

***Part IV: Analysis of the Dynamics of
Near East Futures: Assessing Actor
Interests, Resolve and Capability in 5 of
the 8 Regional Conflicts***

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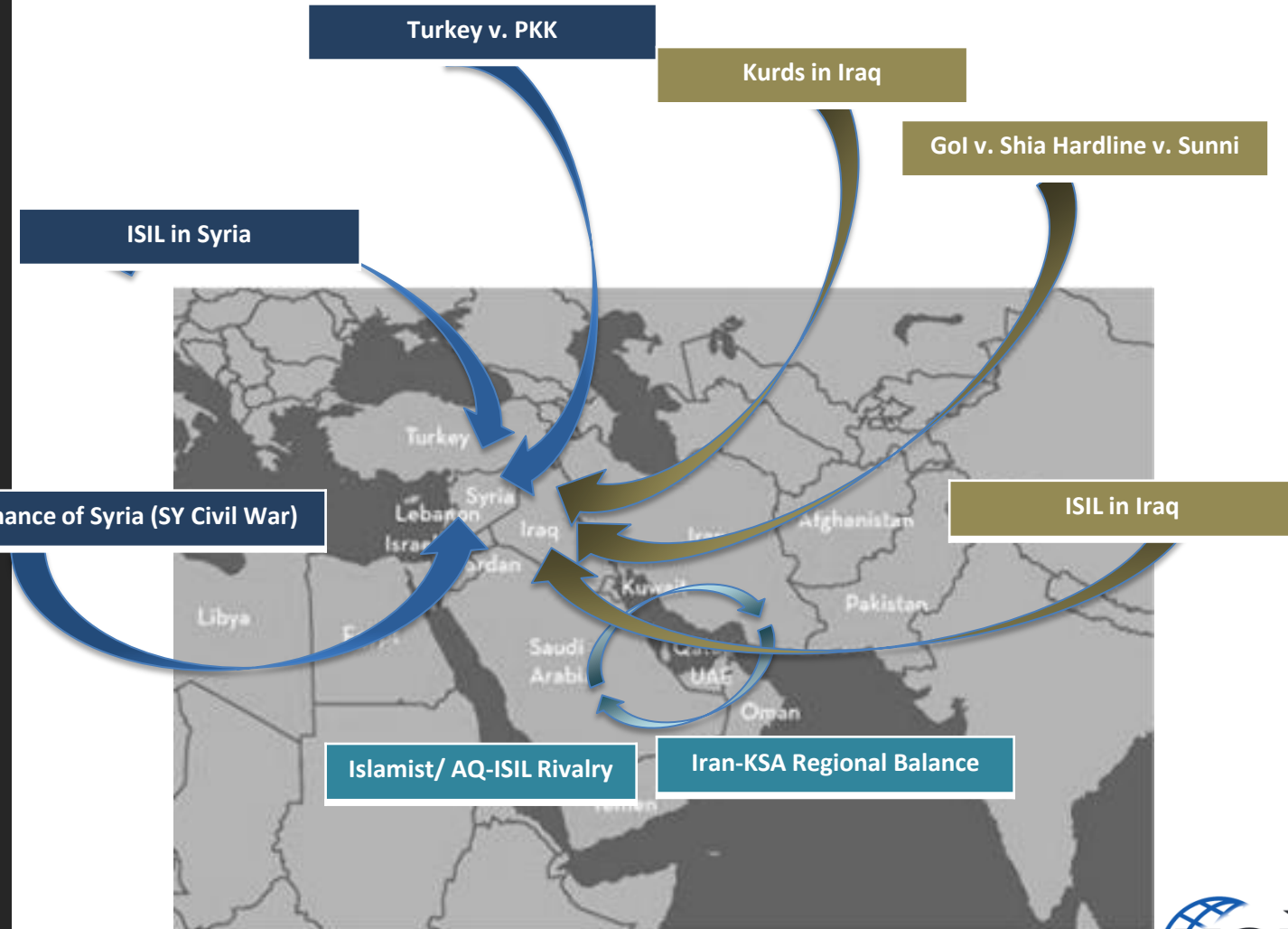
NB: *This briefing is the final part of a four-part study exploring the dynamics of the central Middle East conflict system. Part II describes the system and why it is critical to assess U.S. security interests and activities in the context of the entire system rather than just the conflicts (e.g., defeat of ISIL) in which the U.S. is most interested. Part II describes the analytic approach used to assess regional dynamics and regional futures based on the alignments and conflicts among three critical drivers: actor interests, resources and resolves. Part III illustrates the analytic process applied to 20-plus actor over five of the eight conflicts. Part IV presents the results of the interest, resolve, capability assessment.*

Why is the situation in Syria and Iraq so hard to grasp?

What we currently tend to see as one or two conflicts is in fact **the confluence of 8 distinct militarized conflicts**. Some have overlapping **outcomes**, overlapping **participants**, **interests**, or **locations**, but none are the same on all counts. As a result we cannot assume that actors that share preferences for results in one or more conflict will share preference in other conflicts.

There are no “sides”. Who is on which side depends on which conflict you are talking about.

8 Co-located Near East Conflicts – different actors, different stakes, multiple sides



BOTTOM LINE RESULTS: Interest + Resolve + Capacity = Expectations for the Region

SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Conflict and instability in Syria continues even with the defeat of ISIL. Many regional actors have incentives to continue the conflict in Syria even if ISIL is out of the picture there. Given the satisfactoriness of continued conflict, and high resolve to avoid defeat of Assad, we should expect Syria, Iranian and Russian stalling and provocation regarding ceasefires and be skeptical of any negotiated.

Conflict in Syria continues even with the defeat of ISIL and Assad. Saudi Arabia, Shi'a Hardline and Militia, Syrian Kurds, Al Nusrah and Russia all have Incentives to continue in Syria following defeat of both the Assad regime and ISIL. The majority of actors prefer continued hostilities to joint Islamist/non-Islamist governance in Syria

Conflict and instability continue in Syrian even with Assad victory. Under current conditions there is no incentive and little contravening influence to eliminate Saudi proxyism and indirect interference in Syria and elsewhere in the region.

ISIL IN SYRIA

There is high resolve and untapped capacity for ISIL defeat in Syria. Iran, Hizbollah, Syrian Kurds, Jordan and the Assad regime show high resolve for ISIL defeat. Iran in particular represents a untapped capacity suggesting Iran has incentives to increase support / participation for Assad should ISIL make further inroads in Syria.

Actors are involved for more than security reasons. Rather than just a security issue, regional prestige and influence, and domestic political support are key drivers of the preferences of nearly every actor involved and absolutely condition their decisions regarding the conflict.

DOMESTIC OUTCOME IN IRAQ

Very little regional incentive for sectarian warfare in Iraq even among Kurds and Sunni Tribes. In fact, the prospect of Sunni and Kurds fighting for autonomous control increases the resolve of nearly every actor to encourage Iraqi government granting concessions to these groups.

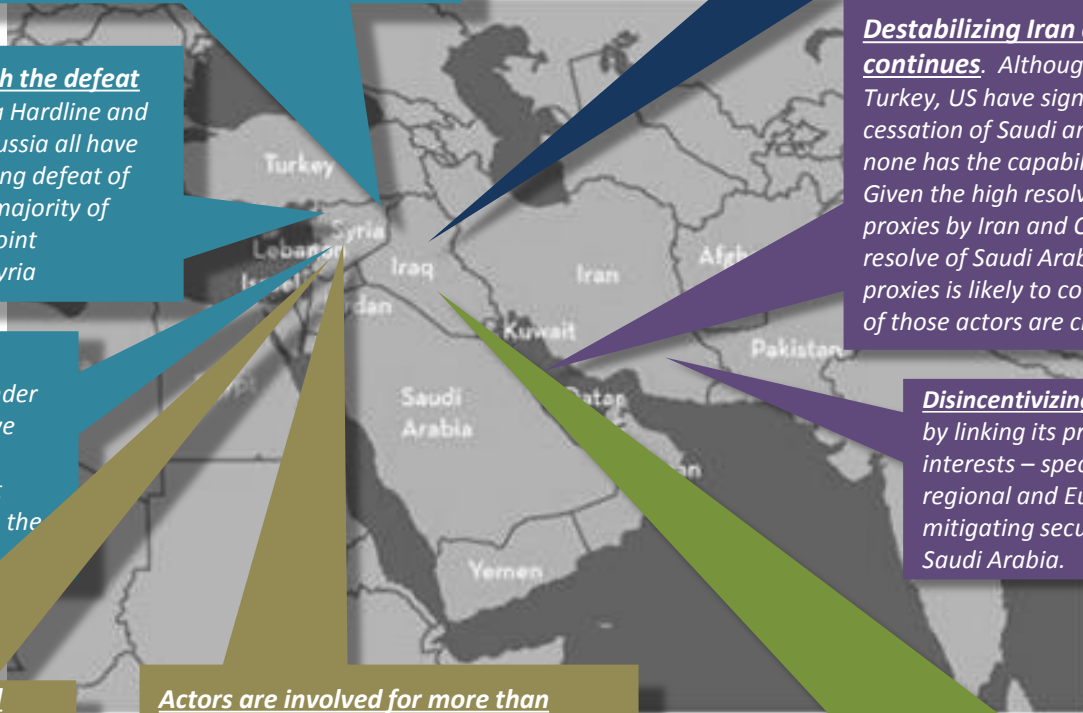
IRAN-KSA REGIONAL RIVALRY

Destabilizing Iran and Saudi Proxyism continues. Although Iraq, Jordan, Russia, Turkey, US have significant resolve toward cessation of Saudi and Iranian proxy funding, none has the capability to cause this outcome. Given the high resolve toward continued use of proxies by Iran and Qatar and more moderate resolve of Saudi Arabia, support of regional proxies is likely to continue unless the interests of those actors are changed

Disincentivizing proxyism for Iran occurs by linking its proxy funding to economic interests – specifically its ability to expand regional and European trade ties -- while mitigating security threats from Israel and Saudi Arabia.

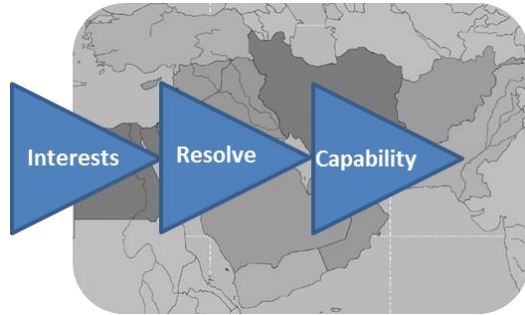
ISIL IN IRAQ

There is significant regional capacity and resolve for ISIL defeat in Iraq. Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Tribes who are indifferent between ISIL victory and defeat. For KSA this reflects contradictory preferences between prestige and internal security interests. Sunni Tribe preference switches to ISIL defeat iff the Domestic Outcome in Iraq is inclusiveness or local autonomy.



The Details

Analysis of the Dynamics of Near East Futures:



Main question: What are the dynamics embedded in the battles against ISIL in Syria and Iraq, the Syrian Civil War, Domestic resolution in Iraq and the Regional Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia and how will these drive the region toward one future or another?

The outcomes of conflicts are not the result of a single actor's actions or desires, but are a product of the interactions of opponents.

The forces that determine one or another regional future reflect the actors' **interests, capabilities** and **resolve**.

While the alignment of actor *interests* determines possible outcomes, the distribution of actor resources and resolve across those outcomes governs the likelihood that an outcome will emerge. In other words, the dynamics that determine one or another future reflect the confluences of actors' interests, resources and resolve.

ACTORS INCLUDED IN STUDY

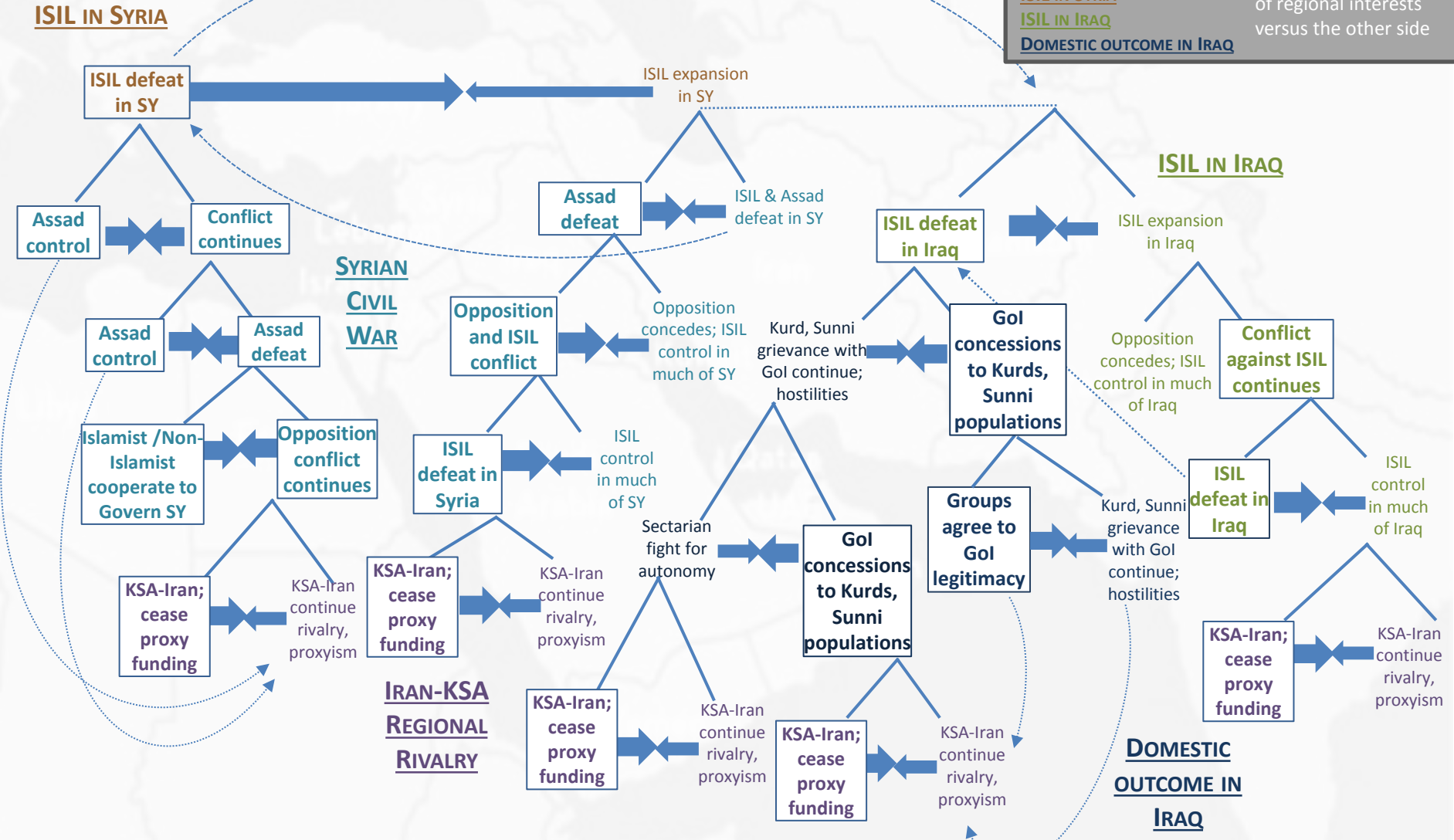
Hezbollah
Iran
ISIL
Government of Iraq (Abadi)
Israel
Jordan
Iraqi Kurds (PUK, KDP)
Syrian Kurds (PYD, YPG) Iranian
Kurds (PDKI, PAKJ) Lebanon
Qatar
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Shi'a Militia and Hardline (Iraqi)
Sunni Tribal Elites
Free Syrian Army
Revolutionary Command Council
Non-ISIL /AI Nusrah Front
Syria (Assad and Loyalists)
Turkey
US

Outcomes Networked across 5 Conflicts and Expected Results according to Regional Interests only

Color of the outcome indicates the conflict to which it belongs

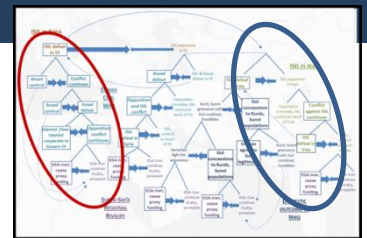
- SYRIAN CIVIL WAR** (Blue)
- SUNNI-SHI'A REGIONAL RIVALRY** (Purple)
- ISIL IN SYRIA** (Orange)
- ISIL IN IRAQ** (Green)
- DOMESTIC OUTCOME IN IRAQ** (Dark Blue)

The thickness of the arrow indicates the direction of the balance of regional interests versus the other side



The interests of key regional actors combine to favor defeat of Assad in Syria replaced by Non-Islamist government, plus defeat of ISIL in Iraq along with more inclusive government there.

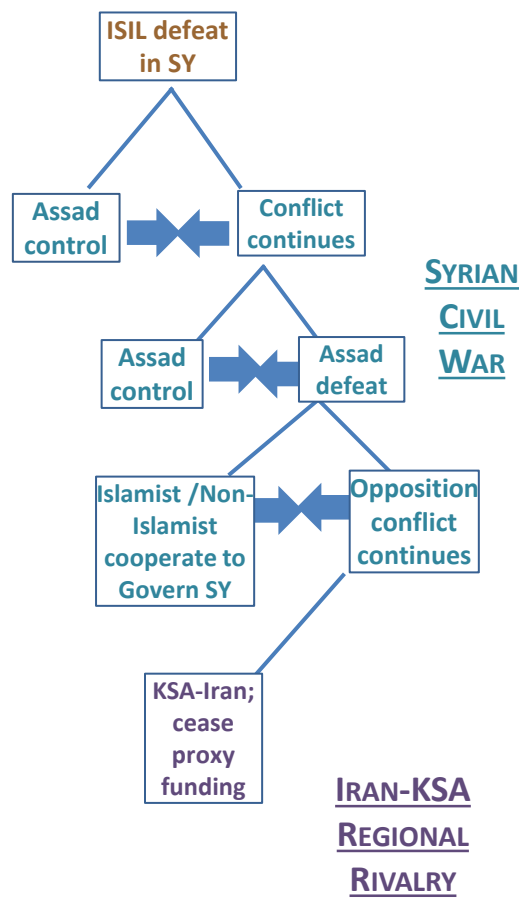
Prospect for the Near East based on the Combined INTERESTS of Regional Actors



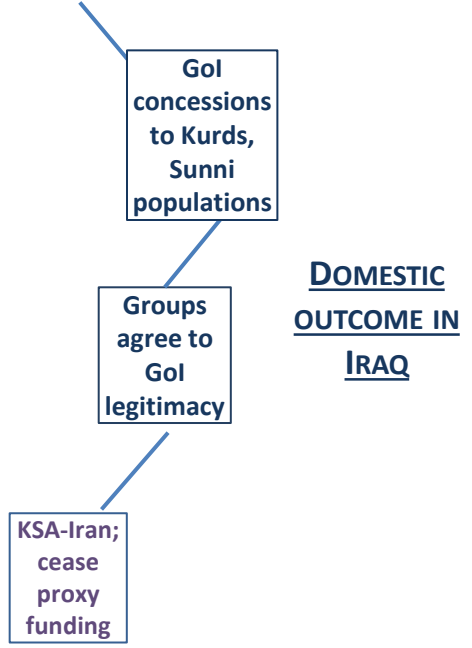
The balance of regional actors' economic, domestic political, security, identity and prestige interests suggests that the region should see:

- Iraq: ISIL DEFEATED, UNIFIED, MORE INCLUSIVE.** Iraq remains unified as the government grants concessions to Kurdish and Sunni populations in order to form a single more inclusive state earning eventual legitimacy for the government to the degree that post-conflict reconstruction is possible. This becomes even more durable as Saudi Arabia and Iran cease proxy funding and direct interference in the region.
- Syria: ISIL DEFEATED, ASSAD VICTORY v. DEFEAT UNCLEAR.** Regional interests are evenly balanced between those best satisfied by 1) Assad regaining control in Syria following defeat of ISIL, or 2) the defeat of Assad's by the Syrian Opposition on the other. In the event that the Assad regime falls, regional preferences are balanced between 1) continuation of conflict among opposition forces, and 2) a joint Opposition government in Syria including all regime opponents.

ISIL IN SYRIA



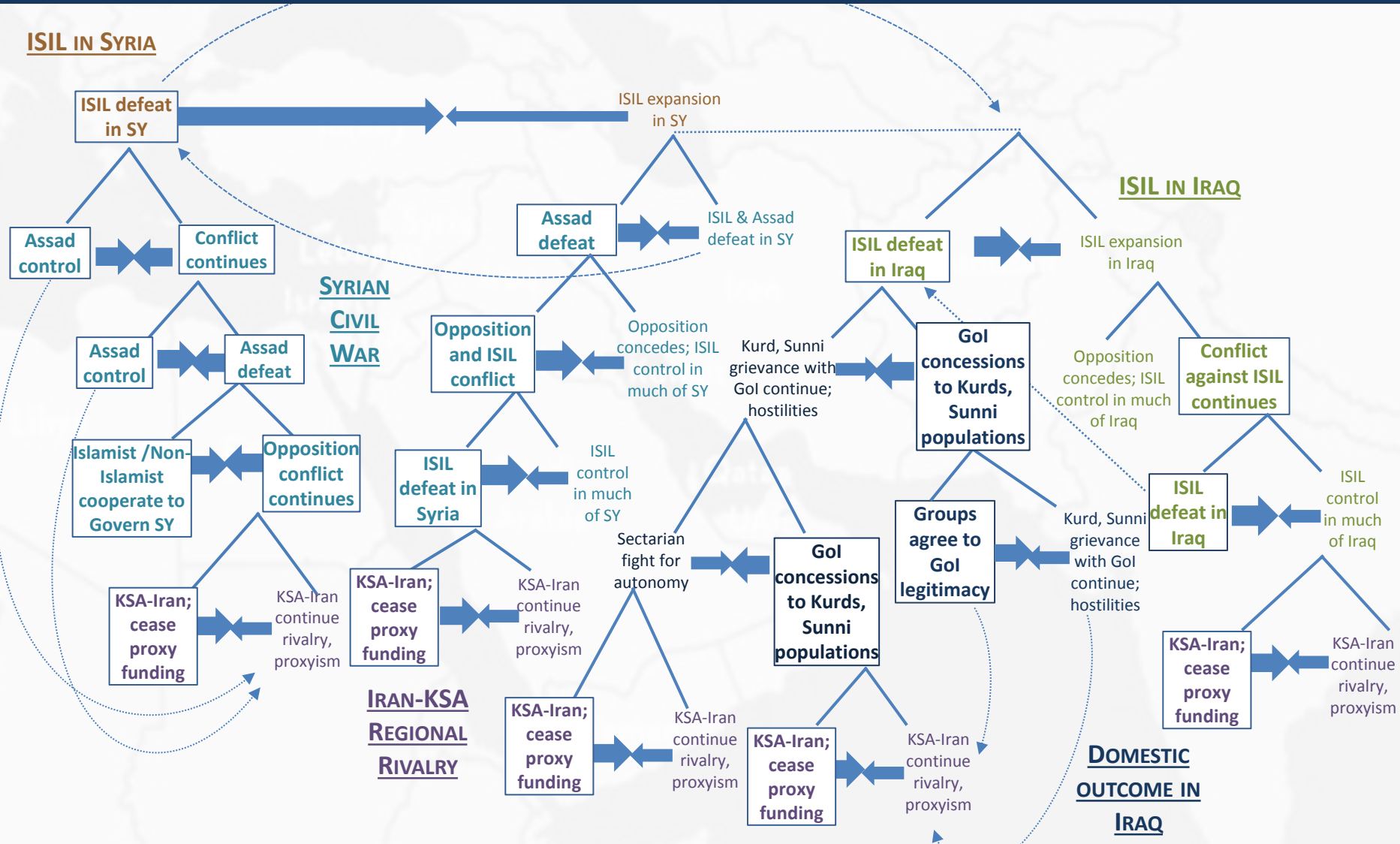
ISIL IN IRAQ



Outcomes by Regional Interests

Regional interests are much more clearly aligned in favor of outcomes in Iraq than in Syria where the favored outcome is unclear

What happens when we take another look at those conflicts considering the actors' resolve and resources defined as capability to determine various outcomes? ...



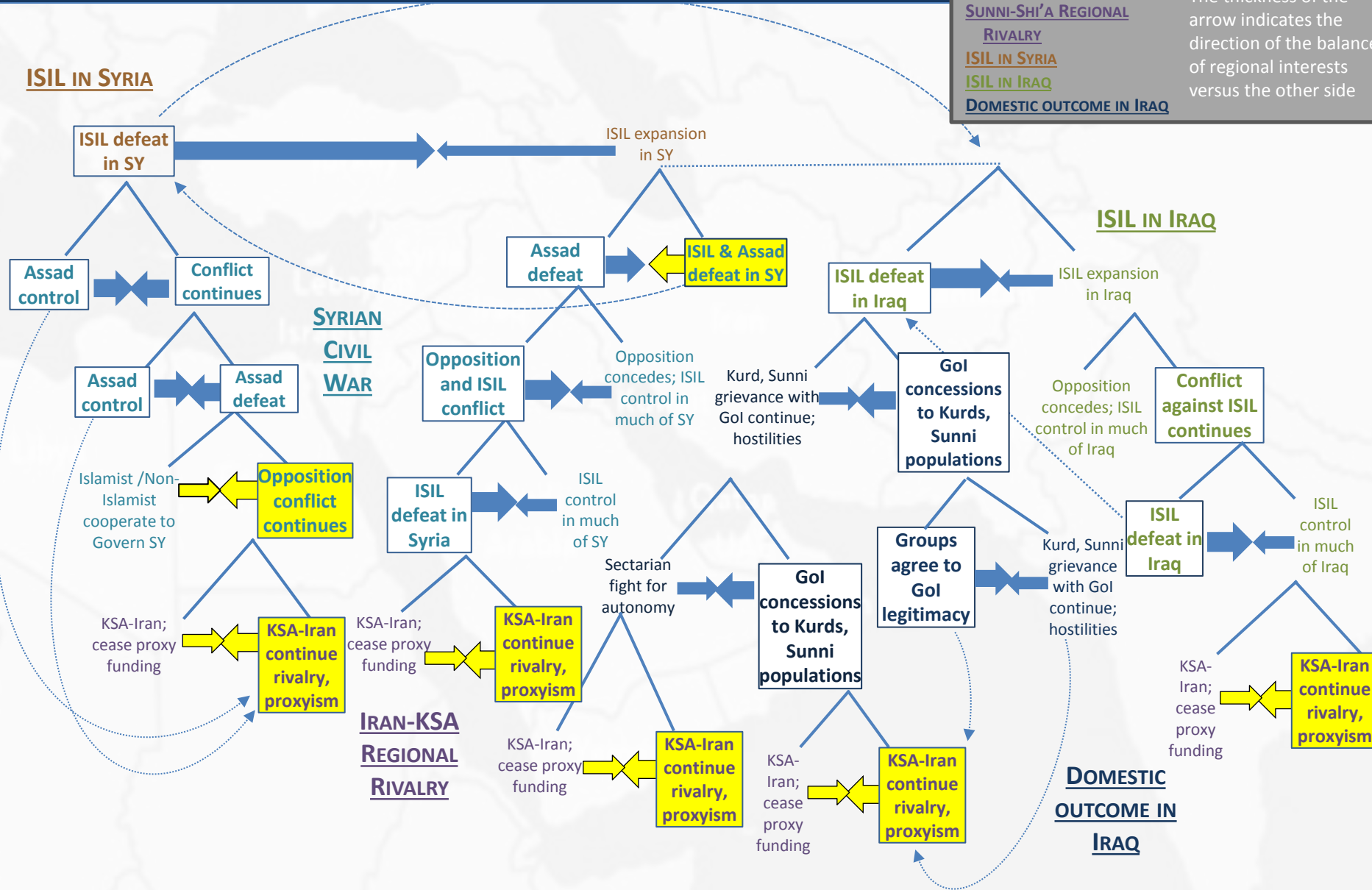
The interests of key regional actors combine to favor defeat of Assad in Syria replaced by Non-Islamist government, plus defeat of ISIL in Iraq along with more inclusive government there.

... expectations for the region look different

Color of the outcome indicates the conflict to which it belongs

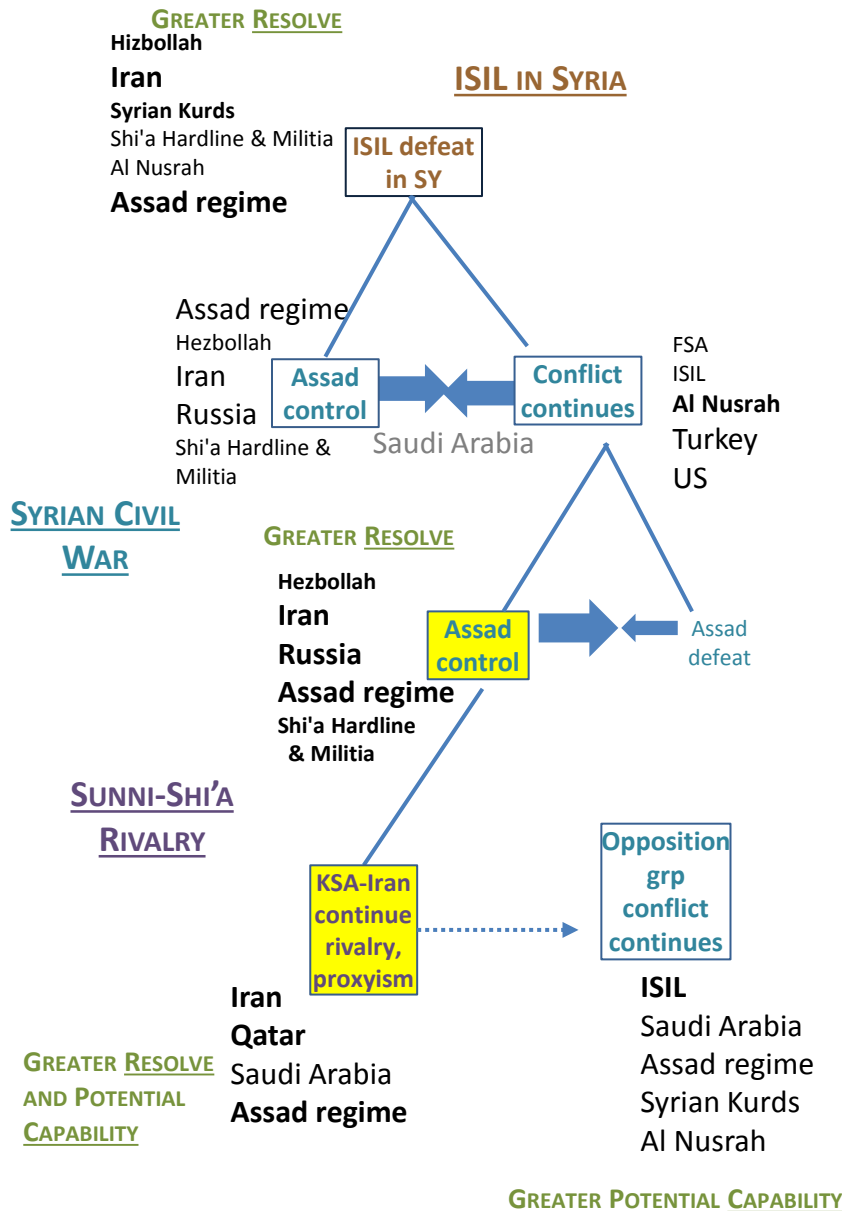
- SYRIAN CIVIL WAR
- SUNNI-SHI'A REGIONAL RIVALRY
- ISIL IN SYRIA
- ISIL IN IRAQ
- DOMESTIC OUTCOME IN IRAQ

The thickness of the arrow indicates the direction of the balance of regional interests versus the other side



Expected Conflict Outcomes according to Resolve and Capability

Prospects based on Regional Actors' INTERESTS, RESOLVE AND CAPABILITY Regarding Outcomes



When we consider actors' resolve and capabilities relative to particular outcomes, the prognosis for the region looks different in important ways.

- **ISIL: DEFEAT IN SYRIA, DEFEAT IN IRAQ.** The push for ISIL defeat in Syria is led by Iran and the Assad regime both of which have both high potential capacity and resolve relative to ISIL defeat. Only ISIL has high resolve toward ISIL expansion in Syria.
- **Syria: CONFLICT WILL CONTINUE BUT ESCALATE SIGNIFICANTLY WITH THREAT OF ASSAD DEFEAT.** Whether Syrian civil conflict will cease in the context of an ISIL defeat is too close to call. Assad, Russia and Iran have strong untapped capability to drive an Assad victory against the remaining Opposition although none show high resolve (i.e., the security value gained by an Assad victory or by continued fighting are not widely different. This reflects their individual competing security interests (i.e., one interest is better satisfied by continued conflict, another by Assad victory.) **Even when we assume the defeat of ISIL in Syria as a precondition, unless actor interests change dramatically, the number of interests served by continued conflict and the generally low resolve on both sides suggests that we should be skeptical of current agreements regarding the Syrian Civil War.** More over, resolve scores rise sharply when continued conflict is replaced by the possibility of Assad defeat. Together these results suggest that unless Assad's Iran's and Russia's perceived security concerns are altered significantly, these actors have both the capacity and will to engage strongly to avoid an impending defeat. **The high resolve of the three actors to avoid defeat should be taken as a warning of their high tolerance for escalation in the civil conflict.**

Appendix

Interest Deep Dive Example: Saudi Preferences in ISIL in Iraq

ISIL in Iraq

Saudi Arabia

SECURITY

Dominate/
sustain Sunni-
Shi'a balance
of power;
mitigate
threat from
Iran and
proxies

SECURITY

Quell non KSA
Sunni extremism,
secularism,
Muslim Brother
influence at home
and abroad

SCORE
(rank,
1=best)

ISIL in Iraq	SECURITY	SECURITY	SCORE
ISIL ousted, fully defeated and/or neutralized as a force in Iraq	4.5	1	5.5 (1.5)
No resolution/ war of attrition; ISIL contained but retains territory in Iraq	4.5	2	6.5 (4.5)
ISIL solidifies, expands its control over currently held Iraq territory	3	3	6 (3)
ISIL expands into Baghdad and returns attention to south	2	4.5	6.5 (4.5)
ISIL dominates, controls most of Iraq	1	4.5	5.5 (1.5)

Resolve Score

[Scale = 1
complete resolve;
to 0 complete
indifference]

Resolve = 0

Resolve = .12

Evaluation: ISIL domination in Iraq shows up as Saudi Arabia's best overall outcome. A closer examination of the pattern of Saudi interests shows significant trade-off complexity in the Saudi interest matrix. This is driven by the opposing nature of its two security interests relative to the posited outcomes. Specifically, the Kingdom's interest in dampened Iranian influence is served by a stronger ISIL in Iraq. The interests driving the Saudi preference are the regional influence and power rivalry with Iran and the influence that Iran could retain if the current Shi'a government and powerful Shi'a community remain intact. In opposition to this however is the domestic threat that ISIL and Sunni extremism represents for the Kingdom. If this is the greater concern Saudi interests are better served by ISIL's defeat at the cost of Iran possibly retaining influence in Iraq. On the other hand, if Iran is the greater perceived threat to Saudi interests, the most favorable outcome is ISIL domination in Iraq. This is a clear example of the value of interest analyses in suggesting strategic approaches: mitigating Saudi concerns about the regional influence of Iran, or increasing its relative concern about ISIL and Sunni extremism are the two ways to influence the Saudis to value the defeat of ISIL in Iraq.

Interests at Stake in Syrian Civil War

	NATIONAL SECURITY;		PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE,		DOMESTIC POLITICS /		IDEOLOGY
	POPULATION SAFETY	IDENTITY (OUTSIDE AREA)	CONSTITUENT SUPPORT	ECONOMICS			
Al Nusra Front	Removal of oppressive Assad regime Retain ability to operate; access to external material support, e.g., via AQ, others	Coordinate and manage fight in Syria as recognized legitimate authority in exile	Retain popular support and Islamist recruits; reform apostate Syrian govt Maintain position as main Islamist org in Syria; dominate rivalry with non Islamist forces and ISIL				
FSA	Removal of oppressive Assad regime	Maintain "Syrian identity" defend against "western domination"	Govern unified Syria (excluding jihadists and leftist Kurds)				
Assad regime and Loyalists	Regime survival - Defeat opposition forces, insurgents Kurds and Islamists in Syria Retain support (e.g., Iran, Russia) necessary to preserve rule	Retain legitimacy/ identity as anti-Western, anti-Israeli resistance org., champion of Arab and Lebanese interests	Retain political legitimacy with and support from Alawi, westernized Sunni, Christians, etc.				
Hezbollah	Defend population against Sunni Islamist threat Preserve links to funds, weapons from Iran through Syria Minimize losses to avoid diluting fighting force	Increase Iranian influence in region	Maintain political position in Lebanon esp. among Lebanese Shi'a; Keep fighting away from Shi'a areas				
Iran	Dominance/sustain Sunni-Shi'a balance of power; mitigate threat from Israel, Saudi Arabia, US	Cleanse the faith; defeat opponents (Sunni infidels; Shi'a)	Defend economic assets (e.g., in Syria); gain foothold in post-conflict economy	Defend economic assets (e.g., in Syria); gain foothold in post-conflict economy		Consolidate territorial control and expansion of Caliphate	
ISIL	Maintain ability to operate, e.g., by attracting acolytes; holding territory	Defend way of life and Kurdish identity including by establishing int'l diplomatic relations	Govern autonomous Rojava as collectivist, "democratic confederation"				
Syrian Kurds	Safety of the population; defend integrity of Rojava Cantons against military threats from ISIL, nationalists, Turks, others	Enhance international/regional influence at detriment to US; strengthen ties with Iran	Demonstrate Russia still has the power to act as a global player				
Russia	Access to Mediterranean; retain safety of port, intel post Stymie spread of extremism into central Asian states; weaken/defeat Chechen and other extremist fighters	Expand regional leadership and influence	Manage domestic support, expectations for government services, pay-outs				
Saudi Arabia	Dominance/sustain Sunni-Shi'a balance of power; mitigate threat from Iran and proxies Quell non KSA Sunni extremism, secularism, Muslim Brother influence at home and abroad	Contain and defeat threat from Sunni extremists, ISIL in Syria and Iraq Retain external material support	Protect Shia Shrines				