



A TALE OF SIX TRIBES

Securing the Middle Euphrates River Valley

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THE ISLAMIC STATE is now largely defeated militarily, with the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces having taken the eastern bank of the Euphrates River and a mosaic of largely Iran- and Russia-supported Assad-regime forces taking areas west of the river. As anti-IS operations wind down and the Trump administration considers its options in eastern Syria, the challenge of how to win over the settled Arab tribes of the Middle Euphrates River Valley remains vital to ensuring that the Islamic State is ultimately defeated and that Iran does not fill the vacuum, thereby setting off a greater Middle East conflict.

Photo: Euphrates River, between Raqqa and Deir al-Zour. ©2010 Greg Sixt, all rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.



A recent visitor to eastern Syria, who will remain anonymous for security reasons, conducted interviews with a number of tribal figures from six of the MERV's largest extended tribal confederations: Walda, Afadla, Sabkha, Busaraya, Baggara, and Ougaidat.¹ The interviews were aimed at determining tribal goals as well as attitudes toward the IS, the United States, Turkey, the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its militia, the People's Defense Units (YPG), and the Assad regime, with its Iran-backed militias and associated forces.

While not reflecting a formal poll of all tribes in the MERV, the answers, as well as the interviewer's impressions, indicate that the United States and its allies can win sympathy from the tribes by showing consistency and committing to stabilization and reconstruction with U.S. allies. The United States also has some room to capitalize on anti-Iran sentiment among the settled tribes, although the regime continues to hold many cards for enticing tribes away from the U.S.-supported SDF.

THE TRIBES AT A GLANCE

WALDA

The Walda tribe predominates in the western rural areas of Raqqa province. Members, numbering about 150,000, also live in Hasaka and Aleppo provinces.

In the early 1970s, about 40% of Walda tribespeople were forced to leave their home villages and towns when the Syrian government built the al-Thawra Dam, the largest in Syria on the Euphrates River. These evacuees, known as "al-Maghmurin" (lit. submerged) because their lands had been flooded by the creation of nearby Lake Assad, were moved to Kurdish-majority areas near Qamishli and the border with Turkey. The loss

of fertile lands, among other factors, had strong effects on the Walda's social, economic, and political status.

The Walda tribe is divided into two branches:

- The JAZIRA, whose territory stretches from the village of Sweida in western Raqqa, to al-Jaber, Ramel, and Shams al-Din, a village east of the Tishrin Dam, north of the Euphrates. Most al-Maghmurin previously lived in these villages.
- The SHAMIYA, who live on the southern banks of the Euphrates, from Mansoura, 30 km west of Raqqa, to Dibsi Faraj, Maskanah, al-Khafsa, and Manbj.

AFADLA

Following the Walda displacement several decades ago, the Afadla emerged as the largest tribe in Raqqa province. According to tribal sources, some 300,000 Afadla now live in Raqqa province in the locales surrounding Raqqa city.

To the east, where they are most concentrated: the village of al-Mishlab, about 5 km from downtown; and then from Raqqa Samra to Tawi Ruman, al-Hamrat, al-Karameh, al-Hawis, and Khas Ajeel, the last of which is located on the northern banks of the Euphrates 72 km from the city.

To the northeast: the villages of al-Rihayat and al-Yarmouk, ranging to Hazima

and Maazellah, 40 km from the city.

To the northwest: areas from the village of al-Jazira to Kubash (east and west) and Awja, 40 km from Raqqa city. In this last village, in 1941, the Afadla and the Bedouin clan al-Fadan, from the Anaza confederation, ended their conflict and established borders.

To the south: on the southern banks of the Euphrates, in villages within the al-Kasrat village districts: Kasra Sheikh al-Jumaa, Kasra Afnan, Kasra Farajah, and Kasra Muhammad Ali.

The tribe's presence on all sides of the city gives it political and social influence, including over other tribes.

SABKHA

Sabkha tribespeople live on the southern banks of the Euphrates, in villages from Kasra Muhammad Agha (7 km east of Raqqa) to al-Akirshi, al-Rahabi, al-Sharida (east and west), and then on to al-Gabli, al-Ghanim Ali, Muqlah (Saghirah and Kabira), al-Jaber, al-Khamisah, Maadan, Sweida, and finally al-Tabni, in

Deir al-Zour province, about 70 km south of Raqqa on the Euphrates. The last location, at the 70-km mark, is known as the "Sabkha line."

According to a tribal leader, the Sabkha numbered about 80,000 in 2011, making it the second largest tribe in eastern Raqqa, after the Afadla.

OUGAIDAT

The Ougaidat is the largest tribe in Deir al-Zour province and in all of Syria, as well as the strongest tribe in eastern Syria. One tribal leader estimates the total number of Ougaidat in the country at 1.5 million, with about a third living in Deir al-Zour province. In the 1940s, the Ougaidat

helped forge the borders of Syria and Iraq through their bloody conflicts with the al-Khirsan clan, a branch of the Bedouin Shammar tribal confederation.

The Ougaidat tribe lives on both banks of Euphrates, spanning an area from Deir al-Zour city up to Abu Kamal. They also live in Iraq.

BAGGARA

Baggara tribespeople mainly live west of Deir al-Zour city, ranging from the northern banks of the Euphrates to the Raqqa provincial border; in villages from al-Husseiniyah to Mahamidah, where the Baggara's chiefdom family lives; to al-Kasrat, al-Kubar, and Jazra al-Milaj, spanning a distance of some 80 km. East of Deir al-Zour, the Baggara live in smaller numbers in the villages of Meratt, Khusham, and Jadid Baggara. Sources suggest a total of approximately 100,000 Baggara live in these areas east and west of the city. Although accurate figures are not available, a large number of people of Baggara lineage have integrated into Deir al-Zour city—in fact, some say a full one-third of the city's residents have roots in the tribe. One prominent Baggara family there is the al-Ayyash. Other regions where the Baggara live include Hasaka province, in an area known as Baggara al-Jabal (Baggara Mountain); Raqqa (e.g., the al-Ojeili and al-Mashhour families); the city of Aleppo and other northern towns; and Idlib. Some Baggara tribespeople report their numbers in Syria as now exceeding one million.

BUSARAYA

Busaraya tribespeople live in rural western Deir al-Zour province, along the southern banks of the Euphrates, in the village of Ayyash and the towns of Kharita and Shmeitiyeh, the tribal capital and home to the al-Fayyad chiefdom family, 20 km west of Deir al-Zour city. They also live in the villages of al-Tarif, al-Bouti, and al-Masrab. About 220,000 Busaraya tribespeople are said to live in Raqqa and Hasaka provinces, Deir al-Zour city, and the surrounding villages. Approximately 56 km east of Deir al-Zour, tribe members live in Buqrus, a town that boasts a high number of university graduates. According to residents, some 150 physicians and 450 engineers live there. Busaraya sources say about 50,000 tribespeople live in Raqqa province, tens of thousands of them in the city and about 10,000 in its Busaraya district, around the al-Hani Mosque and North al-Mansour Street.

ISLAMIC STATE IN RAQQA vs. DEIR AL-ZOUR**RAQQA TRIBES**

No sustained confrontation took place in Raqqa between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, along with the various associated militias. Indeed, over a few days in early 2014, IS defeated JN and Ahrar al-Sham and kicked them out of Raqqa, making the city the de facto Islamic State capital.

DEIR AL-ZOUR TRIBES

In contrast, the fighting in Deir al-Zour between jihadist groups was bloody and bitter. Both the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra sought to hold the province for

various reasons. The first entailed the concentration of Syria's oil and gas resources within the province, making it an obvious prize for all anti-Assad groups.

The second reason involved the location of chiefdom families for the Busaraya, Baggara, and Ougaidat tribes in this province. Since these tribes also have a presence in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka provinces, control of Deir al-Zour would grant the winners implicit leverage in these other areas. Moreover, the population of Deir al-Zour is almost exclusively Arab, with low numbers of Kurds and Assyrians. Deir al-Zour city is also home

to Armenian families, with their Christian houses of worship, and Muslim Chechen and Circassian families. According to one tribal figure, IS and JN employed a carrot-and-stick approach in trying to secure loyalty, the carrot being shares of oil income, the stick being force.

For the Islamic State in particular, seizure of Deir al-Zour province would allow for a link from its de facto capital, Raqqa, to Anbar province in Iraq, where the group also held power. No such link was available otherwise.

ACRONYMS

IS	Islamic State
JN	Jabhat al-Nusra,
MERV	Middle Euphrates River Valley
PYD	Kurdish Democratic Union Party
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
YPG	People's Defense Units

Islamic State Rule and the Eastern Syrian Tribes

Raqqa Tribes

As contrasted with the events in Deir al-Zour, no sustained confrontation occurred between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra in Raqqa.* Indeed, over just a few days in early 2014, IS vanquished JN and the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham coalition, kicking these rivals out of Raqqa and establishing the capital of its Islamist caliphate.

WALDA

The Walda tribe consists of some 150,000 members. In general, during the Syrian war, Walda tribespeople demonstrated support for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and later its rival, JN. In contrast to the Afadla and Sabkha tribes, the Walda did not join IS in large numbers or show strong support for the group.

The chiefdom seat within the Walda tribe belongs to the Nasser clan, which consists of two subfamilies: the al-Bursan, in Jazira (mostly displaced from Hasaka province), and al-Faraj al-Salamah, in the Shamiya area, along the southern Euphrates River. These families played a key role in pushing Assad-regime forces out of rural and urban areas around Raqqa.

The Nasser clan's strong anti-Assad sentiments date to the early 1960s, when the government appropriated thousands of acres of tribal land for nationalization and dam projects. Between the two subfamilies, the al-Faraj al-Salamah holds a stronger anti-Assad position than the al-Bursan, who moved to the village of Bahira near Qamishli.

In April 2013, weeks after the March 4 seizure by rebels of Raqqa city, regime forces killed Sheikh Abdul Rahman Muhammad Faraj al-Salamah in the village of Mazrat al-Safsafah. The sheikh's son Hamid had been instrumental in encouraging military activities targeting Assad forces, and likewise in urging greater anti-regime activity from Walda tribespeople.

Indeed, the al-Faraj al-Salamah sponsored the first armed FSA group established in Raqqa province. In and around al-Thawra, the group waged deadly attacks against regime security checkpoints and patrols. Later,

* This text refers to Jabhat al-Nusra, the early Syrian affiliate of al-Qaeda, rather than its later incarnations Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and Harakat Tahrir al-Sham.

hundreds of Walda tribespeople joined JN in its fight against IS, strengthening JN in western Raqqa. The tribesman Nasser al-Faraj personally recruited dozens of his relatives for JN in Mazrat al-Safsafah; Ibrahim al-Faraj did the same in Mansoura. Other western Raqqa villages in which Nasser tribespeople strengthened JN include al-Jarniya and Dibsi Faraj.

After the Islamic State seized Raqqa in January 2014, the Walda in general and the Nasser clansmen in particular did not fall in line behind the jihadist group, although small numbers did join. Among the exceptions, evidently, is Sheikh Khamri Shawakh al-Bursan, who hails from the village of Shams al-Din and is rumored to have "secretly" expressed his support for IS and joined the group's Council of Tribes.

AFADLA

Members of the Afadla live along the northern banks of the Euphrates. As contrasted with the Sabkha, who live on the southern banks and are Wahhabi and Salafi, the Afadla tend not to be religious. Those who are follow Sufi or other moderate forms of faith.

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, hundreds of Afadla tribesmen, mostly from the al-Breij clan, infiltrated Iraq to defend the regime of Saddam Hussein. Their reasons were tribal and religious rather than political enmity toward the United States, such as the Hussein regime's hosting of an al-Breij sheikh after he left Syria. A few months after peaceful demonstrations began against Syria's Assad regime eight years later, hundreds of Afadla tribesmen joined FSA rebel units after learning that their tribal leaders no longer backed the regime. Unlike the Walda, the Afadla did not back JN. But Afadla leaders and members did support the Islamic State, with the al-Breij, in particular, providing the jihadists with significant forces in Raqqa. Indeed, the first three names on the IS-led Raqqa Council of Tribes are from Afadla:

- Tobad Breij al-Abdulahdi al-Hajo (al-Breij clan), who is said to have been killed in an April 2018 U.S.-led airstrike in Deir al-Zour.
- Bashir Faisal al-Huwaidi, who is based in Raqqa and supportive of the Syrian Democratic Forces. His brother Muhammad, high chief of the Afadla, currently lives in Damascus and has very good ties with the Assad government. The Syrian parliament member Hussam al-Katerji, who has helped

transport oil, wheat, and cotton from IS- and now SDF-held areas, set Muhammad up with a fancy apartment in Damascus and has facilitated ties for him with regime security officials. Muhammad's support for Assad, versus Bashir's for the SDF, has surprised the people of Raqqa.

- Shalash al-Mujahim al-Huwaidi, a cousin of Sheikh Muhammad Faisal al-Huwaidi.

SABKHA

The base of Wahhabi and Salafi adherence in Raqqa province consists of Sabkha tribespeople living in the villages of Muqlah Saghira and Muqlah Kabira and the town of Maadan. Sheikhs Muhammad al-Arifi and Taha al-Tai originally disseminated Salafi ideology in Maadan. Later, Salim al-Hilo, a sharia teacher, Ramadan Ramadan, and Sheikh Muhammad al-Khidr spread the doctrine of Wahhabism.

The roots of Wahhabism among the al-Sabkha lie in the participation by many as foreign workers in Saudi Arabia. There, they were exposed to radical ideas and practices such as women's wearing of the *niqab* (veil), which the returnees propagated in their home villages. Previously, Raqqa tribeswomen donned a simple head covering rather than the full veil preferred in Saudi Arabia.

Not all IS adherents had traveled to the Saudi kingdom. For example, a Sabkha tribesman named Ibrahim Muhammad al-Khalifa, known as Ibn Laden, hails from al-Naamat, a Syrian village, but was working as a shepherd in Jordan. With the outbreak of the 2011 Syrian crisis, he returned to his village to lead anti-Assad activities with support from the al-Rumih family, from Muqlah, and from a man identified only as Suleiman, a resident of al-Jaber village whose family was tied to the Baath Party leadership. He and his family first expressed support for Jabhat al-Nusra before changing their allegiance to the Islamic State. Khalifah, who became emir of Maadan, was considered a hardliner even by IS members. This switch from JN to the Islamic State is illustrative of the move by hundreds of Sabkha tribespeople, who emerged as the second strongest backers of the jihadist group in Raqqa province, after the Afadla.

Deir al-Zour Tribes

The Islamic State, as already noted, fought bloodily against al-Qaeda-linked groups to seize the province of Deir al-Zour, much more so than in Raqqa.

The first explanation for this involves Syria's oil and gas resources, most of which are located in Deir al-Zour.

Second, Deir al-Zour is home to the Syrian Arab tribes of Busaraya, Baggara, and Ougaidat, all of which have family connections in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka. Tribal losses across Deir al-Zour could thus empower other tribes and clans, in the province and elsewhere. Deir al-Zour, moreover, is almost exclusively Arab, with only a smattering of Kurds and Assyrians. According to one tribal leader, both IS and JN employed a carrot-and-stick approach in seeking the loyalty of tribal chiefs, with oil income often the carrot, and force often the stick.

Third, IS was keen to seize Deir al-Zour province to link Raqqa, its de facto capital, with the Iraqi province of Anbar, thus validating its claims to "Iraq" and "al-Sham." Without Deir al-Zour, IS could achieve have no such connection.

BUSARAYA

Along with the surrounding oil fields and fertile agricultural lands, villages inhabited by the Busaraya have strategic value for their proximity to the regime-held Ayyash checkpoint, where its Division 137 is based. The regime has attacked villages and towns in western Deir al-Zour from these positions.

In contrast with the Ougaidat and Baggara, the Busaraya tribespeople have mainly stayed true to their local identity and have not lent support to either IS or JN. In April 2013, however, a so-called gang of thieves from the Busaraya's Assaf clan clashed with JN forces in the village of al-Masrab, revealing fault lines within the Busaraya. After the gang stole a fuel-filled truck, JN sent an armed group to seek the plunderers' arrest. But the Assaf group struck back and killed JN's emir of western Deir al-Zour, Abu Abdul Rahman al-Aqaisi, whose family hails from the Busaraya. This evidence of infighting stoked tensions among cousins. The Aqaisat clan thereafter received support from JN members from the Ougaidat's Abu Kamal clan. Operating from their village of al-Shahil, some forty-five miles east of Deir al-Zour city, they seized al-Masrab from the Assaf combatants.

In early 2014, IS strengthened its military position by seizing the salt mine in the village of al-Tibni, as well as by attacking positions held by the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham in Busaraya-inhabited villages. Later, the group began its attacks against JN.

In April 2014, IS killed JN military leader Abu al-Yaman and other figures. By July 2014, the jihadist group had taken full control of most of Deir al-Zour province, including the western rural villages of the Busaraya.

Although, as noted, Busaraya tribespeople have generally adopted an anti-IS stance, several dozen have joined the group for the salary or the sense of empowerment. Yet the dominant hostile view was exemplified in a September 2016 incident in which tribesmen attacked IS gunmen, who responded by arresting the perpetrators.

BAGGARA

Baggara tribespeople and leaders have adopted no clear-cut attitude toward the radical Islamist groups in Syria. This lack of resistance has created a weak link exploited by the Islamic State in its quest for power in Deir al-Zour province. Yet Baggara tribespeople have not been entirely neutral, reflecting their bid to stay relevant. In response to Ougaidat members joining Jabhat al-Nusra, some Baggara leaders have jumped on the Islamic State bandwagon to maintain leverage. Hundreds of others have indeed joined JN, as well as Ahrar al-Sham and other rebel groups. Baggara sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir has expressed his support for “all anti-Assad groups,” including JN. According to an educated anti-Assad member of the Baggara, the sheikh has since reversed this position: “Sheikh Nawaf was supporting everyone against the government of Bashar al-Assad, including IS and JN, but now he supports everyone who stands and fights alongside Assad, including the Shia sectarian gangs. Sheikh Nawaf has no principles, and he looks out for his personal and family interests, not those of his tribesmen.”

In seeking loyalty from the Baggara, IS has applied pressure in various forms. In December 2014, for example, the group captured three of Sheikh Nawaf’s sons, Assad, Laith, and Mashal, although later freeing them. Nawaf and his sons, around then, had been shifting their political loyalties, making them difficult to pin down. Some reported the sheikh’s loyalty to IS, but he denied this. Assad, the eldest, pledged allegiance to IS during a public meeting in the village of Mahamidah, ending the conflict, at least temporarily. Indeed, Assad was the first leader of a major Deir al-Zour tribe to pledge allegiance to IS.

UGAIDAT

The Ougaidat tribe exemplifies how radical Islamist ideology can divide an extended family. The tribe holds the strongest anti-Assad views among its fellow tribes in Deir al-Zour and, in the early months of 2012, was instrumental in booting regime forces from Deir al-Zour city and the rural areas.

In early 2012, Ougaidat tribesmen joined brigades within the FSA. But a few months later, Jabhat al-Nusra bolstered its position among the tribespeople of al-Shahil, a village east of Deir al-Zour city populated mainly by the Abu Kamal clan, which has a strong Salafi bent and sends many of its youths to work in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Some reports speculated that JN leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani was living in Shahil and leading his al-Qaeda-linked group from the village.

JN gave al-Shahil families—e.g., al-Sayyad, al-Mizal, al-Fayyad, and al-Farhan—the right to invest in the 10,000 barrels per day produced by the al-Omar oil field (vs. the 30,000 bpd prewar output), the largest in Deir al-Zour province. Through this offer, as well as proceeds from the Conoco gas plant in the village of Khusham, 24 km east of Deir al-Zour city, JN could buy the allegiance of al-Shahil tribespeople.

Members of the Ougaidat’s al-Baqir clan—in Khusham and Jadid Ougaidat—were aggrieved by this development because these villages host the oil and gas fields, in addition to the Conoco gas plant. One clansman, a simple taxi driver named Amir al-Rafdan, traced his origins to Jadid Ougaidat and drove a cab in the al-Jura district of Deir al-Zour. Viewing the JN intervention as unfair, he sided with the Islamic State and urged his kinfolk to do the same. He pledged allegiance to the group and its military leader Omar al-Shishani, helping clear the path for IS entry into Jadid Ougaidat and Khusham. Rafdan subsequently rose to become *wali* (governor) of what IS called the “al-Kheir estate” (Deir al-Zour province), similar to the role held by Ali Moussa al-Shawakh (aka Abu Luqman) in Raqqa.

Internal Ougaidat frictions came to a head in May 2014 when JN gunmen, mainly from al-Shahil, attacked Jadid Ougaidat and burned homes belonging to the al-Rafdan family.

The Islamic State’s June 2014 seizure of Mosul, Iraq, granted the group preeminent “moral and military power” across eastern Syria and western Iraq. Amid this climate, forces loyal to Amir al-Rafdan seized al-Shahil

the next month. Worried that they would lose their oil revenues facilitated by JN, the al-Shaitat, another tribe within the Ougaidat confederation, sought support in the form of weapons and fighters from their fellow Abu Kamal clansmen. Within the al-Shaitat, the al-Bahar, al-Zalan, and al-Nahar families all ran oil fields, producing 4,000, 2,500, and 1,500 bpd, respectively, in the villages of Abu Hamam and Kishkeh.

Thus, three Ougaidat families—the al-Baqir, Abu Kamal, and al-Shaitat—were all drawn into the JN-IS struggle, even as their true interests centered on keeping their oil proceeds. That same month, July 2014, the Islamic State completed its takeover of all towns and villages inhabited by the Ougaidat, and kicked Jabhat al-Nusra out of the area.

Indirect U.S. Opportunities with the Eastern Syrian Tribes

WALDA

The Walda tribe has no history of direct hostility toward the United States, although dozens of its members traveled to Iraq in 2003 to take part in jihad against the U.S. invasion. Those jihadists, however, failed upon their return to convert their fellow tribespeople at large to the anti-U.S. cause.

According to interviews with Walda tribespeople conducted prior to the U.S.-backed 2017 liberation of Raqqa from the Islamic State, most agreed that the United States should not rely solely on Kurds and Kurdish-led militias in seizing the Arab-majority province. In turn, interviewees expressed a desire for the United States to protect Arab representation in the post-liberation Raqqa city council elections in order to avert Arab marginalization.

Reflecting such concerns, an influential Walda figure who lives in al-Thawra estimated the city's population of 150,000 to be 85 percent Arab. Yet despite this lopsided proportion, he said, most decisionmakers within the Civil Council are Kurds, a clear inequity.

AFADLA

Afadla tribespeople span a range of persuasions, from moderate to radical, anti- to pro-Assad. The Afadla generally did not welcome direct U.S. military operations in their areas, but neither did they resist them. The spectrum of Afadla reactions follows:

- Islamic State gunmen and radical Salafi scholars have publicly expressed their hostile attitude toward the U.S.-led coalition against the jihadist group in Syria and Iraq. They believe the collapse of IS in both countries will weaken Sunni Arab tribes and strengthen Iran's Shia political, economic, and military program in the region. Also at risk, in this perception, are Sunni interests in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as typically U.S.-aligned Sunni countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states.
- Leftist and secular tribespeople blame the United States for the weakness of the Free Syrian Army as well as civil society groups advocating an equitable resolution to the war. Radical Islamists, they say, have easy access to cash and media platforms (and weapons), while civil society forces enjoy no such access.
- Pro-Assad tribespeople, unsurprisingly, fault the United States for its support to anti-Assad rebels and for encouraging them to oppose the regime.
- Liberal, staunchly anti-Assad tribespeople, an exception, welcome U.S. military and political activity in Syria.

SABKHA

Like the Afadla, Sabkha tribespeople are split among various factions regarding the war. Whereas ordinary members hold no particularly hostile attitude toward the United States, pro-Assad and Salafi-Wahhabi tribespeople oppose U.S. intervention for various reasons. For its part, the pro-Assad bloc claims the United States wants to reenact its cooptation of Iraq, creating a satellite regime led by liberalizing Sunnis and, ironically, Muslim Brotherhood elements. The Salafi-Wahhabi bloc is strongly anti-U.S. and has engaged in military action against U.S.-backed forces in both Syria and Iraq, including after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, when Sabkha members traveled stealthily to Iraq and fought in "Iraqi resistance groups."

BUSARAYA

Like the Sabkha, dozens of Busaraya tribesmen snuck into Iraq to fight coalition forces after the 2003 U.S. invasion. Returning to Syria, they brought with them radical ideas, which later fueled their involvement with

the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra. Since the Syrian war began in 2011, the Busaraya have not coalesced around a unified stance toward U.S. forces. Most, however, have preferred that their territory be liberated from IS by U.S.-backed Arab tribesmen fighting with the rebels than by the Kurdish YPG. Some Busaraya tribal members hold pro-regime, pro-Iran views, and they therefore oppose the U.S. position, although “without offering a clear solution to the Syrian war,” according to a tribe member. The few communists within Busaraya criticize the United States as an enabler of Turkish and Saudi Arabian “imperialism.”

BAGGARA

Some Baggara tribespeople are pro-U.S., some anti-U.S., but as with other tribes, no single view prevails among them. Also like the other tribes, Baggara members traveled to Iraq in 2003, expressly to support the Hussein regime. Most ultimately returned to their hometowns in Deir al-Zour province. Today, most Baggara tribespeople fear the Assad regime and Iran’s Shia militias, and they prefer U.S.-backed Arab rebel liberators to Kurdish YPG-associated elements.

Baggara sheik Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir, who has disavowed the regime only to reembrace it and who now lives in Damascus, has criticized the United States for empowering the Syrian Democratic Forces, which are led by the Kurdish YPG. Sources suggest Bashir sought to establish an “army of tribes” to retake Deir al-Zour province from the Islamic State. He has also voiced support for Iran’s agenda in Syria against the United States. Some tribespeople, who live predominantly in regime-held areas, have adopted a similar view.

UGAIDAT

Members of the Ougaidat tribe hold a hostile attitude toward the United States dating to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Saddam Hussein. This negative perception was reinforced by reports from hundreds of Iraqi Sunni officers, as well as Baath and other government officials, who were displaced to Ougaidat areas during the war. They offered similarly unflattering stories about Iraqi Shia militias. During that same conflict, Ougaidat tribesmen traveled by the hundreds to Iraq’s western provinces to fight against U.S. forces, with some later joining al-Qaeda-linked groups and cells. On returning home, they disseminated the anti-U.S. jihadist ideology they had absorbed.

Ougaidat dislike for the United States could intensify further should U.S. forces back the entry of YPG-led and Bedouin Shammar armed groups into Deir al-Zour province. Such hostility could find expression in attacks or “resistance groups” targeting U.S. forces as well as Kurdish and Shammar fighters. The Ougaidat may even activate sleeper cells affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State.

A less incendiary message from the Ougaidat calls on the United States to support Arab rebel groups in liberating their areas from IS, thus eliminating the radical presence, and to allow for self-rule.

Conflict Between YPG/SDF and the Eastern Syrian Tribes

WALDA

According to interviews with Walda members, the tribe mostly welcomed the Syrian Democratic Forces, led by elements of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, when they arrived in Raqqa province in 2017. The PYD-run Civil Council of Raqqa is headed by Mahmoud Shawakh al-Bursan, sheikh of the Walda’s Jazira clan, who lives in Qamishli.

The modern history of the Shawakh clan is illuminating. Through the agricultural reform (nationalization) laws enacted in 1965–67, the Baath regime seized some 50,000 acres from the family, which was forced to relocate to Hasaka when their village was flooded during the creation of the reservoir known as Lake Assad. When, on April 18, 2017, Mahmoud was nominated to serve as co-president of the Raqqa Civil Council, along with Lamia Mustafa, most of his fellow Walda tribespeople were persuaded to back the SDF and adopt a more anti-Assad stance.

Walda tribespeople who live in Hasaka province have poor ties with area Kurds, but do not express their hostile sentiments. The Kurds in Hasaka, for their part, view the Walda as “strangers who took their historic lands.”

Up to the present day, the PYD and its *idara thatiya* (local administration) do not allow participation or voting from Walda tribespeople in the Qamishli and Hasaka councils. The PYD has essentially demanded that the Walda “go back to your villages in Raqqa and exercise your rights there.” To be sure, the Walda living in PYD-held areas worry seriously that the Kurdish

group will evict them from their homes in Hasaka province and force their return to western Raqqa, where their ancestral lands remain submerged by Lake Assad, near the al-Thawra Dam, Syria's largest on the Euphrates.

An educated tribal leader in al-Walda explained: "The Baath regime rooted us out of our lands alongside the Euphrates River, and today the PYD is going to do the same thing. The Baath Party and PYD—two faces of the same coin."

AFADLA

Kurds do not inhabit the communities around the Afadla tribe, and members have no direct hostile history with the Kurds. Even so, the chauvinist pan-Arabist Baath regime succeeded over five decades in brainwashing Arab tribes, including the Afadla, to hate the Kurds and stand against their "virtual state."

Recently, though, Afadla tribal heads who formerly wielded influence in their villages and in Raqqa city have watched as Kurdish military leaders, with strong backing from the United States, spearheaded their liberation from the Islamic State. They sense this will lead to subjugation to the Kurds, as occurred in Tal Abyad in June 2015 and al-Thawra in May 2017. The PYD ascendance in an area with no previous Kurdish communities, save for a handful of tenant farmers, has infuriated tribe members.

Afadla leaders and members have expressed a clear intention to resist PYD rule over Raqqa post-IS. The PYD and its YPG militia, they assert, should leave Raqqa city and all Arab areas and let the Arabs run their cities, towns, and villages through freely elected local councils.

SABKHA

Like the Afadla, the Sabkha has had no previous contact with the Kurds, since no Kurdish settlements historically abutted theirs. But the Sabkha, too, have been affected by decades of regime-directed propaganda against the Kurds.

The Sabkha has pro-Assad members, who have not viewed the Kurds or SDF with particular hostility. They believe the SDF is cooperating with the Assad regime and thus do not worry much about the group's ascendance. Relatedly, a pro-Assad Sabkha tribal leader reflected:

Kurds form about 5 percent of Raqqa province's residents. They are nothing and cannot rule and run the province. There are Arab tribesmen who joined Daesh [another name for the Islamic State]

and took the Kurds' houses and shops in Raqqa city, and surely the Kurds will take the Daesh members' houses and lands. In the end, the PYD will give Raqqa province back to the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

As for the Sabkha who oppose Assad, they prefer the YPG to regime forces and militias but at the same time have called on the PYD to let Arab tribe members run their own cities and towns. In the words of an anti-Assad activist from Sabkha, "We got rid of the ruling Baath Party—we don't want a PYD ruling party. We want our people to vote and elect their leaders."

BUSARAYA

Most Busaraya harbor strong anti-Kurdish sentiments and therefore are deeply uncomfortable with the liberation of their areas by largely Kurdish YPG militiamen. Most Busaraya interviewees accordingly refused to allow any Kurdish militiamen whatsoever in their areas, with one suggesting, "It is better to keep Islamic State gunmen than be occupied by the YPG."

Busaraya members began fleeing their villages after learning that regime militias, including the Assad-linked tribal confederation led by Turki Abu Hamad, had seized villages in eastern Raqqa, such as al-Sabkha and Maadan.

BAGGARA

In general, Baggara tribespeople do not hold their Kurdish neighbors in high regard. This is especially true of tribespeople in Hasaka province (known as *Baggara al-Jabal*, or Baggara of the Mountain, referring to nearby Mt. Abdulaziz), who live near Kurdish communities and supported the Assad regime's crackdown on the Kurdish rebellion in 2004, which was sparked after a soccer match between an Arab and a Kurdish-majority team. In the event, among other developments, Kurdish protestors used rhetoric targeting Arabs. Six decades earlier, in 1944, Kurds had supported the Bedouin Shammar tribe in its attacks against area Arab tribes, and those tribes have never forgotten the Kurdish-Bedouin coalition against them.

Likewise, the Baggara in Deir al-Zour object to the liberation of their province from IS by the SDF. They cite the "Kurds' opportunistic greed" in seeking to overtake a province that is "100 percent Arab." On August 23, 2017, Baggara sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir relatedly issued this threat to the YPG on

Facebook: “We will return to the glories of 2004 [referring here specifically to the regime crackdown in Qamishli] and the 4th Division’s victories. We will arm the Arab tribes and kick the Kurdish gangs out of northern Syria.” Such sentiments indicate the deep Kurdish-Arab divide in parts of Syria, and show why some Baggara (and other) tribespeople would cooperate with Assad against Kurdish interests.

UGAIDAT

The origins of Ougaidat hostility toward the Kurds date to the 1930s–40s, when the Kurds backed the Shammar confederation against the Arab tribe. Before 2011, thousands of Ougaidat lived in the town of al-Shadadi, as well as in Hasaka city, in both the southern section and the Arab district of Ghweiran. This figure has now fallen into the hundreds.

Like the Baggara, Ougaidat members supported the Assad regime against the Kurds’ March 2004 uprising, a development the regime exploited to recruit Arab tribespeople. These recruits, who were serving in the military and other security apparatuses, along with significant numbers of civilians, were armed by the regime against the Kurdish protestors. The Kurds, in turn, have never forgotten this incident and the support given by the Ougaidat and other Arab tribes to the regime. In the current scene, Ougaidat tribespeople blame the YPG for cooperating with Assad-regime forces and Iran’s Shia militias against Arab tribes in eastern Syria.

Prospects for Euphrates Shield and the Eastern Syrian Tribes

WALDA

Most Walda tribespeople have welcomed the Turkish role in liberating Raqqa province more than the Kurdish role. But the United States relied heavily on the Kurds, who pushed Turkey-backed forces, under Operation Euphrates Shield, from the area. Earlier, in 2013–14, after armed tribesmen helped liberate al-Thawra and its air base from Assad’s forces, hundreds of Walda families fled regime airstrikes to Turkey. But when Mahmoud Shawakh al-Bursan, a tribal sheikh, was nominated to co-lead the PYD-run local council, Walda tribespeople expressed their approval. Meanwhile, in Hasaka province, Walda residents are generally supportive of Turkey’s role in containing Kurdish power in northern Syria.

AFADLA

Even before the war, thousands of Afadla tribespeople lived as Turkish nationals in the southeastern cities of Sanliurfa and Mardin. Some sources even suggest that the tribe’s name comes from the Turkish *afadleh*, which means “big snake.”

While lacking a unified position toward the Turkey-backed rebels, Afadla members generally prefer them to U.S.-supported Kurdish fighters. Moreover, interviews with Afadla tribal leaders and other figures indicate anxieties over U.S. marginalization of the Turkish role in liberating Raqqa from the Islamic State, to the benefit of the Kurds. Still, some have switched their view, acknowledging Kurdish preeminence in post-IS Raqqa. A very small number of the Afadla back the Syrian regime, and have correspondingly criticized Turkey’s destructive role in the national crisis. Among the Afadla displaced to Turkey from their villages in eastern and northern Raqqa, hundreds have continued their migration into Europe.

SABKHA

In early March 2013, Sabkha tribespeople supported the FSA’s Suqur al-Sunna division, al-Nasser division, and Ahfad al-Rasul Brigades. Early the next year, when the Islamic State took Raqqa province and subsequently kicked out the FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra, tribespeople aligned with these groups fled to Turkey. They now await their prospective return home, with Turkish support, but the predominantly Kurdish SDF controls half of the Sabkha’s villages and towns, from Ratlah to al-Akirshi, east of Raqqa. The stretch from al-Akirshi to Maadan, about thirty kilometers, is held by Assad’s forces and the allied tribal group led by Turki Abu Hamad. Overall, the Sabkha are frustrated with both Turkish and Arab tribespeople who allowed the Sabkha hometowns to be seized by either Kurdish or regime forces.

BUSARAYA

Like the Sabkha, the Busaraya tribe includes thousands who have been displaced to Turkey, where they are living with their families in general security and stability, with Turkish government support. Most are anti-Assad political or military figures, and most of these welcome Turkish backing to Arab tribespeople in the liberation of Deir al-Zour.

In the view of one Busaraya tribal leader, Turkey has no long-term plans or sectarian agenda for Syria, but Iran does have such an agenda, aimed at bolstering Shia militias and controlling Syria much as it does Iraq. Reasons for Busaraya support for Euphrates Shield include a perception of Turkey as a natural ally against the Kurdish PYD and its consolidation of self-rule through the People's Council of Western Kurdistan. They also look to Turkey as an ally against Iranian ambitions.

BAGGARA

Having largely joined up with anti-Assad rebels, many Baggara fled to Turkey after the Islamic State took Deir al-Zour province. These tribe members now live with their families in cities such as Urfa, Gaziantep, Mersin, and Istanbul. Turkey also supports Usud al-Sharqiya (Lions of the East), a Baggara-majority rebel group whose fighters are seeking help from the Turkish government to liberate Deir al-Zour province. The United States, however, favors the largely Kurdish SDF and Arab rebel groups of al-Tanf. It is unsurprising that Baggara tribespeople mostly prefer Turkey and its Arab rebels to the SDF and Iran's militias.

Baggara tribespeople who back the Assad regime and fault Turkey for opposing Assad constitute a minority. Sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir, for example, praised Turkish involvement during his exile in Istanbul, but upon his return to Syria in early 2017, he changed course, attacking Turkey.

UGAIDAT

The Ougaidat, too, generally have a sympathetic view of Turkey, where most tribal members and fighters have sought refuge. As with other tribes discussed here, the Turkish government has welcomed the Ougaidat, offering homes and protection for some of their leaders.

The Ougaidat consider Turkey a natural ally against Kurdish, Bedouin Shammar, Assad regime, and Iran-backed Shia militia influence in their home territory of eastern Syria. Most Ougaidat, in turn, prefer Euphrates Shield to the U.S.-backed SDF in liberating their areas from IS control and cutting off the path for Assad- and Iran-supported militias toward Deir al-Zour province. Indeed, hundreds of Ougaidat are fighting within Euphrates Shield, and some of the tribe's rebel leaders have close ties with Turkey's military and intelligence organizations.

History and Attitudes toward the Assad Regime, Iran, and Shia Militias

WALDA

As noted in previous sections, the Walda tribe's anti-Baath attitude dates to the 1960s with the Syrian government's nationalization program and seizure of tribal lands. Notably, the late Baathist figure Ibrahim Hinedi, a member of the al-Ajeel clan (Jabbour tribe) who led Raqqa in the 1980s, viewed the Walda with great antipathy. Hindi was among many Baathists to serve the government in Raqqa, where they suppressed the Walda. This helps explain the strong anti-Assad stance taken by most Walda tribespeople after the Syrian crisis began in 2011.

Not just the Walda, but virtually every resident of Raqqa, even those supportive of Assad, oppose the Iran-backed Shia militias. This harsh opposition stems in large part from Shia militia actions against Arab Sunni tribespeople in Mosul, Iraq, in late 2016—actions that led to the displacement of many.

In July 2013, the Assad regime attempted to cultivate tribal support through the nomination of Walda member Khalaf al-Muftah (Salal family), then deputy minister of information, to the Baath Party's Regional Command. However, Khalaf was unable to use this position to generate regime support among his fellow tribespeople. In April 2017, Assad removed Khalaf from his Regional Command post, with rumors suggesting the move had come because his relative Sheikh Mahmoud Shawakh al-Bursan had ascended to the co-presidency of the PYD-run Civil Council of Raqqa.

AFADLA

Among Afadla interviewees both supportive of and opposed to the Assad regime, all expressed considerable opposition to Iran's sectarian project in Syria; some suggested openness to a potential Russian role in reining in Assad and the Iran-supported militias. On the pro-Assad side, a lawyer said he would welcome the arrival of the Syrian Arab Army but rejected strongly the notion of any Iranian, Afghan, or Iraqi Shia militiaman serving with the Syrian force.

Most Afadla tribespeople were initially open to both Turkey- and U.S.-backed rebels liberating their villages. But after villages were taken by the largely Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces, the inhabitants were ultimately able to return home, where they lived peacefully under

the command of elite forces of the Shammar Bedouin confederation, led by Ahmed Jarba. They preferred this arrangement to living under the Kurdish YPG-led forces, and indeed showed warmth toward the Arab Shammar tribesmen. This was a telling comparison with the Sabkha, who fled their home villages on the southern banks of the Euphrates when regime forces and the allied tribal group led by Turki Abu Hamad neared.

The elite Shammar forces, for their part, traveled to Raqqa city from the eastern suburb of al-Mishlab in June 2017, where the al-Huwaidi family, chieftains of the Afadla, is based.

SABKHA

Sabkha opposition to Bashar al-Assad and his allies was reinforced when, in summer 2017, regime and Alawite-led tribal forces, led by Suhail al-Hassan, raided villages such as al-Akirshi, al-Rahabi, al-Sharida (eastern and western), al-Gabli, al-Ghanim Ali, Muqlah, al-Jaber, al-Khamisah, and Maadan. The invaders engaged in looting and rape, among other offenses.

In fleeing the depredations, the Sabkha took with them their tractors, trucks, cars, and livestock to areas held by the SDF and Islamic State alike. The migration showed that tribespeople preferred living under jihadists or Kurds to control by regime-associated elements.

According to interviews and informal discussions with Sabkha members, some 10–15 percent of tribe members did relocate to regime-held cities such as Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Latakia—but not out of support for Assad. Rather, they sought shelter and education for their children.

Supporters of Assad from within the tribe include Eid al-Darwish, a senior Baath official and pro-regime mouthpiece, and Muhammad Jamal al-Turki, who has fallaciously identified himself to the media as the “tribal leader of the Sabkha”—a claim disavowed by his fellow tribe members.

BUSARAYA

Busaraya tribespeople have a strong anti-Iran bent and vehemently oppose the country’s Shia militias and its “sectarian agenda.” According to one tribal leader, most of his family members worry profoundly about Iran and the Syrian regime’s Alawite militiamen, who they fear will burn down their homes and drive them from their communities. As with the Afadla, even pro-Assad Busaraya tribespeople who have called for the Syrian

Arab Army to rid their lands of the Islamic State will not tolerate the Iranian and Iraqi Shia militiamen. Another tribesman expressed the concern that his thirty-five-year old son, Saddam, named for the late Iraqi leader, would be killed for this name alone.

BAGGARA

One tradition holds that the Baggara tribe descended from Imam Ali ibn Hussein Zain al-Abidin (aka Iman Zain al-Abidin), the son of Imam Ali. For this reason, some tribespeople link themselves to Shia doctrine. Iran exploited this purported connection to convert hundreds of Baggara to Shiism, especially in Hatla, a district in northern Deir al-Zour. In June 2013, gunmen from Jabhat al-Nusra killed about fifty Shia tribespeople from Baggara in this same district.

When Sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir returned from exile in Istanbul in 2017, his move was coordinated with both Iran and Liwa al-Imam al-Baqir, a Shia militia. Having expressed sharp criticism of Iran while in Turkey, the sheikh now praises the Popular Mobilization Forces, whose units operate under Iraqi and Iranian authority.

UGAIDAT

With exceptions—including pro-Assad tribal chiefs and hundreds of officers and staff in the regime’s military and security organizations—most Ougaidat oppose the Assad regime. Indeed, dozens of interviews with tribe members confirm anti-Assad views and strong opposition to Iranian influence and Shia militias, with some even saying they’d prefer living under IS than under Assad and his allied militias. The Islamic State may have committed crimes and killed hundreds of tribespeople, they reason, but Assad and the Iran-backed militias will kill them all or oust them from their homes and land.

In particular, Ougaidat leaders express serious concerns over the prospect that Iran-supported militias will disturb their territories, including in eastern Deir al-Zour and Abu Kamal, while en route from Tadmur or Iraq, with aims of establishing a link from Iran to Syria.

The Ougaidat also note fears relating to the establishment by Baggara chief Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir of the Iran-sponsored al-Baqer Division in early 2017. Bashir has indicated plans to direct his division and other Shia units from the Baggara lands in western Deir al-Zour, along the northern bank of Euphrates, into the eastern parts of Deir al-Zour. Within Deir al-Zour, however, the Ougaidat are stronger than the Baggara.

TRIBAL PROFILES

Walda Tribe

WALDA STRUCTURE

The ten clans belonging to the Walda tribe are listed here roughly according to their membership and influence.

1. **NASSER CLAN.** Led today by Sheikh Nasser al-Muhammad al-Faraj al-Salamah al-Dandal al-Nasser, this clan holds the Walda chiefdom in Raqqa, Hasaka, and Aleppo provinces. The forefather of the clan, Muhammad al-Faraj al-Salamah al-Dandal al-Nasser (1889–1972), had two sons: Dandal, the head of the Shamiya branch, based on the southern banks of the Euphrates; and Hamad, head of the Jazira branch, based on the river’s northern banks. The current sheikh of the Jazira Walda, Mahmoud Shawakh al-Bursan, serves as co-president of the PYD-run Civil Council of Raqqa. His father, Shawakh al-Ahmad al-Bursan, was a preeminent figure within the tribe, serving as leader of both the Shamiya and Jazira branches. This sheikh accepted the offer by former Syrian leader Hafiz al-Assad for his tribespeople to relocate from the eastern banks of Lake Assad to the northern city of al-Thawra, in Hasaka province, where they lived alongside the area’s Kurdish residents. He died in the 1982 in the village of Bahira, near Qamishli.
2. **HUWAIT CLAN.** The chiefdom belongs to the [al-Ali al-Hussein](#) lineage, currently led by Mihedi al-Saleh, who resides in the village of Ghazalah Ghariba. Another member of this lineage, Ghassim al-Moussa, served from 1994 to 2000 as the Baath Party chief from Raqqa province. Other lineages include:
 - [al-Kishur](#), for which the al-Eid family holds the chiefdom; members reside in Ghazalah Sharqiya and al-Thawra.
 - [al-Kabir](#), whose members live in the villages of al-Qajar, al-Namala, and al-Thawra city.
 - [al-Jabal](#), whose key family is Hijab al-Afnan; members live in the villages of Dibs al-Afnan and Maskanah Sharqiya.
3. **AL-JAABAT CLAN.** This clan consists of the following lineages:
 - [Ridin](#), whose key family is al-Issa; members live in eastern Aleppo.
 - [al-Farat](#). The key family is al-Shana, whose members live in the villages of al-Usta, al-Jirneh, and on the state-run farms west of Raqqa city. One prominent figure from this lineage is Muhammad Ali al-Awad, who led the Baath Party in Raqqa from 1966 to 1968.
 - [al-Sebat](#). A central figure is Sheikh Faisal al-Sebat, who currently lives in Damascus with his wife, an Alawite from Latakia. A Parliament member, he resigned in early May 2018 saying that Assad’s government nominates “corrupted officials to run the governmental positions for Raqqa province.” An Assad supporter, Sebat is suspected of corruption, and the regime refers to him as a “Sunni Arab tribesman.”
 - [al-Abdullah](#). The main family is al-Balikh, whose members live in Mrabet village, Hasaka province.
 - [al-Moussa](#). The main family is al-Matar, which counts Abdulrahman Matar, a strongly anti-Assad activist and writer, as a member.
 - [Homs](#). The central family is Shawakh al-Ibrahim, whose members live in Raqqa city and on the state-run farms in western Raqqa.
 - [Hiswa](#). The main family, al-Ghadban, are residents of Dibs al-Faraj.
 - [Issa al-Ali](#). This lineage is in the village of Ishaq.
 - [Quba](#). This lineage is located in Raqqa.
 - [al-Hadid](#), residents of Raqqa and Hasaka (cities).
4. **AL-AMER CLAN.** This group contains the following lineages:
 - [Abu Jrit](#). The key figure is Sheikh Ali Abdullah al-Gasham, who at sixty-five was killed by a coalition drone strike in June 2017, just a week after his wife, Hasna Muhammad al-Arouda, was killed in a similar strike, near Jarniya. Sheikh Ali came from the village of al-Salma, near al-

Jarniya. He was vigorous in offering help to families displaced from Raqqa, opposed the Islamic State, and did not back the seizure of Raqqa by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. Until his last day, he refused to leave the city of Raqqa. Members of his lineage live in Ras al-Ain, in Hasaka province.

- **al-Zako.** The main family comprises the sons of Khalaf al-Muhammad, residing in al-Jarniya, Raqqa, and Hasaka.
 - **al-Mukhna.** The key family is named eponymously and is located in al-Jarniya, Raqqa, and Hasaka.
 - **al-Shaaban.** The key family is Issa al-Obeid, resident in of al-Jarniya and Raqqa city.
5. **AL-ALI CLAN**, with the following lineages:
- **Abu Issa.** This lineage counts Ahmad Aloush al-Othman, the forty-something leader of the Raqqa Revolutionaries Brigade (Liwa Thuwar al-Raqqa), as a member. Abu Issa established the first anti-Assad armed group in western Raqqa province, eliciting support from al-Nasser chiefs as well as his fellow al-Ali clansmen.
 - **Hassan al-Ali**, with the core family being Hamid al-Shihab al-Hamad, whose members live in Ratlah, east of Raqqa city. (Whereas almost all Walda tribespeople live in western Raqqa, the exceptions dwell east of the city, mainly in Ratlah.)
 - **Khaled al-Ali**, residents of Kafr Safra, with the main family being Baalah.
 - **Milhem al-Ali**, with the main family al-Assad, whose members live in the towns of Mansoura, 30 kilometers west of Raqqa city, and Deir Hafir, east of Aleppo.
 - **Humran al-Ali**, residents of Idlib and Hama.
 - **Razzaq al-Ali**, whose central figure is Nouri al-Faisal; he currently lives in the city of Hama, and his relatives live to its north, in the pro-Assad town of Qamhana.
6. **AL-TARAN CLAN**, with the following lineages:
- **Hussein al-Muhammad.** The main family is al-Taran, located in Maskanah and al-Safsafah.
 - **Hassan al-Muhammad**, residents of Khirbet Shihab, near Manbij, in eastern Aleppo.
 - **Maneh al-Muhammad (aka al-Sinabilah)**, with the main family al-Ghabin; residents of Dibsi Faraj, Maskanah, and al-Safsafah.
 - **Rashid al-Muhammad**, residents of Samumah, a village near Maskanah.
7. **AL-GHANIM CLAN.** This group lives in and around al-Khafsa, in eastern Aleppo. The sons of Fasih al-Ghanim serve as chiefs.
8. **AL-FARES CLAN.** This clan resides in al-Thawra city and the villages of al-Safsafah and al-Khafsa, and contains the following lineages:
- **Shekhawi**
 - **al-Jabli**
 - **al-Sunna**
 - **al-Hajat**
 - **al-Jarah**
9. **ABU MASIRA CLAN**, with the following lineages:
- **al-Ghanam.** The central family, al-Ajour, resides in the village of Tal Tharid.
 - **al-Ali.** The central family, al-Aliu, lives in al-Thawra and the village of al-Babiri.
 - **al-Maajat.** The main family, al-Marai is located in the village of Qawas.
 - **Suabit.** The central families, al-Hassan and al-Tallas, are residents of al-Babiri and Qawas.
10. **AL-MARADAT CLAN.** The main family is Dakhil al-Murad, located in al-Jarniya.

Note that other small clans have unconfirmed connections to the Walda, such as the **al-Fardum**, residents of Deir Hafir, al-Bab, and Maskanah.

WALDA ECONOMY

After triumphing in clashes in 1941 with the al-Fadan clan, which belongs to the Anaza Bedouin, the Walda chiefs—led by the powerful al-Nasser and al-Bursan families—held thousands of acres of fertile land on both sides of the Euphrates. With the Baathist coup of 1963, however, the new regime redistributed some 80–90 percent of al-Nasser and al-Bursan lands, to the benefit of Abu Jaber and al-Ajeel tribespeople. The latter tribes thus developed a strong loyalty to the Baath regime, whereas the Walda opposed it. This marked the

“original” rift between the Baath and the Walda tribe, whose members now owned less-valuable and altogether less land.

The next rupture came in the 1970s with the construction of the al-Thawra Dam, an event that displaced some 40 percent of Walda tribespeople, having submerged their fertile lands with flooding. These Walda were forced to move to Hasaka province, where they lived among Kurdish communities. Most of the displaced families encouraged their sons to immigrate to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states for work to support their families. Among the Walda, thousands studied at the University of Aleppo, thereafter returning to the northern Raqqa suburbs, where they filled city and governmental jobs.

WALDA POLITICS

Historically, Walda tribespeople were apolitical. They instead focused on their agrarian livelihood, tilling fertile lands and raising livestock. Their overall political aloofness contrasts with the more urban clansmen of Raqqa province. Still, the Walda tribe includes small numbers of pan-Arabists in the Nasserist mold; communists; and members of the National Progressive Front, a ten-party coalition led by the ruling Baath.

Although displacing and angering many members of the Walda tribe, the nationalization plan in the 1960s attracted others to the Baath Party. Among the Walda appointed to the party apparatus were Muhammad Ali al-Awad, from the Jaabat clan. As elaborated elsewhere in this paper, Awad failed during his tenure in 1966–68 as head of the Baath Party in Raqqa province to persuade his tribal chiefs to get behind the Baath Party. Still upset over the displacements caused by nationalization, they remained officially “neutral.” From 1994 to 2000, Ghassim al-Moussa, a member of the Walda’s Huwait clan, served as chief of the Raqqa province Baath Party. And Khalaf al-Muftah, from the al-Salal family, is the tribesman to have ascended highest in the regime. He served as deputy minister of information, having been nominated by President Bashar al-Assad in November 2012. In July 2013, while his relatives fought against Assad’s forces, Khalaf was named to the Baath Party regional command, but was dismissed from this position by the president in July 2017. Known to have made significant money through corruption, Muftah

commands no respect among his tribespeople. He lives in Damascus.

Afadla Tribe

AFADLA STRUCTURE

The Afadla tribe is divided into seven or eight clans, depending on the source. The eighth clan, though, the al-Shabal, denies membership in the tribe, effectively closing the debate.

1. **AL-DIYAB CLAN.** This clan holds the chieftom position among the Afadla in Syria. Among its leading members is Sheikh Muhammad Faisal al-Huwaidi, whose late father, Faisal al-Huwaidi (1922–82), was married to a daughter of Magham bin Mahad, the sheikh of the al-Fadan, a clan belonging to the Anaza Bedouin. Muhammad Faisal, who has two brothers, moved to Damascus in July 2017 with significant help from parliament member Hussam al-Katerji and his brother Baraa al-Katerji, a businessman with a sketchy profile and close ties to military intelligence. Another prominent tribal leader, Bashir Faisal al-Huwaidi, led the al-Muntasir division of the Free Syrian Army, helping kick Assad’s forces out of Raqqa. He currently lives in Raqqa city. The third brother, Omar Faisal al-Huwaidi, is living in Turkey. The clan contains the following lineages:
 - **Darwish al-Muhammad al-Diyab**, with the al-Huwaida serving in the chieftom role; they live in al-Mishlab, just to east of Raqqa
 - **al-Assaf al-Mishlab**, residents of Raqqa Samra, eight kilometers east of the city
 - **al-Mahinda al-Diyab**, residents of the village of Tawi
 - **Ajeel al-Diyab**
2. **AL-BREIJ AL-DAHER CLAN.** This clan, the most supportive of the Islamic State, contains three lineages:
 - **al-Hassan al-Breij.** The family of Yusuf al-Deeb al-Hajo plays the chief role in Fatisat al-Deeb village. This family has two prominent members: Ismail al-Hajo, a Communist parliamentarian in his early seventies, whom the Assad regime refers to as “sheikh” of the al-Breij despite his Communist affiliation; and Tobad al-Breij al-Abdulhadi al-Deeb al-Hajo. Now in his thirties, he was born

in Iraq because his father had fled the regime of Hafiz al-Assad. Having served in Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, he returned to Syria in 2003, after the outbreak of the Gulf war. Once home, he initiated big construction projects in Raqqa, earning large sums of money for his efforts. The al-Hassan al-Breij lineage also contains members in the village of Fatisah Lakson, led by Najjam al-Fajjar; in Fatisah Biram, led by Fasih al-Ali al-Biram; in Maazellah, led by Mashog al-Balikh; in Tal Saman, led by Muhammad al-Sarhan; and in al-Thamriah, led by Gumah al-Battha.

- **al-Hussein al-Breij.** Members of this lineage live in the villages of Jdeidat Kahett, Jdeidat Khabur, and Jdeidat Baldeh, led by Sheikh Mahmud al-Khabur.
 - **al-Jaber lineage.** Located in Jdeidat Kahett, the families include the al-Harir, al-Galo, al-Zeidat, and al-Sahin, led by Sheikh Mahmoud al-Mikhlif.
3. **AL-MOUSSA AL-DAHER CLAN,** the largest within the Afadla, centers on the al-Hadi family, whose current sheikh is Haji Ahmad al-Hadi. The clansmen live in al-Kasrat village, on the southern banks of the Euphrates south of Raqqa city; north and northwest of Raqqa, they inhabit the villages of Salahabiya, Rihayat, al-Hawi, al-Gayef, Kubash, and al-Khayala.
 4. **AL-MEDLIJ AL-DAHER CLAN.** Abu Hibal holds the chief position in this clan. The current sheikh is Huwaidi al-Mishlab Darwish Hamad Abu Hilal, whose grandfather was sheikh of the Afadla tribe. Ultimately, the al-Huwaidi family, from the al-Diyab clan, took over this position from Abu Hibal. Despite this power shift, Afadla tribespeople hold the Abu Hibal family in special esteem. Lineages within the tribe include the Diyab, Nasser, Balasim, Ghannam, and Ali. They live in namesake villages, some twenty kilometers east of Raqqa, such as Hamra Nasser, Hamra Ghannam, and Hamra Balasim.
 5. **GHANIM AL-DAHER CLAN.** This clan is anchored by the al-Milhem al-Jaber lineage; members live in the villages of al-Rihayat, Awja, and Hazima, in northern Raqqa, and in Raqqa city. Families include the al-Kiswan, al-Salom, al-Shawkan, and al-Jaber, most of whose members were Baathists

close to the regime and holding key government positions.

6. **AL-AHUS AL-DAHER CLAN.** The al-Ajeel family has the chief role in this clan. The current sheikh is Suleiman al-Ajeel. The clansmen live some forty kilometers east of Raqqa in the villages of Khas Ajeel, Khas Habal, Khas Dakur and Khas Alej. This clan includes members of parliament such as Mazlulh al-Ali and Abdul Fattah al-Gumah, as well as the lawyer Ghassim al-Huwaidi. Historical leaders from the clan include Hussein al-Khamri, a Baath Party leader in 1968–69, and Muhammad al-Amash, led the Baath and served in parliament from 1995 to 2000.
7. **ISSA AL-DAHER CLAN.** Members of this small clan live in the village of Maazellah, in Raqqa city, and in Kubash. Its key family is the al-Sultan.

AFADLA ECONOMY

Historically, most Afadla tribespeople have been farmers who tend to livestock. In the last three decades, however, thousands of tribe members have taken government jobs in the administrative sector, as well as at sugar processing plants, brick kilns, and grain mills. This follows from an Assad policy whereby rural Syrians received preference for these positions over urban Syrians, whom the regime suspected of sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Because the Afadla lived close to the city, many opened shops in Raqqa, where they worked before returning home in the evenings. University graduates among the Afadla have moved to the city, where doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and teachers carry out their careers. Another common option for the Afadla is travel to the Gulf for work, from which they send remittances home to their families. Altogether, a general trend for tribe members entails moving to the city, where they can escape the poverty and limitations of rural life and marry the daughters of urban families.

AFADLA POLITICS

Before the 1963 Baathist coup, the agrarian Afadla tribespeople did not engage in political activity. But the seizure of thousands of acres of tribal land and the diminishment of tribal authority during the ensuing nationalization program sowed bitterness between tribal heads and the Assad government. Their long-held nega-

tivity only spilled into the open following the outbreak of anti-Assad demonstrations in Raqqa in 2011. Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s, thousands of poor, marginalized Afadla tribespeople had joined the Baath Party in order to secure government jobs. But in just a few months, amid the protests, they had disavowed their loyalty, with most joining anti-Assad political and armed groups.

A communist strain within the Afadla can be traced to the twentieth-century figure Ahmad al-Nouran, a lawyer from a prominent tribal family who encouraged his fellow tribespeople to join the Communist Party as a means of showing “lawful opposition” to the Baath. Both he and Ismael al-Hajo, another communist tribesman in his early seventies, live in Damascus and have encouraged dozens of their relatives from the al-Breij clan to join the Communist Party.

Among the many pan-Arab, Nasserist activists within the family are Muhammad Minadi al-Huwaidi (Abu al-Yazid), a participant in the anti-Assad National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, founded in 2011 and led by Hassan Abdel Azim.

Sabkha Tribe

SABKHA STRUCTURE

The Sabkha tribe consists of three clans:

1. **AL-SABKHA CLAN.** This clan, which bears the same name as the tribe, spans the eleven sons of the patriarch Hussein al-Ghannam, comprising several lineages.
 - **al-Rakan.** This is the chief family for the entire Sabkha tribe and lives in the village of al-Akirshi, 30 km east of Raqqa. Anwar al-Rakan formerly served as tribal sheikh, and his son Abdul Mohsen al-Rakan now holds the position while living abroad in Saudi Arabia. Sheikh Abdulkarim al-Rakan, in his mid-eighties, formerly belonged to the IS-run Council of Tribes, based in Raqqa. Despite his strong expressions of support for IS, rumors suggest that in 2017 he traveled to Saudi Arabia via Damascus International Airport with help from regime security. As do his relatives, Abdulkarim holds a Saudi passport, allowing him to travel as a Saudi citizen.
 - **Idris al-Hussein.** The key family is al-Klib, located in the town of al-Sabkha.

- **Naamatal-Hussein.** The key family, al-Sabti, resides in the village of al-Naamat, near Maadan.
 - **Ismail al-Hussein.** The main family is al-Khider, located in Suweida village.
 - **Daher al-Hussein.** The chief family is al-Shuwayr, located in Suweida village.
 - **Abdullah al-Hussein.** The key family al-Muhana, located in Suweida village.
 - **Mashhad al-Hussein.** The chief family is al-Askar, located in the village of al-Khamisah.
 - **Hamad al-Hussein.** The main family is al-Khamis, located in al-Khamisah.
 - **Suleiman al-Hussein.** The key family is al-Shabli, located in Muqlah and al-Namisah; one member is the Wahhabi teacher Salim al-Hilo.
 - **Jaber al-Hussein.** The key families are al-Khalifa, al-Hamadat, and al-Issa, located in al-Jaber.
2. **ABU SUBIYAH CLAN.** This clan is held by the al-Safirah, whose people live in the village of Maadan Atiq (Raqqa province) and the villages of al-Qasbi and al-Tabni (Deir al-Zour). Key families: al-Aloush al-Hamad, Muhammad al-Moussa, al-Agrawi (a figure known as Abdul Aziz al-Agrawi was a central figure in the Sabkha), Gawasmah, Suleiman al-Khattab, and al-Thalji.
 3. **GHANIM AL-ALI CLAN.** This clan is led by the al-Shabatt family, located in of the village of al-Ghanim Ali. Known families include Kattaf, Hasham, and al-Aklah.

SABKHA ECONOMY

Aided by their location along the Deir al-Zour–Raqqa–Aleppo highway, tribal leaders have encouraged their children, more often sons than daughters, to attend school and university in the cities. This favorable location also facilitates tribal purchase of goods in Aleppo, along with sales of their agricultural products, such as yogurt, butter, and cheese, along with livestock. Agriculture is the Sabkha’s primary means of livelihood, and tribespeople own fertile lands along the Euphrates River, allowing them to raise large numbers of sheep and cattle. Compared to the Afadla, the Sabkha are more educated. Furthermore, thousands of Sabkha have traveled to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states

for work, sending remittances back to their families in the Raqqa area.

SABKHA POLITICS

In contrast to the other tribes, the Sabkha do not have an adverse history with the Baath regime. The government did not, in the 1960s, nationalize Sabkha lands. And even in 1975, when Syrian president Hafiz al-Assad seized about a thousand acres from Sabkha sheikh Anwar al-Rakan, who was then living in Saudi Arabia, he did not react negatively on returning to his home village of al-Akirshi. Other such attempts to contain al-Rakan power have occurred without diminishing the family's warmth for the Assad leadership, both Hafiz and Bashar. Leaders in the al-Rakan encouraged their kin to join the Baath Party and serve in government positions. Still, Sabkha tribespeople occupy fewer government jobs than the Afadla.

Whereas no known Sabkha members hold Baath leadership or high-ranking government positions, a tribesman named Suleiman Suleiman was leading a pro-Assad militia and serving as Baath Party chief in Raqqa when in March 2013 the city was seized by rebels, who kicked out government forces. Suleiman, whose father was a well-known Salafi figure, distributed some four thousand guns to Baathist thugs; some of this arsenal came from his Sabkha peers. Still, pro-Assad officials blamed Suleiman for the fall of the city, in part to deflect blame from Alawite military and security officials who led about eight thousand forces in formations such as the 17th division of the Syrian army.

Suleiman was captured by the rebels along with some forty-two of his relations. His fate remains unknown; some reports suggest he was killed and others that he is jailed in Idlib by Jabhat al-Nusra. The fate of Suleiman has evidently prevented tribespeople from rising within the Baath infrastructure.

In Maadan, the economic and political capital of eastern Raqqa, activists among mainly the Sabkha but also other tribes include Mustafa Alawi (Abu Amir), a pan-Arabist political leader. He has successfully enlisted dozens of his fellow tribespeople to join his bloc. Also in Maadan, in past decades the late Muhammad al-Arfi and Taha al-Tai spread Salafi ideology among residents. Later, Salim al-Hilo, who is in his seventies, served as an influential Salafi instructor, as did Ramadan Ramadan, with both spreading the ideology within and east of Raqqa city.

Busaraya Tribe

BUSARAYA STRUCTURE

The Busaraya tribe, according to various members, centers on the al-Shalash family, whose members led the post-World War II resistance to British and French Mandate forces. Ramadan Basha al-Shalash (1882–1961) was born in the village of al-Shemitah and died in Damascus. His brother Hammoud Shalash Abdullah Suleiman al-Diyab served as sheikh until the French awarded the title to his cousin Fayyad al-Nasser Abdullah Suleiman al-Diyab in 1925, after Ramadan killed two French officers following the Battle of Ein Abu Gumah in 1925.

The current head of the Busaraya, Muhana Faisal Ahmad al-Fayyad, serves in parliament and is highly supportive of Assad. He does not, however, enjoy a close rapport with his relatives, who in turn grant him little respect. The al-Shalash family, by comparison, still earns high esteem from most Busaraya members, who consider it the true chief family.

The Assad regime has sought to exploit the Shalash-Fayyad rift. One Shalash family member, Ahmad Shalash, previously served in parliament and now splits his time between Damascus and Beirut, maintaining good ties with Hezbollah and Iranian elements, as well as Syrian security. He is staunchly pro-Assad and has issued strange statements against Lebanese parliament members and ministers who oppose the Syrian leader. Like Fayyad within his family, Ahmad Shalash does not have good relations with his kinspeople in Deir al-Zour. When Shalash served, the Assad regime nominated him as an MP for Damascus, not his home Deir al-Zour province.

The Busaraya tribe consists of the following clans:

1. **AL-MOUSSA CLAN.** Clans within the Busaraya begin with the al-Moussa, which counts both the al-Shalash and al-Fayyad families as members. It consists of these lineages:
 - al-Hussein al-Moussa
 - al-Muhammad al-Moussa
 - al-Assaf al-Moussa
 - al-Diyab al-Moussa
 - Abu Abdullah
 - al-Hassan al-Ali

2. **ABU AZAM CLAN.** Members of this clan live in southern Deir al-Zour areas such as the desert town of al-Shulah. The key family is al-Hassoun.
3. **ABU IZZ AL-DIN CLAN.** This clan lives in western Deir al-Zour province and in the village of al-Gabli, east of Raqqa. The sheikh is Hussein Ali al-Sharidah; his brother Hassan supported the Islamic State.
4. **ABU SHAEB CLAN.** Members live in the villages of al-Khrayta and Shemitah.
5. **ABU HAMZA CLAN.** This clan is located in Raqqa city and the western villages of Deir al-Zour, the al-Hamzawi family holds the chieftdom.
6. **AL-AFASHAT CLAN.** The largest clan in the Busaraya, al-Afashat is mostly spread among Raqqa's urban and rural areas. It consists of the following lineages:
 - **al-Moussa.** The key family is al-Mutlaq.
 - **al-Damsah.** The key family is al-Saleh.
 - **al-Naasan**
 - **al-Aniyah.** The key family is al-Nigras.
 - **al-Ahmad al-Shibli**
 - **al-Fehan**
 - **al-Hussein** (key family: al-Rashid)
 - **al-Sayyad** (key families: al-Sayyad and al-Afash).
7. **ABU MATTAR CLAN.** Its members live in western Deir al-Zour villages and Raqqa city; al-Alaya is the key family
8. **ABU DIYAB CLAN,** residents of al-Shemitah.
9. **ABU MUHAMMAD CLAN,** with the key family al-Hamish.

BUSARAYA ECONOMY

Known to be hardworking farmers, Busaraya tribespeople supply Deir al-Zour city with vegetables as well as dairy products like cheese, butter, and yogurt. The tribe occupies good-quality land, but on small plots, prompting many to move to Deir al-Zour for government jobs. Hundreds of others have relocated to Damascus for government employment or to join the military. In seeking new agricultural land, thousands of other tribespeople have moved to rural eastern Raqqa. They own land in al-Kasrat, east of Raqqa city.

High numbers of Busaraya live and work in the Gulf states, from which they send money to support their families. Among the tribespeople of Deir al-Zour province, the Busaraya have the highest rate of university graduation, reflecting encouragement by the older generation.

BUSARAYA POLITICS

Like other tribespeople in Deir al-Zour, the Busaraya are not politically involved. Many have joined the Baath Party for jobs in government, the party, or the military. The Assad regime, for its part, has encouraged tribespeople to take government jobs in Deir al-Zour city in place of existing residents, who harbor anti-Assad, pro-Muslim Brotherhood, as well as communist sentiments. Indeed, hundreds of Busaraya, most of them university graduates, have joined the Communist Party. Most of them oppose Assad.

In early 2011, the Busaraya sheikh Muhana al-Fayyad called on his fellow tribespeople to avoid demonstrations. Eventually, though, some joined the peaceful actions, and others later engaged in anti-Assad military actions. Fayyad, who is strongly pro-Assad, lives in Damascus but commands no loyalty from his co-tribespeople.

As already noted, hundreds of Busaraya tribespeople have moved to Damascus either for work, university, or refuge from the Islamic State. Their loyalty to the Assad regime derives not from enthusiastic support but rather from a desire for stability and security. Ahmad Shalash, introduced earlier, represents a kind of exception, given his pro-Assad, pro-Hezbollah, pro-Iran orientation, not to mention his vulgarity-laced press statements.

Baggara Tribe

BAGGARA STRUCTURE

According to sources within the Baggara, the tribe encompasses the following thirty clans, mostly in Deir al-Zour province but also in Hasaka, Raqqa, and Aleppo:

1. **ABU ARAB CLAN.** This clan, for which the al-Bashir family is central, inhabits Mahamidah, the effective capital of the Baggara tribe in Syria.
2. **AL-ABDULKARIM CLAN.** This is the largest and most influential Baggara clan and is divided into four lineages: **al-Hawara** (from which the famous figure Sheikh Rayash al-Jammus, d. 1945, is a part), **al-Qataa**, **al-Maazat**, and **al-Sayyad**. Decades

ago, al-Abdulkarim clansmen lived in the Deir al-Zour district known as al-Sayyad—an etymological reference to the tribe’s purported genealogical link to Muhammad al-Baqir (the Fifth Imam), a descendant of the Prophet. Major families in Deir al-Zour city who belong to the al-Abdulkarim include Fadel al-Aboud, al-Aish, al-Ayash, Fakoush, al-Talaa, Hattab, al-Harwal, and others. These families also live in Jadid Baggara, the only village in Syria with the namesake of the tribe.

3. **ABU MAESH CLAN.** The al-Talaa family holds the chief position.
4. **AL-GHASSIM AL-OBEID CLAN.** Chiefdom is held by the al-Ramadan family.
5. **AL-HAMAD AL-OBEID CLAN**
6. **ABU MASAHAH CLAN.** Chiefdom is held by the al-Masawi family.
7. **AL-KALIZAT CLAN.** Residents of Umm Madifah and Khawirah villages.
8. **AL-GHARAJNEH CLAN.** Chief family is Batran, located in Umm Eshbah.
9. **ABU HAMDAN CLAN.** Chiefdom is held by the al-Wakaa family.
10. **ABU RAHMAH CLAN,** lives in al-Tabeh and Dahla.
11. **ABU BADRAN CLAN.** This clan is located in the eponymous village near Abu Kamal.
12. **AL-OJEILI CLAN.** Located in Raqqa City, this clan includes the well-known writer Abdul-Salam Ojeili (1918–2006).
13. **ABU HASSAN CLAN**
14. **AL-RAFIYAH CLAN**
15. **ABU ALA CLAN**
16. **AL-HAMAD AL-HUSSEIN CLAN.** This clan resides in the villages of Jazira Abu Hamad.
17. **AL-MREIKHAT CLAN**
18. **ABU SALEH CLAN.** Residing in al-Kasrat, the key family is al-Abdullah.
19. **AL-HALAMIYAH CLAN**
20. **ABU MISLIM CLAN**

21. **AL-ABDULQADER CLAN**

22. **AL-KHANJAR CLAN.** This clan resides in the village of Meratt.

23. **AL-MASHHOUR CLAN.** This clan resides in Tal Abyad, near the Turkish border. The chief family, Balikh al-Tahri, opposes Assad yet supported the Iraqi Baath Party formerly led by Saddam Hussein. Most clansmen have backed anti-Assad activities, and most have ended up on the Turkish side of the border.

24. **AL-RASHID CLAN**

25. **ABU SHAMMAS CLAN.** This clan resides in Hawayij Shinan, in eastern Raqqa; the chief family is al-Hayawi.

26. **AL-HAMAD AL-ABED CLAN**

27. **AL-ALI CLAN**

28. **AL-MIKASIS CLAN**

29. **AL-BAQIRAT CLAN**

30. **ABU SHEIKH CLAN**

BAGGARA ECONOMY

Baggara tribespeople are farmers who cultivate fruit trees and vegetables, as contrasted with the Ougaidat, who, like the Bedouin, manage livestock and often work in the Gulf states. The Baggara are not wealthy, but they are known for certain displays of material respectability. For example, members of the al-Bashir chiefdom family boast fancy reception halls featuring marble and fine carpeting and woven rugs. Ordinary tribespeople, however, do not have fancy homes or farms.

Many Baggara tribespeople work for the Syrian government, largely in Deir al-Zour, after which they return home to their poor surrounding suburbs or villages. Large numbers of Baggara also work in Lebanon and the Gulf states. They are neither wealthy nor very educated, especially relative to Ougaidat tribespeople.

Quite separately from these matters, the Baggara have a reputation for being thieves of livestock, motor vehicles, and tractors. According to Deir al-Zour residents, Assad and Laurence al-Bashir, the sons of the current Baggara sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir, set up, at the outset of Free Syrian Army actions against the regime, an armed group that ran a checkpoint near the al-Wafa Hotel, which was used to steal and

loot travelers' cars. The Baggara have also been accused of stealing from the government-run paper factory and from other public entities. From the Islamic State, the group accepted large sums of cash for helping smooth the group's entry into Deir al-Zour province via Raqqa. They did so in part to weaken the Ougaidat, whose members mostly backed the FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra.

BAGGARA POLITICS

Baggara tribespeople who live in Deir al-Zour city have historically supported the Baath and Nasserist parties. One tribesman from the Abdulkarim clan, Yassin al-Hafiz (1930–78), noted for his intellectualism, served as an architect of Baath Party ideology. A large number of tribespeople belong to the Baath wings in both Syria and Iraq.

Originally, Sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir joined the Party of Socialist Unitarians and called for pan-Arabism. Now he supports Iran's Shia ideology and the Shia coalition in Syria. His frequent changes in ideological alignment have cost him in loyalty among his tribespeople.

As compared with their urban kin, Baggara tribespeople in rural areas refrain from political activity. They joined the Baath Party primarily for benefits and government employment. But many quickly turned against the regime and joined the 2011 uprising. During this period of anti-Assad activism, Sheikh Nawaf delivered anti-regime speeches attended by tribespeople who traveled to Deir al-Zour from their nearby villages.

The Baggara tribe also includes members of the Communist Party.

Ougaidat Tribe

UGAIDAT STRUCTURE

Compared with the Busaraya and Baggara tribes, the Ougaidat has a clear structure that is easy to discern, consisting of three main branches: *Abu Kamel*, *Abu Kamal*, and *Abu Zamil* (aka the al-Shaitat clan). A fourth part is linked to the name Abu Zamal, but a barren forefather evidently put an end to this line.

■ **Abu Kamel Branch.** The strongest of the three Ougaidat branches is Abu Kamel because it includes the tribe's chiefdom family, al-Hifel. The Ougaidat tribe's current sheikh, coming from this branch, is Musab Khalil Abdoud Gadan al-Hifel. His father,

Sheikh Khalil, was a member of parliament who died in June 2016 in his hometown of Theban. The regime didn't support him for parliamentary reelection, so he died enraged at Assad and his circle. His children and other relatives were also angry, and supported peaceable and military actions against the regime. Sheikh Khalil had played a central role in achieving reconciliation between the Ougaidat and the Shammar Bedouin confederation.

Sheikh Khalil was the son of Sheikh Aboud Gadan al-Hifel (1917–87), an influential tribal leader in eastern Syria. In 1943, the father joined the first Syrian parliament, holding the position until his death. When his own father died in 1951, Aboud became sheikh of the Ougaidat. Until 1962, he served as chairman of the National Federation of Deir al-Zour, which Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser had established as the ruling party of the short-lived United Arab Republic. The party's dissolution cleared the way for the creation of the Arab Socialist Union. Sheikh Nawaf Ragheb al-Bashir, also of the Baggara, had served as deputy chairman of the federation.

The Abu Kamel branch comprises the following clans:

1. **ABU HASSAN CLAN.** The chiefdom family is al-Nigras, residents of the town of al-Ashara and the villages of Darnaj and Suweida—with the key family being al-Karhout in the latter. The al-Nigras family in particular is highly respected within the tribe, serving as head of an intratribal coalition known as al-Thilth, and consisting of the Abu Hassan, al-Qaraan, and Abu Rahman clans, members of the Abu Kamel branch.
2. **AL-QARAAN CLAN.** The chiefdom family is al-Minadi al-Khalil—residents of al-Tayana, where the key family is al-Farageh, and al-Quria, where the key family is al-Haji. The al-Bayyattrah, the largest subclan in the city of Raqqa, is also part of al-Qaraan.
3. **ABU RAHMAN CLAN.** The chiefdom family is Kuwan al-Jabarih; members live in the villages of al-Girthe and Diwar, where the key family is al-Khalaf.
4. **AL-BAQIR CLAN,** which has the following lineages:
 - **al-Khalaf.** This contains the al-Jarallah, al-Mishraf, and Anabeza families, the last of which includes Amer al-Rafdan, the former Islamic State emir of the "al-Kheir estate" (Deir al-Zour province).

- **al-Qabesah.**
 - **al-Maraa**, with the key family al-Farageh (different from the family named earlier).
5. **AL-SHUWAIT CLAN.** The chieftom belongs to the family of Nasser Hammoud al-Jijan al-Wakaa, who lives in the village of Sibekhan. Clan members also reside in Abu Hardoub, Ghariba, al-Kishima, and Dablan. The key families are al-Mishlab, al-Dandal, al-Khaled, and al-Azam.

■ **Abu Kamal Branch.** The Abu Kamal branch of the Ougaidat consists of the following clans:

1. **AL-HASSOUN CLAN.** The chieftom belongs to the al-Dandal family (different from the family named earlier), comprising these lineages:
 - **al-Ali al-Hassoun**, comprising the families of al-Assaf, al-Dandal, al-Nassef, al-Hammoudi, al-Hamad, al-Hamada, and al-Hussein, who reside in the villages of al-Baghouz, at the Iraqi border, and al-Ghabra.
 - **al-Muhammad al-Hassoun**, comprising the al-Dagher (key family: al-Hadid), Abu Abdullah (key family: al-Fares), and Abu Souilah extended families. They live in the village of al-Susah.
 - **al-Hammoud al-Hassoun**, of which the families are al-Shalal, al-Makhamish, and al-Hajaj, residents of Hasrat.
2. **AL-DAMIM CLAN.** The al-Jarrah family holds the central position in the al-Damim clan, whose current sheikh is Aboud al-Fares al-Jarrah. He is the father of former Syrian ambassador to Iraq Nawaf Aboud al-Fares al-Jarrah (familiarily known as Nawaf al-Fares), who defected in July 2012 to Qatar, where he secretly backed the 1,500-member al-Jala Division, named for his home village, in its anti-Assad actions. The al-Damim consists of these lineages:
 - **al-Hussein**, residents of the village of al-Maslahah.
 - **al-Hassan (aka al-Agargah)**, residents of the village of al-Salheh.
 - **al-Alawi (aka al-Athar)**, residents of the al-Bahra village.
3. **AL-DALEEJ CLAN.** This clan has a chieftom family of the same name, with members residing in the villages of al-Baghouz and al-Qataa.

4. **AL-MIREH CLAN**, which has a chieftom family named al-Harsah. Members live in the villages of al-Sayyal al-Gharbiya (key family: al-Harzah), al-Sayyal al-Sharqiya (key family: al-Sayyal), and al-Shaafah (key family: al-Hazaa).
5. **AL-MARASHDA CLAN.** Led by the al-Hassan al-Abdullah chieftom family, clan members live in the villages of al-Marashda; key families are al-Moussa al-Abdullah, al-Wazara, al-Hassan al-Diyab, al-Thalji, and al-Shahatha.
6. **AL-JAALKAH CLAN.** This clan is led by Sheikh Asi al-Ahoul; members live in the villages of al-Susah and al-Shaafa.

■ **Abu Zamil (al-Shaitat) Branch.** Before the 2011 war, the population of tribespeople from the Abu Zamil (al-Shaitat) branch had reached 100,000 in Deir al-Zour province. During the war, however, most fled the province, seeking refuge from the Islamic State in regime-held areas, rebel-held areas, and across the border in Turkey. In August 2014, IS killed about eight hundred al-Shaitat tribespeople. The al-Shaitat chieftom is held by Haji al-Abd al-Omar. The tribal branch the al-Shaitat consists of these lineages :

- **al-Khanfour**, residents of Abu Hamam; key families: al-Khanfour, al-Rifai.
- **al-Shahab**, residents of al-Gharajneh; key families: al-Ghanash, al-Khalaf.
- **al-Aliyat**, residents of the village of al-Kishkeh; families: al-Khalaf al Ali, al-Iraqiya, and al-Dajah.

UGAIDAT ECONOMY

As compared to the agricultural lands of the Baggara and Busaraya, the holdings of the Ougaidat are poor. Also relative to other tribes, the Ougaidat send the highest number of their grown sons to live and work in the Gulf states, especially Kuwait and Qatar. According to tribespeople living in Abu Kamal, a full third of the city's tribe members are working in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. The others rely on smuggling between Iraq and Syria to avoid dependence on the official Syrian economy. Of the al-Shaitat branch, about a half of families have relatives living in Kuwait. These workers send money home to Deir al-Zour, where their families build showy villas and homes.

Before the 2011 crisis, thousands of Ougaidat tribespeople had joined the Assad regime's military and security organizations, and were based in Damascus, Deraa, and Homs.

UGAIDAT POLITICS

The Ougaidat are the strongest tribe militarily in eastern Syria, overcoming the Baggara and Busaraya, largely because of their arsenal, which includes Kalashnikovs and pistols. They have enjoyed access to cheap arms through Iraq, especially after the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, when many former Iraqi

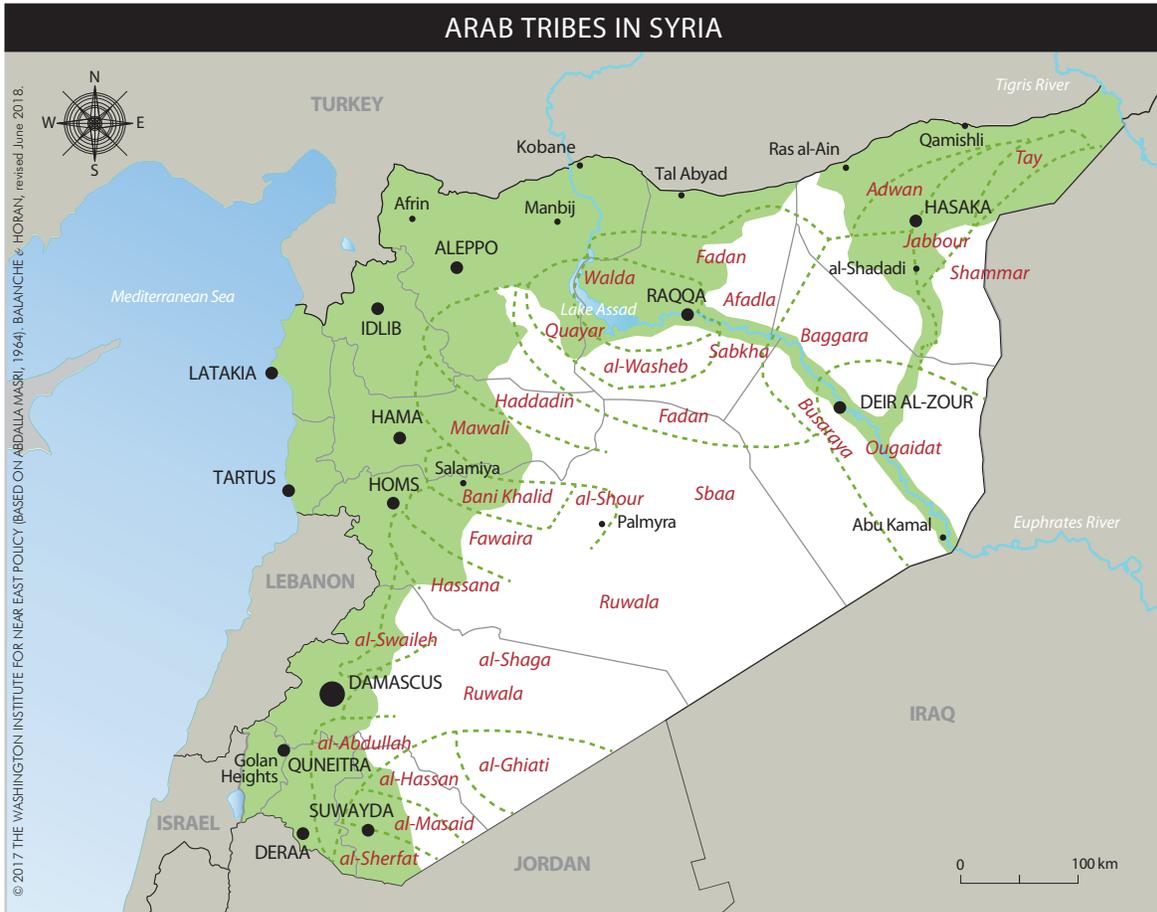
officers and soldiers sold their weapons. To give an idea of the discounts available, a Kalashnikov would sell in Raqqa during this period for about \$600, versus a mere \$60 in Abu Kamal.

Ougaidat tribespeople do not hold historically warm relations with the Baath regime, although thousands have served in Assad's military infrastructure. In addition, the late Hafiz al-Assad tried to establish good ties with the tribe by offering its members seats in parliament. Some also say Manal al-Jaadani, the wife of Maher al-Assad, brother to the current Syrian president, belongs to the Ougaidat.



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ARAB TRIBES IN SYRIA



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- Sedentary area
- Nomadic area
- Sbaa Tribe
- Tribal territory
- Province border
- International border
- Province center
- City

