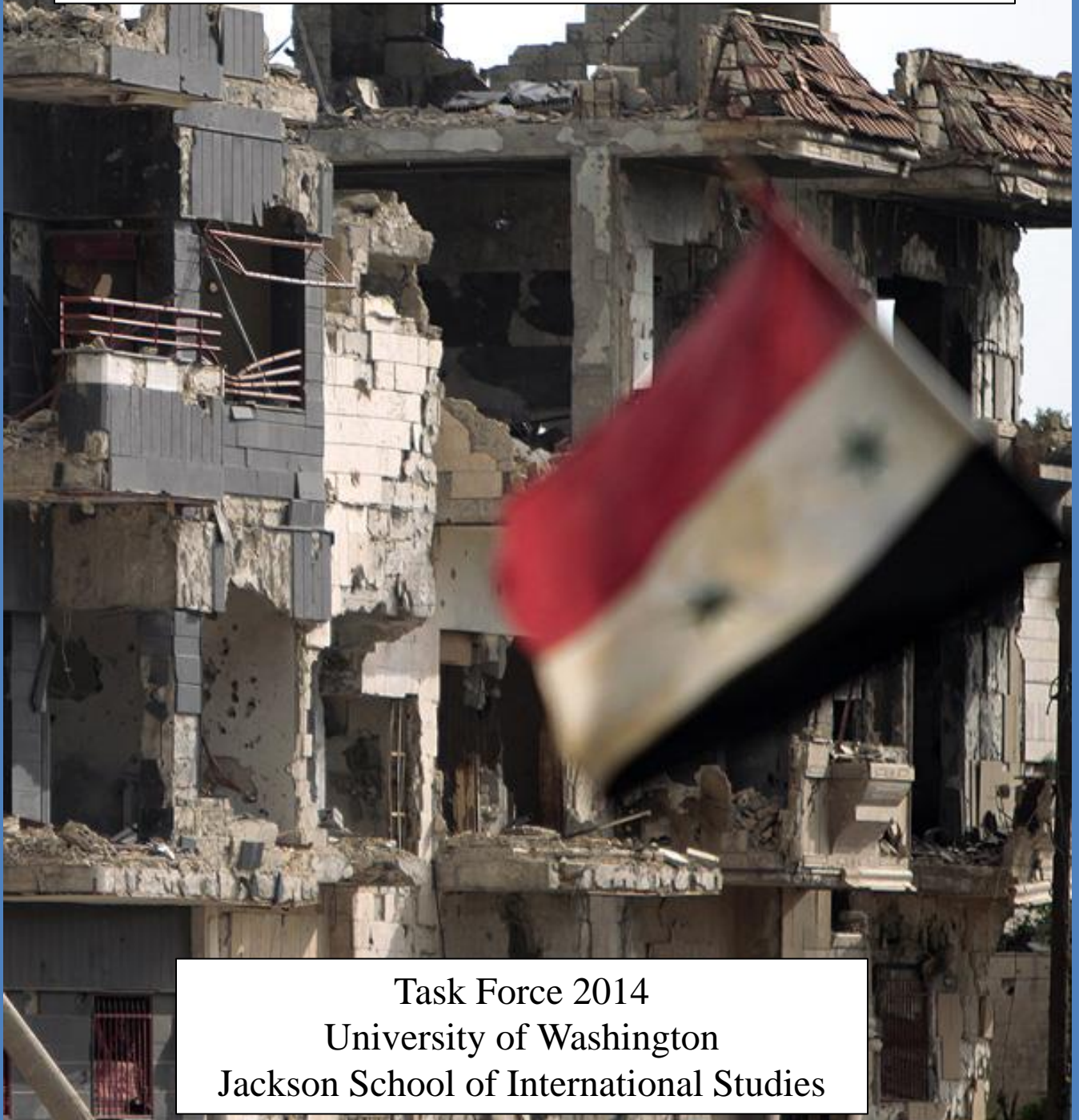


SYRIA: AMERICAN ACTION FOR A COMPLEX CRISIS



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SYRIA: AMERICAN ACTION FOR A COMPLEX CRISIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wanda Bertram and Winthrop Hubbard

Though no complex framework is needed to gauge the grave human costs brought about by three years of conflict in Syria, the crisis itself has been driven by a complex of motivations and interests across multiple systemic levels. Beginning as a nonviolent popular movement seeking reforms to Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime, Syrian protests escalated to violent means when it became clear that the government, rather than accommodating bulleted requests, would retaliate with bullets of its own. The intractability of the conflict frustrated the opposition into splitting along strategic and ideological lines. Today, the number of opposition groups in Syria allegedly exceeds 1,000, their divisions hindering outside powers from organizing an opposition front worthy of broad-based international support. Furthermore, the very support of foreign actors delegitimizes rebel groups in the eyes of many civilians, who recognize that theirs are not the most powerful interests at play in the now-international crisis.

Certain opposition parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, the Syrian Kurdish people, and members of the current National Coalition, have invited international assistance in order to level the playing field against the Assad regime's superior military assets and its support from Russia and Iran. Each of these groups must attempt to broaden its civilian support base—which demands that it make territorial gains and provide social services in a time

of crisis—while also negotiating with international supporters, who hesitate to provide lethal aid for diplomatic reasons or to increase non-lethal aid for fear of enabling terrorist activity.

In contrast, the military and financial successes of parties aiming to establish an Islamic state in Syria—most notably the Islamic Front, ISIL and al-Nusra—have been underwritten by the wealth of private donors, mostly in the Gulf states, who seek to influence the outcome of the conflict for religious reasons. These groups by and large oppose outside intervention in the war. Their hardline ideologies lend credibility to the view that the Syrian conflict is a sectarian one, ironically dissuading outside states from supporting more moderate opposition factions, as these states do not wish to aggravate existing sectarian tensions in Lebanon and Iraq. Multilateral negotiations around the Syrian conflict have progressed at a glacial pace, not only because of the threat of sectarianism, but due to rival interests surrounding developing deals in the regional oil trade.

Publicly recognizing the ongoing atrocities committed by both the Assad regime and opposition factions, the Obama Administration has expressed its wish to end Assad family rule, but wishes to see such a regime change brought about through peaceful political settlements that curb the local influence of militant Islamist groups. The U.S. has avoided unilateral military intervention in the conflict thus far so as to maintain normal diplomatic relations with Russia, China and Iran, but embraced a multilateral agreement in September 2013 to place Syrian chemical weapons under international control. Much of the American public and legislature remain opposed to intervention, recalling the legacy of turmoil left by recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the unintended escalation of NATO intervention in Libya.

Taking into account the complex international and domestic implications of the Syrian crisis, this report details U.S. and foreign interests in the war and proscribes recommendations for bringing about its end. In this crisis, no broad policy strategy can claim a moral highground,

and it is therefore in the highest interest of the United States to negotiate a swift ceasefire in Syria, rather than empowering favored factions and thereby engaging other major powers with conflicting interests in Syria's governance. To this end, the U.S. must approach multilateral negotiations by stressing interests common to all involved parties, be they parties within Syria, regional parties, or parties on the United Nations Security Council.

This report identifies three such interests. First is curbing the growing strength of designated terrorist groups, most significantly al-Nusra and ISIL, which aim to establish an Islamic caliphate irrespective of Syria's current borders. Second is normalizing conflicts and tensions which could destabilize the Syrian region at large, including the animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran and potential civil war in Lebanon, Israel and Iraq. Third is halting the entrenchment of factional divisions within Syria, since resentment on all sides makes reconciliation more distant, inflating the future expenses of war for all belligerents. It is the task of the U.S. to persuade involved parties that these shared interests outweigh individual stakes in the conflict, thus brokering a ceasefire while depriving forces on the ground of the means to continue fighting.

Before a ceasefire may be brokered, unofficial human and capital aid to the warring factions in Syria must cease, so as to convince these groups that they will not be able to achieve supremacy through violent action. As such, the borders of Syria's neighbor states must be tightened to restrict the passage of jihadist fighters or materiel, while still allowing influxes of Syrian refugees. Once disempowered militarily, Syria's domestic parties will be incentivized to either disband or come to the negotiating table, which most have been reluctant to do so far.

With all local and international parties present at negotiations, a ceasefire agreement can be reached and enforced. Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and EU members must be persuaded to halt state support to their respective proxies. Though such an agreement has not yet been forthcoming,

it can yet be achieved, if compromises are made on all sides regarding the composition of a post-conflict Syrian regime. When the ceasefire is brokered and an end to violent action is in sight, the international community should establish buffer zones to separate armed parties with territorial assets; these zones will create temporary federal regions administered by their respective occupiers.

As the federal system described above will neither represent the Syrian people's visions of governance nor establish a central state infrastructure, this system should give way as soon as possible to a transitional government. To this end, the international community should first guide Syria's administrative divisions in holding regional elections, and then summon elected representatives to a delegation to draft a national electoral system and constitution. Throughout this process Syria's governing bodies will be frail, and elections will need to be monitored by UN peacekeeping forces so as to ensure fairness and prevent violence. Though Syria's future electoral system and constitution are matters for the delegation to decide, the U.S. should encourage a system that recognizes the country's ethnic and political diversity.

SECTION I: PARTIES TO THE CRISIS

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Trenton Holmberg

From the end of World War II in 1945 to 1991, the Soviet Union and the United States were great adversaries. The global order was balanced between both powers in a bipolar system based on ideology: capitalist West versus communist East. The United States, Soviet Union, and respective client states split along ideological boundaries, along with newly emerging former colonial states, fought a cold war for ideological supremacy. This cold war caused an expansion of military and economic strength across the world. Former colonies hosted military bases or logistical points to enable greater power projection across potential theatres. One of these colonial holdings, the formerly French-controlled territory of Syria, would soon be part of the Soviet Union's and later Russia's Middle East sphere of influence.

Russia's contemporary involvement in Syria has primarily been restricted to diplomatic and material support of Assad's regime. Russian vessels transport advanced weaponry to Assad's ports, and Russian intelligence supposedly helps direct Assad's guns to targets. Along with China, its ally on the UN Security Council, Russia has worked to marginalize any attempt at discussion of Western military intervention.

The presence of Russia in Syria presents unique challenges for American foreign policy. Recognition of Russia's investments in Syria, both economic and security-related, cannot be swept aside. A plan for action in Syria must also keep in mind other issues that have attracted the

ire of the Kremlin, such as the proposed anti-ballistic missile shield in Eastern Europe, and U.S action in the ongoing Ukraine crisis. The Russian bear in the room cannot be ignored.

BACKGROUND

Russia's history with Syria extends back to the Soviet Union, whose "alliance" with Syria was more of a friendship wracked with occasional disputes. Relations between the Soviet Union's government and the Ba'ath party have been described as "a relationship based on strategic interdependence rather than ideology."¹ In June 1976, the USSR and Syria quarreled over the latter's military intervention in the Lebanese civil war, particularly over their support of the Maronite Christians against the Soviet-backed Palestinian Liberation Organization and its affiliates.² In return, Hafiz Al-Assad expelled half of his Soviet military advisers, and ordered the Soviet Navy to remove submarines and support vessels from the port at Tartus that same year.³

Despite the diplomatic conflicts between Syria and Russia in the 1970s, their relationship had improved by the time Bashar al-Assad took power and has deepened since. As of 2006, approximately 10,000 Syrian military officers have been trained in Soviet and Russian academies, and up to 2000 Russian military advisers are working with the Syrian military.⁴

Throughout the Syrian conflict, Russia has supported the Assad regime at the United Nations, where it has worked with China and rallied for support from the other BRICS states to stall Security Council resolutions advocating for military intervention.⁵ An October 2011 resolution, which advocated a Syrian-led political process and condemned human rights abuses, was vetoed by both Moscow and Beijing.⁶ Another similar resolution was vetoed in February 2012.

The relationship between Russia and the United States, meanwhile, is somewhat strenuous. Russia has opposed efforts to exercise either NATO, EU, or American power in its former satellite states, namely Ukraine and the Central Asian ‘-stan’ states. This dispute has been exacerbated by President George W. Bush’s withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty in 2002, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Russia has also been involved in several high- and low-profile influence and espionage operations against the United States. There are allegations, though no definite proof, of a connection between Russian intelligence services and the recent information leaks attributed to former NSA analyst Edward Snowden. Russia has been complicit in other espionage operations, the most notable being the “Illegals Program” ring cracked by the FBI in 2011.⁷ The goal of this program was suspected to be to gather intelligence on American policy circles, and these deep-cover agents were willing to wait long periods of time in order to achieve their objectives. With such transgressions in mind, we must not attempt to marginalize Russia in discussions involving Syria.

Russia's interests in both Syria and the Levant are largely related to issues of national security, military power projection, and energy security. Russia's *Concept of the Foreign Policy of Russia*, last modified on February 12, 2013, defines overall Russian foreign policy as achieving the following goals:

- Providing security for the country, maintaining sovereign and territorial integrity, and 'securing high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles of the modern world';
- Creating conditions favorable to Russian economic growth abroad, as well as fostering innovation, improving the quality of life, strengthening rule of law and democracy, and ensuring human rights globally;

- Promoting international security and stability, using the UN Charter as a base, and emphasizing the role of the United Nations in global affairs;
- Promoting 'neighborly' relations with bordering states, and assisting them in preventing tension and conflict;
- Establishing mutually beneficial and equal relations with intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and states;
- Promoting Russian culture abroad; and
- Promoting global peace.⁸

Russia also advocates reducing the role of the use of force for international security purposes. Despite this, Russia has supplied Bashar Al-Assad's government with weapons systems through Rosoboronexport, but Rosoboronexport claims that there have been no deals signed since 2011, and current weapons deliveries are part of earlier deals.⁹ Weapons being delivered range from small arms to tanks, heavy munitions, helicopters, and aircraft.

Aside from the economic gains from arms deals, Russia's interests in the region are largely based in national security. The Soviet-era naval base in Tartus, the only Mediterranean base for the Russian Navy, is another sticking point for Russian involvement in Syrian affairs. Primarily, the reason for Russia's involvement in Syria is its concern about militant Islamist spillover from Syria, in the event the Assad government collapses or is replaced by a government friendlier to anti-Russia extremists.

Russian government officials have claimed that the reason for their interest in and support of Bashar al-Assad's government is that existence of ultra-conservative Islamic factions fighting against them.

This hatred towards ultra-conservative Islamic mujahedeen is nothing new in Russia. Since 1994, Russia's Caucasus territories have been the site of a major conflict. Once a dispute

over Chechen nationalism, the conflict has risen to Russia's version of the War on Terror. Russia sees contemporary (post-First Chechen War) Chechen militants as crusaders for the formation of a Caucasus Emirate, led by a variety of warlords, including Doku Umarov, "Russia's Osama bin Laden."¹⁰

In general, the behavior of former Soviet satellite states constantly influences Russian policy making, especially where negotiations with the West are considered. The recent outbreak of revolution in Ukraine and subsequent Russian invasion are fault lines for U.S. policymakers to keep track of.

Russia's source of influence and power overall comes with its having the largest territorial claim on Earth, with an area of 16,377,742 square km and a population of 142,500,480.¹¹ This landmass has yet to be completely prospected for natural resources, but current proven reserves of oil are expected to be 80 billion barrels, 8th in overall global proven reserve rankings.¹² More significant still is Russia's proven natural gas reserves, estimated to be 47.8 trillion cubic meters, the highest amount of proven reserves in the world.¹³ Despite great economic issues that handicapped it soon after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia is considered a major emerging economy, a member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) regime. Russia is 7th in global GDP rankings, with \$2.486 trillion in 2012 dollars.¹⁴

In Soviet times, the military was one of the largest in the world, considered a direct contender to the combined forces of NATO, even before additional Warsaw Pact forces were added to its ranks. (Citation needed.) While the collapse of the Soviet Union reduced Russia's potentially deployable forces, Russia still has 35 million men and as many women available for military service.¹⁵ In addition, Russia is an NPT-designated nuclear weapons state. More than 1,480 strategic nuclear warheads are deployed and 1,022 non-deployed; 2,000 tactical weapons make up their total nuclear armament, in addition to thousands of other warheads currently in the

process of being dismantled.¹⁶ Russia's navy, however, has been an important—and voluntary—contributor to the Combined Maritime Forces and the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR). Though its assistance is not irreplaceable, Russia's support of the mission reassures it of its ability to participate in pertinent, inclusive global issues.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Energy and Other Private Investments in Syria

Russia's influence in Syria derives mostly from its \$4 billion in arms deals with the Assad regime, as well as other forms of aid that have been granted over an extended period of time, even before the civil war began.¹⁷ Its stake in the country economically is around \$19.4 billion, with \$1.1 billion in exports to Syria, amounting to less than .002 percent of Russia's \$528 billion export sector.¹⁸ Russian companies involved in Syria include:

- Tatneft (Oil company, engaged in extraction and exploration)
- Inter RAO (Alleged, though company denies it)
- Sovintervod (Water engineering company)
- Stroitransgaz (Natural gas construction and maintenance)
- Rosoboronexport (Arms exporting, engaged in \$4 billion worth of arms deals, state-owned)¹⁹

On December 26, 2013, Russia and Syria signed a deal that provided for Russia's prospecting and development of 2,190 km² of sea off Syria's coast, for natural gas and oil extraction and refinement. Russian company Soyuzneftegaz has announced that it will be paying surveying and test drilling costs.²⁰

B. Responsibility To Protect (R2P)

In 2009, Russia's position on the Responsibility to Protect initiative was that armed resolution should be considered a final option, only to be used in extreme cases to prevent genocide. In other situations, Russia considers comprehensive assistance to states and preventative diplomacy to be of greater focus than military force.²¹

In 2013 a member of the Russian mission to the United Nations clarified this view, commenting:

“We cannot agree with attempts to base military action against Syria on narrow concepts of so-called ‘humanitarian intervention,’ which have no basis in international law, and are not generally recognized and they go against the letter and spirit of the Charter (UN Charter) and we are convinced that the Syrian conflict can be resolved only through discussion and good faith work to end the suffering of the Syrian people.”²²

C. Arms Deals with Assad

Syria received 72 percent of Russia's arms exports between 2007 and 2011. However, it has been largely unable to pay dues on existing arms contracts, leaving it with \$3.6 billion in arms-related debt.²³ Recent Russian weapons packages given to Syria have trended towards anti-aircraft systems, namely the Buk M-2 (NATO: SA-17 Grizzly) and Pantsir S-1 (NATO: SA-22 Greyhound) systems; as well as Bastion-P coastal defense systems.^{24 25} There have also been reports of Syria acquiring the advanced S-300 (NATO: SA-20 Gargoyle) system, though it is unknown if these are deployed or ready for deployment.²⁶ Since Syria has been unable to pay up front for Russian arms, Iran has been suspected of footing the bill for them. Iran has signed defense pacts with Syria since before the insurrection began, and deepened their partnership by smuggling weapons through Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon, underscoring allegations of its underwriting the Russia-Assad arms deal.

D. Chemical Weapons

Though Russia desires less U.S interaction in Syrian affairs, it is jointly committed to eliminating the threat of chemical weapons. Russia is providing transport and security for the weapons as they are transferred to ships, ships escorted by Russian naval vessels. Russian vessels are also in the area for the protection of shipments of conventional arms to the Assad regime. The reason for Russia's drive to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria is largely to appease the West, which threatened violence against the Assad regime if chemical weapons were used again.²⁷

Despite Western complaints that the timetable for weapons removal must be moved up, Moscow claims that the current deadlines set for removing Syria's chemical weapons "do not need revision."²⁸ Syria has already missed the February 5 deadline to turn over its weapons to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW.) Russia's ambassador to the UN has stated that, among the reasons for the delay, there were threats made against the disarmament team.²⁹

E. A No-Fly Zone

Russia does not wish to see U.S. soldiers on the ground in Syria, meaning that a no-fly zone, whether or not it is backed by NATO, will elicit a negative response from the Kremlin. Russia's stated objection to the no-fly zone is that it is illegal: "I think we fundamentally will not allow this scenario," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich has said. "All these maneuvers about no-fly zones and humanitarian corridors are a direct consequence of a lack of respect for international law."³⁰ Lukashevich also noted Russia's desire to avoid the 'mission

creep' that affected NATO's Libya campaign, and its concern that a no-fly zone will snowball into another regime-change mission.

F. Militant Islamist Movements

The U.S. and Russia share an interest in mitigating the threat posed by militant Islamist movements. However, Russia sees supporting the Assad regime as the best way to blunt the threat. It sees many of the foreign fighters now in Syria as exportable, potentially adding to threats against the Russian government in Chechnya and Dagestan, which have already been compounded by terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamist militants against Russian citizens. Assad's government thus serves as a bastion of Russian security.³¹

Doku Umarov, a Chechen Islamist militant who has been referred to as "Russia's Osama Bin Laden," was reportedly killed in January.³² He is—or perhaps was—leader of the Caucasus Emirate, an independent, unrecognized Islamic state organization in Russia's North Caucasus mountain range. Attacks including the Moscow Theater Siege (2002), the attack on Beslan School No. 1 (2004), the suicide bombing at Domodedovo International Airport in Moscow (2011), and the bombings in Volgograd in December 2013 have all been perpetrated by militant Islamists from the North Caucasus. These attacks have led Russia to claim that their support of Assad is primarily for security purposes, as these militants are highly mobile, and may put their skills learned in Syria to use in Russia if the conflict ends and the demand for imported fighters evaporates.

G. Polish/Eastern European Missile Shield

The proposed "Aegis Ashore" missile shield in eastern Europe is an issue of contention between Russia and the United States. According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, such a

missile defense system on Russia's doorstep greatly threatens its national security and runs the risk of sabotaging earlier arms control and reduction agreements.³³ The initial and most controversial plan for the missile shield would have placed silo-based ballistic missile interceptors in Poland, but this plan was discontinued in 2009. The plan that succeeded it envisions smaller, non-silo-based missiles, but it has not placated Russia. Putin's final word on the entire missile defense issue was that “No one should have illusions over a possibility of taking military advantage over Russia. We will never allow this.”³⁴

H. Ukraine

The United States has been a stalwart defender of Ukraine's sovereignty in both the past, and present. Though there are concerns now largely related to the current protests. The United States wishes to see that democratic institutions and the rule of law succeed here.³⁵ Russian intervention of any form in Ukrainian politics is a constant threat, and there is potential that Moscow could use Ukraine as leverage in negotiations about Syria.

Of primary concern to the U.S. is Russia's intent on using Ukraine's debt to them as leverage in economic negotiations. As of February 10th, 2014, Russia has made repayment of \$2.7 billion in unpaid natural gas bills a condition of their overall \$15 billion economic bailout package to Kyiv.³⁶ The Euromaidan, or “Euro Square” protests erupted after the discussion of an association agreement between the European Union and Ukraine was put on hold in 2013. Ongoing reports of police brutality, and allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Ukrainian government and groups connected to it have dominated foreign news headlines.

Russia's involvement with Ukraine is primarily due to Ukraine's legacy as a former Soviet Socialist Republic, and the presence of several major gas pipelines originating in Russia that pass through Ukraine to consumers in Eastern, Central, and Western Europe. According to

Ukrainian First Deputy Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov, the Ukraine and the EU will sign an association agreement later this year (2014.) However, Russia considers Ukraine a potential member of its proposed Eurasian Union, their own variant of the European Union.³⁷ Protesters are concerned that Russia will military intervene if (now former) Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich concedes to their demands for stronger relations with the West. This concern is valid, as Russian Presidential Aide Sergei Glazyev has mentioned that Russian intervention in Ukraine would be legally justified under the provisions of the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons of 1994³⁸ Russia sees the United States as an unwelcome actor in Ukrainian politics overall, and this concern is repeated in Syria.

As of March 2nd, 2014, Ukraine's Crimea region has made repeated efforts to reassert their status as an autonomous region. Reports of pro-Russian militias and purported Russian armed forces deployed in Crimea have dominated Western headlines^{39,40}. Ukrainian leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk has ordered a full military mobilization, saying the country is "on the brink of disaster."⁴¹ President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have both announced that 'there will be costs' to Russian intervention in Ukrainian affairs. In response, the Russian legislature has asked for Putin to recall the Russian ambassador to the U.S.⁴²

I. Base in Tartus and Security of Russian Nationals

The Russian base at Tartus has been regularly confused for being an actual naval base. In truth, it is more of a dedicated military section of the entire Syrian port.⁴³ The base in Tartus has existed since 1971, serving as a refueling and resupply point for Russian submarines, surface ships, and cargo vessels in the Mediterranean Sea. Modernization plans are supposedly in the works, with then-Commander in Chief of the Russian Navy Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky

reporting “The first stage of development and modernization will be completed in 2012.” Since then, the only modernization that has taken place has been dredging of the harbor.⁴⁴

Modernization aside, Tartus is itself still a major port. It is classified as a ‘full service, deep water commercial port’ that can load and unload rolling stock, (railroad cars) bulk cargo, intermodal containers, and liquids to and from vessels up to 120,000 tons.⁴⁵ The naval portion of the port is officially designated a “Navy Sustainment Center,” and can support all vessels in the Russian Navy except for its aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov⁴⁶. Repairs for vessels can be made by the Sevastopol-based repair vessel PM-138, which is regularly hosted in Tartus. However, the base is still lacking command and control capabilities, in addition, there are limited crew-support capabilities, and the city of Tartus proper lacks public services to support Russian sailors. If Russia wishes to use the facility as a base for operations in the Mediterranean and abroad, much more construction will have to take place.

However, there have been some recent security concerns involving the base. The Free Syrian Army’s chief of staff has threatened to interpret Russia as an ‘enemy country’ and attack its naval vessels.⁴⁷ Their stated rules of engagement would be to not attack the base, but the vessels supplying the Assad regime with weapons and experts. If the base were to come under attack by the Free Syrian Army, or any faction aligning itself with the anti-Assad movement, Russia would logically defend its property. Russian general staff have threatened that they do have the capabilities for an ‘appropriate response.’⁴⁸ It is unknown at this time that said ‘appropriate response’ may mean Russian ‘boots on the ground.’ Russia already has 10 to 15 naval vessels near Tartus, though these vessels may be purposed for a potential helicopter-based evacuation of Russian citizens from Syria.

POLICY DISCUSSION

The United States must take a careful approach when it comes to dealing with Russia, as the latter retains a deep and complicated attachment to Syria. Of particular importance is Russia's insistence on Syria as an important component of national security strategy. Given the number of attacks on Russian civilians that can be linked to Islamic extremists, it may be impossible to convince the Russians to agree to any policy that involves removing Bashar al-Assad from power. At the second round of the Geneva II peace talks, Assad's representatives made good on their promise not to entertain any discussions of Assad's removal.⁴⁹ Russia's geopolitical influence and commitment, in both funds and materiel, to Assad's government suggest the futility of any approach that eliminates or marginalizes Russia from the Syrian conversation.

If intervention in Syria becomes American policy, the U.S. should be mindful as to what degree it will intervene. A no-fly zone along the lines of Operation Deny Flight, the 1995 NATO no-fly zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina, would undoubtedly provoke the Syrians into firing on American aircraft, leading the U.S. becoming a belligerent in the war. Russia worries that this form of intervention could snowball into a Syrian version of the events in Libya, where U.S. and European forces engaged in air strikes against military equipment not related directly to the safety of aircraft. Rules of engagement in a Syrian no-fly zone would have to be strict, as Russian citizens have not yet been evacuated from Syria, and any damage to Russian property, such as the base at Tartus, should be avoided at all costs.

If a decision not to intervene is reached, the U.S. should not use non-intervention as an excuse to ignore the situation's implications regionally and globally. Given that as of March 2014, Russian legislators are demanding the recall of their ambassador to the United States in response to harsh diplomatic language from high-level U.S officials, the window for finding a comprehensive solution with Russia in Syria is closing fast.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Annie Wang

Given the dramatic changes in the international system since the end of the Cold War, China's modern multidimensional diplomacy parallels its rising global position and has expanded beyond its immediate regional neighborhood, establishing a foundational influence within the global community. Diplomatic relations between China and Syria were established in 1956, though activity between the two countries was generally limited to small weapons deals until the early 2000s. The Chinese embassy in Damascus remains one of the last standing to still host its diplomats in spite of the ongoing war, symbolic of China's pledge to maintain a diplomatic presence in Syria.⁵⁰ Although so far China has acted in support of the Assad regime, primarily out of its perceived lack of other stable alternatives, it would embrace any resolution to the conflict achieved through a political process. It is in the U.S.'s interest to align with China in pursuing movement towards a stable transition government that could ensure regional stability.

BACKGROUND

China feels that it must be actively involved in Middle Eastern affairs as a whole in order to protect its interests, particularly regarding its mounting demand for oil and energy. Chinese relations with Syria were still in their infancy in the years leading up to the Syrian conflict, but activity had flourished in the first 11 years of this relationship. Upon taking power in 2000, the

Assad regime initiated a series of economic and military deals with China. From 2003 to 2010, arms sales from China to Syria totaled \$600 million.⁵¹ By 2011, China had risen above even Russia to become Syria's biggest trading partner, with \$2.4 billion in exports.⁵² Under Assad, China has also become a critical contributor to Syria's burgeoning oil sector and state economy. Such contributions began in 2003 with China's state-owned and largest energy company, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), securing a \$108 million exploration and development deal for the Gbeibe fields. CNPC has since made two more impressive acquisitions: 38 percent of Syria's Al-Furat Petroleum Company (AFPC) in 2005; and 35 percent of the Syria Shell Petroleum Development (SSPD) in 2010.⁵³ Sinochem, another large Chinese state-owned energy company, has stakes to nearly 40 percent of Syria's most productive oil field, the Khurbet East field.⁵⁴ China condemned Western sanctions on Syrian oil production and exports when they were implemented in 2012.⁵⁵ It allegedly moved to assist the Assad regime through an \$84 million purchase of Syrian crude oil, even after the U.S. and EU sanctions were in place, offering the regime a rare break from its increasing economic and political isolation.⁵⁶

China's ability to leverage increasing economic, political and military advantages to further its strategic aims poses an undeniable threat to the current global order. China holds legitimate suspicions towards the United States for trying desperately to curb its growth and sphere of influence. As Syria and China both function under autocratic political systems, ideology is certainly a factor in China's refusal to military intervention. Refraining from meddling in the internal affairs and sovereignty of other states is one of Beijing's key principles in foreign policy.⁵⁷ Chinese foreign policy has traditionally been hypersensitive to "international policies that 'interfere' in sovereign decisions because of sensitivities to perceived international interference in [China's own disputed territories of] Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang."⁵⁸ As a result, China will staunchly oppose any action that could set a precedent for future intervention in an

autocratic country under the pretense of humanitarianism. Furthermore, with entrenched economic interests in the Middle East, checking the United State's influence in the region would also help secure long-term sources of crude oil, fulfilling China's spiking energy demands.

Standing up against military intervention in Syria is seemingly uncharacteristic of China's typically low profile diplomacy. However, China's new leadership has implied the departure from a reactive to a more preemptive, proactive foreign policy. In his last keynote report to the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress before stepping down from power, Chinese president Hu Jintao noted that the country needed to develop a military force commensurate with its current international standing.⁵⁹ He further stressed that it was important "to establish a new type of relations of long-term stability and sound growth with other major countries." This statement indicates China's eagerness to realize its global leadership potential beyond the realm of economics. The removal of Syria's chemical weapons, which involved China despite its never having conducted prior naval missions in the Mediterranean, is considered a milestone in international cooperation. The relative success of this effort speaks to the future of cooperative security initiatives, and China's participation to its increasingly proactive global policy.

On January 20, 2014, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who will also lead China's participation in the Geneva II, put forth China's five principles for political resolve of the Syrian dilemma, as follows:

1. China reiterated its firm stance against international military intervention and support for a political solution derived from the interests of the Syrian people.
2. China called for international commitment to the national sovereignty of Syria, stating that a political transition must not serve the interests of foreign influence.

3. China supports the inclusion of all involved parties within Syria, and the prioritization of halting the carnage before combating terrorism or restoring local stability.
4. China stresses the importance of national reconciliation within Syria in parallel to any process of political transition; a task, which though daunting, is key to preventing “acts of ethnic, religious and sectarian discrimination, instigation and retaliation.”
5. China emphasizes the need for providing humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians and refugees. On this point, Wang notes that all engaged parties within Syria must fully accept obligations to carry out relief subsidies, and that the delivery of humanitarian aid cannot be militarized.⁶⁰

Endemic in all formal statements released by the Chinese government is a sense of vagueness and extreme simplification, reflective of their intentions to preserve a shallow surface level of engagement within the Syrian situation.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Preventing The Formation Of An Islamic State

The prevention of the formation of a radical militant Islamist state is inarguably a shared interest of both China and the United States in the resolution of the Syrian situation. Despite being sparsely populated, China’s most eastern province of Xinjiang is considered to be its “Muslim State,” with 45 percent of the population Uighur, a Muslim Turkic-speaking ethnic group.⁶¹ The province has a history of “anti-Han” dissent and protests against the Chinese government date back to the 1990s. As China becomes increasingly engaged in regions engaged with Islamist insurgencies, such the Middle East and North Africa, it is increasingly concerned about becoming the next target of militant Islamist groups. Because of its ties with north African

regimes abhorred by al-Qaeda, China has already attracted the attention of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a group suspected to be one of al-Qaeda's biggest and best-equipped affiliates.⁶² It is in China's interest to prevent ideological and material networking between Xinjiang separatists and any radical Islamist groups, including the militants operating in Syria.

B. Regional Stability

China imports more oil from the Middle East than any other country in the world. Aggregately, in order starting from greatest, imports from Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq have compromised just about half of China's daily imports of 5.6 million barrels.⁶³ As China's energy needs continue to grow robustly and dependency on the Middle East develops in congruency, it has acted on a sense of urgency to cultivate stronger political, economic, and diplomatic ties within the region. China realizes that although the U.S. has a strong presence in the Middle East, it is by no means embraced throughout the Arab world. Being perceived as a more responsible, credible, and mutually beneficial alternative is high on China's agenda in the Middle East.

Since resuming diplomatic recognition of Saudi Arabia in 1990 after 40 years of isolationism, China's relationship with the former has steadily evolved on many fronts. Figures from 2012 show that the primary motives driving deeper relations are \$73 billion (and growing) in annual trade. Saudi Arabia leads China's overseas oil suppliers, comprising 20 percent of its crude imports.⁶⁴ China is the second largest importer of Saudi Arabian goods, trailing the U.S. by less than one percent; commensurately, China is their largest supplier, responsible for 13.5 percent of total Saudi imports.⁶⁵ As China reshapes the international status quo, settling into its new position of political and military influence, it gives Saudi Arabia an alternative to the U.S. in business and security partnerships.

Saudi Arabia's un-muted reservations towards the fall of the Assad regime have forced

China to carefully consider its ties in the Middle East. At a meeting in late December of last year, Chinese and Saudi officials discussed the Syrian crisis, regional development, and expanding trade ties, with China releasing a “Four Supports” Pledge to Arab Countries shortly after. The pledge can be summarized in its four tenets:

1. China respects the national sovereignty of the Arab nations, opposing international intervention in internal affairs;
2. China supports political solutions to regional conflicts;
3. China supports developing mutually-beneficial economic relationships with Arab nations;
4. China supports the interests of Arab countries in enhancing their international positions and strengthening their global influence.⁶⁶

Interestingly, however, China’s oil import patterns have seen increasing diversification recently. A changing makeup of crude suppliers in 2012 increased imports from Iraq by 2.5 percent, while trimming dependency on Saudi Arabia and Iran, albeit by less than one percent.⁶⁷ The stagnant nature of oil imports from the latter two countries pales in comparison to double-digit increases experienced in the several years prior. Diversification could be the result of heightened regional tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as the two are engaged in a deep dispute regarding the Syrian situation. China must be attentive to this delicate balance, or risk destabilizing its key sources of crude oil.

The relationship between China and Iran rests on similar mutual interests in energy. Despite UN Security Council sanctions, China has emerged as Iran’s top economic partner in both trade and investment in the last several years. In 2009, China became Iran’s largest export market, comprising 22.1 percent of exports; and its second largest source of imports, at 13.8 percent.⁶⁸ Iranian oil exports tanked by a third as a result of intensified UN and EU sanctions in

2012; however, Chinese companies readily stepped in to fill the void. From 2011 to 2012, China's share increased from one third to one half of all Iranian oil exports, which in turn made up 20 percent of China's total oil imports. Ongoing Chinese projects in the Azadegan and Yadavaran fields, which promise \$26 and \$3.4 billion in reserves respectively, have helped Iran maintain economic activity after the crippling effects of the 2012 sanctions.⁶⁹ The incentives for China to partner with Iran are not purely economic: pursuing a closer alliance with Iran enables China to strategically counter U.S. influence in the Middle East. So far, China has respected Iran's support of the Syrian regime, and encourages the inclusion of Iran in finding political resolve for the Syrian War.

China's presence in Iraq has intensified on all fronts in the wake of the Iraq War. China is Iraq's third largest trade partner, with an import share twice as large as that of the U.S.⁷⁰ China is also preparing to overtake the U.S. as Iraq's chief oil client, leading to speculation of an emerging "Beijing-Baghdad Oil Axis." Such a relationship would bear crucial implications not only for the pertinent countries involved, but also for the global oil economy at large, as Iraq is set to soon become the world's second greatest oil producer.⁷¹ China's current investments within Iraq are among its largest and most quickly progressing. In mid-2008, after the end of the Iraq War, China revived investment pursuits that it had initiated before the war, and CNPC clinched a 23-year, \$3 billion deal set to explore and develop the al-Ahdab oil field. This deal was Iraq's first major foreign oil contract since the U.S. invasion, and represented China's deterrence of competing Western companies also interested in Iraqi oil.⁷² Since the al-Ahdab deal, China has secured access to three additional oil fields, leading the competition.⁷³ Iraq's tendency to lean towards the East as opposed to the West in oil deals can be ascribed to the state-owned nature of China's oil companies, which can accept a lower return than can the mostly private companies of the West.⁷⁴ China's intimate involvement with Iraq's primary economic

sector has additionally consolidated its position in the country. With now deep-rooted investments in Iraq, spillover from the Syrian war instigates grave fears from China's big oil companies. As their investments in Iraq are now deeply rooted, China's big oil companies gravely fear the spillover of Syrian violence in Iraq.

C. Humanitarian Aid

Resolving the humanitarian crises in and around Syria is a priority for all parties to the Syrian conflict, but while China has acknowledged the dire circumstances and called upon the international community to provide aid, its own contributions have been slim.⁷⁵ Total contributions from China stand at a mere \$3.3 million worth of blankets, which were delivered early in January to be distributed by the Syrian Red Crescent.⁷⁶ Such a measly contribution from the world's second largest economy speaks to China's unwillingness to make bold movements, which could provoke accusations that it is no longer neutral. The Assad regime presents a direct obstacle to delivering humanitarian aid, and convincing China to pressure Assad for relief opportunities would be a worthwhile move.⁷⁷

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

A political settlement, agreed upon by domestic actors within Syria without the interference of external pressures or military action, would be an ideal resolution of the Syrian crisis. China maintains this ideal and is staunchly opposed to any kind of military, political, or even humanitarian intervention in the civil war. It has also taken a firm position against the implementation of sanctions on the Assad regime, fearing that sanctions could directly cripple

the Assad regime. Should the U.S. strike the Assad regime or make any unprecedented moves, it runs the risk of jeopardizing the tone of current U.S.-Chinese relations. China's global economic prominence and rising political and military influence have transformed its affairs with the U.S. into the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century. Although suspicion ran high in this relationship near the end of Hu Jintao's tenure in 2012, the first two years of China's new administration, led by General Secretary Xi Jinping, have been marked by striking efforts towards reconciliation. The last three decades saw an enormous expansion of trade and economic relations between the U.S. and China, which makes deepening positive ties with China a top U.S. priority. As of 2013, China is the largest U.S. import market, at 19.3 percent; and its third largest export market, at 7.5 percent.⁷⁸ Additionally, the United States is running a \$269 billion dollar deficit with China, which also holds \$1.3 trillion in Treasury Securities, helping the U.S. maintain a lower interest rate. China is estimated to be a \$300 billion market for the private investment sector.⁷⁹ Reciprocal investment has also begun in recent years, with \$14.5 billion from Chinese firms last year.⁸⁰ The U.S. and China are more deeply economically engaged than any other existing bilateral partnership, and there is no indication that this codependence is slowing down. Common interests at stake include \$500 billion in trade, \$315 billion in direct bilateral investments, and a rising number of people to people exchange each year. Whether the two powers will support a common, cooperative vision for international peace and development, or diverge as interests compete, is an ongoing debate amongst experts on both sides. However, ignoring China's warnings and pursuing an attack on Syria would seriously threaten long-term U.S.-China relations, sending it on a course of unsparing competition in a changing global system.

China is should not be considered a full-fledged supporter of the Assad regime; it does, however, see the current regime as the only viable option for maintaining regional stability. As

China has forged ties with various nations in the Middle East, attempting to leverage regional alliances in negotiations with China would not play favorably for the U.S. Making concessions on alternative issues—particularly directing U.S. focus away from China’s own disputed territorial, human rights, and security issues—could encourage China to ease its opposition to sanctions. Its opposition has already seemingly softened during the Geneva talks, as China’s ambassador labeled the prospect “a delicate process” rather than directly shutting it down.⁸¹

The U.S., then, should detach itself from immediate demands of Assad’s removal and ensure commitment to terms of non-intervention. As unity was witnessed in the Security Council only after removing condition of economic sanctions, the United States should continue towards a political resolution of the Syrian War. Chinese cooperation, as seen with the approval of UNSCR 2139, looks to be on the horizon.⁸² The U.S. should also encourage China to be more actively engaged in the process of delivering humanitarian aid. As a country looking to garner international respect as a responsible superpower, it should have an interest in playing a co-leading role in resolving the humanitarian disaster in Syria. If the U.S. were to extend invitation for coordinated humanitarian assistance or possibly even ceasefire missions, China could be more inclined to support such efforts to preserve a mutual interest of regional stability.

Recommendations

- Reassure China that no military or foreign intervention will take place and negotiate for them to refrain from blocking internationally collaborative cease-fire efforts.
- Encourage China to be more active in the process of resolving the humanitarian crises, whether it may be through additional contribution or leveraging economic pressure on Assad, forcing him to permit motion of humanitarian operations.

- Partner with China in negotiating for a reliable and stable transitional alternative to the Assad regime that could ensure regional stability

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Veronica Jimenez and Winthrop Hubbard

Several close U.S. allies are among the EU's member states, and during a crisis such as the Syrian civil war, an alignment of U.S. and EU interests can bolster their policy proposals in multilateral negotiations. It is therefore in the interest of both parties to agree on shared interests and policy strategies with respect to Syria as soon as possible. At the outset of the Syrian conflict, a meeting of the EU External Action Service concluded by supporting a political reconciliation between Syria's warring factions, followed by a peaceful move to a transitional government. It also supported comprehensive aid to remedy the war's humanitarian casualties.⁸³

Though the broad interests of the EU in Syria align with those of the U.S.—curtailing the influence of jihadist groups, achieving a ceasefire and transitional government, and attending to the needs of civilians—the two parties suffer from recently strained relations. Key EU members such as France and Germany have expressed a reduced trust of the U.S. in the past year, largely as a result of American intelligence controversies. However, these tensions do not alter the U.S. and EU's common security concerns, nor the essential value of their cooperation in negotiating a ceasefire agreement with Russia and China, filling the gaps in regional state need for humanitarian aid, and pressuring Syria's neighbors to tighten border security and halt the flow of funding to jihadists.

BACKGROUND

Syria's current relationship with the European Union has been largely defined by the Cooperation Agreement of 1977. In this agreement, signed by both parties, the EU sought to promote social and economic development in Syria by establishing three areas of cooperation: financial, technical and economic.⁸⁴ More recently, in 2004, the EU expressed its wish to "develop a closer relationship with Syria, which would provide for political dialogue, mutually beneficial trade and investment relations, and cooperation on economic, social and democratic reform."⁸⁵ However, the EU was reluctant to sign a trade agreement with Syria because of the latter's unstable political climate at the time, and voiced strong support for Syria's domestic reform process.⁸⁶

In 2011, mounting concerns over the Assad regime's radical Islamist opponents in Europe led to the EU imposing an arms embargo on Syrian rebels.⁸⁷⁸⁸ While it supported a regime change in Syria, the EU wished to avoid empowering Islamic militants, who stood to destabilize its economic assets in the region and to threaten the security of its member states. In 2013, wary of the steady escalation of the Syrian conflict, the EU issued economic sanctions on the Assad regime, banning oil exports from Syria and freezing other trade and financial transactions.⁸⁹ Today the EU recognizes the National Coalition as Syria's legitimate government-in-exile, and encourages it to participate in peace talks that could usher in a transitional government and an end to the civil war. Like the U.S., the EU is supporting the rebel factions which it believes can represent the Syrian people, combat the rising Islamic militant insurgency and bolster regional stability, and support Western interests in the Levant.⁹⁰

The EU's federalist structure does not prohibit member states from acting independently or disagreeing on foreign policy, as they have done with respect to the Syrian crisis. European

states continue to pursue their own national interests regarding the crisis, while attempting to influence Union-wide policies. Most member states have treated Syrian refugees as security threats rather than providing them with sanctuary or passage. Germany's offer to accommodate 10,000 Syrian refugees is modest, but still more than the offers of all other EU members combined.⁹¹ German chancellor Angela Merkel, furthermore, did not support military intervention in the Syrian conflict. However, many initiatives that the EU does support—most notably those encouraging the establishment of a transitional government without Assad—have floundered in the UN Security Council, due to vetos by Russia and China. It is therefore in the best interest of the EU to coordinate its policies with those of the U.S. as it seeks to bring an end to the Syrian civil war.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Sanctions and Military Action

The European Union maintains that action must be taken in response to the gross human rights violations by the Assad regime,⁹² and has leveled sanctions against the Syrian government. These include sanctions on oil, any products relating to the creation or use of arms, heavy financial measures, and luxury goods.⁹³ However, it has not maintained such restrictions on arms sales to the rebel forces, dissolving the embargo established in 2011 in May of 2013.⁹⁴ Though no EU members admit providing arms directly to Syrian rebels, the end of the ban suggests that these states are not interested in seeing moderate rebel forces disarmed. France and the UK, in particular, pushed for the ban's dissolution, and France pledged to support the Syrian opposition with non-lethal aid.⁹⁵ At the same time, France and the UK have recently become more conservative in their stance on intervention. The British parliament has voted not to support any

military intervention, while France states that it will intervene only if the Syrian government fails to eliminate its chemical weapons.⁹⁶

Chancellor Merkel has established that Germany will not be involved in any sort of military intervention in Syria, insisting on the possibility of negotiating a political solution.⁹⁷ Merkel recommends that other EU states follow Germany's lead in accommodating additional Syrian refugees, and that they increase their humanitarian aid to Syria's neighbors, which are managing large refugee populations.

B. Diplomatic Action

Setting forth its objectives for the Geneva II Peace Conference, the European Council on Foreign Relations outlined three broad goals. First was to identify all international parties with vested interests in the conflict, so as to facilitate communication between actors concerned with negotiating a resolution.⁹⁸ Second was to respond in a timely manner to the humanitarian needs of victims and refugees.⁹⁹ Third was to encourage formal recognition of and communication between domestic parties, thus facilitating dialogue between these parties to make each more amenable to a peace agreement.¹⁰⁰ Though doubt was cast over the achievability of all of these goals, the first round of talks indicated that the regime might allow for humanitarian intervention where it was most needed. The Syrian government decided to allow confirmed non-belligerents to leave the area of Homs, as well as agreeing to release certain prisoners of war, including women and children who were being tortured.¹⁰¹ As the Geneva talks have ended without further progress, formal multilateral diplomacy has paused, but it is likely that EU leaders are continuing to meet with their counterparts in Russia, China, the U.S., and the Middle East.

C. Threats of Terrorism

Terrorism has become an area of concern for the EU in the context of the Syrian crisis, as European jihadists who have joined the conflict could return to Europe and threaten domestic security.¹⁰² Of the fighters who have already returned from Syria to EU states, some are proven to have been trained by al-Qaeda, and to have returned with the intent of committing acts of terrorism in their respective states, specifically the UK.¹⁰³ Responding to such discoveries, France and the UK have begun working together to discourage young Muslim citizens from going to Syria and joining militant Islamist groups.¹⁰⁴

D. Management of Syrian Refugees

As the crisis continues, EU member states must attempt to control increasing numbers of refugees entering the Union. Many Syrian refugees in Turkey have begun to migrate to Europe, creating potential economic and social costs for EU states, while the EU's policy thus far has been to support refugee populations through monetary aid rather than asylum.¹⁰⁵ EU states have donated millions of dollars to refugee aid funds, but remain hesitant to increase available spots for refugees, and have increased security infrastructure and personnel on their Turkish and Greek borders to deter refugees.¹⁰⁶ The UNHCR, meanwhile, hopes to resettle 30,000 of the most affected Syrian refugees, in part by pressuring EU states to make more spots available.¹⁰⁷ Though certain states have agreed to work with the UN to alleviate the refugee burden, they reserve the right to determine their degree of commitment, and the UK has been particularly reticent in this regard. As other EU members willingly take part in the UNHCR resettlement program, the British Parliament has already determined that the UK can only accommodate and care for 500 Syrian refugees.¹⁰⁸ It has also established that permanent resettlement will not be granted, and that refugees will be sent home as soon as Syria has returned to a stable condition.¹⁰⁹

E. Opposition to NATO or Western Military Intervention

In 2011, popular protests erupted in Libya and escalated into civil war, a situation to which the Syrian crisis has been compared. The Libyan crisis prompted a UN and NATO response, which included a no-fly-zone, and which paved the way for an intervention by NATO on behalf of the Libyan rebels. Certain EU states took a leading role in addressing this conflict, both diplomatically and militarily, but their strategies for resolving the Libyan conflict cannot be repurposed in the current Syrian conflict.

EU member states see an intervention in Syria as less feasible and less agreeable than intervention in Libya, for multiple reasons. First, the Libyan movement that opposed the Qaddafi regime was unified in its demands (an end to state-sponsored violence and a replacement of the government), just as Libya's neighboring countries were unified in their support of a NATO intervention.¹¹⁰ Western support of the Libyan rebels echoed this unity, and parties agreed on their "responsibility to protect" the Libyan people through military action. Second, prior to the Libyan crisis, the EU depended on Libya for 10 percent of its oil imports, and was thus highly interested in returning the country to stability as swiftly as possible. Third, the EU feared that anarchy in Libya would prompt an overwhelming wave of Libyan and Sub-Saharan refugees to Europe.¹¹¹ In contrast, international support of the Syrian opposition is hardly unanimous,¹¹² and NATO is not willing to implement a "no-fly zone" if there is risk of a Russian or Iranian counter-intervention.¹¹³

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

Though EU member states have not yet agreed on a unified response to the Syrian crisis, the interests of these states in Syria align more than they conflict. Recognizing the complexity of the crisis and their own limited military capabilities, the EU's members overwhelmingly favor a political, rather than military, resolution to the civil war. They wish to continue efforts at diplomacy, in the tradition of the Geneva I and Geneva II peace talks, in which European representatives act as mediators. They support moderate Syrian opposition groups, and will likely continue to provide non-lethal aid to these groups with the assurance that the aid reaches its intended recipients.

Thus far, attempts by the European Union to sway UN policy towards the removal of Assad have failed, but a stronger partnership with the U.S. in Security Council meetings could advance the interests of both parties. In the event that a ceasefire is reached in Syria and a transitional government ushered in, EU member states stand to contribute instrumental refugee aid, pressure on Turkey to tighten border security, diplomatic enforcement of a ceasefire, oversight of buffer zones, and public shows of support. As previously mentioned, the EU includes some of the U.S.'s closest allies, and the U.S. should draw on these allegiances to harness EU support for its response to the Syrian conflict.

Recommendations

- Encourage EU member states, particularly the UK, France, and Germany, to work with and support the U.S. in outlining terms for a ceasefire, stressing that this partnership is essential to proposing Security Council resolutions that Russia and China will support.
- Urge EU member states to contribute further financial and logistical aid to the UNHCR fund for Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.
- Request that EU member states pressure Turkey to tighten border security, leveraging

their provision of further aid for refugees in Turkey.

TURKEY

Alexis Chouery

Due to its unique location between Europe and the Arab world, Turkey has remained politically and economically distinct from its neighbors since the end of the Ottoman Empire. Today it employs a foreign policy that favors its alliance with NATO while attempting to establish economic and cultural influence over Arab neighbors such as Syria. Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011, Turkey has maintained an open border policy towards Syrian refugees, and will house some one million refugees by the end of 2014.

As the conflict continues, Turkey's refugee burden will only increase, especially given the tightening of border security in other states neighboring Syria, and this growing burden strains Turkey's economy and could potentially destabilize its civil society.¹¹⁴ It is in the interest of Turkey, but also of its neighbors and NATO allies, that it secure the means to care for its refugees while prohibiting their migration into Europe. Improving security in Turkey's refugee camps and on its unstable southwestern border, where Sunni terrorist groups are known to smuggle and recruit, is therefore instrumental. However, the Turkish government has avoided punishing these groups, out of a shared interest in subduing the local Kurdish population. U.S. policy towards Turkey in the context of this crisis must therefore convince the latter to tighten its borders, and to become more amenable to the likely establishment of a semi-autonomous Kurdish region in Syria.

BACKGROUND

Turkey has been a NATO member since its induction in 1952 and a member of the EEC since 1963.^{115 116} Its current government, led by the conservative and moderately Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP), has maintained ties with the U.S. since the end of WWII and the two share positive diplomatic relations.^{117 118} Turkey's support, whether overt or tacit, of any and all opposition groups in the Syrian crisis could thus be seen as an attempt to maintain good relations with the West. Its lax approach to the presence of radical Islamist groups in its border region has drawn international criticism, especially as these groups may pose a long-term threat to Western-backed governments such as Turkey's own.¹¹⁹

Historically, relations between Turkey and Syria have been troubled by Turkish attempts at regional hegemony, issues of Kurdish autonomy, and mutual exploitation of the Euphrates river for water.¹²⁰ Their relationship warmed in the 1990s and 2000s after Syria relinquished its support of the PKK, which the Turkish government considers a terrorist organization, and after wars in Iraq “gradually drew Turkey and Syria closer over the threat of Kurdish separatism.”¹²¹ Both states have struggled with their Kurdish populations for the better part of a century, and the Turkish government's historic discrimination against its Kurdish minority have blocked it from gaining EU membership. Throughout the Syrian crisis, the Turkish government has publicly ignored brutal acts by ISIL against Turkish Kurds.

Though the U.S. and Turkey share an interest in promoting democracy in Syria, thwarting terrorism, and maintaining regional stability, the U.S. has not pursued Turkey's proposals for military initiatives to further these interests, such as proposals for a NATO no-fly zone. Turkey hesitates to intervene in Syria on its own without the approval of NATO or the UN, and is wary

of instability in its armed forces following a 2006 attempt within the military to oust the the Justice and Development Party.^{122 123 124} A more aggressive military policy, however, could help Turkey secure its border both from threats to Syrian refugees and from terrorist groups moving between the two states.

Turkey has maintained an open border policy towards Syrian refugees since the beginning of the conflict. Its unusually comfortable refugee camps, called “Cadillac camps” by some outside observers, show off Turkey’s economic prosperity and set a high standard for other camps still in the making.^{125 126} The camps have become a burden to the economy since refugee numbers in Turkey started exceeding initial projections, far surpassing the government’s originally-stated “red line” of 100,000.¹²⁷ As such, the unilateral mentality that shaped Turkish refugee policy at the beginning of the conflict has begun to lose support.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Caring for Refugees

The UNHCR projects that there will be 4.1 million Syrian refugees by the end of 2014, of which Turkey will be home to one million, according to United Nations estimates.^{128 129} Currently, Turkey harbors 515,202 registered Syrian refugees, with 202,000 living in camps and 313,000 not in camps, though the total population is likely much larger due to the number of refugees thought to be unregistered.^{130 131} About 36 percent of Syrian refugees in Turkey are living in camps throughout the country’s south and southeast provinces, while the remaining 64 percent are living in cities across the country.¹³² Outside the camps, refugees face enormous challenges in accessing essential services, and their living conditions are very often substandard.¹³³

The UNHCR has requested \$4.2 billion to care for all of the refugees from Syria, and Turkey has turned to the UNHCR to help plan for future refugee sites.^{134 135} By the end of 2014, approximately 300,000 refugees are expected to reside in Turkish camps, and 700,000 in Turkey outside the camps. The state's need for outside aid, which will rise to around \$522 million by the end of 2014, has become increasingly burdensome to the economy.^{136 137 138} The government has spent \$2 billion on refugee care so far, while receiving only \$180 million in aid from Europe and \$41 million from the U.S.^{139 140} The cost of this growing refugee population has forced Turkey to reject major refugee transfers from time to time, while officially still following its open border policy.¹⁴¹

Since not all refugees in Turkey agree to register, and Turkey has arguably taken on more refugees than it can accommodate, the government “has begun a novel approach known as Zero Point Distribution. Food and basic hygiene necessities are left right at the Syrian border (i.e. the Zero Point) with the hope that Syrians will be able to subsist off this assistance yet remain in Syria.”¹⁴² The aid is placed away from official crossing areas in order to avoid goods falling into the hands of the Syrian Government.¹⁴³ In order to prevent too many major refugee transfers, some small and medium-sized camps have been constructed in Syria close to Turkey.¹⁴⁴

B. Security Concerns

Syrian refugees in Turkey's border regions face increasing security issues.¹⁴⁵ As the influx of refugees increases, areas in Syria near the Turkish border become more populous and territorial battles in these areas grow more intense. Turkish armed forces have attempted to keep young males in refugee camps from “popping in and out of Syria—whether to fight or to check on family.”¹⁴⁶ Designated terrorist groups, including ISIL and al-Nusra, have set up guarded checkpoints on the highway from Aleppo to the southeastern Turkish cities where refugee camps

are established. The camps themselves allow anyone in or out, further jeopardizing their security. Safety concerns have thus incentivized large numbers of registered refugees in Turkey to settle outside the camps, sacrificing easy access to food, medical care and other goods.

The flux of jihadist fighters along Turkey's southwest border has also become a concern. Jihadist fighters entering Syria from the north usually move through Hatay, landing at an airport mere feet from the Syrian-Turkish border and crossing it easily. Turkey also serves as a key transit point for private donations from Kuwait and other Gulf states to Sunni terrorist groups in Syria.¹⁴⁷

C. E.U. Relations

Turkey maintains an unclear level of regulation along its border with the EU, and it is possible that unregistered refugees are crossing through Turkey to Spain, Italy, or Greece, which are the most common destinations for immigrants from the Middle East. Many of these countries are not responding to requests to accommodate additional refugees, so many refugees who have reached the EU are stuck inside their point-of-entry country. This influx of refugees imposes significant costs on EU member states, which are already struggling to recover from recent economic crises. To maintain positive diplomatic relations with the EU while preserving its image as a leader in the Middle East, it is in Turkey's best interest to secure its borders, while requesting financial and logistical aid for its own refugees from international parties such as the UNHCR.

D. Kurds in Turkey

The Kurdish community in Syria is currently battling for autonomy in Rojava, its self-proclaimed territory in Syria, and currently comes into frequent conflict with ISIL. ISIL is

attempting to both conquer the territory of Rojava and to subdue the Kurdish people across state borders, as it allegedly “sees the Kurds as ‘heretics’ and an obstacle to setting up an Islamic ‘caliphate’ stretching from Iraq, which borders [Hasaka], to Syria.”¹⁴⁸ The Turkish government, which would benefit from a weakened PKK, has neglected to punish ISIL and other designated terrorist groups targeting the Kurds, and has allegedly even enabled these groups.

The establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region in Rojava could pave the way for an expansion of Kurdish autonomy in Turkey, and as such, the Turkish government has attempted to curb Rojava’s independence during multilateral talks.¹⁴⁹ It sparred with the Kurdish Supreme Committee at the Geneva II conference, demanding that the KSC rescind its declaration of territorial autonomy, while the KSC asked that Turkey “immediately cut their support for Nusra Front and other radical Islamist groups, which had been supplied by the AKP government.”¹⁵⁰ However, in order to secure admission to the European Union, Turkey must prove to Brussels that its sectarian government is treating all citizens humanely—including the Kurds. As such, Turkey is trying to demonstrate its humanitarian efforts to the global community by highlighting its accommodation of Syrian refugees, drawing focus away from its mistreatment of the Kurds.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

As Turkey’s growing refugee burden threatens the stability of its economy, it is in the interest of Turkey and its allies—including the U.S.—to alleviate this burden through increased logistical and financial aid and stricter border security. Unless the Syrian refugees in and around Turkey are provided with security and essential services, these refugees will continue to seek settlement in Europe, placing financial strains on members of the EU. Furthermore, tightening

border security in Turkey is essential to establishing peace in Syria and the Syrian region, as it will stem the shipment of aid to terrorist groups across Turkey's borders.

So far, the UNHCR fund for Syrian refugees has provided aid to Turkey, but donors to this fund must be incentivized to contribute more lest they fall far short of the \$522 million goal. Turkey's relationship with Israel, in particular, is currently warming thanks to Israel's payment of reparations to Turkish citizens, and Israel could capitalize on these improvements by helping alleviate Turkey's financial need. At the same time, the U.S. should recognize the potential of leveraging its assistance to Turkey in order to secure the latter's cooperation in tightening border security. The international community must pressure Turkey to take a harder stance against designated terrorist groups operating near its southwestern border, particularly since these groups pose a long-term security threat to Turkey itself.

Ankara has already voiced support for a UN-regulated buffer zone in northern Syria, which would curtail terrorist activity near Turkey's borders, shelter many internally displaced Syrians from harm, and help enforce a possible ceasefire. The proposed buffer zone would stretch approximately 20 km into Syria from Turkey, encompassing Road 215, a highway to Aleppo that is currently controlled by designated terrorist forces. As Turkish armed forces are deployed to the border to tighten security, they must work closely with international troops helping to enforce the buffer zone. These will include UN peacekeeping forces from states without vested interests in the Syrian conflict, so as to avoid civilians and non-Western states perceiving the buffer zone as an American intervention. Implementing a NATO no-fly zone in northern Syria would also provide much-needed assistance in enforcing the buffer area, but widespread international opposition to a no-fly zone makes this policy option dubious.

Recommendations

- Leverage the deliverance of a large refugee aid package to persuade Turkey to secure its borders against the movement of jihadist fighters and weapons in and out of Syria.
- Specifically, urge the deployment of Turkish armed forces to bottleneck the west coast border area of Hatay, preventing additional jihadists from entering Syria.
- Establish UN peacekeeping forces at the Turkish entrance to Road 215, so as to sever weapons shipments into Syria, maintain the security of refugees traveling from Aleppo to Turkey, and mitigate the influence of jihadist groups along Syria's northern border.
- Propose the assistance of UN peacekeeping forces from states without high stakes in the conflict—such as Morocco, Malaysia and Indonesia—in securing Turkey's borders and potentially implementing a buffer zone.
- Strengthen overall security within refugee camps to avoid fighters moving in and out of the camps freely, or being recruited to armed groups from within the camps.
- Encourage the use of Zero Point Distribution to assist refugees currently being turned away from Turkish camps.

LEBANON

Melanie Eng and Kell Brauer

Lebanon and Syria have been intertwined throughout history as independent states, with Syria often participating as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force in Lebanese politics. Syrian troops occupied Lebanon for almost three decades during the Lebanese Civil War, and Syria has been implicated in clandestinely meddling in Lebanon's domestic politics. The Syrian Civil War is no different: refugees and jihadist fighters are now spilling over the Syria-Lebanon border, and threaten to destabilize Lebanon's fragile regime.

Still haunted by the specter of its own bloody civil war, Lebanon is poised once again on the precipice of calamity. With the influx of millions of Syrian refugees, Salafi jihadists bombing civilian communities, sectarian tensions climbing daily, and a deadlocked government unable to maintain effective law and order, Lebanon stands a very real chance of deteriorating into a full-fledged proxy battleground for the Syrian civil war. It is in the interest of the U.S. to forestall such a situation; in doing so, it should pursue a two-track policy toward Lebanon that mitigates the destabilizing effects of the Syrian refugee crisis on Lebanon's economy, infrastructure and national security, while simultaneously bolstering the Lebanese national military's capacity to curb jihadist violence.

BACKGROUND

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, Lebanon among other states in the Middle East was devised by European colonial ambitions which divided the Middle East among the victors.¹⁵¹ Present-day Lebanon and Syria were awarded to the French, and in 1943 during World War II the Vichy French government conceded to Lebanese demands and gave Lebanon its independence. Lebanon had the mixed blessing of being the most diverse state in the Middle East; Lebanon had a little over half its population as various Christian denominations (Maronite being the largest) and the half Muslim, about equal parts Shi'a and Sunni.¹⁵² After receiving independence Lebanon relied on an "elite pact" enshrined in the National Pact between the Maronite Christians and the Sunnis to assuage the fears of a single group ruling at the expense of the others in which seats in the parliament were divided on a 6:5 ratio between Christians and Muslims.¹⁵³ Executive positions were also divided along confessional lines: the president was to be Maronite Christian, the prime minister Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the parliament a Shi'a Muslim.¹⁵⁴ In 1958, the pact encountered its first major challenge when Maronite President Chamoun refused to break off relations with the West after the 1956 Suez Crisis, despite protests by Muslims within Lebanon to support Arab solidarity and Sunni Prime Minister Karami's call for Lebanon to join the short-lived United Arab Republic.¹⁵⁵ An uprising in 1958 by Arab nationalists and communists led to U.S. troops being deployed in Lebanon.¹⁵⁶ Following the 1958 Lebanon Crisis, there was a period of peace in Lebanon that, where Lebanese banks flourished and Beirut was known as "the Paris of the Middle East."¹⁵⁷ This would prove to be the calm before the storm however, as in 1975 Lebanon would become embroiled in a fifteen year civil war that would kill over 120,000 people and destroy most of the country.

The Lebanese Civil War was a perfect storm in which grievances from multiple domestic factions and regional players played out in Lebanon. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, some

400,000 Palestinian refugees settled in southern Lebanon. Black September in 1970-1971 evicted the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) out of King Hussein's Jordan, where they resettled among the large Palestinian population in southern Lebanon and began recruiting. Upsetting the delicate sectarian balance in Lebanon, the PLO advocated for a redistribution of parliamentary seats, as the 1943 National Pact did not accurately represent the larger Muslim population in Lebanon and the decreased Maronite population from emigration.¹⁵⁸ These grievances reached the boiling point in 1975, when violence broke out between the Maronite Phalangists and a Muslim coalition between the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the PLO. Hostilities between the PLO and Israel led to a limited Israeli incursion in 1978, and a larger invasion of southern Lebanon proper in 1982.¹⁵⁹ Afraid of losing the port of Beirut, Syria intervened on behalf of the Lebanese Christians; Syrian troops would continue to occupy Lebanon even after the war ended. With the Tai'f Agreement in 1989, equally divided seats in parliament between Muslims and Christians placated the various militia groups, who all disarmed except for Hezbollah. Hezbollah claimed that it was Lebanon's defender from Israel, and thus did not need to disarm.^{160 161} In 2005, following possible Syrian involvement in the assassination of prime minister Rafic Hariri, a popular Lebanese movement put pressure on the Lebanese government to withdraw Syrian troops which had been in the country for almost twenty-nine years.¹⁶² In 2006, Hezbollah militia captured Israeli soldiers in an attempt to swap them for Israeli-held Lebanese prisoner, which precipitated a war between Israel and Hezbollah.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, massive protests against the regime organized by Hezbollah started a seventeen month standoff which concluded with the Doha Agreement of 2008.¹⁶⁴

The current government of Lebanon is delicately balanced. Since the minority has eleven of the thirty ministers in cabinet under 2008 Doha Agreement, Hezbollah can directly prohibit executive action unilaterally by vetoing the president's mandate.¹⁶⁵ Thus, Lebanon's government

has been gridlocked along sectarian lines and Prime Minister Najib Makati has been unable to form a cabinet due to pressure from both anti-Assad and pro-Assad camps after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011.¹⁶⁶ Frustrations with the situation eventually lead Makati to resign and for the past eleven months, Lebanon has been without a prime minister or a cabinet.¹⁶⁷ On February 15, 2014, Tammam Salam, the new prime minister of Lebanon, announced the formation of a twenty-four member cabinet that spanned Lebanon's wide political spectrum.¹⁶⁸ Critics attest that the cabinet is "made of shattered glass" and will "choke on the first meeting," but it remains to be seen if the new Lebanese cabinet will prove more functional than the non-existent one that preceded it.¹⁶⁹

In Lebanon's multi-faction government, two main alliances have emerged: the March 14 Alliance that opposes the Assad regime, and conversely the March 8 Alliance that supports Assad.¹⁷⁰ With large numbers of Hezbollah fighters crossing into Syria to defend the Assad regime and oppose the "takfiri" Sunni extremists, Sunni extremist organizations such as al-Nusra have responded by striking Hezbollah positions in Lebanon, such as a string bombing of Hezbollah districts in Beirut on January 21, February 2, and February 3, 2014.^{171 172 173 174} On January 27, a new branch of the ISIL was officially established in Lebanon, and it along with al-Nusra in Lebanon and the Abdullah Azzam Brigade declared war on "Rawafid, Nusairis, the army of the cross, and the descendants of the Salul clan," pejorative terms to refer to Shia, Alawis, the Lebanese Army and the House of Saul, respectively as well as the "Party of Iran" (Hezbollah).¹⁷⁵ These three extremist organizations have pledged to attack Hezbollah bastions wherever they lie, including outside of Beirut in Lebanon, in response to the crimes perpetrated by Hezbollah on Sunnis in Syria.¹⁷⁶ The Syrian conflict has spread across the border into Lebanon, where a weak and gridlocked government will most likely be unable to contain it.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Caring for Refugees

Lebanon houses the world's largest number of Syrian refugees, who now comprise one fifth of its total population¹⁷⁷. More than 1 million refugees have fled across the Lebanese-Syrian border since 2010, swelling Lebanon's small population by 25%.¹⁷⁸ This number is projected to reach 1.5 million by the end of 2014.¹⁷⁹ Many refugees are living with Lebanese families in Beirut, the southern Bekka Valley and in rural northern communities, while others seek refuge in the 250 informal tent settlements scattered along the Syrian-Lebanese border.¹⁸⁰ The unmitigated influx of Syrian refugees is taking a heavy toll on Lebanon's economic and social stability, straining its infrastructure and overloading an already-struggling healthcare system¹⁸¹. The United States recently pledged \$76 million in humanitarian aid to Lebanon over the next year, but this will only make a small dent in the projected \$7.5 billion needed to offset damages to the country's economy and infrastructure in 2014¹⁸²¹⁸³. Effective aid distribution and access are ongoing challenges, as many refugees are scattered throughout the country and remain hard to reach in local communities¹⁸⁴.

The Lebanese government's open border policy is at odds with its refusal to house the deluge of incoming Syrian refugees in formal shelters or camps. This policy, based on fears of a permanent resettlement upsetting Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance (since the majority of Syrian refugees are Sunni Muslims), is not without precedent: Palestinian refugees that established formal camps during the 1948 Israeli-Palestinian war intended to stay for a month, and ended up staying for the next 65 years.^{185 186} They now comprise 10 percent of the domestic population.¹⁸⁷ What's more, Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps have historically fostered the development of resistance groups like the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), whose

presence in Lebanon dragged the country into armed international conflict, strained relations with its neighbors and became the grounds for violent foreign invasion.¹⁸⁸ Sequestering Syrian refugees into clearly marked, formal camps may also leave them vulnerable to easy identification and attack by their opponents, with no effective means of escape.

The refugee crisis in Lebanon is projected to hit its economy with a \$7.5 billion loss by the end of 2014.¹⁸⁹ The greatest burden is shouldered by impoverished Lebanese families who are forced to shelter Syrian refugees, but already struggle to feed, clothe and house themselves.¹⁹⁰ The increased demand for food and housing has driven up the cost of living in places where poverty already runs rampant, while the surplus of cheap labor offered by desperate refugee workers are driving wages down.¹⁹¹ Poverty and unemployment levels are expected to double in coming months, while overcrowding and lack of sanitation systems in rural areas pose an immediate risk of waterborne diseases, measles and tuberculosis.¹⁹²¹⁹³

B. Spillover Violence and the Rise of Lebanese Sunni Jihadist Groups

Syrian refugees settling in Lebanon are self-segregating by sect, bringing strong hostilities into their new communities and aggravating existing sectarian divisions that now threaten to undermine the country's delicate ethno-religious balance¹⁹⁴. Tensions are especially high where Sunni Syrian refugees have integrated into Lebanese Shiite communities.¹⁹⁵ The resurgence of sectarianism in Lebanon manifests most threateningly in the growing power of Salafi jihadists who were once marginalized by the country's moderate Sunni community.¹⁹⁶¹⁹⁷ Influenced by their new Syrian compatriots and angry at Hezbollah's involvement in the neighboring civil war, increasing numbers of Lebanese Sunnis are joining forces with the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Jabhat al-Nusra, and most recently, Lebanese ISIL to carry out lethal

suicide bombings in Shiite communities around Beirut and in Hezbollah-dominant civilian areas in the Bekka Valley.¹⁹⁸

Most recruits are young, disenfranchised Sunnis who come from the country's impoverished areas (namely the Northern Governorate, Sidon in the south, and various Palestinian refugee camps) where job opportunities are scarce, social services are crumbling and overall quality of life is very poor.¹⁹⁹ These fighters view Salafi radicalism, and its vision for a new Islamic Lebanese state, as a welcome opportunity to change the squalid conditions of their everyday lives.²⁰⁰ The growing power and influence of these jihadist groups in Lebanon is exacerbated by the inability of the gridlocked Lebanese government and weak national military to police extremist violence within the country²⁰¹.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

Unlike the situation in Syria, the U.S. currently has an opportunity to snuff the sectarian fire burning in Lebanon before it spirals out of control and brings down the fragile Lebanese government. A breakdown of law and order in Lebanon would not only be a humanitarian disaster, but would pose a massive security risk for U.S. allies in the region, namely Israel and Turkey. In the long-term, a dysfunctional or non-existent Lebanese government could pose a similar problem to U.S. security as the lawlessness in Somalia, where al-Qaeda affiliated militants could train for operations against the U.S. and its interests abroad.

In order to preserve the Lebanese regime, the strain from the refugees on Lebanon as well as growing Sunni extremism must be addressed. The former of the two issues is the most straightforward to accomplish. Increasing not only the U.S. contribution to Lebanon but also

encouraging other nations such as those in the European Union and the Arab League will help offset the massive economic blow refugees are supposed to take in the following year on Lebanon's budget. Likewise, increasing the penetration and effectiveness of the disbursement of aid to individual families will alleviate some of the strain of accepting refugees as well as supervising the construction of formal refugee camps in communities that are oversaturated with refugee populations. Finally, officiating a timeline could help relieve Lebanese fears of a permanent resettlement of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Considering the fragile and delicate nature of the Lebanese demographic balance in Syria, a twenty-percent permanent increase in their population could have disastrous effects regarding the survival of the current 1:1 confessional division of Lebanese Parliament. Maronite Christian militants participated in a fifteen year civil war when their hold on power was threatened by Muslim calls for an equal distribution of seats in parliament, it stands to reason that a similar course of action will be pursued should they believe that a permanent resettlement of Syrian refugees would lead to further calls for the seat division to represent demographic realities in which the Maronite Christians would represent the minority.

The proliferation of Sunni extremists in Lebanon is a more complex issue to address. A U.S. military intervention, whether backed by NATO or acting unilaterally, may seem a viable option and most effectual for preventing Lebanese collapse as the U.S. did in 1958. However, the Beirut barracks bombing in 1983 which killed 241 American soldiers is in much more recent memory and with the current political climate in the U.S. against military intervention in the aftermath of the Iraq War, domestic support for an intervention seems unlikely. Furthermore, Hezbollah, now a full-fledged and popular political party in Lebanon, would undoubtedly oppose any direct U.S. military action in Lebanon.

The alternative to a U.S. military intervention is supporting the current Lebanese military which has been targeted the Sunni extremists. As aforementioned, Hezbollah is a part of the current government in Lebanon and seen as a legitimate defender of Lebanon by many Lebanese Muslims. As such, undoubtedly some U.S. materiel and funding given to the Lebanese Armed Forces would find its way into the hands of Hezbollah, indirectly supporting an organization that the U.S. has explicitly labeled as terrorists. Israel, a close U.S. ally, would also greatly oppose funding of the LAF, since some materiel will likely find its way to Hezbollah, which is a sworn enemy of Israel. However, unlikely though it may seem, Hezbollah and Israel actually have common cause against the growing Sunni extremism in Lebanon, as both are considered enemies of al-Nusra and the ISIL in Lebanon. Supporting the LAF and indirectly Hezbollah may seem atrocious to Israel's security, but it is the lesser of two evils, as a stable Lebanese state with Hezbollah is preferable to a collapsed Lebanese state overrun with militants from multiple factions.

Recommendations

- Back the Lebanese government's initiative to set up a \$1.6 billion World Bank and UN sponsored fund at Geneva II for non-humanitarian aid to mitigate the economic and structural impacts of the refugee crisis in Lebanon.[51]
- Increase targeted humanitarian aid to Lebanon to meet UNHCR standards for 2014
- Improve administrative capabilities of on-the-ground aid agencies to ensure Lebanese families in hosting communities receive benefits.
- Send trained medical personnel, vaccines and technical equipment to bolster health facilities in areas with high refugee concentrations.

- Support the construction of formal Syrian refugee camps to alleviate the burden on local communities.
- Send financial/technological aid to strengthen the Lebanese Armed Forces, which are currently too weak to fight the escalating power and influence of radical groups throughout the country, and too small to adequately secure national borders.
- Construct an economic stimulus aid package to facilitate job creation and structural improvements in Lebanon's impoverished communities, where disenfranchised Sunnis are defecting to violent jihadist groups as their only vessel for change.

SAUDI ARABIA

Daniel Maggioncalda

Saudi Arabia's massive oil export trade and its antagonism towards multiple Shia regimes in the Middle East have made it not only a historic U.S. ally, but a party with vested interests in the outcome of the Syrian conflict. Tensions between it and Iran have risen as the crisis has progressed, since the deposition of Assad could curb current Iranian economic developments and reduce its overall influence in the region, while Assad's remaining in power could have the reverse effect on Saudi Arabia. At stake for Saudi Arabia in the long term is the docility of its Shia minority population, who live mostly in the country's oil-rich regions, and whom the government believes could pose security threats if Shia influence in the region is not limited. While it therefore aims to support the Syrian opposition forces as much as it can, Saudi Arabia also takes care to restrict the departure of its citizens to the jihadist front in Syria, to avoid both angering its Western allies and empowering anti-Western jihadist groups.

The U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia stands to be strengthened or atrophied by this crisis, and U.S. intervention in Syria would reassure Saudi Arabia of the continued alignment of their interests. An interventionist strategy would require further military cooperation between the two parties, while the sting of continued non-intervention could be soothed by promises to improve the U.S.-Saudi partnership on other economic and security fronts.

BACKGROUND

Saudi Arabia's position in this conflict is deeply intertwined with its historical relationship with Iran. On the surface, the conflict between the two states could be classified as a religious one, as Iran is governed by a Shi'ite theocracy while the Saudi government is predominantly Sunni. Throughout the conflict, Saudi jihadists have been caught trying to join Sunni militant groups in Syria.²⁰² There is, however, another reason why these two states remain in such fierce political competition.

Saudi Arabia's Shia population represents only 12 percent of the total,²⁰³ but is largely concentrated along the Persian Gulf coast, where most of the Kingdom's crude oil reserves are located and where the U.S. military has established an array of bases and outposts.²⁰⁴ Oil accounts for 45 percent of Saudi GDP, 80 percent of budget revenue, and 90 percent of its exports.²⁰⁵ In recent years the oil trade has helped to boost the nation's GDP per capita, with GDP per capita in 2012 registered as \$30,500, 45th among all nations.²⁰⁶ While Saudi Arabia's Sunnis and Shi'ites alike benefit from its oil reserves, Iran suffers from international sanctions and a starved economy, though the Iranian nuclear deal hinted at in recent negotiations would begin to ease sanctions and allow more Iranian crude to reach global markets. Saudi Arabia is actively competing with Iran for influence throughout the Middle East. It has much to lose if Iran reaches a nuclear deal and re-enters the international market, or if it is allowed to proceed with the construction of an oil pipeline from its Gulf coast to Syria's Mediterranean coast,²⁰⁷ as both would bolster the political and economic influence of Iran in the region.

The oil trade has aligned U.S. and Saudi interests for half a century, but today the U.S. market for Saudi oil could be shrinking. Saudi Arabia's oil exports to the U.S. in 2012—roughly

500,000 barrels—were significantly less than the 650,000 barrels exported to the U.S. only 10 years earlier.²⁰⁸ With the United States investing more heavily in natural gas drilling, domestic energy production has surged. Natural gas production in the U.S. has grown 25 percent in the last decade.²⁰⁹ Should this trend lead to a steep drop in American purchases of Saudi oil, it could erode the trade relationship between the two—a trade, simply put, of Saudi oil for American weapons.²¹⁰ The Saudi regime could subsequently find itself directly threatened by the restless Shia population along its Gulf coast, particularly if there were a simultaneous increase in Iranian (and therefore Shia) influence in the region. Without the economic stability provided by eastern oil reserves, revolts and threats of secession from the Shia minority could spike, leading to a domestic crisis. There is evidence that the Saudi government is already worried about such a crisis, as it has taken steps to limit public dissent in 2014. Its new, vague “anti-terrorism” law could be used to justify government action against protests for greater Shia rights.²¹¹ A hypothetical Shia uprising could also threaten the security of neighboring Bahrain, whose predominantly Shi’ite population is ruled by a Sunni regime supported by the House of Saud.²¹²

Compounding Saudi Arabia’s current insecurities is a new generation of jihadists departing to fight in Syria. This flux of jihadist fighters is worrisome, first and foremost, because of the growth of non-state Islamist militias in the greater region, and the accompanying threat to Shi’ite or Western-backed powers such as the Saudi government. Saudi Arabia also risks being seen as inadequately curtailing private support of terrorist organizations, a diplomatic issue with the U.S. since Osama bin Laden left Saudi Arabia for Afghanistan in 1979, to lead Saudis on a jihad against Soviet invasion.²¹³ Today, King Abdullah’s regime is aggressively combating the departure of young Saudis to Syria, using a reinterpretation of the theory of jihad.²¹⁴ When extremists are caught, they are sent to Saudi-run rehabilitation centers where “patients” are taught an interpretation of Islamic teachings that conforms to government policy.²¹⁵ According to

this policy, a young man needs explicit permission from the King in order to fight. Though the government supports resistance to Assad's regime, it refuses to allow men to fight in the name of jihad, knowing it must restrict its involvement to disciplined military action.²¹⁶

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Maintaining economic and political primacy in the region

Saudi Arabia's Shia population has experienced political, religious, and economic repression for several generations at the hands of King Abdullah's regime: they have no legitimate representation in the Saudi government and are kept out of high-level positions in the armed forces.²¹⁷ This discrimination has led to a rise in radicalism and retaliation, and even allegations of secessionist plots, in the east.²¹⁸ In light of such domestic conflicts, the Saudi elite's concerns in Iran and Syria are primarily with economic stability, and the political stability that depends on it. Both are threatened by recent economic developments among Saudi Arabia's neighbors, as Maliki's regime in Iraq aligns itself with Damascus and Tehran,²¹⁹ China gains direct access to a third of Iraq's untapped oil fields,²²⁰ and Russian companies secure monopolies on several of Syria's own reserves.²²¹²²² Meanwhile, Saudi ties with the U.S. are slipping, and with the possibility of international sanctions being lifted in 2014, Iran is threatening to bring over 800,000 barrels of its own oil onto the international market.²²³ This spike in supply could cause international oil prices to drop by as much as 10 percent, and could allow the U.S. to reduce its dependence on Saudi oil.²²⁴ Such a situation is contingent upon a nuclear arms agreement and would take several years, but it would nevertheless threaten Saudi Arabia's currently thriving economy along with its claim to regional primacy.

B. Obstacles to military involvement in the Syrian conflict

Intervening militarily in Syria on behalf of opposition forces would allow Saudi Arabia to counter the influence of Shi'ite regimes in Tehran, Baghdad, and Damascus, which see Saudi Arabia as a common enemy. Despite having ample military capacity to intervene, however, it has awaited support from its Western allies before committing,²²⁵ and for a number of reasons has asked that the U.S. commit in its place. First, Saudi Arabia wishes to play down its reputation as a hotbed of jihadist activity, having been perceived as such in both Western and predominantly Shia states since the inception of al-Qaeda.²²⁶ Second, Saudi Arabia perceives itself as creditor in its diplomatic relationship with the U.S., since it aided the U.S. significantly in 1973 by electing to keep oil prices steady despite OPEC ambitions.²²⁷ Third, in spite of a bounty of military technology purchased from the West—the Saudi Air Force features a fleet of 84 new F-15E Strike Eagles²²⁸—Saudi pilots are less well trained than American pilots, and raising their skills to comparable levels would take time.²²⁹ In light of the urgency of the Syrian crisis, Saudi Arabia may lack confidence in its own fighters to provide adequate assistance to the opposition.

C. Potential for unrest among Shia populations

After its inception in Lebanon in 1982, Hezbollah quickly grew in Saudi Arabia as a force of Shi'ite resistance to repression from the Sunni regime. As the group's growing ties to the Iranian government aggravated tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government amplified its discriminatory policies towards Shia citizens, significantly affecting their welfare. Most of the impact was felt in the political sector, where Shia representation was stifled in the Majlis al-Shura, a legislative council with only 4 Shia members out of 120 in total.²³⁰ In 2003, Shi'ite Saudis in the east approached the government with a peaceful request for national unification to bring about an end to their oppression. Soon after, al-Qaeda staged a

series of terrorist attacks throughout the country, targeting both Westerners and Saudis. The Saudi Arabian regime quickly adopted strict national security tactics, effectively putting Shia requests for reform on hold.²³¹ A 2009 attack by Saudi security forces on Shia pilgrims in Medina²³² made it clear that the Saudi Shia minority would not soon be embraced by King Abdullah's regime.

These recent events highlight the increasing hostility between religious populations in Saudi Arabia, tensions that have historically resulted in violence and could do so once more. There is reason to expect Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia and Iran to act in sympathy, as evidenced by the growth of Hezbollah in both states, and by the defiant actions of Shi'ites in Hasa in 1979 following the Iranian Revolution. The U.S. currently maintains bases in eastern Saudi Arabia, in part to provide security in the case of domestic unrest.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

As previously suggested, the complex of regional interests in the Syrian crisis may be of a religious nature among populations, but hardly so among states. For instance, though mutual ties to Shia Islam have enabled Assad's alliances with Hezbollah, Iran and Iraq, the fact that he is a secularist²³³ implies that these alliances are largely political. A common interest in crippling Saudi Arabia's influence unites the aforementioned actors, while Saudi Arabia in turn combats their influence so as to preserve prosperity and peace with its Shia minority. It is thus of great interest to Saudi Arabia that Iran should not reenter unrestricted international oil markets, nor that the Assad regime should survive this crisis, as either would increase the likelihood of unrest on Saudi Arabia's tense but oil-rich Gulf coast.

The U.S. could strengthen its historic alliance with Saudi Arabia by continuing to cripple Iran's economy through sanctions, and by intervening militarily on behalf of the Syrian opposition, which could also disrupt Tehran's plans for a new pipeline to the Mediterranean.²³⁴ Such policies would boost economic ties with Saudi Arabia and fulfill the latter's desire to see favors from 1973 repaid. However, since late 2013, the U.S. has not demonstrated the level of commitment and urgency requested by the Saudi government.²³⁵

If the U.S. deems military intervention necessary for resolving this crisis, it must ensure that the Saudi Arabian military is willing and able to support U.S. efforts with funding, troops, public support, and other such aid. To engineer such cooperation, more effort should be put into strengthening the abilities of Saudi pilots, such that there is no reason for Saudi Arabia not to contribute troops to the intervention. On the other hand, if negotiation and ceasefire continue to appear the most effective way to resolve the crisis, Saudi Arabia can be expected to support any transitional government that removes Assad from power. However, a ceasefire cannot be achieved unless the Saudi government takes all available action to restrict the flux of jihadist fighters. Incentivizing the Saudi government to take extra action could include promises to expand existing oil deals; to continue sanctions on Iran at their full effect; or to maintain U.S. bases near Saudi Arabia's Gulf coast, which might otherwise be eliminated in light of the current plan to reduce U.S. defense spending.

Recommendations

- Implement training programs to increase the competence of Saudi pilots, in the event that the U.S. should choose to intervene militarily in Syria.
- Reassure Saudi Arabia that a U.S. nuclear agreement with Iran is not going to occur within the next several years.

- Work with the Saudi government to ensure that a lasting stop can be put to Saudi arms contributions to opposition forces in Syria.
- Assure the Saudi regime that the United States will continue its significant economic and military investment in the Saudi state.
- Make evident that the United States is committed to the Saudi regime by promising military protection in the event of a domestic Shia revolt against the state.

ISRAEL

Gil Bar-Sela

The war in Syria has created new challenges for Israel's foreign policy. Along with Iran, Syria is Israel's most prominent opponent and the hostilities between the two date back to the founding of Israel. Israel has long been concerned with the Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah nexus and the various security threats it poses. So far, Israel has chosen a policy of non-intervention in Syria, and has broken it only on a few incidents when it suspected an advanced arms transfers to Hezbollah.

However, as jihadist organizations' influence in Syria increase, Israel is beginning to view those organizations as the most imminent short-term threat to its security. Those organizations' destabilization effect is already being felt in Lebanon, making the need to stabilize Syria more urgent. While Jerusalem might recognize the need to negotiate with Tehran as a necessary evil in order to achieve a ceasefire in Syria, it is more likely that it will perceive such negotiations as further undermining Israel's national security. Israel is extremely apprehensive toward Tehran's nuclear program. Israel perceives nonproliferation talks with Tehran as a "historic mistake,"²³⁶ and is very anxious about the U.S. warming up to Tehran. In order to assuage Israel's fears and prevent retaliatory response on the Syrian or Iranian front the U.S. should publicly recommit to Israel's security, and consider some limited, short-term concessions in regards to Israel's policies toward Palestine.

BACKGROUND

Syrian-Israeli tensions began with the inception of the Arab-Israeli conflict and have evolved in accordance with it. In 1923 Britain and France devised the Syrian-Palestinian border, and administered control over the two countries under a League of Nations mandate.²³⁷ In 1947, UN Resolution 181(II) divided Palestine into two states: Arab (Palestine) and Jewish (Israel).²³⁸ Following Israel's declaration of independence in 1948 the first Arab-Israeli war broke out. Syria fought Israel along with the League of Arab States, and advanced into Israeli territories in several places beyond the 1923 border.²³⁹ In 1949 an armistice was signed between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries. A demilitarized zone was established between the 1923 border and the Armistice Line—slightly west of the 1923 border.²⁴⁰ The events of 1947-1949 resulted in a massive flux of roughly 700,000 Palestinian refugees from Israel into Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.²⁴¹

From then until 1967 there were frequent armed skirmishes between Syria and Israel over water access in the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, fishing rights, and control over areas within the demilitarized zone.²⁴²²⁴³ Then in 1967, as tensions along its borders—particularly with Egypt—increased, Israel preemptively struck Egypt, Jordan and Syria, conquering the Suez Canal, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza strip from Egypt; East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan; and the demilitarized zone and Golan Heights from Syria.²⁴⁴²⁴⁵ The 1967 war resulted in another flux of approximately 300,000 Palestinian refugees into the Neighboring Arab countries.²⁴⁶ During that time Palestinian guerrilla forces began to consolidate into the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, receiving aid and support from Hafiz al-Assad's regime.²⁴⁷

The next major conflict between the two states came in 1973, when Syria and Egypt initiated a coordinated surprise attack on Israel in order to regain control over territories lost in 1967. Sporadic fighting continued until a disengagement agreement was signed on March 31, 1974 without significant territorial changes.²⁴⁸

When the Lebanese civil war broke out it provided both Syria and Israel with incentives to pursue their interests through intervention in Lebanon. Beginning with the December 1974 aerial attack on a Palestinian camp near Beirut, Israel continuously targeted Palestinian camps in southern Lebanon in response to PLO's belligerent activities and border infiltrations. Israel's operations were heavy-handed, resulting often in the deaths of many Palestinian refugees.²⁴⁹ In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon in order to drive PLO guerilla forces away from the Israeli border, destroy PLO infrastructure there, and undermine Syrian hegemony in Lebanon.²⁵⁰²⁵¹²⁵² The Israeli invasion provoked the founding of the Shiite militant organization Hezbollah, with heavy Iranian and later Syrian backing.²⁵³²⁵⁴²⁵⁵ In June 1985 Israel withdrew most of its forces from Lebanon, but until 2000 retained control over a strip of roughly 10 kilometers along the Israeli-Lebanese border—approximately 10 percent of Lebanon's sovereign land.²⁵⁶ During that time Israel engaged in ongoing clashes with Hezbollah, and the organization became, to a large extent, an extension of Syria's posture against Israel.²⁵⁷ The prolonged fighting effectively turned southern Lebanon into a proxy war zone between Israel and the Syrian-backed Hezbollah.²⁵⁸

There were several attempts to negotiate a peace agreement between Israel and Syria that would include Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights and security arrangements acceptable to both. Israel and Syria negotiated directly throughout the 90s with the U.S. as mediator, but in March 2000 the negotiations collapsed due to reluctance and ambivalence on both sides.²⁵⁹ Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak felt he did not have constituent support to make territorial concessions amounting to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights, back to the June 1967

border, as demanded by Syria;²⁶⁰ and Assad's imminent death shifted his focus away from peace negotiations and toward ensuring a smooth transition of power to his son Bashar.²⁶¹ In May 2000, shortly after the failed talks, Israel unilaterally and abruptly withdrew its forces from southern Lebanon, severing Syria's ability to leverage its influence on Hezbollah as a bargaining tool.²⁶²

Beginning in 2000, under the leadership of Bashar, Damascus reoriented its foreign policy to strengthen its alliance with Tehran and increase its military support to Hezbollah.²⁶³ But in 2006, under intense international pressure, Syria withdrew its forces from Lebanon. Hezbollah continued to be supported by Syria, but now drew more support from Iran, who was building Hezbollah's stockpile of missiles, rockets and anti-tank weapons.²⁶⁴²⁶⁵ In the absence of both Israeli and Syrian presence, Hezbollah enjoyed a monopoly of force and increased independence in southern Lebanon.²⁶⁶ In 2006 Hezbollah attacked an IDF (Israel Defense Forces) patrol within Israel's borders, killing and abducting several IDF soldiers. Israel responded forcefully to the attack and another incredibly costly war between Israel and Hezbollah immediately ensued. The war ended without a clear-cut victory on either side, which was interpreted in the region as an achievement for Hezbollah and its supporters, Syria and Iran.²⁶⁷ Similarly, from Israel's perspective, the war re-emphasized its vulnerability to Hezbollah's attacks and highlighted threats to its security from the Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah nexus.²⁶⁸ This perceived threat was heightened by the Israeli notion that Syria was developing a covert nuclear weapons program, which Israel struck in 2007 in order to retain its regional nuclear monopoly.²⁶⁹²⁷⁰

In light of the intensified security threats on the Syrian front, in 2007 indirect peace talks between Jerusalem and Damascus resumed under Turkish mediation, largely to pull Damascus away from Tehran's orbit.²⁷¹²⁷² The talks collapsed in 2008, however, because Assad opposed

Israel's aggressive military operation in Gaza against the militant, organization Hamas, also backed by Syria and Iran.²⁷³ The last round of indirect negotiations began in 2010 under U.S. mediation, but ended in 2011 when popular protests began in Syria.²⁷⁴

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Iran

Iran is one of Syria's most formidable backers and also extends its support to Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, all considered terror organizations by Israel and the U.S.²⁷⁵ The rise of Iran as a regional power, particularly in light of Tehran's nuclear ambitions, is of grave concern for Israel. Despite Israel's regional nuclear monopoly, it perceives Iran's nuclear program as the biggest threat to its national security.²⁷⁶ Iran's nuclear program has recently been the biggest point of contention in U.S.-Israeli relations. Jerusalem views the November 2013 interim agreement with Tehran as an erosion of the U.S.' commitment to the security of its regional allies.²⁷⁷ Israeli officials explicitly warned that despite the breakthrough in nonproliferation talks with Tehran, an Israeli military option against Iran's nuclear facilities is still on the table.²⁷⁸ Due to Iran's role in the 2006 war with Hezbollah, its ongoing support of militant organizations hostile to Israel and its nuclear ambitions, Israel has a vested interest in weakening Iran's regional influence.

B. Hezbollah

Hezbollah poses the most immediate security threat to Israel's northern border, particularly considering the 2006 war in Lebanon, which highlighted Israel's vulnerability to Hezbollah's missile and rocket attacks. In 2009-2010 Syria began to transfer advanced missiles to the militant group, thus upgrading its rocket and missile capabilities.²⁷⁹ Since the beginning of the war in Syria the alliance between the two has grown stronger: Hezbollah troops have been fighting alongside the regime, and have received additional advanced weapons transfers from Damascus, raising Israeli concerns that they will be used against Israeli targets.²⁸⁰²⁸¹ Israel has responded to those weapons transfers with several targeted aerial strikes, detailed below.

- January 2013: Israel struck a Syrian weapons convoy parked outside a Syrian research center near Damascus, supposedly en route to Hezbollah.²⁸²
- May 2013: Israel attacked Damascus' international airport to prevent a delivery of Fateh-100 ground-to-ground missiles.²⁸³
- July and October 2013: The Israeli Air Force attacked a missile warehouse near Latakia, targeting Russian land-sea missiles housed there.²⁸⁴²⁸⁵
- January 2014: Israel struck a Syrian base in the Latakia airport.²⁸⁶

C. Jihadist Groups

The growing presence and influence of jihadist organizations in Syria is quickly becoming a primary concern for Jerusalem. New Israeli research has suggested that organizations such as al-Nusra and ISIL intend to operate from within Syria against Israeli targets, particularly in the Golan Heights.²⁸⁷ Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service, has also identified an increased interest from al-Qaeda in operating against Israel.²⁸⁸ The recent flux of jihadist fighters into Egypt and now into Syria makes these new threats even more alarming.

Israel is also concerned about the spillover of hostility and terrorist activity into Lebanon, with Sunni militant groups such as al-Nusra in Lebanon conducting suicide bombings against Hezbollah and the Iranian Embassy in Beirut.²⁸⁹²⁹⁰ Such activities could quickly destabilize Lebanon's delicate balance of power. They may also encourage Hezbollah to make up for its vulnerability at home by renewing attacks on Israel.²⁹¹ Additionally, in at least two instances, militant Sunni organizations such as the Abdullah Azzam Brigades have fired rockets directly into Israel from within the Lebanese border, heightening tensions between Israel and Lebanon.²⁹²

The growing presence of jihadist organizations in the region may now also extend to Palestine. Shin Bet has identified hundreds of groups associated with al-Qaeda that are operating in the West Bank and Gaza.²⁹³²⁹⁴ The presence of Palestinian groups linked to al-Qaeda is a recent development, one that may complicate any attempts to revive Israeli- Palestinian peace negotiations, but according to Shin Bet those groups are still in their infancy and can be stopped.²⁹⁵

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

So far, with the exception of the targeted strikes against weapons transfers to Hezbollah, Israel has responded to the civil war on its border with unusual restraint; partly to avoid further escalation and destabilization, and partly because it is difficult to tell which security issue concerns Israel more—the Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah nexus, or the increased activities of jihadist organizations in Syria and Lebanon. It is likely that with the growing influence of ISIL, al-Nusra and other Sunni militant groups, the balance is tilting toward the latter.²⁹⁶ Israeli officials regard Assad as “the devil we know”: certainly not Israel's friend, but at least a foe who

works in predictable ways.²⁹⁷ Damascus has long held a policy of restraint toward Israel: since the 1974 Armistice Syria's anti-Israeli sentiments have been expressed only indirectly, through its support of Hezbollah and Hamas.²⁹⁸ That policy was maintained even after the 2007 Israeli strike on Syria's nuclear reactor, as well as after Israel's most recent aerial strikes.²⁹⁹³⁰⁰ On the other hand, jihadist groups are proving the efficacy of their unpredictable behavior in destabilizing the region, as the recent events in Lebanon have shown.

Israel, like the U.S., would like to see a transition of power away from Assad, and the construction of a moderate, Western-oriented government not tied to Tehran and capable of containing militant Islamist groups. But it is unlikely at this time that such a transition of power could be ushered into Syria, as the regime currently enjoys the enduring backing of Iran and Russia, which brought the second round of negotiations in Geneva to an end without any major breakthroughs. A more feasible short-term goal, therefore, is to achieve localized ceasefires between the warring forces, and to deliver humanitarian aid into besieged areas under the regime's control. These goals, while limited, would at least prevent further casualties and minimize Syria's vulnerability to the influence of jihadists. To achieve these goals, the U.S. should withdraw its opposition to Iran's participation in the talks, and instead induce its Iranian counterparts to leverage their influence over Assad and Hezbollah.

While Israel might perceive negotiations with Iran as an evil requisite, it is more likely to view such bilateral efforts with Iran as further undermining its security. This could lead to additional aerial strikes on Hezbollah in Syria, public denunciation of U.S.-Iranian efforts, and the increased likelihood of a unilateral Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, undermining whatever diplomatic success has been achieved through the nonproliferation interim agreement with Tehran. Domestically, Israel might try to leverage the support of influential pro-Israel lobbying groups like AIPAC. Most recently, in response to the agreement with Iran, AIPAC

supported the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act of 2013 that was proposed in the Senate.³⁰¹ The rash and abrasive bill, openly opposed by the Obama administration, would expand sanctions on Tehran and would give Israel *carte blanche* to strike Iran.³⁰²³⁰³ AIPAC eventually withdrew its support, and it is unlikely that the bill will go to a vote, but such domestic backlash could occur again if the U.S. operates in a way that conflicts with Israel's interests.³⁰⁴³⁰⁵³⁰⁶

The relationship between the U.S. and Israel also faces challenges with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On January 10, 2014, shortly after Secretary of State Kerry's trip to Israel to build a framework for renewed Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, the Israeli government announced the construction of 1,400 new housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.³⁰⁷ The U.S. State Department considers the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem as "illegitimate," and "unhelpful."³⁰⁸

It is possible that the P5+1 interim agreement with Tehran has induced Jerusalem to flex its muscles in the West Bank. This could signal a policy tradeoff between the two issues, which the U.S. may leverage in order to gain Israeli support for diplomatic efforts with Tehran regarding Syria. The U.S. should consider a lenient approach towards Israel with respect to its upcoming peace negotiations with Palestine and the building of settlements in the West Bank. Such a short-term trade off, however, will further complicate a permanent solution between Israel and Palestine.

The U.S. should continue to assure Jerusalem of its commitment to Israel's security by providing Israel with additional funding for its short-range anti-rocket Iron Dome interceptors, and continuing to co-develop the David Sling interceptors.³⁰⁹ Those systems could then be placed along Israel's northern border with Syria and Lebanon. In addition, the U.S. should publicly reiterate its commitment to Israel's security, and maintain that any attack against Israel—by Hezbollah or any other actor—will not be tolerated.

The U.S. could also support Israel in establishing stronger alliances with Turkey and Jordan, who share many of Israel's security concerns in Syria. Israel is currently negotiating a reparations agreement with Ankara for the nine Turkish civilians killed by the IDF during a raid on a Turkish flotilla in 2010. The flotilla was attempting to enter the blockaded Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid in protest of the abominable living conditions in the Strip.³¹⁰ Since then there have been no diplomatic relations between Ankara and Jerusalem, but the Israeli government is now offering to pay \$20 million to the victims' families.³¹¹ The U.S. should support Israeli and Turkish efforts to thaw their relationship and reforge their alliance, enabling the two states to cooperate on mutual security concerns, particularly the movement of jihadist groups in and out of Syria.

The U.S. could also offer humanitarian aid to Turkey and Jordan vis-a-vis Israel. So far, Israeli authorities have sanctioned a low-profile response to the crisis in Syria. Some aid has been given to Syrians living near Israel's border, and Israeli hospitals have treated a small number of roughly a few hundreds of Syrian casualties.³¹²³¹³ This symbolic gesture could be expanded with U.S. aid, particularly with regard to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and Turkey. Israel's involvement in the refugee crisis could help build cooperation with Jordan and Turkey, promoting regional stability.

Recommendations

- Invite Iran to the next round of negotiations.
- Publicly reinforce U.S. commitment to Israel's security, and declare that any acts of aggression against Israel by any actor will not be tolerated.
- Consider a lenient approach to Israel's settlement-building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

- Provide additional aid for Israel's anti-missile defense systems, to be placed along its northern border.
- Encourage Israel to aid Turkey and Jordan in managing their Syrian refugee populations, in order to build better relationships with both and promote cooperation on issues of mutual security.

IRAN

Kell Brauer

A diplomatic solution between Washington and Tehran over the future of Syria is very difficult owing to the long history punishing sanctions between the U.S. and Iran, the skepticism and paranoia that the Iranians have come to view the U.S. with after the American role in the 1953 coup and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the vested strategic interest of Iran in maintaining its supply link with Hezbollah. So long as Tehran continues its extensive support of Assad's regime with funds and materiel, Assad is unlikely to even consider stepping down from power. With the possibility of a nuclear deal with Iran on the table as well, U.S. policymakers must tread very carefully in order to not endanger the nuclear negotiations. Leveraging the economic sanctions and the restrictions on Iran's nuclear program may lead Tehran to back away from their steadfast support of the Assad regime and to tacitly accept a transitional government in Syria without Assad. Seizing upon the opportunity provided by the nuclear talks would demonstrate to Tehran a new era in U.S.-Iran relations that have been so strained in the past while more importantly creating a sustainable plan for Syria's future.

BACKGROUND

At first glance, the Iran-Syria partnership is an odd one. Ideologically, the two regimes could not be more different: Assad's Ba'athist regime is secular and polar opposite of the Islamic

theocracy of Tehran. Religiously, Assad and his administration are Alawite, a Shi'a branch, considered heretical in the Twelver Shi'a sect to which most Iranians belong.³¹⁴ Despite these divides, however, Iran and Syria both share a strategic interest in opposing U.S. and Israeli hegemony in the Middle East, which makes these unlikely bedfellows so committed to the survival of one another.

Syria and Iran have maintained close relations since the Iran-Iraq War and remain steadfast allies. Damascus was the first Arab nation to recognize the new Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 and was the only Arab nation to explicitly oppose the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980.³¹⁵ In March 1982, Damascus and Tehran formalized their alliance with a bilateral agreement on oil and trade as well as a secret agreement regarding military matters. During Israel's invasion of Syria's neighbor Lebanon in 1982, Damascus and Tehran found common ground in resisting the expansion of Israeli control. Syria and Iran began funding militant anti-Israeli organizations such as Hezbollah and to a lesser extent Hamas, which would become an integral part of both countries' security and diplomacy policy. A string of bombings by Hezbollah on targets including the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre, U.S. and French military barracks, and both U.S. embassies in Beirut eventually lead to a withdrawal of American peacekeepers in 1984 from Lebanon and a partial withdrawal of Israeli troops in 1985. Damascus and Tehran briefly came into conflict in the latter half of the Lebanese Civil War while supporting secular militia Amal and Hezbollah respectively; but they reconciled their contesting positions to crush Michel Aoun's anti-Syrian revolt in Lebanon in 1988-1989. During the 1990s when Syria was led by Hafiz al-Assad and Iran by Mohammad Khatami, both countries briefly flirted with closer relations with the U.S. Syria contributed troops to the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq and Iran attempted to bring down "the wall of mistrust," but Washington under the Clinton Administration remained suspicious of Assad and Khatami's motives. Neither action led to

improved relations between Syria nor Iran with the U.S. and further strengthened the bond between the two pariah regimes.³¹⁶

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War, Iran has been committed to keeping the Bashar al-Assad regime in power. It has dispatched elements of its Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and the Quds Force, an IRGC special forces unit, to assist, advise, and train loyalist Syrian forces.³¹⁷ Hezbollah, under the guidance of Iran, has also moved across the Lebanon border into Syria in order to fight the Syrian rebels and defend the Assad regime.³¹⁸ Hezbollah has over five thousand fighters in Syria to support Assad's beleaguered and understrength army.³¹⁹ Arms from Iran are also flying through Iraqi airspace under the guise of humanitarian aid in order move arms and personnel into Syria.³²⁰ Despite U.S. pressure on Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Mailiki to prohibit the Iranian flights, Iran continues to transport aid to the Assad regime by air. Approximately \$10 billion has been spent by Tehran on support for Syria, and in January 2013 the two states agreed on a \$1 billion credit extension from the Export Development Bank of Iran to the Commercial Bank of Syria.³²¹

U.S.-Iranian relations have been strained at best since the 1979 Islamic Revolution which overthrew the pro-Western Mohammad Shah Pahlavi.³²² Mohammad Shah Pahlavi came to power in a CIA and MI-6 coup replacing the democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, who had threatened Western interests by seeking to nationalize Iranian oil production.³²³ The U.S. lost a pro-Western and secular leader in Iran when the Shah was overthrown in 1979 and instituted the first in a series of punishing sanctions against Iran.³²⁴ The Shah's infamous opulence had polarized his people and induced them to support Ayatollah Khomeini, the new leader of Iran. The subsequent Iranian takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, and the British and American sale of chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein during the

Iran-Iraq War, together sullied Washington's chances of developing relations with the new Islamic regime in Tehran.³²⁵

In the aftermath of September 11th, Tehran officially sympathized with the U.S. and made offers to assist in the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in order to bring al-Qaeda to justice.³²⁶ President Bush spurned the Iranian offer and famously placed Iran in "the axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea.³²⁷ In 2003, the U.S.'s invasion of Iraq on dubious grounds suggested to Iran that the U.S. would use the pretext of seizing WMDs in order to depose regimes it opposed and confiscate their natural resources.³²⁸ These recent events vindicated hardliners in Iran who believed that the U.S. was inherently imperialistic.³²⁹ After the Iraq War, Iran continued levy belligerent political rhetoric, conduct nuclear research in violation of Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty protocols, and support Hezbollah financially and logistically. However, in June 2013, the more moderate Hassan Rouhani was elected president of Iran and agreed to talks on Iran's nuclear program with the U.S. in August 2013.³³⁰ On November 24, 2013, the U.S. and Iran reached an accord in Geneva for Iran to agree to intrusive on-site inspections of its nuclear plants and the dilution or destruction of its most highly enriched nuclear stock in exchange for a mitigation of the punishing sanctions on Iran which had caused a dangerous 40 percent inflation on the rial while preventing Iranians from transferring money out of Iran.^{331 332} The November 24th Agreement is the first agreement signed between Tehran and Washington in thirty-four years and also the first since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.³³³ Since February 18, 2014, Iran and the P5+1 have been meeting in Vienna to discuss a permanent agreement to Iran's nuclear program, and the talks have been reportedly "productive" thus far.³³⁴

Tehran has stated that any resolution to the Syrian crisis that removes Assad from power is unacceptable, causing the Syrian National Council to refuse to attend the Geneva II summit if

Iran was invited.³³⁵ U.S. State Department officials also opposed Iran attending the talks. As of January 21, 2014, the UN offer was rescinded and Iran was no longer invited to the summit.³³⁶

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Mutual Security

Iran and Syria have a common interest in opposing Israeli and U.S. action in the region, and pursue this interest by supplying arms to Hezbollah. Hezbollah acts as an extended deterrence for Iran against Israel's nuclear weapons program, and gives Syria an asymmetric strategy for attacking Israel. Furthermore, Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon prevents Syria from being surrounded on all sides by hostile states, with NATO-allied Turkey to the north, Israel to the southwest, and a historically hostile Iraq to the east.³³⁷ Hezbollah, Syria and Iran's "resistance axis" thus provides mutual security while resisting the incursions of Israel and the U.S.³³⁸ An Israeli military strike into Iran, for example, would lead to retaliatory rocket strikes by Hezbollah in Lebanon into Israel, with rockets supplied by Iran through Syria. Once the war started in Syria in 2011, in the words of former director of the CIA James Woolsey, Tehran faced possibly "the biggest strategic setback... in 25 years" if the Assad regime collapsed and their lifeline to Hezbollah was broken.³³⁹ Ali Akbar Velayati, senior aide to Iran's Supreme Leader, remarked in January of last year that "if the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is toppled, the line of resistance in the face of Israel will be broken."^{340 341}

B. Nuclear Nonproliferation

Mutual adherence to the November 24th Accords is also threatened by the events in Syria. If Iran cannot maintain its connection with Hezbollah and feels that its terrorist organ has

become emaciated, it will redouble efforts to seek a nuclear weapon in order to offset Israel's military advantage. Likewise, a U.S. failure to honor the agreement and relieve sanctions would be seen by Iranian hardliners as further proof of U.S. imperialist motives, and undermine the possibility of a future relationship with a more moderate, progressive Iran.

C. Legitimacy

Iranian support for Hezbollah and Hamas cannot be solely explained by mutual security concerns. Hamas is a Sunni militant group, and thus shares a common enemy with Iran—Israel—but not a common religious identity.³⁴² Iran's alliance with Hamas, then, speaks to its support for Muslim solidarity in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Shortly after the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini created Qods Day, a new holiday on the last Friday of Ramadan, to “proclaim the international solidarity of Muslims in support of the legitimate rights of the Muslim people of Palestine.”³⁴³ Iran also symbolically gave their embassy to the PLO in Jerusalem to the PLO in the aftermath of the revolution, even before hostile relationship between Iran and Israel took shape.³⁴⁴ As the only theocratic Islamic state in the Middle East, Iran understandably gains legitimacy by opposing Israel and supporting the Palestinians, as the brotherhood among Muslims is repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'an.³⁴⁵ Supporting the Palestinians demonstrates Iran's commitment to Islam and upholding the Qur'an as both a political and spiritual text in Iran.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

Iran remains the most unwaveringly committed and heavily invested national actor in the survival of the Assad regime. So long as Assad continues to receive arms, funds and personnel from Iran, it is unlikely he will pursue any productive peace talks with the opposition. There lies a possible diplomatic solution of severing the Tehran-Damascus axis in an alternative negotiation. Should the U.S. provide reprieve for Iran on sanctions such as the SWIFT codes and financial transactions, and make concessions to their nuclear development, the Iranians might see less of a threat in the loss of its Hezbollah deterrent in exchange for a nuclear one. However, Iranian nuclear development remains unpopular domestically, with Congress threatening not to honor the November 24th Accords; and even more so with Israel, whose Prime Minister has called the Accords a “historic mistake.”³⁴⁶ If an easing of sanctions were possible, Israel would likely oppose it.

Iran’s demands—the preservation of Assad’s regime or at least the creation of an Alawite-dominated area near Latakia through which Iran can funnel aid to Hezbollah—cannot be satisfied without directly contradicting U.S. interests.³⁴⁷ Hezbollah’s Iranian support, by design, deters Israeli strikes against Iran and contains U.S.-Israeli expansion; thus to appease Iran would oppose U.S. and Israeli interests. Furthermore, the SNC have vowed to boycott any peace talks that involve Iran. Uniting the opposition may mean having to exclude Iran from the peace talks. Conversely, inviting Iran will cause the SNC to withdraw from the peace talks and any possible resolution reached at Geneva will be undermined by the absence of major opposition parties.

The 2009-2010 electoral protests in Iran signaled to the regime that it was ruling without the approval of a generation that has suffered under the sanctions. Under the relatively moderate Rouhani, the Tehran regime is willing to negotiate with the U.S. in order to reduce the sanctions. Mitigating these sanctions would lift the local pressure on Rouhani to maintain Iran’s hostile stance towards the U.S. The U.S. knows the consequences of failing to uphold its promises to

Iran: after President Khatami voluntarily froze the Iranian nuclear program on November 14, 2004, under the false impression that the U.S. and the European Union would lift sanctions, Iran resumed its enrichment of uranium and replaced the moderate Khatami with the anti-West, far-right Ahmadinejad.³⁴⁸ Should the U.S. fail to meet Tehran's call for cooperation, it will only justify the assertions of hardliners that the U.S. is not to be trusted.

The U.S., then, should reassure Israel that its goal in mitigating sanctions is not to back away from its alliance and allow Tehran to pursue nuclear weapons, but to cultivate the possibility of a viable relationship with the new moderate president. The lifting of certain sanctions will preserve Israeli security while promoting a respectful relationship between Tehran and Washington and moving away from decades of hostility. Such improvements would reduce Iran's fears of an imminent U.S.-Israeli strike, and thus increase the chance of Tehran's backing away from its steadfast defense of the Assad regime. A shift in Iran's policy toward Assad would in turn increase the likelihood of Assad's removal from power, as well as the severing of Iran's supply lines to Hezbollah, both of which bolster Israeli security.

Recommendations

- Reduce sanctions on Iran as a show of good faith and to encourage cooperation between Tehran and Washington.
- Encourage the Iranians to reconsider their position on Assad, using further lifting of sanctions as leverage.
- Reassure Israel that the U.S.-Israeli alliance is still of paramount importance and that cooperation between Tehran and Washington will not be at the expense of Israel's security, but rather could greatly improve it.

JORDAN

Anna Rumpf

Jordan has been geographically caught in a region of conflict and destabilization since its creation. The instability in Syria threatens a spillover of violence in the region, and strains Jordan's economy and limited natural resources by accommodating Syrian refugees. In reaction to the threat the war in Syria poses, Jordan has taken measures to protect its borders and bolster the internal stability of the country while maintaining an open-border policy to accommodate refugees fleeing Syria. Destabilization poses a threat from both a backlash of opposition fighting in Syria as well as fears of violence from Assad's government should Assad's regime decide that Jordan is a threat because of the country's close ties with the Western world—in particular the United States. Therefore, since the fear of violence is well founded on both sides and there is no end of the war in sight, Jordan's focus on internal security and push for dialogue between groups in Syria to come to a political settlement helps ensure Jordan's stability.

Regional destabilization would be damaging not only to Jordan, but also to U.S. interests in quelling the spread of global terrorism, and would put Israel, a close U.S. ally, in more immediate danger. In order to mitigate threats, it would be in the U.S.'s interests to assist its longtime ally in Jordan with security efforts and to help ease the burden of refugees. The U.S. maintains a strong diplomatic relationship with Jordan which was exemplified with President Obama's meeting with King Abdullah II on February 14th when, after discussing the Syrian

conflict, Obama pledged a \$1 billion deal in loan guarantees, and the renewal of a 5-year MOU that would provide Jordan with \$600/million annually in military and economic support to aid Jordan.³⁴⁹ On top of these efforts, the U.S. has stationed a small number of troops based in Jordan and has been undertaking training programs to strengthen the region.³⁵⁰ Should the U.S. eventually choose to use direct action to intervene in the Syrian conflict, Jordan may prove to be a useful foothold from which to exert influence. Though the U.S. has provided Jordan with a considerable amount of aid, Jordan's stability and prosperity remains threatened from the possible overflow of violence and refugee numbers that are still increasing.

BACKGROUND

With Israel on one side, Iraq on the other, and Syria to the north, Jordan has been threatened by conflict overflow for decades. In order to survive, Jordan has not only had to address spillover concerns but also to absorb high numbers of refugees. With the establishment of Israel two years after the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan gained its independence from Britain in 1946, the first wave of Palestinian refugees entered Jordan. This initial wave has been followed by large numbers of Palestinian refugees seeking shelter in Jordan in the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967, attributing to a Palestinian refugee population of 2,034,641 (2013) in Jordan today.³⁵¹ This has been combined with 63,037 (2012) refugees from Iraq and 593,186 (2014) from Syria as of January 2014 to bring Jordan's refugee population to a total of 2,690,864—representing over 30% of Jordan's population.³⁵² Even though Jordan has maintained its open border policy for decades, refugees have experienced discrimination, and “there exists a social cleavage between the refugees and native Jordanians.”³⁵³ This has materialized in the form of differential access to passports (and thus working visas), and sensitivity toward Palestinian refugees resulting from the

Black September conflict in 1970 that began the Jordanian civil war from 1970-1971 between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O.), and the Jordanian government. This culminated in the expulsion of the P.L.O. from Jordan to Lebanon.³⁵⁴ With the help of training and aid from Britain, Saudi Arabia and the U.S., Jordan has developed a capacity for receiving large influxes of refugees, bolstering its ability to weather local conflicts despite the country's limited resources. However, its economy, social structure, and politics are continually threatened by regional instability.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Maintaining Regional Stability

Jordan has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the U.S. and Israel. Jordan and the U.S. have expressed common national interests:

The United States and Jordan share the mutual goals of a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East and an end to violent extremism that threatens the security of Jordan, the region, and the entire globe.³⁵⁵

Since 1996, Jordan has maintained a trade partnership with the U.S. through Qualifying Industrial Zones (Q.I.Z.) established by the U.S. Congress, where free trade is permitted.³⁵⁶ This agreement in 1996 has been coupled with other economic agreements such as the Jordan Free Trade Agreement, which was implemented in 2010. Following the establishment of Q.I.Z.'s and free trade agreements, Jordan was economically incentivized to shift support toward a U.S.- and Israel-friendly policy. Jordan stands to benefit from growing relations with Israel because of their shared border, the benefit of trade relations and support from the U.S., and a more reliable partner with which to share scarce natural resources in the region.

In a meeting with Secretary of State John Kerry in November, Jordan's Foreign Minister, Nasser Judeh, laid out the U.S. and Jordan's common interest in bringing stability to the region. Judeh supported Kerry's efforts to continue working towards a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians, and urged Israel to withdraw from controversial settlements.³⁵⁷ Peace between Israelis and Palestinians would relieve the burden Jordan has long borne from Palestinian refugees. Although Jordan has maintained an open border policy and has granted citizenship to some Palestinian refugees, a fear from East Bank non-Palestinian Jordanians, who make up the elite in Jordan, is that Palestinians will "[dilute] the Jordanian national identity" and attempt to turn Jordan into a Palestinian state.³⁵⁸ This fear has led to the revocation of citizenship of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO in order to reduce Palestinian representation in Jordan's parliament as well as the denial of Palestinian refugees for entry coming into Jordan from Syria.³⁵⁹ Judeh spoke to the importance of coming to a political settlement in Syria as the only option to "restore peace, stability, and security and put an end to violence and destruction and killing."³⁶⁰ This has been the official stance of Jordan as the only option to ending the Syrian crisis.³⁶¹ This would include restoring Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, which would neutralize the threat they pose to Jordan's government.

Jordan believes that the U.S., Russia and other countries have the power to exact change in Syria. Judeh expressed his support for American diplomatic initiatives, including the removal of chemical weapons and efforts to bring parties to the Geneva II conference.³⁶²

B. Accommodating Refugees Without Threatening Social, Political, and Economic Structures

Jordan has long maintained an open border policy for all refugees. Since the beginning of unrest in Syria, a wave of approximately 600,000 refugees has arrived in Jordan, representing a 10 percent increase in Jordan's population of 6.5 million.³⁶³ With total refugee numbers nearing

2.71 million and expected to rise by 200,000 in 2014, Jordan's ability to cope with the economic, political, and social costs of caring for refugees is threatened.³⁶⁴

Financially, the burden of aiding the refugees has fallen mostly on Jordan's government:

Each refugee costs the country 2,500 Jordanian dinars (\$3,530) per year to host, authorities have said. The interior minister has said that the foreign assistance extended to the country so far barely covers 30 percent of the costs borne by Jordan, which exceed \$830 million.³⁶⁵

A number of nations have contributed to Jordan's necessary assistance through the UNHCR's Syria Regional Response program, which allocated \$228 million in 2013, the U.S. being the largest single contributor with \$84.5 million.³⁶⁶

Jordan faces "growing economic challenges and a political system whose legitimacy is increasingly questioned."³⁶⁷ Jordan was one of the nations that experienced unrest in 2011 that called for economic and political reform. While the Syrian crisis has diverted some attention away from reform in order to handle the pressing security issues, Jordan's government has tried to neutralize reform demands by proposing parliamentary elections in 2013.³⁶⁸ This strategy, however, has met with little success, because the main opposition party, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, boycotted elections and called Jordan's electoral laws unfair.

The fast arrival of a large number of refugees has caused social strains as well. Because of the state of emergency that refugees raise, resources that would have supported Jordan's poor have been allocated to refugees.³⁶⁹

In order to ease the strain refugees have posed on Jordan, the influx of donor aid can not only help the country assimilate refugees, but also spur Jordan's economy. According to a report in December 2013, Jordan's government plans to spend at least \$1 billion of foreign aid (mostly from other Gulf nations) on development projects.³⁷⁰ Funding thus far has been largely used as emergency resources to provide immediate food and shelter for refugees. The shift in spending

of donor money to boost Jordan's economy has been " criticized by some international donors and NGOs for pushing them to spend more of their aid money on Jordanian citizens, rather than on Syrian refugees."³⁷¹ However, Jordan's altered view changes the focus from short-term relief projects to investing aid in infrastructure projects and to boost its economy in order to help the country and the refugees they assimilate in the long term, which is a shift that some UN agencies are making. Thus, aid is not only helping Jordan accommodate the influx of refugees from Syria, but is also helping Jordan to make structural changes to boost its economy.

C. Securing Freshwater Availability

Owing to its geography and climate, Jordan has "one of the lowest levels of water resource availability, per capita, in the world."³⁷² As a nation whose land is only 1.97 percent arable, freshwater resources are limited and of high importance; thus regionally shared freshwater rivers create complicated trans-border political issues.³⁷³ Jordan shares both the Jordan River and the Yarmuk River with Syria, and the Jordan River Basin, a major source of Jordan's freshwater, spans area in Syria, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon.^{374 375 376} In the past, the Jordanian and Syrian governments have agreed to share water sources and delineate the number and locations of dams on the rivers.³⁷⁷ Current conflict and instability in Syria, however, jeopardizes the sanitation of and jurisdiction over water coming into Jordan, and constrains the amount of water that Jordan can provide to its people. This problem is exacerbated by the increases in Jordan's population as more refugees arrive from Syria.

Locals say that municipal water had been pumped through the village twice a week but that, since the refugee influx, it's just once a week — and they blame the Syrians for the rationing. There's not enough water as it is in this country, one of the world's driest, and now there are more people sharing what little is available.³⁷⁸

In order to cope with water insecurity in the area, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian government in the West Bank, with help from the World Bank, made a historic water-sharing deal in December 2013.³⁷⁹ The project will include a new desalination plant in Aqaba, Jordan, near the Red Sea. Among other things, the water-sharing agreement will consist of Jordan giving Israel “50 million cubic liters of desalinated water each year,” in exchange for the same amount from Israel in northern Jordan.³⁸⁰ Northern Jordan not only has little water available, but is also the location of the Za’atari refugee camp, home to 120,000 Syrian refugees.

D. Preventing Terrorist Overflow From Syria

One of Jordan’s main concerns relating to the conflict in Syria is the possible overflow of terrorism. Jordanian extremists, inspired by jihadist ideologies, have traveled to Syria to fight.³⁸¹ This can be coupled with the fact that smuggling of weapons, drugs and money across Jordan’s border with Syria has increased 300% in 2013 alone.³⁸² As happened with Tuareg fighters who fought in Libya in 2011 and returned with weapons and skills to Mali to cause unrest in their own country in 2012, the Jordanian government fears that a similar situation could be possible with fighters returning from Syria.

Jordan has previously been threatened by terrorist backlash from extremists coming into Jordan from other countries. In 2005, Abu Musab Zarqawi’s al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorist network led suicide bomb attacks in three of Amman’s hotels - an event which has been described as “Jordan’s 9/11.”³⁸³ Zarqawi had a history of bad emotions toward Jordan’s government and had orchestrated multiple different attempts to bomb Jordanian buildings.

Another destabilization attempt (that was foiled), occurred on October 21st 2013, with a plot to bomb shopping centers and to target Western diplomats. The plan was to be carried out by

11 al-Qaeda linked Salafist Jordanians who had been fighting in Syria and smuggled weapons and explosives into Jordan from Syria.³⁸⁴

These attacks pose threats to the security of the government of Jordan and with increasing instability to the North, Jordanian efforts must be bolstered to control extremist factions that have long existed in the region but may be presented with opportunity during the Syrian crisis when resources are spread thin.

The government also fears that Assad's removal from power might result in a vacuum of authority in Syria, breeding regional terrorist activity, similar to the plots mentioned above in 2005 and 2012.³⁸⁵ This could become an even bigger threat if the Syrian government's chemical weapons fall in the hands of extremists wanting to send a message or assert control over a certain area. Although their use would be brutal, there are extremists such as Zarqawi (although he is no longer living) who have planned to use poisonous chemical to carry out plots, including a foiled attempt by Zarqawi in 2004 to bomb Jordan's intelligence headquarters that involved the use of poisonous chemicals (which was said to be one of his specialties).³⁸⁶

Instead of aiding in the survival or removal of the Assad regime, Jordan has concentrated its policies on bolstering efforts within Jordan's borders to strengthen the country, in preparation for whichever outcome may result from the conflict in Syria.³⁸⁷ These efforts include looking for a political and diplomatic settlement to end the conflict. Amman has thus released statements expressing that Assad should step down, but has hesitated to officially call on him to do so.³⁸⁸

This caution could be due to the fact that

Amman remains wary of [Assad's] still-considerable power and his ability to fuel problems for his southern neighbor, whether by directly attacking the country or by covertly provoking unrest. It is also known that if Assad remains in power Jordan will have nowhere to run.³⁸⁹

Jordan was one of the countries to experience protests in the events commonly termed as the Arab Spring.³⁹⁰ Although the Jordanian government has actually increased its legitimacy

through this conflict thanks to international recognition and aid, there remains fear that the attention can turn back to Jordan with calls for reform and regime change. However, in an interview with Aron Lund, Dr. Joas Wagemakers, a specialist on the Salafi movement in Jordan claimed that the Jordanian jihadi movement has found legitimacy in fighting the Syrian government but there is no real jihadi-Salafi organization or movement in Jordan and the possibility of Jordanian Salafis becoming a credible threat to the throne is not likely.³⁹¹

E. Maintaining Relations With Foreign Powers

By avoiding conflict in a region commonly afflicted with instability, Jordan has posed itself as an “oasis of calm.”³⁹² This has proved to be very beneficial to foreign powers interested in seeking a foothold or influence in the region will logically turn to Jordan.

China and Jordan have enjoyed growing diplomatic relations after the past three decades. Recently, there has been growing cooperation between the two countries—“China is now Jordan’s 3rd largest trading partner, all while war and political instability have thrown Jordan’s neighbors into turmoil.”³⁹³ While the war in Syria ravages on, Jordan and China held the 10th annual China Fair Jordan 2013 in September. Jordan is an attractive trading partner for China because of its proximity to other regional countries making it a “gateway to the entire Levant” as well as the market opportunity to sell Chinese goods. As a worker at the fair in 2013 said, “the more other countries fight, actually, the better the business is here.”³⁹⁴ Thus it is unsurprising that business between China and Jordan has actually increased since 2011.

Jordan has also experienced growing positive relations with Russia. This has recently resulted in the possibility of the co-development of nuclear energy reactors in Jordan to help with their resource scarcity:

[Russian] state-owned Rosatom has been contracted to construct the reactors by 2021 under a build-own-operate basis. The Russian company will take on 49

percent of the plants' \$10 billion construction and operation costs, with the Jordanian government contributing 51 per cent and retaining a majority share in the plants.³⁹⁵

Though Jordan's ties with the U.S. remain the most important foreign relationship for the country, China and Russia's growing relations with the country could eventually prove to weaken the U.S.'s influence over the nation. The U.S. is Jordan's primary export partner and third largest import partner.³⁹⁶ This is coupled with U.S. aid and the deployment of a small number of troops to help with the security threat in Jordan.³⁹⁷ For the Chinese, this creates an even better opportunity because U.S. support diminishes the threat of instability and insecurity. As Liu Chao, the chief of political and press affairs at the Chinese Embassy in Amman assured "Don't worry. America won't hit Jordan. It's a close friend."³⁹⁸

Russia's growing relations with Jordan could diminish the U.S.'s influence in the country. While this effect may not be great, the real significance is the potential block that Russian influence could pose on Jordan's willingness to allow the U.S. to intervene in Syria through its borders. Russia has been adamantly in support of the Assad regime and has blocked Security Council efforts to take action in Syria. If the U.S. chooses to implement a no-fly zone—which Russia would oppose—Russia may try to use its increasingly positive economic and political relations with Jordan to block this effort.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

Both the U.S. and Jordan have an interest in ensuring the security of the region and to seeing a stable regime in Syria, preferably with a new government that is friendly with Jordan and does not increase the influence of radical Islamic groups. In order to further these interests,

possible policy options for the U.S. include securing Jordan's borders to decrease the smuggling of weapons and aid into Syria for groups with terrorist agendas, and to provide aid to ease the economic burden that refugees pose to the country.

In order to maintain security in Jordan, there has been discussion of creating a buffer zone along the Syria-Jordan border. The U.S. has played with this idea by training Syrian opposition forces that may be used to establish and enforce such a buffer zone.³⁹⁹ A buffer zone would not only protect Syrian and Jordanian citizens from attacks along the border, it would also allow for humanitarian aid to more easily reach those in need in Jordan, and prevent violence from spreading to Jordan, Israel and the Golan Heights. A buffer zone would also help curb the number of refugees fleeing Syria, as refugees in the area would no longer be under direct of violence. However, this does not mean that conditions in Syria would necessarily be better for those seeking refuge. This plan has not been carried out because of a lack of international action to help set up and enforce these zones, conditions that led to failure of safety zones in Bosnia in 1993.⁴⁰⁰

Another possible action could be the enforcement of a no-fly zone from within Jordan's borders. While possibly effective, this effort would go against Jordan's interest of ending the conflict with dialogue and a political solution without getting militarily involved and could endanger Jordan's security from neighboring Syria as well from other nations in opposition of the establishment of a no-fly zone (namely Russia). The idea of a no-fly zone may be more successful in a nation like Turkey that has taken a more pro-military response to the Syrian crisis.

It would be in the U.S.'s interests to provide further monetary support to ease tensions raised by the increasing refugee population in Jordan. As Jordan's current government maintains positive relations with Israel as well as the U.S. and other regional nations, it is in the U.S.'s interest to preserve the stability and legitimacy of that government, which may be compromised

if the government cannot cope with the costs of having the country's population increase by 10 percent from Syrian refugees in almost three years.⁴⁰¹ Additionally, supporting Jordan's capacity to assist its refugees would maintain a U.S.-friendly presence in a geographically important, tumultuous region—especially in terms of the availability and control of its natural resources. Although the U.S. currently provides \$1 billion to Jordan per year for economic and military aid, Jordan's government estimated that the strain of refugees will cost the government \$4 billion by the end of 2014.⁴⁰²

Remaining one of Jordan's most important allies financially may also be important to maintain the foothold that the U.S. could have in the region. Jordan's interests for stability and security of the region could materialize in a variety of actions. By maintaining positive and important relations with the U.S., Jordan's actions may align more with U.S. interests than those of China and Russia—which have been strongly growing in the past few years. This is significant not only with the crisis in Syria (as Russia and the U.S.'s interests are very different concerning the survival of Assad's regime), but also with the Arab Israeli crisis that U.S. Secretary of State Kerry has been working hard to come to a peaceful solution for recently.

The U.S. is currently running peacekeeping and training programs in Jordan, which includes the deployment of 1,500 troops and patriot missiles and F-16 jet fighters to help maintain Jordan's safety and security.^{403 404} While this program may prove to be important to the U.S.'s foreign policy toward Syria, it is important that U.S. ties with Jordan do not render Jordan as a target for anti-U.S. violence. In the past there have been anti-U.S. terrorist attacks in Jordan. Bombings in 2005 and an attempt in 2012 that were meant to target Western diplomats and embassies also took (or threatened to take) Jordanian lives as well as threaten the security of Jordan's government.

Recommendations

- Increase financial aid to Jordan not only to help with the burden that refugees pose, but to help Jordan boots its own economy in order to further the stability of the current government.
- Maintain open and positive relations with Jordan through the inclusion of Jordanian officials in negotiations such as the Geneva talks as well as those between Israeli and Palestinian forces in order to further cooperation between the two countries, and allow for a U.S. friendly presence in the region. This close relationship will prove to be useful if the U.S. needs quick and easy access into Syria.
- Maintain a presence in Syria with its peacekeeping troops and missiles to help maintain the stability of Jordan. Should the situation worsen, more of a U.S. presence should be considered at the request of the Jordanian government.
- Increase U.S. troops and surveillance technology in Jordan to improve border control and internal security, and to stem weapons/money trafficking into southern Syria
- Increase funding for the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center (KASOTC) for counter terrorism efforts.
- Throughout all dealings with Jordan, remain cautious of the other loyalties Jordan must speak to in order to maintain its peaceful presence in the region.

IRAQ

Patrick Gallagher

Sharing a large border to the West with Syria, Iraq has long been a crucially important component of Middle Eastern relations. As the country with the second largest Shia population in the Middle East, the second largest proven oil reserves behind Saudi Arabia, and the country where a large component of the current opposition in Syria is rooted in, the nation of Iraq and its interests and impacts cannot be left out of any discussion of the current conflict in Syria.⁴⁰⁵ In recent years Iraq has proven to be increasingly unstable both politically and in the realm of sectarian violence, and with the civil war in Syria taking place right along its borders, the current political situation in the country is sure to both impact the situation in Syria as well as be heavily impacted by it. As the Islamist militant forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant continue to grow both within Iraq and Syria, the threat of a potential regime change within Iraq in the favor of the Islamist militants would be catastrophic, as the compounding of the nationwide violence of the Syrian civil war with the provincial sectarian violence within Iraq into a larger regional sectarian conflict would mean the continuing of catastrophic violence and a further interruption to the political and international relations equilibrium of the Middle East. The maintenance of stability in Iraq is important to ensuring the conflict in the region does not expand, and ensuring the governmental stability of Iraq could be the key to preventing its spread. The current Iraqi government under Prime Minister Maliki would be able to preserve its own stability by preventing ISIL from establishing a stronger foothold in the country and enflaming

Sunni-Shia relations, and therefore prevent Iraq from developing levels of violence comparable to Syria and extending the conflict across borders.

BACKGROUND

With a population estimated to be nearly 32 million, Iraq is the second largest country by population in the Middle East. The majority of Iraq's population, 75%-80%, is Arabs with 15%-20% Kurdish, and additional 5% of other ethnic groups. The vast majority of the country's population is Muslim, 97%, with a small population of Christians which number only 3%, which is less than half of the Christian population prior to the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Iraq is a Shia Muslim majority country, with 60%-65% of the Muslim population practicing Shia Islam while 32%-37% of Muslims practice Sunni Islam.⁴⁰⁶

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the Bush administration adopted a policy toward Iraq aimed at combating a perceived rise in Islamic influence throughout the region. The Bush administration rationale for the intervention in Iraq against the totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein was that the promotion of a new, democratic political order would make it harder for extremist groups to gain support in the Middle East region. The hope was that Iraq would become more liberal and democratic and by effect the region would move towards more democratic methods and thus weaken the strength of extremist Islamists who were in opposition to the U.S. The immediate consequences of this sentiment have gone in the opposite direction, as Iraq today still is home to large and growing insurgency with violence reaching the same levels post-war that it had at the height of fighting during the war.⁴⁰⁷

In 2008, the Bush Administration began the negotiation of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iraq, which set a deadline for the withdrawal of all U.S. military forces from Iraq

by the end of 2011. After entering office, President Obama expressed a desire to begin the withdrawal sooner. However, doubts cast over the stability of the Iraqi regime caused delays, forcing an amendment of the SOFA to allow between 10,000 to 20,000 American personnel to remain in the country. Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki remained extremely opposed to a continued American military presence in the country, making it clear that all U.S. military forces were obligated to leave Iraq by the end of December 2011.⁴⁰⁸ Immediately after the withdrawal of U.S. forces on 31 December 2011, Prime Minister Maliki began concentrating his political power. Maliki ordered the arrest of Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, and Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi—three leading members of the Iraqiyya coalition, which had received more votes than Maliki’s own party in the March 2010 elections. Later, photographs of the tortured corpses of Hashemi’s bodyguards revealed that Maliki was using torture to trump up allegations of political violence against the three officials, who presented a potential challenge to his leadership.⁴⁰⁹

When the elections of 2005 brought Maliki to power, the position of Prime Minister was one of very limited powers. It leveraged very little authority over the rest of the government, which represented a multitude of political parties that had sprouted in the wake of the previous regime. Maliki was appointed because many of the government’s party bosses believed that there was little impact his administration could have due to his party, the Dawa Party, not being the strongest Shia party and thus not giving him much power outside of the limited powers of his office. To solidify his power and maximize his influence, Maliki first secured the leadership of his own support base, the Dawa Party, by usurping his predecessor, Ibrahim Jafaari. Maliki then constructed a network of influence among the key generals and civil servants who held power below of the level of the ministries, thus creating a “shadow government” that gave him authority outside of his own office. He also appointed family members and close colleagues from

the Dawa Party to positions of power, most notably his son Ahmed Maliki to Deputy Chief of Staff, which gave him oversight of the Iraqi Security Forces.⁴¹⁰ Lastly, Maliki consolidated his authority over the military: he created the position of Commander in Chief, to which he appointed his close ally Farouk al-Araji; and set up Operations Centers, which concentrated security forces in provinces where sectarian violence was taking place, and whose commanders could be appointed only by Maliki.

When the results of the 2010 parliamentary elections threatened to unseat Maliki as Prime Minister, Maliki convinced the Kurdish and Shia members of the government to support his candidacy, by exploiting their fear of Sunnis gaining too much power under the Iraqiyya coalition.⁴¹¹ Maliki's political maneuverings and consolidation of personal power has led to the popular belief that he is attempting to reestablish Iraq as a dictatorship, and caused widespread feelings of discontent and marginalization in the Sunni population of the country, who feel that Maliki has deliberately excluded them in order to protect his own power.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Mitigating Sectarian Violence and Terrorist Activity

Since the 2011 withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq, sectarian violence has compounded in areas with large Sunni populations, most notably the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah in the province of Anbar. Over the course of 2013, an estimated 7,800 Iraqi civilians and 1,000 Iraqi security troops have been killed in attacks motivated by sectarian tensions. This is the highest number of casualties in a single year since 2008.⁴¹² In January 2014, large portions of Ramadi and Fallujah were taken by Sunni Islamist militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a group fighting in opposition to the Shiite regime of Prime Minister Maliki

and demanding his resignation. Some residents of Fallujah have reported that the militants there are attempting to impose Islamic Shari'a law. Prime Minister Maliki has since claimed a commitment to "end the presence of those militants without any bloodshed."⁴¹³ He has expressed a desire to work with Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar to prevent continued hostilities. Rather than engage in urban combat with the militants, Maliki has expressed a desire to negotiate with Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar province in the hopes of preventing continued hostilities. Maliki's hope is that these Sunni tribal leaders do not desire the type of Islamist state that the ISIL desires, and would resist them in order to avoid becoming subordinate to them and their ideology. The Sunni militants belong to the Sunni Islamist organization known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The ISIL fighters are fighting in opposition to the Shiite regime of Prime Minister Maliki and are demanding his resignation with the ultimate goal of imposing their own Islamist-style state.

ISIL's influence is bolstered by the popular discontent of the Sunni population: in the face of Prime Minister Maliki's corruption and harsh security measures against Sunnis, a dogma that opposes the Shia governing of Iraq has become increasingly attractive to Sunni Iraqis. ISIL has thrived due to the chaos of the Syrian civil war, now possessing key holdings in the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in the Sunni Anbar Province of Iraq. ISIL fighters regularly move across the Iraqi-Syrian border, and large numbers of fighters, notably suicide bombers, have begun pouring into Iraq and contributed to the high level of violence in 2013. If this continues, it will likely radicalize the Shia majority of the country in opposition to militant Sunnis, which has been relatively unsuccessful in combating the rise of Islamist militants concentrated in Anbar. Maliki faces a dilemma: a strong military response against Fallujah and Ramadi will likely cause greater discontent among both Sunnis and Shiites, who have become increasingly fearful of the high levels of sectarian violence; but negotiation and quarantine have proven ineffective in halting

bloodshed or regaining territory from the militants. The most recent blow to such peaceful efforts came in mid-January, when the Maliki government tried to negotiate with ISIL to allow local police and other government officials to return to Fallujah. ISIL militants kidnapped the tribal sheikhs and a local imam with whom they were performing negotiations.⁴¹⁴

One of Maliki's primary strategies in fighting ISIL has been to mimic the U.S. military's strategy in 2007, when it worked with Sunni tribal militias to combat al-Qaeda insurgents in what has become known as the *Sunni Awakening*. Prime Minister Maliki's government began urging Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar to oppose the ISIL fighters in December of 2014, promising pensions and benefits to Sunni tribal fighters killed in the hostilities as well as potential pardons for tribal leaders who have previously fought against the government.⁴¹⁵⁴¹⁶ This current strategy appears to be aimed only at containing the hostilities in Anbar, but could potentially aid in the improvement of Sunni-Shiite relations within Iraq. However, many Sunni Iraqis are reluctant to accept Maliki's offers and align with the government. Sunni politician Osama al-Nujaifi describes why: "From 2006 to 2008, tribesmen were able to beat al-Qaeda with the cooperation of American forces and the support of the Iraqi government...After gaining victory over Al-Qaeda, those tribesmen were rewarded with the cutting of their salaries, with assassination and displacement."⁴¹⁷ Many tribal leaders have begun to fight ISIL and al-Qaeda militants in Anbar, but deny affiliation with the government and instead cite their desire to defend themselves from extremists.

The U.S. has had a limited response to the recent hostilities. Secretary of State Kerry, in his remarks to the press regarding the recent violence, stated that the U.S. government will offer support to the Maliki regime, but finds it important that the Iraqis fight "their fight" on their own.⁴¹⁸ The U.S. has begun supplying hellfire missiles as well as reconnaissance unmanned drones to the Iraqi government for use against the militants, and is seeking Congressional

approval to sell Apache helicopters to the Iraqi military.⁴¹⁹ Additionally, Iraq's foreign minister has proposed allowing the U.S. to conduct Predator drone strikes, though Maliki has become reluctant to request this form of formal intervention due to preserve his own bid for a third term as Prime Minister.

As the Syrian Civil War continues and Maliki's inability to deal with the militants currently occupying Anbar persists, ISIL and its affiliates will likely continue to strengthen. This would make it of great interest to the Maliki regime of Iraq to oppose ISIL across both Iraq and Syria, understanding that its continued growth will destabilize the Iraqi government.

B. Iraqi-Syrian Relations

Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria, Western nations have blacklisted the Assad regime as an importer of oil. Assad's government has relied heavily on Iranian exports of oil due to the difficulties it has faced in accessing its own oil due to the current conflict. However, a secondary but important source of oil to the Assad regime is crude oil from Iraq. This oil has begun to reach Assad's military via trade firms from Lebanon (Overseas Petroleum Trading) and Egypt (Tri-Ocean Energy), as proven by shipping and payment documents, though all parties have denied that the shipments occurred.⁴²⁰ Sytrol, the Syrian national oil company that received these shipments, is on the list of firms barred from doing business with any U.S. or E.U. companies. However, the sanctions placed against Sytrol by the U.S. and E.U. do not apply to firms outside of these states, though firms that conduct transactions with blacklisted firms run the risk of becoming blacklisted themselves. Transactions between Sytrol and Overseas Petroleum Trading have proven to be extremely profitable for the Iraqi government, which controls all crude oil being produced in Iraq and being exported out of Iraq. The price being charged to

Sytral is \$15 to \$17 above the official Iraqi price, which amounts to nearly \$15 million more per tanker of crude oil being imported into Syria.⁴²¹

In 2011, Iraq, Iran and Syria signed a \$10 billion deal to begin constructing an oil pipeline that originates in Iran and travels through Iraq to Syria.⁴²² The pipeline would be one of the largest and most significant in the region, and ultimately it would lead all the way into the Mediterranean by way of Lebanon. This comes as it has been recently revealed that oil fields in the Mediterranean that have as of yet not been tapped in to, would be some of the largest and most profitable in the world. This potential pipeline would be incredibly profitable for Iraq and Iran, indicating another financial incentive for Iraqi involvement in Syria and most importantly for Iraq to want to prevent any Sunni Islamist factions from coming into power in Syria. If an Islamist Sunni faction in a similar vein to ISIL were to come to power in Syria, then it is extremely unlikely that they would be willing to honor an oil deal with the Shia government of Iraq which most Sunni Islamists see as a tool of the Iranian government, to which it refers to as the Safavid Empire. For this reason, it is advantageous for the Shia government of Iraq to want to fight Islamist militants within its own borders especially those elements who aim to create a regional conflict spread across both Iraq and Syria. If the Iraqi government is able to successfully mute the effectiveness of ISIL and other Islamist factions who are travelling across the two countries' borders, then it is working to prevent a government or factions within a new government in a post-civil war Syria from coming to power and denying the Iraqi government its potentially highly profitable oil pipeline.

In Northern Iraq along the Turkish border, the Iraqi Kurds that operate under the semi-autonomously governed zone of Iraqi Kurdistan have begun construction and operation of their own oil production facilities. These facilities have been estimated to be capable of producing enough oil to export a total of 400,000 barrels of oil per day to Turkey.⁴²³ Turkey has been very

receptive of this, agreeing to receive the large amounts of oil from the Iraqi Kurds, as the Iraqi Kurds continue to make prospective oil deals with other nations. This new development in Iraqi oil could stand to make the Iraqi Kurds, a Sunni minority in Iraq, a more powerful force for the government of Maliki to contend with. In response to the Kurdish oil deals being conducted Turkey, the government of Prime Minister Maliki has threatened to blacklist Turkish oil firms and sue both Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey for what it is labelling to be the illegal smuggling of Iraqi oil. Iraqi oil is nationalized, and the central government reserves the exclusive right to manage its extraction and sale to foreign countries. However, Iraqi Kurdistan is currently designated to receive a total of 17% of all Iraqi oil revenues. In reality, the Kurds receive about 12% of oil revenue, making it understandable why the Kurds may feel that they need to resort to producing and selling oil autonomously in order to yield a much greater profit for their own local government. By threatening to sue and blacklist Turkish oil firms, Maliki risks angering the Turkish government which could result in it placing more political pressure on the Iraqi government. A discontented Sunni Kurdish minority with large oil holdings in Northern Iraq could serve as a palpable threat to the stability of Maliki's regime. Already facing violence from Sunni militants in the Anbar province and along the Syrian border, the Maliki government could be put at serious risk of destabilization if the Kurds take up arms against them or even simply give them a great deal of political resistance with the support of Turkey. However, there is some potential for this oil issue to be used as leverage to force Maliki's hand in how he handles sectarian violence in his country and his handling of it along the Syrian border.

According to current Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, the official stance of Iraq towards the current conflict is one of agreement and solidarity with the people of Syria.⁴²⁴ He stated that the government of Iraq supports the desire for freedom of the Syrian people, but denounces any use violence. Iraq has offered full diplomatic assistance to the current UN envoy

to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, in his work in finding a peaceful resolution in Syria. The government of Iraq has expressed its support for new governance in Syria, but has not recognized much of the opposition movements currently taking hold in Syria, citing them as extremists. Zebari has made it a point to emphasize Iraq's condemnation of any violence through means of terrorism.

However, there has been some evidence of Iraqi involvement in the Syrian Civil War, both direct and indirect. In March of 2013 a combined convoy of both Syrian and Iraqi troops experienced an ambush by fighters from ISIL. The ambush resulted in the deaths of 51 Syrian soldiers and 9 Iraqi soldiers and many dozens wounded, with an unknown number of ISIL casualties. The ambush came as a group of Syrian troops claims to have been forced from their position by ISIL fighters along the border. These Syrian soldiers then reportedly fled to the assistance of Iraqi Army forces stationed along the border. The Syrians took their wounded casualties from the initial contact with ISIL fighters to link up with the Iraqi Army group. After combining, the two combined forces and were subsequently attacked by ISIL during which they suffered the majority of their casualties. ISIL claimed responsibility for the ambush and announced its satisfaction with having defeated the combined forces of the two Shia armies and proven a direct connection.⁴²⁵ However, there has been no other clear indication of any joint military operations between the Iraqi Army and the army of Syria's Assad. Nonetheless, the perception among ISIL fighters is that they are indeed combatting a combined Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian force which they compare to the Safavid Empire.

Alternatively, there have been Shia militia fighters currently operating with the Syrian capital of Damascus in support of the Assad regime. These fighters belong to the Damascus based Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas (LAFA), which consists of fighters from several Iraqi Shiite militias and are sponsored by the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.⁴²⁶ These fighters represent the section of Shia Iraqis heavily aligned with Iran, notably the Shia cleric

Muqtada al-Sadr who is an immensely popular politician within the Shia population of Iraq and a representative of the strictly Islamic Shia view point with particular emphasis on cooperation with Iran. These militias have their roots in the same militias that fought against U.S. forces during the Iraq war, at the urging of Sadr. These fighters have been sponsored by Iran and trained and transported into Syria for combat in Damascus.⁴²⁷ The greatest significance of the presence of these fighters is the influence of Iran over Iraqi Shia Muslims. The Iranian government through its close connection to the various Shia clerics and pro-Iranian Shia Iraqis has the ability to place a great deal of political pressure upon Maliki, who relies on the support of the Shia majority in order to stay in power. The loss of support from Iran could potentially mean a loss in power for Maliki, and this makes it apparent that he is unlikely to want to limit the use of any of these militants in Syria. The fighters of LAFA fluctuate around 2,000 and are allegedly well-trained both in the insurgent tactics that militants used against U.S. forces in Iraq as well as the urban tactics currently being used widely throughout Syria.

POLICY DISCUSSION

Due to the increasing destabilization of Iraq and the Maliki regime's inability to effectively handle these destabilizing situations, the U.S. should consider continued diplomatic and logistical support to the Iraqi government. It is important that the U.S. openly support stability in Iraq, but that does not necessarily mean the U.S. government should explicitly and openly support the regime of Maliki, as it has by Secretary Kerry's recent comments. Rather, showing open-ended support for stability in Iraq and an end to violence is more inclusive to Sunni Iraqis and Shia leaders who may be more effective at leading Iraq than Maliki or whom the Iraqi people may find more suitable. The U.S. must avoid simply supporting Maliki outright,

especially due to the recent accusations of corruption against Maliki. This could be perceived both within Iraq and the region as the U.S. simply upholding tyrants in order to secure U.S. interests, as it did with Qadaffi in Libya. Currently Maliki's greatest danger is the risk of the violence being perpetuated by the ISIL in both the Iraqi Anbar province and in non-Sunni populated provinces in Iraq, which could be targeted due to the anti-Shia ideology of the ISIL, to continue to grow and spread throughout Iraq and threaten the country's infrastructure.

Maliki's strategy of negotiating with the both the ISIL or Sunni tribal militants have been largely ineffective; however the U.S. could potentially assist in these negotiations. The U.S. does not openly negotiate with organizations it recognizes to be terrorist organizations, and to large effect the government of Iraq does not either. Rather, the U.S. should support Maliki's attempts to negotiate and establish good relationships with Sunni tribal leaders in the areas where the ISIL has began to strengthen. The U.S. dealt with these leaders heavily during the Sunni Awakening and since these leaders have shown to be reluctant to support Maliki against the ISIL, there is the potential that they would be more open to talking with the U.S. as opposed to the government of Maliki which they feel has wronged them. The U.S. could potentially provide the monetary promises that were denied to these Sunni tribes by Maliki in the past, and provide financial incentive for their support of military operations against the ISIL or their assistance in negotiating with the Sunni Islamists, as they had attempted in the past. Placing the emphasis of U.S. funding of the Iraqi government's efforts against radicals in this way could be more effective than simply providing weaponry to the regime, especially since the ISIL has become so imbedded into the city of Fallujah that it is unlikely that missiles and attack helicopters could remove them without devastating the city. The U.S. government should condition its support for Maliki, only in dealings directly with Maliki's regime, on his maintenance of good relations with the Sunni population. The U.S. should actively encourage Maliki to make good on both his

previous and current promises to the Sunni people and the pursuing of better relations with them. Though making this too public could bring too much attention to the previous wrong doings of Maliki towards the Sunnis, presenting his ineffectiveness and risking regime change which would not be effective at this time.

Maliki's current political conflict with the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey could also serve to be used as a diplomatic tool to leverage Maliki in the direction of U.S. interests. Maliki currently faces the threat of political pressure from Turkey in response to his threats to sue and black list its oil firms in response to Turkey's purchasing of oil from the Kurds. Sunni revolt in both the Sunni Triangle and in Northern Iraq would weaken Maliki's central government and further demonstrate his lack of ability to control the affairs of his country and potentially make Shia Iraqis fearful as Sunni Iraqis continue to successfully act in opposition to the government. This could result in political losses for Maliki within his country and the potential of his losing power as Prime Minister. The United States could work with Turkey to resolve this issue, as the United States has had a long history of dealing with the Iraqi government, the Iraqi Kurds and the Turkish government since the War in Iraq. If the U.S. could convince Maliki that he needs the U.S.'s support to prevent being destabilized by the Kurds and Turkey, this could be used as an incentive for him to abide by U.S. diplomatic suggestions in regards to appealing to the non-Islamist Sunnis.

The U.S. should also attempt to make an effort to curb the influence of Iran through its implicit support of Maliki. If the U.S. is able to keep Maliki in power through its funding and diplomatic tools, it is likely that Maliki would be less susceptible to the political manipulations of Iran who would use them to counteract U.S. influence and achieve their own aims in the region. If Maliki were to lose power however, especially in the face of a rising Sunni Islamist militancy, it is likely that in his place a Shia politician closely tied to Iran and the radical Shia

clerics of Iraq would rise to power. Shia Iraqis would be more likely to want to support a new leader who would be more aggressive in putting down the Islamists and preventing spill over into more Shia populated provinces of Iraq. Maliki on the other hand presents a more balanced option for the U.S. Supporting Maliki means that rather than having an open war against Sunni Islamists and risking the alienation of the Sunni minority, there is the potential for the suppression of these militants as well as cooperation with the non-Islamist elements of the Sunni population. Additionally, a Shia politician more strongly connected to Iran would likely bolster more support for the current Iranian sponsored operation of militias in support of Assad in Syria. Although there are currently Shiite Iraqi militias operating in Syria under Maliki, there is the potential for there to be many more under an Iraq led by a more radical Shia leader.

Presently, the U.S. has already begun shipping weapons to Iraq for use in combat against the ISIL, primarily missiles and reconnaissance drones. However, the U.S. government should avoid following the suggestions, such as that mentioned earlier by the Iraqi foreign minister, which suggest direct U.S. military assistance in the form of drone strikes. This is a bad strategy on multiple fronts. Direct military intervention on the side of Maliki or any other Shia regime would alienate the Sunni population of Iraq, making them feel that they are being targeted by the U.S. government and the Shiite population of Iraq. Additionally, this would paint Maliki and in essence the entire Shia base of Iraq as puppets of the U.S. This would make it even harder for the Iraqi government to make any lasting positive relationship with the majority of the Sunni population. Prolonged military violence against ISIL with the use of American military force would serve only to strengthen the cause of the ISIL, highlighting how the U.S. is using their Shia puppets to suppress their Islamic message. This would very likely push the Sunni base of Iraq further in the direction of the ISIL.

The U.S. strategy in Iraq in order to best suit U.S. interests in Syria should be primarily characterized by preventing the destabilization of the current Iraqi government and the development of a regional conflict from the combination of the Syrian Civil War and the regional sectarian violence currently within Iraq. As outlined above, this is best achieved by using U.S. diplomatic capabilities to provide support for the regime of Prime Minister Maliki in order to subdue Islamist factions within Iraq, minimize Iraqi involvement in Syria, and prevent the collapse of the Iraqi government and a subsequent power vacuum which would produce more chaotic violence in the region.

THE REGIME AND ARMED FORCES OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD

Lily Anderson

The regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is using the capacity of its armed forces to crush anti-government opposition fighters, with which it has been engaged in violent conflict for the past three years. Assad's military supplies, advising, and supplemental forces depend on the foreign support of Iran, Russia, China, and Hezbollah. It is in the interest of these actors to see Assad remain in power because of his consistent foreign policy in the region, most notably his championing of Palestinian rights and opposition to Western economic and political influence in the Arab world. Negotiating a significant decrease or end to the military aid coming out of Iran, Russia, and China would greatly increase the regime's willingness to negotiate a political solution to the current military deadlock with the opposition. It is in the US' short-term interest to weaken the Assad regime's assault on rebel-held areas in order to contain and respond to the humanitarian and refugee crisis, which threatens the long-term goal of regional stability and diffusing religious and ethnic tensions in the Middle East. This strategy will also set the stage for a more genuinely Syrian-led effort to craft a transitional government, which both foreign and domestic actors have declared is essential.⁴²⁸

BACKGROUND

In a country whose population is 74 percent Sunni Muslim, Bashar al-Assad and the majority of his ruling coalition belong to the minority Alawite sect of Shi'a Islam, many of whom rose to the highest ranks of the military during the period of French mandate.^{429 430} By 1946, when Syria received independence from France, Alawite officials and high ranking officers held some of the most powerful positions in the newly established Syrian Arab Republic. Independence was also followed by a period of political instability, during which the country experienced 10 military coups— a record in the Arab world.⁴³¹ In 1953, the Arab Ba'ath party merged with the Arab Socialist Party to form the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, which would come to dominate Syrian politics for the next 60 years.^{432 433} The Ba'ath Party's pan-Arab sentiment was expressed through the creation of the United Arab Republic in 1958 between Syria and Egypt, but divergent visions for a power sharing arrangement between the leadership of the two countries brought an end to the alliance in 1961.^{434 435} Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafiz al-Assad, came to power in 1970 through an intra-Ba'ath military coup, and is credited with launching an era of relative stability and consistent policy, despite the regime's willingness to use violence as a means to hold the state together.^{436 437} Syrio-centric Arabism and anti-Zionism were the pillars of the regime of Hafiz al-Assad, and have guided Bashar al-Assad's actions since he assumed the presidency in 2000.^{438 439} The notion that a strong military apparatus is the only thing standing between order and chaos in Syria has remained a crucial argument for the legitimacy of Bashar al-Assad's current regime.

The Syrian government is structurally decentralized, with its power bolstered by carefully-constructed alliances between government elites and prominent members of the various ethnic and religious groups in Syria. Elites in various state institutions have a relatively influential role in Syrian politics, giving them a significant stake in the survival of the regime.⁴⁴⁰ Survival of the regime is also safeguarded by members of Bashar al-Assad's family who sit in

top positions in the government, military, and security forces.⁴⁴¹ Alawite elites have concentrated their influence within the Syrian Army for decades; roughly 70 percent of all soldiers, and some 80 percent of military officers are Alawite.^{442 443} Assad is also protected by Syria's four overlapping security apparatuses (Department of Military Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence Directorate, General Intelligence Directorate, Political Security Directorate), which parallel the regular military forces and are responsible for reporting possible defectors to the President, ensuring that no major units defect with their leadership.⁴⁴⁴ These apparatuses have operated mostly outside of the law due to the state of emergency that was in place in Syria from 1963 until 2011, when it was lifted by the government in an attempt to appease the uprisings that began in March of that year.⁴⁴⁵

As of 2011, the Syrian Army was one of the largest and most capable armies in the Arab world, despite the setback of outdated Soviet equipment, with 220,000 personnel.^{446 447 448} Its fighting capacity has been reduced since the beginning of the crisis due primarily to defections, but its total manpower has recently been estimated at 178,000 troops and 314,000 reservists.⁴⁴⁹ The vast majority of these are army troops, of which there are thirteen divisions. Eight of these divisions contain conventional army brigades, and the remaining five are specialized, including the all-Alawite Republican Guard, which is headed by the president's brother Maher al-Assad.⁴⁵⁰ ^{451 452} Maher al-Assad is the second most powerful man in Syria and has managed some of the regime's most brutal crackdowns on protesters since 2011.^{453 454} He does not give interviews and operates almost exclusively out of the public sphere, but his influence on Bashar al-Assad should not be underestimated, and should be an indication that the regime's reach extends further than the public eye.⁴⁵⁵

A personal and direct chain of command between the President and individual unit commanders, is very important for Bashar al-Assad's counterinsurgency campaign.⁴⁵⁶ Bashar al-

Assad deploys only the most loyal core of his conventional divisions, so as to prevent large defections, making paramilitary forces and pro-Assad militias a significant source of combat power for the Syrian army.^{457 458} The Assad regime has relied primarily on two types of pro-regime militias: (1) *shabiha*, the mostly Alawite smuggling networks dominated by members of the Assad's extended family, and (2) more locally-organized militias comprised of minority populations who have armed themselves to protect their communities from armed opposition and extremist forces.⁴⁵⁹ The militarization of minority communities has been fueled by a desire for self-protection in the face of an uncertain future in which the Sunni majority could very well take control of the country.⁴⁶⁰ It is also representative of the Assad regime's deliberate attempts to frame the opposition movement as against minority rights and protection.

Tactics of the regime forces include demolishing entire neighborhoods in opposition strongholds, depriving starving civilians of humanitarian aid in the form of food and medicine, and dropping barrel bombs on communities that have been taken by rebel forces.^{461 462} The Syrian government has not publicly addressed its use of barrel bombs, but their increased usage is putting new urgency on the issue of gaining access to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The crude weapons, canisters packed with hundreds of pounds of explosives, fuel, and scrap metal, are dropped from government helicopters and are inherently indiscriminate in their destructions.⁴⁶³ Although official estimates put the army's strength at 178,000 troops, tactics such as these indicate that the Assad regime may in fact be experiencing a shortage of manpower, specifically infantry power.⁴⁶⁴

A resolution adopted by the UN Security Council on February 22 ordered all parties within Syria to stop blocking the delivery of humanitarian aid and strongly condemned the government's use of barrel bombs.⁴⁶⁵ The capability of Assad's forces is one of the driving forces behind the increasing death toll in Syria, and cutting off those sources could play a crucial role in reducing

the humanitarian crisis at hand.

The strength of Assad's militias and the enduring loyalty of his military and security forces are paramount in considering what a post-Assad Syria will look like: A lesson should be taken from the Bush administration's decision to disband Iraqi security forces, which have become an important part of the insurgency in Iraq.⁴⁶⁶ The Geneva II Peace talks between delegations from the government and the opposition forces are predicated on the Geneva Communiqué, which calls for a transitional governing body to set up free and fair elections in a democratic and pluralistic Syrian state. The current power dynamics on the ground make it unlikely that Assad will willingly cede power, and he has stated that he will be seeking a new term as president.⁴⁶⁷ The first round of peace talks in Geneva have made no progress in planning a political transition in Syria.⁴⁶⁸

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Decreasing Military Assistance from Iran, Russia, and China

Iran, Russia and China provide a major lifeline to Assad's strained resources and are an impediment to U.S. influence in the region. They play critical roles in sustaining half of the armed conflict both by providing Assad with the weapons and supplementary forces he needs to continue his extended military operations, and reassuring Assad that his forces can outlast the opposition, as he can more reliably depend on future support from these major allies. Negotiating a decrease or end to arms supplies, parallel a similar program to cut funding for Islamist groups within the opposition, would force Assad to reconsider his stance on seeking a new term, considering that his calculation is likely based on confidence in the continuation of his foreign military support.⁴⁶⁹ In addition, a weakened regime would likely result in an opportunity for

increased access to provide relief for the 9.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴⁷⁰

- Iran and Syria have a long-standing partnership in the region, and Iran has spent approximately \$10 billion on support for Syria.⁴⁷¹ Aside from direct support, Iran supports Hezbollah, which has between 2,000 and 4,000 fighters in Syria on the side of the Syrian government, including “hit squads” of highly trained fighters charged with the assassination of opposition leaders.⁴⁷²
- Russia has increased its military aid to Syria, despite claims that no new arms contracts have been signed since 2011.⁴⁷³ Historically, arms trades with Syria have not been critical for Russia: though Russia contributed 72 percent of Syria’s arms imports from 2007-2011, delivery of arms to Syria accounted for just 5 percent of Russia’s total arms deliveries abroad in 2011.⁴⁷⁴ In addition to arms deals, Russian exports to Syria were worth \$1.1 billion in 2010, and Russia maintains an economic stake in the Syrian energy industry, as well as a strategic stake in combatting U.S. influence in the region.⁴⁷⁵
- China’s role in propping up the Assad regime is driven not only by arms trades, but by large equities in Syria’s oil industry and an opposition to foreign intervention in the region.⁴⁷⁶ As permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and Russia have also played a critical role in countering U.S. and European efforts to put pressure on the Assad regime.⁴⁷⁷

B. Eliminating the Regime’s Chemical Weapons Arsenal

Assad’s agreement to hand over his chemical weapons took some of the focus away from the Syrian army’s traditional arsenal, which he stated was not at all affected by the deal.⁴⁷⁸ Still, the deal is one of the only confidence-building measures to which the Syrian government has

agreed. Initially, the Russian-brokered deal served to legitimize the Assad regime as a rational actor, interested in working with the international community on some level to prevent foreign intervention, and even create a WMD-free region in the Middle East.⁴⁷⁹ However, recent delays in the transport of chemical weapon agents to the port of Latakia, where they would be bound for destruction at sea, are casting doubt on the Assad regime's commitment to the process, as only 4.1 percent of the roughly 1,300 tons of toxic agents have been destroyed.⁴⁸⁰ Syrian authorities have indicated that violence and territory held by non-governmental forces have caused the delay, and have proposed a new timetable to remove its chemical weapons by late April.⁴⁸¹ At Russia's insistence, the original agreement does not authorize punitive military action in the case that the Syrian government does not follow through.

This gives Russia an opportunity to play a historic role in ensuring the deal is still completed, which would further Russia's objective to be seen as a global power on equal footing with the U.S. in the region, and to legitimize Russia's staunch support of Assad throughout the conflict.⁴⁸²

C. Curbing the Expansion of Designated Terrorist Forces in Syria

This is an especially complex situation, as foreign al-Qaeda and domestic affiliate groups are associated with practically every party involved. The opposition forces are most frequently linked to designated terrorist groups, as they align in their short-term goal of defeating the Syrian government forces. The ideological differences between the various opposition factions and the major designated terrorist forces in Syria are detailed elsewhere in this report, but divergence in their long-term goals for Syria and the broader region have led to infighting and disarray which has largely benefitted the regime's forces.⁴⁸³ Assad has been accused of financing and cooperating with al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Syria in an effort to bolster his own governments

legitimacy as an opponent of terrorism.⁴⁸⁴ It is likely a relationship of convenience, however, based on short-term interests as Assad purchases oil from al-Qaeda forces who have taken control of oil-producing areas.⁴⁸⁵ There is also the question of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and its presence in the Syrian conflict. Deemed a terrorist organization by the US, Hezbollah has contributed significantly to Assad's forces, further strengthening the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah axis' antagonistic position towards Israel and alignment away from the US.⁴⁸⁶

Attention given to the Islamic extremist elements within the opposition has deterred U.S. and other Western powers' support for the opposition in the past, due to fears that weapons or aid will end up in the hands of anti-US jihadist forces. After a brief hiatus, the U.S. resumed aid to the opposition, however, and is currently providing nearly \$260 million in direct non-lethal support to moderate opposition forces in hopes of curbing the influence of extremist groups in the struggle against the Assad regime.⁴⁸⁷

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

The U.S. has hesitated to use military force against the Assad regime, keeping in mind the legacy of military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. The U.S. also has little leverage over Bashar al-Assad himself, who is aware of these legacies and observed American political and media responses to President Obama's proposal of targeted military airstrikes last year to deter Assad's use of chemical weapons.⁴⁸⁸ Assad recognizes that the U.S. has refrained from waging war more because of international and domestic opposition than any promises he has made.⁴⁸⁹ Still, completing the chemical weapons agreement on good terms would build confidence and cooperation between Russia and European powers involved in the conflict.

Security being one of Russia's primary concerns in the region, disarming Assad's current regime of its chemical weapon arsenal would contribute to the construction of a less dangerous post-Assad Syrian environment, one in which Islamic extremists will not have access to such weapons. Both Russia and China have isolated themselves within the international community in regard to UN Security council resolutions concerning humanitarian responses.

With respect to Iran, it is important to include Hezbollah in negotiations on the halting of military aid to the Assad regime, as both are serving to assist the Syrian armed forces and fueling the conflict on the ground. Iran will be reluctant to give up on Assad because of the route he has allowed Iran to take through his country in supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, but Tehran may be convinced that a future government would serve this purpose as well. More concretely, Tehran might be willing to negotiate their level of support for Hezbollah in Syria if Russia guarantees access to the port of Tartus, where Iran can continue to support Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The central goal of the US-backed moderate opposition forces is the removal of Assad from power, but they may be willing to negotiate the preservation of the existing security structure as the foundation for which to reform the Syrian government. The current strength of Assad's conventional and paramilitary forces, however, must be reduced to get to this point. The US's best option for pressuring Assad to step down is to act *multilaterally* through the diplomatic process of Geneva II, which includes convincing Assad's allies to abandon his cause in Syria. Effectively disarming Assad's military forces through international cooperation would give the U.S. and the international community leverage in current efforts to negotiate confidence-building measures, such as cease-fires and prisoner exchanges.⁴⁹⁰

Recommendations

- Divert military support from Russia, Iran, and China to isolate Assad, by:

- Allowing Russia and Iran to quietly work out an agreement in which Iran has access to the Port of Tartus in exchange for a halt in arms supplies to the Syrian armed forces and its support for Hezbollah in Syria. This would allow Iran to maintain their support for Hezbollah in Lebanon
- Back away from the idea that Assad must go, while encouraging Russia to play a more active role in stopping the violence in Syria. Ensure Russia that the future Syrian government will include some level of Assad's influence, and continue to be a client of Russian military equipment, as well as uphold any and all oil deals signed by the Assad regime
- China will likely follow Iran and Russia's lead in backing away from their military support of the Assad regime, as China's energy needs quickly increase
- Ensure the removal of Assad's chemical weapons arsenal by supporting Russia and the arrangements they made in agreement with Assad last September
- Unite the moderate opposition forces in their vision of an inclusive transitional government that is non-antagonistic towards the U.S. or its allies in the region, as well as the minority populations within Syria
 - Continue to supply non-lethal aid to moderate opposition forces
 - Empower local governments;
 - Act upon the most recent UNSC resolution concerning humanitarian access, and increase humanitarian aid to the Syrian people, especially in areas where local governments or general stability have been achieved
 - Issue a statement that the U.S. and the UNSC will not tolerate any religious or ethnic violence under the future government— in effect, offer

the Security Council's protection for Alawite and Christian minorities that will no longer have the protection of the Assad regime.

HEZBOLLAH

Melanie Eng

Hezbollah, a Shiite Islamist paramilitary group, political party and U.S.-designated terrorist organization based in Lebanon, is currently the largest foreign paramilitary force fighting for President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.⁴⁹¹⁴⁹² Hezbollah militiamen, armed and trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, are Assad's most technologically and logistically capable line of defense and play a critical role in the survival of his regime. Hezbollah's unyielding involvement in Syria has also given impetus to the spread of sectarian violence into Lebanon, where emergent Sunni jihadists are now attacking Shi'ite communities and threatening to destabilize Lebanon's own fragile peace. Inasmuch as Hezbollah's military support for Assad continues to fuel both tiers of regional destabilization, the United States should focus on ensuring its military withdrawal from Syrian territory; derailing the transfer of Iranian weapons and missile systems through Syria into Lebanon for its use against Israel; and reorienting its military focus toward policing Salafi jihadists within Lebanon.

BACKGROUND

Hezbollah formed in 1982 as an armed resistance movement to Israel's occupation of Southern Lebanon.⁴⁹³ It has since served as Lebanon's most powerful national defense force, headquartered in southern Beirut's Daicha quarter with strongholds throughout the Bekaa Valley.

With a weapons arsenal of more than 50,000 “dumb” rockets and an undisclosed number of advanced Iranian and Russian-made missiles, Hezbollah is regarded by the U.S. State Department as the world’s most technically capable non-state militia.⁴⁹⁴⁴⁹⁵ Hezbollah’s long-term agenda is the obliteration of the state of Israel, which it views as an illegal usurper of Arab land and “America’s spearhead in our Islamic world.”⁴⁹⁶ In 1992 the organization’s vision evolved pragmatically as it began actively participating in the secular Lebanese political system, after years of decrying it and advocating its replacement with an Iranian-style theocracy.⁴⁹⁷ Still, curbing perceived American and Israeli expansionism in the Middle East remains Hezbollah’s primary *raison d’etre*. It cites Israel’s presence in the disputed Shib’a Farm territories (near the tri-border area with Israel and Syria), its overflights in Lebanese air space, and its holding of Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails as evidence of Lebanon’s continued need for an armed national deterrence force, and as rationale for its ever-expanding weapons arsenal.⁴⁹⁸⁴⁹⁹

Hezbollah derives much of its popular support from the provision of social services, which were first established in marginalized Shi’ite communities during the Lebanese civil war under the orders of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁵⁰⁰ Providing basic education, medical care and housing for neglected communities during this volatile time in Lebanese history won Hezbollah the favor of a large, loyal constituency: Lebanese Shi’ites driven to the margins of society by the war, who were not afforded the same generosity by their established leaders that Sunni and Christian populations were at the time.⁵⁰¹ To this day, Hezbollah’s schools, hospitals, roads and social welfare programs form the infrastructure of most Shiite communities in south Beirut and the southern Bekaa Valley, validating its reputation as “the only fully institutionalized political party in Lebanon.”⁵⁰² The Lebanese government, gridlocked since former Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s resignation 10 months ago, is on the verge of reconstruction; the planned division of power

would grant Hezbollah one third of seats in the National Cabinet and preserve the political predominance of its official party, the March 8 Alliance.⁵⁰³

Hezbollah also serves as a powerful Levantine proxy for its religious ally and primary international patron, Iran.⁵⁰⁴ The two entities share a close alliance predicated on religious solidarity and a common interest in the destruction of Israel, in which Iran is the senior partner.⁵⁰⁵ The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF) has armed, trained and bankrolled Hezbollah since its inception to further their mutual goal of anti-Israeli deterrence, with Quds Force Major General Qassim Suleimani acting as de facto director of Hezbollah's military wing.⁵⁰⁶⁵⁰⁷ In addition to providing arms, intelligence, and paramilitary training, Iran spends between \$100 and \$200 million annually to fund the organization's political infrastructure, propaganda campaigns and social institutions.⁵⁰⁸⁵⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Iran relies on Hezbollah as its strongest deterrent against potential Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.⁵¹⁰

Hezbollah also accrues large amounts of revenue from various money-laundering networks across the globe, with a particularly strong presence in Latin America.⁵¹¹ Narco-trafficking, counterfeiting and piracy operations in the lawless tri-region between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay are particularly lucrative, but Hezbollah operates trafficking networks that span through at least 12 Latin American countries.⁵¹² In 2011, the U.S. Treasury blacklisted two Lebanese money-exchange houses for moving millions of dollars through the U.S. financial system to fund the organization in a complex money laundering operation that spanned across Europe, Africa, China and Latin America.⁵¹³ Most recently, it was implicated in a "high threat" multinational money-laundering operation reaching across 20 countries that generated millions of dollars in illegal profits.⁵¹⁴

The regime of the late Hugo Chavez in Venezuela was a particularly important ally of the Iran-Hezbollah axis, covertly providing weapons to Hezbollah fighters in Syria, and helping its

operatives launder more than \$30 billion in illicit funds to mitigate the financial impact of international sanctions on Iran.⁵¹⁵ Hezbollah officials also hold senior positions within the Venezuelan government, and continue to operate training camps on Venezuela's Margarita Island in the wake of Chavez's death.⁵¹⁶

While the U.S. State Department, Gulf Cooperation Council, Israel, Canada, Australia and Netherlands consider Hezbollah an international terrorist organization, irrespective of its political and military wings, the European Union has blacklisted its military wing only.⁵¹⁷ The Obama Administration increased existing sanctions on Hezbollah following its entrance into the Syrian war, and currently pursues a policy of bolstering the Lebanese state and national military at the expense of Hezbollah.⁵¹⁸ By the end of 2014, the U.S. government will have supplied the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) with \$1.1 billion in financial and military aid to strengthen Lebanon's border security and counterterrorism capacities.⁵¹⁹⁵²⁰

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Assad's Military Defense

Hezbollah's stakes in the neighboring civil war are primarily driven by the geostrategic importance of Syria as a conduit for funds, technology and advanced weaponry smuggled into Hezbollah's Lebanese strongholds from Iran.⁵²¹ The Assad regime historically presided over such an arrangement, allowing Hezbollah to receive advanced Iranian missile systems vital to its military and technological buildup *vis-à-vis* Israel, and providing its own auxiliary support as well.⁵²² Hezbollah's existential interest in the preservation of the Assad regime is coupled with additional religious-sectarian concerns, which Nasrallah has made the focus of his public rhetoric regarding Hezbollah's presence in Syria. He originally justified Hezbollah's entrance into the

Syrian civil war as a necessary protective measure to safeguard the holy Sayyidah Zaynabb Mosque and Shrine in Damascus, as well as Shi'ite villages along the insecure Syrian-Lebanese border, from destruction at the hands of takfiri jihadists who had descended upon the country.⁵²³⁵²⁴ The growing volatility of al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria has since vindicated this rationale. Nasrallah now extols the need for an indefinitely sustained Hezbollah military presence in Syria, to prevent jihadists from further commandeering the current power vacuum, destroying Shiite holy sites, and assuming a widespread hold on the country.⁵²⁵

Between 3,000 and 5,000 Hezbollah fighters are aiding Assad's defense in rotating monthly tours, including several special "hit squads" tasked with the assassination of key opposition leaders.⁵²⁶⁵²⁷ Overall, they comprise one-third to one-half of all foreign militiamen defending Assad in Syria.⁵²⁸ Trained and armed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Quds Force, Hezbollah fighters serve as an essential lifeline for Assad in his fight to maintain power.⁵²⁹⁵³⁰ Hezbollah upgraded its role in the Syrian civil war last year from a limited defense force in Damascus to a widespread offensive operation, engaging in direct combat, sniper operations, facility and route protection and joint clearing operations throughout the country.⁵³¹ Hezbollah also provides intelligence, logistical equipment and guerilla warfare training to members of the Syrian Army to strengthen Assad's national defense from the inside.⁵³²

B. Preserving Supply Routes and Strategic Enclaves

Hezbollah's secondary activities in Syria involve preparing for the maintenance of operational capacity in Syria in the event of Assad's defeat. To this end, Nasrallah and Iran's Quds Force are coordinating efforts to build a 50,000-strong militia of Syrian Shiite and Alawite fighters, to be tasked with the defense of Hezbollah-controlled supply routes along the Lebanese-Syrian border, strategic Shi'ite/Alawite enclaves in northern Syria, and transit hubs on the

coast.⁵³³⁵³⁴ The objective of this operation is twofold. First, it will preserve territorial contiguity between Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon's Eastern Bekaa Valley and regime remnants in a post-Assad Syria — enabling Hezbollah (and Iran) to continue influencing the Syrian conflict after Assad's departure, and preventing any ascendant Sunni government from exercising full control of the country.⁵³⁵ More importantly, it will allow Hezbollah to continue receiving Iranian weapons through critical transit channels such as the Port of Latakia on Syria's northwestern coast.⁵³⁶

C. Spillover of Violence in Lebanon

Hezbollah's active support for the Assad regime has sparked the resurgence of dormant sectarian hostilities in Lebanon, between pro-opposition Sunnis who denounce its involvement in Syria and pro-regime Shi'ites/Alawites who support it.⁵³⁷ Bombings of the Iranian Embassy, the Shi'ite enclaves of South Beirut, and other Hezbollah-dominant parts of Lebanon attest to the mounting power and aggression of previously-marginalized Sunni radical groups within Lebanon, including those linked to al-Qaeda, as more and more Lebanese Sunnis embrace jihad to protest Hezbollah's war against their coreligionists in Syria.⁵³⁸ The Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Lebanon's largest al-Qaeda affiliate, claimed responsibility for two separate bombings on Iranian institutions in Beirut since November 2013, while Jabhat al-Nusra has declared all Hezbollah-controlled parts of Lebanon are "legitimate targets" for future attacks.⁵³⁹⁵⁴⁰ The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is the latest extremist group to establish an official branch in Lebanon; its entrance into the country's sectarian feud underscores the Lebanese state's inability to keep jihadist forces at bay, and the country's precarious positioning on the brink of a complete breakdown of law and order.⁵⁴¹

The chance of sectarian violence spilling over the poorly managed Syrian-Lebanese border would be high even if Hezbollah did not overtly support Assad. But as Salafi jihadists are now using its involvement in Syria to rationalize further attacks on Lebanon's Shiite communities, it is clear that this has at least accelerated the spillover of sectarian violence — and might be the key to either sustaining or slowing it. Anti-Assad sentiments run deep within Lebanon's impoverished Northern Governorate, where the largely-Sunni population still bears the emotional scars of oppressive post-civil war Syrian occupation under Hafiz al-Assad.⁵⁴² As such, it is impossible to predict whether Hezbollah's potential withdrawal from Syria would appease Lebanon's Sunni militants, curtailing their attacks on Hezbollah-controlled communities and restoring relative peace to the country — or if inflamed tensions have already set Lebanon on an irreversible path towards widespread sectarian chaos. Leaders within Lebanon's Salafi movement have given some indication, however, that such ends are feasible: Tripoli's most highly revered Salafi sheikh, Salem al-Refai, stated that “our calls for jihad will stop once Hezbollah withdraws from Syria.”⁵⁴³

D. Greater Threats to Israel's Security

Hezbollah is smuggling at least 12 advanced missile systems previously stored in Syria into Lebanese territory piece by piece, along with stockpiles of other weapons belonging to the Assad regime.⁵⁴⁴⁵⁴⁵ Once assembled, these systems would allow Hezbollah to target Israeli aircrafts, ships and military bases with unprecedented accuracy.⁵⁴⁶ Weapons convoys carrying advanced surface-to-surface missiles (Iranian Fatah-110s), anti-ship cruise missiles (Russian Yakhonts) and anti-aircraft missiles (Russian SA-17s) were targeted by Israeli defense forces several times within the past year, along supply routes from Damascus to Hezbollah strongholds in the Southern Bekaa Valley and near the port of Latakia.⁵⁴⁷ These threats to Israel's security are

augmented by the recent movement of Hezbollah forces into the Syrian side of the disputed Golan Heights, a strategic region that would allow it to strike Israel with lethal precision in any future confrontation.⁵⁴⁸

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Options

Facilitating Hezbollah's withdrawal from Syria will serve both short-term and long-term U.S. goals in the region. First and foremost, it will accelerate the fall of Assad's regime by depriving him of a vital military lifeline, if not cutting his foreign defense force in half. This will diminish violence imposed upon civilians by the regime, reduce Assad's leverage in future diplomatic negotiations, and derail the construction of strategic regime-allied enclaves that threaten to undermine the unity and stability of a post-Assad Syrian state. Further, the retreat of militias currently protecting Iranian-Hezbollah transit routes in Syria will allow for their dissolution pending the rise of a new government in Damascus. Without these key channels in place, Hezbollah's stance against Israel will be severely weakened for the foreseeable future.

U.S. interests in reducing Hezbollah's home-front military capabilities stem primarily from its commitment to Israel's security. But within the context of sectarian violence intensifying Lebanon, Hezbollah's military strength may now be the last bastion of Lebanese stability — and an unexpected deterrent against Israel's newer, more volatile jihadist enemies. As such, it is in the U.S.'s immediate interests to ensure the restoration of Hezbollah's military strong arm and political priorities to Lebanon. The LAF has demonstrated an inability to thwart the proliferation of Salafi extremists on its own. Forcing the return of Hezbollah troops to Lebanon would significantly bolster the country's internal security capabilities, and reorient the focus of

Lebanon's *de facto* defense force to domestic concerns. It may also mollify Lebanese jihadists who cite Hezbollah's presence in Syria as the sole reason for their attacks, and who have publicly promised to cease and desist once Hezbollah withdraws its military support for Assad.

Ensuring Hezbollah's withdrawal from the Syrian war will undoubtedly benefit U.S. regional objectives on multiple fronts, but negotiating its departure will be difficult. The U.S. is unable to directly reckon with Hezbollah's leaders, given its status as a blacklisted terrorist organization. This leaves the U.S. with two circuitous options for negotiation: 1) convincing France, a close ally in the EU and former colonial power in Lebanon, to approach Nasrallah directly, and 2) brokering a deal with Iran. France has maintained cordial relations with Hezbollah's political leaders since the E.U. blacklisted its military wing in 2013, and also holds considerable leverage over the group due to these newly imposed sanctions.⁵⁴⁹ This puts French policymakers in a strategic position to bargain for Hezbollah's withdrawal from Syria. French President Francois Hollande, whose government has demonstrated a deep commitment to Lebanon's security and stability over the course of the Syrian war, would undoubtedly be in favor of negotiating Hezbollah's departure from the conflict.⁵⁵⁰ However, despite E.U. sanctions threatening to compromise Hezbollah's future fund-raising operations, their immediate impact has not been crippling (or even noticeable) enough to incentivize Hezbollah's cooperation on their own. Instead, it would be more effective to pursue this option as a secondary strategy that supplements a closed-door agreement with Iran.

Hezbollah could not survive in Syria without Iran's support, so an Iranian ultimatum that orders Hezbollah out of Syria would be the quickest, most effective means of guaranteeing its departure. Iran will be reluctant to abandon its ally in Syria, though, as the demise of the Assad regime would sever its territorial connection to the Levant and undermine its ability to empower anti-Israeli deterrents in the region. However, Iran may be enticed to recalibrate its priorities with

the promise of concessions on its nuclear program and the easing of U.S. sanctions. Similar top-down methods of coercing Hezbollah via Iran have proven effective in the past: during the Lebanese hostage crisis of 1985, President Ronald Reagan was able to secure the release of three American hostages from detainment in Beirut by covertly negotiating an arms deal with Iran.⁵⁵¹ The prisoners, abducted by Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad Organization, were released in exchange for the secret provision of antitank missiles shipped to Iran.⁵⁵² Leveraging nuclear concessions in a covert agreement with Iran may yield equally positive outcomes in the current crisis, especially given the relative amicability of U.S.-Iranian relations today compared with relations in 1985.

The U.S. would also need to take precautionary measures to ensure Hezbollah honors any future commitment to withdraw from Syria in a timely and permanent manner — and to prevent rogue Hezbollah battalions from crossing back over the border after initial retreat. These provisions can be achieved by increasing financial, logistical and military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF), for the purpose of preserving Lebanon's national border-security capabilities and expanding the LAF-ISF Common Border Force.⁵⁵³ Despite Hezbollah's widespread infiltration of all other national institutions, the LAF remains a transparent, independent albeit weak entity meriting the full confidence of U.S. State Department.⁵⁵⁴ A stronger, equally credible national defense force would help stabilize the region by keeping Hezbollah fighters out of Syria and Iranian/Syrian missile systems out of Lebanon.⁵⁵⁵ Bolstering Lebanon's state security apparatus would also curtail the spread of Salafi jihadist groups, in addition to weakening Hezbollah over the long-term by eroding its domestic legitimacy as the country's sole defense force.

Finally, the U.S. must take steps to demonstrate continued commitment to Israeli security. The U.S.'s closest regional ally is likely to perceive a nuclear deal with Iran and the return of

Hezbollah troops to its national borders *en masse* as a tandem affront, and in supporting these measures the U.S. risks alienating a close partner. Inevitable tensions may be assuaged, however, by renewed efforts to help Israel develop key deterrence facilities, like its David Sling and Iron Dome interceptors.⁵⁵⁶

Recommendations

- Negotiate with Iran to relinquish its support for Hezbollah fighters in Syria in exchange for concessions on its nuclear program.
- Work with France to pressure Nasrallah directly and incentivize his independently-ordained withdrawal from Syria with the easing of E.U. sanctions.
- Counter the flow of weapons along the Iran-Syria-Lebanon axis by bolstering the Lebanese Armed Forces' border-security capabilities with increased financial, technical and military aid.
- Mitigate increased threats to Israel's security by helping fortify its national deterrence programs.

THE NATIONAL COALITION OF SYRIAN REVOLUTION AND OPPOSITION FORCES

and THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY

Bryan Lam and Amanda Ramshaw

Rather than intervening militarily on behalf of the Syrian opposition, whose cause they publicly support, the U.S. and other Western powers have attempted to reconcile the opposition and the Assad regime by assisting the National Coalition and its military branch, the Free Syrian Army. These international supporters, who have christened themselves the “Friends of Syria,” advocate for diplomatic partnership with and non-lethal aid to the NC and FSA. Though the NC’s influence within Syria is limited as a result of its being headquartered outside the country, policy experts claim that the FSA is sure to have a role in Syria’s post-conflict government, making contact and cooperation with the FSA of high interest to Western powers.⁵⁵⁷⁵⁵⁸ Cooperation with these organizations, however, is complicated by their deep reluctance to negotiate with President Assad while the latter remains in power. Material assistance to these groups is also made difficult by the possibility that aid will reach designated terrorist organizations instead, as it has in the past.

BACKGROUND

The National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, otherwise known as the National Coalition (NC), was established in November 2012 in Doha, Qatar.⁵⁵⁹ It was founded after Western allies of its predecessor, the Syrian National Council, pressured the latter to create a new umbrella group to better represent Syrian minority groups with a diversity of aims and interests.⁵⁶⁰ It currently receives broader international recognition and legitimacy than any other Syrian opposition group. At a “Friends of Syria” conference shortly after the formation of the NC, over 100 countries publicly stated their support for the coalition.⁵⁶¹

In accordance with its origins, the NC set forth its aims as the deposition of President Bashar al-Assad and his associates, the creation of a transitional government, and the establishment of a democratic Syria tolerant of all minority ethnicities and religions.⁵⁶² To exhibit its representation of Syrian minority interests, the NC at one point delegated five seats in the general assembly to Alawites and reserved a deputy seat for Kurds.⁵⁶³ The NC initially required a promise of Assad’s removal before agreeing to attend negotiations, holding him accountable for the atrocities of the conflict.⁵⁶⁴

While the NC remains opposed to negotiating with the Syrian government, pervasive doubts about military intervention in the international community have forced the NC to participate in diplomatic talks. However, the efficacy of the talks has been cast into doubt by questions of the NC’s real legitimacy among Syrian civilians. Headquartered in Cairo, the NC considers itself a government in exile, but as such would be unable to “fend off challenges to its political leadership indefinitely unless it relocates to Syria.”⁵⁶⁵⁵⁶⁶ Other opposition groups, such as the Islamic Front and al-Nusra, are able to seek out local support personally, while the NC remains far away from the conflict. Not only have these groups summoned their existing support

from private civilians rather than external state backers, they have been more capable than the NC to deliver aid to civilians in need, which they use as a weapon of influence.⁵⁶⁷⁵⁶⁸

The NC may have inherited some of the legitimacy issues that crippled the SNC, which was the most internationally recognized Syrian opposition group until its dissolution. Though the SNC was comprised of diverse groups including the Damascus Declaration, Muslim Brotherhood, and Kurdish National Council, it failed to unite its internal ranks on issues of importance.⁵⁶⁹⁵⁷⁰ It made insufficient efforts to include local leaders in its campaigns for a peaceful resolution, making itself appear distant and elitist to many Syrian civilians; and its failure to agree on a military plan opened the door for Islamist militants to take advantage of the resulting power vacuum.⁵⁷¹ Eventually, these weaknesses led the SNC's major international backers to declare that it could "no longer be viewed as the visible leader of the opposition."⁵⁷² The NC was created in the wake of the SNC's disbanding, but it too has struggled to represent the Syrian population fairly: the majority of its seats are filled by members of the SNC, and it has been forced to sacrifice some of its military and humanitarian priorities in order to maintain international support and funding.⁵⁷³⁵⁷⁴⁵⁷⁵⁵⁷⁶ There is therefore a risk that the NC, like the SNC, will lose its effectiveness and its international backing, and that the international community will have to seek a new representative coalition with which to engage in peace talks, significantly delaying negotiations.

The NC's military branch is the FSA, which currently acts as a military deterrent to the armed forces of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Of primary interest to the FSA is U.S. support in removing Assad from power, but also of high interest are an end to the years-long civil war and reforms to the Syrian government. With over 100,000 fighters—though exact numbers are difficult to ascertain—the FSA maintains a level of influence in Syria that is an asset to U.S. foreign policy in the region.⁵⁷⁷⁵⁷⁸ Its membership "appears to consist largely of experienced

military personnel.”⁵⁷⁹ 75 to 80 percent of FSA personnel identify as Sunni Muslims, consistent with the Sunni fraction of the Syrian population at large. This parallel has most likely bolstered civilian support for the FSA. It should be noted that the other 20 to 25 percent of FSA members are Sunni Kurds.⁵⁸⁰ Today the FSA is active militarily in “the northwest (Idlib, Aleppo), the central region (Homs, Hama, and Rastan), the coast around Latakia, the south (Deraa and Houran), the east (Dayr al-Zawr, Abu Kamal), and the Damascus area.”⁵⁸¹ The FSA is made up of multiple brigades, including the Farouk Brigade, Tawhid Brigade, Idlib Martyrs’ Brigade, National Unity Brigades, and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi Brigade.⁵⁸²⁵⁸³

The FSA was officially founded on July 29, 2011 by Colonel Riad Mousa al-Asaad, who had defected from the Syrian Air Force earlier that year. A majority of armed opposition fighters in the FSA were defectors from the Syrian Armed Forces, suggesting discontent within Assad’s military. FSA headquarters were established in Turkey, where Riad al-Asaad had patronage from the Turkish Armed Forces. The shared border between Syria and Turkey made this base strategic.

Riad al-Asaad headed the FSA until December 2012, when a massive restructuring, in tandem with the creation of the Supreme Military Council (SMC), led to Salim Idris’s becoming the Chief of Staff.^{584 585} Though technically demoted, Al-Asaad remains an elevated figurehead⁵⁸⁶ in the FSA. The new command structure allows “rebel commanders from across Syria [to join] forces under a united command they hope will increase coordination between diverse fighting groups.”⁵⁸⁷ The Supreme Military Council considers itself “the highest military authority in the Syrian Arab Republic.”⁵⁸⁸

Though the 30-person SMC was elected and Salim Idris appointed by “some 500 delegates,” there were disagreements in late 2013 as to whether Idris remained the Chief of Staff.⁵⁸⁹ The uncertainty lasted through mid-February 2014⁵⁹⁰⁵⁹¹⁵⁹² and may have affected the U.S.’ ability to communicate with the FSA. This made a resolution of the dispute an urgent issue,

as much U.S. cooperation with the FSA is predicated on knowledge of who is in charge. On February 14, 2014, the Supreme Military Council released a statement announcing that Idris was no longer Chief of Staff. The details of his deposition are still murky, and one unnamed SMC commander labeled the removal of Idris as a “coup,” hinting at Saudi involvement in the matter. The new Chief of Staff of the SMC is Brigadier General Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir, and Colonel Heitham Afeisi is his appointed deputy.⁵⁹³ However, it is increasingly apparent that the SMC suffers from issues of internal communication, making a breakdown in SMC-U.S. interactions ever more likely.

The FSA maintains a high level of structure and has a formal Statement of Principles. Set forth in July 2012, this Statement of Principles serves to direct the Army, as well as providing outside parties such as the U.S. with a point of reference. According to this declaration, the FSA fights for “a plural, democratic, civil state for Syria and their commitment to abiding by international law,” but “rejects all forms of terrorism” and “recognizes the threat posed by Syria’s chemical and biological weapons stockpiles and pledges to safeguard these dangerous materials.”⁵⁹⁴ The FSA claims to seek “a peaceful end to Syria’s crisis,” but maintains that it will use violence “if necessary to end the tyranny and dictatorship of the Assad regime,” as it aims chiefly “to protect Syria’s civilians and to guarantee them a brighter future.”⁵⁹⁵

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Geneva II Conference and Obstacles to a Peace Treaty

As the Syrian rebel faction with the greatest international legitimacy, the NC is currently representing the opposition at the Geneva II peace talks, which began January 22. The NC only accepted its invitation to the talks days before, partially as a result of internal ideological disputes,

as attending the talks contradicted the NC's stated refusal to negotiate with the Assad regime. These disputes led to the withdrawal of the SNC from the Coalition.⁵⁹⁶ The first round of negotiations saw hostility between the NC and regime representatives, with opposition officials claiming that the regime was ignoring the dialogue of Geneva I, which called for a peaceful transition; and that the government was "not willing to fight terrorism."⁵⁹⁷ Though subsequent rounds saw an agreement by the regime representatives to evacuate women, children and the elderly from the besieged city of Homs (men remaining until the government received a list of their names), they have not yet brokered an end to the violence.⁵⁹⁸ Shortly after the negotiations themselves, the Syrian government dropped barrel bombs on the city of Aleppo, killing over 150, and assaulted aid convoys and evacuation vehicles at Homs with gun and mortar fire.⁵⁹⁹⁶⁰⁰ Besides the temporary agreement for Homs, the Geneva II Conference ended with no established transition and little optimism for another round of negotiations.⁶⁰¹

Though the FSA provides an organized, viable vehicle for international military support of the opposition, and has lobbied for such support continuously, negotiating support for the FSA in diplomatic terms has proven difficult. Though it seeks U.S. assistance in establishing a transitional government, the FSA has so far abstained from the Geneva II peace talks, refusing to engage diplomatically with Assad while he is still in power. General Idris also refused to agree to a ceasefire.⁶⁰² Such stubborn diplomacy on the part of the FSA does not bode well for success at Geneva II from the National Coalition's perspective.

B. U.S. Distribution of Nonlethal and Lethal Aid to FSA

From March through December 2013, the U.S. assisted the FSA with nonlethal aid including "food rations, computers, and vehicles."^{603 604} This assistance was suspended on December 11, 2013,⁶⁰⁵ when the Islamic Front broke into a Supreme Military Council warehouse

in Bab al-Hawa, a border crossing into Turkey, and allegedly stole U.S. aid materials.⁶⁰⁶⁶⁰⁷ To avoid inadvertently assisting jihadist groups, the U.S. suspended nonlethal aid to the FSA, but resumed it in late January 2014.⁶⁰⁸⁶⁰⁹ The incident highlights the complex obstacles to aiding certain opposition groups exclusively.

In addition to the U.S. State Department's nonlethal aid, the Central Intelligence Agency has been suspected of providing arms and ammunition to the FSA, and of running "a covert program to arm and train the Syrian rebels."⁶¹⁰ However, assuming that it exists, this lethal aid may be insufficient to create a "unified disciplined rebel structure."⁶¹¹ General Idris repeatedly asserted that the FSA would benefit most from U.S. donations of "weapons, equipment, training, and money."⁶¹² Idris was not satisfied with the amount of aid disbursed to the FSA by its allies, contrasting it to the generous support given by allies of the Assad regime.⁶¹³

C. Complications of Jihadist Elements on Syrian Front

In addition to warring with Assad's military, which is 178,000 strong,⁶¹⁴ the FSA must now fight another enemy: jihadist groups, most significantly al-Nusra and the ISIL. These groups, rather than only employing Syrian fighters, have attracted Sunni jihadist fighters "from throughout the Arab and Muslim world."⁶¹⁵ In addition to waging war against the FSA and Assad regime directly, these groups have capitalized on the FSA's victories in certain territories by attempting to take control of those territories: they are, at least to General Idris, "very dangerous and maybe sometimes more dangerous than the regime."⁶¹⁶

POLICY OPTIONS

Negotiating with and disseminating aid to the Syrian opposition forces via the National Coalition

allows the U.S. to engage with smaller rebel groups, such as the Local Coordination Committees⁶¹⁷, by way of an organization with which its own interests are clearly aligned. In the interest of abstaining from direct military intervention and harnessing the support of other international actors, the U.S. might support the NC's establishment of and leadership in a transitional governing body. A Syrian government cooperative with the U.S. would be a strategic asset in the Middle East, particularly relative to Iran, which requires the consent of any Syrian government in sending assistance through the country to Hezbollah. However, before such a government can be established, the NC must garner greater support and legitimacy among Syrian civilians. The U.S. should assist this process by increasing humanitarian aid to the Syrian people via the NC, which would not only serve the latter's reputation on the ground, but require it to return to Syria from Cairo and thus boost its local authority.

Any policy recommendations regarding the FSA should realistically align with recommendations regarding the NC. Were the NC to establish a transitional government in Syria, the FSA would act as the government's military body, thus requiring little administrative restructuring or the creation of a new military. Whether or not a transitional government is established, however, the need for nonlethal aid to the FSA remains, as supporting the FSA preserves a viable conduit for humanitarian aid to civilians. With its size and mobility, the FSA has the capacity to organize the dissemination of aid to local populations. The FSA and NC should therefore work together to develop an administrative structure for the distribution of aid, which the U.S. and other international parties can provide.

THE ISLAMIC FRONT

Bryan Lam

The Syrian opposition movement is split ideologically among several different visions of post-conflict governance in Syria. One opposition organization, the Islamic Front (IF), led by the Salafist group Ahrar al-Sham, seeks to create “a civilized Islamic society in Syria ruled by the law of God.”⁶¹⁸ Their Salafist ideology is a stricter form of Sunni Islam and the IF is not favorable towards the religious minorities, including the current ruling Alawites. Complicating matters is that the IF has established a relationship with al-Qaeda and the jihadist group al-Nusra, which has been designated as a terrorist group by the U.S. Its strength and influence within Syria makes it a key player in the conflict, whether as a U.S. ally or obstacle to a political resolution. Their presence within Syria is large enough where it is important to negotiate with the IF, or at least the more moderate groups within the larger body, to join in a transitional Syrian government.

BACKGROUND

The IF brings together several Islamist groups that were previously united under the Syrian Islamic Front (SIF), which formed in December 2012.⁶¹⁹⁶²⁰ SIF’s objectives revolved around creating an Islamic state in Syria, guided strictly by sharia, or strict Islamic, law.⁶²¹ In November 2013 SIF disbanded and IF formed. Its leading party is Ahrar al-Sham, which was also influential in SIF and absorbed seven of its 11 groups.⁶²²⁶²³ IF’s goals mimic those of SIF: it

seeks to create a Syria under strict sharia law. IF's charter states that "no one in an Islamic society is above accountability, whoever he may be"; according to its leader, Hassan Aboud, the government IF envisions would be based on institutions with a small number of elections for officials.⁶²⁴⁶²⁵ IF's capacity for organized unity is high, but its military strength is difficult to ascertain. It has an unconfirmed 70,000 soldiers, but despite the uncertainty is still considered highly influential, given its strong member factions.⁶²⁶

Ahrar al-Sham, the leading group within IF, has dictated the goals of the umbrella group at large.⁶²⁷ Its origin is unknown, but it is believed to have formed at the beginning of the Syrian conflict before declaring its existence publicly in 2012.⁶²⁸ Via Ahrar al-Sham, IF has developed ties with multiple influential groups, including the designated terrorist group Jabhat al-Nusra.⁶²⁹ While not formally allied with one another, the two groups are ideologically similar: both allow foreign fighters to join their ranks in order to further their goals, and both seek to establish an Islamic state in Syria, although Ahrar al-Sham is less aggressive and more domestically focused.⁶³⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood have been known to fund IF, both out of the Brotherhood's desire to influence IF's armed forces and because Ahrar al-Sham has incorporated some Brotherhood affiliates.⁶³¹ Through Ahrar al-Sham, then, IF has established ties with both jihadist groups and with the Muslim Brotherhood, which itself has indirect ties to certain Western-backed groups.

Many of IF's former members once had ties with the FSA, due to their previous joint membership in the Supreme Military Council (SMC).⁶³² These groups' increasing disputes with Western objectives and methods led them to break with the SMC and its Western allies.⁶³³ The IF views the NC as a traitor due to the latter's participation in diplomatic negotiations with Assad; it also officially disapproves of the Muslim Brotherhood and their insistence on gaining power through the political process and elections.⁶³⁴⁶³⁵ IF aims to establish a state governed by

sharia law, rather than secularism or civil law, although its proposed government provides for limited voting for public officials.⁶³⁶ Its doctrine insists that Assad does not belong in Syria, and that his regime should be removed and replaced with an Islamist government to prevent more oppression.⁶³⁷ Despite their public stance, the IF is still a significant presence within Syria that is important to include for a peaceful Syria.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Questions of Islamic Front Alliances

IF considers the NC “traitors” to the opposition for engaging in Geneva II talks with the Assad regime, and has stated that the conditions of Geneva II will only be binding for the NC itself.⁶³⁸ Both assertions complicate prospects for U.S. negotiation with IF. Were IF to succeed in establishing a post-Assad Syria governed by Islamic law, Syria could become hostile towards the U.S. and Israel, particularly if the IF were to ally with al-Qaeda groups in order to achieve its aims, which it has stated its willingness to do.⁶³⁹⁶⁴⁰ In any case, IF’s representation in a future Syrian regime might allow al-Nusra to continue operating in Syria, posing obvious security problems to groups on all sides of the conflict.⁶⁴¹ In fact, Abu Khalid al-Suri, a top commander within Ahrar al-Sham that recently died, had links to al-Qaeda.⁶⁴² However, despite the affiliations between IF and designated terrorist groups, it is essential that the U.S. negotiate with the organization. While heavily Islamist, IF’s goals are still more secular than those of al-Qaeda or ISIL, and it may be considered a “swing vote” in the conflict.⁶⁴³ Allying with IF, and thus acquiring its military and civil influence, would put the U.S. and the factions it supports in an advantageous position.

B. Bringing the Islamic Front into a Transitional Syria

Regardless of which groups—if any—IF chooses to ally itself with, it will not be receptive to any Syrian government that does not rule under sharia law. They believe that the people want to live under Islamic rule, given that 74% of the population is reported as Sunni Muslim, from which Salafism is derived.^{644 645} With their military presence, a transitional government that is not of Islamic rule would only provoke IF to continue fighting. They have stated in their charter that they are willing to use military force in order to topple the Assad regime.⁶⁴⁶ Even though a transitional government would lead to the end of Assad, IF does not trust the Geneva II participants, nor would they accept anything less than an Islamic state. In lieu with their rejection of Geneva II and the actions of the NC, IF has the capability to continue its fight if a moderate transitional government were created. The best scenario would be to convince IF to join in the transitional government plan (see Policy Recommendation chapter). Some of the groups that joined the IF are much more moderate, such as the Haq brigade, and may be willing to participate under a democratic government.⁶⁴⁷ Persuading these groups to join in a ceasefire and participating in a transitional government would be the best course for ending the conflict.

C. Violence against minority groups

The creation of an Islamic state in Syria could very possibly lead to persecution of and violence against minority groups, especially the Alawite minority, as Alawites form the better part of the Assad regime. IF's charter does not lay out any future policy towards the Alawites, so their fate under an Islamist government is unclear, but the potential for genocide is not insubstantial.⁶⁴⁸ Certain IF member groups have voiced resentment towards Alawites, despite the organization's more ambiguous position as a whole.⁶⁴⁹ Towards Syria's Kurdish minority, to contrast, IF has consistently been tolerant, believing they should be treated equally under the law; IF

even has a Kurdish Islamic Front under its umbrella.⁶⁵⁰ However, Syria's Kurds have long aimed to establish their own autonomous region, a goal that IF (along with all other major groups in the conflict) opposes. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) currently defends and governs the self-proclaimed autonomous region of Rojava, while IF's vision for a future Syria precludes the existence of such a region.⁶⁵¹ Thus any attempt by IF to unite Syria under sharia law would likely meet with armed resistance from the PYD, reducing stability in Syria and the region at large.

POLICY OPTIONS

In order to create peace and stability for Syria, the IF must be convinced to join a future ceasefire agreement along with the other groups in the conflict. One method to do this would be to convince some of the member groups under the IF to break away to weaken the umbrella group's influence. As noted earlier, there are groups under the IF that are not as strict in their views as Ahrar al-Sham. The IF would still have provincial authority during the ceasefire period and it would be given an invitation to participate in the following election. The trade-off for the IF would be that the group would have a presence within the new Syria even if it did not have a representative win the election. Any dissenting groups within the IF would be addressed in the same way as al-Nusra and al-Qaeda unless they agreed to join in the transition.

SYRIAN KURDS

Winthrop Hubbard

Syria's Kurds faced decades of oppression and marginalization before the current crisis, and amidst the chaos of a war-torn Syria they have carved out an autonomous territory and defended it against all sides. However, this is not to say that the Kurds form a politically united opposition front: far from it. Their self-proclaimed autonomous region, Rojava, is not recognized by any international body; nor is it inhabited by a Kurdish majority. Nevertheless, where other groups in the Syrian conflict have met with struggle and very little gain, the Kurds have, at least for the moment, earned new respect and autonomy.

These gains remain fragile. Kurdish militias are engaged in territorial warfare with militant Islamist groups, and remain smaller and less advanced than the major armed forces in Syria, all of which oppose a new autonomous Kurdish region. If the Kurds are to consolidate their gains, they will have to convince the next Syrian regime that opposing Kurdish autonomy is not worth the struggle. This objective is hindered by the Kurds' internal ideological divisions, though they share a common desire and willingness to protect their territory. Decades of persecution have instilled in the Kurds a fear of discrimination as a minority group, which makes them as wary of an Arabic post-Assad government as they are of the Assad regime itself.

BACKGROUND

Though most of Syria's Kurds identify as Sunni, their relatively secular political ideals make them a historically distinct group within the country. Their presence in Syria dates back to the end of World War I, when a French and British mandate divided the Kurdish people between Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Today the Kurds number 24 million in these states collectively, making them the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, albeit one with various non-mutually intelligible dialects.⁶⁵² Deprivation of the Kurds' right to self-determination has created animosity between the ethnic majorities in these states, leading some Kurds to choose rebellion in response to their persecution, which in turn elicits further repression of the Kurdish population. Thus all states with major Kurdish populations have histories of conflict and violence between Kurds and government armed forces. In 2011, anti-government protests by Arabs in Syria's main cities were echoed by non-violent Kurdish protests in predominantly Kurdish areas.

The Syrian Regime under Assad has consistently abused its large Kurdish minority in order to suppress rebellion, through the abrogation of civil rights, violation of human rights, division of the Kurdish population, and suppression of political and cultural expression. 280,000 Kurds have been labeled as foreign or concealed Kurds, while another 280,000 are completely undocumented.⁶⁵³⁶⁵⁴ In the 1960s, accompanying growing Arab nationalism, the Syrian state banned the speaking and teaching of the local Kurdish dialect, imposed Arabic names on Kurdish towns, outlawed Kurdish political parties and incarcerated their leaders, and organized the migration of Arabs into high-density Kurdish areas.⁶⁵⁵⁶⁵⁶ Kurds were given the opportunity to attend school through the secondary level, but faced massive discrimination in the job market, where most were denied membership in professional unions or syndicates and thus cut out of high-earning industries. Moreover, undocumented and "foreign" Kurds were banned from attending secondary school.⁶⁵⁷ In March 2008, Syrian security forces opened fire on a Kurdish new year's celebration, compounding the state's continual repression of Kurdish festivals and

other assemblies.⁶⁵⁸ Despite this history of abuse, a majority of Kurds identified with the state of Syria before the outbreak of conflict in 2011.⁶⁵⁹

Since the conflict began, the state has attempted to woo the Kurdish people by stepping back on its repressive tactics—a viable strategy because of the many Kurdish rebels who fear harsh discrimination under a majoritarian Arab regime. Assad’s regime has largely left the Kurdish people to their own devices in the war, allowing them to form a semi-autonomous region without harsh recrimination.⁶⁶⁰ Similarly, the Kurdish language is now being taught in universities, albeit with restrictions.⁶⁶¹ Kurdish party leaders are not blind to the obvious timing of these changes, and maintain their opposition to the regime as a legitimate governing body.⁶⁶²

The major Syrian Kurdish groups are the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC). Neither of these groups existed in their modern form before 2003.⁶⁶³ The KNC formed out of 15 or 16 smaller parties at a meeting in Iraqi Kurdistan in October 2011.⁶⁶⁴⁶⁶⁵ Though its members are by no means ideologically uniform, the KNC includes some of the oldest and most well-known parties in Kurdish politics, particularly the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS).⁶⁶⁶ KDPS is the most influential, oldest, and second largest Syrian Kurdish party, and can be considered the sister party of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Iraq, of which Iraqi Kurdistan President Marsoud Barzani is a member.⁶⁶⁷ Other parties in the KNC include Yekiti, Azadi, and several other smaller and less influential groups. What ties these groups together is an opposition to the dominance of the PYD.⁶⁶⁸

The PYD was formed in 2003 by followers of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Turkey (PKK), paralleling the PKK’s goals in Turkey by lobbying the Syrian government to respect more Kurdish civil rights. The PKK has been officially designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by Turkey and the U.S., and the PYD and PKK formally downplay their connection, though both espouse far-left political views that have been

described by some right-wing observers as “quasi-Marxist.”⁶⁶⁹⁶⁷⁰⁶⁷¹ Prior to the current crisis, the PYD suffered years of repression at the hands of the Syrian Regime.⁶⁷² The PYD has distinguished itself by remaining separate from historically established Syrian Kurdish parties, developing its own fighting force at the beginning of the Syrian crisis (the People’s Protection Units, or YPG), and by maintaining ties to the PKK.⁶⁷³

Though the PYD, KNC and Syrian Kurds at large are nominally united under the Kurdish Supreme Committee, the PYD and KNC have taken divergent paths in response to the current civil war.⁶⁷⁴ Both share the goal of an autonomous Kurdish region within Syria, but while the KNC has attempted to flex its influence by allying with major opposition groups, the PYD has militarized and remained independent of those groups. Initially attempting to stay neutral after the outbreak of civil war, the PYD has since repelled attacks on its territory by state armed forces, the FSA, and militant Islamist groups.⁶⁷⁵⁶⁷⁶⁶⁷⁷ It unofficially commands the aforementioned People’s Protection Units (YPG), an armed force consisting of around 30,000 fighters, 40 percent of whom are women.⁶⁷⁸ However, the PYD’s firm anti-Assad stance has led it to sign a ceasefire with the FSA.⁶⁷⁹ It is now fighting a defensive campaign in its self-proclaimed autonomous territory of Rojava, against all trespassers, most of whom are militant Islamist groups.⁶⁸⁰

The KNC, meanwhile, has focused on diplomatic efforts. After attempting to join the Syrian National Council (SNC), it decided that the SNC would not respect the rights or autonomy of the Kurds and left the group.⁶⁸¹ It then joined the SNC’s successor, the National Coalition, on the condition that in a post-Assad Syria the NC would respect Kurdish rights and rename the “Syrian Arab Republic” the “Syrian Republic.”⁶⁸² The KNC represents itself internationally as the voice of the Kurds, through its participation in the NC and attendance at Geneva II.⁶⁸³

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Kurdish Diplomatic and Military Efforts at Autonomy

On January 21, 2014, the PYD and allied Kurdish parties officially declared what was already nominally established: an autonomous Kurdish-controlled zone in northern Syria called Rojava.⁶⁸⁴ Syrian Kurds who support this effort envision the autonomous zone being regulated in a similar way to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. The establishment of a new autonomous Kurdish state is actually opposed by the KRG, which has closer relations with the KNC than the PYD.⁶⁸⁵ However, despite these political disputes a majority of Syrian Kurds support the declaration of autonomy, as evidenced by the declaration being signed by more than 50 different Kurdish parties.⁶⁸⁶ The PYD has publicized its long-term mindset by administering social services and governance in Rojava.⁶⁸⁷

However, the PYD's control over the region is fragile and incomplete. It has been in constant conflict with powerful militant Islamist groups including al-Nusra and ISIL.⁶⁸⁸ Although largely successful up to this point in its campaigns, its gains are not necessarily permanent. It is also worth noting that the largest city in Rojava, Qamishli, though predominantly Kurdish, has never come under Kurdish control and remains firmly in the hands of the regime.⁶⁸⁹

Despite their shared goals, the PYD and KNC have been divided in their diplomatic tactics, and have failed to present a united front for Kurdish demands at Geneva II.⁶⁹⁰ Frustrated at the lack of formal Kurdish representation at Geneva II, and anticipating a decision by the UN to bar them from formally attending the conference, Kurdish Syrian organizations attempted to unite their views prior to the talks and after many rounds of negotiation agreed to a single

strategy. The groups decided that the KNC would represent the Syrian Kurdish community as part of the National Coalition.⁶⁹¹ However, over the course of the conference, the PYD has declared that the KNC is not representing their previously negotiated viewpoints and interests, and is therefore not an official representative of the Syrian Kurds.⁶⁹² Neither is the PYD willing to join the National Coalition, the main representative of the rebels in Syria at Geneva, stating that the NC is failing to advocate for Kurdish rights.⁶⁹³ For their part, the NC rejects the autonomy of Rojava, and claims that the PYD is serving the Syrian Regime.⁶⁹⁴ This internal strife means that the PYD and its military body stand alone in their fight to control Rojava, and to resist militant Islamists there.

The location of Syria's oil assets complicates the Kurdish position in the crisis, as large oil fields lie in areas with large Kurdish populations.⁶⁹⁵ Control of these areas is both a boon and a threat to Kurdish campaigns for autonomy: While it lends leverage to their diplomatic position, it also endangers the security of their autonomy against other parties desiring control of the oil fields.⁶⁹⁶ Moreover, any future Syrian regime will be reticent to allow the Kurds to control the most valuable resource in the country.

B. Troubled Relations with Turkey

The Kurdish minority in Turkey's eastern region has a long history of conflict with the government, dating back to the foundation of the PKK in August 1984.⁶⁹⁷ The PKK has resisted Turkish rule since then, and is affiliated with the PYD in Syria today. This alliance in itself is grounds for Turkey to oppose any effort at a semi-autonomous Kurdish region governed by the PYD. The United States and Turkey have dubbed the PKK a "terrorist organization," which offends the PYD Kurds fighting in Syria and hinders negotiations between the two states and the PYD.⁶⁹⁸ The PYD, for its part, has accused the Turkish government of backing both militant

Islamist and FSA groups that have clashed with PYD forces.⁶⁹⁹ However, there are some signs that the PKK is willing to work with the current ruling party in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP has gone further than any other major party in the present or past to expand minority rights for the Kurds, permitting the Kurdish language in media and schools, aligning and making oil deals with the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq (KRG), and negotiating directly with the PKK and its imprisoned leader.⁷⁰⁰⁷⁰¹⁷⁰²⁷⁰³ It is currently in peace talks with the PKK. However, these talks were derailed recently by the allegation that a government organization had assassinated Kurdish activists.⁷⁰⁴ Moreover, despite the abovementioned progress, Turkey claims that the PYD is working with the Assad regime; allegedly blocks the PYD from attending Geneva II; and maintains strong opposition to the autonomy of Rojava, which shares a long border with Turkey.⁷⁰⁵⁷⁰⁶

C. Syrian Kurdish Relations with the KRG

Following the deposition of Saddam Hussein by coalition forces and the resulting security vacuum in Iraq, Iraqi Kurds were able to form a semi-independent state in the north of the country, known as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), or simply Kurdistan.⁷⁰⁷ Kurdistan's new government has been working closely with the KNC, while engaging in several disputes with the PYD. Its influence on the conflict in Syria has largely been neutralized by the PYD's widespread support and military success in defending Kurdish-majority areas. The KRG offered only minimal support to the PYD's declaration of autonomy in Rojava, but knows that many of the Iraqi Kurdistan government's constituents and leaders support and sympathize with the PYD.⁷⁰⁸

D. Obstacles to a U.S. Alliance

As an anti-Assad, relatively secular and pro-Western group, the Syrian Kurds represent an apparent ally for the U.S. in Syria.⁷⁰⁹ Complicating any U.S. alliance with the Kurds, however, is certain Kurdish groups' conflict with the FSA and their refusal to join a major coalition. Constant mistreatment by the Assad regime has left the Kurds with no allegiance to the Ba'athists, but they also fear equal discrimination at the hands of a potential Arab regime. The U.S. has insisted on maintaining Syria's territorial integrity and expressed disapproval of a new Kurdish autonomous region, such as the one that the PYD and its allies have established and which they currently control.⁷¹⁰

POLICY OPTIONS

Were the U.S. to continue on its current diplomatic trajectory regarding the Kurds, it would largely ignore their struggle for autonomy. Alternatively, the U.S. could choose to partially or fully endorse certain Kurdish campaigns, and work to bring international support for the Syrian Kurdish struggle. If the only goal of U.S. policy in Syria was to create a strong relationship with the Kurdish people, the best way to do so would be to recognize the legitimacy of Rojava, lift the PKK terrorist designation, formally include the PYD and the KNC in any future diplomatic discussions about Syria's future, and recognize the KRG's right to sell oil to Turkey without the interference or approval of the Iraqi government. Such attempts at appeasing all Kurdish factions would not need to happen all at once, nor even be made into official policy. First, the U.S. could state that it recognizes the legitimacy of the Kurdish factions and praise the PYD for its effectiveness in fighting terrorist organizations. It could also initiate covert talks with the Turkish government to mediate negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK.

However, this type of titanic shift in policy may not be what is best for American

interests in Syria. Legitimizing the Kurdish autonomy with U.S. support would anger all other parties involved from the FSA to the Assad regime. Therefore, tacit support for the Rojava project is a better solution. Simply not condemning the efforts at Kurdish autonomy will be enough to make them willing partners in any ceasefire, a situation they would likely welcome in anyway. Then, because not promoting it after it has already achieved some level of stability, the U.S. should endorse a semi-autonomous state as part of a transitional government and eventually as part of any future arrangement in Syria.

THE NATIONAL COORDINATION BODY FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

Amanda Ramshaw

The National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (henceforth the NCB) describes itself as a “coalition of non-armed opposition parties and figures based in Syria.”⁷¹¹ Its members, who include 15 “left-leaning” parties and three Kurdish political parties as well as independent figures, oppose the use of violence or military force in the current Syrian crisis.⁷¹² The organization nevertheless gives tacit support to the FSA. Though its willingness to negotiate with the Assad regime makes it a strong potential ally for the U.S., American cooperation with the NCB is complicated by the organization’s anti-interventionist—and particularly anti-American and anti-Saudi—ideology, as well as its disputes with U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford and its diplomatic partnership with Russia and China. Despite these obstacles, the NCB could currently be employed as mediator between the Assad regime and opposition forces, particularly if a ceasefire agreement were reached and a transitional government established.

BACKGROUND

The NCB was established in June 2011, with Hassan Abdul Azim as Chairman and Haytham Manna as official Spokesman.⁷¹³ Though the demographics of its constituency are difficult to determine, it is known to include the Communist Labor Party of Syria, the Movement (Together) for a Free Democratic Syria, and the Kurdish Leftist Party in Syria.⁷¹⁴ If its own reports are to be

believed, the NCB also includes the Arab Democratic Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), and the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria.⁷¹⁵

The most recent diplomatic conference attended by the NCB was the Syrian Salvation Conference in Damascus in September 2012. This conference brought together some 20 Syrian opposition groups, and concluded with a “call for [the] immediate toppling of the regime.”⁷¹⁶ Participants agreed on the following goals and values:

- Deposition of the regime and establishment of a civil democratic state
- Rejection of sectarianism
- Adoption of non-violent resistance, but recognizing the Free Syrian Army as “one of the components of the revolution”
- Extraction of the Syrian army from the “clutches” of the regime
- Accomplishment of the goals of the revolution
- Protection of civilians
- Democratic resolution of the “Kurdish national case”
- Maintenance of Syria’s territorial and social integrity.⁷¹⁷⁷¹⁸

Since the conclusion of the Syrian Salvation Conference, however, the achievability of all of these goals has diminished.

The NCB has made clear its willingness to negotiate with President Assad, but this willingness represents its desire to restore peace to Syria rather than any support for the regime. Though the NCB will tolerate Assad’s remaining in power, Spokesman Manna has stated that the regime “is dead in the hearts and minds of all Syrians.”⁷¹⁹ Despite its willingness to come to the table with Assad, the NCB did not attend the Geneva II peace talks. Manna explained that participation in the talks would amount to “political suicide...tantamount to surrender, to hoist the white flag.”⁷²⁰ The NCB was further concerned that the Syrian crisis had been co-opted by international powers with alien interests.⁷²¹ However, diplomatic achievements from Geneva II,

such as UNSCR 2139, still stand to affect the NCB's operations, especially given the NCB's tacit alignment with the FSA.⁷²²⁷²³⁷²⁴

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Alignment with Western Powers and Allies

Though its willingness to negotiate with the Assad regime makes it a strong potential ally for all international parties—both Russia and Western powers allegedly support it—the NCB has proven difficult to engage with diplomatically, and the strength of its civilian constituency is dubious.⁷²⁵ The NCB has “rejected international support and foreign military intervention,” expressing special distrust of any American or Saudi interference in Syria, and has “instead [called] for internal pressure on the Syrian government in order to achieve a political solution.”⁷²⁶⁷²⁷ Additionally, though it officially supports the FSA,⁷²⁸ the two groups disagree on the appropriate use of military force.

B. NCB Ties with Russia and China

Russia and China have both expressed support for the NCB, as the organization's ideology conflicts little with either Russia's wish to see Assad remain in power or China's stubborn policy of non-intervention.⁷²⁹ Unlike the NC, which is supported by the U.S. and other Western powers, the NCB has the geopolitical advantage of being based in Syria and potentially exerting greater influence over civilians. Despite these theoretical assets, however, the NCB has been criticized as retaining diplomatic recognition only thanks to Russia's support, and as merely “issuing online statements and going on talk shows to denounce the Islamist insurgency.”⁷³⁰

Considering its dubious civilian legitimacy, it is unlikely that U.S. engagement with the NCB will yield positive diplomatic returns.

POLICY OPTIONS

As the likelihood of Assad's deposition diminish, the negotiation of a ceasefire becomes a higher priority for all international parties to the conflict. If such a ceasefire is agreed upon and established, the NCB will stand to act as a valuable intermediary between the former Assad regime and other elements of a transitional government, as its ideology has historically prioritized moderation and negotiation. However, a potential obstacle to coordinated action with the NCB is the latter's tense relationship with U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford. The NCB doubts Ford's ability to negotiate a successful resolution to the crisis.⁷³¹ As such, it is in U.S. interest that Ford should be seen as helping broker agreements to a ceasefire and transitional government. Finally, with a view to including the NCB in Syria's potential transitional government, the organization should be strongly encouraged to participate in the March 2014 P5+1 diplomatic talks, as its presence is necessary for future inclusion.

THE SYRIAN MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Rebecca Donato

The Muslim Brotherhood's historical presence and political support throughout the Middle East/North Africa region have made the organization a key component of the Syrian opposition. Recent political upheaval in Egypt has made the Brotherhood's participation in a future Syrian government an even more delicate prospect. It is impossible to ignore the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, however there are two major concerns in the role they currently hold in Syria today. The first concern is the funding it provides to other groups, despite not holding any formal membership within them; and the second is the uncertain role that it will play in a post-war Syria.

BACKGROUND

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, also known as the *Ikhwan*, was formally recognized in 1945.⁷³² Although largely borne out of the Salafist movement in Syria, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood looked to the original Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood for both their ideology and organization.⁷³³ The “ideological flexibility” of the Syrian Brotherhood and their insistence “on the indigenous Islamic roots of democracy” justified the Brotherhood's commitment to a democratic government.⁷³⁴ Much of the Brotherhood's success in the elections came from their ties to

Syria's large Sunni business class.⁷³⁵ Their popularity posed a threat to the Ba'ath Party when it gained control of the country in 1963, and the Party concerned itself with weakening the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and their Sunni supporters. Relations between the two parties were tense and sometimes violent until the coup of Hafiz al-Assad in 1970.

By the mid-1970s, opposition to the Ba'ath Party's draft constitution, secularist ideology, Alawi membership, and unsuccessful economic policies pushed both the Brotherhood and much of Syria into unrest.⁷³⁶ Certain divisions of the Brotherhood took on a jihadist element in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Radicalization in these divisions was due largely to the birth of the radical Fighting Vanguard in the 1960s from the Brotherhood's Hama division, and the transfer of Brotherhood leadership to the Hama division in 1975.⁷³⁷

An attempt on Hafiz al-Assad's life in 1980 left the regime paranoid of the Brotherhood and its growing jihadist factions, leading it to massacre between 500 and 1,000 jailed Brotherhood members in Palmyra, and to pass Law No. 49, making membership in the Brotherhood punishable by death.^{738 739} In response, the Brotherhood's leadership endorsed the creation of a "military branch" to work with the Fighting Vanguard against the government.⁷⁴⁰ In February 1982 members of the Fighting Vanguard, Brotherhood members from Hama, and Hama residents rioted and killed dozens of Ba'athist officials in the city.⁷⁴¹ The regime reacted with a military assault on Hama, followed by house searches, arrests and mass executions. After the 27-day offensive nearly 25,000 people were dead.⁷⁴² Following the Hama massacre, the Brotherhood in Syria fragmented, and split from the Fighting Vanguard.⁷⁴³ Much of the Brotherhood leadership and members went into exile, losing much of their credibility within Syria, while some exiled members of the Fighting Vanguard participated in the rise of al-Qaeda in the 1990s.⁷⁴⁴

Under new leadership in the late 1990s, the Syrian Brotherhood reformed its ideology to

include a “newfound commitment to nonviolence, the protection of minorities and the promotion of democracy” in an attempt to reconcile with the government.⁷⁴⁵ They participated in negotiations with Bashar al-Assad upon his entering office in 2000, asking that he “release all Brotherhood prisoners, authorize the return of all exiled persons to Syria, and lift the ban on membership in the Brotherhood.”⁷⁴⁶ However, Bashar released only a fraction of the jailed Brotherhood members, and refused all other demands.⁷⁴⁷ Later in 2001 the Brotherhood agreed to the National Honor Charter, which denounced using violence “against one’s own government” and “expressed the Brotherhood’s commitment to democracy.”^{748 749} In 2010 Mohammad Riad al-Shaqfeh took control of the Brotherhood as Comptroller General, and called on Turkey to help resolve the issues between the Brotherhood and the Assad regime, however the regime refused to meet the demands of the Brotherhood.⁷⁵⁰

Though the Muslim Brotherhood was nearly absent from the early stages of the 2011 Syrian uprisings, Bashar al-Assad accused the Brotherhood of starting uprisings, portraying it and all other Islamic opposition groups as radical in order to present his regime as a symbol of stability.⁷⁵¹ Though they did not invite the Brotherhood to their meeting in September 2011 in Doha, opposition leaders soon realized that the Brotherhood’s local history, organizational capacity, and access to financing made them key stakeholders in a post-Assad Syria and therefore key to the opposition.⁷⁵² In March 2011 the Brotherhood became part of the Syrian National Council (SNC), and in March 2012 they laid out their ideal post-Assad government in the document *Covenant and Pact*, which describes a democratic and pluralistic civil state and insists on equality for all citizens.⁷⁵³ Although it makes up a minority in the General Assembly of the SNC, the Brotherhood’s real influence comes from its presence within the General Secretariat and its Executive Bureau.⁷⁵⁴ These two powerful pieces of the SNC were partially comprised of, “Brotherhood-connected independents and other sympathetic Islamists as well as

secular allies who had been brought in on votes from the [Brotherhood] bloc.”⁷⁵⁵ The SNC later joined the National Coalition, but has since withdrawn its membership (and thus its participation in Geneva II) because the Assad regime made no effort to commit to the aims of the first Geneva talks in June 2013.^{756 757} Today the SNC is a self-proclaimed “government in exile.”⁷⁵⁸

Hamas, a self-described wing of the Muslim Brotherhood that currently controls the Gaza Strip, has used Syria under Bashar’s rule as an asylum for wanted members and Damascus as a base for its leader, Khaled Meshal.^{759 760 761} In January 2012, when it became clear that Assad would not seek a political solution to the uprising, Meshal chose to leave Syria because he felt Assad had taken the wrong response to the conflict.⁷⁶² Hamas lost allies in the governments of Syria and Iran after Meshal’s departure, but subsequently gained them in two states with known support for the Muslim Brotherhood, Turkey and Qatar.⁷⁶³

Egypt recently saw the Muslim Brotherhood gain and lose power within the government, leaving a turbulent legacy for the group’s prospects in Syria . Soon after Mohammed Morsi, chairman of the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, assumed power in June 2012, he was criticized for letting most of Egypt’s political power within parliament lay in the hands of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist Nour party. Public opposition rose in November 2012 when, in an effort to quickly draft and pass a new constitution, Morsi announced a decree that gave him far-reaching powers. Other public complaints focused on his failure to revive Egypt’s post-revolution economy and ensure the rights of all citizens under a democratic government. On June 30, 2013, mass protests occurred across Egypt, and on July 1 the military warned Morsi that they would intervene if in 48 hours he did not create a new plan to meet the public’s demands. On July 3 the army announced an interim government and suspended the constitution. Since Morsi’s departure Egyptian society has become polarized between support for Army Chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and for the Muslim Brotherhood. Both Turkey and

Qatar have shown support for the Brotherhood in Egypt since Morsi left, as they did when Meshal left Syria.

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Financial Support to Non-Coalition Groups

Aside from working within the formal opposition through groups such as the Syrian National Council and National Bloc, the Brotherhood has also used its strength in exile to gain influence with militant groups fighting within Syria by providing funding.⁷⁶⁴ However, official funding by the Muslim Brotherhood is hard to track and much of the funding may be funneled through private parties (particularly in Qatar), family networks, or specific factions of the Brotherhood.⁷⁶⁵

In January 2012, members of the National Coalition to Support the Syrian Revolution established the Civilian Protection Committee (CPC) as a way to provide support and funding to armed resistance groups in Syria.⁷⁶⁶ Muslim Brotherhood member Nadhir Hakim was appointed the political leader of the CPC and former Brotherhood member Haitham Rahma organized its military funding.⁷⁶⁷ Although the Brotherhood adamantly denied that the armed groups they supported through the CPC were part of a specific Brotherhood militant group, they pressured the groups that wanted continued assistance to follow Brotherhood policy.⁷⁶⁸

Three groups currently belonging to the Islamic Front—the Tawhid Brigade, Suqor al-Sham and Ahrar al-Sham—have received support from the Brotherhood.⁷⁶⁹ However, their refusal to accept Brotherhood leadership has resulted in the severing of aid, at least through official networks.⁷⁷⁰ Ideologically, the Brotherhood and the Islamic Front are almost indistinguishable, but their visions of a post-Assad Syria are different. While the Muslim

Brotherhood envisions a civil state in Syria and claims that it is willing to participate in a democracy, the Islamic Front's vision resembles "a Sunni version of Iran."⁷⁷¹

Although they have officially broken ties, the constantly changing nature of alliances within Syria allows for the possibility of these two groups to realign. The similar ideologies that exist between the two groups give them a strong foundation for a potential alliance. With an estimated 70,000 fighters, the Islamic Front has one of the largest organized military presences in Syria.⁷⁷² If they can reconcile their differing positions on the future governance of Syria, the Brotherhood and the Islamic Front may form the same sort of alliance that currently exists between the Syrian National Coalition and the Free Syrian Army.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prior to their exile the Brotherhood made up a formidable opposition within Syria, and the group has maintained influence even after they were forced to leave. Their secret networks of funding and unofficial opposition group membership in addition to their formal membership in opposition organizations, such as the Syrian National Council, make it clear that the Brotherhood must hold some of the power in a transitional government. In order to curb problematic alliances that could interrupt current diplomatic attempts to end the conflict, such as the potential one with the Islamic Front, it is necessary to bring the SNC back into the Syrian National Coalition. By bringing the SNC back under the umbrella of the National Coalition, this ensures that the Brotherhood is already participating within a power-sharing organization that will not be dominated by them. If the Brotherhood were to gain power independently or dominate any kind of transitional government, there may be a repeat of the events that recently took place in Egypt. The main challenge to bringing the SNC back into the Coalition is resolving the reason for their

initial split, the SNC's opposition to the Geneva II peace talks.

DESIGNATED SUNNI TERRORIST GROUPS

Wanda Bertram

Capitalizing on an environment of conflict in order to boost their authority in the Levant, a region they view as both strategically and ideologically significant, Sunni terrorist groups have made military gains in Syria through two main organizations even as those organizations compete for primacy. Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) currently compete for territory in the provinces of Aleppo, Raqqa, Hasaka and Deir al-Zour, each establishing spheres of influence through military and humanitarian campaigns. But regardless of affiliation, Syria's Islamist militants frequently find themselves in common battles against the Assad regime, which for al-Nusra leads to occasional cooperation with other factions. Not only does the fluid presence of terrorism complicate the logistics of U.S. support to the opposition; it poses a special threat to both regional and global security because of the large number of foreign fighters in these groups.

BACKGROUND

Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (henceforth ISIL) both have origins in Al-Qaeda in Iraq (henceforth AQI), an Al-Qaeda faction created by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, which carried out most of the terrorist attacks against NATO and local government forces in Iraq after 2002.⁷⁷³ Zarqawi established a network of jihadist safehouses within Syria between 2002

and 2006, to ease the movement of funding and of fighters into Iraq.⁷⁷⁴ In 2011 AQI—rebranded as the Islamic State of Iraq—used what remained of its aforementioned infrastructure to send jihadists and military strategists from its own ranks into Syria, creating Jabhat al-Nusra in January 2012.⁷⁷⁵ In April 2013 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who had succeeded Zarqawi as leader of the Islamic State of Iraq, moved more forces into Syria under the new organizational name ISIL.⁷⁷⁶ Al-Nusra and ISIL shared a stated aim: to overthrow the Assad regime and establish an Islamic caliphate including Iraq and Syria.

By the end of 2012, al-Nusra had claimed responsibility for over 600 attacks directed at the Syrian regime.⁷⁷⁷ At least 40 had been suicide bombings, including two car bombs killing 55 people at a military complex in Damascus, two bombings in Aleppo that killed 50, and other attacks in the cities of Hama, Dara'a, Idlib and Deir al-Zour.⁷⁷⁸ The U.S. Department of State designated al-Nusra as a terrorist organization following its claims of responsibility.⁷⁷⁹ Upon announcing ISIL's foundation in April 2013, Baghdadi declared a merger with al-Nusra, but Abu Mohammad al-Julani, al-Nusra's leader, rejected the merger.⁷⁸⁰⁷⁸¹ To resolve the dispute, Ayman al-Zawahiri, chief of al-Qaeda's core leadership since the death of Osama bin Laden, ordered that the two organizations should remain separate (subject to a merger in the future) and that al-Nusra should serve as al-Qaeda's primary franchise in Syria.⁷⁸²⁷⁸³⁷⁸⁴ Al-Nusra has since made substantial territorial gains in eastern Syria, as well as the town of Maaloula near Damascus.

Like al-Nusra, ISIL has perpetrated terrorist attacks in all of Syria's major cities since 2013. It now controls a swath of towns and cities along its northern border, near Turkey, as well as the city of Raqqa.⁷⁸⁵⁷⁸⁶⁷⁸⁷⁷⁸⁸⁷⁸⁹ Its jihadist networks and cells in Iraq are still strong, having freed 500 jihadist prisoners and taken control of Fallujah and Ramadi, and staging up to 68 car bombings per month as of January 2014.⁷⁹⁰⁷⁹¹ Though ISIL, the Free Syrian Army (henceforth FSA) and other unaffiliated opposition groups share a common enemy in Assad, ISIL has seized

control of multiple FSA-held areas, including Azaz, Raqqa, the Minakh military air base and an air defense base in Hama.⁷⁹²⁷⁹³⁷⁹⁴ Though the FSA initially welcomed ISIL as “our brothers who came to help...when other Islamic and Western countries kept silent,” the subsequent onset of territorial aggression by ISIL in northern Syria has sapped the FSA’s ability to combat the regime.⁷⁹⁵⁷⁹⁶

ISIL and al-Nusra derive much of their assets from private donations, as well as revenue taken from oil holdings throughout Syria and, in the case of ISIL, in Iraq. Extortion and taxation in controlled areas—such as in the Iraqi city of Mosul, which yields at least \$8 million every month—also forms a large part of their financing.⁷⁹⁷ The groups use these assets to further gains both military and infrastructural. Responding to the need for soft power and for laying the groundwork of a post-Assad infrastructure, al-Nusra divides its forces into “military” and “security” factions, and devotes substantial resources to its humanitarian and civil operations wing.⁷⁹⁸⁷⁹⁹ ISIL also provides humanitarian aid to towns under its command, including managing the Islamic Administration for Public Services in Aleppo, but has treated civilians under its jurisdiction with such brutality as to prompt popular revolts.⁸⁰⁰⁸⁰¹

AREAS OF CONCERN

A. Ideological and Structural Kinship of Militant Islamist Groups

Al-Nusra, ISIL, the Islamic Front, and numerous other unaffiliated parties share the goal of establishing a Syrian state governed by Islamic law, rendering it possible that these groups should work together in the short term to combat the Assad regime and other rebel groups, though important personal and ideological divisions complicate their relationship. The most noteworthy tension and conflict exists between ISIL, which is carrying out attacks and fomenting

instability across state borders; and al-Nusra and other Islamist groups, whose campaigns are at least currently confined to Syria.

Though ISIL fought alongside several other rebel groups (including the FSA) in 2012 and early 2013, their seizure of the city of Azaz from al-Nusra, followed by numerous attacks on other factions and the arbitrary torture and killing of Islamist opposition fighters, decidedly alienated them from the rest of the militant Islamist movement.⁸⁰² Jaysh al-Islam, an influential member of the Islamic Front, already had strongly anti-ISIL sentiments.⁸⁰³ A strained relationship with al-Qaeda's core leadership was finally severed in February 2014 when Ayman al-Zawahiri declared that no links of organization or accountability existed between al-Qaeda and ISIL.⁸⁰⁴ It remains to be seen what ISIL's isolation will mean for those who have declared loyalty to both al-Nusra and ISIL, such as Jamaat Jund ash-Sham, an Islamist militia composed of Lebanese and Syrian fighters; and the Green Battalion and Suqor al-Ezz, both commanded by Saudi mujahideen.⁸⁰⁵ Other groups more directly affiliated with ISIL have pledged *bay'ah* only to Baghdadi, not to Zawahiri, making their split with ISIL unlikely. (CITE)

Al-Nusra, however, sustains good relations with many other Islamist militias, most notably members of the Islamic Front. Together, al-Nusra and many future parties in the Islamic Front signed a declaration of opposition to the National Coalition in September 2013.⁸⁰⁶ An Islamic Front commander said of al-Nusra in an interview last year that "we see honesty in their work as well as toughness and courage."⁸⁰⁷ The two groups have worked together both diplomatically and militarily, with the Islamic Front using al-Nusra as a mediator and fighting alongside it in numerous conflicts; Ahrar al-Sham, one of the largest and most powerful parties in the Front, has been known to quietly share and exchange commanders and fighters with al-Nusra.⁸⁰⁸⁸⁰⁹ Mohamed Bahaiah, a leading figure in Ahrar al-Sham, is also Ayman al-Zawahiri's personal representative in Syria.⁸¹⁰ Most recently, in February, Islamic Front factions cooperated

with al-Nusra fighters and fighters from the FSA to oust ISIL from Deir al-Zour.⁸¹¹ In empowering the non-radical opposition to fight the Assad regime, the U.S. must be careful not to encourage a merger between these groups and al-Qaeda, which may be impossible: sending military aid to the SMC could drive the Islamic Front to make an alliance with al-Nusra; but sending military aid to the Islamic Front—which the U.S. has not done so far—risks shipping weapons directly to future al-Nusra fighters.

B. Access to Oil and Oil Revenue

Al-Nusra and ISIL have both taken control of important Syrian oil fields and refineries, which have become an important asset in financing their operations, and often a subject of territorial battles with each other and with the FSA. Syria's oil fields are distributed along the country's eastern border, as well as along a path stretching roughly from Homs to Raqqa.⁸¹² Of these assets, al-Nusra is known to control fields in the Deir al-Zour and Hasaka provinces, and frequently battles with Kurdish groups for control of the northeastern fields.⁸¹³⁸¹⁴⁸¹⁵⁸¹⁶ ISIL controls fields in the province of Raqqa.⁸¹⁷

Though oil production in Syria has been decimated during the conflict, with total output down to no more than 80,000 barrels a day, ISIL and al-Nusra's assets may be enough to sustain their operations indefinitely.⁸¹⁸⁸¹⁹ In areas including Deir al-Zour, administrators have been said to ship crude oil from the fields they oversee to small nearby refineries, manned by civilians with no other way to make a living. (CITE) There have been repeated allegations on all sides of the opposition that the Assad government is a primary buyer of the final product, having it delivered—either through middlemen or directly—in tanker trucks from ISIL- and Nusra-controlled areas to behind government lines.⁸²⁰⁸²¹ These groups have also kept some pre-existing supplies to the government intact to avoid provoking attacks on their facilities, meaning that the

supply of oil may be the only thing standing in the way of chaos in certain towns.⁸²² In addition to selling oil and gas to finance their independent purchases, al-Nusra and ISIL also use their assets directly to provide utilities to civilians, in cities including Ash Shaddadeh and Deir al-Zour.⁸²³

C. Interception of Humanitarian and Military Aid

The delivery of aid to Syrian civilians, internally displaced persons, and U.S.-backed opposition factions suffers from the presence of militant jihadist groups, as these groups directly and indirectly disrupt the activities of aid organizations in-country. Organizations through which the U.S. sends humanitarian aid must take a cautious approach to sending workers into Syria: one such organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, saw seven of its workers kidnapped in October 2013 by ISIL.⁸²⁴ Fighting between opposition groups also makes it logistically difficult and prohibitively risky for aid workers to travel to conflict-heavy areas, preventing the delivery of aid to the communities where it is most needed.⁸²⁵⁸²⁶ Most of these communities are in the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib and Raqqa. Non-lethal military aid has also been seized by militant Islamist groups, such as in November 2013, when al-Nusra raided FSA warehouses in Bab al-Hawa and subsequently turned the warehouses over to the Islamic Front.⁸²⁷

Beyond obstructing the efficiency of aid organizations, the theft of assistance materials—as well as the financial returns from hostage-taking—allow militant Islamist groups to redistribute the aid as their own or to sell it to finance their operations. Sabotage also reduces the confidence of donors regarding their own assistance, particularly where military aid is concerned: U.S. aid to the FSA was suspended for a month after Bab al-Hawa, as the Obama Administration “decided that it was a risk to be providing that assistance if it’s going to the extremists.”⁸²⁸ Complicating the task of properly directing aid, however, is the fact that the same

border crossings used by sanctioned aid groups are also often used by terrorist organizations to smuggle goods and fighters into Syria, especially along Syria's border with Turkey.⁸²⁹

D. Private Financing from Gulf States

In addition to revenue taken from oil assets, ISIL and al-Nusra—as well as many other opposition factions of various ideologies—derive substantial funds from private donors in the Gulf states. Such financing is catalyzed by organizations marketing themselves to donors as nonprofits, which aggregate funds before moving them across Syria's Turkish and Lebanese borders; and by social networks of individual financiers with contacts in Syria.⁸³⁰⁸³¹⁸³² As such, much of the direct responsibility for halting Syrian terrorist financing falls on the governments of these Gulf states.

In 2001, following the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) found that various Gulf states lacked well-developed legal mechanisms for restricting donations to terrorists.⁸³³ Laws were particularly lax in Kuwait, which is also home to a deeply-rooted community of activist-minded Sunnis and Syrian expatriates.⁸³⁴⁸³⁵ Unsurprisingly, online and face-to-face networks for financing Syrian rebel brigades developed in Kuwait in fall 2011, and, though broad-based at first, contracted as the conflict grew more complex, to source mainly from ideological hardliners.⁸³⁶ Though Kuwait is by no means the only site of direct financing for Sunni jihadists in Syria, its underdeveloped legal mechanisms allow donors in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and other Gulf states where security is tighter to send money to “clearinghouses” there, raising few red flags for security institutions because of the personal connections common across Gulf state borders.⁸³⁷⁸³⁸

Some of these financing networks allow donors to “sponsor” the provision of lethal aid to jihadists, but much of the funding they raise goes towards the civil and humanitarian operations

of militant groups.⁸³⁹ At the same time, ideological disputes within donor social networks impact and respond to relations between brigades on the ground, and sometimes shape the practices of those brigades.⁸⁴⁰ The governments of Kuwait and other Gulf states hesitate to intrude in assemblies and disputes within local donor communities, especially when politically influential individuals are involved. However, many in government and civil society have begun to fear the sectarian strife that could be ignited at home by such entrenched involvement in the Syrian opposition movement.⁸⁴¹

E. Spillover of Activity in Lebanon

Having already aggravated the sectarian dimension of a crisis whose origins were civil and political, ISIL and al-Nusra now use the Syrian cause to justify further attacks across the border in Lebanon. Both groups have founded branches in Lebanon and, along with the al-Qaeda-affiliated Abdullah Azzam Brigades and other Sunni militant groups, are responsible for at least 10 terrorist attacks on or near Hezbollah facilities so far. The rhetoric and internal recruiting of these groups draws on extant Sunni-Shi'ite tensions in Lebanon, which have been recently heightened by Hezbollah's alignment with the Assad regime; and on the impotence of Lebanon's current government and military. The Abdullah Azzam Brigades are now headquartered in Aarsal, a Sunni enclave in the Southern Bekka Valley.

Certain Salafi clerics and jihadist fighters have pledged to halt their attacks on Hezbollah once Hezbollah withdraws from Syria. The grand territorial aims of ISIL and al-Qaeda, however, belie their likely interest in provoking unrest in Lebanon regardless of circumstantial justification. It is also of interest to question whether the disputes that have pitted ISIL and al-Qaeda against each other in Syria will affect their relations in Lebanon, as their battles in Syria are currently territorial, and Lebanon is not yet in such a security crisis as to yield territory to either group.

F. Potential Spillover of Activity Into Chechnya

As of December 2013 there have been 36 confirmed cases of fighters traveling to Syria from Chechnya, while reliable sources estimate the actual number to be as high as 186—to say nothing of the 118 total confirmed cases from Russia and Central Asia at large, or the high regional estimate of 839.⁸⁴² Of all foreign fighters known to have joined militant Syrian opposition factions, it is expected that the vast majority are now part of ISIL or al-Nusra. Al-Nusra in particular is known to have a battalion devoted to Chechen fighters, many of whom are a special asset due to their experience in rebel warfare.⁸⁴³

The possibility of these fighters returning to Chechnya to commit further attacks, in the name of militant jihadist movements that arose after the second Chechen War, is of great concern to Russia. Chechnya is home to the Caucasus Emirate, a militant Islamist movement and unrecognized state which claims territory between the Caspian and the Black Seas, and which has been responsible for numerous high-profile terrorist attacks in Russia since the turn of the 21st century. Were the terrorist activity in Syria to “spill over” into Chechnya, the fighters may bring with them a new financial asset: many of ISIL and al-Nusra’s financial backers in the Gulf states have in past years given money to Chechen militants, and could do so again.⁸⁴⁴

POLICY OPTIONS

Because diplomacy and negotiation with Western powers constitutes a breach of ideology for al-Nusra and ISIL, strategy options available to the U.S. for constraining the expansion of these groups fall into four broad camps: the severance of al-Nusra and ISIL’s sources of funding, the empowerment of the Supreme Military Council (henceforth SMC) and other non-radical

opposition forces, the provision of aid to civilians who would otherwise rely on terrorist organizations for their basic needs, and the publicizing of ideological inconsistencies within the Syrian jihadist movement as they appear.

Particularly amidst allegations that the Assad regime itself has been purchasing oil from ISIL, a severance of al-Qaeda's access to and market for Syrian oil demands military intervention. However, supporting the SMC in fighting al-Nusra and ISIL directly will be ineffective for a number of reasons. First, we are reminded of the reason that al-Qaeda has been able to expand influence in Syria: by drawing away SMC forces from fighting the Assad regime in areas like Damascus, to fight radical factions in northern Syria instead, al-Qaeda creates security vacuums in the abandoned areas in which new radical cells can grow. Additionally, the fact that al-Qaeda carries out its attacks through local franchises organized into cells, as opposed to through vertically organized ranks, the destruction of individual cells does not ensure damage to al-Qaeda as a whole and the decapitation of leadership is usually swiftly followed by the leaders' replacement.⁸⁴⁵⁸⁴⁶ For the U.S. to support such strategies would only prolong the violence and decrease local stability: it must instead focus on empowering the non-radical opposition to fight Assad's regime.

Both ISIL and al-Nusra often preface their takeover of towns and neighborhoods with civil assistance, including food packages, utilities, and medicine. Communities without these resources have no choice but to see al-Qaeda as a benefactor, but many of these same communities have turned against their occupiers when governance grew abusive. Increasing the amount and widening the distribution of humanitarian aid, especially to towns in contested areas of northern Syria, will hasten the resistance of communities to al-Qaeda without carrying the risky political connotation of military support to the SMC or Islamic Front. Second, two Gulf nations—Kuwait and Saudi Arabia—are known to lack sufficient provisions for combating

terrorist financing.⁸⁴⁷ Negotiating with the Saudi and Kuwaiti governments to tighten security measures on international donations will help stem the flow of private support to al-Nusra and ISIL. There may also be options for supporting the Iraqi government to decrease ISIL's presence and influence in Mosul. Third and last, the cell-based organization of al-Nusra and ISIL makes them liable to discrepancies in the ideologies of different cells, leading to ideological inconsistency across the Syrian jihadist movement. The same phenomenon in Iraq led to a major al-Qaeda franchise's killing and abuse of Muslims, and its unwillingness to cooperate even with other Islamist movements, which undermined its stated jihadi goals and cost it much local popularity.⁸⁴⁸ In Tunisia and Egypt, al-Qaeda suffered when the success of nonviolent movements delegitimized its claim that jihad is necessary for the overthrow of rulers supported by the West.⁸⁴⁹ An opportunistic communications strategy, which publicizes the successes of nonviolent movements in Syria as well as the brutality of al-Nusra and ISIL towards fellow Muslims and Islamist movements, will cripple the spread of their extremist ideology and empower the non-radical opposition.

SECTION II: POLICY DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EMPHASIZING SHARED INTERESTS

Winthrop Hubbard and Wanda Bertram

The following policy discussion section sets forth recommendations for resolving the Syrian conflict, which has already claimed over 130,000 lives and caused unthinkable infrastructural and economic damage. Ending the conflict requires first convincing all parties involved that they stand to gain from resolution more than from continued military action, by making all parties aware of their shared interests. This report identifies three such shared interests and their broad strategic implications.

First, common to all parties, save militant Islamist groups, is an opposition to the growing influence of designated terrorists in Syria. Moreover, ISIL and al-Qaeda's goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate beyond Syria's borders contradicts the aims of every other organized party to the Syrian conflict, and actively destabilizes campaigns for Syrian sovereignty in both the short and long run. ISIL regularly slaughters and brutalizes members of all other warring parties, including its ideological kin; and while al-Nusra has been known to strategically collaborate with groups including the Islamic Front and even the FSA, one can be sure that this cooperation does not signal any ideological concession or compromise.

The gains and assets of ISIL and al-Nusra must be curtailed for the bloodshed in Syria to cease. Not only are these groups backed by wealthy external actors—most of them private individuals not seen at the negotiating table—they enjoy increasing support among Syrian civilians in return for providing social services to areas under their control. Each victory for one

of these groups means a loss for all other parties, both territorially and socially. The U.S., EU, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, and Russia have already condemned the actions of these groups, but disempowering ISIL and al-Nusra is truly in the interest of all parties favoring Syrian state sovereignty.

Second, the spread of war and terrorism beyond Syria's borders to its greater neighborhood, which has begun already in Lebanon and Iraq, is of interest to none but designated terrorist groups. The Syrian conflict has bolstered the position of jihadist groups relative to their primary targets, including Israel and Chechnya; aggravated tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran; and allowed Hezbollah to expand its reach and assets. If regional conflict grows, it will serve to trivialize the struggle of Syria's domestic parties, leaving them without adequate diplomatic or humanitarian assistance; and to sap the resources of states within and outside the region without promising a clear resolution. Parties with economic stakes, such as oil deals, in Syria and the region at large will see their opportunities upset by regional instability. Though domestic and international actors have a variety of interests to protect in and around Syria, all share the goal of curbing a costly regional crisis.

Lastly, for all parties to the Syrian conflict, the costs of war—in human lives, civilian welfare, material assistance, property and economic assets—are rising as hostilities continue, while obstacles to peace become further entrenched. Sustained violence on all sides heightens sectarian tensions, making the prospect of domestic reconciliation and collaboration in a future government less and less realistic. International actors, who must continue to fund their proxy factions at great economic cost, are caught up in the politics of war rather than enjoying the rents of peace. None of these parties, nevertheless, have yet been incentivized to find a resolution to the conflict, because all believe that they can more easily achieve their objectives militarily. As the conflict continues and deepens without notable concessions or victories on any side,

resources for war will diminish, and all involved parties will turn their attention to seeking non-military solutions. This process should begin sooner rather than later.

In summary, all parties to the Syrian conflict share a desire to curb the influence of designated terrorist groups, avoid the spillover of conflict to the region at large, and to seek a political resolution rather than waging an incessant war of attrition. Despite their differing visions of how Syria should be governed, all parties, in acknowledging their common interests and the efficiency of compromise, should agree to prioritize ending the violence by establishing a ceasefire and securing the borders of all states in the region. The U.S. should thus emphasize these immediate interests and objectives in conversations with all involved groups, with an eye on the longer-term goal of creating a transitional government in Syria and holding free elections. Next steps for pursuing these objectives are laid out in the following chapters.

STRENGTHENING BORDER SECURITY

Melanie Eng, Anna Rumpf, Alexis Chouery and Patrick Gallagher

Porous international borders, kept open to accommodate massive refugee outflows, are critical to the survival of both jihadist groups and regime forces fighting in Syria. Al-Qaeda affiliates vying to fill the country's power vacuum are sustained militarily by weapons, funds and fighters pouring in from Iraq, Turkey and Jordan; while Hezbollah militiamen aiding Assad's defense move freely over Syria's poorly-monitored border with Lebanon.⁸⁵⁰ Meanwhile, designated terrorists migrating out of Syria are finding sanctuary in Sunni enclaves and neglected refugee settlements abroad, activating new cells in these communities and posing a grave security threat to all countries in the surrounding region.^{851 852 853} As such, stemming these cross-border flows is the first prerequisite to maintaining regional stability in the Levant, reducing violence within Syria, and ultimately ushering in a timely, lasting ceasefire between warring factions.

Derailing the international movement of paramilitary fighters and resources first requires working with political leaders in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq to implement heightened national security measures along their respective borders with Syria. The U.S. should also support the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces and UN observers along particularly volatile international boundaries, comprised of non-partisan, multinational delegates. This comprehensive approach to increased border security will ensure that belligerents are eventually deprived of the resources needed to sustain combat within Syria, while also preventing jihadist

forces from spilling into neighboring countries and putting down roots. It is also the most effective way to sever financial transactions between terrorist groups and their private international patrons, who move funds and weapons through covert smuggling channels that are otherwise difficult to blockade.⁸⁵⁴

An uptick in border security must be supplemented with increased efforts to help Syria's neighbors manage the burden of incoming refugees, which are projected to reach 4.1 million by the end of 2014.⁸⁵⁵ This can be achieved through the provision of unilateral economic assistance to individual countries, as well as by increasing the U.S. contribution of humanitarian aid to the UNHCR global fund, while encouraging other capable international donors to do the same. So far, only 12 percent of the UNHCR's \$4.3 billion aid appeal for Syrian refugees in 2014 has been met.⁸⁵⁶ The stabilizing effect of increasing aid to host countries is threefold: it will keep key Middle Eastern economies from collapsing under the strain of sudden population spikes, prevent refugee camps from turning into breeding grounds for terrorist groups, and serve as leverage in persuading affected countries to amp up national border patrols when they may not otherwise choose to do so.

Rigorous border security on all fronts, along with more effective management of expanding refugee populations, are essential preconditions to the implementation of a ceasefire and the negotiation of a transitional governing body. The following section will highlight the specific regional tenets of this two-tiered policy goal along each of Syria's international borders.

FORTIFY SYRIAN BORDERS WITH REGIONAL SECURITY FORCES, MULTINATIONAL PEACEKEEPERS AND UN OBSERVERS

In summary, the United States should deliver financial, technical, and logistical aid to Lebanese,

Jordanian, Turkish and Iraqi governments to bolster national security and surveillance along each country's border with Syria, while still supporting their respective open-door policies toward refugees; delegate multinational peacekeepers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Oman and the EU to secure Syria's most volatile border areas in order to optimize overall security; and enhance national border patrol efforts with UN observers to ensure full compliance with heightened security measures.

A. Lebanon

Capitalizing on Lebanon's fragile political climate and the government's inability to secure national borders, ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra are sending fighters and weapons from Syria to bolster their Lebanese affiliates, who are consequently growing in power.⁸⁵⁷ The weak, underfunded Lebanese Armed Forces cannot effectively patrol these channels, particularly in the north, where national boundaries remain ambiguous.⁸⁵⁸ Lebanon's political leaders have repeatedly entreated the international community to help curtail the influx of jihadist fighters; to this end, the U.S. has already provided \$8.7 million, but more aid is needed.^{859 860} Fully securing the Lebanese-Syrian border would not only curb the spread of terrorist groups into Lebanon, but also stem weapons shipments from Hezbollah stockpiles in Syria to its domestic headquarters in Baalbek — and put an end to the unrestricted movement of Hezbollah fighters into Syria for Assad's military defense.^{861 862 863} The presence of UN peacekeepers is particularly vital in Lebanon, where an overt increase in LAF patrols near Hezbollah-controlled areas might incite armed hostilities between the two groups.

- Increase financial and technological aid to the LAF-ISF Common Border Force, building its capacity to police the influx of jihadist fighters and weapons from Syria.

- Deploy peacekeeping troops from the United Nations Interim Forces In Lebanon (UNIFIL), currently stationed along Lebanon's border with Israel, to secure its border with Syria, as permitted by UNSCR 1701.
- Request the relocation of Indonesian peacekeepers for this purpose, as Indonesia already has more peacekeeping delegates in UNIFIL than any other contributing country, and is considered a highly valuable partner in counterterrorism by the U.S.
- Concentrate augmented LAF security forces on the northern Lebanese-Syrian border, where national boundaries are most fluid, while concentrating UN security forces on the southern border near Hezbollah strongholds.
- Concentrate UN international observers around the ports of Beirut and Tripoli, which serve as the largest transit points for international smuggling into Lebanon, and where governmental and institutional corruption is deeply entrenched.

B. Jordan

Militant jihadists fighting the regime in southern Syria are supplied largely by weapons and funds smuggled across Syria's border with Jordan.⁸⁶⁴ The smuggling of illicit goods over Jordan's northern border has increased by 300 percent since the beginning of the Syrian conflict.⁸⁶⁵ The return of fighters and weapons⁸⁶⁵ back into Jordan further threatens to erode Jordan's stability. Currently, U.S. and Jordanian forces are training moderate Syrian opposition fighters to help combat the growing influence of groups with terrorist agendas.⁸⁶⁶ This has been coupled with training for Jordanian troops to strengthen Jordan's internal security and border control.⁸⁶⁷ While these efforts to bolster Jordan's safety continue to grow, full regulation of the 230-mile-long border remains a challenge.

- Continue U.S. training programs for Jordanian troops.
- Send additional U.S. troops and surveillance technology to Jordan to improve border control and internal security, and to stem the trafficking of money and arms into southern Syria.
- Increase funding for the King Abdullah II Special Operations Training Center (KASOTC) for counterterrorism efforts.
- Support financial assistance proposals currently on the table, including a \$1 billion deal in loan guarantees, and the renewal of a five-year MOU that would provide Jordan with \$600 million annually in military and economic support.⁸⁶⁸
- Concentrate multinational peacekeepers along the Jordanian-Syrian border near Daraa, where rebel strongholds are concentrated, and on the Jordanian side of the Golan Heights, which is at risk of instability due to its proximity with Israel.
- Delegate multinational peacekeepers from Oman and Indonesia, which both maintain positive diplomatic and economic relations with Jordan and the United States while harboring no tribal affiliations with either Jordan or Syria.

C. Turkey

Rebel fighters and smugglers are moving freely over the Turkish-Syrian border in both directions, supplying jihadist fighters in northern Syria with weapons and posing a security threat to vulnerable Turkish areas such as Hatay. Other areas include the Rojava region populated by Kurds, and others in refugee camps that travel to Turkey from Syria on road 215 (or locally known as the Road to Gaziantep from Aleppo). Turkey's unguarded western border in Hatay is the main entry-point for jihadist fighters moving into Syria from the north, with fighters landing at an airport mere feet from the Syrian-Turkish border.⁸⁶⁹ Turkey also serves as a key transit

point for private funds transferred from Kuwait and other Gulf states to Sunni jihadists fighting in Syria.^{870 871}

- Incentivize Turkey to deploy national security forces along its border with Syria, by offering a substantial refugee/humanitarian aid package to help support its growing refugee population.⁸⁷²
- Similarly leverage unilateral humanitarian aid in persuading Turkey to tighten regulations on flights from, and financial transactions with, Kuwait.
- Strengthen security in Turkey's refugee camps, to protect vulnerable displaced Syrians from the threat of militant jihadists moving freely across the border.^{873 874}
- Implement extra security near Rojava and Hatay with both Turkish national and UN multinational defense forces; bottleneck transit routes between Hatay and northern Syria to stem the flux of militant fighters.
- Delegate UN peacekeepers from NATO, France and the EU to guard the Turkish entrance to Road 215, thus curtailing weapons trafficking to militants in northern Syria, protecting refugees en route from Aleppo, and preventing jihadist groups from taking control of the Turkish-Syrian border.
- Supplement national border security forces and UN peacekeepers with NATO troops, and provide additional refugee/humanitarian aid to Turkey to facilitate cooperation between all three security mechanisms.

D. Iraq

Since the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011, Iraq has faced an influx of Islamist fighters belonging to ISIL, which seeks to undermine the regime of Prime Minister Maliki and eventually

establish a caliphate that includes Iraq. The group has established strong holdings in Anbar province, a Sunni-majority province near Baghdad in central Iraq, and currently holds half of the city of Fallujah and portions of the city of Ramadi.⁸⁷⁵ In response, Maliki has assembled his armed forces in the province, but has abstained from direct military clashes with ISIL in order to avoid mass civilian casualties. Instead, Maliki has attempted to negotiate with Sunni militia leaders to persuade them to fight ISIL alongside Iraqi Security Forces.⁸⁷⁶ These efforts have largely failed due to the Sunni population's distrust of Maliki, which stems from his previous political abuses towards them and refusal to pay reparations.⁸⁷⁷

- Supply the funds needed for the Maliki regime to compensate Sunni tribal leaders for failure to abide by past deals. Reparations will help repair the relationship between the Shia government and the moderate Sunni base of the Sunni minority, provide Sunni tribal leaders with the necessary funds to conduct counterinsurgency operations against ISIL in Anbar, and allow Maliki's military forces in Anbar to relocate to the Iraqi-Syrian border.
- Require that Iraqi Security Forces assemble en masse along the Iraqi-Syrian border in exchange for the provision of these funds.
- Establish non-combatant observers from the UN, NATO and U.S. along the Iraqi-Syrian border to ensure fair treatment of incoming Sunni refugees, and to prevent both Shia militias and ISIL fighters from moving freely into Syria.
- Request Omani, American or European observers to protect the Iraqi-Syrian border. Prime Minister Maliki should not oppose the presence of U.S. or European observers, as he has previously requested non-combatant military trainers and advisors in battling terrorists.

MITIGATE THE BURDEN OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN NEIGHBORING STATES

In summary, the United States should increase its contribution of humanitarian aid to host countries through the UNHCR global fund; encourage the EU, the UK, Canada, Japan and other capable, willing international donors to increase their own contributions to UNHCR; deliver financial, medical and technical funding to independent, project-oriented NGOs working to combat disease, food shortages and lack of refugee housing in each country; help offset the economic burden of refugee inflows to countries where domestic infrastructure is least stable.

A. Lebanon

Lebanon houses an estimated one million Syrian refugees—more than any other country in the world—and is expected to receive another 500,000 by the end of 2014.⁸⁷⁸ Thus far, only 11 percent of the UNHCR’s \$1.7 billion humanitarian aid appeal to help Lebanon support its refugees has been covered.⁸⁷⁹ The influx of refugees is also straining the Lebanese public sector, and projected to cost its economy \$7.5 billion over the upcoming year.⁸⁸⁰ The government refuses to construct formal camps, so refugees unable to stay with Lebanese families are forced to live in makeshift settlements where food is scarce, disease runs rampant, and neglect is fueling a turn to radicalism and sectarian violence.^{881 882}

- Back the Lebanese government’s initiative to set up a \$1.6 billion World Bank and UN sponsored fund for non-humanitarian aid to mitigate the crippling impacts of the refugee crisis on Lebanon’s public sector.⁸⁸³
- Provide the Lebanese government with unilateral economic aid to help offset refugee burden on the domestic economy.

- Increase the U.S. contribution of humanitarian aid to Lebanon through UNHCR.
- Send trained medical personnel, vaccines and technical equipment to bolster health facilities in areas with high refugee concentrations: the Bekaa Valley, the Northern Governorate, and parts of Beirut.
- Financially assist NGOs already working to construct schools, provide social services and address food/water shortages in Lebanon: UNICEF, Mercy Corp, World Vision and Medical Teams International.
- Improve administrative capabilities of on-the-ground NGOs to ensure Lebanese families hosting refugees receive aid benefits and adequate compensation.
- Urge the Lebanese government to construct formal Syrian refugee camps to alleviate the burden on local communities.

B. Jordan

Jordan has accepted approximately 600,000 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian conflict—increasing its total population by 10 percent—and is projected to receive an additional 200,000 by the end of this year.^{884 885} This increase to Jordan’s existing refugee population, which already constitutes 30 percent of its overall populace, will cost the country an estimated \$5 billion by the end of 2014, and puts enormous strain on limited national resources.^{886 887} The economic burden of Syrian refugees is aggravated by ongoing civil unrest in Jordan, as citizens continue to demand economic and political reforms. In 2013, The UNHCR and other aid organizations provided \$736.7 million to Jordan, covering 75 percent of Jordan’s total projected needs for Syrian refugees that year.^{888 889} Although the UNHCR has allocated an additional \$430.4 million for 2014, there is still a huge gap between the aid Jordan has received and the amount it needs to properly care for refugees in the upcoming year.⁸⁹⁰

- Increase U.S. humanitarian aid to Jordan through UNHCR.
- Financially assist NGOs already working to construct schools, provide social services and address food/water shortages in Jordan: UNICEF, Mercy Corp, World Vision and Medical Teams International.
- Provide the Jordanian government with unilateral economic aid to offset the burden of refugees on the domestic economy.

C. Turkey

Turkey currently harbors more than 500,000 registered Syrian refugees, a number projected to increase to one million by the end of 2014.^{891 892} To date, its government has spent \$2 billion on refugee assistance, while receiving only \$69.5 million in assistance from all UNHCR donors.^{893 894} This financial burden, which is expected to reach \$522.4 million in 2014,⁸⁹⁵ has forced Turkey to reject major refugee transfers from time to time, while still officially following its open border policy. To accommodate the Syrian refugees that Turkey is not able to absorb, a center could be set up to intercept refugees and resettle them in countries that have pledged to help: Canada has agreed to house 1,500 refugees; Germany, 11,500; Norway, 1,000; and Sweden, 1,200.⁸⁹⁶ To help refugees who are turned away at the Turkish border due to a lack of identification papers, a ‘white paper’ tent should be established where witnesses can testify to the refugees’ viability.

- Meet Turkey’s refugee funding needs through a combination of U.S. and UN aid, using this aid as leverage in negotiations around border security.

- Encourage the use of ‘Zero Point Distribution’ for refugees that are currently being turned away from camps in Turkey, this should be pushed until the refugee registrations can be allowed or the refugees are admitted elsewhere.
- Persuade Turkey to reopen its refugee camps to incoming Syrians.
- Provide the Turkish government with unilateral humanitarian aid packages to boost the capacity of existing camps and build new ones. Work with other NATO countries to support the building of the camps.
- Support the construction of NATO-enforced ‘white paper’ zones to temporarily house Syrians denied refuge in Turkey, where these refugees can seek temporary protection before being resettled into alternative host countries abroad.
- Financially assist NGOs already assisting with education, childcare and other social services in Turkey, such as UNICEF.
- Appeal to Canada, Japan and Kuwait—Turkey’s largest UNHCR sponsors—to increase their contributions to the refugee aid fund.

D. Iraq

There are currently over 1,700 native Syrian refugees present in Iraq, along with 200,000 Iraqi refugees returning in haste from Syria, where they migrated during the Iraq War. The Iraqi refugees are mostly Shi’ites who have been put in particular danger due to persecution by Sunni militants in Syria. Their re-emigration has been sponsored by the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration. Increasing Iraq’s capacity to house incoming refugees will alleviate some of the burden borne by Jordan and Turkey, but the attendant increase to Iraq’s Sunni population will be politically disadvantageous for Prime Minister Maliki.

- Working with the UN, set up refugee centers on the Iraqi side of the country's border with Syria, in close proximity to the Iraqi forces assembling there. In addition to providing humanitarian aid to refugees, these centers should enforce the fair treatment of Sunnis entering the predominantly Shia country.
- Establish refugee camps in Iraq for Sunni refugees, and ensure the fair treatment of Sunnis within these camps. Assure Prime Minister Maliki that these refugees will not stay permanently.
- Provide unilateral and UN assistance to the Iraqi government to care for its refugees, in exchange for its cooperation with increased border security measures.

ACHIEVING A CEASEFIRE

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This report recommends that the U.S. work to broker a ceasefire agreement between the main international parties to the Syrian crisis, as a ceasefire would effectively disarm the forces on the ground and compel them to negotiate a political solution. Brokering such an agreement, however, necessitates a softer approach toward Assad's state backers, even as the current international environment becomes more open to a ceasefire. Russia and China, who until recently consistently shielded the regime from punitive action at the UN Security Council, have now adopted the UNSC Resolution 2139 to Ease Aid Delivery to Syrians.⁸⁹⁷ The U.S. should seize the opportunity created by the Resolution to pursue a multilateral strategy accommodating Russia and Iran, particularly with respect to their interest in Assad's staying in power; and simultaneously leverage the U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia to curb private support to the Syrian opposition.

Considering Russia and Iran's vital interests in Syria vis-a-vis the Assad regime, neither will likely decrease their support of the regime as long as they fear that a post-Assad Syria will be less conducive to their regional and international goals. So far, the U.S. has been adamant in supporting a transitional government in Syria that does not include Assad.⁸⁹⁸ But this demand is making the possibility of achieving a ceasefire and a political solution to the crisis in Syria increasingly difficult, as it propels Iran and Russia to deepen their support of the regime. The

U.S. must change course to pursue a softer approach. It should privately lift its demand for Assad's removal, accepting a transitional government that includes Assad or members of his regime, and support a democratic process in Syria that, in the long run, could bring about a regime change. Publicly, however, the U.S. may continue to condemn the regime's violence, and commit to resolving the war with the cooperation of all international parties.

To incentivize all parties to commit to a ceasefire, the U.S. should proceed by emphasizing common interests: curbing the influence of designated terrorist groups, avoiding additional spillover of the conflict into the region, and achieving an agreeable political solution to end this devastatingly costly war. The U.S. can cater to certain concerns from each international party, as detailed in Section II of this chapter, in exchange for each actor's cooperation with the ceasefire agreement. The ceasefire, accompanied by border control mechanisms, will eventually disempower all belligerents, and create an incentive for the opposition and the regime to engage in peaceful negotiations.⁸⁹⁹

Section III lays out the basic conditions needed for effective implementation of the ceasefire on the ground, which are beyond the scope of this report. First, in passing a binding UN resolution, the UN could employ enforcement mechanisms agreed upon by all actors. Punitive actions against any violator of the agreement would also have to be determined. Second, the ceasefire would necessitate a buffer zone between the warring factions, particularly around regions of Alawite and Kurd minorities who would be more susceptible to acts of violence. Those buffer zones would be maintained by internationally appointed peacekeepers agreed upon by all sides. Third, the delivery of humanitarian aid must be incorporated into any ceasefire agreement. As UNSCR 2139 shows, such an agreement can be achieved if Russia and China do not have a reason to perceive it as a disguise for a political effort against the regime.

RUSSIA

A. Concerns

Russia's support of Assad's government derives in part from its insistence that supporting a stable Syrian government curbs the development of terrorist organizations that could harm Russia.⁹⁰⁰ This conflict benefits Russian national security in the short term, though Russia would prefer a stable Syrian government. Russia continues to supply arms to Assad to assist in eliminating the terrorist threat, however.⁹⁰¹

Additionally, Russia views the U.S. presence in the Middle East as hegemonic, and is thus highly interested in keeping Syria within Russia's sphere of influence. To this end, Russia has maintained its naval base at Tartus,⁹⁰² arms deals with the Assad regime, and multi-billion dollar investments in Syrian infrastructure.⁹⁰³ It has also, until recently, blocked UN Security Council resolutions that could lead to a regime change, even under a managed transition of power; as it fears a repeat of interventions in Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq, where the U.S. replaced 'hostile' regimes with ones more receptive to U.S. interests.

Finally, Russia believes that humanitarian aid delivery is being primarily hampered by Syrian anti-government forces, and has on multiple occasions rejected UN sanctions against Assad's government.

B. Policy Recommendations

Tightened border control measures, as detailed in the previous chapter, could assuage Russia's concerns with respect to its vulnerability to insurgency. Dealing with Russia's desire to limit perceived U.S. hegemony, however, requires more subtle tactics. The U.S. should privately withdraw its insistence on Assad's removal from power, in exchange for Russia's cooperation

with a ceasefire agreement that would include temporarily halting arms agreements with Syria. Once the threat of toppling Assad is removed, Russia could more easily agree to support democratic election in Syria at a later date.

The ratification of UNSCR 2139 indicates that accommodating Russia can yield positive results. This Resolution recognized Russia's concerns about the humanitarian situation in Syria, while openly criticizing both "sides" in the conflict and removing the threat of sanctions from Assad's regime. The U.S. should publicly credit Russia for its cooperation on the Resolution, and use this momentum to continue accommodating and collaborating with Russia.

In the long run, Russia's strong economic ties with Syria could serve to help rebuild the Syrian economy. Russian companies have approximately \$19.4 billion invested in Syria, including the Tartus naval base, and a variety of natural resource extraction and distribution operations.⁹⁰⁴ Russia is also involved in assisting the Syrian government in developing a recently-discovered oil and natural gas field off the Syrian coast. Russia's public and private assistance to Syria can help jumpstart the latter's struggling economy while furthering Russian interests in the region, and establishing a ceasefire will create an optimal climate for both.

- Ensure tight border controls in the region to satisfy Russia's concerns with respect to its national security.
- Privately reassure Russia that the U.S. will not pursue any action to remove Assad from power in exchange for Russia's cooperation with the ceasefire agreement, and a temporary freeze on Russia's arms agreements with Syria.
- Continue to collaborate with Russia on the delivery of humanitarian aid in accordance with UNSCR 2139.
- Publicly credit Russia for their support of UNSCR 2139 and their efforts to resolve the

crisis in Syria.

- Condition all of the above measures with Russia's support of a free Syrian election that would be conducted as soon as a delegation (that includes members of the regime) has agreed to a national electoral system.

IRAN

A. Concerns

Tehran's primary interest in supporting the Assad regime concerns the vulnerability of Iran's supply link with Hezbollah in Lebanon via Syria. Hezbollah serves as Iran's main deterrence against Israel, and as such has enjoyed Iranian support since its inception.

Iran also seeks to lift some of the crippling sanctions on its economy implemented by the U.S. and the European Union, which have caused massive inflation on the rial and prevented Iran from accessing American and European petroleum markets. Negotiations with Iran to end its steadfast support for the Assad regime are complicated by the concurrent nuclear talks; any attempt to coerce Iran to withdraw support from Syria would likely also terminate the nuclear talks by vindicating Tehran hardliners opposed to the U.S.

B. Policy Recommendations

Before it concedes to work towards a sustainable ceasefire in Syria, Iran must assuage its present security concerns by securing a supply route to allied non-state forces in Lebanon, and it must see a reduction in Western sanctions as a show of goodwill. The last three decades of diplomacy between Tehran and Washington have been marked by belligerence and animosity. Abrasive behavior by both parties has only hardened the resolve of each to oppose the other,

hindering the possibility of productive diplomacy. Further coercion and sanctions would only justify the claims of hardliners in Tehran, and undermine the political influence of President Hassan Rouhani and his relatively moderate backers. Washington can and should capitalize on this historically warm moment in its relationship with Tehran to achieve a ceasefire in Syria, but it will require a departure from three decades of bellicosity towards the Iranian regime and will necessitate discreet, productive bilateral dialogue.

Considering that Russia has a vested interest in maintaining its military presence at Tartus, and that it does not view the Shia irregular forces in Lebanon as terrorist groups, it is possible that an arrangement could be brokered between Moscow and Tehran in which Iran would resupply its allied non-state forces using the Russian facilities at Tartus.⁹⁰⁵ However, the U.S. should avoid formally supporting these negotiations between Iran and Russia due to the sensitive nature of such an arrangement. Furthermore, the Israeli government will likely see the agreement as an Iranian attempt to undermine Israeli security, and as a breach of trust on the part of the U.S. should the U.S. participate.

Lifting sanctions would also incentivize Tehran to reevaluate its commitment to the Assad regime. The most recent sanctions imposed on Iran under the Obama Administration forbid transactions with Iranian state-owned banks, essentially locking Iranian finances inside the country and causing massive inflation on the rial.⁹⁰⁶⁹⁰⁷ Should some of these economic sanctions be lifted, it would reduce domestic pressure on the Iranian regime, and would encourage continued productive diplomacy between Washington and Tehran. Strengthening the relationship between Tehran and Washington will help persuade Tehran to back away from its historical allegiance with fellow pariah state Syria, and embrace a more inclusive role in the world system.⁹⁰⁸

Finally, a necessary step in negotiating Iran's withdrawal of support from the Assad

regime is to reassure Israel that closer relations with Tehran do not compromise Israeli security. Israel is understandably suspicious of Iranian motives. The U.S. must reassure Israel that a relationship with Tehran does not come at the expense of the Israeli state, but rather strengthens it, should Tehran continue to pursue more diplomatic solutions with the West. Furthermore, tangible steps can be taken to reinforce Washington's commitment to the security and sovereignty of the Israeli state. Funding Israeli anti-missile and anti-rocket batteries to be placed along Israel's northern border with Lebanon would help thwart rocket attacks on Israel by Shia militant groups and bolster the security of the Israeli state. Likewise, a more permissive stance by the U.S. with respect to Israeli settlement-building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem would reaffirm U.S. commitment to Israeli sovereignty and would help offset the trepidation the Israeli government feels concerning a closer Washington-Tehran relationship.

- Privately withdraw U.S. insistence on the removal of Assad from power.
- Ensure Iran of its access to its regional allies via Russian controlled Tartus.
- Lift some of the Iranian sanctions in exchange for Tehran's cooperation with a ceasefire agreement.
- Re-assure Israel of Washington's commitment to its security and provide additional aid for Israel's anti-missile defense systems, to be placed along Israel's northern border.

SAUDI ARABIA

A. Concerns

Saudi Arabia considers Iran its chief rival in the Middle East and opposes Iran's increased regional influence. The relationships between Assad's regime, Maliki's regime in Iraq,

and the Iranian government in Tehran threaten King Abdullah's ambition of establishing political and economic advantages over nearby Shia regimes. Consequently, Saudi involvement in the Syrian crisis has increased in correspondence with Iran's.⁹⁰⁹ Saudi Arabia has greatly benefited from Iran's crippled economic and political standing thanks to Western sanctions, and is opposed to any multilateral action that could reverse this trend.

Riyadh is also concerned that Iran's expanding regional influence could catalyze dissent and possible revolt in Saudi Arabia's eastern province, where most of its sizeable Shia minority resides.⁹¹⁰ King Abdullah's regime has a long history of human rights violations committed against this Shia minority, which have so far gone mostly overlooked by the international community.⁹¹¹

Finally, the prospect of reduced sanctions on Iran poses two chief concerns to Saudi Arabia. First, if sanctions on the Iranian economy were lifted in 2014, roughly 800,000 barrels of oil would become available on international markets, reducing the value of Saudi oil by an estimated 10 percent.⁹¹²⁹¹³ Second, while Saudi Arabia is the second largest exporter of oil to the U.S., it could lose some of its American oil imports if the U.S. were to decrease its investment in Saudi oil, and invest in Iranian oil instead.

B. Policy Recommendations

The U.S. could use its military and economic ties with Saudi Arabia to persuade King Abdullah's regime to stop the supply of arms to the Syrian opposition. The U.S. has a strong, long-standing alliance with Saudi Arabia along the Persian Gulf, with \$86 billion in arms sales alone.⁹¹⁴ As the U.S. defense budget for FY15 faces dramatic cuts, the U.S. could reassure Saudi Arabia of the importance of their partnership despite these cuts.⁹¹⁵ Such rhetoric could assuage Saudi fears that its alliance with the U.S. is weakening, while making clear that continued

partnership is predicated on Saudi cooperation with the ceasefire agreement. The U.S. could also promise to support Riyadh in the event of a Shia uprising in the east. Upgrades to existing U.S. military establishments in Saudi Arabia could be considered in order to make this commitment more tangible.

The U.S. should also reassure Saudi Arabia that imports of Saudi oil would not decrease, nor be diverted towards the Iranian economy, were sanctions on Iran to be reduced. The U.S. could also promise to increase exports of Saudi oil in the future. Additionally, The U.S. could support Saudi efforts to exert its influence in a democratic Syria after the ceasefire is established. This would promote a long-term Syrian resolution conducive to Saudi goals, and would further reassure Saudi Arabia that its regional interests with respect to Iran will be preserved.

Taking the aforementioned conditions as given, Saudi Arabia could be persuaded to withdraw its support of armed rebel factions in Syria. However, private Gulf donors to opposition factions cannot be easily controlled. It is likely that such private support would decrease with tightened border control mechanisms, as discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, the Saudi government could more effectively disempower private financing networks with the aid of the U.S. The U.S. could support the regime's efforts to curb the funneling of private arms to Syria by providing intelligence and surveillance expertise, and such support could also be extended to neighboring Gulf states like Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.

- Reassure Saudi Arabia of U.S. unwavering military alliance, despite U.S. defense cuts, in exchange for Saudi cooperation with the ceasefire.
- Ensure U.S. support for the Kingdom in the event of any future Shi'a uprising.
- Reassure Saudi Arabia of U.S. economic ties with the kingdom. Offer to reduce oil imports from other sources and increase imports from Saudi Arabia.

- Provide Saudi Arabia with intelligence and surveillance expertise to curb the illicit flow of arms into Syria by private backers.
- Support Saudi efforts to exert their influence in a democratic Syria.

CHINA

A. Concerns

China adamantly opposes foreign intervention in Syria, in accordance with its long-standing foreign policy, which puts a premium on state sovereignty.⁹¹⁶ China's non-interventionist ideology matches its interest to curb what it perceives as worldwide American hegemony. This position has hardened in the wake of NATO's mission in Libya, which raised Chinese fears that any Western intervention could potentially expand beyond the Security Council's authorization.⁹¹⁷ Therefore, China will continue to recognize the Assad regime as legitimate until the regime itself agrees to a political solution to the Syrian crisis.⁹¹⁸

On an economic level, China has vested interests in Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and wishes to guarantee a regional stability conducive to prosperous economic conditions. A spillover of the Syrian conflict could destabilize its neighboring countries, leading to economic and energy crises with vast implications for China.

China's economic relations with Syria were still in their infancy in the years leading up to the Syrian conflict. However, trade activity exploded during Bashar al-Assad's term, during which China ascended to become Syria's biggest trade partner in 2011 as well as a leading investor in its oil sector.⁹¹⁹ During the war, China has remained the leading source of Syrian imports outside of the Middle East region.⁹²⁰ Although the total sum of investments in Syria are miniscule from China's perspective, Chinese state-owned oil companies still hold stakes in some

of Syria's largest, potentially high-yielding oil contracts and undeveloped fields.⁹²¹ China's indirect economic stakes within Syria make the crisis a peripheral concern that should be defused as quickly as possible.

B. Policy Recommendations

In order to secure Chinese support of a ceasefire, the U.S. must commit to terms of non-intervention in Syria, even in the event of a breach. In light of such a commitment, it is likely that China would not block any efforts to achieve a ceasefire and would abstain from the Security Council vote. China's cooperation with the ceasefire would also serve as an opportunity for it to establish legitimacy as a responsible stakeholder in the Middle East, where it has immense investments and growing political influence. In addition to committing to nonintervention, the U.S. should encourage continued Chinese cooperation on initiatives such as UNSCR 2139, and increased Chinese support of humanitarian efforts in Syria, which would further multilateral interests in regional stability.⁹²²

- Reassure China of U.S. continued nonintervention.
- Withdrawn U.S. opposition to Assad's regime in exchange for China's continued support of UNSCR 2139 and cooperation with the ceasefire agreement.
- Encourage continued cooperation on initiatives such as UNSCR 2139, and increased Chinese support of humanitarian efforts in Syria.

CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF A CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

A. Border Control

Tight border control measures—as discussed in detail in the previous chapter—will need to be enforced on all of Syria’s borders to insure that the ceasefire is not breached, and to prevent the transfer of illicit arms into Syria. Port and air surveillance will also be necessary for the maintenance of the ceasefire agreement. Tightened border control mechanisms would drain the illicit flow of arms into Syria, eventually exhausting the warring forces. International observers should be stationed in Syrian and Lebanese ports, such as Latakia and Beirut, to prevent both state and non-state actors from supplying weapons to Syrian parties. Radar installations along Iraq’s western border would also aid in identifying aircraft flying from Iraq or Iran into Syria to resupply forces. Setting up observers and radar installations are imperative to maintaining the ceasefire; should weapons circumvent the border controls, it will only encourage international actors to withdraw their support for the agreement and push factions within Syria to abandon the ceasefire altogether.

B. Enforcement

A second crucial condition for the ceasefire is the establishment of a system to implement punitive sanctions on violators of the agreement. A UNSC resolution, with the agreement of Russia and China, could set binding conditions and disciplinary sanctions to deter potential violators.

C. Buffer Zones

After a system for implementing sanctions has been created, buffer zones should be established between the warring factions in Syria, such as those successfully implemented by the UN between the Greeks and Turks in Cyprus in 1964.⁹²³ The buffer zones would prevent parties from engaging in hostilities that could threaten the ceasefire, and protect civilians from

retaliatory aggression at the hands of dissatisfied groups. Buffer zones should be manned by UN peacekeeping forces, drawn from neutral Muslim nations with high standards of military competence and varied denominational backgrounds, to reflect the diversity of the Syrian population and protect various Syrian groups equally. Such nations include Oman, Malaysia, Morocco and Algeria.

D. Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid must be swiftly dispersed to Syrian communities in dire need. UNSCR 2139 already demands immediate access to zones in pressing need of humanitarian aid, and calls for an end to all violence in the country. Russian and Chinese approval of the Resolution confirms that an interest in addressing Syria's humanitarian crisis is shared by all members of the Security Council. While the Resolution should be implemented immediately, it is likely that its execution will be delayed due to hostilities on the ground, particularly in the besieged cities of Homs, Aleppo and Damascus.⁹²⁴ However, once a ceasefire is established, a consistent delivery of humanitarian aid will not only save lives, but may also encourage domestic factions to avoid provoking a resumption of violence.

CONCLUSION

With the adoption of UNSCR 2139 there are reasons to believe that wider cooperation between the world powers could be achieved in order to end the violence in Syria. As with the Resolution, this would require a softening of U.S. position toward the regime, specifically with respect to Assad staying in power, in order to gain Russian and Iranian cooperation. A comprehensive and enforceable ceasefire will be the first step toward ending the violence in Syria, and together with

tight border control measures, will deprive the forces of arms and induce them to negotiate. In the long run, a final transition of power in Syria would still be possible through democratic election.

ESTABLISHING TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS

Rebecca Donato, Amanda Ramshaw, Wanda Bertram, Winthrop Hubbard, Bryan Lam and Lily Anderson

This final chapter of recommendations proposes policy strategies for ushering in a transitional government—and later free national elections—after the establishment of a ceasefire in Syria.

A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

When a ceasefire has been successfully brokered and enforced, the nation will be divided into federal areas corresponding to the established territories of warring factions. The borders of these areas will be temporarily non-negotiable, monitored by UN peacekeeping forces. As such, in the period before a transitional government is elected, it will be logical to allow the dominant groups in each area to administer their territory and oversee local electoral processes. Obviously, within a federalist structure, Syrians in different areas of the country will be subject to vastly different domestic legal systems, some of which will no doubt be inspired by Islamic sharia law. The potential human suffering brought about by these legal systems must, unfortunately, be borne as the price of peace—but only temporarily. It is in the interest of the U.S., as well as of all prospective parties to a new Syrian government, to swiftly bring an end to these artificial borders by holding elections for a transitional administration.

Under the temporary federalist system described above, Syria's central government will

be largely nonexistent; UN peacekeeping forces will bear primary responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the Syrian state during this period. These forces will patrol and enforce the buffer zones that divide administrative regions, and will also be tasked with reporting any violations of the ceasefire. However, in the interest of establishing a transitional government to take over administrative central administrative duties, the design of a new electoral system, and the drafting of a constitution, elections should be held as soon as possible to elect regional representatives. Local electoral processes will be monitored by UN peacekeeping forces.

The transitional government, or delegation, described above will include representation from parties with territorial and economic assets in Syria—the Ba’ath Party, Free Syrian Army, Kurdish Democratic Union, and Islamic Front groups—as well as from organized parties with civil influence, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and prominent internationally backed groups like the National Coalition. There is a need both for protection of minority ethnic and religious groups, such as Alawites and Kurds; and for proportional representation of the territorial reach of parties. Therefore, each administrative division within Syria will be allotted one representative for every 750,000 civilians, including internally displaced Syrian citizens and registered refugees; plus one token additional representative, including for administrative divisions with under 750,000 people. The delegation will thus comprise between 30 and 40 Syrian members. It will also include three UN advisors appointed by the United Nations Security Council, whose role shall be to provide guidance and oversee the government’s operational integrity. These advisors, though nominally representatives of the UN, can come from the neutral Muslim countries of Oman, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Algeria.

To encourage coalition-building within the transitional government, all legislative decisions must be approved by at least two-thirds of all members, including the UN advisor. The passage of a constitution will be the only exception to this rule, and will require a consensus

among the delegation.

Improvements to the provision of security and social services notwithstanding, the establishment of a transitional government in Syria will not heal social divides conceived or exposed during the Syrian civil war. To ensure that this new government does not provoke the resumption of hostilities, particularly in areas with sizeable minority populations, the scope of its central authority over local governments must be limited. Areas whose populations overwhelmingly wish to preserve some regional autonomy should be allowed to do so, receiving permission from the transitional government to create domestic laws that differ significantly from those in the rest of the country. Such permissive federal policies will create a system of sectarian “checks and balances” that helps limit discriminatory legal action. Minority-controlled regions will necessarily include some Sunni Arabs, and will have the power to pass laws discriminating against them; just as regions dominated by Sunni Arabs will be able to pass laws discriminating against their local minority groups. Ideally, all popular local governments will refrain from discriminatory practices so as to avoid retaliatory action in other regions.

NATIONWIDE ELECTIONS

As provided in the framework for a delegation representing all domestic parties involved in the present conflict, the organization of an electoral administration body will be shaped by the Syrian representatives. This transitional government should last only as long as is necessary for it to prepare for and conduct free and fair elections, which are a critical component of building lasting peace and security in Syria.

The U.S. recommends that the semi-autonomous provinces established under the transitional government hold their own provincial elections to enhance the legitimacy of a

federal election. It remains to be seen whether elections will be allowed to take place in areas currently under the control of Islamic parties, but any UN peacekeeping mission's first priority should be to maintain the ceasefire in these volatile areas rather than attempt to force elections. Ideally, the newly elected future government of Syria will represent the common interests of all segments of Syrian society, and will be tasked with disempowering and dissolving these extremist forces.

UN involvement in the election process should include technical assistance, including advising during the electoral system design period; logistical support in registering voters; printing and distributing ballots; and security support to ensure a safe electoral environment. While election observation by the UN is no longer common, the Syrian situation calls for the presence of foreign observers to legitimize the process designed by the delegation, which may lack the public's trust given the last three years of violent conflict and destabilization.⁹²⁵ Election observers, like the security forces in proposed buffer zones, should be drawn from stable and neutral Muslim and Arab countries such as Oman, Algeria, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. Observers will also be responsible for monitoring the dispersal and retrieval of ballots both within Syria and for registered refugees who have fled outside the country. Monitors must also be present in various countries where expatriate Syrians live, to count absentee ballots.

The U.S. State Department has stipulated that any future Syrian electoral system should be designed with UN guidance. However, although UN advisors will sit in the transitional government and assist in constructing the new system, the delegation itself reserves the right to ultimately decide which type of system this will be. International advisers must take care to not overstep their political boundaries, or risk jeopardizing the perceived legitimacy of the new electoral system altogether. However, advisers should firmly maintain that if any military personnel are to run in elections, they must first forfeit their participation within the military and

run as civilians.

Although official international support to Syrian groups must cease in order for a ceasefire to be brokered, it is expected that come election season, some humanitarian aid will be given by specific states to particular areas in order to encourage votes for favored candidates. Considering all the rebuilding necessary after the ceasefire, however, such directed donations will surely do more good than harm, and are not worth discouraging.

CONSOLIDATION OF MILITARY POWER

The nature of this proposed transitional period in Syria calls for Assad's armed forces and various armed rebel factions to work together to restore security. Since all of the parties expected to take part in the transitional government possess their own military forces, it is essential to gradually unify these forces to form a coalition military, loyal to the newly elected Syrian government. These troops' transition from enemies to allies may require much time and effort, so a representative military council should be established in order to make the transition smooth. This council should bring together commanders from each wing of the new military, including Assad's armed forces, the FSA, and Kurdish and Islamic Front forces should they comply. The transitional government will have the authority to direct this council in order to bolster the security of Syria during the transition period; while the military council organizes each wing's particular security strategy, troops will take orders directly from their commanders. Once free elections have taken place, a formal military head will be appointed, whether by the elected government or by popular vote.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Wanda Bertram and Winthrop Hubbard

Deadlocked for three years due to ideological conflicts both local and global, sectarian and economic, the crisis in Syria no longer suggests an objectively virtuous response from the United States. Acknowledging that no strategy will fulfill the demands of domestic Syrian parties while satisfying international parties with vested interests, the U.S. should pursue a policy strategy that will bring about and enforce a ceasefire in Syria as soon as possible. Any successful strategy for achieving these aims must be both optimistic and realistic. This report presents just such an approach. It recommends halting the flow of arms and fighters to all warring factions by tightening regional borders and negotiating with UN Security Council members, and subsequently establishing temporary federal zones whose administrations can usher in a new transitional government. In the long term, this report envisions nationwide elections in Syria, elections which if free and fair will likely result in the deposition of Bashar al-Assad.

The writers of this report recognize that the viability of these recommendations relies on the United States's capacity to cooperate with other international parties. Negotiating with Russia, in particular, will require assertive yet delicate diplomacy. Given the recent crisis in Ukraine and the diplomatic firestorm ignited by Russian occupation of Crimea, U.S. relations with Russia are volatile, and policymakers may have to adjust this report's recommendations vis-à-vis Russia in order to broker a ceasefire in Syria. Nevertheless, though conditions for

cooperation with Russia or any other state are subject to change in the near future, the broad policy strategies outlined in this report should remain practical and achievable.

1. SYRIA COUNTRY PROFILE⁹²⁶

Total Area: 185,180 km

Ethnic Groups: Arabs 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians and other 9.7%

Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim (including Alawite, Druze) 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%

Population: 22,457,336 (July 2013 estimate)

Population Growth Rate: 0.15% (2013 estimate)

Birth Rate: 23.01 births/1,000 population (2013 estimate)

Death Rate: 3.67 deaths/1,000 population (2013 estimate)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): 107.6 billion USD (2011 estimate)

Gross Domestic Product per Capita (PPP): 5,100 USD (2011 estimate)

Export Commodities: crude oil, minerals, petroleum products, fruits and vegetables, cotton fiber, textiles, clothing, meat and live animals, wheat

Export Partners: Iraq 58.4%, Saudi Arabia 9.7%, Kuwait 6.4%, UAE 5.5%, Libya 4.1% (2012)

Crude Oil Exports: 152,400 bbl/day (2010 estimate)

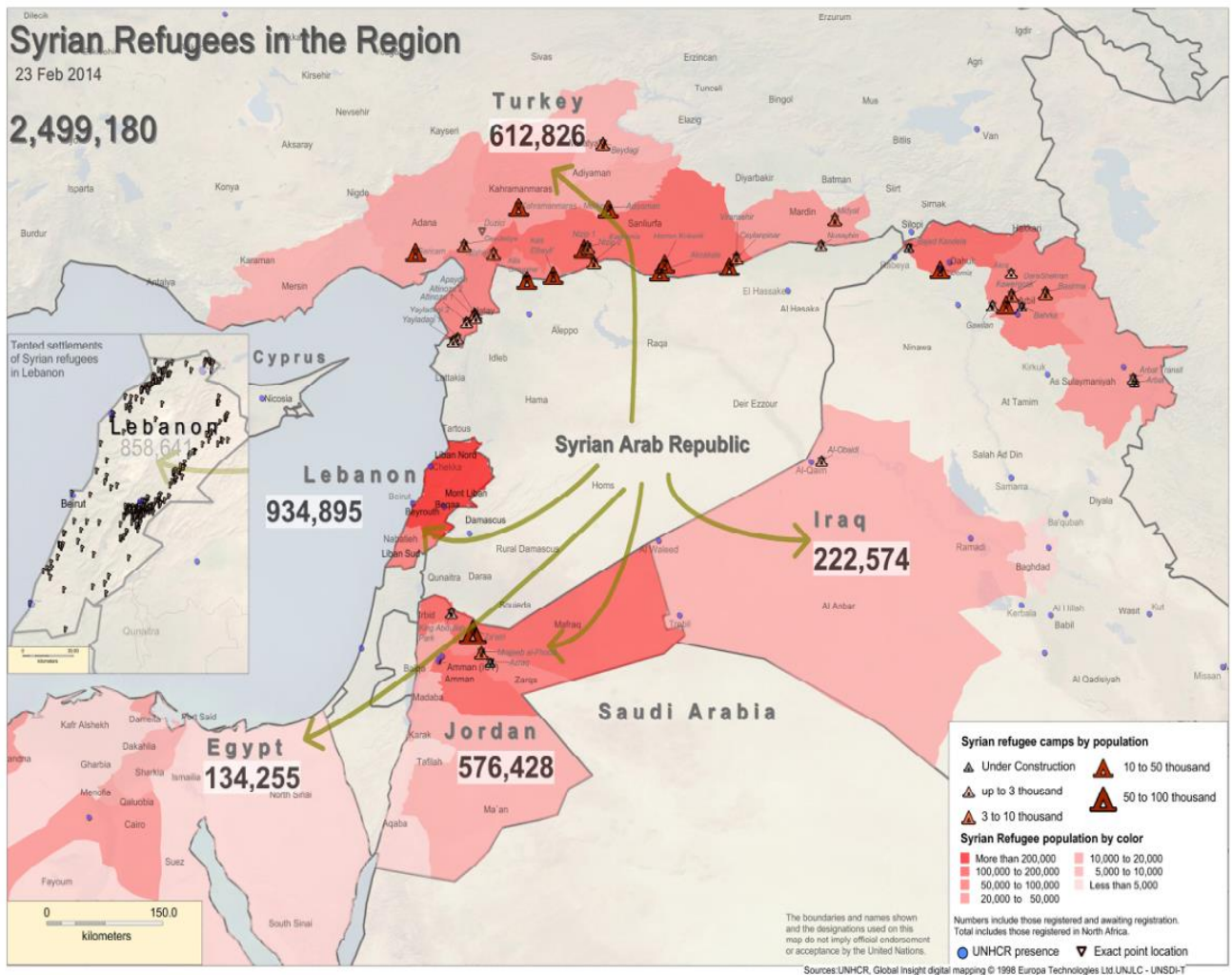
Pipelines: Gas 3,170 km; Oil 2,029 km (2013)

2. MIDDLE EAST OIL AND GAS⁹²⁷

Selected Oil and Gas Pipeline Infrastructure in the Middle East



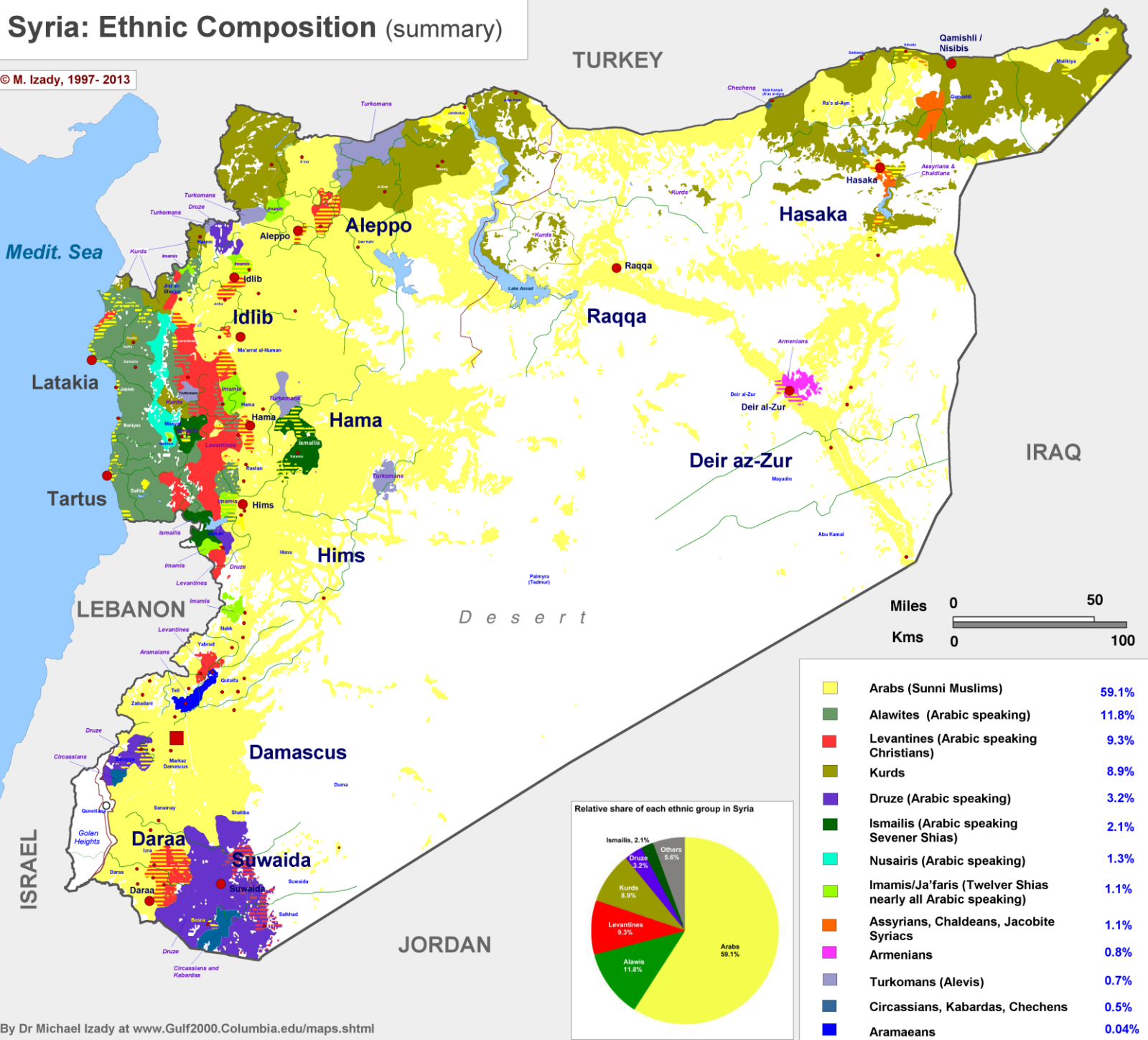
3. SYRIAN REFUGEES⁹²⁸



4. SYRIAN ETHNIC COMPOSITION⁹²⁹

Syria: Ethnic Composition (summary)

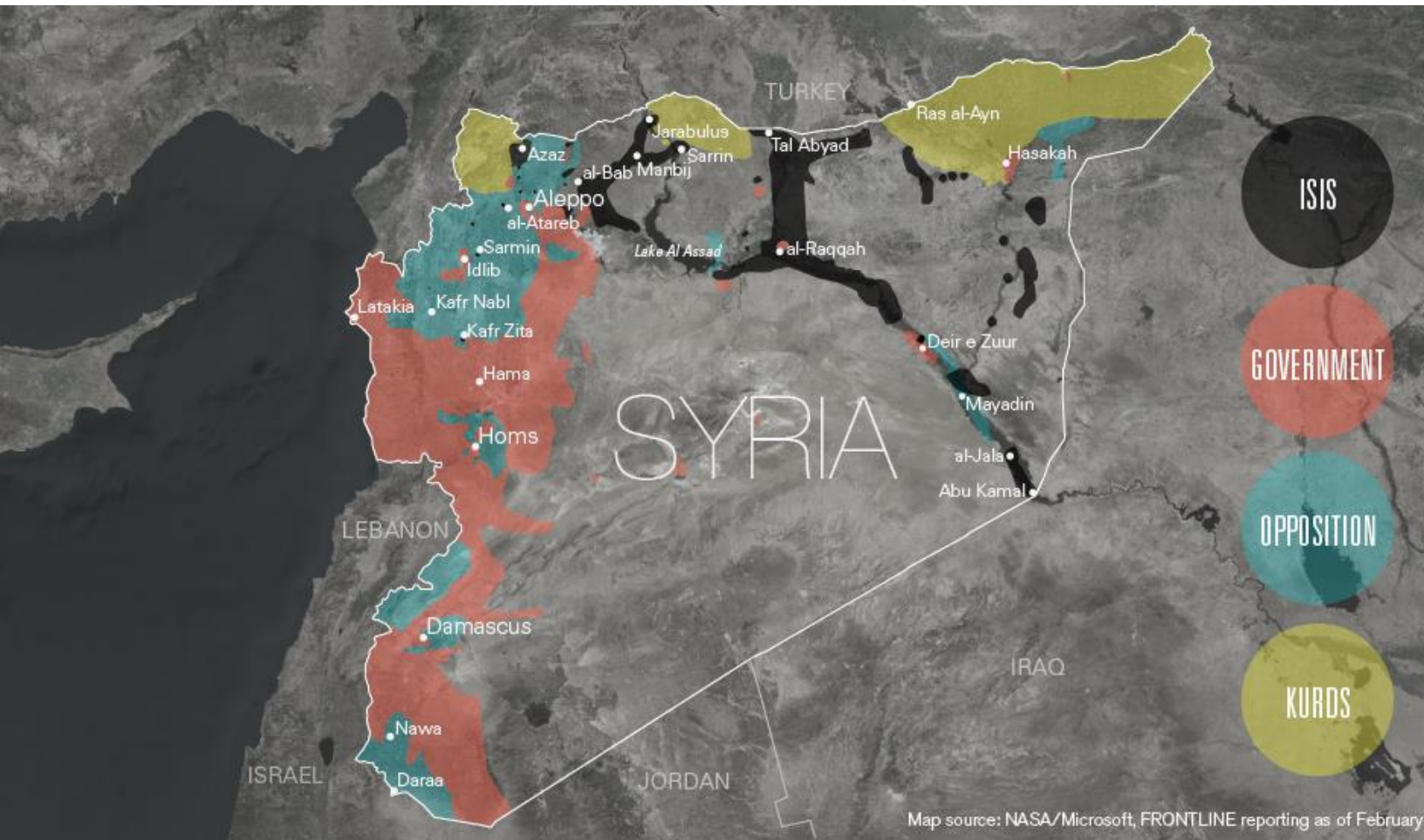
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By Dr Michael Izady at www.Gulf2000.Columbia.edu/maps.shtml

Version 4

5. SYRIAN SITUATION ON THE GROUND⁹³⁰



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- 王毅强调，日内瓦会议标志着对话谈判的开始，它应当是一个持续的进程。为此，有必要确定清晰明确的后续机制，让对话谈判不间断，政治努力不停顿。不仅要谈起来，还应谈下去，直至谈出结果。日内瓦会议也应是一个开放的平台，和谈的大门向所有致力于政治解决的叙利亚派别敞开，各方积极参与，发挥作用。

王毅说，叙利亚政治过渡进程应该由叙利亚人民主导，叙利亚的未来最终只能由叙利亚人民自主决定。国际社会应坚持捍卫联合国宪章及国际关系基本准则，致力于维护叙利亚的主权、独立、统一和领土完整，尊重叙利亚人民的意愿和选择。应在叙利亚各方间采取公正平衡、不偏不倚的态度，不断为达成政治过渡方案创造有利条件，提供必要环境，同时应避免从外部强加政治解决方案。要维护并发挥好联合国斡旋调解的主渠道作用。

王毅说，叙利亚各方在立场和诉求上存在着分歧和矛盾。固守立场，只会山穷水尽；互谅互让，才能柳暗花明。我们希望叙利亚各方从国家前途命运和叙利亚人民的整体利益出发，拿出政治意愿，从各自立场出发相向而行，走出一条借鉴国际和地区有益经验、符合自身国情、兼顾叙利亚各方利益的“中间道路”。

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