

Syria's Salafi-Islamist 'Revolution'

Despite all the video of atrocities by foreign fanatics in Syria, western sources continue to claim that the 'Syrian Revolution' is mainly secular. This idea is promoted by the US, which has tried to separate the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra from the 'Free Syrian Army' (FSA).

Yet 29 FSA groups responded: 'We are all al-Nusra', identifying strongly with the fanatics. A review of the major armed groups in Syria shows that ALL major groups appear to be Islamist, a vital common factor against a Syrian government committed to maintaining a secular and multicultural nation.

There are differences between groups. But the 'Military Revolutionary Council' in Aleppo is Islamist, as is the Military Police. All the largest groups (Tahweed, Farook, Liwaa al-Ummah, Khalid bin Walid, Mohamed Sultan Fateh, Ahrar al Sham) are Salafi or Muslim Brotherhood backed. The most prominent army defectors are also Islamists, committed to a religious state: such as Brigadier General Zaki al Louli, Lt Mohammed Tlas and Colonel Abduljabbar Oqaidi.

Following are some details of FSA's Islamist and Jihadi credentials. 'Jihadi' here means those engaged in armed struggle to overthrow the Syrian secular system and establish a Salafi-Islamic state.



The 'Sunni Card', played by the US and the Saudis, refers not to Sunnis but to Sunni fundamentalists - Salafis and Salafi-Takfiris - who will attack other Muslims. Claiming to represent 'real muslims', they help divide the region.



Islamist and Salafi-Jihadi armed groups in Syria

Group	Overview, Ideology	History
Jabhat Al-Nusra	5000+ Wahabi-jihadis, led by Abu Mohammed al-Julani, mostly foreign, Al Qaeda in Iraq link (Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi)	Funded by Saudi Arabia, respects no national boundaries. Sheikh Abu Ahmed, Hasaka commander: 'We want sharia ... it's the right path for all humanity' – 'most effective' and disciplined fighters - Obama admin has tried to separate al-Nusra from others, labelling it a terrorist group
Liwa al-Tawheed Brigade	Islamists: said to be the largest in Aleppo Province (R) (SU)	Abu Ahmed, unit leader admits support for Assad in Aleppo is very high, about '70 percent' (R); praises al Nusra as 'the cleanest' (B); Tahweed temporarily captured a military base near Aleppo (SU)
Ahrar al-Sham (Free Men)	Islamist and Salafist - want an Islamic regime with Shari'a (Q)	'Nationwide' group, 'adherents of the conservative Salafi ... Islam' (A), 'not part of the FSA' (A) 25 rebel units
Mohamed Sultan Fateh brigade	Islamist brigade	Headed by army defector, Brigadier-General Zaki Ali Louli (R); along with Tahweed, the MSFB has formed an Islamist military police in Aleppo
Suqoor al-Shahbaa Brigade (Falcons)	Jihadi group - 500 men, led by army defector and Islamist Lt Mohammed Tlas, who has declared loyalty to the western-backed 'National Coalition' (R)	Abu Sadek says 'The Aleppans here, all of them, are loyal to the criminal Bashar, they inform on us' (A); they have burnt family photos in homes because they showed 'uncovered women' (A), praise al Nusra and wear Pakistani Salafi headdress (A); yet Abu Marwan, defector pilot admits 'the FSA 'brand' has mostly been tarnished' (B)

R=Reuters 8/1/13; B=Bayoumy 11/1/13; A=Abouzeid 14/11/12; SU=Surk 16/12/2012

Nov 2012: Ahrar Al-Sham, Liwa Al-Tawheed and Al-Nusra (L to R) issue a joint statement: "We have unanimously agreed to urgently establish an Islamic state."



Group	Overview, Ideology	History
Farouk Brigade FSA (Homs)	Salafi– jihadi - aims for an Islamic state, ‘one of Syria’s largest’ (B); initially led by Lt. Abdul Razaq Tlas.	Blew up Homs Hospital because it was treating soldiers, slogan: death is ‘the penalty to unbelievers’ (H); Farouk has had armed conflict with al-Nusra (B); US advisers pretend Farouk is ‘secular’ (ICG); in fact ‘most of the al-Farouq Battalion’s members are Salafis, armed and funded by Saudi Arabia (M).
Khalid bin Walid brigade FSA (Homs)	Muslim Brotherhood; led by Abdul Rahman Sheikh Ali	US advisers pretend KBW is ‘secular’ (ICG); in fact ‘Khalid Ibn al-Walid Battalion is loyal to and supported by the Muslim Brotherhood’ (M); believed responsible for public beheading carried out by a child (HRI)
Liwaa al-Ummah (Banner of the Nation)	6,000 Islamists (Q) – led by Mahdi al-Harati (IE)	Syrian and Libyan – claims inclusiveness but with ‘an Islamic frame of reference’ (Q); Libyan members underline the jihadi character of the group (F). Financed by Kuwaiti sheikhs (IE)
Sukur al-Sham (Falcons of the Levant)	Salafi-Jihadi	Syrian but includes other Arab, French and Belgian fighters – Tactics include suicide and car bombings (Q)
Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya (The Islamic State)	Salafi-Jihadis - small group that has included British	Believed to be involved in kidnapping western journalists, controls Bab el-Hawa crossing from Turkey (NW Syria) (Q)



Q= Quilliam Foundation 2013; A=Abouzeid 14/11/12 ; AA=Abdul-Ahad 28/12/12; F=Fitzgerald 2012; IE=In Extremis 2012; H=Homs Hospital; B=Bayoumy 11/1/13; ICG=International Crisis Group 12/10/2012; M=Mortada 13/6/12; HRI=Human Rights Investigations 10/12/2012.

Left – Two Kuwaiti sheikhs who support Liwaa al-Ummah, with leader Mahdi el-Harati (centre) (IE)

Right - Liwaa al-Ummah logo



Group	Overview, Ideology	History
Ansar al-Sunnah	Salafi-jihadi – includes Iraqis and Kurds (Q)	Salafi jihadists, formed in Iraq in 2003, with links to eastern Syria; they execute civilians (SRW)
Liwaa al-Islam	Salafi-jihadi - 'sees its struggle as a jihad'	Follows 'strictly the rules of Shari'a, the Quran and the Sunnah' - openly sectarian against Alawis (Q)
Jundollah unit	Jihadis - Includes Turkish, Libyan and Azeri Islamists, Aleppo	In Karm al-Jabal district of Aleppo (B); Azeri fighter says Bashar was 'worse than Stalin' (B)
Military Revolutionary Council, Aleppo	Jihadi - FSA coordination body, headed by Colonel Abduljabbar Oquaidi	Oquaidi defends al Nusra – 'anyone fighting the regime is a mujahid and a revolutionary and we kiss their forehead' (B)
Revolutionary Command Council, Damascus Suburbs	Voice for Islamist groups	This group runs significant media (including Facebook), does not use Islamist language, but their videos show fighters using Islamist slogans

Q= Quilliam Foundation report 2013; B=Yara Bayoumy, Reuters 11/1/13; SRW=Syria Rebel Watch 31/8/2012,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOaprrydSE4>



Left – FSA head in Aleppo, Islamist and army defector Col. Abdul Jabbar Oquaidi
 Right - FSA Salafi executes army cadet prisoners



Group	Overview, Ideology	History
Abu Ali Sulaibi group	Muslim Brotherhood group, Saif al-Dawla district of Aleppo	'You are all informers. I know you cross back to government side and report on us' Abu Ali Sulaibi says. 'I know they hate us. They blame us for the destruction. Maybe they are right .' (AA)
Raqqa Tal Abyad FSA battalions	Appears Salafi-led	Groups in this northern area appear to be Islamist, including some army defectors, by Al Jazeera reports commander appears Salafi
al Lairmoon FSA	Islamist	Active FSA brigade, their video has FSA flag with black Shahada
Suyoof al Shahba unit, FSA	Islamists ('Swords of revenge')	Filmed using anti-aircraft weapons
Grandsons of Hamza brigade	Muslim Brotherhood families	Leader Abu Ghaybar (A)
Abu Bakr battalion	Islamist, with foreigners	Online video (Syriatube) shows them using anti-aircraft cannon at Kuweyres airport
Liwa al-Fateh	Islamist, but denounced by other Islamists as corrupt (A)	Part of the FSA but 'not as religiously conservative'; Suyoof al Shahba fighters call them corrupt (A)

H=Homs Hospital; B=Bayoumy 11/1/13; ICG=International Crisis Group 12/10/2012; HRI=Human Rights Investigations 10/12/2012.



FSA group get child to behead an unarmed prisoner, believed to be under the directions of the Khalid Ibn al-Walid Battalion of the FSA (HRI).

Armed foreigners in Syria, some of the main groups

Late 2012: after a Syrian government report, the UN confirms that foreign jihadis come to Syria from at least 29 countries, and that minorities were arming themselves against the foreigners (Pawlak and Nebehay 2012)

Group	Overview, Ideology	History
Libyan Islamic Fighting Group	Al Qaeda linked Salafis – thousands – leader Abdel Hakim Belhadj	Leader Belhadj was said to have had command of 23,000 Libyan LIFG fighters in Aleppo over June-July 2012 (L), another report says he led a group of 700 fighters in Aleppo (LFP) – facilitated by the US embassy in Libya and paid by Saudis and Qatar
Pakistani Taliban	Salafi-Jihadis – thousands - linked to Saudi and Qatari secret police	‘Around 1,000 members of the Pakistani Taliban have been killed in clashes near the Syrian capital city of Damascus’ (JNN) in a major FSA operation – Pakistanis organised by the Saudis and Qatar (JNN)
Lebanese Salafis	Jihadis from Tripoli (LS)	Paid by Saudi-Lebanese billionaire Saad Hariri’s ‘Future Movement’ (YD)
Saudi prisoners	1,300 Saudi Arabia death row prisoners, pardoned to fight in Syria – some had been jailed for jihadi type crimes (La)	Saudi documents showed a group of 1,334 convicts including “105 Yemeni, 21 Palestinian, 212 Saudi, 96 Sudanese, 254 Syrian, 82 Jordanian, 68 Somali, 32 Afghan, 194 Egyptian, 203 Pakistani, 23 Iraqi and 44 Kuwaiti citizens.” (La) Probably not the only group
Iraqis, Yemenis, Afghans and others	Salafi-Jihadis	Funded by Saudis.
British and Australians	‘Dozens’ of British jihadis and ‘over 100’ Australian jihadis	BBC reports ‘dozens’ of British jihadis in Syria (Mc); Australian Foreign Minister Carr reports ‘over 100’ Australians involved in the violence in Syria (PTVa)

La=Lehman 2012a; Lb=Lehman 2012b; LFP=Libyan Free Press; LS=Lebanese Salafis, 1/12/12; PTyVa=Press TV 4/1/13; Mc= McClenaghan; JNN=Jafaria News Network; YD=Yusuf Diab 12/12/2012

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