



The civilian establishment of the Iranian-led Shiite axis in southern Syria

By Tal Beerli

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Executive summary:

The Iranian-led Shiite axis sees southern Syria as a strategic area of paramount importance aimed at achieving the goal of exporting the Islamic revolution in terms of its civilian establishment. Achieving this objective will be an essential supportive instrument towards the advanced efforts of forming a military foundation, enabling the creation of a direct Iranian front against Israel from southern Syria.

This civilian establishment of founding a foothold in southern Syria creates an active link with the local population to the ends of which is to create a dependence of the population on elements of the Shiite axis. This dependence produces sympathy. This sympathy enables the free action of Shi'ite axis elements inside and out of the local population.

The majority of the Shiite axis civic efforts are concentrated in the Quneitra and Daraa districts of southern Syria. We identify at this point a preference towards the Daraa district. The civic efforts in Suwayda district are encountering many difficulties due to opposition deriving from the Druze population (as opposed to the Druze population in the northern district of Quneitra, which have been collaborating with elements of the Shiite axis since the beginning of the civil war). In light of this opposition, the Shiite axis is currently concentrating its effort in the Suwayda district by cultivating military militias, some of which are assisting in the civilian establishment efforts. (The report mentions four militias operating in Suwayda).

After the reconquest of southern Syria by the Syrian army with the help of Shiite axis officials (at the end of 2018), an accelerated process of civic establishment began with the establishment of "civic foundations", the takeover of mosques and Hussainiyas (a site for Shiite religious gathering) and the initiation of economic projects. The purpose of all this is to take over civilian life and create a dependency of the local population upon aspects of economics, education, religion, etc.

In this report, the Alma Center located not only the assets established by the Shiite axis but also the individuals managing them.

The report lists five "civic foundations" that we identified as operating in the area under the auspices of the Iranian led Shiite axis. These foundations receive direct funding from Iran and Hezbollah while some are military factions disguised as civilian bodies operating local militias (The most prominent of these foundations are "Jamaia Al-Zahara" and "Jamaia Al-Bostan" or in its new name "Al-Arin").

Some of these militias have direct Hezbollah appointed directors such as "Haj Abu Mahdi" and "Haj Fares".

The report lists nine mosques and hussainiyas operating under the auspices and mission of the Shiite axis. Their goal is to create an infrastructure for the Religious conversion of the local population to Shia.

The report details key individuals from the local government and business suspected of acting as proxies in the interests of the Shiite axis in the region. These include, for example, the head of the agriculture directorate in Daraa, the Mukhtar of the village of Qarfa and businesspersons, some of whom do not even live-in southern Syria but have economic interests in the area.

These figures coordinate economic development plans for various geographical areas in southern Syria. These programs designate certain areas for economic development. The Shiite axis actually takes over these territories (for example, areas designated for fish farming and commercial sheep farms in the Kwdana area, agricultural land in the area of the town of Namar in the northern Daraa district, and places designated for economic development in the Yarmouk Basin).

It is known that a Lebanese Hezbollah operative named "Abu Ali Al-Harakhi" runs Hezbollah's political office in southern Syria and serves as the executive director of economic projects in the region.

From the material collected it can be ascertained, that some of the foundations and some of the individuals are in contact with the UN and are receiving budgets directly from it.

For example, the "Jamaia Al-Zahara" foundation receives assistance from the United Nations. Some of the contributions are directed to the budgeting of Shiite militias in the area assisting the foundation (such as the "Deraa Al-Watan" militia under the command of Tariq Al-Maaruf). The head of the **Agriculture Department in Daraa is in direct contact with the UN Food Aid Program, which assists with food aid projects intended for the local population. **Apparently, these UN resources are exploited and are diverted according to the Shiite axis priorities...****

General:

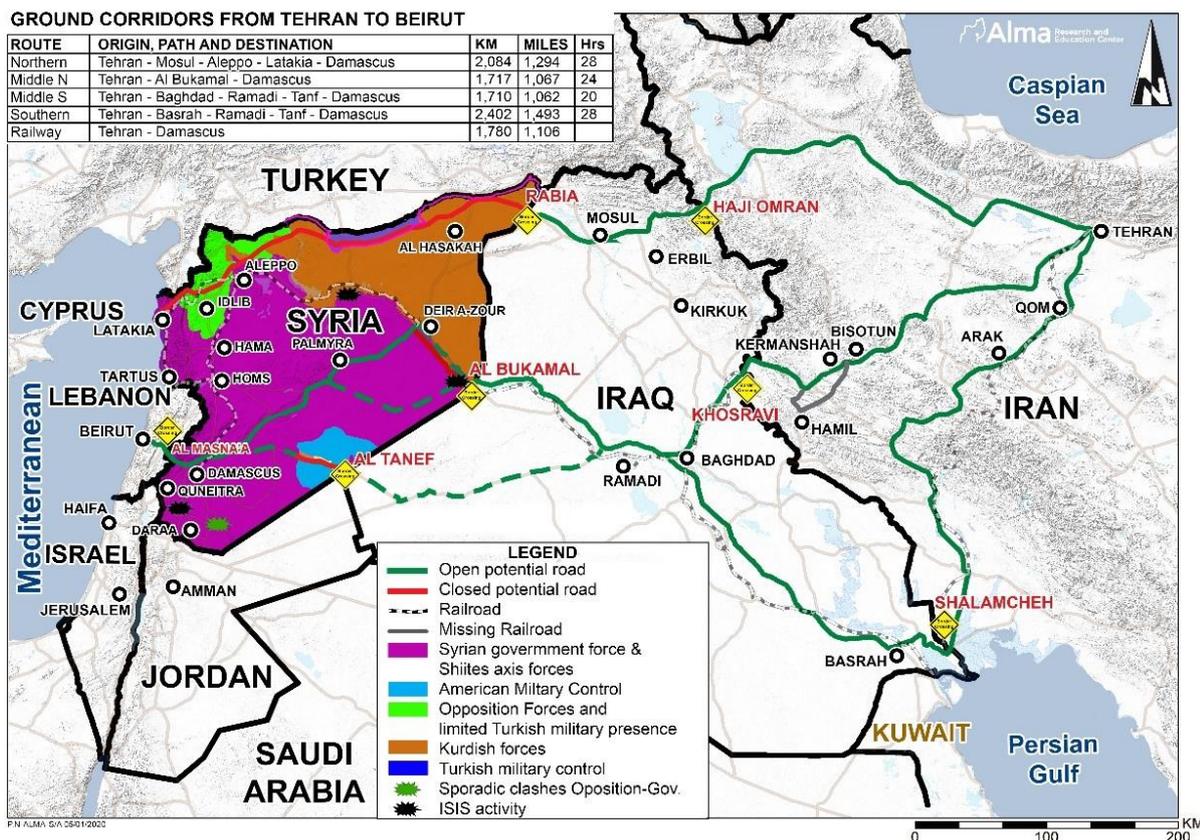
Abu Al-Fazel Salehi Nia, the Cultural Adviser at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus wrote in the *Al-Watan* newspaper (pro-regime Syrian daily) in November 2019; *"the realization of Iran's vision of a new Middle East includes Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. This will affect the global balance of power and prevent the United States and its allies in the West from controlling the Middle East, which is made up of small and divided countries ..."*

Syria is a necessary and strategic part of the land corridor that runs from Iran through Iraq into Syria and from there to Lebanon. Within the land corridor, which aims to serve the ideology of "exporting the Islamic Revolution", there are three main paths: Al-Rabiaa in northern Syria, Al-Bukamal in eastern Syria and **Al-Tanf in southern Syria**. **Currently the northern route in Al-Rabiaa and the southern route in Al-Tanf are blocked to Iranian expansion due to an American presence (and Kurdish to the north). However, the Iranians Believe that the American presence will not last forever...**

In addition to the American disruption of the Shiite-axis land corridor in the Al-Tanf area, the Russians are also interfering with the Shiite axis in achieving its goal. Unlike the Americans, the Russians apparently intend to stay in Syria indefinitely while their interests clash with the interests of the Iranian led Shiite axis. The Russians were a very important component in the fight to liberate southern Syria from the rebel control in 2018. Under Russian command, there are currently two main forces in southern Syria: the first, a Russian organic military police force and the second, a proxy force made up of locals ([the "Fifth Corps" under the command of Ahmad Al-Uda](#)).

A notable example apropos the conflict of interest between the Shiite axis and Russia in southern Syria occurred in the town of Al-Harra. Russians military policemen were sent to prevent an Iranian founding attempt, which included not only visits by senior Shiite officials but also an attempt to help the townspeople maintain wells, build various infrastructure and rehabilitate schools.

However, it seems that the Russians have a lot of work to do and that the founding of the Shiite axis headed by Iran in southern Syria is increasing.



In addition to the potential of southern Syria becoming part of the land corridor, the area constitutes a front-line facing Israel. Although Iran is geographically distant from Israel, southern Syria (along with southern Lebanon) allows Iran to create one geographical front, enabling it a military platform against Israel, through its proxies, Hezbollah and Shiite militias.

[Link to: Hezbollah-Southern Syria: Deployment of the “Southern Command” and the “Golan File” Units.](#)

[Link to: The Shiite Militias in Syria](#)

In addition to the military infrastructures, the Iranian-led Shiite axis is concentrating extensive efforts to "link" the southern Syrian region to it also through a civilian establishment, similar to the Hezbollah model in Lebanon. Hezbollah's Lebanese model proves itself by assimilating the military infrastructure within the civilian infrastructure. Creating a broad civilian infrastructure enables the military infrastructure to operate in a sympathetic and enabling civilian environment, thus establishing within the region the Human Shield tactic, which makes it exceedingly difficult for the enemy.

An effective civic infrastructure (similar to the infrastructure created by Hezbollah in Lebanon), produces active contact with the citizens through institutions, foundations and organizations that provide citizens with health, religious, economy, welfare and education services, etc.

The establishment of the civic infrastructure of the Shiite axis in southern Syria consists of several elements: demographic, social, religious indoctrination (whose purpose is Shi'ism) and economic.

Demographically, the main inclination is to transfer Shiite population to the region and converting the local population to Shi'ism. The relatively small number of Shiites in Syria, which stands at about one percent of the total population according to reports before the civil war (excluding the Alawite population), does not allow for a significant change in the overall demographic balance. Therefore, the Shiite axis seeks to strengthen the Shiite civic envelope in the southern Syrian region by increasing the Shiite population there. This was done either by transferring Shiite families from among Shiite militia combatants or by converting Sunnis to Shi'ism.

This report will focus mainly on the indoctrination- Shi'ization and the economic and social part. In the indoctrination- Shi'ization method a process of strengthening and accelerating Shi'ization is carried out by introducing Iranian religious and cultural values into the local civilian population and establishing the Islamic Revolution by creating foundations and Hussainiyas. To accelerate these processes and to strengthen the local population and gain its sympathy, the Shiite axis headed by Iran, offers, through its representatives in the region, money (charity / employment) food, public services, education, economic projects, and the like.

In accordance with the local culture, it is clear that the main condition for success in the civic establishment is the formation of close ties with large and well-known respected families in the area. The Shiite axis puts a lot of effort into this and guarantees itself the support and recruitment of the local population.

Indoctrination-Sheization-the establishing of a religious foothold - "civic foundations":

Under the direct guidance of the Iranian embassy in Damascus, which activates various organizations, extensive Sheization activities are carried out throughout Syria, including in southern Syria. Iranian tentacles have been in southern Syria since before the outbreak of the 2011 civil war. These branches began operating in 2006, probably in the town of Qarfa (a Shiite center - see below) in the Daraa district and then later in the town of Sheikh Miskeen and in the city of Nawa.

One of the main factors setting the Shiite movement in southern Syria in motion after the reoccupation of the region by the Syrian regime in 2018, was the visit of Abu Al-Fadl Al-Tabatabai (representative of the supreme leader and clerics in Tehran), in Quneitra and Daraa. The visit took place at the end of 2018. **After this visit, a number of foundation offices opened under the façade of welfare foundations. The disguised purpose being the boost of the Shi'ization process in the area while taking advantage of the poor disposition of the residents of southern Syria.**



Above: Al-Tabatabai's visit in Daraa.

<https://enabbaladi.net/archives/259360>

"Civilian foundations" with a covert military faction:**"Jamaia Al-Zahra'a" foundation:**

"Al-Zahra'a" - the literal meaning is "flower", insinuating the second name of Fatma, the daughter of Muhammad, the wife of Ali Ibn Abu Taleb - the founding father of the Shia):

The establishment of the foundation took place in the city of Daraa at the end of 2018 after the visit of Abu Al-Fadl Al-Tabatabai intending to assist "the poor and victims of the civil war". The foundation consists of many of the Daraa Al-Masalmeh family members. This is an example of the connections and the links created between the Shiite axis and large families in southern Syria.

Muhammad Al-Zidli - a Shiite cleric from Daraa and a land trader trading for the benefit of Shiites in the area heads the foundation. **His deputies are:**

- A. **Jamal Aqeel Al-Masalmeh** - a well-known farmer from Daraa, an engineer by profession, see the location of his house at:

<https://aliqtisadi.com/>

<http://wikimapia.org/11935669/ar/>

- B. **Muhammad Mazid Al-Masalmeh**, known as "Abu Anes", a contractor and one of the most respected members of the Al- Masalmeh family.

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011311839057>

- C. **Atef Shehadeh Al-Taleb** a man with many connections to the Assad regime security forces.

Other senior members of the foundation are **Azzam Al-Masalmeh** and **Issa Al-Makhal Al-Masalmeh**.

As of 2018, the foundation plans to establish various institutions in the Daraa reef in order to add leverage to its activities.

The man in charge of securing the foundations' activities is a man named **Wasim Al-Masalmeh**, known as "**Wasim Al-Amar**". He is a man of many resources, a senior military official in the Iran-backed Shiite militia ("Saraya Al-Areen" - the military arm of the "Jamaia Al-Bostan" foundation, see below) and serves as an Iranian collaborator in the field of drug trafficking and land acquisition. He is also very close to the intelligence service of the "Air Force Security".

His headquarters are located in the city of Daraa near the "Panorama". The headquarters is located in the basement of a civilian occupied residential house.

(Coordinates: 32.638186, 36.108362)

<https://www.facebook.com/HassanAbdallah1990/posts/422305845377962>

Towards the end of 2018, the foundation received tens of millions (unknown in which currency) directly from Iran for budgeting its current activities. **According to the "Daraa Al-Thawra" website, the foundation receives a monetary budget also from the Red Crescent and the UN.** Some of this assistance is directed to the funding of Shiite militias assisting the foundation in the area, such as the "Deraa Al-Watan" militia under the command of Tareq Al-Maaruf.

https://t.me/s/DARAA_ALTHUWRA

"Jamaia Al-Bostan" Foundation (Lately changed to "Al-Arin" Foundation):

It is a charity operating throughout Syria, which belonged to Bashar Al-Assad's cousin, the businessperson Rami Makhluf, the foundation was "nationalized" last year (2020) while the Assad regime took full responsibility of it in order to deprive Rami Makhluf of his status due to his personal conflict with President Bashar al-Assad and his wife. The conflict resulted in the expulsion of Rami Makhluf from any business relationship with the Syrian regime.

After the Assad regime took over the foundation, Bashar's wife, Asma, was assigned as the promoter of the foundation, along with the name change, "Al-Arin", thus severing all ties to Makhluf.

Despite its outward innocent appearance, it seems that this foundation serves as a kind of Iranian militia using its seemingly innocent cover as a disguise for carrying out extensive military activity in the Quneitra area, which includes recruiting youths, especially in Khan Arnabah and in the Al-Ba'ath district. Among other things, it appears that Iran directly funded the foundation at least between the years 2011-2015, and that there is intense Hezbollah involvement in the foundation. The person in charge of Jamaia al-Bostan's ties with Hezbollah is Samar al-Darwish who is in contact with Hezbollah via Hezbollah activist Al-Haj Abu Mahdi.

<https://medirections.com/index.php/2019-05-07-15-50-27/wartime/2020-07-06-16-04-04>

The foundation is active in promoting cultural matters in addition to its military and charitable activities.

Wasim Masalmeh, the head of security for the Jamaia Al-Zahraa Foundation, is also the commander of the military wing of the Al-Arin organization (Jamaia Al-Bostan).

The address of the Quneitra branch of the foundation (in the photo), which provides, among other things, medical treatments, is:



القنيطرة - خان أرنبه - طريق مدينة البعث - مفرق الخدمات قديماً

Quneitra - Khan Arnabah - Al-Ba'ath – The old Services Junction

Southern Syria - Civilian Shiite Establishment - Civilian Foundations with a Covert Military Arm

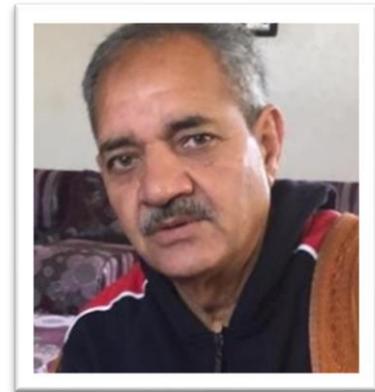


Additional "civilian foundations":

Note - outwardly, the three foundations listed in this chapter are pro-government foundations and have no Shiite façade or symbol in contrast to the two foundations listed above. However, according to the information gathered by Alma Research and Education Center, these foundations operate indirectly as additional platforms in favor of the Shiite axis.

The Ahab Al-Qa'ed Al-Khaled foundation:

The center of the foundation's location is in the town of Al-Yadudah. Abu Bilal Al-Zubani, in his fifties, heads the foundation. He is the father of at least two sons, and a graduate of the University of Damascus. He appears to be a relatively religious man and lives in Daraa. It also seems that, at least according to his Facebook profile, he is quite well known in the area.



Above: Abu Bilal Al-Zubani

His Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/people/>

The foundation provides up to 35,000 Syrian pounds per person per month (in addition to medical assistance and groceries). It operates under the guise of supporting the families of those killed by the regime, but its purpose is to instill in them the devotion of the Shiite beliefs. **According to the website "Syria 24", the foundation receives direct financial support from Hezbollah's martyr institutions.**

<https://www.sy-24.com/news/>

Another individual who is linked to the foundation is Abu al-Majd al-G'anem (he managed one of the foundation's branches). He seems to be active in the area of the town of Al-Muzayrib: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010679444404>

It is also known that one of the founding members of the foundation, Yosef Mahmoud Ud al-Qudsi, known as "Abu Mahmoud", killed in July 2019, was an opinion leader in the area. He persuaded the people of the region to support Assad's forces when they reoccupied the region. In addition, his son is an Iranian and Hezbollah collaborator in the region, assisting, among other things, the drug trafficking that takes place in the Daraa area.

"Tajma Mahabi Hafez" foundation (Al-Assad):



According to the "Syria 24" website, the purpose of the foundation is to glorify Hezbollah's image in the eyes of region's youth. **The foundation is headed by Walid Al-Hamzi and Yosef Al-Manjer (Yosef Ahmad Al-Manjer ("Abu Thaar") - originally from Al-Yadudah) Dr. of Law and Lecturer at the University of Damascus. Member of the Ba'ath Party and social activist in the Daraa area.**



Above: Yosef Ahmad Al-Manjer.
<https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Yosif59>

"Tammuz - Al-Jamaia Al-Suriya Ladam Asar Al-Shuhada Foundation" (Tammuz - Syrian Foundation for the Support of Martyrs' Families):



Established in 2012 promoting indirect Shiization, while organizing social and cultural activities and providing civic assistance to families who have lost loved ones who served with the regime armed forces (in the below photos: food distribution by the foundation and a commemoration ceremony held in Daraa in March 2020 attended by 500 bereaved families).



The foundation operates throughout all of Syria (Latakia, Homs, Damascus, the south and more ...). The number of martyrs that the foundation commemorates and helps their families stands at 2500 (as of January 2019).

In the photo the foundation leader, Syrian doctor **Mazen Hamidi** (who is close to President Assad):



<https://www.facebook.com/Tammuzsyria/>
<https://www.cspsey.org/initiative/2250>

Indoctrination- Shiization - the establishing of a Shiite religious foundation - Mosques and Hussainiyas:

Another significant instrument for strengthening the presence of the Shiite axis in southern Syria and the dissemination of the Shiite school of thought is through the project of founding **Hussainiyas (a place for Shiite religious gathering) and taking over mosques**. The aim is to provide infrastructure for the needs of the population in the area or for the needs of the Shiite communities that already exist in these areas (for example, members of the Iranian-supported Shiite militias or local Shiites):

Ali Ibn Abu Taleb Mosque (see below), named after the founding father after of the Shia. The mosque, located in the city of Daraa, belonged to the Sunnis, efforts were made to make it a place for Shiite prayer and study.

Hussainiya in the Al-Matar neighborhood in the city of Daraa: adjacent to Sunni mosques, opened in the presence of Hossain Fadlallah of Hezbollah and members of the Syrian ruling Ba'ath party.

In the city of Daraa, there are also a number of individuals of Iraqi origin operating in mosques and Hussainiyas, such as: Abu Jafar al-Araki, Khatam Al-Tamimi, as well as the Shiite Iraqi exiles who fled Baghdad in 2003 and have since taken over entire streets in Daraa while preaching Shiite values.



Above: Ali Ibn Abu Taleb Mosque (Location: 32 ° 37'37 "N 36 ° 6'29" E)



Pictured left: The Hussainiya in the town of Busra Al-Sham (from the Twitter page "Syrian Revolutionary Boys". The picture from March 2015 is from when the rebels took over the town. Its title: The Hussainiya of "The Roafid" - a derogatory nickname for Shiites).

Hussainiya in the town of Al- Sheikh Miskeen - offers many social services (especially for children) headed by an Iraqi descent named "Abu Manthar".

Hussainiya in the town of Al-Malih Al-Arabiya (pictured below) - previously conquered by the opposition suffering heavy damage.



Hussainiya in the town of Tafas - Home to a man named Muhammad Al-Hejazi who has significant ties to the Iranian regime.

Hussainiya in the city of Quneitra - its construction completed in 2018, conducts religious trips every three months to the Tomb of Zainab a Shiite holy Shrine.

Hussainiya in the town of Kwdana – the Hussainiya (Located - 33.019368, 35.894771).

The town of Qarfa - a Shiite center in Daraa district:

The town of Qarfa is the prominent Shiite center in southern Syria (Daraa province), due to the blend of its population.

"Al-Hudah" Hussainiya (location: 32 ° 48'47 "N 36 ° 12'3" E) was built by Iran and is headed by Imam Zidane Al-G'azali - a well-known figure in the area, a trustee of the Iranians, who uses various methods to attract young Sunni people to the Shiite school of thought. He is also active in the **Ali Ibn Abu Taleb Mosque**.

It is worth noting two key individuals in Qarfa regarding the Shiite axis. The first is the Mukhtar of Qarfa, Ismail Ibrahim Al-G'azali, known for his ties with Hezbollah and Iran an acting collaborator of the regime's security forces. The second is Anas Ahmad Al-Qaed ("Abu Zahra'a"), who has multiple religious ties and is associated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

He and his family managed to convert at least 150 people to Shi'ism (as to the end of 2018) in the town of Qarfa. They targeted mostly young children. They seem to have contributed greatly to the Shiite development of the area in helping build Hussainiyas and places of worship among other things.



Above: Al-Hudah" Hussainiya in the town of Qarfa



Above: Mukhtar of Qarfa, Ismail Ibrahim Al-G'azali



Above: Anas Ahmad Al-Qaed ("Abu

Shi'ization in the Suwayda District:

Although the Iranian-led Shiite axis is trying to get close to a number of influential local leaders and institutions in Suwayda, it appears that as of early May 2020, it is having a very difficult time doing so. Instead, the Shiite axis chose to go on a much more aggressive path by establishing substantial military infrastructures that stand out in the region.

One of the Iranian militias supported by the Shiite axis operating in Suwayda is the "Zin Al-Abidin Brigade", its designated role is to spread Shi'ism among Suwayda youths. Each activist in the brigade receives \$200 a month (while the average salary in Syria at best reaches about \$50 a month).

In 2016, the "Zin Al-Abidin Brigade" was publicly established. Druze citizens and clerics, who feared a demographic change in the city's population, attacked its positions, which led to the closure of its public headquarters forcing it to operate in a covert mode.

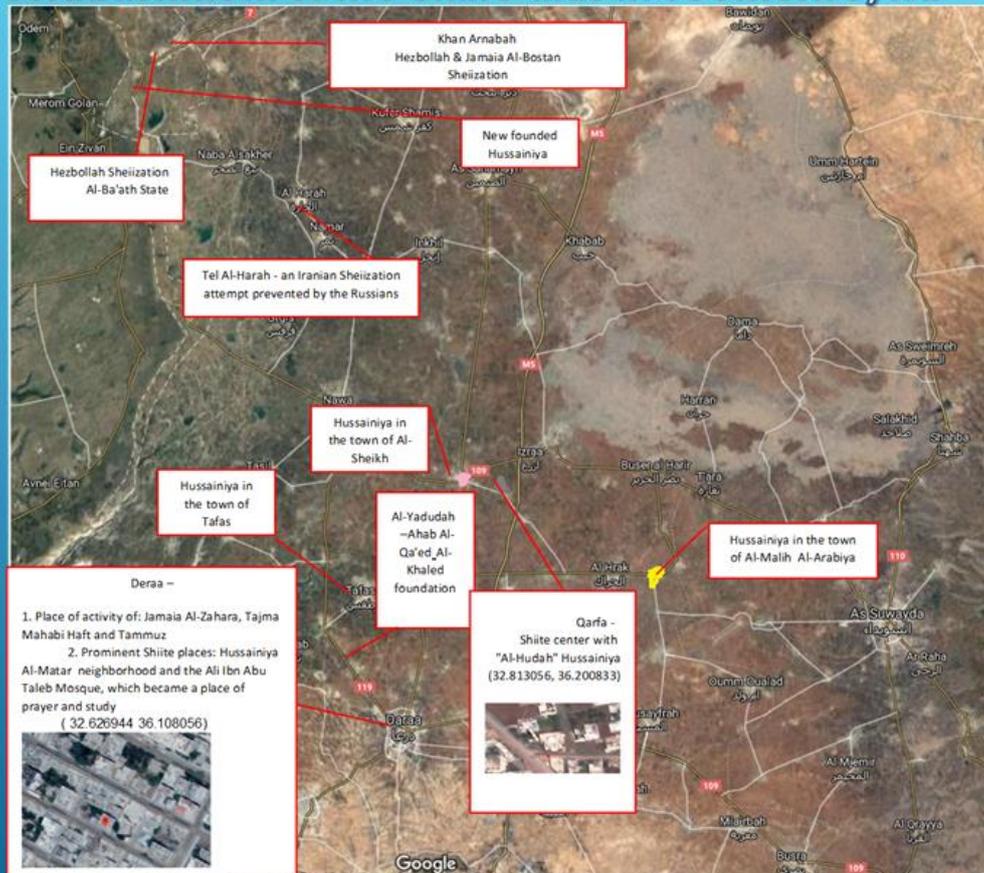
In Suwayda, there are other militias associated with the Shiite axis involved in both military-based and civilian-based activities:

"Liwa Al-Tawhid" - led by Saleh Jarbo, which numbers around 100 activists.

The Kamil Nasser and Anwar Al-Kreedy militia affiliated with the Jamaia Al-Bostan foundation. One of the commanders of this militia is Ya'arov Zohar Al-Addin. The militia numbers about 400 activists and is linked to a Hezbollah member named Haj Fares.

Another key figure is Rakhid Salum, a hotel owner who serves as commander of the city's "Homeland Defense Committees". His hotel serves as the center of activity of the Shiite axis in the city of Suwayda.

Civilian establishment of the Shiite axis in southern Syria - overview



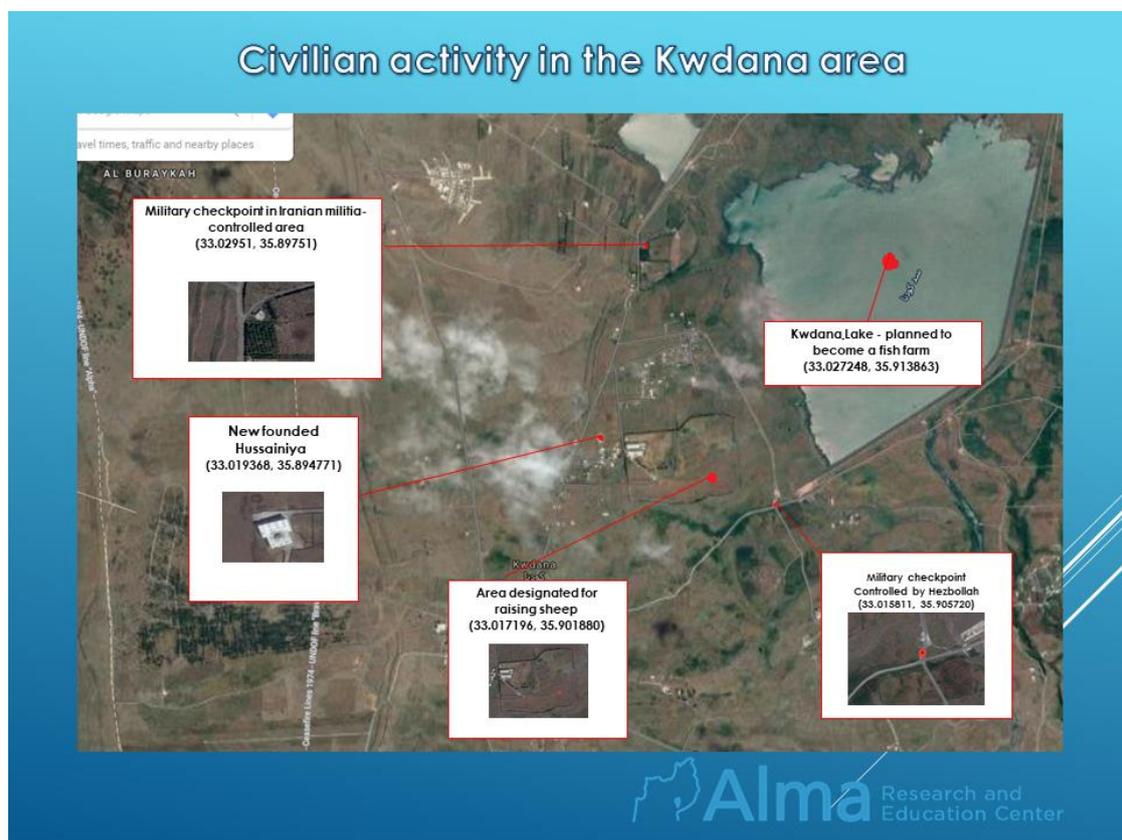
An updated map with all detailed information is available here: <https://bit.ly/3nigKIG> Alma

Prominent mixed economic and personal projects:

Following the Syrian Regime regaining control in southern Syria in the second half of 2018, Shiite Axis officials decided to utilize two key resources near the village of Kwdana by the Israeli border: The Kwdana dam, lake Kwdana and the grazing grounds in the area:

The local dam formed a lake for the development of a fish farm for commercial purposes (location: 33.027248, 35.913863).

In addition, some of the open areas are used for raising goats for commercial purpose (for example - 33.017196, 35.901880). In addition, **Shiite militias also took over agricultural land in the town of Namar in the northern Daraa Reef.**



In southern Syria, there are comprehensive plans for various economic projects. According to the "Nabaa" website, senior representatives of the Shiite axis held a number of meetings with 'Abd Al-Fatah Al-Rahal (head of the agriculture department in the Daraa area - see details below). Among the representatives of the Shiite axis who held these meetings were elements from the "Al-Hashad Al-Shabi Al-Raki" militia such as Sadiq Salah, the Akid (Col.) Abd Al-Hadi Al-Rubaie (commander of the Al-Khashd Al-Shabi Al-Iraqi militia in the area) and senior Hezbollah figures.

<https://nabaa-sy.net/2020/06/t1/>

'Abd Al-Fatah Al-Rahal also coordinates the future economic and social programs to be promoted in the Yarmouk Basin area (at this stage their nature is unclear). It seems that some of the Sunni residents of the area are trying to contest the phenomenon but are lacking the means compared to the Shiite axis resources. It should be noted that quite a few expatriates from Jesh Khaled ibn Al-Walid (former ISIS members) joined the regime forces after the fall of the region, forces that are actually supported by the Shiite axis, thus giving the Shiite axis local power that can help them cultivate their plans in the area. **There is no doubt that the desire to survive outweighs everything else, including ideology.**

'Abd Al-Fatah Al-Rahal head of the agriculture department in the Daraa area and an engineer by profession. Al-Rahal has ties to the UN Food & Agriculture Organization; apparently, he is the one coordinating the distribution of that aid to the population. According to the Facebook page of Daraa's director of agriculture, it appears that as part of his role, Al-Rahal makes many field visits to many areas of the district.



Above: 'Abd Al-Fatah al-Rahal



Above: Al-Rahal met with a delegation from the UN Food Aid Program (October 26).

<https://www.facebook.com/>

According to the "*Nabaa*" website, the person responsible for financing most of the Shiite axis' economic projects in the region is Khodr Taher, known as Abu Ali Khodr or Al-G'awar, who is originally from the Safita region in northern Syria (see more details below). It also mentions the name of a Lebanese individual named "**Abu Ali Al-Harakhi**" who runs Hezbollah's political office in southern Syria and serves as the executive director of economic projects in the region. His location is at Hezbollah's headquarters marked here (coordinates: 32.630034, 36.070797):



<https://www.iamahumanstory.com/>

Khodr Ali Taher ("Abu Ali Khodr or Al-G'awar ") is a wealthy Syrian businessperson. Born in 1976. Made headlines following his conflict with Syrian Interior Minister Mohammad Rahmon, who tried unsuccessfully to boycott **Al- Taher's** business operations. During the Civil War, he controlled the passage of goods between the territories controlled by the regime and the territories controlled by the opposition. He owns a tourism company called "Ila" and two other companies called "Eliasmin to Lamkaulat" and "Al-Syria to Ladara Alfandakia". He also runs a company called "Al-Qalala Laharasa and Al-Hamaya Al-Amaniya" whose purpose is to preserve and protect oil drilling, tourist tours, transportation of goods and energy facilities. He also owns a communications company called "Emmatel" which is headquartered in the Almaza district of Damascus. Previously it was reported that Taher has trade and smuggling ties on the Turkish border. U.S. sanctions were imposed on him in 2020 as part of the Caesar Act.



Above: Khodr Ali Taher

Summary:

The Shiite axis, led by Iran, is making great efforts to "link" southern Syria to it through the establishment of civilian infrastructures. Through Shi'ization and economic efforts, the Shiite axis seeks to shape a sympathetic and enabling civic environment. **An effective civic establishment produces an active connection with the local population.** The active connection is made, among other things, through the foundations, sponsorships, economic projects and through the personas detailed in this report.

The purpose of the active relationship is to create dependency of the civilian population on the Shi'ite axis. This dependency generates the population's sympathy. This sympathy enables military activity within and outwards, using the population as a Human Shield based on the use of the civilian infrastructures. In addition, this sympathy enables the exploitation of human resources in the region with an emphasis on recruiting activists.

As detailed in this report, the activity in south Syria is mostly based on local Syrian individuals who are managed and guided as proxies by Iranians and Lebanese Hezbollah members. It seems that the Iranian embassy in Damascus is responsible for the inclusion of the civilian effort.

The Shiite axis's civilian efforts, which are usually carried out "under the radar", are met with a number of elements trying to stop them, such as Russia (through Russian military police and through the Fifth Corps led by Ahmad Al-Uda - a Russian proxy-sponsored force). In some cases, the Shiite axis's efforts encounter opposition from the local population. At this point, it appears that these attempts have no serious impact.

We need to ask ourselves a number of questions: What will happen in the future, will southern Syria become southern Lebanon? Will the Sunni population in the area allow a wide and large deployment of the Shiite axis within it? Who or what can stop this?

The Iranian-led Shiite axis is driven by ideology. In contrast, most of the local population in southern Syria needs minimal civil services and money to survive, ideology is of low priority if at all. To fulfill its ideology, the Shiite axis is willing to invest and pay. At this point, the interests coincide and so we estimate that the efforts to establish the civilian infrastructure in southern Syria will intensify and even succeed in most cases. (A good example of this is the fact that quite a few expatriates like, Jesh Khaled Ibn Al-Walid, former ISIS members (Sunni) in the Yarmouk Basin, joined various branches of the regime after the fall of the region, even though these forces are supported by the Shiite axis. Thus, the Shiite axis gained local power that could help them nurture their plans in the area).

Already today, we can name dozens of sites where the Shiite axis proxy is deployed (Shiite militias, local militias supported by the axis and Hezbollah and its units). This deployment exists both in Syrian military sites and more importantly within many Sunni towns and villages. We estimate that this deployment will continue to take root and even intensify. The intensive activity of the Shiite axis in the civilian aspect will assist this development formidably.

In our opinion, the only significant elements that can stop the process of a civil establishment of the Shiite axis in southern Syria are local elements, i.e.: only the local population will be able to stop this process. Support of local forces (similar to the Fifth Corps under Ahmad Al-Uda) will enable the locals to act (delay and perhaps even prevent) against the military and civilian establishment of the Shiite axis in the region. This may prevent southern Syria from becoming the "twin brother" of southern Lebanon.