



1. Please provide information on conscription and military service in Syria.

Nature of military service

According to a 2007 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC) research response, Article 40 of the 1973 Syrian Constitution states that “military service is compulsory and regulated by law”.¹ Syrian males are required to register for military service upon reaching the age of 18 and may complete military service from 18 to 42 years of age.² Exemptions are provided for males who are the only son in a family, have health problems, are studying or are living abroad.³ In March 2011, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued Legislative Decree No.35, which reduced the duration of military service from 21 months to 18 months for men who had completed the fifth grade, effective 1 June 2011.⁴ The period of mandatory military service for men who have not completed the fifth grade is 21 months.⁵

Limited information is available on conscription and military service in Syria.⁶ As noted in the UK’s September 2010 Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, War Resisters International’s April 1998 report, *Refusing to Bear Arms – A worldwide survey of conscription*

¹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, SYR102395.E – Syria: Compulsory military service, including age limit for performing service; penalties for evasion; occasions where proof of military service status is required; whether the government can recall individuals who have already completed their compulsory military service, 8 March http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=451040&l=e – Accessed 10 January 2012; War Resisters International 1998, Syria – Conscription, 25 April http://www.wri-irg.org/programmes/world_survey/reports/Syria – Accessed 19 January 2012

² Arwashan, Naji 2008, ‘When can I pay back the badal?’, *Honorary Consulate General of Syria in Detroit eNewsletter*, Vol.1, No.10, 21 June <http://www.syrianconsulate.org/Newsletter/10-062008.pdf> – Accessed 19 January 2012; US State Department 2011, *Background Note: Syria*, 18 March <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm> – Accessed 18 January 2012; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, SYR102395.E – Syria: Compulsory military service, including age limit for performing service; penalties for evasion; occasions where proof of military service status is required; whether the government can recall individuals who have already completed their compulsory military service, 8 March http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=451040&l=e – Accessed 10 January 2012

³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, SYR102395.E – Syria: Compulsory military service, including age limit for performing service; penalties for evasion; occasions where proof of military service status is required; whether the government can recall individuals who have already completed their compulsory military service, 8 March http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=451040&l=e – Accessed 10 January 2012; US State Department 2011, *Background Note: Syria*, 18 March <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm> – Accessed 18 January 2012; Coalition to stop the use of Child Soldiers 2008, *Child Soldiers Global Report – Syria*, Refworld website, 20 May <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/486cb134c.html> – Accessed 18 January 2012

⁴ ‘Legislative Decree reducing mandatory Syrian Military Service’ 2011, SANA, source: *Dp-news*, 20 March <http://www.dp-news.com/en/detail.aspx?articleid=78445> – Accessed 10 January 2012; US State Department 2011, Syria – Country Specific Information, 12 July http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1035.html – Accessed 18 January 2012

⁵ US State Department 2011, Syria – Country Specific Information, 12 July http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1035.html – Accessed 18 January 2012

⁶ The Middle East Reporter 2011, *The Syrian Army*, 22 October

and conscientious objection to military service, though dated, is one of ‘the most comprehensive reports on military service in Syria’.⁷ The 1998 War Resisters International report states that after registering for military service, males are issued a document detailing the particulars of their service, including whether they are eligible for postponement.⁸ In 2007, the IRBC reported that with respect to proof of military service status, a 2007 Reciprocity Schedule located on the US State Department website, which is no longer accessible, indicated that individuals are issued a certificate of military service when they are discharged from the military.⁹

Syrian conscripts and reserves

Reports differ on the size of the Syrian army, with estimates ranging from 220,000 to 420,000 personnel on active duty, including conscripts, and an additional 280,000 to 450,500 man reserve force (although Weiss concedes that 450,500 is most likely an exaggerated figure).¹⁰ An October 2011 *Middle East Reporter* article points out that ‘even before the uprising began in Syria in mid-March, the structure and strength of Syria’s army was shrouded in mystery’.¹¹ It is unclear how the current uprising in Syria will affect military service. In January 2012, STRATFOR reported the following:

Alawite officers, who are outnumbered by mostly low-to-mid-ranking Sunni conscript soldiers, dominate the Syrian military. Unwilling to fight against their coreligionists, many of the Sunni conscripts have deserted or defected to the Free Syrian Army. The regime crackdown has therefore been mostly led by all-Alawite forces, including the Republican Guard, Fourth Armored Division, the 14th and 15th Special Forces Divisions, riot police, Military Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, the General Intelligence Directorate, the National Security Bureau, Baath Party security, the Political Security Directorate and, of course, the Shabiha.¹²

In terms of the capability of Syria’s reserve military force, Cordesman states that ‘In general, Syria’s reserve military forces are little more than “paper” forces with no real refresher or modern training, poor equipment and readiness support, and little or no experience in mobility and

⁷ UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report – The Syrian Arab Republic*, 3 September, pg.44 <http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rcct=j&q=uk%20home%20office%20september%202010%20report%20on%20syria&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCoQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwebarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk%2F20101208171359%2Frd.s.homeoffice.gov.uk%2Frd.s.pdf%2F10%2Fsyria-030910.doc&ei=oYwPT9qBBJGurAfm39XmAQ&usg=AFQjCNElq8Fj9gFq82LToh7u6XGBZ5B8vQ> – Accessed 13 January 2012

⁸ War Resisters International 1998, *Syria – Conscription*, 25 April http://www.wri-irg.org/programmes/world_survey/reports/Syria – Accessed 19 January 2012

⁹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *SYR102395.E – Syria: Compulsory military service, including age limit for performing service; penalties for evasion; occasions where proof of military service status is required; whether the government can recall individuals who have already completed their compulsory military service*, 8 March http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=451040&l=e – Accessed 10 January 2012

¹⁰ The High Commissioner for Human Rights’s Fact-Finding Mission for Syria 2011, *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission on Syria pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-16/1*, UNHCR Refworld website, August, pg.19 www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e4e2ba72.html – Accessed 11 January 2012; The Middle East Reporter 2011, *The Syrian Army*, 22 October; ‘Factbox – Syria’s military: what does Assad have?’ 2011, *Reuters*, 6 April <http://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFLDE72S19O20110406> – Accessed 13 January 2012; Weiss, Michael 2011, *Safe Area for Syria: An Assessment of Legality, Logistics and Hazards*, Foreign Policy website, 24 December, pg.10 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/111228_intervention_Syria_paper.pdf – Accessed 11 January 2012

¹¹ The Middle East Reporter 2011, *The Syrian Army*, 22 October

¹² STRATFOR 2012, *The Use of Mercenaries in Syria’s Crackdown*, 12 January <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/use-mercenaries-syrias-crackdown> – Accessed 18 January 2012

sustainability'.¹³ Weiss concurs with Cordesman, stating that 'Reservists in Syria, however, are subject to no such discipline or rigor, rendering them at best insufficient and at worst useless in a conventional military conflict'.¹⁴

2. Is it likely that someone who has completed his military service is considered a reservist and has been called upon to serve in that capacity?

A 2007 statement from a Canadian Embassy Official in Damascus to the IRBC indicates that the Syrian government considers individuals who have completed military service to be 'reservists', in that they are able to be recalled for military service:

The Canadian Embassy Official stated that the government can recall individuals who have already completed their military service.¹⁵

Regarding the likelihood that someone who has completed his military service could be recalled to serve in the military due to the uprising in Syria, a 2004 report from the Swedish Embassy in Damascus states that 'Generally, there is no reserve service', unless the government believes that the political situation warrants recalling 'reservists'.¹⁶ The report states that:

Generally, there is no reserve service. However, there may be during these political situations. For instance, during the Iraq war last year, there was no reserve service. In case there is reserve service, it is for not more than three months. Notification is through an individual note as in the case of mandatory service.¹⁷

In 2011, Weiss, *AFP* and *The Christian Science Monitor* reported that the Syrian government had recalled reservists in the wake of the Syrian uprising, which supports claims that those completing military service could be recalled to serve as reservists.¹⁸ However, this 2011 recall reportedly had mixed success with 'credible evidence' suggesting that the regime was 'unable to

¹³ Cordesman, Anthony 2008, *The Israeli and Syrian Conventional Military Balance*, Center for Strategic and International Studies website, 11 June, pg.3 http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080611_israeli-syrian_conv_mil_bal.pdf – Accessed 11 January 2012

¹⁴ Weiss, Michael 2011, *Safe Area for Syria: An Assessment of Legality, Logistics and Hazards*, Foreign Policy website, 24 December, pg.10 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/111228_intervention_Syria_paper_.pdf – Accessed 11 January 2012

¹⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *SYR102395.E – Syria: Compulsory military service, including age limit for performing service; penalties for evasion; occasions where proof of military service status is required; whether the government can recall individuals who have already completed their compulsory military service*, 8 March http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/RIR_RDI/RIR_RDI.aspx?id=451040&l=e – Accessed 10 January 2012

¹⁶ Swedish Embassy in Damascus 2004, 'Request for military service in Syria', Swedish Migration Board website, 22 April http://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?anno=2&hl=en&rurl=translate.google.com.au&sl=sv&tl=en&twu=1&u=http://lifos.migrationsverket.se/dokument%3FdocumentAttachmentId%3D34057&usg=ALkJrhjii52gTsemJs2ZV-o8mQW7rFocCw – Accessed 17 January 2012

¹⁷ Swedish Embassy in Damascus 2004, 'Request for military service in Syria', Swedish Migration Board website, 22 April http://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?anno=2&hl=en&rurl=translate.google.com.au&sl=sv&tl=en&twu=1&u=http://lifos.migrationsverket.se/dokument%3FdocumentAttachmentId%3D34057&usg=ALkJrhjii52gTsemJs2ZV-o8mQW7rFocCw – Accessed 17 January 2012

¹⁸ Weiss, Michael 2011, *Safe Area for Syria: An Assessment of Legality, Logistics and Hazards*, Foreign Policy website, 24 December, pg.10 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/111228_intervention_Syria_paper_.pdf – Accessed 11 January 2012; Peterson, Scott 2011, 'We were ordered to shoot on the people', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 June <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0613/Syrian-Army-deserter-We-were-ordered-to-shoot-on-the-people> – Accessed 13 January 2012; 'Despite cohesion, Syria regime could fall' 2011, *AFP*, 19 June http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jrD6bDpjfp9_bYAhpVGsnn2Tv8g?docId=CNG.3c87464718e1d06029b507a4b825c92c.811 – Accessed 20 January 2012

call back more than 60 per cent of its reserves'.¹⁹ In another example of the Syrian government recalling reservists due to a perceived threat, in 2008, London-based Arabic-language daily *Al-Hayat* reported that the Syrian army was calling up reserve units over fears of an Israeli military attack.²⁰

¹⁹ Weiss, Michael 2011, *Safe Area for Syria: An Assessment of Legality, Logistics and Hazards*, Foreign Policy website, 24 December, pg.10
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/111228_intervention_Syria_paper_.pdf – Accessed 11 January 2012

²⁰ Stern, Yoay 2008, 'IDF Deputy Chief vows 'painful' response to any attack on Israel', *Haaretz*, 2 April
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/idf-deputy-chief-vows-painful-response-to-any-attack-on-israel-1.243171> – Accessed 11 January 2012

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