

# The Negotiations Process in the Syrian Conflict

## Routes and Results

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## Introduction

The increasingly heightened tone made the discourse used between the two sides of the conflict a highly polarized one. Although the first few months of the armed revolution in Syria witnessed a sort of negotiation at the end of 2011, the concept of negotiation remained shy till the present time. Or let's say it did not lead to reducing the heightened tone of mottos or make a significant change in the discourse used, while the military clashes ended up in striking a destructive balance that achieve depletion but not victory. Moreover, the fact that a part of the clash is controlled by external balances contributed in a way or another to this shy presence of negotiation and increased the local political paralysis for the wider settlement. Yet the local observer has his own spectacles in which he tries to find what is possible in addition to what is required.

As main determinators of to discuss the negotiation path, we can build on the results of a previous study that found out the following:

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- The two sides still believe that the military treatment of the situation is the feasible one rather than the political solution. This is reflected in the abundance of the military movement, coupled with a complete clinging to the mottos raised and initial demands.
  - Unless the negotiation process is supported by regional and international will that is capable of practicing pressures to control the path of negotiations, the communication channels between the two sides are not going to result in any constructive agreement towards cease of fighting and treatment of the congestion.
  - All the deals that were based on agreements between the Assad regime and the notables of the areas, without the presence of the militant groups, ended up in failure.
  - The non-settlement of the structure of the opposition, in its political and military sides, makes the negotiation deals limited in goals and local in representation, in a way that reduces both the political and military roles in the negotiating person."

Given the accumulated outcomes of the negotiation path during 2014, this paper is going to explore the features of this path and its determinators, especially the truces model that is still spreading; leaving behind a broad question about whether these local truces are an introduction to reconciliation or a tactic for confrontation.

Despite the cold shadows that the truce agreements throw at the military conflict scene, in a way that increases the appetite of those interested in talking about "transitional justice", but the glare of battle is more present in the scene that is watched by those at the theatre of events - including the truce areas - whether they were sides in the confrontation, or followers of one the sides, or just silent spectators with some sort of alignment. This is because the polarization that was reflected in the initial mottos sneaked into the depth of societal structure. The harsh experience that the simple citizen underwent without having a choice in it, equipped the collective memory with knowledge

that remolded the bonds and redefined identity and belonging; it established a discourse that uses attack rather than communication and elimination than meeting .This, combined with the huge deformation of the societal structure in its local and territorial meaning, so far resulted in a standstill in the distance separating between the initial mottos in general, between those seeking to reclaim authority in the manner of "The people want", and those clinging to it on the manner of "I or no one".<sup>1</sup>

## The Negotiation Path

There have been various forms and purposes of negotiation. Some were local, others were sponsored from outside and others were called upon by the UN. The purposes also varied, from prisoner exchange, to siege lift, ceasefire, and finally truce agreements. The common denominator between all these is the recession of the negotiation horizon in the phase of escalation; that is to say the when negotiations fall under the control of the mutual conviction that military victory can be achieved as a long-term strategic solution. This thing would turn negotiation into a transitional confrontation tool, and enhance the presence of weaponry instead of minimizing it at the level of the comprehensive war. So the main feature of the negotiation process would be opportunism, at the expense of the shrinking of the national dimension that is capable of lowering the latency of congestion and then help in moving to a transitional phase on the strategic term.

We can di between the local or regionally sponsored negotiations, and the negotiations that are based on a UN call in an attempt to - as declared - reach a solution that may end the conflict.

The local negotiations come as a logical result of the military confrontations, and there is often a great chance for reaching a happy ending. The outside-backed negotiations seem always to be stumbling and unable to reach their goal, i.e., reaching a political solution. Moreover, they usually are accompanied with military escalation, making these political negotiations a reason for escalation, and a goal that most of the time turns into a title of a phase.

Local negotiations can be summarized in two main forms:

- First form: prisoner exchange deals
- Second form: Ceasefire agreements, which gradually developed to take the shape of a local truce that include ceasefire, among other items.

Both forms meet in the sense of being a transitional development of the conflict, and in the limited scale and nature of the agreement. Whereas they differ in terms of the participant sides and the drives behind the negotiations, the first would seem in most instances unable to progress without an external mediation that is capable of practicing pressure on either or both sides of the conflict. The second seems to be closer to achieving a common local interest, i.e., taking a breath.-

Both forms have their evidence in the negotiations between the Kurdish groups and forces, or between the fighter groups themselves. Rarely these negotiations did get any attention outside their

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<sup>1</sup> عن دراسة سابقة في مآلات التفاوض صادرة في كانون ثاني/يناير 2014 تحت عنوان "من الكيماوي إلى جنيف"  
[http://csr-sy.com/pics/files/Studis/from\\_chemical\\_to\\_Geneva2.pdf#](http://csr-sy.com/pics/files/Studis/from_chemical_to_Geneva2.pdf#)

close local scale, and in many instances they were an expression of convergence on the long-term goal and evidence of an increasing common understanding among the fighter groups. This resulted in increasing mutual trust. This example is on the contrary side of the negotiation path between the revolutionary fighter groups and the Assad regime<sup>2</sup>. This path is surrounded by challenge that prevents reaching an approach that can embrace everyone; the thing that would raise the popular satisfaction index and mitigate congestion in the overall scene.

In this paper, we will be tackling this hard path and probe both the local and the regionally-backed negotiation process. Both forms will be discussed: the prisoner exchange and the truces.

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<sup>2</sup> من ذلك حصار عفرين (في حلب): اتفاق وقف إطلاق النار في 19 حزيران/يونيو 2013 بين الثوار والكردي (بي إي دي) تضمن فك الحصار عن عفرين (غالبية كردية) وتضييقه على نبل والزهران (غالبية علوية).  
أسرى البصيرة (في دير الزور): اتفاق بين النصر و جيش القادسية في 28 آذار/مارس 2014 تضمن إطلاق سراح المحتجزين ووقف إطلاق النار والتعاون لتطهير البصيرة من نفوذ تنظيم الدولة

First:

# Detainee Exchange Deals



# Prisoner Exchange Agreements<sup>3</sup>

It is certainly saddening that humans become a tool for blackmail or a number for exchange; but the happy ends towards which the prisoner exchange processes move can return to the scene some balance and make some arrests a way for liberation; though a happy ending at the level of the overall war does not seem to be coming. Moreover, the situation of lawlessness along with the tyranny of dictator authority helped turning population communities into open-air prisoners, yet subject to arrest for extortion whenever the needed by the policies of military force, not the provisions of law.

## Arrests as a gate:

As reported by many local and international rights organizations working on documenting the dossier of Arrest in Syria, supported by the related databases at the CSR, the arrestments done by the Assad regime become especially active in accordance with what goes on one the ground. Thus, arrest turn into a policy of eliminating the opposition in the form of inspection campaigns on the civil populated areas that did not witness an anti-Assad political activity. In February 2012, during the 10 days following the famous Mezzah demonstration, more than 1,000 persons were arrested during the campaign of raids and mobile arrests across the residential neighborhoods of Mezzah. Most of those arrested are still in detention today. Another form of exploiting arrests is the extortion of opposition figures, be them civil or military, by arresting their relatives. Evidence on this can be seen in the numbers of detained children (below ten) and women; and also the arbitrary arrests on street checkpoints. Arrests are also used as a security pre-emptive policy as happened after the USA announced intent on performing an airstrike in September 2013. All the above-mentioned policies have the same goal - that is to protect the authority - and are issued by the security apparatus, not by the military institution.

The arrests policy by the fighter groups aim at securing negotiation tools and pressure cards for the purpose of freeing detainees, imprisoned by the Assad regime. This has two forms:

- Kidnapping of military or security figures like what happened in the Damascus countryside in April 2014, by the FSA.
- Capturing soldiers at the battle frontline as happened with the Lebanese soldiers captured by the Al-Nusra Front during the Aarsal clashes in August 2014.

Add to that the new development on the dossier of Adra in Damascus countryside after the fighters took control of the city in December 2013. However, this has not yet become a widespread scene too call it a new policy.

## The Arrests Policy

The main features of the arrests policy by the two sides of the conflict are the following:

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<sup>3</sup> من زاوية قانونية يتعدى في الحالة السورية حتى الآن استعمال لفظ "الأسر" وما يمكن أن يشتق عنه من تسميات اصطلاحية وما يرتبط بها من أحكام قضائية، والصحيح استخدام مصطلح "الاحتجاز" بدل "الأسر"، إنما نقوم باستعمال هذا اللفظ هنا بحسب الشائع إعلامياً في توصيف صفقات تبادل المحتجزين.

- Arbitrary arrests are done on regular basis under comprehensive policies managed by the security apparatus, on the part of the Assad regime. As for the fighter groups, arrests are done on an irregular basis under a local decision making and implementing mechanism issued by the military command of the militant group; thus - in the context of comparison - we can attribute the decision of arrests to the "military body" of a militant group, while there is no security apparatus at all like that of the Assad regime that is involved in the decision making.
- Arrest practices are widespread in the areas under Assad control; while on the part of the fighter groups it is limited to the frontlines and battle fields.
- Despite the lack of accurate documentation of the numbers of detainees, what is firmly established by the organizations active in the rights documenting of the Syrian affair is the huge disparity between the numbers of detainees at the two sides. Detainees arrested by the Assad regime are estimated at hundreds of thousands, including more than 85,000 enforcedly detained and an unknown number of battle prisoners; whereas reports from rights organization speak of a much lesser level of arrests, and no cases of enforced detention in the areas under the control of revolutionaries - only in exceptional situations - and an unknown number of battle prisoners, except that which is disclosed in exchange deals.
- In many cases, arrests are done on the basis of suspicion, kinship with a suspect, or randomly at checkpoints (for belonging to a certain area or certain family) in addition to concealing the location and destiny of the detainee. From a legal point of view, this practice of the regime which falls under "enforced disappearance" along with the large numbers of detainees and the murderous practices of torture, tantamount to "crimes against humanity". By no means would the revolutionary do such acts, in relation to the arrests dossier.

Given the above-mentioned, the arrest practices seem to be an integral part of the language of communication; and it is unlikely that these practices are going to become of less importance in the future for both sides, under what we witness today of international observatory and rights procedures to mitigate the intensity of the conflict or control its path. This grants the prisoner exchange deals more significance and specialty, especially with the increasingly worsening situation of the conflict, and the development of negotiation language and the shared experience by the two sides with every new exchange deal.



# Main Deals

The Syrian map witnessed tens of prisoner exchange operations, that were not limited to the biggest two sides (the regime/the revolutionary groups with their different designations); rather there were plenty of prisoner exchange operations that did not include the Assad regime as a direct party to it<sup>4</sup>, like those between the revolutionary groups and the pro-Assad local Kurdish forces, or between the revolutionary groups and the Islamic State, or between the Kurdish forces and the Islamic State. For several considerations, these operations<sup>5</sup> were more easily done and more stable than those done with the Assad regime. However, in this paper we want to study only the negotiation processes between the Assad regime and the revolutionary groups. We will highlight their main features after quickly outlining the most prominent deals:

Exchange deal	Outline
<p><b>The Iranian Prisoners</b> 10 January 2013</p> <p>Participant Sides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• FSA (Al Baraa Brigade)</li><li>• Assad regime political leadership</li><li>• An Iranian negotiation mission</li><li>• Regional mediation (Qatari-Turkish)</li></ul>	<p>By Iranian request and Qatari effort, an agreement was reached with the militant group that held the 48 Iranian detainees, through which the detainees were to be released in return of releasing 2130 detainees at Assad-regime security branches, including 76 women and 4 Turkish citizens. The negotiations were described as hard and took months, and were preceded by two failure attempts to reach them or eliminate them by shelling. The main features of the deal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Even though it was not the first time in which Iranian prisoners were exchanged with Syrian prisoners, it was biggest in terms of numbers, the diplomatic weight of mediation, and the new rich political significance.</li><li>▪ An Iranian mission sent by the Iranian leadership directly participated in managing the negotiation process alongside the Assad regime.</li><li>▪ While the detainees that the FSA requested to be released come from 12 Syrian governorates (out of total 14 Syrian governorates), the Assad regime did not request the release of detainees other than the Iranian ones, even though there were 9 members from Hezbollah in captivity by the FSA in Aleppo, several months before the completion of the deal, let alone Syrian detainees..</li><li>▪ Due to the lack of central command and the poor revolutionary coordination, the FSA did not have a bank of information prior to entering the negotiations about the full data of detainees, thus agreeing on the Assad-regime's version of female detainees' number of 76 only.</li></ul>

<sup>4</sup> بحسب الموثق لدى قواعد بيانات المركز السوري للإحصاء والبحوث تجاوز عدد هذه العمليات 16 حتى نهاية آب/أغسطس 2014.

<sup>5</sup> من ذلك الصفقات المبرمة مع تنظيم الدولة \_بوصفه طرفاً ثالثاً مستقلاً عن النظام وعن فصائل الثوار\_ كصفقة تل بيض بين تنظيم الدولة وبين القوات الكردية المعروفة بـ (pyd) في 21 تموز/يوليو 2013، و صفقة تبادل الأسرى بين لواء ثوار الرقة وبين التنظيم في 9 حزيران/يونيو 2014.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Assad regime refused to release famous revolutionary figures like Lt. Colonel Harmoush, Tal Al Malouhi and Al Aissami.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Azaz Hostages</b> 19 October 2013</p> <p>Participant sides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FSA (Asifat Al Shamal Brigade)</li> <li>• Assad regime political leadership</li> <li>• Regional mediation (Qatari-Turkish-Palestinian)</li> </ul>	<p>A multinational prisoner exchange deal in which several sides took part; nine Lebanese soldiers, detained by an FSA group for over a year, were released in return for releasing over a hundred (according to the agreement) female Syrian detainees held in Assad prisons, in addition to releasing two Turkish pilots who were kidnapped in Beirut a few months before finalizing the deal. The main features of the deal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ For several months, the detainees' dossier did not move into serious negotiation until it became a regional matter.</li> <li>▪ Being the deal that included the highest number of detainees' nationalities, the demand for releasing Syrian detainees were made by the FSA side only, whereas the other side negotiated for the release of foreign nationalities only.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Deir Maloula Nuns</b> 10 March 2014</p> <p>Participant Sides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al Nusra Front</li> <li>• Assad regime political leadership</li> <li>• * Qatari mediation</li> </ul>	<p>After being held for 3 months by the fighter groups in Qlamoun area, Western Damascus country, the 16 hostages (13 nuns and 3 women workers) were released, in return for the release of 150 women detained in the security branches of the Assad regime. The main features of the deal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The negotiation was about releasing women in return for releasing other women.</li> <li>▪ After the Assad regime became famous for using the sectarian dimension, the revolutionary groups managed to leverage the same dimension as a pressure card, nd succeeded in this.</li> <li>▪ The gains of the Assad regime were limited in this deal due to the positive testament that was given by the nuns about the Al Nusra Front personnel involved in the kidnapping; the nuns deprived the Assad regime from claiming a victory even at the level of local media.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Adra Al Omaliya</b> 23 May 2014</p> <p>Participant Sides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islamic Front</li> <li>• Assad regime security management</li> </ul>	<p>The fighter groups managed to seize and control the Adra Al Omaliya city and hold approximately 1,500 Alawite families, after clashes in which several officers and soldiers from the Assad military were killed, in December 2013. In May 2014, the Assad military and the Islamic Front in Douma which is under the control of the revolutionaries completed the first prisoner exchange deal in the Adra Al Omaliya dossier, making this dossier a turning point in the path of negotiations. The main features of the deal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The revolutionaries used the siege style instead of the abducting style; the place of the hostages was known over months.</li> <li>▪ The agreement was to release one family from the besieged city for one detainee at Assad security prisons;</li> </ul>

which means an advantage in numbers for the Assad regime contrary to what went usually in the previous deals.

- The revolutionaries and the regime negotiated directly without regional mediation, which indicates that the negotiating skills of the revolutionaries have developed despite their lack of a central command.
- The revolutionaries allowed the non-Alawite families to leave the besieged city, simulating the practices of the regime personnel at checkpoints, which establishes the rules for sectarian conflict.

In addition to smaller exchange deals<sup>6</sup> that increased especially in 2014, but did not seize significant media or political attention. Yet the same features and characteristics apply to them, which we will point out in the following section.

## The Exchange Deals Route

The main highlights of the negotiations deals are as follows:

- The sectarian dimension has been an increasing factor in the negotiations path. The negotiator in the name of the Assad regime prioritized Iranian prisoners, whereas the negotiator in the name of the revolutionaries prioritized women prisoners.
- Except for favoritism and buying connections, negotiation on prisoner exchange is the broadest way to release "political prisoners" detained at Assad regime's forces; the number of those released by negotiations exceeded the number of those included in the seven<sup>7</sup> presidential pardons that were issued between March 2011 and June 2014 including those charged by the terrorism court.
- The Al Nusra Front, specifically, has been capable of bringing its enemies to negotiation, and employing that in sending political messages to the external parties that are concerned with the Syrian affair, by choosing the right files, time and negotiation conditions. This includes the "Nuns' deal", the US journalist Peter Theo Curtis file, the Fijian peacekeeping soldiers in Southern Syria, and the Lebanese soldiers in the Qalamoun area, with a pragmatic negotiation practice that is lacked in most of the other revolutionary groups. This practice has been integrated politically, militarily, and media-wise.
- The negotiating capacity of the revolutionary groups has grown significantly throughout the conflict history, to become capable on its own of going through big negotiation deals. This

6. توزعت على العديد من الجبهات مثل درعا والقلمون والغوطة الشرقية والغربية واللاذقية، ومؤخراً عملية إطلاق سراح صحفي أمريكي بوساطة قطرية.  
7. أشهرها: مرسوم العفو في 31 ايار/مايو 2011، مرسوم العفو في 21 حزيران/يونيو 2011، مرسوم العفو في 15 كانون الثاني/يناير 2012، مرسوم العفو في 16 نيسان/ابريل 2013، و مرسوم العفو في 10 حزيران/يونيو 2014

indicates that the revolutionary groups are capable of moving, reaching, negotiating, and possessing the power for protecting the interests, in an attempt to present itself as a substitute for the Assad regime.

- The deals contributed to clarifying the conflict image and the position of the Syrian individual in it, as well as the reality of the external roles and the extent of inferiority and sovereignty over decision. That is to say, Iran, Turkey and Qatar managed to make clear presence in the negotiation route. As we cannot describe the Turkish and Iranian mediation roles and neutral ones, due to the presence of citizens from both countries in the exchange deals, Qatar had the widest participation among the mediation players.
- The Assad regime negotiators showed consistency with the goals of their political and security command, whereas the negotiator on the opposite side focused on humanitarian purposes. Under the lack of a central command and a comprehensive political vision, the most prominent investment on the revolutionary groups' side was the media side – though weak – to raise the reputation index and increase rallying in the resources of the negotiator.

At the level of the revolutionary project, the absence of a representative and efficient central leadership limited the negotiation to local deals only, which allowed the various revolutionary groups to bypass the problematic issue of lack of comprehensive political vision. This logic allowed the fighter to be the primary and ultimate decision maker in the negotiation process, the thing that may transform the negotiation into a tool of conflict not a tool of understanding. This stripped the negotiation from its sense of political conflict into the route of military practices, reducing the prospects of a comprehensive settlement for the control of an image of continuous war.

This applies in part on the truce agreements, at a time in which un-backed political negotiations, seeking to reach a comprehensive settlement under the Geneva conferences, stumbled.



Second:

# Truces



# Truces

The truces witnessed today come within the same context in which came the first agreements for ceasefire between the two parties, whose appearance accompanies the beginning of the armed revolution in early 2012; an attempt to restore a secure quietness

## Evolution of an armistice agreement

Whilst the ceasefire agreement in the Damascus suburb of Zabadani announced in January 2012 was considered a political and military victory of the revolutionary factions considering the very different potential between the two involved parties, reason for which it was considered a political provocation, the armistice agreements signed today by revolutionary factions and Assad regime forces are considered a setback on the path to freedom for the revolutionaries. There is a wide range of changes occurring in the consciousness of those dealing with and having to do with truces, changes that are not limited to the possibility of winning or losing militarily.

The long months since then until now had a role in clarifying the nature of the relationship between revolutionaries, regime forces and the parties responsible for them, how much this relationship influence the emergency situations and how much it depends from external pressures; so while the first armistice agreement of Zabadani was considered in view of a political submission and of the Arab initiative at that time, today it is seen firstly in view of the actual military balances. While the first truce began a clear step towards an achievement that dramatically turned on the path of a conflict which demonstrates the loss of mind of the authority through a security grip by Assad, today the truce agreements do not bear this curiosity but do bear a bet on time for the change of the conflict's rules and this is what increase its extent. The readings of a near end are completely absent, readings dreaming to reach a division in the military institutions loom on the sidelines of an armistice agreement, and it has been discovered the scene on the dependency of all the military institution on the political leadership of the regime; the unseasonably imported similarities with a military coup or a wide vertical split or a sudden military and economic collapse have fallen and so it dominated the scene an

image of negative balance in the body of a truce satisfying the parties in conflict for a new phase on the path of negotiations and on the path of conflict.

At the grassroots level and at an individual level, researchers stand in front of a truce scene with very much skepticism. Does the truce represent a real shift, or an occasion to seem like this, in the political position of the opponent to the Assad regime? Or is it beyond that the truce could end and is it a break of a warrior?

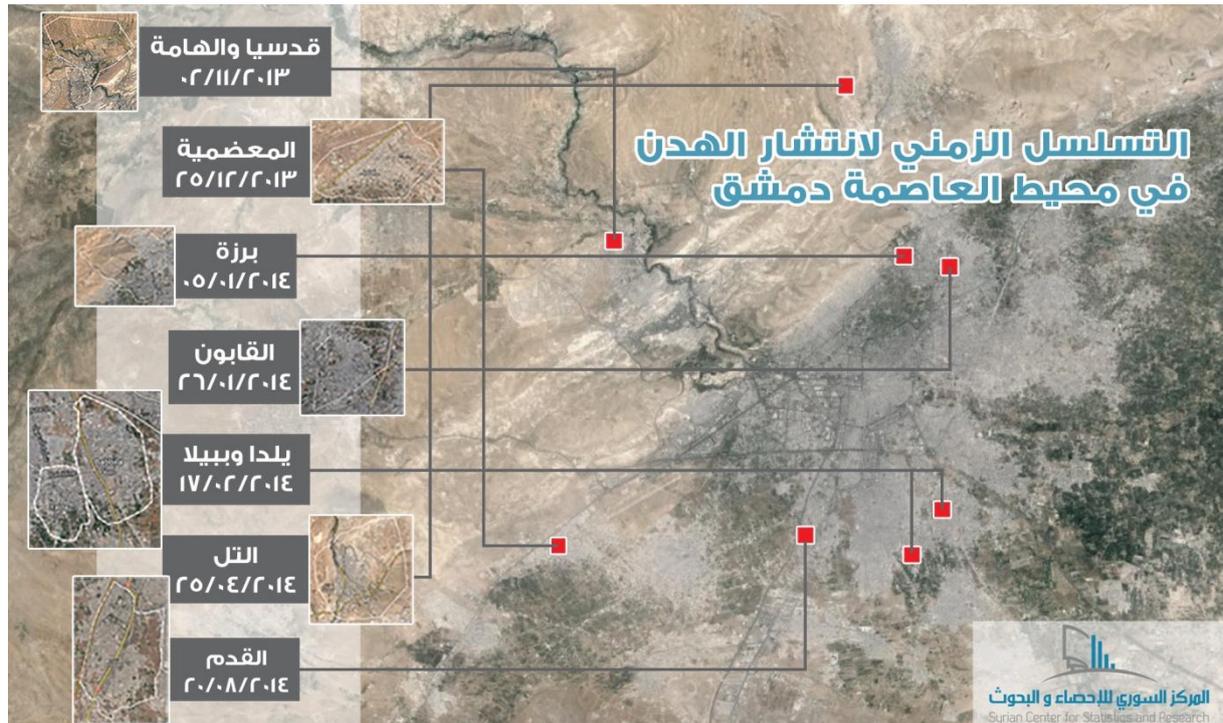
What is sure is that a new shift on several levels has infiltrated the decision of Syrians on both the parties involved in truces, while what is not sure is the depth of this new shift and where can end, especially with the stability of the stated demands close to the slogans designed in the first confrontation.

If the truce was able to provide a situation of satisfaction at an individual level amid a hail of horrors that engulfed the residents in the truce community, this will be an indicator of the real extension of the truce and of the continuation of the state of ceasefire. This can be an objective looking to the future of truces from a side in the case that the factions that signed the agreement and ceasefire represent the simple citizen and fall under the pressure of reconciliation, but the real actual scene doesn't give us this situation in roles and interests. The talking here is about the priority of demands and the legitimacy of people's representation as well as the extension of the agreement and the monitoring of confidence; in addition certain indicators measuring the level of satisfaction are required, all of which seems beyond reach by researchers, especially because every truce agreement is almost an independent model considering its path since its creation and the characteristics of the parties involved in it from civilians to militaries, although the intersection occurring between the terms of the agreements and its sharing between all; at least on one side it is represented by the strategy of the negotiator on behalf of Assad regime.

Here we will try to get closer to the objective results of the truce agreements by integrating the reading on two levels:

- The first, which is the “Particularity of the truce models”, stands with the terms of the agreement and its motivation;
- The second, which is “The Public opinion Poll”, monitors the details of the community involved in a truce and the indicators of satisfaction.

## Specificity of armistice models



## Strategies and Determinants

Basically, to restore security is considered an essential input to settlement and a necessary though not sufficient condition to restore a political quietness ripped by the echoes of the demonstrators' slogans at the beginning of the revolution.

In treating the Assad regime, there is an attempt to reach this quietness through a violent strategy based essentially on the integration of two issues:

- To bring the civil and armed revolutionary growth to a halt through confiscating it with arrests, dividing it with displacement and leading to its bleeding with battles it has a direct responsibility for the enforcement of those security services.
- To push forward a ceasefire agreement through usurping the rights of people and then negotiating to give back them, giving responsibility of the decision to the political leadership. On the ground, the situation arrived to the point of usurping the right to life by shelling, starvation and displacement leading to an increased strength of the military institution and its supporting militias.

## Terms of the agreement

The terms of the agreement are different and variable according to the region involved in the truce; all of them converge in basic terms wanted by the regime delegation, which are as follows:

- The formation of a joint armed force for the supervision of the entrances to the neighborhoods
- The rotation of state institutions under the supervision of the regime (the police station and the municipality)
- Deal with the weapons issue through their delivery or by withdrawing outside the area

In addition to other terms wanted by the residents' delegation:

- Release of the prisoners
- Break the siege for people and goods

In addition to terms sometimes absent but present most the times as the conditions of hand over weapons, settle the situation of armed men or part of them, restore electricity services and water supplies, allow people to move between the areas under truce, lift the regime's flag at the roundabouts and so on.

## Negotiation documents

Returning to the armistice agreements and terms, we can say that the most important points of the negotiation were the following 8 ones along with the ceasefire:

**Ceasefire:** the truce guaranteed a ceasefire as a result of the commitment of the other terms. The truce had success in creating a new balance that reached the condition of a ceasefire although all the terms of the truce were not fully completed. The ceasefire can be considered a political success for the regime as it is a way to restore quietness without realizing the demand to put an end to Assad regime rule made by revolutionaries.

**Detainees:** the regime showed a relative flexibility about the detained women and children, while it was more rigid about the detained young men; it promised their release within the context of the agreements that included the delivery of weapons as in the case of the factions in the Barzeh and Qaboun districts of Damascus, and it refused to promise in other areas under truce as in the Daraya and Qadam areas. Detainees were not released and weapons were not handed over as a result.

**Weapons:** the factions of the province maintained their weapons while the regime focused its efforts mainly on the evacuation of heavy weapons from the area. Regime succeeded in sparing heavy weapons in the battle regardless of their whereabouts. Revolutionaries succeeded in maintaining their weapons in spite of the occasional handover of light weapons.

**Armed men:** Agreements have oscillated between settlement formats and the withdrawal to inside or outside the area. Regime has put the condition of evacuating in particular Jabhat Al Nusra from the area while seemed to relatively accept the permanence of others groups in the region. Regime succeeded in besieging the armed groups inside the region and failed in settling their condition and handing over their weapons, while revolutionaries succeeded in securing their safety although the area was opened and the siege lifted.

**Control:** factions maintained their positions and extended their influence inside the neighborhoods under truce. The areas of influence have been distinguished so that regime withdrew from some neighborhoods leaving them under the control of the factions while on the other hand factions did the same. In this way it was obtained an absence of regime forces within residential areas and their presence only in the outskirts. This resulted in three circular levels: a deep circle under full control of revolutionaries, a middle circle consisting in a joint force in the form of checkpoints at the neighborhoods' entrances, a bigger circle consisting in a regime military force as a protective wall dividing the area from central Damascus. This agreement represents an implicit recognition of the presence of the factions' authority as a reality, and this is a development in the regime position regarding the factions, a position which is beyond the traditional narrative of terrorist armed groups. This recognition can't be legally proved as this agreement has not been concluded with a political entity able to include the recognition turning its security authority into one of the state faces. Furthermore, the agreement was not documented in writing and it is an implicit recognition depending on circumstances without any legal guarantees.

**Services:** revolutionaries insisted in their demand to restore services as electricity, water supplies, bakeries and medical centers and regime has kept some of the promises made; the result was a slight improvement not responding to the demand of residents.

**Siege:** at the top of the conditions of revolutionaries, the truce managed to break the siege for steps allowing the entry of food and medicines, the market moving and to relatively stave off the spectre of hunger; it also allowed the return of residents.

**Repair damages:** this condition was included most times in the agreement but it had not a practical presence on the ground although months have passed after some agreements; regime has promised to repair the damaged neighborhoods accepting the condition of the residents' delegation, and in some cases the factions have promised to remove the rubble and open a way to permit the entry of people. The result was a persistence of devastation in the damaged neighborhoods with only some restoration works in the areas reached by the homeowners. The families of the victims have not received any kind of official compensation neither any privilege.

**Reference:** this concept was not declared in the terms of the agreement but it is present between the lines; regime continued to despise the supervision on the municipality and the police station, and in some cases on the schools. Some agreements included a special term for the opening of a settlement office for the activists or armed men who want to contribute, and the regime approved most the times to take responsibility of repairing damages and restoring the most important services after the demand of the residents' delegation. Normally all these demands are responsibilities of the government, so this is taken as a recognition of its authority, while the residents were meant to put responsibility for the devastation on it.

At the end, the regime managed to get legitimacy for its government, the reference to its state, sovereignty for its decision on the affairs of the citizens who are also not under its security control.

## Public opinion poll

In order to get closer to the truces' reality and their impact on the lifestyle, the "Syrian Center for Statistics and Research" carried out a public opinion poll in collaboration with the "OMRAN for Strategic Studies" within a field study titled "[People's position on truces](#)", which monitor the reality of truces from three points of view that are useful in our study of motives. The three points of view are as follows:

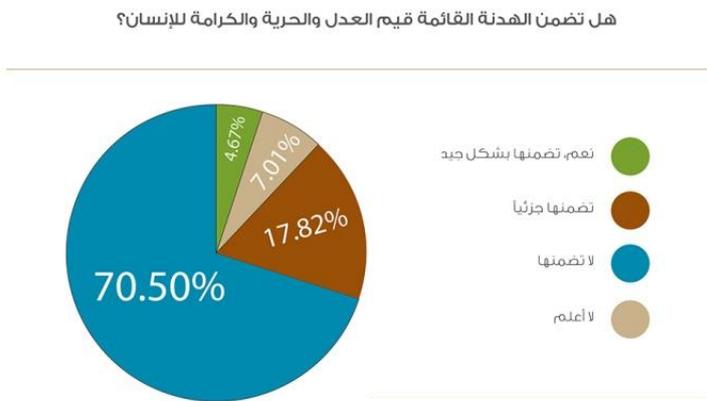
- Policy: attempt to monitor the size of deviation from the revolution's demands in people
- Social: attempt to monitor the truces' balance between achieving tranquility and increasing burdens
- Economic: attempt to monitor the impact of the truce on the living reality and the extension of its realization in the interests of people.

The field study included a thousand samples of adults gathering them through direct interviews and using a questionnaire of twenty questions. On the basis of this study, we can define the reality of truces from three points of view, as follows:

## Policy: attempt to monitor the size of deviation from the revolution's demands in people

**Regarding the revolutionary demands**, the people's position has not significantly changed as the majority of residents in the areas that have risen up against Assad's regime consider that it is necessary to complete the work in supporting the revolutionary movement until the toppling of Assad's regime. Although part of the revolution's popular incubator detached from it being a loss in the revolution balance, this is not a profit for the popular incubator loyal to the Assad's regime as the position towards the revolution turned to neutrality and not to hostility. If similar studies have confirmed results in this context, it would mean that the harsh experience lived by the divided Syrian society has not succeeded in prompting it towards the circle of common demands, but contributed in rising the state of polarization and in increasing tensions foreshadowing an increased intensification of confrontation.

**About the extension of the harmony provided by the truce with values of justice, freedom and dignity for the human beings**, the majority of people think



شكل رقم ( 1 )

that the truce didn't guarantee the minimum expected. No justice has been achieved and the ghost of detention is still present. Despite the release of detainees was usually the first term of a deal during negotiations, recently this issue has not occurred in the areas under truce. There is a situation of deep discontent considering this fact, and the possible presence of more thorny issues similar to that of detainees it means more deterioration of the satisfaction index and a delay of the possibilities to settle a mutual consent.

**Regarding the people's position towards the activity of the Free Syrian Army**, if the truce was supposed to lead the people's position from FSA towards the regime, the study revealed that the overwhelming majority considers necessary the presence of FSA in the areas under truce and that they have to maintain their positions. Even if this result is considered not sufficient to give evidence that people continue to trust FSA, however it gives evidence that FSA comes before regime in the light of the limited options that the citizen has between the control of FSA or the control of regime. If other studies end with similar results, this will push towards reading the truce as a necessary choice and not the preferred choice. This means that truces will continue if the surrounding circumstances continue, and this explains the continuing of the misery of the living condition and services although the entering in truces.

**Regarding the size of confidence that truces will continue**, the majority of people



شكل رقم ( 2 )

think that regime work on breaking the ceasefire, which means an absence of confidence by majority in the regime commitment to the truce, while a minor percentage has lost confidence in all the parties regarding not violating the truce. Only 4% of the study sample believe that the truce will continue without violations. This

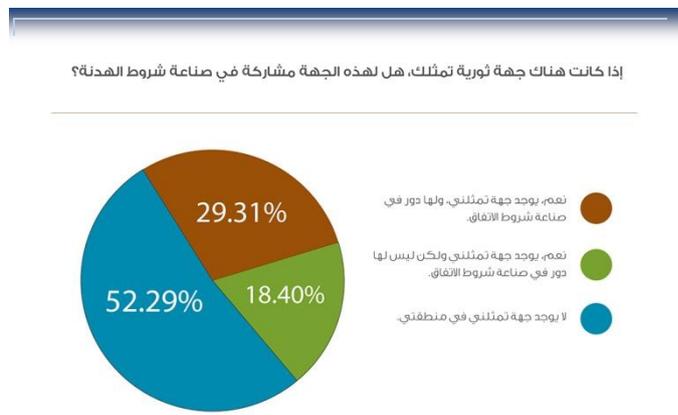
fact can indicate how much the truce is fragile if other similar studies will have the same results or if facts on the ground will confirm it more than what happened till today. So far the truces are ongoing in many areas for several months despite brief violations to ceasefire several times.

**Regarding the reasons that led to a weakened civil revolutionary movement despite the relative calm brought by the truce**, the study has revealed the presence of a weakness caused not by a change in the political alignment but by a change in the image of revolution from a civil level to a military one, with the conviction that regime can be fought only by force. On another level, the reasons of this weakened performance of the civil revolution are related to the small number of civil activists, who are few compared to the beginning of the revolution; in turn the small number of activists is related to reasons as the militarization of the revolution, the displacement of

activists between detention and exodus, and death according to regime's policy. Furthermore, the despotism of the new authority has partly contributed in weakening the civil revolutionary movement. In this context, the suffering of civilians, and in particular of activists, is very clear. So the suffering of the whole society begins in front of the need to a militarization as a logic and natural response to this phase and current circumstances.

**Social: attempt to monitor the truces' balance between achieving tranquility and increasing burdens**

**Regarding the legitimate representative of civilians in the truce agreed with Assad's regime,** in order to know the amount of coverage available in the truce



شكل رقم ( 3 )

agreement and to estimate if the negotiating team really represents the voice of the majority and is keen to achieve its interest, the opinion poll revealed a representation to the extent of one-third. One again the study has revealed that the confidence index has dropped as more than half of the sample has lost confidence in all the parties. The study has also revealed a

significant split between the parties representing people in what concerns the participation in drafting a truce agreement with regime between loyalists and opponents. Lastly, the study has revealed how the popular mood turned towards giving confidence to the military entities in spite of the civil entities, confirming again the militarization of revolution and society

**Comparing the situations of families before and after the truce** in order to know how much the truce benefited family reunification, the study has concluded that more than half of the families did not benefit from the truce. It also revealed an important aspect regarding the direction of the movement taken by the truce which is directed only within the country, meaning that the truce do not permit to the families who want it to leave the country for family reunification outside the country. This means that the

truce has partially broken the siege permitting the entry of food supplies and the return of displaced people without allowing those besieged to leave.

This helps to understand why the negotiating delegation was not able to represent widely the segments involved in the truce resolution, and it also helps to identify the reasons of the low confidence in the regime’s policy on truces and its compliance with them. This brings us to evoke the concept of siege but less worse.

**Regarding the population pyramid and its impact on truces,** it is evident through

a simple observation that the number of women and children among residents is increasing after the agreement, and in order to figure out the size of the vulnerable people in the population movement determined by truces, the study tried to monitor the estimates of residents: it resulted that a significant percentage believes



شكل رقم ( 4 )

that the number of children and women increased significantly after the truce, meaning that also the social burden on the local administration has increased in the areas under truce. Despite what the presence of families permits to achieve in support and social connections in these difficult conditions, however in war conditions it turns into a card to put pressure and to blackmail in the light of the fall of the legal and regulatory controls. The increased numbers of women and children after truces suggest an increased need of stability even in a reality with great lack of services and basic needs for life.

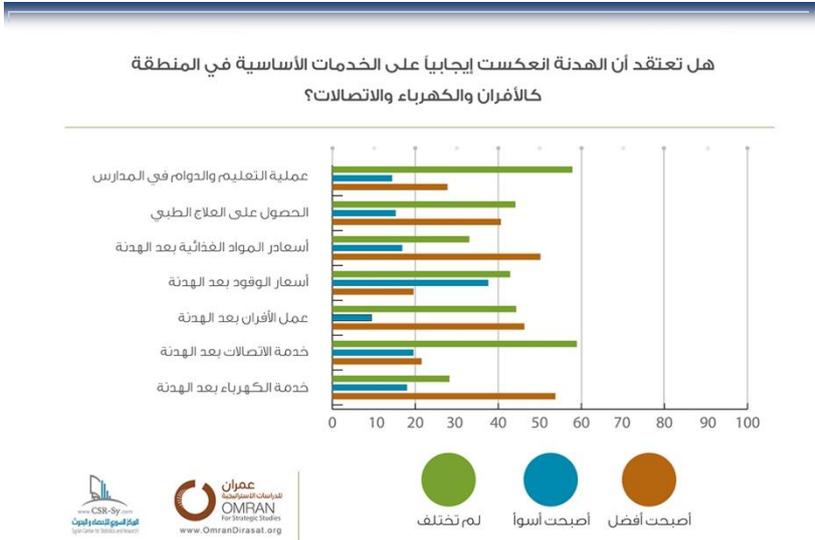
**Regarding the capacity of truces to restore life to its monotony,** the study has

revealed an improvement in the bakeries activity, availability of food, medical care and



electricity, while no improvement was witnessed in other basic needs as communication services, fuel and education activities. This can lead to the conviction that the improvement of the emergency is meant to survival and not to improve the living

conditions, being a guarantee to avoid cases of starvation without permitting any living progress to society, especially in terms of cumulative achievement or in what is defined as strategy, as in the case of the education process.



**Regarding the extent of the popular participation in drafting truces and then how much it is involved in the agreement,** it was found that just a good observation of the agreement's terms, and not the participation in its drafting, did not arrived even to

the 40%, and that most times the observation was confined within the limits of the truce agreement in a specific area without interest in the truce agreements in the nearby areas, as it was witnessed in



شكل رقم ( 6 )

other similar truces. If it is confirmed by more studies interested in public affairs in the same study population, this can indicate two things: firstly that the agreement it may not

necessarily reflect the general mood expressing the popular will as much as it reflects the reality of the presence of a balance of interests provided by truces to the war decision makers, which means more fragility in the agreement and more dependence on the variations of circumstances. Secondly, the withdrawal of the limitation of the agreement from the geographical limits of the truce area to the limits of mentality and interest, which is in accordance to a reality in which there is the absence of a central command gathering the opponents to the Assad regime and there are weakened coordination and performance tools..

### Economic: attempt to monitor the impact of the truce on the living reality and the extension of its realization in the interests of people

**Comparing the living condition before and after the truces** with estimates of what truces have brought in terms of recovery, it was found that the quantity of food and medicines that entered the area after the truce's signature was few and absolutely not sufficient to satisfy the needs.

The opinion poll can't measure what the truce has achieved in terms of improvement and recovery, but the result obtained at the end of the study revealed the presence of discontent despite the truce. Although the result of a previous discussed question indicated an improvement in the treatment ability and availability of basic medicines and food, however it did not monitor the extension of what was achieved by this improvement in terms of meeting the needs of people, so it appears clearly that the emergency improvement doesn't correspond to what is required.

هل تعتقد بأن كمية المواد الغذائية والدوائية التي دخلت للمنطقة بعد الهدنة ؟

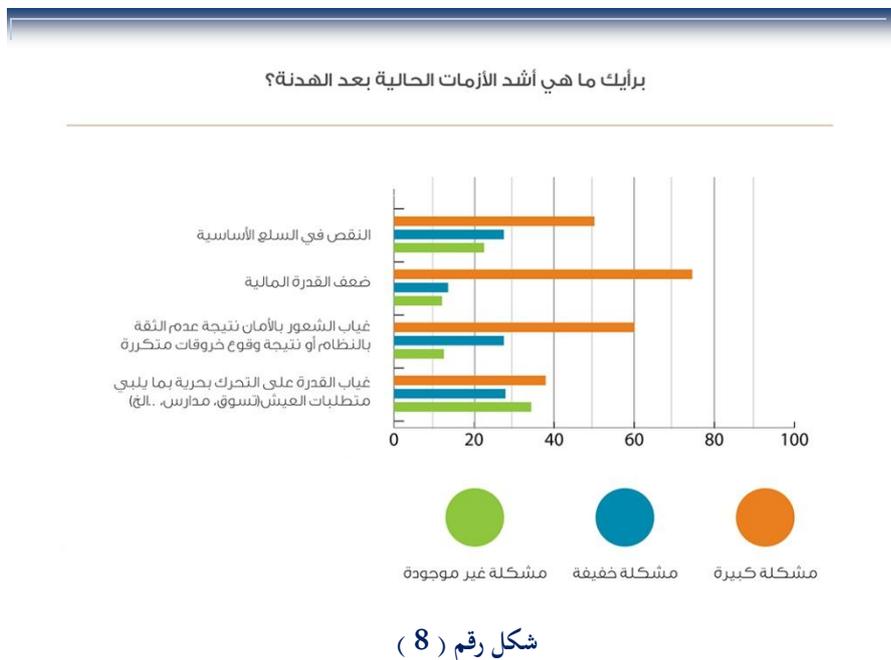


شكل رقم ( 7 )

If similar studies end conforming the failure of the truce agreement in meeting the basic needs of people, this will be an additional indicator of the level of deterioration in health and living conditions suffered by the community before the siege and that it is still suffered till today despite the truce.

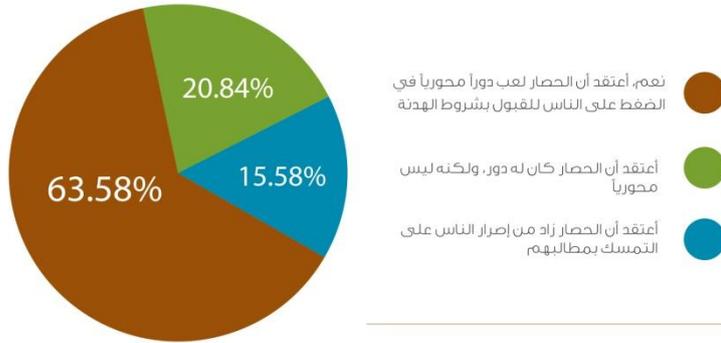
**Regarding the most prominent living difficulties after the truce phase began,** the study revealed that the majority believes that the bigger problem is represented by the weak financial capacity, which means that the siege policy will continue but in a

different form. This is followed by the lack of the feeling of security despite the ceasefire, and this probably reflects the loss of confidence in the war's decision makers. Then it follows the living condition and the difficulties caused by the lack of basic



materials. Then in the last scale of pressing challenges it comes the problem of social paralysis and the arrest of normal life rhythm as shopping, schools, medical consultation and so on; it is to be taken into account the fact that services deteriorated in both health and education sectors. The field study can probably result in the success of the resistance began by Assad's regime disuniting the demands of the revolutionary movements drawn by the slogans at the beginning of the revolution and diverting the attention of people towards avoiding starvation, so that a dignified and stable living became the last of priorities in this phase.

هل تعتقد أن الحصار قبل الهدنة قد لعب دوراً محورياً في تحديد شكل الهدنة وبنودها؟



**Regarding the size of the rule played by the siege in pushing towards a ceasefire,** at the end of the study it resulted that the siege had a key role in determining the truce form and its terms, confirming the success of the siege policy in

breaking the revolutionaries' decision and in creating new political considerations.

## Conclusion

The ceasefire is in itself a significant achievement in the perspective of Assad regime and a urgent need imposed by military and political priorities; it is also a popular demand dictated by an intuitive predisposition of civil society to avoid military confrontations and its horrors. In detail, it was necessary for the regime to grant victory to its state while it was necessary for the residents' delegation to grant safety to their people. In this sense agreements began such as swapping the right to life for recognizing regime's authority even if without a statement; the political consideration prevailed on the calculations of regime considering the outside world, while the security consideration prevailed on the factions' calculations considering the residents.

For this reason, regime was not embarrassed by leaving weapons and territory to armed groups in return for its state safety, and this is surely a temporary political success; its stability depends on the continuation of the existing forces balances, and this explains why the regime welcomed any new term of the truce in the outskirts of the capital and

acted promptly to make it known publicly through its media, in order to demoralize the popular sector of the revolution or to undermine its trust in the Free Syrian Army. Achievements gained on the sidelines, despite their importance, guaranteed by the presence of a big difference between the media and covering capabilities of the two parties.

The state of ongoing calm is suffering from the loss of future stability if we consider the serious failure in the community indicators that help us to read the scene from a closer distance, as the satisfaction index, the confidence index and others, that will be covered in the next study (the National Reconciliation) in some details.



# العملية التفاوضية في الصراع السوري مسارات ومآلات



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