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Free Syrian Army Faces Mass Desertions Over Low Pay, Fragmented Leadership

By Jason Ditz
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The on-again, off-again faction of choice for the Obama Administration to back in the Syrian Civil War, the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) has been struggling for years to win any important battles or amass and real territory of their own, and the group is now hemorrhaging fighters.

Those familiar with the situation say that poor conditions for FSA fighters and the fragmented leadership are a factor, but the main source of desertion is the low salaries, which are themselves irregularly paid in several of the factions that face constant funding problems.

FSA commanders say that fighters are paid as low as \$50 a month to start, and even those fighting for a long time report getting less than \$100 a month, when they get it at all. With other rebel factions like ISIS paying \$1,000 or more as a monthly salary, the FSA just isn't a reliable place for rebels to earn a living in a war that seemingly is going to last years.

Supporting family members is all but impossible for FSA fighters, and that's doubly problematic with the FSA controlling so little land of their own, meaning the family they are living behind are often in "enemy territory" and persecuted for being related to an FSA fighter.

It's no surprise, then, that the FSA is struggling to keep its estimated 35,000 fighters, split up into over 2,000 different factions, contented with their position in a war that is often changing, but in which their side never seems to be winning.