revolutionary Council, also known as the Supreme Council for the Syrian Revolution, was established in May 2011. It was one of the first national coalitions to be created by grassroots activists. Like the SRGC and the LCC, it is a coalition of grassroots activists and local coordinating committees. The three organizations work closely together.



Exiled opposition groups like the Syrian National Council have lost legitimacy and popular support. They have been empowered by the international community to the detriment of the grassroots opposition structures developing on the ground. External support should not go through these opposition coalitions. Instead, international support should go into Syria in a way that helps contribute to the development of current political structures.



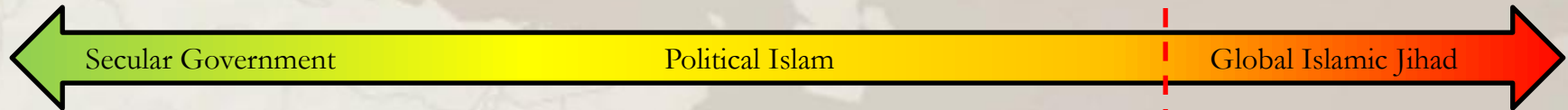
Local Coordinating
Committee



Syrian Revolution
General Commission



Supreme Council for
Syrian Revolution



Rastan Military Council



Farouq Battalion



Ahrar al Sham Battalions



Jahbat Nusrah

As of now, the majority of the opposition is politically secular. However, the longer the conflict protracts, the more likely that groups will radicalize. Disparate sources of funding are already negatively shaping the conflict by contributing to increasing trends of radicalization.

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