

## 1. METHODOLOGY

The SMC currently lacks a distinctive voice in the pan-Arab and international press and, where there is coverage, it is frequently negative. As stated in the tender, there is very limited STRATCOM capability and no functioning Media Office. This has allowed the Assad regime and violent extremist elements to dominate the media space, particularly through aggressive use of digital media, including the Syrian Electronic Army. There is now an urgent need to provide a counterbalance to the regime's narrative to build trust and confidence in the SMC and the FSA within Syria and among the international community.

This project will be delivered in five main phases (for a detailed overview of these phases, see Timeline on p.15)

- Phase 1:** Baseline attitudes survey/existing equipment and skills audit/SMC office procurement
- Phase 2:** Rebranding Exercise/Media Awareness and Crisis Communications Training for FSA and SMC  
Creation of SMC and FSA websites
- Phase 3:** Operational and strategic media training for SMC Media Office staff
- Phase 4:** Product design, creation and placement and proactive media engagement, with focus group testing to gauge effectiveness
- Phase 5:** Project evaluation and follow on planning for transition/sustainability

These phases will be enabled through the following functions, as outlined in the tender:

### Mentoring

ARK/Accadian will provide Hiwa Osman as the dedicated mentor to the Head of SMC STRATCOM and General Idriss, as required. Hiwa was previously Media Advisor to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Iraq Country Director for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting. His role will develop the media handling skills of the Spokesperson and, where needed, General Idriss, including preparation for media appearances, written and oral briefings and overall guidance on strategy.

### Media Strategy

ARK/Accadian will provide a 're-branding' of the SMC in order to distinguish itself from extremist armed opposition groups and to establish the image of a functioning, inclusive, disciplined and professional military body. There are four distinct audiences for this project: the FSA/SMC; the general population inside Syria; the Syrian regime; and the international community.

In **Phase 1**, ARK/Accadian will carry out a baseline analysis of Syrian attitudes towards the SMC/FSA through its Basma and Insight analysis team. The initial stage will augment

the findings from a voxpop produced by Basma, which can be viewed [here](#). (password: basma2013)



Figure 2: Still from Basma voxpop with Syrian refugee stating: "There still isn't any real management for the SMC that is working properly."

This data will be used in **Phase 2** to develop a core narrative around trust, discipline, bravery, service, patriotism and justice, and an awareness of the of the media in reinforcing this perception.

In **Phase 3** we will establish the operational elements, including a rolling core narrative, key messages and Q&A. As confirmed by the National Coalition Media Office spokesperson, transparent delivery of information across all media is key to the perceived legitimacy of the SMC/FSA within Syria and the success of this project.

Outputs in **Phase 4** will vary according to capabilities and requirements but, on previous experience, are expected to include:

- 4 x posters campaigns (public expectation, FSA recognition and accountability)
- 1 x leaflet (FSA Rules of Engagement and role of SMC)
- 4 x radio spots
- 8 x ENG's (popular expectations from FSA, heroes of FSA, FSA Rules of Engagement)

Costings for these products have been provided but are not included in the budget.

**Softening the FSA Image**

**Stickers before** 08 Nov 12

**Stickers after** 19 Nov 12  
With ARK advice and Basma design

**I am a Free Syrian Army member**

**A saying by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH):**  
"Do not kill a decrepit old man, a young infant, or a child, or a woman; do not be dishonest about booty, but collect your spoils, do right and act well, for Allah loves those who do well."

**A saying by the First Caliph in Islam:**  
"You shall not behave treacherously, you shall not betray, you shall not mutilate, you shall not cut palm trees and you shall not burn them".

- - I will do my best not to cause destruction.
- - I will protect civilians and I will neither harm them, nor terrorize them.
- - I will keep my oath.
- - I will not mutilate.

**Free Syrian Army:**

- We Liberate
- We build
- We do not destroy

Figure 2: Basma has already carried out limited rebranding for the FSA that was well received

ARK will use its existing communications networks inside Syria and leverage Basma's extensive experience of developing and disseminating content, as outlined below.

**Digital Media**

The regime and extremist groups heavily utilise new media to convey their messages, including through Twitter, smartphone applications and even graphic novels. Extremist

groups in Syria typically favour direct online engagement over interaction with traditional media and competition for resources has increased the quantity and quality of these media outreach efforts<sup>1</sup>. As part of its CVE work, ARK is researching the media capabilities of extremist groups and these findings will be used to develop an online presence for the SMC. This, and close monitoring of the regime's media outputs, will enable the SMC Media Office to portray a distinct contrast in values, behaviour and agenda. ARK/Accadian's inclusion of Dr Milad Kawas, a high profile Syrian media activist, in the core team ensures all digital content generated will resonate strongly with a Syrian audience.

To achieve a strong digital presence, ARK/Accadian will draw on its existing relationships with media organisations. In the past year, ARK's Syrian media production programme, Basma, has created the fourth most popular Facebook page associated with Syria, and its Chemical Weapons (CW) information poster reached a primary audience of 700,000 on Twitter. The two FSA-related Facebook pages have fewer than 2,800 'likes' between them. If required, ARK/Accadian will use the services of a trusted professional 'web optimiser' to provide solutions that will maximise traffic to the SMC/FSA sites.

### Broadcast Media

A December 2012 poll shows that TV remains the most popular source of information, with Al Arabiya the most popular channel<sup>2</sup>. ARK is currently carrying out extensive polling inside Syria to update this information and determine which media channels are currently most used. Previous experience has shown the importance of using channels that are perceived to be neutral in order to ensure maximum outreach among all demographics. Using its existing networks and connections, ARK/Accadian would target key Syrian satellite TV networks (Orient TV, Souria al-Shaab, Souria al-Ghad, Barada) and regional Arabic networks and primary international channels.

FM radio remains an effective medium for reaching a large target audience inside Syria. ARK Strategic Communications has developed and is now partnered with ten radio stations broadcasting a range of challenging content in Syria.

### Print Media

Print media has traditionally been the most saturated communication channel in Syria. It is also the form most commonly used by violent extremist organisations when establishing a presence in a new municipality. The SMC Media Office will also be required to inhabit this space, through ARK/Accadian's well-developed network of print media contacts, including the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Canada's Globe and Mail, Daily Telegraph, Independent, the majority of whom are based in Istanbul or Beirut.

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<sup>1</sup> Each large VE battalion has its own production house.

<sup>2</sup> YouGov Dec 2012

## Provision of SMC Press Office

ARK/Accadian proposes an SMC Media Communications Office be established in Istanbul to provide physical proximity to the NC Press Office and to the pool of journalists based in the city. ARK/Accadian is aware the NC is currently moving its Media Office and will seek to co-locate. ARK has already set up a media production office in Istanbul for the Basma project and has a developed understanding of the costs, locations and issues involved in this. ROM costs have been provided that are not included in the core budget.

ARK/Accadian will also create websites for the SMC and FSA, initially with holding pages, as well as coordinating all associated new media accounts. ARK/Accadian would utilise Bahar Abdulrazak, a highly skilled Syrian web designer and IT technician with strong experience in preventing hacking, to create the websites.

### Links to FSA Front Commands

ARK has proven experience providing equipment to, and coordinating feeds and content from, its 25 Basma stringers inside Syria. This guarantees that we have the technical understanding to provide appropriate, effective and cost-efficient equipment to enable content to flow from the FSA Front Commands (FC) to the SMC Media Office.

## Media Training

Currently, there is a limited capability to communicate key facts relating to the SMC/FSA's operations or the military situation on the ground. To provide an effective Media Office capable of conveying the agreed core narrative, dealing with crises, responding to press enquiries and creating unique digital content, ARK/Accadian will provide the following training:

### FSA Front Commands

5 members from each - 25 pax - 1 week training – Gaziantep

Media Awareness and Internal Branding. This will be structured along the following lines:

#### Workshop 1

- Working with the media
- Perceptions of FSA/SMC within Syria (gathered and produced by Basma as 'Voxpops', the first of which can be viewed [here](#). Password: basma2013);
- Aspirations for FSA/SMC, development of mission statement;
- Combat camera training (for five pax)<sup>3</sup>,
- Effective IT/ social media use and basic IT security.

Outputs: Objectives and priorities identified; key messages drafted.

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<sup>3</sup> On previous experience, we recommend limited combat camera training as resulting footage is typically poor quality and difficult to use. Where possible, professionally-trained camera crews will be used to ensure maximum use of video footage as well as minimising satellite transmission time.

This training session will also be attended by members of the SMC Media Office to build contacts and trust between FSA media officers/combat camera men and their counterparts in the SMC Media Office. The workshop will be led by Naji Al-Jars, a charismatic and highly respected Syrian trainer who has trained 500 media activists to date, primarily in how to document violations (stills and film camera) and write an accompanying script.<sup>4</sup>

### SMC Media Office

3 x 4 day trainings – held in Istanbul for maximum 15 members of the SMC Media Office. Specialised training may also be provided to specific staff members (web design, crisis communications, etc.).

#### Workshop 2: Communications channels and products – all staff

- Developing the core script and messages
- The communication spectrum: multi-channel publicity

#### Press officers

- Drafting press releases, lines and statements

#### Digital media – this training will take place in the Basma office

- Digital media channels: best practice and managing third party risk
- Digital editing

Outputs: Core narrative and key messages shaped into press lines; template statement and press release drafted; social media guidance

#### Workshop 3: Strategic Planning – all staff

- Forward planning grids
- Spotting opportunities and mitigating risks
- Media monitoring using print, broadcast and social media

Outputs: Grid populated with key milestones; media monitoring requirements identified.

#### Workshop 4: Media handling skills –spokespeople, press officers

- Spokesperson training: preparation for interviews
- Structure and content of responses
- Challenging questions: techniques for staying on-message

Outputs: Recorded radio and TV interviews; peer feedback forms; self assessment forms; ‘top tips’ interview guidance

In addition, three members of the SMC Media Office will be trained as digital editors to handle the raw footage coming in from the FC combat camera men. The output from all workshops will be used as content to maximise use of resources and experience.

### **Equipment purchase**

ARK has already set up a fully functioning media office in Istanbul (Basma) and is fully aware of the requirements, costs and issues involved. ARK has extensive experience in

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<sup>4</sup> Naji has trained FSA Officer Rawwad Al-Aksah (field commander north of Homs) and his three-man media team in the use of hidden cameras, how to portray leaders as charismatic, importance of leaders appearing at protests, and effective YouTube use (titles, what to broadcast and what not to broadcast etc.). Hentah (Basma supported/affiliated magazine, run by Naji), has also run a series of profile pieces on FSA fighters.

the purchase and distribution of appropriate media equipment into Syria and has Turkish and Syrian staff available to facilitate these transactions at both ends. ARK/Accadian is aware of the different satellite and bandwidth issues that arise with streaming video and has significant experience managing this and minimising costs.

### **Improved linkages between SMC and NC media offices**

ARK is well-known to and trusted by the NC and its Media Office. In July 2013, ARK ran a Media and Strategic Communications workshop on behalf of HMG for the NC Media Office and Political Committee, which was attended by Muhamad Mustafa from the SMC media office. ARK has held extensive consultations with Mustafa about the SMC's media requirements and he **requested ARK provide support to the SMC similar to that provided to Basma.**

ARK's Communications Advisor, part of the core team, is currently working with the FCO NC Communications Advisor on a media strategy for the NC. She will be 75 percent committed to the SMC Media Office and 25 percent with the NC to maximise synergies. ARK will provide the SMC with a similar training programme to the NC's. This approach supports a meeting this week between representatives of President Jarba's office (Monzer Akbik, Faiz Sara), the SMC (Louay Mokdad), interim Prime Minister Dr Ahmed Tomeh and the NC media office (Khalid Al Saleh, Sinan Hataht and UK CP-funded advisor Amil Khan) to discuss coordination and cooperation between the media offices.

In the first phase, ARK/Accadian will deliver the following activities:

- Convene an 'All Staff meeting' with members from both Media Offices.
- The Communications Advisor will develop a media planning grid for the SMC. Information will be shared at a joint weekly meeting.
- Shared distribution lists will be set up.

Other initiatives may include:

- Work shadowing and hot-desking for SMC staff in the NC Media Office.
- A familiarisation visit to a Western Press Office.
- Joint press conferences, statements and articles.

### **Additional relevant political or other factors**

General Idriss has mixed levels of support from FSA units, however, a recent pledge by Saudi Arabia to channel all financial and material support through the SMC has the potential to significantly increase its relevance with FSA units.

ARK is aware that there are plans to collapse the SMC or create a parallel institution and develop a Syrian National Army from the FSA. The new Prime Minister is assessed to be supportive of General Idriss but keen to move to establish a legitimate Syrian National Army project, which would be backed by Saudi Arabia. The ARK/Accadian team would be agile enough to flex across to the new body to build on and exploit work already done and legitimise the FSA as a disciplined and credible fighting force.