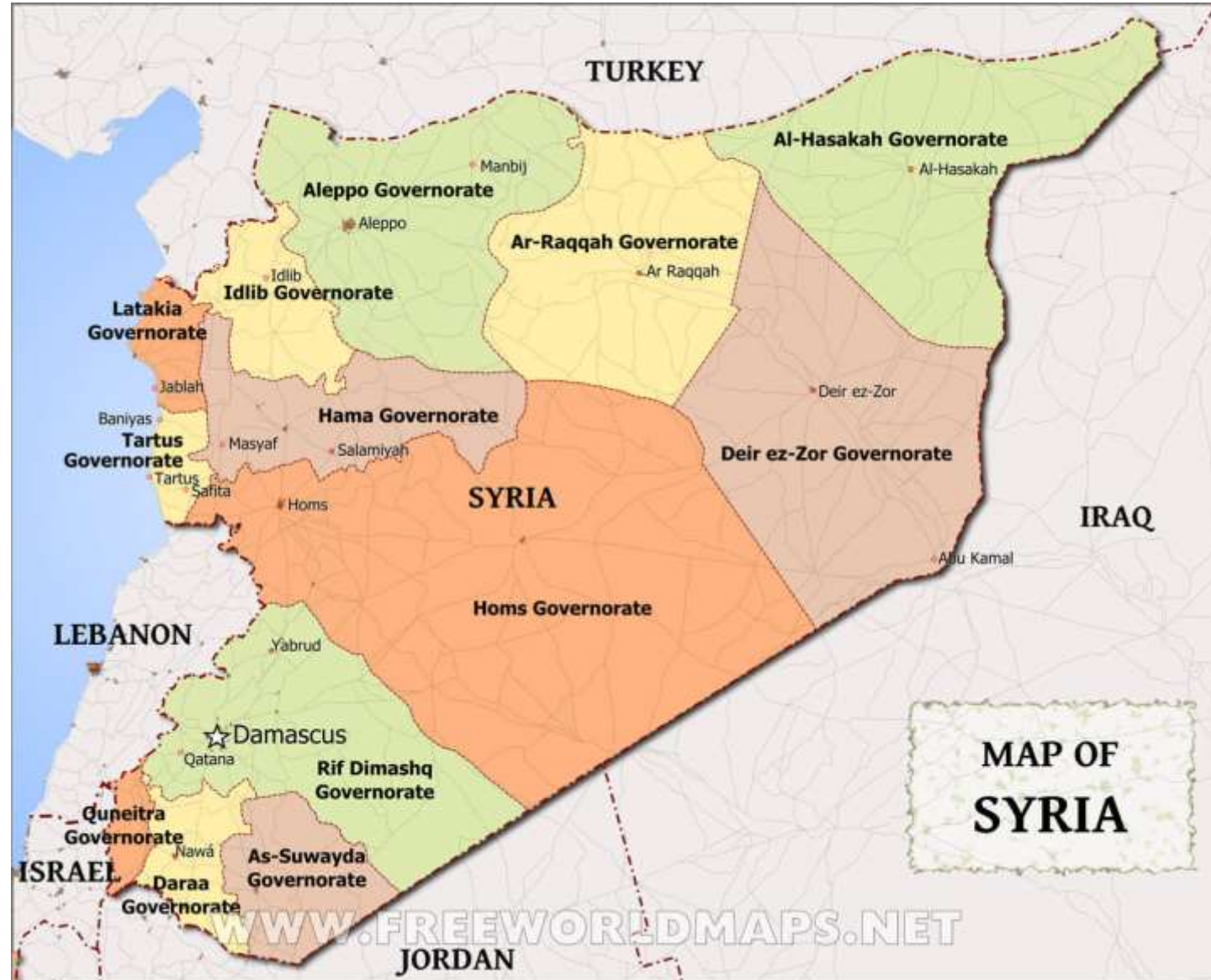
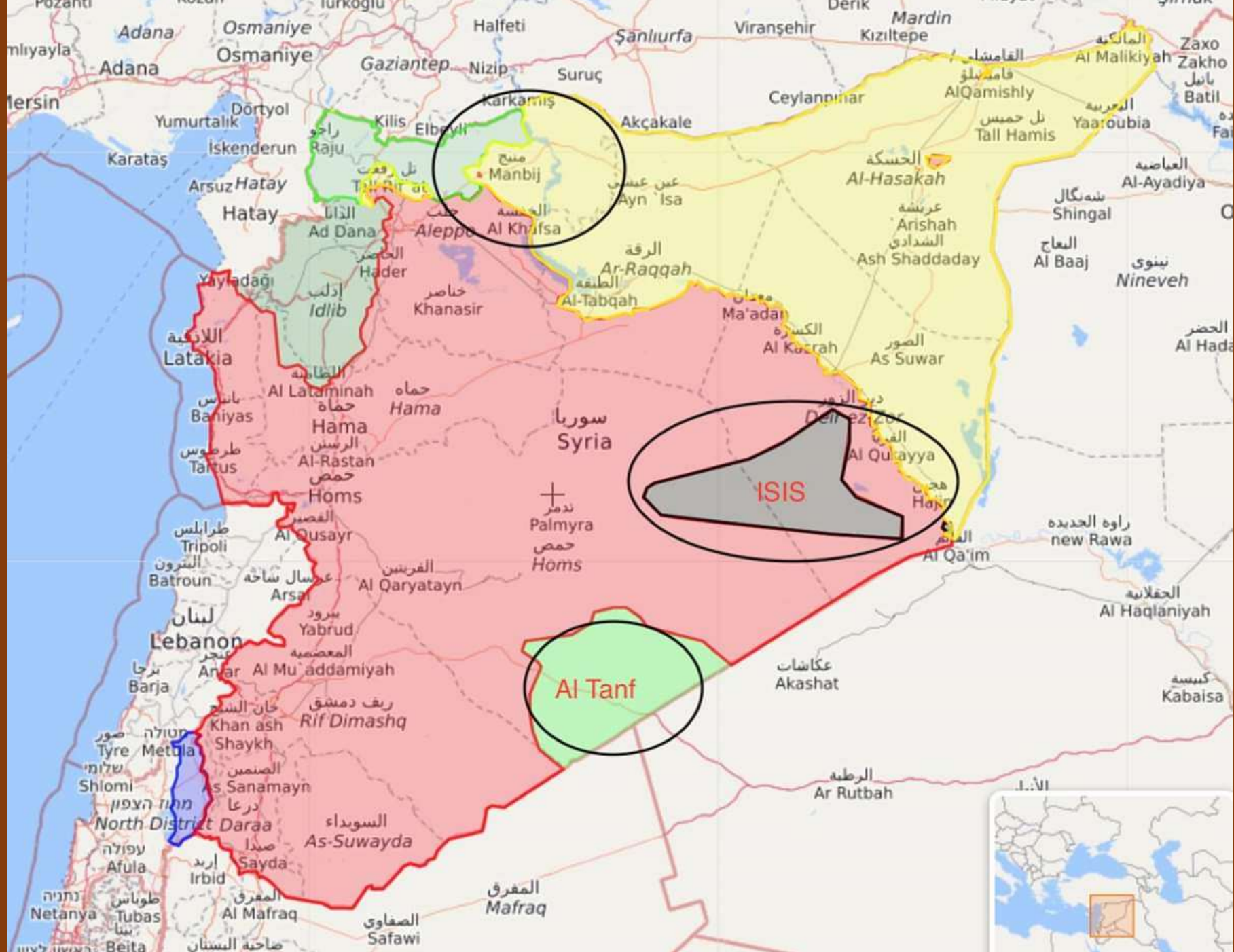


Syria

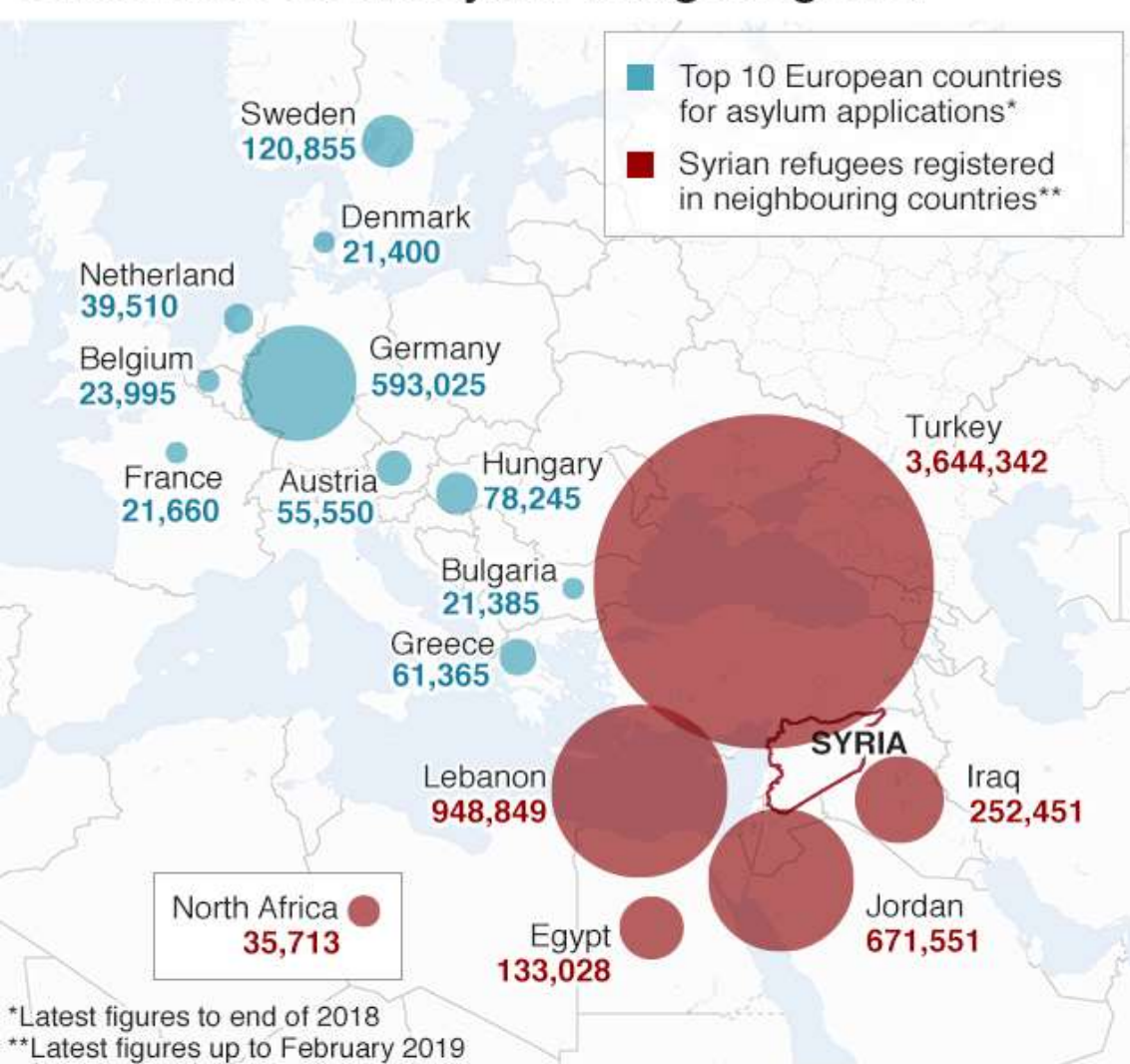
Interreligious and political dynamics
during the Syrian conflict and their
impact on society.

Revd Dr. Andrew Ashdown.
E-Mail: andrewashdown@talktalk.net



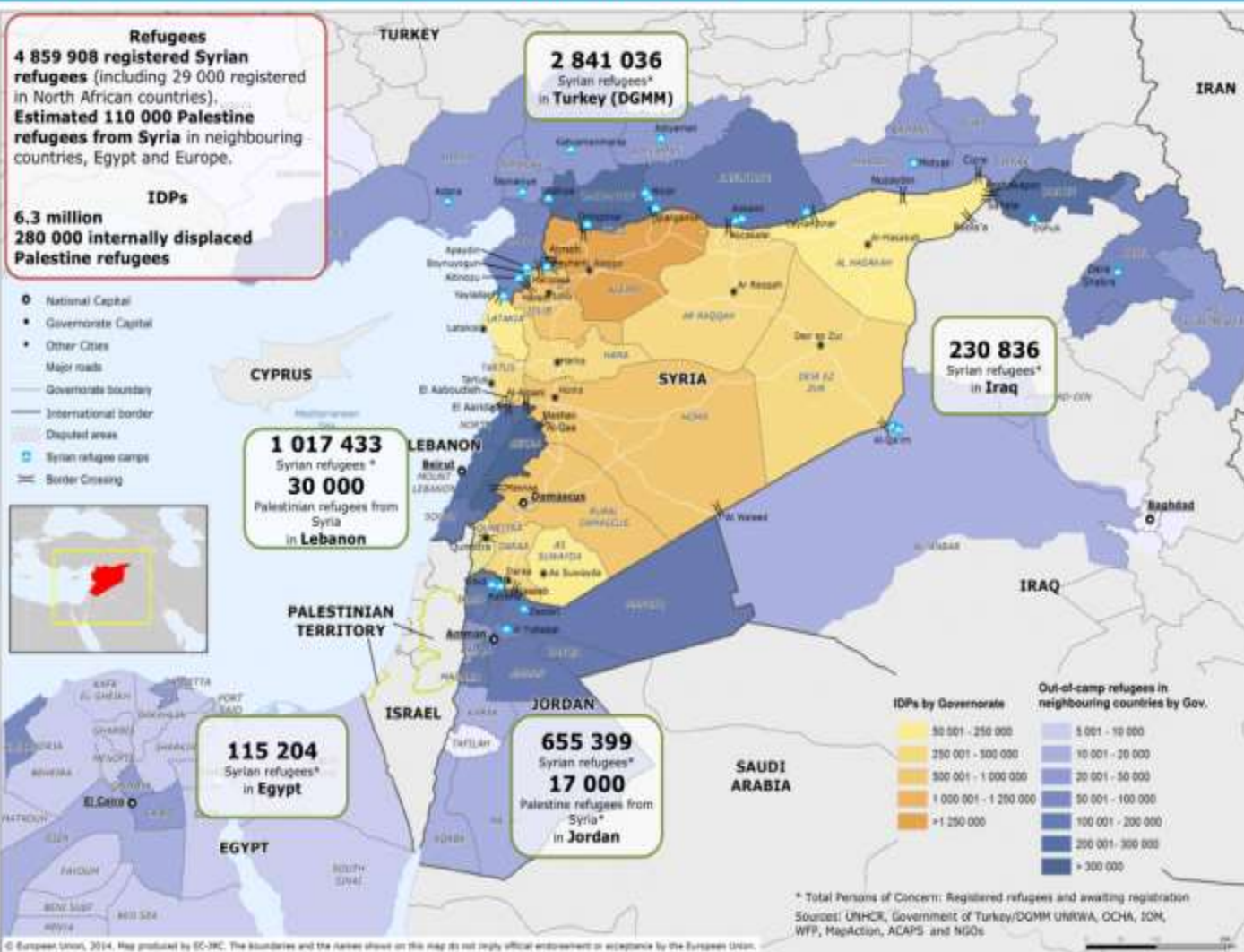


Where have all the Syrian refugees gone?



*Latest figures to end of 2018
 **Latest figures up to February 2019

Source: Eurostat / UNHCR





Lebanon. 1.5 million



Iraq. (Erbil) 250,000

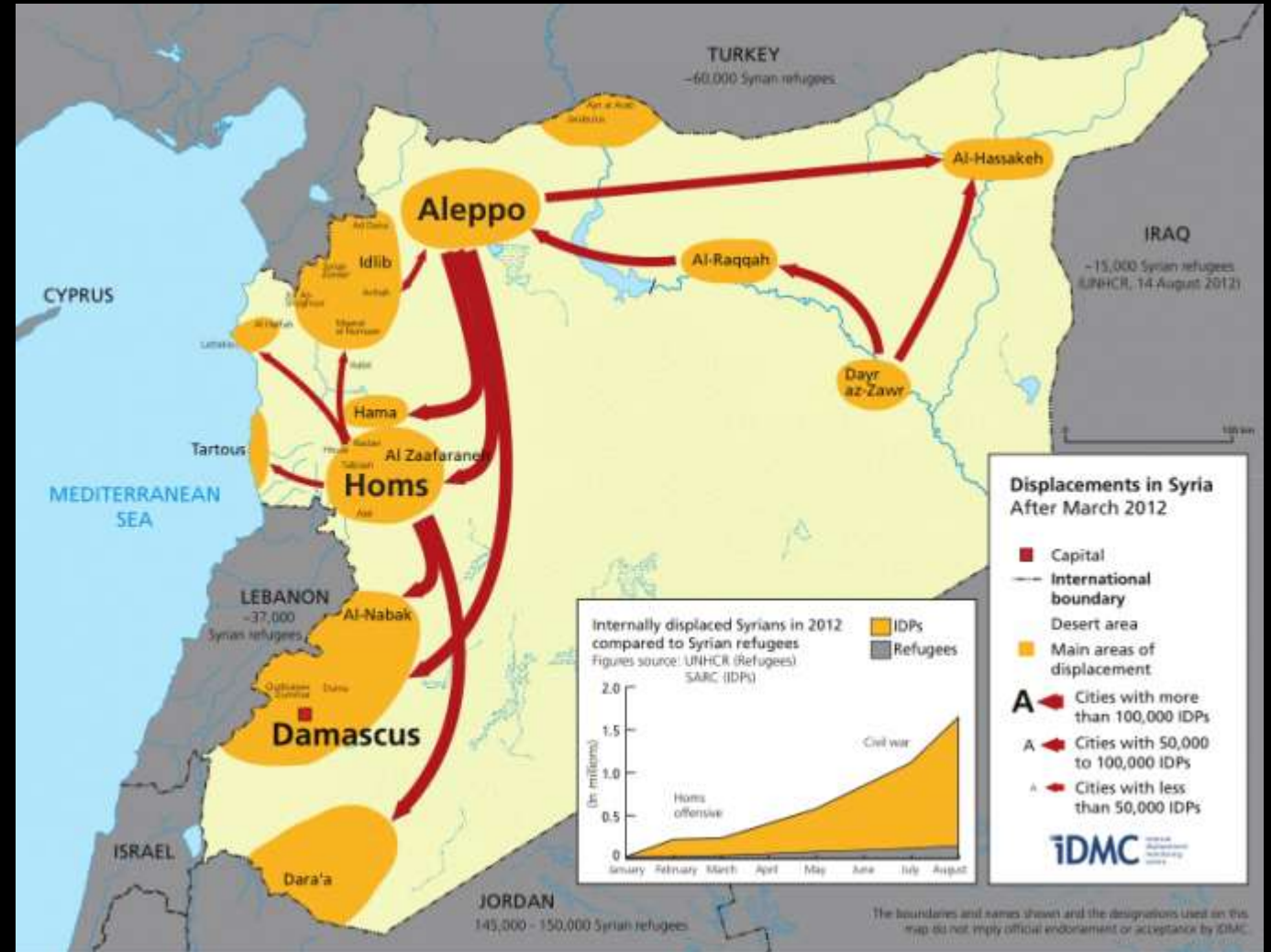
2018 Figures UNHCR

Refugees 5.6 million.

Internally Displaced inside Syria:
6.2 million.

In 2018. 1.4 million IDPs
returned home (UNHCR)

In 2018/19, 100,000 refugees
returned home (UNHCR)



Main Historical dates

- 10th Century BCE Neo-Assyrian Empire
- 7th – 6th Century BCE Neo-Babylonian Empire
- 4th – 1st Century BCE Hellenistic Syria
- 64BCE – 6th Century Roman Empire
- 661 – 750CE Ummayyad Caliphate
- 8th C – 1453 Byzantine Rule
- 1453 – 1918 Ottoman Empire
- 1923 – 1945 French Mandate
- 1958 – 1961 United Arab Republic with Egypt
- 1963 Ba'ath Party in Power

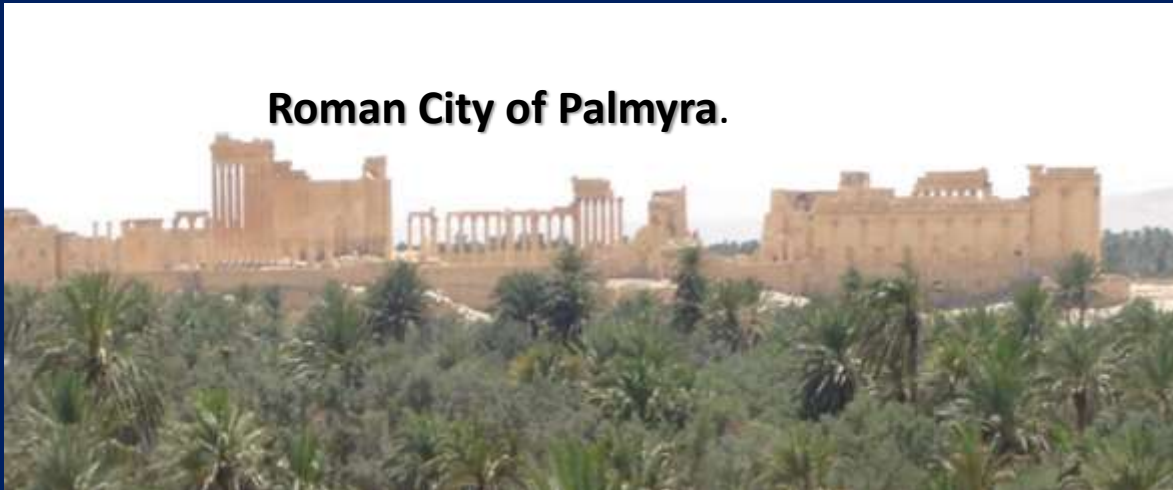
Greek City of Apamea



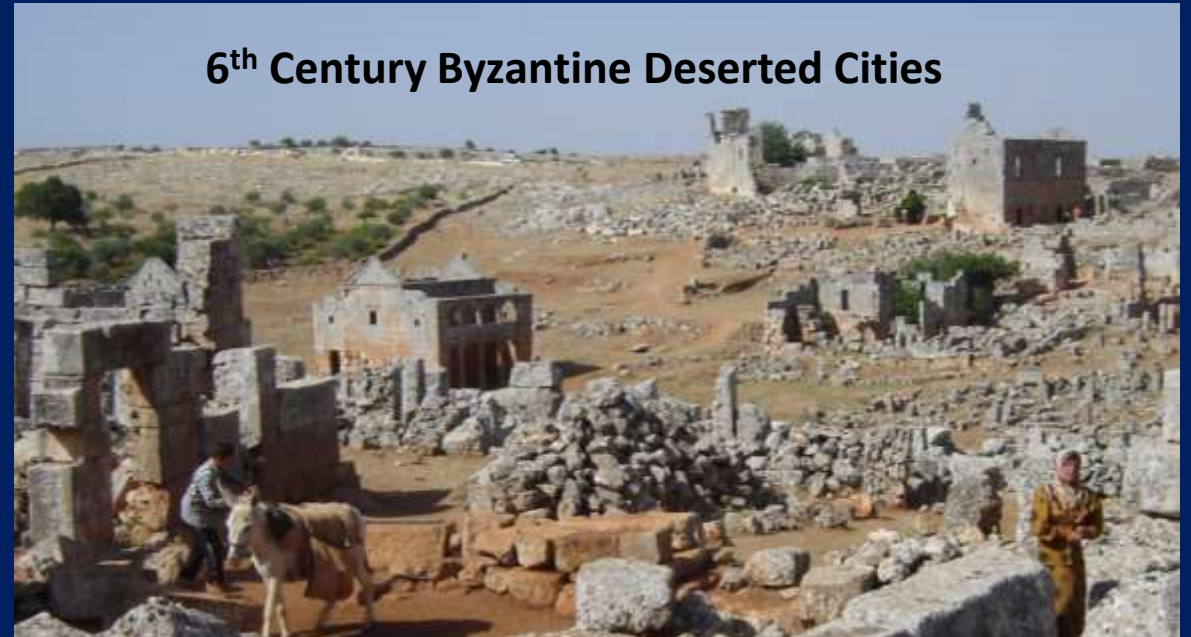
Crusader Castle of Krak des Chevaliers



Roman City of Palmyra.



6th Century Byzantine Deserted Cities





**Start of Silk Road.
Trading in Silk, mother of pearl,
Silver, Inlaid copperware, olive oil etc.
Crossroads for Europe, Asia,
Arabia and North Africa.**



Religions in Syria

87% Muslims. **74% Sunni Muslims (Including Kurds)**
13 % Others (including Alawi, Ismaili and Shi'a)
10% Christian **All denominations**
3% Druze





Christianity in the Middle East

ORIENTAL ORTHODOX

Armenian
Orthodox

Syrian Orthodox

Coptic Orthodox

Ethiopian
Orthodox

EASTERN ORTHODOX

Greek
Orthodox
Patriarchates
of

Jerusalem,

Antioch

Alexandria

CATHOLIC CHURCHES

Latin Catholic

Greek Catholic
(Melkite)

Maronite

Syrian Catholic

Armenian
Catholic

Chaldaean

Coptic Catholic

PROTESTANT

Anglican
Episcopal

Presbyterian

Lutheran

Armenian
Evangelical

ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST

‘East
Syrian’ or
Church of
Persia.
One of the
oldest
churches.
Mainly in
Iran, Iraq,
Syria and
Lebanon





Omayyad Mosque, Damascus 634CE



**Sayyida Zeinab Mosque, Damascus.
Burial place of Zeinab, daughter of Ali
And Granddaughter of Mohammad.**

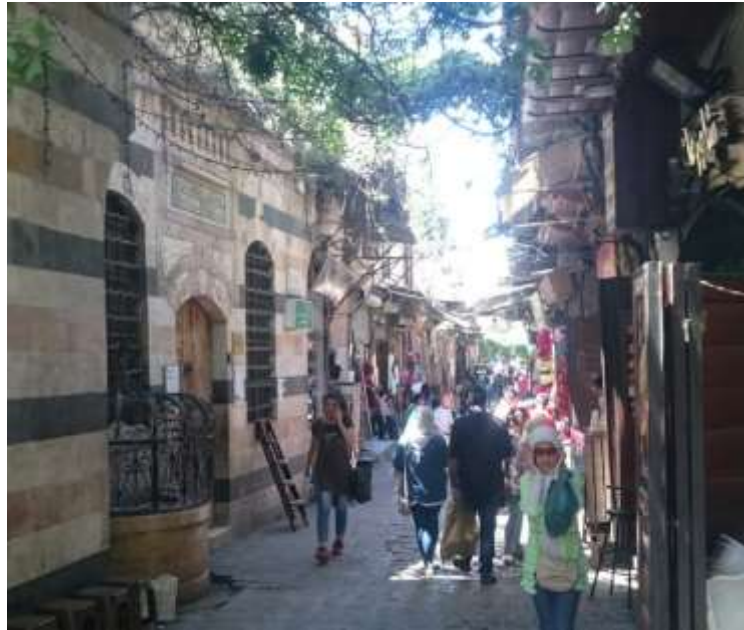
Islam in Syria

74% Sunni. (Including 10% Kurds)
13% Shi'a. (Alawi, Ismaili,
3% Druze

“There is no such thing as a unified ‘Syrian’ religious scene.” (Pierret, 2013, p. 12) There has always been a “regional fragmentation” in the Syrian *Ulama*, with a particularly strong rivalry between the two urban centres of Aleppo and Damascus. It is also important to recognise that many Sunnis support an Arab Nationalist perspective as opposed to that of Sunni political Islamism. Pierret, T. (2013) *Religion and State in Syria. The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Types of Inter-faith Engagement

- Communal.....*Communities living together side by side*
- Academic.....*Studying scriptures*
monasteries/conferences
- Friendship.....*Invitations to homes/family events*
- Social..... *Sharing of festivals*
- Economic..... *Shared businesses/infrastructure etc*
- Political..... *Faith leaders a bridge to State*



Damascus



Al-Tall

Adra

REBEL CONTROL

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

DAMASCUS

EASTERN GHOUTA

DAESH CONTROL
(partial & contested)

REBEL CONTROL

Mezzeh
Air Base

Darayya

Al-Sbeneh

Set Zaynab

Shebaa

padh

Hawsh

Dayr Salman

Al-Ahmadiyah

Al-Qaisa

Harran
al-Awamid

Damascus International Airport

SOURCES: SANA, SOHR, Indep. Observers, etc.

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Since 2012, 11,000 civilians killed in attacks from East Ghouta and Jobar on Central Damascus, including 1,500 children. 30,000 injured or maimed.





Shell damage
to parked cars.
Damascus

Car bomb in Damascus July 2017



Huda. Christian teacher:

“Freedom? Don’t talk to me about ‘freedom’. I hate the word ‘Freedom’. ‘Freedom’ to me means guns and bullets, suicide bombings and killings. I have deleted the word from my vocabulary. We had peace before they brought us ‘freedom’.”



Sunni shop keeper. Old City, Damascus.

“ I haven’t had any customers for 2 weeks. No-one can afford to buy luxuries now. The cost of these carpets now is a quarter what we could sell them for before the war. My resistance to terrorism is to keep the shop open and keep working, and to be ready for when the war ends. Syria will survive.”





Yarmouk. 2014.





East Ghouta. April 2018.





Maaloula, Christian pilgrimage Centre since the 3rd Century



Maaloula.
Occupied by 'rebels'.
23 Sep 2013 – 24 April 2014

"The fighters included people from the Free Syrian Army, the Al Farouq Brigades, Ahfad al Rasul, Jabhat al Nusra, Jaish al Islam, Ahrar al Sham, Jabhat Islammiya, Palestinian Hamas fighters (Jabhat Tahreer al-Qalamoun), and Jabhat al Ruhr Qalomoun. Amongst them were fighters from Libya, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Ugyar Turkic Chinese as well as Syrians."

Abdo Haddad stresses: "We must emphasise that the so-called 'moderate' 'Free Syrian Army' were major partners in all of these. There was no distinguishing between the 'moderate' groups and the extremist factions." Interview with refugees from Maaloula. At St. Saviour Monastery, Lebanon. 1 May 2017





Most of the residents of the village escaped on 7 September via sewers out of the village, leaving local Defence volunteers. The following weeks and months saw a long and difficult battle between the Maaloula Defence force, with the Syrian Army and Hezbollah, and the terrorist factions to recapture the town – a battle that cost the lives of over 200 Syrian Army soldiers. During this time, the terrorists “brought in looting gangs to the town. They wrote on the doors of houses either ‘This is a Muslim house’, or, on Christian homes, ‘We will slaughter you.’” By the time Maaloula was recaptured, “ninety homes were destroyed; no church was left intact. The terrorists dug up graves and desecrated bodies. They destroyed farms, and cut down fruit trees.”

Interview with refugee from Maaloula. 1 May 2017

Sarkis Raiham, a local farmer, speaking at St. Saviour Monastery, Lebanon on 1 May 2017.





Antoinette in the cave in her home where she hid as her male relatives were shot outside. She was injured when the 'rebels' fired inside the house.

Outside the cave where the bodies of the martyrs of Maaloula were thrown.

St. Thekla Shrine. Maaloula.
September 2016 (Above)
November 2017 (Below)





Monastery of St. James the Persian Qara.
5th Century







**Reconciliation meeting
and dialogue. Homs. 2014**



Sheikh Mohammed

Murdered two weeks later whilst trying to negotiate a ceasefire /reconciliation deal with 'moderate' rebels, at their invitation.



Samir Hawash. Independent Internal Opposition Leader.
Meeting in 2015.



In 2010 he was informed by a colleague in Turkey. “Get ready. There is going to be a war in Syria. It has all been planned.” He was involved in early demonstrations but was told early on that an armed uprising was being planned with assistance from outside. He says: “When the demonstrations began, most people wanted change, but now maybe 60-70% of Syrians in the country support President Assad as the only person who can hold the country together. He has become a symbol of unity.” It was the militants who fired first in the early demonstrations he said. In the first days of the ‘peaceful’ demonstrations, over 80 soldiers were killed – the names and dates are documented. “All the militant groups want to see a Muslim State and the division of the country, whilst the unarmed parties seek a secular pluralist State. But these are not given credence in the international arena. Turkey will support any opposition as long as regime change is the goal. The only goal on the part of the international community from the very beginning has been regime change, and they are willing to allow the destruction of the country to achieve it.”

IDPs in Tartous wait for aid.
6.9 million internally displaced in Syria at height of the conflict.



“Back home, we were besieged for two weeks by Nusra, Ahrar al Sham, FSA and Nur ud Zinki, and ran out of all supplies, including food.

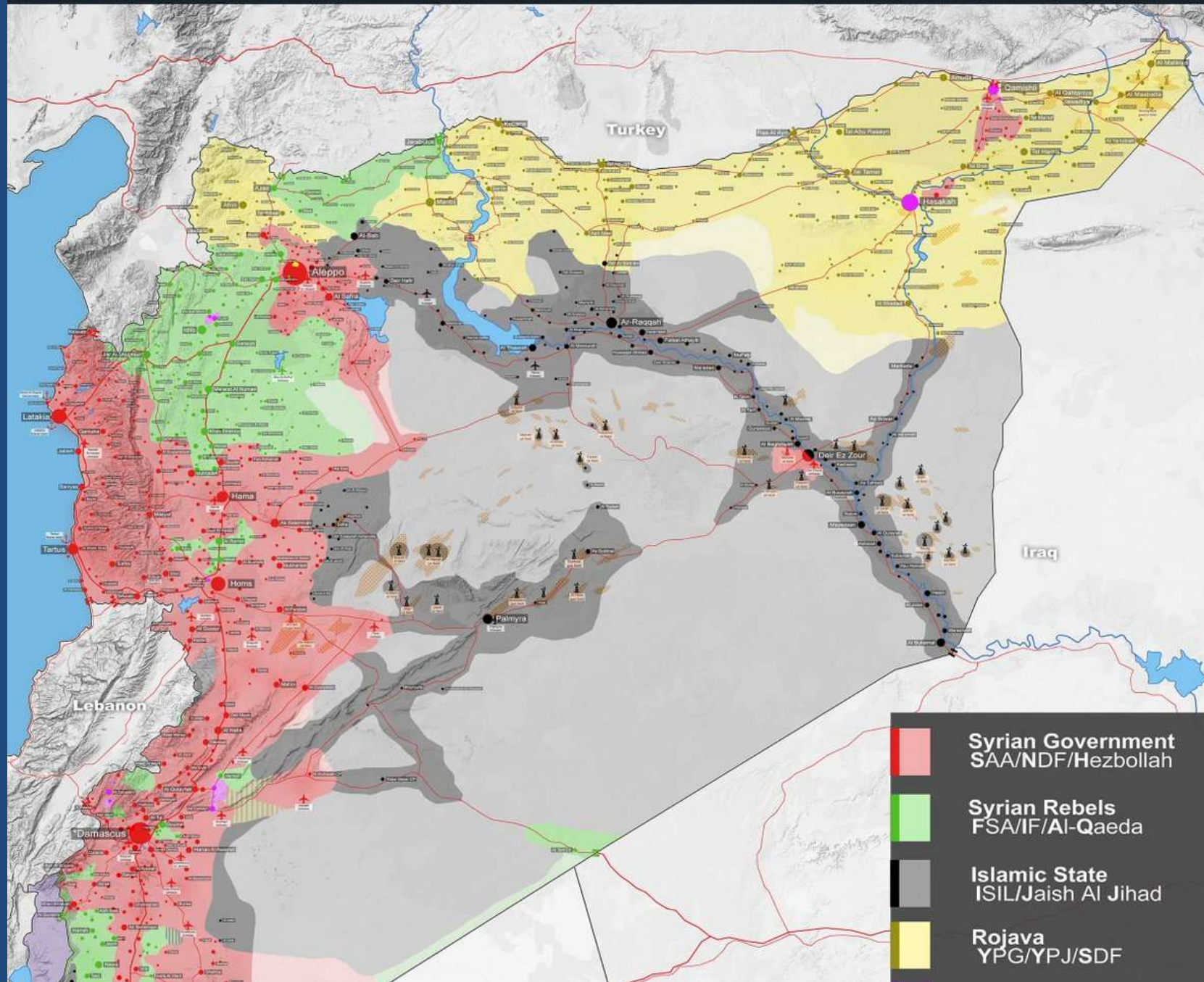
The Jihadists stopped all food supplies and placed snipers in mountains who shot us. We had to put the bodies of those who died in houses. We had no medical care for those who were wounded and we had to use clothes as bandages.

In two months, 250 people were killed by snipers and mortars, and at least 300-400 were injured – some with minor wounds, and others with severe injuries. After the continuous siege we decided to escape the village. As we ran, some went to the Turkish border, some to Idlib, 130 of those who fled to Idlib were captured and killed. Those who fled to Turkey had relatives there who helped them. Then the Syrian government brought us here and provided this accommodation.

The media say the majority of IDPs flee from the brutality of the Syrian government. But we had safety. I don't need the freedom the Jihadists are calling for as we already had freedom. Please help us by leaving us alone. We have enough of your 'freedom'.” *IDP speaking in an internally displaced camp in Lattakia. November 2015*



“I lost my son aged 25 and my husband aged 52. When we escaped they were captured. My husband was caught, beaten, shot and then beheaded, and my son was beheaded. My brother and my brother’s son were killed the same way.”





The road to Aleppo...via Khanasser





Road to Aleppo.
September 2016







**West Aleppo.
September 2016**

**Population in 2005: 2.3 million
Estimated in 2017: 1.8 million**

**80% Sunni Muslim
12% Christian
7-10% Kurd
Remainder Shi'a & other
minorities**





Aleppo Council of Doctors. 13 September 2016

When asked about the regular reports that there are only a few doctors left in Aleppo and the last paediatrician was killed in a government airstrike, they laughed: “First of all, you must understand that there is a media war against Syria, so you won’t hear about what’s happening in Government-controlled areas. Actually there are 750 paediatricians currently active in Aleppo. The one that was killed is not in any register as a doctor in this city. Nor is the ‘Al Quds’ hospital that was supposedly destroyed known in Aleppo. It was probably a temporary field clinic set up by the terrorists. When they say that a ‘hospital’ has been targeted by the government, they are usually temporary field-clinics; they are not registered clinics or hospitals. Today, there are 4,260 doctors in Aleppo of which 3,150 are active. Of these about 1,500 are specialists. Since the start of the conflict, 20 registered hospitals have been destroyed by the terrorists, but these are not mentioned in the western media. But there are still six active public hospitals and about 40 private hospitals in the city. At the moment we have a huge shortage of medicines and equipment in both public and private hospitals, including MRI machines. Our priorities are spare parts for equipment. Most of the aid given the WHO and by other agencies and all the resources given by Saudi Arabia and Turkey goes to the terrorists, not to the citizens of the city.”





Sheikh Jarrar Industrial City. Aleppo countryside

Prior to the conflict the Industrial city contained 1000 factories and 200 under construction. This was the industrial heartland of Northern Syria. After its occupation by ISIS and then Jabhat al Nusra, 675 factories were dismantled, and their equipment stolen in convoys of lorries to Turkey. Then all the factories were destroyed. The Head of the Complex told us that in 2010, the year prior to the uprising, there was a huge rise in weekly visits by Turkish business companies wanting to know exactly what factories existed, where they were and what equipment they held.









East Hanano, East Aleppo

December 2016





Jibrin Registration Centre. East Aleppo. December 2016





Jibrin Registration Centre East Aleppo December 2016





Syrian Army handing out food.

Russian field hospital looking after civilians.



Of 135,000 civilians who Emerged from East Aleppo In December 2016, over 110,000 chose to go to Government areas where They were provided with Food and shelter. The Remaining – militants and Their families, were bussed Safely to Idleb.



The centre is well organised. The Syrian Red Crescent have tents available that offer information about all social welfare facilities available, and offer free medical attention. In cases of emergency, ambulances are on hand to transport patients to hospital. Free food is being distributed by the Syrian Red Crescent and the Syrian Army, and we saw a convoy of Russian lorries providing aid. There is also a Russian field hospital on site which offers immediate medical treatment. The sense of relief among the thousands of refugees is palpable. All were keen to talk, and we interviewed several who had arrived only yesterday and today. They all said the same thing. They said that they had been living in fear. They reported that the fighters have been telling everyone that the Syrian Army would kill anyone who fled to the west, but had killed many themselves who tried to leave – men, women and children. One woman broke down in tears when she told how one of her sons was killed by the ‘rebels’ a few days ago, and another kidnapped. They also killed anyone who showed signs of supporting the government. The refugees said that the ‘rebels’ told them that only those who supported them are true ‘Muslims’, and that everyone else are ‘infidels’ and deserved to die. They told us they had been given very little food; that any aid that reached the area was mostly refused to them or sold at exorbitant prices. Likewise, most of them had been given no medical treatment. (A doctor who had been working with the refugees for weeks told me last night that in an area recently liberated, a warehouse filled with brand new internationally branded medicines had been discovered.)

Most of the refugees said that they had had members of their families killed by the ‘rebels’ and consistently spoke of widespread murder, torture, rape and kidnap by the ‘rebels’. They said if anyone left their homes, their properties and belongings were confiscated and stolen. One old man in a wheelchair who was being given free treatment in the Russian field hospital said he had been given no treatment for three years despite asking. He said: “Thank God we are free. We now have food. We can now live our lives. God bless the Syrian Army.” They all said they were glad to be out and to be free. All the refugees without exception were visibly and clearly profoundly relieved, and happy to be free. One woman said: “This is heaven compared to what we have been living.” We asked if the Syrian Army had ill-treated anyone. They said: ‘Never.’ One woman said: ‘They helped us to escape and provided us with food and assistance.’.....



'White Helmets' HQ . E. Aleppo.
School Compound Adjacent to Jabhat Al-Nusra HQ.

**"Women should wear clothes that cover the whole body.
 The clothes should be wide and not like men's clothes.
 Women should not wear perfume.
 The clothes should not be like those of the 'infidels'.
 The clothes should not be attractive."**





East Aleppo Eye Hospital occupied by Jihadists.
Used as Shari'a Court and prison.



East Aleppo. May 2017



Aleppo Citadel.



Registration Centre for assistance in East Aleppo





**Delivering Water tanks to East
Aleppo. May 2017.**





Volunteers of charity work in Aleppo.



Serena.

“You’ve walked in the streets and seen Syrian females. We have total freedom to dress the way we want, to eat what we want, to get the education we want and medical care. We choose our way of life. Females’ situation in Syria is very good. And it was so before the crisis too. Now in some areas, females are really suffering. They are not allowed to get an education or practice their rights under the control of the extremists. If the regime changed here and these extremists took control of everything, just imagine how miserable life would be for us. We won’t even be able to walk in the street without a male accompanying us! Females will be forced to stay at home and be oppressed.”

Daraa. June 2017



Deraa. April 2017



Euphrates Valley. NE Syria. May 2018.

Remains of 1st Century Roman city of Sergiopolis,
Resafa, Eastern Desert, boobytrapped by ISIS.



Shells to flowerpots. Syrian Army checkpoint. Eastern desert.



Hazards of the journey. Lorry targeted 24 hours previously.



Deir Ezzor. NE Syria. May 2018.









Melkite Archbishop Jeanbart of Aleppo.

“It is a duty of every Christian to find out the truth. It is a huge injustice to judge others until you know the truth. We need our Christian brothers and sisters in the West to learn the truth and to help us to stay, not to leave. After all the suffering, we are working hard with our Muslim brothers and sisters to open hearts and minds to each other .”



