

World

Assad Starts to Lose Grip on His Militias

BY ARYN BAKER/BEIRUT

As the threat of an imminent U.S. attack dims, supporters and officials of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime quietly worry that his feared *shabiha* (ghost) fighters may spin out of control. "Assad is saying, 'Let me win first, then I will deal with them,'" one regime official told TIME on the condition of anonymity. "But I don't see how. They could last for decades."

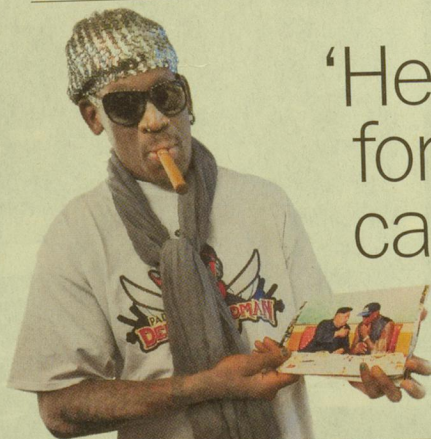
The West rightly fears the rising power of antiregime militias—some of which have ties to al-Qaeda—but less attention has been paid to those mustered by Assad. The longer the war rages, the more difficult it will be to control them. Most are funded by local businessmen or

religious leaders vying for government favor. They originated in the organized-crime networks of Latakia province, where Assad's Alawite sect dominates. But now they're just as likely to be Sunni, Kurdish or Eastern Orthodox Christian. And if their leaders refuse to comply with a future political resolution—distant, at this point—Syria could be further shredded by factional fighting, like Afghanistan in the early 1990s before a widespread backlash against the warlords there led to the rise of the Taliban.

Assad recently claimed that the rebels fighting his regime are mostly from al-Qaeda and warned of catastrophe should the fractious opposition militias have their way with Syria. But if his *shabiha* similarly splinter, the next Syrian crisis could be one of his own making.



Assad is interviewed by a reporter for Le Figaro in Damascus on Sept. 1



NORTH KOREA

'He's my friend for life—I don't care what you guys think.'

DENNIS RODMAN, former NBA star, on North Korean leader Kim Jong Un; he plans to train the country's 2016 Olympic basketball team



WORLD'S HIGHEST 'VANITY' SKYSCRAPERS

The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat found that many landmarks have lots of unoccupiable space thanks in part to spires.



Burj Khalifa
Dubai
29%

unoccupiable



Zifeng Tower
Nanjing, China
30%



Emirates Tower One
Dubai
32%

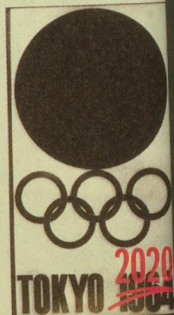


Bank of America Tower
New York City
36%

The Explainer

How Japan Plans to Profit From the 2020 Olympics

Tokyo kept its bid under \$8 billion—less than half of Istanbul's—in the hopes of a \$30 billion economic boost from its hosting duties. This would be a crucial boon as the world's third largest economy grapples with tepid growth and massive debt. Its mission: spend the rest of the decade leveraging the facilities and intel amassed during its last Summer Games—in 1964.



RETROFITTED STADIUMS

THEN: In 1964, venues like Yoyogi National and Tokyo Metropolitan gymnasiums hosted tournaments for swimming, basketball and gymnastics, among other sports.
NOW: They'll be refurbished for table tennis and handball.

COST-FRIENDLY OLYMPIC VILLAGE

THEN: Renovating a former U.S. military housing compound for 6,600 athletes reportedly cost more than housing for the first nine modern Olympics combined.
NOW: The \$955 million, 17,000-bed complex planned for Tokyo Harbor will later be converted to a residential community.

STREAMLINED TRANSPORTATION

THEN: Tokyo introduced the world's first high-speed bullet train to shuttle visitors and athletes between competitions.
NOW: It'll continue to update that technology—some wait times are as low as two minutes during rush hour—and renovate stations to be accessible to the elderly, disabled and children.