

# Syrian Underground

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1998 The Syrian people were going through a transformation. The Russian political machine was trying to turn Syria into a puppet government. The two parts of Syrian politics were the Muslims and the Christians. Both were at odds with the Russians and each other.

The Syrian underground were freedom fighters trying to hang onto their country. Their efforts were met with severe harsh treatment. Their families were gassed by the Russian-backed government. Death was an everyday occurrence. There was no rest for the people trying to fight back.

One such lady was Rana Bittar who helped set traps and roadside bombs. Her reputation as a Russian soldier killer had swept across Syria. Just her name would strike fear among the Russian invaders.

Her faithful friend was Marriya Butaram. Marriya had been trained as a bomb maker when she was ten years old. By the time she was 25 years old, she was the best they had in the underground. She was called a specialist in the fight against the Russian army.

In the city of Al-bida the underground movement had been planning a raid on the local governor's office. They wanted to make a loud statement; the people were tired of so much oppression. Their dictator had turned against the Syrian masses.

Rana was working every day to stop the Russian takeover of her homeland. Her father Alora was the son of one of the few Stavrosian men living in the area. The families were under such hardship it was necessary to relocate to a safer location. The S.G.L. could not reach them for two years. Marriya's family was under surveillance and it was getting harder to stay out of sight.

On a late night under the cover of a hard rain, Rana Bittar and Marriya Butaram with five other members of the Syrian underground went to the governor's office. Once there, they set up an explosives display to ensure that the building would collapse. Rana stated that it was about four in the morning when the explosives went off. It rocked the area. The city of Al-bida woke up to the sound of the people telling the world the fight for a free Syria would go on. Although Rana and Marriya were wanted by the Syrian police, they had never been identified by anyone. No one knew what they looked like.

Bushra Al-Assad the daughter of Hafez Al-Assad the Syrian president had at one time gone to school with Rana. She had no idea that Rana was the celebrated freedom fighter that had been blowing up government offices, attacking military checkpoints, and occupied Russian troop barracks.

On February 21, 2001 a picture of Rana had been taken at one of the sites she and Marriya had set charges. Cameras were set up near possible locations that

could well be targeted. The Russian military wanted to find the bombers that had plagued their intent to establish a Syrian puppet government. The photograph of Rana and Marriya was circulated among Syrian and Russian police. Their photos were plastered all over the news. They showed up on anything that could be used as a billboard.

The underground could see that the two would be liabilities to the movement. Even after all their service to the Syrian people and all the work they accomplished, it came down to this; it was time for them to leave the country they called home; the home they may never see again.

It was March 19, 2001 when Bushra AL-Assad found out that the bomber her father had spent so much time and money to find was her old friend. Bushra had been a good friend to Rana in school. Bushra did not approve of her father's methods and the harsh treatment of their people. Bushra sent a messenger to leave a letter for Rana. She asked Rana to contact her and that she wanted to help. Rana was afraid to contact Bushra until Marriya made it clear they had to get out of Syria. The two would need any help they could get. Rana sent a note back that she would meet Bushra at a small shop. After they met, Bushra told them she would make arrangements to get both of them out of the country. A few days later, Rana and Marriya were taken to a grass air strip near an abandoned Russian outpost. As the girls were getting out of the car, a shot was fired. Then more shots came, and the air came alive with the sound of gun fire.

General Abdul Karim had learned of the escape plan. His men were lying in wait near the grass strip. The driver of the car was killed, the two Syrian escorts were killed as they got the women on board. Shots kept striking the side of the plane. It was a rough take off. Once airborne, the two ladies could relax. Rana and Marriya were flown to Greece. Bushra had given them exit visas and enough money to pay their way to America.

On September 11, 2001 Rana Bittar and Marriya Butaram left Greece for New York. The flight was diverted to Ireland. At first, they feared they were being stopped to find them. Soon after they landed in Ireland, they found out it was over the World Trade Center. Rana cried to know that the evil she was escaping from was already at work in America.

By September 20, 2001, she and Marriya were on the ground in America. The girls have made a life for themselves. There they've raised their families. They live a quiet and peaceful life. Rana and Marriya keep with the Stavrosian way as well as hold a First Life Celebration. She did not want to give her location away. She did say their celebration for 2023 would be on Charles Mill Lake.

This interview was held on August 8, 2022

Location: Bucyrus, Ohio

Little Athens Greek Restaurant

S.G.L. Researcher

Paul Muggins