

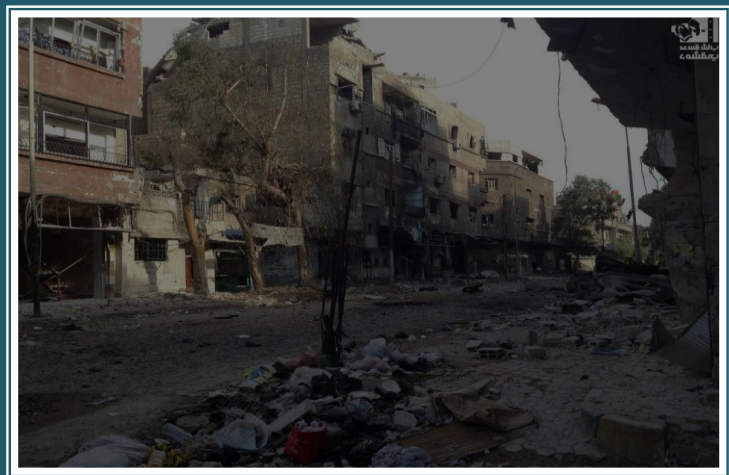
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# Palestinian Refugees of Syria in Light of the Syrian Revolution

*A detailed political and field study on the violations against  
Palestinian refugees in Syria between 2011-2012*

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## Introduction

This study attempts to draw attention to the conditions of Palestinian refugees in the Syrian uprising. It focuses on the composition of the refugees, their history and their political position, following the Syrian uprising. The plight of Palestinian refugees in Syria, during the unfolding civil war, provides a clear glimpse of the many challenges faced by Palestinian refugees and it is hoped this study will help bring this to our attention.

Much of the findings are based on field surveys and personal examinations by me. In addition, news reports about the conditions of Palestinian refugees in the Syrian camps are included as a primary source of information. However a conscious effort was made to filter out information that has inundated news channels and social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, primarily because the Syria regime used the same channels of information for the porpoise of propaganda.

The numbers and statistics of Palestinian casualties in this report are based on the most recent published data. This study tries to give an overall analysis of the unfolding events and does not focus on any single event in detail. We focused on the most significant events within the Syrian uprising in Daraa, Latakia, Al Yarmouk Camp and Damascus; all of which are considered as key areas in sketching the conditions of Palestinians in Syria. The study also briefly looked at the other small camps inhabited by Palestinian refugees. The study ends with a number of conclusions and recommendations.

**Tarek Homoud**

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## ➤ Historical Preface

The Syrian-Palestinian relation, in comparison to others, is quite exceptional. The relationship between the two peoples is inextricably linked historically, socially, economically and of course geographically. Historically, due to geographical proximity, they shared many similarities culturally. This proximity encouraged families from the two countries to intermarry and live between the two countries. Following the Sykes-Picot agreement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C families were divided across borders. However, traditions, and social values between north of Palestine and South of Syria remained similar. Such similarities, naturally, lead many Palestinian refugees in 1948 from the north of Palestine to move to Syria and Lebanon. Around 55% of the current Palestinian refugees in Syria came from Safad city and its surrounding areas, while 27% of the refugees descend from Tabariya and its neighboring areas<sup>1</sup>.

Following their expulsion, Palestinian refugees in Syria, were distributed into a different locations in the first Five years of their exile. Bedouin tribes that arrived from the plains of Tabariya, Safad and Al Nazareth lived in the Golan Heights, which contained vast pastures and was suitable for Bedouin life style of livestock herding.

As for Damascus and its countryside it was a safe haven for Palestinian refugees who came from Safd, particularly for those who had industrial training, craftsmanship and earned their living through trade. In the north of Syria, the coastal city on the Mediterranean, Latakia, was a refuge for the people of Haifa and Tantura cities, whose lifestyle was based around fishing.

Homs and Aleppo refugee camps were established without any specific socio economic background in mind. They were populated by Palestinian refugees who fled to Lebanon and where taken by force in trains and displaced to northern parts (Homs and Aleppo) of Syria. It is possible that the mechanism of transferring those refugees in this manner was linked to resettlement plans made by successive military governments in Syria in return for political support for these regimes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Palestinian refugees from the early begging were supporting the Syrian people through their political position and relief/aid tasks they carried out.

<sup>2</sup> For more information look at Al Salm Al Dani, Ridwan Zyada, First Chapter

## ➤ **Palestinian Refugee Categories in Syria<sup>3</sup>**

Palestinian Refugees in Syria are distributed into Thirteen separate camps. They are located in the northern and south western parts of the country in Aleppo, Damascus and Daraa. United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) recognize Ten camps <sup>4</sup>while the other Four camps are recognized by Syrian government. UNRWA doesn't recognize these camps as they were established without its consent<sup>5</sup> and supervision<sup>6</sup>. There are a number of Palestinian residential compounds, not classified as camps, estimated at Twenty, located mostly in Damascus and its countryside.

Palestinian Refugees in Syria are classified into many categories that are based around legal factors, history and economic conditions. The five categories as follows:

### **1- The 1948 Category:**

This category represents the vast majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria comprising of 85 % of the refugees. It enjoys good legal conditions as it falls under law number 260 issued in 1956 which equates them with the Syrian citizens in terms of rights and duties, except running for elections or voting<sup>7</sup>. Males in this category aged 19 or over were obliged to carry out mandatory military service for a year and a half<sup>8</sup>. A decade earlier this was two and a half years. The law gives opportunity for this group of refugees to employment and access to all public sector jobs, even at high management positions.

### **2- The 1956 Category:**

The populations of this category are residents of Akrad Al Baqqara and Al Ghannama towns who were expelled in 1956 towards Syria. They were estimated to be around

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<sup>3</sup> Cited from a module about Palestinian refugees in Syria, Palestine Academy for Refugee Studies, Tariq Homoud

<sup>4</sup> UNRWA recognizes 9 Palestinian camps, it deals with Daraa and (Aideen and Tawri' camps) as one camp only. Daraa was established in 1950 while the second in 1967. Both of the camps are merged together in terms of buildings and can't be discriminated

<sup>5</sup> Al Yarmouk camp is the biggest in the Palestinian Diaspora after Al Baq'a camp in Jordan then Al Raml camp in Latakia and then Handrat refugee camp in Aleppo.

<sup>6</sup> There is no actual difference between recognized and unrecognized camps by UNRWA except in hygiene services. Unlike the unrecognized camps, UNRWA provides services in the recognized camps.

<sup>7</sup> Law number 260 considered Palestinians living in Syria as Syrians in terms of work, employment and military service in the same time, they should keep their citizenship.

<sup>8</sup> The compulsory Military service was performed by Palestinians within the Syrian Army until 1964. Then, the Palestinians started to do it within the Palestine Liberation Army. Syrian Army however, had the right to keep Palestinians within its divisions if they are suitable for them. The Palestine Liberation Army is subject to the laws and regulations which organize the work of the Syrian army. The branches of this army are attached to the by Syrian military according to geographical distribution.

2000, documented by General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GCPAR)<sup>9</sup>. This category enjoys the same rights as the first category, apart from compulsory military service. They are also not allowed to work in the public sectors unless they have short-term contracts.

### **3- The 1967 Category:**

This category arrived in Syria following the 1967 war with Israel. Most of them came from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They hold Egyptian and Jordanian travel documents and are treated as foreigners before Syrian law.<sup>10</sup>

### **4- The 1970-1971 Category:**

This category has a very complicated situation as they don't have any legal ID documents. They migrated to Syria following the incidents of Black September in 1970-1971, between the Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Most of them hold expired Jordanian passports as they were not able to renew them due to security reasons. This category receives educational and basic health services from UNRWA. Yet, they face a lot of difficulties in the labor market as a result of their legal conditions. They also can't travel out of Syria.

### **5- The 2006 Category**

Include those who were forced to leave Iraq following the 2003 War. The Syrian government allowed waves of Palestinian refugees from Iraq to come to Syria in 2006. Some entered legally and others illegally. Their numbers are estimated at 4000 to 5000, who are registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This category suffers from a very complicated legal and security conditions. They don't have the basic civil rights and they are similar to the 1970 category in terms of legal status.

## **➤ Numbers and Statistics**

Official numbers and statistics of Palestinian refugees in Syria issued by UNRWA and the General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GCPAR)<sup>11</sup>, are considered as a

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<sup>9</sup> General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees is the official body responsible for Palestinian refugees from the documentation and recording side. It is attached to Syrian Social Services and Labor Ministry. The commission supervises the managing the refugee camps in terms of services as well as overseeing the work of UNRWA

<sup>10</sup> There are some individual cases that managed to obtain the merits of the second category after registering with General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees through personal relationships.



representative of their minimum numbers. Bearing in mind that UNRAWA statistics are different to those issued by GCPAR. There are some refugees who are registered at the GCPAR but not the UNRWA due to the fact that UNRWA had its own terms and definition<sup>12</sup>. GCPAR is an official governmental body that is responsible for documenting Palestinian Refugees on the land of the Arab Syrian Republic. It adopts a similar mechanism to that of UNRWA but with fewer restrictions. GCPAR included records of the refugees who came from Akrad Al Baqara and Al Ghanma in 1956. It also included individual refugee families from the year 1967. Furthermore, it works with those who held valid or expired Jordanian passports in accordance with the Syrian law towards Arab refugees. This was the same with those who held Egyptian travel documents.

The most recent statistics released by UNRWA early in 2012, showed that Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA totaled at 487,000<sup>13</sup> refugees. Meanwhile, the statistics of GCPAR records showed that there are 494,819 refugees registered at 18<sup>th</sup> August 2012<sup>14</sup>. It is estimated that from the number of Palestinian refugees who came to Syria in 1948, numbering around 90,000, 75%<sup>15</sup> of them are residing in Damascus and its countryside. Meanwhile the rest of the refugees are distributed in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Daraa and Latakia. Around half of the refugees live in the major refugee camps, while the rest are distributed in the Syrian residential neighborhoods and other cities.

Relatively, Palestinian refugees in Syria enjoy the best legal status compared with their Palestinian refugee counterparts in other places. This is reflected in the fact that great numbers of Palestinian refugees live in Syrian neighborhoods where they share common values and traditions with the local inhabitants. It became very hard to differentiate Palestinian neighborhoods from those Syrians due to the social relations and the integrations between them for the past 60 years.

The services provided to Palestinian refugees in the camps made it hard to differentiate them from other homes in the neighborhood. The camps are in better conditions compared to other Palestinian refugee camps in other Arab countries. However, these camps are still overpopulated and Syrians were also amongst its dwellings. It was noticeable from the recent statistics that the number of Palestinian professionals who worked in the different sectors in Syria had increased. In 2005, the number of Palestinian academics in

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<sup>11</sup> General Commission for Palestinian Arab was established In 1949 according to law 450 and was attached to Interior ministry then Social and Labor Affairs Ministry. Since 1963, it was run by a Palestinian nominated by Baath party leadership.

<sup>12</sup> UNRWA's definition of Palestinian refugees "Those in Palestine refugees are people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict.", source: [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org)

<sup>13</sup> UNRWA's Official Website: <http://www.unrwa.org/atemplate.php?id=100>

<sup>14</sup> General Commission for Palestinian Arab Refugees' Website: <http://www.gapar.net/ar/statistics.html>

<sup>15</sup> Public Poll by PRC

Damascus University reached 100, some of them professors or lecturers<sup>16</sup> and many Palestinians occupied high ranking posts<sup>17</sup> in the state. The trade, economic and industrial contribution of Palestinian refugees in Syria is strongly present within the Syrian market.<sup>18</sup>

## ➤ **Palestinian Refugees in Light of Syrian Revolution**

### **1- What is the revolution**

Before we feature in details the state of Palestinian refugees in Syria, we ought to briefly highlight the Syrian civil war. This will support our understanding of the conditions of Palestinian refugees and their position regarding the future of the country.

Arab revolutions began in Tunisia, extended to Libya and Yemen. The common element in all these uprisings, as agreed by observers, is the internal social conditions. Meanwhile, external elements like the extent of the support of these countries to Arabic causes were a contributing element. This was clear in the chanting and slogans expressed by protestors within these revolutions. It was apparent; the Palestinian cause was not a fundamental theme for Arab protestors as their main concern was local and social concerns. It is instructive, that, some of these repressive regimes shaped its internal policies under the pretext of protecting national security and the central cause of the Arab nation, which is Palestine. Such attitude was more of a slogan for the people but things started to change with the rise of communication and social media, where the new generations were able to distinguish between slogans and the real policies of the regimes.

In Syria, Daraa city was the stronghold of the revolution. A number of children were arrested and brutally tortured for writing juvenile slogans on their school walls. The over reaction from the government towards those children was a provocation for the tribal community of Daraa, which later poured on to street. The conduct of the government against what happened in Daraa aggravated other social classes across the Syrian society from the north to the south where a popular demonstration started to appear. The uprising of the people was the consequence of repressive, internal conditions over the past Four decades.

To conclude, the Syrian revolution is a social and local uprising that was triggered due to domestic causes only. Political and external elements, like the strong relation between the regime and the Palestinian cause, has delayed the uprising in Syria. The curtailing of

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<sup>16</sup> Tarek Homoud (2005), Palestinian Competencies in Syria, Field Study, Palestinian Refugees Civil rights, Damascus

<sup>17</sup> Major General, Mahmod Azam and General Hazem Al Khadra headed consecutively the leadership of the Syrian Air Force through the 1980es and 1990es.

<sup>18</sup> Like the company of Awad Amora for Aluminum, Asia Clothing which are famous products in Syrian market.

freedoms and political repression within Syria is more than other Arab countries. Syria can be considered as the most repressive regime of all. Syrian regime has miserably failed to capitalize from its political and national accomplishments (in terms of supporting Palestine) in dealing with the street uprising within the country. State security services and apparatuses were unsuccessful in solving the crisis peacefully, before it snowballed into a civil war. For example the demands of Daraa people which were sent to Syrian president, Bashar Al Assad, where simple and could have been granted.<sup>19</sup>

## 2- Palestinian involvement in Syrian Revolution

### – Daraa City

Syrian revolution was triggered on the 18th of March 2011, through a protest in Al Imari mosque, after Friday prayers to condemn the arrest of 11 children from Daraa town. Worshipers in the mosque included a number of Palestinians, as Palestinians live close to the areas so they often come to the mosque. As events unfolded, security forces responded to the protests brutally which left many dead and wounded. Protests then spread and thousands of protesters burned Syrian security premises on Monday the 21st of March 2011. One official building, Al Qasr Al Adli (Justice Palace)<sup>20</sup> which is 200 meters away from Palestinian refugee camp of Daraa was burned. Therefore, security forces authorized to eliminate protests in the area and accused Palestinians in the camps of participating in the events that erupted on Monday. This was confirmed later in a news report published in Al Watn Newspaper<sup>21</sup>, which is close to the Syrian regime. It had published a detailed report on Daraa events which accused Palestinians of causing what it described as a riot. It claimed Syrian people; residents of Daraa who participated in the protests were a few<sup>22</sup>. The paper also stated that meetings between Syrian security services and Palestinian leaders from the different factions met with Hisham Bakhtyar,<sup>23</sup> Head of the Syrian National Security Office, who rebuked and held them responsible<sup>24</sup>. Despite these accusations, the paper failed to present any name of those accused of igniting the protest. On that day, the number of

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<sup>19</sup> Look at Al Watn Syrian Newspaper, issue 21st March 2011, Damascus

<sup>20</sup> The camp is located 300 meters from Daraa down town

<sup>21</sup> Al Watn Daily Newspaper is the only private newspaper in Syria funded by Rami Makhlif. Its positions close the state funded newspaper while tackling mainstream issues.

<sup>22</sup> Look at Al Watn Syrian Newspaper, issue 22nd March 2011, Damascus.

<sup>23</sup> Hisham Bakhtyar, Head of the Syrian National Security Office, was killed later in a bombing that targeted Syrian security leadership.

<sup>24</sup> From a witness statement of member of a Palestinian delegation that visited the Syrian security leadership.

Syrian protesters exceeded 15 thousand<sup>25</sup> whereas the total number of Palestinian refugees in Daraa camp doesn't reach 10 thousands including women, children and old people.<sup>26</sup>

The accusation that Palestinian refugees<sup>27</sup> were behind these events raised alarms for Palestinians. They realized they were the most vulnerable group and open to abuse. Meanwhile state security services paid no attention to their status or position. The state security services wanted the Palestinians to be the scapegoat for the crisis. Desperate attempts were made to place the blame on Palestinian refugees for the Daraa protests, but the cycle of protests had spread after few days. The new spot was Al Raml neighborhood in the southern part of Latakia city. Unluckily, this area was adjacent to Al Raml refugee camp, populated by Palestinian refugees. Protestors attacked a number of official buildings.

Accusing Palestinians became a routine. In a press conference on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, Bothaina Shaban, Media and Political consultant for President Bashar al Assad held Palestinian groups in Al Raml refugee camp responsible for the commercial buildings' sabotage. She also accused them of initiating what she described as "conspiracy project". This was the first statement from a high ranking Syrian official, which came early, and indicated clearly that Palestinians are behind the protests. Shaban's statements pushed some figures from Palestinian leadership in Damascus to contact her to condemn her statements and express the fact that Palestinians in Al Raml camp are neutral.

The statements of Shaban against Palestinians can be read as follows:

- 1- It was an attempt from the security services in Syria to temporarily diffuse the crisis by slamming protests on external elements until they can eliminate them.
- 2- Exploiting the issue of the radical elements of Fatah al Islam that appeared in Lebanon in 2007, as those members are originally Palestinian refugees from Syria, from Daraa city<sup>28</sup> in particular. Thus, an accusation of Palestinians would seem logical in the view of the international community. Syrian security services promoted this propaganda in Daraa city.
- 3- Such a scenario was used to cover up the failure of security services to suppress protests, despite their violent attempts to do so at al Imari mosque in Daraa early in the revolution. This accusation from security services was an attempt to cover their failure in front of the political leadership.

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<sup>25</sup> Researcher Tarek Homoud witnessed the protestors who came from Al Bald and Mahta areas. They were mostly Syrians.

<sup>26</sup> Look at UNRWA's website, Palestinian refugee numbers in Daraa camp, <http://www.unrwa.org/atemplate.php?id=405>

<sup>27</sup> Syrian people know that local Syrian media can't broadcast any detailed report about the side which was behind the event unless the regime approves it.

<sup>28</sup> Three members of Radical Fatah Al Islam group leaders are from Daraa including spokesperson Abu Salim Taha.

The claim that Palestinian refugees in Daraa were behind the protests quickly vanished as protests swept across other Syrian cities and villages not inhabited by Palestinians. This was the main episode regarding the involvement of Palestinians.

The other episode of Palestinians' involvement appeared when the Syrian army invaded Daraa governorate, end of April 2011, following a tight siege especially on Daraa town, which was the stronghold of the revolution. The siege affected all aspects of the town and caused food, drinking water and power shortages<sup>29</sup>. As a result, some Palestinian refugees volunteered for relief work from Daraa camp. They established a humanitarian passage to transfer food in addition to providing medical assistance to wounded Syrians, although there is a neighborhood and a valley that separates them. This made it very difficult for Palestinian refugees to carry out their tasks. They also promptly established a modest field hospital inside the Daraa camp to save the wounded. A number of the volunteers became well known in the city like, Mousafa al Tafouri, who was executed at the hands of the Syrian army after he was arrested in Daraa town. Tafouri was killed due to his humanitarian role of smuggling food supplies into the besieged town to help people as well as helping other affected areas.

The Syrian Army carried out its military operations and launched various checkpoints across the neighborhoods and on the outskirts. However did not storm the Daraa refugee camp. It carried out some arrests against youths at the end of the siege. It can be read that the Syrian army refrained from invading the Daraa Palestinian refugee camp in an attempt to neutralize it. This was a step to avoid opening another front of confrontation, especially after the failure of security services in promoting the propaganda that Palestinians were responsible for protests in the city. The regimes behavior only created distrust amongst Palestinians and other Syrians.

The work of Daraa field hospital grew in becoming the biggest field hospital in Syria until it was destroyed on May 2012.

### **3- The Militarization of Daraa Refugee Camp**

Armed groups were formed in Daraa camp amid great controversy between the rebels. There were two different views, the first group preferred launching attacks to defend and support the Syrian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who arrived from the Golan area, adjacent to the refugee camp. While the other group proposed to remain in the camps and carry out their humanitarian role only, like treating the wounded and providing supplies. But with the escalated military campaign by the regime against the camp; the first group

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<sup>29</sup> Water supplies in Daraa town were cut by the regime though the source which is the water springs in Almazarib town, 11km far from Daraa. One third of Almazarib town's populations are Palestinians. The populations stormed into the Water station in the town, kicked regime forces and reopened Water supplies to Daraa.

became more prominent and a military group was formed. The military brigade formed, was named “Brigade of Martyr Tahir al Syasna” it was named after its first victim.

Prior to forming the military group, it can be stated that the regime avoided attacking the field hospital for two reasons:

- A- The regime would look extremely aggressive if they bombarded a refugee camp. Especially as they always presented themselves as supporters of the Palestinian cause.
- B- The desire to neutralize the refugees in the camp from participating in military activities as they had military experience from Lebanon.

Yet, the formation of a military brigade inside the camp was the straw that broke the camel's back. The camp was bombed for two and half months resulting in the fleeing of most of its residents. Later, in July 2012, it was stormed by the regime after the bombing, which nearly destroyed the entire camp.

The important event that took place, following the bombing of Daraa camp, was negotiations between the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Syrian regime. A representative of the regime met with three members of the FSA in the presence of a neutral person ( Hamas movement representative)<sup>30</sup>. The regime did not send an official representative but delegated a loyal individual. An agreement was reached and signed by all parties which concluded that FSA leaves the camp in return for a commitment from the regime that its forces will not invade or bomb it. It also stated that the camp should be fully neutral. As a matter of good intention, FSA pulled out from the camp hours before the regime gave its response to the deal. Later, the bombing of the camp stopped for 24 hours<sup>31</sup> before it resumed again but the camp was emptied of its people and armed groups.<sup>32</sup>

It can be said that the regime, through negotiations, wanted to know the scale of loss of the FSA, which was the destruction of the biggest and most important field hospital in the Palestinian camp. The regime seemed to succeed as FSA pulled out the camp even before the regime approved the signed agreement.

The constant bombardment of the camp caused mass exodus and resulted in a huge humanitarian crisis on many levels for its population. A number of Palestinian refugees were killed in the fighting which caused tension in the camp and pushed some

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<sup>30</sup> Regime asked for negotiations but did not send an envoy. Alternatively, they sent a loyal Palestinian person affiliated to Popular Front to Liberate Palestine –General Command headed by Ahmed Jibril

<sup>31</sup> The regime’s envoy was not mandated to agree or refuse anything; rather his job was to transfer the demands for the regime.

<sup>32</sup> Negotiations’ details were told by a witness who attended negotiations’ rounds.

Palestinian refugees, who were soldiers in the Palestine Liberation Army, to defect and join the FSA.<sup>33</sup>

The most significant defection was by Colonel Qahtan Tabasha, in Battalion 422 in Al Qadisya Brigade, which is part of Palestine Liberation Army (PLA. He is a Palestinian refugee from Daraa camp, defected and joined the leadership of Military Council (Military Council is another Syrian armed group similar to FSA but with smaller scale) in Daraa where he undertook the task of defending the camp in association with the groups of FSA. He then moved to Al Mazaraib<sup>34</sup> Military operation centre. Later he was killed by the regime forces in Zayzon border areas. He was on a military mission to support FSA group which was trying to secure exit for Syrian refugee families into Jordan.<sup>35</sup>

#### **4- Latakia**

With the outbreak of protests and military confrontations in Daraa and Latakia cities, Palestinians were affected as they were officially accused of initiating these events. It led to confrontations in Al Sakntory locality, Al Raml neighborhood in the southern part of Latakia city. The regime then destroyed Al Raml refugee camp in August 2011 and carried out its largest military operation in Daraa against the camp. Syrian army sent warning to the residents of the camp to leave. Thousands of its inhabitants left immediately in different directions. The sport city in Latakia city opened its doors to the IDPs. The bombing that took place targeted the Syrian neighborhood and not as what was described officially which was that the Syrian' armed boats shelled Palestinian camp. Only small parts of the camps were shelled when fighters entered it. This resulted in three persons being killed in the camp. The destruction was limited and some houses were exposed to live bullets.<sup>36</sup>

#### **5- Al Yarmouk Camp and Damascus Explosion**

On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2012, people in the camps woke up to the shocking news that 16 recruits of the PLA were kidnapped on their way home from their training centre, where they were in a compulsory military service. Their corps where found later

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<sup>33</sup> Palestinian youths perform military service in Palestine Liberation Army, they did not participate in any field operation along with the regime.

<sup>34</sup> Two thirds of its populations are Palestinians. Its plains were used by the Free Syrian army to station there, when they pulled out from Daraa after they ran out of ammunition.

<sup>35</sup> He died along with Qasim Al rimahi, a Palestinian who was leading a group of FSA in Almazarib town that was fighting the army for two days.

<sup>36</sup> Personal Investigation in the camp following bombing, August 2011, by researcher Tarek Homoud.

weeks after their kidnapping. The perpetrators of the crime are still not known. Both sides have accused the other for the incident<sup>37</sup>. Prior to highlighting the event we shall focus on the following:

- Kidnappers contacted the official Palestinian including the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Army for two weeks. However, they did not ask for any demand and no negotiations took place between the two parties. It seems the connection was mediated by a third party.
- 14 out of the 16 corps were found, a burned body of a bus driver was found two days after the killing of the recruits in Rikarda area bombing (An opposition armed group called, Hawks of Sham<sup>38</sup> claimed the responsibility of Rikarda attack) where a checkpoint of the Syrian regime is located.
- The attack took place after confrontation between the Palestinian refugee camp of Al Nairab and Al Nairab village in Aleppo which is populated by Syrians. The confrontation happened following a quarrel between two school children which then developed into a violent conflict. It claimed the lives of three Palestinians and two Syrians. The Syrian village accused the Palestinian camp of supporting the regime without any basis. A reconciliation committee was formed between the two sides on the basis of supporting the Syrian revolution and the agreement from the victims' families.

These points pose a number of questions on the causes of these events especially as it happened in a governorate that was removed from any protests or fighting.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2012, protests from the mosques in Al Yarmouk camp took to the streets after Friday prayer, in condemnation of the massacre that targeted Aleppo. All the protests came to an end peacefully except one in Palestine Street. Syrian army opened fire against protestors leaving Four Palestinians dead; this caused some opposition fighters to intervene resulting in confrontations that lasted a day. The number of casualties increased and the Al Yarmouk camp became at the centre of events. Armed clashes spread to other quarters and Palestinian refugee camps like Al Hajir Al Aswad, Al Tadmon, and during the following day in Al Qadm. This expanding scale of the conflict displaced many Syrian families living close to the camp, where they took refuge in al Yarmouk camp.

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<sup>37</sup> Leadership of Palestine Liberation Army as well as the regime accused armed gangs of carrying out the massacre, look at Gulf Newspaper, 12/07/2012, about the statement of leadership of Staff of the army. Also see the statements of Major General Tariq Al Khadra for Sana News Agency on the 13/07/2012. The opposition accused the regime of doing the massacre as the soldiers defected then arrested, look at Al Sharq Newspaper on 12/07/2012, also look at the Syrian National council statement on the incident, 12/07/2012.

<sup>38</sup> Hawks of the Sham is armed groups linked to FSA and is active in Idlib area. The group adopted the military operation in this Youtube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsQNkjc5F4>



Jihad Maqdsi, the spokesperson of Syrian Foreign Affairs Ministry said on his Facebook page<sup>39</sup> that some guests don't respect the rules of their host and so they should leave for the countries of the Arab spring. Since then, Al Yarmouk camp has continued giving humanitarian support to thousands of Syrian families who took refuge and protection inside the camp. The camp is providing financial support to residents who were killed, wounded or arrested. The number of those killed from the refugees in the camp is 140<sup>40</sup>, three quarters were in the last three months. The camp is exposed to snipers that target its main roads and junctions that lead to Syrian quarters like Al Hajir Al Aswad, Al Tadmon, Yald and Bibela.

## ➤ **Palestinian Political Stance on Syria Crisis**

### **1- Stages of Palestinian Positions**

The political stance of Palestinians falls into three stages:

#### **– Stage 1**

The first stage was total “silence” that lasted for two weeks from the beginning of the revolution in March 2013, until Hamas movement issued its first press release on the 2nd of April 2012. All other factions within the PLO<sup>41</sup> and allies' factions<sup>42</sup> remained silent.

#### **– Stage 2**

The second stage is best described as a “neutral stage”. It extended from the end of the first stage until Hamas left Syria. Press statements of Palestinian factions<sup>43</sup> sounded neutral. However, individual press statements of some factions adopted the point view of the regime, especially Popular Front to Liberate (PFLP) Palestine –General Command<sup>44</sup>. Also, an

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<sup>39</sup> This text was posted on Jihad Maqdsi's Facebook page, “It is very hard when you honor your guests generously yet some of them don't respect the rules of your house (accommodation). If they can't show this respect they should leave to oasis Democracy in Arab spring countries”

<sup>40</sup> Unpublished statistics prepared by the Action Group for Palestinians in Syria.

<sup>41</sup> It includes Fatah, Popular Front, the Democratic Front, Al Nidal (Struggle) Front, Fida Movement, and Palestine Liberation Front and People party.

<sup>42</sup> Islamic Movement of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front to Liberate Palestine –General Command, Al Nidal (Struggle), Al Saiqa (Thunderbolt), Fatah Al Intifada and the communist party.

<sup>43</sup> Look at the condemnation statements of PLO's factions and the allies' factions within that period, especially the statements of Aleppo and Damascus bombings.

<sup>44</sup> Look at the interviews of Anwar Raja, head of media department of the PFLP- General Command with Al Dunia TV and Syrian state TV published on YouTube.

official from Popular Front to Liberate Palestine (PFLP) in Diaspora, Maher Al Tahir, made statements on the Syrian TV in which he supported the position of the regime.

During this stage, one could make a distinction between the different Palestinian factions. The official press statements of the factions seemed to be very neutral especially the factions affiliated with the PLO in Syria. This is due to the fact that these factions are loyal to the regime and have strong ties with it. They also share similar views with the regime with regards to the peace process between Palestine and Israel.

The factions that were loyal to the regime adopted a position closer to the regime. This was very clear in their statement when the Syrian army bombarded Latakia in August 2011. They condemned a press release issued by UNRWA who expressed its concern that some Palestinian refugees were killed or wounded in Latakia due to a military operation.

– **Stage 3:**

This is where the positions of the different factions became clearer. The Islamic movement ( Hamas) which is the biggest in Syria pulled out of the country and refused to cooperate with the regime. Their withdrawal from Syria meant, pushing away the political cover the regime enjoyed as defenders of Palestinian goals. This step by Hamas was a turning point and divided the allies' factions. As Hamas left Syria, which was neutral, the leadership of the coalition factions was dominated by Popular Front to Liberate Palestine – General Command along with Al Saiqa (Thunderbolt) faction.

**Later, as Hamas left the coalition the following shifts began to take shape:**

- A- There was a tendency towards great bias to the regime, especially amongst those groups that were dominated by persons loyal to the regime like PFLP – General Command.
- B- The press statements of the coalition remained neutral while the disapproval of the general popular position of Palestinians was clear about the regimes use of extreme violence in Daraa and other parts of Syria. The factions were not able to justify the practiced of the regime against Palestinians.

The PLO in Syria remained neutral, although some of their officials criticized the regime. Their neutrality is mainly because the PLO and the Syrian regime do not have good relations. Following the attacks on Daraa, PFLP Command formed security committees. These groups were formed despite the refusal of most of the coalition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> From a speech for Ahmed Jibril, Forward Magazine, August 2012-11-10

Meetings of the groups continued with attendance of all members and factions of the PLO. The only absentee was Hamas<sup>46</sup>. Hamas was also absent from the meeting when the security committees were formed.

Generally, the political position that was adopted by Palestinian was to remain neutral, recognizing the rights of Syrians to shape their political future. This was clear in the press statements issued by most of them. The position of Palestinians was, was however, controversial for some of the revolutionary groups who's short term goals were very different to the Palestinian position. They refused any political position that did not clearly and loudly adopt their point of view.

## **2- Palestinian Divisions over the Syrian Revolution**

The Palestinian political position is not limited to Palestinian factions only. There has been an increasing disconnection between Palestinian factions and their popular base, the Palestinian mainstream in the camps. This was very clear in the funeral of those who were killed in the Naksa day in 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2011<sup>47</sup> by Israeli army. During that funeral, Palestinians chanted against Palestinian factions and the Syrian regime held them responsible for the massacre carried out by Israel on the Naksa day. Mourners in the funeral besieged Al Khalisa compound where head of PFLP – General Command and Dr. Talal Naji was inside<sup>48</sup>. The building was burned and 5 people were killed including two bodyguards affiliated to the PFLP – General Command. One of them is Abu Al Abd Nasir<sup>49</sup> head of Syria branch. Those in the building including the officials of PFLP – General Command were rescued from imminent death by Syrian security.

This incident created a tense atmosphere in Al Yarmouk refugee camp, (the capital of the Palestinian Diaspora) between the two parties. The first (popular masses in the camp) supported the Syrian revolution but its support was only notional. Meanwhile, the second party supported the Assad regime and is represented by PFLP – General Command. It was apparent that some independent groups in the camp started thinking about forming divisions to help the Syrian revolution. General Command standing by the regime formed security committees in the camps. However, the Palestinian divisions were not effective. The Syrian divisions carried out relief, media and political tasks in addition to organizing

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<sup>46</sup> This statement drew wide criticism from Palestinian factions which support the revolution despite the fact the language of the statement was moderate. Yet, it came at a time where Daraa and Al Yarmouk refugee camps were exposed to the heaviest bombing since the start of a revolution. Thus, Palestinian groups which support the revolution issued statements to condemn that statement.

<sup>47</sup> 24 people were killed by the Israeli army on the border on that day.

<sup>48</sup> Al Khalsa building is headquarter of PFLP – General Command in al Yarmouk camp.

<sup>49</sup> Abu Al Abed Nasir was killed by knives as a group arrested him while he tried to calm them down. He was stabbed 50 times. One of the building's guards was killed by burning alive in his corner.

protests. Meanwhile, the Palestinian divisions were focusing on the media, except for a few which organized protests to support the Syrian by documenting and broadcasting the uprising on the web.

It was a commonly accepted that the Palestinians, as they are a minority, should carry out humanitarian work. Some Palestinian groups focused on the relief and humanitarian tasks only because any targeting of camps by Syrian forces would prove catastrophic.<sup>50</sup> As thousands of Syrian families took refuge in Palestinian refugee camps it became extremely dense.

## **A- Fatah**

The presence of Fatah in Syria is very weak. This is due to a historical rivalry between the Syria President, Hafiz al Assad and Yasser Arafat which emerged during the civil war in Lebanon. This rivalry caused Fatah to adopt a neutral position. The movement participated in all events organized by the PLO factions in Syria. Obviously, the stance of PLO concerning the crisis represents Fatah movement. It is also worth stating that Fatah took their own independent neutral position and did not support the regime due to the sensitivity of Palestinian presence in Syria, as well as the Palestinian internal dispute. In general, Fatah was not excited about the Syrian revolution as it was with other Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Therefore, press statements issued by Fatah, especially those coming from its offices in Syria were neutral. This stance was most likely the only common position between Fatah and Hamas since the Palestinian division.

Fatah remained neutral even in the most bloody moments, when the massacre of Yarmouk took place on August 2012<sup>51</sup>. The press statements of Yasir Abed Rabo, <sup>52</sup> member of the Executive Committee of the PLO, were the only position in which Fatah/PA explicitly condemned the Syrian regime and held it responsible for Palestinian bloodshed in the camps<sup>53</sup>. This was in addition to the criticism of Fatah branches of Ahmed Jibril, in which it accused him of killing Palestinians<sup>54</sup>. The media of Fatah and PA refrained from attacking the Syrian regime or commenting on the events there.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This was an outcome of a dialogue via Skype with a group of Youths in Al Yarmouk Camp. There were different views but most of them agreed on supporting the revolution by Humanitarian efforts. While other field support can happen through Syrian revolutionary groups.

<sup>51</sup> Palestinian News Agency (Wafa), 3/08/2012, PA press statements about Al Yarmouk massacre and its demands to neutralize the camps.

<sup>52</sup> He is not affiliated to Fatah but the responsible for its media. He is known for being opposed to the Syrian regime since his defection from the Democratic Front to Liberate Palestine in Damascus in 1989.

<sup>53</sup> Reuters News Agency, 3/08/2012

<sup>54</sup> Maan News Agency, 4/08/2012, about the statements of PLO political Bureau which held Jibril responsible for arming and driving the camps in the conflict.

<sup>55</sup> Al Hayat Newspaper, London: Instructions have been made to official media outlets in Ramallah not to speak about Syria, 15/7/2012. Yet, PA denied the news, see Al Quds Al Arabi, London 16/07/2012

## B- Hamas

Hamas' position was the most complicated, critical and controversial of all. This is due to the assistance provided by the movement by providing shelter to Hamas leaders. The regime facilitated the political and media work and perhaps the military work of Hamas movement. The relation between the two sides developed and reached a peak in the past few years before the revolution. But despite these facts, the Hamas position towards Syrian revolution moved from silence, to neutrality to public condemnation of the regimes practices, until finally, the movement decided to leave its Syria headquarters. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2012, in Ankara, Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas Political Bureau, on board of the conference of Justice and Development Party, in Turkey stated clearly that the political position of Hamas, is to stand by the Syrian people. Observers considered this position as the straw that broke the camel's back between Hamas and the Syrian regime. Generally speaking, Hamas's neutrality concerning the Syrian revolution, for a considerably long time, contributed to the fact that other factions stood by the regime, especially those in the block headed by Hamas.

The position of Hamas and Fatah created a united Palestinian neutral political stance. However, unlike Fatah, Hamas movement was criticized by both sides in Syria. The Syrian regime considered Hamas position as a betrayal given the help and assistance it provided to the movement. The opposition believed Hamas was giving up on the principles of national liberation embraced by Hamas<sup>56</sup>. By looking at Hamas position we can say that the movement analyzed the unfolding events in two stages.

First, at the beginning of the revolution, the movement was convinced that a solution can be reached. Therefore, it proposed mediation by Khalid Mish'al between protesting groups in Daraa and Doma with the regime. Mish'al agreed to mediate but asked for guarantees that the regime would respond to protestors' demands. At that time, Al Assad cut the relation with Mish'al as he refused to issue a position against Sheikh Dr Yusuf Al Qaradawi<sup>57</sup>, Head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, who supported the Syrian revolution from the start. Due to this fact, the mediation attempt by Mish'al failed before it started<sup>58</sup>. Other attempts were made to solve the crisis, as a deal was reached between all resistance factions including those in Lebanon like Hezbollah and Amal movement<sup>59</sup>, but that also failed. The regime refused to give any promises to any party that it will respond to the people's demands.

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<sup>56</sup> This irony in the position appeared in the media outlets linked to both sides. Groups close to Hamas ideologically like Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and opposition leaders refused and criticized Hamas position. The regime also criticized what Hamas said and described the movement of being ingratitude.

<sup>57</sup> Al Sharq al Awsat Newspaper, London: Mish'al and Hamas a life journey, Mish'al and the Syrian crisis, 28/09/2011

<sup>58</sup> Al Safir Newspaper, Beirut: Hamas and Syria... reproach not break, Sami Klib, 17/12/2011

<sup>59</sup> Al Safir Newspaper, Beirut: Hamas delegation meets with Nasrallah over the Syrian crisis, Qasim Qasir, 2/08/2012

Their second position was the realization that it was going to be extremely difficult to find a political solution for the crisis and following that calculation it left Syria. This position reached a fork when Khalid Mish'al refused to meet Bashar Al Assad on 14<sup>th</sup> of Jan. 2012. The request for a meeting with Al Assad was sent through the head of Syrian Intelligence, Ali Mamlok. Later, Mish'al<sup>60</sup> had finally left Syria on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Jan. 2012.

**The refusal of Mish'al to meet al Assad can be argued as the following:**

- Hamas movement was certain that the regime doesn't have any solution to the crisis other than military repression; this was clear as military operations never stopped. A meeting with Bashar Al Assad would have been politically exploited by showing that there was indeed a conspiracy against.
- The refusal can be interpreted as an escalation from Hamas movement in protest against Syrian regime's practices against the Syrian people.

The belief of Hamas movement that there was no prospect for any solution was concluded by Mish'al in his speech in Turkey where he announced full support for the Syrian people and their revolution.

**C- Popular Front to Liberate Palestine –General Command**

Popular Front to Liberate Palestine –General Command is considered the closest Palestinian faction to the Syrian regime and its polices. It also relies on the regime more than any other faction including Al Sā'iqa (Thunderbolt) faction which is considered the armed wing of Al Ba'ath Socialist Party.

The position of PFLP–General Command was an important one despite the fact that the faction has a weak and symbolic presence in occupied Palestine; yet it has a stronger presence and organizational branches in the camps in Syria. The faction has considerable military experience which could affect the revolution in Syria. In the beginning of the uprising the faction held two positions. The first believed in the account of the Syrian regime which was clear from their media outlets<sup>61</sup> and their press releases. The second position a minor shift to a more neutral position as it sided with the general Palestinian position.

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<sup>60</sup> Al Jazeera Net, Amman: Mish'al avoided meeting Al Assad before he left Damascus, Mohamad al Najar, 19/02/2012: <http://www.aljazeera.net/mob/f6451603-4dff-4ca1-9c10-122741d17432/ab318b39-612f-4700-bb4d-6aefc374fc14>

<sup>61</sup> Al Quds Radio Station is widely heard in Syria. It is affiliated to the PFLP – General Command. It is the sole political outlet that is licensed in Syria beside the official media. The radio has adopted the position of the regime since the early events.

At the beginning of the revolution there were rumors that some members from PFLP–General Command were helping the Syrian security in suppressing protesters. These rumors spread due to the press statements by the group which was opposing the Syrian revolution. This belief was further supported as the group remained in high alert on the weekends, especially when its offices were attacked. Also, the premises and offices of the faction in Al Yarmouk camp were used by Syrian security to initiate its military operations.

PFLP – General Command felt the danger of their position after two incidents which caused them to make their position firm and clear. At first, it felt it was at risk when its offices were attacked in Al Yarmouk Camp on 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 where al Khalsa<sup>62</sup> offices were burned. The second incident was the killing of Palestinian Liberation Army recruits and the events that followed in Al Yarmouk camp. Those two incidents pushed the group to support the regime.

The attitude of PFLP–General Command towards the regime can be classified for two reasons. First they calculated that they will fall only if the Syrian regime falls. The second reason is the constant support of the regime to the PFLP–General Command. Also the faction is being financed by Iran and Hezbollah<sup>63</sup> as other groups stopped receiving finance from them long time ago.

These are the most important positions that represented the general Palestinian attitude towards the Syrian revolution. The rest of Palestinian factions not mentioned in this report held similar stances to the ones discussed here.

## ➤ **Palestinian Casualties**

### **A- Palestinian Casualties within the Syrian Crisis**

Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, Palestinians were killed along with Syrians. Until the 12th of October 2012, the number of documented Palestinian killed in the revolution is 511<sup>64</sup>. There are also many unknown numbers of undocumented victims due to security reasons concerning the safety of their families. Palestinian organizations have not documented the names of those killed and the figures used in this study are based on our own field reports. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2011, the first Palestinian was killed in Daraa while providing first aid to wounded Syrian in Daraa al Mahata town

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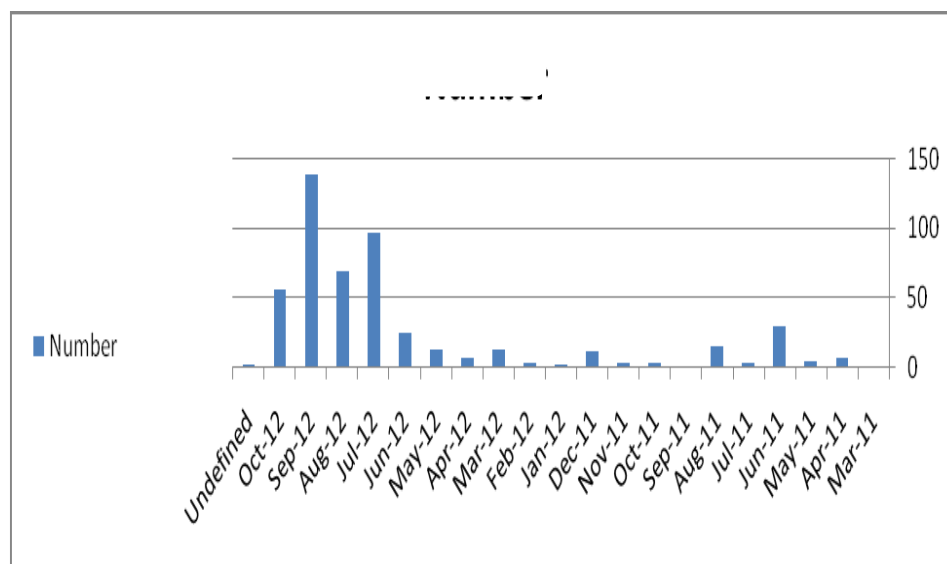
<sup>62</sup> Supra Notes

<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact that Islamic Jihad was under the same pressure in terms of financial support, yet its stance was not similar or close to the PFLP – General Command. This might be because of the weight that the movement has in Palestine.

<sup>64</sup> This includes the number of Palestinians killed on the borders in Golan Heights whose number is 27.

By looking at the general number of Palestinians killed, we notice the following:

- The number of documented Palestinians killed in the revolution is 511 which represent 1.38% of the total victims. This percentage exceeds the rate of Palestinian refugees in the camps which represents 1.2% of the total population.<sup>65</sup>
- The ratio of Palestinians across Syria in general is 2.1% out of the total Syrian population. There is also a similar ratio to the number of Palestinian victims compared to the Syrians.
- More than three-quarters of Palestinian were killed during the last five months, compared with 60% of the Syrian victims in the same period.

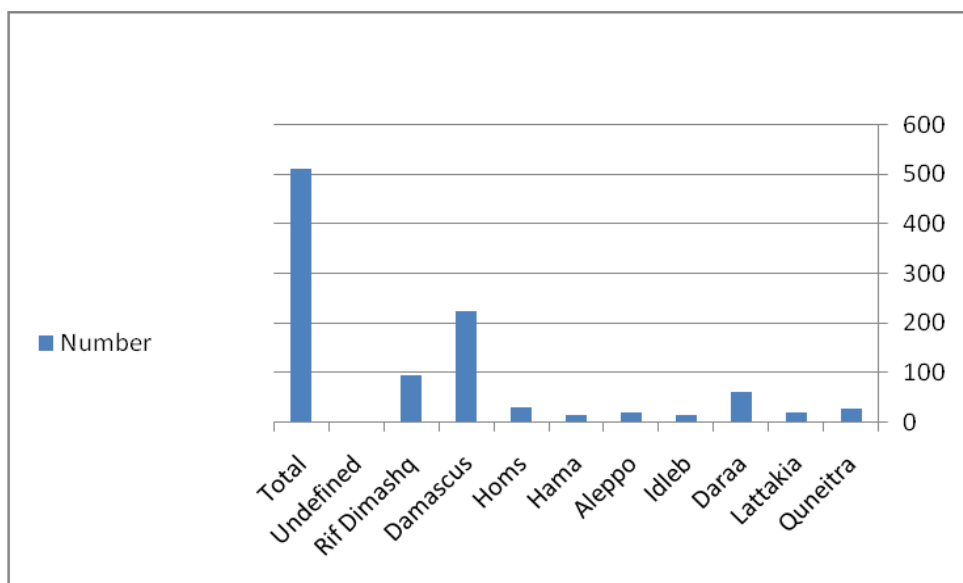


**Chart of the number of Palestinian victims for each month**

- Palestinian victims were targeted mostly in Damascus and its countryside where 75% of Palestinian refugees are based. The rest was in the Daraa region.

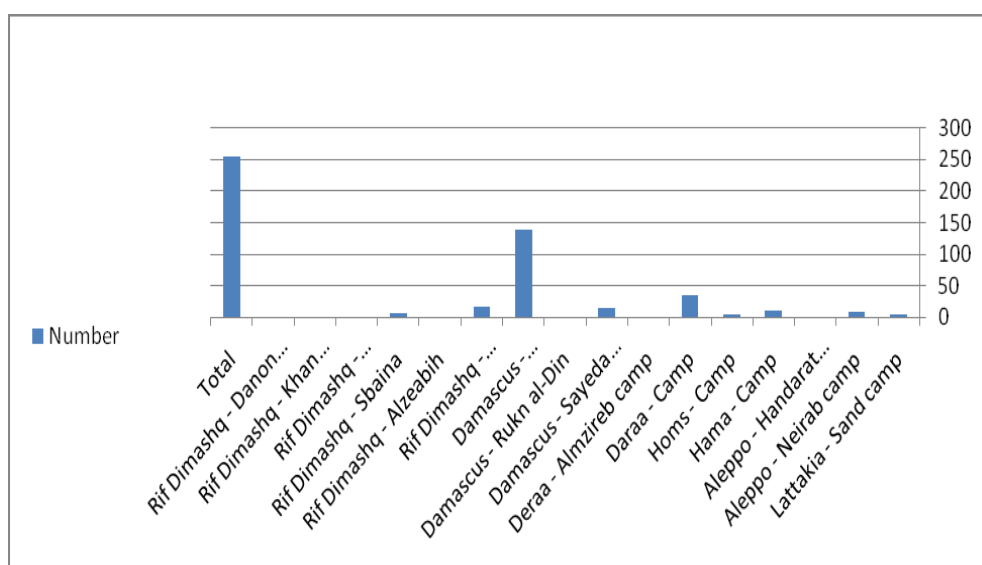
<sup>65</sup> From the website of the Syrian Martyrs Database, «[www.syrianshuhada.com](http://www.syrianshuhada.com), however the website did not document all names of Palestinian victims as it the database relied on information coming from groups out of the camps.





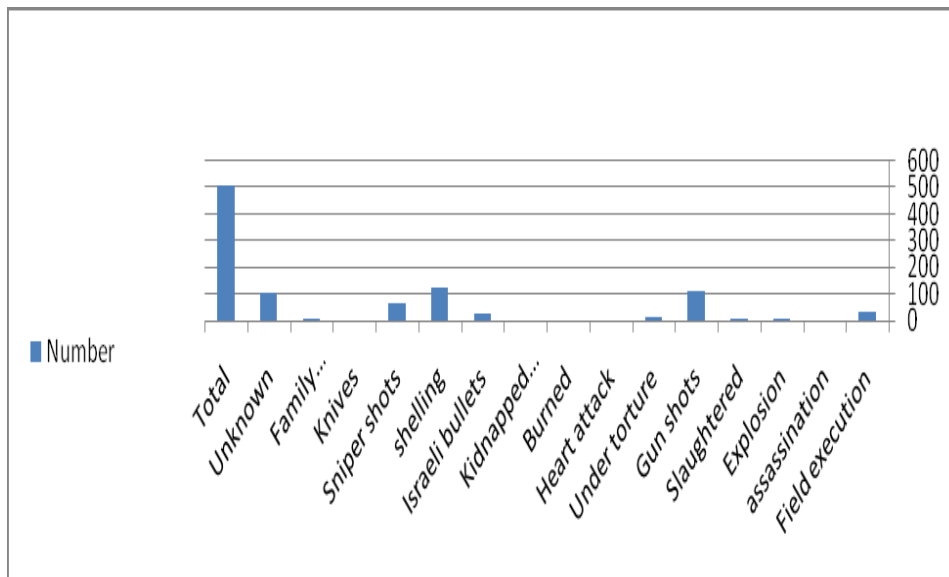
**A chart explains the distribution of Palestinian victims across Syrian cities**

- Al Yarmouk Camp which is a home to more than a quarter of the Palestinian refugees recorded the highest number of Palestinian victims.



**A chart shows the distribution of Palestinian victims across Palestinian refugee camps in Syria**

- Most of the victims were killed by bombings and not from direct bullets during protests, crossfire, or killed by snipers.



**A chart showing the mechanism killing which claimed the lives of Palestinian refugees' victims**

The ratio of Palestinian deaths in the revolution reflects the following:

- The number of Palestinians killed as a proportion is similar to that of the Syrians.
- The ratio of Palestinian refugee victims ended the controversy over Palestinian position with regards to the regime. The dead Palestinians spoke louder about their position all the than political statements.
- The ratio of victims reflected the social cohesion between Palestinians and Syrians where they lived together for over 6 decades.
- The parentage of Palestinian victims is the highest amongst minorities in Syria.

## ➤ **Palestinian Refugees in Diaspora Again**

### **A- Palestinian Refugees in Syria flee to Jordan**

Palestinian refugees in Syria arrived in the country in 1948 where their numbered 90,000. A large number of these refugees came from the borders between the two countries. Palestinians were again displaced 1967, as Israel occupied the Golan Heights forcing Palestinians and Syrian population out of the region. But the most recent movement of Palestinian refugees has is different. In the early days of the revolution, a number of Palestinian refugees with other Syrian refugees fled Daraa city towards Jordan. However, Palestinian refugees needed a visa to enter Jordan; they were forced to enter Jordan illegally.

As the crisis in Daraa and the rest of Syria escalated, thousands more, Palestinians and Syrians, fled to Jordan. Palestinian families were separated from their Syrian brethren, once they arrived in Jordanian territories, and special rules were applied against them. For example they were deprived of sponsorship (a scheme that allows Jordanians to sponsor a family) scheme<sup>66</sup>. The scheme was implemented for Syrian families only. Such treatment caused Palestinians further suffering and they were threatened by the Jordanian government with refolement<sup>67</sup> (return to the country from which they fled). The government also proposed to transfer Palestinian refugee to the occupied Palestinian territories in case large numbers<sup>68</sup> came to Jordan. It even proposed to the Egyptians to transfer those refugees (who hold Egyptian Travel Documents) to Gaza strip via Egypt. However, their proposal was refused by Egyptians.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the calls of International Humanitarian organizations to give Palestinian refugees their rights in accordance with International law, the Jordanian interior ministry refused to change their policy towards the Palestinians.<sup>70</sup>

Palestinian refugees who arrived from Syria are kept in Hosh Al Bashabsha and Cyber city<sup>71</sup> Camp, where both places lack the basics of life. Only a small number, 420 families, were allowed in Al Zatari refugee camp<sup>72</sup>. Governmental reports indicate that 160 families were admitted into the camp.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Jordanian Authorities created the Sponsor Scheme for Syrian refugees who came to the camps, northern of Jordan. It has allowed any Jordanian citizen to sponsor any Syrian family in return of a symbolic sum of money. The scheme allows them to move freely across the country. While on the other side, it deprived Palestinians from this scheme.

<sup>67</sup> Look at Human Rights Watch about conditions of Palestinian Refugees who escaped from Syria To Jordan, 4/07/2012, [www.hrw.org.ar](http://www.hrw.org.ar)

<sup>68</sup> Donia Al Want News Website: Jordan vows to transfer Palestinian refugees if huge waves come, 23/09/2012, <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2012/09/23/318931.html>

<sup>69</sup> Look at the United Press International, Amman: An Egyptian Diplomat state that transferring Palestinian refugee families from Jordan to Gaza needs profound security examination, <http://arabic.upi.com/News/2012/08/30/UPI-56051346325729>

<sup>70</sup> Al Arab Al Youm, A decision circulation in the Jordanian Interior Ministry of preventing the sponsor scheme for Palestinian refugees, 25/07/2012.

<sup>71</sup> Look at Amnesty report about the subject, prepared by Nour Al Bazaz, member of research team in Syria Affairs, 24/07/2012, <http://livewire.amnesty.org/2012/07/24/>

<sup>72</sup> Al Mustqbl Newspaper, Bara' Al Halbi, Coordinator of Action Group for Palestinian Refugees in Syria. Restrictions and security conditions make relief efforts difficult, 06/10/2012

<sup>73</sup> The difference in these numbers and official numbers because some Palestinian families that arrived in Jordan forged Syrian ID/passport documents so they are treated like Syrian refugees.

## **B- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to Lebanon**

Hundreds of Palestinian refugees escaped to Lebanon through al Masna' border crossing, between Syria and Lebanon. They settled in Palestinian refugee camps and were hosted by their friends and relatives. Some families rented temporary houses. By the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2012<sup>74</sup>, the numbers of families which arrived in Lebanon reached 2,370. This was not the actual number as it only consists of those who came to the camp. But the fact is that there were other families that lived in Lebanese neighborhoods. Unlike Turkey, the Jordanian and Lebanese government lacks a clear policy in tackling the influx, which made documentation difficult.

### **The Palestinian refugees who arrived to Lebanon have the following problems:**

- Inability to remain with relatives or friends' due to the harsh living conditions faced by host families.
- The families are extremely poor and there is an absence of local and international organizations to provide assistance.
- They lack housing and accommodation unlike those who went to Jordan or Turkey.
- Families faced legal problems regarding their residency permits, because the Lebanese government considered their entry as an emergency and only allowed 28 days.

## **C- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to Turkey**

Ten Palestinian families fled to Turkey. Most of them arrived on August 2011 when Al raml refugee camp in Latakia was bombed. There were others who arrived in Turkey by air using official visas granted by Turkey. These families are not considered refugees. Palestinian refugees were also prevented from entering turkey unless they obtained visas unlike their Syrian counterparts. This reality encouraged illegal immigration and Palestinian refugees became a commodity. They paid large sums of money to enter Turkey, as much as 12.000 Euros<sup>75</sup>. In some cases the refugees pay with their lives on their journey.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Report of PLO Popular Committees which supervises the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, 24/09/2012

<sup>75</sup> In three separate meetings with three Palestinians who fled Syria to Turkey waiting to be smuggled to Europe.

<sup>76</sup> Al Arab Newspaper, Doha, 6/09/2012,  
<http://www.alarab.qa/mobile/details.php?issueId=1731&artid=206570>

#### **D- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to Gaza Strip**

Dozens of Palestinian refugee families who hold Egyptian travel documents and Palestinian passport arrived in the Gaza Strip through Cairo airport<sup>77</sup>. These families were originally from the Gaza Strip and have been living in Syria for the past few years<sup>78</sup>. The total number of families who arrived in Gaza is 104.<sup>79</sup>

#### **E- Palestinian refugees from Syria flee to other places**

Following the Syrian revolution, fleeing out of Syria became a major goal, regardless of where it would lead. They wanted to escape the killing and repression in any way possible. Unfortunately, for Palestinians leaving and entering another country, became considerably more difficult. Some families have managed to travel to Libya and other Scandinavian and European countries to seek asylum. There are no accurate numbers for those yet.

### **➤ Summary**

This report has described the situation of Palestinian refugees in light of the Syrian uprising. It highlights the shifts in their role and the impact of the revolution on Palestinians. Palestinians in Syria experienced a favorable position compared to other Palestinian refugees. The Syrian regime even boosted its standing by displaying support to all the different Palestinian factions. Such a relation gave the regime legitimacy. The Syrian revolution was not opposing the regime for its foreign policy but due its domestic repression and injustice.

Right at the outset of the conflict, the Palestinians pulled in different directions and as a consequence most wanted to remain neutral, hoping that it would quickly fizzle out. They shared common goals and objectives with both sides. From the foreign policy perspective, it is undeniable that the regime has supported the Palestinian cause and Palestinian rights. At the same time, it is very hard for Palestinians deny the fact that Syrian people should have their rights, freedom and social justice.

However as the military repression escalated with growing number of fatalities, Palestinians were no longer able to remain neutral and had to take a position and deal with the consequences. Palestinians found themselves naturally supporting the Syrian people who have been hosting them since the Nakba. This decision proved fatal as

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<sup>77</sup> Quds Press Agency, 23/07/2012, Al Khalej Newspaper, Shariqa, 24/07/2012

<sup>78</sup> Al Khalej Newspaper, Supra Notes 1

<sup>79</sup> UPI, Supra Notes

Palestinians were killed and injured with their Syrian brethren. The leadership of some factions, like Hamas, given their support for the people, had to flee.

Palestinians also fled with Syrians into the neighboring countries, but they experienced different treatment by officials in the country of refuge. Jordan and Lebanon proved harder to enter and find refuge than other countries. Jordan used discriminatory laws and Lebanon, due to the general level of hardship and discrimination felt by Palestinians, they struggled to find security. Palestinians also fled to Turkey and as far away as Scandinavian countries to escape the violence unfolding in Syria.

Palestinians in Syria have joined the people of Syria in defending their freedom and dignity. Those that fled continue to face the precarious and uncertain future that all Palestinians experience as a people who are still struggling in their own pursuit for freedom and dignity.





About the author:

**Tarek Homoud** is a Palestinian activist and journalist born in Syria, Diraa City in 1981. He is member of Palestinian Writers and Journalists Union. Homoud is also an expert in the issue of Palestinian refugees particularly in Syria. He has published a number of studies, researches articles in different media outlets. At the moment, he is the coordinator of Action Group for Palestinians of Syria.