HUNGRY FOR PEACE

POSITIVES AND PITFALLS OF LOCAL TRUCES AND CEASEFIRES IN SYRIA

Dr Rim Turkmani, Prof. Mary Kaldor, Wisam Elhamwi, Joan Ayo and Dr Nael Hariri

A father and his daughter pass through a hole made in an ancient wall in the area of Jalloum, in Aleppo's old city. Such holes are opened up to allow access from one neighbourhood to the other and avoid walking in the streets that are exposed to sniper fire.

Photo by Ammar Abd Rabbo

SECURITY IN TRANSITION
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION INTO THE SECURITY GAP

LSE

مدني madani
لدعم دور المجتمع المدني في التحول الديمقراطي
Supporting Civil Society role in democratic transition

Contents

1 Introduction

The complexity and ferocity of the Syrian conflict means that an overall political solution is unlikely to be achieved in the short term. At the same time, the humanitarian cost of the conflict has risen so dramatically that there must be a change of approach by the international community to push for a political solution to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

The United Nations Security Council has called for an end to armed violence in the country, and for a political transition on the basis of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. It passed resolution 2139 (22 February 2014), calling for an increase in aid access and an alleviation of the humanitarian situation in the country, also emphasizes that the full participation of all groups and segments of Syrian society, including women, represents the only sustainable opportunity to resolve the situation in Syria peacefully. This resolution was followed up by resolution 2165 (14 July 2014) which authorized cross-border and cross-line access for the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria without state consent.

For these calls for an improvement in the humanitarian situation and an end to the violence to have a tangible impact on the ground, the international community must adopt a new approach to the conflict. The ongoing peace efforts which are already being brokered inside Syria by ordinary people and communities every day should be reinforced and complemented by the international community in order to develop a comprehensive strategy for sustainable peace in Syria.

Some of these local ceasefires, truces and cross line provision of services provide glimmers of hope in a dire situation, but for them to make a significant difference they need to be properly supported, monitored and linked to a broader process. Across divisions, Syrians have been motivated by the desire for stability, humanitarian needs and need for services such as water, electricity, food, vaccinations or the release of prisoners. While armed factions, under pressure from civilians, have often found it necessary to demonstrate to their supporters their commitment to peace, more often than not, obstacles to peace-making discussed in this report prevent its realization.

One such example of thwarted peace efforts is that of the Syrian government's engagement with many local deals (or *Musalahat* 'reconciliations') that have been struck following long periods of siege, such as in Mouadamieh and Yarmouk camp. Though these deals were widely considered to be de facto surrenders, the terms of the deal were subsequently reneged upon, as evidenced by the continued besieging of Mouadamieh. While in Mouadamieh, hunger may have been the primary motivator for this deal to have been struck, there have been numerous other bottom-up attempts to reach peace that have been ongoing in Syria since the end of 2011, and which were motivated instead by the basic need for stability and control.

Undeniably, local deals are often challenging to achieve and maintain because of the motivations and strategy of actors both at the national level and at that of the international community. The major regional and international powers have failed to recognize that their actions in providing arms to many different competing parties in Syria, as well as their political rhetoric, is fuelling the conflict, and is serving as a

disincentive to make peace at every level. The piecemeal support for the Geneva II peace talks means that there isn't an ongoing, credible process to which local deals can be linked.

The rapid expansion of the Islamic State inside Syria is another persuasive reason for the reinforcement of peace and stability within the country. Terrorist organizations have been able to expand in Syria by exploiting the lack of security brought about by the violence and the collapse of state institutions. Ending this violence through political solution and supporting the bottom-up approach for creating peace and security are crucial steps for combating the spread of terrorism inside Syria and in the region as a whole.

With the new peace envoy Mr de Mistura appointed on 10 July 2014 this report argues that international engagement to bring about peace in Syria and alleviate humanitarian suffering needs to focus on the situation on the ground and not only on convening top-level talks.

The fact that an international agreement on the removal of chemical weapons was reached and implemented with success so far suggests that this approach is possible.[1]

The international community could also help to provide monitors and peacekeepers to monitor local peace agreements, evacuate fighters and civilians, to assist with the provision of services and reconstruction efforts, and to develop a transition process that leads to the demobilization of fighters. The example of the April 2012 ceasefire and the deployment of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) monitors for several weeks, during which time the number of people killed fell by a quarter, is an indication of how effective such involvement can be.

1.1 Methodology

While the drivers of conflict in Syria must not be underestimated, this report examines the local aspects of the bottom-up peace-making efforts in Syria that have led to ceasefires, truces or provision of services and how they could fit into the national, regional and international context. The report examines case studies of local ceasefires, truces and other deals across Syria to determine the factors that contributed to the success or failure of these cases, including the role of the international community. Such local deals have been brokered since the first year after the uprising in Syria, though they went largely unreported in the media, primarily because of the need for secrecy around the negotiation process, but also because the climate of public opinion generated by the media (particularly social media) in the opposition circles was hostile to any dialogue or negotiations with the Syrian authorities.

Despite that the fact that the cases studied often differed in their circumstances, some common patterns were observed regarding the success or failure of the deal-making. Because of the secretive nature of the negotiations, it is difficult to present a quantitative analysis of ceasefire negotiations inside Syria, especially if the talks failed, though when the subject is researched examples of several attempts to reach local agreements were evident on many levels inside Syria.

The information gathered was collected by field researchers inside Syria and by researchers outside, who conducted Skype interviews with those people inside Syria involved in the deal-making process. In total, 45 respondents were interviewed. Some of the researchers themselves had previously brokered several deals and taken part in mediating some others. Secondary sources – such as media, United Nations and international non-government organization (INGO) reports, government statements etc. – were relied on to cross-references details.

In preparing this report, the authors examined more than 35 different local negotiations in different parts of Syria, between October 2011 and the present time. We present some of these as case studies, focusing on Homs, the Damascus countryside, Ras al-Ain and the provision of services in Dara'a and Aleppo.

By investigating the varied landscape of the Syrian conflict the report shows that while in some areas of the country the level of violence is very high, there are large parts of the country where efforts to achieve local ceasefires have taken place, with some degree of success. In particular, areas in which there are still large numbers of civilians and an active civil society are more likely to have developed bottom-up peace-making mechanisms.

2 Dynamics of conflict and peace in Syria

It is estimated now that around 10.8 million people in Syria are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and one third of them live in areas that are difficult to reach. The number of internally displaced persons is estimated to be 6.5 million. The number of people who live under siege is estimated to be over 250,000, distributed around 40 areas across the country.[2]

Efforts to bring to an end this dire situation, and the conflict that drives it, must be inclusive to be sustainable, and this is true at the local as well as the international level. The experience of conflicts across the globe shows that solutions built on a binary model of conflict involving only those who are engaged in violence will be short-lived.[3]

There are a number of deep-rooted drivers of the conflict in Syria, which revolves around the struggle for democracy, rights, social justice and identity. Indeed, the armed conflict is assuming aspects of a sectarian clash, a *jihad*, or a geo-political proxy war. Each of the armed groups, including both state and non-state actors, are backed to one degree or another by regional and international players, and they all have a variety of justifications and motives: they may be fighting for political reasons, economic gain or for sectarian and/or religious agendas while their external patrons are preoccupied with geo-political positions (the obstacles to peace at local, national and international level are discussed in further detail in Section 5 below, and in the case studies of this report).

The dynamics of the conflict would appear to suggest that the Syrian regime will not be militarily defeated, but also that it will not be able to re-exert control over all of Syrian territory by militarily defeating the various armed groups, despite its rhetoric to the contrary. If there is to be any prospect for an end to the conflict, it must be

predicated on political compromise and settlement. Any agreements between these various factions, even if it were possible, might well entrench increasingly sectarian and predatory interests. A sustainable peace can only be achieved through a process that involves all sectors of society in a situation free of fear.

2.1 Who wants peace in Syria?

Most Syrians have been affected by the armed conflict, yet the vast majority of them have not actively fought in it. The civilian majority is eager to see peace and the end of its suffering. But people who have suffered deeply and lost family members are not content to reach a settlement and an end to the fighting at any cost. They rightly want a just peace. If peace deals are not just and do not respond to the roots of the conflict in Syria then it is unlikely to be sustainable, and the humanitarian crisis will continue (for further analysis of the socio-economic roots of the crisis see the Syrian Centre for Policy Research report[4]).

So who represents those who want peace? In the current circumstances there can be no truly legitimate representative of any sector of the Syrian society. The situation is exacerbated by the almost complete absence before the beginning of the uprising of active independent political parties (with the exception of the Baath party) and civil society organizations able to express the concerns and needs of the people.[5] More than three years into the conflict, those most able to express people's aspiration are the civil society organizations and groups that emerged in the last few years and the non-violent political movements that are active mainly inside the country.

Most of the local ceasefire attempts that we have observed inside Syria have civil society actors at their core, either as groups, organizations, civil councils or independent community leaders and dignitaries. Many others were negotiated and led by traditional leaderships such as tribal and religious figures.

A recent survey[6] by OMRAN strategic studies centre investigated popular support for local agreements that were reached after November 2013, most of which were concerned with lifting the siege on the besieged areas. Nearly 1,000 people took part in the survey; they were either people in besieged areas or people in the refugee community.

The survey revealed significant popular support for local truces, especially among the refugee community. Sixty-nine percent of the people support the local truce, while 26.5 percent were against it. Among the refugees community, this support was greater, with 88.5 percent in support and 11.4 percent against.
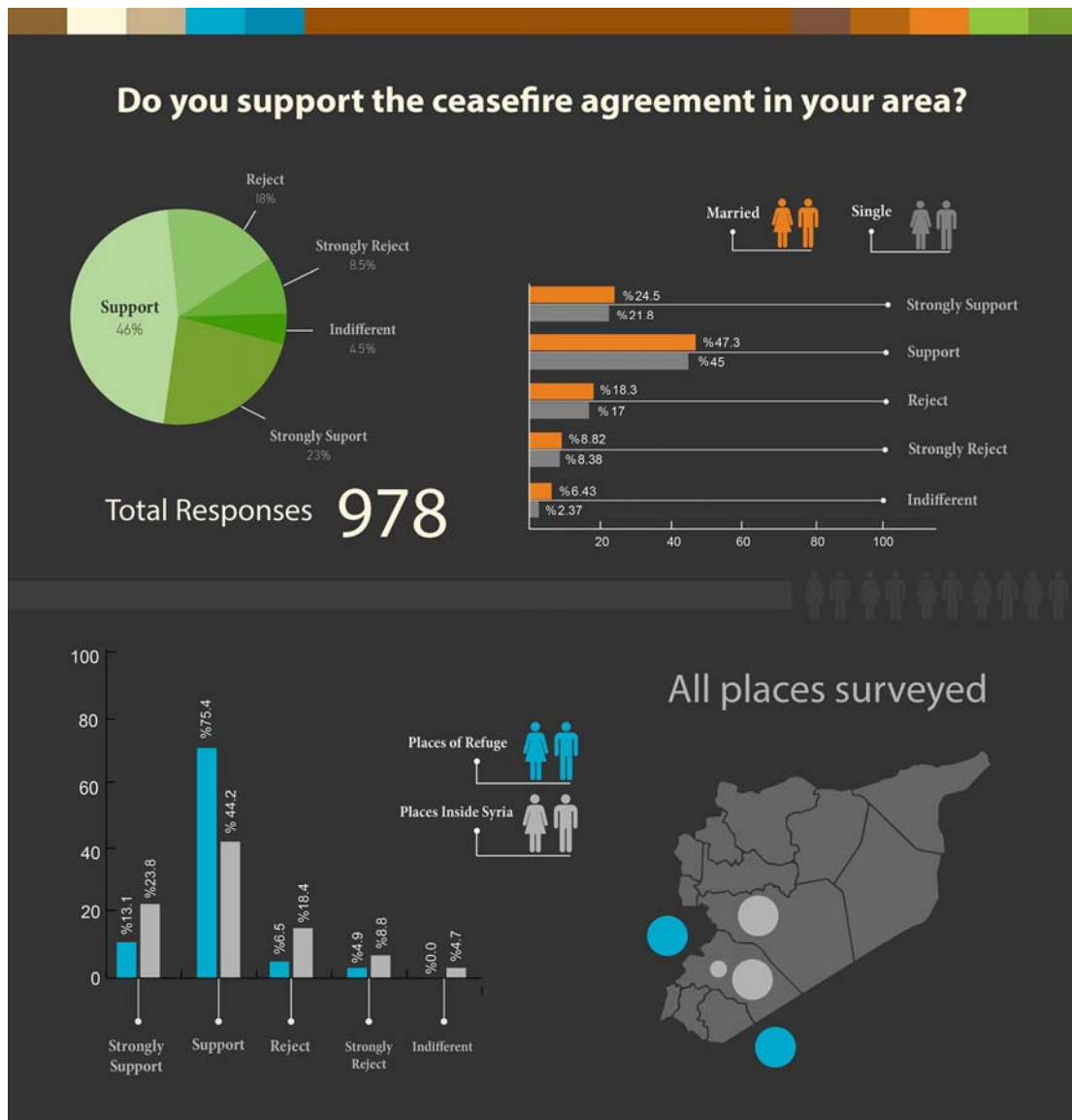
Figure 1: Results from a survey on public support for local truces (OMRAN for Strategic Studies)

The survey also revealed the lack of popular representation, with less than one third of the people who responded confirming that they were represented in the negotiations. Asked, 'If there was a revolutionary body that represents you, did this body play a role in negotiating the conditions for the truce?' The answers were:

- 52.29 percent – There is no body that represents me in my area
- 29.21 percent – There is a body that represented me and it played a role in the negotiations
- 18.40 percent – There is a body that represented me but it did not play a role

If theres is a revolutionary body that represents you did they participate in creating the ceasefire conditions?

29.31%

52.29%   18.40%

Yes there is a group that represents me and they did take part in creating the ceasefire conditions

Yes there is a group that represents me but they did not take part in creating the ceasefire conditions

There no group that represents me in my area

Figure 2: Results from a survey on public support for local truces (OMRAN for Strategic Studies)

When participants were asked whether they support the continuation of the ceasefires after they have been agreed, 69 percent were in favour of continuation.

Are you with…

| 37.56% | 31.48% | 16.20% | 14.76% |

0   20   40   60   80   100

Cotinuing the ceasefire and expanding it to nearby areas

Continuing the ceasefire without allowing it to spread to other areas

Ending the ceasefire

I don't know

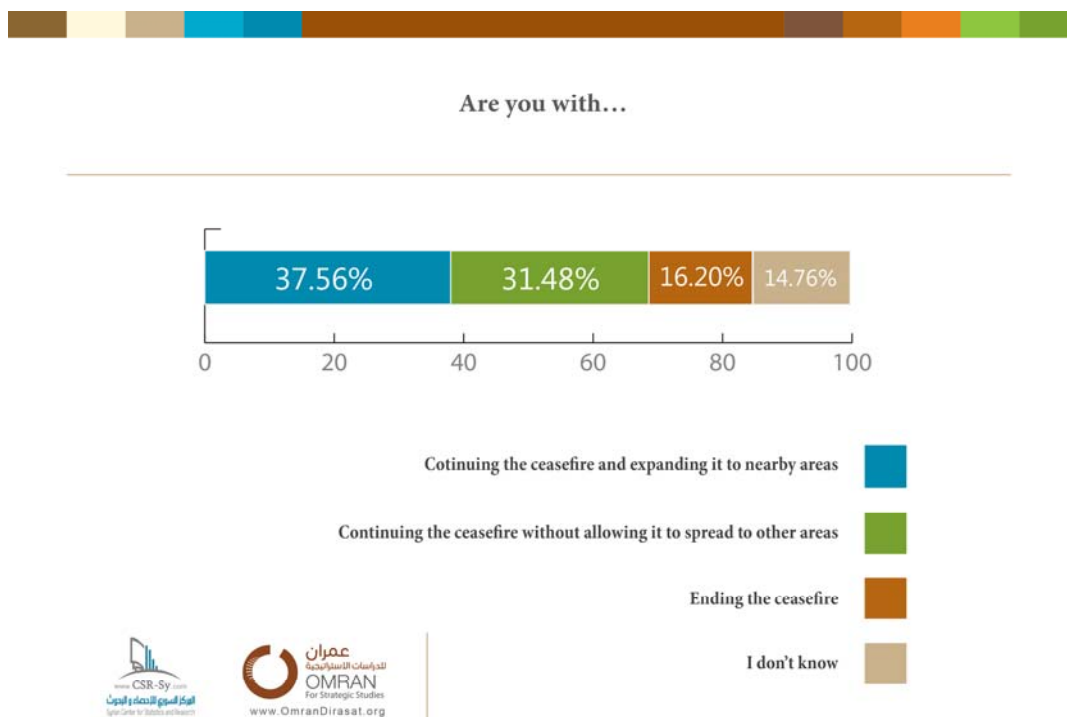**Figure 3: Results from a survey on public support for local truces (OMRAN for Strategic Studies)**

2.2 The role of civil society and traditional leaderships

By referring to 'Syrian civil society' we do not mean only NGOs and civil associations. Because of the lack of civil society in Syria prior to the conflict, the civil society organizations, groups and initiatives that have emerged in Syria are operating in, and have defined themselves in relation to, the current crisis. They lack any legal framework in which to operate, and, given the conflict and high level of repression and insecurity, are working under extremely difficult circumstances. This has not, however, compromised their efficiency, nor their ability to proliferate over the entire country. Although fragmented in nature, Syrian civil society has benefited from working in the shadows, from the breakdown of repressive security authority in many areas, and has come together with the traditional leaderships to become the most important players on which a future peace in Syria can be built.

Its rapid development in the face of dramatic challenges has paved the way for the formation of civil society networks, coalitions and unions. The government at times is allowing certain type of civil society organizations, particularly the registered ones, to be actively engaged in its operations, even though they are not known to be strongly associated with government (for example, the involvement of the Shabab Al Khair charity in the evacuation of civilians in Homs and in attending to their needs afterwards). The role of these civil society organizations was even mentioned officially in the deal sent to the besieged areas in Homs via the UN mediator (paragraph 10), something that would have been unthinkable before the uprising.

2.2.1 Community groups and traditional leaders

Equally important are community groups and traditional figures such as the religious and tribal leaderships and also national Syrian figures and technocrats, all of whom are working to support community initiatives that reject political polarization and contribute to social processes that are supportive of civil society, rather than those that support one side's military victory.

2.2.2 Local administrative councils

In areas in which state institutions have collapsed, civil councils, sometimes known as local administrative councils (LAC), have been established to partially replace the function of the state in providing services. The civil councils are now playing a key communicative role between the armed groups and the local community on one side, and the armed groups and the mediators trying to broker ceasefires (e.g. their role in the negotiations for Al Waar area in Homs paragraph 4.1).

2.2.3 Businessmen and traders

Local businessmen who fear yet more destruction to their businesses are increasingly engaging in the brokering of local deals or in applying pressure to armed groups to accept ceasefires. Pressure from the business community in Damascus, for example, is reported to be behind the ceasefire in the area of Qaboun in Damascus (see Section 6.3 for details on the war economy and how economic factors drive the conflict).

2.2.4 Understanding of local context is key

The ability of the political and civil society groups that are active inside Syria to understand the complex nature of the conflict and propose solutions that reflect this understanding was demonstrated by the fact that the first comprehensive and sophisticated regional ceasefire plan came from inside Syria, and in particular from the political movement Building The Syrian State current[7]. This regional ceasefire plan was put forward initially to the then UN–Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria Kofi Annan in early 2012 and later to his successor Lakhdar Brahimi in September 2012 in Damascus. The plan proposed that a UN team mediates indirect negotiations to achieve a ceasefire between the regime and each of the main armed opposition groups in their own region. Monitors and international peacekeeping forces would then monitor these local ceasefires.

The plan noted:

We must understand the reasons that led [the armed groups] to carry arms and the methods in which they face the authorities. To reach a sustainable ceasefire and to engage them in a political process, the root causes of arming must be eliminated. Otherwise, any ceasefire would be no more than a truce, where the conflicting parties pause to take a breath before resuming the fight. Those armed groups and elements, in its majority, are located within their residential areas, and haven't yet rebelled against the community leaders in these areas (dignitaries, men of religion, politicians, and business men). Therefore there is a good possibility of communicating with them and convincing them to stop the violent methods of fighting against the authority through these community leaders. But those leaders are unable now to convince the armed groups of the feasibility of the renunciation of violence nor can they guarantee their safety within the current circumstances.

3 International attempts to halt the violence; lessons to learn

3.1 12 April 2012 ceasefire during Annan mission

On 23 February 2012, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was appointed as UN–Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria. His appointment was backed with a UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/66/253 issued on 21 February 2012 which prescribed that the Syrian government 'Allow full and unhindered access and movement for all relevant League of Arab States institutions and Arab and international media in all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic to determine the truth about the situation on the ground and monitor the incidents taking place'.

The Annan plan was supported by two UN Security Council resolutions, S/RES/2042 (2012) on 14 April 2012 and S/RES/2043 on 21 April 2012. Mr Annan put forward a six-point plan for peace in Syria, which was annexed in the Security Council resolution S/RES/2042 on 14 April. The plan prioritized a Syrian-led political solution and included a call for a ceasefire in its second point:

(2) commit to stop the fighting and achieve urgently an effective United Nations supervised cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties to protect civilians and stabilize the country;

Importantly, the resolution also backed this call with a monitoring mechanism '*subject to a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties*'.[8]

On 12 April 2012 Mr Annan announced a ceasefire in Syria, which he had negotiated following talks with the Syrian regime and the commander of the Free Syrian Army, Riad al-Asaad. The ceasefire exceeded expectations in that it had the immediate and dramatic effect of dampening the violence in the first few days.

The number of casualties per day from all sides in the week before 12 April was around 101. This dropped to 15 and 17 per day in the two days following the announcement of the ceasefire, representing a fall in the number of people killed of around 85 percent (Figure 4). This dramatic decline did not, however, last for long, and the number of casualties continued to rise, reaching the pre-ceasefire level in mid-June 2012.

3.2   The United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS)

On 21 April 2012 the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) was established by a resolution of the UN Security Council as part of the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan. The UNSMIS mission,[9] initially led by Major General Robert Mood, was deployed in stages, becoming fully operational on 30 May. By 30 June it deployed 277 unarmed military observers with a civilian component that included 81 international civilian staff and 40 local civilian staff. When the mission ended on 19 August 2012 there had been one fatality in the mission, a member of the local civilian staff.

UNSMIS's mandate was to monitor the cessation of violence as well as to support the implementation of Kofi Annan's six-point plan. The mission focused on major population centres and areas of acute tension.

The mission faced multiple difficulties, and security obstacles and delays frequently hampered reporting. Opposition activists cited attempts by the government to intimidate them and to employ retaliatory measures against them for cooperating with the UN mission. There was also an increasing level of direct risk to the monitors themselves, in the form of hostile crowds, as well as an increase in direct firing at the observers, for example at al-Haffeh on 12 June.[10]

3.2.1   Liaison with civil society

According to UNSMIS, a key part of their work involved engagement with local communities to build a network of contacts, which was seen as a significant means to bring about stability. Representatives from civil society groups liaised with UNSMIS to provide their civilian staff with access to the 'second line' in the uprising, who were typically educated and organized and able to influence the rebel fighters,. A lawyer from this 'second line' expressed how surprised the civilian staff of UNSMIS were when they had meetings with him and around 50 of his colleagues in Homs: '*they appeared to be amazed that behind the uprising there are so many lawyers, engineers and doctors who are working actively but quietly in the background*'.

The report of the mission noted the impact of this networking and knowledge-building from within the local communities, not only on local stability but also in informing high-

level international decision-making: '*As civilian staff was deployed, mixed teams expanded their interactions and sought every opportunity to engage with the local population in Government and opposition areas, building a network of community contacts as well as national officials.... The Mission worked actively in support of all aspects of the plan, and the observers, by establishing facts, contributed to building the international consensus.*'[11]

In the first three weeks of its deployment, UNSMIS had a remarkable effect in reducing the violence in the areas in which observers were deployed. Although figures to demonstrate the effects of these efforts in these areas are not available, the overall casualty figures in the country showed a 24 percent decline per week from all sides (Figure 5).
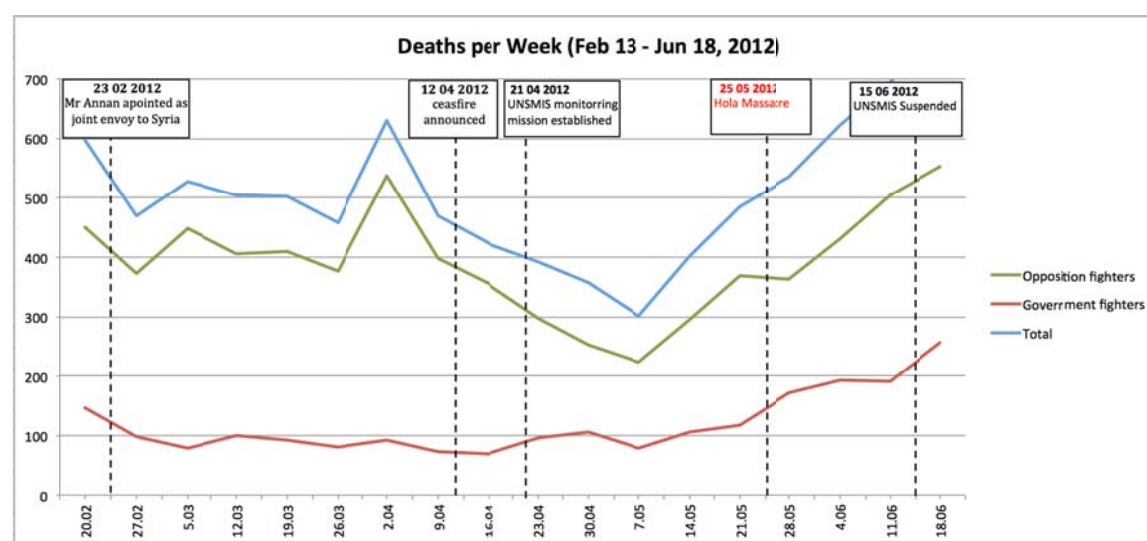
Figure 4: Deaths per week, February to July 2012

3.2.2   Reasons for failure of ceasefire plan/pull out of UNSMIS

After mid-May, the level of hostilities began to climb and by mid-June had reached or even surpassed pre-12 April levels. According to UNSMIS reports, the reason for this is that '*Government forces appeared to be engaged in a major coordinated effort to reclaim urban centres hitherto under opposition control, increasingly directed at larger towns, using a combination of helicopters, armoured units, artillery, and infantry, supplemented by militia forces. The armed opposition also increased the tempo of their military operations in support of their goals.*'[12]

Ultimately, the risks faced by the mission combined with a lack of progress in bringing about a full cessation of violence led to the end of the mission. On 15 June 2012, UNSMIS suspended its activities owing to an intensification of armed violence across the country. The UN Security Council pledged to consider redeployment if there was a reduction in the level of violence and an end to the use of heavy weapons, but by 20 August 2012 these two conditions were not met, and the United Nations monitoring mission in Syria officially ended.

Many factors contributed to the short-term nature of the ceasefire, including:

- mediation of the ceasefire took place at the international level, neglecting the fact that there was not an effective chain of command among the FSA and other fighting groups, as well as the local fragmented nature of the fighting in Syria;
- the absence of monitors of the ceasefire in the initial period (UNSMIS was formed after the ceasefire on 21 April and was not fully operational until 30 May);
- the continued violence and attacks, combined with a lack of faith in any credible political process or negotiations.

While the 12 April ceasefire did not hold, it showed that such efforts can have positive effects on the situation faced by civilians, if combined with mechanisms to ensure that it continues to be observed, in particular by imparting real pressure on the parties to undertake a genuine commitment to ceasefire and political transition. The experience of UNSMIS also shows the importance of taking account of local realities and combining international efforts with the knowledge of civil society actors. This experience provides valuable insights for future efforts at peace in Syria, even though the current situation is, if anything, more complex and intractable.

3.3   Eid al-Adha truce, October 2012

On 17 August 2012 Lakhdar Brahimi, the veteran Algerian diplomat, took over from Kofi Annan as the international envoy of the United Nations. The mandate of Mr Brahimi as the UN–Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria was different to that of Mr Annan. Mr Brahimi's mandate was drawn from his appointment by the UN Secretary-General and the League of Arab States LAS 'to help explore a peaceful, political solution to the conflict in Syria'[13]. In the absence of a UNSC-authorized mission, no monitors were available to observe any truce or ceasefire, including the one he brokered in October 2012. This seriously undermined the efficacy of his efforts by limiting the tools he had at his disposal as a peace envoy.

On 24 October Mr Brahimi announced that the Syrian regime and some Syrian opposition groups that he had been in contact with had agreed to a truce in principle during the three days of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, which started on 25 October.
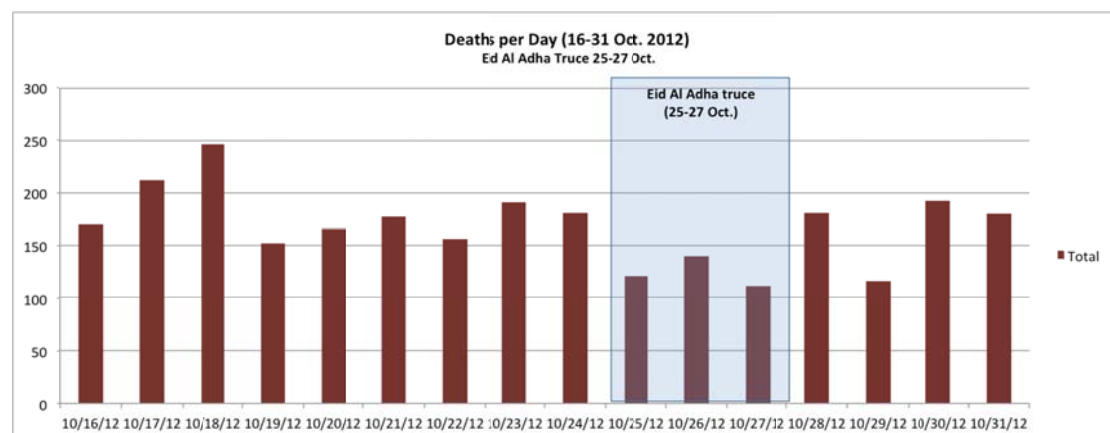

Figure 5: The fall in deaths per day during the Eid al-Adha truce

The deaths per day during the truce dropped from 184 per day in the weeks before the truce to 124 per day during the truce, a fall of around 33 percent (Figure 6).

Given the nature of the conflict in Syria and the intensity of fighting before the truce was announced, a one-third reduction of deaths overnight was a successful beginning. But this success did not last, for reasons similar to those discussed in relation to the 12 April ceasefire, and which were compounded by the complete lack of monitoring mechanisms and the authority of the UN Security Council to back up Mr Brahimi's plans.

The only area where the Eid truce not only succeeded but endured well after Eid was al-Zabadani outside Damascus. Here, the truce combined both 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches, as the locally negotiated truce in the area coincided with the internationally negotiated truce of Eid al-Adha.

Subsequent efforts by Mr Brahimi focused at the top political level on the convening of 'Geneva II' peace talks, both on international and regional fronts, and Syrian top political talks. The inability of the international and regional actors in the conflict to agree on one way forward for Syria was the main reason for the failure of the Geneva II talks. The lack of political will on the Syrian level, the fact that the process was divorced from the reality on the ground, the failure to make the process inclusive by including civil society actors and the lack of any implementation mechanisms also contributed to the failure of the Geneva II talks.

4   Local ceasefire and truce attempts: successes and failures

Local attempts at conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Syria existed well before they were brought to the attention of the wider world by recent coverage in the media. The environment was hostile to any dialogue and negotiations, in part due to popular anger against the levels of violence by the government, but also because of certain political groups and countries in the region which became party to the conflict and developed an interest in its continued intensity. As a result, those parties which realized that negotiation was the way forward to achieving their own goals conducted these talks in strict secrecy. In many cases, the same people who were chanting 'no to dialogue' in public were all the while engaged in talks with the government. In the case of Homs, for example, serious talks took place as early as the autumn of 2011 (see Section 4.1). The authors surveyed and located a number of locally negotiated deals in Syria in nearly all areas, even those areas in which the violence was most extreme. Even the party least expected to engage in any talks, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has signed deals with a civil society organization in Aleppo (Section 4.4.1).

This section assesses four case studies of local deal-making that offer some evidence of positive outcomes, which can help inform, and be integrated into, broader efforts to build peace in Syria.

In preparing this report, the authors examined more than 35 local negotiations in different parts of Syria, between October 2011 and June 2014. We present some of these as case studies, focusing on Homs, the Damascus countryside, Ras al-Ain and the provision of services in many areas of Syria. Homs and the countryside of Damascus were chosen because the cases there are most recent, and their particular circumstances are most relevant since they are key to understanding the conflict from its onset to the present day.

4.1   Case study I: Homs

4.1.1   Background

Uprising, to armed conflict, to deadlock and siege
Homs was one of the first cities to join the uprising in the spring of 2011. Violent clashes between security forces and protestors started in Homs in April 2011 after the security forces attacked a nonviolent vigil around the clock tower of the city, leading to the death of tens of protesters. Despite the crackdown, the protest movement continued to grow, and the clashes continued to intensify towards the end of the year, only decreasing when the Arab League monitoring mission entered the city for a short period at the end of 2011. When fighting resumed, the armed opposition forces gradually gained control of some areas of the city (part of the old city, Khaldieh and Baba Amr) and the Syrian army launched several major operations to regain control. While partially successful in reaching their military aim, the excessive and indiscriminate use of force created a strong feeling of resentment among the remaining fighters and great bitterness among the civilians.

In February and March 2012 the government forces launched military campaigns against Khaldieh and Baba Amr areas of Homs that resulted in the FSA withdrawing from Baba Amr and the government forces entering the area. Parts of Khaldieh were recaptured by the military, at the loss of a very high number of casualties, especially among civilians, because of the heavy use of indiscriminate weapons such as mortar shelling.

The fighting in early 2013 resulted in the siege of a major part of the city of Homs. This included significant parts of the old city, Jouret Shayyah and Qarabis. Inside the besieged areas there were thousands of civilians and around nine fighting brigades, the major ones being Liwa al-Haqq and Al Ansar, which joined the Islamic Front in 2013. Most of the fighters are from Homs itself or from the nearby countryside. The main force that was directly imposing the siege was the National Defence Force (NDF), reinforced by the national army.

Sectarian dimensions to the fighting
Over time, the fighting in Homs began to take on a sectarian dimension. The city witnessed several massacres and cases of kidnapping that had sectarian motivations, in addition to the politically motivated Karm al-Zaytoun massacre in March 2012, leading to a strong divide along sectarian lines in the city.

Increased importance of 'Popular Committees'/NDF
Armed 'Popular Committees' were formed in the Alawite majority neighbourhoods; they were initially mainly concerned with protecting their own areas and overrunning the checkpoints. Gradually, they began to play a supportive role for

government forces in their military campaigns in early 2012. They started to take full control of many checkpoints in the recaptured areas and there have been cases where they fought even governmental forces in the city over controls of the checkpoints.

These pro-government militias later developed into the more formal pro-government paramilitary forces. The NDF was formally announced in early 2013 and included similar militias from all over the country. Aided by local knowledge of the city and its communities, supported with finance and training from the authorities as well as, reportedly, by its regional supporters, the NDF became very influential in Homs, to the extent that its direct involvement and consent has become instrumental in any deal.

Current situation
Many of the people who fled Baba Amr and the old city of Homs moved to the then safe suburb al-Waar. This area is full of residential towers, not all fully inhabited. Many internally displaced people found refuge in these buildings. It is about 7 kilometres northwest from the center of Homs and is separated from the city by a green belt of farms and orchards. On the borders of al-Waar, there are two villages inhabited by people of Shia background: Raqqa and Mazraa. By May 2013 an estimated 400,000 people were living in al-Waar, with half of them displaced from other areas in Homs and its countryside. As of June 2014 it is estimated that there are between 250,000 and 400,000 civilians in al-Waar.

Al-Waar remained quiet until the spring of 2013, when some of those who left Baba Amr and the old city began to form a nucleus of fighting groups. When the groups expanded and launched various operations against the government, the excessive use of force by the government forces in response to these attacks encouraged yet more fighters to join the rebel forces. Today it is estimated that there are about 2,000 rebel forces fighters in al-Waar, the majority of them from outside al-Waar itself.

The government forces besieged al-Waar in the autumn of 2013 although this siege was not as suffocating as that imposed on the old city. Clashes and shelling are common, but there are no major military operations in al-Waar.

4.1.2   Early negotiations in Homs
Over the last two and half years many talks and negotiations were initiated in Homs. One of the first serious attempts took place early in 2012, when senior security and army officials, as well as the minister of the interior, paid several visits to Homs. They met with local leaders of the FSA and social leaders of the public movement at Al Safir hotel, as was reported to our researchers by a participant in these meetings. The high-level nature of the negotiating team and the fact that many leaders from Khaldieh and Baba Amr agreed to meet with them indicated the readiness for talks at that time, at least from some within the authorities and the FSA. The talks, however, did not materialize in the form of a deal, and there was a lack of follow-up from the authorities' negotiating team, which did not come back with an offer after their return to Damascus. At least three of the officials from the government side who led these talks were killed in the bombing inside the National Security building

in Damascus in July 2012. The mediator who arranged for the FSA leaders to attend the meetings at Al Safir hotel was also shot at a checkpoint shortly after the meetings.

The sectarian divide in Homs added to the intensity of the fighting. The increasing involvement of the NDF meant that there was very little room for negotiation. The only talks and negotiations that were taking place were those led by figures trusted by both sides, and negotiations centred on the release of kidnapped people or the exchange prisoners. In sum, negotiations over the future of Homs have always been fragile, and pose serious dangers to the individuals involved.

Nevertheless, towards the end of 2013 more serious negotiations were opened in Homs. One such negotiation focused on the area of al-Waar and the other one involved the entire city.

4.1.3   Ceasefire negotiations that included the entire city

By the autumn of 2013, the fighting brigades in Homs were concentrated in two areas that were under siege: the old city and al-Waar. There are several opposition fighting groups in Homs. Inside the Waar area there are many small fighting brigades which lack leadership and coherence.

The humanitarian situation has worsened in these besieged areas and in the entire city. Pressure exerted by civilians on the fighting brigades to enter ceasefire negotiations gradually increased, and eventually the dignitaries of the city managed to convince all the fighting rebels in Homs to enter into such talks with the authorities.

The negotiations started in October 2013 and lasted for a week. They were not reported in the media. A committee of three known professionals was formed (at least one of whom is a doctor; none of whom is a religious figure) and they were given full mandate from the opposition fighters to negotiate a ceasefire agreement with the authorities. This is the first time that a deal covering an entire city in Syria has been considered.

The frame of the deal included a ceasefire, the lifting of the sieges in the old city and in al-Waar, the release of the detainees, the reopening of the market and the return to normal life in the city. The committee travelled to Damascus, where they met with high-ranking officials, including top officials at the presidential palace and a very senior security official. Initially, they received encouraging reactions, and were asked by the authorities to attend a meeting at the Iranian embassy, which they did. In the meeting they were told that the government's condition for any settlement is that the armed rebels should hand in their heavy arms, and that the government was ready to open up the way for them to move into the countryside (carrying light arms only), with Iranian guarantees. This offer was rejected because of the lack of trust and because there was no real guarantee for the safety of the rebel fighters.[14]

The committee returned for meetings at the presidential palace, where they were told that the President had delegated a certain officer at the palace to deal with these negotiations. Upon meeting this officer, they were then told to meet with the head of the NDF in Homs, who also happens to be a nephew of this officer.

The committee went back to Homs and met with the head of the NDF there. The only offer that he made was that the civilians leave the besieged areas with their hands up; as for the armed rebels: '*we will crush them one by one. And the destiny of al-Waar is going to be similar to that of Baba Amr and Khaldieh*'[15]. Unsurprisingly, negotiations were broken off at this point, underlining the significant, and generally negative, role that the NDF plays.

4.1.4   Ceasefire negotiations for the Waar area in late 2013

Although al-Waar is under siege, it is not as tightly maintained as the siege on the old town. The government allows students and workers to leave and enter the area, though they are not allowed to bring food back with them except in very small amounts. The Red Crescent is allowed to deliver very limited humanitarian aid to the area.

Negotiations between opposition fighters and the Syrian authorities started in early December 2013, and remain ongoing to this day, on and off, on many tracks and fronts. In the last two months, the entrances to al-Waar were closed, the only exception being the one that leads through the villages with a Shia majority: Raqqa and Mazraa. The group controlling the checkpoints there were charging fees for everything that goes in or out of the area.

At the end of October, the armed opposition inside al-Waar launched an attack on the Al-Jazeera al-Sabea area of al-Waar, which overlaps with Mazraa village, forcing the 70 Shia families that lived there out of the area. At this stage the Syrian authorities started negotiating with the armed opposition. Members of the local administrative council of Homs played a role in these negotiations, and one of the council members pressured the rebels to release six people whom they had arrested from the villages.

The authorities in these negotiations asked for the rebel forces to:

- withdraw from the Al-Jazeera al-Sabea;
- allow the reopening of the state institutions inside al-Waar; and
- desist from launching any military operation in the area.

In return it offered to:

- stop the shelling; and
- open all the roads leading to the area.

This deal was agreed, but during the process of its implementation, the authorities tried to return far more people to the Mazraa and Raqqa villages than it had initially proposed, which gave rise to fears among the armed opposition that the authorities were trying to pave the way for Hizbullah to enter the area through these villages. This created mistrust, and the deal broke down, leading to the resumption of fighting.

When talks resumed to negotiate common checkpoints at the Al-Jazeera al-Sabea, the parties came close to a settlement. However, the agreement was spoiled by the armed loyalist groups of Mazraa that were imposing levies on goods entering the besieged al-Waar, who feared that they would lose this income if the deal succeeded. This illustrates not only the importance of understanding local dynamics,

but also the need to take into account the developing war economy that emerges during periods of siege.

According to interviews by the authors with participants on the negotiating side, another track of negotiations opened up again shortly after these latest talks broke down. The authorities this time asked for:

- the initiation of the process of 'settling' the situation of 200 opposition fighters (in the 'settlement' process, those who are wanted by the authorities, either because they took up arms, or for other reasons, hand themselves in to the authorities, which then interrogate them and release them if there is no criminal charge against them);
- the opposition to hand in 100 pieces of light arms;
- the formation of popular committees from the people of al-Waar itself to protect the area, under the supervision of the state;
- access to all the roads leading to military institutions in al-Waar; and
- access for state television to enter the area and film there.

In return, they would:

- re-open all the roads leading to al-Waar;
- allow freedom of movement.

In an attempt to build trust and implement this deal in stages, the negotiating party in al-Waar asked for the delivery of 1,000 food parcels, so that for every ten pieces of light arms handing over to the authorities, they should receive 100 food parcels in return. The Syrian authorities refused, instead insisting on the delivery of arms before they would provide any food parcels. This alarmed the negotiators, who saw similarities with what happened in Mouadamieh where the regime failed to fulfil its promises. This made them reluctant to complete the deal.

Overall, there was a huge lack of trust and a feeling among opposition groups that the authorities want nothing less than a surrender, rather than a fair deal. There is also the related concern that the authorities are using local ceasefire agreements and negotiations, coupled with sieges, as part of its military strategy to defeat opposition armed groups and regain control over neighbourhoods.

The absence of independent monitors to build trust and monitor agreements, and the lack of a political process in which these deals can be more than isolated episodes, mean that these assumptions are far from unjustified.

4.1.5   Evacuation of civilians in early 2014

By early 2014, more than 2,000 civilians were left without sufficient food, clean water, medical care or education in the besieged old city of Homs, which has been under siege by government forces and the NDF since 9 July 2012.

Before the Geneva II peace talks, the government sent three different proposed agreements to the fighters in the besieged areas, the first one of which was sent in late July 2013. However, these plans were perceived by the people under siege as tantamount to total surrender, with no guarantees, no humanitarian aid and no evacuation of civilians. The settlements were therefore understandably refused.

During Geneva II, the opposition delegation began to negotiate the situation of Homs with the government delegation. However, they did so without consulting with the people inside the besieged areas, causing anger among the residents of besieged Homs. There was a feeling that the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) had no right to represent them, and that they knew very little about the situation on the ground. Several entities, including the Homs Local Administrative Council, spoke to the SNC about this issue, but remain unsatisfied with their communication, and decided to lead the process themselves. Reaching out directly to the UN's main country office in Syria, they formed a committee to oversee these negotiations that included:

- members of the medical team;
- members of the media team;
- two civilian representatives;
- members of the armed groups.

The UN office consulted the Syrian authorities and asked both parties to present their positions, and an indirect communication channel was set up via Mr Brahimi's office in Damascus. The government sent its plan, which the civilian representatives responded to with their comments and requirements, and after one further redrafting (full text of the plan available in paragraph 10 in the appendix [Homs agreement mediated by the UN]), the plan was agreed and the evacuation started. After approximately 900 days of living under a brutal siege, the tragic situation left the citizens of Homs with no choice but to abandon their homes and their families and to put themselves at the mercy of the Syrian government, with no guarantees for their safety.

A three-day ceasefire was agreed between the Syrian authorities and the representatives of the besieged areas (later, it was extended by an additional three days) from 6 a.m. till 6 p.m. During the ceasefire, women, children (under the age of 15) and the elderly (over the age of 55), were evacuated in batches through a safe corridor between the besieged areas in Homs and the Waar area. This corridor was monitored and supervised by the UN and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). After the first 24 hours of evacuating the civilians, food parcels and medical supplies were to be delivered to the besieged areas through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and SARC officials.

The evacuation operation took six days from 7 to 12 February 2014. Throughout the six-day execution phase, the ceasefire agreement was violated several times by the NDF, which shelled the evacuation site. An officer was sent from Damascus to pressure the NDF to comply and allow the evacuation to be completed safely, which did bring the NDF into compliance.

About 1,348 civilians were evacuated, and 500 food parcels were allowed in. There are concerns that of those who left a number were detained and subjected to ill-treatment. Not all civilians agreed to leave. Fighting then resumed, and the siege was reinforced after the ceasefire.

4.1.6 The resumption of negotiations and the evacuation of fighters from the old city

A new round of negotiations started again in mid-March 2014, when a committee of seven people, three from the old city and from al-Waar, was formed with a strong mandate from the civilians and the fighters to negotiate what they called 'Stabilization frame' with the authorities. The formation of this committee was strongly motivated by the civilians in these areas (and even many of the fighters) to put an end to what seemed to be an endless tragedy in the city. One of the members of the committee which attempted to reach an agreement in October played a mediator role here, facilitating engagement between the new committee and officials on the government side.

The committee was under severe pressure to deliver something tangible from their talks, in order to preserve the belief among their constituents that negotiations could bring concrete results. For the committee to be able to preserve the mandate it had been granted by its most difficult constituents – the fighters in the besieged old city – it needed to show evidence that it could bring an end to the suffering in the old city of Homs, which the suspension of all humanitarian aid after the evacuation in February, had left residents having to resort to eating grasshoppers and the leaves of trees to survive, as was widely reported in the international media. After several rounds of negotiations with the minister of national reconciliation and senior security officers in Homs, the negotiations made sufficient progress to develop a draft of a mutually agreed framework.

The committee issued an open statement to the international community:

'Today, the humanitarian situation inside the besieged areas of Homs is extremely critical....We send this last appeal to remind the international community of its humanitarian responsibility and its pledge to abide by international humanitarian law. We ask it to take all measures to send humanitarian aid as soon as possible into the besieged areas in Homs and to ensure delivery, including the upscaling of the presence of UN in Homs and pressuring the regime to allow humanitarian aid access.' [16]

As time passed with no resolution in sight, the fighters in the old city began to lose hope that anything other than a military exit was possible. The desperate nature of the fighters' plight was illustrated by the failure of a planned car bombing, which killed more than 40 people in mid-April when the device exploded prematurely during its preparation.

The committee, however, continued its work, and was able to exploit a division it identified among the four branches of security force in Homs, two of which were in favour of the agreement; another two (who worked in collaboration with the NDF) were against it. The final meeting the committee had with the security officials resulted in a draft of an inclusive framework that took into consideration most of the problems that the city was suffering from. It included an end to military operations from all sides; a role for the fighters in running the security of their areas, in coordination with the police; the release of detainees; the formation of committees from the people to run the civil administration of their own areas; the return of all students and civil servants who were fired to their positions; and the resumption of services to the affected areas.

The main items in the draft of the framework, according to information passed to the authors from the negotiating committee, were:

I) Halt to fighting

1. Immediate ceasefire and end to military operations from all sides;

2. The gradual elimination of the visible arming in and between the neighbourhoods;

3. The redeployment of the heavy military vehicles to new positions to ensure the security of the city.

II) Detention and disappeared people

4. The release of detainees from the city of Homs, with the exception of those arrested because of legally proved criminal involvement;

5. An end to the arrest of people without a charge;

6. A commitment to find the fate and whereabouts of people who disappeared from all sides.

III) Standing against extremism

7. Sidelining the extreme elements on all sides, especially the militias;

8. To guarantee that the hardliners in the old city and al-Waar will not initiate any violent event and to collaborate with state institutions in case of any violation to the law;

9. To end the language of violent incitement and the accusations of betrayals from all sides.

IV) The rights of civilians and return of service

10. The freedom of movement and transfer of goods for civilians;

11. The return of services to the unserviced neighbourhoods and the rebuilding of infrastructure;

12. To investigate the situation of workers and civil servants who have been fired from their work and also the students who have been expelled from their universities.

V) Joint management

13. The formation of multilevel neighbourhood management committees that work in collaboration with the local government of Homs and with the police.

VI) Working towards a permanent solution

14. To work on establishing the ground for national consensus through committees of elders and wise men.

The response of the authorities to the progress made in drafting this framework was to launch a particularly violent military attack with the aim of conquering the besieged areas militarily. As a result, the negotiation committee issued a statement announcing the

suspension of the talks from their side. The military campaign led to more death and destruction and to a series of revenge attacks on loyalist neighbourhoods. This new bloodbath prompted the negotiation committee to call for the resumption of talks in an effort to end the bloodshed.

The talks were indeed resumed, but a new obstacle had emerged. The Islamic Front began its own independent negotiations with the government and Iran, discussing in its talks the evacuation of the old city of Homs, without first consulting with the negotiation committee in Homs. The Islamic Front, known to be a recipient of Qatari and Turkish support, relied on its power and influence that spreads beyond Homs to make an attractive offer to the Syrian authorities and Iran. They offered the release of more than 70 kidnapped people (including Iranians); the opening up to humanitarian aid of Nubbul and Zahraa, which were besieged by opposition forces; and the evacuation of the old city of Homs and its handover to government forces. In return, the fighters inside the old city would be allowed to leave the city in buses with their light arms.[17]

4.1.7   Resumption of negotiations for the area of al-Waar

After the evacuation of the old city, the negotiation committee decided to resume the talks in order to solve the problem of the Waar area. They started from the same framework (see Section 4.1.6) that had been agreed previously, with some modifications specific to al-Waar.

The committee had a meeting with the main security committee in Homs.

In this meeting, the same government representatives who were previously in favour of a fairly negotiated deal were now adopting much more hardline positions, as a result of their perceived victory in the old city. The idea of negotiating a framework for a solution was refused.

Instead, they offered submission through the process of 'settlement', in which fighters hand themselves and their weapons to the government, to be interrogated and then released, or not, based on their history. This framework was refused by the negotiation committee. The talks continued, with slow progress, and on 23 May they agreed a one-week ceasefire while the negotiations for a final agreement went on. The ceasefire lasted for 20 days, with only minor violations. The negotiations resumed in the meantime and a new negotiation framework was agreed, which included the release of prisoners and detainees.

However, a dispute started when the timescale of the agreement was discussed. The negotiation committee reported to the authors that, because of the lack of trust, they wanted the agreement to be implemented in stages over a period of several months, whereas the Syrian authorities wanted the entire implementation process to last for one week only. As a result, the negotiations were frozen. Two days later, violence retuned to al-Waar, and arbitrary shelling by government forces and pro-government militias resulted in significant casualties.

One issue under dispute was the party that would play the role of guarantor for the agreement. The Iranian officer who was present in the negotiation meeting offered Iran as a main guarantor to monitor the implementation of the agreement. The absence of any other player who would assume this responsibility led the

negotiation committee to accept this offer, along with a subsequent item that was added to the negotiation framework, which stated that the Iranian guarantor would open an office in al-Waar to monitor the implementation of the deal. When the draft of this framework leaked to the media it caused significant controversy.[18]

4.1.8 Conclusion on Homs

The case study of ceasefire and truce attempts in Homs shows that there is a strong appetite among civilians and a variety of actors for a negotiated end to the fighting, even among those who are not under siege or significant pressure from the government. The strong social relations in Homs, which exist across besieged areas and those outside the siege, are one explanation for the efforts of most residents to reach an agreement, efforts that lasted for more than nine months despite all the obstacles and challenges. But the case study also shows how difficult and fragile any agreements can be in the absence of implementation mechanisms. Open to outside manipulation, warlords and regional interference, and inadequately accounted for in national or international efforts to end the violence, the efforts of civil society actors has been consequential but incomplete, or, at times, overtaken by events. In cases in which traditional leadership and civil society were able to play a key role (as in al-Waar), a much more fair, inclusive and sustainable framework emerged, with clauses that respond to the needs to the local civilians rather than the demands of the fighters.

The importance of the NDF as a key power player is apparent in its ability to effectively make or break initiatives by the central government or to drive conflict with armed opposition groups. This is equally so in the increasing local role that Iran is playing in the conflict. The Waar negotiations track, which was often hindered by the actors who were profiting from the siege, demonstrates to what degree the war economy serves to sustain the conflict at this stage.

4.2 Case Study 2: Barzeh local ceasefire

4.2.1 Background

Barzeh is a neighbourhood in northeast Damascus. It is one of the 'hot zones' – a site of intense and protracted armed conflict – in Damascus. The front line separates two neighbourhoods in Damascus: Barzeh and Esh Alwarwar. Barzeh is a rebel-held area, while most of Esh Alwarwar's residents are known to be government loyalists. Barzeh is located on a main road that connects several loyalist neighbourhoods to central Damascus. The main recent conflict in that locality is a political one, between powers demanding political change in Barzeh on one side, and the government and its loyalist army and paramilitaries on the other side, mostly based in Esh Alwarwar and Dahyet al-Assad.

Most of Barzeh's original 35,000 population are locals who have lived there for a long time, working in agriculture and commerce, whereas Esh Alwarwar sprung up about 40 years ago, emerging shortly after the late Hafez al-Assad acquired power in Damascus.

Esh Alwarwar was built on hilly lands that were confiscated by authorities, including from residents of Barzeh, and redistributed to or occupied by an influx of a new class

of government employees who managed to get job opportunities in the urban capital through their ties to the new ruling family. The vast majority of the occupants of the neighbourhood are from Alawite background and are lower rank army and security forces employees and officers. Esh Alwarwar is a poor neighbourhood, its inhabitants dependent on government employment and salaries.

For this reason, these two adjacent neighbourhoods are very different in terms of their religious affiliation, their relationship to authorities and, most importantly, in terms of their current political positions. Some Barzeh locals perceive Esh Alwarwar residents to be unlawful occupiers of their lands, and fighting between these two neighbourhoods pre-dates the current crisis. Indeed, as far back as the early 1980s there were incidents of hostilities between these two neighbourhoods that led to deaths on both sides.

Barzeh is one of the neighbourhoods that held major protests against the government at an early stage of the uprising in 2011. When demonstrations were still peaceful, locals from Esh Alwarwar were organized and mobilized by the neighbourhood official leader (*Mukhtar*) to attack protesters and beat them up. Barzeh was later targeted by government paramilitaries from Esh Alwarwar and Dahyet al-Assad. Barzeh is said to be one of the first places where locals resorted to kidnapping people from the other side in order to exchange them for detainees and kidnapped civilians.

4.2.2   Situation in Barzeh and Esh Alwarwar prior to the truce

Military situation

The military situation around Barzeh was that of a deadlock in the second half of 2013. For months, neither of the warring parties was able to make any significant advance. For the local Barzeh FSA fighters, simply holding their position was considered a success, especially as it was becoming clear that military support from other neighbouring opposition military fronts would not be forthcoming. Local FSA fighters successfully fortified their positions, mined entrances against heavy artillery of Barzeh, and covered it with sniper fire. However, towards the end of the siege of Barzeh, the rebels' supplies were becoming critically low.

This deadlock was perceived negatively by pro-government armed militias, especially by the local fighters of the NDF in Esh Alwarwar and Dahyet al-Assad, whose leadership was known to be from Dahyet al-Assad. The armed groups that surrounded Barzeh included a reported considerable presence of the Fadl Abbas Iraqi Shi'i militia. Towards the end of the siege it was noticeable that the government employed more of its regular army on the Barzeh front line, and appointed army officers to lead the battle on that front.

The government had strong interest in Barzeh for a number of reasons. Barzeh FSA was blocking a main road that connected Esh Alwarwar, Dahyet al-Assad and Tishreen Military Hospital to Damascus, which meant that these areas were only accessible via a very long route around Barzeh. While this resulted in significant pressure on the residents of Esh Alwarwar, it was also clear to the government and its supporting militias that they were exhausting their resources on a stationary front in this neighbourhood.

Humanitarian situation

The siege of Barzeh caused significant shortages of essential food and medical supplies, and resulted in some cases of malnutrition. There have been numerous attempts to achieve victory over Barzeh fighters, and these included using starvation as a tactic to weaken them. Given the geographic location of Barzeh, this siege was not entirely successfully imposed. Also, because the civilians were displaced from the area, the siege failed to achieve its goals. This is in contrast to the starvation siege on Mouadamieh and the Yarmouk Palestinian camp in the suburbs of Damascus, where the starved civilian population of these neighbourhoods put enormous pressure on local fighters to compromise for surrender-like truces. Similarly, on the Esh Alwarwar side, many residents have been displaced by the fighting.

4.2.3   Occupancy and leadership of Barzeh

At the time of the local ceasefire, Barzeh was occupied only with FSA fighters and a very small number of civilians, since the rest of the local civilian population left when the violence escalated. As a result, that there were fewer civilians to apply pressure on the FSA to enter a deal, and the primary concern voiced by civilians was from families displaced outside the neighbourhood who wanted to return to their homes.

There was, however, a clear structure of command and leadership within the Barzeh FSA, and a high level of confidence in this leadership. This transparency, and the trust it engendered, facilitated decision-making processes and helped to reach an agreement in the negotiations and subsequent ceasefire that started later, as demonstrated in the following sections.

4.2.4   The truce

A truce was first requested by representatives from the National Defence Forces of Esh Alwarwar and Dahyet Kudsayya. The close involvement of the Army 4th brigade in pushing for and arranging this local ceasefire only became clear later on.

The truce was reached in the context of other ceasefire attempts in and around Damascus. It is clear that there was a political decision at the senior government leadership level to bring about these ceasefires and settle selective battles through negotiations, possibly to ensure the road could be used.

Tripartite committee: government, opposition and local notables

A committee was formed by both sides to work on building and maintaining the truce. Although not clear in terms of its structure, the committee included three groups of representatives: one representing the government's side; one representing Barzeh rebels inside Barzeh; and a third one of Barzeh local figures who live elsewhere, either due to displacement or migration prior to the conflict. The group inside Barzeh was focused on the details of the conditions of the ceasefires, and they held the exact picture of the military situation on the ground. The outside representatives of Barzeh provided the link with government representatives when needed. These groups have been involved in work between the two sides, for example to release kidnapped people from both sides prior to the truce. The three groups communicated with each other often, and held meetings through radio walkie-talkies, telephone and face-to-face meetings outside Barzeh.

4.2.5 Interests in the truce

There are many reasons that encouraged the FSA in Barzeh to negotiate for a ceasefire. According to them, they were:

- the hardship and humanitarian need of the displaced locals of Barzeh in the places that they moved to;
- the deadlock of war in that locality, where no advances were being made on that frontline.

The reasons on the government side included:

- the main road that connected Esh Alwarwar, Dahyet al-Assad and Tishreen Military Hospital (government supporting areas) to Damascus;
- NDF efforts towards a truce following their failure to make any military advancement, in spite of the military campaigns they led for over ten months with the government's regular army;
- an increased number of causalities on the loyalists side (the reported number by Syrians government media is 4,000).

Within this context, the NDF approached Barzeh FSA to agree on a truce. Accordingly, a committee was formed from both sides, and after about a month of negotiation, an agreement was reached. Before the agreement was finalized, both sides consulted their military and civilian supporters.

4.2.6 Announcement by Barzeh Local Coordination Committee

After many attempts and days of mediations and negotiation between government forces and the local fighters of Barzeh, a deal was brokered for a ceasefire in Barzeh. The announcement by the Barzeh Local Coordination Committee came on 5 January 2014. It stated the conditions of the ceasefire, listed below:

1. Ceasing fire on both sides;
2. Government's army retreats from all areas it occupies in Barzeh;
3. The roads are cleaned, to be accessed and used by civilians;
4. Detainees are released from government's prisons;
5. All places that have been occupied as military places are converted back into civilian areas free from the presence of the Syrian army;
6. Services are returned to the neighbourhood and infrastructure is repaired to prepare for the return of civilians;
7. The main roads are opened for Esh Alwarwar civilians and checkpoints are installed on the roads;
8. Families are allowed to return after the repair of infrastructure and services;
9. The FSA maintains their positions and their arms and control over the neighbourhood;
10. The regular army retreats from any positions they hold within the neighbourhood, and especially from higher position used for sniper fire;

11. The siege on the neighbourhood is ended;
12. The FSA is responsible for managing the neighbourhood and its fighters, and it does not hand any of the fighters or their weapons to the government (contrary to what some of state media channels were reporting);
13. The formation of what the government termed the Popular Army (Jaysh Shaabi), by Barzeh FSA surrendering their names and the serial number of their weapons to the government for a 'situation settlement'.

Civilians were supposed to return to their homes after two weeks from the date of this agreement, once the infrastructure and services had been restored, and it was clear that the truce would be observed.

4.2.7   Balance of power

It is very important to understand the balance of power in Barzeh, as it bears heavily on the conditions and establishment of the local ceasefire agreement, and accounts for the marked differences with other local ceasefires taking place recently in the suburbs of Damascus.

The role of the committee responsible for observing the progress of the truce was instrumental in its success, as was evident when loyalists raised the official flag of the state, which is widely perceived as the flag of the regime by the FSA. In response, the FSA raised the revolution flag on the highest point of Barzeh, causing anger and frustration on the loyalist side. The Barzeh side contacted the committee to report the incident, and as a consequence, both flags were brought down. An additional factor in the power dynamics of Barzeh is evident in the confidence and ability of the Barzeh FSA and activists to publicize the truce and claim it as a victory over a regime that gave up and surrendered to their conditions.

4.2.8   Progress of the ceasefire

The ceasefire has been relatively successful (until the date of writing this report), although there has been one major violation of the truce terms on the regime side. The government had promised to release detainees once the road was opened, but has only released a small number, delaying the release of the rest, and thereby contravening an essential condition of the Barzeh FSA. The government claim that the delay is due to bureaucratic reasons. The opening of the road and the influx of civilians before the release of detainees has been seen as a major weakening of the negotiating position of the Barzeh FSA, and they feel that detainees will never be released as a result.

4.2.9   Conclusions related to the Barzeh truce

In some senses, the conditions in Barzeh reflect the nationwide situation. With deeply rooted historical grievances and differences, war-weary civilians and fighters were locked in a military stalemate and had significant incentives to negotiate. The implementation of the truce has had some positive humanitarian impact, but there remain problematic aspects, particularly that aspects of the truce were reneged upon by the government side. Despite this, the Barzeh agreement remains one of the most successful agreements because it was closer to a win–win situation than other agreements achieved around the same period,

such as in Mouadamieh. It also demonstrated that joint security responsibility for the areas is possible. Moreover, the fighters of Barzeh remained in the area and were not simply exported to other areas to join the fight on other fronts, as in the deal which saw the evacuation of fighters in Homs.

4.3   Case study 3: Ras al-Ain

4.3.1   Background

Ras al-Ain is a Syrian town with 80,000 inhabitants located in the north of Hassakah governorate. It is strategically located directly on the Syrian-Turkish border. To its east is a major road to Qamishli, an area which has most of Syria's oil wells, and to its west is a road that connects Ras al-Ain with the other two areas of Kurdish majority, Ain al-Arab (Kobani) and Afreen. A diverse town, the largest group are the Kurds, alongside Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians, Chechens, Turkmen and others. Its economy is based on agriculture.

Like many other areas with a Kurdish majority, and compared to other areas in Syria, Ras al-Ain enjoys a reasonably strong presence of civil society and political parties. The most organized party in the two was the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a member of the National Coordination Committee (NCC), which is itself a coalition of opposition parties that are based in Damascus. The Arabic presence in and around Ras al-Ain is largely tribal, and is influenced by its own tribal leadership. Although the inhabitants of the town are socially conservative, they are not very religious.

The town joined in the protests in the spring of 2011, but it remained free from violence. In the middle of 2012 the government reduced its presence in Ras al-Ain and other areas in the northeast, a presence that was quickly filled by the People's Defence Units (YPG), which are controlled by the PYD.[19]

4.3.2   Conflict dynamics and attempts at truces

The town remained relatively safe and stable until 8 November 2012, when the FSA launched several attacks on the government forces in Ras al-Ain. Heavy clashes continued for four days. Following this, the government began a heavy bombardment, destroying many buildings and killing dozens of people, which resulted in a mass exodus of civilians from the town, yet no government takeover. Despite the bombardment, the FSA managed to remain in Ras al-Ain and started deploying its forces around the town.

4.3.3   Tension between FSA and Kurdish groups; intermittent fighting

The FSA tried to reassure the locals with promises to end the oppression and corruption, but tension between the FSA and the Kurds in the town started to grow. The increasing armed presence of the FSA was responded to with an increased arming of the Kurdish side and the growth of the YPG. Signs of regional involvement from the Turkish side became more obvious when a delegation from the FSA, headed by the leader of the military council in Hassaka, met with the LAC of Ras al-Ain on 17 November 2012. They presented the council with the following demands:

1. to prevent a demonstration called by the Higher Kurdish Council to take place on 18 November;
2. to take down the flags of the PYD from the buildings, 'because it upsets Turkey, which may then close the border checkpoint'[20];
3. to open the road to the east that leads to Qamishli so that the FSA could 'liberate' the remainder of the northern areas.

According to information provided to the authors of this report, the response of the local council was that:

1. the demonstration was a public right;
2. the Kurds had to be respected as an essential component of the Syrian society, including the raising of flags;
3. no military forces would be allowed to use the road to go to the rest of the Kurdish majority areas, as there was no significant government presence there.

The council said that these demands were to fulfil a Turkish request and not in the Syrians' best interests.

The following day, the FSA installed checkpoints at the eastern entrance of the city to prevent participation in the demonstration and the return of the internally displaced people. Negotiations were initiated by social leaders to remove the checkpoints. As a result the parties agreed that:

1. internally displaced people should be allowed to return to Ras al-Ain;
2. the revolution flag would be raised in the town;
3. there should be no signs in the town that suggest loyalty to the government or that upsets the parties that support the revolution (a reference to Turkey).

The next day, members of one of the Islamist groups took down a Kurdish flag over a checkpoint at Ras al-Ain. This led to major clashes that involved the YPG and the FSA and lasted for several days, with many casualties on all sides.

4.3.4   Early attempts at truces

Attempts to achieve a truce were led by the Kurdish National Council, some of the national figures in the area and some of the brigades that did not take part in the fighting. Both parties agreed on a truce, an exchange of prisoners and return of dead bodies. They also agreed that fighting between the FSA and Kurdish forces was not in the best interests of the revolution. This lasted two days, at which point it broke down into more clashes. Further rounds of negotiations followed. The military leaders of all sides were involved and ordered their forces to withdraw, and they agreed on recommitting to the previous truce settlement, but not on a timeline.

This time, the truce lasted for three weeks. During this truce, most of the fighting parties engaged in efforts to control the resources of the town and the surrounding area, including the wheat, the banks, and oil and gas depots. The Kurdish forces were keen for the truce to hold in order to maintain access to the road to other Kurdish areas in the west, which was then controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra. Despite this, there were continuous rumours that the other side was about to launch a battle. Both sides also increased the number of their fighters and increased their stock of arms; they also redeployed their

forces in the area over some strategic locations. A new round of clashes broke out on 12 December 2012 for three days, when members of the FSA took over certain houses, claiming that their owners had collaborated with the Syrian authorities, and set up a checkpoint in the middle of the central market.

The clashes ended as the Amir of Jabhat al-Nusra from Azaz intervened to mediate a ceasefire. Jabhat needed the road from Ras al-Ain to remain open as the supply route to Azaz and Tal Abyad. The Kurdish fighters also benefited from this. Two days after the ceasefire, meetings took place between traditional leaders and dignitaries from across the city to find ways to extend the ceasefire. These dignitaries issued the following demands to the warring parties:

1. to extend the ceasefire;
2. to establish a civil council with representatives of all of the city's groupings;
3. to establish a border checkpoint with Turkey, run by the civil council;
4. to end all armed activity inside the town.

The armed groups did not respond positively to the civilians at first, but the endless shuttle meetings helped to sustain the ceasefire for a month. On 16 January 2013 there were renewed clashes. There had been an increasing number of arrests and incidents of torture by the FSA. In addition, the Turks had opened up the border checkpoint to the FSA, which allowed them to bring in additional fighters and weapons. These clashes lasted for 14 days, and involved heavy shelling, leading to high civilian casualties.

4.3.5 Role of civil society and civil society organizations

Several civil society organizations, tribal leaders and political groups intervened at this stage to negotiate a ceasefire. Throughout the negotiations, the FSA groups were shelling Ras al-Ain, and when they were asked by the civil society mediator to stop the shelling as a confidence-building measure, their response was that they had heard that the Kurdish forces had also obtained three mortar cannons, and they would stop the shelling if the Kurdish forces promise not to use these cannon as well. The message was passed through the mediators, and both parties agreed to the suspension of shelling, but only two days later, one party violated the agreement, though conflicting accounts and the absence of monitors made it difficult to determine with any degree of certainty which side was the first to violate the agreement.

Negotiations continued, and a final agreement for a ceasefire was reached in February. Shortly after the agreement, a meeting to confirm the final statement of the agreement was convened and was attended by the parties to the conflict, the social leaders and dignitaries from all social components of the city. They announced the following final agreement (see Figures 9a and b in the Appendix for the Arabic original text of the agreement):

'And Allah has full power over His decree, but most men know it not.'

Almighty God has spoken the truth

Field agreement between the Free Syrian Army and People's Defence Units (YPG)
in the city of Ras Al-Ain

*Based on our belief in the unity of a free Syrian land and people, and motivated
by the commitment to the principles of peaceful coexistence between all
components of the Syrian people and rejection of all sectarian, ethnic,
chauvinistic and exclusionary approaches. And in order to unite all people in the
battle of dignity against the bloody authoritarian regime in order to build a free
Syria where all components enjoy their legitimate rights under the banner of
'Syria for All Syrians' to be a country that can genuinely express the authenticity
and the civilization of the coexistence. For all of this, the parties meeting in Ras Al
Ain agreed to resolve all the arising conflicts and disagreements according to the
following principles:*

*1- Redeployment of military forces and the complete removal of armed
manifestations from the town.*

*2- To establish a temporary monitoring and follow-up committee agreed upon
by both parties, in order to follow up and monitor the implementation of the
terms of the agreement.*

*3- To establish by consensus a local civil council that represents the social
components to manage all the civic affairs of the town.*

4- The border checkpoint to be managed by the city council.

*5- Local council represents the sovereign entity in the city, The intervention of
military forces in the affairs of the local council is completely prohibited.*

*6- To establish common checkpoints between the YPG and the Free Syrian Army
at the entrances to the city of Ras al-Ain, until the City Council takes over when it
is able to.*

*7- To facilitate and secure the passage of people, goods and forces of each party
across the checkpoints of the other party.*

*8- Cooperation and coordination between the Free Syrian Army and YPG to
liberate cities that are still under the regime control.*

*9- Cities and towns where there is no existence of the regime: Derbassiyeh,
Amouda, Tel Tamer, Maabada and Al-Malikihha are considered liberated cities
and a should be declared so in a joint statement.*

10- To end hostile media campaigns between the two parties.

*11- The introduction part of this agreement is considered an essential term of the
agreement.*

Signatories

Free Syrian Army   People's Defence Units (YPG)

4.3.6 Consolidation, and move to civilian administration

Further meetings in Ras al-Ain took place to reach a strong consensus around the agreement. The results of these meetings included the decision to establish a local civil governing council consisting of 40 members (later reduced to 20 members) from all the parties and from civil society, excluding anyone associated with the Syrian government. The tasks of the council were agreed to be:

- to oversee the administration and the public services of the city;
- to ensure that all armed groups redeploy to outside the town and that there is no more evidence of arming inside the town;
- to ensure the end of hate speech in the media from all sides;
- to run the border checkpoint with Turkey.

This agreement lasted for six months, during which time the civilians who had fled the city returned to their homes, and normal life in the city resumed.

4.3.7 Breakdown of the agreement

During this period, the PYD worked to re-establish itself militarily in the city and stock up on weapons. This increase in the power of the PYD reached a level whereby it became impossible to reach any agreement in Ras al-Ain and other neighbouring areas without the agreement of the PYD and the Asayesh, the Kurdish police forces. The increasing Kurdish military control of the city, combined with their increased control over the resources of the state in the area, led to a growing tension among the social components of the city, especially since Kurds constitute around 35 percent of the population of that area. Further tension emerged among the Kurdish community in Ras al-Ain as well, as they were not unanimous in their support for the political project of the PYD.

The ceasefire ended with the beginning of heavy clashes on 16 July 2013, which ended with the YPG expelling FSA brigades from the city. The battles spread outside the city and reached many of the towns which had a strong Kurdish presence. As a result of these battles, PYG forces managed to push FSA brigades 30 kilometres away from Ras al-Ain.

During these battles, the civilians in Ras al-Ain suffered heavily. There were many civilian causalities, as well as much looting and crime. Many people left the city and became refugees in Turkey.

4.3.8 Observations from Ras al-Ain ceasefire attempts
- As can be seen from the timeline below (Figure 7) a series of truces had to be brokered before a more lasting one could be achieved. The length of the period of the truces increased from two days, to three weeks, to one month and finally six months.

- The existence of strong civil society structures and political parties prior to the crisis and conflict was a significant factor in brokering ceasefires.
- Civil administration was put in place to control the town instead of military control.
- Shortly after the February 2013 agreement, a civil society organization that was involved in the mediation wrote to Mr Brahimi asking him to send monitors to observe the ceasefire, in order to prevent the collapse of the previous agreements that were reached in the city. The answer from his team was that Mr Brahimi's mandate did not give him any power to send monitors.

The timeline for the ceasefires in Ras al-Ain shows that, with each failed attempt, the duration of subsequent ceasefires increased.
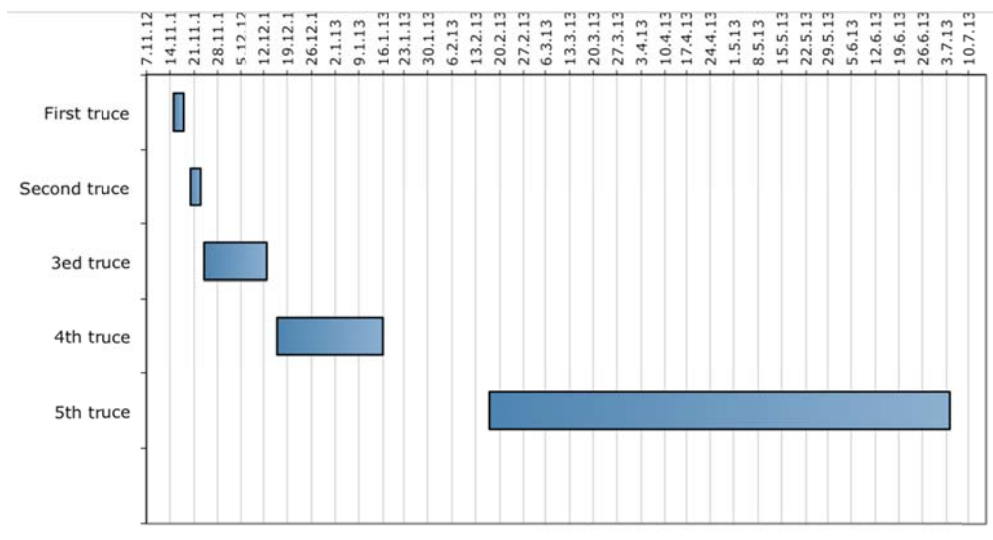
Figure 6: Timeline of truces in Ras al-Ain

Some of the negative aspects of the ceasefire efforts include the following:

- At times, ceasefires were exploited to prepare for a bigger battle, and, as elsewhere, used as a military tactic.
- The ceasefire was premised on a balance of forces at local level. Once these changed, the agreement broke down and fighting resumed.
- Interference by Turkey played a significant role in initiating the fighting and undermining the ceasefires.

4.4 Case study 4: Provision of services

Many local negotiations in Syria were motivated primarily by the need to provide services, especially to civilians. In the city of Aleppo, for example, the provision of water and electricity was the main reason why all sides engaged in talks. These were mediated by civil society actors, which in turn were motivated by the desire to alleviate the suffering of the civilians, and which were able to communicate with all

sides, including the Syrian government and the opposition fighters. Such talks were taking place almost continuously since the armed conflict affected services in Aleppo, and in most cases they were successful in reaching agreements and restoring the services to the city and the countryside. Below is one such example of these talks.

4.4.1   Power station in Aleppo

Background

The issue of a thermal power station played a significant part in the crisis in Aleppo, which began with the armed opposition entered the city in July 2012.

The crisis in the city escalated from a confined local crisis to one that affected the entire city, as the clashes reached the vicinity of the thermal power plant that generated electricity for the entire city. In September 2012, different armed opposition rebels (comprising mainly the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham [ISIS], in addition to the al-Nusra Front, al-Tawhid Brigade and other brigades) surrounded the station and clashed with the Syrian authorities' forces located therein. The escalations developed from sporadic clashes to intense fighting and led to the injury of members from both fronts and the capture of the engineers and technicians working in the station by the Syrian Army. The Syrian Army closed down the station and cut the power of Aleppo city and its rural areas, threatening to maintain the blackout until they received medical care for military personnel injured inside the station.

Civil society mediation

Owing to the lack of trust between the parties, individuals associated with the governorate of Aleppo issued urgent requests for volunteers from the medical and civil sector, who agreed to go to the perimeter of the power station in the village of al-Sfireh to mediate a deal between the parties.

The head of the Ahali Aleppo Initiative'[21] (The people of Aleppo Initiative), together with some resident doctors from Aleppo University, volunteered to play this role. The Ahali Aleppo Initiative is a civil society group that was formed in 2012. It bridges many divides in Aleppo and managed to maintain its independence and avoid being politically associated with any party of the conflict. The group was able to play the role of mediator in many negotiations in Aleppo, which resulted in the resumption of services such as electricity and water.

The parties were informed of the arrival of this team, its political independence, and its role in providing medical assistance and in mediating a deal between the parties. After treating the wounded soldiers, the team took the time to listen to the perspective of the Syrian army and the workers of the station. The army complained that they were deprived of food supplies because of the siege imposed on the power station by the opposition forces, and that the opposition forces have been searching all workers when entering the station in order to prevent any smuggling of food.

When the medical team emerged from the power station they listened to the armed opposition forces, who asked the team not to cooperate with the Syrian army. The team responded by reasserting their independence from either party; that they

represented only the defenceless civilian detainees and the people of Aleppo who were languishing in darkness; and that the principal interest of the team was in finding an agreement that satisfied both parties.

Agreement between the parties

For six days after that the Ahali Aleppo Initiative team conciliated between the parties, in order to remove the civilian power station workers from the conflict and to restore electricity to the city of Aleppo. The negotiations ended in the signing of an agreement (Figure 9b:10) between the parties. The items of the agreement included:

1. free access for farmers to land close to the station to harvest their crops;
2. a 48-hour ceasefire to allow the farmers to complete the harvest;
3. the protection of the workers of the station;
4. the evacuation of a wounded soldiers, with surrender of his weapon to ISIS.

Conclusion: a positive role for local, independent mediators

Before the intervention of the Ahali Aleppo Initiative, the conflict around the thermal power station was very likely to escalate much further and even result in the destruction of the station and the death of many civilians.

The siege of the thermal power station lasted for eight months, during which time the Ahali Aleppo Initiative continued to play the role of mediator whenever there was a conflict between the parties. It was also responsible for delivering any aid or materials to the station.

Many other key negotiations that are cantered around the provision of services were mediated by the Ahali Aleppo Initiative, most recently they played even an implementer role in providing back the water services in the city after many weeks of no water.

This model of negotiations between warring parties that are motivated by providing services have been observed in many other places in Syria, such as in Daraa in the south of Syria.

5   Conclusions: Factors that motivate local ceasefires and their positive aspects

Clearly, local truces and agreements can have positive humanitarian impacts. The recent series of truces around Damascus enabled the UN and other local organizations to access besieged areas. Issue 43 of the OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin[22] carried the reports of aid convoys that reached rural Damascus following the truce:

> *Extensive war damage has taken place in Barzeh, Rural Damascus, with whole blocks of apartments lying empty. Following a truce between the Government of Syria and opposition forces in January 2014, there have been consistent reports of people returning to Barzeh. On 8 February, an inter-agency convoy of 50 trucks moved from Damascus to deliver food, NFIs and medicines for up to 23,000 people. On 2 February, another inter-agency convoy to Al Kisweh in Rural Damascus delivered 244 m³ of relief items such*

as WASH, food, health, shelter and protection items, including 200 boxes of
high energy biscuits and 50 cartons of PlumpyDoz to prevent malnutrition
were delivered for up to 8,000 people.

Although this access was very difficult to negotiate, and it was repeatedly blocked afterwards, it was the only mechanism that enabled humanitarian aid into the conflict area to break the hunger siege that was imposed on some of the areas.

Participants in the survey conducted by OMRAN strategic studies centre were asked about the main reasons that led the opposition forces to accept the truce. Forty-five percent of people answered that it was the lifting of the siege, 28 percent answered that it was to provide peace for security, 25 percent responded that it was the absence of the prospect of military victory, and 21 percent indicated that it was the need for the opposition forces to re-arm.

The following sections summarize our findings concerning the factors that are conducive to reaching local ceasefires that have a positive humanitarian or political impact.

5.1 Pressure from civilians and existence of civil society or civilian structures

It is probably not surprising that areas in which the ratio of fighters to civilians is lowest are, with certain exceptions, the areas with the greatest likelihood that the various parties will engage in talks, especially for humanitarian purposes.

Pressure exerted by civilians is often expressed through civic councils such as the LACs or civil society groups and organizations and the social leaders of the area. The LACs usually have medical and humanitarian aid committees, which witness first-hand the difficulties faced by the civilians, and report back to the councils, who in turn apply pressure to the armed groups in the area to engage in talks. These often lead to a cessation of fighting, and enable both the delivery of humanitarian aid to the areas and the evacuation of the wounded.

A clear illustration of the importance of the relative numbers of fighters and civilians in a conflict zone is that of Homs, where there were talks concerning two besieged areas. In al-Waar, the ratio of fighters to civilians is very low (2,000:400,000), and pressure from civilians led to more or less continuous talks between the warring parties, resulting in the partial lifting of the siege conditions. Workers and students were allowed to enter and leave the area, limited amounts of humanitarian aid were allowed in through the Red Crescent, and recently a successful ceasefire has been brokered and implemented. By contrast, in the besieged areas in and around the old city, there are only a few thousand civilians, who are nearly matched in number by fighters, and there, the siege was far more tightly imposed, with no one allowed in or out, and no humanitarian aid allowed in until recently. It was only once the residents were confronted with a complete lack of medical services and the prospect of starving to death that pressure from civilians was enough to start negotiations.

An exception to this finding regarding the ratio of fighters to civilians is the case of eastern Ghouta, in the countryside of Damascus, where an estimated 250,000 people live under siege. One reason for this exception may be the ready access to sources of food provided by both land and animal farming in these areas, which keeps the people further away from the prospect of starvation.

5.2 Provision of services

In many cases, the provision of services was a strong motivation for parties of the conflict to collaborate, and in most cases this collaboration resulted in important improvements in humanitarian conditions. One such example of this is the power station in Aleppo (paragraph 4.4.1), where the need for electricity provided a motivation even for ISIS to engage in talks mediated by civil society organizations, and this resulted in the resumption of the electricity supply to large areas of Aleppo. Another example is the vaccination campaign in the northern areas in Syria, where the violence is at its worst. In several cases, truces have been agreed between the warring parties in order to enable medical teams to enter the area and provide vaccination to the children there.

Evidence of cooperation between civilians in opposition-controlled areas and those in government-held areas can also be found in the provision of water across Syria. Government officials, supported by UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs such as Oxfam are able to deliver safe and clean water to millions across the country, including across conflict lines, with the cooperation of engineers and people in rebel-held areas.

The return of services to areas under siege is often one of the key conditions of the local agreements (e.g., Barzeh and Homs). In Barzeh, teams sent by the government to fix the roads and restore electricity moved in to the areas and started working shortly after a deal was reached.

The negotiation channels that are open for the sake of providing services are often facilitated also for other types of negotiations such as ceasefire and the exchange of prisoner. They also serve as good confidence building measure.

5.3 Military stalemate

It was noticeable that most field military leaders that were interviewed for this report had a clear vision that their fight can only end with a negotiated exit, whereas those managing the battle from a distance tended to cling to the belief that a military victory is still possible. This accounts to some extent for the fact that the impetus for negotiations largely comes from local leaders rather than from top commanders in the opposition forces.

5.4 Access to strategic resources

As in the case of Barzeh, one strong motivation for the Syrian authorities to engage in talks with the opposition and to agree on a deal that had considerable benefits for the opposition is control of access to areas of strategic interest to the regime. Similarly, in the talks in the Waar area in Homs, one of the requirements of the regime in the deal that was brokered was access to state institutions in the area, along with other military points there.

5.5 Other motivations

Other factors that prompted parties to engage in talks with each other include the exchange of prisoners and kidnapped people, or simply the desire to demonstrate to supporters that the party is willing to engage in peace.

6   Main obstacles and deal spoilers

The lack of strong political will for peace from most parties inside and outside Syria has been, and remains, the biggest obstacle in the way of any deal or ceasefire. Where this has not been the case, the following obstacles and spoilers were observed.

6.1   Military tactics and bad faith agreements

In some cases the parties would only engage in local talks in order to gather resources and strength, or in order to focus on the fight on another front. In the case of Madaya, for example, Syrian authorities' forces engaged in talks with opposition forces in order to secure the road that led to the neighbouring area of Zabadani. This meant that the army was able to send military supplies to attack Zabadani using this road. This deal created a deep rift between the two areas and the road has been named 'treason road'.

In many cases, the parties involved in the negotiations, particularly from the opposition side, were reluctant to accept the government's offers because of bad experiences in similar cases. In Homs, for example (Section 4.1.4), an offer was rejected after the opposition activists involved in the deal communicated with activists from Mouadamieh, who warned them that the government had violated a similar deal that it put to them. The lack of evidence that negotiation can deliver tangible results was also observed to be one of the reasons why talks fail; for example, in Homs the inability of the negotiation committee to secure humanitarian aid for the besieged areas made the fighters inside the area lose hope in negotiations.

The formula presented by the government in many cases is a win–lose formula that the opposition fighters find it necessary to reject, even when they are unable to attain anything better from the government. The protracted nature of the conflict and the depth of suffering incurred makes them reluctant to agree so easily to settlement offers that don't include concessions that reflect the sacrifices made by the people in the course of the conflict.

6.2   Regional interference

Regional interference was observed to be one of the biggest spoilers to peace talks in Syria. Most important truce or ceasefire attempts failed, or their course was diverted away from the real interest of Syrians, because of regional interference. The clearest example of this is Homs, where the ceasefire negotiations came down to negotiations between groups supported by regional parties (Section 4.1.3), and during some of the negotiation rounds the talks were held directly with an Iranian official. In Ras al-Ain, FSA forces supported by Turkey came into direct conflict with Kurdish groups, which also benefited from Kurdish regional support. Similarly, the talks to broker a ceasefire for the Palestinian camp outside Damascus named Mukhaiam Al Yarmouk were delayed and complicated because of conflict between different Palestinian groups.

By contrast, in the areas in which regional interference was at its lowest, such as Barzeh, the peace talks were most successful.

The testimony of the representative of the civilians inside besieged areas of Homs on 18 February 2014 spelt out very clearly the negative role of some of the regional players who were financing some of the opposition fighting groups (Section 9). When asked, '*Who you think is responsible (besides the regime) inside or outside for what is happening in Homs now*?' his answer was clear: '*The primarily responsible party for what is happening to the besieged Homs is the Donors.… They have politicized the revolution with their ideologies…. Donors disrupt effective military operations, then they themselves give the order for fake ones*'. When asked by the authors who exactly he was referring with the term, 'donors', he was clear that he meant certain countries and also certain religious authorities from outside the country who support some of the parties.

6.3   The burgeoning war economy

In most of the cases observed, especially the humanitarian-motivated truces, the war economy was one of the main spoilers. In contemporary wars, the various parties develop forms of finance that are dependent on continuing violence; these can include kidnapping for ransom; the use of checkpoints to extort money; and illicit trade in oil, people, cigarettes, alcohol or historic artefacts. Syria is no exception.

Recent fieldwork conducted in Turkey and Syria by researchers at the London School of Economics provided insights that suggest a political economy of war has emerged in Syria. Outside money has incentivized fighting: armed groups fighting the government prolong battles in order to receive further funding from Gulf-state backers. It also emerged that some groups receive weapons from these backers, which they prefer to sell rather than to use to defend civilians against government forces.

Kidnapping is rife in both government and rebel-controlled areas. Armed groups kidnap individuals perceived to belong to wealthy families and extract ransoms of tens of thousands of dollars. In government areas, security forces are believed to be complicit in kidnapping. In Aleppo, some rebel fighters behave like warlords, extracting money from traders. Checkpoints in both government and rebel-held areas serve as prime locations for extortion to take place: when bribes are paid, speedy passage follows.

Armed groups seize assets and have stripped entire factories in Aleppo's industrial district, selling expensive industrial machinery on the black market in neighbouring Turkey. Smuggling is taking place along the Turkish border. Fuel and tobacco – both heavily taxed in Turkey – are smuggled across the border, as is scrap metal, looted both from deserted sites of armed conflict in Syria, and when oil production sites are taken over by armed groups.

Furthermore, a trade in Syrian antiquities has emerged. Syrian archaeological antiquities are for sale, some stolen from museums, others from archaeological sites yet to be formally categorized. These activities finance violent actors on the side of the government and those opposing it. There appear to be systems of collusion and mutual enterprise, and the lines between political and criminal activities are often blurred. Corrupt officers in government forces are said to sell weapons to rebel

groups, sometimes in exchange for captured government soldiers. These activities rely upon the continuation of armed conflict to maintain an environment in which they can take place relatively unhindered, and in some cases become necessary activities for survival.

An investigation into the Syrian war economy should be conducted to assess this emergence of a predatory political economy, often found in contemporary wars, whereby the various warring parties acquire economic and sometimes sectarian interests in the continuation of violence. By tracing the revenue sources of the various warring parties and their associated networks, it ought to be possible to identify levers to weaken the capacity, the will and the effects of violent actors.

6.4 The absence of independent, trusted mediators

Negotiations are more successful when there is an independent mediator, as can be seen in the Aleppo case study. With most Syrians affected in one way or another by the conflict, however, it is not easy to find any independent mediator in Syria, let alone one proficient to undertake all the other aspects of mediation in such a complex conflict. Many society leaders, whether from the traditional leaderships or from the civilian contingent, have been ready to come forward and play this mediation role. But these positions come with high risk to those involved. In one case in Homs, one of the mediators was shot shortly after he arranged a meeting between FSA leaderships and army and security officials from the government. In the recent negotiations in Qaboun in which a Syrian woman from a sect seen as being supportive of the government acted as mediator, she was kidnapped during the process, only to be released later on. Similarly, the doctor who mediated the negotiations in Homs in March 2014 was arrested by the security forces. Most recently two mediators in Damascus were assassinated.

During the period of UNSMIS, civilian personnel from the mission did successfully undertake the role of independent mediator, as was reported to the authors by some of the interviewees in Homs who were present in the meetings between members of UNSMIS and fighters and opposition activists in old Homs. During the operation of the evacuation of the civilians in Homs (Section 4.1.5), the office of the joint UN–Arab League special envoy to Syria was a key mediator role in the talks.

6.5 The absence of independent monitors

In nearly all the cases observed, one important factor to account for the failure of a deal to be negotiated or maintained was the absence of any independent and authorized party who could observe the ceasefire or truce.

With no UN Security Council-mandated observers or peacekeepers, the joint UN–Arab League special envoy to Syria was not able to assist home-grown peace deals or negotiations in Syria, many of which are taking place in areas where the level of violence is not so intense.

6.6 The need for demilitarization and integration with a credible political process

Related to the problem of Section 6.1 is the fact that local deals will be inherently fragile where there is no trust that ceasefires or truces will be honoured in good

faith, where they are perceived or are actually used in order to gain military advantage either in the locale or elsewhere in Syria, and where the agreements are reneged upon by parties who see the balance of power changing.

Most importantly, the deals must be integrated with a political process. Without such integration, they will be regarded simply as defeats or as selling out, by whichever side of the conflict.

A key part of this political process must be a clear plan for demilitarization, which must have three aspects: the removal of heavy weapons from key built up areas and an end to the indiscriminate use of force; demobilization of opposition groups and effective guarantees for their safety; and demobilization of NDF and government-associated militias.

In some cases, like in al-Waar in Homs, the rebels were at some stages ready to withdraw from the area to the countryside when the government offered this option to them. However, the main reason that stopped them from doing so was the lack of any safe area to go to where their safety could be monitored. In some areas, for example Nabek, rebel fighters who were forced to leave were all killed.

In some cases, the absence of a safe place that can accept and assist the fighters who withdraw is the reason that violence spreads into other areas, with immense humanitarian consequences. When the government evicts fighters from an area, or when they are asked to leave by the civilians if a deal is achieved with the government, these fighters often go to another area where violence soon start or intensifies. For example, the Waar area in Homs was safe until the middle of last year, when fighters from other areas in Homs and the surrounding countryside started to seek refuge there. Soon after that the violence spread in the area, and it is now under blockade. Had there been any safe place where these fighters could go peacefully the spread of violence in Syria could have been better controlled.

The same thing happened in the eastern countryside of Hama, where FSA fighters who had to leave villages in which deals were achieved with government forces moved into other villages, whereupon, before long, violence dramatically escalated. Another example comes from the evacuation of the fighters in Homs in April 2014, where, as a result of the deal, the fighters were allowed to move to the northern countryside of Homs that is under opposition control. Immediately, some of them started organizing new brigades, and others even joined some of the extreme fighting groups.

6.7   Pro-government paramilitary forces

Government paramilitary forces are not the only armed groups that can be accused of spoiling and preventing peace deals, but they are among the most disruptive to the peace process of all the armed groups operating in Syria. Examples of such efforts are described in a Carter Center report[23]. The NDF repeatedly violated the process of evacuating civilians in Homs and tried to prevent humanitarian aid from entering the besieged area despite that the government gave its approval to these operations.

Often the reason why these groups are so intent on spoiling any deal have to do with the war economy, since they benefit from imposing levies on goods that enter the areas

under siege. In some of the cases observed, such as in the villages in the al-Hosen area, deals were reached between government and opposition forces, yet the pro-government forces in the area worked actively to obstruct the deal, to the extent that they engaged in direct clashes with government forces.

They also reportedly tried to revoke the ceasefire in Mouadamieh, engaging in clashes with local rebels after it began, and blocking aid convoys from entering the town.

6.8 Fighters from outside the area

It is something of a rule of thumb that the further away the fighting is from the area in which the fighters originate, the more difficult it is to achieve a deal. This applies to Syrian, Arab and foreign fighters alike. A strong connection to the community is a key factor in the ability to understand the needs of this community, to communicate with its members and to be willing to build peace in it.

7 Chemical weapons mission access vs humanitarian aid access

The success of the chemical weapons missions has been widely reported and commended by the international community, and in some areas that the mission has visited, the need to provide access to such a mission precipitated a local ceasefire (e.g., a ceasefire was agreed in Kafarzita in the countryside of Hama in May 2014 to give access to the chemical weapons mission visiting the town). This shows that, when genuine political will exists, concrete humanitarian actions can be achieved. The international community has invested a genuine effort in supporting the chemical weapons disarmament mission, and consequently the mission progressed steadily according to its scheduled plans without hindrance.

This can lead us to conclude that the international community is yet to unite and determinedly pursue the goal of ensuring humanitarian access in different localities in Syria. The success of chemical weapons mission shows that the international community is capable of creating the necessary access for international monitors and facilitating ceasefires if it demonstrates sufficient will to do so.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

There is a growing momentum for bottom-up agreements and peace deals in Syria. Many locally initiated attempts to make peace in Syria are being conducted by people across the country every day. Local peace deals, if properly supported and observed, could be the best hope for alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people – by reducing levels of violence, providing safe havens within Syria, and offering access to humanitarian assistance.

While they can prove problematic in some areas, and have been co-opted as part of the government's starvation and surrender policy or used as a military tactic by other forces, local agreements have often delivered tangible improvements on the ground that the top level talks singularly failed to do. Moreover, no top level agreement is likely to succeed without the engagement and commitment of local actors in the process. For these

reasons, rather than dismissing local agreements, they must be considered an essential element of a larger inclusive solution to the conflict in Syria. The most intractable obstacles for home-grown peace deals, beside the lack of political will at the top Syrian and the international levels, are the vested interventions of regional actors and the growing war economy. Other obstacles include the increasingly fractured and complex nature of the armed actors on both sides, both of which hold a variety of motivations for prolonging the fighting. The absence of a third party which can facilitate and monitor the local agreement is also a reason why many attempts for building peace on the ground in Syria have failed or have been very slow.

In order to capitalize on what existing momentum there is, the authors present the following recommendations.

I – For members of the International Community, and particularly regional governments involved in and/or affected by the conflict

1. Neither the bottom-up approach to peace nor the top-down one is likely to deliver significant results on its own. A new combined model is needed, one that unifies both these approaches to form one that strengthens and supports the role of local civil society, and ensures it is integrated into the top level negotiations process. Significant progress in reaching peace in Syria can only happen if the local aspect is considered in the context of the regional and international one.

2. Local ceasefire agreements need to be part of a larger comprehensive peace plan which ensures that the pursuit of a deal on the local level is not just a military tactic to continue the fight in another area. Local ceasefires and agreements should be an essential part of any solution – they are the only mechanism that takes into consideration local actors and the particular roots of the conflict in different areas.

3. Outside Syria, there should be a greater focus on achieving agreements among the international and regional parties before attempting to foster any significant progress among Syrian parties engaged in top-level talks. Meaningful stability inside Syria can only be achieved when an agreement among external parties is reached. There must be clear agreements and commitments among the international and regional parties to support peace and de-escalate the conflict. In particular, the flow of arms from outside states must be halted. All parties should honour agreements not to capitalize on ceasefires to rearm military units while the ceasefire holds. The international community should use its influence with armed groups and military units to prevent their arms, ammunition or other military supplies from being delivered during a ceasefire.

4. Inside Syria, the international community should upscale its presence and engagement on all levels. This should include:
   - international mediators that can support and advise local civil mediators and help to facilitate local deals;
   - international monitors in areas where violence is not intense and where local peace deals are reached, and peacekeepers in violent areas, with a Chapter VI (UN Charter) mandate;

- humanitarian and relief agencies, the presence and engagement of which has proved to be an incentive for truces;
- consideration of Syrian-composed, civil society-based mediation teams and monitoring forces, formed with the participation of all religious and ethnic groups, which could facilitate, observe and assist with the implementation of ceasefires, aid delivery and other humanitarian tasks;
- assistance in facilitating the demobilization of fighters, their reintegration into civilian life and protection from other armed actors, as part of a broader political process and the cessation of armed violence.

5. It is essential for sustainable peace that Syria's war economy is undermined. By tracing the revenue sources of the various warring parties and their associated networks, it ought to be possible to identify levers to weaken the capacity, the will and the effects of violent actors. The role of the general sanctions on Syria in accelerating war economy should be considered.

6. Priority should be given to engagement with local leaderships inside Syria, whether military, civil or traditional, since they are far more able to mobilize their constituents and understand their needs than leadership outside the country. While communicating with one, presumably unified, exiled leadership can be more convenient, it is far less effective.

7. Civil society must be engaged and empowered. Among all the players in Syria, civil society is the one that has the ability to communicate and liaise with all other actors inside and outside Syria in order to reach peace. Engaging with and enabling civil society is key to success in reaching ceasefires, delivering humanitarian aid and providing basic services. Their engagement in any agreements leads to the inclusion of the actual needs of the civilians in the area and to a more fair and sustainable framework for peace. By civil society we mean civil organizations, traditional leaderships, and on occasion, local business.

II – For the parties to the conflict, they must:

1. Engage in ceasefire and truce negotiations in good faith in the interests of Syrian civilians, and also as confidence and trust building measures which could lay groundwork for future political solution of the conflict.

2. Refrain from targeting or harassing civil society actors engaged in mediation, brokering, or monitoring of ceasefires and truces.

3. Strictly adhere to agreed terms of negotiated truces, and ensure affiliated militias and groups respect decisions of local ceasefire committees.

4. Recommit to the principles of the Geneva Communiqué, particularly in respect to working to build a more inclusive and representative peace process.

5. Allow safe, reliable access to UN-mandated monitors.

6. Immediately end the use of siege and starvation as tactics of war.

7. Fully respect the rights of civilians and fighters who have evacuated or demobilised as a result of ceasefire and truces and who are therefore *hors de combat* in accordance with international humanitarian law.

8. Ensure safe, reliable access to humanitarian and health workers at all times.

Appendix

9 Testimony of the representative of the civilians in besieged Homs

A quoted text from an interview[24] conducted in Arabic (translated by the authors) on 18 February 2014 with 'Souria Ash-Shaab' TV channel of Sheikh Abu Harith al-Khalidi, the person chosen to be the representative of civilians and wounded in besieged Homs, and the one who led the negotiations with the government:

Interviewer: *Who do you think is responsible (besides the regime) inside or outside for what is happening in Homs now? We hear about many heroic battles every day, still the situation in Homs keeps getting worse, if we want to put that down in simple words ... who is responsible for where Homs has reached now?*

Sheikh Abu Harith al-Khalidi: I would summarize in two words. The primarily responsible party for what is happening to the besieged Homs is the donors; donors are responsible for what is happening in besieged Homs, for they have politicized the revolution. They have politicized the revolution either with their ideologies or their intellectual or factious affiliation. They recruited people inside to serve their own agendas, in other words, they have emptied the revolution of its real value, emptied the revolution of its content.

The main responsibility for what is happening in besieged Homs and the betrayal of besieged Homs are the donors. Donors disrupt effective military operations, then they themselves give the order and support for battles that do not even exist…

We are staying inside, but it is them responsible (the donors), not the youth who came out of besieged Homs. Young people who came out of besieged Homs have been there for two years of which they have been under the bombing and fire of this criminal unjust regime and they have spent at least a year suffering from starvation. Many of them suffered harsh humanitarian and medical cases such as diseases, amputation and quadriplegia. You could have heard them crying night and day, hopelessly waiting for a relief that was not coming. However, those donors and their agents who served their agendas made besieged Homs the hen that lays golden eggs. They launched virtual military operations [battles which exist mainly in pictures and videos on social media pages but have hardly any presence on the ground], like 'Qademoun' military operation or 'Al Jasad Al Wahed', which all turned out to be operations of embezzlement practiced in the name of helping young people in besieged Homs… I Swear to God we do not see or read them but as fraud and stealing activities practiced by Con-artists.

Interviewer: *If we may talk about the role of the Syrian National Coalition, the United Nations coordinated with you without referring to the Syrian coalition. What is the role of the coalition currently, and what has it been during the past two years, during the siege of Homs? And what is the role of the coalition in this truce?*

Sheikh Abu Harith al-Khalidi: The Syrian coalition has done nothing for us.

Even when we called them and told them, 'we are coordinating with UN', 'Homs is on the edge', 'Homs is breathing its last breath', all we got was: 'our hearts beat with you', 'We are praying for you', 'be patient, be patient'. They told me to hold on for ten days. How can I endure ten days and I do not have food for tomorrow? I do not have milk for one crying baby and his mother cannot breastfeed him because she is starving.

They went to Geneva and talked about humanitarian access to Homs and other besieged areas, but unfortunately they were lost in details.

They never took a decisive stand to prevent the regime from this act, but on the contrary, they had a positive attitude towards the displacement of people, like we are happy for the departure of people!

We never wanted to get out. We were hoping the coalition could have a principled attitude that would put the United Nations and the other friendly countries into making pressure on the regime to open the passages and humanitarian crossings to allow civilians in and out of besieged Homs safely, while leaving it optional to the people whether to get out or stay in without compromising on the entry or non-entry of food baskets.

The coalition has not been of any use to us, or any other entity, or the military council that is associated with them, nor anybody. They benefit Homs with nothing whatsoever.

10 Homs agreement mediated by the UN

Summary of the besieged areas in Homs agreement mediated by the UN. Syrian government version, addressed to the UN representative in Syria. The Arabic original (Figure 8) agreement was provided by member of the negotiation team.

Drawing on our discussions since Friday 24 January 2014 and the subsequent meeting and talks regarding the situation in the old neighbourhoods of the city of Homs, and based on what we reach throughout the last few days, we confirm the following:

1. Our readiness to provide you with the required support to contribute with us in vacating the civilians (children, women, elderly people) as soon as possible. In this regard, we define women as female in general; as for children, they are all whom do not exceed 15 years in age; the elderly are those who are 60 [at later negotiations the maximum age bracket was reduced to 55] or above.
2. The first step should be evacuating the first batch of the civilians to the closest convenient place in the Old City with the participation and attendance of the United Nation representatives and the International Committee of the Red Cross, preferably. In addition to that, teamwork from our side consists of social and medical commission, representatives of the Syrian Red Crescent and civil police, with female police agents in attendance.
The evacuated civilians will then be medically assisted and checked, accordingly with your collaboration. After that they will be given the choice to move into the refugee centre that was already equipped in a suitable place

close to the Old City in the presence and knowledge of your representatives. This way their situation will be similar to other Syrians in the displaced centres where they can be supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the organizations and the Red Crescent.

Alternatively they can go to any place of their own choice, including the Waar neighbourhood in the city of Homs.

3. A meeting will be held directly after the evacuation of the first batch previously mentioned to assess the basic needs that will be sent to the Old City according to the estimations of the Relief Sub-commission, your teamwork and the Syrian Red Crescent. We confirm that this procedure will take place under collaborative supervision of Homs province authorities, United Nation representatives and the Red Cross, and they will be protected in all the areas that are under the control of the Arab Syrian Army and the specialized authorities.

4. Arms holders could benefit from this humanitarian procedure to vacate the Old City neighbourhoods, and they will be dealt with according to the governmental procedures to resolve their situation with the specialized authorities benefiting from the presidential pardons and the issued instructions in this regard.

5. With regards to the wounded and people with special needs, they will be transported to the hospitals collaboratively with the Red Crescent and they will be provided with all required care. They can also benefit from the rights mentioned in the previous paragraph to resolve their situations according to the agreed basis.

6. It is understandable and agreed that the execution of the previous paragraphs '4-5' will take place after receiving lists of the names of people who are willing to benefit from this procedure. They should be formerly informed of the ways that their (legal) situation will be resolved. They will have the choice then to vacate the Old City or stay there.

سعادة السفير يعقوب الحلو المحترم

الممثل المقيم للأمم المتحدة في سورية

تحية طيبة وبعد :

استناداً لمناقشاتنا منذ يوم الجمعة ٢٠١٤/١/٢٤ وما تلاها من لقاءات ومناقشات وخاصة لجهة معالجة أوضاع الأحياء القديمة في مدينة حمص وعطفاً على ما تم التوصل إليه خلال الأيام الماضية نؤكد لكم ما يلي :

١- استعدادنا لتأمين الدعم اللازم لكم في المساهمة معنا في خروج المدنيين من " أطفال - نساء - كبار السن " في اقرب وقت ممكن .

علماً أننا نرى أن النساء هن الإناث بشكل عام ، والأطفال هم الذين لم يتجاوزوا العمر ١٥ سنة وكل من دون ذلك في السن ، أما كبار السن هم كل من بلغ العمر ٦٠ سنة ومن هم فوق ذلك .

٢- اتفقنا على تنفيذ الخطوة الأولى وهي خروج الدفعة الأولى من المدنيين واستقبالهم في اقرب مكان مناسب من المدينة القديمة بمشاركة وحضور ممثلي الأمم المتحدة وحبذا أيضا ممثلي لجنة الصليب الأحمر الدولي وذلك بوجود فريق العمل من طرفنا والمؤلف من لجنة اجتماعية طبية ومندوبي الهلال الأحمر السوري والشرطة المدنية وفيها بعض عناصر الشرطة النسائية.

بعد استقبال المتوقع خروجهم وتأمين احتياجاتهم الاغاثية والطبية حيث تتم عملية التدقيق والتفتيش أصولا بالتعاون معكم .

وبعد ذلك يمكن للمدنيين الذين خرجوا وتم تقديم كل ما يلزم لهم أن ينتقلوا إلى مركز الضيافة والإيواء الذي تم تجهيزه في مكان مناسب وقريب من المدينة القديمة بحضور ومعرفة مندوبيكم في حمص وبذلك يكون وضعهم مثل أوضاع جميع السوريين الموجودين في مراكز الإيواء بإشراف الشؤون الاجتماعية والجمعيات والهلال الأحمر .

Figure 7: The first page of the agreement regarding the evacuation of civilians in Homs, which the Syrian government sent to civilian representatives in Homs via the UN mediators[25]

قال تعالى:

و الله غالبٌ على أمره ولكن أكثر النَّاس لا يعلمون

صدق الله العظيم

الاتفاق الميداني
بين الجيش الحر ووحدات الحماية الشعبية في مدينة رأس العين

ايماناً بوحدة سوريا الحرة أرضا وشعبا، والتزاماً بمبادئ العيش المشترك والتعايش السلمي بين كل مكونات الشعب السوري، و رفضا لكل التوجهات الطائفية والعرقية والشوفينية والإقصائية والإنكارية، لتوحيد كل طاقات الشعب في معركة الكرامة ضد النظام التسلطي الدموي البغيض، لبناء سوريا حرة تتمتع فيها كل مكوناتها بحقوقها المشروعة، تحت شعار سوريا لكل السوريين، لتكون الوطن المعبر بصدق عن تاريخ وأصالة وحضارة ... اجتمعت الأطراف المجتمعة في رأس العين على إزالة كل الخلافات والصراعات التي نشبت وتأثيراتها وفق الأسس التالية:

١- إعادة انتشار القوات العسكرية وإزالة المظاهر المسلحة من المدينة كلياً.
٢- إنشاء لجنة متابعة ومراقبة مؤقتة مكونة من الطرفين بالتوافق مهمتها متابعة ومراقبة تنفيذ بنود الإتفاق.
٣- إنشاء مجلس محلي مدني يمثل مكونات المدينة بالتوافق، يقوم بإدارة كل شؤون المدينة.
٤- المعبر الحدودي يدار من قبل مجلس المدينة.
٥- المجلس المحلي يمثل الهيئة السيادية في المدينة ويمنع تدخل القوى العسكرية في عمله مطلقاً.
٦- إقامة حواجز مشتركة بين وحدات الحماية الشعبية والجيش الحر على مداخل مدينة رأس العين، ريثما تسلم إلى مجلس المدينة عندما يكون قادرا على ذلك.
٧- تسهيل وتأمين عبور الأشخاص والمواد والقوات من كل طرف عبر حواجز الطرف الآخر.
٨- التعاون والتنسيق بين الجيش الحر ووحدات الحماية الشعبية لتحرير المدن غير المحررة التي لا تزال تحت سيطرة النظام .
٩- المدن والبلدات التي لا وجود للنظام فيها ، الدرباسية عامودا وتل تمر والمعبدة وديريك هي مدن محررة، ويعلن عنها ببيان مشترك من الطرفين.
١٠- وقف الحملات الإعلامية العدائية بين الطرفين.
١١- تعتبر المقدمة بندا أساسيا من بنود الاتفاق.

التوقيع

وحدات الحماية الشعبية

الجيش الحر

Figure 8: The full Arabic original text of the agreement between the Free Syrian Army and the People's Defence Units (YPG) in Ras al-Ain[26]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

لا إله إلا الله
الله رسول محمد

بيــــان

إلى من يهمّه الأمر:

يرجى العلم بأنّ جنود وعساكر الدولة الطاغوتية المرتدة قاموا بأسر واحتجاز الموظفين العاملين في المحطة الحرارية بريف حلب الشرقي، وذلك ردّاً على قيام مجاهدي الدولة الإسلامية بقنص اثنين منهم حيث قُتل أحدهم وجرح الآخر، فقام على آثرها الجيش المُحاصَر المتواجد هناك باحتجاز وأسر الموظفين العاملين داخل المحطّة وتعريضهم للمضايقات والأذى بالسب والشتم والتهديد مصرحاً بأنّه لن يفكّ أسرهم إلا بإدخال الطبيب على الجندي المُصاب، وحرصاً على سلامة الموظفين المسلمين سمحنا بدخول الطبيب وتشخيص حالة المرتد المصاب، وبعد معاينة الحالة وتشخيصها ظهر بأنه بحاجة إلى مشفى لمعالجته، لكنهم رفضوا إطلاق سراح الموظفين العّزل الذين لا علاقة لهم بالقتال بين الطرفين.

وعليه قمنا بعد دعوة لجنة (مبادرة أهالي حلب) برئاسة المهندس "طريف عطورة" ومن خلاله بالتفاوض مع الجيش المُحاصَر، ومع محافظ حلب، وتم الاتفاق على الآتي:

───────────── { 1 } ─────────────

Figure 9a: Page 1 of the deal between ISIS and 'Aleppo's people initiative' civil society group to give access to civil society members to enter the power station in Aleppo

١ . السماح للفلاحين والمزارعين الذين لهم أراضي محيطة بالمحطة من حصاد أراضيهم.

٢. تعهد الجيش المرتد بأن لا يمسّ الموظفين بسوء، وأن يطلق سراحهم، ولا يتعرض لهم في المستقبل بأي سوء أو أذى أو مضايقات، وتخلّي الدولة الإسلامية مسؤوليتها من أي نقض لهذا العهد أمام الله ثم أمام الناس.

٣. يتم إخراج المرتد الجريح من المكان بناءً على مبادرة الأهالي مع سلاحه الشخصي، ويسلم سلاحه الشخصي للدولة الإسلامية، ولا يتم التعرض له طيلة فترة نقله من أماكن نفوذ وسيطرة الدولة الإسلامية إلى أماكن ونفوذ الدولة الطاغوتية، وتتكفّل الدولة الإسلامية بالتزام هذه الشروط ما لم يخلّ المرتدون بهذا الاتفاق.

ويعطى المزارعون فترة ٤٨ ساعة لحصاد المحاصيل الزراعية يُوقف فيها إطلاق النار بين الطرفين، وفي حال خرق وقف إطلاق النار يكون الاتفاق منقوضاً، ولنا بعد ذلك اتّخاذ ما نراه مناسباً للتعامل مع الجنود المُحاصَرين... والله على ما نقول وكيل.

<div align="center">

الدَّولة الإسلاميّة في العراق والشّام

ولاية حلب

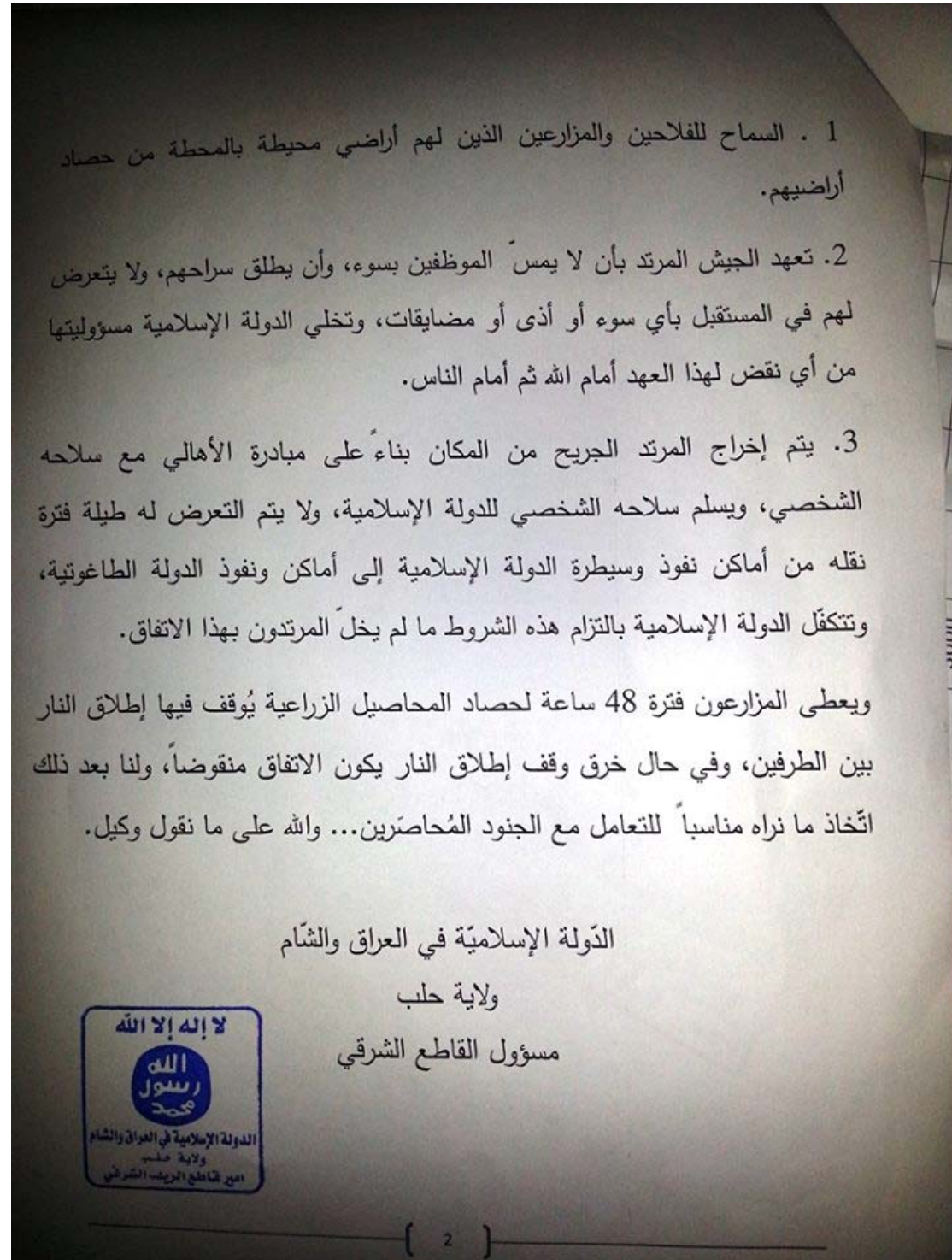مسؤول القاطع الشرقي

</div>

{ ٢ }

Figure 9b: Page 2 of the deal between ISIS and 'Aleppo's people initiative' civil society group to give access to civil society members to enter the power station in Aleppo[27]

Notes

[1] Albeit under the threat of military force by the United States.

[2] OCHA (2014) 'Humanitarian Bulletin: Syrian Arab Republic', Issue 45, March 2014.

[3] B. Walter (2010) 'Conflict Relapse and the Sustainability of Post-Conflict Peace', World Development Report 2011 – Background Paper, 2.

[4] Syrian Centre for Policy Research (2013) 'Socioeconomic Roots and Impact of the Syrian Crisis', http://scpr-syria.org/en/S34/'Socioeconomic-Roots-and-Impact-of-the-Syrian-Crisis'-2013 (last accessed 9 July 2014).

[5] M. Jamal Barout (2011) 'The past decade in Syria: the dialectic of stagnation and reform', http://english.dohainstitute.org/release/178025b6-8cd7-4eb7-b544-fb991f80d840 (last accessed 23 September 2014).

[6] OMRAN for Strategic Studies (2014) 'Cease Fire Agreements in Syria and their Effectiveness' http://www.omrandirasat.org/node/86 (last accessed 3 October 2014).

[7] For more information see http://binaa-syria.com/B/en/content/about-building-syrian-state-current-and-its-vision-futur-state-syria

[8] See paragraph 5 of UN Security Council Resolution 2042, http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2042 (last accessed 9 July 2014).

[9] www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unsmis

[10] UN News Service (2012) 'Syria: UN observers blocked from entering town of al-Haffeh, fired at upon departure', UNHCR, 12 June 2012, http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fdafa182.html (last accessed 9 July 2014).

[11] http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unsmis/background.shtml

[12] Ibid.

[13] UN announcement for the appointment for joint UN and AL representative to Syria: http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/activities_by_region/middle_east/syria

[14] Reports suggest that this suspicion may be well-founded, with indications that some fighters were subsequently conscripted into the Syrian army. Others, and opposition activists, were detained and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

[15] As reported by an interviewee who attended the meeting

[16] Syrian Civil Coalition (2014) 'Humanitarian call from inside the besieged Homs', 6 April 2014, http://bit.ly/1v8craZ

[17] Widely reported as a surrender, the authors found mixed views on the evacuation of fighters from Homs. While there are undoubtedly those who did consider this a surrender, some of the fighters clearly did not. The NDF, meanwhile, who wanted to conquer the old city and kill or arrest all the fighters there, are reportedly discontent and bitter about the deal, since it allowed the opposition fighters to keep their arms and leave.

[18] Ibrahim Hamidi (2014) *Al Hayatt*, 7 June, http://alhayat.com/Articles/2837471

[19] Carter Center (2013) 'Regional Conflict Report: Ras al-Ain', 18 February, http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/Ras-al-AinReport.pdf

[20] As reported by an interviewee who attended the meeting.

[21] https://www.facebook.com/Ahali.Initiative

[22] OCHA (2014) 'Humanitarian Bulletin: Syrian Arab Republic', Issue 43, February 2014.

[23] Carter Center (2013) 'Pro-Government Paramilitary Forces', 5 November, http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/Pro-GovernmentParamilitaryForces.pdf

[24] The interview is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOP2jZs8D-w

[25] Provided by a member of the negotiation team in the old city of Homs.

[26] Provided by a member of the negotiation team in Ras al-Ain.

[27] Provided by a member of the negotiation team in the thermal electric station agreement.