



November 12, 2013

**The Al-Nusra Front played a major role in the rebel takeover of a large Syrian army arsenal southeast of Homs. The weapons may contribute to the organization's military capabilities and be transferred to regional Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organizations.**



Some of the crates of weapons and ammunition seized; the black flag belongs to the Al-Nusra Front (Jalnosra.com website)

## Overview

1. On November 5, 2013, organizations of Syrian rebels, including the Free Syrian Army and the Al-Nusra Front took control of a Syrian army precinct in the village of **Mahin**, southeast of the city of Homs. **They took over an arsenal considered one of the largest in Syria.** The takeover occurred during a large rebel military operation called the "The doors of Allah which are not slammed shut." The Al-Nusra Front, which glorified its role, **issued photographs of scores if not hundreds of crates of weapons seized in the operation** (See below).

2. According to statements issued by the rebels, **they seized large quantities of anti-tank missiles, rocket launchers and Grad rockets.** In addition large quantities of light arms and ammunition were also seized. The Free Syrian Army forum listed the weapons as follows: **10,000 Grad rockets, 10,000 107mm rockets**, more than 20,000 120mm mortar shells, more than 10,000 anti-tank shells, **thousands of Kornet anti-**

**tank missiles**, thousands of RPG launchers, thousands of hand grenades and mines, thousands of Kalashnikov assault rifles and machine guns, and large quantities of ammunition (Syrianfreearmy.com, November 9, 2013). On YouTube, one of the rebel leaders said that "the next stage will be **to move the weapons to a secure area and then to distribute them to all fronts.**"<sup>1</sup>

3. **The takeover of the Syrian army arsenal provided the Al-Nusra Front with an important source of weapons.** One of the organization's senior commanders previously said that they did not lack weapons because in one of the raids on a Syrian army base they acquired more weapons than they could have gotten from sources outside Syria.<sup>2</sup> During 2012 and 2013 the Al-Nusra Front has displayed a variety of weapons, including anti-tank missiles that fell into their hands during fighting (See Appendix). However, compared to the past, the weapons seized in Mahin were **exceptional, both in quantity and apparently in quality.**

4. The takeover of the Mahin arsenal was a success for the rebel forces in general and the Al-Nusra Front in particular. It demonstrated the Al-Nusra Front's **dominance among the rebel forces and its ability to collaborate with other rebel organizations** (much more than its Al-Qaeda-affiliated rival, the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria).

5. In our assessment, **the Al-Nusra Front and other jihadist organizations will try to take over other Syrian arsenals, including those with advanced weapons** which will be used against the Syrian regime. Moreover, **some of the seized weapons may be transferred to global jihad-affiliated terrorist organizations in other arenas**, especially weapons found attractive, such as rockets and anti-tank missiles (similar to the Libyan model after the fall of the Gadhafi regime, when **Libya** became a source of weapons for global jihad organizations throughout the entire region.). Possible arenas include Lebanon, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, where Al-Qaeda- and global jihad-affiliated terrorist networks operate.

<sup>1</sup> **Note:** On November 15, 2013, (after this bulletin was issued) Syrian media affiliated with the regime reported that the Syrian army had succeeded in retaking the arsenal. It can be assumed that during the period between the time the rebels took over the arsenal and the time it was retaken by the Syrian army, and assuming that the report of the retaking was accurate, the Al-Nusra Front and its allies managed to remove at least some of the arms and transfer them to other locations.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see the September 17, 2013 bulletin "[The Al-Nusra Front \(Jabhat al-Nusra\) is an Al-Qaeda Salafist-jihadi network, prominent in the rebel organizations in Syria.](#)"

## Description of the Takeover of the Syrian Arsenal According to the Al-Nusra Front

6. According to the (slanted) version of the arsenal takeover issued by the Al-Nusra Front, it began on October 21, 2013. **Two two suicide bombers** drove vehicles loaded with explosives (a modus operandi characteristic of the Al-Nusra Front). The vehicles were driven to Syrian army bases in the town of Sadad, just to the northwest of Mahin. They blew themselves up, killing an estimated one hundred Syrian soldiers. A battle followed, ending with the Al-Nusra Front takeover of the bases. Reinforced by other Islamist organizations, the Al-Nusra Front attacked the arsenal in Mahin.

7. The last stage of the fighting at Mahin lasted from November 2 to 5, 2013, ending when Al-Nusra Front operatives, with assistance from the other organizations, took control of the arsenal. Several Syrian officers were killed during the fighting. The statement issued by the Al-Nusra Front ended with its hope that the weapons and ammunition would "fuel the break of the siege on Homs and the eastern environs [of Damascus]" (Jalnosra.com website).



Part of the statement issued by the Al-Nusra Front about "The doors of Allah which are not slammed shut" (Jalnosra.com website). It glorifies the part played by the Al-Nusra Front in taking over the arsenal at Mahin.

8. **The Free Syrian Army and other rebel organizations also participated in the takeover of the Mahin arsenal.** Al-Marsad Al-Souri, a Syrian human rights organization that monitors the events in the country, reported that the Al-Nusra Front was assisted by other organizations in the takeover, among them **the Islamic State in**

**Iraq and Greater Syria** (the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq) and the Al-Khadraa' Brigade, which belongs to a jihadist organization called the **Harakat Ahrar al-Sham** (the Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant) (Aawsat.com website).

### Pictures of the Arsenal Issued by the Al-Nusra Front



Crates of weapons and ammunition (Jalnosra.com website)



Crates of weapons and ammunition. Mortar shells can be seen in the open box in the center (Jalnosra.com website)



Crates of weapons and ammunition draped with the Al-Nusra Front flag (Jalnosra.com website)



Anti-aircraft weapons seized in Mahin (Jalnosra.com website), apparently Soviet Shilka ZSU-23-4 system.

### Weapons from Mahin Reported by Orient News TV and Uploaded to YouTube



Konkurs anti-tank missiles



Vehicles



A rebel commander from an organization that participated in the takeover with the Al-Nusra Front reports that the storerooms held anti-tank missiles and Grad rockets. He added that the next stage would be to transfer the weapons to a secure area and from there to distribute them to all the fronts.

### Weapons from Mahin Reported by Al-Ghad TV and Uploaded to YouTube



**160mm mortar shells**



**120mm mortar shells**



**130mm mortar shells**



**Crates containing Grad rockets**

## Appendix

### Weapons That Fell into Al-Nusra Front Hands in 2012-2013



Arsenal taken over by the Al-Nusra Front in the northern area of the environs of Hama, in northwestern Syria (Twitter)



From the Al-Nusra Front's Twitter account: rifles, machine guns, RPG launchers and mortar (Twitter)



Anti-tank RPG launchers seized by the Al-Nusra Front from the Syrian army in the city of Aleppo in October 2012 (YouTube, December 2012)



Weapons and ammunition that fell into the hands of the Al-Nusra Front during an attack in the region of Daraa on October 5, 2012 (Jalnosra.com website)



Weapons seized during at attack on a Syrian military security force base (YouTube, August 2013)



Missiles seized by Al-Nusra Front operatives. The location, date and circumstances are unknown. The from a video posted on YouTube on May 31, 2013.