

June 2014

## The Colonial Strategy of ISIS in Syria

Felix Legrand\*

The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) has taken control of significant parts of northeast Syria. The jihadist organization is in the process of building what it calls an “Islamic state” in the former Baathist stronghold that is Syria’s poorest region. ISIS’s strategy in Syria relies on the use of a foreign indoctrinated jihadist elite, which represents the core of its military and political structure, augmented with local allies of convenience. When looking at ISIS’s local backers and the background of its Syrian components, it appears clear that ideology is far from being the dominant explanatory factor for its capacity to rally support. The fact that ISIS, a group external to Syrian society, has been able to develop colonial-style control over the province of Raqqa and part of the surrounding provinces is due to its ability to exploit the social fragmentation created during the past forty years of Assad rule. In a method that is similar to how the regime had built up its control over the region, ISIS used a combination of force, clientelism and manipulation of local rivalries to build wide but rather weak alliances over northeast Syria. The looseness of these alliances was revealed when nearly all Syrian elements of ISIS in Idlib and Aleppo defected during the first days of an anti-ISIS offensive led by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in January 2014. During a month of fighting ISIS and negotiating with its local supporters, the rebellion was able to expel the jihadist group from northwest Syria (Aleppo and Idlib). Understanding the nature of ISIS’s integration into the Syrian political and social fabric is essential for the development of a realistic and efficient strategy to curb the expansion and the consolidation of the jihadist state currently under construction in Iraq and Syria. This strategy cannot be military only, but requires a careful political and social approach to replicate the rebellion’s success in the northwest, where it managed to isolate the foreign elements of ISIS from its local backers and so defeat them.

Six months after the start of the Syrian revolution, Bashar al-Assad visited Raqqa for Eid al-Adha. On this occasion, major tribal leaders of Raqqa publicly pledged allegiance to the president. Two years later, in a similar ceremony, the same tribes pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). Had they changed from being Assad's strongest allies in the region to jihadist fanatics? ISIS, an organisation formerly linked with al-Qaeda, has become a major actor in the Syrian conflict, taking full control of large territories in Syria's northeast. ISIS managed to make the world's most advanced model of a jihadist state out of Syria's poorest region, a former Baathist stronghold. Along with experienced international jihadists and indoctrinated foreign fighters, ISIS's Syrian component consists mostly of local clients and allies of convenience. The looseness of these alliances was revealed when nearly all Syrian elements of ISIS in Idlib and Aleppo defected during the first days of an anti-ISIS offensive by the Syrian rebellion in January 2014. Understanding the nature of ISIS's integration into the Syrian political and social fabric is essential for the development of a realistic and efficient strategy to curb the expansion and the consolidation of the jihadist state currently in construction in Iraq and Syria.

Starting as one jihadist rebel faction among many, ISIS has now completely broken with the rest of the rebellion and taken control of large territories in northeast Syria, fighting at the same time against the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Islamist rebels, Kurdish militias and occasionally the Assad regime. In early 2014, a successful anti-ISIS campaign conducted by the FSA led to the expulsion of ISIS from most of Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia provinces, forcing it to retreat to its Raqqa stronghold. When an open war between rebel forces and ISIS broke out, a clear territorialization between ISIS-free areas and ISIS-only areas appeared. Since then, ISIS has focused on the consolidation of its "Islamic State" in territories where it enjoys a monopoly of force. In Syria, it controls the province of Raqqa, the eastern part of the province of Aleppo (Jarablus, Menbej, al-Bab) and parts of the contested provinces of Hasaka and Deir Ezzor. The cadre and hierarchy of ISIS are primarily non-Syrian.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of foreign jihadists have moved to northern Syria and make up the core of the organization and its most loyal fighters.

---

<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the top leadership of ISIS, see: "Top ISIS leaders revealed," *Al Arabiya News*, February 2014. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/2014/02/13/Exclusive-Top-ISIS-leaders-revealed.html>

Regarding local ISIS leaders in Syria, a series of interviews were conducted in June 2013 during a visit in Idlib, as ISIS was consolidating its control in the province, appointing local Emirs and a parallel judiciary system. Other interviews with Syrian contacts were conducted in Gaziantep, Turkey in January 2014 (during the FSA led offensive against ISIS) as well as Skype interviews in June 2014.

## The rapid collapse of ISIS in Syria's northwest

The ISIS appeared in Syria in April 2013, when the Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi tried to merge his movement with Jabhat al-Nosra, which he claims to be ISI's Syrian branch.<sup>2</sup> The Islamic State of Iraq thus became the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham, but Jabhat al-Nosra continued to exist independently as its leadership,<sup>3</sup> supported by Al-Qaeda Central Command,<sup>4</sup> refused this merger. In the rebel controlled north of Syria, Jabhat al-Nosra split between those who recognized the authority of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, joining ISIS, and those who stayed loyal to Jabhat al-Nosra's Syrian leader Abu Mohamed al-Jolani. The most radical elements of Jabhat al-Nosra and the majority of its foreign fighters tended to prefer ISIS.

While what is left of Jabhat al-Nosra has been keeping a rather low profile, ISIS quickly sought to impose its rule, undermining local rebel civil and military structures. Rarely fighting the regime, ISIS focused on consolidating its presence in rebel-held territory, creating small emirates or settlements such as in the border town of ad-Dana (Idlib), the region of Jabal al-Akrad (Latakia) or squatting in emptied residential suburbs of Aleppo. From the summer to the end of 2013, ISIS regularly targeted activists, FSA commanders and community leaders, causing growing resentment among locals. In most cases, until early 2014, opposition forces officially attributed these killings to regime spies so as to avoid divisions within the rebellion.

In January 2014, in a coordinated and prepared campaign, major local FSA brigades attacked all ISIS positions in Aleppo and Idlib provinces. Several observers<sup>5</sup> have described the military successes of the January war against ISIS, stressing that factors such as cooperation, foreign support and good timing (as ISIS was busy in Iraq taking over Fallujah)<sup>6</sup> were the key reasons for the FSA's victory over the jihadists.

The most striking element of this campaign, however, are the political and social efforts made by civil and military rebel figures to isolate ISIS foreign fighters from their local allies. The FSA was able to win quickly because local support for the foreign jihadist group collapsed in a couple of days with little fighting. The Syrian elements of ISIS proved to be weakly integrated into the organization and rarely ideologically motivated. For Syrian fighters, joining ISIS was a guarantee for securing a salary, heavy weapons and ammunition. It was also a quick and efficient way to move up the social ladder. In the process of building an

---

<sup>2</sup> Declaration of The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, April 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKobKmBLYLU>

<sup>3</sup> Response to the creation of ISIS by Abu Mohamed al-Jolani (Jabhat al-Nosra), April 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB3Afi3hgA>

<sup>4</sup> Response to the Creation of ISIS by Ayman al-Zawahri (Al-Qaeda central)

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/710586/ayman-zawahiri.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Joshua Landis, "The Battle between ISIS and Syria's Rebel Militias", *Syria Comment*, January 2014.

<http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/battle-isis-syrias-rebel-militias/>

<sup>6</sup> Liz Sly, "Al-Qaeda force captures Fallujah amid rise in violence in Iraq," *Washington Post*, January 2014.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/al-qaeda-force-captures-fallujah-amid-rise-in-violence-in-iraq/2014/01/03/8abaeb2a-74aa-11e3-8def-a33011492df2\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/al-qaeda-force-captures-fallujah-amid-rise-in-violence-in-iraq/2014/01/03/8abaeb2a-74aa-11e3-8def-a33011492df2_story.html)

Islamic state in parallel to the rebel civil and military structures, ISIS distributed positions of power to its supporters. In Idlib and Aleppo, many frustrated low-level rebel commanders joined ISIS and rapidly became local “Emirs” who could arrest anyone and take over private property in the name of the “Islamic State”.

In the town of ad-Dana (Idlib), which became an ISIS stronghold, families linked to the local FSA brigades were kicked out while others gained influence by welcoming ISIS and financially benefiting from the jihadist presence. As of the summer 2013, this border town became a hub acting as a transit point for foreign fighters, weapons, money and war spoils going in and out of the country.

Prior to the January 2014 military campaign, FSA leaders and activists established secret contacts with local ISIS civilian and military supporters to convince them to defect. Ultimatums were given to Syrian ISIS fighters to handover their heavy weaponry and integrate other brigades. As foreign fighters lost their local support, they gathered in Saraqeb, a strategic town in the Idlib province, and were besieged for two weeks by local rebels. On January 17, the FSA stormed the town and what was left of ISIS fled to Raqqa.

### **ISIS consolidation in the northeast of Syria**

After ISIS’s defeat in Idlib and Aleppo, its most ideological elements moved to Raqqa, taking complete control of the province with the exception of some pockets controlled by the regime and Kurdish areas. By the end of January 2014, no other factions were tolerated in Raqqa. The Salafi faction Ahrar al-Sham fled, and what was left of the local FSA went underground.<sup>7</sup> ISIS then stopped being a faction among others to become, as its name suggests, an actual jihadist state.

It is no coincidence that ISIS succeeded in Raqqa, and to a lesser extent in the neighbouring provinces of Hasaka and Deir Ezzor, while it failed elsewhere. This success can’t be explained by the mere results of military victories and even less so by a supposed ideological outreach to the local population. The fact that ISIS, a group external to Syrian society, has been able to set up colonial-style control over the province of Raqqa and part of the surrounding provinces is due to its ability to exploit the social fragmentation created during the past forty years of the Assad rule. In a similar way to the regime’s control over the region, ISIS used a combination of force, clientelism and manipulation of local tensions to build wide but rather weak alliances over northeast Syria.

The province of Raqqa was relatively quiet in the beginning of the revolution. Raqqa’s tribes were considered loyal to the regime and were used to crack down on the rare attempts of sedition. Raqqa was known as a Baathist stronghold and a land of socialist economic experimentations. A series of land reforms (1960s-1970s), the construction of the Euphrates Dam (1973), and counter-reforms (starting from the end of the 1970s) gave the regime the ability to reward loyalty, displace populations and deepen its control over untrusted tribes, the Kurds and the border with Turkey. Baath party membership among Raqqa’s population was

---

<sup>7</sup> ISIS had almost eliminated the FSA in the Raqqa province by assassinating and kidnapping its leaders.

one of the highest of the country and tribal representation constantly increased in both the parliament and key position in security agencies during the rule of the Assads.<sup>8</sup>

Economic liberalization reforms started in the 1990's and intensified with Bashar al-Assad's arrival to power in 2000. One of the first measures taken by the new president was to privatize state-owned farms.<sup>9</sup> The liberalization of Syria's northeast agricultural economy considerably weakened farmers' ability to face the devastating 2006-2010 drought.

The economic grievances of Syria's population are a central factor in explaining the start of the March 2011 revolt. Following the drought, thousands of people fled the northern areas for regions that then became the cradle of the 2011 uprising, such as Deraa (where the first demonstrations were held) and the neighbourhood of Baba Amro in Homs (the site of the start of the armed struggle). Migrants, who had fled the north to urban centres, took an active role in the demonstrations across the country. The first victims of the revolution, killed in the Deraa protests, were members of the Shammar tribal confederation who had recently migrated from the Jazireh in the north of Syria to the southern region of Horan, which was less affected by the drought.

It is in this context of a devastated and clientelized rural economy that ISIS emerged as a major force in Syria's northeast.

### **Settler colonialism in the new Jihadi safe haven of Raqqa**

ISIS control over major parts of Syria's northeastern regions relies on military and political control by an ideological foreign elite and on the construction of local networks of alliances with tribes and influential families. ISIS is clearly an external body to the Syrian social and political environment. When trying to understand the nature of ISIS's control over a territory, it is necessary to make a distinction between the jihadist fighters, usually from Iraq or part of the international jihad network, and their local allies of convenience.

In order to administer newly conquered territories, ISIS utilizes a form of settler colonialism whereby foreigners take up nearly all the key political and military positions in the "Islamic State". Foreign jihadists, some experienced from previous jihads while others are young recruits, come with their wives and children to the new jihadist safe haven, getting rid of their passports as a pledge to give up their former lives. This demonstrates a stark contrast to the FSA and civil Syrian opposition structures, which enjoy an abundance of potential recruits among the local population but lack material resources. ISIS is unable to mobilize sufficiently loyal local combatants and administrators, and is therefore forced to work hard to attract foreigners.

---

<sup>8</sup> Myriam Ababsa, *La recomposition des allégeances tribales dans le moyen- Euphrate syrien (1958-2007)*, études rurales, 2009 [http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/46/75/92/PDF/Ababsa-Etudes\\_Rurales\\_184.pdf](http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/46/75/92/PDF/Ababsa-Etudes_Rurales_184.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

## Unstable tribal allegiances

As ISIS consolidated its control over the province of Raqqa, it made great publicity of the Bay'ah, or oath of allegiance, of major local tribal leaders. A ceremony was organized in October 2013, where fourteen tribal representatives publically announced their support to the "Islamic State".<sup>10</sup> The same tribes, in a similar ceremony, had pledge allegiance to Bashar al-Assad during his visit to Raqqa in August 2011,<sup>11</sup> a few months after the start of the uprising and in a time when the armed struggle had not yet begun.

The tribal system of allegiance is complex and public stands taken by their leaders need to be interpreted with caution. While Baathist ideology claimed to fight sectarianism and tribalism, it in fact used both to divide, rule, and consolidate its authority. Instead of suppressing tribalism, the Assad manipulation of the tribal system sought to weaken traditional tribal vertical authority and to promote a new and more fragmented tribal elite.<sup>12</sup> As a result, no faction is able to claim anymore that it has the full support of an entire tribe or clan. Yet tribal ties, and the potential to mobilize them, remain decisive. This explains the efforts made by all belligerents to win tribal support. The general trend is that the traditional tribal authority will tend to side, at least openly, with the strongest force of the moment, the objective being not to collectively expose the tribe to violence or repression. However, beyond the formal apparent pledges of allegiance, a closer look needs to be taken to understand which local actors are actively implicated in supporting or opposing ISIS, and what are the reasons behind such positioning.

The al-Bariyaj clan of Raqqa for example, part of the large al-'Afadla tribe, was considered the regime's closest local ally. Pro-regime militias (*Shabiha*), who were used to suppress the 2011 demonstrations and to attack activists in Raqqa, were largely composed of members of the Bariyaj clan. The same clan is today among ISIS's most crucial local allies in Raqqa. If not all members of the clan have taken a similar position, the Bariyaj are over-represented among ISIS's local fighters in the province.

The many examples of the same individuals, families and tribes shifting from zealous support to the regime to allegiance to ISIS have fuelled conspiracy theories of regime-made jihadists. The regime has in many ways deliberately facilitated the growth of these groups by liberating jihadist prisoners early on in the revolution, avoiding fighting them, rarely shelling their positions and infiltrating and manipulating certain groups to serve its interests. The reasons for these shifts are to be found in a more pragmatic strategy of local actors. In many cases, these groups need a strong force like ISIS to defend their interests that were once defended by the regime in face of more powerful tribes, the Kurds and today certain opposition forces.

---

<sup>10</sup> October 2013, Raqqa's tribe pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4rfodQz-c>

<sup>11</sup> August 2011, Raqqa's tribe pledge of allegiance to Bashar al-Assad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPgLh0--Atg>

<sup>12</sup> Carole A. O'Leary and Nicholas A. Heras, "Syrian Tribal Networks and their Implications for the Syrian Uprising," *The Jamestown Foundation*, 2012

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=39452#.U481A\\_mSwv1](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39452#.U481A_mSwv1)

## Exploitation of local rivalries

The complex tribal, ethnic and class divide in Syria's northeast made it possible for an external force like ISIS to build rapid, albeit provisional, alliances by surfing on local tensions.

Ancient rivalries over economic resources have been exploited by the French mandate, the Assad regime and now by the various factions fighting for the control of the northeast. Land reforms and counter-reforms during the Assad rule enabled the state to distribute resources and trade off loyalty. Today, the northeastern region of Syria has the poorest population living on the richest soil.

Oil trade in eastern Syria is a significant source of funding for the different actors of the conflict. To everyone's surprise, Sheikh Nawaf al-Bashir's family, a respected leader of the powerful Bagara tribe, recently pledged allegiance to ISIS. Sheikh Nawaf al-Bashir is a former Syrian politician. A member of parliament in the early 1990s, he later participated in the 2005 Damascus Declaration demanding democratic reforms and in 2012 joined the Syrian National Council. His family's recent support to ISIS is by no means ideological, but was motivated by the need to ensure their security and access to resources. It happens that his clan resides in Al-Kasra region along the northern bank of the Euphrates River on the road between Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. ISIS needed safe access on this road to lead its battle against the rebellion for control of Euphrates Valley and eventually link its Raqqa stronghold with Western Iraq where it was preparing to conquer Mosul and Tikrit. Bashir's clan in al-Kasra was given the control over two oil wells in exchange for their public support to ISIS and safe access on the Raqqa-Deir Ezzor road along the Euphrates River.<sup>13</sup>

ISIS has also been playing on local rivalries between Arab tribes and the Kurds, as well as between the tribes themselves. Baathist land reforms of the 1960-70s had less to do with distributing feudal land than settling loyal tribes along the northern borders. Tensions between native Arab tribes and Kurds on one side and Arab settlers on the other have been high since the start of the uprising. In such a revolutionary context, the state was absent and did not protect these regime-loyal settlers from stronger tribes and from the Kurds. This played a major role in pushing them into the arms of ISIS as the only force capable of defending their interests.

The battle of Tal Hamis, in the province of Hasaka in February 2014, was a striking example of ISIS's capacity to win over tribal support building on local rivalries. A video<sup>14</sup> circulating on the internet prior to the battle shows a meeting between a crowd of tribesmen, their leaders and what seems to be a delegation of ISIS members. The tribal leaders address the crowd and try to mobilize it against the "PKK"<sup>15</sup> and rival Arab tribes using chauvinistic Arab rhetoric.

---

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with local contacts in June 2014.

<sup>14</sup> February 2014; Tal Hamis (Hasaka), Arab tribes and ISIS gathering  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE7DJUYaAlg>

<sup>15</sup> Anti-Kurdish rhetoric often refers to YPG (People's Protection Units) militias as PKK (Kurdish Workers Party active in Turkey), highlighting that the PYD (Democratic Union Party), the main political component of the YPG, is the Syrian affiliate of the PKK.



In the same video, another man representing ISIS uses a much more jihadist discourse and explains that the “Islamic State” only lacks men and that it will provide the fighters who join with all the needed weapons and ammunition. ISIS successfully allied itself with local Arab tribes motivated by anti-Kurdish resentment, leading to the defeat of the Kurdish YPG (People’s Protection Units)<sup>16</sup> in its attempt to take over the Arab town of Tal Hamis.

## **The upcoming military, political and social war against ISIS**

ISIS’s fragile local alliances are already showing signs of cracking. In Raqqa, dozens of fighters from the Bariaj clan reportedly defected from ISIS and clashed with them in late April 2014, following the arrest of a woman for not wearing a full-face veil.<sup>17</sup>

An alliance of certain Arab tribes, the FSA and the Kurds are now fighting ISIS both politically and militarily. Even if Kurdish militias have the capacity to fight the jihadists, doing this alone alienates Arab tribes, in particular Arab settlers, and carries the risk of pushing them into the arms of ISIS. Kurds lost in Tal Hamis because they attacked ISIS without coordinating with local tribes. On the other hand, the Shammar tribe and the YPG successfully cooperated in expelling ISIS from Yaroubiya.<sup>18</sup> In their alliance to fight both the regime and ISIS, mixed Arab and Kurdish brigades such as the Komala forces<sup>19</sup> (part of the FSA) and Jabhat al-Akrad<sup>20</sup> (independent) have been a crucial bridge between the two communities and has allowed them to achieve successes on the ground. Inspired by this pattern, Turkish authorities seem to have become less tolerant (or supportive) of the anti-Kurdish jihadist group in the north: they have put ISIS and now Jabhat al-Nusra<sup>21</sup> on their list of terrorist organizations. To the extent that reports claim their support for Raqqa’s FSA brigades despite the latter’s recent collaboration with the Kurds.<sup>22</sup> Even the autonomist-leaning PYD has started to adopt an increasingly open attitude towards Arabs, encouraging them to join the YPG forces and participate in the provisional autonomous administration of mixed areas under their control. PYD leader Saleh Muslim has repeatedly stated that Arab settlers will not be kicked out of their lands as a way of reassuring them about Kurdish intentions and of pulling the rug from under ISIS’s feet.<sup>23</sup> Recent FSA and Kurdish

---

<sup>16</sup> YPG is a Kurdish militia dominated by the PYD, controlling most of the Kurdish inhabited areas in the north of Syria.

<sup>17</sup> Skype interview with contacts in Raqqa, June 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Drott, “Arab Tribes Split Between Kurds and Jihadists,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 2014 <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55607>

<sup>19</sup> Quwat al-Komala (the Komala Forces) announces its joining to the Syrian Revolution Front (part of the FSA) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGCC3jDQA28>

<sup>20</sup> Facebook page of Jabhat al-Akrad (the Kurdish Front) <https://www.facebook.com/jebhet.elekrad>

<sup>21</sup> Sophia Jones, “Turkey Blacklists Al Qaeda-Linked Syrian Rebel Group In Sign Of Growing Concern Over Extremists,” June 2014

[www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/03/turkey-jabhat-al-nusra-syria\\_n\\_5437834.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/03/turkey-jabhat-al-nusra-syria_n_5437834.html)

<sup>22</sup> A series of Skype interviews with residents of Raqqa and the border town of Tal Abyad, some of who are close to the local FSA brigade, suggest an increased support to local brigades and in particular to Liwa Thuwwar al-Raqqa.

<sup>23</sup> Aron Lund, “The People’s Rule: An Interview with Saleh Muslim,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 2014. <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=54675>



cooperation against their common enemy is an important step towards weakening ISIS in its northeastern stronghold and cutting its foreign elements from their local support.

Close monitoring on the ground of the correlation between local social structures, the grievances of the population and the rise of the most radical jihadist groups sheds light on an important dimension of the multi-layered conflict. With the uprising, following decades of impoverishment of the rural population caused by the savage liberalization of the economy and environmental degradation, the local population expects improved economic benefits in the oil rich northeast of Syria. There are, therefore, non-ideological motivations that explain the support that ISIS has enjoyed from the local population in Syria. These need to be taken into account because they form the basis of an effective strategy for confronting ISIS that does not rely exclusively on military means. Fighting ISIS will require significant fire power and close military coordination among rebel forces. But the solution cannot be only military. A careful political and social approach must be adopted in order to replicate the FSA's success in the northwest (Aleppo-Idlib-Latakia), where it managed to isolate ISIS foreign elements from its local backers and so defeat them.

## **About ARI**

The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) is a consortium of regional policy analysis institutes that strives to mobilize research capacity to advance knowledge and nurture home-grown and responsive programs for democratic reform in the Arab World. ARI seeks to generate, facilitate, and disseminate knowledge by and for Arab societies. In the quest to build free, just and democratic societies, ARI focuses on the current revolutionary processes in the Arab World, the new patterns of interaction between political forces, governments and societies, political, socio-economic and cultural transformations, and social justice. It opens a space for diverse voices and brings in the key actors in the transformation processes at play: intellectuals and activists, women and representatives of civil society, human rights groups, social movements and political parties, the private sector and the media among others.

ARI produces policy research, supports networks and young scholars, provides neutral space for debate, convenes policy dialogues and organizes regional platforms on critical issues related to the transition processes.

[www.arab-reform.net](http://www.arab-reform.net)

## **About the Author**

Felix Legrand writes reports and articles for the Syria Papers project and edits and coordinates ARI's publications on Syria. Felix is a founding member of the Initiative for a New Syria. He is also part of Noria, a network of researchers and analysts for which he wrote "Les camps palestiniens dans la révolution syrienne" (2012). He holds a Masters in Law, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences-Po). He is fluent in Arabic, French and English.

---

The Arab Reform Initiative does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented herein are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Initiative, its staff or its board. Copyright of this publication is held by the Arab Reform Initiative. You may not copy, reproduce, republish or circulate in any way the content from this publication except for your own personal and non-commercial use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of the Arab Reform Initiative.

©Arab Reform Initiative May 2014

[contact@arab-reform.net](mailto:contact@arab-reform.net)