



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Syrian women block highway, win back captive men, 2011

• Arab Awakening (2011)

Time period notes: *Though this case could be considered part of the larger (ongoing as of May 2011) campaign for democracy in Syria, I consider it to be a distinct campaign because it maintained separate, concerted goals inside of the larger campaign or movement.*

April 13

2011

to: April 13

2011

Country: Syria

Location City/State/Province: *Banias*

Location Description: *Highway on the thoroughfare between Syria and Turkey.*

Goals:

The release of men arrested by the Syrian government in the villages of Bayda and Beit Jnad.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "We want the men of Bayda!"
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › of highway.

Notes on Methods:

Given the brevity of the campaign, segments are unclear.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- female Syrian villagers
- students and children

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

not known.

Partners:

not known.

External allies:

not known.

Involvement of social elites:

not known.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The organizing entities are entirely unclear.

Segment Length: 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Syrian government and military.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None.

Campaigner violence:

Not known.

Repressive Violence:

Syrian military crackdown in Baida involved brutal beatings and the arrests of 350 villagers.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although some detainees were released (over 100) it is unclear whether the full demands were ever met.

The uprising against Syrian dictator Bashar Al-Assad is a part of a larger wave of campaigns in the Arab world in 2011. Known by some as the "Arab Spring," these movements' targets included dictatorial figures, Western imperialism, sectarian discourse, militarism, economic conditions, and censorship. The conflict in Syria focused on the 40-year dictatorial rule of the Assad family. Bashar Al-Assad inherited the presidency after his father's death in 2000.

Conflict, both nonviolent and violent, broke out in Syria in mid-March after an immolation mimicking that of the Tunisian campaign for democracy, and a series of student demonstrations. Most of the demonstrations in the early struggle – about 8-9 months -- were nonviolent in their intentions, but violence was often present as well.

Assad responded in April 2011 with increasing arrests and seemingly semi-random killings throughout the country. As the struggle escalated, both protests and military forces spread into increasingly rural areas populated by smaller villages. In early April, protestors in the coastal city of Baniyas held a large protest that featured the chant inherited from Egypt and Tunisia -- "????? ???? ????? ?????? (The people want the overthrow of the regime!)"

As people in the city and the region escalated their demonstrations, the area experienced a crackdown, complete with checkpoints. The regime targeted the village of Bayda, along the coast, because many of its residents had participated in the protest at Baniyas, and, according to some, the residents were planning their own protest.

Syrian security forces entered Bayda, pulling men and women from their houses and beating them in the town square. The police detained around 350 men – most of the men in the village. At least one person died in the repression.

The next day, hundreds of women and children gathered in the center of Bayda, rallied, and marched to the main coastal highway, where they occupied the center of the road, blocking all traffic between Baniyas and Tartous, both civilian and military.

By the time the marchers reached the highway they had grown to 2,000. The women and children held olive branches and Syrian flags, chanting "We want the men of Bayda," "We will not be humiliated!" and "Peaceful! Peaceful! Muslims and Christians!"

Shortly, the Syrian military arrived with a tank and began to threaten to shoot. A number of children and male teenagers lay in front of the tank to block its way. The remaining marchers refused to disperse.

During the afternoon, in an apparent attempt to placate the marchers, Syrian authorities released over 100 detainees.

Despite cheers of triumph, the women declared that they would not end their occupation until all of their husbands and sons were released. As of the writing of this case, there is no further information available about the outcome in Bayda. Even if the victory turns out to have been only partial, it was significant in the face of almost overwhelming violence.

Research Notes

Influences:

The Syrian women are part of the larger movement for democracy in Syria, as well as the Arab Spring. (1)

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Hanna King, 4/25/11

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