

Syria war



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President Bashar Sad's aircraft dropped bombs on the market in Aziza, a town near the border with Turkey north of Aleph, killing 20 civilians. " It's enough! " shouts Abdullah Mahout Hajj Seed, standing amid a pile of rubble dotted with household possessions: a shoe here, a telephone there. " Does the world like seeing Syrian blood? " Almost two years into Syria's uprising, now a full-blown civil war, misery and despair are growing across the land.

Lockhart Abraham. The joint envoy of the UN and Arab

League who is trying to mediate, is making no progress. A military solution looks far off too. Though rebel fighters continue to make advances in the north and east of the country, Mr. Sad's forces are consolidating along the north-south axis from the capital, Damascus, to the coastal heartland of his Assad sect. "This is never going to end," says a usually hopeful rebel commander from the eastern province of Idlib. The opposition fears that international support may be dwindling. Members of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, a political body formed in Qatar in November, grumble that pledges of money have yet to be honored. It's unfair," says a member. " We're told, 'do this, do that,' but then the promises are never fulfilled. " The body has started to distribute money to activists on the ground and has created a committee to set about the creation of a transitional government. But patrons are loath to speed up the flow of support because they are unsure where it will end up. Syria's opposition, despite the best efforts of the new coalition, remains patently fragmented. The rebels look mainly to Qatar and Saudi Arabia, since they, unlike the warier Western governments, do provide lethal aid, But they appear to be thinking twice too.

Funds for rebel fighters continue to trickle in but at a far slower pace than expected. Saudi Arabia is afraid that, were Mr. Assad to fall, the Muslim Brotherhood, which it loathes, might take over. Jordan, nervously eyeing Salami fighters over the border, is reluctant to let weapons across. Jam al-Ward. A member of the coalition who liaises with the rebel fighters, reckons that fewer than 20% of their weapons are being supplied from outside Syria; most, he says, are bought on the black market or have been captured from military bases.

The fighters' morale has been dented and they are becoming still more fractious. Rebel units argue over their share of booty. A battle under way for six weeks to capture Hama military airport outside Aleppo involves 13 different groups. None will want to go home empty-handed. The tighter sound increasingly hostile to the outside world. A new rebel council is viewed as "a toy of the West", says a fighter in Aziza. Divisions in rebel ranks are widening. Salami fighters recently shelled Ras al-Main, a Kurdish-controlled town, under the eye of Turkey, which fears an upsurge of Kurdish nationalism.

Looting and stealing are common. "It's a mess," says a disgruntled activist from the eastern city of Deir ez-Zor. "The regime is killing, the Free Syrian Army [a main rebel front] is stealing, and we are suffering." The plight of ordinary civilians is worsening. The UN says it is struggling to raise enough money to keep people alive. The British government has donated aid worth \$100m and America almost double that amount, but the results are barely visible on the ground. Everywhere Syrians are chopping down trees to get wood for heating and cooking.

In this atmosphere, Jubbah al-Nassau, a Jihadist group with its own evidently abundant sources of cash, has expanded its reach. In rural areas, people continue to support local fighting units, since they are made up of their sons, husbands and fathers. But in Aleph, Syrians commercial hub, and in Deir ez-Zor desperate residents are increasingly turning to Jubbah al-Nassau, because it is the most effective group at hand, though many reject its ideology. One rebel commander says that most of the rebels are preparing for a reckoning with Jubbah al-Nassau, were Mr. Sad to fall.

Sensing a growing reticence among Western governments to bolster the rebels more wholeheartedly, Mr. Sad is digging in. Ousted from large swathes of the north and east, his forces are now concentrating on holding Damascus, Homs (the country's third city) and the coastal region. A massacre on January 15th in the village of Hashish, on the edge of Homs, is the latest in a chain of such attacks along this axis on villages of Sunnis, who make up the bulk of the country and its opposition.