

Maciej Paszyn

National Defence University, Warsaw, Poland

Identification of the non-professional territorial armed formations on the MENA Region

Abstract

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is characterized by a high incidence of local intrastate or international armed conflicts. In the vast majority of cases, in these operations are involved the non-professional territorial armed forces. These are military organizations composed of volunteers living various local communities. This article shows the role and significance of these formations on the example of the civil war in Syria.

Keywords: *armed conflict, MENA region, territorial defence, Syrian Civil War, Free Syrian Army, Peoples Protection Units*

Introduction

Starting from the beginning of the mass anti-government protests called “The Arab Spring”¹, 17 December 2010, in the Middle East and North Africa hereinafter referred to as the MENA, observed a significant number of armed conflicts. General characteristics of the listed conflicts defines them in the vast majority, as Non-international, anti-government military operations characterized in certain cases, as the substrate religious and activities of the international organization of Sunni-called “Islamic state” (IS)².

Described conflicts have been observed in areas such countries as Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Libya and Syria. It should be noted that these are unfinished conflicts with highly dynamic events, which making it difficult to conduct research and will outdated information in certain cases. Analysis of the ongoing military action allows to specify the types of armed formations involved in the described conflicts. In addition to regular government armed forces, international armed forces (engaging in conflicts Non-international), and the mercenary formations, the important role is played by the entities referred as non-professional territorial armed formations (NPTAF), means military organizations created on the basis of the local population, adapted primarily to carry out defensive and support tasks. This article will refer to the identification of these formations in the MENA region, with a particular focus on organizations created within the territory of Syria. It will describe their characteristics and roles, which they fulfill in the contemporary conflicts in the analyzed area.

Non-professional territorial armed formations – general charakteristic

Due to the semantic inaccuracy, it is necessary to define the conceptual framework for the foregoing expression. The last two members to express determine the military nature of a given subject, describing it as a separate branch of the military, supplied with weapons and military equipment. The expression “non-professional” means the opposite of the word “pro” to describe dealing with a specific activity or field in a professional manner, usually as a way of life. Therefore, the expression “non-professional” means a condition

¹ The expression defining the social protests and conflicts in the Arab countries, in 2010-2013, the cause of which was social discontent stemming from social and living conditions, unemployment, rising food prices, as well as corruption and nepotism among state agencies. The protests were directed against autocratic regimes limiting civil liberties.

² It should be emphasized that the author distinguishes between hostilities from terrorist acts carried out often by the same entities, focusing in this article mainly on the first type of activities.

in which the members are to serve in the formation on a periodic basis, and will generally have other gainful work not connected with the military. It should be specified that receive of salary for the periodically service by the soldiers described the formation, does not disqualify organization from the analyzed group. The use of the term “territorial” indicates that the subject has featured a constant, particular area of responsibility, appointed by administrative or ethnic boundaries, coincide mostly with the area of residence of the members of the formation. It excludes from the conceptual collection, operational armed forces based on conscript soldiers and their sub-units.

Summary abovementioned members of the expression “territorial non-professional armed forces” classified to this group:

- territorial defense forces;
- national guards and militias;
- independence and anti-government organizations conducting military actions.

Extending the described group of the second and third subgroup was necessary because of the subordination organizational described formation. The definition of “territorial defense forces”, which is the starting point to characterize the analyzed entities, determines that it is “(...) part of the Armed Forces to be exercised over defense task on particular areas within the country. These units represent multi-types of forces, formed of local resources and population, intended mainly to carry out regular and irregular warfare in areas of their responsibility; to support the operational forces” (*Słownik terminów z zakresu Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* 2002, p. 145).

Based on the analysis of armed conflicts in the MENA area reported, that a significant part of NPATF was not an integral part of the armed forces of the state, but was subordinated to the other state institutions, party or religion group. Therefore, for the purpose of research it was necessary to extend the analyzed a set of organizations of a national guard and militias. It was also noted, that a significant number of conflicts in which one of the side did not have the status of an independent state, while hostilities were independence or/and anti-government character. Accordingly, analyzed group was also expanded of organizations carrying out rebel activities against the government. Specified subgroup analysis will allow for a full examination of the problem.

Possibility of extending the research process of territorial defense forces, national guard, militia and pro-independence and anti-government organization, has been confirmed by analysis of the provisions of international humanitarian law. A situation in which analyzed the organization is part of the armed forces or security forces of a country is self-evident and no requires additional comment. The participation of

other formations regulates the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. It states that the sides to the conflict may be also “(...) splinter armed forces or other organized armed groups are under responsible command and exercising control over part of the territory that could lead continuous and consistent military operations and apply this protocol” (Protocol II of Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts 1977).

On the basis of this protocol, it was found that there are reasons to take up the research process all identified military organizations that meet the criteria of territorial non-professional armed formations involved in armed conflicts MENA region in 2011-2015, including pro-independence and anti-government organizations conducting military operations. Aspect of an organization’s ability to exercise control over a partial territory, maintaining continuous and consistent military operations and abide humanitarian law, remains indefinitely in some cases.

Syrian civil war – key to understanding the situation

The general characteristic of NPTAF shows that the formations of described type are strongly based on local communities, often created by local authorities, the operation of which is strongly connected with the specifics of life of the population. Social characteristics of the regions of country, such as ethnic composition, social structure, wealth, relationship to central and local government authorities, patriotism, national and or local or religiosity will affect the principles of formation and functioning of the described components and will determine the overarching mission and goals these organizations. Armed conflict, which showing the greatest multi-dimensional complexity of the socio-military area MENA is the Syrian civil war.

Launched 15 March 2011 the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic, caused as a result of mass anti-government demonstrations and the use combat munitions against demonstrators by security service, led to the creation of a significant number of local armed formations, some of which evolved into military organizations with nationwide coverage. The social structure of the Syrian state from before 2011, in which according to various sources 74-75% of the population of the country had discriminated by authorities Sunni population, approx. 7% was Kurdish ethnic minority and governance was mainly by 11-14% (Kaczorowski 2006, p. 32-39). Alawite minority (variant of Shia Islam), as well as a variety of engaging both Muslim and the Euro-Atlantic bloc countries contributing to a situation in which describing civil war is a conflict quoted both

on the ground socio-social, political and economic, but also religious and ethnic backgrounds.

This determines a condition in which we can observe the following lines of a dispute between the groups of interests:

1. Socio-economic conflict between an autocratic government led by Bashar al-Assad and the Baath Party and calling for an fundamental political changes majority of the Syrian population.
2. Shiite-Sunni religious conflict.
3. Autonomic aspirations of Kurdish minority.
4. The international political and economic conflict over control of extraction and supply of petroleum deposits the Middle East, which involves the local and world powers such as the United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran and France.

The above-mentioned dependence, combined with course of hostilities since the conflict began, determine the current situation of political and military forces fragmentation in the area of Syria.

A discerning analysis of official speeches of the various armed formations spokesmen posted on the official social networking sites and in other media devoted to the described conflict international scientific, published video records on military activities, as well as specialized journalism reportage, made it possible to distinguish six major parties of the conflict functioning in the second half of 2015 years, carrying out different political and military objectives:

- I. The government side strives to maintain the state power, bring the end of the revolution and the maintenance of the Syrian state borders from before the outbreak of civil war.
- II. Kurdish party, whose primary objective is to protect the Kurdish population and to obtain the greatest possible autonomy of the Rojava region.
- III. The coalition of organizations gathered around the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which are primarily formations secularist (not referring to any religion) and moderate Sunni formations. Their aim stated objective is to overthrow Bashar al-Assad and establish a secular democratic power (with a limited role of Islamic authorities).
- IV. A coalition of Sunni groups gathered around the organization formerly belonging to Islamic Front (Arab. *Jabhat al-Islamiyya*), whose aim is to overthrow Bashar al-Assad and Syria's transformation into an Islamic republic.

- V. The al-Nusra Front (Arab. *Jabhat Al-Nusra* – The Support Front for the People of Al-Sham) constituting the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda pursuing international objectives of the organization
- VI. Islamic State (Arab. *Ad-Daula al-Islamiyya*) seeking to create a Sunni caliphate throughout all MENA region.

Overarching, different political objectives of mentioned above groups, transfer sometimes into converge military targets. It leads to a situation in which the needs of the military operation concluded military alliances between the selected formations from above-mentioned parties. The vast majority of the formation of groups II-V combines both conduct hostilities against government forces and against the Islamic State.

Much more complicated situation can be observed regarding the nature of the interaction between these groups. Analysis of military operations carried out by formations of groups III and IV showed that particular organizations differ from one another in terms of relations with the Kurdish formations and radical al-Nusra Front. A significant part of the Sunni groups (Group IV), has taken military action against the Kurdish forces, presenting a differentiated approach to the Syrian wing of al-Qaeda. Formations Group III in the vast majority are operating against al-Nusra Front, presenting a differentiated approach in relation to the Kurds. Analysis of cooperation and the fight against the various formations of the groups to other groups will be presented later in this article. The scale of the complexity of the problem describes Table 1.

Table 1. Parties of the conflict in the Syrian civil war

Group No.	Name of fighting side	Supporting by (main supporters)	Alliance with	Military action against
I	Government forces	Iran, Russia,	–	II-VI
II	Kurdish forces	USA,	III	I, V, VI, partly IV
III	Free Syrian Amrmy	USA, Turkey	Partly with II and IV	I, VI, partly IV
IV	Sunnic formations	Saudi Arabia, Turkey	Partly with III and V	I, VI, partly II
V	al-Nusra Front		Partly with IV	I, II, VI, partly III
VI	Islamic State		–	I-V

Intrastate nature and complexity of the conflict in Syria affects a significant participation in combat operations by military formations, which are not part of the state armed forces.

However, this does not mean that all military organizations operating against the government troops will have the non-professional territorial armed formations status. Analysis of source materials allowed to obtain information that a significant part of the fighting groups is a mercenary (with a significant number of foreigners) and/or composed mostly of former professional soldiers, who began military actions against the government. These formations are characterized by having significant amounts of heavy combat equipment and conduct independent, complex offensive actions, extending beyond the area of the particular province. Therefore, it is impossible to include to NPATF main forces of al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State, as well as selected formation of groups III and IV. Nevertheless, all these six parties to the conflict, has allied formations which satisfy the described above conditions.

Government side

Syrian Armed Forces (SAF) are the backbone of government troops, which is a classic example of government armed forces consisting of the component Army, Air Force, Navy, intelligence and counterintelligence, and other support formations. The biggest support formation with approximately 100 thousand soldiers (*The Shia crescendo* 2015) is National Defence Forces organization (Fig. 1) (Arab. *Quwat ad-Difa' al-Watani*).

Fig. 1. Emblem of National Defence Forces



Source: National Defence Force Syria Logo.

This organization is a classic example of territorial defense formation. Subject to orders of SAF command, with limited functional autonomy formation is composed of light infantry units and sub-units of militias. It performs the entire spectrum of support activities for SAF operational troops, including combat tasks. Usually it does not perform independent, offensive operations. The organization, whose formation began at

the turn of years 2012 and 2013, entered local Shiite militias called “The Popular Committees” (Arab. *Al-Lijana al-Sha’biyah*) (Lund 2013), was created as armed formations designed to defend the population against radical Sunni groups. National Defence Forces was also joined by members of the organization “Shabiha” – militarized formations derived from the governing Ba’as party, closely linked to the Assad clan. The main NDF headquarters is located in the capital – Damascus.

Formation also be divided into regional commands, which are identical to the pre-war administrative division of the country. Subordinate units of the regional commanders carry out tasks only within their own provinces called muhafazas. The NDF-in includes not only the Shiite Alawite, but also representatives of the Druze and Christian minorities. The formation and training process of new subunits is strongly supported by the Iranian government, which inter alia sends Revolutionary Guard Corps instructors, as well as by the organization Hezbollah (Kozak 2015). A characteristic feature of NDF is the committing by its members robbery on property belonging to families that support Sunni groups. This practice is respected by government authorities.

NDF is not the only NPTAF operating on the government side. In addition to nationwide NDF, in the fight are involved some minor local formations such as: “The army of Monotheism” (Arab. *Jaysh al-Muwahhideen*) (Landis 2013a) which is the local Druze militia operating in Suwaydii, Deray and Damascus areas, or the Christian militia formation called Sootoro operating in the area of the city Quamishli. It should also be noted that the government forces are supported by a significant number of professional armed formations (usually mercenary) that are not part of the regular army. To this group of formations may include Sunni Ba’as Brigade (Arab. *Katā’ib al-Ba’th*) (Dark 2014), a Palestinian-Syrian al-Quds brigade (Landis 2013b) or a Shi’ite al-Abbas brigade (Arab. *Liwa Abu al-Faql al-Abbas*) (Mahmood, Chulov 2013) – acting both Syria and Iraq armed religious formation dedicated to protecting the Shiite religious centers against Sunnis. The estimated size of mercenary formation (according to previous sources) on the government side is in the range of 15-25 thousand people and they have less relevance from a military point of view.

Kurdish forces

In contrast to the government side, Syrian Kurdish forces in consisting in the vast majority of non-professional territorial armed formations. The most important organization is numbering 40 thousand soldiers (Perry, 2014) formation called People's Protection

Units – YPG (Kurd. *Yekîneyên Parastin Gel*). They include also numbering (according to various sources) of 7-10 thousand soldiers female formation – Women’s Protection Units – YPJ (Kurd. *Yekîneyên Parastin Jin*), having separate command and perform the same task like YPG, including combat missions. The main objective of described formations is to defend Rojava region (north-eastern part of Syria, also called the “Western Kurdistan”, residing in the vast majority of the Kurdish population) against the Islamic State armed forces. The YPG/YPJ include only units of light infantry (which distinguishes them from Peshmerga – Kurdish formations operating in Iraq), formed the basis of the local people.

It should be noted that the following formations are supporting by volunteers from in North America and Western Europe countries, but their number varies according to different sources approx. 500 people and has more propaganda than military significance. Equipped primarily handguns and a limited number of heavy machine guns mounted on civilian off-road vehicles, Peoples Protection formation has minimal offensive capabilities, limited in its operation to the territory of Rojava autonomy and adjacent areas (Aleppo, Raqqa). However, despite obvious deficiencies in equipment, these formations effectively carry out defensive and irregular actions, resulting in is the maintenance of protected area, as well as the recovery of part of the land occupied temporarily by the Islamic State. At this point it is necessary to mention the fact that the problems with the supply of YPG/YPJ are associated with the political opposition of the Turkish government, which accuses described formations with close links to the PKK, considered by the Turks as a terrorist organization. The actual relationship between those two organizations are not fully known, but there is evidence of the joined to YPG/YGJ formations by members of the PKK (Anghel 2015).

Fig. 2. Emblem of People’s Protection Units



Source: People's Protection Units.

Fig. 3. Emblem of the Women's Protection Units

Source: Women's Protection Units.

In addition to the YPG/YPJ on the Kurdish side operate also smaller non-professional territorial armed forces. They include a militia formation of “Kurds for Safety” (Kurd. *Asayish*) (Barbarani 2015), as well as cooperating with the Kurds, tribal paramilitary formation “Forces of the Brave” (Arab. *Jaysh al-Sanadid* or *Quwet al-Sanadid*) (Hamou 2015), which consists the Shammar tribe members. From a military point of view, only important armed organization that can not be classified as NPATF, is made up of former Kurdish SAF pro soldiers, numbering approximately 7 thousand people (Civiroglu 2013) Kurdish Front Brigade (Arab. *Jabhat al-Akrad*), which originally was part of Free Syrian Army.

The coalition formations gathered around the free Syrian army

Due to the complex, specific structure, organization Free Syrian Army (FSA) is a uniquely difficult to classify. It has a nationwide chain of command and its staff is saturated by professional soldiers, serving in the SAF before the outbreak of civil war. In addition, describing organization is characterized by the implementation of complex operational tasks, including offensive one and possession of a restricted number of heavy combat equipment. Therefore, you cannot classify this formation as a non-professional and territorial cohesion. However, it should mention the fact that the core of this formation, are the units of light infantry. A characteristic feature of this organization is its multi-structure. FSA is not a unitary formation, but a federation of paramilitary organizations gathered around the overriding commands/military councils. The structure consists of several nationwide coalitions of armed groups, forming organization of macro-regional coverage (operating in the area of several Muhafazash).

An example of such a structure may be the Southern Front of FSA, operating mainly in Daraa and Quneitra governorate, consisting of nearly 50 smaller organizations counting in mid-2014 a total number of about 30 thousand soldiers (Lund 2014a). Some of these organizations can also be classified as armed formation alliances/coalitions of a local or regional level. Examples of such formations might be First Division or First Commando Corps. It should be noted that the names of these formations do not coincide with the terms of organizational units of the regular armed forces. In reality, battalions, regiments, brigades, divisions and corps have varying degrees of abundance, despite identical organizational terms, and are generally several times smaller than counterparts in the regular army (Winter 2013).

In summary FSA is a federation of paramilitary organizations, which is characterized by three, four and five-specific cases and the structure of military alliances. At the lowest levels of the organization, there are formations mainly on local range, and they can be as independent creations considered as NPAAF. Their size and the degree of autonomy are varied. Some of them strictly fall under the command of higher management, creating a structure similar to the regular army, while others act with a high degree of independence.

Evidence of this – for example – is a differentiated approach to particular formations from other sides of the conflict, especially to radical Sunni groups. A large autonomy of the part of formations in terms of alliances creates a situation in which the affiliation to described group is not constant. Accordingly, and with attention to the ambiguous source material, it cannot be precisely set the number of formations allied in FSA, and the total number of soldiers. It is estimated that this number reaches to approx. 100 organizations, bringing together in total in their ranks according to various sources, 50-60 thousand members.

Diversified is also the composition of the various formations. The dominant number of organizations is based on the local Sunni population, led by professional officers and NCOs serving earlier in the SAF. At this point, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that before the civil war in Syria was obligatory, compulsory military service lasting one and a half year. The influx of foreign volunteers (coming from the neighboring countries, and the Northern Africa and the Balkan states) is limited and does not fundamentally change the distribution of forces in the described conflict. Due to the significant organizational fragmentation, it is impossible to cite and describe all formations and alliances.

The key alliances (according to the author) belonging to FSA are contained in Table 2.

Table 2. Key alliances inside Free Syrian Army

Name of formation (arabic)	Size	Area of activity	Official emblem (Fig. 4-6)
Southern Front FSA	30 000	Daraa, Quneitra	
Syria Revolutionaries Front (<i>Jabhat Thowar Suriyya</i>)	10-15 000 (Gutman 2014)	Idlib, Aleppo	
Army of Revolutionaries (<i>Jaysh al-Thuwar</i>)	3 000	Aleppo, Homs, Latakia, Hama, Raqqqa	

Sources of figures: Southern Front (Syrian rebel group) [fig. 4]; Syrian Revolutionaries Front [fig. 5]; An Analysis of Jaish al-Thuwar (The Army of Revolutionaries) – A Component of the Syrian Democratic Forces [fig. 6].

Sunni formations

Armed formations classified in this group do not create, no uniform structures with nationwide coverage, but are a collection of autonomous military organizations linked to different military alliances. The various formations consist in vast majority of the Syrian Sunni population led by former professional soldiers of the SAF. Their range of activities generally limited to one muhafaza (one governorate), while the vast majority of sub-units are a light infantry unit.

However, some of the formations described the group has a diverse number of captured, heavy combat equipment. Example may represent the biggest independent group (part of the few major alliances) with a range of macro-region – the Islamic Movement of Free Men of the Levant (*Abrar ash-Sham*) the size is approx. 15-20 thousand members (*Abrar al-Sham. Mapping Militant Organizations* 2013) consisting of smaller local sub-units (generally referred to brigades) organization, has in its arsenal captured armored infantry (BMP-1), tanks (T-72, T-64, T-54) (Zelin, Lister 2014) howitzers (2S1-Carnation) and heavy field artillery.

Consist of former professional soldiers, political prisoners and the civilian population describing formation, characterized by a relatively high degree of organization, implementation of complex military offensive and irregular action, as well as proven organizational support from Al Qaeda. In view of the above facts organization can not be classified clearly as a anti-government NPTAF.

In contrast to the Ahrar ash-Sham, the other groups do not have the degree of organization and combat potential (despite the fact that some of them heavy combat equipment). In connection with limited combat capabilities those groups form local and regional alliances that can be considered as relatively uniform armed actors. The total number of formation is variable, and fragmentation (estimated tens formation) makes it impossible to describe them all. The key (according to the author opinion) formations are included in Table 3.

The described formations create in late 2013 as a permanent organizational and military alliance with nationwide coverage and significant potential battle, called the Islamic Front (Arab. *Al-Jabhat al-Islamiyyah*, Fig. 7) (Solomon 2013), counting at the height of approx. 50-60 thousand soldiers (Solomon 2014). It consisted of two smaller alliances: Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (Arab. *Jabhat Surya Tabrir al-Islamiyya*) composed with the formation of *Lawa al-Tawhid*, *Lawa Sukur ash-Sham* and *Jayish al-Islam*, and the Syrian Islamic Front (*al-Jabhab al-Islamiyya as-Suriyya*) composed with the formation of *Ahrar ash-Sham*, *Lawa al-Haqq* (the city of Homs), *Ansar al-Sham*.

Fig. 7. Emblem of the Islamic Front coalition



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Front_\(Syria\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Front_(Syria)) [access: 20.12.2015]

Tab. 3. Main Sunni formations

Name of formation (Arabic)	Size	Area of activity	Official emblem Fig. 8-12
Islamic Movement of Free Men of the Levant (<i>Ahrar ash-Sham</i>)	15-20 000	Aleppo, Raqqa, Damascus, Homs	
Army of Islam (<i>Jaysh al-Islam</i>)	17 000 (claimed) (Gutman, Alhamadee 2015)	Damascus, Homs	
Army of Mujahideen (<i>Jaysh al-Mujahideen</i>)	5-6 000 (Lund 2014b)	Aleppo	
Islamic Union of the soldiers of the Levant (<i>Ajnad al.-Sham</i>)	15 000 (Lund 2014a)	Damascus	
Authenticity and Development Front (<i>Asala wa-al.-Tanmiya</i>)	13 000 (Guide to the Syrian rebels 2013)	Aleppo, Damascus, Homs	

Sources of figures: Ahrar al-Sham, Wikipedia [fig. 8]; Jaysh al-Islam [fig. 9]; Army of Mujahideen [fig.10]; Ajnad al-Sham Islamic Union [fig. 11]; Authenticity and Development Front [fig. 12].

For the described group it is necessary to include another important military component, which due to the very high autonomy and ethnic factor was not placed in the table above. Syrian Turkmen Brigades (turk. *Suriye Türkmen Ordusu*) is a population of 10 thousand (Hall 2013) armed people formation composed of representatives of the Turkmen minority in Syria. Strongly supported by Turkey armed organization, operates chiefly in the north of the country in the Aleppo and Latakia province, cooperating to a significant extent with other Islamic groups. Brigades do not form a unified military structure with nationwide coverage, but are operating as an independent units operating in different muhafazahs. Based on the local population are a classic example of non-professional territorial armed formations.

The al-Nusra Front and The Islamic State

The combination of these two sides of the conflict in one section does not involve identical politico-military objectives (organizations carry out military actions against each other), but due to the significant organizational and functional convergence in the described area of research. Both the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State authorities have a central command and carry out organized, expansive activities with a range extending beyond the area of Syria. In addition, they are powered by a substantial number of foreigners, according to Samia Nakhoul (2015): “IS – 30% of all soldiers fighting in Syria”), trained often in foreign centers. All of the above factors described disqualify grouping of non-professional territorial armed formations.

However, it should mention the fact that the command authorities of both organizations at the regional level, have a high degree of autonomy from central headquarters, as well as work with local tribal authorities. Both organizations are supported also by smaller armed groups retain significant organizational autonomy. The only entity complies with the conditions of NPTAF, holding the essence of military capability, is supporting the al-Nusra Front formation, called “Banner of the Nation” (Fig. 13) (Arab. *Liwa al-Umma*).

Described Islamic organization consists of their own declaration 6 thousands soldiers (Fitzgerald 2012) is composed in vast majority of local Sunni population and carry out military activities only in Hama governorate. Other formations were absorbed by two main described organizations or do not have significant combat capabilities.

Fig. 13. Emblem of the Banner of Nation



Source: Liwaa al-Umma.

The Alliances

The gradual expansion of the Islamic State, supported by a large number of overseas volunteers, unflagging position of the government forces, as well as a dynamic situation described international engagement in civil war, led to create a military operating coalitions/alliances between key organizations from groups II-V.

They consist of the establishment of joint military councils and subunits interact at both the tactical and operational level. Formed on the basis of convergent military targets, they are expected to raise the combat potential in operations mainly carried out against government forces and IS.

The first reported example was the created in September of 2014 by YPG and part of FSA formations, coalition called “Volcano Euphrates” (Arab. *Burkan al-Furāt*) (Bizar 2014), which aimed to cooperation against Islamic State in the Aleppo and Raqqā governorate. The success of the alliance described in the battles for the Kobane city led to join another moderate Syrian formation and appointment in October 2015 coalition called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Kurd. *Hezên Suriya demokratik*).

Generalizing described alliances are commonly established by selected formations of the groups on the line: Kurdish forces – FSA formations – selected Sunni formations; FSA formations – Sunni formations; Sunni formations – al-Nusra Front. Part of the Sunni groups cooperating with al-Nusra conducts limited operations against the Kurdish forces and selected FSA formations. Based on the analysis of source materials it is possible to classification nine of described type alliances.

The vast majority of them (the most important coalitions are listed in Table 4) features a regional or macro-regional cooperation scope and refers to cooperate only within the scope of the operation. The exception is here Syrian Revolutionary Command Council (Arab. *Qiyādat Majlis ath-Thawra as-Sūriyya*), which includes key formations Islamic Front and the Free Syrian Army and which has national coverage.

Table 4. Selected alliances

Name (Arabic)	Member groups	Military actions against	Area	Official emblem Fig. 14-18
Syrian Revolutionary Command Council (<i>Majlis Qiyyadat ath-Thawra as-Sūriyya</i>)	III and IV	I and VI	Syria	
Syrian Democratic Forces (<i>Quwwāt Sūriyā al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya</i>)	II, selected III and IV	VI	Aleppo, Al-Ha-saka, Ar-Raqqā	
Aleppo Conquist (<i>Fatah Halab</i>)	III and IV	Mostly I; VI	Aleppo	
Partisans of Islamic Law (<i>Ansar al-Sharia</i>)	IV and V	Mostly I; II and VI	Aleppo	
The Army of Conquest (<i>Jaish al-Fatah</i>)	IV and V	Mostly I	Idlib	

Sources of figures: Syrian Revolutionary Command Council [fig. 14]; Syrian Democratic Forces [fig. 15]; File:Fatah Halab operations room.jpg [fig. 16]; Ansar al-Sharia (Syria) [fig. 17]; Army of Conquest [fig. 18].

The remaining area of MENA region

Political and military instability of MENA region, resulting in, among others, the expansion of the IS and other extremist Islamic groups, affects a significant increase in active participation in military actions by the whole population of particular countries. Armed formations, created based on the local communities, carry out military actions (depending on the country), against or in cooperation with the Islamic fundamentalist groups.

Generally, formations created at the grassroots, in view of the limited potential of fire, do not lead mostly independent military action, but interact with other military entities or are absorbed by them. In the vast majority, their light weapons, local or regional considerable autonomy organizational structure, the significant impact of religious and clan, as well as the voluntary nature of the service, converging described formations to selected groups of Syrian. By far the most numerous and highest-organized group is Iraqi “Peoples Mobilization” (*al-Hashd al-shaabi*) (Fig. 19).

The pro-government armed organization, based in the vast majority of the local Shiite communities, has approx. 100-120 thousand members (Sly 2015). It is a classic example of the territorial defense formation, closely cooperating with the Iraqi regular army. Backed by a relatively high degree of organizational autonomy, supported among other things by Iranian instructors, is an important element of the fight against IS.

Fig.19. Official emblem of the Iraqi Peoples Mobilization



Source: Popular Mobilization Forces.

Analysis of armed conflict on the MENA region, revealed a multitude of organizations created based on the local communities. However, due to the development of some of them and/or their absorption by larger groups (mainly international Sunni extremist formations), part of them cannot be classified as NPATF.

For example, in due to the organizational and military development it cannot be classified to describing group, operating in northern Iraq Kurdish Peshmerga formation. Due to an unspecified number of foreign mercenaries and professional soldiers, and also because of the international linkages, additional study needs an Islamist groups in Libya (eg. Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries coalition – *Majlis Shura Thumar Benghazi*) and Yemen (Supporters of God – *Ansar Allah/Houthis*). Despite numerous controversies and documented acts of terrorism, for the described type of formation it

is possible to include the armed component of Hezbollah, as well as very poorly described, operating in Libya militia formations of Tuaregs and Tubu tribe.

Conclusions

The above analysis showed the scale of the involvement of non-professional territorial armed formations in military actions on the MENA region. The geopolitical and ethno-religious characteristics of the region, substantially affect the structure and the objectives of described groups. Nationwide social activities directed against the old, secular regimes suppressed by the help of police forces and the army, activated to begin military action a significant part of the population of the country (Libya, Syria, Yemen). The significant weakening or collapse of authoritarian government, combined with the instability of internal democratic resulted inter alia in dynamic growth of radical Sunni groups (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Lebanon). The gradual expansion of the IS contributed substantially to the formation process of pro-government Shiite formations (Iraq, Syria, Yemen) as well as forge alliances between secularist, Shiite and moderate Sunni groups (Syria, Libya). In the current phase can be observed deepening described coalitions as well as increase the active involvement of the of regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel) and global (US, Russia, France) powers.

The development of regional alliances and increase the involvement of other countries in inter-state conflict shows the probable future of military formation described in this article. Due to the significantly limited military potential of territorial non-professional armed formations, their independent role in hostilities on the MENA region will steadily decrease, along with a progressive increase involvement by external operational forces and foreign mercenaries (in that case IS). It is therefore expected further development of alliances described by groups whose activities will achieve a national or interstate range. Foreseeable trend is confirmed by the events of the activities in Syria and Iraq, where it is possible to seen (in the IX.2014-XII.2015), tying of the major coalition operation between territorial formations of the region with partly owned by other entities (in the area of Iraq, has been cooperate between Peoples Mobilization formation and Peshmerga forces). Summing up group of group described type functioning on the MENA region, in order to keep any military significance, are somehow doomed to one of three solutions: close cooperation with the government forces and the regular army, absorption by a larger organization with international reach (applies to this collection of Islamic groups) or the entry into multi-agent military alliance.

The above analysis shows that non-professional territorial armed forces can play an important role on the modern battlefield. In situations in which conflict is an intrastate, and the type of warfare has single battles without an unity frontline, described formations are typically capable of independent execution of tasks in tactical and operational dimension. The increase in the intensity of the conflict and its internationalization, combined with increased involvement of regular troops operating limits the functioning potential of territorial formation to carry out support task only and / or creates for them the need to co-participation in military alliances with other groups.

References

- Abrar al-Sham*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahrar_ash-Sham [18.12.2015]
- Abrar al-Sham. Mapping Militant Organizations*, Stanford University, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/523> [05.11.2014]
- Ajnad al-Sham Islamic Union*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajnad_al-Sham_Islamic_Union [18.12.2015]
- An Analysis of Jaish al-Thuwar (The Army of Revolutionaries) – A Component of the Syrian Democratic Forces*, Hasan Mustafa, <https://hasanmustafas.wordpress.com/2015/11/16/an-analysis-of-jaish-al-thuwar-the-army-of-revolutionaries-a-component-of-the-syrian-democratic-forces/> [16.11.2015]
- Anghel I. (2015), *Why is ISIS fearing Kurds? Only reliable force against ISIS*, Video Document, Günther Steinmeier – Best Documentary, Germany, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tmbo9lBfE58>
- Ansar al-Sharia (Syria)*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ansar_al-Sharia_\(Syria\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ansar_al-Sharia_(Syria)) [05.12.2015]
- Army of Conquest*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_Conquest [17.12.2015]
- Army of Mujahideen*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_Mujahideen [05.12.2015]
- Authenticity and Development Front*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authenticity_and_Development_Front [29.11.2015]
- Barbarani S. (2015), *Syrian Kurdish female leader Aitan Farhad about life as an Islam State target*, “The Telegraph”, <http://ekurd.net/syrian-kurdish-female-leader-aitan-farhad-about-life-as-an-islam-state-target-2015-04-20> [20.04.2015]

- Bizar R. (2014), *YPG and FSA form a joint military chamber to combat ISIS in Syria*, “Ara News”, <http://aranews.net/2014/09/ypg-fsa-form-joint-military-chamber-combat-isis-syria/> [12.09.2014]
- Civiroglu M. (2013), *Kurdish Commander: Jibadi Groups in Syria Have Hijacked FSA*, Rudaw Media Network, <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/11082013> [13.08.2013]
- Dark E. (2014), *Pro-regime Sunni fighters in Aleppo defy sectarian narrative*, “Al Monitor”, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/syria-aleppo-sunni-quds-baath-brigades.html> [20.03.2014]
- File:Fatab Halab operations room.jpg*, Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fatah_Halab_operations_room.jpg [09.06.2015]
- Fitzgerald M. (2012), *Rebel army moves command centre inside Syria to organise fractured forces*, “The Irish Times”, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/rebel-army-moves-command-centre-inside-syria-to-organise-fractured-forces-1.536948> [24.09.2012]
- Guide to the Syrian rebels* (2013), BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24403003>
- Gutman R. (2014), *Al Qaida rebels leave mass grave behind as they desert base in Syria*, McClatchy DC, Washington, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/middle-east/article24761188.html> [06.01.2014]
- Gutman R., Alhamadee M. (2015) *Islamist rebel leader walks back rhetoric in first interview with U.S. media*, McClatchy DC, Washington, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/middle-east/article24784780.html> [20.05.2015]
- Hall R. (2013), *Turkmen seek key positions in new Syrian cabinet*, “Global Post” Boston, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/asianet/130403/turkmen-seek-key-positions-new-syrian-cabinet> [03.04.2013]
- Hamou A. (2015), *Ahead of battle against Islamic State in Syria's northeast, one faction hesitates to join SDF*, Syria Direct, <http://syriadirect.org/news/ahead-of-battle-against-islamic-state-in-syria%E2%80%99s-northeast-one-faction-hesitates-to-join-sdf/> [02.11.2015]
- Islamic Front (Syria)*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Front_\(Syria\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Front_(Syria)) [20.12.2015]
- Jaysh al-Islam*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaysh_al-Islam [19.12.2015]
- Kaczorowski B. (2006) *Wielki Encyklopedyczny Atlas Świata. T. 10. Azja Południowo-Zachodnia*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa
- Kozak C. (2015) *The Regime's Military Capabilities: Part 1*, Institute Study of War, Washington, <http://www.iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/05/the-regime-military-capabilities-part-1.html> [26.05.2015]

- Landis J. (2013a) *Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi: The Druze Militias of Southern Syria*, Syria Comment, Chicago, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/druze-militias-southern-syria/> [13.11.2013]
- Landis J. (2013b) *Overview of some pro-Assad Militias*, Syria Comment, Chicago, <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/overview-of-some-pro-assad-militias/> [01.09.2015]
- Liwa al-Umma*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liwa_al-Umma [12.02.2015]
- Lund A. (2013) *The Non-state Militant landscape in Syria*, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-non-state-militant-landscape-in-syria> [27.04.2013]
- Lund A. (2014a), *Does the Southern Front Exist?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55054> 1.03.2014]
- Lund A. (2014b), *Pushing Back Against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant: The Syria Revolutionaries' Front and the Mujabideen Army*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=54103> [07.01.2014]
- Lund A. (2014c), *The Ajnad al-Sham Islamic Union*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=54750> [04.03.2014]
- Mahmood M., Chulov M. (2013), *Syrian war widens Sunni-Shia schism as foreign jihadis join fight for shrines*, "The Guardian", <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/04/syria-islamic-sunni-shia-shrines-volunteers> [04.06.2013]
- Nakhoul S. (2015), *Saddam's former army is secret of Baghdadi's success*, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-baghdadi-insight-idUSKBN0OW1VN20150616> [15.06.2015]
- National Defence Force Syria Logo*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:National_Defence_Force_Syria_Logo.jpg [11.03.2013]
- People's Protection Units*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Protection_Units [19.12.2015]
- Perry T. (2015), *Syrian Kurds now say they now control territory the size of Qatar and Kuwait combined*, "Business Insider", <http://www.businessinsider.com/syrian-kurds-now-say-they-now-control-territory-the-size-of-qatar-and-kuwait-combined-2015-8?IR=T> [15.08.15]
- Popular Mobilization Forces*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_Mobilization_Forces_\(Iraq\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_Mobilization_Forces_(Iraq)) [23.12.2015]

- Protocol II of Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (1977), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/475?OpenDocument>
- Słownik terminów z zakresu Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego* (2002), II ed., (ed.) Łepkowski W., Wyd. AON, Warszawa
- Sly L. (2015), *Pro-Iran militias' success in Iraq could undermine U.S.*, "The Washington Post", https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqs-pro-iranian-shiite-militias-lead-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/2015/02/15/5bbb1cf0-ac94-11e4-8876-460b1144cbc1_story.html [15.02.2015]
- Solomon E. (2013), *Six Islamist factions unite in largest Syria rebel merger*, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-islamists-merger-idUSBRE9AL0I420131122> [22.11.2013]
- Solomon E. (2014), *Factbox: Syria's rebel groups*, Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-rebels-factbox-idUSBREA080SW20140109> [09.01.2014]
- Southern Front (Syrian rebel group)*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Front_of_the_Free_Syrian_Army [09.06.2015]
- Syrian Democratic Forces*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Democratic_Forces
- Syrian Revolutionaries Front*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria_Revolutionaries_Front [08.10.2015]
- Syrian Revolutionary Command Council*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Revolutionary_Command_Council [16.12.2015]
- The Shia crescendo* (2015), "The Economist", <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21647367-shia-militias-are-proliferating-middle-east-shia-crescendo> [28.03.2015]
- Winter L. (2013), *A Modern History of the Free Syrian Army in Daraa*, Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth
- Women's Protection Units*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_Protection_Units [05.12.2015]
- Zelin A., Lister C. (2014), *The crowning of the Syrian Islamic Front*, "Foreign Policy", <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/24/the-crowning-of-the-syrian-islamic-front> [24.06.2013]