

Syrian Rebels

Throughout the span of the Syrian Civil War, anti-government forces, usually referred to as rebels, fighting against President Bashar al-Assad have turned on each other more than once. The latest case of this internal rebel betrayal began on November 14th just north of the tragically fallen city of Aleppo, a once beautiful city that has recently crumbled into near nothingness.

These recent attacks, however, are not the only recorded cases of rebel infighting in the month of November. Other attacks took place in eastern Aleppo earlier in the month when the Zinki group and the allied jihadist Jabhat Fateh al-Sham attempted to crush the Fastaqim faction in an attempt to seize weapons and power. There are believed to be as many as one thousand armed rebel groups in Syria, some smaller and less powerful, and some much larger and much more capable.

Although there are many different rebel coalitions fighting in Syria, there is only a small number of those coalitions that have made big news throughout the war and continue to be a serious threat to Assad and his loyalists. A few of these more threatening groups include the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic Front, the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF), and various independent and jihadist groups.

The Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), originally led by Riad al-Asaad, is a rebel group formed in 2011 by army deserters based in Turkey. In December of 2012, a number of brigades associated themselves with the newly-created Supreme Military Council (SCM), hoping to allow the group to grow in strength and become a more moderate alternative to the active jihadist rebel groups at the time. After the Supreme Military Council joined with the Free Syrian Army, the Free Syrian Army became a looser network of brigades

rather than an active unified fighting force, and the Supreme Military Council divided their thirty members into five parts, each part representing a different front in Syria.

The Islamic Front was formed in November of 2013 when seven Islamic groups declared that they were forming the largest rebel alliance yet in the then thirty-three month long Syrian conflict. The group had an estimated 45,000 fighters at the time. Their goal being to “topple the Assad regime completely and build an Islamic state.” Each of the seven groups took on separate roles and stated that they would work towards a “gradual merger.”

The Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF) was formed by about twenty rebel groups in September of 2012. Some of these groups included the Farouq Brigades, the Islamic Farouq Brigades, Liwa al-Tawhid, Liwa al-Fath, Liwa al-Islam, Suqour al-Sham, and the Deir al-Zour Revolutionaries' Council. Over time, the group has become lost military strength due to groups leaving and less equipped groups joining, and it is now being questioned whether the remaining groups will continue to fight under its banner or join the Islamic Front.

Independent groups fighting in the war include the Ahfad al-Rasoul Brigades, the Asala wa al-Tanmiya Front, the Durou al-Thawra Commission, Tajammu Ansar al-Islam, the Yarmouk Martyrs' Brigade, and the National Unity Brigades. Although some of these independent groups have achieved small victories, most have repeatedly suffered defeats due to the small size and lack of military strength found in these smaller rebel groups.

The Syrian rebel forces have used the justification of being jihadists for why they continue to fight such a brutal war. A jihad is a holy war and a jihadist is one who takes part in a jihad. Many Muslims define “jihad” as a command to spread the Islamic faith through peaceful means, but extremists groups have used a violent interpretation of the phrase to justify their

actions. Jihadist groups include the Al-Nusra Front and Jaysh al-Muhajirin wa al-Ansar. ISIS is considered to be a jihadist group as well.

The Zinki group has recently claimed that the fighting has ended and the disputes are actively being resolved. The rebel clash resulted in twenty-five injured militants and a single death. This case of rebel infighting was fairly short-lived, but the war still looks as though it may have a long way and many more battles between rebel groups who began seemingly fighting for the same cause to go before a moderate level of peace may be restored in Syria.