



Syrian Conflict Fueled by Unlikely Industry

The Syrian Information Ministry recently revoked the BBC's media accreditation of two journalists, citing that the articles published were "false and misleading." The Syrian government has repeatedly warned BBC regarding their depiction of the state since the conflict began in 2011, citing a continued trend of misrepresentation by the media empire. Yet, what cemented the final severance was a story reporting on the rise of Captagon, a synthetic amphetamine, and the drug's alleged connection to Syrian President Bashar Assad's family and other senior army officials concerning their role in production and distribution. With the Syrian government not explicitly citing this article in the reasoning for removing BBC's accreditation, it calls into question the magnitude of the entire situation and market of Captagon.

The production of Captagon originated in Germany in the 1960s, as it was initially intended for attention deficit disorders, narcolepsy, and other conditions. It was discontinued in the late 1980s, but illegal production continued in Eastern Europe and eventually made its way to the Middle East. The current black-market version often contains fenethylamine, caffeine, and other fillers intended to strengthen or lengthen the pill's effects. Captagon production, specifically within Syria, can be traced back to 2014, with "the drug of jihad," as it is nicknamed, being distributed to ISIS soldiers to keep them awake during the conflict. Its production has expanded since then, with factories established throughout the country and on the borders with Lebanon and Jordan.

With BBC documenting Jordanian and Lebanese forces attempting to crack down on Captagon smuggling, the drug's integration into the military and state became increasingly evident. Through journalistic reporting and recording, the ties between Captagon and the Fourth Division, an elite sector of the Syrian Army, became more evident. The Fourth Division is led by Maher al-Assad, brother to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Its continued economic expansion over the years despite the heavy sanctions calls into question the source of revenue streams. It is the only section of the Syrian Army capable of free movement across borders without restriction, making it possible for smuggling to occur. With the EU citing the government as a "central player" in the production and trade of Captagon, a series of sanctions and condemnations have been put into place on top government officials by the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union. BBC has uncovered further connections to the trade of Captagon within Syria to the Assad family, resulting in the recent revoking of accreditations.

As the most considerable market demand for the drug exists within Saudi Arabia, various Arab states have pledged that halting the production and trade of Captagon remain essentially in stopping the crisis within Syria. With officials from Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan meeting this past May to discuss Syria's rejoining the Arab League, it was deemed essential for Syria to crack down on the drug before its re-admittance. With international pledges and policies being enacted to help curb the continued industry, the true extent to which Captagon is integrated into the Syrian state remains wholly

unknown, as only an active effort from all parties to stop trade networks will allow for the drug to release its stronghold.