

SYRIA



THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

And

THE NUN

Syrian Arab Republic is a country in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east, Jordan to the south and Israel to the southwest. A country of fertile plains, high mountains and deserts, it is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Arab Alawites, Arab Sunnis, Arab Christians, Armenians, Assyrians, Druze, Kurds and Turks. Arab Sunnis make up the majority of the population.

The Golan Heights

This is the area captured from Syria and occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War Geopolitical which Israel effectively annexed in 1981. This region includes the western two thirds of the geological Golan Heights, as well as the Israeli-occupied part of Mount Harmon.

Hafez al Assad - 1971

Head of State and Government



The Assad family originates from Sulayman al Wahhish, Hafez Assad's grandfather, who lived in the northern Syrian mountains in the village of [Qardaha](#).

The locals reportedly nicknamed him **Wahhish**, which means "wild beast" in Arabic, because he was physically strong and a good fighter. Al- Wahhish remained the family name until the 1920s when it was changed to al-**Assad** which means "**lion**" in Arabic. Because of Sulayman's reported strength and marksmanship, he was respected in his village. At the outbreak of the **World War I**, the Ottoman governor of the **Aleppo Vilayet** sent troops to the area to collect taxes and round up recruits. The troops reportedly were fought off by Sulayman and his friends who were only armed with sabres and old muskets.^[6] Because Sulayman was respected, he was a local mediator between quarreling families. He was also one of the local chieftains who were the de facto rulers of the area. The chieftains from the powerful families would provide protection to their neighbors and in return they gained loyalty and respect.

Hafez al-Assad's father **Ali Sulayman al-Assad**, who was born in 1875, inherited many similar characteristics of his own father and became well-respected among the locals. For his accomplishments, he was called al-Assad, the lion, by the locals.^[8] He made his nickname a surname in 1927.^[1] He lived until 1963, long enough to see his son's rise to power. He married twice and over three decades had eleven children. His first wife Saada was from the district of Haffeh. They had three sons and two daughters. His second wife was Na'isa, twenty years younger than him. She was the daughter of Uthman Abbud from the village of **Qutilba**, a dozen kilometers further up the mountain. They had a daughter and five sons. Hafez was born on 6 October 1930 and was the fourth child.

The **al-Assad family** (Arabic: عائلة الأسد 'ā'ila al-'Asad) has ruled **Syria** since **Hafez al-Assad** became Syria in 1971 and established an **authoritarian** government under the control of The **Ba'ath Party**. After his death in 2000, his son **Bashar** succeeded him.

The Assads are originally from **Qardaha**, just east of **Latakia** in north-west Syria. They are members of the minority **Alawite sect** and belong to the **Kalbiyya** tribe. The family name Assad goes back to 1927, when **Ali Sulayman** (1875–1963) changed his last name to al Assad, which means "the lion"

in Arabic, possibly in connection with his social standing as a local mediator and his political activities. All members of the extended Assad family stem from Ali Sulayman and his second wife Naissa, who came from a village in the [An-Nusayriyah Mountains](#).

Family connections continue to be important in Syrian politics. Several close family members of Hafez al-Assad have held important positions in the government since his rise to power and continuing after his death.





In this Oct. 29, 2013 photo; Mother Superior Agnes-Marian of the Cross walks with people fleeing the rebel held suburb of Moadamiyeh to the government held territory in Damascus, Syria. Amid Syria's brutal civil war, a nun has emerged as an unlikely power broker and figure of controversy. Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam of the Cross has thrust herself into the role of go-between and publicist, arranging cease-fires, organizing pro-government media trips and conducting speaking tours as perhaps the country's most prominent critic of the uprising against President Bashar Assad. (AP Photo/Dusan Vranic)

More

BEIRUT (AP) — Amid Syria's ferocious civil war, a nun has emerged as an unlikely power broker and figure of controversy.

Mother Superior Agnes-Mariam of the Cross has thrust herself into the role of go-between and publicist, arranging cease-fires, organizing pro-government media trips and conducting speaking tours as perhaps the country's most prominent critic of the uprising against President Bashar Assad.

Anti-government activists scathingly call her "Assad's nun" for claiming a chemical attack that killed hundreds was exaggerated, and for saying rebels used kidnapped babies in massacres that were blamed on Syrian forces.

She is so despised by the opposition that even acts of seeming goodwill are criticized, such as arranging a rare truce that allowed thousands to leave a blockaded town.

Supporters see her as a brave truth-teller, and she reflects the fears of many Syrians who worry that hard-line Muslim rebels trying to overthrow Assad will make life intolerable for Christians and other minorities.

The nun insists she is not an Assad propagandist, describing his family's decades-long hold over Syria as a "tumor," but she saves her harshest criticism for the rebels.

"The rebels presented themselves as the doctor who will remove this tumor," she said in a recent Skype interview. "They imposed arms as a treatment, and it is killing Syria."

Agnes-Mariam, 61, was born Fadia Laham in Lebanon to Palestinian Christian refugees. In the social upheaval of the '60s, Laham was a self-described hippie and trekked to Nepal on what she called a spiritual journey that led her to Catholicism.

She moved to Syria two decades ago, establishing a new order within the Greek Catholic Church, The Unity of Antioch, and founded the St. James convent 55 miles (90 kilometers) north of Damascus.

The nun was skeptical of the 2½-year-old Syrian uprising from the start.

She claimed much of the footage of anti-Assad demonstrations posted to social media networks was faked, along with video of Syrian forces beating and killing protesters

The Syrian government heavily restricts foreign reporting on the fighting. But Agnes-Mariam organized pro-government media tours, using her connections to obtain visas for journalists.

During a January 2012 tour, French TV reporter Gilles Jacquier was killed in a mortar attack in the city of Homs. Officials said he was killed by rebels, while reporters accused the government. Agnes-Mariam said she was unfairly blamed.

In May 2012, after Assad-loyal forces massacred dozens of Sunni men, women and children in the Houla region, she claimed the slain children were Alawites — members of Assad's sect — who had been kidnapped by rebels.

She made a similar claim after hundreds of civilians were killed in a chemical attack on rebel-held suburbs of Damascus on Aug. 21. In a 50-page report, she said the children were probably kidnapped because their mothers weren't in the videos that activists uploaded to YouTube. She also claimed some videos were faked so victims would appear more numerous.

Her report was cited by Russia's foreign minister to cast doubt on claims that Assad forces perpetrated the attack.

Peter Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch said Agnes-Marie's allegations were "based on bizarre theories about bodies being moved." He said it is normal for the bodies of men and women to be separated so that they can be ritually washed according to Islamic custom.

Most recently, Agnes-Mariam surprised reporters in late October by appearing in her black habit and white wimple outside the rebel-held town of Moadamiyeh, where she brokered a truce allowing residents to be evacuated from the besieged area.

Agnes-Mariam said she got involved after seeing photographs of starving Moadamiyeh children on her Facebook feed. "I said, 'This doesn't happen in Syria,'" she said.

The nun contacted other government and security officials she knew from decades of interfaith outreach. She said she gradually built up her connections through her "pushy" personality and constant lobbying, saying people found it hard to refuse a nun.

The truce failed several times, but over a series of days, some 5,000 people were evacuated.

Activist Qusai Zakariya, however, accused of nun of breaking her word by allowing Assad's security forces to seize men suspected of being armed rebels as they left. Zakariya said she bears responsibility for their fate if they were tortured or killed in custody.

The nun said the men were taken to determine their status as civilians or fighters. She said that two men disappeared but that volunteers were trying to locate them.

George Kallas, an official at the Beirut-based Greek Catholic Patriarchate, which oversees Agnes-Mariam's convent, would not comment directly on her work and said her statements do not reflect the opinion of the Greek Catholic Church.

Agnes-Mariam is now on a speaking tour of the U.S., Canada and Britain. But she withdrew from an anti-war conference in London this weekend after other speakers threatened to quit if she participated.

In Britain's weekly Spectator, one writer called her "the Syrian equivalent of one of Hitler's brown priests." Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch said she "abuses her religious status to spread her lies."

To others, she is a humanitarian who is informing the West by correcting biased media reporting.

"She is searching for the truth about what is happening in Syria," said Damascus-based freelance reporter Safa Mohammed.

For her part, the nun said she is doing her flawed best.

"I am not the awaited-for Messiah," she said. "I am trying to work as a human."

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NATO powers move to exploit refugee crisis to intensify bombing of Syria

Even as tens of thousands of Syrians flee to Europe, the NATO powers are proposing to step up the bombing of their war-torn country and the drive for regime change in Syria.

According to a report in the *Sunday Times*, British Prime Minister David Cameron is seeking the support of sections of the Labour Party for a plan to address the migrant crisis that involves bombing Syria and destroying the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The plan would be voted upon in the British Parliament in October.

Yesterday Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, demanded "air strikes and other British military assistance to create secure and safe enclaves" in Syria. This would mean bombing Syria and seizing its territory, which would be an aggressive attack on Syria and an act of war. Nonetheless, British officials rushed to support Lord Carey's proposal.

"We've got to defeat these criminal gangs who trade in human misery and risk people's lives and kill people. You've got to deal with the problem at the source, which is this evil Assad regime and the [Islamic State (IS) militia] terrorists," declared UK Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne.

Osborne's statement is the height of political cynicism. It is the US and NATO-backed intervention in Syria, along with the financing of Islamic fundamentalist organizations by their allies in the Gulf monarchies, which created the conditions for the emergence of ISIS. Civil war has been deliberately stoked as part of a policy of undermining and overthrowing the Assad government.

Now, as tens of thousands of Syrian refugees stream into Europe, the NATO powers intend to exploit the crisis to intensify their drive for regime change in Syria, which will only force more Syrians to flee their country.

London's aggressive posture received support from Paris, after French President François Hollande proposed "to neutralize" Assad at an ambassador's meeting in Paris last month. A top secret military meeting at the Elysée presidential palace on Friday reportedly discussed France taking on the role of a "team player" in a US-led coalition to carry out air strikes in Syria. Speaking to *Le Monde*, French military sources indicated that they expected they would have US military support for a war for regime change in Syria. "The Americans have officially declared that they are in this for the long term, with an aerial campaign that will last at least three years," one official declared.

French opposition politicians made tactical criticisms of Hollande's proposal, indicating that they would prefer integrating Russian and Iranian forces into war planning in Syria. They also indicated that they wanted to avoid a re-play of the situation in September 2013, when Paris aligned itself with Washington to push for war in Syria, only to find itself humiliated when the Obama administration decided not to attack Syria and called off the war without consulting Paris.

"If an intervention is going to take place, it requires a broader agreement with partners besides the United States. Russia and Iran must be reintegrated. France must get back to an independent policy in Syria. The last time we spoke about strikes, we were pretty aligned [on Washington]," declared former conservative French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

The military escalation not only threatens more mass carnage and social devastation in Syria, but a direct clash between nuclear-armed powers, as Washington threatens to destroy the Syrian regime and Moscow considers launching a war to defend Assad, a key Russian ally in the region.

"To say we're ready to do this today—so far it's premature to talk about this. But we are already giving Syria quite serious help with equipment and training soldiers with our weapons," Russian President Vladimir Putin declared on Friday during an economic forum in Vladivostok.

Putin also indicated, however, that Moscow could support negotiations that could lead to a political settlement in Syria and possibly the stepping down of Assad. "In general, the understanding is that this uniting of efforts in fighting

terrorism should go in parallel to some political process in Syria itself,” he said. “And the Syrian president agrees with that, all the way down to holding early elections, let’s say, parliamentary ones, establishing contacts with the so-called healthy opposition, bringing them into governing.”

Washington quickly moved to criticize attempts by Moscow to boost its influence in Syria. On Friday, US intelligence officials claimed that Russian troops were building an air base near the coastal Syrian city of Latakia, from which they could launch air strikes.

As part of its alliance with Syria stretching back to Soviet times, Russia has for decades operated a naval base at the nearby port city of Tartus.

On Saturday, US Secretary of State John Kerry called his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to complain of indications of an “imminent enhanced Russian military build-up” in Syria.



While this aerial invasion of Syria continues Syria’s main threat of a total invasion is from its historical enemy the State of Israel waits in the wings ready for an invasion of this ancient Land of Syria

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GOLAN HEIGHTS

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Rudolph S. Daldin

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Windsor Canada



In memory of Valentino & Angela Daldin