



# Background on social and economic structures in North East Syria

Region Profiling

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## Introduction:

This paper aims to provide background information for discussions on North East Syria NES, as it focuses on social structures, local governance entities, and the central changes in context of this area. The paper doesn't provide accurate statistics on economic and development indicators, nor does it propose to cover all aspects of the local complexities. Names of influential and key persons have also been obscured for social and security considerations.

The paper covers three main themes prevalent in the area. First is the local social structure, as it provides a general map of society and local councils, who contribute vastly to the political context on the local level. Second, the paper looks into new intermediaries, or new local elite. Those have played a major role in shaping the security and social context in NES in post-ISIS era. And third, the paper covers the theme of local economy, which appears to be semi-active, albeit highly connected to the security situation; For instance, economic activity decreases in towns that suffer from ISIS's influence or have tense relations with Al-Assad's regime.

The paper is based on data collected through twenty interviews with key persons in twenty different locations across NES between December 2019 and May 2020. In addition, the paper relays on secondary sources such as available open-source material and accumulated knowledge of the research team throughout the past years.

# Deir Ez-Zor

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## Introduction:

The Deir ez-Zur Governorate Syria has known since its establishment, and independence in 1946 got disintegrated. Now, both the regime forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) share parts of the region. While the Assad regime and its allies control the Al-Shamiya region, i.e., south of the Euphrates, the SDF control the Jazira north of the river. Furthermore, the battles aimed at expelling ISIS, with the support of the US-led international coalition, enabled the Syrian Democratic Forces to gain new territories. The region is still unstable due to the presence of ISIS cells in some towns of the region. In addition to that, the Autonomous Administration struggles to implement a useful governance model. As a result, the region is becoming a burden on the administration, impacting services' provision to the local population.

## Social Structure

Arab tribes and tribes spread over four parts of Deir ez-Zur region as a whole, namely: Al-Shamiya, Al-Jazira, the Eastern Line, and the Western Line. The Assad regime controls the southern side of the river, i.e., Al-Shamiya, while the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) control the part north of the river called Al-Jazira. Al-Bakkarah tribe spreads on the western line of the Jazira, which is called Al-Bakkarah line, while the eastern line is called Al-Auqaidat after Al-Auqaidat tribe.

Al-Auqaidat region includes the towns of Al-Shuhail, Jadeed Ekedat, Al-Sour, and Al-Busirah. In contrast, Al-Bakkara region includes the towns of Al-Kasra, Al-Jazrah, Jadeed Al-Bakara, and Abu Khashab. During ISIS' reign over both eastern and western lines (2013-2017), most of the local leaders were from Al-Auqaidat region due to the proximity to the Iraqi borders, which ISIS used to cross into Syria. While the towns of Al-Bakara surrendered to ISIS forces. In 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces, with the support of the International Coalition Forces, entered Deir ez-Zur. It began the liberation operations from the town of Abu Khashab, then the three towns of Al-Jazarat, reaching Al-Kasra in the western line, i.e., Al-Bakara line. Later, the Autonomous Administration established alliances with the local forces in both; Al-Bakara and Al-Auqaidat.

Both lines contributed, in cooperation with the Autonomous Administration in north-eastern Syria, to the formation of power structures, such as local councils, peace councils, and communes (neighborhood councils), in addition to security enforcement at the local level after ISIS left Deir ez-Zur. Individuals, who accomplished this, were involved in the formation process and have now become local leaders or local mediators between SDF and the Autonomous Administration in north-eastern Syria on the first hand, and the local population on the other hand.

## Al-Bakkara tribe

Al-Kasara, Al-Jazara, and Abu Khashab are towns located in the western line of Deir ez-Zur governorate, and all their population is from the Al-Bakara tribe. The tribe has wards. In Al-Kasara, there is Al-Bu Hmaid ward, and AL-Jazara includes three areas, namely: Al-Bu Hmaid, Al-Bu Shams, and Al-Milaj, which are the names of Al-Bakara tribe wards. Abu Khashab is a ward of the Al-Obaidat tribe, and Jdeed Bakara is in the eastern countryside within Al-Auqaidat areas, where AL-Abd Al-Kareem ward from Al-Bakara lives.

## New Local Structures

### Deir ez-Zur Civil Council

In the spring of 2017, during the war aimed at expelling ISIS, the town of Al-Kasra became an important military center in the region. It transformed into a platform for gathering and launching military operations towards both of the western and eastern lines.

In September of the same year, when the region became stable, the SDF forces asked degree holders and intellectuals in the region to get involved in reconstructing Deir ez-Zur and establishing its safety. In the beginning, the local population of the region did not welcome this initiative. However, those doubts dissipated soon, and the establishment of the Deir ez-Zur Civil Council was announced.

### Formation Mechanism

The first stage started from the town of Abu Khashab, in the form of an initiative launched by Mr. Ghassan Al-Youssef from the Al-Obaidat tribe (Al-Bakkara). The majority of the participants were from the area of Abu Khashab, Al-Obaidat-Bakkarah ward, because this town was the first to be liberated from ISIS. The planning took place in Abu Khashab, and implementation took place in Al-Kasra because Abu Khashab was far from the western and eastern lines, and due to its location between Al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zur. As a result, Al-Kasra was the place of implementation as it is in the middle.

In the second stage, the Council was using the old building of Al-Kasrah's agricultural center as its office building. Until this stage, the Council was not able to employ anyone. However, when ISIS vanished, people were encouraged to work with the Council. Since then, there are eight thousand teachers in the western countryside.

The Council's president is from the western countryside (Al-Bakkarah), and his deputy (Abu Omar al-Shaiti) is from the eastern countryside (Al-Auqaidat).

A month ago, the headquarters moved to Al-Ma'amel (Al-Salihiya area - or Al-Halabiya), the area between the eastern and western countryside. The Council will have a branch in the western countryside and another one in the eastern one.

The reference is Mr. Abd Al-Mehbash, the Head of the Territorial Government.

## Deir ez-Zur Reconciliation Council

The Autonomous Administration introduced the Reconciliation Council since the beginning of its control over the region. The Administration took this step in coordination with the people of Abu Khashab. The Autonomous Administration was the one to propose the idea of the Council.

## The Structure

There are 36 reconciliation sub-committees spread across the western and eastern countryside. Besides, there is an Administration Bureau of the Reconciliation Committees. In the event of any dispute, the solution must be local. However, if it reaches a dead end, it is referred to the Council, which relocated to Al-Kasrah. If the Council could not resolve the issue, the Justice Office in Al-Kasra handles the problem. All employees are from the area.

The sub-committees and the administration of reconciliation committees resolved 1,600 cases, including land disputes, retaliation, debts, and divorces. Ultimately, The Council resolves civil cases under the supervision of the Autonomous Administration.

## The Local Economy

After the defeat of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2017, the local economy in the localities of Deir ez-Zur liberalized, especially in the Western Line, which is known to the locals as the Al-Bakkarah line (after the Al-Bakkarah tribe). The liberalization of the local economy followed securing the areas. Thus, the market revitalized, and goods flowed from several areas such as Al-Jazira, Al-Raqqa, and Al-Shamiya region that is under the control of the Assad regime. However, the liberalization of the local economy and the active markets re-arranged Al-Bakkarah line, which gave prominence to some localities that had no economic importance before 2011.

## Al-Kasrah

Before 2011 and during the war, the town was modest. However, since then, it has become an economic center for the villages of the Western Line. It witnessed the opening of medium and large-sized shops, bakeries, small restaurants, hardware stores, clothes shops, plumbing installation shops, and wholesale and retail food stores since the end of the year 2017.

The Autonomous Administration organized the gas distribution process through licensed and approved distribution centers. Sadcop plant provides gas from Aleppo, which is under the control of the Assad regime.

The monthly cash flow comes through two sources. The first is the employees of some Syrian public establishments who were still getting their monthly salaries by crossing the Euphrates River south to go to the city of Deir ez-Zur, where the regime is in control. The second source is through money transfer "Hawala offices" in the town, which some residents use to receive remittances from their families and relatives abroad.

## Al-Jazrah

Market activity remains modest in Al-Jazara's three towns, i.e., Bu Hamid, Bu Shams, and Al Milaj. Resources such as cooking gas are scarce. Given the population density, the available cooking gas is insufficient. As is the case for all the towns of Deir ez-Zur, gas comes from Rmelan region in Al-Jazira, through distribution centers in Al-Jazara.

The town has not recovered economically after the defeat of ISIS. Al- Jazara's three towns remain, as they were before 2011, a small area with no local economic activity. The area used to have grain silos belonging to the Syrian state, which used to secure some jobs for the residents. However, the silos are no more than old, deserted buildings today.

The old shops reopened after they were closed by ISIS, but there are no new shops. The town still depends on the old local merchants. Hawala offices have been active in receiving money from outside Al-Jazara's three towns. In addition to that, the town makes use of some Syrian public employees, who receive their monthly salaries from Deir ez-Zur.

## Abu Khashab

No one opened new shops. However, after expelling ISIS fighters, the Autonomous Administration supported the opening of a bakery in the area. The bakery partially stimulated the local economy. Furthermore, distribution centers licensed by the Administration distribute the gas that comes from Rmelan area as is the case in all Deir ez-Zur towns.

Abu Khashab, like Al-Jazra, used to have grain silos. However, they are out of service today.

Money flows monthly to Abu Khashab, as is the case for its counterparts in Deir ez-Zur, from two sources. Money transfer offices and salaries of some public employees. The peculiarity in Abu Khashab is that sometimes the crossing to the other bank is blocked by the regime. To bypass this, the employees have to pay almost half the salary to bribe the crossing guards or pay the same amount as transportation fees. Such salary does not exceed, at best, the equivalent of 70\$.

## Al-Busirah

The economic activity in the town changed from the production of goods to trading them. Before 2011, there were some plants and small workshops that produced carpets and thyme in the town. However, they no longer existed during the war years. With the entry of the Autonomous Administration, the town turned into an active market as the case was in Al-Kasra. Large and medium shops for food, clothing, household items, and vegetables were opened, which improved the town's labor market and increased employment opportunities for the local unemployed people.

Gas is available through Rmelan and Aleppo. Money transferring offices increased after the entry of the Autonomous Administration, who secured the region. These offices, in addition to some salaries of Syrian state employees, revived the local economy monthly.

## Al-Sour

The security situation in the town is stable, but the local economy has not recovered yet. Some of the old stores, which were closed during ISIS's reign, have reopened today, but there are no new stores.

There are no money transfer offices and gas distribution centers in the town. Residents go to the town of Markada and the city of Deir ez-Zur to receive money transfers from outside the area and depend on the free market to get gas, as they have no distribution centers similar to their neighbors in other towns.

The town depends on the cities of Deir ez-Zur and Hasaka in terms of receiving salaries and working in the public establishments of the Syrian state.

## Jadeed Al-Bakara

Some shops were rehabilitated after the expulsion of ISIS in 2017 due to the unstable security situation. As the case is in the town of Al-Sour, there are no new stores nor money transfer offices in Jadeed Al-Bakara town. Moreover, the regime has tightened security, even on public employees. Therefore, it is challenging to reach Deir ez-Zur for work or to get monthly wages, as most of these wages go to regime barriers or as high-cost transportation.

The scarcity of these resources, and the shortage of necessary materials such as gas, have led to permanent poverty among the population and high unemployment rates compared to the neighboring towns.

## Jadeed Ekedat

Security conditions in the town remain unstable and people receive remittances from neighboring towns. There is no new commercial activity. Only a small number of old shops have reopened. Therefore, the town depends on its neighboring towns economically. Even cooking gas, which is fundamental for the livelihood of the population, is not always available.

## Al-Shuhail

The partial security stability helped revive the local economy, and several new shops opened in the town. Some activities related to food, mechanical workshops, and blacksmith shops were active. The remittances movement became active after the entry of the Autonomous Administration.

Gas is available, but favoritism in the local structures - communes and local councils - reinforced the division among the population because some of them got quicker access to resources compared to others.

As is the case in other Deir ez-Zur's towns, some public employees receive their salaries from the Syrian Government in the regime-controlled areas of Deir ez-Zur.

## Summary

The towns of Deir ez-Zur, and both lines, Al-Shamiya and Al-Jazira, still pose a significant challenge to the Autonomous Administration. On the one hand, they are Arab tribal areas; therefore, they settle intense local accounts among members of the tribes. On the other hand, jihadist organizations such as ISIS and the Al-Nusrah Front had strongholds in these areas. This duality created local dynamics that reshaped the region once again and deconstructed its geography, which, in turn, led to greater involvement of the Autonomous Administration in local affairs and increased the security burden it handles.



# AlJazeera /Alhasakeh

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## Introduction:

As a result of the local and international forces' diversity on its lands, The Syrian Jazira or Al-Hasaka governorate forms a complicated situation in the Syrian war. The remains of the regime's forces, the presence of the Autonomous Administration that emerged since 2012, the remains of ISIS on its borders with Iraq, and the cultural diversity of the region; are all factors contributing to the partial stability of the Jazira region (Al-Hasaka and AL-Qamishli). At the same time, they contribute, however, to the exiting latent conflict status.

This report concentrates on four dimensions in Al-Hasaka governorate / the Territory of Syrian Jazira: The borders with Iraq, the Arab tribes, the partial presence of the Al-Assad regime, and the diversity in the region are underlying themes that form the area of the Jazira territory or AL-Hasaka governorate.

## The borders

Both AL-Houl and Tal Hamis towns are on the borders with Iraq. Before the war on ISIS, the borders were vital for ISIS's flow of fighters and weapons from both sides. Now that SDF is controlling the region and is attempting to empower the local society in these two towns through Autonomous Administration's entities, the borders are controlled in cooperation with the Iraqi side.

## Tal Hamis

The area is known for the instability of its agricultural yield. It is close to the Iraqi borders and has an oil compilation station. Furthermore, The area is known for having a large number of public employees. Administratively, Tal Hamis subordinates AL-Qamishli city. It also has a significant market that serves the western and southern countryside. In the past, it used to be a smuggling corridor between Syria and Iraq. However, after declaring war on ISIS, the International Coalition, led by the USA, in collaboration with SDF raised security levels in the area, which led to the decline of smuggling activities over the recent years.

A mixture of multiple tribes comprises the inhabitants of the town. Among them are the tribes of Al-Sharabiyin, Witi, AL-Rashid, Shamar, and Bu Assi tribe. Kurds also exist in Tal Hamis, but most of the residents are from Al-Sharabiyin and Witi tribes. Some of the area's dignitaries play a role in the conciliation committees and the administrative bodies of the region. Some directors of different services and official bodies are still on top of their duties. For instance, a judge and a prosecutor from the region are still working in the court. As for the services field, Mr. Mohammed Ali Al-Khalaf was appointed a joint president of the Municipality of People in the first electoral phase.

The town's economy is relatively active with the existence of small facilities (grain separators, mills, and maintenance workshops). There are also some wholesale stores and wire-transfer offices.

## Al-Hawl

It is on the eastern side of the governorate and shares borders with Sinjar in western Iraq. Smuggling activities are active in the region and are still ongoing, although at a slower pace than it used to be, i.e., before the control of the international coalition and SDF. The border town includes now a camp called AL-Hawl camp, which contains families from ISIS fighters, in addition to other displaced families from neighboring areas. This required top-level security coordination between SDF and the other parties on the Iraqi side, such as the Popular Mobilization Forces, the Iraqi Army, and Shinkal Protection Units. Al-Hawl camp hosts Iraqis and foreigners from more than 60 countries, in addition to Syrians from other governorates. The camp is under the supervision of the Autonomous Administration, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, UNHCR, and other international organizations.

Al-Khawatinah tribe lives in the area since the 19th century. Kurds do not consider this tribe a Kurdish tribe, while the neighboring Arab tribes do not consider it an Arabic tribe. They also speak a particular local Arabic accent that distinguishes them from Arabs living in the region.

The local leaders working in the Autonomous Administration bodies (presidents of the municipality) are all from the region. There is also a judge and a court council from Al-Khawatinah tribe in the town, and the Au-

Autonomous Administration relies on them in dealing with the dossier of the organizations working at Al-Hawl camp. For instance, Mr. Akram Abdullah AL-Khalil is the Head of the Organizations' Sub-Bureau in Al-Hawl. He has established good relations with the residents of the region, as he descends from the most prominent families of AL-Khawatinah in the area.

## The Tribes

The Arabic tribes and their wards form an essential part of the Syrian Jazeera, namely Al-Hasaka canton. This complex local structure has pushed the Autonomous Administration to engage more at the local level to force stability, which is considered a need for the security of the whole Jazeera district.

## Al-Shadadah

It is in southern Al-Hasakah and includes Jebessa gas factory and oil fields and has rock salt mines. The area is agricultural and close to the Khabour river, although urbanization has expanded horizontally and vertically in the town.

The tribe-based local calculations create dynamics that affect governance and stability in Al-Shadadah and its surroundings. Each of Al-Jabbour, Al-Sharabiyin, Al-Siad, and Al-Nai'im are famous tribes in Al-Shadadh. These factors made it complicated for the Autonomous Administration, whose arrangements did not satisfy people until today. The area has significant military importance as it was the first area to carry arms in the Syrian Jazeera. As for the southern parts of Al-Shadadh, they are considered marginalized areas, where ISIS cells are still active.

Some influential tribal figures occupy administrative positions, and the others occupy political positions close to the Autonomous Administration. There are a judge and a court council formed of the region's residents. For instance: Mr. Joma'a Ibrahim Al-Khalil is one of Al-Sayad tribe sheiks, and he was a former district administrator in Al-Shadadah during the regime's control before 2011. AL-Fadel family also plays a significant role in the local rule since they are the Sheiks of Jabbour tribe in the southern region.

## Tal Burak

Tal Burak is a knot linking the eastern and the north-western regions, and it is also a starting point to head towards Iraq, Qamishli, and Al-Hasakah. It includes the guesthouse and the chieftom house of the Al-Jabbour family. After the Syrian revolution in 2012 and the security and military tension in the area and ISIS wars, the tribe split between Al-Melhem and AL-Fadel tribes. AL-Fadel tribe controls the regions of Al-Shadadh, southern Al-Hasakah, and Al-Khabour line, while Al-Hasakah and AL-Hawl and Tal Burak towns remained under the authority of the traditional leadership of the AL-Meslat family from the Al-Melhem ward.

Sheik Nawaf Abdulaziz Al-Meslat represents a living example of this competition. After residing in Saudi Arabia, then Jordan, and now Damascus, he plays a significant role in attracting young people to return to

the region. For instance, the sheik recently secured the return of the Bu Khatab ward of the Jabbour tribe to the Syrian Jazeera after the financial situation in Lebanon deteriorated. These workers from the sheik's tribe returned to the region after he mediated for their sake with the regime's intelligence services.

## An overview of the Assad regime

After ruling the Syrian Jazeera/Al-Hasakah governorate for 40 years, the Assad regime does not control the resources of the region nor shape the local politics anymore. After being the only political and temporal player in the region, it is now an actor with limited abilities and a confined geographical presence.

In the Syrian Jazeera/ Al-Hasakah governorate, there are around 90,000 employees (both women and men) in the official departments of the Autonomous Administration and the institutions of the Syrian state<sup>1</sup>. For example, there are around 8,000 workers on duty in the gas plant and Rmelan fields and around 500 retirees. All these people receive their salaries to the day from the Syrian Petroleum Company via Syria's Real Estate Bank, based in Al-Hasakah or Al-Qamishli city, or via the post offices in both cities. Most of these engineers, technicians, rig workers, maintenance workers, and production workers are from the region, only around 10% of these working force comes from outside the region, and most of them live in Rmelan city.

In terms of the regime's geographical presence, it has an extensive security presence in the center of Al-Hasakah and Al-Qamishli cities. The Assad regime maintains this presence through the different security branches present in these cities, which control the center of the city and its surrounding service institutions such as the hospital, the personal status department, the Immigration and Passport Department, and the Educational Institutions.

The Syrian Army deployed two military bases outside the two major cities in the Al-Hasakah governorate. The first is called the Tabtab base and is near Al-Qamishli, and the second is called Kawkab base. It is located in Mount Kawkab next to Al-Hasakah, in addition to Al-Qamishli airport, which connects the region with Damascus and Beirut.

The Assad regime has a third hidden presence where it maintains good relations with some Arab tribes and some of their sheiks in the region, such as the Tayy tribe or the Tayys neighborhood in Qamishli. Mohammed Al-Abed Al-Rahman, the tribe's sheik, has good relations with the security branches spread in the Al-Hasakah and Al-Qamishli cities. He facilitated the armament of his tribe and its mobilization under the name of the National Defense Forces.

The presence of the regime under these different forms raises a question about its ability to continue. For example, the Assad regime has a security presence in Al-Hasakah city, and the city includes Arabs, Kurds, and Assyrians in addition to a large number of IDPs. This social structure, on the one hand, and the Assad regime's security structure, on the other, have led to the expansion of the Autonomous Administration at the expense of the regime. The central market is no longer central in the city, and three markets administered by the Autonomous Administration have emerged, which are Al-Salihya neighborhood market, Al-Mufti Neighborhood market, and Tal Hajar neighborhood market.

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1 - These figures are based in estimations provided by field researchers, and are not formal or completely accurate.

## Diversity

The northern parts of Hasaka province, or the “upper Jazzirah” as called by the French is an ethnically diversity region. In this region, cities have a dense Kurdish presence next to Arab and Assyrian communities and reflects the extent of ethnic and cultural diversity and the nature of a plural society. Of those cities are Qamishli, Derik(Malikiyeh), and Terbesby (Qahtaniyeh). This diversity was reflected in local political polarization, and some local leaders rushed to create local military or political forces based on this diversity or taking advantage of it.

## Qamishli

Despite the presence of the regime in the security square and with its allies, the Tay tribe, the city is governed by the Autonomous Administration. For instance since 2014, the merchants in the central market of the city pay taxes to the Autonomous Administration which also provides security and basic service services to the market.

In the city there is an interesting intertwining between regime and administration. While Assad photos are widespread in the regime streets, the areas under the administration’s control is filled of pictures of fallen fighters in the war against ISIS. Inside the city, there is an unannounced agreement to facilitate the passage of everyone on the main roads, as there are very few checkpoints inside the city to allow for smooth movement of goods and residents across the districts.

The regime’s presence allowed for Russian forces to station at the airport. This interaction between the regime, the Russians and the autonomous administration, with the different local communities (Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians), prevented any direct or indirect Turkish military offensive onto the region, however it left the most important city in northeastern Syria without a single authority to control it.

## Derik / Malikiyeh

located in the far north-east of Syria in the area called “bec de canard” thus it shares border with both Iraq and Turkey. Derik, is the original name, also known as “Malikiyah,” one of the largest cities in the province and has plenty of villages and Kurdish tribes, in addition to being an epicentre of Kurdish nationalism, influenced by the proximity to the Kurdistan region of Iraq and the Kurdish provinces in Turkey. In addition to the Kurds, there is a remarkable historical Assyrian presence in Derek despite the frequent waves of immigration, as well as the presence of Arab tribes, mainly Shammar and Tai, in addition to “Ghamr”, the displaced people from Raqqa of Arab tribes who were housed in this region as a compensation to their lost lands flooded by lake on the Euphrates Dam.

## Tirbespiye

Was named Al-Qahtaniyah by the regime , but with the Autonomous Administration returned it to the original name, was also named in Arabic “Qubour Albyd “ as a direct translation to the name (White Tombs). In Terbisbah there are Yazidis, Syriacs, Kurds, and Arabs, as well as a percentage of the Arabs of Al-Ghamr (mainly of the Wledeh tribe from Al-Raqqa). All these cultural-social components make the city a miniature of the whole Al-Hasakah Governorate.

The city is under Autonomous Administration authority. Both Arabs and Kurds have a presence in the local government.

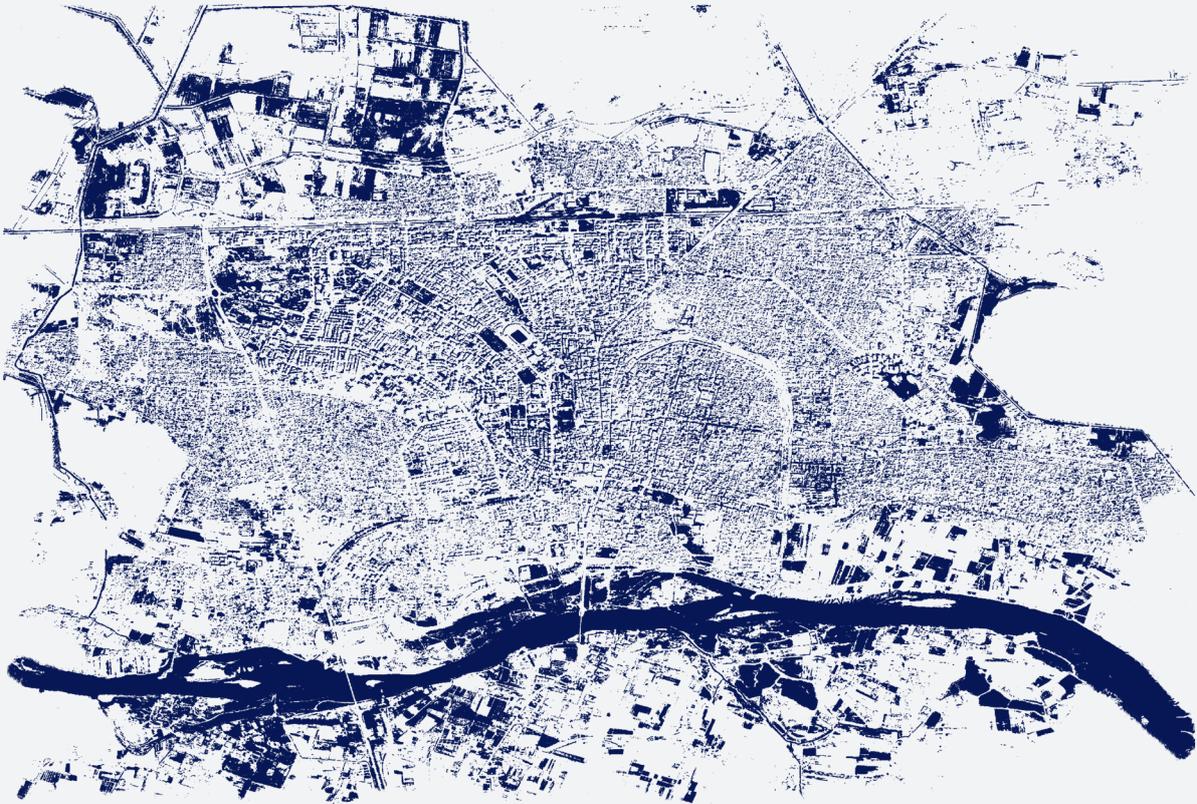
The formations of a security forces reflect the diversity in the city. There are the Syriac Sutoro forces, and the Asayish (Police) of two branches, an Arab and a Kurdish

## Summary

The Jazira region was relatively stable in 2020. However, the writers of this report associate this stability with four factors: the borders, the tribes, the partial presence of the regime, and the region’s diversity. Today, these four characteristics of the Jazira region will determine how effective the stability in this region of the Middle East is.

The borders with Iraq remain an essential source of the political legitimacy the Autonomous Administration needs. Through border control, the administration will achieve political gains in any future negotiations with the regime. Even though ISIS does not impose a threat anymore, borders remain the most crucial factor. As for the Arab tribes, they still pose significant challenges to the Autonomous Administration in terms of community policing, and thereby, raising the level of community representation and serving the regions of the Arab majority become of utmost importance. Whereas the partial presence of the Assad regime sometimes hinders the Administration’s development and security efforts. Although this presence remains limited, it can still play a disabling role. Finally, the diversity reflects the importance of the region and its local forces that work with the Autonomous Administration. It is worth noting that diversity management is still nascent.

## Introduction:



# Raqqqa

## Rural Suburbs

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The local forces that controlled Al-Raqqqa city and its neighboring regions have diversified from 2011 to date. In the fall of 2017, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) supported by the International Alliance entered the city of Raqqqa. Since then, the Autonomous Administration established offices there and started creating a local governance structure. The area is still going through a new experience, putting, therefore, pressure on the local bodies of governance in the area. Today, the area that was for years under ISIS control is under full control of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian Democratic Council.

This report covers three themes in Al-Mansurah, Al-Mansurah countryside, and Al-Karamah. local structures, and the local economy form key themes that allow us to understand the emerging experience of the Autonomous Administration in Al-Raqqqa area after ISIS left the city.

## Al-Mansurah

### The Local Economy

#### Before 2011

The water grid was excellent, where water supplies were dependent on Al-Mansurah's group of pumps located on the Euphrates river. There was also a water unit in Al-Mansurah. The electricity grid was also convenient. Al-Mansurah's dam conversion plant generates electricity, while the city has its power plant.

There is a sewage treatment plant, in addition to a good landline and wireless telephone network. In Al-Mansurah's countryside, we can find the Baath dam, which generates electricity and regulates the stream of the Euphrates river.

There was also in Al-Mansurah's countryside, a single public sector factory that used to produce chairs, fabric, furniture, and nails. Furthermore, there were grain silos in the area.

#### After 2017

There are small shops such as a greengrocer, a grocery, a junk shop, a small repairs shop, small car maintenance shops, and a car washing service.

Cooking gas is available in specialized shops for the price of 6500 -7000 SP per gas cylinder. It is also provided every four months by the local „commune“ for the amount of 2500 SP.

There are private wire-transfer offices, „Hawala offices.“ As for the Syrian Government's public servants, such as the dam employees, they still report to work and receive their salaries.

There are no licensed companies neither banks in the area. Despite relatively good security situation, the economic situation and the provision of services (mainly health and education) remain dire. There's no hospital in the area. Health services are provided through a clinic that was there since before 2011 and is currently run by the local council, in addition to private clinics run by doctors

### The local structures

#### Before 2011

Al-Ba'ath Party was active in the area, out of which emerged some essential partisan leaderships, such as Ibrahim Al-Hunaidi, a member of the National Command Committee of the party.

- A timeline of Al-Mansurah transfer from one actor to the other:
- Late 2012: The Assad regime lost control over the region.
- From 2012 until 2014: FSA affiliated factions and Al-Nusra front controlled the area.
- From 2014 until 2017: ISIS controlled the area.
- From 2017 to date: The Syrian Democratic Forces control the area.

### After 2017

A municipality and neighborhoods council were established. Their funding was in the form of taxes and additional support they received from organizations such as Emaar Almansoura, an organization with a board of directors composed of the region's youth represented by Mr. Abdul Muhsin Al-Faraj. Furthermore, local authorities established an arbitration court that applied the Syrian law.

The area has witnessed several waves of displacement between 2012 and 2017. The area has received influx of IDPs from the adjacent countryside or from the provinces under the control of Assad's regime mainly from Homs, Hamah, Aleppo countryside and Deir Ez-Zor countryside. Most IDPs reside in school buildings, makeshift shelters or rental properties. Some IDPs have returned to their areas of origin while some of them still reside in Almansurah.

## AL-Mansurah Countryside

It includes the following villages: Al-Hamam, Al-Barouda, Mazra'at Al-Hareer, Abu Rajab, and Abu Qobee' Gharbi and Sharqi.

## The Local Economy

### Between 2011 and 2017

Water pumps on the Euphrates river provide the water supply, which accommodates the farmlands with the needed amounts of water to extract annual crops. Al-Mansurah power plant provides electricity. By the beginning of 2013, Al-Mansurah's countryside witnessed a small-scale industrial development in the area. For instance, some construction and industrial workshops emerged, such as AL-Ogaili Group, a private sector company that produces threads and textile supplies. Also, there are small factories for plastic granules.

### After 2017

No new shops opened, and the economy in the region declined under ISIS, until the arrival of the Syrian Democratic forces. Today, the residents of the region became financially connected with the city of Al-Mansurah or Al-Raqqa and Al-Thawra cities. There are "Hawala offices" in Al-Mansurah through which people receive their remittances, while public servants of Al-Mansurah's countryside go to Al-Thawra city to collect their salaries from Al-Assad regime. Furthermore, Al-Raqqa is the most important commercial city; it has become a work destination for residents of Al-Mansurah countryside.

## The Local Structures

Al-Ba'ath party played a significant role in all the villages of Al-Mansurah's countryside. There were no active Salafi or Islamist movements in the area; nevertheless, one of the most prominent leaders of ISIS known as Abu Lukman descended from one of the Al-Mansurah villages. Abu Lukman was among ISIS's central leadership in both Syria and Iraq.

Now that the troops of the Syrian Democratic forces have entered Al-Mansurah villages. They established a municipality for the whole countryside of Al-Mansurah, for which they chose Al-Hamam village as a base. A People's Assembly was composed in the same village; it supervises all the village councils in the area. These entities are self-funded through fees and taxes they charge, in addition to the support they receive from the Syrian Democratic forces.

There is no judicial system, no judge, no court, nor a jail in the villages of the district. Moreover, there are no local or non-local organizations in the area.

As in Almansura town, the countryside suffers from inadequate service provision, as the area lacks the presence of any hospitals or clinics. A single clinic in the village of Abu-Kobe'e Gharbi already exists since 2011 and is supervised by nurses, not doctors. Also, there are two pharmacies, one of them is in Al-Hamam, and the other is in Abu-Rajab.

This area also witnessed displacement waves, as some of its residents fled to other regions during different periods of time. The area has also received IDPs from Homs, Hamah and Palmera. Some IDPs still reside in make-shift shelters or rental properties, while some others are faring better; they bought properties (and built houses)

## Al-Karamah

### The local economy

Compared to its conditions before 2011, the region's economic situation has severely degraded. Even back then, it was not in good shape. The region was greatly affected by wars since it is considered agricultural, and agriculture was among the most damaged sectors. Farmers were not able to invest in their lands anymore because of the high cost of cultivation, which fits neither their financial resources nor the production revenues. Before 2011, a conversion plant in Al-Raqqa city powered the electricity grid, and the district was well connected to Al-Raqqa city. Today, the war has destroyed the bridge between the two banks of the Euphrates river, which weakened the town's economy. The town had a public sector factory specialized in manufacturing carpets, in addition to a factory specialized in producing bricks. Today, the town's market subsists on the salaries of the Syrian Government's employees and some external remittances received in Al-Raqqa city.

### The local structures

The Ba'ath party was remarkably active in the region during the period of the regime's rule. In return, there was an expansion of the Iraqi Ba'ath party known as the right-wing of the Ba'ath party. Therefore, the Assad

regime subjected the area to strict security scrutiny as it established sub-units of the three security branches (Political Security, State Security, and Military Security). Furthermore, leaders emerged from the region who joined ISIS, such as Abu Ali AL-Shar' (Fawaz Al-Mohammed Al-Hassan Al-Kurdi) and Abu Shamel (Tubad Al-Breej) who was the prince of the tribes' office.

The Municipality of People was established in March 2017, with its affiliated communes. Taxes and fees fund it, besides the support received from Al-Raqqa's Civil Council. There is also an arbitration court, a religious court, and an SDF prison.

This region did not witness the activation or formation of any civil society organization or association. Also, the organizations operating in Al-Raqqa city did not become active in this region except for the Al-Sawsan organization that runs the clinic under supervision of the health committee. The clinic has been there since before 2011 and is the main provider of health services in addition to several private clinics.

As in Almansurah and its countryside, Alkaramah witnessed IDPs influx from other regions mainly Homs, Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor in periods between 2013 – 2013 and later between 2017 and 2018. Moreover, Alkaramah was the destination of IDPs from Raqqa city who fled the city during heavy clashes between opposition forces and regime forces in early 2013 and between opposition forces and ISIS later the same year.

Some of Alkaramah residents also fled at one point to the nearby Almanakher IDP camp during the battles in 2017 between ISIS from one side and the SDF and US-led international coalition on the other side.

## Summary

The Suburbs of Al-Raqqa city are not connected anymore like they were before the war. On the one hand, they constitute separate towns, each with its economy that varies from one village to the other. On the other hand, new leaderships and elites of the society that were not present in the history of the area have emerged. These Dynamics reconstructed some towns and villages in Al-Raqqa countryside after SDF's control. These newly formed dynamics effectively influence the already emerging governance system in towns. Al-Raqqa countryside, which relies on agriculture for the development of its local economy, does not have the same levels of production of the past. The blocked roads between Al-Raqqa's suburbs and the scarcity of resources are among the factors that do not aid local development over the medium term.



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