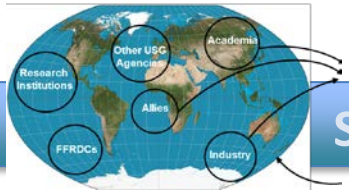


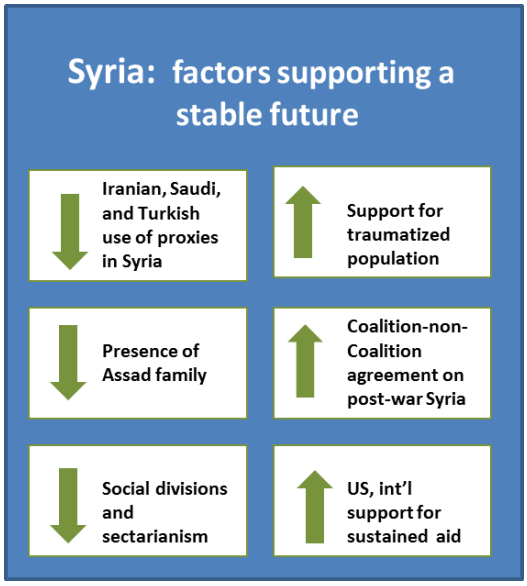
SMA Reach-back

Question (V5): *What are the factors that will influence the future of Syria and how can we best affect them?*

Executive Summary

Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

Experts varied from pessimistic (chronic warfare) to cautiously optimistic regarding their expectations for the future of Syria, yet mentioned many of the same factors that they felt would influence Syria's future path. Most of these key factors – ranging from external geopolitical rivalries to the health and welfare of individual Syrians – were outside what typical military operations might affect. Instead they center on political and humanitarian recovery, healing of social divisions and the solid backing of international actors that agree on what that recovery will entail. The six factors are described below.



External Factor: the use of Iranian, Saudi proxies in Syria

Iranian and Saudi use of proxy forces is one of the wild-cards in the future of Syria and is probably quickest way to reignite violence in the wake of any cease-fire or negotiated settlement. In fact, the intensity of the Iran-Saudi regional power struggle and how this might play out in Syria was the factor most mentioned by the SMA experts.

Encouraging the conditions necessary for stability in Syria requires discouraging Iran-Saudi rivalry in Syria. This can be done in a number of ways including offering for security guarantees or other inducements to limit proxyism in Syria (e.g., for Iran promise of infrastructure reconstruction contracts). Unfortunately, Iran stands to have greater leverage in Syria following the war, regardless of whether Assad stays or goes. If Assad or loyalist governors remain in Syria they will be dependent on Iran (and Russia) for financial and military support. As Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center) writes, "even total victory leaves the regime in command of a devastated economy and under continuing sanctions." Still, if Assad is ousted and Iranian political influence in the country wanes, its economic influence in Syria should remain strong. Since at least 2014 Iran, the region's largest concrete producer has been positioning itself to lucrative gain post-war infrastructure construction contracts giving it significant influence over which areas of Syria are rebuilt and which groups would benefit from the rebuild. Under these conditions, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and/or Turkey could ramp up their efforts to contain Iranian influence by once again supporting aggrieved Sunni extremists. This would be all the more likely, if as Josh Landis predicts, "Assad, with the help of the Russians, Chinese, Iraqis and Hezbollah, will take back most rebel held territory in the next five years."

External Factor: the degree of Coalition-non Coalition agreement on the governance and security conditions of post-war Syria

Lt Col Mel Korsmo an expert in civil war termination from Air University concludes that a negotiated settlement is the best path to political transition and resolution of the civil conflict in Syria. Others felt that any resolution of the Syrian civil conflict would depend on broad-based regional plus critically, US and Russian (and perhaps Chinese) agreement on the conditions of that resolution. The first question is whether there remain any elements of 2012 Geneva Communiqué or UN Security Council resolution 2254 which endorsed a roadmap for peace in Syria that might be salvaged. Lacking agreement among the major state actors, the authors expected that proxy warfare would continue in Syria. Moshe Ma'oz (Hebrew University) and others however argued that it may be too late for the US to wield much influence over the future path of Syria; it has already ceded any leverage to Russia and Iran. Others argue that the way the US might regain some leverage is by committing to the battle against Assad with the same effort given to defeating ISIL. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that it is imperative to attempt now to forge agreement on the clearly-stated steps to implementing a recovery plan for Syria.

External Factor: US and Coalition public support for sustained political, security and humanitarian aid for Syria

Another condition that must be met if the US and Coalition countries are to have impact on political and social stability in Syria is popular support for providing significant aid to Syria over an extended period of time. This may be a tall order, particularly in the US where the public has long thought of Syria as an enemy of Israel and the US in the Levant. Compounding this, the experts argue that when warfare comes to an end in Syria the regime will be so dependent on Russia (and Iranian) aid, that the Syrian government will lose its autonomy of action. While encouraging Americans to donate to charitable organizations aiding Syrian families may not be too difficult, gaining support for sustained US government assistance in the amounts and over the length of time required is likely to be a significant challenge. It is also one that could be quickly undermined by terror attacks emanating from the region.

Internal Factor: the role of Assad family

Osama Gharizi of the United States Institute of Peace[1] points to the current "strength and cohesion" of the Syrian opposition and argues that a "disjointed, weakened, and ineffectual opposition is likely to engender [an outcome] in which the Syrian regime is able to dictate the terms of peace" –a situation which would inevitably leave members of the family or close friends of the regime in positions of power. Unfortunately, many of the experts believe that while there may be fatigue-induced pauses in fighting, as long as the Assad family remains in power in any portion of Syria civil warfare would continue. Furthermore separating Syria into areas essentially along present lines of control would leave Assad loyalists and their Iranian and Russian patrons in control of Damascus and the cities along the Mediterranean coast with much of the Sunni population relegated to landlocked tribal areas to the east. Such a situation would further complicate the significant challenge of repatriating millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom lived in the coastal cities.

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[1] The opinion and analysis expressed is solely that of the author and does not necessarily represent USIP's position.

Acceding to Assad family leadership over all or even a portion of Syria is unlikely to offer a viable longer-term solution, unless two highly intractable issues could be resolved: 1) the initial grievances against the brutal minority regime had been successfully addressed; and 2) the Assad regimes' (father and son) long history of responding to public protest by mass murder of its own people had somehow been erased. The key question is how to remove the specter of those associated with Assad or his family who would invariably be included in a negotiated transition government. Nader Hashemi of the University of Denver suggests that US leadership in the context of the war in Bosnia is a good model: "the United States effectively laid out a political strategy, mobilized the international community, used its military to sort of assure that the different parties were in compliance with the contact group plan … it presided over a war crimes tribunal ..." In his view, prosecuting Assad for war crimes is an important step.

Internal Factor: What is done to repair social divisions and sectarianism in Syria

Nader Hashemi (University of Denver) and Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute) observe that the open ethnic and sectarian conflict that we see in Syria today has emerged there only recently – the result of over five years of warfare, war crimes committed by the Alawite-led government, subsequent Sunni reprisals, the rise of ISIL and international meddling. As a result, there is now firmly-rooted sectarian mistrust and conflict in Syria where little had existed before. Other than pushing for inclusive political processes and rapid and equitable humanitarian relief, there is little that the US or Coalition partners will be able do about this in the short to mid-term. As Hashemi says, healing these rifts will be "an immense challenge; it will be a generational challenge; it will take several generations." On the brighter side, he also allows that in his experience most Syrians "are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country." While separation into fully autonomous polities is untenable, reconfiguring internal administrative borders to allow for "localized representation" and semi-autonomy among different groups may be a way to manage social divisions peacefully.

Internal Factor: Demographics and a traumatized population

There is a youth bulge in the Syrian population. Add to this that there is a large segment of young, particularly Sunni Syrians who have grown up with traumatic stress, have missed years of schooling so are deficient in basic skills, have only known displacement and many of whom have lost one or both parents in the fighting. There is hardly a more ideal population for extremist recruiters. Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute) calls this "a social recipe for disaster" that he believes in the near future will be manifest in increased crime and terrorist activity. As a consequence, it is important for the future of Syria and the region to assure that children receive education, sustained counseling and mental health services and permanent homes for families and children.

***Contributors**: Yezid Sayigh (Carnegie Middle East Center), Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute), Moshe Ma'oz (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Nader Hashemi (Center for Middle East Studies, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver), Josh Landis (University of Oklahoma), Lt Col Mel Korsmo (Lemay Doctrine Center, Air University), Osama Gharizi (U.S. Institute of Peace)*

***Editor**: Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI*

SME Input

Transcript of Virtual Think Tank Interview with Murhaf Jouejati (Middle East Institute)

Ms. Sarah Canna, NSI

Murhaf Jouejati: On the international level, one of the most important factors, of course, is the Russian engagement in Syria, which is shaping the future of Syria. If Syria is left in the near future in one unit, it is going to remain as it has been for the past fifty years in the Russian cap, which means that, for me, the opportunity to flick Syria into the Western cap would be lost. It would give Russia a great strategic advantage over its international rivals in that it would have this major airbase in Syria, which it already has, extending its reach into the Middle East. Also, it could have the access that it does to the Mediterranean through the Port of Tartus. So, it would be a great strategic advantage for the Russians, and Syria would be much much more than, I don't want to say a Russian province, but certainly it would lose its autonomy, and this is a disadvantage of western countries.

> "At the social level, I am really not only in fear but almost in a panic for Syrians because now, we have a generation that is going to grow up of mostly displaced people and mostly traumatized people …you have a social recipe for disaster, and this is going to, in the future, lead to a lot more crime, and certainly, terrorist organizations are going to do a lot of recruiting among those traumatized youth …"

Another international factor (and here, it has to do with the United States and that also, I think, impacts the future of Syria) is the partnership (it's been some time now) between the United States and the PYD. I'm sure it is well-intentioned, but what that does is create more friction than already exists between Kurds and Arabs. Even though the United States has been making efforts to include in this Syrian democratic force a lot of Arab elements, still, the optics are that this is in support of the Kurds, which attracts the ire of the Arab force and attracts the ire of Turkey (an ally). So, I think what that does…the impact of this in the future is it will increase the ethnic strife between the Arab and Kurd.

At the regional level, of course, the major influence is Iranian, and that is already shaping the future of Syria. Iran not only has its IRGC there, not only has its advisors, and not only has its allied Shia militia in Syria, but it also has, as you know, the credit lines to Syria. With that it is buying a lot of property, whether private property or even public property, and the Iranians are truly consolidating their power on the ground and their economic power on the ground in addition to their military, making it such that in the future, Syria is going to be again no more than an extension of Iranian power into the Levant. That would truly cement that bridge between the Teheran and Damascus and Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon. The impact of that is also very nefarious, that would be, if at all possible, even more sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites, which inevitably is going to lead to a lot of radicalization among Sunni Iraqis. Now, the Sunnis in Syria aren't a majority, but this Shia minority keeps on growing in power, so you're going to have increasingly (I think) Sunni terrorism coming out from Syria as a result of this increasing Iranian influence.

At the national level, the ethnic and sectarian strife in Syria has never in recorded history been higher, but still, I think we have a window. It is not too late. There is a sense of a Syrian national identity. I don't want to say it supersedes the sub-national identities, that would not be true, but there is still a sense of a national identity, and if played right, there is no reason for Syria to break up and to cause more headaches to not only the region but internationally as well. You know, if this strife continues to increase, if everything stands as it is today, of course there is going to be even more spillover into the region, and you are going to have increasing cross-boundary strife along sectarian lines with all its implications for the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. I know there's a lot more to add on this factorial level, but these are the most strategic things that I can think of.

At the micro level, I'm looking at the economic aspect and where reconstruction is going to take place in the future in Syria, that is going to shape the future of Syria, and it all depends on the assistance where it mostly comes from. Since the Iranians are consolidating their power now in Syria (their economic power) my guess is that a lot of the reconstruction contracts will go to the Iranians and the Russians, and that is going to again cement Syria with Iran and with Russia at the expense of the West. There are already the demographic changes that Iran is trying to force. There are neighborhoods and homes that had been Sunni and that have been devastated and now are being increasingly being taken over by Shias; the same is true in Damascus. In Damascus, even in the old city, some Christian neighborhoods are beginning to feel this increasing Shia influence in that a lot of Shias are buying places there. You have the same phenomenon happening in Raqqa, which was recently vacated by force and, again, you do have Shias moving in there. So, the regime has an interest in changing the demographics so that in the areas of its power, like Damascus, it would have a more equitable balance of sectarian power.

Also, at the economic level, if Syria had been carved up, if the regime continues to control the areas it controls now, which are, of course, along the Mediterranean coast down to the central city of Homs in Damascus, and you have the breakup of Syria, you have the rest of the land to worry about. It would be landlocked, and there it is dominated by tribes. What you will have is tribal coalitions and even potential alliances with those who have become radicalized, and there you have a very, very dangerous marriage of tribal coalitions and terrorist groups. So that is something to worry about.

At the social level, I am really not only in fear but almost in a panic for Syrians because now, we have a generation that is going to grow up of mostly displaced people and mostly traumatized people. You have, now, the youngsters without an education who have been displaced and who…some of them have no more parents. So, you have a social recipe for disaster, and this is going to, in the future, lead to a lot more crime, and certainly, terrorist organizations are going to do a lot of recruiting among those traumatized youth, and we will have on our hands a huge [group] of terrorists. So, again, sectarianism is at an all-time high, which is not only true in Syria, I feel that here; it is across the region. So, if everything remains the same, as our friend Kenneth Waltz says, if everything remains the same, you are going to have, in the future (I don't know when, I don't have a crystal ball), but the potential for a redrawing of the Middle East map. So, something has to be done now.

What can the US do?

Now, I've heard all of the different ideas about what people would like the United States to do. I'm not going to say that the US should invade Syria and fight the Russians; I am not that crazy. But, there are a certain number of things that the United States -- at least the next

administration if not this administration -- can do. One is to support the Turkish efforts in the north, and these Turkish efforts happen to supply and to support the free Syrian army. Everybody has poo-pooed the free Syrian army. If the free Syrian army has been weak and divided, it is as a lack of foreign support. But once Turkey put its mind to it and grouped these folks, they did very well on the ground, and they were very good partners for the Turkish initiative. What the US can do is to support the Turkish initiative. In order to create some sort of harmony among ethnic groups in the north, it could bring in the KNC, the Kurdish National Council. These are, in fact, a majority of the Kurds who aspire to some sort of autonomy, aspire to be under some sort of federal system in Syria but do not want to break away. In this manner, we Americans would be helping our Turkish ally in its quest for security along its border without the fear of any Kurdish violence. It would bring Arab and the Kurd together, and it's a force that already exists on the ground. So, I think that if the United States were able to partner with the partners of our Turkish ally, the FSA, if it were to make an effort to unify the Iraqis, to train, and equip, I think we would have on the ground a force that could be credible and that we could count on.

You know … in Lebanon and Turkey (certainly Turkey), inside the camps and outside the camps, you have hundreds of former army officers who have defected, who are moderate. There is nothing Islamist or jihadist about them. They are itching to go back home, and they are itching to participate in this. But they are not alone. They are not alone outside the camps or, in the case of those I met in Gaziantep, they are not also alone to move around. So, you have a formidable manpower that is available that is pro-Western, that is pro-democratic, and that is trained as a result of their past professions who provide major support to this Turkish effort, and again, if the US and Turkey can marry their efforts, I think they would do wonders.

In terms of containing the Russians, we can end the Assad regime and fighting ISIL because the FSA … has won battles against ISIL. There is also, if the US were to take this track…and then I am not talking about US boots on the ground; I'm not talking about US armed force against anybody. But, if the United States were to make some effort also in terms of information and to bring back the lights up to the fact that this is not a western imperialist Zionist conspiracy against the Syria but this is a national uprising against a dictator and that the people want freedom.

Now, especially in the United States, most folks seem to think that this is a fight between a regime we don't like very much because it is bloody and brutal and corrupt and a bunch of thuggish murderers in ISIL. Well, it is those who are sandwiched in between who are our natural allies …I don't want to go into the past to cry over spilled milk, but if these things had been done in the past, we wouldn't be here today. … I'm still of the view that things can change for the better for Syrians and the region and the entire world if things are properly stopped.

Sarah Canna: I really appreciate that. You know, coming from inside the DOD, it's really hard because everyone in the region seems to hate the United States, and it's so hard for us inside because we're trying to do our best…

Murhaf Jouejati: … and my heart is in the United States. But truly, what has come out of Washington in the past 5 years would only exacerbate those negative feelings towards the United States because the view in Syria and in the Middle East, and I think throughout the

world, in the beginning, was this is an open-shut case. These are peaceful demonstrators demonstrating for freedom, much as in Hungary in 1956 or Prague in 1968 or in the wall falling in Berlin or the Iron Curtain breaking, and now these democracies flourish in Eastern Europe. So, people were thinking of these things when this happened, and then the United States would, again no boots on the ground, would support them in their fight for freedom. What we got is a United States that tied its hands behind its back, allowed the Russians everything under the sun, allowed the Iranians everything under the sun, and still, 6 years into this, there is hesitation in Washington. … It doesn't feel good to be hated. Why should we run to a place where we are hated, but by not doing anything also, we are creating even more hatred?

Sarah Canna: And it's really…it seems to me that the US reputation is a huge problem in the area, that we have so little credibility that some polls in ISIL controlled areas, which who knows how good they are, are saying that they would rather have ISIL than the US on their territories. So…

Murhaf Jouejati: The United States is not a reliable partner. It's not because it wants to be not a reliable partner, but because there are domestic politics in the United States. When you are in the United States, and you feel these domestic politics and the debate inside; those outside don't see it. What they see is a decision from the US, regardless of what happens inside, and the decision of the United States now is, despite chemical attacks against the civilian population, despite a Russian air force bombing hospitals day in and day out, despite Iranians and all of their allied militias, including Hezbollah, killing right and left, the United States wants to pursue diplomacy, which is good, but a diplomacy without teeth, and diplomacy without teeth does not work. So, you and I know this, but the United States continues in its diplomacy without teeth, and so, people now have come to question the credibility and the reliability of the United States.

Sarah Canna: This is concerning because what happens if the populations prefer Russia's involvement in the region because they are a more reliable partner? I know that's hard for the Sunni population in particular to ever embrace Russia, but…

Murhaf Jouejati: When I was in Syria, and we had dozens of Bulgarian movies at night and Soviet movies, and so on. We knew that we had to be patient and wait for Thursday nights until *Love Boat* comes on, and this is true for Sunnis and Alawis and Christians and everybody else. We wore jeans, we liked Madonna… you know, the Russian-Syrian connection is not an ideological one, but it comes … mostly as a result of the US-Israeli partnership. No, Syrians do not prefer things Russian to things American, but America is not investing where it should.

Sarah Canna: So, I had another question getting back to what the US can do. So, what has to happen first: do we have to get rid of ISIL first or get rid of Assad first? Or what's the first step towards stability? Or is it not that simple?

Murhaf Jouejati: Well, it's not simple. The US should continue, I think, in what it is doing in this US-led coalition against ISIL; there is no doubt about that. But, it should now take steps against the Assad regime. Again, analytically, and I have looked at a lot of articles and a lot of evidence and so on. There has been cooperation between the Assad regime and ISIL; ISIL is in the interest of the Assad regime because Assad can portray himself to the world as the

secular leader opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. If ISIL did not exist, the man would be in very serious trouble. He had released what is now the top leadership of ISIL from Syrian jails in the name of releasing political prisoners. He has bought, and continues to buy, oil from ISIL. He has bought, and continues to buy, power from ISIL. So, he has enriched them in many ways. Talk to the very recently defected mayor of Palmyra, and he will tell you how the entire loss and recapture of Palmyra was a hoax. He was there, and Assad had every interest to show ISIL in Palmyra, and the destruction of Syria's cultural heritage, which is humanity's cultural heritage, and then of him, thank the Lord, taking it back. I don't know if these things are difficult for Westerners to see, but Middle Easterners and Syrians see through Assad in everything that he does. So, it is very important to take ISIL out, but it is also very important to take the other side of the coin out, not with boots on the ground, not with American boys and girls coming back in body bags, but employing a local population that wants him out.

Sarah Canna: So, let's skip ahead to the point where the civil war is over, and we're ready to do political reconstruction. How is that possibly going to work when Sunnis are a majority, and the Shia minority is not used to giving up power?

Murhaf Jouejati: Your question is all a function of whether Assad is in there or not, but the equation that was agreed upon by the United States and Russia, initially, in Geneva, is a very good one. It is a transition to a transitional government, and that transitional government would be half regime, half opposition. The regime part and the opposition part would include people with no blood on their hands. … Both sides have to agree on the selection of the others, and in this way, and only this way, it has to be constitutional as well; minorities would have a guarantee that they are represented at the table.

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Comments on Syria's Future

Dr. Moshe Ma'oz
Professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies,
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

The strategic balance of power in the Syrian conflict has been in the regime's favor for several years now, notably following Russia's military intervention about a year ago. Consequently, it is fairly likely that Bashar [al Assad] will continue to govern a "little Syria" in the foreseeable future and will endeavor to expand his control to more regions.

Bashar has demonstrated dedication, stamina and brutality in his aim to hold power, and has been assisted by his dwindling army, his Alawite community and its militias, and particularly by Iranian troops and Shi'i militia groups, notably Hezbollah, and above all - Russian air power. Both Iran and Russia also have

"The U.S. has changed its position concerning Bashar's role and now is ready to tolerate his position as Syria's president for a short period … In this respect, Washington's position has been reduced in favor of Moscow's prominent role in Syria and beyond. "

rendered to Bashar massive financial and diplomatic support; they are likely to sustain their help to Bashar (even though Moscow would not insist that he personally stay in power as long as Russian strategic interests in the region are not compromised.

The U.S. has changed its position concerning Bashar's role and now is ready to tolerate his position as Syria's president for a short period within the framework of a political settlement. In this respect, Washington's position has been reduced in favor of Moscow's prominent role in Syria and beyond. Already in 2013 Russia manipulated the U.S. concerning the Syrian chemical weapons, thwarting American plan to destroy by air Syrian strategic sites thus contributing to Bashar's fall.

Other elements that may tolerate Bashar's continued rule, for different reasons, are Turkey, Israel and growing groups of Syrians. Some of the latter are exhausted by the brutal conflict and its terrible implications and may be ready to accept Bashar as president while developing illusions regarding a fair political settlement in Syria.

Other factors that have contributed to Bashar "s survival is essentially the lack of a strong, united military opposition to his government, the deficient coordination among them and among the states that support opposition forces, namely: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the U.S. The latter's objection to Jabhat Fath A-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra,-- a proxy of Al-Qaida) which is (unlike ISIL) composed of many Syrians --has served to weaken the opposition efforts to oust Bashar from power.

ISIL's threat to Bashar has been minor but the international effort to fight it plays into the hands of Bashar, Putin and Rouhani. Consequently, not only Bashar is likely to survive ,but Iran will expand its endeavors to construct a Shi'i Crescent alliance with the Syrian Alawi(not Shi'i) regime ,Hezbollah ,perhaps also Iraq and Yemen; this as a strategic threat to Sunni Muslim states the U.S. position and to Israel as well as to regional oil resources.

Washington should thus review its strategic thinking regarding Syria and the region; its goal must be ousting Bashar and helping the Sunni majority population (65% Arabs and 10% Kurds) to establish a new democratic, pluralist Syria. The U.S. should also assist the Sunni - Muslim states in the region to thwart Tehran's dangerous ambitions.

Comments on Syria's Future

Alexis Everington
Madison-Springfield, Inc.

The single largest factor outside of Syria is the US relationship with Russia. Until US and Russia come to a viable and enforceable agreement that both sides respect, war by proxy will continue. Similarly, the second most important factor outside is the relationship between KSA and Iran. Until this is resolved, again both countries will support proxies to fight each other – more for political gains than even sectarian ones (for example there is much evidence to suggest that KSA needs wars in the region to divert internal focus from its own domestic problems).

The single largest factor inside Syria is consensus on who will lead the country. If Assad stays in power there will be no peace. The pro-Assad contingent must move towards

accepting a Sunni leader but the Opposition contingent must move towards accepting real support for government and institutions.

Excerpt of Virtual Think Tanks Interview with Nader Hashemi, September 2016

Sarah Canna, NSI

Nader Hashemi: … Syria no longer exists. I mean, the country has been completely destroyed over the last 5 years, and I'm not talking about simply the people, but I'm talking about the infrastructure, any sense of sort of normality, government system. So, the country would have to be completely rebuilt from scratch, and one of the big factors that I think will weigh in on any sort of future viable Syrian state will be whether the scars of the war will be able to heal, and I'm speaking specifically about this deep virus of sectarianism that has spread throughout the country. Syria did not have deep seeds of sectarianism before, but now they're so deep that they're trying to patch that up and put together some sort of cohesive political community where everyone can cooperate together in the context of a functioning state. That will be an immense challenge; it will be a generational challenge; it will take several generations. But first and foremost, none of that can happen… we can't have a serious conversation about the future of Syria unless the fundamental underlying root problem of why there has been a conflict in Syria is addressed. That goes back to the 45-year-old rule of one family in Syria, the house of Assad (currently the son), and his inability, refusal, reluctance to share power and concede power is I think the number one factor that has produced this war. Until there is some clarity on what is going to happen with the Assad family, whether he will depart the country, whether he will be relegated to some area of the country, that's the million-dollar question. I don't think there can be any sense of stability in Syria as long as that person and that political regime are still in power. The war will still continue in some form or another as long as that regime is around. So, I think that's the big question.

"I don't think there can be any sense of stability in Syria as long as [Bashar Assad] and that political regime are still in power. The war will still continue in some form or another as long as that regime is around."

Of course, because of the diplomatic paralysis that we're facing right now, it doesn't seem as if that question is going to be resolved any time soon because Russia and Iran are in the driver's seat. The US government refuses to get involved directly on that issue with respect to Syria. So, I think this speaks to the… the biggest factor is really the question of the internal political settlement in Syria. If there can be some political settlement that has at least a semblance of legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians, that there can be some sense of a transition to something better, a process where there will be genuine self-determination for Syrians, a genuine sense of inclusiveness and political stability, then we can start to talk about reconstruction, rebuilding, reintegration, return of refugees, etcetera. Until then, those underlying issues are at the heart of this conflict, and they revolve around the political issues related to the house of Assad and the legacy of 45-year-old rule. With what has happened particularly over the last 5 years, unless we start dealing with those questions, any talk of a future Syria I think is completely irrelevant.

Sarah Canna: So, I struggle with this myself because when you think about the future of Syria, as you said, you hit this roadblock of, you know, is Assad going to stay or is he going to go. Do you have any sense of whether a political settlement can be reached with Assad in power or does he have to go?

Nader Hashemi: Yeah, he would have to go because he symbolizes all that has gone wrong in Syria over the past 5 years in terms of the war and also all that has gone wrong with Syria over the last 45 years in terms of the legacy of political authoritarianism, the individual figure of Assad. If he's still in power, even sharing power hypothetically or with his power diminished, he will be such a lightning rod of opposition because he embodies that in the eyes of the vast majority of Syrians, and I would argue to people in the Arab and Islamic world, the embodiment of political tyranny. So, he would have to go, that person and his family. Now, what happens afterward? Will some remnant of the regime be allowed to stay or not? That's where we give in to difficult issues of interpretation and judgment. My understanding of Syria is that the country is now effectively run like in a mafia state. So, if you remove the mafia don at the top, all of the other ministers and people in positions of power are all so loyal to the mafia don so that if the mafia don leaves, then everything else collapses.

Now, having said that, there has to be, I think, when you talk about the future of Syria, a consideration and a set of built-in safeguards so that if Assad leaves that there are guarantees for minority protection, particularly among the 12% Alawites that are supporting the regime. The ruling family comes from that community, and they have legitimate fears of retribution and revenge should there be a transition to political power. That guarantee of protection of minority rights, broadly speaking, would have to be built in. Now, how that works itself out, what the arrangement will be, those are subject to debate, but in my view, this conflict cannot end and will not end as long as the figure of Assad and his ruling regime are still in power and control the military, the major institutions of the state. This is of course a big stumbling block because Russia and the United States and their respective allies don't agree on this, and Russia and Iran still I think mistakenly believe that you can have political stability and a future for Syria while the house of Assad still remains in power, and they're hoping to do this militarily and crush the opposition. Let's say they were able to crush the opposition and recapture Aleppo. I would argue that you would have a low intensity war of attrition that would carry on for decades, and if you just stop and think about it for a moment, this shouldn't be difficult to fathom. According to all of the human rights assessments, the Assad regime is overwhelmingly responsible for the vast majority of war crimes and crimes against humanity, totaling about half a million over the last 5 years. To think that the person responsible for that level of violence can be retained in power and that could preside over a period of stability is wishful thinking at best. He has to go, and as long as he doesn't go, this conflict will continue, either at a high intensity or a low intensity, but it certainly will continue.

> "Right, now the United States is viewed by many Syrians in a very confused way. They sort of see the United States striking a deal with Iran, and Iran is backing the dictator; they're unsure of what US intentions are."

Sarah Canna: Now, the difficult part of this question is how can we, the US, best affect positively the future of Syria? If you assume that the US interest here is in regional stability, you know, what can the United States do?

Nader Hashemi: That's a good question. Well, I think one problem now is the United States has a credibility problem in the eyes of most Syrians and in the broader region, but we want to just focus the conversation among Syrians right now. Syrians are deeply frustrated and angry and upset because as these atrocities have been taking place, as Aleppo has been besieged, US aircraft are flying in the same airspace that the Russian aircraft is and that the Syrian government aircraft is, bombing civilian targets, while the United States is not engaged and has no interest in stopping those atrocities. So, one, there's a sense that the United States in the past 5 years under President Obama did not want to do anything substantive to help a political transition or to help the process of political change. So, you talk to most Syrians today, they're very frustrated with the United States. So, that's one big problem; there's a credibility problem.

Assuming that we can get over that, what the United States I think can do and should do is the United States has to be on the side of the political aspirations for self-determination, for dignity, and for democracy that I think most Syrians aspire to. Right now, the United States doesn't have that reputation. Right, now the United States is viewed by many Syrians in a very confused way. They sort of see the United States striking a deal with Iran, and Iran is backing the dictator; they're unsure of what US intentions are. But broadly speaking, beyond those perception problems, I think the United States has an interest in a stable Syria because, as we've seen over the last 5 years, because Syria has become unstable, it has created a vacuum where ISIS has inserted itself, and it has created this terrorist state.

So, you know, the way that you deal with that question is there has to be a process in place in Syria where there is a political transition away from the old regime. There has to be a sense that Syrians have a voice in a future post-Assad regime, there's a sense of economic reconstruction, political stability, minority rights protection, and that people are not going to be living as second class citizens effectively as they have been under the Assad regime, where if you weren't part of the ruling apparatus, you were essentially disenfranchised. The United States has to be a part of that process, and because the United States is the biggest country, most powerful country still in the world, people, even Syrians who are critical of US foreign policy, still look to the United States for leadership. They see the United States very half-heartedly engaging with Russia, going to conferences while Russia is bombing hospitals and creating mayhem, that doesn't instill confidence and doesn't help the reputation of the United States in Syria.

Of course, there is a broader, deeper historical problem where the United States is viewed by most Arabs and Muslims as the inheritor of great power legacy and great power influence in the region. In other words, the United States is viewed as sort of the successor to British and French great power politics in the Middle East, and they don't view the United States as a country that is aligned with the popular aspirations of the people on the street, for democracy, for social justice, for dignity. They view the United States as striking deals with dictatorial regimes and pursuing an agenda that is at odds with the aspirations of the average person and that allows extremist groups like ISIS, like Al Qaeda, to exploit and recruit young people who see this chasm between when the United States rhetorically says it stands for, its values, and what it actually does in terms of pursuing its interests, which are, you know, allying itself with dictatorial regimes or not getting involved when there is

mass atrocities. Extremist groups exploit this tension, this chasm between US values and US interests, and they're successful in recruiting some people who have no other choice.

So, there is I think long term things that the United States can be doing in terms of the stability of Syria, and that requires I think a fundamental reorientation of US foreign policy towards the region where it is more supportive of democratic transitions, political reform, democratization. In many ways, some of the things that president Obama said during the Arab spring uprisings where he gave several important speeches in 2011 sort of articulated those goals. Specifically, with respect to Syria, the United States I think can play a positive role if it sort of starts to champion what it has done in the past and in other violent conflicts where it is a voice for a process of transitional justice for the accountability of war crimes, for making sure that there is a judicial system in place that will try war criminals and bring them to trial and allow the Syrian society to start to heal again. Those types of things are something that the United States has a lot of strength in based on its past record: the role in the Nuremburg trials, the support the United States gave for the international war tribunal in the former Yugoslavia, those types of things will go a long way in terms of increasing the prestige and the image that the United States has in the eyes of many Syrians.

Sarah Canna: Now, do you think that a unified Syria is the only future pathway that's going to result in stability? What about like a smaller, an Assad Syrian, a Sunni?

Nader Hashemi: Yeah, that's the big question these days, and I don't think there is any possibility of dividing up Syria and creating new states. Number one: because there is zero support in the international community for redrawing the borders despite what some people may think, and I don't think the problem in Syria as your question sort of implies is because the borders that were drawn were colonial borders and were illegitimate borders. Yes, they were colonial borders, and yes, they were in that sense illegitimate. However, the problem in Syria today is not because the borders were drawn on the wrong places on the map. The problem is what has been happening inside those borders by political leaders who have come to power in the post-colonial era. Having said that, if you talk to most Syrians today, the vast majority of them, even on different sides of this conflict, still identify with this sense of Syrian nationality. They are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country. Now, where there is difference of opinion and where I think there is some room for reconfiguring the structure of politics in Syria is to keep the borders intact but to redraw the internal administrative borders so there can be more localized representation among the different groups that exist in Syria. I'm talking about specifically a federal type of arrangement where, for example, Syrian Kurds will have more autonomy in terms of the governing of their own affairs, or Syrian Alawites may be able to have their own sort of autonomous federal region, but within the framework and within the overarching architecture of an existing Syrian state that coincides with the current borders. That's I think where there is room for discussion and where questions of minority rights and representation can be accommodated, but trying to dismantle the Syrian state and redraw the borders along an Alawite state or a Sunni state, that's not in the cards. There's zero support for that internationally, and the main reason is because people fear the precedent of what that might mean for other countries if we start redrawing the borders. Internally the redrawing of the administrative borders along a federal system I think is where we should put our emphasis in terms of trying to solve some of the tensions until perhaps some future time when Syrians can overcome their sectarian differences, which are a result of this war and then perhaps among themselves agree on new administrative

guidelines and structures of governing themselves. But I don't believe that the redrawing of the borders is really a serious option.

Sarah Canna: Now, I have one more question before I want Allison to have the chance to ask a couple of questions. Someone has mentioned that they are concerned that the Sunni population in Syria is just so exhausted by the war that they might be willing to forgo a fair settlement and just become part of Syria under Assad once again. Do you see that as a potential future?

"If you talk to most Syrians today, the vast majority of them even on different sides of this conflict … are still proud to be Syrians. They still want to see a cohesive and united country. Now, where there is difference of opinion … is to keep the borders intact but to redraw the internal administrative borders so there can be more localized representation among the different groups that exist in Syria."

Nader Hashemi: Absolutely, and Syrian people are no different than any other people. This has been a brutal war, and people are exhausted. Now, it's just a question of survival. But, if that were to happen, that would simply be a short term proposition because eventually, within a short period of time, the same set of political grievances, the same set of frustrations that led to the uprising in March of 2011, will resurface again. It's basically suggesting now that Syrians are so exhausted of trying to break out of the jail that they were in that they are simply willing to go back into the prison system to recuperate. But, eventually, they're going to want what everyone else in the world wants, and that's a basic life of dignity where they have political representation, when there is a judicial system that functions with some resemblance of justice, where people can have the freedom to travel. The notion implied in this question is that somehow the best way out of this mess is to just try to convince Syrians to just go back into the collective prison that they were in under the house of Assad, and then we can all just sort of wash our hands and go home. That might be very tempting, and many Syrians might want that in the short term, but that's a guaranteed I think recipe for disaster in the medium and long term because the same sets of political grievances will inevitably resurface, and on top of that, we've got 5 years of a brutal borderline genocidal war. To think that the genocidal mastermind of this war who's overwhelmingly responsible for the vast majority of war crimes and crimes against humanity can reconstitute power and political legitimacy and by rule of force keep his society under control. Again, it might be a short term possibility, but that's going to eventually lead to reprisals, revenge, instability. There's no way that someone who has presided over this much bloodshed can be a force for stability. So, I think the premise of the question in my view is a complete non-starter.

Sarah Cana: Alright. On that note, Allison, did you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Yes, actually, and thank you so much for your insight and really interesting views on this. I really wanted to ask you a little bit more about what happens after Assad goes. So, it's my understanding, and you yourself suggested that we have a sort of mafia-run state, right? So, should we not expect that there would be additional civil warfare even if Assad were to go tomorrow between the various groups within the Syrian

opposition now, or do you think that would be such a relief that Assad was gone that those differences could be settled?

Nader Hashemi: No, I think that if Assad goes, you'll have another Libya, and that's perfectly understandable. Let's not forget the enveloping context here. This has been a war that has been far more bloody than Libya, far more bloody than Iraq; it is a war that has taken place against the backdrop of 40 years of extreme political tyranny and then the last 5 years of a borderline genocidal war. To expect that after the demise of the dictator that you're going to get all of these liberal-minded political actors agreeing to reconstitute a new Syria is wishful thinking. People are going to respond based on the recent political history that they're coming out of, and that's a political authoritarian regime, arguably of the worst sort that the Arab war has seen under the Assad family and then 5 years of a bloody and brutal, borderline genocidal war.

So, the forces that are going to come out of this, they are going to be at each other's throats. There's no reason to expect a transition to political stability, and that speaks to I think the bigger question that we cannot seriously envision a future Syria that is stable unless we have a very detailed and sophisticated plan in place for the day after. So, if Assad leaves, if he packs up and goes, what's the plan for political stability, stabilization, and a transition in the immediate aftermath of his demise? I think that's a very difficult question to answer, and it requires a lot of political thinking. It would require a serious international intervention of some sort to make sure that you don't have a situation that replicates what we saw in Libya. There has to be a plan in place for … security forces that could then lead to a political process, but thinking that it's just a question of removing Assad and then Syria is going to transform itself into Sweden or Canada as some people implicitly think, just suggests that there's a complete disconnect from the reality of what's happening in Syria today.

So, the answer to the question is that if Assad leaves, that's not the end of the story. In many ways, that's the beginning of a new phase, and there has to be a serious concrete plan in place in order to guarantee that the situation doesn't go from extremely bad to arguably much worse in the aftermath of the collapse of the Assad regime. There has to be a detailed plan for someone to take political authority that has legitimacy, and there has to be a stabilization force. Now, who's going to compromise that stabilization force which troops which countries, no one has really investigated or talked about that yet, and I think that's where the conversation should be going.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Is there anybody or are there any characters now that you could see who might serve as that legitimate political leadership?

Nader Hashemi: No, I think that's something that ultimately in terms… if you're talking about political leadership. That's something that I think the Syrians themselves are going to have to determine, and I think that the way that that could be suggested is that there has to be a very clear plan that's announced well in advance of the demise of the Assad regime, this is how it's going to work. So, there will be a transitional authority whose job will simply be governing and trying to stabilize the country until we can get to a point where there can be an election that can represent the aspirations of the Syrians, and that sort of election would start to provide the political leadership that has some sense of political legitimacy. But there's not one particular individual now I suspect that's, given my reading of Syrian public opinion, there will be a multiple number of potential political parties or leaders that could

contest for leadership, and the best option at least would be some sort of national governing coalition that represents the sort of broadest, sort of swath of Syrian public opinion to preside over a period of political transition. But no, there's not one individual that can take over, and I don't think there is one individual that I can finger at this time.

So, it's less about individuals, and it's more about sending a message to the Syrian people, but now that the old dictatorship is gone away, there will be an opportunity within the foreseeable future for the Syrian people to exercise their voice and to elect their political leaders who will then be accountable to them, and if they don't measure up, they will then be subject to democratic checks and balances. That has to be built into the plan, and then we have to leave it up to the Syrian people to see who they would elect as a leadership.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Okay, so one last question on this, and thank you so much for indulging me, but you're suggesting that the plan needs to be…the US role really could be in helping just forge a plan before moving forward, not determine the plan, not shape the plan, but helping the party to form it themselves?

Nader Hashemi: Yes.

Allison Astorino- Courtois: So, it seems to me that that would then require us to do one of the things that you, and this is just practicalities… one of the things that you suggested was detrimental to sort of the perception of the US as an honest broker in the area, which is to come to some agreement with Iran on what's going to happen at least in sort of western areas of Syria, right? So basically, what we're telling the US government here is, "Okay, you need to suck it up, and people in Syria are going to feed into their already suspicious view of the US, but this is what has to happen." Do I have that correct?

Nader Hashemi: I see what you're saying, but I think there are still things that can be done. I think if, in the aftermath of the election in November, assuming Hillary Clinton gets in, if she comes and announces that she is articulating a new US foreign policy towards Syria that breaks with the old policy, the United States will now be on the side of the Syrian people and strongly support the agreed upon peace plan articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2245. The United States is now going to be a voice for peace and for political transition in Syria, and it actually demonstrates that it is going to stand up to the Russian position, stand up to the Iranian position, and try to identify both rhetorically and practically with the aspirations of most Syrians. Then, I think the Syrian people are going to start to judge the United States based on what it's actually doing, and so if the United States provides some sort of no-fly zone or safe zone for Syrian civilians as Hillary Clinton has said, that's going to affect hearts and minds. If the United States' aircraft are simply not going to fly over Aleppo and watch the devastation down below but perhaps send a message to Syrian aircraft that if you're going to bomb Aleppo, you're going to come up against our aircraft, and we're not going to allow you to fly in this no-fly zone. I think that if you take just one concrete example, if Hillary Clinton were to announce that we are having a no-fly zone over a section of Syria, this is going to be a safe zone where Syrian civilians can go where they'll be protected from Syrian regime bombardment. That immediately would have a huge transformative effect in how many Syrians view the United States.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Unfortunately, US's own strategic interest would argue against that course of action, right?

Nader Hashemi: Right. That's the positon of the Obama administration, right. Although, Hillary Clinton has articulated a different vision, and there is a debate, as you know better than I do. I was just watching Charlie Rose the other night, and he is just one voice among many where he had a long, detailed interview (it's worth looking at) on these specific issues. He was interviewing General Petraeus, and General Petraeus was going into a detailed analysis of what could happen and might happen that would change the political balance of power in Syria and would lead to something better, and he was saying basically what I just articulated.

So, I think also that the role that the US can play under a new administration, if the United States were to show that it's actually using its power and influence on the global stage to bring the world together, to organize, let's say, an international conference on reconstruction and economic development in Syria. The United States leads the way in bringing together the best experts in international criminal law to establish a war crimes tribunal for accountability in justice, and the United States is seen as being the leading voice in organizing and bringing the international community together, of course, ideally, better under the auspices of the United Nations, which would give it more legitimacy. That type of activity that the United States did play post-1995 in the context of Bosnia, where the United States effectively laid out a political strategy, mobilized the international community, used its military to sort of assure that the different parties were in compliance with the contact group plan as it was called back then and then set up a period of… it had forces on the ground, it led to a process of transition, and also at the international level, it presided over a war crimes tribunal, which was an international war crimes tribunal, but the United States was one of the leading parties in making sure that that was established. That's a potential model there that I think is worth investigating. It's not a direct parallel, but I think there's lessons to be learned from the conflict in Bosnia that also apply to the question of Syria.

Allison Astorino-Courtois: Thank you so much, and I will hold the other one million questions that I have for you for another time; I don't want to use up all of your day.

Sarah Canna: So, I said we would take half an hour, and we're at that point. So, what we're going to do is I'm going to make a transcript of this conversation, and I'll forward it to you if you'd like to review it. Allison and I are going to collate all of the responses. We have a number of people who are contributing to this question; they're going to be put into a report, and Allison and I are going to write an executive summary, a 1-2 page… a review of what everyone has said and the key points, and you'll get a copy of that. As we get any feedback from CENTCOM, we'll be sure to forward it to you.
Nader Hashemi: Wonderful, thanks. Good luck.

Comments on Syria's Future

Yezid Sayigh
Senior Associate, Carnegie Middle East Center

The principal factor affecting the future of the Syrian conflict is that the Assad regime is not simply unwilling to engage in any degree of genuine power-sharing - it is unable to do so without the risk of unraveling. But the key issue here is not simply that it will therefore continue to fight for outright military and political victory. Rather, even total victory leaves the regime in command of a devastated economy and under continuing sanctions without

the resources to rebuild its power or consolidate its hold over the country. So its logical goal has to be to regain access to external capital and markets, and to get sanctions lifted. In theory, it has little hope of achieving this thru normal diplomacy and will face severe reluctance from the US, EU, and GCC countries and Turkey, and so it will extend the fighting inside Syria as a means of coercing external powers into accepting its demands. This is not something that will start to happen in a year or two or only after a political deal is reached; the regime is probably thinking along these lines now. I suspect that Russia (and others such as China) will endorse regime demands, arguing that the "Friends of Syria" governments can't demand a transition or peace in Syria and then be unwilling to increase its chances of success by lifting sanctions and allowing trade in goods and capital flows to resume. Turkey will also have an interest in getting back into the Syrian market, as will Lebanon and Jordan, which have suffered the most economically and are desperate to repatriate refugees and revive their flagging economies and business sectors. The regime knows this and has been adopting new laws since late 2015 designed, at least in part, to attract investors and Syrian flight capital. Securing the regime financially and economically will, I believe, become the real purpose behind much of its military operations (i.e. as leverage and coercion of external governments) and the focus of behind-the-scenes discussions with the US and EU (et al), probably mediated by Russia, once the new US administration picks up the foreign policy reins from Spring 2017.

Comments on Syria's Future

Dr. Josh Landis
Director, Center for Middle East Studies & Full Professor
University of Oklahoma

I believe that Assad, with the help of the Russians, Chinese, Iraqis and Hezbollah, will take back most rebel held territory in the next five years. Of course, the regime is very weak both militarily and financially so the US could stop it from defeating the rebel factions by either throwing in more arms or helping regional actors take or hold parts of Syria. The Israelis may want to support various militias around the Golan to protect its border. We, of course, have influence in Israel and could in turn influence this process. Jordan too, may want to maintain proxy militias on its border with Syria rather than allow Assad to retake all the Deraa region, but I don't suspect that Jordan would push hard for this if the US and Saudi Arabia give up their support for their proxies along the border. Jordan may prefer Assad at this point, because if he restores stability to the Deraa region, many refugees will probably return to their homes in Syria. Jordan could begin combatting terrorism with Damascus again, despite the bad blood between them.

> "If the US helps the Iraqi government take back all ISIL controlled territory, Baghdad will eventually help Assad regain ISIS territory on the Syrian side of the border. Baghdad will not want a Sunni rebel controlled statelet in Eastern Syria. If the US tries to support rebel militias or tribes to replace ISIL, it will have to remain in the region to defend them against Assad and Baghdad."

We still don't know how much of Syria the Turks hope to take and populate with rebel militias. The US has influence over this process because of our remaining relationship with Erdogan and the PYD. How much land will the PYD (Kurds) take in addition to the areas it now controls? The US can partially control this process by either arming them to take more ISIS territory or not. The price of the Kurds taking more Arab majority territory is that they will not want to return it to Arab rule and the US will be exacerbating local ethnic rivalries and injustices in order to destroy ISIS.

If the US helps the Iraqi government take back all ISIS controlled territory, Baghdad will eventually help Assad regain ISIS territory on the Syrian side of the border. Baghdad will not want a Sunni rebel controlled statelet in Eastern Syria. If the US tries to support rebel militias or tribes to replace ISIS, it will have to remain in the region to defend them against Assad and Baghdad. Baghdad will also not want the Kurds to spread too far into ISIS territory. If the US does not want Assad to take back territory from ISIS, it will have to find an Arab partner to replace the Syrian Arab Army in these ISIS territories. This will place Washington in opposition to Baghdad's interests.

The dominant militias in Norther Syria are the Islamist militias associated with Nusra - now the Syria Conquest Front. Most believe that America is supporting a War against Islam and has secretly sided with Iran, Assad and Russia to destroy them. It will be hard for the US to dissuade them of this conspiracy. The "moderate" militias are no match for the Islamist factions and have no interest in separating from them. This leaves the US in a quandary about their future and about further support and arms for them. I don't have an answer for this problem. I do not think that there is much that the US can do to win their support or to ween them away from Salafism or convince them to adopt more liberal, West-friendly views.

Strategy Considerations for the Syrian Conflict: Civil War Termination and Its Implications

Lt Col Mel Korsmo, USAF, Air University

The Endstate

If the United States desires an end-state in Syria that involves political transition of the leadership there (namely the removal of Assad), the primary pathway that this will be accomplished—particularly given the present coalition of 50+ states, the involvement of the UN, and the host of external intervening states such as Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—will be through a negotiated settlement. Russia's abandonment of the ceasefire agreement arguably represents not a move for all-out military victory, but rather strategy to surge, freeze the conditions on the ground, and enter the next round of negotiations from a stronger position.

Why a negotiated settlement?

All civil wars eventually come to an end. Civil war scholarship indicates four prominent termination pathways exist for civil wars. These include: (1) military victory by the rebels; (2) military victory by the government; (3) ceasefire/stalemate; or (4) negotiated settlement (i.e. peace agreement) (Toft 2009). Since the end of the Cold War, the preponderance of civil wars now end in negotiated settlements (by one dataset, 54% of civil

wars in the 1990s (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003a; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003b) and 15 of 19 (79%) of wars from 2000-2006 (Hartzell and Hoddie 2015). This is the preferred, dominant method pursued by the UN and the international community, especially when multiple parties are engaged in an internal conflict.

When negotiated settlements occur, decision-makers select from a menu of political, military, territorial, and economic power-sharing provisions for the peace agreement. The selected provisions impact military strategy significantly, for these provisions affect:

- How long peace lasts (peace duration)
- Whether the government continues to violate human rights (political repression)
- The degree of political dissension and the number of terrorist attacks
- How to address the challenges of ethnic regions (e.g. Kurds, Turkish enclave)

Ceasefires = stepping stones to negotiations (or to renewed conflict).

Ceasefire/stalemates are rare on their own; ideally they serve as transitions to peace agreements. Said differently, the cessation of hostilities in play in Syria at the end of September—and any ceasefires hereafter—should not be perceived as a final destination but rather as a stopgap measure en route to the final destination of a negotiated settlement. In addition, the desired end state of a political transition—assuming continued UN involvement and a large international coalition—will necessitate codifying that transition process in a negotiated settlement between interested parties.

What defines a negotiated settlement?

Negotiated settlements are distinguished by the physical preservation of the conflict adversaries and by the initiation of contractual government-rebel guarantees—more commonly referred to as peace agreements—that establish post-war allocation of valued state resources.

Why does this matter? It matters because the war termination pathway reliably impacts the duration of peace that follows the war.

Empirical research shows civil wars ending in military victory—especially rebel victory—result in more durable, long-lasting peace than when wars end in negotiated settlements (Toft 2009). However, with respect to human rights, wars ending in military victory are more likely than negotiated settlements to result in acts of genocide and mass killing after the conflict formally ends (Harff 2003; Licklider 1995).

Peace is less likely to endure w/negotiated settlements.

Since peace is *less* likely to endure, are there any provisions within the peace agreements that might help peace last longer? The short answer is yes, with qualifications that are covered later below. *The principal provisions within peace agreements that actors can influence are power-sharing arrangements (PSAs).* PSAs are divided into four main dimensions: political, military, territorial, and economic power-sharing arrangements. Examples:

- *Political* power-sharing measures include guarantees of proportional representation in the legislative branch, in the executive branch, and in the civil service.
- *Military* power-sharing agreements may involve integration of the opposition into the main defense force or into leadership positions of the military.

- *Territorial* power-sharing measures involve either allocating separate powers to sub-state units (federalism) or granting autonomy to an opposition group to control local issues in a certain region.
- *Economic* power sharing is rarely used and is void of any empirical support; I will not detail it further.

How do power-sharing agreements (PSAs) impact the durability of peace?

PSA advocates contend that any civil war resolution must address three major security-related concerns about power, authority, and resources. These concerns include: 1) who controls the use of coercive force (resolved by military PSAs); 2) who controls the distribution of political power (resolved by political PSAs); 3) who controls the distribution of resources (resolved by territorial and/or economic PSAs).

Three main views exist in the empirical literature on this: Some scholars have demonstrated that the different dimensions reinforce each other; the more power-sharing that exists, the more that peace will endure (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003a; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003b; Hartzell and Hoddie 2007). Others show that only certain dimensions really matter. Military and territorial dimensions, for example, are less easily implemented. Such concessions therefore reflect "a higher degree of a higher degree of commitment by the parties" (Jarstad and Nilsson 2008) that makes peace more likely to prevail.

A third major perspective is that power-sharing agreements in negotiated settlements are dangerous. The argument here is PSAs reify the identities of contending groups and are therefore "as likely to recreate the security dilemma as solve it" if powerful external parties do not intervene and guarantee the settlement (Walter and Snyder 1999). I will address this argument on third-party security guarantees later below. Additionally, any parties excluded from the original agreement will be encouraged to re-engage in violence in order to secure similar concessions.

Caution: Peace ≠ just the absence of war.

Intervention success is not based solely on whether civil war recurs—that only assesses the government's ability to deter internal violence. It says nothing about what life is like for the people in the state, and whether they live without anxiety or fear for their personal safety. Does the government assure its own population that it will not personally threaten the well-being of its citizens after the conflict ends? In other words, does the government continue to *politically repress* its own people by violating their physical integrity rights (e.g. through *kidnapping, extrajudicial killing, torture, and illegal imprisonment*)?

Why should we care about the absence of political repression?

First, *insecure people turn elsewhere for their security*. Many Sunnis, for example, turned to ISIS for security when their interests were no longer protected. As one scholar put it in 2014, "The fundamental problem in Iraq now is not that the government did not have enough coercive capability but that the governors were using that capability against the Sunnis" (Saideman 2014). Second, *a government's respect for its citizens' physical integrity rights is empirically demonstrated to reduce the number of terrorist attacks in that state* (Walsh and Piazza 2010). Third, this *challenge of balancing a government's ability to deter and its ability to assure the population is not new*. Madison forecast these difficulties in Federalist no. 51, asserting that "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty is this: You must first enable the government to control

the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself." We ignore the second element at great risk.

Do power-sharing agreements help or hurt the degree of political repression?

This is an under-researched issue. My dissertation research on the subject, covering 36 civil wars that ended between 1989-2005 in negotiated settlements, indicates that political repression decreases—i.e. human rights improve significantly—in the short term (defined as two years after the civil war has ended) when certain conditions are present:

1. *Human rights improve when military PSAs are excluded*. All nine causal pathways leading to significant improvement in human rights involved the *absence* of both types of military power-sharing measures. In contrast, 11 of the 12 pathways leading to worse or unchanged human rights involved the *presence* of integration of opposition parties in the defense force.
    a. Implication: Do *NOT* advocate for a new integrated military defense force. It will in all likelihood lead to *worse* political repression by the government, which is likely to lead to increased dissension and terrorism.
2. *Political repression consistently decreases (human rights improve) when the territorial PSA of autonomy is excluded.* Preliminary data, using cross-tabulation procedures, indicates that the relationship of autonomy on human rights is consistently negative and statistically significant at five years and ten years after the war has ended. Control variables were not included, so this observation should be confirmed further. It aligns with other theoretical and empirical cautions about partitioning as a solution to civil war (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009).
    a. Implication: Do *NOT* advocate for full territorial autonomy for the Kurds or any other ethnic group. Instead, consider alternatives such as federalism.
    b. The relationship between federalism and political repression is positive over the medium and long term (nominal impact in short term). This relationship falls short of statistical significance (likely due to the fact only 4 of 36 cases used this measure; all 4 resulted in improved human rights).
3. *Political repression consistently decreases (human rights improve) when robust third-party security guarantees are included.* Robust third-party security guarantees were defined here as the combination of a strong mandate allowing for the use of force and a substantial footprint of at least 5,000 armed peacekeepers to enforce that mandate. Syria will need much more.
    a. Implication: We need to be thinking about who in our coalition (or from the UN) will be providing boots on the ground. Without a third-party guarantee to monitor and enforce, the ability of any parties to credibly commit to an agreement against recent opponents is highly unlikely (Walter 1997; Walter 2002).

The Caveats (aka challenges in specifically resolving the Syrian conflict):

Multiple, shifting combatants generally lead to really long wars with more battle deaths, more likely genocide or politicide, and less stable ceasefire agreements that break down more quickly (Cunningham 2011). Likewise, multi-party negotiations present additional barriers to peace not found in two-party conflicts. Of 233 civil wars starting after WWII and ending before 2003, 81 (35 percent) involved multiple combatants: 46 had three parties, 17 had four parties, 7 had five parties, and eleven had six or more. The last group includes the long-lasting conflicts in Afghanistan, Colombia, the DRC, Somalia, and Uganda.

1. Implications: Following Clausewitz, "The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment" that needs to be established here is "the kind of war on which [we]

are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature." This strategic question must be addressed.

2. Implication #2: Any public explanation of our involvement and engagement here ought to reference this complexity and its inherent challenges.
3. Implication #3: Multi-party negotiations present additional barriers to peace. Recent research on long, complex civil wars provides several key ideas (Cunningham 2011):
    a. The key "veto players"—those sets of actors with separate preferences over the conflict outcome and with both capacity and incentive to block an end to war—must be incorporated into any agreement if it is to conclude without all-out victory by one side.
    b. Simultaneously, international actors/intervenors must consider ways to *reduce*, rather than expand the number of veto players in civil war.
    c. Targeted sticks and carrots are more effective tools for inducing combatants to negotiate rather than fight.

Summary

- The Syrian conflict reached another ceasefire, albeit one that quickly reverted to renewed, if not intensified violence. Ceasefires should be understood as merely a stepping-stone en route to either renewed conflict or an eventual negotiated settlement, not a final destination.
- Negotiated settlements with multiple parties are complex. Beyond including key veto players, certain adaptions should be made to the menu of potential carrots and sticks:
    - Exclude: Autonomy and integration of the military (in main ranks & leadership)
    - Include: Robust third-party security guarantees; possibly federalism
- These adaptations balance the ability of the state to deter internal repression while assuring the population. In other words, civil war recurrence is more likely to be delayed and political repression to be reduced. In turn, this is empirically shown to reduce political violence and terrorist attacks.

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Comments on Syria's Future

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Entering its seventh year, the increasingly intractable Syrian civil war has displaced nearly 12 million people, taken the lives of another 300,000, and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and sense of national cohesion. What once began as a civic uprising against a corrupt, exclusionist regime quickly descended into a host of conflicts among and between a myriad of militias and armed groups, including extremists such as the so-called Islamic State (IS), all with their own zones of influence, governing structures and international patrons. Given this complex reality, the future of Syria will be influenced by a variety of factors, two of which stand out: the strength and cohesion of the Syrian opposition; and the extent to which the actions of, and rivalries between, key regional actors can be managed and mitigated.

> "Unsurprisingly, a fragmented and weakened opposition skews any political settlement process towards the regime …"

[2] The opinion and analysis expressed is solely that of the author and does not necessarily represent USIP's position.

The strength and cohesion of the Syrian opposition will be a key determinant to the future trajectory of the country: a strong, cohesive and unified opposition is more likely to induce and influence a peace process that results in more inclusiveness in, and reform to, the flawed political system that initially catalyzed the civic uprisings in 2011. A disjointed, weakened, and ineffectual opposition is likely to engender the opposite outcome, one in which the Syrian regime is able to dictate the terms of peace.

Today, the conflict dynamics in Syria are such that the latter is the more likely scenario to emerge. Once the main objective for many in the international community, support for moderate opposition elements battling the regime in Syria has been superseded by the fight against IS and other extremist groups. As a result, those in opposition to the regime, such as the Free Syrian Army, have been eschewed in favor of those that prioritize defeating extremist groups first, be they IS or in the case of Turkey, PYD units along its southern border. The Syrian Democratic Forces, compromised of mainly Kurdish units and supported by the US, along with the Sunni Arab and Turkmen groups backed by Turkey, have benefited most from this shift in approach. Though gains are being made towards the immediate objectives laid out by the groups and their respective backers (defeat of IS; and weakening the PYD and its military arm, the YPG), the opposition as a whole, already tenuously organized and linked, has suffered. Whatever common cause or ultimate objective that may have once existed among opposition forces is today nonexistent. Instead, opposition forces are consumed by parochial objectives ranging from the grandiose, such as establishing a semi-autonomous Kurdish enclave in the northeast, to the most basic, like surviving the regime's onslaught of Aleppo or holding on to whatever territorial gains they have mustered against the regime and/or other opposition groups.

Unsurprisingly, a fragmented and weakened opposition skews any political settlement process towards the regime. On a local level, evidence already exists of how the Syrian regime leverages its military advantage vis-à-vis opposition communities and groups to dictate outcomes in their favor: **local reconciliation pacts – essentially capitulation agreements –are imposed on areas retaken by the Syrian government, with terms almost always encompassing provisions related forced displacement and arrest of key individuals and groups**. If terms are not initially agreed to by local communities, then shelling and bombardment commences, as was the case recently in Hama, until opposition communities surrender to the terms presented. Little to no negotiation takes place. This tactic also seems to be underlying the regime's approach to the national political peace process enacted following UN resolution 2254 in December 2015 and is only strengthened by the divisions and lack of cohesion among the opposition as a whole.

The extent to which the actions of and tensions between regional actors, particularly Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, can be managed and mitigated will also be a pivotal factor in determining the future trajectory of Syria. The Syrian conflict has become an extension of the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, both of which are jockeying for regional supremacy and influence. Neither country desires Syria to completely fall under the orbit of the other, a fact which is only fueling and radicalizing the conflict, as evidenced by the strong linkages each country has to the more radical Sunni and Shia elements fighting in Syria. The rivalry will also impact the overall nature of the peace process as each side has certain red lines that any agreement should not cross. Without an attempt to defuse tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia on a regional level – and the unbridled support given to their Syrian proxies –Syria will continue to bear the brunt of the rivalry's blowback. As for Turkey, its involvement in the Syrian conflict centers on reversing the gains made by

the PYD and nullifying any attempt to unify territories under PYD jurisdiction. The Kurdish issue is set to become one that exacerbates the conflict in the immediate term if no consensus emerges to both the limits of Turkey's engagement and the role of the PYD in a future Syria.

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Yezid Sayigh is a senior associate at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, where his work focuses on the Syrian crisis, the political role of Arab armies, security sector transformation in Arab transitions, the reinvention of authoritarianism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and peace process.

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